

The paper begins by analysing the ideas, themes and motifs of the theatre texts from the anthology *The Generator:: for Manufacturing Any Number of Drama Complexes (Slovenian Experimental Dramatic and Performative Texts from the Modernist Period (1966-1986))*. It aims to shed light on the anthology's selected texts through the female perspective, or rather, its absence. It deals with the consequences that the absence of awareness about the lack of a female perspective in Slovenian drama can have on the representation of women and woman(liness). The paper explores such representations in Slovenian (experimental) drama and raises awareness about the possible effects of patriarchal ideology and its consequences by analysing the plays' ideas, themes and motifs. In doing so, it pays special attention to the difference between men's and (rare) women's playwriting. The texts from *The Generator* are taken merely as a case study to indicate the presence of particular symptoms in Slovenian (experimental) drama within the anthology's given period. The paper briefly highlights the differences in the representation of woman(liness) from a broader developmental perspective, from a temporal distance, in the form of a comparative analysis of contemporary women's playwriting, specifically, Simona Hamer's 2010 play *Nemi lik (The Silent Character)*.

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**Keywords:** Slovenian Drama, modernism, experiment, Women's Writing, Female Playwrights, representation of women, womanliness

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# Silent Characters: Women Playwrights, Women's Writing and the Representation of Woman(liness) in the Slovenian Drama Experiment (1966–1986)

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## Preface and an Attempt at Self-Criticism:<sup>1</sup> The Absence of Female Playwrights in the History of Slovenian Drama (1966–1986)

The paper's starting point<sup>2</sup> was the anthology *The Generator:: for Manufacturing Any Number of Drama Complexes*. The following words from the anthology's introduction by the editor Blaž Lukan prompted me to write a thesis on the topic of the representation of women or womanliness – which in Slovenian drama (from this period) ironically takes place in the virtual absence of representation of the female perspective:

In the plays and performance texts in the anthology, we can observe thematic and linguistic imagination, a real dramatic-experimental outburst, similar to what, after the 1960s and 1970s, can only be identified in Slovenian drama again after 2000 – at least it would appear so – with the emergence of many distinctive post-dramatic names of the now middle and younger generation of writers, more precisely, women writers (e.g., Simona Semenič, Simona Hamer, Iza Strehar, Varja Hrvatin).

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1 I developed the "Preface or An Attempt at Self-Criticism" in response to the comments at the discussion of my paper "The Act: Third Reading" at the *Amfiteater* journal symposium Theatre Experiment in Slovenia (1966–1986) and Its Resonance. The anthology *The Generator* was also the starting point for the present conference to reflect on experimental and Slovenian drama. The version of the discussion published here has been reworked and elaborated into an independent scholarly and argumentatively supported form.

The title "An Attempt at Self-Criticism" has its origins in Nietzsche's introduction to *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1995), in which Nietzsche (self-)critically comments on, evaluates and also temporarily positions his own work 15 years after its creation.

2 This research paper by Nika Leskovšek (39188) has been a part of the programme "Theatre and Interart Studies" (P6-0376), (co-)funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

I would especially like to draw attention to the phenomenon of women writers, which is a novelty in Slovenian drama, as they have been in the minority for decades; only three women are included in this book, and there were not many more in the wider selection. (27)

Of the thirty authors or artistic collectives representing the period 1966–1986, only three women are included in *The Generator*: Svetlana Makarovič, Ifigenija Zagoričnik and Brina Švigelj.<sup>3</sup> Representing only 10 per cent, this number indicates a significant predominance of male playwrights.<sup>4</sup> Lukan's comment suggests that the unequal gender ratio and under-representation of female playwrights in the public sphere reflect the reality of the time. The question is whether this was indeed the actual situation, or is the under-representation of female playwrights in the history of Slovenian drama somewhat a consequence of the unreflected effects of patriarchal ideology?

In the paper, I first review the statistical distribution and representation of gender in Slovenian drama. However, I situate the data on the absence of women authors (as well as the absence of a female perspective in writing and female representation in public) into the socio-temporal continuum and context of the 1966–1986 period to explain how this came about. The absence of research into the causes behind the "reality" obfuscates the functioning of (patriarchal) ideology and enables its further reproduction. Furthermore, I argue that this unequal gender representation is not innocent. The historical lack of representation of women authors and women's writing in Slovenian drama implies significant consequences for the representation of woman(liness) as is produced and reproduced within Slovenian playwriting. Historically, it has been overwhelmingly represented by male playwrights, who (usually) also represent a male perspective in their playwriting and produce men's writing.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper, I show the representation of woman(liness) in men's playwriting of this period, using texts from *The Generator* as examples. These encompass Slovenian experimental dramatic texts and shorter theatre texts from the modernist period, 1966–1986. Later, I show the differences between female and male dramatic writing in the texts published in the anthology. I mainly draw attention to the difference in the

3 Ifigenija Zagoričnik, a.k.a, Ifigenija Zagoričnik Simonović; Brina Švigelj, a.k.a., Brina Švigelj Mérat or Brina Svit, which at the same time testifies to the fact that women's names are subject to certain conventional, yet socially influenced changes, to which men's names of the time were overwhelmingly not subject.

4 In examining the disparity in the representation of woman(liness) within women's writing on the one hand and men's writing on the other, I ask the proofreader (of the Slovenian [and English] version[s] of the text) not to correct the apparent redundancy of using "male playwright" and "female playwright", since the sole use of the word "playwright", along with the fact that the masculine gender is grammatically dominant in the Slovenian language, obfuscates the exclusion of other genders from the speech situation. Moreover, according to Caroline Criado Perez, using only "playwright" would have a psychological impact in a way that the women experience perceived exclusion from the speech situation.

5 I do not consider femininity (as well as masculinity) or gender as biological, but as a fluid performative category (according to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990). Although the latter only becomes entirely obvious in the full meaning and development of gender politics in dramatic texts in the later period, in the *The Act: Third Reading*, before that (in *The Generator*) it is more of an exception.

representation of woman(liness) in the two writings: how female characters are constructed, the (stereo-)typification, the formation of the image of woman(liness), what kind of mentality, ideas and ideology the works reproduce ... In the paper, I indicate the need for social and temporal contextualisation of the interpretation of this kind of unreflected representation of woman(liness), which has been historically reproduced in Slovenian drama as “actual” or “objective” on a massive scale. The essay is based on a conceptual, thematic and motivic analysis of dramatic texts, i.e., on the method of drama analysis or, rather, its close reading. Finally, I embark on a comparative analysis of contemporary dramatic texts, especially from the point of view of the representation of woman(liness), to consolidate the *differentia specifica* of the modernist texts, which I currently detect through the absence of the female perspective and the effect of the domination of patriarchal ideology.

## The Lack of Female Playwrights

The absence of publicly recorded female playwrights, already mentioned in *The Generator* (Lukan 27), is confirmed for the case of Slovenian drama from 1966–1986 by analysing data from other sources. For example, an analysis of the registered texts submitted for the Slavko Grum Award. Founded in 1978 and awarded annually since 1979 for the best dramatic text, the Slavko Grum Award is the most important in Slovenian drama. An analysis of the data for the first 20 years of the award (taken from the brochure published on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Week of Slovenian Drama) reveals the following situation: in the first decade of the award’s existence (1979–1988), the number of entries did not exceed five female authors per year. The situation remained the same – or worse – regarding the number of female authors in the second decade (1989–1998), as fewer female playwrights submitted texts for the award. In 1991, there was only one female playwright; in 1992, there were none; in 1993, for the first time, there were, exceptionally, six female playwrights registered, and then the number dropped again. The names of registered authors throughout the years mostly repeat: Svetlana Makarovič, Alenka Goljevšček, Polonca Kovač, Jana Kolarič, Zlata Volarič, Alja Tkačev, Brina Švigelj, Vera Remic Jager, Jelena Sitar, Ivanka Hergold, Jana Milčinski, Zora Tavčar, Bina Štampe Žmavc (with Anka Kolenc, Mateja Mahnič, Marička Cilenšek, Regina Kralj ... registered with only one entry each) (Drnovšček and Poštrak).

The situation started to change only in the third decade of the prize’s existence (1999–2008), more precisely after 2001, when the number of entries was seven.<sup>6</sup> Then, in 2005, it grew to 11, and in 2007 to a record 15 entries. I consider 2007 to be

<sup>6</sup> I have considered works by individual female authors, and the number listed is that of authors who submitted. The number of submitted texts (by female authors) is often higher, as authors (regardless of their gender) often submitted several different texts in the same year.

a watershed year in several senses. On 1 April 2007, for the first time in the history of the Slovenian Drama Week, after 29 years of awarding the Slavko Grum Award, it was awarded to a female author, namely Dragica Potočnjak for her text *Za naše mlade dame* (*For Our Young Ladies*).

The situation appears even worse if we look at the Gracious Comedy Quill Award, i.e., the award for a genre-specific theatre text, given at the Days of Comedy Festival in Celje since 1998 (but not every year). Here, the first (and so far only) female author received the award in 2018: Iza Strehar for the comedy *Vsak glas šteje* (*Every Vote Counts*) (“Nagrade festivala”). The under-representation of female authors for the analysed period is confirmed by the number of entries and the success of female authors in the award mechanisms. The situation begins to change only in the third decade of the Slavko Grum Award’s existence (1999–2008).

## Why Are There No Female Playwrights (Submitting Texts for the Slavko Grum Award)?

To better understand the reasons for the low number of female playwrights submitting texts for the Slavko Grum Award competition and the low number of female playwrights officially registered in the public domain during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, we must consider additional factors and situate them into the temporal and social context. There are more complex processes at work here than can be inferred from the statistics alone. First, the three-to-four-member jury that evaluated the submitted texts consisted exclusively of male members until 1995 (i.e., for the first 17 years of the award). In 1995, Ignacija Fridl joined the three-member jury as the first and only woman, and only in 1999 did the then five-member jury for the first time include two female jurors, Marinka Poštrak and Tea Štoka. Another fact is that many of the female authors were mostly writing youth literature, texts or poems intended for children or younger audiences; they tended to be actresses, puppeteers and youth writers, who, by applying, were also seeking validation, legitimation and professionalisation of specific genres and types of drama (some of them aimed at younger audiences as well.) Thus, the first indication that women’s writing had its own themes and specificities, which the (male) jury did not appreciate at the time.<sup>7</sup>

The male dominance, or even monopoly, in Slovenian drama, both in the number of playwrights submitting for competitions and in the professional control of the field (the perception of playwriting as a male profession; the lack of attention to specific (female) topics), as well as the generally unfavourable social conditions for female playwrights (who were primarily wives and mothers, who did not have the time to

<sup>7</sup> Currently, the Slavko Grum Award is limited to texts for adult audiences.

create), can all be considered factors that discouraged female playwrights from submitting their works or even from creating them.<sup>8</sup> The decline in the number of female playwrights applying in the award's second decade also indicates a certain distrust of institutional award mechanisms on the part of female playwrights.

The sudden increase in anonymous or coded entries demonstrates that gender has not played a neutral or negligible role in submissions and awards. In 2004, no female authors applied for the competition. However, there were at least ten applications with a coded identity (e.g., "Code Janezek", "Code Lojze", or simply an anonymous author), which shows that this is not a case of merely concealing one's identity, but rather a gender-motivated decision (the coded names were Slovenian male names).<sup>9</sup> Despite the generally anonymous selection process,<sup>10</sup> since at least 2001, anonymous or additionally coded entries have increased. A peculiar additional complication in the matter of gender bias in bestowing the awards was triggered by Žanina Mirčevska in 2009 when she entered the competition under the male pseudonym Tomi Leskovec and then went on to win the Slavko Grum Award together with Simona Semenič that same year. Together, they became the second and third female authors after Potočnjak to win the Slavko Grum Award in the award's first 30 years.

## The Dominance of Patriarchal Discourse in Literature and Literary Theory

The following analyses of the phenomenon of women's writing show that this is not a peculiarity of Slovenian drama or, more broadly, of Slovenian literature and literary history. Silvija Borovnik, in her study *Do Women Write Differently*, which draws mainly on German-language theory and practice, shows that patriarchal discourse is predominant in the literary field. In the early 1980s, Manfred Jürgensen noted that "the reception of women's literature, at least in the German-speaking world, is still bound by the patriarchal literary-historical concept" (qtd. in Borovnik 12). In comparison, in the late 1980s, Sigrid Schmid Bortenschlager pointed out that women's literature was excluded from (scientific) consideration by literary history, as it was considered "inferior, trivial" (qtd. in

8 The historical lack of (Slovenian) women artists in the field of literature, mainly in the field of writing novels or narratives, and the reasons for it have been dealt with extensively by Silvija Borovnik *Pišejo ženske drugače?* (*Do Women Write Differently?*, 1995); and in several publications by Katja Mihurko Poniž, for example, *Zapisano z njenim peresom: prelomi zgodnjih slovenskih književnic s paradigmo nacionalne literature* (*Written with Her Pen: Breaking the Paradigm of a National Literature by Early Slovenian Women Writers*, 2014) and *Od lastnega glasu do lastne sobe: literarne ustvarjalke od začetkov do modernizma* (*From One's Own Voice to One's Own Room: Women Literary Creators from the Beginnings to Modernism*, 2001).

9 The only official female entrant that year was Martina Šiler, but she applied with a redacted version of her play *Reykjavik*, which she had already submitted the year before.

10 In this period, the identity of the authors was, in principle, unknown to the jury awarding the Grum Award, as the author's name was submitted in a separate envelope when the text was submitted. Unless it was a text that had already been staged or was known to the public, for example, in the case of the automatic transfer of the previous year's shortlisted nominees for the following year's prize, or text that had already been staged.

Borovnik 14). In Slovenian drama, texts for children and adolescents could also be listed in this category of overlooked and denigrated women's literature, excluded from scientific discourse. Renate Wiggershaus also notes the lack of representation of women's literature in anthologies and reviews of literary history – with the rare exception of works by female authors with predominantly male protagonists so that the (male) jury can identify with them (qtd. in Borovnik 16). Borovnik also cites the lack of translations of women's literature into foreign languages. These situations all help to create and reinforce the “general impression that quality literature is written predominantly by men” (Borovnik 16).

## The Absence of Women in Decision-Making Mechanisms: Defining the Male Perspective as Universal

British author Caroline Criado Perez aptly demonstrates how systemic inequality and the under-representation or even absence of women in all fields, not just in drama have decisive consequences for women's lives in general, which also affect the representation of women and womanliness. Criado Perez takes the example of analysing the absence of women in decision-making mechanisms and working practices. By analogy with the demonstration of the functioning of patriarchal ideology – the indirect topic of this paper – I relate this to either the dominance of patriarchal discourse in literature (Borovnik 12–16) or the absence of female experts in award and selection mechanisms, for example, in the Slavko Grum Award.

In her comprehensive research work *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, Criado Perez analyses how the under-representation of women in power politics causes (statistical and real) data gaps based on a wide range of international statistics from everyday life. Women and their perspectives are usually under-represented or absent from deliberative and decision-making mechanisms. Thus, their position remains overlooked, defined as irrelevant, and marginal. The exclusion of the female position from decision-making mechanisms and systems of representation consequently creates the impression that the male position is neutral and majority, which helps to shape and further entrench the world along patriarchal lines. The problem arises when the male perspective and view are presented in official data as the relevant one and as a starting point for generalisations and universal experience. However, it is essential to recognise that the male perspective is not a universal experience, as the experience of other genders is excluded.<sup>11</sup>

As shown in the previous chapter, in Slovenian drama – at least from 1966 to 1986 – the long-standing exclusion of female representatives from the ranks of experts or deci-

<sup>11</sup> The use of the masculine gender as the grammatically dominant gender represents a similar problem in gender politics. Criado Perez shows that the use of the masculine gender has a crucial impact on our perception and experience and, for example, on the exclusion of other genders from the linguistic situation and is thus by no means a neutral form of use.

sion-making bodies in the awarding of the Slavko Grum Award, the consequent lack of recognition of the importance of specific “female topics” and genres for the development of Slovenian drama, the lack of support for (further) creativity of female authors and the diminishing of their visibility in the public sphere have contributed to the persistence and spread of a patriarchal discourse in the field of drama. These factors help to reinforce the belief that quality playwriting is exclusively in the male domain (29 years without a female award-winner) and enable the numerical dominance of male playwriting.<sup>12</sup> In analysing patriarchal ideology in the context of Slovenian drama during the modernist period it becomes apparent that the predominantly male playwriting does not encompass an objective or universal experience, as it disregards the experiences of other genders. What is essential here is to recognise and become aware of the differences between men’s and women’s dramatic writing and the one-sided representation of womanliness. Therefore, using concrete examples, let us look at how women and womanliness are represented, particularly how they are manifested through the female characters in men’s playwriting.

## Examples of Men’s Dramatic Writing in the Analysis of Texts from *The Generator*

In this section, I exclusively analyse texts<sup>13</sup> written by the now well-established male playwrights, poets or predominantly male collectives in *The Generator* anthology. In a superficial examination of some randomly selected theatre texts, the analysis of female characters and female roles reveals the following representations of woman(liness).

An example from the first selected play: the first image of a woman appearing in the play is a lady in the role of a naked model, posing for a nude, “trying very hard to imitate the famous Modigliani model” (Lukan 79). The instructions for the play explicitly state that “this scene should in no way interfere with the rest of the action on stage” (79). Other female characters in the text include an actress who “makes people, who are not into sport, sing” (80) and a ballerina. Therefore, the only female characters in this play are cast as a nude model (for painting), an actress who sings and a ballerina. Note that all the female characters are also silent, i.e., they are not verbally represented (except for singing). Female characters are completely absent in the next theatre text from *The Generator*. In the very next one, we see the following female image: “A naked woman’s back appears. Naked woman’s breasts are projected onto it. The two merge to form a back with breasts. The back is still, the breasts are bobbing up and down” (88).

The image or representation of women that the reader can draw from these randomly selected plays of male writing from *The Generator* is either one of the female char-

<sup>12</sup> Ironically, this was indirectly made possible by women taking on the roles of wives and mothers.

<sup>13</sup> Formally and genre-wise, they are defined as happenings, poeticised playlets and series of instructions (or scores).



acters being mostly silent, anonymous and interchangeable, lacking any particular distinguishing characteristics, or, at the other extreme, one without any female character at all, because the characters and topics of women/womanliness are not in the foreground, are not of interest to the (male) authors, and consequently, the female characters in these plays are absent. Female characters appear in these plays as an uninteresting, missing, and unnecessary aspect. Moreover, in these examples of men's writing from *The Generator*, the image of women appears as one-dimensional, sensualised, sometimes sexualised and objectified, preferably reduced to the visual effect of a beautiful exterior, physicality, and often even nudity. In these texts, women do not play decisive or active roles. Instead, their roles are limited to the supporting function of momentary impressions, which should take place somewhere in the background to possibly liven up the main action but not distract from it.

The analysis of further examples of the representation of women in *The Generator* only confirms this image and effect. Women appear mostly as prostitutes or (vulgarily) whores, they are cast as sexual objects and victims of sexual, verbal or physical violence. Mothers are another role they frequently occupy, and sometimes (less frequently), they also appear as wives and mistresses or concubines. Women also appear in other texts written by male authors in the following roles: A girl in the role of a victim of (imminent) rape (Lukan 31–6) with a similar motif appearing at least once more (241). The character “Woman with bare breasts” (52–60) is described: “A woman with bare breasts enters: Milk, fresh milk, drink my milk, drink it, drink only fresh milk, drink only my milk! She wanders around the room. Enter the bald man. They sit on the floor. The bald man strokes her breasts, then drinks her milk” (59), and in another segment, it says: “But you cannot deny that a woman with or without her breasts torn open is more interesting than a woman who is normal in every way” (63). There is also the following quote: “A disabled man without a penis: ‘All whores should be shot! Yes, let’s put them all in front of the wall! And before that, three hundred and sixty-eight hunks should pass over them. Let the bitches drop dead! And let mine be first!’” (65) or, for example, “MALE VOICE I: Ugh, women’s poetry! That’s a fact” (258).

The only exception that stands out in a positive sense and introduces some fresh air to gender relations, playing with gender identity with his/her female nickname or surname is Andrej Rozman imenovana Roza (Andrej Rozman named Roza) and his/her text *Odkar sem tajnica dvojno življenje živim (izpoved)* (*Since I became a female secretary I've been living a double life (a confession)*) (322).<sup>14</sup> Specific texts respect gender equality, at least in principle, in the distribution of acting roles.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The (male) author is actually using female pronouns in the text, which is more obvious in the Slovenian original.

<sup>15</sup> These texts include, for example, Milan Jesih's *Limite* (*Limits*), Tomaž Kralj's *Pupilija Ferkeverk in Zaspanček Razkodranček* (*Pupilija Ferkeverk and Sleepy Curlyhead*), Iztok Osojnik's *Radijska igra za pet glasov* (*Radio Play for Five Voices*), and Gledališče sester Scipiona Nasice (Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre): *Minutni dramski teksti* (*Minute Drama Texts*).

In all other plays from *The Generator*, images of women or female characters are absent, thus missing the representation of women/womanliness. Where they do appear, there are fewer female characters than male ones, and they also have fewer lines. The analysis considers all the texts by male authors in the anthology, i.e., 55 out of 58. The representation of women authors in the collection is even lower than the initial 10 per cent, as there are typically several texts representing male authors, compared to one text per each female author. We can therefore say that 5 per cent of the texts in the anthology represent women authors. I would like to point out also that in men's writing, the female characters are mostly silent (as well as nameless, anonymous). In these playlets, they are not even allowed to speak, thus depriving them of their own voice and the possibility of articulating their own position and role.<sup>16</sup>

## Unequal Representation of Women: Silent (Silenced, Non-speaking, Voiceless) Characters

As analysed in *The Generator*, we cannot overlook that this kind of representation of women and womanliness is numerically predominant within the so-called men's writing in the period 1968–1986. The unequal representation of genders and its consequences are also visible in other areas of the arts and the public in general. Maja Kač's article "Spominjanje žensk v javnem prostoru: 'Dokler o njih ne govorimo, jih ne spravljamo v zavest'" ("Remembering Women in the Public Space: 'Unless we talk about them, we do not become aware of them'") provides some data for Slovenia. The data at the global scale that Criado Perez cites in her comprehensive study *Invisible Women* do not differ significantly. While she does not quote specific figures for theatre or drama, it can be inferred from the many diverse examples she gives that female characters are under-represented, even absent, or often silent, in broader everyday situations as well as in artistic media. That is to say, they do not speak or have no right to a voice, even when a woman is the main protagonist.

With regard to women's silence and the lack of (verbal) representation of women in the arts, mainly film and television, Criado Perez notes the following: "An analysis of G-rated (suitable for children) films released between 1990 and 2005 found that only 28% of speaking roles went to female characters" (20).<sup>17</sup> Further analysis shows that men have more roles and spend twice as much time on screen – this rises to nearly three times as much when, as most films do, the film has a male lead (Criado Perez 20). Moreover: "Men also get more lines, speaking twice as much as women overall; three times as much in films with male leads; and almost twice as much in

<sup>16</sup> "Egist: You've been to the garden? Vida: Yep. Egist: You've seen death? Vida: Yep. Egist: Well, then you can shut up!" (316).

<sup>17</sup> The book *Invisible Women* is based on cross-cultural comparative analysis and a wide range of international statistical data including analyses of different everyday life situations. Originally published in 2019, it draws on the most up-to-date (statistical) data and studies (Slovenian translation in 2022 by UMco publishing).

films with male and female co-leads” (20). There is much more data like this, which shows gender inequalities and confirms the majority representation of men in films and on television (in terms of presence, numerical predominance, visibility and verbal representation). A similarly unbalanced situation (in terms of gender) is evident when analysing gender representation on statues, banknotes, and even in the news (radio and TV and newspaper media) and textbooks (20–21). Women’s share in representation is a mere 24%: that is, of the women we listen to or read about (radio, TV and newspaper) (21). This is a figure measured globally. In Slovenia, this percentage might be even lower. An example from the Register of Immovable Cultural Heritage in Slovenia, according to the article by Maja Kač, quotes the following data: out of 233 statues in Slovenia, only ten are dedicated to the memory of women; 223, or 96%, are dedicated to men.

## Women’s Writing: Distinctive Characteristics

As for the distinctive characteristics of women’s writing – Borovnik designates it as women’s literature, meaning literature written by women authors – Silvija Borovnik notes that it is only in women’s writing that the poor conditions of work and the circumstances in which it is produced are more often exposed; it exposes gender equality as just apparent, it raises “the woman question”, and it is thus closely linked to the social position of women (24–25). Thus, in her discussion *Do Women Write Differently?*, Borovnik establishes and reinforces the awareness of the thematic difference between men’s and women’s writing: “The thematic range is certainly the area where it is still easiest to talk about the ‘male’ and the ‘female’ in literature” (227). In my opinion, an important observation by Borovnik here is to highlight the topics of political matters and national destiny in men’s writing. In contrast, women’s writing shows its connection to the feminist movement, the struggle for women’s emancipation, and the personal, or private, as political (Borovnik 227). Borovnik further notes that it is thus not unusual for women’s writing to take form initially as experiential literature, with a large portion of autobiographical and confessional material, often protesting (from personal, authentic experience through first-person confession) against the socially reproduced patriarchal image of women, and thus establishing women as subjects (224–225). Borovnik adds that women’s writing often resorts to the devices of the humorous, the absurd and the grotesque, as well as irony (243). From all this, it can be concluded that it is only with the emergence of women’s writing that the awareness about the problems of women’s under-representation, the emphasis on the specificity of their marginal (creative) position, and the ideological creation of the silence of women’s position in public come to the fore. Because most male writers were not interested in these topics, they were usually not part of their (personal) ex-

perience, and they did not feel the need to legitimise them. The under-representation of women's dramatic writing consequently leaves out of the drama a whole plethora of female topics, often including the establishment of female characters as full-blooded subjects. The difference between men's and women's writing can be detected already in the few examples of men's writing in *The Generator* anthology. Let us look at some examples.

## Examples of the Representation of Woman(liness) in Women's Dramatic Writing from *The Generator* Anthology

In contrast to the men's writing in *The Generator* anthology, all the female authors have female characters with content who are given a voice and the opportunity to speak. In two authors, Brina Švigelj and Ifigenija Zagoričnik, the characters interestingly come from the classical European dramatic repertoire, namely Ophelia and the ancient queen Clytemnestra. The motifs arising in women's writing in *The Generator* are strikingly similar:<sup>18</sup> witchcraft, burning at the stake, witch hunts and witch trials, and women are placed in the role of victims. Sacrifice, imprisonment and the limitation of freedom are frequent topics, as well as sexual and physical abuse, disguised as metaphors in the dramatic treatment, drawing on fantastic, fairy-tale, and folk motifs or using mythological characters.

In Ifigenija Zagoričnik's play *stepping outside she is free*, Clytemnestra finds herself in the focus of a centuries-long witch hunt. The passage concludes with the burning of the stake that awaits Clytemnestra, accompanied by other women (xenia, xanthippe, her mother and the mother of God). Similarly, in Svetlana Makarovič's play *Starci: Igra v osmih slikah (Old People: A Play in Eight Pictures)* (Lukan 128), the motifs of witchcraft, the witch trials and the character of the witch named Orange, who makes clouds and wind and sunflowers, are present. Significant is the motif of the (witch's personal) freedom. Fairy tale and fantasy motifs and variations of motifs and characters are present, as well as gender swaps, for example, the witch from *Hansel and Gretel*. Here it is a couple of evil older men who cage the younger victims and feed on their dreams and youth. The motif of femicide also appears: all that remains of the victim is a charred, broken and mangled corpse, which again emphasises the victim's anonymity.<sup>19</sup> "But yesterday I was Marjetica, and today I have no name anymore, isn't it strange, in this cold" (143).

<sup>18</sup> Strikingly, as they are not thematically coordinated, but rather individual texts that have only been selected to appear together *post festum*.

<sup>19</sup> Makarovič's play abounds with characters that are considered stereotypes of the Slovenian national psychological character, such as the possessive pathological mother on the one hand and outcast (elderly) childless witches on the other.

There are some elements of personal confession and autobiography in the authors' work, playing with familiar motifs from the classical dramatic repertoire and ancient Greek mythology or classical tragedy (Clytemnestra, Ophelia) in terms of content and words and reworking them in a personal-authorial way. In Makarovič's work, for example, one can notice the distinctive style of her poetry and ballads, as well as her reinterpretations of folk motifs (maidens, orphans), the predominance of dark atmosphere, cruel imagery, specific iterations ("in this cold"), etc.

Ifigenija Zagoričnik uses the character of Queen Clytemnestra. However, the author's introduction of sacrifice – a witch trial with burning at the stake – instead evokes a confessional-personal effect and autobiographical derivation of various motifs from ancient Greek tragedy and mythology (e.g., the appearance of Clytemnestra's daughter Iphigenia),<sup>20</sup> combining the original sacrifice of Iphigenia by Agamemnon (based on a motif from Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, translated to Slovenian by K. Gantar) and Orestes' matricide of Clytemnestra (in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*) as a reaction to her revenge on Agamemnon. The author emphasises the female characters and the sacrificial role of the (noble) woman, the queen and Iphigenia's mother.

Similarly, Brina Švigelj (intimately and personally) reinterprets a classical motif, which appears to be more about the emigration motif of Beautiful Vida. However, it is the use of the name (Ophelia) that testifies to a more tragic resolution of the fate of the young girl who has left for parts unknown (perhaps by train or by taxi, as the text implies) and disappeared in the darkness of the disappointing first (and last) night of love. Švigelj's language in *Ofelija (Ophelia)* is poetic, full of metaphors, and subtly sensitive to nuance and mood changes, testifying to the depth of inner feeling and richness of sensory impressions and emotional moods, which distinguishes it from the otherwise realistic language and action, and sometimes also the absurdist and conceptually conceived nature of much of the men's writing in *The Generator*.

An analysis of these texts shows that women's writing reproduces a different representation of womanliness than men's writing. Men's writing reduces the role of women to silent (non-speaking, voiceless, even silenced) characters; it is dominant and thus determines the social image of women.<sup>21</sup> Women's writing plays with the (literary) tendency of men's writing to represent women as silent characters by highlighting, raising awareness of, reflecting on and reinterpreting it. In this regard, Švigelj's artistic treatment of the plot in *Ophelia* is crucial. Positioning the silent female character into a central role does not take the silent female character for granted, nor does

20 The playlet is signed by Ifigenija (Zagoričnik), a name that in ancient Greek tragedy or mythology designates the daughter of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon (in the play, husbands and sons are reduced to a supporting role, mentioned in their function of potential betrayal), who was sacrificed to the gods by her own father in order to make the military campaign against Troy possible. The author's playing with names suggests a personal reinterpretation of the myth.

21 Let us recall that in one of the most famous Slovenian (political) plays, Dominik Smole's *Antigona (Antigone)*, 1960), the titular character remains silent, in fact even absent, as she does not appear in the play at all.

it reduce it to an irrelevant side character but willingly emphasises the silence itself. Although a constant topic of conversation by other characters and central to the action, Ophelia is exposed as absent and silent by a skilful dramatic manoeuvre.<sup>22</sup> There is a great deal of repetition, pauses, silences, sighs (“(short break)” 330–331, 333), unspoken thoughts, the language is at times disrupted, there are many innuendos, hints, insinuations without a definite answer as to where the young girl has disappeared to after a night of love. What is significant is the change of (patriarchal) discourse into a feminine/feminist one, in the sense of acknowledging and affirming the pain, the anguish of a young girl, the end of a young path due to deviating from the social norm and what is considered appropriate for the female gender: “Too independent, they must have said” (328); “People talk, you know, about their evenings on the shore” (331); “Her dress was too short” (332).

Švigelj’s writing in *Ophelia* already anticipates, to a certain extent, the characteristics that can be found (with no indication of direct influence), for example, in the more contemporary dramatic women’s writing of Simona Semenič.<sup>23</sup> There are gaps, pauses, interstices, and silences, which indicate a rebellion against and a break with men’s writing. The patriarchal discourse suddenly proves to be insufficient, imposed from the perspective of a different view. A proper alternative to this was not yet offered since, at the time (1966–86), the new (women’s) writing had not yet won its place en masse. We can only speak of that in more contemporary dramatic examples.

## The Female Silent (Non-speaking, Voiceless, Silenced) Character

I use the silent character as a metaphor for the representation of woman(liness) (or its absence), as this goes directly to the heart of the theme of gender politics and hegemonic gender relations in performing arts or drama. Moreover, it explicitly thematises the very position of silence that became established as the representation of woman(liness) throughout the history of Slovenian drama. I use the example of Simona Hamer’s dramatic writing as an example of contemporary women’s writing that can critically reflect on and articulate the silent and verbally absent representation of women (besides the aforementioned *Ophelia* by Švigelj). Simona Hamer’s *The Silent Character* was written or, rather, performed as part of the 2010 action *preglej: Zakon!* (*preglej The Act!*) and 2011’s *The Act: Third Reading*,<sup>24</sup> where the silent character or

22 In Švigelj’s playlet, we can also see a clear division and gender polarisation between the male (the young boy dressed as a page) and the female perspective, the First One and the Second One (by all appearances Ophelia’s chambermaids, her (personal and intimate) confidants, comforters, which also includes the role of the chorus, the people).

23 The fragmentation of writing, pauses, language, the abandonment of (grammatical) rules and norms points to the problematisation of existing patriarchal values and ideological narratives and discourses into which women are forced.

24 *The Act: Third Reading* was a performative action of the then group or drama laboratory PreGlej (later Preglej), which was clearly politically oriented and explicitly socially engaged, while by no means gender-neutral. The title of *The Act* refers to the family legislation act, while *Third Reading* refers to the National Assembly reading the bill in 2010.

rather her silence, appears in an explicitly articulated form. *The Silent Character* is an (experimental) theatrical text, more akin to a playlet in length, as it only takes up two pages in its original publication. Thus, formally, it bears similarities with the modernist drama experiments of *The Generator*.<sup>25</sup>

In *The Silent Character*, there is a discrepancy between its verbal, spoken part and its visual part.<sup>26</sup> The spoken text is represented by instructions (that can be staged by a voice from the off). There is an evident lack here, as the content of the text/instructions refers to a character that is not verbally represented in the text, the silent character. The silent character is absent at the speech level, she is silent, and the play is about the absence of her verbal re-presentation. As such, the silent character cannot exist in the dramatic text. It can only exist outside the text, hidden in the *didascalies* or stage directions as a performative trace. Her mode of existence is in her presence and her reduction to bare corporeality.

In *The Silent Character*, this is doubly emphasised, both in terms of content and performance. The silent character is not a gender-neutral character, nor is it merely a linguistic function or a neutral signifier. As the author points out: the silent character has genitals and breasts as well. The silent character is a female character, albeit subject to de-subjectification, objectification and reduction to gender. The instructions of the voice from the off, i.e., the director of the torturous situation, literally force her to expose herself publicly, her intimacy, and her gender. If I were to use the patriarchal discourse, I could claim that the reduction of the silent character to her gender, to her corporeality and to the visual, external, superficial dimension functions as a symbolic artistic castration. The text acquired additional meaning through its performance, as in *The Act: Third Reading*, the silent character was performed by the author Simona Hamer herself (12 March 2010 at Cankarjev dom), thus positioning her role of a female playwright within the symbolic sexual and dramatic relations of contemporary drama. In this way, through her cunning use of the silent character in contemporary women's playwriting, Hamer manages to critically reflect on the position of the female playwright within the patriarchal discourse and to draw attention to her reduction to silence.

In Simona Hamer's work, silent characters are formally and stylistically separated from the main text – by italics. They can therefore be found only in stage directions which in drama theory represent the marginal position and reduction to secondary

25 In both form and content, her performance text is reminiscent of a work of high modernism, Samuel Beckett's meta-theatre text *Catastrophe* (1982), which also consists of instructions performed by the director, his assistant and the object, which is mute. The text is dedicated to the Czechoslovak playwright (and later president) Václav Havel. Beckett wrote it at the time of Havel's imprisonment for dissent, and it is thus one of his few explicitly political works.

26 The playlet is formally divided into four parts, separated vertically and horizontally. The first part is a description of the (dramatic) situation of the silent character. The second part is a voice from the off, giving instructions to the silent character (regarding the action). The third part is an instruction to us, the readers or viewers, on how to act in relation to the performance or the text: "WHAT PART DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? / NO, DON'T READ - LOOK!!!" (this is a visual simulation of shouting at the spectator/reader). The fourth and final part is a footnote in small print: "This is a silent character. / There is nothing else / except what you see. / ..." (*The Act: Third Reading* 34).

text that may or may not be staged. By depriving the silent characters of the right to speak and of the main text, they are condemned in their own impotence to be at the mercy of and dependent on the big other, the narrator and the author or, rather, director, to give them visibility (and audibility) or to deprive them of it.<sup>27</sup>

Five years after *The Act: Third Reading* and *The Silent Character* (2010), Hamer further developed and expanded the concept of the silent character in her play *Nemi liki (Silent Characters)*, (2015), in which silent characters refer to all socially deprived groups, not only women, but all nameless marginalised groups and existences, expressing the roles of the many interchangeable and, from the point of view of society, expendable anonymous people.<sup>28</sup> Hamer thus extends her critique of patriarchy and systems of power and value to the critique of the turbo-capitalist consumerist system.<sup>29</sup>

## What about Representation of Women and Womanliness in Playwriting Today? A Change for the Better?

In Slovenian drama, gender representation only started to move towards equality after 2000: In 2001, the number of anonymous submissions for the Slavko Grum Award increased (2001). For the first time in 2002, women were in the majority on the jury. In 2007, the award was given to a female author for the first time. Since 2007, the Slavko Grum Award has become more gender-balanced in general, although still male-dominated: the award has been thus given eight times to male authors, five times to female authors, and twice to several authors. Overall, in the last 16 years (2007–2022), the award has been given eight times to female authors and ten times to male authors. Men still tend to be awarded the prize in a higher proportion.

However, the situation regarding the presence and gender representation of female playwrights has changed radically. To confirm this, I would also like to quote Maja Šorli's observation, who compared the activities of the theatre collective Pupilija Ferkeverk and their predecessors, the so-called Pupilčki (Pupilceks) poetry groups (active in the 1960s) to the more contemporary participants of PreGlej (the so-called PreGlejčki were active around the breaking year 2007). As she puts it:

<sup>27</sup> Simona Hamer developed the concept of silent characters in her project lasting until 2015, and concluded the two-year accompanying part of her artistic research with a (practical) round table at the 2014 Maribor Theatre Festival entitled *Silent Character(s) in Dramatic Literature, on Stage and in Reality*.

<sup>28</sup> From migrants, the countless anonymous refugees and underpaid workers from the Middle East, victims of verbal harassment, physical and sexual violence, female victims of war, women, nameless cleaners and secretaries, maids, nightclub dancers, etc.

<sup>29</sup> Simona Hamer's *Silent Characters* is still a play in which only men speak all the time, be it teenagers or their fathers, soldiers, nightclub customers and businessmen. The reproduction of the patriarchal representation of women in showbiz, entertainment and capitalist consumerist society is supported by quotations from the lyrics of famous pop stars (Beyonce, Rihanna, Rita Ora, Nicky Minaj), who sing about helpfulness, submissiveness, the female body and its objectification in over-sexualised lyrics.



The artists – the poets of the groups 441, 442 and the 443 movement – were all male, and it was only with *Pupilija* that a kind of gender balance was reached. The female co-travellers (as Ivo Svetina calls them) did not write their own poetry. Moreover, this is the fundamental difference between the Preglejčki and the Pupilčki. The PGLab was dominated by women, while in the performance of *Devet lahkih komadov* (*Nine Easy Pieces*), the number of performers was balanced by gender.<sup>30</sup> (Šorli 74)

For example, in *The Act: Third Reading* by the Preglej group (staged in 2010, published in 2011), which also contains the text *The Silent Character*, which I am analysing in comparison to *The Generator* anthology, there are seven texts in total, the majority of which, specifically five texts, are written by women and two by men.<sup>31</sup> The gender ratio in the Preglejčki group shifted to 5/7, or 71 per cent, in favour of female authors or rather playwrights during the course of over a quarter of a century.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I focus on the problem of the unequal representation of gender in the area of Slovenian drama, especially in the period 1966–1986, i.e., the explicit dominance of male playwrights and the absence of female representation, which is usually interpreted as the consequence of the reality of there being less female playwrights, while less attention is paid to and fewer attempts are made to understand the causes of this situation. In the paper, I address this very issue. With the dominance in the field of drama by male professional authorities and the under-representation of female playwrights in the award mechanisms, the lack of recognition of the importance of female topics or the specificity of women's work, and the absence of its promotion, the situation of unequal representation between the genders appears to be the effect of the functioning of patriarchal ideology, rather than representing reality.

In the rest of this paper, I focus on the significance of this dominant situation of male playwriting for the representation of woman(liness) in Slovenian drama and its absence, as well as for the lack of awareness about the (absence of) female perspective. I illustrate the practical consequences caused by the dominant male playwriting unilaterally determining the reproduction of the representation of woman(liness)) by using examples from the analysis of men's writing from *The Generator*, which turns out to uncritically reproduce the image of anonymous and silent female characters reduced to the visual or sexual dimension. In the case of the one-sided and monolithic,

<sup>30</sup> "In the PGLab, in considering our texts, we often come across the topics of equality, equal opportunities and difference, especially in relation to gender politics. The 1960s were the years of sexual liberation, but not of sexual equality and respect. There were no women poets in the 441, 442 and 443 groups. Today, in general, there is still no significant progress in this area, which is why the Preglejčki endeavour to foster respect and equal opportunities for both sexes" (Šorli 85).

<sup>31</sup> Two of them are pseudonyms, however, there is gender equivalence in the relationship between the author and their pseudonym.

even one-dimensional or stereotypical representation of woman(liness) in male playwriting (at least in the examples of plays from *The Generator* discussed here; a larger sample of plays would be needed to assess the situation in the history of Slovenian drama in its entirety), I emphasise the need for awareness of systemic blind spots in interpretations that emerge without any awareness of the absence of a female perspective. Despite being in the majority during this period, male playwriting is neither the normative nor the universal experience in the representation of woman(liness), although it may be presented as such. The female and any other gender perspective are, in fact, excluded from it. This is especially important because this state of patriarchal domination persists throughout at least three to four decades of Slovenian drama 1966–2006.

The imbalance in gender representation, the historical lack of representation of women's writing and the dominance of men's writing render an alternative, diverse and balanced representation of woman(liness) impossible and impoverished; the whole range of critical treatment of specific (female) topics and diversity in the portrayals of female characters (representations of women) is missing. Thus arises the danger of domination and reproduction of a narrow, passive, objectified and male-centred representation of woman(liness), which on the one hand, is sexualised and, on the other hand, is usually positioned within a patriarchal and/or Christian system of values. It is a representation of woman(liness) that is, first and foremost, silent. Silence, or rather, the silent character, thus turns out to be an appropriate metaphor both for naming the position of (absent) female authors, Slovenian female playwrights and their inadequate representation, i.e., for the real, extra-fictional element, as well as for the (intra-literary, or intra-fictional) representation of female characters within Slovenian drama. Since female playwrights and representations of woman(liness) in Slovenian drama remain silent, the voice and articulation of this silence and absence are also often missing. On the contrary, it is only in female playwriting that the silent character is used as a critical tool for exposing patriarchal domination (in the cases of Brina Švigelj's *Ophelia* and Simona Hamer's *The Silent Character*).

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