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## Abstract

Comedy has always paid much attention to the depiction of gender relations, love affairs and the happy ending that a wedding represents. In this paper, the author explores to what extent 21<sup>st</sup>-century Slovenian comedy tracks the changing roles of men and women in the family and society and diverges from traditional representations of the body and sexuality. The analysis covers Slovenian comedies that question social constructions of genders, roles and occupations, play with gender stereotypes or go beyond them in some of their aspects: *Denis in Ditka* by Tone Partljič; *Boris, Milena, Radko* by Dušan Jovanović; and *jerebika, štrudelj, ples pa še kaj* by Simona Semenič. In these comedies, gender relations form the central theme, and a female character plays the leading role.

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**Keywords:** contemporary Slovenian drama, comedy, construction of social and gender roles, love, the body, T. Partljič, D. Jovanović, S. Semenič

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# Going Beyond Gender Stereotypes in Contemporary Slovenian Comedy (Ditka–Milena–Bogdana)

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## Summary

All three comedies analysed in this paper appeared in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; thus, they mirror the changed roles of men and women in family and society, the attitude towards the female body and the desire for personal happiness regardless of social conventions. The main characters, Ditka, Milena and Bogdana, reject the historical model of the wedding of nubile ladies and tamed shrews, the stereotype of youth and beauty, and captivity in the expected social role. They enter into the so-called pure relationship, using Giddens's term, which is characterised by the couple entering into marriage for the sake of the relationship and mutual trust and intimacy rather than due to external social or economic circumstances (Švab 214–216).

Tone Partljič's comedy *Denis in Ditka* (*Denis and Ditka*), subtitled *An Electoral Erotic-Political Farce*, foregrounds women in politics and poses several questions concerning stereotypes in the construction of male and female identity, such as the traditional understanding of women as tender and emotional, versus men as strong and rational or the division of roles in which women care for the home and children. The man goes to work as the family breadwinner. The comedy does not go beyond the binary division of the gender roles it portrays; it only switches the gender functions, as the futuristic ending presents a family where the female Ditka is a full-time parliamentarian, whereas the male Denis stays at home and is pregnant. Gender stereotypes are employed first and foremost for comedic effect, though they partly also invite reflection on social norms and problematise hidebound gender roles.

*Boris, Milena, Radko* by Dušan Jovanović takes its structure from the tried and tested model of the love triangle, as indicated already in the comedy's title. The audacity of the text stems from the choice of characters; it is about the older generation and love at a ripe old age. It is these questions – what is natural, what is decent,

what kind of behaviour becomes the young and the old – that Jovanović turns into dramatic dialogues. Gender stereotypes make for many comedic situations and puns; simultaneously, due to the characters' ages and the documentary references, they break with established social conventions. There is also a kind of self-reflection on the part of the author and his characters, who analyse the psychology of their own actions, thus undermining the comical situations, laying themselves vulnerable and aware of the fleetingness of existence.

Simona Semenič has set the events of the comedy *jerebika, štrudelj, ples pa še kaj* (*rowan, strudel, dance and more*) in a specific place and time, that is, a village in the Vipava Valley on Assumption Day in 1963. The events take place in parallel: some of the villagers are at the parish house getting ready for mass, while others are in the hall of the old school, preparing an important celebration; on this day, both the bishop and the comrade secretary of the Central Committee are coming to visit. This portrait of society and the collective subconscious thus sums up the ideological divide among Slovenians, which, however, serves in the text as an external frame for the sexual adventures, fantasies and romantic yearnings of the villagers. The author gives free rein to sensuality and returns to the archetypal elements of womanhood, foregrounding the natural body freed from cultural norms. The central element of the dramatic text is the theme of sexuality, in particular, the female desire for pleasure. The villagers may be constantly surrounded by political discourse. However, it does not fatefully determine their everyday affairs or the limits within which they are to live their lives, and their sexual practices are not legitimated by marriage or partnership.

Contemporary Slovenian comedy often sticks to well-trying, traditional gender roles and gender relations, which are a bottomless source of comedic effects, not least due to the gender stereotypes connected with relations between men and women. The three comedies analysed, on the other hand, are examples of comedies that also problematise gender stereotypes and lift taboos, be they about women in leading positions in the public sphere, love in old age, or the emancipated female body and the right to sexual pleasure.

*Translation: Christian Moe*