

In the Renaissance and Humanism periods, the political, economic and cultural development in our area was determined by several factors. Among these were mostly more intense relations with the Czech lands, reformation movements, the pressure from the Ottoman Empire, ambitions of the Principality of Transylvania to extend its influence, the effort exerted by the Habsburgs to strengthen their power, as well as the resistance of the Hungarian nobility against absolutist tendencies. The parallel effects of all these factors led to a series of anti-Habsburg uprisings and an economic disruption which, in turn, brought about a demographic stagnation. Simultaneously, this development helped the establishment of Slovakized Czech language as our secondary, administrative, legal, liturgical and literary (codified) language to exist alongside the traditional Latin.

In the Baroque period, the advancement of theatre arts in this territory was greatly influenced by political, social and economic changes in Europe. From among many determining factors, it was mostly the still present Ottoman occupation of a large part of Hungary, as well as the persisting estate uprisings of the Hungarian nobility, which kept rebelling against the centralist policy of the Habsburgs.

In comparison with other European countries of the late 17th and early 18th century, a true national theatre culture did not exist in the area of present-day Slovakia. One of the reasons for this was the non-existence of nationally aware Slovak nobility, which had always identified with the Hungarian aristocracy – a class that had been, since the Middle Ages, the essential ruling class in the Hungarian territory, the so-called *Natio Hungarica*. A relevant factor in this context was also that the official language of the Hungarian nobility was Latin. Also, the significant number of German city patricians in the area of present-day Slovakia made the German language widely spread. In addition to Latin and German, the language used in this territory in the late 17th and most of 18th century was Slovakized Czech.

Because the stimuli for theatre production in the so-called pre-Chalupka period did not originate from domestic sources, and because theatre was not performed – with a very few exceptions – in the local language, the Slovak historiography did not even consider this theatre to be an integral part of the national theatre culture. This erroneous opinion was changed and subsequently completely rejected by the systematic research work of such personalities as Milena Cesnaková-Michalcová, Václav Černý, Ján Mišianik, Jozef Minárik, Ervín Lazar, Ján Port, Štefan Hoza, Emil Krapka, Ladislav Čavojský, Július Pašteka, Mišo Kováč Adamov, Martin Slivka, Andrej Maťašík, Ján Jaborník, Tibor Ferko, Juraj Čechetka, Mária Kýšková, Alexandra Mallá, Rudolf Dupkala, Daniel Škoviera, Jaroslava Čajková, Ladislav Kačic, Miklós Vojtek, Michaela Mojžišová, Peter Himič, Miroslav Varšo, Richard Marsina, Ivan Mrva, Vladimír Segeš, and Dušan Buran. The results of their comprehensive or partial research work have provided us with a historiographic base offering a vivid picture of the first stage of the development of Slovak theatre-making.

Despite these facts, it can be said that every type of theatre expression in the so-called pre-Chalupka period influenced the conditions that would later help establish our national theatre culture. The breaking point came on the 22 August 1830, when Gašpar Fejérpataky-Belopotocký produced Ján Chalupka's play *Kocúrko* in Liptovský Sv. Mikuláš and Slovak theatremaking entering a new historical era.

Title page of the second edition of Juraj Palkovič's play *Two Blows and Three Thumps* from 1810. The play is considered to be the first original play of the secular drama category written and produced during the Bernolák period. It was first published in 1800. In 1842, it was performed as part of Grabinger's beneficial event in Prague. It premiered in the Estate Theatre and reprised in the New Theatre.

It was the first Slovak play produced in a professional theatre.

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REALISM AND DEALING WITH THE EUROPEAN MODERNISM AND THE AVANTGARDE

THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF POST-WAR DRAMA – SOCIALIST REALISM AND THE SEARCH FOR A NEW SHAPE OF HUMANITY

DRAMA DURING THE NORMALISATION PERIOD – BOTH SERIOUS AND HAPPY – AND THE TRANSITIONAL 80S

DRAMA THAT GOT DECLARED DEAD (THE 90S)

PLURALISTIC FORMS AFTER THE YEAR 2000

Since its beginnings, Slovak drama has made a short, but very rich journey. It has been inspired not only by European art movements, but also by domestic social and political life, as well as the quality of theatre. Slovak playwrights, too, did not avoid period fashion and traps that negatively affected the form and quality of the plays. Just like the stories and their heroes who faced their own problems and external circumstances, Slovak drama also fought its battles – some successfully, some not. It has left us with important details about human perceptibility and sensitivity in the context of historical and civilizational changes.

The beginnings of Slovak drama date back to the play *Two Blows and Three Thumps* (1800) by Juraj Palkovič, written in Slovakized Czech. It is no coincidence that in the 19th century, during the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy, national revivalist and defensive tendencies found their medium in dramatic writing. Initially, our playwrights wrote plays in the national language following the example of German comedies and farces (e.g. Ján Chalupka, Ján Palárik), but later also wrote historical plays (Jonáš Záborský), and attempted so-called big drama (Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav). Only very gradually, along with the development of amateur theatre in Slovakia, more original and realistic plays were produced. These were mostly characteristic for rural themes – an entire line of this approach can be traced from the beginning of so-called naïve realism (Ferko Urbánek), through analytical drama (e.g. Jozef Gregor Tajovský), all the way to expressionist and symbolist influences (Vladimír Hurban Vladimírov).

After the foundation of the Slovak National Theatre in 1920, attempts at a professionalization of theatre slowly affected the writing of several playwrights. Ivan Stodola and Július Barč-Ivan produced extensive dramatic work that demonstrated several tendencies – from satirical plays satirizing the conditions in the Czechoslovak Republic, through plays that reacted to the events of both world wars, all the way to existentialist and psychological plays, philosophical-meditative contemplations about the meaning of life, conscience and humanism.

Eva Maliti-Fraňová: KRCHEŇ THE IMMORTAL
Slovak National Uprising Theatre, Martin, 19 October 2002
Directed by Rastislav Ballek
From left: Jana Olhová, Ján Barto
Photo by Matúš Olha
SOURCE Theatre Institute Archive



PRENATAL PHASE OF THE SLOVAK CRITICISM

THE 1920S – FIRST STEPS

THE 1930S AND 1940S – CONTROVERSIAL PROFESSIONALIZATION

THE “GREY” 1950S VS. THE “GOLDEN” 1960S

THEATRE INSTITUTE – A PLACE WHERE CRITICISM IS BORN AND REVIEWS ARE KEPT

THE 1970S – NORMALIZED CRITICISM

CRITICISM AT THE TURN OF THE ERAS

THE 1990S – STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE

THEATRE CRITICISM TODAY – A CRISIS OR A CHALLENGE?

The story of theatre criticism is inherently connected to the theatre stories. Its purpose is to monitor theatre activities in certain space during a certain period of time and report about it through reviews, essays, internal critiques, discussions. Consistent performance of this task is important not only immediately after a staging of a new play when the critics evaluate the results of several weeks or months long attempt at a creation of a dramatic work. The critic's work surpasses this timeline (“here and now”) and becomes significant as a theatre history artefact. In essence, it infinitely extends the longevity of a play whose shelf life is limited to a relatively short period of time from the opening night to the closing night.

In an ideal case, the record that the critic communicates offers the opportunity to grasp a multidimensional notion of the play long after its last performance. At the same time it bears witness to the context of the creation of the play – production of a particular theatre at a particular moment or through the seasons, the level of theatre culture in the country during a certain period of time, influences of international drama and so forth. Without this road map created by the critics further theatre studies would be complicated or even impossible. Even though other means of preserving the ephemeral, fleeting material of a dramatic work – photographs, audio or video recordings – have been around and used for a long time, they are far from perfect. Unlike the critic, they lack the ability to analyse, put a particular work in the social and historical context, comparatively evaluate shifts from tradition or contemporary trends, name new phenomena, point out original interpretation of a text, focus on individual components of a play, draw attention to overall weaknesses – they can only prove or possibly disprove what the critic expresses.



Arthur Miller: AFTER THE FALL
Slovak National Theatre Bratislava 19 September 1964
Directed by Pavol Haspra
Mária Kráľovičová, Ladislav Chudík
Photo by Jozef Vavro
SOURCE Theatre Institute Archive