

THE PLAYS OF LILLIAN HELLMAN, CLIFFORD ODETS AND WILLIAM INGE ON SLOVENE STAGES

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Abstract

After the Second World War, Slovene theatres started to include in their repertoires more and more American authors and their plays. Their choice were varied, from serious dramas by Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, to comedies by Norman Krasna and John van Druten, dependant mostly on the availability of the texts. In the immediate postwar years the theatres liked to present playwrights with progressive ideas in their plays, such as Lillian Hellman and her *The Little Foxes*, which was successfully produced at three Slovene theatres, while her *The Children's Hour* received negative reviews. In the fifties, three theatres chose two plays by Clifford Odets, *Golden Boy* and *Country Girl*, mainly because of his socially critical ideas and his admiration of humanity. His plays were rather well received; however, the critics doubted his literary genius. William Inge and his plays, *Come Back*, *Little Sheba*, *Picnic* and *Bus Stop*, chosen mainly because of the warmth with which the author depicted the tragedy and the beauty of life, were produced at three Slovene theatres. The author received rather wide-ranging opinions from the critics. Some thought him to be an unoriginal depicter of dull American life, while others praised his lyricism and new dramatic techniques.

Introduction

Lillian Hellman, Clifford Odets and William Inge and their dramatic works belong to the principal artistic works of American drama, although they have been received differently by American critics and literary historians. Lillian Hellman and Clifford Odets, who became famous in the thirties, were recognized as authors with social concern and progressive elements in most of their works. William Inge, who emerged as a playwright in the early fifties, has often been placed along-side Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller as the best postwar American playwright. The purpose of my paper is to establish which of their plays were staged in Slovenia and at which theatres, why the plays were chosen by the theatres, how successful the translations were and how the performances were received by the audience and by the critics in the Slovene press at that time. Two plays by Lillian Hellman, *The Children's Hour* and *The Little Foxes*, two plays by Clifford Odets, *Golden Boy* and *The Country Girl*, and three plays by William Inge, *Come back*, *Little Sheba*, *Picnic* and *Bus Stop*, were

performed at twelve Slovene theatres, in the period between 1949 and 1970. All the plays were translated for the staging purposes only and have not been published in Slovene. The plays were mentioned in the literary reviews of certain Slovene theatres and in the collected reviews of performances.

Lillian Hellman (1906 – 1984) wrote plays, film scripts and memoirs. She came into contact with drama while working as a reader of dramatic scripts and was supported in her writing attempts by Dashiell Hammett, a writer of detective novels. She succeeded with her first play, *The Children's Hour* during the Depression. During the Spanish Civil War she was politically involved against fascism and after visiting Spain she developed radical views of society and the world. In the beginning of the fifties she was called to testify in front of the McCarthy subcommittee. She engaged herself in the fight for human and civil rights and was a known social figure. Some of her most successful plays are *The Children's Hour* (1934), *The Little Foxes* (1939), *Another Part of the Forest* (1946) and *Toys in the Attic* (1960). After a few unsuccessful plays and film scripts she became famous with her memoirs, *An Unfinished Woman* (1969), *Pentimento* (1973) and *Scoundrel Time* (1976).

Most foreign literary critics believe that the plays of Lillian Hellman are not works of political propaganda despite her political involvement. In her plays she revealed the corruption of modern society and treated themes such as free will and the responsibility of an individual (Rollyson 12). The critics also praised the excellent development of her characters, the sharp dialogue and effective realism on stage (Schäfer 89). Lorena Holmin found in Hellman's work the influence of Ibsen and Chekhov, as well as parallels to Odets' social protest and Faulkner's interest in the South (9-10).

The Little Foxes was not her first work, but I will deal with it first, since it was performed in Slovenia before *The Children's Hour*. *The Little Foxes* was produced in 1939 and was well received also because of the excellent cast (Tallulah Bankhead as Regina) and it had 410 performances. At the beginning of the twentieth century in the American South the Hubbard family, Ben, Oscar and their sister Regina, the representatives of the rising middle class, attempt to build a cotton factory as investors of half of the building cost, the rest being provided by a businessman from the North. The only problem is that Regina's husband Horace, who returns from the hospital under the pretext of being missed by his wife and daughter, refuses to get involved. Regina tries to force him into the deal and when she fails she lets him die. In the meantime Oscar and his son steal Horace's shares and at the end Regina blackmails them and wins her way. The only person who decides to stand up against them is Regina's daughter Alexandra. The main theme of the play is greed and its negative consequences, which can be seen in the Hubbard family, and the guilt of the people who surround them and passively watch their destructive march. There has been a difference of opinion among the literary critics whether the play is mainly a drama of social protest or drama of characters. Loren Holmin thought that the play shows the effect of greed on the society as well as on the individual (63-4); meanwhile Rollyson's opinion politics does not play a visible role in this drama, but nevertheless Hellman presents the Hubbards as representatives of modern evil (131). Jürgen Schäfer (91) and Joseph Krutch (12) also think that the author attacks modern American society as

a whole, although the latter does not perceive it as an effective accusation. The aforementioned critics also found in Hellman's play elements of melodrama, especially some flat characters, stolen shares, threats and blackmail, but they praised the excellent characterization and the relations between the Hubbards, particularly of Regina and Ben. Lillian Hellman herself reflected on the opinions of the audience and the critics and realized that her intentions with the play had been misunderstood or lost to some extent.

I had meant to half-mock my own youthful high-class innocence in Alexandra, the young girl in the play; I had meant people to smile at, and to sympathize with, the sad, weak Birdie, certainly I had not meant them to cry; I had meant the audience to recognize some part of themselves in the money-dominated Hubbards; I had not meant people to think of them as villains to whom they had no connection. (*Pentimento*, 180)

The play was staged by three theatres in Slovenia, under the title *Kobilice*. On April 23rd 1949 the Šentjakobsko Theatre in Ljubljana presented the play under the direction of Milan Petrovčič. The play had thirty-nine performances in that and the following seasons. The Slovene National Theatre in Trieste staged it on March 10th 1950 under the director Modest Sancin. The play had only nine performances. The last production followed at the Slovene National Theatre in Maribor, on January 6th 1951, with the guest director Jože Babič. It had thirteen performances.

Theatres in Maribor and in Trieste introduced in their theatre programmes the author as a progressive writer and they defined the play as a blunt attack on cruel capitalism, a work which demolishes the audience's illusions about the peaceful harmony of the capitalistic middle-class family (Dolar 24-6). The director Jože Babič praised the sharp psychological analysis of the characters and the writer's frankness in exposing their actions and relationships (Peršak 375-6).

Two accounts of the production at the Šentjakobsko Theatre were found; the Šentjakobsko Theatre celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in 1952 and Jože Mahnič in the literary magazine *Obzornik* (208-213) summed up the performances, including "Kobilice", which he introduced as a modern American drama with deep psychology and progressive social thought. He believed that the work teaches socialism with life itself. Vladimir Frantar in his presentation of the Šentjakobsko Theatre (*Živo gledališče II*, 39) emphasized the first performance of the play in Yugoslavia and its success at the theatre as well as on tours. According to him the critics in the press mostly praised the director, the entire cast, especially the lead actors.

All three critics who wrote about the staging in Trieste in 1950, Vladimir Bartol in the newspaper *Primorski dnevnik* (2, 5), J. K. in the newspaper *Ljudski tednik* (13) and an unknown author on Radio Trieste (Jože Peterlin, *Slovensko tržaško gledališče* 28-30) generally made positive comments on the production, especially about the director and his work. All three critics agreed this play to be one of the best performances at the Slovene theatre in Trieste by then. It is interesting that the author of the radio also viewed Hellman critically; he did not see her as an especially important author in modern American drama, but he valued the general human thought in her

work. He wondered whether the writer remained an artist with a refined sense for human rights and freedom or if she developed into a fighter for some kind of ideology. According to him *The Little Foxes* is not a declaration of a cultural fight; it only reveals an egoistic and rotten society.

The production of the play in Maribor was written about by two critics, Srečko Golob in the newspaper *Vestnik* (4) and Branko Rudolf in the literary magazine *Nova obzorja* (604-8). They both praised the whole performance as one of the best after the war, especially the director and the entire cast and found a few faults in the presentation of some roles. Golob was bothered by the director's emphasis of the psychological element and neglect of the social area. Babič achieved that by omitting several scenes, which show the economic background, according to this critic the essential element in the play.

The Children's Hour was written in 1934 and was based on an account of a true story, which Hammett advised Hellman to read. In the play a spoiled young girl Mary tells a lie to her rich and powerful aunt, Mrs Tilford, about her two teachers, Martha and Karen, being lesbians. The aunt believes the girl and the two women lose their battle against her slander in court. Their lives are ruined and Martha commits suicide. At first sight the taboo of lesbianism seems to be in the centre of this play, but in fact the play deals with the conflict between a lie and the truth. The two teachers are not the victims of the lie, but of the gullible righteous society, presented by Mrs Tilford, which accepts the lie for the truth and acts in her blind conviction of justice. The play became controversial because of the motif of the lesbian love. The audience and the critics of that time understood Mary as a completely negative character (Holmin 26); they commented on the third act where the shift is made from Mary, whom they received as a main character in the play, to the two teachers (Lederer 29) and they did not like the ending, especially Martha's death. Katherine Lederer also emphasised the true theme of the play, which is the damage people cause with their selfishness and hypocritical judgements. She also explained the shift of the attention in the play; Mary is just a carrier of the lie, and as soon as the lie is public, she disappears, while further damage is caused by the reactions of people to this lie. (31-2) Both Lederer and Carl Rollyson (68-75) agree about plausible characterization of Mary and the lack of depth and background in the characters of Martha and Karen; according to Christopher Bigsby Mrs Tilford's remorse and calm reaction of people present at Martha's death are questionable. He thinks that the play deals with the persistence at any cost of being innocent and its destructive effect. (275-6)

The play was produced at The Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana, on April 20th 1955. It was directed by young Balbina Barabovič, and was performed twenty times.

The play was discussed by Bratko Kreft in the theatre programme (173-4), according to whom the play deals with a delicate area of women's sexuality, which the society condemns. Later in his article he pointed out the central core of the play, namely slander, which is the worst sin of the moralizing and narrow-minded society. Kreft praised the smooth dialogue and realistically presented characters, as a special quality he pointed out the writer's compassion for Karen and Martha, who are destroyed by the society's slander as well as their own nature. The important effect of the

play is the shock the audience experiences, which is one of the main tasks of drama according to Aristotle. He also stated that one of the reasons for choosing this play was the opportunity for several actresses to be involved in the play. Before the premiere Jože Tiran in the newspaper *Slovenski poročevalec* (4) introduced Lillian Hellman as a gifted writer, who in her later works dealt with the social relations in America, but in her first play she showed the provincial milieu, where the ordinary people succumb to powerful forces which act under the influence of a lie.

Several critics published their thoughts about the play and its performance in newspapers and two literary magazines (*Beseda* and *Naša sodobnost*). Vasja Predan in *Ljudska pravica* (April 26th 1955, 6), Marjan Jerše in *Slovenski poročevalec* (5) and Miklavž Prosenec in *Beseda* (362-75) rejected the artistic value of the play itself, while Jamar in *Ljubljanski dnevnik* (6) and Vladimir Kralj in *Naša sodobnost* (376-8) found certain values in this work. They questioned the choice of the theatre to produce the play and were certain of *The Little Foxes* being a much better selection for the central Slovene theatre. According to the critics the director followed the script too closely and failed in the starting scene and the dull end.

Clifford Odets (1906 – 1963) grew up in the Bronx and left school at the age of seventeen to try breaking through as an actor. He came into contact with Theatre Guild and joined the Group Theatre in New York. He played minor roles and started to write, but the Group Theatre did not choose any of his works. He became famous in 1935 with a one-act play *Waiting for Lefty*, which he wrote for a competition, sponsored by the New Theatre League and the magazine *New Masses*. Thus a myth was born that Odets wrote his first play because of the reward. Gerald Weales on the contrary believes that Odets wanted to contribute his work to charity. The play had enormous success and was performed in thirty different cities all over America, but was also attacked for its revolutionary views (11-36). Odets had four plays on Broadway in the winter of 1935, *Waiting for Lefty*, *Awake and Sing*, *Till the Day I Die*, and *Paradise Lost*. He received offers from Hollywood, wrote a few film scripts and eventually moved to California. People in New York resented his connection to Hollywood and saw it as a betrayal. Odets' other successful plays were *Golden Boy* (1937) and *The Country Girl* (1950).

The literary critics of that time and later valued Clifford Odets either as a promising playwright who did not bring his talent to full effect or as a writer of the thirties (Miller 1). Most of his plays do not contain a political programme and are not works of propaganda, although the plays written in the thirties show the reality of the Depression. Working at the Group Theatre was a very influential and valuable experience, and is shown in several characters that Odets puts into the centre of his plays (Weales 31-2). In his plays Odets wanted to express his love for the people and his praise of the human spirit; he pointed to the tension in the individual, in the USA and in the world; he dealt with the search for happiness and fulfilment and the characteristics of the American society (Miller 2-3). According to Bigsby love is the central force in Odets' plays, but it is destroyed by corruptibility and harsh materialism (180). An important element in his work is language, the use of slang, the language of New York and of immigrants, which makes his characters real individuals and unique.

Golden Boy is a drama about a young man Joe, the son of an Italian immigrant, who is a talented violinist but decides for a career in boxing. He eventually succeeds but in the process loses himself and dies in a car crash with his girlfriend Lorna. In this play two worlds are confronted. The first is the modern world of cruel and corruptive business, dominated by the greed for money, materialism, and making profit. This world is presented by the characters, such as the boxing manager Moody with his reminiscences of the golden twenties, and the gangster Fuseli, who buys a part of Joe's profit. The other is the old world with values like inner human happiness and satisfaction with a humble way of life, presented by Joe's father Bonaparte. The play shows the downfall of a young, talented individual in a world which dehumanizes him into its property. Though successful as a boxer Joe does not find happiness and fails to see any possibilities for it in the future. He wants to run away from both worlds and the question of his suicide remains in the mind of the reader.

The play was written in 1937, when the Group Theatre was in crisis. It was a great success and it ran for 250 performances. It was directed by Harold Clurman, while the production on the West coast by Stella Adler. The play was also staged in Paris and London and a film version was completed in 1939, with a happy ending.

In Gabriel Miller's opinion there are two main themes in the play, the desire of a soul for a safe haven and the close connection of success and death. He also found the elements of a gangster film in the play (173-84) According to Bigsby Joe is a flat character, constructed by the author for his dramatic purposes; he lacks self-recognition and knowledge of other people, and runs from the cognition of his own identity (182).

The play was staged in Slovenia at The Municipal Theatre in Ljubljana, on March 26th 1955, the director being Jože Babič.

In his presentation of the play Miloš Mikeln in the theatre programme (199-201) summarized Harold Clurman's article. He emphasized that the boxer's story is a symbolic image of the great fight in which we all take part. Joe in his strife for society's acceptance neglects his true artistic essence, becomes a killer, a defeated man and has to die. Mikeln exposed Joe's brother Frank as a free man, opposite to Joe.

The three critics, Jože Javoršek in *Slovenski poročevalec* (1955, 4), Miloš Mikeln in *Ljubljanski dnevnik* (2), and Primož Kozak in *Beseda* (145-55) expressed interesting thoughts about the author and the play in their articles. According to Javoršek the play condemns violence and expresses the author's hope for democracy. Mikeln defined the play as mediocre and unpretentious work and doubted the value of the writer's dramaturgy, although he did find a certain amount of quality in it. Kozak on the other hand rejected the play as a literary work of art and only saw its educational and pedagogical purpose. The critics disagreed about the success of the direction; Javoršek praised it, Mikeln saw its weakness in the building of the characters, and Kozak thought that the style of staging should be light, and not as serious as it was. The critics praised the actors of the side roles and found imperfections in the lead roles.

The Country Girl deals with an older actor Frank Elgin, who is given another opportunity by Bernie Dodd, a director in one of the New York's theatres. He offers Frank a lead role, but can hardly convince him to take it. Frank's wife Georgie, who had been preparing her things to leave, finally persuades him to try it. Frank tells

Bernie about Georgie's suicide attempts and makes him believe that Georgie wants to ruin Frank's chances at succeeding at this project. Bernie and Georgie thus get into conflicts until the truth is finally revealed in the morning when Frank, drunk, over-sleeps at the theatre. Bernie sees that Frank has been lying but in the end he keeps him in the play and Frank triumphs in his role. Although Bernie falls in love with Georgie she decides to stay at Frank's side. The scene of this play is the world of the theatre, which many times shows its cruel side; the producer Cook fights for success and profit, while the director Dodd strives for the artistic creation. In this world an individual is given another chance to prove himself, to find self-confirmation and the praise of others. Frank is a personality with psychological problems, low self esteem, a drinking problem and entirely dependent on his wife. Through the play we see Georgie's self-sacrifice and courage in her relationship with her husband and in her fight against Bernie's accusations, but also a certain amount of resignation.

The play was performed in 1950 and it was performed 235 times. It was staged in London under the title *Winter Journey*, and also filmed.

The critics Edward Murray and Jean Gould emphasized the absence of the social element, characteristic of Odets' previous plays. Murray praised above all its deep psychological characterization (241-49).

The Country Girl was staged at three Slovene theatres, under the title *Premiera v New Yorku*. The Municipal Theatre in Ljubljana was the first to present it on March 31st 1956, the director was Igor Pretnar. It ran seventeen performances. On September 20th 1958, it was performed at the Primorsko Drama Theatre in Nova Gorica, and directed by Janez Drozg. In 1959, on June 20th, it was staged at The Slovene People's Theatre in Celje, under the direction of Andrej Hieng. It was performed only five times.

The work was presented by Igor Pretnar in the theatre programme (257-9), where Pretnar stated his perception of the play's main idea, namely the fight for humanity and man's nobleness, which has to end victoriously. In his opinion the basic conflict lies in Frank himself, the alcoholism and as its result Frank's depraved character, against which Bernie and Georgie fight. The brightest point in the play is its optimistic end, which is not typical of Odets as well as of other writers of modern American drama, who deal with the themes in an "ideologically progressive" manner. But on the contrary they depict the gloom and hopelessness of the American life, ending their plays pessimistically and tragically. According to Pretnar the play requires a neutral presence of the director, like Wyler's direction, and poetically realistic acting.

There was also a concrete reason for choosing this particular play for this theatre. The actor Miro Kopač wanted to celebrate his thirty-five years of acting that season and together with the stage manager Dušan Moravec (1998) they decided for this play, with which the National Theatre from Belgrade toured in Ljubljana in 1955.

According to two critics, Miklavž Prosenc in *Ljudska pravica* (6) and Simon Fras in *Ljubljanski dnevnik* (7), the performance of the play in Ljubljana was successful. Both praised the work of the director Igor Pretnar. Prosenc was especially enraptured with a new viewpoint that the director had found in Frank's personality, namely his moral freedom and responsibility for his own actions; in the play the psychology of an individual and not of the milieu was accentuated, and that presented a small but

important step forward for the critic. According to Fras the director wanted to express the ethical idea of the play, which was the importance of a fight for the humanity in a man. Both critics commended the lead roles.

There was only one article published about the performance in Nova Gorica. The unknown author (ib.) in *Ljudska pravica* (6) praised the young cast in a supportive way and did not mention any deficiencies in the performance. His critique is superficial and does not show the true picture of the performance and its success.

The theatre in Celje presented the play in a newspaper *Celjski tednik*, since its play bill was not being published at that time. The theatre changed its programme three times, because they could not get the Slovene translations in time, so their last choice was Odets' work. The unknown author of the article stressed the familiarity of the story to the people (May 15th 1959). The performance in Celje was the last one in that season and a successful one too. The critics H. S. in the newspaper *Celjski tednik* (4) and Tine Orel in the magazine *Naša Sodobnost* (857-63), praised it as an accomplished creation owing to a good direction and persuasiveness of the actors in playing their roles.

William Inge (1913 – 1973) studied English at the University in Lawrence, Kansas, was involved in drama productions and wanted to succeed as an actor in New York, but was without financial means after having finished his studies. He continued with postgraduate studies and received his Master's degree. After five years of lecturing Inge worked as a critic at a newspaper in St. Louis during the Second World War. In 1944 he interviewed Tennessee Williams after his first successful play *The Glass Menagerie* and their meeting proved to be a crucial moment in Inge's life. Within three months he wrote his first play, *Farther Off from Heaven*, with the production of which Margo Jones opened her Theatre 47. Afterwards he wrote four successful plays, all produced on Broadway: *Come Back, Little Sheba* (1950), *Picnic* (1953), *Bus Stop* (1955) and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (1957). He also wrote some successful film scripts and novels. His later plays were not well received and caused in a sensitive writer disappointment and depression.

Some literary critics place Inge alongside Williams and Miller as an important American postwar playwright (Schäfer 139), although he later could not repeat his success of the fifties. The themes of loneliness, love, the loss of youth, innocence and promises prevail in his plays. According to Bigsby he presented provincial America as a picture of life, where human efforts and possibilities are destroyed, and the relationships between people unsuccessfully die away into bitterness (1992: 153). The critics praised his masterful presentation of women characters.

The story of *Come Back, Little Sheba* evolves in a small town in the Middle West, the home of a childless couple, Lola and Doc Delaney. A free-minded student Marie lives with them as a tenant and has a well-shaped boyfriend Turk. Lola grieves over her lost dog Sheba, while her husband Doc tries to stay sober, but eventually, triggered by his fancy for Marie and contempt for Lola's admiration of Turk, fails, gets drunk and is taken to hospital. After his return he begs Lola to stay with him and she does. In this play Inge deals with the need for love and the consequences of its absence in human life and relationships. Doc and Lola got married young because Lola was

pregnant but she later lost the baby. Since then they have lived their lives without genuine love, physical or psychical, intimacy and communication. Lola cries for her lost youth and expresses her unsatisfied sexual desire through observing the young couple and admiring Turk's muscles, while Doc tries to repress his disappointment with drinking.

The play had 190 performances, and the film version proved even more popular, being judged in Cannes as the best film, and Shirley Booth was awarded with Oscar for the leading role.

Come back, Little Sheba was staged at the Slovene People's Theatre in Celje, on December 20th 1955, for the first time in Yugoslavia. It was translated and directed by Dušan Tomše. It was only performed nine times, the least of all plays in that season.

Herbert Grün wrote an interpretation of the play for the theatre programme (149-51). He discussed many aspects of this play, from alcoholism, disillusionments of life, the picture of drab everyday life in provincial America, to the absurdity of life, which are intertwined in this play. As the most important theme he pointed out alcoholism and justified its treatment in literature.

In the article, published by Oton Župančič in the same theatre programme, the critic introduced the author and the opposing criticism by literary theoreticians and critics about his work. There are critics, who compare Inge to Chekhov, while others reject the comparison and claim that Inge does not reach Chekhov's depth of idea. Some critics renounce Inge as a quality writer because his plays were written according to the American concept, while others favour him as an important creator of new literary ways. In Župančič's opinion Inge moved the reader with his simplicity and the unobtrusive symbolism of his characters.

The performance in Celje and particularly the choice of the author and his play caused rather turbulent reactions in the press, similar to the opinions abroad. Articles were published in five different newspapers and magazines. Tine Orel in *Celjski tednik* (5), and Bruno Hartman in *Večer* (4), did not see anything new, exciting and worth presenting in the idea and the theme of the play and in Inge's dramaturgy as a whole. Jože Javoršek in *Slovenski poročevalec* (1956 4) wrote that the theme of the play was not close to the Slovene taste. Miloš Mikeln in *Ljubljanski dnevnik* (1956 4) and Vasja Predan in *Ljudska pravica* (1956 6) on the other hand praised the author and his work. In Mikeln's opinion Slovene theatres did not know how to perform this kind of plays. Predan rejected the condemnations of the unoriginality of American drama and defined Inge's play as a fine modern play. Regarding the performance critics believed that the lack of success was partly due to the impression of a successful film, shown at the cinema a short time ago, and because the director could not create the typical atmosphere, present in Inge's plays. The critics praised mostly the creations of the side roles and found several faults in the two lead roles.

Picnic was written and produced in 1953. Flo Owens, her daughters Madge and Millie, and their neighbour Helen Potts live in a small town in Kansas. Madge, a very beautiful, sensitive girl, dates Alan, a wealthy student, and Flo has high hopes for them marrying. This way Madge could enjoy a well-provided life. But Madge does not share her enthusiasm; she feels that Alan admires her as a beautiful object and not as a real person. One morning their lives are shattered by the arrival of a tramp Hal, who

was actually Alan's colleague at college and is in search of a good job. Hal and Madge are drawn to each other from the start, which does not appeal to Flo. Rosemary, a teacher who lives at Helen's, is also disturbed by Hal, when she realizes that she is not young anymore and cannot wait for the love of her life forever and has to trap Howard into marriage if she does not want to end up alone. After a night spent together Hal wants Madge to come with him, and Madge, having experienced real bodily love and powerful feelings for the first time, follows him against her mother's will. The dominant themes in this play are the need for love, seen in all the characters in a different way, the search for one's own identity and one's place in the world, mainly expressed in the wandering Hal and Madge. *Picnic* is a drama of characters, around which the author unties a story. Rosemary is one of the best drawn of Inge's women characters.

The play was developed from one-act play *Front Porch*. During the try-out outside Broadway Inge had to change the ending into a happy one and make the character of Hal more likable. The play received the Pulitzer price, the New York Drama Critics' Award and the Outer Critics' Circle Award.

Picnic was directed by Miloš Mikeln and produced at the Prešeren Theatre in Kranj on October 7th 1955. It was performed nine times. Later it was staged at the Tone Čufar Theatre in Jesenice on May 31st 1970, under the direction of Jože Vozny, where it had the same number of performances.

The author and the play were introduced by Radoslav Jan and Miloš Mikeln in the Prešeren Theatre Programme. Jan (37-39) saw some similarity to Chekhov in Inge's work. Both writers show melancholy at the realization of the tragedy of human existence on one hand and the beauty of life on the other. Inge's characters continue living and hoping in spite of the fact that they are aware of the tragic life. *Picnic* was written to enlighten and ridicule and it showed humanity, and for these reasons it was also chosen by the theatre. Jan hoped that the play would have a successful run and also for the production of Inge's *Bus Stop* planned for the following season. In Mikeln's opinion (40-43) the play draws the reader with its simple and true philosophy and with its presentation of genuine life in all its coloured images. He too mentions Inge's affinity to Chekhov, and thinks that Inge is his most intimate modern heir. Mikeln points to the problem they came across during the staging of the play, which was the absence of colloquial language on Slovene stages.

Three critics reacted to the performance in Kranj. Dušan Železnjov in *Slovenski poročevalec* (4) was pleased with the discovery of a new writer, whom he superficially compared to Chekhov. Jože Šircelj in *Ljudska pravica* (5) praised the play's formal perfection, but objected to its shallow idea. The most enthusiastic was again Vasja Predan in *Ljubljanski dnevnik* (4), though he felt that the performance did not correctly present the work. According to him the director did not catch the characteristic atmosphere of the play. All three critics believed that the actresses played their roles well and contributed to the partial success of the play. Their opinions about the success of the whole performance vary. Železnjov thought it very successful, Šircelj was more reserved, and Predan observed that the performance did not achieve the effect of the dramatic text itself.

There was no critique after the performance in Jesenice, but the announcement about the play was published in the newspaper *Železar*, where the author -nj- (12)

presented the play as a comedy of ordinary American people, who strive for a better life, and also as a picture of American society, which has lost its sense for the basic relations between people.

Bus Stop was written and produced in 1955. In a modest tavern by the roadside an interesting group of bus travellers is gathered because of the snow storm. There is a young woman Cherrie and a green cowboy Bo, who kidnapped her and wants to make her his wife, his companion Virgil, Dr. Lyman, a former professor, who likes young girls, a young girl Elma, the owner of the place, Grace and Carl, the bus driver, who have an affair upstairs, and the sheriff Will. During their stay Bo tries to win Cherrie by force, but fails, gets into fight with the sheriff and repents. He realizes he knows nothing about women but knows that he wants Cherrie. Cherrie gets to know his gentle side and assents to going out with him. The central theme is again love and the search for it. The play is distinguished for its dialogue between the characters, which are, with a few exceptions present on the scene, and the attention is shifted from one couple to another.

Bus Stop developed from a one-act play *People in the Wind*. It had 480 performances and was followed by a successful film version. Baird Shuman defined the play as a romantic comedy, which analyzes different kinds of love. In his opinion the dominant element is sexuality, out of which love is born (59-70).

The play was presented at the Prešeren Theatre on April 5th 1957, with Mirč Kragelj as the director. It had eighteen repetitions.

This play was also introduced by Rado Jan in the theatre programme (1957: 95-99). He defined Inge as of "the most American authors of modern drama" on account of the important role of landscape and its atmosphere in his plays. This play shows characters travelling, which is reminiscent of the pioneer times of the formation of the USA and has a romantic connotation to every American. Most of the characters in this play are types from American romanticism, and experience a certain change at the stop in the tavern. In Jan's opinion the core of the play is the necessity of a fellow human being for man's redemption.

The unsigned author of the article in *Slovenski poročevalec* (5) acknowledged Inge's popularity in the world on the ground of the simplicity and romantic features of his work, but he believed Inge to be one of the Americans who return to Europe with techniques of European naturalism. In the critic's opinion the play offers nothing new, but it reveals certain qualities, especially Inge's mastery of the stage space and time, and his excellent presentation of everyday events and ideas. The performance could not catch the necessary atmosphere, but he praised the cast.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the 1950s Slovenia began to open itself to the world, and among other changes in the political as well as cultural sphere, more works by American dramatists were staged. The theatres produced various American plays, among them plays by Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, as well as by Irwin Shaw and other authors, such as James Gow and Arnaud D'Usseau, comedies by Norman Krasna,

John van Druten and others. The critics valued serious plays and accepted the necessity of light plays, which were popular among the audiences of the time. The choice of plays was based in part on their success in American and European theatres, as well as on the contacts of Slovene stage managers and directors with the film versions or productions shown by foreign theatres in Slovenia. But the most important factor was simply the availability of texts.

The first theatre to present a play by Lillian Hellman was the Šentjakobsko Theatre in Ljubljana in 1949, eleven years after the premiere of *The Little Foxes* in the United States. The play was then performed in two subsequent seasons in Trieste and Maribor. The last theatre that performed her work was the National Theatre in Ljubljana in 1955. The Municipal Theatre in Ljubljana was the first that presented Clifford Odets and his two plays, the latter having been performed at two theatres, where the same translation was used. The Prešeren Theatre obviously liked and accepted the works of William Inge. In two years they presented two of his plays.

Lillian Hellman was received with enthusiasm as a politically progressive playwright. The reason for the staging of her play *The Little Foxes* in 1949, as well as in two subsequent seasons in three Slovene theatres was certainly the social criticism expressed in her work, which the theatres and critics as well perceived as an attack on the corruption and evils of capitalism. American critics, meanwhile, generally agreed about her attack on the modern society as such. However, regarding the political situation in Slovenia in the years after the Second World War, the understanding and the exaggeration of Slovene public is quite logical. All three productions in Slovenia were successful. On the other hand, her play *The Children's Hour* was rejected by the critics four years later, and the production received negative reviews as well.

The theatres and critics were not enthusiastic about Clifford Odets, although they found some value in his work. His *Golden Boy* was most likely chosen for the production in Ljubljana because of its social-critical theme dealing with the corruption and wealth of the business world, and also because of its renewed production on Broadway in the same year. The production was rather successful. *The Country Girl* was first staged in Ljubljana in 1956 in order to celebrate the 35th career anniversary of the actor Miro Kopač and it was successful as well. The production in Celje, two years later, was also well received, whereas in Nova Gorica its success cannot be objectively determined owing to lack of data and reviews of the production. Assuming that Clifford Odets was chosen because of his progressive ideas, it is interesting that the theatres did not pick his earlier plays, especially his most ideologically pointed play, *Waiting for Lefty*.

The work of William Inge received rather opposite opinions in Slovenia. Some producers and critics valued and liked his work, while others rejected him completely. Human problems, dealt with realistically, were the impetus behind the production of *Come back, Little Sheba*, which was only partly successful, particularly when compared with a fine film version of this play. His *Picnic* was selected because of the comic element and human warmth, which was also the reason for the production of the play *Bus Stop*. The production of *Picnic* in Kranj was very successful according to some critics, artistically weak according to the others, and *Bus Stop* in the same the-

atre received average reviews. For the production of *Picnic* in Jesenice there were no reviews to be found.

Although the production of these plays did not have such an influence as the works of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller they had a refreshing impact in the dramaturgical policy of Slovene theatres, due to their light-hearted approach to life. In some cases Slovene critics pointed out their critical attitude to American social and economic system, but such criticism did not prevail. The fact that these plays are not of the highest aesthetic merit can be seen in the limited run these plays had not only in Slovenia but also in America.

Maribor

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