

## AMERICAN 'COMMITTED' DRAMA IN SLOVENE THEATRES

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The purpose of this study is essentially to demonstrate that the delayed stagings of American 'committed' plays, written in the thirties and produced in Slovene theatres immediately after World War Two in the late forties and fifties, were often miscontextualized and partly misinterpreted by the literary critics of the period. This was only in the early post-war years largely due to the need to serve the then ruling ideology and to comply with the criteria of Marxist aesthetic, especially that of a radical social criticism. However, the later stagings particularly of Arthur Miller's and also Tennessee Williams's plays, did not see the same phenomenon, for it was they that assured the popularity of the American post-war drama on Slovene stages and, even more importantly, helped Slovene theatre to come off age in the sixties.

There was some interest in American literature already throughout the nineteenth century and the first Slovene translations from American literature emerged in the early 19th century.<sup>1</sup> At the turn of the century Bret Harte, James Fenimore Cooper and Mark Twain were translated into Slovene and a few American plays were then performed on Slovene stages: William Wilkie Collins's *The North Against the South: The Struggle for the Liberation of Slaves* (1904), Frances Burnett-Hodgson's sentimental drama *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1906), V. Moody's play *The Great Divide* (1907), Percy Mackaye's comedy *The Scarecrow* (1908) and Edward Sheldon's play *The Nigger* (1909).

After the First World War, especially in the twenties, almost exclusively American literature for youth was translated into Slovene. It is interesting to note that Slovene translators from American literature were not identical with those who were translating British literary authors in the period between the two wars and in the period immediately after the Second World War. The foremost translators from American literature after World War Two have been Mira Mihelič, Ivan Černagoj, Jaro Dolar, Maila Golob, Herbert Grün, France Jamnik, Janko Moder, Janez Gradišnik, Branko Gradišnik, Gitica Jakopin, Rapa Šuklje, Jože Fistrovič and Dušan Tomše. This points to a very different cultural orientation of the two groups and a comparative limitation of their literary interests.

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<sup>1</sup> For the best critical references see Janez Stanonik, "Ameriško-slovenski odnosi" ("American-Slovene Relations"), *Enciklopedija Slovenije*. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1987, pp. 64-65; 69-72.

Janez Stanonik, "The Reception of American and Canadian Literature in Slovenia", *Cross-cultural Studies*, ed. Mirko Jurak. Ljubljana, University of Ljubljana, 1988, pp. 329-335.

Janez Stanonik, "American Studies in Yugoslavia", in *Yugoslav Perspectives on American Literature, An Anthology*, ed. James L. Thorson, Ann Arbor, 1980, pp. 21-27.

Between the two wars were rendering American literature into Slovene also Ivan Mulaček and Pavel Holeček. Ivan Mulaček,<sup>2</sup> who had spent a part of his life in the USA, and Pavel Holeček<sup>3</sup> were both important early translators and cultural mediators between American and Slovene cultures.<sup>4</sup> In 1926 Eugene O'Neill's play *Anna Christie* was for the first time performed in Ljubljana and his *Desire Under the Elms* in 1932. In the thirties Maxwell Anderson's play *What Price Glory?* (1937) and Edna Ferber's popular success play *Dinner at Eight* (1937) were also performed. To be sure, there was a significant change in the emergence of American literature in Slovenia in the thirties, which is probably due to the fact that the Nobel Prize was awarded to Sinclair Lewis in 1930 and American literature thus put into the limelight, and even more so, it was the result of the visit of Louis Adamič (1898-1951) to Slovenia. Adamič was an important Slovene emigrant essayist, novelist, journalist and social commentator, who had migrated to the United States of America early in his life.<sup>5</sup> He visited his native Slovenia for the first time since his childhood in 1932 on the Guggenheim scholarship.

During this visit he established contacts with the most important cultural figures in Slovenia, including those involved with theatre, which caused a revived interest in American literature among the Slovenes. An American edition of the then most prestigious literary magazine *Ljubljanski zvon* (*The Ljubljana Bell*) was in preparation, but because of financial difficulties the scheme fell through. However, upon Adamič's suggestion many Slovene translations from American poetry appeared that very same year in the magazine,<sup>6</sup> as well as the translation of V.F. Calverton's article "The Emancipation of American Writing" ("Emancipacija ameriškega slovstva"). Victor Francis Calverton<sup>7</sup> (1900-1940) was an influential American literary critic in the twenties and thirties, who died at an early age just before World War Two. Louis Adamič was acquainted with him and mentions him in his letters.<sup>8</sup>

Griša Koritnik's translation of V.F. Calverton's article is particularly significant, for it represented the first attempt at a more widely informative description of American literature in a Slovene periodical.<sup>9</sup> Its insistence on the fact

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2 Ivan Mulaček (b. 1874) in 1903 emigrated to the USA and became editor of the magazine *Nova domovina* in Cleveland. He established the magazine *Nada* in Chicago and returned to Europe to study English at various universities. When back in Slovenia he translated a lot of English and American texts into Slovene and published literary and cultural news from the Anglo-Saxon world in Slovene press.

3 Pavel Holeček (b. 1882) was a prolific translator from English and American literature and a grammar-school teacher in Celje since 1919. In 1925 he started to publish the collection "Mladinska knjižica" in Celje, which featured the translations of Thompson's animal sketches, Jack London's short stories and several other American authors.

4 Cf. Janez Stanonik, "The Reception of American and Canadian Literature in Slovenia", *Cross-cultural Studies*, ed. Mirko Jurak. Ljubljana, University of Ljubljana, 1988, pp. 329-335.

5 For more in Igor Maver, "The Possibilities of Verse Translation: The Reception of American Poetry in Slovenia Between the Two Wars", *Acta Neophilologica*, XXI, (Ljubljana, 1988/89), pp. 31-37.

6 V.F. Calverton, "Emancipacija ameriškega slovstva" ("The Emancipation of American Writing"), translated by Griša Koritnik, *Ljubljanski zvon*, LII, 1932, pp. 293-299.

7 The major works by V.F. Calverton are: *Anthology of American Negro Literature*. New York: The Modern Library, 1929; *The Liberation of American Literature*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1932; *The Awakening of America*. New York: The John Day Company, 1939.

8 In more detail in Igor Maver, "The Possibilities of Verse Translation: The Reception of American Poetry in Slovenia Between the Two Wars", *Acta Neophilologica*, XXI, (Ljubljana, 1988/89), p. 32.

9 V.F. Calverton, "Emancipacija ameriškega slovstva" ("The Emancipation of American Writing"), *Ljubljanski zvon*, LII, 1932, pp. 293-299.

that American writing was still trying to get rid of its 'colonial complex' did not really stimulate the interest of Slovene verse translators for contemporary American poetry, which was erroneously still considered to be purely derivative of the European one and of the given 'psycho-economic' reality of the American dream. For the Slovene theatrical climate of the thirties it was of some importance that Calverton described Eugene O'Neill as the foremost representative of the American 'national consciousness' in drama: "In the dramas written by Eugene O'Neill there is no return to English dramas as far as the source of poetic inspiration is concerned, not as in the dramas of the younger school of playwrights gathered around Paul Green, Sydney Howard, Philip Barry and Lyn Riggs."<sup>10</sup>

In the thirties especially American texts with the more overt social messages were translated into Slovene, which is true of both fiction and verse. American black poetry, for example, saw a downright enthusiastic reception in Slovenia. Upon Adamič's suggestion,<sup>11</sup> the poet Mile Klopčič and Cvetko Kristan translated some of the American black poets into Slovene, but unfortunately not from the originals but from the German book of translations by Anna Nussbaum (*Afrika Singt*). Langston Hughes was particularly popular, not only because of the themes of his poems but also for his social and political outlook and racial insight.<sup>12</sup> The comparative lack of Slovene translations from American poetry in the period until 1945 can be given several explanations and, moreover, they can be indirectly detected in the critical essays on American poetry written in Slovene magazines and newspapers of the period.<sup>13</sup>

One of the reasons was the fact that Slovene poets and translators saw American literature as primarily derivative of the European 'high literature', which was really worth translating; second, Slovene literary critics considered the American way of life as 'materialistic' and 'anti-lyrical'; and third, the scarcity of verse translations was partly the result of the then general Slovene cultural orientation and contiguity of the German speaking countries.

Apart from Louis Adamič and Ivan Mulaček there were two more literary figures, who assumed the roles of cultural mediators between American and Slovene cultures and literatures in the thirties: Ivan Zorman and Etbin Kristan. Ivan Zorman (1889-1957) was a poet in his own right and is important because of his translations of Slovene poetry into English, published in his anthology *Slovene (Jugoslav) Poetry*. Etbin Kristan (1867-1953) migrated to America just before the Great War and became editor of various emigrant papers and magazines as well as a politician. He was particularly interested in the theatre and his own plays demonstrate his social(ist) commitment. He returned to Slovenia only in 1951, but all along kept

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>11</sup> Mile Klopčič, "Prvi Adamičev obisk domovine (1932-1933)" ("The First Visit of Louis Adamič to His Home Country"), *Louis Adamič: simpozij*, ed. Janez Stanonik. Ljubljana, University of Ljubljana, 1981, pp. 260-261.

Mile Klopčič, "Iz lirike črncev" ("From the Black Lyrical Poetry"), *Ljubljanski zvon*, LII, 7-8, 1932, pp. 434-436.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Igor Maver, "The Question of Literary Transmission and Mediation: Aesthetic, Linguistic and Social Aspects of Slovene Translation from American Verse Through 1945", *Slovene Studies*, ed. Tom Priestly, Bloomington, Indiana University, 1992, pp. 91-99.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Ferdo Delak, "Ameriška mlada lirika" ("New American Lyrical Poetry"), *Slovenec*, 56/ 1928, pp. 280-287.

Vinko Košak, "Ameriška lirika" ("American Lyrical Poetry"), *Jugoslovan*, I/ 65, 1930, 10.

close contacts with Slovene cultural and literary workers and therefore 'mediated' particularly between American and Slovene theatre.<sup>14</sup>

The theatre critic Dušan Moravec interestingly maintains that Slovene interest in drama in the period between the two wars was, in fact, not directed beyond Europe. As for American drama, he writes: "When Pavel Golia at the beginning of 1926 brought O'Neill's play *Anna Christie*, we found this at that time very recent play almost dated, certainly not particularly interesting and without any specifically 'American' elements in it. It was staged in a conventional manner and the cast poorly performed their roles. Until Bratko kreft's staging of *Desire Under the Elms* (1932) we had been waiting for a new encounter with it".<sup>15</sup>

Immediately after the devastation of World War Two the economic situation in Slovenia was extremely difficult and the cultural links with the United States were being only gradually reestablished. Also, there was a great deal of ignorance as far as American literature was concerned. But there were also sheer 'technical' problems. Because of the centralization of the federal institutions within the former Yugoslavia in its capital Belgrade and the lack of foreign currency, it was extremely difficult to get hold of American books in Slovenia, for everything had to pass via Belgrade.

Louis Adamič was instrumental in mediating between American and Slovene theatre immediately after the Second World War. According to the Slovene actor Andrej Kurent he in the late autumn of 1949 selected and sent to Ljubljana five dramatic texts, which were performed with success a number of times in Ljubljana and which paved the way for contemporary American drama to be performed on the stages in Slovenia. Namely, during the visit to Slovenia in 1948 Louis Adamič met Slavko Jan, the then manager of the Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana, and Andrej Kurent, who informed him about the scarce productions of American dramas in Slovenia and about the extremely deficient knowledge of American dramatic creativity among the Slovene public.<sup>16</sup> Upon his return to the United States Adamič sent Slavko Jan five plays: Kanin Garson's play *Born Yesterday*, Arthur Miller's plays *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible* and Tennessee Williams's play *Sweet Bird of Youth* (this play was staged only in 1959, when it had already become a success in European theatres).

*All My Sons* and *Born Yesterday* were first put on stage in 1951, *Death of a Salesman* in 1953 and *The Crucible* in 1955. Kurent describes the 1953 production of *Death of a Salesman* as 'legendary' and believes that the Slovene national Theatre in Ljubljana produced the first significant play from the New World comparatively early, which was the result of Adamič's paramount mediating role between Slovene and American theatre. It is also interesting that Eugene O'Neill's widow, at the intervention of Louis Adamič's wife Stella, in 1967 gave a special permission for the play *Long Day's Journey into Night* to be performed in Ljubljana without paying the royalties.

Looking now at some of the major Slovene playwrights of the discussed period of the late forties and fifties in order to provide a broader literary-historical context,

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14 Cf. Mirko Jurak, "Novi svet' v dramah Etbina Kristana" ("The New World in Etbin Kristan's Drama"). *Literarne in gledališke interpretacije in presoje*. Ljubljana: DZS, 1988, pp. 139-144.

15 Dušan Moravec, *Slovensko gledališče od vojne do vojne*. Ljubljana: CZ, 1980, p. 115.

16 Andrej Kurent, "Adamičeva pomoč slovenskemu gledališču" ("Louis Adamic's Help to Slovene Theatre"), *Louis Adamič: simpozij*, ed. Janez Stanonik. Ljubljana, University of Ljubljana, 1981, pp. 65-69.

it could be said that Ferdo Kozak, Bratko Kreft and also Primož Kozak dealt in their plays with the clashes of ideas, expressed social views, different world views and were in some way or other 'committed' to some precise philosophical ideology. Primož Kozak's later dramas written in the early sixties (e.g. *Afera*, *The affair*, 1961) were, however, already described as "a fusion of Marx's humanism and Heidegger's and Sartre's individualism".<sup>17</sup> The late fifties and early sixties also saw the development of the important experimental Slovene theatre "Oder 57" ("Stage 57"), which moved away from the early, essentially political and thesis post-war theatre.<sup>18</sup>

Orthodox Marxism or even the extreme Zhdanovism<sup>19</sup> fortunately never did become a widely accepted Slovene literary aesthetics in the discussed period of the late forties and fifties, for 'spade poetry' and 'party reviewers' soon became the object of ridicule,<sup>20</sup> while Zhdanovism in theatre was only felt for a short while as a highly bureaucratized administrative force. There was a heated dialogue between the critic Josip Vidmar and Boris Zihelr concerning the importance of world view in artistic creativity, which had an important influence on the Slovene cultural life.<sup>21</sup>

Vidmar expressed the view that *Weltanschauung* represents a relatively insignificant element in a work of art, whereas Zihelr as a Marxist literary and cultural theoretician, together with the writers Juš Kozak, Miško Kranjec and Ivan Potrč, believed that the writer's world view is a constituent part of artistic creativity.<sup>22</sup> Vidmar tried to settle accounts with the narrow and orthodox Marxist aesthetics in Slovene art especially in his book *Meditacije* (*Meditations*, 1954) and in a number of articles, which indirectly also influenced the selection of dramatic texts (above all those overtly 'committed' ones) to be performed in Slovene theatres.

The relationship between artistic evaluation and cultural practice in theatre was in Slovenia immediately after the war mostly examined against the theory and art practice of Maxim Gorky. Even the political break with the Informbureau of the Cominform in Moscow in 1948, which had a significant bearing on the socio-political development of the former Yugoslavia, did not cause a complete rejection of social(ist) realism and the literary aesthetics of Gorky. During the first years after 1948 Slovene drama criticism did not explicitly try to address the theatre issues of literary aesthetics. In the Slovene dramas of the period one of the central themes was the discussion of the role of the Slovene intellectual in the post-war society and the central motive was the relationship between the intellectual and the politician, society and state, between culture, politics and ideology.<sup>23</sup>

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17 Vladimir Kralj, *Pogledi na dramo*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1963, p. 360.

18 Vladimir Kralj, "Avantgardna dramatika na ljubljanskih odrih" ("Avant-garde Drama on the Stages in Ljubljana"), *Naša sodobnost*, IX, 1961, p. 948.

19 In 1946 Cankarjeva založba in Ljubljana published in a tiny booklet the Slovene translation of A.A. Ždanov's speech on the Russian magazines *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* entitled "Referat o revijah 'Zvezda' in 'Leningrad'" (32 pp.). Together with a few other translated articles by Gorky and Lenin it did not cause a sufficient aesthetic-theoretical tension, neither did it engage a lively discussion about the question of literary aesthetics. In art the aesthetic criterion prevailed over the sociological one.

20 Jože Koruza in Franc Zadavec, *Slovenska književnost 1945-1965: Dramatika ter književna esejistika in kritika*. Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1967, pp. 226-229.

21 Boris Zihelr, "Književnost in prevratne dobe", Ljubljana, *Novi svet*, 1952.

22 Jože Koruza in Franc Zadavec, *Slovenska književnost 1945-1965: Dramatika ter književna esejistika in kritika*. Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1967, pp. 288-294.

23 Malina Schimdt-Snoj, *Intelektualec na preizkušnji: slovenski dramski junak med intimo in revolucijo*. Ljubljana: Mihelač, 1993. The author analyzes the emergence of the usage of a revolutionary activist in the works of Slovene post-war dramatists Ivo Brnčić, Bratko Kreft and Ferdo Kozak.

Considering the delayed stagings of American pre-war 'committed' plays in Slovene theatres in the late forties and fifties, it can be concluded that the political break of the former Yugoslavia with the Soviet Informbureau of the Cominform in 1948 was reflected in theatre productions. American plays performed in Slovene theatres in the discussed period (including the Permanent Slovene Theatre in Trieste) were quite numerous. There were also several productions of Eugene O'Neill's play *Desire Under the Elms*, which according to the then critics toeing the party line 'reflected' the need for the socialist reform of agriculture. Eugene O'Neill's plays had, however, been performed already before the war. *Anna Christie* in 1926 and *Desire Under the Elms* in 1932 and 1939. His other plays written prior to 1940 were staged in Slovenia with great success after the war (e.g. *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *Electra*, *Desire Under the Elms*, etc.). A book about Eugene O'Neill's dramatic art was published by Dušan Tomše (*Eugene O'Neill*, Ljubljana 1971) in which he presents O'Neill's dramatic opus in some detail and describes his crucial role in the development of American drama.

The nowadays rather unknown American play *Deep are the Roots* by James Gow and Arnaud d'Usseau was performed in 1948, 1949, 1952 and 1953. Despite its genuine artistic value and progressive racial outlook it was miscontextualized in the Slovene socio-political context in order to show how a literary 'product' of the capitalist world criticizes itself. The play was first put on stage in 1948, therefore just before the break of the former Yugoslavia with the Cominform, and its theme, the social oppression of black Americans, was seen by contemporary critics as just one example of all the 'evils' capitalism entails. The theatre bulletin, along with mentioning Langston Hughes's progressive social themes in the play *Mulatto*, thus concludes that "the realist depiction of the contemporary reality of black Americans should incite all progressive and oppressed social forces, regardless of their colour and language, to unite in the joint struggle against imperialism".<sup>24</sup>

The director of the 1948 performance of *Deep are the Roots*, Branko Gavella, according to the theatre bulletin had contacts with the "Hudožestven teatr" (MHAT) in Moscow, founded by V.N. Dančenko and K.S. Stanislavski, which represented part of Stalin's political apparatus and propaganda. Gavella was a Croatian director, essayist and critic, who had been involved with Slovene theatre already during 1930-1935 and then again in 1947. It is therefore no coincidence that the theatre bulletin also brought an extract from a review of the Moscow performance of *Deep are the Roots*: "This is why the question of the blacks .... necessarily points to the existing body of social and political antagonisms, about which American press has remained completely silent. In the capitalist society the destruction of personality has become a system, which comprises economic, political, national, moral and cultural annihilation."<sup>25</sup> Such blatantly ideological views never did rub off onto the theatrical tastes and cultural appreciation of Slovene theatre-goers, and due to the changed political circumstances virtually disappeared in the late forties.

Maxwell Anderson's play *What Price Glory* (in Zuckmayer's adaption entitled *The Rivals*, 1937) was the only American 'committed' play staged in Slovene theatres back in the thirties, while Anderson's play *Winterset* was performed only in 1954 and *Joan of Lorraine* in 1955. William Inge's plays *Picnic* (1955) and *Bus Stop* (1957), Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1956), Clifford Odets's *Golden Boy* (1955) and

<sup>24</sup> Vasja Ocvirk, *Gledališki list Mestnega gledališča*, 1948, p. 91.

<sup>25</sup> Boris Rjurikov, *Teatr*, Moscow, 6.6.1947, quoted in *Gledališki list mestnega gledališča*, 1948, p. 91.

*Country Girl* (1955, 1956) and Lillian Hellman's plays *The Little Foxes* (1950, 1951) and *The Children's Hour* (1955) were performed on different Slovene stages in the fifties and attracted a lot of attention.

It is interesting to note that the Slovene diplomat Joža Vilfan, the Yugoslav representative to the UN, had personal contacts with Hellman and was in correspondence with her in the fifties. Hellman's two plays *The Little Foxes* and *The Children's Hour* clearly reflect her social concerns and were performed with great success in two Slovene theatres, Maribor and the Permanent Slovene Theatre in Trieste, simultaneously. Odets's well-known play *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), although it was never actually staged in Slovene theatres, was quoted in this instance by Slovene critics as a prime example of "socialist drama".<sup>26</sup> His other plays performed in Slovenia were discussed along similar lines.

Hellman's play *The Little Foxes* was seen by the critics essentially as one breaking false illusions about "the harmonious peace in a capitalist bourgeois family": "With an extreme brutality, which in its economic logic does not even hesitate to perpetrate the worst of crimes .... those people (the Hubbard family) are obsessed with the demon of capitalism, they fight and destroy each other in cold blood."<sup>27</sup> In the fifties several plays with the subject of war were also put on stage in Slovenia: Irving Shaw's *Bury the Dead* (1954) and Herman Wouk's play *The Cain Affair* (1956).

Slovene productions of Arthur Miller's socially-conscious plays in the fifties should also be mentioned in this context, although he is generally not considered a 'committed' playwright, because they were of essential importance for the development of Slovene theatre proper (*All My Sons*, produced in 1950; *Death of a Salesman*, 1953; *The Crucible*, 1955; *A Memory of Two Mondays* and *A View from the Bridge*, 1956). Arthur Miller's dramaturgy was said to be one of social realism, particularly because of his views on 'social drama'.<sup>28</sup> His plays represented a real breakthrough of American drama on Slovene stages.

Slovene critics stressed Miller's indebtedness to the American theatre of the thirties, which in their view grew directly or indirectly out of the Marxist notion of class struggle, but further maintained that in *All My Sons* "he never goes so far as to realize that it is the capitalist mode of production that caused the generational problem between parents and children, the problem of responsibility and patriotism".<sup>29</sup> *The Crucible*, however, was seen as a play that settles accounts with McCarthyism and one that is laden with the recognition of social problems.<sup>30</sup> The main reproach of Slovene critics was that Miller's plays do represent a reflection of the problems of the capitalist society, a criticism of the American way of life, although one cannot find in them any kind of clear ideological thesis about the

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26 Jaro Dolar, "Kobilice: drama brutalnega kapitalizma" ("The Little Foxes: A Drama of Brutal Capitalism"), *Gledališki list*, VI/4, 1950/51, pp. 25-26. Also Vladimir Krajc, "Lillian Hellman: Kobilice" ("Lillian Hellman: The Little Foxes"), *Primorski dnevnik*, 6, 14.3.1950.

27 J. Traven, "Ameriška dramatika in slovensko gledališče" ("American Drama and Slovene Theatre"), *Gledališki list ljubljanske Drame*, 1956/57, pp. 159-166. Also Lojze Filipič, *Živa dramaturgija 1952-1975*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1977, pp. 423-437.

28 Arthur Miller, "On Social Plays", published as Preface to his play *A View from the Bridge*. New York: Viking Press, 1955.

29 Jože Tiran, "Arthurja Millerja Vsi moji sinovi" ("*All My Sons* by Arthur Miller"), *Gledališki list SNG Ljubljana*, 5, 1949/50, p. 93.

30 Cf. for example Božidar Borko, "Drama o krizi kapitalistične etike" ("The Drama of the Crisis of the Capitalist Ethics"), *Slovenski poročevalec*, Ljubljana, 17.2.1953.

contradictions of capitalism and the condemnation of the capitalist mode of production.<sup>31</sup>

If American audiences and critics accepted Willy Loman from *Death of a Salesman* as a typical national figure, then the British critics and theatre-goers were definitely not that overwhelmed, for they were perhaps not able to identify with the hero nor with most (anti)heroes of Miller's plays.<sup>32</sup> Miller's 'social' plays were much better received in France, where Existentialism was very strong at the time. It is no coincidence that it was Jean-Paul Sartre, who adapted Miller's play *The Crucible* and wrote the script for its film version. In Spain Miller was generally viewed in terms of the strong religious tradition, i.e. as an atheist that depicts some sort of 'mental death', which is present in the United States.

As for the reception of Miller's plays in Slovenia, the production of *All My Sons* in Ljubljana (1950) made the critics lament the fact that 'the socialist theatre' of the thirties was dead. Miller's art was seen as one exposing the contradictions of the American capitalist society, but, the critics regretted, he was not 'a proper revolutionary', because he never explicitly condemned the capitalist mode of production.

The 1953 performance of *Death of a Salesman* was a success and the critics felt that Miller was aware of the existence of deep conflicts in American society.<sup>33</sup> *The Crucible*, staged in 1955, was however considered a monumental drama of Shakespearean dimensions, which boldly settles accounts with McCarthy and his sort.<sup>34</sup> It won the sympathy of the Slovene public and critics and showed the changed Slovene taste in theatre, which now insisted on artistic non-thesis thematic complexity and subtle psychological suggestiveness. By 1955 American drama had thus made a name for itself on Slovene stages largely owing to the productions of Miller's plays. According to Slovene theatre critics, they enabled a good insight into the reality of the American society and made a theatre-goer 'socially aware' and think about the basic social contradictions of this society, the crisis of its morals and ethics.

The discussed American 'committed' plays, written in the thirties and performed in Slovene theatres in the period after the Second World War, in the late forties and fifties, show that sociological and socio-political critical interpretations, namely that theatre contains the material which can 'prove' certain 'laws' of social development and reflects current social problems, essentially described American historical 'leftism'<sup>35</sup> in terms of the ruling ideology. Such critical views thus often became a manipulating ideological force that largely disregarded the aesthetic value of the staged American plays and have only started to gradually disappear from the early sixties onwards. Also, during that time, with the adoption of a softer socialist socio-cultural policy (especially as the result of the Vidmar-Ziherl debate), quite a few Slovene playwrights and theatre critics became 'cultural dissidents'. For often it

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31 Igor Pretnar, "Drama o borbi za človeka" ("The Drama of the Struggle for Man") *Gledališki list Mestnega gledališča*, 1955/56, 9, pp. 257-259; "Ameriška dramatika in slovensko gledališče" ("American Drama and Slovene Theatre"), *Gledališki list ljubljanske Drame*, 1956/57, pp. 159-166.

32 Ivor Brown, "As London Sees Willy Loman", *The New York Times Magazine*, August 28, 1949, pp. 11.

33 Božidar Borko, "Drama o krizi kapitalistične etike" ("The Drama about the Crisis of Capitalist Ethics"), *Slovenski poročevalec*, Ljubljana, February 17, 1953.

34 Lojze Filipič, "Drama našega stoletja" ("The Drama of Our Century"), *Gledališki list*, 1, SNG in Ljubljana, 1955/56.

35 A comprehensive study of this phenomenon can be found in the book by John Patrick Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992, pp. 145-210.



si art that can and does in a given historical context undermine revolutionary cohesion and theology.

Particularly the plays written in the thirties by Hellman, Anderson, Odets and later on also by Miller, helped to forge the Slovene social awareness in the theatre of the immediate post-war era. These, to a smaller or greater degree socially 'committed' or socially aware plays, were, however, often miscontextualized and partly misinterpreted in order to comply with the criteria of the not always explicit Marxist aesthetics. Luckily, this early 'post-revolutionary' stage of cultural development was in the Slovene cultural space comparatively soon replaced by the more tolerant and broader aesthetic critical views, the appreciation of human psychology in the considerations of theatre art and the critical awareness of a given socio-cultural context, which helped to avoid various misinterpretations.

Arthur Miller's plays, although socially highly 'aware', and Tennessee Williams's psychological plays were instrumental in this process, which represented a breakthrough of American drama on Slovene stages. It took place in the early sixties and was significant for the development of Slovene theatre, which was at the time becoming increasingly ideologically 'subversive' and artistically complex. Tennessee Williams's cinematic plays performed in the fifties were extremely popular also because of their film versions (e.g. *A Streetcar Named Desire*, 1952; *The Glass Menagerie*, 1953; *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, 1958).

The production of Tennessee Williams's play *Sweet Bird of Youth* in 1961, for example, caused a lively critical discussion as to the Aristotelian purpose of drama as a catharsis, which was in American drama no longer seen as central like in the classical Greek tragedy, for American plays were said to appeal to intellect and to ultimately cause at least some recognition (*anagnorisis*) on the part of the audience. Vladimir Kralj in this light maintained that "while European drama is weak from the intellectual point of view, American drama astounds us with a kind of raw vitality".<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, Edward Albee's theatre of the absurd caused a new interest in American drama in the early sixties: *The Zoo Story* was performed in 1962, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* in 1963, and *A Delicate Balance* in 1964.

If in the United States 'the Literary Left' in theatre production in the thirties represented a 'positive' and 'progressive' value, as much as such labels are deficient and incomplete in themselves, then the role of the immediate post-war 'leftist' (Marxist) theatre criticism in Slovenia, dealing with the stagings of American 'committed' plays written in the thirties, was a rather miscontextualizing one. Arthur Miller's 'social' plays were an exception, and together with Tennessee Williams's plays and Eugene O'Neill's classics came to represent the true value of the American post-war theatre and assured its popularity in Slovene theatres.

The 'revolutionary' post-war theatre criticism represented just a short phase in the development of Slovene theatre of true, original artistic merit, based on axiological criteria, which has on a larger scale, with a significant help of American drama, emerged precisely in the period from the early sixties onwards, thus breaking away from the revolutionary paradigm of appreciating primarily the 'committed' and socially critical value of plays. Thus it has become what it is today: psychologically subtle and suggestive, socially critical, formally innovative, artistically highly complex and original.

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Jože Koruza in Franc Zadravec, *Slovenska književnost 1945-1965: Dramatika ter književna esejistika in kritika*. Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1967, p. 299.