

## The Reception of Anglo-American Drama on the Post-War Croatian Stage: Theater, Politics, Ideology (Part II)

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This article is the second part of the study published in the previous issue of SRAZ. It continues the examination of the relationship between theater and politics as exemplified by the reception of Anglo-American plays on the post-war Croatian stage. While the previous section dealt with the 1945–55 period, this section develops the topic up to the early seventies. Two chapters constituting the second part of the study supply further evidence that the connections between theater and the politics are always there, even when submerged and perhaps for the moment forgotten, only to appear again as a new development in their tense and uneasy interrelationship.

### Chapter 3.

#### In Delicate Balance (1955–1967)

The Congress of the Yugoslav Writers' Association held in Ohrid in 1955 only surveyed the previous ten years, taking stock of the past period, and very little was said about the future. Art ceased to be an ideological weapon and one had to learn to live in the new freedom. There no longer existed the strong and ubiquitous connections between ideology and art, and especially politics and theater, in which political demands, ideological criteria and administrative sanctions constantly acted as a means of oppression. This does not mean that there were no intermittent conflicts caused by the inherent tension between ideology and art, which always strives for unattainable absolute freedom. However, the conflicts which are resolved *ad hoc* are quite different from constant pressure which even in its mild forms means an imposed limitation.

The changes in the repertoire policy were not accomplished overnight and the list of plays which were performed during the 1955–67 period illustrates the gradualness of the change, as well as the direction in which the tastes of the repertoire selectors and the audience were moving:

The list of Anglo-American Plays on Croatian Stages from 1955 to 1967:

G. B. Shaw:	<i>Saint Joan</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1955/56
Herman Wouk:	<i>The Caine Mutiny</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1955/56
	<i>Court-Martial</i>	Pula 1957
G. B. Shaw:	<i>Candida</i>	Osijek 1955
		Zagreb (HNK) 1956/57
		Varaždin 1966/67
Arthur Miller:	<i>The Crucible</i>	Dubrovnik 1955
G. B. Shaw:	<i>Pygmalion</i>	Rijeka 1955
		Dubrovnik 1956
William Inge:	<i>Bus Stop</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1956/57
James M. Barrie:	<i>Admirable Crichton</i>	Zagreb (Kom.) 1956
Arthur Miller:	<i>Death of the Salesman</i>	Osijek 1956
		Zagreb (HNK) 1959/60
Eugene O'Neill:	<i>Before Breakfast</i>	Varaždin 1956/57
		Zagreb (ZDK) 1957/58
J. B. Priestley:	<i>Ever Since Paradise</i>	Karlovac 1956/57
Tennessee Williams:	<i>The Glass Menagerie</i>	Karlovac 1956/57
Harriet Beecher Stowe:	<i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i>	Bjelovar 1956
Eugene O'Neill:	<i>Anna Christie</i>	Bjelovar 1956
Margaret Mayo:	<i>Baby Mine</i>	Sisak 1956
William Shakespeare:	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	Požega 1956/57
		Osijek 1962
G. B. Shaw:	<i>The Devil's Disciple</i>	Požega 1956/57
L. E. Huxley:	<i>That's How Love Is</i>	Požega 1956/57
Richard Hopewood:	<i>The Perfect Husband</i>	Karlovac 1956/57
		Požega 1962/63
William Shakespeare:	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	Pula 1956
		Osijek 1957
		Rijeka 1961
Frederick Knott:	<i>Call M for Murder</i>	Rijeka 1956
		Bjelovar 1956
		Sisak 1956
		Karlovac 1956/57
		Osijek 1957
Terence Rattigan:	<i>The Deep Blue Sea</i>	Sisak 1956

Avery Hopwood:	<i>Fair and Warner</i>	Sisak 1956
John Patrick:	<i>The Hasty Heart</i>	Pula 1956
Lillian Hellman:	<i>The Autumn Garden</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1957
George Axelrod:	<i>Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter</i>	Zagreb (Kom.) 1957
Felicity Douglas:	<i>It's Never Too Late</i>	Zagreb (Kom.) 1957 Bjelovar 1958
John Osborne:	<i>Look Back in Anger</i>	Karlovac 1957/58 Dubrovnik 1959
William Shakespeare:	<i>Macbeth</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1957/58 Rijeka 1958
Frances Goodrich – Albert Hackett:	<i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1957 Pula 1957 Varaždin 1957/58 Dubrovnik 1959 Sisak 1959
Arthur Miller:	<i>A Memory of Two Mondays</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1957/58 Pula 1958 Karlovac 1961/62
Eugene O'Neill:	<i>Desire Under the Elms</i>	Karlovac 1957 Požega 1962/63
George S. Kaufman:	<i>When Men Play Cards the Way Women Do</i>	Dubrovnik 1957
John Steinbeck:	a dramatization of <i>East of Eden</i>	Varaždin 1957
William Shakespeare:	<i>Twelfth Night</i>	Bjelovar 1957 Osijek 1964 Dubrovnik 1964
William Shakespeare:	<i>Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	Osijek 1957 Pula 1960 Rijeka 1965
Irwin Shaw:	<i>The Gentle People</i>	Pula 1957 Karlovac 1958
G. B. Shaw:	<i>Arms and the Men</i>	Sisak 1957
Tennessee Williams:	<i>Portrait of a Madonna, An Unusual Romance</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1958

William Shakespeare:	<i>King Lear</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1958 Pula 1963 Rijeka 1967
Tennessee Williams:	<i>The Last of My Solid Gold Watches, Baby Doll Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1958 Zadar 1960/61
Eugene O'Neill:	<i>A Long Day's Journey into Night</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1958/59 Osijek 1958 Zadar 1958/59 Virovitica 1965/66
Graham Greene:	<i>The Living Room</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1958/59
Samuel Beckett:	<i>End Game</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1958/59
John Steinbeck:	<i>Of Mice and Men</i>	Požega 1958/59 Dubrovnik 1961
J. B. Priestley:	<i>An Inspector Calls</i>	Dubrovnik 1958
Tennessee Williams:	<i>Orpheus Descending</i>	Varaždin 1958/59 Pula 1959 Osijek 1960
Felicity Douglas:	<i>That's What You Call Luck</i>	Rijeka 1958
J. B. Priestley:	<i>A Scandal</i>	Rijeka 1958
Mary Chace:	<i>Harvey</i>	Sisak 1958
Richard Nash:	<i>The Rain Maker</i>	Zagreb (Kom.) 1959
Irwin Shaw – Jean Pierre Aumont:	<i>Lucy Crown</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1959/60 Osijek 1960 Dubrovnik 1961
William Gibson:	<i>Two for a See-Saw</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1959/60
William Saroyan:	<i>The Cave Dwellers</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1959/60
William Shakespeare:	<i>Richard III</i>	Rijeka 1959
Tennessee Williams:	<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1959/60
Jan de Hartog:	<i>The Fourposter</i>	Karlovac 1959
Garson Kanin:	<i>Born Yesterday</i>	Požega 1959/60
Peter Ustinov:	<i>Romanoff and Julietta</i>	Zagreb (Kom.) 1959 Varaždin 1959/60

		Pula 1959/60
		Virovitica 1960/61
		Osijek 1961
		Dubrovnik 1962
		Osijek 1959
William Inge:	<i>Picnic</i>	
Charles Dickens:	an adaptation of <i>Cricket on the Hearth</i>	Sisak 1959
William Shakespeare:	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	Varaždin 1959/60
		Rijeka 1969
Thornton Wilder:	<i>The Matchmaker</i>	Zagreb (Kom.) 1960
George Axelrode:	<i>The Seven Year Itch</i>	Dubrovnik 1960
Mark Twain:	an adaptation of <i>The Prince and the Pauper</i>	Dubrovnik 1960
Shelagh Delaney:	<i>A Taste of Honey</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1961/62
G. B. Shaw:	<i>You Never Can Tell</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1961/62
Agatha Christie:	<i>The Mousetrap</i>	Dubrovnik 1961
		Zadar 1961
Arthur Miller:	<i>A View from the Bridge</i>	Rijeka 1961
R. Dougall –		
T. MacAllen:	<i>Gog and Magog</i>	Zagreb (Kom.) 1962
		Dubrovnik 1962
Joseph Kesserling:	<i>Arsenic and Old Lace</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1962/63
		Dubrovnik 1963
Jerome Kilty –		
G. B. Shaw:	<i>My Dear Liar</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1962/63
		Split 1962/63
		Osijek 1964
William Shakespeare:	<i>Troilus and Cressida</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1962/63
		Split 1962/63
Eugene O'Neill:	<i>The Iceman Cometh</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1962/63
Peter Ustinov:	<i>Photo Finish</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1962/63
		Split 1963/64
W. Somerset Maugham:	<i>The Sacred Flame</i>	Dubrovnik 1962
Edgar Wallace:	<i>The Magician</i>	Rijeka 1962
Thornton Wilder:	<i>Life in the Sun</i>	Pula 1962
M. H. Gressicher:	<i>Henry VIII and his Six Wives</i>	Bjelovar 1963

Tennessee Williams:	<i>Period of Adjustment</i>	Rijeka 1964
Lorraine Hansberry:	<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>	Rijeka 1963
Peter Shaffer:	<i>The Public Eye</i>	Pula 1963
Harold Pinter:	<i>The Lover</i>	Dubrovnik 1964
	<i>The Collection</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1964
William Shakespeare:	<i>Othello</i>	Varaždin 1964/65
William Shakespeare:	<i>Hamlet</i>	Bjelovar 1962
		Karlovac 1962/63
		Zagreb (ZDK) 1963/64
William Saroyan:	<i>Hey, You There!</i>	Dubrovnik 1965
Murray Schisgal:	<i>The Typists</i>	Zagreb (ITD) 1965
	<i>Tiger</i>	
Jack Popplewell:	<i>Dear Delinquent</i>	Zagreb (Kom.) 1965
Arthur Miller:	<i>After the Fall</i>	Rijeka 1965
Arthur Miller:	<i>Incident in Vichy</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1965/66
Edward Albee:	<i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1965
		Osijek 1966
		Rijeka 1966
		Dubrovnik 1966
Arthur Kopit:	<i>Chamber Music and the Day the Whores Came Out to Play Tennis</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1966
Harold Pinter:	<i>The Homecoming</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1966/67
Murray Schisgal:	<i>Luv</i>	Zagreb (ITD) 1966
		Osijek 1967
		Dubrovnik 1968
		Požega 1970
		Pula 1970
Eugene O'Neill:	<i>Welded</i>	Zagreb (Kom.) 1966

The list of about ninety plays, some of which were performed concurrently in several theaters, shows the extent to which the Croatian audience was informed about the contemporary English and American theater, but it is not a completely faithful representation of the real situation. It does not include guest performances of British and American plays by theaters within Croatia or guest appearances by theaters from

other republics. For example, between 1958 and 1962 Rijeka saw fifteen productions<sup>1</sup> by companies from Belgrade, Ljubljana, Pula, Zadar, Zagreb and Šibenik, and in the case of Zagreb the number is naturally greater.

Still, it would appear that the repertoire in 1955, with three of G. B. Shaw's plays, was a linear continuation of the immediate post-war practice. However, the staging of Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial*, which opened during the same season on January 27, 1956 (two years after its debut in New York) can stand as an illustrative example of the change in the relationship between the government and the theater. The play, a skilful adaptation of the novel, did not break any new ground as far as the staging technique was concerned; on the contrary, it contained all the conventions of Stanislavski's realistic method. The novelty lay in the play's ideology. Vlado Madarević, one of the survivors of the socialist realist school of criticism, was not far from truth in his review when he called the play "crypto-fascist".<sup>2</sup> In his opinion the play tried "to justify the most inhuman subordination within the American military" and "openly propagates... the caste-like interests of the bourgeois class".<sup>3</sup> The unsympathetically drawn character of the writer who is the intellectual instigator of the mutiny against the authority of the cowardly captain prompted Madarević to say that Wouk "brands as public enemies all those progressive writers whose work serves the cause of peace"<sup>4</sup> and that the play was "a kind of McCarthy-like literary reaction against a number of powerful, really humane contemporary works about World War II soldiers, like for instance, Mailer's famous novel *The Naked and the Dead*".<sup>5</sup> In conclusion Madarević was very surprised "that both Belgrade and Zagreb critics, with the exception of Glišić from *NIN* (who has correctly noticed the 'poisonous' quality of the text) greeted all the

1. Guest appearance of British and American plays on the stage of the Rijeka National Theater from

1958–1962:

Tennessee Williams:	<i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i>	(Zagreb Drama Theater)
Arthur Miller:	<i>A View from the Bridge</i>	(Belgrade Drama Theater)
John Osborne:	<i>Look Back in Anger</i>	(Belgrade Drama Theater)
Richard Nash:	<i>The Rainmaker</i>	(Zadar National Theater)
Terence Rattigan:	<i>Separate Tables</i>	(Ljubljana City Theater)
Edmund Morris:	<i>The Wooden Platter</i>	(Šibenik National Theater)
Tennessee Williams:	<i>Orpheus Descending</i>	(Belgrade Drama Theater)
Tennessee Williams:	<i>Orpheus Descending</i>	(Pula National Theater)
G. B. Shaw:	<i>Pygmalion</i>	(Belgrade Drama Theater)
Sean O'Casey:	<i>The Plough and the Stars</i>	(Belgrade Yugoslav National Theater)
Eugene O'Neill:	<i>Long Day's Journey into Night</i>	(Belgrade Yugoslav National Theater)
J. B. Priestley:	<i>The Glass Cage</i>	(Ljubljana City Theater)
Irwin Shaw:	<i>Lucy Crown</i>	(Zagreb Croatian National Theater)
Agatha Christie:	<i>The Mousetrap</i>	(Belgrade Contemporary Theater)
Brendan Behan:	<i>The Hosiery</i>	(Belgrade Yugoslav Drama Theater)

2. Vlado Madarević, "An American Apology of the Cult of Personality", *Republika*, Zagreb, May 1956, p. 48.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, p. 49

unintentional errors and intentional propaganda in the play with a great deal of understanding".<sup>6</sup>

Three or four years before such a review would have occasioned swift reaction: at least the play would have been banned. The scandal caused in 1953 by Josip Kulundžić's play *Man is Good* which was far less ideologically "poisonous" resulted in the play being banned and Matković's resignation as theater manager. Madarević reproached all the Belgrade and Zagreb critics for their lack of what used to be termed "vigilance", but nothing happened. Moreover, he was correct in his assessment of the play: it is a political and ideological play, which defends the inviolability of military organization, its discipline and subordination even when going against common sense, truth and honesty. The play propagated something which was completely contrary to the proclaimed Yugoslav government policies of the time. But, this same government, which since 1953 was preoccupied with developing its concept of the so-called "self-management" system as an operational model which would combine a one-party system, centralized planning and participatory democracy, focused its attention on the mass media (radio and newspapers) and relegated theater to the aesthetical "preserve". Madarević's review was met by silence and not one of the attacked critics felt it necessary to justify his lack of vigilance.

Even later Madarević often wrote similar reviews calling for caution and political and ideological vigilance, in the belief that the role of literary criticism was still to warn, protest, explain and teach. For instance, when reviewing Maugham's *Constance*, he wrote that a performance of such "an insignificant drawing-room comedy of little literary value and an exceptionally problematic moral conception" took the theater way back to "the ambiance of petty pre-war bourgeois society"<sup>8</sup> and that the selected plays "should have a healthy core" and not be "so obviously in opposition with the moral concepts of our socialist development".<sup>9</sup>

This type of prescriptive, ideologically intoned criticism persisted, as will be seen, for quite a long time. Apparently, the theater, having left the political orbit, did not take criticism with it. Day-to-day reviewing, confined to the newspapers, remained under the watchful eyes of the editors, who felt responsible for the education of the masses and for the promotion of the official ideology.

One of the marked characteristics of the repertoire, as evidenced by the 1956 season, was the continuing fascination with American drama. America, which attracted two waves of immigrants before the war, was now the prosperous America of movies and UNRA parcels - with their riches of condensed milk, strange orange-colored cheese and powdered eggs (which were called Truman's eggs), not to mention such outlandish delicacies as spiced ham with pineapple, which somehow could not be served as a dessert, though it was sweet. All this may seem unimportant, but the images of America were extremely kaleidoscopic, confusing and contradictory. The clash of the abstract Cold

6. *Ibid.*

7. Vlado Madarević, 'Constance', *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, April 22, 1956

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*



War rhetoric and the reality of condensed milk was hard to comprehend and reconcile, but always fascinating.

The most fascinating thing was, however, the readiness of this powerful and sinister, yet generous country, to re-examine its system and values in its dramas. A number of plays, in fact the majority of plays, from *Deep Are the Roots* to *Death of a Salesman* demonstrated this willingness to question the contemporary American social reality with a great deal of self-criticism – something both the Yugoslav drama and the system were completely devoid of. This was not only puzzling and exciting, but in an odd way reassuring. The fact that Willy Loman commits suicide, not by jumping off a bridge or throwing himself under a train, but by smashing his Studebaker must have been reassuring to an audience for whom owning a car was an unattainable dream. Austere lives were much easier to bear if one knew that houses, cars and refrigerators were no guarantees of happiness. One can say that in a sense contemporary American drama had an Aristotelian cathartic effect on Yugoslav audiences, “calming their spirits and purifying their minds”.

The fascination with American drama and its visible presence on Croatian stages (nine plays in 1956) coincided with the disappearance of the authors who had dominated the stages for some forty years. Most prominent among those to have disappeared was G. B. Shaw. Having appeared at the beginning of the century on the stages of Zagreb and Osijek, his sharp satirical dialogue had weathered all the Croatian political perturbations during the first half of the century. He was undoubtedly the favorite author whose rational critique somehow suited the irrational situations which were the setting of Croatian social and political life. He was performed by the liberal bourgeois class who found in him an ally in its struggle against the backward feudal relationships and mentality, while the leftist intelligentsia hailed him as a fellow-destroyer of the bourgeois conventions and irrational myths. Performed while the Austro-Hungarian monarchy was in power, between and during the wars and in the first decade after World War II, he was regarded as almost a “native” author and until five years after his death (1950) he was in the full sense of the word the most popular British playwright on the Croatian stage.

As a result of his popularity, authors whose work was similar to his, either in themes, technique or humor, albeit without his deadly satire, also played an important part in every repertoire: Galsworthy, Priestley, Maugham and Rattigan. With Shaw's disappearance from the Croatian stages, these playwrights, who had for years represented British drama in Croatia, also disappeared.

The case of Shaw's disappearance from the stages is by no means peculiar to Croatia and therefore cannot be explained solely by the specific character of the Yugoslav political situation. He was also the most frequently performed British author in Europe (especially Germany) and America, and yet today he is primarily known as an author whose private letters provide material for witty stage dialogues or whose play *Pygmalion* became the popular musical *My Fair Lady*. Surprisingly, Shaw's exit from the repertoire of the world occurred at a time of reawakened interest in Ibsen, whom Shaw wholeheartedly defended against disparagement by English critics, and in Shaw's contemporary, Chekhov, who himself considered his plays to be so “Russian” as to make them incomprehensible abroad.

There are two reasons which could explain this phenomenon. One could be termed dramaturgical and the other theatrical, but they complement each other. The dramaturgical reason is probably best expressed in G. S. Fraser's book *The Modern Writer and His World* when he compares Shaw, Ibsen and Chekhov:

What Shaw failed, however, to take over from Ibsen and Chekhov was their ability to use symbols – the shot sea-gull, the primeval forest, the cherry orchard that has to be sold, the wild duck in the attic – to give their plays, under the prose surface, the third dimension of poetry. Such symbols stand for an aspect of a situation that cannot be explicit, that the characters themselves are not *consciously* aware of, but Shaw always feels that every situation can be made explicit, that at least those characters who are his spokesmen can be aware of everything, and therefore poetry escapes him. The history of English prose drama till about 1955, when there was a kind of problematic renaissance is mainly one of the exhaustion of Shaw's original inspiration. It was exhaustible because of that lack of poetic depth.<sup>10</sup>

Ironically in 1926 Krleža considered Shaw's greatest asset that he did not imitate Ibsen as a "poet of atmosphere" but instead developed his dialogues by a "rational sharpness which penetrates as deep as a surgical scalpel".<sup>11</sup> The shift from Krleža's judgement to Fraser's marks the decline of Shaw's visibility on the modern stage. What drove Shaw out of favor with critics and audiences was not so much his realism (after all Chekhov, Hellman and Miller are realists), but his pronounced rationalism, which appreciates only concepts and which brings those concepts into dialogical confrontation in dramatic form on the stage. The modern post-war stage does not appreciate the spoken word as the fundamental component of a performance, let alone the spoken word "which is chrystalized into a rational sharpness". The author who was a positivist and Fabian socialist, who himself admitted that he had never written a word for art's sake, believing that drama can improve the world by the power of its rational word, had become an anachronism.

The other reason for Shaw's disappearance from the world's stages has to do with purely practical theatrical considerations. As a dramatist who paid attention only to the construction of dialogues, who neglected "atmosphere", and did not use ambiguities or suggestiveness, Shaw did not lend himself to interpretations. His plays, single-minded in their logic and "well-made" in construction, do not need the intervention of a director. Everything that is usually done by a director during the rehearsals Shaw himself included in his stage- directions, which do not allow for much linkering. While it could be argued that in the second half of 20th century the director's role has possibly grown out of proportion with his contribution to the dramatic text, it is quite certain that Shaw's plays by their nature discourage directorial interpretations. Instead, their solid structure rooted in the 19th century "actor's theater", they require nothing more than a competent stage manager, who like a kind of traffic warden, takes care of the actor's exits and entrances.

Nevertheless, although Shaw's plays were forgotten so soon after his death, it is almost certain that he will be rediscovered in the near future – in the history of drama the rational and the irrational succeed one another with predictable frequency. As if to corroborate this statement Shaw's demise from the Croatian stages was closely followed

10. G. S. Fraser, *The Modern Writer and His World*, Pelican Books, Baltimore, 1964, p. 52

11. Miroslav Krleža, "George Bernard Shaw", *Jutarnji list*, Zagreb, 1926, no. 5243

by the astounding success of, on the one hand, Tennessee Williams's poeticized plays, and on the other, of the theater of the absurd. Gone were the days when Zlatko Matetić could berate Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* for not having "any of that positive ideological orientation which was found in Arthur Miller's plays"<sup>12</sup> and indignantly conclude:

There is something else, especially in our case, which makes it inadvisable to include this work in the repertoire, and that is the homosexual aspect and emphatic psychopatic atmosphere depicted in the play, which was also present, although in a different way, in *Children's Hour* produced by the same theater. It is a good thing that we should keep in step with world productions and be able to watch dramas just a year or two after their Broadway premieres, but these exclusively theatrical aspects which were taken into consideration by the theater management, cannot be the only ones when selecting works for the repertoire. In this way the interest in this work will be limited to that narrow circle constituting the audience at premieres, while the public at large will neither find much in it, or lose much without it.<sup>13</sup>

Incidentally, Matetić's prediction were proven wrong because "the narrow circle" made *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* one of the most performed plays (eighty-one performances) of the repertoire. In any case, now, barely two years later, three of Williams's short plays (*Talk to Me Like the Rain*, *Baby Doll* and *The Last of the Solid Gold Watches*) prompted another critic to say that "the essential value of these plays about rain and anxiety, death and failure is to be found in their poetic quality"<sup>14</sup> and that "poetry is one of the essential virtues and forces in the whole dramatic opus of this excellent dramatist, a virtue all the more significant since poetry is always a hidden threat to drama".<sup>15</sup> Yet another critic, discussing *Talk to Me Like the Rain* stresses how Williams's characters try to escape reality by hiding in a world of fantasy which "fills this chamber drama in which nothing seems to be happening, although it is in fact packed with drama and overflowing with lyricism".<sup>16</sup> The only allusion to the past attitude towards Williams can be found in Ljerka Krelić's off-hand remark that in *Baby Doll* "we once more discover Williams's peculiar passion for delving into deformed human psyche",<sup>17</sup> but this time the remark is a matter-of-fact statement without any ideological connotations. Whether or not Williams's sudden critical acceptance and popularity was caused by a combination of the reaction to Shaw's rationality and of the fascination with American drama, the fact remains that in 1958 six of his plays were produced in Croatia and the only serious competition he encountered came from another antipode of Shavian dramaturgy – the theater of the absurd.

Contrary to all possible expectations, the success of Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco was truly astonishing. Unforeseeably, their anti-plays which expressed the absurdity and illogicality of all human activities and the impossibility of human communication and relationship by distorting language and depriving the dramatic action of consequentiality and psychological motivation struck a responsive chord with Croatian audiences and critics. It is a matter of conjecture why a nation actively engaged

12. Zlatko Matetić, "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof", *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, May 15, 1956

13. *Ibid.*

14. Želimir Falout, "A Lyrical Seance", *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, Dec. 12, 1958

15. *Ibid.*

16. Ivo Hergešić, "Three Great Little Plays", *Borba*, Zagreb, Dec. 10, 1958

17. Ljerka Krelić, "An Evening with Tennessee Williams", *Večernji vjesnik*, Zagreb, Dec. 12, 1958

in working out its own native Marxist social system should have responded so wholeheartedly to the theater of the absurd. But, let us, for a moment, leave this question unanswered.

For the difference between the introduction of Beckett and of Ionesco to the Croatian stages constitutes an instructive episode. While Ionesco's plays reached Zagreb and Dubrovnik (mainly owing to the efforts of their translator and director, Vlado Habunek) without any complications, Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, translated as early as 1957 by Alka Škiljan, had to wait for nine years before it was produced in Zagreb in 1966. The play was directed by the same director who had directed it in 1957 when it was rehearsed and staged only for the members of the Zagreb Drama Theater (ZDK). However, it was not produced for the general public because the director, the cast and the management of the theater themselves decided not to do so. Nobody required such a decision to be made; there was no censorship and no possibility of negative repercussions either for the actors or the management. The play had been studiously rehearsed and the actor playing the main role performed it very successfully nine years later in the Croatian National Theater. Therefore, the decision not to stage the play at that time had nothing to do with theatrical considerations but stemmed from the uncertainty about the ideological role of the theater. The director, either fearing that the spirit of helplessness emanating from this pessimistic play would infect the audience or fearing that the play might be misunderstood and thus a disservice done to the hitherto unknown author, decided not to stage it at that time. After all, only three years had passed since that Plenum of the Yugoslav Writers' Association which emphasized the artist's social responsibility manifested in a conscious self-censorship, as defined by Milan Bogdanović:

It is that censorship which imperatively comes from the poet himself and about which, as I vividly remember, comrade Oskar Davičo spoke exceptionally well in Dubrovnik several years ago. He said approximately the following: "I do not need any censorship. I am my own greatest and most rigid censor." This seems to me to be a very apt description of the attitude, motivation and awareness of the poet's role in society and especially in our society.<sup>18</sup>

The full extent of this self-imposed censorship on the selection of Anglo-American plays on the Croatian stages will never be known, but fortunately it was a question of individual decisions and not of an all-pervasive policy. Thus the same theater, Zagreb Drama Theater, which abstained from staging *Waiting for Godot* staged Beckett's *End Game* the following season on October 17, 1958. From then on all the major Beckett's and Ionesco's plays have been performed to great critical acclaim:

Samuel Beckett:	<i>End Game</i>	Zagreb (ZDK), 1958/59
	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Zagreb (HNK), 1966/67
		Dubrovnik 1971
	<i>Happy Days</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1965/66
	<i>A Comedy</i>	Zagreb (ITD) 1970
Eugène Ionesco:	<i>The Chairs</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1957/58
	<i>The Lesson</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1957/58

18. Milan Bogdanović's discussion at the Plenum, *op. cit.*, p. 159

	Dubrovnik 1965
<i>Exit the King</i>	Dubrovnik 1965
<i>The Bald Soprano</i>	Zagreb (Kom.)
	Dubrovnik 1965
<i>Rhinoceros</i>	Zagreb (Kom.)

Marija Grgičević's superlative review "The Heights of Tragedy", following the staging of *Happy Days* is characteristic of the critical response:

The oft quoted statement of Ionesco's that our era is not one of tragedy, seems to be incorrect. With *Happy Days* by S. Beckett a tragedy has been created equal in its universal human content to that of Aeschylus, only more familiar, closer to us than *Oresteia* because it has been created to suit our times.<sup>19</sup>

Grgičević dismissed all possible charges that could be laid against Beckett's nihilism by saying that "in his play it reaches its own negation" and that in any case "as with every work of genius the play is an inexhaustible source of interpretations". Another critic, Zlatko Markus from *Studentski list*, shared Grgičević's enthusiasm saying that the play "is watched in panic-stricken expectancy ... as if Beckett had seduced us and infected us, stamping on our consciousness the prevailing condition of contemporary man - waiting".<sup>20</sup> Even the critic from *Vjesnik*, the organ of the Socialist League of Working People, greeted the play with unqualified praise, claiming that in *Happy Days* "Beckett, eternally enigmatic, unreal and distant to a certain section of theater audience, suddenly becomes a writer whose language is comprehensible, whose reality is familiar and whose dilemmas are similar to our own".<sup>21</sup>

It is curious that in Croatia, unlike in Poland and Czechoslovakia, the absurdist drama, despite its acceptance and popularity, did not significantly influence the development of Croatian drama. Martin Esslin reports in *The Theater of the Absurd* that "after the thaw had set in in Eastern Europe, it was precisely the theater of Ionesco which provided the model for an extremely vigorous and barbed kind of political theater",<sup>22</sup> because the theater of the absurd could effectively portray "the essentials of the mood, the basic psychological dilemmas or frustrations involved".<sup>23</sup> Further on Esslin retells how when *Waiting for Godot* was performed in Poland in 1956 "the audience there immediately understood it as portrayal of the frustration of life in a society which habitually explains away the hardships of the present by emphasizing that one day the millenium of plenty is bound to come".<sup>24</sup> This inherent potential of the absurdist drama to be used as a political statement criticizing the shortcomings of a system was exploited to great advantage in Poland by Slawomir Mrozek and Tadeusz Różewicz and in Czechoslovakia by Vaclav Havel. However, in Croatia the handful of plays which were influenced by Beckett and Ionesco, like Vanča Kljaković's *Encounters* (1961) and *Bobo* (1962) or Zvonimir Bajsić's *The Confidence Men* (1964) concentrated only on the technical and external aspects of the absurdist drama. In *Bobo*, for instance,

19. Marija Grgičević, "The Heights of Tragedy", *Večernji list*, Zagreb, Oct. 11, 1965

20. Zlatko Markus, "Beckett Has Arrived", *Studentski list*, Zagreb, Oct. 19, 1965

21. Jozo Puljizević, "A New Side to Our Old Friend Beckett", *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, Oct. 25, 1965

22. Martin Esslin, *The Theater of the Absurd*, Anchor Books, Garden City, 1969, p. 271

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, p. 272

the main character Bobo, having accidentally drunk some nitro-glycerine, sits under a tree waiting to explode. In the course of the play he is joined by several suicidal characters with names like Bibi, Bubu, Bebe, who wait with him, but the explosion never occurs and the play ends with a whimper, not a bang. *The Confidence Men* presents two characters who decide not to go on working but to do something surprising. They lure an alleged gambler, cheat him at cards and when, conscience-stricken, they decide to visit him and return his money they find out that he had died. The charm of the play lies in its use of language, constant misunderstandings between the characters and its emphasis on the impossibility of meaningful communication.

While it is possible that the same self-imposed censorship which prevented *Waiting for Godot* from being staged in 1957 might have been responsible for the playwrights' reluctance to exploit the political implications of the absurdist drama, it seems to me, in retrospect, that at that time there was a great difference between the general situation in Poland and in Yugoslavia. The late 1950s and early 1960s in Yugoslavia were a time of perceptible change for the better, the standard of living was steadily increasing and the sense of helplessness and disorientation, which is a necessary precondition for close identification with the absurdist drama, was replaced by the sense that expectations would be fulfilled in the not too distant future.

Judging by the curious and interesting critical reaction to John Osborne's well-known *Look Back in Anger* there was, however, one segment of society which did not share this optimism – the educated youth. Education in Yugoslavia was free and as the only means of attaining upward mobility it attracted a lot of young people, especially from the less well-off sections of society. However, the supporting structure, ranging from student housing to libraries and expensive books, was not sufficiently developed, and as a result students' life was full of very real hardship. Moreover, having endured all the hardships – unheated rooms, despotic landlords, constant lack of money, bad food in student restaurants, etc. – the students found all the better positions occupied by the still relatively young generation which waved around their revolutionary credentials. This, then, is the context in which one should view the popularity of the theater of the absurd as well as the curious reaction to Osborne's play.

*Look Back in Anger* was shown in Zagreb in September 1958, a little over two years after its triumphant debut in London. The review in *Večernji list* praised the play in the conventional way, stating that "the audience rewarded the actors with heartfelt applause".<sup>25</sup> Continuing in the same, not overtly enthusiastic, manner Ljerka Krelius mentions that Osborne is "an undoubtedly interesting figure in the latest wave of English playwrights", but has misgivings about the director's interpretation which "insisting upon the bitterness of the main character, Jimmy Porter, and his dissatisfaction with all that surrounds him, has given the play an unexpected hue, so that Jimmy comes out as an embittered opponent of his wife, or rather his wives, as women, rather than of the morals and traditions of English upper society".<sup>26</sup> Vlado Madarević predictably finds in Osborne a champion of "the powerful dramaturgy... which has been emerging since

25. Ljerka Krelius, 'Look Back in Anger', *Večernji list*, Zagreb, Oct. 2, 1958

26. *Ibid.*

Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov and which has found its fullest contemporary expression in the subtle psychological realism of the poetic Williams and critically sharper Miller”.<sup>27</sup> However, Mađarević continues by claiming that “young Osborne has gone a step further, both as regards content and expression, introducing in his plays a new motif – an angry protest against the way today’s young generation in the West is living”.<sup>28</sup> Making sure that he is talking about the young generation in the West, Mađarević in conclusion describes this generation which “no longer sees any prospects in their own society and which, stripped of all ideals, yet spurred by a kind of new idealistic nihilism, refuses to accept such an empty, spare and aimless life”.<sup>29</sup> The *Vjesnik* reviewer, Mladen Vujčić, held a similar view, though less impressed with Osborne’s dramaturgy, stressing that the value of Osborne’s work was to be found “less in dramaturgical and textual structure than in the force of his existential criticism of contemporary capitalist society”.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, the only discordant note was sounded by the young critic of *Studentski list*, Željko Falout, who by virtue of his youth should have been most sympathetic to Osborne’s anger. Instead, Falout attacked everything other critics had praised, claiming that the play’s “dramaturgical basis is constituted of a couple of literary reminiscences, obsolete and half-dead”,<sup>31</sup> that the dialogues are full of “cheap effects, empty aphorisms, badly copied from some mediocre text by Huxley”<sup>32</sup> and that “the social aspect is also the fruit of playing with literature, of literary reminiscences, of poorly digested D. H. Lawrence”.<sup>33</sup> The sharpest point of his criticism was, however, aimed at the way the problems of young generation were treated in the play:

I believe that there are more profound reasons for the disorientation of the contemporary youth and that it takes on more profound forms than have been shown in this drama. The shamelessly shallow way in which the author has approached the most serious problems of our time will not go down in the annals of drama but in the annals of phoneyess. While the popularity, the world success of the phoney Osborne is yet another proof of the fact that the modern spirit has been submerged in stupidity. This “drama” will, however, satisfy every snob and petty bourgeois, for it painlessly tickles their fancy, and innocuously outrages them and in its conformist shallowness and melodramatic thoughtlessness does not touch upon the sore points of the real problems.<sup>34</sup>

Falout had to wait two weeks for a response to his attack, but when it came it was in its very title conciliatory. As a reply to his article “Gentle Little Osborne”, A. Majetić and M. Bertoša chose the title “Osborne – Not Great But Not Small Either”, accusing Falout of “exaggerating and stringing together a row of diminutives: this small performance of the small Osborne on the small stage, thus burying all the artistic aspects of this drama”.<sup>35</sup> They think that “Osborne has a feeling for the stage”, that “he has proved to be a truly talented dramatist” and that in the play “he has transposed the

27. Vlado Mađarević, ‘Look Back in Anger’, *Republika*, Zagreb, Jan. 1, 1959, p. 29

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

30. Mladen Vujčić, ‘Look Back in Anger’, *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, Oct. 2, 1958

31. Želimir Falout, “Gentle Little Osborne”, *Studentski list*, Zagreb, Oct. 14, 1958

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. A. Majetić – M. Bertoša, “Osborne – Not Great But Not Small Either”, *Studentski list*, Zagreb, Oct. 28, 1958

situation of a moment, anger and boredom, into a permanent state” the cause of which should be sought in “the social position of English youth, as well as youth of other countries, in whose theaters sit different Porters and Helens”.<sup>36</sup> But Falout would not be denied. In his reply “Neither Drama Nor Anger” he emphatically stated that he “did not renounce his opinion of Osborne”<sup>37</sup> and added:

I am and will continue to be of the opinion that Osborne has been toying frivolously, like an amateur, with some very serious problems. His superficiality is worse than any enhancing lies. To play with the crisis of modern youth, which is in many ways catastrophic, means to hinder every serious, sincere, profound, scientific approach to the problem. This means keeping back the truth, covering it over, making it seem better than it is... I do not believe in Osborne's anger. We all know of people who have been angry at the world because they did not possess a winter coat, or because they lived in a damp basement. But once they get a winter coat or a comfortable apartment they begin to love the world. Osborne's anger, although there has been so much ado about it, is nothing more than a petty bourgeois itch, a commercial fad, or, at best, the hoarse, inarticulate hollering of a drunken neurotic. Real anger is different, more profound and meaningful and does not sell itself before cheap footlights.<sup>38</sup>

In other words Falout denied Osborne the right to be angry, feeling that the circumstances of his own youth had been much harder than those under which Jimmy Porter lived his life. What right did Jimmy have to be angry, sitting in a warm room and complaining about the quality of Sunday papers and radio programs, when the majority of Falout's generation was freezing in rented rooms unable to buy newspapers, let alone radios? By repudiating both the drama and the anger in Osborne's play Falout gave vent to the pent-up anger of his generation which saw itself as, on the one hand, completely excluded from the decision-making process and on the other hand unable to participate in the first wave of consumerism.

Nobody took notice of the polemic and though uncharacteristic in its tone and the issues raised, it was not reported in any other newspaper. Olga Božičković, the drama critic of the Belgrade paper *Politika*, the best informed Yugoslav daily, was in Zagreb at that time and sent a detailed article to Belgrade about the Zagreb theatrical scene, particularly covering Beckett's *End Game* and Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, but she also failed to notice Falout's article, which in those years of silence surrounding theater was something of an exception. Had somebody taken notice, the events which closely followed would have been less surprising. Less than six months later the first post-war student demonstrations were staged in Zagreb. The students, angered by the quality of food served in their restaurant, took to the streets and their slogan “Down with the Red Bourgeoisie” clearly indicated that the quality of food was not the main cause of their dissatisfaction. The demonstration was quickly contained, but the fact remains that Falout's article anticipated and shared in the anger of a generation struggling for its place under the sun, which, to paraphrase George Orwell, seemed to shine stronger on some than on others.

Falout's review as well as the reviews of Williams's and Beckett's plays also demonstrate that the frame of reference in which Anglo-American plays were viewed had changed. The plays, having escaped the limelight of official scrutiny, were no longer

36. *Ibid.*

37. Želimir Falout, “Neither Drama Nor Anger”, *Studentski list*, Zagreb, Oct. 28, 1958

38. *Ibid.*



praised or criticized solely from ideological positions. Even when this happened, as in the case of Matetić's criticism of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* or Madarević's of *The Caine Mutiny* the official response was not forthcoming. For instance, when Graham Greene's *The Living Room*, a play with an obvious religious, specifically Catholic bias, was staged in 1959, Darko Suvin wrote in *Vjesnik* that the play took place "within the hermetically sealed Catholic system... which is therefore affirmed as the only possible framework for a discussion of human values".<sup>39</sup> He continued by saying that the play was dogmatic, that "the adulterous wife is punished and the adulterous husband defeated and morally condemned, while the Sacrament of Matrimony, even though with a psychotic, is justified and bloodily defended" and that Greene's work is "fostering bigotry and death". After stating that "a contemporary artist cannot negate life in the interests of reactionary dogmatism", Suvin concluded that "there was no room in the theater for religious education".<sup>40</sup> The fact that the play was directed and selected by Branko Gavella, certainly one of the most distinguished figures not only of Croatian but Yugoslav theater history, was sufficient to put a stop to any undue discussion. In 1959 the authorities no longer bothered to go into the question of how a socialist theater, which after all received a considerable subsidy, had seen fit to include in its repertoire a modern work with an expressly Catholic ideology.

The lack of ideological guidelines meant that critics had to start relying on their own aesthetic taste and that American drama had lost its prerogatives as an ideologically suspicious art form which had to be approached with precaution and respect. Even Lillian Hellman, formerly praised for her "progressive" attitude, was virtually accused of plagiarism after the performance of *The Autumn Garden*. Zvonimir Berković wrote in *Večernji list* that "the small hotel in the middle of a hot, dry summer, a hotel where nothing ever happens, and to which the same guests always return - comes from Chekhov",<sup>41</sup> that "all those characters, suffocating with bedroom, who would like to start anew, experience something, fly off somewhere, but whose wings have been clipped - come from Chekhov"<sup>42</sup> and that "all those gloomy dialogues between tired characters"<sup>43</sup> also come from Chekhov. Ivan Starčević in *Vjesnik* shared this opinion ending his review with a statement that "Chekhov transplanted to American soil is not Chekhov"<sup>44</sup> and that "in the end it is not only the characters in Mrs. Tuckerman's hotel who are bored, but the audience, too".<sup>45</sup> While it is possible that this harsh criticism of Hellman's work was a reaction to the unqualified praise which had been showered on her during the socialist realist period the fact remains that even the greatest foreign successes now had to be verified on the Croatian stages. For instance, when writing about William Gibson's *Two for the Seesaw*, a very popular play in America, Nenad Turkalj says that "success on choosy Broadway is obviously no guarantee of quality, although Gibson undoubtedly managed to reflect in his work certain aspects of the intimate life

39. Darko Suvin, "The Gloomy Room in Our Theater", *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, Feb. 24, 1959

40. *Ibid.*

41. Zvonimir Berković, "The Autumn Garden of Lillian Hellman", *Večernji list*, Zagreb, Jan. 20, 1957

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

44. Ivan Starčević, "The Autumn Garden", *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, Jan. 23, 1957

45. *Ibid.*

of the contemporary American, burdened with complexes and caught up in the cruel daily struggle for existence".<sup>46</sup> While Turkalj used his review to stress the gloomy picture of American life, Ljerka Krelius of *Vjesnik* come to the conclusion that "this problem had been dealt with in plays long ago, while Gibson, in bringing it up to date and pepping it up with the excitements and psychology has not contributed anything essentially new to it".<sup>47</sup> In contrast to this opinion voiced in the official paper of the Socialist League of Working People of Croatia, we have the opinion of Nasko Frndić, in *Borba* (Jan. 1, 1960), the paper of the Socialist League of Working People of Yugoslavia:

In a three-hour drama with only two characters Gibson carefully outlines the psychological profiles of two young Americans, who have come together by chance in the poetry of youth and troubled times... The drama as a whole is of interest to us as yet another way of becoming acquainted with the unconventional, robust psychology of the young people of big-town America.

Yet, in spite of the divergent opinions about particular plays, so different from the uniformity of the preceding period, the interest of the critics was still primarily thematic. Although one would expect that reduction of ideological pressure would have resulted in criticism of greater vitality and intelligence, in 1960 it is still very difficult to single out even one outstanding personality among theater critics who might by virtue of his arguments and critical methods come close to the quality of Croatian literary criticism. The lack of critical vitality can be attributed to several equally relevant factors. As I have already mentioned drama criticism was still confined to newspapers whose function was to inform and educate as well as affirm the ideological principles – at least by implication. Secondly, as theater was pushed into the aesthetic "preserve" on the margins of societal interest, the profession of drama reviewing had a rather low status, so that for the majority of the critics it was only a stepping stone for other careers. For instance, the reviews written by Branko Hećimović, Nikola Batušić, Darko Suvin, etc. were only trial runs for their later theoretical studies of the theater and literature and teaching careers. Consequently, critics were constantly replaced by other critics, and critical discourse had no time to develop, while those few critics who, like Vlado Mađarević, had remained in the profession since immediately after the war, retained their ideologized discourse.

The rather belated encounter of Croatian critics with Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* and the arrival of the younger generation of playwrights – Pinter, Albee, Kopit, Schisgal, etc. – bring us to the end of this relatively unpoliticized period in the history of Croatian theater. The Zagreb Croatian National Theater did not stage *Death of a Salesman* until April 4, 1960 (although there had been thirteen performances by the Osijek Theater in December 1956). By that time Miller was no longer known only for *All My Sons* but was vying with Tennessee Williams for popularity and the premiere of *Death of a Salesman* was received by the critics as something very special. However, as it turned out, the praise in the reviews was quite conventional. Nenad Turkalj asserted that "Arthur Muller is today undoubtedly the greatest name in American drama",<sup>48</sup> and that "he is one of the few writers who, without exaggerated versification and beating

46. Nenad Turkalj, "William Gibson's *Two for the Seesaw*", *Večernji list*, Zagreb, Jan. 11, 1960

47. Ljerka Krelius, "Two for the Seesaw", *Vjesnik*, Jan. 12, 1960

48. Nenad Turkalj, "Death of a Salesman", *Večernji list*, Zagreb, April 19, 1960

about the bush, has spoken out about the contrariness and conflicts which everyday life brings to the average citizen of one of the greatest nations in the world”.<sup>49</sup> After stating that the play is “a masterpiece” about “the average American”, Turkalj concludes that “conversations and ideas” in the play “are realistic documents of American everyday life, regardless of whether they are presented in a realistic scene or in the imagination of the main character”.<sup>50</sup> In Many Birmiša’s opinion the play is about “the existential problems of a family”, but that there are also “two parallel threads running through the play – the social and the psychological”.<sup>51</sup> She shares Turkalj’s opinion that “as a social drama it is a faithful slice taken out of the life of contemporary America and a strong indictment of society”<sup>52</sup> but also points out that “the psychological complexity of the personality is played out to perfection, particularly in the double experiences of the present and the future, reality and illusion, truth and desire”.<sup>53</sup> Nasko Frndić stresses that *Death of a Salesman* is a play “with a very clearly defined ideological basis, a pictorial and analytical summary of the position of a little man in a class-conscious businessmen’s society”.<sup>54</sup> As an example of this he takes Ben, Willy Loman’s brother, who went into the jungle when seventeen and came out a rich man at twenty-one, and claims that in this “terrifying personality” Miller “expresses the horror of a society where life is ‘an asphalt jungle’”.<sup>55</sup> Although Duško Car agrees that Willy Loman is “a document of a given state of affairs” he at least shares the opinion of the majority of American critics who consider the play a modern tragedy and states that “its greatness is best seen if we realize that it is not a sentimental drama about ‘a victim’, but a tragedy of a man who becomes aware that he has failed in life’s cruel struggle”.<sup>56</sup>

All in all it would seem that the play did appear on the Zagreb stage rather too late and that the critics were just repeating what had been written about Miller for fully ten years already. Moreover, this production was also the last in which Miller received positive reviews. The performance of his play about the plight of the Jews in war-time France, *Incident in Vichy*, at the Croatian National Theater (December 28, 1965) marked a turning point in his reputation. A week later Many Gotovac started her review with a question: “What do you think would happen if one of our young writers were to write something like *Incident in Vichy*?”<sup>57</sup> Her answer: “Probably nothing, for it would never be staged!”<sup>58</sup> Reproaching the author for the fact that his dramatic idea was ancient the reviewer concludes that Miller has treated it superficially and routinely:

The very ease with which Miller pours out his sentences and seems to string them together endlessly, while tripping up over a problem only two or three times, leaves one with the impression of a professionally executed job without any more profound worries. The only problem is that behind the dialogue there is actually nothing but a void, a few lightly outlined characters, who, apart from their

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. Many Birmiša, ‘*Death of a Salesman*’, *Studentski list*, Zagreb, April 19, 1960

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

54. Nasko Frndić, ‘*Death of a Salesman*’, *Borba*, Zagreb, April 18, 1960

55. *Ibid.*

56. Duško Car, ‘*Death of a Salesman*’, *Telegram*, Zagreb, April 30, 1960

57. Many Gotovac, ‘There Are Many in Vichy with Forged Documents’, *Telegram*, Jan. 7, 1966

58. *Ibid.*

oratorical skill, have nothing to offer that would make it worth conversing with them... And if the intention of this performance was to prove that at least five of our local dramatists could write a better play than Miller's latest drama then it has served its purpose.<sup>59</sup>

With *Incident in Vichy* we witness a process similar to that which took place a number of seasons earlier with the dramas of G. B. Shaw. Arthur Miller's dramatic idiom, an extremely accomplished blend of realistic, expressionistic and cinematic devices, is indeed rooted in traditional dramaturgy stemming from Ibsen, and to some extent even Shaw. When the director Dino Radojević,<sup>60</sup> who between 1954 and 1967 had directed the largest number of American dramas in Zagreb, exclaimed in an interview: "I am tired of American drama!... I hope I won't be directing an American play for a long time...",<sup>61</sup> he was referring to the plays by Williams, Miller and O'Neill which seemed old-fashioned in comparison with the new generation of Anglo-American playwrights.

The positive reception of Albee's, Pinter's and Kopit's plays indicates that Miller's decline had nothing to do either with a surfeit of Anglo-American dramas (their number was equal to the total number of all other foreign plays in the repertoire) nor with any official suggestions or political directives. Rather, it was a question of their modernity, best expressed by Nikola Batušić's reaction to Osborne "who seems rather archaic, and after great Kopit, Pinter and Arrabal strangely smooth, too stretched out upon the Procrustean bed of classical European drama from the end of the last and the beginning of this century".<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, the repudiation of the social realist drama of Ibsen, Shaw, Miller and Osborne in favor of the stylized and absurdist distortions of "the great Kopit" can also be interpreted as an ideologically motivated final rejection of the socially committed drama which had dominated the stages for two decades.

In any case, an era of Anglo-American theater on the Croatian stages came to a close in December 1965 with Miller's drama, and the following year Marija Grgičević greeted the new generation by saying, "the new American drama brought to us by the generation which is replacing Williams and Miller is now reaching us with works by Edward Albee, Murray Schisgal and Arthur Kopit. It appeared at the beginning of this decade with Albee's *Zoo Story*, full of vitality, rough sincerity and hopeless revolt".<sup>63</sup> The review was written following the performance of Kopit's *Chamber Music and the*

59. *Ibid.*

60. Although virtually all of Branko Gavella's students have directed Anglo-American plays (Kosta Spaić, Mladen Škiljan, Georgij Paro, Davor Šošić, Ivan Hetrich, etc.) Dino Radojević is certainly the first to have specialized in them. The following are the plays directed by him between 1954 and 1967:

Arthur Miller:	<i>The Crucible</i>	(ZDK)1954
Tennessee Williams:	<i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i>	(ZDK)1956
Arthur Miller:	<i>A Memory of Two Mondays</i>	(ZDK)1958
Eugene O'Neill:	<i>Long Day's Journey into Night</i>	(HNK)1958
Tennessee Williams:	<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>	(ZDK)1960
Peter Ustinov:	<i>Photo Finish</i>	(ZDK)1960
William Shakespeare:	<i>Hamlet</i>	(ZDK)1964
Eugene O'Neill:	<i>A Moon for the Misbegotten</i>	(ZDK)1967

61. *Telegram*, Zagreb, Oct. 14, 1960

62. Nikola Batušić, "Osborne's 'Eptaph for George Dillon', *Republika*, Zagreb, May 5, 1965, p. 267

63. Marija Grgičević, "Sarcastic Boulevard", *Večernji list*, Zagreb, Dec. 13, 1966

*Day when the Whores Came Out to Play Tennis* (December 12, 1966) which received other good reviews with headlines such as “In the Spirit of Beatnik Philosophy” praising “Kopit’s allusions concerning people’s loneliness in an unwieldy, complex, crazy world...”<sup>64</sup>

In his “Letter from the Theater”, published in the Belgrade biweekly *Književne novine* (*Literary Journal*) on July 24, 1965, Vlado Madarević was already praising Murray Schisgal as an “as yet unknown contemporary writer”. Naturally, faithful to the standpoints and categories adopted in his youth Madarević considers Schisgal to be an interesting writer because he writes “successful satirical sketches about the position and problems of the so-called ‘little man’ in the big world of Americanized technological civilization, which reduces people to a mere cog in the wheel of everyday life”. While Madarević thought the one-act play *Typists* rather “long drawn-out”, he stated that “*Tiger* was written under the strong influence of Ionesco, especially *The Lesson*, although with a more personal tone and more realistic plot”, which Madarević, as a critic from the period of socialist realism, found most satisfying.

In 1966 Schisgal’s *Luv*, produced in the new ITD Theater in Zagreb, attained a success such as no other play, Yugoslav or foreign, had ever achieved in Croatia. Other plays had been performed over a hundred times, but during a very short period of time *Luv* was performed over and over. Not only did it tour all the different theaters, being produced in Zagreb, Osijek, Požega and Dubrovnik, but it had 180 performances in just six years. Along with 94 performances of *Tiger* and *Typist* Schisgal broke all records as a favorite of critics and audiences as well. Nasko Frndić again found in *Luv* “the philosophy of life of the American Beatniks”<sup>65</sup> praising especially the acting, “the speed with which the lines are delivered, the physical aspect, the real physical clash between the actors, which all make it more like the acting which has become dominant in American theaters”.<sup>66</sup> It is true that Sonja Bašić’s excellent translation and Relja Bašić’s acting and directing contributed to the play’s remarkable success. Marija Grgičević called Schisgal’s humor “extremely intelligent, rather crude, and amusing in a very ironical way”<sup>67</sup> and Many Gotovac was of the opinion that he “basically ridicules the prevalent myths of the American way of life – psychoanalysis, which is served up in every possible situation”.<sup>68</sup>

In contrast, the premiere of Harold Pinter’s *Collection* and *The Lover* in 1964 was anything but a success and not only with the biting severe critics but with the audience as well. Marija Grgičević called it “exclusive experimentation” and asked “what kind of a game the Zagreb Drama Theater was playing with its audience, first asking them to attend through ‘Friends of Theater’ clubs, while at the same time repulsing them with such an unfitting approach to theater repertoire planning”.<sup>69</sup> Jozo Puljizević was equally unimpressed claiming that “theater does not exist just for two spectators or one critic”

64. Nasko Frndić, “In the Spirit of Beatnik Philosophy”, *Borba*, Zagreb, Dec. 15, 1966

65. Nasko Frndić, “A Forceful Tempo”, *Borba*, Zagreb, Dec. 21, 1966

66. *Ibid.*

67. Marija Grgičević, “An Excellent Satire on Love”, *Večernji list*, Zagreb, Dec. 21, 1966

68. Many Gotovac, “*Luv*”, *Telegram*, Zagreb, Dec. 23, 1966

69. Marija Grgičević, “In a Vicious Circle”, *Večernji list*, Zagreb, Oct. 7, 1964

and that while Pinter “will succeed in confusing the snobs who will admire him without understanding” he has won his place “in the history of contemporary deviations in the modern theater”.<sup>70</sup>

Pinter’s success with the critics came with the production of *The Homecoming* in 1967. Only one critic, Nikola Batušić, felt it necessary to admit that he had been wrong in his assessment of Pinter three years earlier:

When I wrote about Harold Pinter’s *Collection* and *The Lover* three years ago I claimed with certainty that these would be his first and last plays to appear in Zagreb. I am now glad to be able to say I was wrong, for his play *The Homecoming* on the Small Stage at the Croatian National Theater has convinced us all of this writer’s skill. This is a clearly conceived drama, lucid in all its details, consistently brought to its tragic conclusion.<sup>71</sup>

Marija Grgičević, who had harshly criticized Pinter’s first plays, wrote about *The Homecoming* in glowing terms, as if it had been written by somebody else:

Pinter’s drama is exceptionally correct, every little detail is an essential part of the whole, while each scene follows on from the previous one. His naturalism is full of mystery, every word, every object and glance gains unusual significance. And this is also the case in the performance which was directed with such great precision by Georgij Paro. Having mastered both the characterization and the achievement of gradually building up the tension, the director has, by using consistently realistic means, managed at times to achieve the mirage-like quality of Pinter’s world.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, the period of uneasy truce between ideological pressure and theater came to a close with the acceptance and affirmation of the new generation of playwrights. Curiously, the development away from the socially committed plays of Shaw, Hellman and Miller towards the absurdist, anxiety-filled and ambiguous plays of Beckett, Kopit and Pinter paralleled, with an ever smaller delay, the development of drama in the West. It is quite possible that in addition to the other reasons mentioned, the political leadership’s disinterest in the selection of foreign plays may have been part of a deliberate policy to create abroad the impression of complete artistic freedom in Yugoslavia as an important proof of its non-aligned status. However, the issue of the national theater, which will be dealt with in the next chapter, demonstrates that the truce was only temporary and that relationship between politics and theater continued weaving its complex pattern of emphases and counter-emphases.

#### Chapter 4.

##### A New Turn (1968 – 1971)

It is only fitting that the reception of a play by Eugene O’Neill, the progenitor of the modern American drama, should have acted as the catalyst for the new situation in which theater once again found itself in the focus of Croatian political life. While O’Neill’s *The*

70. Jozo Puljizević, ‘*The Lover*’, *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, Nov. 7, 1964

71. Nikola Batušić, ‘*The Homecoming*’, *Republika*, Zagreb, 1967, no. 3–4, pp. 152–55

72. Marija Grgičević, ‘The Psychology of the Herd’, *Večernji list*, Feb. 28, 1967

*Iceman Cometh* was one of the biggest theatrical successes in Zagreb in the 1960 season, now barely five years later, following the premiere of *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (November 25, 1967) the reviewers were openly asking whether his was not an obsolete theatrical idiom. Jozo Puljizević at least tried to spare O'Neill himself any sharp criticism by attacking the performance,<sup>73</sup> but Marija Grgičević, recognizing that O'Neill "has always been America's greatest dramatist"<sup>74</sup> drew a conclusion which not only disqualified this American Irishman but a whole theatrical epoch:

The two decades that have passed since his drama, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, was written, have so shaken the foundations of bourgeois theater that the impossibility of what was until recently considered great theater is becoming increasingly obvious.<sup>75</sup>

While in the case of G. B. Shaw it was a case of a rationalist criticized for his lack of poetry, not even poetry could save O'Neill now; nor could his symbolism threaded through with realism. His belonging to a specific theatrical epoch made him an anachronism.

This reaction was, however, predictable, considering that even an "angry young man" like Osborne had been regarded as "archaic". A new element in the reception of O'Neill's play was introduced with the provocative question posed by Srećko Lipovčan in *Telegram* on December 8, 1967:

What meaning, after all, does this world of the American farm hold for us? I would not, naturally, be asking this question if it did not seem to me that we are rather too uncritical in respect to foreign works, and rather too disinclined to value our own. Do we not have in our rather meagre heritage texts which would – now that we have opted for this kind of theater – be suitable? Or even more suitable?

The same question was echoed by Tomislav Kurelec two weeks later, when following the premiere of Neil Simon's *Barefoot in the Park* he dramatically asked the theater management whether they thought "that Simon really represented true people's theater, true theater of the people and whether there was no need to develop audience tastes to aspire to anything greater than Simon".<sup>76</sup>

The remarks of Lipovčan and Kurelec did not derive from purely aesthetic considerations, nor did they finally have to do with an assessment of O'Neill's place in modern drama. They were entering the emerging controversy over the issue of a national theater. Darko Gašparović in his reply in *Telegram* (December 22, 1967) made quite clear what it was all about:

Lipovčan asks himself "what meaning, after all, this world of the American farm holds for us", after which, carried away by patriotic zeal, he decries the fact that we have unjustifiably forgotten two texts from our theatrical heritage. If we follow his line of thought we might as well ask what the world of the Athenian ruling family meant to us, or that of the Danish court or the aristocratic ambience of Russia in its decadence, and thus come to the conclusion that we have no need either of Racine, nor Shakespeare or Chekhov... and that we should instead be staging Stjepan Miletić's tragedy *Tomislav, King of the Croats* or the historical drama by Ante Tresić-Pavičić.

It is very nice to respect one's own cultural heritage, but it is not so nice when in doing so one loses sight of all aesthetic criteria, and starts emphasizing as something living and topical that which is

73. Jozo Puljizević, "Cruelty and Kindness", *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, Nov. 27, 1967

74. Marija Grgičević, "The Helplessness of Psychology", *Večernji list*, Zagreb, Nov. 27, 1967

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Telegram*, Zagreb, Dec. 22, 1967

today of merely historical value – all in an attempt to resolve our unfortunate complex of national inferiority.

The issue of the national theater was an aspect of a more besetting problem of central importance to the development of Yugoslavia as a socialist experiment and the very existence of the State itself. As always in such important historical moments, the peaceful coexistence between art and politics was broken and political disinterestedness in the theater came to an end.

The newly launched journal *Prolog* (March 1968), devoted exclusively to theater, stated emphatically in its programmatic manifesto that its primary aim was the promotion of Croatian drama “which must open up towards a determined and unbending critical engagement with the essential and crucial ethical, social, political, moral and existential issues of the time and place”.<sup>77</sup> As regards the contemporary world drama, their staging “is in most cases an attempt to bring over experiences which are completely foreign and uninteresting to us”.<sup>78</sup> In the same issue Gašparović pleaded for a new kind of playwright, who must be “against the society which had made material standards its only aim, while cynically throwing revolutionary ideals and spiritual values into the garbage”.<sup>79</sup>

Therefore, from its first issue, *Prolog* articulated and united two tendencies, both of them encountered in the politicized tradition of Croatian theater – the promotion of the national drama and the critique of society from radical positions. While the second tendency corresponded with and reflected the “new left” student movement in Europe and the U.S., the nationalism was an indigenous manifestation.

The so-called “Croatian question”, one of the central problems during the time of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, came up again in the late sixties because the socialist government had been unable, even under Tito, to resolve it. Tensions between the two largest nations in Yugoslavia, Serbia and Croatia, ran deep and were not easily overcome. The problem was compounded by the complete stagnation in economic growth, rising unemployment and emigration, which were all the result of hurriedly adopted economic reforms. As the cake to be shared was becoming smaller, the Croats felt that they were discriminated against by the central government. Those opposed to economic discrimination against Croatia included not only the social strata who had not been able to come to terms with the socialist order and ideology, but also a part of the top echelons of the Party and intelligentsia. Therefore, though culture and art continued to be outside the official interests of the government, the opposition wished to affirm itself through artistic and cultural channels, on the one hand, because they were not under government supervision, and on the other because it offered them the best opportunity to overcome the contradictions within their own ranks. The preservation of the purity of the Croatian language protected from Serbian influence, the cultivation of Croatian national history, the fostering of Croatian culture and theater – all became the slogans advanced by the opposition.

77 77. *Prolog*, Zagreb, 1968, no. 1, p. 4

78 78. *Ibid.*

79 79. Darko Gašparović, “The Possibility of Critical Commitment in Croatian Contemporary Drama”, *Ibid.*, p. 11



Therefore, even though during the late 60s the central government and the Party were not regulating or censoring dramatic productions for their form or message, the repertoire was subjected to political pressures at the local level. This section of the theater program is now very much politicized reflecting the ideology of the opposition towards the central government and its policies. The old socialist slogans about the “brotherhood and unity” of the Yugoslav peoples, are being subverted or at least opposed by the suggestion that because of unbridgeable differences each of the Yugoslav nations should live a completely independent life.

Concurrently with the demands for economic independence, the whole of Croatian culture and theater are being mobilized for a political struggle. When Srećko Lipovčan asks what that world of the American farm holds for us and pleads for Croatian dramas to be staged instead of O’Neill, he is speaking as a militant adherent of those forces who wish to turn the theater into a polygon for their political ends. The native repertoire in fact was already completely politicized. Romantic dramas from the 19th century were being shown; Šenoa’s *Croatian Diogenes*, in which the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa was cheered as the Croatian queen, was adapted for the stage; plays with an expressly nationalistic bias were being commissioned. At the premiere and subsequent performance of Marijan Matković’s *General and his Jester* (February 1970), a play which attempted to demythologize a national historical hero, there were demonstrations by nationalistically inclined youths who condemned the play as “an insult to the national history and national feelings of the Croatian people” and demanded that it be taken off. This play as well as others gave rise to discussions the likes of which the foreign repertoire was spared during this whole period. Of course, the relatively peaceful life of the foreign drama on the Croatian stages is in no way a refutation of the basic argument of this thesis – the constant, fateful connection between the theater as a social phenomenon and politics.

However, the process of politicization of the theater did not seriously affect the selection of Anglo-American plays. The acceptance of Albee, Kopit, Schisgal and Pinter had opened wide the gates for further excursions into the Anglo-American contemporary drama. On the other hand, though the attitude towards and the critical reception of Anglo-American drama had not changed, the following list of the plays performed in the 1967–1971 period shows a gradual decline in the number of works performed:

Jean Reavey:	<i>Mercy</i>	Zagreb (ITD) 1967
Eugene O’Neill:	<i>A Moon for the Misbegotten</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1967/68
Neil Simon:	<i>Barefoot in the Park</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1967/68
J. M. Synge:	<i>The Playboy of the Western World</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1967/68
John Osborne:	<i>The Epitaph for George Dillon</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1967/68
James Saunders:	<i>The Scent of Flowers</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1967/68
John Arden:	<i>Live Like Pigs</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1968/69
William Shakespeare:	<i>Julius Caesar</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1968/69

Frank Gilroy:	<i>Who'll Save the Ploughboy</i>	Pula 1968
Arthur Miller:	<i>The Price</i>	Osijek 1968
Leslie Stevens:	<i>The Marriage Roundabout</i>	Osijek 1968
Edward Albee:	<i>The Zoo Story</i>	Osijek 1968
Harold Pinter:	<i>The Dumb Waiter</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1969
Peter Shaffer:	<i>The Public Eye</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1969
anon.:	<i>Arden of Feversham</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1969
Harold Pinter:	<i>The Caretaker</i>	Student Theater at Zagreb (Kom.)
Sean O'Casey:	<i>The Plough and the Stars</i>	Rijeka 1969
William Shakespeare:	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	Rijeka 1969
Arthur Miller:	<i>A View from the Bridge</i>	Požega 1969
Peter Shaffer:	<i>Black Comedy</i>	Zagreb (Kom.) 1970
Peter Ustinov:	<i>Half Way up the Tree</i>	Split 1970
James Goldman:	<i>The Lion in Winter</i>	Dubrovnik 1970
Samuel Beckett:	<i>A Comedy</i>	Zagreb (HNK) 1970
William Shakespeare:	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>	Osijek 1970/71
Edward Bond:	<i>Saved</i>	Zagreb (ZDK) 1970/71
Harold Pinter:	<i>The Landscape</i>	Zagreb (ITD) 1971
Tom Stoppard:	<i>Rosencrantz and Guilden- stern Are Dead</i>	Zagreb (ITD) 1971

The selection of plays is representative of the trends in contemporary drama and there are no conspicuous omissions or inclusions, except for the gradual decline in the number of productions resulting from increased demand for the national drama. This means that in those politicized years there were two attitudes co-existing: the attitude towards foreign drama and the attitude towards our national drama. The first still totally liberal, without ideological directives while the second increasingly politicized and in the focus of political contention. In fact the foreign repertoire has never again been subjected to censorship or to officially inspired political criticism. For the next twenty years at least ideological issues have been pursued only within the framework of the interrelationship of the main nationalities in Yugoslavia. This thorny problem, however, has to be examined separately from the topic discussed throughout our study. Nevertheless, this new problem shows that the connections between theater and politics are always there, even when submerged and perhaps for the moment forgotten, only to appear again to make us feel a new development in their tense and volatile interrelationship.

RECEPCIJA ANGLO-AMERIČKE DRAME NA HRVATSKOJ POSLIJERATNOJ POZORNICI:  
KAZALIŠTE, POLITIKA, IDEOLOGIJA (II DIO)

Ovaj članak je drugi dio studije koja je objavljena u posljednjem broju SRAZ-a. U njemu se nastavlja ispitivanje odnosa između kazališta i politike na primjeru recepcije anglo-američke drame na poslijeratnoj hrvatskoj pozornici. Dok se prvi dio bavio periodom 1945-55, drugi dio razvija temu do ranih sedamdesetih godina i kroz prezentirani materijal upućuje na zaključak da su veze između kazališta i politike i nadalje prisutne, čak i onda kad su naizgled nevidljive, da bi se uskoro ponovo pojavile kao nova faza u razvoju tog nelagodnog međuodnosa.