Lyrical Drama of the 1940s in the Context of the Slovak Surrealist Movement

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This article focuses on the clarification of the terms "lyrical drama" and "poetic drama" as well as on the definition of their features in the avant-garde era. It briefly introduces "nadrealizmus" (literally "overrealism") as a Slovak variant of the surrealist movement. Based on structural and semiotic criteria, it situates six plays from the first half of the 1940s within the context of surrealist drama and theatre. It records the change of dramatic form in the categories of character, plot, composition, and genre. In the case of staged plays, it uses contemporary reviews to describe directorial techniques. It also pays attention to the coexistence of lyrical and dramatic principles, the loosening of structure, the use of montage, the associative approach, working with rhythm, and the oscillation between the visual and the musical. On this basis, it demonstrates that the plays of Rudolf Dilong, Štefan Žáry, Ján Poničan, Peter Zvon and Leopold Lahola from the early 1940s correspond to avant-garde poetics in drama and deal with key philosophical and anthropological issues of the surrealist movement, such as the problem of the subject, freedom, creativity, the nature of reality, and the validity of dreams.

Kľúčové slová: avantgardné divadlo, surrealizmus, nadrealizmus, lyrická dráma, básnická dráma

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Despite an initial scepticism towards surrealist art in Slovakia, several surrealist poetry collections were published between 1935 and 1938, and several lectures were held to promote surrealism and its artistic practices.[1] In 1938, a group of Slovak surrealists formed and joined the international surrealist movement.[2] The renaming of Slovak surrealism to *nadrealizmus* (literally "overrealism") took place in February 1939, shortly before the collapse of Czechoslovakia.

As a specific "national" variant of surrealism, Slovak *nadrealizmus* is considered to be the first and only avant-garde movement in Slovak literature that met the traditional definitions of an avant-garde;[3] it had a group character, a theoretical and critical background, and a common publishing platform in the form of several anthologies. It also manifested itself in several forms of art and connected this to the international context.[4]

Slovak *nadrealizmus* is an example of the avant-garde on the periphery. Also due to the political and cultural ties between France and Czechoslovakia before 1939, it was formed on the basis of French and Czech surrealisms.[5] Móric Mittelmann Dedinský, one of the pioneers of surrealism in Slovakia, states that Slovak poets relied more heavily than Czech poets on the French prototype, which they knew about from Czech translations (Dedinský 1963: 36). However, Štefan Žáry (1918–2007), another figure of *nadrealizmus*, emphasized in his memoirs the unique character of the movement and its independence from foreign models:

1 The first manifestation of surrealism in Slovak poetry is considered to be Rudolf Fabry's (1915–1982) collection of poems *Uťaté ruky* [Cut-off Hands] (1935), followed by Móric Mittelmann Dedinský's (1914–1989) *Krivky* [Curves] (1936), Rudolf Dilong's (1905–1986) *Mladý svadobník* [The Young Wedding Man] (1936), and Arnold Paldia's (1918–2003) *Prsty nad riekou* [Fingers over the River] (1937).

2 The surrealist group in Czechoslovakia was founded in the spring of 1934. There were no Slovak artists among its founding members. The group was disbanded demonstratively in 1938 by one of its most prominent members, Vítězslav Nezval (1900–1958). Despite the dissolution of the group and the subsequent Nazi occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, the artistic activities of the followers of Czech surrealism continued and new groups were formed.

3 For more on the development of surrealism and *nadrealizmus* in Slovakia, see Bakoš (1969: 243–257) and Šmatlák 1971. Avant-garde impulses appeared in Slovak literature as early as in the 1920s, but it was not a distinct and group effort. Of the avant-gardes, expressionism was mainly applied in prose and drama whereas poetry experienced it in the form of poetism and, marginally, futurism.

4 The activities of literary surrealism and *nadrealizmus* also involved figures working in the fields of art history, philosophy, psychology, and other disciplines. Around thirty adherents took part in café gatherings (Vašš 2018: 22). Among the members of the "avant-garde of '38", Mikuláš Bakoš includes visual artists, primarily Ladislav Guderna (1921–1999), Viliam Chmel (1917–1961), Cyprián Majerník (1909–1945), and Ján Mudroch (1909–1945) – that is, artists of two generations (Bakoš 1969: 259). However, the inclusion of artists "in the nadrealist circle is not clear-cut, although they were in contact with poets in the preparation of nadrealist anthologies and collections of poetry" (Šaková 2019: 181). For more on artists' ivolvement in preparing poetry collections, see Mojžišová (2006: 609–621). The "avant-garde of '38" is related to the year of the publication of the first anthology of the surrealist movement in Slovakia, *Áno a nie* [Yes and No]. The surrealist manifesto was already conceived in early 1938 by Dedinský, but it was never published.

5 In contrast to Slovakia, Czech surrealism integrated the impulses of poetism; its peak phase was from 1924 to 1929. For more on the relationship between poetism and surrealism in poetry, see Čolakova (1999: 61–94).

> Being the most recent, it differed from the French model but also from the Czech variety in its understanding and means of expression. [...] Psychic automatism gave way even to the slightest stealthy control of reason; intellect hovered above it like a spirit over the waters; randomness yielded to a given or at least hinted-at theme; wild dishevelment to poetic cosmetics. [...] The Slovak group of *nadrealists* was characterized by a lesser degree of sophistication than the Czech group, but it was more numerous in terms of the number of creative poets (Žáry 2004: 130).[6]

Slovak *nadrealizmus* was also avant-garde in a "post-avant-garde time" (Hamada 2006: 596), since its peak phase coincided with the years of the Second World War, which is also the period of the first Slovak Republic as a German satellite. The primary venue of the movement was Bratislava as the only Slovak city with an artistic bohemian scene, where, even during the war years, "unlike other European metropolises and cities of the time, evening and night-time café life functioned as it normally did" (Vašš 2018: 10). Given the attitudes of its key actors, the functioning of *nadrealizmus* under the conditions of the totalitarian regime was seen as an affirmation of art's potential in the search for freedom rather than as an expression of collaboration or evasion.[7]

Literary *nadrealizmus* manifested itself primarily in poetry, where it was represented by the "seven" central poetic figures as well as by other poets situated on the periphery of the movement who did not necessarily subscribe to the ideological foundations of surrealism but who, at a certain stage of their work, employed its poetic techniques.[8] *Nadrealizmus* was considerably less represented in other literary forms, despite its initial ambition: "*Nadrealizmus* must reach into all fictional possibilities – into the novel, lyric prose, and theatre to its consequences. I have observed that the public expects from us more than we can boast of today" (Kunoš 1965 [1940]: 65).[9]

In the field of drama, avant-garde movements (poetism, surrealism, as well as *nadrealizmus*) have been mentioned in connection with the poetic drama movement which developed from the mid-1930s to the late 1940s. Approx-

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6 Similarly, Jaroslava Šaková notes that nadrealizmus strove for distinction and independence "without constant comparison with the Czech or French environment" (Šaková 2019: 181), which could be related to the foreign policy orientation of the wartime Slovak Republic.

7 The nadrealists proclaimed anti-fascist attitudes during the Second World War. After the rise of communism in Czechoslovakia in 1948, coupled with the suppression of the avant-garde, they embraced socialist realism.

8 The core authors were the poets Rudolf Fabry (1915–1982), Vladimír Reisel (1919–2007), Ján Brezina (1917–1997), Pavel Bunčák (1915–2000), Július Lenko (1914–2000), Ján Rak (1915–1969), and Štefan Žáry. Theoretical and critical reflections on surrealism and nadrealizmus were carried out by Bakoš (1914–1972), Klement Šimončič (1912–2010), and Michal Považan (1913–1952). Surrealist-oriented poetry in the 1940s was also written by authors of the Catholic circle, such as Valentín Beniak (1894–1973), Rudolf Dilong (1905–1986), and others, as well as by authors of the younger generation of poets such as Pavol Horov (1914–1975).

9 In addition to the prose fragments of Fabry and Dedinský (1914–1989), the prose works include Žáry's *Mesto pri rieke, kde sa stretávame* [The City by the River Where We Meet] (1942) and Guderna's *Vodnár mŕtvych vôd* [The Waterman of Dead Waters] (1942). Affinities with nadrealizmus can also be found in the novella *Panna zázračnica* [The Miraculous Maiden] (1945) by Dominik Tatarka (1913–1989) and in the novel *Nevesta hôl'* [The Bride of the Hills] (1946) by František Švantner (1912–1950).

imately two dozen theatre and radio plays of various genres are included in this lineage, with an equally heterogeneous range of authors (Rampák 1976; Kusý 1984; Garay Kročanová 2024).

The connection between poetic plays and the avant-garde was understood within a broader cultural context of the period, without any investigation into inter-form relationships. Nor has there been a specification of the intersections and distinctions between lyrical drama, verse drama, poetic drama, and avant-garde drama. The literary historian Ivan Kusý (1920–2000), when characterizing "poetic plays" between 1935 and 1945, stated that "the previous development of Slovak dramatic literature, as well as the nature of the genre, shows that there is no parallel path with either 'lyricized prose' or *nadrealist* poetry" (Kusý 1984: 765). At the same time, he stated that "they use the expressive elements of poetism, *nadrealizmus*, or the so-called lyricized prose" (Kusý 1984: 765). The theatre scholar Zoltán Rampák (1920–1998) defined poetic drama and poetic theatre as verse plays; he also included plays "breaking the temporal and spatial continuity" and "stage works whose construction showed an increased degree of metaphoric quality or parabolicity" (Rampák 1976: 303–304).

Lyrical drama, verse drama, poetic drama, and avant-garde drama are distinct concepts, but there may be overlaps between them in particular works. The connection between the lyric[10] and drama derives both from the very birth of the literary form and from the parallel between lyrical self-confession and the voice of the dramatic character.[11] Jonathan Culler defines the basic oppositional axis for the lyric between image and sound wherein the lyric and drama is linked by a visual aspect (the opsis) (Culler 2020: 315).[12] He understands dramatic monologue as a form of lyrical poetry. He also draws attention to the relationship between the ritual and the fictional component in dramatic monologue and lyrical poems. Culler states that the dramatic monologue produces a separation between the communicative act performed by the fictional speaker and the verses composed by the poet whereas fictional components are assimilated differently in lyrical poetry (Culler 2020: 334).

Both the lyric and drama can make use of a verse that emphasizes a tendency toward musicality. In drama, the expression of emotion, mood, and reflection as characteristic elements of the lyric are associated with a decrease in dramatic tension and a weakening of the plot (a strengthening of the principle of simultaneity at the expense of succession); from this point of view, the "static" lyrical and the "action" dramatic principles are mutually exclusive. On the other hand, the two types can also be linked through other aspects, such as the impact

10 Theories of the lyric in the Czech and Slovak contexts emphasize either the absolute, unchanging essence; the specific life situation expressed by the lyrical subject (an essentialist-ontological criterion); or the specificity of language, its arrangement, coherence, and rhythm as well as the way of unification of the meaning (linguistic-functionalist criterion) (Nünning 2008: 792).

11 Anglo-American theories of the lyric, represented, for example, by Robert Langbaum (1924–2020), consider lyrical speech as dramatic-monological and understand the subject as a dramatic person even in lyrical poems (Nünning 2008: 792). Culler (*1944) explains the genesis of the understanding of the dramatic monologue as a form of lyric poetry and points to two traditions of understanding the dramatic monologue (Culler 2020: 322–335).

12 In the case of lyrical drama, however, the work with rhythm, sound, and repetition is equally relevant.

of spoken delivery or the category of time (the aspect of presence). Ambivalence in determining the hierarchy of components and the nature of their mutual influence is often expressed precisely by formal and genre designations (e.g. lyrical drama and the dramatic poem).[13] The notion of lyrical drama implies the secondary nature of the lyrical element, but, at the same time, it draws attention to lyricism as an essential characterizing and distinguishing feature. According to Pavel Janoušek, it thus understands the lyric in drama as both a distorting and an enhancing element (Janoušek 1989: 111–112).

The process of denying the principles of drama by lyrical elements intensified in the era of modernism. At the turn of the twentieth century, lyrical drama and lyrical theatre were introduced in connection with the aesthetics of symbolism and impressionism.[14] Lyricization was translated into the concept of intimate theatre and static drama,[15] which, in the first decade of the twentieth century, also resonated with the playwrights of Slovak modernism[16] in the form of "fragmentary scenes which were modernistically emotional and exalted" (Hučková 2009: 39). The next phase of lyrical drama and theatre in interwar Czechoslovakia was associated with avant-garde movements, especially poetism.[17] Although Slovak theatre culture developed differently from its Czech counterpart during this period, it was contact with the avant-garde Czech and Soviet theatre scenes that contributed to a shift in the poetics of Slovak drama and theatre – particularly in forms described as "poetic theatre".

Verse was a traditional device in the history of drama, one capable of expressing and stimulating action. In the realist period, preference was given to prose lines, which – especially in connection with the popularity of rural themes – often imitated folk speech. The lyrical drama at the turn of the century also mostly employed prose lines, but, unlike in realism, these were poeticized and rhythmized. This lyrical quality was further supported by the increased use of monologue and by the playwrights' emphasis on stage direction. Both of these practices contributed to the subjectivization of drama. Another important symptom was the emphasis on the silent and the unspoken, which made room for emotional attunement: "Language there gradually unleashes its symbolic,

13 Culler also cites the findings of Northrop Frye (1912–1991), elaborated by Robert D. Denham (*1938) into the form of a diagram, in which the movement between the lyric and drama appears as an oscillation between sheer insight and imitation, between introspection and a pull towards the outside, and between ritual and plot (Culler 2020: 301–316).

14 At the end of the nineteenth century, the performance of poetry in literary salons and cabarets had already changed the relationship between poetry and theatre. Poetry could be performed as ordinary reading or recitation, but its theatricalization was increasingly common (Deák 1996: 44–45).

15 August Strindberg (1849–1912) put forward the demand for intimate theatre in the preface to his play *Miss Julie* (1888). Following the example of the Munich Intimate Theatre, founded in 1895, the Intimate Free Stage also operated in Prague between 1896 and 1899, organizing theatrical performances as well as recitation performances and lectures.

16 These were mainly the works of Vladimír Hurban Vladimírov (who also published under the name VHV, 1884–1950) and Vladimír Hurban Svetozárov (who published under the abbreviation VHS, 1883–1949).

17 Theatrical poetism in Bohemia in the interwar period was developed by several ensembles and figures. Highlights of the theatrical avant-garde included the Osvobozené divadlo theatre and the D-34 theatre as well as the directors Jindřich Honzl (1894–1953), Jiří Frejka (1904–1952), and Emil František Burian (1904–1959).

poetic, and poeticizing possibilities shackled by the realist-naturalist conception of dramatic probability" (Janoušek 1989: 129).

In the next phase of poetic drama, which developed from the second half of the 1930s until 1948, the main dramatic text employed stylized, poetic language; however, the line of dialogue more often took the form of a verse or even a poem. The poetic line ceased to serve as a medium between the characters, instead emphasizing the author's poetics; essentially, it also contributed to subjectivization. This approach undermined the referential function of drama (the shaping of the dramatic world as a reference to reality) and emphasized the poetic and meta-linguistic function (the artistry and qualities of language itself).

According to Janoušek, poetic drama highlights the contrast between poetry and prose and can be applied to "drama that uses the expressive means of poetry to let its characters speak in an aesthetically stylized manner" (Janoušek 1989: 110). The choice of this designation in literary historiography accentuates the contemporary dominance of poetry and the permeation of its practices into prose and drama. The notion of poetic drama is related to the poeticization of language through the use of poetic devices, which alters the dramatic form, and to extra-linguistic devices that shape the "metaphorical" or "parabolic" nature of the work.

Alfred Jarry (1873–1907) and Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918) are considered to be the forerunners of surrealist drama in the European context. In the interwar period, two main lines of surrealist drama emerged in France. One tended towards the grotesque and mockery, while the other leant towards a poetic vision of the world (Pašteka 1998: 462). *Encyklopédia dramatických umení Slovenska* [The Encyclopaedia of Dramatic Arts of Slovakia] states that surrealism "did not manifest itself as integrally in Slovak drama as in poetry. It was rather an intense influence of surrealist poetics on certain plays, which fundamentally stemmed from a traditional structure and thereby acquired strong elements of parody, imagination, unreality, and lyricism" (Encyklopédia... 1990: 393).

The authors of the encyclopaedia mention the plays of Gejza Vámoš (1901–1956), Kazimír Bezek (1908–1952), Dilong, and Žáry from the 1930s and 1940s in connection with surrealism. Július Pašteka (1924–2019) explored a similar range of authors and works focusing on the poetics of surrealism,[18] assuming that further attempts at surrealist drama might have remained in manuscript form (Pašteka 1998: 461). Jelena Paštéková (2018) also mentions surrealism in connection with the theatrical debut of Leopold Lahola (1918–1968).

The noetic and ontological foundations of surrealist art presuppose the knowledge and realization of the surreal in a work as a result of the creativity of the subject, which is situated outside of ordinary, rational perception ("new vision"). The aesthetics of surrealist art postulates a different conception of beauty, produced through stimulation and convulsion, associated with the pleasures of sex and death, and grounded in bizarreness and originality (a dissimilarity to re-

18 Pašteka's view of surrealist drama in Slovakia is ambivalent: he considers Vámoš's farces to be a manifestation of dadaism; he also characterizes Bezek's play as poetistic, while noting "some of its surrealist aspects" (Pašteka 1998: 471), and he even labels Dilong's plays as an inclination towards postmodernism.

ality, surprising combinations, dreams and delirious projection, and the like). The poetics of surrealism contradicts the "structural" principles of drama as well as the essential conventions of theatrical performance. The proclaimed principles of surrealism fundamentally change the whole process of artistic communication: "Avant-garde dramatics is full of contradictions, extremes, and even dead ends, the only result of which was that individual expressions often reached the limits of communicativeness" (Janoušek 1989: 131). Since professional Slovak theatre was only established in the interwar period and continued to fulfil mainly a national representative function, it could hardly build a repertoire on plays of an experimental nature. This may also explain the low number of Slovak plays that can be placed in connection with avant-garde poetics. From this perspective, events such as the Evening of *Nadrealist* Poetry on 25 February 1939 correspond more closely with surrealism than the plays in the repertoire of traditional theatre. The programme of this event can be read as the script of a revue-style performance, creating a theatrical effect in the non-theatrical setting of Bratislava's Grémium café.[19]

Six plays from the first half of the 1940s can be placed within the realm of *nadrealizmus*; four of them were published in print and three were staged.[20] These plays were Dilong's *Valin* (1940) and *Padajúce svetlo* [The Falling Light] (1941) and Žáry's *Slnovraty* [Solstices] (1946), which Pašteka described as "surrealistic". Lahola's *Bezvetrie v Zuele* [Windless in Zuela] (1947), which Paštéková connected to theatrical *nadrealizmus*, is also worthy of attention. Unlike Pašteka, this study does not deal with Bezek's *Klietka* [The Cage] (1939), which is poetist; however, with regard to its theatrical realization, there is the possibility of seeing two other plays in the context of *nadrealizmus*, namely Ján Poničan's (1902–1978) *Štyria* [The Four] (1942) and Peter Zvon's (1913–1942) *Tanec nad plačom* [Dance over Weeping] (1943). Both plays were directed by Ján Jamnický (1908–1972), who participated in meetings of the *nadrealists* and whose theatrical poetics were appreciated by them.[21]

19 In connection with poetry, Dedinský points out, however, that "Slovak nadrealists did not engage in so-called 'surrealist activity', and, although in their search for surrealist forefathers they resembled the French and Czech surrealists like an egg to an egg, [...] those surrealist toy-plays with cadavre exquis, automatic texts, and the like were not pursued by the Slovak nadrealists. I think that the consciousness of the social significance of poetry, which has always been strong in the Slovak context, also influenced the group of Slovak nadrealists" (Dedinský 1963: 36). Dedinský also stresses the connection between the formation of the Slovak version of surrealism and the development of scientist-oriented literary scholarship and art studies. This was primarily the work of the Scientific Synthesis association in Bratislava between 1937 and 1940, which brought together "mostly young scientists oriented towards the rationalist and anti-spiritualist directions of modern science, philosophical neopositivism, and the literary-scientific school of Russian formalism and Prague structuralism" (Hamada 2006: 593). The influence of structuralism persisted until the advent of Marxist art criticism after 1948, and it reasserted itself in thinking about literature from the 1960s onwards.

20 In the first half of the 1940s, the plays *Valin*, *Padajúce svetlo* [The Falling Light], *Tanec nad plačom* [Dance Over Weeping] and *Slnovraty* [Solstices] were published in book form. The Slovak National Theatre staged *Štyria* [The Four] in 1942 and *Tanec nad plačom* [Dance Over Weeping] in 1943, both directed by Jamnický, and the New Stage of the Slovak National Theatre staged *Bezvetrie v Zuele* [Windless in Zuela] in 1947, directed by the Czech visual artist and director František Kudláč (1909–1990), who was also the author of the set.

21 Žáry mentions that the analysis of Jamnický's theatre work was to be represented among the articles in the journal that he and Považan planned to publish after the end of the war; Jamnický was also to be a member of the editorial board (Žáry 2004: 78).

Dilong, Žáry, and Poničan were primarily poets, and Poničan and Lahola also worked in other literary genres and media. Poničan[22] and Zvon[23] had contacts with professional and amateur theatre other than as playwrights. Poničan collaborated with the theatre as a translator, and Zvon was an insightful theatre critic and theoretician; both were also connected with the theatre by their family background as their wives acted in the Slovak National Theatre. Due to historical circumstances, Lahola did not establish himself as a playwright until after the end of the Second World War; however, his artistic range also encompassed writing and translating poetry.[24] The *nadrealist* group also included Žáry as well as Dilong, who was considered a key figure of Slovak Catholic modernism. Poničan was in personal and artistic contact with actors of *nadrealizmus*.[25]

Milan Hamada (1933–2023) drew attention to two basic approaches to the research of *nadrealizmus* in Slovak literary and art history. Critics who were part of the movement understood "the literary and artistic work on the basis of the aesthetics of defamiliarization, functionalism, construction, the artefact, aesthetic autonomy, and so on" (Hamada 2006: 596). This approach was taken up by proponents of the structuralist method in the following decades. Alongside this line of research, an emphasis was also placed on the philosophical and anthropological dimensions of *nadrealizmus* – its ability to express existential upheaval, feelings of a disordered world, and the devaluation of the human being – through fragmentation and a sense of incompleteness (Hamada 2006: 596–598).

When looking for criteria to include the above-mentioned plays into the context of *nadrealizmus*, it is therefore useful to apply a structural-semiotic approach. In examining individual plays, this study considers the general criteria of lyrical and avant-garde drama at the level of basic dramatic categories (character, plot, space, and time). The possible realization of the poetics of surrealism and *nadrealizmus* in drama and theatre are traced through the ways in which the individual components of dramatic and theatrical form are released and brought together. There is a notable "montage-ness" and "collage-ness",

22 Poničan's first dramatic attempts were made at the beginning of the 1920s during his studies in Prague. These were plays corresponding to the concept of proletarian art, with the theme of class struggle, formally conceived in the spirit of the avant-garde (especially cubism and futurism) and occasionally performed in workers' associations. During the interwar period, he engaged in various literary forms, including drama, and he translated theatrical works.

23 The playwright Peter Zvon (his real name was Vladimír Sýkora; he published theatre articles and reviews under the name Juraj Valach) was of Czech origin, but his family had lived in Bratislava since 1920. At the suggestion of his wife, the Slovak National Theatre actress Oľga Kadancová-Sýkora, he began contributing theatre articles and reviews to the magazine *Elán* in the early 1940s. He wrote in Czech, and his wife translated his texts into Slovak (Chorváth 1970: 183).

24 Leopold Lahola (real name Leopold Arje Friedmann) had a talent for literature, visual arts, music, and foreign languages. He wrote plays, film scripts, prose, and poetry, and he translated and directed films. During the Second World War, he was interned in a labour camp because of his Jewish origin and eventually participated in the Slovak National Uprising. He emigrated from Czechoslovakia to Israel in 1949 in response to criticism of his play *Atentát* [Assassination] (1949) and with an awareness of growing anti-Semitism. He later lived in Germany, returning to Czechoslovakia for work during the political reforms of the 1960s.

25 Given the small size of Bratislava's cultural scene, Poničan was acquainted with the figures of *nadrealizmus* and even rented an apartment to Považan and Reisel for a while. As a communist, however, he considered their activities during the wartime Slovak Republic to be a Slovak form of "betrayal" of intellectuals.

which can be an (un)intentional means of creating surreality.[26] The techniques of combination are examined at the level of the line (which may also take the form of a poem) as well as at the level of composition, where the inventiveness of the plays' final form becomes apparent (intergenericity and multimedia elements). Given the contact of drama and theatre with poetry, attention is given to the visual and sonic aspects of the plays implied in the dramatic text or recorded in reviews of contemporary staging. Different elements, parts, and levels of the work take on a relevance for individual plays. This study also takes into consideration the expression of the mood, feeling, and situation of the subject.[27]

The poetics of plays[28]

In the era of the avant-gardes, lyrical drama, a concept hierarchically superior to surrealist and *nadrealist* drama, is characterized by a fundamental change in dramatic form, while, at the same time, the innovation disrupts the specificity of drama as a literary mode. The changes concern all the basic categories of drama. The social relevance of the theme is reduced. The themes of the plays often concern problems of feelings and relationships, which are manifested through external and internal conflict. The dramatic text becomes "verbalized"; speech dominates over action or is unrelated to it and thus does not drive the plot forward. A poem can also become a line of dialogue, introducing an element of recitation into the staging. Speech is not primarily intended to affect the characters themselves but is rather meant to impact the spectator (or reader). The characters lose their individuality and inner depth (Janoušek 1989: 137). They become generalized signs – flat, hollow, and "metaphorically speaking, puppets guided by the will of the author" (Janoušek 1992: 32). The plot based on action, causal connections, and narrative continuity also disappears. Space and time shift from the everyday and familiar to the semiotic (Janoušek 1992: 32–33). Even though the "objective" fictional world of the drama is seemingly preserved, what dominates is the author's mode of shaping it (subjectivization): "When objective causality is replaced by the principle of subjective association, the individual components of the dramatic structure become significantly more independent in meaning" (Janoušek 1989: 136). The weakening of dramatic cohesion can be compensated for by theatrical means. The strengthened role of theatre is also confirmed by the fact that a production can be based on a drama in the form of a script or libretto, which may itself be created from a source belonging to a different literary form (such as the staging of poetic or prose works).[29]

26 While the construction of drama always entails the spacing and condensing of plot and the collision of different character contexts, it also presupposes the melding of plot. In lyrical and avant-garde drama, the importance of plot and characters is denied. The unifying factor becomes the subject of the author (playwright or director), or language itself takes on this role.

27 Most of the plays were written during pivotal moments in the authors' lives and were marked by intense emotions, such as a break-up, the threat of death, a new relationship, or starting a family. Perhaps only in the case of Žáry does artistic inspiration prevail over personal motivation.

28 This section of the study builds on author's previous research of lyrical and poetic drama (Garay Kročanová 2006, 2022, 2023, and 2024).

29 This approach was used by the Czech avant-garde theatre in the interwar period (Osvobozené divadlo, D-34). The Slovak National Theatre only staged poetic works by Slovak Romantic authors between 1946 and 1949.

Surrealism and *nadrealizmus* in drama presuppose extreme positions of lyrical drama with the effect of upsetting all the components of the dramatic form. The main dramatic text should be based on automatism, associativity, randomness, illogicality, and even absurdity. It should thus generate a dreamlike, hallucinatory, depth-psychological, surprising, and "surreal" fictional world that engages the perceptiveness of the reader (or spectator). The line and dialogue through which the context of individual characters and the plot are shaped should convey surrealist imagery or "convulsive beauty". A suitable means can be a line in verse,[30] which conveys the sound and intonation of surrealist poetry, or an associative, illogical, "poetic" line in prose. In accordance with the poetics of avant-garde, the characters become a dissociated projection of the author's subject, and the logic and clarity of the plot is abandoned. Surprisingly, bizarre combinations at different levels of the dramatic structure create the chance for a new, unexpected shape beyond ordinary perception. All these elements make it impossible to use traditional genre labels.[31]

Among the plays whose theatrical realization is based solely on textual cues are both of Dilong's dramas and Žáry's play. In Dilong's works, the protagonist Valin represents the archetype of the modernist accursed poet, while also serving as a resonator of the author's own fate;[32] the character stands as a surrogate for the authorial subject (Janoušek 1992: 33). The plays depict Valin's alienation from society, family, romantic relationships, and friendships as well as the loss of home and the separation from his own creative work. Key themes of Dilong's drama can be the subject, creativity, and freedom, which are areas also explored by surrealism. Although the prologue and epilogue are often seen as archaic elements in modern drama (Vangeli 2001: 228), *Valin* is framed by a fencing duel between the Archangel and Lucifer which connects the protagonist's "curse" to eternal, universal events. The character of Lucifer from this framing section is also referenced in the title of the second part of the originally planned trilogy (*Padajúce svetlo* [Falling Light]). Moreover, this framing device creates an effect of the play "entering" itself and contributes to the hybridity of the whole work.

30 A dramatic line in the form of a *nadrealist* verse (or poem) can be considered an important criterion for classifying a play within the realm of nadrealizmus. However, for inclusion in the category of *nadrealist* drama, the text must also meet the basic formal requirements of drama – particularly the division of the text into characters' lines, the use of dialogue, the presence of secondary text (especially stage directions), and a compositional structure appropriate to the dramatic form. All of the selected texts meet these criteria.

31 Marek Lollok, Tomáš Kubart, and Jitka Šotkovská state that the relationship of surrealism to drama and theatre is characterized by an interdisciplinary approach reflected in form, imagery (realized scenically), playfulness, imagination, lyricism, and compositional looseness (Kubart, Lollok, and Šotkovská 2023: 21–22).

32 Pašteka finds connections between Dilong's dramas and his demonstrative "break" with Slovak literature, which was a reaction to the critic Jozef Kútnik Šmálov's (1912–1982) objections to the modernist and avant-garde orientation of contemporary Catholic poetry. The protagonist's name given as the title of the play may also refer to Dilong's personal situation: the name is in the form of a possessive adjective, which makes it possible to see it as an allusion to Dilong's relationship with Valéria Reiszová (1917–2000), also known as the poet Ria Valé. It was an undesirable relationship, given Dilong's priestly status and Reiszová's Jewish background. The title may also evoke a pun on the name of the medieval poet, rake, and thief François Villon (1431–1463, pseudonym "Vaillan"), who is also mentioned in the play.

Both plays use multiple types of verse interspersed with prose lines. A characteristic feature is the referencing of various older genre forms (e.g. the dispute between the Archangel and Lucifer recalls the medieval debate genre, the opening part of *Valin* evokes vagabond poetry, the plot includes motifs reminiscent of François Villon's poetry, and rural scenes allude to folk plays). Dilong may have used some of these references – much like the surrealist artists – in a subversive or parodic manner. The combination of scenes that evoke older artistic periods with elements highlighting modernist and avant-garde conflicts with authority ("accursed" poets, generational strife, and anti-bourgeois rebellion against society and mass taste) creates the impression of a bizarre juxtaposition. In both plays, influences from high and low culture, traditional and modern forms, and artificial and folkloric art are interwoven; this leads Pašteka to view Dilong's drama as anticipating postmodernism (Pašteka 1998: 482). The rapid shifts between different layers of the dramatic text, each with its own tonal register, produce a sense of incoherence and dissonance.

Both of Dilong's plays incorporate singing and dance scenes. Some parts recall vagabond poetry, while others evoke traditional meadow songs (*trávnice*) and folk dance[33] as well as Romani music. In the section entitled *Premena* [Transformation] in *Valin*, there is even a tendency toward expressive theatre. The resulting form of the play combines the principles of different types of theatre – drama, singing, and dance. Despite the traditional genre designation of both plays (tragedy), they can be considered as a hybrid and multimedia dramatic formation. In their "stringing" composition they are close to the revue genre, known from Czech avant-garde theatre. Its foundation lies in a loose structure; episodic form; heterogeneity of scenes; the possibility of actor improvisation; and the alternation of acting, reciting, singing, dancing, and occasionally film projection.

Transformation is expressively a strong part of *Valin*. It is positioned at the end, before the epilogue in which Lucifer and the Archangel duel again, to emphasize that the struggle and duality persist. It is a night scene in the woods that recalls a bad dream, a horror vision, or a manifestation of the unconscious. It shows the gradual plunging of Valin's partner, Lera, into the earth, her ceremonial burial, which ultimately turns into Valin's invocation of life.

> Lera (puts down the shovel; she is in the pit up to her shoulders and, slowly exhausted, begins pushing soil onto herself with her hands, weaker and weaker): A night of ruin shall rise in a forsaken land. Whose are you, coffin split by fists? Whose cloak of sorrow? Whose bell? / Like a chain, it tolls upon a starless robe, (she lifts her hands weakly upward) / Let your steps come without haste, and let time bring the struggle to its end. (Her hands and head fall; she is motionless.)

33 Although Dilong was serving as a priest in various locations in western Slovakia at the time the plays were written, he often spent time in Bratislava and took part in meetings of the artistic bohemian scene. Martin Vašš mentions the eclectic programmatic content of the gatherings of the nadrealists at Bratislava wine bars, where avant-garde poetry alternated with folk songs and guitar performances by the writer Ľudo Ondrejov (1901–1962), whose work, however, showed no signs of surrealism and who, after the issuance of the Jewish Code, took over a Jewish-owned bookstore in Bratislava through the process of Aryanization (Vašš 2018: 29).

> Valin: So you will bend the old beginnings of the bell towers, and the threat of the demon / will slip from the mud, the voice of other bells you hear in reverse / a chaste one receives in her hands a new bridal garment. / Time tossed flowers into a bottomless well, and elsewhere the veil / of fruit was extinguished, it drove away the mists, / unshod the black shoes from the trees, / in the cabin of gloom it trembled with shadow, and drew close only to bones. / Oh, call life back into the gardens, break the old time in your cast hand, fall from the sky like a lark / wake up, behold the castle lights, step out of the tent in the cursed distance! Life, blaze up! (turns slowly to Lera, walks to her, kneels as if listening, suddenly stands and cries out in despair). She's dead, she's dead! Dead! (his head falls. He hesitates, then more gently.) Ah – what about me? Where to go? Human life is struggle – let us try to struggle, let us try to live on! (he exits) (Dilong 1940: 69–70).

Another unperformed play in the context of *nadrealizmus* is the "theatrical féerie" *Slnovraty* [Solstices], written by Žáry in the early 1940s when he was still a university student (Žáry 2004: 132). After revision, it was published in book form in 1946 with the genre label "a verse play in four scenes". A contemporary review (Zeter 1946: 410) dismissed it as a poor imitation of the plays of Vítězslav Nezval,[34] which were already outdated in the post-war period.

Pašteka called it a melodrama because, like Nezval's *Manon Lescaut*, it was built on a musical principle and on working with rhythm, rhyme, repetition, and refrain (Pašteka 1998: 489). The characters correspond to the principles of *nadrealist* drama – "some automatons, speaking, reciting, acting automatons" (Pašteka 1998: 490) – which are rearranged in the acts.[35] There is no logical link between their lines, but they are connected through rhyme. The plot is thus formed on an associative basis (Pašteka 1998: 490). *Slnovraty* [Solstices] has a similar character layout to Poničan's play *Štyria* [The Four] (two male and two female characters) and deals with the problem of relationships, but, unlike Poničan's play, they result in the tragic unfulfillment of love. The apparent playfulness and bizarreness overlay the adversity of fate manifested through Eros and Thanatos. The title of the play allows us to perceive a parallel between the movement of the characters and the orbit of the planets, and between human and cosmic events.[36]

Žáry is the only playwright to use *nadrealist* verse throughout the play; only rarely does a prose line appear with the effect of a surprising disturbance of rhythm. The use of a two-part *nadrealist* verse, or a poem without punctuation within the line, contributes to the impression of dynamism. The lines alter-

34 Žáry's play shares elements with Nezval's lyric comedy *Milenci z kiosku* [The Lovers from the Kiosk] (1932) and *Loretka* (1941), a play in five scenes, as well as with Nezval's successful theatrical adaptation (1940) of Antoine François Prévost's (1697–1763) novel *Manon Lescaut* (1731).

35 The characters-automata were already featured in Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's (1876–1944) play *The Electric Dolls* (1909).

36 The title of Žáry's first nadrealist collection from 1941 was *Zvieratník* [Zodiac]. The title recalls the name of the Czech magazine *Zvěrokruh* [Zodiac] (issues 1–2 from November and December 1930), which was edited by Nezval. Several artists from the surrealist circle showed an interest in astrology and cosmology.

nate between images based on the principle of association, and rhyme serves a euphonic function. The imagery contributes to defamiliarization and the creation of a lyrical mood. Typically, only the final part of the poetic line advances the plot.

> Magda (adjusting her hair in front of the mirror): You hair / without you night would fall And I wander like a thousand others // You emerged from black horrors Severed the star's terrible tail And the day took me into its fertile hands // Without you hair I am Cinderella / Who separates grain from poppy seeds / I am a brushed-off wounded pear / Without you hair I am a winter gnat / Stepped on and in fright / / Just once you ignited beauty The eyes went blind He was there / You gave yourselves to the breeze like fairies Then we drank The moon was rising and was full // Zuzka, Zuuzkááá, I'm disturbing you again! (Žáry 1946: 9).

Žáry's play uses the duality and contrast of elements (at the level of characters, action, and composition) which are rearranged in the individual acts, thus creating the idea of rhythm as being characteristic of the lyric. The rhythmic regularity ensures the integrity and "harmoniousness" of the play that otherwise appears uncompact. Variations imply a conscious, deliberate shaping of the composition, a principle that contradicts the exclusion of the intellect in surrealism; however, Žáry's play emphasizes the self-activity of automatic-mechanical movement, as if without the author's intervention. The individual components and the structure of the dramatic text make it possible to consider *Slnovraty* [Solstices] as the most explicit manifestation of *nadrealizmus* in drama.

For the following three plays, there are also contemporary theatrical reviews available; this makes it possible to reconstruct the productions. Poničan's four-act conversational play *Štyria* [The Four] is the result of a collaboration between the dramatist and director Jamnický, who combined the original dramatic text with Poničan's poetry (Felix 1999a [1942]: 223). The characters labelled He and She, who recited the poetic sections, were not part of the dramatic action and did not participate in the development of the dialogue.[37] By interweaving dialogic lines in prose and poetry as dramatic monologue, the play creates a rhythm based on the alternation of the real and the universal, the concrete and the abstract, dialogue and monologue, dynamism and stillness, and acting and recitation.

> Milan: Wait. Right away. When the sun sets. Look, it's already above the peak ... It's fading ... Night is coming soon, and its sorrow will spread over the trees. The most fitting scenery. Like last night ...
> She: Why do feelings drift away with time? / Do the clouds wave goodbye to the land? / Time dulls the axe of revenge. / Clear skies have passed. Clouds. / And I have been left without a single hair of anyone's. / Embraces. Kisses. Hearts on deck. / Everything, everything was sold to ruin. / Time dulls the axe of revenge. / The clouds have passed. Clear skies. / And I have been left without

37 In one of the reviews, there was an objection that the poetic insertions (poetry and Frédéric Chopin's music) were unrelated to the action (Zavarský 1999 [1942]: 222).

a single hair of anyone's. / Volcanoes. Rains. Sparks of electricity. / Caresses, detours, the smile of Colombina. / Time dulls the axe of revenge. / Clear skies have passed. Clouds. / And I have been left without a single hair of anyone's. // Little moon, moon, it's just us, the two of us belong together. / While those two in secret games, we are alone in sorrow, alone in a dream. //
Nataša: You're wicked … (Poničan 1962: 229–230).

The play is based on the transformations in the relationship of two married couples (misunderstanding, imminent separation, a proposed exchange of partners, reconciliation, and a return to the original harmony). The threat of banality is offset by the montage-like nature of the production text and the tendency towards abstraction.

As Jamnický pointed out: "The play is an arithmetic problem themed around the digit four; smoothly and rationally solved, clear – like a problem with such a low digit – elementary. A conventional, conversational married quartet, figures and situations distilled, in simple colours, mostly themes of characters, situations, temperaments, [and] elemental components (fire, water, air, earth, and ether?). But the simpler the number, the deeper it conceals" (Jamnický 1998b: 63). The oscillation between the real and the poetic plan allows reality to be reflected and mirrored in poetry, imagination, and dreams.

The production at the Slovak National Theatre was set in a stylized, minimalist, and artistically coordinated stage design.[38] The emphasis was placed on the division and flexibility of the space, into which the characters were positioned to enhance the visual aspect; "four actors, two reciters, and a dancer embodied sculptural compositions with their bodies; movement, rhythm, and relaxed poses created Jamnický's favoured 'tableaux vivants'" (Mojžišová 2004: 64). On stage, verticality and horizontality were used (the positioning of the actors at height, in the proscenium, at the back of the stage, even with their backs to the audience), actors were rearranged in space, and the action on stage was connected with the auditorium, where the reciters were positioned. The lyrical mood of the production was created by ballet, lighting, and piano music.[39]

Jozef Felix highlighted the expressive diversity of the production (the tragicomic, the artistic, the grotesque, and the poetic) and stated that the main (drama) had become secondary, just "a background for the recitation of poetry. Poetry – in all its glory – came to the fore. The play proper became a mere pretext for the poetry" (Felix 1999a [1942]: 224). In his review, Juraj Valach (a pseudonym of Vladimír Sýkora, who was also the playwright Zvon) characterized the initial dramatic text as "a canvas with characters whose faces have not been sketched". He appreciated the involvement of music, which guided the voices of the actors and helped to create the plasticity of the characters: "It is thus approaching the ideal of the Moscow theatre artists, who have come to the

38 Ladislav Vécsey was listed as the author of the set, while the design came from Jamnický's brother-in-law, the well-known Slovak architect Emil Belluš (1899–1979).

39 Similarly to the experiments of Prague's Osvobozené divadlo theatre and the E. F. Burian Theatre, where "recitations were enhanced by the performance of expressive dance and connected with modern music" (Jochmanová 2011: 409).

knowledge that character is the rhythm and colour of the word... Something else is stage music, which, in our opinion, has the function of lights, that is to say, it is essentially a colour; a colour, admittedly, not of the stage, but a colour of the spiritual atmosphere" (Sýkora 1999 [1942]: 227–228).

Jamnický's production of *Štyria* [The Four] was an expression of lyrical theatre, which could be associated with the poetic trend of *nadrealizmus* (surreality as a poetic aspect of reality).

The plot of Zvon's *Tanec nad Plačom* [Dance over Weeping] unfolds from the moment when the figures of feudal lords, depicted in a painting in a manor house, decide to step into the present to see whether the world has changed.[40] They find themselves at a masquerade ball held at the residence of a general director, which, for a brief time, allows the creation of a magical reality composed of heterogeneous fragments (masks and costumes). Zvon's play generates surreality through a "time gate" opened at a magical (carnival) moment, while also emphasizing the relativity of movement through time. For the feudal initiators of the encounter, it is a "leap" into the future – which is the present for the other characters (and for the contemporary audience); for the fictional characters from the present, it is an encounter with the past.[41] Zvon uses the verse and prose to characterize two historical eras, creating a contrast between the "high" poetic speech (though *nadrealist* verse is not used)[42] and the "low" vernacular, even slang, prose line. The variability of lines and textual fragments in the play alters the rhythm, creates a sense of surprise through unexpected juxtapositions, and shifts the focus from the characters to the artificiality of the fictional reality and from the subject to signification.

> Adela: You sound like a book and so somehow archaic. It's terribly nice. I think I'm falling in love with you.
> Count Richard: Madam?!
> Adela: Oh, please excuse me. I forgot you were shy.
> Count Richard: Madam?!
> Adela: Oh, go on, please!
> Count Richard: Do you know, my lady, the sweetness of weariness? / Do you know, my lady, the sweetness of falling asleep? / In that final moment, you yourself will feel/the fragrance with which the sun bids farewell to the day. / It is evening in life, and one hears the bells in the fields, / and the dew slowly, softly falls at your feet. / The flowers scent the air for you – do you feel it, my lady – youth! The bird finishes its song – ah, lovely love – and silence comes to meet the weary day.

40 Michal Chorváth noted that Sýkora offered his first play to the Prague director Emil František Burian but that it was never staged and had since been lost. He also mentioned that *Tanec nad plačom* [Dance over Weeping] was based on "someone else's theme" (Chorváth 1970: 183). Peter Karvaš considers the motif of a character stepping out of a painting to be a "situational impulse" that may have been inspired by the film *Dívka v modrém* [The Girl in Blue] (1939) by Czech director Otakar Vávra (1911–2011), which was based on a story by Felix de la Cámara (real name Felix Cammra, 1897–1945) (Karvaš 1980: 139, note 17).

41 From another point of view, this is the possibility of the meeting of the living and the dead. Zvon wrote the play at a time when he was coming to terms with the death of his brother while also starting a family. The play was not published and produced until after the playwright's untimely death.

42 The play also incorporates a parody of a surrealist poem recited by a drunken Poet.

Adela: Oh, you are a poet, my dear Count. (To Alfred). You see, only the old can do that nowadays. You young ones are quite out of form.
Count Alfred: A poet, you say? Do you like poems? / For me, the most beautiful poem is one word: woman.
Adela: Be quiet, it's so banal that it could be modern.
Count Alfred: Modern, madam?
Adela: Yes, modern. Try to translate something from poetry into common speech today. You will see what banality you will get out of it (Zvon 1957 [1943]: 28).

The dramatic conflict unfolds as a misunderstanding, quarrel, and dispute between the past and the present. The characters evoke traditional comic types, drawing on the tradition of *commedia dell'arte*. The play is structured around parallelism and contrast, and around the variation of elements (characters from different historical periods form gallant pairs); changes and repetition in the rearrangement of characters contribute to the rhythm of the drama. Alongside the humorous exaggeration of differences between the sexes and historical eras, the universal question of human happiness and social injustice comes to the fore. The apparent turn into an operetta farce or a banal conversational play is transformed in the end into a deeper social message about the persistent division of people into the powerful and the weak, and the rich and the poor.[43]

Various genre classifications have been attributed to the play (medieval debate, disputation, conversation play, operetta farce, [tragic] comedy, grotesque, and high comedy). Jamnický also saw it as "a masterful continuation of *commedia dell'arte* today ... a picture of the mechanization of our conventions, emotional responses, and life actions" (Jamnický 1998a: 71). In his review of the theatrical production, Felix returns to the "fantastical-allegorical framework" of Zvon's play, in which he sees "1. the possibility of excellent dramatic contrasts ... [and] 2. the possibility of stylizing reality on two levels – ideal and real – thus also enabling a confrontation between these two realities and the subtle development of implications and satirical intentions" (Felix 1999a [1943]: 278). Felix's observation builds on the theoretical articles by Sýkora (Valach/Zvon), in which he explored, among other things, the concept of double space on stage – a structure capable of expressing reality as well as imagination and dreams, the illusory and the spiritual world, and "reality within unreality, the real within the overreal" (Sýkora 1948: 28).

The title of Lahola's debut play, *Bezvetrie v Zuele* [Windless in Zuela], implies a feeling of paralysis, stagnation, and being thrown into an imaginary space. The theme has been interpreted in relation to post-war demands for currentness as an expression of uprootedness, loss of certainties, and "the hallucinatory idea of a brain displaced by the lack of a homeland" (Lahola 1947: 6) as an expression of the situation that Lahola and others had experienced during the

43 The main text of the play follows the structuralist exploration of dialogue and monologue and its importance in shaping the context of the characters and developing the conflict in the plot: the final accusatory monologue is sung by the previously yelping and silenced servant Barnabas. By carving out a space for statement, a seemingly peripheral figure moves among the central characters.

war years. However, the central problem of the play, expressed through the protagonist José Issuri, is also a life lived as "not one's own", without the fulfilment of desires for freedom (of movement, opinion, and partnership).

The play's polarity is created by three pairs of characters (José and his successful yet manipulative childhood friend Menendez Moreno, José's wife Maria and muse Nora, and José and his double), and the principle of two three-person relationships (José – his double – Menendez Moreno; José – Maria – Nora) is applied. The central concept of the play is the protagonist as a dissociated character, as well as the relationships of dependency, manipulation, the repression of libidinous desire and creative impulse.

The compositional division into four scenes and two epilogues hints at the visual qualities of the play and the montage aspect. The director's intention was a multimedia production that combined the principles of poetry, drama, and film: "I am cancelling the epic sequence of events and creating a new, cinematic structure, shots based on the poetry of the author" (Kudláč 1947: 5). Techniques of montage, editing and stopping the action are applied through the alternation of "real" and "dreamlike" scenes as well as by interrupting the action with poetic lines and the insertion of poems.

> José: Class is over. You don't need to continue. Maybe some other time.
> Nora (pauses for a moment, then continues reciting): Usually, from the one we ask the key to suffering / we get more suffering, but no key at all / The sea is so mute / That's how things are in *tierra caliente* / the silent rice fields. / The wind has abandoned the sky / and now not even a wreck sticks out of the water / No one is writing letters to anyone today / And the man who, until now, only walked / suddenly decided to go. / Perhaps by the bay a woman is waiting / Earthquakes are frequent in Oaxaca / In August, the port of Acapulco boils / In Zuela, the boats lie dead / It is windless in Zuela.
> José (looks at his watch): You'll miss dinner.
> Nora (shakes her head to say no) (Lahola 2005 [1947]: 25–26).

The stage directions place emphasis on vocal expression, gestures and movements, lighting, and music – through which the performance of psychological processes in a dreamlike or imaginative state is already implied in the text. The stage direction for the first scene states: "Spatiality as in a dream [...] The entire prologue takes place in a kind of fog. Dreamlike lighting. A blue spotlight always illuminates the one who is speaking" (Lahola 2005 [1947]: 6). The conclusion of the play in the second epilogue (José's death under the wheels of the train he intended to take out of Zuela) is preceded by a dreamlike epilogue in which psychological pressures are processed and resolved.[44]

44 After the duel, Menendez Moreno leaves, taking away Maria, wounded by a symbolic gunshot, and José's double also takes away Nora. This is followed by José's "therapeutic" conversation with the double, who he listens to with laconic disinterest.

Conclusion

Dedinský drew attention to the change in the hierarchy of the arts by which André Breton (1896–1966) contradicted the views of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). Breton places music the lowest; architecture, theatre, and the word above it; and painting the highest (Dedinský 1963: 38–39). Surrealism's tendency to emphasize the pictorial at the expense of the musical, however, is a theory that Dedinský finds poetic practice has often failed to adhere to.

The playwrights of the first half of the 1940s used surrealist techniques with varying degrees of "orthodoxy" but undoubtedly experimented with the visual and musical aspects of drama and staging. Dramatic situations, their development into performances and scenes, and the fictional space and the implication of the stage design allow for the realization of imitation and performance in a new and surprising way, often with the use of expressive and bizarre scenes. In the case of staged plays, the design of the set and costumes alongside the involvement of music and movement play an important role. The visual aspect of the plays, however, generally does not convey a surrealist objectness or fragmentation but rather an imaginative, dreamlike atmosphere.

Dilong creates a revue-like sequence of images only loosely connected to the main plotline. At the same time, he inserts striking images charged with strong emotional pathos and symbolic meaning (e.g. the burial of a partner, an unrecognized poet breaking his monument, and collapsing by a cross). Lahola alternates between realistic scenes and memory-like, dream-hallucinatory ones, disrupting the natural sequence of events and allowing a free arrangement of scenes based on the flow of associations. Žáry in each act "highlights" a different scene each time, which is created by a rotational movement similar to the change of seasons or daily cycles. Poničan creates a "mirroring" of reality and poetry, shifting attention from the material and concrete plane to its reflection in abstraction. Zvon shows the imprint ("reincarnation" and materialization) of the past in the present.

Dilong's and Lahola's plays focus on the subject and try to bring out the unconscious component (creativity and libido) in the drama that produces the poetic vision. This dimension is complemented by an external conflict (more pronounced in Dilong's plays, whereas in Lahola's play the whole action can also be understood as the subject's imagination). Both Poničan's and Zvon's plays oscillate between the fictional and the poetic plane. While Poničan's play emphasizes the poetic aspect of reality, Zvon's play creates a peculiar space in magical time, in which the distinction between contrasting poles disappears; the duality is abolished. Žáry's play shows different levels of mechanics. The idea of the solstice creates a parallel between the characters and the planets and draws attention to certain moments in time when the poles are rearranged (the alternation of long and short days, love and death). These processes are superior to the elements participating in them, thereby reinforcing the impression of impersonality. (The characters do not act, but the processes "happen".) In all the plays – except for Dilong's, which more strongly include an epic dimension – the perception of time shifts away from ordinary passage towards timelessness; the subjective; a dreamlike time of ideas and memories; and a condensed, magical, or mechanical, cyclical time.

The plays from the first half of the 1940s were hybrid works whose construction involved a compositional loosening (associativity and montage) as well as unification through a musical principle (rhythm, variation, and repetition). They correspond with both surrealism and *nadrealizmus* through surprising imagery and structure and through meanings focused on transcending reality and on issues of the subject and freedom.

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