Memory Appeal as a Theatrical Value: The Power of Humanity and the Ideology of Patriotism

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Abstract: Since 2000, Slovak theatre has been increasingly focused on themes related to Slovak history. There has been a distinctive body of productions that portray and reinterpret the breakthrough periods in the socio-political development of the country while providing a new perspective on the fixed perception of personalities who used to be their component parts. For example, the 19th-century Enlightenment period, the Second World War and the period of the wartime Slovak State, and the Communist regime period from the latter half of the 20th century. During those periods, theatre professionals were intrigued by the different versions of totalitarian regime and their impact upon life and society. From local themes, we move to broader European contexts which often are documentary-like by nature and testify to the fact that even in Slovakia people have been living in European times. Productions are created on the basis of the dramatizations of literary works that capture collective and personal remembrances of the witnesses of these processes (for instance, *Vojna nemá ženskú tvár* [War's Unwomanly Face] by Svetlana Alexievich and *Vtedy v Bratislave* [Once Upon a Time in Bratislava] by Jo Langer). Reminiscences are heard from the stages in the form of memory chorales and intimate confessions. Their common feature is a breaking away from collective ideologies and identities (motherland and nation), favoured or dictated in the past, and coming back to the value of the life of a human being as a humanistically thinking and feeling being.

Key words: *Vojna nemá ženskú tvár*, *Vtedy v Bratislave*, contemporary Slovak theatre, the Great Patriotic War, the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia

Since 2000, Slovak theatre has been increasingly focused on themes related to Slovak history. In this context, it would be more appropriate to use the concept of "past" rather than "history". Past turning points and events building up our history and determining the present were in the focus of creative professionals' attention. These were specific and individualized events and situations in the form of people's stories. As opposed to interpreted and inevitably generalizing history (frequently, with factual abstraction and thus

with a conditionally distorting and evasive emotionality), creative professionals ventured to capture a personal recollection, an experience or an emotion, and to bring them back to life. Often history, as narrated through theatre, acquired a different, richer, and more dynamic form than the generally known and recorded technical facts which had petrified the past as something bygone and immutable. History may appear to be more than just something firmly fixed, steadfast, and static. By contrast, past stories emanate a dynamic charge and desire to learn what is hidden behind official history. They allude to our past, to lived and to unvoiced experiences, to diverse events and fates which contain a promise of rawness, mysteriousness, and vividness.

Like in other post-socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, this tendency in Slovakia was associated with the new processes of self-awareness, self-identification, and self-definition, with the quest for finding one's identity and for redefining history, which disregarded a lot of humane aspects in original interpretations and pushed them into the background in the name of a "higher good". The socio-political turnaround after 1989 has gradually made theatre professionals want to research in an unbiased way who we are, what our roots are, what we believe in, and what values we profess. A very distinctive body of productions has emerged that portray and re-interpret the breakthrough periods in the socio-political development of Slovakia, while shedding new light on opinion-leading personalities, whose active participation is integral to the shaping of this. In a way, the productions have run counter to the well-known and established concepts, looked upon as generally fixed interpretations of what, how, and why something had happened.

For instance, productions have portrayed the 19th-century period of National Enlightenment, the Second World War and the wartime Slovak State (1939–1945), and the period of the Communist and socialist regime in Czechoslovakia from the mid-20th century. Aside from productions portraying cultural activists, politicians, and artists as individuals who happened to live within sweeping breakthrough moments of (political) history in the "here and now", there were also productions put on Slovak theatre stages that portrayed "ordinary people". They were their contemporaries who had experienced those periods first-hand, and over time they reflected, assessed, and commented on past events. Sometimes, these people were not completely anonymous individuals but rather men deliberately overlooked by recorded history. These individuals, through their revivification as the pro-

tagonists of plays, have been given the power to narrate their stories and engage in a discourse with history and its spectators. These were largely documentary-based productions which aspired to be something more than just non-fiction theatre. They endeavoured to present man's soul and emotions on stage, as captured in autobiographical books, quotations, recorded discourse, and personal letters, to divulge fragile and inherently human features. It seemed as if personal memory and flashbacks were put on an equal footing in a documentary medium, indispensable for the blending of the picture with our period.

Old myths have collapsed, but not for the sake of creating new ones or repudiating the old. Theatre and society got caught in an evolutionary incubation phase in which parts of the past were searched for that had affected both the external processes and the human soul, and consequently their persistent impact was constantly felt in the present time. These were not just things that were hurtful, traumatic, or uncured. Productions, or rather their characters, did not name and shame anyone, they did not discharge themselves of responsibility or of guilt. On the contrary, the aim of revivified stocktaking (living through an event and commenting on it once again) was to get to know our future as a point of collision between the past and foreboded future.

In productions, the world was not divided into a series of opposites: us and them, good and bad, the loyal one and the enemy, and the winner and the defeated. Intolerant power, a magic negative hero who could only be portrayed in hidden form in the past, was allegorically and metaphorically transformed into a series of individual decisions and acts, amidst which man is bound to fight for himself. There has been a shift from a typically Slovak tragic perception of oneself and critical attitudes towards a period's system (as a representation of time) to analytical thinking and ambivalent attitudes (as current self-presentation).

The portrayed world has become more complex and diverse. Characters are more controversial because they observe the paradox of life per se rather than the authors' construed logics (or the story construed by the author). Just as life gives no unequivocal interpretations and answers, productions are not the messengers of news developed and interpreted based on a new wave of opinion, a new regime, or any momentarily enforced ideology (which was often the case in Slovak theatre in the past). Through these productions, the world outlook has become a tested entity, an implicit character of a dialogue between the stage and the auditorium reflecting on humanity and on human nature. In this case, memory is a tool or mechanism for understand-

ing life, while memory's appeal is a value articulated by theatre. Numerous productions reanimated memory; they referred to the current threat of the repetition of the past, whose negative sides were far too quickly forgotten by modern society. It may be said that theatre professionals were intrigued by various versions of totalitarianism and by their impact on society and on an individual's life as its active part.

Having said that, one must admit that dramatic scripts and productions were largely non-dramatic and suffered from what is being referred to as drama crisis, i.e., from epic quality, linearity, monologicality, subjectivism, dramatized reading, and narration. Dramatic action and acts changed to images and descriptions; a dramatic story was replaced with monologues at whose core was the theme rather than the situation.[1] The conflict was shifted inside a character or left on the edge of the story. Here, the conflict lurked for spectators, the post-history, and the prior future which posed both a threat and desired salvation in one. At this point of discontinuity, Slovak theatre professionals approach man as a liminal being with a chance to recover his value system and postpone the heralded end of civilization and of the history of humanity.

The power of humanity and love with respect to the ideology of patriotism (love of motherland and of one's native country) and Communist ideology as a proclaimed instrument of a better future are captured in two productions of autobiographies: *Vojna nemá ženskú tvár* [War's Unwomanly Face] by Belarusian author Svetlana Alexievich (Slovenské komorné divadlo Martin [Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin], 2017, direction Marián Pecko) and *Vtedy v Bratislav*e [Once Upon a Time in Bratislava] by Slovak exile Jo Langer (Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin, 2015, direction Patrik Lančarič). Thematically and timewise, these productions are like Gemini building a bridge to the present. Both of them approach complex historical events and preferred ideologies from a woman's perspective. Through a woman's memory, theatre professionals make an appeal to humanist values as the only acceptable value invariables to be applied to the present and to the future. Thematization rather than dramatization was deemed important by them, and therefore the study focuses on the themes relevant for a theatre discourse and their theatrical interpretations.

Vojna nemá ženskú tvár captures the period of the Great Patriotic War between 1941 and 1945. Above all, producers focused on the things hidden be-

1 For more details, see: SZONDI, P. *Teória modernej drámy*. Bratislava : Tatran, 1969.

hind recorded history, i.e., on the feelings and confessions of Soviet women, active female soldiers, who personally experienced the war. In fact, it is a dramatized narration of seven female characters named after the real names of the actresses impersonating them. The lines of each character were composed of book-recorded oral history (of numerous remembrances) as pars pro toto. There is a connection between the past and the present in the form of the revivification of recorded remembrances and their subsequent comments. Women would act as a compact resounding chorus in one instance, while in the other they act individually to communicate their intimate confessions. It is apparent that in terms of time, means, and the past, their remembrances and comments were not fit for use in drama and theatre. There was a need to bring them forward in time, while being mindful of the epic quality not completely alienating the characters created based on narration and reminiscences from the dramatic effect of the present here and now. There was a dual intention and purpose behind giving the real names of actresses to their protagonists: to disrupt the time line of the past as narrated in the book, thus partly weakening the alienating epic effect (Verfremdungseffekte), and to create a timeless female character or woman's voice as a scaled-down history of an ordinary human being. The production structure consisted of four basic thematic segments: The Great Patriotic War – the Beginning, In War, Love in War, and About Victory. The production was focused on temporal periodization and thematic areas as well as on observing opinion shifts, the evolution of motivation, and characters' attitudes. The ambition was to get to know the female history of war through the perception of individual persons, through their personal experience and a shared memory.

The female characters stood up for themselves while jointly creating a mosaic of wartime events, war itself, and the post-war period and feelings. The production very clearly captures the contradiction between what we have heard about war (or seen in men's films) and what we attribute to authentic testimonies through dramatic adaptation from the perspective of theatre-goers with theatrical experience. In the introductory part, the viewer learns that the women enlisted in the army voluntarily. They were eager to go to the battlefront and to fight in combat operations. Some of them fled their homes against the approval of their parents. They were young women between 16 and 20 years of age, and they yearned to be useful and to contribute to a great victory, much like the men.

When military operations moved to the Soviet Union, they regarded it their duty to stand up for their country, defend their motherland, and not

yield an inch of soil to the foreign aggressor. Throughout the production, the idea captured by Alexievich in several women's testimonies is repeatedly highlighted: upbringing towards patriotism and in parallel towards hatred of the foreigner (perceived as hostile) which she has also presented in books. They were brought up with the idea that they and their motherland were one and the same. They felt no fear, just curiosity. The notion of death was remote, it was beyond the logic of a young person's life. Their patriotism was nurtured by various public speeches and statements in the press. With the passing of the years, the female characters comment on it from the stage with a slightly ironic and bitter tone and quote these encouragements aloud. Stalin himself called them to arms, approaching them as his brothers and sisters, thereby appealing to the entire nation to defend their motherland. Individualism gave way to a noble idea of community based on a strictly nationalist approach which was intended as a source of strength and courage at a time of crisis.

Other girls, being young Komsomol members, deemed their participation in war to be their noble duty. Others cherished naive and even romantic ideas of going to the front hand-in-hand with their sweethearts and of becoming a hero, imagining that someone would write a book about them with their names remembered for eternity. They swapped their lives for a notion, for the ideal of a Soviet man who was fearless of death. All of them wanted to live and wished for a happy future. That was yet another reason that made them go to fight. They believed they would return, finish their studies, get married, and start a family. Due to the propaganda then, it was not feasible to perceive war differently from what had been presented to them through stories shown in the movies, which were a rather distorted picture of reality:

> "**Lucy:** We didn't know what war was about. For us, it was a game. We've been raised on the romanticism of revolution, on the ideals of a happy Soviet man. We trusted our newspapers, parents, Stalin. The war will end soon. We'll defend our motherland and go home.
> **Everyone:** Let's go, let's go, let's go!
> Let's go, whenever!
> **Lucy:** The war raged for five horrifying years. Sixty months. I'm the only one from our class to have returned home. Why? Why is it me who is alive? I frequently keep asking myself."[2]

2 ALEXIJEVIĆ, S. – HORVÁTHOVÁ, I. *Vojna nemá ženskú tvár* [Unpublished dramatic script]. Martin : Slovenské komorné divadlo Martin, 2016, p. 9.

They went to the battlefront furnished with ideas and ideologies contained in poems, songs, and newspaper articles which were explicitly quoted and expressively declaimed by director Marián Pecko on various occasions throughout the production. While in the script one would find romantically devoted statements of women commenting on the meaning of the lyrics of the song *Sviaščennaja vojna* [The Sacred War], which heartened those who left for the battlefront, in the production, the spectator hears it streaming from the loudspeakers at the full volume of the chorus, while the stage is covered with a deep red curtain. That which in the Soviet land was deemed inappropriate to listen to two days after Operation Barbarossa had been launched as it did not comment on a speedy victory but rather a difficult and deadly fight, suddenly changed into a patriotic anthem:

> "Arise, the great country, arise for a fight to the death! Against the dark fascist forces, against the cursed hordes. Let noble wrath boil over like a wave. This is the people's war, a Sacred War!"[3]

In parallel with the song there are two male characters reciting, or rather loudly shouting, the poem by Ilya Ehrenburg *Zabi ho!* [Ubi ego!, Kill Him!] in Russian and Slovak into the microphone. Although Ehrenburg's biography and creation are known in Slovakia, the poem, initially published in the *Pravda* daily newspaper in 1942, was not mentioned or analysed in our region and not placed into context with other works by Ehrenburg, which were referred to as antifascist (and, hence, ideologically correct):

> "**Man No. 2:** The Germans are not human beings. From now on, the word 'German' is the most horrible curse. (...) We shall not speak any more. We shall not get excited. We shall kill. (...) If you think that your neighbour will kill a German instead of you, then you haven't recognized the threat. (...) If you leave a German alive, the German will hang a Russian man and rape a Russian woman. If you kill one German, kill another – there is nothing more amusing for us than a heap of German corpses. (...) Kill the German – that is your grandmother's request. Kill the German – that is a child's prayer. Kill the German – that is your motherland's loud request."[4]

3 KUMAČ, V. L. Sviaščennaja vojna [Sviaschennaya Voyna]. In *Izvjestia*, (24. 6. 1981).

4 ALEXIJEVIĆ, S. – HORVÁTHOVÁ, I. *Vojna nemá ženskú tvár* [Unpublished drama script]. Martin : Slovenské komorné divadlo Martin, 2016, p. 11.

The girls' characters admit that the poem turned into a cry for many and justified killing during the war. They knew it by heart. At the same time, the creators put commentary in their mouths, admitting that they did not have the slightest idea that what encouraged them on one side of the battlefront was in fact exactly the same tool serving as anti-Soviet fascist propaganda on the other.

Another important fact was also presented by the theatre makers in the production: girls in war were bound to become soldiers, always ready to fulfil all commands. They were taught to hate and to think about revenge for the death of their brothers, sisters, children, razed villages, mutilated dead bodies, and so on. The producers allocated the most attention to those features of women's narration which (in terms of interpretation) was drawn to a perception of war which was very different to that of previous (past) interpretations. The point was not a heroic killing of men by other men and their victory over a defeated enemy. The history of women in war was focused on details, colours, fragrances, and voices amidst the agony of war and recorded them in their (emotional) memories. Through the words of those directly involved in the war, the characters could not avoid talking about beauty, love, and compassion amidst the raging war. In this way, the production turned into an intimate narration with a humanist message. The characters embodying various women reflected on the war as a stage of life. They recalled it as part of their youth, of maturing, and as a moral experience. Little things prevailed over grand history and ideologies. On a scorched land they would see the beauty of falling white snow, amidst the corpses they recognized the freedom of a colt, and even the enemy was perceived as a human being. They frequently would notice his youth, face, and smile. They frequently would speak of their own dreams and imagination. For instance, they would hate to die in men's underwear, and even when dead they wished to look pretty. It looked as if the women had lived through two wars: one which ended in the victory of the Allies and another without winners, which was full of different feelings and emotions irrespective of the side of the battlefront on which people would be standing. They felt love for the seriously wounded men: they would stroke them, smile at them, and sing a song. They were sad when people got killed or had to take a weapon in their hands. They rejoiced when finding a living person amidst the dead, and it made no difference whether he was one of their own men or a German.

Several women had been looking forward to showing no mercy for anyone once Berlin was taken. Instead they end up searching for a bit of bread

for the children of their enemy and for captives, and they treat the wounds of their enemies:

> "**Lucy:** I've inscribed on the Reichstag building that I, Efrosina Grigorievna Bereusova, have come here to kill war. I kneel each time I see a mass grave.[5]
> **Nadya:** I couldn't do otherwise. Each of us had to decide this issue for herself.
> **Eva:** It can't be that you have a heart for hatred and a heart for love. A human being has only got one heart. I was constantly wondering how mine could be saved."[6]

The fact that the war was dramatically different from what many male and female soldiers had thought it to be at the beginning, and that the idea of patriotism was misused by the ideology of the authorities, started to unfold before them during the war and even more so towards its close. The characters could now freely talk about what could not be confessed by Soviet women to anybody. Their motherland had betrayed them. It sent them to war without weapons, food, or means of transportation. Stalin's orders Nos. 227 and 270 (quoted during the performance) instructed them not to surrender at any cost. They were instructed not to take a single step backwards, not to surrender without resistance, and to attempt to break out from encirclement or to be taken captive. Defensive squads were put directly behind unstable divisions. Comrades were shot down by comrades. Those who survived in captivity were accused of espionage and executed. It was only then that they grasped and internalized fully the value of not killing a man, and this insight was communicated to contemporary viewers by the producers through a fully intact interpretation. In war, people do not think, they kill. They kill in the name of grand ideals, such as motherland, peace, and freedom, or they kill out of fear. Through the mouths of modern female characters, the female soldiers who took an active part in the Great Patriotic War and remember it all are asking and appealing from the stage: What was it good for? Whom did it serve? Why are we killing one another when life is such a unique gift?

> "**Nadya:** We thought that people who'd gone through all the hardships would be nice to each other and that goodness and love would prevail.

5 Ibid, p. 48.
6 Ibid, p. 64.

Zuzana: That they'd be different.
Jana K: We didn't doubt it, not for a second. All people will be brothers and sisters. So, we've been waiting for the day to come!
Lucy: And people... and people... hate other people just as before. They are killing again. Who's doing that?
Nadya: Us... it's us."[7]

In a clear way and through such a finale, the producers allude to the following: the plural changes to singular. While ideologies feed on groups to diffuse responsibility, humanity is a matter of every human being's decision.

The second production, *Vtedy v Bratislave*, depicts Czechoslovakia immediately after the end of the Second World War. It was the producers' response to upheavals in modern Slovak society, in the European community, and in Western civilization, and to the processes ushering in a state of threat, i.e., current unrest, extremist moods, the aggression of power, threats, political delusions and deceptions, and influential demagogy. On several levels and in several elements, the key component for dramaturge Peter Pavlac and director Patrik Lančarič has been a dialogue between the past and the present with a running commentary, the effort to grasp events, processes, relationships with people, and the attitude towards the country which the protagonists considered their motherland.

The main character is Jo Langer, the wife of the imprisoned Communist functionary Oskar Langer, sentenced in the staged political trials of the 1950s in Czechoslovakia. They were a Jewish couple: Jo came from Hungary and Oskar was from Czechoslovakia. From a distance, the mother shares her remembrances and confessions with her two daughters. She takes stock of her experiences and decisions and places them in the socio-political context. The lines are supplemented by reading out from her diary and by projecting authentic visual documentary material on the screen: the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet tanks, shots of concentration camps, handshakes between powerful leaders, President Tiso and Hitler, inscriptions on banners from May Day celebrations and marches, exclamations of "Long live peace, long live our motherland!" and "Long live socialism!", photographs of the working class President Gottwald and Stalin, the hand of a worker holding a dove, the live address from the staged political trial of the Communist poli-

7 Ibid, p. 66.

tician Rudolf Slánský[8], and so on). A woman's personal memory on stage was thus given a historical documentary back-up through the eye of the camera.

The story is framed between the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938 and the events preceding the Prague Spring, the invasion by the Warsaw Pact troops of Slovakia in 1968. However, the events are not chronologically sequenced but rather told in the layers of memories throughout time. They are discontinued by commentaries, ruptures, digressions, and retrospective narration. Implicitly, the production gives an account of the story of the pursuit of humanity, in the defiance of social events and systems that destroy human value.

Jo Langer was a child of the First World War. The world of her parents laid in ruins. While her parents were learning to forget, her generation was learning to think. She was in pursuit of the truth about the old, shattered world as well as of the new world affected by war. Everyone had their way of accomplishing it. She (a Hungarian Jew), her husband (a leftist intellectual of Jewish origin) and daughter managed to emigrate to the United States, where they lived safely until the end of the Second World War. Here they experienced early marital problems due to a clash of two differentpersonalities and their intellectual and social frustration. The news about the killing of almost their entire family in Slovakia alternated with news of the victories of the Allied troops, the bombing of Berlin and Dresden, and the deaths of 20,000 Germans, over which they rejoiced for some kind of feeling of justice. Every time the character of Jo would catch herself reflecting on the reanimation of past happy emotions, she would resort to the element of time shifting and evaluate past events from a present time perspective. Also, she would give direction to her own motifs from the period to unravel other events she had experienced:

> "**Jo:** Must our moral principles change so much to have 'peace to men of good will' rule the Earth? I've wronged, humankind on both fronts has wronged. To me, the non-existence of God or his guilt seemed more certain than ever before. (…) And then the letter arrived. Father was asked to come back home.

8 In 1951 Rudolf Slánský was dismissed from his position, arrested, and charged with organizing a seditious conspiracy. In a staged trial given broad mass media coverage, he was sentenced to death and executed in 1952. In conjunction with this, several other politicians and their families were identically charged (i.e., with starting a fictitious conspiracy group).

The war was over, and he was needed as a talented economist…
Tanya: And a stalwart!
Jo: The letter's been signed by Karol Bacílek, who was appointed minister of State Security several years later.
Tanya: What made you go back?! You had been granted American citizenship by then!
Jo: There was a need to help build socialism that would change those confused and erred people."[9]

Despite their doubts, differences in opinion, and divergent lifestyles, Jo loved her husband for his unshakeable faith in the power of socialism to create a new, better, more equitable, and honest post-war world. Her generation survived the aftermath of both world wars and it realized that it was imperative to undertake a fundamental action for the generations to come. This faith helped her survive the years to come behind the Iron Curtain, by Oskar Langer's side, to cope with the irony and the wrongs of a Communist system which she could never internalize and teach her daughters the love of him, of their father, although his children were never as important to him as his faith in the Communist Party.

Returning from the United States to Czechoslovakia was accompanied by marital and ideological controversies. Jo indulged in sports and poetry; she loved conversations with her friends over a glass of something and smoking a cigarette, and she was not really much good at housework. Oskar was an ascetic intellectual; he did not give credit to poetry without a social message and socialist ideas. To him, physical love and conceiving children was just following primitive instincts. The character of Jo ridiculed these recollections, much like the controversies over ordinances and procedures of the Communist Party and the socialist working morale.

At that time, the Communist Party was at the forefront of the working class. Jo had to cope with her distrust in the ideology of the Communist Party, her cadre's dossier, and the nonsensical planned economy as well as with her urban non-proletarian background. The main female character was the key element of the production through which Lančarič portrayed the transformation of the idea of fair socialism and communism into a dogma of a socialism and communism that punished in a fair way. In no time, the socialist

9 LANGER, Ž. – PAVLAC, P. *Vtedy v Bratislave* [Unpublished drama script]. Martin : Slovenské komorné divadlo Martin, 2015, pp. 7–8.

system which had been built with great expectations turned into a system of terror, fear, denunciation, and the persecution of innocent people whose representative was the character of Jo and her daughters and friends. The monstrosity of this period void of any security and clear-cut rules was accentuated by the producers by using contorted and hyperbolized chorus scenes speaking into the microphones:

> "**Friend No. 2:** And, most of all, the party has no time to carry out subtle analyses of the differences between the wrongs caused intentionally and those that are a consequence of individuals' mistakes or human fallacies!
> **Friend No. 1:** It's always better to take a few people put in jail and have them interrogated and released once their innocence is proven than to leave a single enemy unapprehended!
> **Tanya:** (almost cries out because the pressure of uttered words is too strong) That's enough of that, mum! I don't believe father has never contested that!"[10]
> "**Voice No. 3:** Trust the party, comrades! The party has never let us down, it has demonstrated it deserves our unreserved trust shown by our people."[11]

Jo Langer's husband was tagged as the class enemy of the Communist Party. He was falsely charged and imprisoned for twenty-two years on the grounds of espionage against the state and being part of a group led by Rudolf Slánský. The trial selectively led to the politically motivated executions of the alleged members of an espionage group in which there were several acquaintances of the Langers. The record of the trial was also used in the production for a reasonably long while. The well-known statement about the sentenced prisoners was also uttered in it, namely that they were not human beings. Jo kept moving with her children into constantly deteriorating housing conditions. She was fired by her employer, eventually being evicted from her home in the town, and ended up in the countryside under Displacement Action B. The family property was confiscated and her daughters faced the grim prospect of not being allowed to study. The producers deliberately dynamized the narration through direct encounters of the main character with party representatives and one-time family friends. The reactions of these counterparties portrayed the system as a system based on fear and as a distortion of common sense:

10 Ibid, p. 15.
11 Ibid, p. 44.

"**Jo:** I lived in constant fear. I feared for my husband, I feared to open the newspaper in the morning and to turn the radio on. I feared the police, I feared I'd be put in prison as an imperialist spy when I went to the post office, to collect a parcel from our relatives in America , I was fearful for you that you'd be expelled from school, I was fearful for Tanya when she started withering right before my very eyes and lost consciousness due to malnutrition."[12]

The production has the parallelly-running themes of the power and courage of women to endure and defeat the unfree external system, built on the dissemination of fear, by virtue of an inner freedom. It was imperative to take care of her children and explain to her elder daughter (an ardent pioneer/scout) that her father had been arrested and to safeguard her daughters from the assaults of the community, raising them to become honest people and not lose faith in man thanks to kind little gestures she had experienced. The producers put an emphasis on those parts of the novel that captured Jo Langer's determination not to betray her own moral principles, common sense, loyalty, and support for her incarcerated husband. Their sense of dramatic detail facilitated the softening of tension through sentences filled with humour and irony, such as the reading out of exclamations such as "Salute labour!" and "Long live peace!" at the end of letters notifying the mother and her daughters of disastrous existential impacts and so on.

Once granted amnesty, Oskar Langer spent the rest of his life fighting for his vindication, which came too late and after having devotedly collaborated with the Communist Party. The last task in Jo's life awaited her after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact armies during a visit to Sweden (where her elder daughter Susie was allowed to perform as a singer) where she sought to persuade both her daughters to leave their motherland and stay living in emigration. She had lost faith that the situation back home would change for the better and that history would not repeat itself. She wanted to find a safe home for her children and for their children. She understood home to be "a place" everyone has to seek within themselves and within our beloved ones. It was a root that did not belong in the soil but rather to people. Shortly before her first emigration to North America in 1938, she had instilled an idea in her mind that she was only part of the past and of the future; she blended in with the whole world and with everything that lived in it. Influenced by the experiences gained over the many years of her life,

12 Ibid, p. 45.

the ideas of patriotism and an equitable socialist society were transformed into concrete interpersonal relationships. In Sweden she realized that people there had a sense for every living being, for accepting a foreigner without suspicion, and understanding his desire for a life of freedom:

> "**Jo:** Here, for the first time ever, I feel that mankind can improve in a humane way. Yes, for the first time ever I've a persistent feeling that life can get better for humanity without having to pay for that with wasted fates and with everything else that makes life worth living."[13]

At the beginning of the third millennium, with growing extremism and nationalist moods transgressing European borders, Slovak theatre makers have embarked on artistic research into the concepts of motherland, nation, country, and the state. It was deemed important for them to call to mind the values of every human life and of man as a humanistically thinking and feeling being. This gap has widened between the politically- or party-oriented management of public affairs based on a preferred ideology and a human being faced with the consequences of the execution of political or party power in their name. Through theatre, the appeal of memory has become a value alerting to the negative phenomena of the past as well as an appeal to enforce the power of humanity, which is at the core of every individual human being.

Translated by Mária Švecová

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This article is an output of the VEGA project No. 2/0170/16: "Theatre as a Communication of the Crisis of Values".

Biography

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