

# The Origins of Postdramatic Theatre in Slovenia

## Balbina Battelino Baranovič's Experimental Theatre (1955–1967)

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The article claims that the origins of postdramatic theatre in Slovenia can be traced back to the end of the 1950s in the work of the director Balbina Battelino Baranovič. Slovenian theatre historiography obtained a detailed and comprehensive overview of her opus for the first time in 2015 with the monograph *The Edge in the Centre: Selected Chapters from the History of Experimental Theatre in Slovenia (1955–1967)*, written by Primož Jesenko. The present article now brings to Slovenian theatre studies the findings about the characteristics of Baranovič's stagings as characteristics of postdramatic theatre, focusing on an analysis of her work in the Experimental Theatre, established and run by Baranovič in the period 1955–1967. Here, the author understands the director as a forerunner of postdramatic theatre, which – according to the author of the term, Hans-Thies Lehmann – emerged in the 1970s. In contrast, the existing interpretations mark the performance *Pupilija, Papa Pupilo, and the Pupilceks*, created in 1969 by the Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre as a reference point of its beginning in the Slovenian space.

When discussing the postdramatic orientation of Balbina Baranovič's Experimental Theatre as the theatre "after" drama, that is, beyond the traditional understanding of dramatic theatre, the selection of the texts to be performed speaks for itself. The repertoire was based on texts and plays that can be grouped under four specific categories: adaptations of narrative works; dramatic texts that circumvent traditional, Aristotelian dramaturgy-based absolute drama; absurdist drama; and poetic works. The article examines the characteristics of postdramatic theatre in the light of two tendencies: the tendency to withhold signification and the tendency to dehierarchise theatrical means; concluding that these tendencies were largely realised in the stagings which were performed as theatre in the round. The withdrawal of signification, that is, the shifting away from representation toward the affirmation of presence, is (according to Lehmann) grounded in the obliteration of the intentionality of the sign and in stripping the theatrical event of its representational character. In the Experimental Theatre of Baranovič, this was combined with the tendency for onstage

activity to be as authentic, alive and genuine as possible. This was readily apparent especially in the approach to acting: partly already in the opening performance, the dramatisation of Zola's novel *Thérèse Raquin* (1955), and fully in the staging of Plato's philosophical work *The Last Days of Socrates* (1957), conceptualised as a stage essay, which was a novelty on Slovenian stages. The second highlighted tendency leading to the aesthetic of the postdramatic, that is, the dehierarchisation of theatrical means, was evident from the direction. The author explores it in the case of the staging of Goethe's *Faust* (1959) and analyses it from the perspective of parataxis, namely, a side-by-side arrangement of theatrical elements, which were organised multidirectionally on the stage, according to the principle of simultaneity, but breaking with the convention of the expected density of signs.

The postdramatic dehierarchisation of signs in the Experimental Theatre can be recognised also in the stagings of poetic works. These were experimental performances of a "recital-music-dance nature", in which the poems, the dance, and the music were placed side by side according to the principle of simultaneity. These performances went largely ignored in the daily periodicals and were not critically analysed.

The article concludes that the new stage quality and sensibility, signalling the aesthetic of postdramatic theatre as post-Brechtian, anti-illusionist, no longer dramatic text-based theatre, can probably also be detected in the performances directed during the discussed period of time by Balbina Battelino Baranovič on the stages of other repertory theatres, and calls for further research and analyses.

*Translated by Katja Kosi*