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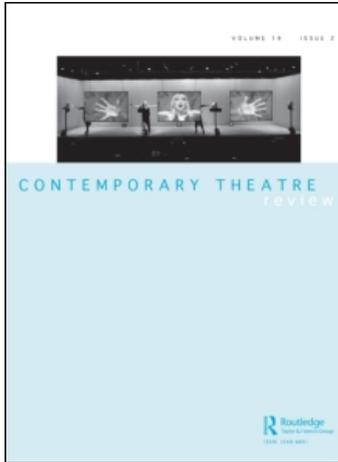
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### The Alchemy of Power and Freedom - A Contextualisation of Slobodan Šnajder's *Hrvatski Faust* (*The Croatian Faust*)

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## The Alchemy of Power and Freedom – A Contextualisation of Slobodan Šnajder's *Hrvatski Faust* (*The Croatian Faust*)

Duška Radosavljević

1. See Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, trans. and ed. by James Strachey (London: Vintage Hogarth Press, 1961/2001), p. 114.
2. Petar Marjanović, 'Slobodan Šnajder: The Croatian Faust (1982)', trans. by Tim Bowen, *Scena: Theatre Arts Review*, 8 (1985), 221–26 (p. 222).
3. The name is of German origin – Schneider – but has become Croaticised. Even when his plays are published in German, Šnajder insists on keeping the Croatian spelling.

Barely two years after the end of the Yugoslav war, in August 1997 Slobodan Šnajder, an exiled Croatian playwright and dissident from the Tudjman regime, made what he called a 'semi-public' appearance in Belgrade's Centre for Cultural Decontamination – a cultural institution set up in opposition to the Milošević regime. As one of the leading Yugoslav playwrights of the 1970s and 1980s, Šnajder had always been welcome in Belgrade and on this occasion, inevitably, his opinion was sought on the recent Serbo-Croatian conflict. Šnajder summed it up as a case of Freudian 'narcissism of small differences'.<sup>1</sup> German people, he noticed, differ enough from region to region to be able to live together while Serbs and Croats do not.

In his 1985 commentary on the play, critic Petar Marjanović singled out the traditionally 'non-communicative' nature of Šnajder's plays and his chosen style as a writer.<sup>2</sup> Šnajder,<sup>3</sup> the person, however, comes from a family of writers from Zagreb, where he was born on 8 July 1948. He was exposed to theatre and drama from an early age, but went on to study English and Philosophy at the University of Zagreb. The year 1968 – and the student rebellions throughout Europe (including Yugoslavia) – coincided with his own student days. As a result, he became one of the founders of the theatre periodical *Prolog* – a mouthpiece for the radical student theatre movement, with a definite political edge – which he also edited for many years thereafter. Between 1969 and 1981 he wrote eight plays, some of which were based on

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4. Marjanović, 'Slobodan Šnajder: The Croatian Faust (1982)', p. 222.
5. Slobodan Šnajder, *Hrvatski Faust* (Novi Sad: Sterijino Pozorje, 1983), p. 7.
6. The Yugoslav Drama Theatre in Belgrade was founded in 1948 with the aim of bringing together the best of the theatre artists from the whole country. It was a super-national institution by choice rather than by interference from policy-makers. The Yugoslav Drama Theatre had a remarkable career in terms of its international activity and cultural exchange. Its 1951 production of *Yegor Bulichov* by Gorki was highly acclaimed in Russia, having been shown at the Moscow Arts Theatre. Meanwhile five of Sartre's plays were staged here as well as four by Camus from 1948 to 1986, and in 1965 Mrožek's *Tango* had its world premiere here.
7. Lada Čale Feldman points out that Ciulli ingeniously connected the story of Faust in the Nazi puppet-state to a popular seventeenth- and eighteenth-century trend of adapting Faust for puppet theatre. (*Teatar u teatru u hrvatskom teatru* (Zagreb: MD & Matica Hrvatska, 1997) pp. 307–08).

famous writers, but most of which feature a typical metaphysical dimension. His 1979 play *Držićev san* (*Držić's Dream*), for example, which was performed at the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb in 1980, focuses on the first significant Croatian playwright Marin Držić. The theme of this play, in Marjanović's words, is the time of the Croatian Renaissance 'illustrated in the fate of its greatest writer Marin Držić (1508–67), who was murdered by the Dubrovnik aristocracy because his ideas and his work were contrary to the ideology of the ruling class'.<sup>4</sup>

While also following the popular Yugoslav trend of rewriting history – or theatre history – *The Croatian Faust* distinguishes itself by shifting its focus onto the theatre rather than a particular historical fact or person. By means of emphasis, in his Preface to this play, which is entitled 'Who is Speaking Here?', Šnajder suggests that the 'subject of the drama *The Croatian Faust* – and therefore that which speaks – is a performance, and therefore – fiction'.<sup>5</sup>

This declaration is indicative of a degree of political defensiveness. The play was among the first to tackle one of the taboos of recent Croatian history, the Croatian Nazi allegiance during the Second World War. It was awarded the leading Croatian award for Yugoslav drama – the Gavella Prize – in 1980/81 and published for the first time in *Prolog* in 1982. Its first premiere in Split was immediately followed by a premiere at the Yugoslav Drama Theatre<sup>6</sup> in Belgrade and another Croatian production in Varaždin, all in 1982. In 1983 it won the Sterija Prize at the Yugoslav contemporary drama festival – the Sterija Festival in Novi Sad – which represented a pinnacle for any Yugoslav dramatist. Significantly, the play was never staged at the theatre where the action is taking place – the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb – although both the Belgrade and the Varaždin production were shown there on tour. Additionally, Roberto Ciulli created a German version of the play in 1987 for Theatre an der Ruhr Mülheim<sup>7</sup> which played for four years, whilst Hans Hollmann directed the play for the Burgtheater in Vienna in 1993. In the 1990s Šnajder settled in Germany, where his new plays were staged with continued frequency and success. However, in the early 2000s, following a change in the political climate in Croatia, he was invited back to Zagreb and given the artistic directorship of the Zagreb Youth Theatre – a significant position of power in Croatian Theatre – which lasted for four years, and after which he fully returned to his literary career once again.

It might be worth stating my own position here before proceeding with the discussion of Šnajder's play. Although ethnically a Serb, I was raised in the spirit of Yugoslavism and left the country when that particular denomination ceased to be tenable in the early 1990s. After several years of confusion and denial – all the while continuing to declare myself as a Yugoslav in the UK – in 1997, I was just starting to envisage a PhD thesis on political theatre in the post-1989 period. Listening to Šnajder at the Centre for Cultural Decontamination was a crucial moment for the subsequent formulation of my research question, even if that was not entirely evident at the time. Facing the problem that very little – if anything at all – was known about Yugoslav drama and theatre in the English-speaking world, I acquired many different roles in the course of my research including that of a cultural translator, historian and curator as

8. Lada Čale Feldman's study *Teatar u teatru u hrvatskom teatru* (1997) explores the model as a particular form of intertextuality by charting its use in Croatian dramatic and folkloric tradition, while Zoran Milutinović looks at selected Serbian metaplays in the context of a larger European dramatic tradition in *Metateatralnost: Imanentna poetika u drami XX veka* (Beograd: SIC, 1994). However, the two studies do not specifically focus on the political significance of the form.

9. Bosnians were not referred to as an ethnic group in the former Yugoslavia. People living in Bosnia were referred to as Muslims – although Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs also lived in this republic. Of course, religious denomination was irrelevant and discouraged in communism. However, a large part of the Bosnian population was traditionally Muslim, even though these Muslims had originally been Slavs who had converted to Islam during the Ottoman occupation.

10. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1940), pp. 55–57.

well as a researcher and critic. Unlike most Yugoslav theatre scholars I was also viewing the material from a greater geographic, historical and critical distance. I was eight when *The Croatian Faust* was staged in Belgrade and I never got a chance to see its original production. However, I was always aware of the cultural and political significance of this play and particularly the Macedonian director Slobodan Unkovski's Yugoslav Drama Theatre production which – as one of the peer reviewers of this article has pointed out – brought into the vernacular a particular line from this play: 'Father, deliver me from Serbian heroism and Croatian culture'. This paper is therefore primarily interested in the historical and political circumstances of the production and reception of *The Croatian Faust* in the early 1980s. It examines a range of critical sources from the period although it also makes some reference to several later texts from both Serbian and Croatian scholarship. Theoretically, the paper is concerned with the political significance of self-reflexivity – the fictional and cultural narcissism inherent in the play – and is rooted in a belief that metatheatricality has been the key undiagnosed feature of Yugoslav political theatre since the 1960s and a significant factor in enabling its reception in the rest of the world.<sup>8</sup> Inevitably, the paper being written in the present context invites the possibility that there is another reading within the given reading of this play some twenty-five years later – following the Serbo-Croatian war in the 1990s – and within the current climate of a phenomenon known in the region as Yugo-nostalgia.

## The Balkans

Situated on the Balkan semi-peninsula, in the south-eastern corner of Europe and surrounded predominantly by non-Slav countries – such as Italy, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Greece and Albania – the former Yugoslavia (literally the Land of the South Slavs) formed a relatively self-defined demographic unit. Since the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991, the region has increasingly been referred to by its more generic term – the Balkans. In addition to the Yugoslavs – Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, Bosnians,<sup>9</sup> Macedonians and Montenegrins – the Balkans also include Bulgarians, Greeks, Romanians and Albanians. Most of these nations are patriarchal and conservative and most of them have had a history of political unifications and conflicts with each other, the example of the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s being the most acute. Of all the Balkan people, however, Serbs and Croats together with Bosnians and Montenegrins probably share the most significant similarities. Despite their distinct cultural histories over the centuries, they have at least retained sufficient linguistic similarities to have been able to share a single language during the Yugoslav years – Serbo-Croat.

In his 1921 study *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Sigmund Freud asserts that any emotional relationship between two people or two groups of people who come close together often 'leaves a sediment of feelings of aversion and hostility'.<sup>10</sup> This results in the feelings of jealousy, rivalry and mutual contempt between, for example,

neighbouring villages or closely related groups. Additionally, Freud argues that the undisguised antipathies and aversions which people display towards each other are often motivated by narcissism or self-love, which is ultimately a manifestation of the self-preservation instinct. He states, '[t]he whole of this intolerance vanishes temporarily or permanently as the result of the formation of a group, and in a group'. Yet, such tolerance is short-lived, tending not to 'persist longer than the immediate advantage gained from the other people's collaboration.'<sup>11</sup>

The story of Yugoslavia (1918–91) – as a state formed from the remains of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires through a unification of the previously divided South Slav nations – can, at least in part, be understood in terms of the mechanism of group dynamics as described by Freud. Democracy as a system never really took root among the deeply patriarchal and extensively colonised Balkan people who then slid into another monolithic system of communism. The unification of the South Slavs in 1918 into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians was a result of the awareness raised by the nineteenth-century Pan-Slavic idea – the Illyrian Movement – which emphasised the shared linguistic and cultural characteristics of the South Slavs living under the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, respectively. Evidently, in the aftermath of the liberation it was in the interest of these nations to form a socioeconomic union, facilitated by the existence of a shared ideology. However, resentments among the constituent groups quickly resurfaced, leading to the assassination of the king in 1934. The Second World War also coincided with a civil war in Yugoslavia, during which a merciless extermination of each other's ethnic groups ensued.<sup>12</sup>

Following the socialist revolution, Yugoslavia was reinvented as a multinational state on the premise of equality and 'Brotherhood and Unity', and existed as such for nearly fifty years. Yugoslavia's own brand of liberal socialism gave an illusion of freedom and easy satisfaction of basic needs. However, the overemphasis on collective responsibility resulted in a typical loss of individuality and a thorough subjugation to the leader, Josip Broz Tito.

The 1980s in Yugoslavia saw a gradual release of various repressions and a growing iconoclasm in relation to the socialist ideology. Tito's death resulted in a crisis on all levels – political as well as psychological. As he had never named a successor, in the 1980s the country was governed by a federal presidency (a group of representatives from each republic) and the president was elected by the group on a rotational basis. This in itself caused a fracture in the supranational identity. Each republic's individual interests became prominent and the resultant socioeconomic problems were in turn blamed on another, thus causing ethnic division and sowing the seeds of nationalism.

Both Franjo Tudjman and Slobodan Milošević – the Croatian and Serbian leaders that plunged Yugoslavia into war in the 1990s – rose to power through a combination of nationalist rhetoric and manipulation of popular sentiments (as well as tight control of the media). Even while operating within a system of basic democracy, most of the post-communist party leaders were frequently perceived as subconsciously modelling themselves on Tito – or at least they appeared to covet the

11. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, pp. 55–57.

12. For more on history of the region see, for example, Laura Silber and Alan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia* (London: Penguin Books, 1996); Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War* (London: Penguin Books, 1992) and Andrew Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998).

13. Sigmund Freud, 'Civilization and its Discontents', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, trans. and ed. by James Strachey (London: Vintage Hogarth Press, 1961/2001), p. 114.
14. Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (New York/London: Methuen, 1980).
15. Since Lionel Abel's 1963 study *Metatheatre*, the use of the term has ranged from denoting various manifestations of intertextuality to the text's increased awareness of its own theatricality. Despite Richard Hornby's (1986) particularly systematic approach to the genre of metadrama and the accompanying issue of 'perception', Hutcheon's discussion of the inherent mechanism of metafiction as a tool of empowerment remains most closely concerned with the role of the reader.
16. A more recent discussion of Brešan's play by Zoran Milutinović is available in English at <http://eprints.ucl.ac.uk/3872/1/3872.pdf>. Alongside *The Croatian Faust*, this play is also the subject of Čale Feldman's *Teatar u teatru*. Jovanović's play has been translated into English by Lesley Wade Soule and published as a supplement to

levels of absolute undisputed power and adulation that the communist superego had enjoyed.

This brief history of Yugoslavia clearly demonstrates the kind of dynamic that Freud describes in his discussion of group formation and particularly in relation to his concept of the 'narcissism of small differences':

It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness.<sup>13</sup>

However, in order to understand more fully the sociopolitical context of Šnajder's playwriting, it might be worth noting an additional perspective on this play derived from Freud via Linda Hutcheon. By analogy to Freud's conferring on narcissism the status of the 'universal condition of man', Hutcheon seeks to translate Freud's concept to literature and establish narcissistic fiction as 'the original condition' of fiction.<sup>14</sup>

### Yugoslav Metatheatre of the 1980s

For some, the event of Tito's death in 1980 was a moment of relief, and for others it was a moment of profound bereavement. For most people within the country, however, the death of Josip Broz Tito signalled an impending crisis and the necessity to address the tensions which had previously been kept firmly under the surface.

In the 1980s, a growing number of Yugoslav playwrights turned to metatheatrical forms as a means of re-examining history and offering political commentary.<sup>15</sup> Significant precursors to this trend included the Croatian Ivo Brešan's 1965 play *The Performance of Hamlet in the Village of Lower Jerkwater*, which remained unstaged for political reasons until 1971 and then won all the major theatre awards in the country, and the Slovenian Dušan Jovanović's play *Act a Brain Tumour or Air Pollution* which was published in 1972 but only received a production in 1976, for similar reasons.<sup>16</sup>

Hutcheon notes that the metafictional is essentially didactic, in that it places an emphasis on the process of creation rather than the final product, thus inviting the reader's participation in the creation of meaning.<sup>17</sup> Representing a more sophisticated version of didacticism than the one offered by some Brechtian proponents, metatheatre goes hand in hand with the contemporary trend – also identified by Ruby Cohn<sup>18</sup> in relation to postwar British theatre – of rewriting history. Fictions and realities are brought into interchangeable, if not identical domains, which results in a particularly complex process in theatre where the reader's reception is durational and collective.<sup>19</sup> Most importantly however, metaplays, like metafiction according to Hutcheon, bestow – or restore – freedom and power to the reader. The shifting perspectives or multiple frames that the metafictional offers may prevent the reader or audience from falling into the trap of sentimentalism or melodrama – a concern shared by Brecht. However, metaplays do not necessarily

*Studies in Theatre Production*, suppl. 1, 1994–95.

17. This process has become more of a focus of the reception theory and its application to the study of theatre audiences (such as Susan Bennett's *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (London: Routledge, 1990), although not necessarily with regard to metatheatres directly.
18. Ruby Cohn: *Retreats from Realism in Recent English Drama* (New York/London: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
19. I have elaborated on this in Duška Radosavljević, 'Believe it or Not? Suspension of Disbelief and Emotional Responses to Fiction', in *Consciousness, Theatre, Literature and the Arts*, ed. by Daniel Meyer-Dinkgrafe (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), pp. 70–82.
20. 'The representation of human behaviour from a social point of view is meant indeed to have a decisive influence on the spectator's own social behaviour.' John Willett, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (London: Methuen Drama, 2001), pp. 100–01.
21. Kovačević also wrote *A Roaring Tragedy* in 1991 as a continuation of the themes explored in the previous two

interfere with the audience perception in the direct way espoused by Brecht.<sup>20</sup> While not necessarily precluding emotional engagement, they may afford the spectator the freedom to choose how and why he/she engages with the performance.

In addition to Šnajder's *The Croatian Faust*, other notable Yugoslav metaplays from the 1980s included Ljubomir Simović's *The Travelling Theatre Šopalović* (1985), Nenad Prokić's *The Metastable Grail* (1985), and later in that decade the plays of Dušan Kovačević *The Claustrophobic Comedy* (1987) and *The Professional* (1989).<sup>21</sup> In the 1990s, amid growing mythomania and a proliferation of sentimentalist-nationalist narratives, followed by distinctly escapist fictions, metatheatres struggled to conform to audience demand while also maintaining critical distance.

By the mid-1980s a number of theatre critics and commentators also began to write more openly and acknowledge the increasingly overt political content of contemporary Yugoslav drama. Dragan Klaić (1986) considers this openness a new and 'valuable contribution towards the climate of tolerance and self-examination' as well as representing a significant contribution to the process of 'democratisation of public life':

The Yugoslav stage was an early public forum for certain issues, even before they were raised in more appropriate places – in political circles or in the media. It was the theatre – both writers and the audience, who broke certain taboos and provoked discussion of themes previously avoided in the public arena.<sup>22</sup>

Klaić further observes that the provocative new works often won their place in the repertoire by virtue of the fact that any attempt at censorship would have only increased public interest in a particular play. In addition, the decentralised nature of the Yugoslav federation often made it possible for occasionally banned works in one part of the country to appear uncensored elsewhere. Most importantly, Klaić notes that theatre critics supported this politicisation of theatre and stood by the creators in their intention to stimulate and widen the ongoing debate regarding the nature of Yugoslav society and its inherent problems – implying that this eventually had the potential to reach both the authorities and public consciousness.

Thus the early socialist critics, who resisted ideologically provocative drama in the 1950s and 1960s, as noted by Vladimir Stamenković,<sup>23</sup> had clearly become a thing of the past. It might be argued that the increasing economic crisis of the 1980s was an important factor in the popularisation of the political as controversial topics were bound to bring in audiences and therefore boost revenue.

Klaić identifies several interrelated currents in the contemporary political drama. The topic which emerges most explicitly in the 1980s is Yugoslavia's break-up with the Eastern Bloc in 1948. The events surrounding this date had become taboo due to the fact that Tito's method of dealing with staunch Stalinists and reactionaries was not dissimilar to Stalin's own gulags – the most (in)famous one of these being the camp on the island of Goli Otok in the Adriatic. Second,

plays. In 1996 – the year in which his metacinematic screenplay *Udground*, directed by Emir Kusturica, received the Palme d'Or in Cannes – this was followed by a Pirandellian metaplay *Larry Thompson: The Tragedy of a Young Man*. See Duška Radosavljević, 'Staging Theatricalised Reality: Yugoslav Metatheatre and its Political Significance', in *Macht Performanz, Performativität, Polittheater seit 1990*, ed. by Birgit Haas (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 2005), pp. 283–302.

22. Dragan Klaić, 'Obsessed with Politics: Currents in Yugoslav Drama', *Scena: Theatre Arts Review*, 9 (1986), 7–19 (pp. 7–8). Klaić's essay is published in an English issue of the theatre magazine *Scena*. The text credits no translator, so it is most probably written in English. All other Yugoslav sources are quoted in my translation, unless otherwise noted.
23. Vladimir Stamenković, *Pozorište u dramatisovanom društvu* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1987), p. 13.
24. Klaić, 'Obsessed with Politics', p. 11.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
26. In addition to Simović's *The Travelling Theatre Šopalović*, Goran Marković's film *Déjà vu* and Kovačević's

the topic of the Yugoslav socialist revolution remained important. The 1980s, however, brought about attempts at rethinking the Yugoslav revolution in line with Weiss, Grass, Bond and Müller, who 'counter the optimistic eschatology of revolution, characteristic of Brecht, with a sceptical vision that is more anthropologically than ideologically based'.<sup>24</sup> Third, within the current of revisiting the Second World War, Klaić notes a combination of themes: Yugoslav resistance to Nazism and the accompanying interethnic tensions and moral responsibility of theatre professionals during the occupation and more generally – the relationship between 'theatre and political power' and between 'creativity and ideology'.<sup>25</sup> Here the focus is particularly on *The Croatian Faust*, *The Travelling Theatre Šopalović* and *The Metastable Grail*. Finally, contemporary political drama also explores the generation gap or satirises stereotypical characters of leaders who abuse their position of power to set themselves up as oppressors. Evidently here the notion of patriarchal power structures is shown as penetrating the socialist power structure. This might have been a reflection of the political power-struggles that unfolded on a general level in the country following Tito's death; but, more importantly, they reveal the essential problem of the monolithic, increasingly non-libertarian nature of socialism in practice, in the given context. Most of these plays, in fact, consider the present both as a consequence of past mistakes and as an anticipation of a bleaker future.

The metatheatrical trend in the Yugoslav drama of the 1980s is treated by Klaić as well as many other Yugoslav critics of the period as simply a strand of political theatre rather than in terms of its handling of the form and content or the nature of audience reception it requires. Klaić notes that the trend was closely linked to a re-examination of attitudes towards theatre during and immediately after the Second World War. Recalling that in 1941 the occupying authorities attempted to ensure a continuation of theatre activity in major centres, but licensed primarily German classics and local light comedies, he highlights that, over time, the actors' continued activity began to be viewed as morally problematic<sup>26</sup> – particularly in relation to the escalation of the occupier's brutality and a growing strife of both the local population and the partisan movement.

Public gestures such as acting were seen as unpatriotic, performed under supervision of the enemy as acts of collaboration. After the war, several theatre professionals, active under occupation, were tried for their activity and condemned to a temporary loss of civil rights. At least two actors were executed.<sup>27</sup>

On the whole, the 1980s saw a significant change of cultural climate, including the increasingly democratising nature of contemporary theatre. More specifically for the concerns of this essay, Klaić's discussion provides a clear context for a reading of *The Croatian Faust*, a play that could be seen to have inaugurated this decade's flourishing trend of metatheatrical political re-examination.

*Underground* also feature the theme of the ethics of actors doing their job during the war.

27. Klaić, 'Obsessed with Politics', p. 13.
28. The term 'metaphysical' is used to categorise Šnajder's literary approach, which is primarily interested in the sphere of ideas and ideologies – a feature of much of the Yugoslav (meta)drama from the period. This play has also been referred to as an 'epistemological tragedy' by the Hungarian critic László Végel in his Afterword "'Hrvatski Faust" kao strategija duha' in Slobodan Šnajder, *Hrvatski Faust* (Novi Sad: Sterijino Pozorje, 1983), pp. 111–22 (p. 113).
29. In her reading of the play, Cale Feldman departs from the standpoint that Šnajder's key intention is to logically complement the phrase 'the world is a stage' with Enzensberg's thesis. She then proceeds to argue that 'the metaphor of historical events as a theatre play' inevitably relies on the inner political processes of theatre-making as a collective creation following a particular set of decisions. (*Teatar u teatru*, p. 305).
30. Slobodan Šnajder, *Hrvatski Faust* (Novi Sad: Sterijino Pozorje, 1983), pp. 7–11 (p. 8).
31. Marjanović, 'Slobodan Šnajder'.

### *The Croatian Faust*

Although rooted in historical fact, the play *The Croatian Faust* is a decidedly non-naturalistic (meta)play. It focuses on the historical personality of Vjekoslav Afrić – a Croatian actor who defied the Nazi authorities by leaving the theatre to join the partisans – but is also rich with intertextual references to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the Bible and the Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža's work. Its structure is representative of 'fragmentary' dramaturgy; the length of its thirty-one scenes varies and the connections between them are not always established. Characters are often referred to by different names throughout the script. For example, the main character – the actor Afrić, who played Faust in the 1942 production at the Croatian National Theatre – is variably referred to as Actor or Afrić or Faust. This is by no means indicative of the playwright's carelessness or idiosyncrasy, but of his predominantly metaphysical<sup>28</sup> relationship to his work. Thus every such change of denominator is in fact a reference (possibly even an instruction to the actor and director) regarding the level from which the character operates in a particular place in the script.

Faust remains a role which, like other roles from Goethe's play, is double-cast in the course of Šnajder's play, i.e. the roles are first played by the actors of the Croatian National Theatre and later – due to gradual incrimination or elimination of the actors – seemingly taken on by Ustasha representatives. This gesture is inevitably indicative of various kinds of ideological bargainings with the devil throughout the play.

In relation to this, in his Preface to the play, the author proffers:

Faust, in the year 1981, and a Croatian one at that, certainly isn't a romantic subject *in opposition*, some Indivisible (Individuum). He crawled out of the performance as a 'collective fiction of history' (Enzensberger).<sup>29</sup> He is therefore not, like Goethe's Faust, saved . . . Not only is he not an Individuum (Indivisible), but on the contrary, he came about, like a matrix of new possibilities, through a synthesis of several of the best examples from history.<sup>30</sup>

Directed by Tito Strozzi and designed by Žedrinški, the premiere of Goethe's *Faust* – which is 'the subject' of this play – took place on 31 March 1942 in Zagreb. At the time it was hailed as the most important Croatian production of all time and, being intended as an expression of the Croatian Ustasha authorities' allegiance to the Third Reich, it was seen as a point of entry of the new Croatia into Europe.<sup>31</sup> Similarly to Nietzsche's appropriation and manipulation by the Nazi German authorities, Goethe's *Faust* was also seen at the time as a cultural symbol of the Third Reich.<sup>32</sup> In relation to this, Marjanović notes one of Šnajder's departure points as being his observation that 'the very essence of great works must contain something that enables them to be used for repressive ends'.<sup>33</sup> *The Croatian Faust* demonstrates the mechanism of state control over theatre as well as the fact that the particular social context of the 1942 *Faust* highlights the 'links between theatre and

32. Šnajder also thematises the Nazi appropriation of Wagner whose music he weaves into the play, as well as jokingly at one point alluding to a German appropriation of Mozart.
33. Marjanović, 'Slobodan Šnajder', p. 224.
34. Ibid. In relation to this, in his review of the play Jovanov also observes: 'The essential openness of *The Croatian Faust* is most obvious in its rejection of the notion of immobility (and unchangeability) of narrative, which in this case originates from the theatre of History and the history of Theatre . . . . Šnajder equally avoids both the common traps of 'documentarism' and the impotent allegories of quasi-historical drama (a component which is still present in our drama) . . . . [T]he author not only uses Goethe's work exclusively as a problem-forming reference . . . but he also leaves the mechanism of the theatre-within-theatre on that level, turning it into the object of transcendence'. Svetislav Jovanov, 'Glorija sudbine, ništavilo moći', *Književna Reč*, 25 December 1982 (no page number).
35. He literally asks his members of staff to divide themselves on either side of a line. Interestingly the Croatian term 'podjela', meaning division, is also

power' and 'the sublime and very indirect connection between great art and political violence'.<sup>34</sup> This framework then allows the author to engage with and examine various manifestations of both political and personal power inherent to the given dramatic situation: the power of the actor, the power of the critic-turned-theatre manager, the power of ideology and a particular ideological subscription, and the ultimate Balkan question – the power of the political leader. However, a key issue that Šnajder touches on is the power of freedom of interpretation entailed within a work of art – and in metafiction.

One of the most significant, often noted, aspects of *The Croatian Faust* is that it did not use a single line from Goethe's text. Instead, the action of Šnajder's play follows the plot of Goethe's, imbuing the text with parallel or multiple dimensions of meaning. In addition to the narrative of Faust itself, we are also witnessing a narrative of the Second World War in Croatia (the play starts significantly just before Easter 1941 and ends with the end of the war in 1945) – including the individual journeys of the play's protagonists. On a strictly metatheatrical level, all the ritual stages of theatrical production are discernible: casting (when in Act One, Scene Five the theatre manager Žanko attempts an ethnic division of his staff),<sup>35</sup> rehearsal (the elements of Žedrinški's original scenography are gradually assembled between Scenes Six and Ten while the actors rehearse scenes from the play and Afrić-Faust is seen to be sexually attracted to Nevenka-Margareta through Mefisto's solicitation), photo-call (where Afrić photographs Žanko, listening to his political declamations), the first-night performance (Scene Sixteen, subdivided into five acts) and after-show celebration (Scene Seventeen – end of Act One); a repeat performance with Žanko as Faust (instead of Afrić who has joined the partisans) follows in Act Two.

When in Act One, Scene Eleven, the First Actor and the Second Actor are rehearsing Faust and Mefisto's deal-brokering in Goethe's play, Afrić is actually being tempted by Rakuša into the resistance movement. By Scene Fifteen – in the dressing room on the first night of the show – their deal is struck in a paraphrase of a famous communist slogan 'Death to Fascism, Freedom to People':

FAUST: Death to Faust!

MEFISTO: Freedom to people!<sup>36</sup>

While recognising that the play is potentially 'a meta-discourse with the original', Šnajder maintains that this particular intertextual technique is a reflection of his own beliefs regarding the function of art and culture. In elaborating his point that a paradigmatic exploration of the 'social being' of a theatre performance in this play is deeply conducive to debate, he wishes to advocate that all such paradigmatic cases should be subjected to scrutiny 'in every moment, each one separately, by everyone individually':

What is not said appears to be said. Thus what in fact is not said is symbolised even more powerfully and attention is drawn to it. I feel that this is the job of the theatre and of plays in general.<sup>37</sup>

- used to mean the 'casting' of roles in theatre.
36. Šnajder, *Hrvatski Faust*, p. 64.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 9; English quote taken from Marjanović, 'Slobodan Šnajder', p. 224.
38. Elias-Bursać's translation published in 1985 in *Scena*, sections of which are quoted in this paper, refers to Šnajder's Margareta as Margaret and to his Mefisto as Mephistopheles.
39. Jasenovac was the largest concentration and extermination camp in Croatia during the Second World War, set up by the Ustasha authorities and mainly used for the extermination of ethnic Serbs, as well as Jews, Gypsies and opponents of the Ustasha regime.
40. In the interest of clarity, I have inserted modifications to Elias-Bursać's translation in parentheses.
41. Nationalist guerrilla force loyal to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia government in exile during the Second World War. It mostly consisted of Serbs and Montenegrins but also had some Slovenians, Croats and Muslims in its ranks.

Another historical fact that serves as a point of focus in this play is that, by the third night of the performance of Goethe's *Faust* in Zagreb, seven members of the Croatian National Theatre – including the leading actor, Vjekoslav Afrić, and two other members of the cast – left the theatre to join the partisans. The production with a continually changing cast, however, remained in the repertoire until the end of the war. Janko Rakuša, the actor who initially played Mefisto, and spent most of the rest of the war in the resistance movement, was eventually caught by the Ustasas – the Croatian Nazi authorities – and consequently tortured and hanged on Christmas Day 1944. Additionally, Afrić's party contact – Nevenka Tepavac, who was not an actress but in Šnajder's play appears as an actress playing Margareta<sup>38</sup> – was also caught and tortured and finally taken to execution in a bag because she could not walk. In Šnajder's play, both of these acts of brutality are performed on the stage in front of the cheering nazified bourgeoisie. Thus Šnajder's stage begins as a theatre stage within the context of a particular society in the first act, and – in a non-naturalistic turn – by the second act it grows into a metaphor of that society with its corruption exposed.

Conveniently, 'Walpurgis Night' ('Walpurgisnacht') and the dance of the witches are here translated as the proceedings of liquidation in Jasenovac<sup>39</sup> concentration camp. Nevenka-Margareta's torture and Rakuša-Mefisto's execution are shown on the stage of the theatre and overseen by Faust who is now played by the Ustasha theatre manager Žanko:<sup>40</sup>

FAUST: Do you know what this is?

*He shows him a Chetnik<sup>41</sup> pamphlet.*

Here is what will be left of Croatia when the Serbs arrive.

*He shows him the pamphlet.*

MEPHISTOPHELES: Oh, yes, beyond all measure. The entire world ought to pay for Kosovo, and especially us Turks.

FAUST: Do you hear the bloody drums from across the Drina: Serbs are gathering . . . – Croats to their own! What are you?

MEPHISTOPHELES: Faust, you mortal: you're asking a drop of water in the sea whether it came from this or that river.

FAUST: Only God can help you now, Satan.

MEPHISTOPHELES: Oh, fine, then it will be fine if it is up to your God. God, father of mine, who loved me more than all your angels because I shouted NO when all shouted YES; Father, deliver me from Serbian heroism and Croatian culture.

DEPUTY-HEAD-OF-STATE BUDAK (*Screams from the loge*): Now that's enough!

FAUST: Mr Budak, we have cleansed this institution three times from top to bottom in our great racial house-cleaning, and this actor has deceived us all. It took quite a while to come up with flawless evidence.

*He slips a noose over his head.*

...

*Margaret tries to straighten up but she cannot. Two Ustashi rush over and knock her down. A large paper moon comes out and the whole scene is given ghostly contoured lighting.*

42. In addition to the fact that the very first few lines of the play refer to the actor Afrić as the 'Croatian Hamlet' and that Faust is often shown holding a skull in Šnajder's play, this line is also clearly reminiscent of Claudius' exclamation at the end of the 'Mousetrap' scene in Shakespeare's play.

FAUST: Lights, lights!<sup>42</sup>  
*Dogs bark. Shots in the distance.*

...

VOICE: Pull out the chair!

*The Deputy-Head-of-State gives the sign and they hang Mephistopheles.*

HEAD DIRECTOR (*Leaping out of the audience*): I most fervently protest! Why, this is a cultural institution. In [this] thousand years of ours we have never slaughtered in theatres! I shall write to the ministry.

DEPUTY-HEAD-OF-STATE: Complaint lodged!

USTASHI: That dog did know how to make us laugh!

CRITICUS: He was a [natural]; [a kind of comic talent] that is rarely born. [W]e Croats, [however], are more suited to tragic roles. The place of Janko Rakuša will remain unfilled in the history of [contemporary theatre]. This true loss must be grieved today by all those who ...

VOICE: Now we have no Mephistopheles.

OTHER VOICE: That was one powerful actor.

VOICE: He was a Communist.

OTHER VOICE: For the hell of it.

VOICES: Amen.

*Margaret watches them from her sack. She moans. Darkness.*<sup>43</sup>

43. Slobodan Šnajder, 'The Croatian Faust', trans. by Ellen Elias-Bursać, *Scena: Theatre Arts Review*, 8 (1986), 193–221 (pp. 216–17).

According to the Croatian critic Dalibor Foretić, the line which he recognises as a paraphrase of Krleža, 'Father, deliver me from Serbian heroism and Croatian culture!':

... has aroused spontaneous applause at every performance of the play at the Yugoslav Drama Theatre in Belgrade ... The first moment of real catharsis and relief in applause arrived at the right place.<sup>44</sup>

44. Dalibor Foretić, *Nova Drama (Svjedočenja o jugoslavenskim dramatikama i njihovim scenskim refleksima, 1972–1988)* (Izdavački Centar Rijeka: Sterijino Pozorje, 1989), p. 118.

The audience, Foretić suggests, was in fact applauding the director Slobodan Unkovski's emphasis on resistance to myths and ideologies in this production. As mentioned above, this thematic choice represents a significant factor within the context of the Balkans, whereby most cultural activity is inward-looking and rarely able to transcend the geographic boundaries of the region. However, Šnajder's metatheatrical framework allows for the paradoxical, twofold nature of metafiction to take full effect – making it possible to achieve both the critical distance required by Brecht and an emotional engagement sought by most audiences.

45. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. xvi.

In this sense Šnajder evokes Hutcheon's notion of a contemporary artist who appears as 'the inscribed maker of a social product that has the potential to participate in social change' through its reception<sup>45</sup> – which must have also been the author's intention when he called for the scrutiny of Balkan historical paradigms 'in every moment, each one separately, by everyone on their own'. This relinquishing of fiction's power through a demystification of the illusion-making processes is probably most obvious in the fact that the shifting perspectives or multiple frames that metaplays offer may prevent sentimentalist responses. What is more, members of the audience are empowered as potential co-creators of meaning.

By merging the ‘factual’ and the ‘theatrical’ into a non-naturalistic ‘heterocosm’, *The Croatian Faust* simultaneously engages with the culturally specific material and the non-culturally specific issues of art and power. By extension, the play more specifically heightens the poignancy of human suffering under repression but also prevents a solely sentimentalist response. The horrific historical fact – specifically the Christ-like execution of Janko Rakuša in this section – is not trivialised by the inner play’s theatricalisation, but indeed becomes even more tragic. This is also emphasised by the juxtaposition of the play’s cheerful, almost comedic beginning against its progressive ruthlessness. The playwright’s discourse is a combination of ‘Faustisms’ and the official jargon – whether it is the jargon of the theatre critic, the communist or the nazified state.<sup>46</sup> Both of these linguistic devices lend the play elements of grotesque parody, whose atmosphere is also much more macabre than most other metaplays of the period. While suitably entertained in places therefore, Yugoslav audiences at the time would have been confronted by a daring play that not only explicitly dealt with historical taboos, but – in Unkovski’s production – also placed another, illusion-seduced and blindly nazified theatre audience squarely in front of them. It is almost as though Šnajder and Unkovski were envisaging their own Faustian contract with their prospective audiences – potential self-knowledge in exchange for a confrontation of the ugly truths.

The play’s fragmentary nature also extends to the characters, in that none of them is portrayed as a villain or a hero per se – the protagonist, after all, is the play – and the responsibility for the crimes against art and humanity remains on the level of the collective, as does moral conscience, on the other hand. In this respect, the play, at the subplot level, also explores the juxtaposition between the collective and the individual, which becomes a recurrent theme in the context of the 1980s and 1990s’ re-examination of socialism. The central character – the actor – and his journey, remain on the level of the subplot. Afrić begins as a *bon vivant* and a womaniser, but having obtained the knowledge – which he hadn’t bargained for – ends up amid destruction, alone and a victim of a vicious circle of history. The collective at the beginning of the play features ordinary people as well as some international Nazi dignitaries, local authorities and the staff of the theatre. In the course of the play the collective becomes homogenised around the Nazi ideology whilst the remaining individuals can only attempt an escape. By the end, Afrić is the only survivor, standing alone in a deserted theatre. He is accompanied by a new Mefisto, a partisan commissar who offers him a new deal – to make a new Faust,<sup>47</sup> to reinvent Croatian theatre in line with the new ideology.<sup>48</sup>

The third act is a single unnumbered scene, a snowscape. Faust, Mefisto and Margareta merge into ‘a transcendental triad’:

FAUST (MARGARET): I’ve been everywhere and I’ve died twice.  
 MEPHISTOPHELES: History has had its [fill] of me.  
 I’ve mastered many a trade.  
 They’ve beaten me and I have beaten [others].  
 They killed, I have killed.

46. Throughout the play, references are repeatedly made to the then official purification of the Croatian language against Serbisms.

47. ‘COMMISSAR: I know: *Faust* is a German play, but then again, Marx was German. We fought with Hitler, not with the German people’ (‘The Croatian Faust’, p. 220).

48. Čale Feldman also offers an ontological interpretation of this moment. Having once refused to play Faust, Afrić appears to be ‘condemned to carry the damnation of his [character’s] dilemma, as the new authorities commission the same play. If a return to his real self – the self of an actor – inevitably results in an ideological slavery, then the theatre as a site of freedom is impossible.’ (*Teatar u teatru*, p. 307).

They've sliced open my uterus. They took my breath and progeny.  
 I'm not certain whether I am the exact same goose I was at the beginning.  
 What was in the Beginning?  
 The Word? The Deed? The Will?  
 ...  
 Where is the land of my unborn children?  
*The roar of the oncoming tanks.*  
 When will the dawn break?  
*Snow.*  
 Upright, I walk my question.  
 I say 'yes' to this youthful madness.  
 I age.  
 I feel very [cold].  
*Faust/Margaret/Mephistopheles stares into the snow which falls more and more densely. It covers the fallen stalagtite [sic] without inscription.*<sup>49</sup>

49. Šnajder, 'The Croatian Faust', p. 221.

While illustrative of the author's 'metaphysical' approach to his playwriting, the ending has inevitably posed an interpretive and a practical staging challenge to directors as well as critics whose perspectives are explored in greater detail below. Meanwhile, in his Preface, Šnajder proposes that the play should be read precisely from the end, signalling that it may hold a key to the interpretation of the play as a whole:

Is it not the case that *a certain* philosophy claims that all of history is brought to an end, and is it not the case that thus *all* its dramas have finished? The play finishes with an image: a field on a winter's day, maybe at the time of socialism in its youthful madness, covered in snow which erases the difference, but also prevents new growth from total freezing.<sup>50</sup>

50. Šnajder, *Hrvatski Faust*, p. 7.

However ambiguous, Šnajder's standpoint is at least that of cautious questioning in relation to Marxism and the Yugoslav revolution. By focusing on a factual event in the staging of a fictional story he places an emphasis on action rather than the theme. Having shown that a work of fiction can be used for 'repressive ends' he also indicates that ideologies – whether left or right – can end up using the same text for their own purposes. It is possible that he was also pointing to the fact that both ideologies to which his two Fausts – partisan Afrić and Ustasha Žanko – subscribed ended up being equally repressive.<sup>51</sup> In any case, *The Croatian Faust* is an instance of a playwright using a self-sufficient 'heterocosm' to justify his intention, and once again this 'heterocosm' remains open to interpretation. However, unlike the inner play, which has a non-culture-specific value and can thus be translated into any context, the outer play is a 'heterocosm' which also provides a very specific context. The audience is then invited to deliberate its own understanding of the issues raised.

As already noted, Šnajder cautiously avoids making statements by raising seemingly rhetorical questions, deflecting potential criticism and concentrating on the predominantly abstract concerns. For example, in his Preface he wonders what kind of knowledge Faust would wish for 'today' – when the Faustian kind of knowledge 'is inadequate for "an

51. A few years later, young playwright Nenad Prokić would indeed assert this analogy between fascism and communism in his debut *The Metastable Grail*.

52. Šnajder, *Hrvatski Faust*, p. 8.

electronic processing of data”<sup>52</sup> Yet, in a final word of pre-emptive defence, he concludes:

It is not simply that there is no desire to explain the whole world and its history out of what is nevertheless a limited entity like a nation, but quite the opposite. Sometimes attempts are made here to explain things from the point of view of history as a whole. *Faust* liberated some of its participants and then they liberated it. *The Croatian Faust* takes into account that it might be read both from an emancipated and an emancipatory point of view. I believe that it will be understood that *The Croatian Faust* does not contain any unheroic or anti-cultural speeches. This drama of hate bears a message of love.<sup>53</sup>

53. Cited in Marjanović, ‘Slobodan Šnajder’, p. 224.

Thus the ultimate question which the play poses, in both its content and form – the latter assuming the emancipatory power of metafiction as noted by Hutcheon – is the question of freedom.

### Original Critical Responses to *The Croatian Faust*

54. László Végel, ‘Lyricism, myth, history (On the directing poetics of Slobodan Unkovski)’, trans. by Ilona Nemeth-Jacobs, *Scena: Theatre Arts Review*, 9 (1986), 181–84 (pp. 183–84).

55. Stamenković, *Pozorište u dramatisovanom društvu*, p. 140.

56. Klaić (‘Obsessed with Politics’, p. 14) notes that Afrić was only involved in making the first Yugoslav postwar film – *Slavica* – and then went on to teach theatre direction. Extracts from this film feature in Unkovski’s production.

57. The very ending, where Manojlović shoots at his own image on the screen, thus acquires yet another level of self-reflexivity.

Directed by one of the leading Yugoslav directors, Slobodan Unkovski, the Yugoslav Drama Theatre’s 1982 production of *The Croatian Faust* was hailed as a theatrical masterpiece at the time. In an essay on Unkovski’s poetics, László Végel reads his direction of this play as an attempt at tackling national mythomania, summing it up – in a paraphrase of Barthes’s claim that ‘myth is the free speech of politics’ – as a ‘poetics of neomythologisation’ which leads to a kind of dystopia.<sup>54</sup> Svetislav Jovanov (1982), meanwhile, emphasises the way in which Unkovski’s interventions with the play evoked Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Quite rightly, he sees the performance of Goethe’s *Faust* at the beginning of Act Two as a ‘Mousetrap’ scene, and identifies the Commissar’s attempt at putting a case to Afrić for a new Faust at the end of the play as a paraphrase of Hamlet’s speech to the actors. Unkovski’s most significant decisions, highlighted by most of the critics, included positioning of the inner play’s audience on the stage opposite the real audience (‘thus emphasising’, according to Stamenković,<sup>55</sup> ‘that theatre is a world and that the world is a theatre’), the set’s ceiling consisting of plastic tubes which gradually fill up with blood, and a cinematic intervention at the end of the play – a montage of footage featuring the actor Vjekoslav Afrić<sup>56</sup> as well as the films of Predrag Manojlović,<sup>57</sup> the actor playing Afrić here. The montage replaced the final scene of ‘the transcendental triad’ as well as the reference to ‘youthful madness’.

Opinions were divided particularly on the point of the rewritten ending, which also features a rather radical interpretive statement whereby actor Predrag Manojlović shoots at his own image on the screen.

Marjanović offers an overview of the responses to the play, which range from Stamenković’s view of the ending as an anticlimax caused by an alienation through the use of a ‘colder medium’, to Ćirilov’s mixed

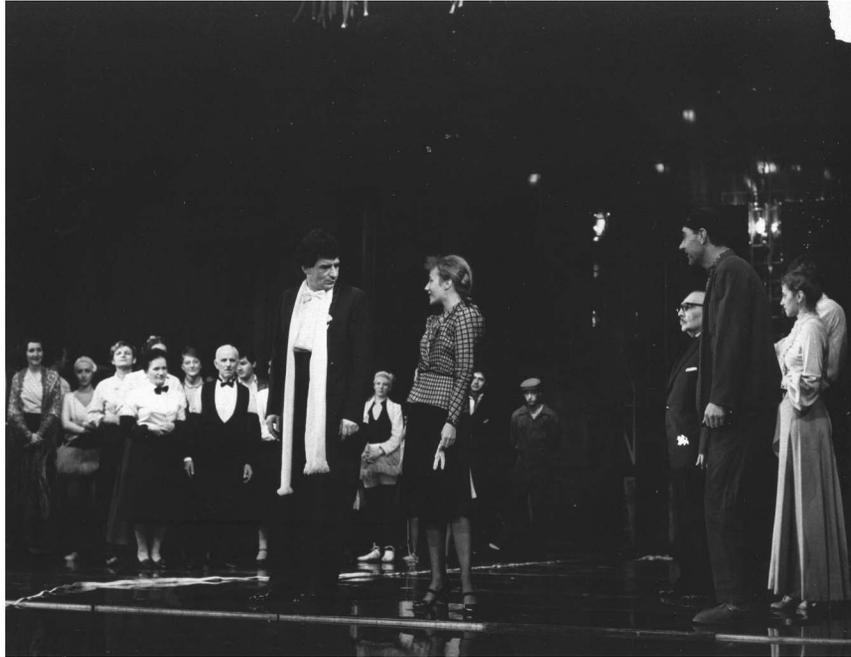


Image 1 Yugoslav Drama Theatre production (1982) directed by Slobodan Unkovski. Courtesy of Jelena Kovačević, archive of the Yugoslav Drama Theatre, Belgrade.

58. Marjanović, 'Slobodan Šnajder', p. 226.

59. Ibid.

60. According to a recent article by Klaić, Popović was a kind of critic who actively 'attempted to project himself as a combination of a political authority and a theatre expert, often coming across as an aesthetic conservative and an ideological dogmatist'. Dragan Klaić, 'Pozorje na kraju ili na početku puta?' (2005), <http://www.pozorje.org.yu/scena/scena-teatron/11.htm> [accessed 14 October 2007], (para 4 of 8).

appreciation of the play's apparent alignment with the 1960s avant-garde while considering the film finale an 'unnecessary' distraction from the potential impact of the final monologue ending with the words 'I am very cold'.<sup>58</sup> However, Marjanović concludes his overview with a retrospective comment on the levels of freedom of critical and artistic expression at the time of the play's premiere three years previously, thus highlighting a particular paradox achieved by the production whereby the fiction spoke for itself more loudly than the critics dared to acknowledge:

Most critics did not dare to attempt a more detailed interpretation of the 'film finale', which represents the sharpest critique of postwar Yugoslav society ever seen on the Yugoslav stage, so the performance of this play can be regarded as an illustration of just how much artistic freedom [there is in contemporary Yugoslav theatre].<sup>59</sup>

In contrast, a more conservative critic Dušan Popović<sup>60</sup> has a categorically and discursively different view that clearly engages with the political rather than the aesthetic effect of the final scene. Looking at both Varaždin and the Belgrade productions as shown at the Sterija Theatre Festival, which awarded the play its top prize, Popović himself inadvertently highlights the way in which the text's openness allows a variety of interpretations. He interprets the ending of the play as meaning that the young Commissar represents the Stalinist, pre-1948 version of Yugoslav socialism, of which the mature Afrić is apprehensive, and calls it 'the madness of youth'. While comparatively analysing the directorial

treatment of ‘moral reality’ in the two productions, Popović raises issues with Unkovski’s treatment in line with the official ideology and through the use of the appropriate jargon:

Can the artist, actor, fighter and communist Vjeko Afrić, who to the end of his life was true to his partisan sympathies as an artist and man and who remained firmly committed to the self-managing development of the Yugoslav socialist revolution, can such a man be shown as a confused intellectual sceptic who, feeling himself deceived in the victory of 1945 because of his own revolutionary choice in the war, fires in his own disappointment at his own image as a fighter? Yugoslav society cannot permit the historical figures of the Yugoslav revolution to become the target of dealers in dead souls, who can no longer defend themselves, nor the butt of speculations that attempt to transform the shape and character of the revolution into a parade of opposing flags.<sup>61</sup>

This quaintly evocative account might go at least some way in explaining why much of the political drama of the 1980s still left Klaić dissatisfied and frustrated in 1986.

It is also significant here that Serbo-Croatian Second World War hostility is openly treated by the playwright, albeit ironically.<sup>62</sup> Whether or not the breaking of this postwar taboo in the theatre context in any way led to the events of the early 1990s in the former Yugoslavia is not clear. In any case, Šnajder’s play was the first significant attempt at tackling the phenomenon of national mythomania, which had inspired Yugoslav theatre ever since its inception. The play, therefore, addresses the national taste for myths and the rewriting of history – confronting the audience with an ‘unpleasant’ version of this trend. Or, as Dalibor Foretić proposes:

Šnajder discovers a common Croatian variation of the [Faust] motif, whereby a peasant sells to the devil a piece of bloodied flesh in exchange for happiness and a peaceful life . . . Starting from historical fact, Šnajder, in his poetic inspiration, charts the process of the [devil] billing [the peasants] for that blood.<sup>63</sup>

Ingeniously, by incorporating this trend into a metatheatrical framework, the playwright manages to elevate the play to a wider level of significance than is usually found in the dramatic output of the region and thereby creates points of accessibility to the text even outside the borders of Yugoslavia, which would eventually lead to several productions of the play in the German language. The line ‘Father, deliver me from Serbian heroism and Croatian culture’, however, retains an inwardly sinister tone, which obviously continued to ring true to the end of the twentieth century.

## Conclusion

Šnajder’s gradual return to Croatia from his exile in Germany started in 2000, following the elections in which Stjepan Mesić, formerly the last

61. Dušan Popović, ‘Sterijino Pozorje 1983–1985’, trans. by Andrew Barfield, *Scena: Theatre Arts Review*, 9 (1986), 58–71 (p. 63).

62. The Serb playwright Jovan Radulović’s *Golubnjača*, which also dealt with the Ustasha persecution of Serbs from children’s perspectives, had indeed provoked controversy a year before. In 1982 Dejan Mijač’s production at the Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad led to further troubles.

63. Foretić, *Nova Drama*, pp. 116–17.



Image 2 Theater an der Ruhr, Mülheim production (1987) directed by Roberto Ciulli. Courtesy of Aleksandar Milosavljevic.

president of Socialist Yugoslavia, was elected President of the Republic of Croatia. In April that year Šnajder gave an interview to the Belgrade weekly *Vreme* in which he reflected on a number of personal issues and political topics. In it, he denounced the local obsession with the cult of

64. Valentina Delić, 'Odluka za život', (Interview with Slobodan Šnajder), *Vreme*, 486 (29 April 2000), [http://www.vreme.com/arhiva\\_html/486/16.html](http://www.vreme.com/arhiva_html/486/16.html) [accessed 18 March 2007].

the hero by paraphrasing Brecht in saying that 'the symptom of an unhappy state is not an absence of heroes but a necessity for them'.<sup>64</sup> However, he makes an exception here for Tito and his movement – implying that this was indeed necessary for the good of the region. In retrospect, he sees his play *The Croatian Faust* as being an encapsulation of the question of what actually happened with the positive energy of the partisan movement in 1941 and why it was wrongly invested following the end of the war. The consequent failure to 'open out everything fully, to count out the dead, to see exactly who is who' is, according to Šnajder, part of the explanation as to why everything unfolded the way it did:

That whole moral capital brought in from the forests was squandered foolishly, but when you look at the period 1941–45, it seems that the right choice was made then, whatever happened later with that choice and those people. How they later changed their coats, how they accommodated themselves, how they lied about their own achievements – that's a different question. But had it not been for the 1941 communists, Croats and Serbs would have killed each other off to the last. And there would have been no one left here for the gentlemen like Tadjman and Milošević to build their empires on.<sup>65</sup>

65. *Ibid.*, para 5 of 15.

Although forming part of what might be recognised as the growing phenomenon of Yugo-nostalgia – not dissimilar to the German Ostalgia – Šnajder's view would probably be considered overly idealistic or maybe even unpopular by the standards of a lot of Serbs or Croats who continued to live in their respective states throughout the recent wars. Even in the eyes of some independent commentators and writers about the region, such enthusiasm for Titoism – however benign and fruitful it might have seemed – is not always fully shared. Writing about the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Silber and Little (1996) note that throughout his rule Tito worked to prevent his state from falling under the hegemony of the Serbs, who were the biggest nation in the region and twice as numerous as the second biggest, the Croats:

Successive post-war constitutions were designed to balance institutional power between the republics, as a way of spreading power among the nations . . . . By the time of the promulgation of the 1974 constitution (Tito's last), the country was decentralised to an unprecedented extent.<sup>66</sup>

66. Laura Silber and Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia* (London: Penguin Books, 1996) p. 29. In addition, they claim, Tito was particularly stringent when it came to any manifestation of nationalism and carried out purges as a means of enforcing his doctrine of 'Brotherhood and Unity'. To his credit, however, nationalists were mainly forced into exile where 'they nurtured their resentment in expatriate communities that proved fertile breeding grounds for extreme nationalism' (*ibid.*).

Yugoslavian post-Second World War multiculturalism rested on active suppression of the nationalist feelings incited during the war itself. The internal borders were also redrawn with this in mind so as to defuse ethnic concentration in particular republics. This affected the Serbs more acutely than other ethnic groups and in the aftermath of the 1974 decentralisation they found themselves to be a minority in a lot of other republics as well as in the newly formed Autonomous Province of Kosovo. After Tito's death, these resentments, provoked in part by the escalating Albanian movement for independence, the economic crises of

67. However, many in the West were unable to understand the particular political and interethnic complexities of the Yugoslavian state following the end of socialism as a viable political system, as observed by Silber and Little: 'After the collapse of the Warsaw pact, Yugoslavia lost its strategic importance to Washington. Preoccupied with the Gulf war, and the future of the disintegrating Soviet Union, the US left the handling of the conflict to the European Community, which proved lamentably incompetent.' Silber and Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, p. 29.

68. Christian-Muslim marital unions particularly proliferated in Bosnia.

69. Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 10.

the 1980s and the demise of socialism as an ideology, led to an explosion of nationalist movements and subsequent territorial wars.<sup>67</sup>

Despite this, the Yugoslav years had created a Yugoslav identity. Inter-marriage between various ethnic groups and religions<sup>68</sup> was not a rarity, and a lot of the 'ethnically pure' nationals declared themselves as 'Yugoslavs' rather than anything else. Rather illuminating in relation to this is Andrew Baruch Wachtel's charting of the idea of Yugoslavism from its origins in the German Romanticism of the 1830s and 1840s, to the modernist multicultural model of the early twentieth century, the early socialist supernational model and the multinational policy of the 1960s onwards. Wachtel contends:

It is possible that Yugoslavia could have survived as a multinational state had its leaders moved to a multinational cultural policy while simultaneously democratizing the country and transforming the basis of Yugoslav identity to an individualistic-libertarian model. But this would have entailed a cultural shift of monumental proportions, and it was not attempted in Yugoslavia. As more and more people saw themselves with less and less of a connection to people outside of their own ethnic group, the possibilities for economic and political compromise diminished.<sup>69</sup>

Once again, this very clearly recalls Freud's own observations about group behaviour and patterns of unification and separation. The 'cultural shift of monumental proportions' could have led to a genuine democratic pluralism. Instead, the country's existing socioeconomic, political and geographical organisation led particular groups to feel under threat and the nationalist 'sentiment' was conveniently recruited by the ruling or aspiring elite in their bid for power.

The apparently unanimous audience reaction to the line 'Father, deliver me from Serbian heroism and Croatian culture', cited by Foretić, is a moment deeply symptomatic of a narcissistic audience – the audience applauding its own image on the stage. In a further frame within the frame, the image they were applauding was that of ethnic narcissism. Arguably, this kind of audience expectation is rooted in a culture which bases itself on self-preservational modes of celebration of history and mythology. We must not forget that, due to centuries of subjugation to foreign rule, cultural practices among the Balkan people had as their main function the notion of cultural memory and self-perpetuation.

Metatheatre denies its audience the authority of the playwright's vision and any single interpretation of a given play. In terms of the genesis of the trend in the former Yugoslavia, playwrights sought to subvert the existing power structures within a society in the grip of an ideology – as in the case of Šnajder's *The Croatian Faust*. Here, metatheatre becomes a convenient means of viewing the given context from the point of view of theatre, whereby the inner theatre becomes a safe metaphor for the political context itself. A more significant consequence of this trend is the potential empowerment of the reader/audience member, as suggested by Hutcheon, while an unanticipated positive consequence of it was also the accessibility of these plays to audiences outside the country. As the

70. Hutcheon,  
*Narcissistic  
Narrative*, p. 1.
71. The author wishes to thank Lorna Fitzsimmons for inspiration and some editorial suggestions in preparing a version of this paper for a different kind of publication. Many thanks also to Una Bauer for her editorial support in preparing this article for current publication.

theatre tradition of the South Slavs was initially strongly influenced by culture-specific myths and political concerns, rarely ever venturing into examining widely accessible issues and narratives – with some notable exceptions including Marin Držić and Miroslav Krleža on the Croatian side and Jovan Sterija Popović and Branislav Nušić on the Serbian side – metatheatre served as a significant means by which to fuse the abstract and the specific and gain international attention without having to resort to footnotes.

Ultimately, a metaplay such as Šnajder's *The Croatian Faust* – which wades through the underworld of history in order to reinvent itself as a luminous contemporary classic – is an additional illustration of Hutcheon's point<sup>70</sup> via Ovid that although ultimately self-destructive, 'Narcissus continued to live on in two forms – in the underworld, as well as, in a different form, as a flower'.<sup>71</sup>