DRAMATIC REPRESENTATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY TERROR
GENRES OF (POST)MODERN TRAGIC THEATRE?

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INTRODUCTION

According to 20th-century death-of-tragedy theorists like George Steiner, Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Northrop Frye, tragedies are unfit for today's world because the chaotic world of today is not able to produce a true tragic hero anymore. Does this mean that terror, violence and tragic events such as depictions of war, rape or any other form of suffering have completely disappeared from the modern stage? No. This paper shows that mass as well as individual tragedy is very much present on the stages of contemporary theatre, but in genres different than the traditional tragedy and with protagonists different than traditional or classic tragic heroes. Furthermore, the main question dealt with in this paper is in what way the (post)modern theatre represents terror and violence on stage.

For the purposes of this paper, it is necessary to first clarify that the notion of tragedy will be used to describe events of exertion of violence and/or terrorism upon the innocent, be it an individual or the masses, and not in terms of an Aristotelian defini-
tication of tragedy. Since the author of the paper agrees only partially with the Greek definition of tragedy as a form of theatre art not intended to make the audience laugh, and generally with the claims of some theorists that every great (post)modern play dealing with universal problems of man could be called a tragedy.

If we are to believe Albert Camus, tragedy has, since its beginnings, undergone only two major golden ages: the antiquity and the age of French classicism. Camus claims that our time is extremely interesting and thus tragic. The reason for the existence of only two golden eras of tragedy, Camus, among others, sees in the fact that tragedy is formed on the breaking points of the development of human civilization, mainly in the West, when Man wants to separate from an old world order and transcend into a new one, which is for him still undefined. Obviously, Camus identifies the contemporary world as such a turning point. Moreover, he claims that our epoch overlaps with the drama of civilization, which might, as it did a long time ago, trigger tragic expression.

Much like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Camus categorically differentiates tragedy from drama and melodrama, where in tragedies the forces that are in conflict are equally in the right and are equally reasonable, while, on the other hand, in (melodrama) only one party is right. As examples, he provides Greek tragedies Antigone and Prometheus, where both Antigone and Prometheus are in the right just as much as their antagonists, Creon and Zeus. So what triggers the creation of all elements and the combination of them which results in a tragedy? According to Camus, tragedy is formed in a moment when a man out of arrogance (or even stupidity, like Ajax) comes in conflict with the divine order and harmony incorporated either in gods or in the society. The tragedy will then be much greater, if this mutiny is justified, and the order necessary. This often occurs in the West, when the civilization’s pendulum is situated halfway between the divine society and the society that surrounds Man.

Similar thoughts can be found in Jonathan Dollimore’s Radical Tragedy, where he says that tragedy often appears in borderline areas or cracks between the profane and the religious society or between collective and individual identity.

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1 For example, Jovan Hristić.
3 Camus, “O budućnosti tragedije,” 268.
4 Camus, “O budućnosti tragedije,” 269.
5 Camus, “O budućnosti tragedije,” 270.
Furthermore, Jovan Hristić in his essay *The Problem of Tragedy (Problem tragedije)* defines tragedy as a dramatic form, whose greatness is defined by the significance of its topic. Let us elaborate on that: Hristić claims that the Greeks considered all those forms which did not intend to make the audience laugh to be tragedies. Thus, today we might label a tragedy even those forms which we usually refer to as “serious drama” or “drama in the narrow sense.” This is why it is possible to agree with Hristić’s conclusion that tragedy is a synonym for every great drama. The notion of literary greatness is defined by the criteria of topic, i.e. whether the play in question deals with the most basic and universal questions of humanity in a certain time, and values such as the truth and meaning of life. Can we, thus, like Steiner and Frye truly confirm and claim that tragedy and tragic expressions have disappeared from 20th-century theatre, or will we be able to establish that it has merely altered form and/or genre?

Tragedies are forms usually associated with depictions of violence and the demise of heroes. In Greek and classical tragedy (both German and French) these heroes were often individuals singled out by fate or destiny, gods, heritage, family lines etc., but since we are focusing on the present, a period in which the globalization process, the problem of over-population and loss of individuality and true values have caused the society and the world to become a place of everyday conflict and exertion of violence and/or terrorism of unprecedented enormity, this paper will discuss depictions of mass violence, directly or indirectly affecting the common man. This study looks at various examples of genres like documentary theatre, tragic comedy and drama in the narrow sense, showing some of the ways that 20th-century playwrights deal with these issues of terror(ism) and violence. Peter Weiss’ *The Investigation* is a piece of documentary theatre and uses original transcripts from the Auschwitz process after the Second World War in the form of an “Oratorio in 11 Cantos” to depict its terrible events.

Moreover, Chris Thorpe’s *Safety*, a play the author of the paper will label as poetic or lyrical theatre, shows how the terrors of war influence individuals who are indirectly connected with tragic events. This will be shown through the character of Michael, who is a well-known photographer specializing in war zones.

Finally, Henry Adam’s play *The People Next Door* was, however, triggered by the events on 9/11 showing, in the form of a tragic comedy, the paranoid climate towards

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all Muslims and the way individuals on both affected sides had to deal with tragic events thereafter. This Edinburgh Fringe Festival hit is a tragic comedy about isolation, trust and persecution in the aftermath of the Twin Towers.

TRAGEDY AND THE PRESENT

As mentioned in the introduction, Dürrenmatt says that even if our world could produce an individual tragic hero, it has been rationalized to such a degree that the hero would not survive or be successful for long. Similarly to George Steiner and Northrop Frye, he explains that instead of tragedy, a more modern version should exist in the form of tragic comedy — a mixture of tragedy and comedy, which in Dürrenmatt’s works has an inevitable nuance of the grotesque.

Dürrenmatt himself explains the impossibility of existence of heroes in contemporary art:

The world today as it appears to us can hardly be encompassed in the form of the historical drama as Schiller wrote it, for the simple reason that we no longer have any tragic heroes, but only vast tragedies staged by world butchers and produced by slaughtering machines. Hitler and Stalin cannot be made into Wallensteins. Their power was so enormous that they themselves were no more than incidental, corporeal, and easily replaceable expressions of this power; and the misfortune associated with the former and to a considerable extent also with the latter too vast, too complex, too horrible, too mechanical, and usually simply too devoid of all sense. Wallenstein’s power can still be envisioned; power as we know it today can only be seen in its smallest part for, like an iceberg, the largest part is submerged in anonymity and abstraction. (...) There are no true representatives, and the tragic heroes are nameless. Any small-time crook, petty government official or policeman better represents our world than a senator or president. Today art can only embrace the victims, if it can reach men at all; it can no longer come close to mighty.  

In the 1950s at approximately the same time as Dürrenmatt, George Steiner writes his *Death of Tragedy* where he argues that rationalism and a world without the presence of God has led to the disappearance of the tragic art form. He claims that “[...] tragedy is that form of art which requires the intolerable burden of God’s presence. It is now dead because His shadow no longer falls upon us as it fell on Agamemnon or Macbeth or Athalie.”\(^8\) Towards the end of the book though, he admits that the possibility of tragedy today does exist, but in a different form; “perhaps tragedy has merely altered in style and convention.”\(^9\)

It was also in the mid-20\(^{th}\) century when Northrop Frye in his first essay in *The Anatomy of Criticism* categorizes protagonists in fictional literature, not according to their moral, but according to their power of taking action. The fifth category or mode is the ironic mode, where the hero is weaker than we are considering his power and/or intelligence, and we see him in a state of captivity, frustration or absurdity. According to Frye, literature of the last 100 years or so has a particular tendency towards the ironic mode.\(^10\) Consequently, we can argue that the power of today’s hero or protagonist to (re)act has changed; the magnitude of his actions has been reduced in size and the scope of tragedy has been dwarfed to anonymity.

The second half of the 20\(^{th}\)-century’s theatre has, after a number of –*isms* in its first half (realism, naturalism, expressionism, symbolism), fostered several major movements, among which the most notable ones are the theatre of the absurd, Brecht’s epic theatre, Artaud’s theatre of cruelty\(^11\) and many more. It was the horrors of the Second World War that produced a sense of complete meaninglessness among mankind, best expressed through abandoning traditional dramatic devices, such as logical plot development or meaningful dialogue. Another consequence becomes obvious

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\(^8\) George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 353.

\(^9\) Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, 353.


\(^11\) It is the term theatre of cruelty which seems to put across a sense of violence or terror, but its creator, Antonin Artaud, had something completely different in mind. This theatre of cruelty advocates “neither sadism nor bloodshed, at least not in any exclusive way” (Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double* [New York: Grove Press, 1958], 101) but an attack on the audience’s expectations and subconscious with spectacle, symbolic gestures, ritual movement, sounds, inarticulate cries, and with as few words as possible, since he was convinced that words are incapable of expressing certain attitudes and feelings and that these can be revealed only through gestures or sound, often accompanied by explicit graphics.
when one takes a look at the characters who have become helpless creatures, left at the mercy of uncontrollable and inscrutable forces by the absurdist playwrights in their attempts to try to convey humanity’s feelings of utter despair and alienation. Even though the 20th century was a century of utmost terror, apart from, according to some, the passing trend of in-yer-face theatre which was very much present during the 1990s and especially on the British stages and advocated by playwrights, such as Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, the violence and terror in 20th-century theatre were usually only reported and rarely explicitly shown on stage.

In addition to the in-yer-face theatre in the 1990s, a much broader stream appearing in the period between the 1970s and 1990s has been identified and defined by Hans-Thies Lehmann as postdramatic theatre, a theatre after drama. This postdramatic theatre presupposes that the concept of drama remains solely as a latently prescribed idea of theatre. This new theatre is characterized by the lack of a logical plot and coherent text instead of which intermediality and images appear regularly. There are no identifiable characters or dramatic collisions of values as in the 'dramatic theatre'. Text becomes more of a presence than a representation, more of a shared experience by the author, actors and the audience that a means of representing the plot; the hero/character is reduced to a mere body and the borders between space and time, illusion and reality disappear.

This paper deals with quite opposite forms of representations of violence and terror in drama than Lehmann’s postdramatic theatre or the theatre known as in-yr-face theatre. It shows that amidst all of the turmoil of the second half of the 20th century

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12 See: Sanja Nikčević, Nova europska drama ili velika obmana (Zagreb: Meandar, 2005).
13 A term coined by Aleks Sierz, see his In-Yer-Face Theatre (London: Faber and Faber, 2001).
14 During the period of the in-yr-face phenomenon, which was especially keen on covering taboocado topics such as parent-child murder, incest, explicit homosexual and heterosexual sex, the stages were filled with blood, semen, guts, guns and knives, severed body parts, raped and violated men and women, and it was, and with some critics still is, considered high art. The trend emerged and was accepted all over Europe and even the US as the new form of drama, especially among young playwrights and directors (Thomas Ostermeier, Marius von Mayenburg, Jon Fosse etc), but it seems to have passed quickly, not having established itself as a stable genre with the audience. In-yr-face theatre is, even though it was a short-term craze, a very controversial issue, praised by some, rejected by others — both critics and audiences. It is exactly because of this controversy that it should be discussed in a separate paper, and will here only be mentioned sporadically in comparison to the genres investigated in this paper.
15 Hans-Thies Lehmann, Postdramatsko kazalište (Zagreb—Beograd: Centar za dramsku umjetnost i Centar za teoriju i praksi izvođačkih umjetnosti, 2004), 42.
the theatre still reaches to and returns to the emotive and the cathartic and there are still theatrical forms that beckon the audience to sympathize, to re-live what the victims had experienced without the explicit scenes of violence. The genres in question are documentary or verbatim theatre, drama in the narrow sense and tragic comedy. These forms contain depictions of violence and terror shown through narration and language, but directly affecting the protagonists and their lives, depicting “pure cruelty, [but] without bodily laceration.”

According to Terry Eagleton, “the human history includes the history of the body, which in respect of physical suffering has probably changed little over the centuries” and “because we share a form of material body, in other words, conflict is built into our existence.” And conflict causes violence and tragedy. “All tragedies are specific” and “they have no shared essence other than the fact of suffering,” he continues, from which we may draw the conclusion that tragedy, violence and terror are inherent to mankind with the difference of the way people deal with it. The question raised in this paper is: in what way does the (post)modern theatre deal with it?

One trend or genre encompasses plays of violence reported by the victims themselves and includes verbatim or documentary theatre plays, such as Peter Weiss’ The Investigation / Die Ermittlung, Nicholas Kent’s Srebrenica, Terence O’Connel’s Minefields and Miniskirts and dramas in the narrow sense (such as Lydia Scheuermann Hodak’s Marias Pictures). The other trend includes plays showing by-standers directly affected by mass tragedies and causing private tragedies on a personal level (family tragedy, social exclusion etc.), such as Henry Adam’s The People Next Door or Mate 16

18 Ibid., Sweet Violence: the Idea of the Tragic, xv.
19 Ibid., Sweet Violence: the Idea of the Tragic, xvi.
20 Ibid.
21 The term postmodernism applies to the period after World War II (1939—1945) and refers to the countertraditional experiments and tendencies to strive away from modernist, conventional, mainstream forms. Postmodernists also attempt to „overthrow the elitism of modernist ‘high art’ by recourse to the models of ‘mass culture’ in film, television, newspaper cartoons, and popular music. Many of the works of postmodern literature — by Jorge Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, Thomas Pynchon, Roland Barthes, and many others — so blending literary genres, cultural and stylistic levels, the serious and the playful, that they resist classification according to traditional literary rubrics.” See: M. H. Abrams and G. G. Harpham, “Modernism and Postmodernism,” in M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 203.
Matišić’s *The Sons Die First* (*Sinovi umiru prvi*) as tragic comedies or Chris Thorpe’s *Safety* as a drama in the narrow sense or another example of poetic theatre.

These plays differ in form, structure, language, point of view, protagonists and their attitude towards power, politics and religion, but what they all have in common are violence and terror leading to mass and individual tragedy in the 20th century, depicted in different ways.

**DOCUMENTARY THEATRE**

The term ‘documentary theatre’ refers to dramatic representations of events or topics, whose script is based on the usage and incorporation of pre-existing documentary material (such as newspapers, government reports, trial records, interviews, etc). It should be distinguished from the term ‘verbatim theatre’, which is, according to Derek Paget’s article, “a form of documentary theatre firmly predicated upon the taping and subsequent transcription of the interviews with ordinary people, done in the context of research into a region, subject area, issue, event, or combination of these things. The primary source is then transformed into a text which is acted, usually by the performers who collected the material in the first place.”

Documentary theatre is, as the *in-yer-face theatre* trend, a topic for a separate research and it will only be presented for the purposes of this paper. Much more attention will be given to the analysis of a representative play. Documentary and verbatim plays started to appear in the 1960s and the most famous plays, among others, include: Peter Weiss’ *Marat/ Sade*, Richard Norton-Taylor’s *The Colour of Justice — The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*, Moises Kaufman’s *The Laramie Project* (and its sequel), Anne Deavere Smith’s *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*, Robin Soans’ *Talking to Terrorists* etc. The plays of interest for this particular paper are plays depicting mass tragedies as results of war, such as Nicholas Kent’s *Srebrenica*, based on the events in July 1995, when Bosnian-Serb forces took over the UN-protected enclave of Srebrenica and massacred about 8,000 people. Furthermore, there is Terence O’Connel’s *Minefields and Miniskirts* — a stage adaptation of Siobhan McHugh’s book (first published in 1993)

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about Australian women's role (as nurses, journalists, volunteers, but also of those who waited at home for their shattered husbands, fathers, brothers and sons to return home) in the Vietnam war, is based on oral history interviews with over 30 women. Their actual words make up ninety percent of the script for the dramatized version, also called *Minefields and Miniskirts*, but their interviews have been blended to make five composite fictionalized characters, who encountered adventure, but also abuse, romance and rape and carnage.

In this paper an example from German literature will be discussed, i.e. Peter Weiss’s *Investigation*. This is a piece of documentary theatre based on historical and legal documentation from the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt 1963—1965. The *dramatis personae* include nine witnesses, twenty-three defendants and three representatives of the court — a judge, a defence attorney and a prosecutor. Even though it is a representation of the trial process for the Auschwitz crimes, in *The Investigation* (written in 1965, at the time of the end of the Auschwitz process in Frankfurt), Weiss deliberately avoids staging and representing the concentration camps. Instead, his play is based on trial transcripts and includes a huge amount of purposeful editing and montage of text to create an atmosphere of trial which, through language, would merely evoke in the readers or audience the most horrific images of what had happened during the victims’ incarceration. The play has no stage directions whatsoever, not even the simplest instructions or descriptions of place or time; it is very static and quite long, with no scenery changes or stage movement. In spite of that, with this play and the rest of his oeuvre, Peter Weiss became a “chronicler of men’s and women’s suffering at the hands of their fellow men in the 20th century.”

The play is written in free verse thus creating distance from a mere re-enactment of a trial and contributing to its artistic value, making it a work of art, a *Kunstprodukt*, rather than a political play. Although the play is based on the Auschwitz trial, there is no ritual of court represented on stage, not even symbolically; as von Schilling puts it, it is only “ästhetische Klage,” an aesthetic prosecution. The statements the witnesses

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23 I refer to the witnesses as dramatis personae even though Weiss explicitly prescribes in the Anmerkung that his Zeugen are not to be considered *dramatis personae*.

24 Robert Cohen, *Understanding Peter Weiss* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 16.

give and the descriptions of physical and moral mutilation of the prisoners showing a horrifying spectrum of atrocities committed in Auschwitz are very graphic, but also give insight into the camp as a world of its own, with its own laws and hierarchy.

Guilt is not an issue in this play; there is no ritual of court, but rather a ritual for itself; as mentioned before, it is only “ästhetische Klage.” This ritual resembles a liturgical ceremony with various repetitions: the form of the play is symbolic and is based on Weiss’s study of Dante Alighieri’s *La Comedia Divina*, with its 11 oratorios, each divided into three parts, making a total of 33. The Aussage/Klage — Reflexion ritual is repeated in each part, creating a constant exchange between the long utterances of witnesses and short replies from the defendants, like a back-and-forth exchange of a chorus and protagonist in early Greek tragedy.

The victims, i.e. the witnesses have no names, just as they had lost them when they entered the camps and became merely numbers. They remain numbers in the play as well (with one exception of Lili Tofler) thus being reduced to practically mere voices, or “Sprechröhre”, as Weiss calls them in the Anmerkung. On the other hand, the defendants and perpetrators do have names, with which Weiss emphasizes the importance of individualizing guilt.

In many cases, the demise of many victims remains unrevealed, unspoken of and their death is often hidden behind vague phrases like “They’re just going to take a bath.” Phrases like these do not explicitly reveal what happened to the people the witnesses were separated from, devising for them a kind of universal destiny, which would remain the same for the majority of the prisoners of the camp.

Von Schilling describes “das Lager als Inbegriff des Grauens schlechthin beschrieben und erscheint als Welt und System jenseits von Recht, Humanität und jeglicher Zivilisation, in dem allenfalls überleben konnte, wer dessen Gesetze akzeptierte und sich zudem nicht selbst aufgab.”

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28 Von Schilling, *Die Gegenwart*, 64 (“the camp simply described as the embodiment of horror appears as a world and a system beyond justice, humanism and civilization, a place in which one could survive only if one accepted its laws and did not give up on oneself,” translated by S. Novak).
The play is stripped of even the simplest techniques of dramatization or stage directions; it is written to create a collage of images of violence the victims underwent the whole way “von der Rampe bis zu den Feueröfen” merely through language.

Alfons Söllner describes the almost therapeutic effect of the play; it is an attempt to come to terms with the monstrous past events, an attempt of the so-called Vergangenheitsbewältigung through aesthetics:

Die Wirkungsaesthetik der Ermittlung läßt sich in ihrem Kern als der Versuch beschreiben, eine Art kollektiver Psychoanalyse in Deutschland einzuleiten. Eine als falsch und vordergründig empfundene politische und gesellschaftliche Identität sollte durch Konfrontation mit dem Verdrängten aufgesprengt, ein Reflexionsprozess sollte eingeleitet werden, dessen erster Schritt in der Konfrontation mit einer monströsen Vergangenheit bestand. Ein zweiter schritt sollte in der Einsicht bestehen, dass es sich um eine Vergangenheit handelte, die man gar nicht ‚bewältigen‘ sondern immer nur präsent halten konnte. Die Perspektive der Opfer erschien dabei als der eigentliche Irritationsfaktor, den die Ermittlung mit allen Mitteln einer schockierenden Ästhetik festzuhalten versuchte.29

The play itself is not a tragedy in Aristotelian terms, but quite the opposite: it does not imitate a serious action, it narrates it; the language is not with pleasurable accessories, but rather vulgar and crude; the dramatis personae are not of great magnitude, but anonymous ordinary people, but it shows incidents that arouse pity and disgust nonetheless, wherewith the audience undergoes emotional changes, which could be called a catharsis.

29 Alfons Söllner, Peter Weiss und die Deutschen. Die Entstehung einer politischen Ästhetik wider die Verdrängung (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1988), 183 (“The aesthetics of effect can, in its core, be described as an attempt to introduce a kind of collective psychoanalysis in Germany. A false and superficial political and social identity should burst when confronted with the oppressed and a process of reflection should be introduced, with its first step being the confrontation with the monstrous past. Another step should comprise of the recognition that this past cannot be ‘overcome’ but only kept present. The perspective of victims occurs as the true trigger factor which, with all its means, attempts to retain the shocking aesthetics of the Investigation,” translated by S. Novak).
DRAMA IN THE NARROW SENSE

As opposed to the documentary or verbatim theatre, with Die Ermittlung as a representative example, there are a series of texts showing the atrocities of war in form of heart-warming plays dealing with individual sufferings, such as Lydia Schueermann Hodak’s Maria’s Pictures (Slike Marijine), a play about war rape and forgiveness of the victim and her mother, Mate Matišić’s Nobody’s Son (Ničiji sin) about the disappointment of soldiers after the war or Chris Thorpe’s Safety (2002) which will be discussed in this paper. Safety, much like Maria’s Pictures, is a play indirectly featuring the violence of war on the Balkans during the 1990s. Michael is a war photographer who had become so indifferent to seeing everyday suffering that he has lost the ability to react when his own daughter was drowning in the park. The play shows how his life crumbles under the burden of indirect exposure to violence, terror and suffering of fellow men all over the world.

The main protagonist Michael is a middle-aged man whose job is to travel all over the world and take photos of dead and/or mutilated bodies, blood, violence, ruined towns and villages. And he does a great job at it. But his job and the terrors he had seen have influenced his life to such a degree that it seems that he cannot feel anything anymore. His marriage is breaking up because he is always somewhere where there is a war; he is having an affair with a younger woman who aspires to become like him, which will inevitably ruin her as well; he cannot save his own daughter from drowning, but can only stand there and look at her flailing arms in the water and think about the light and the composition of the photo. As opposed to Weiss’s play, the protagonist here does not experience direct violence, but reports on it and it influences and ruins his life indirectly.

The scenes from his everyday life at home are intertwined with scenes from his trips to Bosnia in 1995, also creating a collage of images of violence and terror happening in some remote place clashing with images of everyday family events at home, reminding us that even when we are sitting and peacefully having dinner with our family or friends, “there is a war going on somewhere in the world, always, all the time.”

In comparison to Weiss’s play, the language in Thorpe’s play is characterized by shortness of utterances, a great number of pauses in speech, interruptions and quick

exchanges of words between characters, swearing and cursing. Its form and register symbolize modern communication, i.e. the lack thereof that often occurs among family members, spouses, lovers etc. when faced with everyday problems of the modern world.

His descriptions of what he had seen and photographed are also very graphic and vivid: “First assignment I ever had, the man standing next to me got shot and I didn’t even notice. You must have heard the phrase so many times. (...) I turned my head to say something to him and he was lying on his back, choking to death. Shot right through the windpipe. He just looked up at me, tried to breathe a couple of times and then just gave up on living.”\textsuperscript{31} The descriptions then progress in vividness, crudeness and detail as Michael reveals more and more episodes from wars:

He barely turned toward us. Didn’t get up to greet us as was customary in that part of the world. Seemed to have lost his enthusiasm. And his feet, which were lying at the side of the road about ten metres away. (...) I remember trying not to disturb the bloody grooves he’d left in the dust trying to escape from the sun. (...) If I could just get a shot where the truncated, shattered ankles sticking out of his trouser legs weren’t too obvious. Nothing too gory for the breakfast table. I squatted down in the dust. I got my shots. He was sweating, grey. He’d shat himself. He had flies in his beard. He was dying.\textsuperscript{32}

Similar to its concise language, the stage directions are also minimal.

When observed in its entirety, it is a rather conventional play in 21 scenes, with very simple plotting, very few characters (altogether 4), with a gradual build-up of suspense and a climactic scene, but in which not all problems are resolved, and there is no happy ending. Romantic conflicts are included and they are conventional and typical for the social context of the play; lack of communication between husband and wife, husband’s stressful job, his constant absence from the family home, his extramarital affair and the wife’s resentfulness and indifference have caused their family to become dysfunctional. The suspense is created by a slow revelation of details from Michael’s life, including his family life and his work assignments; the audience at first knows only that Michael is a celebrity, a famous war reporter. The trigger for his being in the focus of

\textsuperscript{31} Thorpe, \textit{Safety}, 12.
\textsuperscript{32} Thorpe, \textit{Safety}, 19.
the media is a recent event of his daughter’s near drowning. Luckily, she had been saved by a young man who was invited to dinner as a sign of gratitude. In the conversations with his wife Susan, the young man who had saved his daughter and the journalist Tanya, who would become his mistress, Michael is forced to unveil his personal tragedy.

Even though the play is about war, terror and violence, it is by no means a political play, but a tragedy of an individual by-stander, a witness to all the atrocities mankind is capable of committing towards fellow man, causing him to remain almost indifferent and completely detached when witnessing his daughter’s drowning: “SUSAN: There’s the same man, watching, because he doesn’t know what to do for a second. Whether to jump in and swim or take a fucking picture.”

If analysed as a tragedy, it can be concluded that Michael’s tragic flaw was his obsession with his work which led him to a state of emptiness and void of all emotions, causing him to almost let his daughter drown and in the end lose his family. And his hamartia is the accidental shooting of a boy who came at him one night in a godforsaken place plagued by war. In a final attempt to keep his wife, Michael suddenly admits: “SUSAN: (…) So I’m going to leave you to your awards and your dead boys and let you spend time in the places you really love. / MICHAEL: I killed him. (…)”. And then he took a photo of him.

TRAGIC COMEDY

Quite an opposite atmosphere than in the two previously discussed genres can be felt in the genre that seems to be quite popular with the audience, the tragic comedy. The reason for this might be found in the fact that today’s audience is in need of a mechanism to cope with the everyday terrors they hear about on the news, or even worse, the acts of terror and violence they have to live through. Examples of this genre are Davor Špišić’s Welcome to War, written in Croatia in 1992 soon after the war broke out, or Mate Matišić’s first part of The Post Mortem Trilogy entitled The Sons Die First on black market trade with corpses and remains from mass tombs on ex-Yugoslav ter-

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33 Thorpe, Safety, 63.
34 Thorpe, Safety, 73.
The example discussed in this paper is Henry Adam’s *The People Next Door* (2003), a tragic comedy triggered by the 9/11 events, but showing the echo of these events in the UK and the impact they had on the part of the population with slightly darker skin color.

The protagonist of this play is a mentally challenged young man of about 25 living off of welfare and doing drugs once in a while: he has no job, no family, no heritage or origin thus no future, no prospects of improvement. He is lost and in search of his own identity. Adam describes him as of a “mixed, indeterminate race”.\(^3^5\) A police officer one day asks him to go undercover into a mosque and spy on his half-brother who is under suspicion of terrorism. Nigel at first refuses but is bullied into it by the dirty police officer who is verbally and physically violent towards him, because of which Nigel’s young friend and neighbor Marco shoots him dead in the end.

As opposed to the two previously discussed plays, this one shows violence on stage; the police officer, whom Nigel ironically calls ‘super cop’ Phil, exerts physical and verbal violence on Nigel; he beats and bullies him into doing what he wants, threatens him with eviction and criminal prosecution, all of which has great effect on Nigel knowing how unstable he is.

The comedy within the tragedy is based on flirt with stereotypical characters, including an old nosy and busy-body cookoo woman, Mrs. Mac as Nigel’s neighbor, his young black friend Marco living in a single-parent family with his mom, whose promiscuity and frequent sexual encounters with strangers while Marco is in the next room will scar him for life, a Caucasian and corrupt representative of the law, Phil, who is constantly harassing Nigel, and lastly Nigel himself, who is ignorant of the world around him and likes it that way (he has not heard about the 9/11 events at all). An additional comic factor is the open exaggerated prejudice against the Moslem population after the tragedy of the Twin towers.

The cult of tragedy is closely associated with the cult of hero. And the main character in this play is a typical representation of a modern hero, whom Victor Brombert defines as characters who “do not conform to traditional models of heroic figures; they even stand in opposition to them.”\(^3^6\) Such is the case with Nigel as well. It is obvious

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that Adam here deliberately blurs the lines separating the heroic and antiheroic in order to create a multifaceted subversive (anti)hero with no nostalgia for heroic values whatsoever. According to Dürrenmatt, the contemporary times are times where it is impossible for individuals to express heroic values. It is a time when Creon’s secretaries and clerks resolve the case of Antigone, and not Creon himself,\(^{37}\) a time when the individual is lost in a world where political power has become so bureaucratic and mechanical that true tragic protagonists, let alone heroes, can arise. Nigel here, much like most of Dürrenmatt’s protagonists, seems to struggle futilely against the hardly visible bureaucratic power which does not allow heroic actions.

The language of the play is much more colorful and life-like than in the previous two plays: it is not as matter of fact as in Weiss’ play and much more elaborated than in Thorpe’s play, full of slang and colloquialisms, and swearing, to illustrate the status and level of education of the protagonists, but also to depict the verbal violence and abuse that goes on in the play.

Even though the play was triggered by the events of 9/11, there are no images of the event itself, only allusions to it; the play intends much more to show the effect this tragedy had on the lives of some innocent by-standers in the times of the aftermath, indirectly drawing them into the web of violence that was starting to spread around the world in concentric circles. Similarly to Thorpe’s play, it shows how mass tragedy indirectly caused probably thousands of individual tragedies that were unspoken of in the paranoid times of the 9/11 2001. In this case, it was depicted through the genre of tragic comedy.

As opposed to the two previous examples, in this play there are ample and detailed stage directions which include descriptions of rooms, detailed descriptions of the characters and their behaviour (posture, gesture, and articulation).

The comic elements of what could be described as comedy of character/comedy of situation/grotesque tragedy contribute to the hybridity of genres Dürrenmatt would call a tragic comedy and Frye an irony.

In comparison to the two previously discussed plays, Adam expresses his attitude towards politics, religion and exertion of power very openly, which is a very typical convention of comedy. By defining the character of the representative of the law as a

corrupt, dirty, drug-taking, Machiavellian brute and depicting his victim as a small, pitiful and retarded young Paki male who arouses sympathy from the audience, Adam appeals to the audience by re-introducing an affirmative ending of the play where good wins over evil, thus restoring hope in justice, but through a process in which he shows that terror and violence has in the long run an effect on mankind on a very large scale.

CONCLUSION

From Aristotle’s definition of tragedy as “the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions”\(^\text{38}\) we can conclude that our three death-of-tragedy theorists are right, to some extent. According to Steiner, the tragedy is dead. Dürrenmatt claims that there is no place for tragedy in contemporary theatre, only for (tragic) comedy. Frye identifies his modes according to the strength of the literary characters and according to him, ours is an age of the ironic mode, where the character is weaker than we are. Hans-Thies Lehmann writes about a new type of theatre, the *postdramatic theatre*, which encompasses completely new artistic and performing paradigms outside the scope of dramatic theatre. All of the above results in the conclusion that there is a systematic disappearance of tragedy in the 20\(^{th}\) century. But is tragedy really dead together with all the tragic themes and notions associated with tragedy (catharsis, tragic flaw, guilt, pathos)? The analysis of the three texts shows that tragedy is not dead. It has merely changed the nature of its characters, its form, structure, language and genre.

The heroes of today's tragedies are not great leaders, politicians, warlords etc., but nameless individuals, often victims of the ruthless political or social system, as shown in Weiss’, Adam’s and Thorpe’s play. In Weiss’ play, the audience sympathizes with the nameless victims, while judging the perpetrators. The fact that guilt needs to be ascribed to individuals with name and surname is also significant, resulting in personaliz-

ing guilt for war crimes and transforming the lengthened arms of the system into villains and anti-heroes, as Dürrenmatt would describe them. The same principle is also visible in Adam’s play and portrayed in the characters of the policeman acting as a criminal and Nigel, the simpleton, in the end finding the courage to step up against the bullying system, becoming the real hero of the play. Furthermore, in Thorpe’s play, Michael, the loser character, finds strength to carry on becoming what Dürrenmatt would call a “brave man” (der mutige Mensch).

The tragic events are not shown on stage, but rather only reported about, similarly as in the Greek drama and as opposed to shocking trends such as the in-yer-face theatre. In all of the discussed plays, the violence and terror is depicted through language by either the victims themselves as in Weiss’ play The Investigation, or by the bystanders indirectly affected by the violence as in Thorpe’s and Adam’s play. In the latter two, the outbursts of violence occasionally occur on the stage, e.g. when Nigel is beaten by the policeman or when Michael’s memories take us back to the time of war in Bosnia, but the violence and terror(ism) is mostly present only in the background.

On the other hand, the language is not pleasurable as in the Greek tragedies, but quite the opposite, it is sometimes very rude and explicit, bordering on vulgar and obscene, quite similar to the language of in-yer-face theatre.

The structures and forms of the plays vary from traditional form of a play divided into acts and using everyday language as in the case of Thorpe’s and Adam’s play to an innovative form of almost ritual like text / dialogue including choir-like utterances evoking Greek atmosphere and enhancing the tragedy feel of Weiss’ play.

As shown in the plays discussed here, the mass terror and violence, as unchanging anthropological facts about mankind, do not happen on stage, they are reported by the participants or they cause other individual tragedies on a smaller scale, but just as horrible for the affected direct or indirect protagonists. The plays discuss universal questions of mankind, such as the relationship between individuals, the relationship between an individual and society or the system (political, religious or any other), the attitude of the system or society towards an individual or the relationship between different systems. Furthermore, the plays deal with the questions of truth and value of each and every life as well as describe historic events familiar to all and can thus come quite close to modern-day tragedies.
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