

An International Online Theatre Studies Conference

26. - 27. 1. 2021

the days after

Through the Lens of Karel Čapek's Plays
R.U.R. and **The White Plague**: Ethical Dilemmas of Industrial and Post-industrial Societies in 20th and 21st Century Theatre



100th anniversary

25 January 2021 marks the 100th anniversary R.U.R.'s premiere at the National Theatre in Prague.

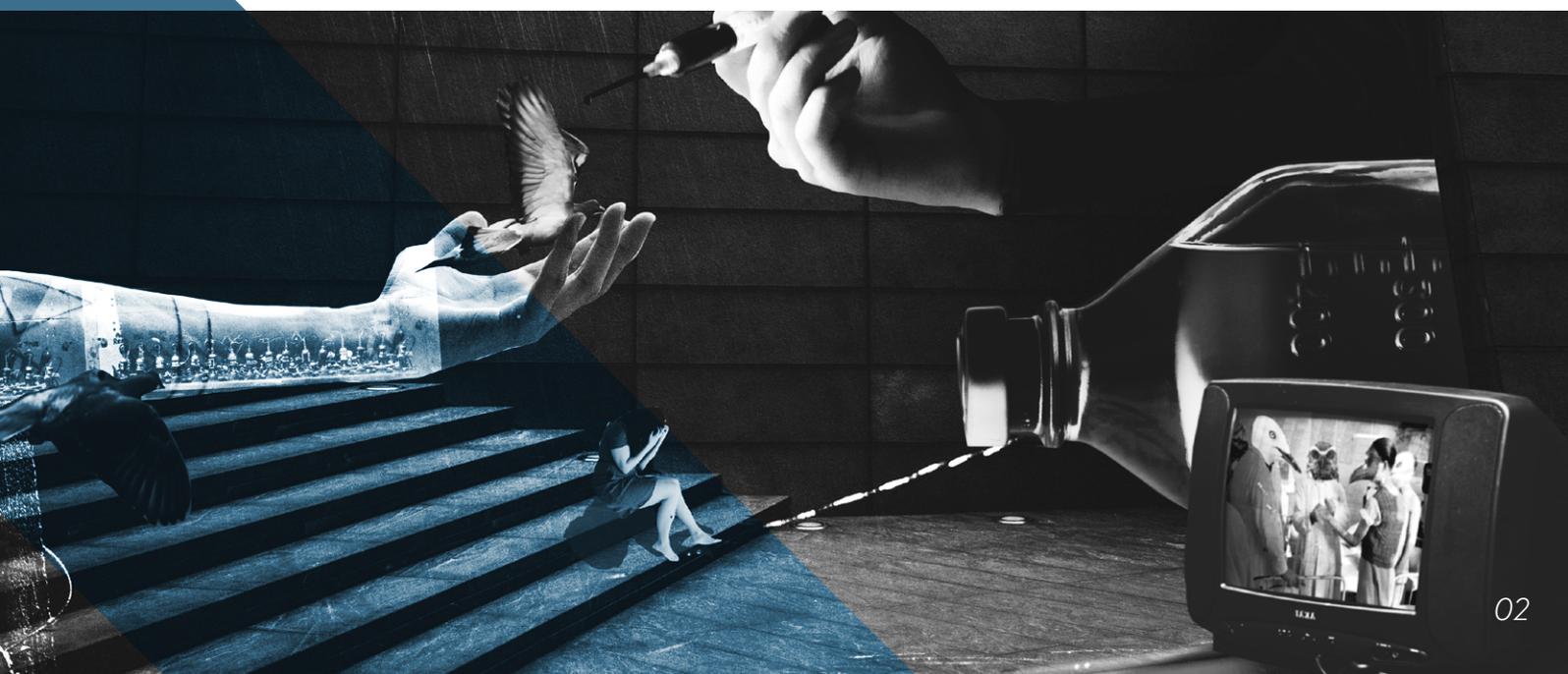
Written in 1920 by Czech writer, dramatist and journalist Karel Čapek as a comedy, the play coined the word "robot", which, along with its title, gained worldwide notoriety in the following years. The play marked the emergence of a thread of science-fiction themes in the Čapek's novels and plays, while his drama *The White Plague* has taken on a special urgency in light of the current SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Both plays warn of the ethical and existential dilemmas of modern civilisation in the form of global threats linked to the negative effects of machines and technology, totalitarianism, armaments or pandemics. On one hand, artificial intelligence has become commonplace, a helpful part of our everyday lives that can even compose music and paint pictures, while, on the other, it raises ethical dilemmas and concerns as strong as those articulated 100 years ago.

For the 100th anniversary of the premiere of R.U.R. at the National Theatre in Prague, the Arts and Theatre Institute, in collaboration with the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space, The Society of the Brothers Čapek, and Silesian University in Opava, hosts an online international theatre studies conference.

The conference takes place on the Zoom platform in English. Contributions will be published in a collection of conference proceedings following the event.

Follow the conference on link below:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_eMoihq90T1Gzb19E9iCOYg



conference program

day 1

DAY 1	1/26/2021	
9,30	Martina Pecková Černá / Arts and Theatre Institute and Hasan Zahirović / The Society of the Brothers Čapek, Silesian University in Opava	Welcome, Introduction & Morning coffee
I	THEN: From the History of staging R.U.R. and The White Plague on Czech and International Stages	
10,00 - 10,15	Hasan Zahirović / The Society of the Brothers Čapek, Silesian University in Opava, Czech Republic	The White Plague Reflexion in the Countries of the Former Yugoslavia
10,20 - 10,35	Josefína Panenková / National Theatre Archive, Czech Republic	Presentation of Documents Related to the First R.U.R. Staging in the National Theatre
10,40 - 10,55	Klára Kudlová / Institute of the Czech Literature, Czech Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic	The Radio Drama The Syndeton Experiment as an Homage to Karel Čapek's R.U.R.
11,00 - 11,15	Karol Mišovic / Institute of Theatre and Film Research, Slovak Academy of Sciences Slovakia	The White Plague in Slovak Professional Theatres after 1945
11,15 - 11,45	Discussion	Moderators: Martina Pecková Černá, Hasan Zahirović
Break		
II	THEN: From the History of staging R.U.R. and The White Plague on Czech and International Stages	
12,30 - 12,45	Svetlana Efimova / Assistant Professor of Slavic Literatures and Media Studies at the University of Munich, Germany	One or Two Characters? The White Plague at the Savoy Theatre (1938) and its Unique Impact on Literary Criticism
12,50 - 13,05	Zdeněk Vacek / Director of Karel Čapek Memorial, Czech Republic	Puppets Against Poverty: R.U.R. and Subsidized American Culture in the Great Depression
13,10 - 13,25	Anna Štádlarová / translator, researcher, Czech Republic	Čapek's R.U.R.: The Reception, Genesis and Analysis of Spanish Versions with Regard to Their English Source Texts
13,30 - 13,45	Asta Petrikien / Lithuania, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University	R.U.R.: Its Staging and Reception in the Lithuanian Press
13,45 - 14,15	Discussion	Moderator: Hasan Zahirović
Break		
III	NOW: R.U.R. and The White Plague in Current Ethical, Existencial and Social Contexts	
14,30 - 14,45	Tereza Stöckelová / Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic	Technologies, Microbes and the Limits of Human Autonomy
14,50 - 15,05	Svetlana Slapšak / Prof. of Anthropology of Ancient Worlds, Anthropology of Gender, Balkanology, Slovenia	Ancient Automata, Slaves and Robots: The Pre- and the Post- of the Performing of Democracy
15,10 - 15,25	Azime Aydogmus / researcher, performer, instructor, Turkey-USA	An Evaluation of AI and Autonomous Robots to Prevent the Dehumanisation of the Live Stage
15,30 - 15,45	Hana Lacová / Department of Slovak Literature, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University, Slovakia	The Ethical Dilemmas in Slovak Drama with the Theme of Utopia in the First Half of the 20th Century
15,45 - 16,15	Discussion	Moderator: Martina Pecková Černá



conference program

day 2

DAY 2	1/27/2021	
9,30		Chat & Morning Coffee
IV	NOW: Current Czech and International Stagings of R.U.R. and The White Plague	
10,00 - 10,20	David Košťák / dramaturge of Švanda Theatre Prague and Rudolf Rosa / Institute of Formal and Applied Linguistics, Charles University, Czech Republic	AI: When Robot Writes a Play – A Drama Entirely Written by Artificial Intelligence
10,25 - 10,40	Marek Bečka / Cakes and Puppets Company and Theatre Faculty, Academy for Performing Arts, Czech Republic	Cakes and Puppets company: R.U.R. 2020
10,45 - 11,00	Vladimír Čepěk / dramaturge of Josef Kajetán Theatre in Pilsen, Czech Republic	How to look at Čapek's Robots in 21th century - R.U.R. in JKT Plzeň
11,05 - 11,20	Patricia Paixão / Teatro Estúdio Fontenova, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nova University, Portugal	R.U.R. and The White Plague – Portuguese Depictions in Performing Arts for the 21st Century
11,25 - 11,40	Katarína Kašpárková Koišová, Vladimír Fekar a Patrik Lančarič / Zlín City Theatre, Czech Republic	Zlín City Theatre: The White Plague Podcast 2020
11,45 - 12,00	Nicole Metzger / Theater Spielraum, Austria	The White Plague – A Staged Reading at the Theater SPIEL-RAUM in Vienna
12,00 - 12,30	Discussion	Moderators: Martina Pecková Černá, Hasan Zahirović
Break		
V	AFTER: Historical and Up-To-Date Set Design Concepts for R.U.R. and White Plague Stagings	
13,15 - 13,35	Věra Velemanová / Czech Theatre Studies Dpt., Arts and Theatre Institute, Czech Republic	Under the Weight of Time: Hofman's Scenography for Productions of Karel Čapek's Plays The White Plague and R.U.R.
13,40 - 14,00	Libor Vodička / Head of Theatre Collection, National Museum, Czech Republic	Presentation of National Museum's Collection Related to Čapek's R.U.R. and The White Plague
14,05 - 14,30	Markéta Fantová / Artistic director of Prague Quadrennial, Czech Republic and Patrick Du Wors / Scenographer, pedagogue and curator, Canada	Reflection of the Results of the PQ STUDIO: Common Design Project on The White Plague
14,35 - 14,55	Veronika Ambros / Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Centre for Comparative Literature, University of Toronto, Canada	Friedrich Kiesler's R.U.R. in Berlin in 1923 – Modern Multimedia Show Avant la Lettre
15,00 - 15,30	Discussion	Moderator: Markéta Fantová
	Closing Remarks, Farewell	



Part I

THEN: From the History of staging R.U.R. and The White Plague on Czech and International Stages

The White Plague Reflexion in the Countries of the Former Yugoslavia Hasan Zahirović / The Society of the Brothers Čapek & Silesian University in Opava Czech Republic

Although he is better known today for his children's books, Karel Čapek's work is read and enjoyed in the countries of former Yugoslavia due to his artistry, his vision and the originality of his ideas, even eighty years after his death. The White Plague met with strong opposition from the Czechs prior to World War II and was also poorly received in some countries of former Yugoslavia. This was certainly the situation in Serbia, where the plot caused a sensation and a huge political scandal. The White Plague was removed from repertoires and performances of the play were forbidden in almost all of the country's theatres. After World War II, Marshal Tito, the former leader of Yugoslavia, prevented the play from being staged at all.

Presentation of Documents Related to the First R.U.R. Staging in the National Theatre Josefína Panenková / National Theatre Archive, Czech Republic

Since its establishment in 1883, the Theatre Archive at the National Theatre in Prague has grown along with the regular artistic activities of the country's leading stage. While the range and types of materials held in the archive expanded throughout the 20th century, the collection primarily contains theatrical signs and posters, photographs, press clippings and other written materials, and designs for sets and costumes. In addition to archival documentation, the collection also includes a library, which features a large collection of working play texts, as well as literature on theatre, music and visual art. This contribution will address the archive's holdings in relation to the first performances of the plays R.U.R. (1921) and The White Plague (1937).

The Radio Drama The Syndeton Experiment as an Homage to Karel Čapek's R.U.R. Klára Kudlová / Institute of the Czech Literature, Czech Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic

This paper examines the two main sources of Barry Letts' radio drama The Syndeton Experiment, broadcast by BBC Radio 4 in April 1999. The primary source, with regard to the setting, characters and contextual plot, is the BBC sci-fi series Blake's 7, written by Terry Nation and televised by the BBC from 1978-1981. The second intertextual source, which informs both the plot of The Syndeton Experiment and its key characters, is Karel Čapek's play R.U.R.. The main characters of Blake's 7's notorious fourth series appear in this radio drama and set out to find "syndeton" on the basis of testimony from a researcher on the secluded planet Kapeka. The group successfully reach Kapeka and meet the researcher, Dr. Rossum. They learn that, for many years, he has been "transforming" the original inhabitants of Kapeka into neurobots. After Dr. Rossum dies in the play's last scene, his research into the functioning of the "elemental isotope" syndeton is viewed as his positive legacy.

The Syndeton Experiment pays a manifold homage to R.U.R., revealing intertextual links to both the plot and the character of Dr. Rossum. The secret of the F power and the use of syndeton in Letts' drama are reminiscent of the formula that allows for the creation of robots in Čapek's play and of "krakatit" in his famous novel. Both dramatic texts also present the character of Dr. Rossum as a god-like figure. Despite the similarities, the final act of The Syndeton Experiment clearly strikes a sci-fi note, in contrast with the melodramatic, "ethical" ending of Čapek's R.U.R..

The White Plague in Slovak Professional Theatres after 1945

**Karol Mišovic / Institute of Theatre and Film Research, Slovak Academy of Sciences
Slovakia**

Karel Čapek's work was staged in the Slovak professional theatre, particularly in the period just before the outbreak of World War II. Both his older and new plays were predominately performed by Czech theatre artists working in the dramatic ensemble of the Slovak National Theatre. After the war, interest in Čapek's dramatic work declined considerably, especially where his plays with an anti-militarist stance, such as The White Plague and The Mother, were concerned. After 1956, however, when the communist totalitarian regime allowed Čapek's texts to be performed again, four productions of his anti-war drama The White Plague appeared in Slovak theatres, each with considerable political resonance. Jozef Budský at the Slovak National Theatre (1958) and Jozef Palka at the State Theatre in Košice (1961) each expressed concerns about the possible existential impacts of the ongoing Cold War. A later production at the Ukrainian National Theatre (1968) was a direct stage protest against the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops, while the last Slovak performance (to date) at the Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra (1983) offered a critique of Normalisation and the political manipulation of citizens.



Part II

THEN: From the History of staging R.U.R. and The White Plague on Czech and International Stages

One or Two Characters? The White Plague at the Savoy Theatre (1938) and its Unique Impact on Literary Criticism

Svetlana Efimova / Assistant Professor of Slavic Literatures and Media Studies at the University of Munich, Germany

In the London production of *The White Plague* (1938, titled *Power and Glory*), Oscar Homolka played both the main roles (Dr. Galén / Marshal), which provoked a protest from Karel Čapek. In studies of the play, literary critics are still arguing about the extent to which this staging decision corresponds to the original text. Why are literary critics still debating a 1938 theatrical production in the twenty-first century? This staging revealed the play's crucial ambivalence and set a precedent that theatrical interpretation can be equal to critical interpretation. Nevertheless, the reviews of *Power and Glory* (especially by Charles Morgan and Otto Raul) were quite paradoxical in their implications and described the London production in a way that differs from later literary criticism. The influential critic Charles Morgan (*The Times*, *The New York Times*) seems to reflect more on the play than on its staging, whereas Otto Radl's (*Přítomnost*) comments on Oscar Homolka's performance reveal an inner contradiction in the staging choices made in London. This paper argues that *Power and Glory* is not only a thought-provoking interpretation of Čapek's play, but also an important case study for the relationship between staging practices, theatre criticism and literary studies. The paper concludes with a look at another extreme approach to staging the central conflict of *The White Plague*: instead of the amalgamation of two characters, a division of the spectators into two groups facing one another (New York, 2004).

Puppets Against Poverty: R.U.R. and Subsidised American Culture in the Great Depression
Zdeněk Vacek / Director of Karel Čapek Memorial, Czech Republic

The boom of the "Roaring Twenties" ended on Black Thursday, 24 October 1929 with the fall of the New York stock exchange. In spring 1933, shortly after being elected president of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt launched The New Deal, a large scale recovery project. An army comprised of millions of the unemployed were paid by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The culture sector too was part of the project, with many public libraries were established in the 1930s. About 0.5% of the WPA's budget was allocated to the Federal Theatre Project. Over four years (1935-1939), the FTP supported 200 theatres with 15,000 employees, and staged 1,200 productions visited by about 30 million people, who were attracted by significantly subsidised ticket prices. Tens of millions more Americans sought an escape from the woes of everyday life through their radios. The Federal Theatre Project had five regional centres, in New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles and New Orleans. A strong generation of artists such as Elia Kazan, Arthur Miller and Orson Welles came of age under the protective wing of the US government. The works of the Čapek brothers can't be disregarded in considering the FTP, particularly, *Ze života hmyzu* (*The World We Live In*) and *R.U.R.*.



Special attention should be paid to the staging of the play about artificial beings by New York's Marionette Theatre. Directed by world-famous puppeteer Remo Bufano, the theatre and its company of 47 staged over 1000 performances of 19 productions, including R.U.R.. Three dozen unique images from the United States Library of Congress offer a backstage look at the production of puppets for Rossum's Universal Robots. The robots were conceived extravagantly to satisfy the young audiences the production hoped to draw. The character of the nursemaid Nana is especially charming.

Čapek's R.U.R.: The Reception, Genesis and Analysis of Spanish Versions with Regard to Their English Source Texts

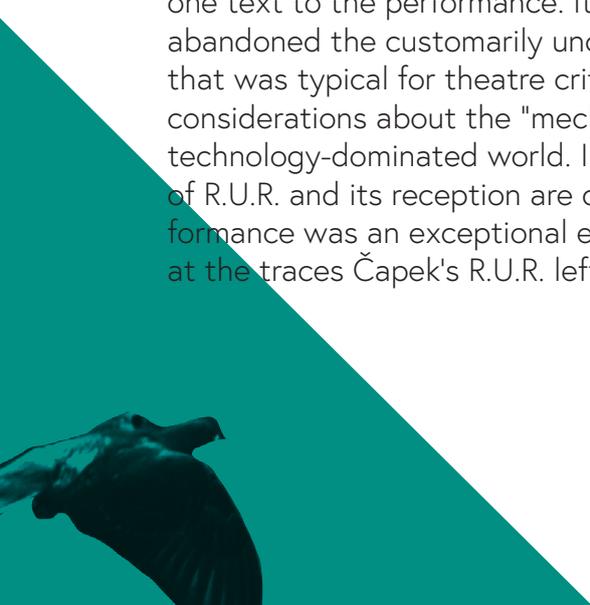
Anna Štádlarová / translator, researcher, Czech Republic

In this thesis on the topic of Čapek's play, "R.U.R.: The Reception, Creation and Analysis of Spanish Versions with a View to the English Model," I research the choices made by Paul Selver in the 1922 English translation of R.U.R., thanks to which the play reached worldwide attention. Selver's changes have subsequently been transferred to Spanish versions of the play (which were translated from English) and have influenced the way foreign audiences perceive it. When compared with the original, it is interesting to note that the foreign language versions of R.U.R. studied as part of this research are missing an entire scene and speeches are considerably censored; the Spanish text also contains several shifts in meaning. English productions of R.U.R. used this text until 1989 and this "censored" version remains the only available Spanish text to this day.

R.U.R.: Its Staging and Reception in the Lithuanian Press

Asta Petrikienė / Lithuania, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University

In this paper, I will present the reception of Karel Čapek's R.U.R. in Lithuanian daily newspapers. For this purpose, I will survey the production of Čapek's play in the context of the short tradition of Lithuanian theatre. R.U.R. premiered at the State Theatre in Kaunas on 17 October 1927. Professional Lithuanian dramatic theatre was founded in 1920, the same year that Čapek wrote his play. Thus, only seven years passed from the establishment of professional Lithuanian theatre to the premiere of Čapek's futuristic oeuvre. The performance was directed by Borisas Dauguvietis, whose work was characterised by an eclectic repertoire and the very fast pace of the performances he directed. These features were also characteristic of the State Theatre in Kaunas, the main Lithuanian theatre of the time. Hence, the staging of R.U.R. was an exceptional event in local theatre culture. The data used for this research consists of performance reviews in Lithuanian dailies. Reviews of the performance were published by all four major dailies. Their authors were the most famous theatre critics of the time, and, in some cases, they devoted more than one text to the performance. It is important to note that, in their reviews, some authors abandoned the customarily uncomplicated pattern of retelling the content of the play that was typical for theatre criticism of the time, and embarked on more philosophical considerations about the "mechanisation" of humans and the future of humanity in a technology-dominated world. In the historiography of Lithuanian theatre, this production of R.U.R. and its reception are decidedly under-researched, despite the fact that the performance was an exceptional event of its time. My analysis thus allows for a closer look at the traces Čapek's R.U.R. left on Lithuanian theatre.



Part III

NOW: R.U.R. and The White Plague in Current Ethical, Existential and Social Contexts

Technologies, Microbes and the Limits of Human Autonomy

Tereza Stöckelová / Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic

The talk will address the issue of more-than-human agency (of technologies and microbes) and the ways in which it creates the texture of contemporary societies. Going beyond the modern conceptualization, according to which human society, nature and technology are ontologically different, separate and incommensurable (i.e. the former operating in the realm of free will and historicity while the latter two are governed by causality and timeless laws of nature, and are external to the human world), it will discuss the constitutive entanglement of human-non-human agency. The notion of performativity will be considered as a tool for thinking through these issues.

Ancient Automata, Slaves and Robots: The Pre- and the Post- of the Performing of Democracy

Svetlana Slapšak / Prof. of Anthropology of Ancient Worlds, Anthropology of Gender, Balkanology, Slovenia

New research into Ancient technology in the Hellenistic cultures reveals the use of automats in public and in private spaces as a by-product of the high technology which was planned and executed for warfare, agriculture, astronomy, measuring, mines, etc. Beside spectacular devices for temples, there was a whole line of small mechanisms used on the streets and at gatherings. All of these "wonders," private and public, reflected the new situation of the theatre, previously one of the institutions of democracy. Theatre as a democratic institution changed into a spectacle. Its structure was altered and the status of the actors eventually came close to the status of slaves. Performing slaves, like the Homeristes in Petronius' Satyricon (Trimalchio's Feast) were, in fact, living automats, defined by their text (for the rich) or coded improvisation (for the populace). Some automats have been used in modern theatre since Antiquity, but the genre division between puppet theatre and human performing was set rather firmly. Humans performing robots in Čapek's R.U.R. demonstrate a rather unique feature: the inventor of the robot puts robots into action as if there was a history of robots. And the history of repression must end in a rebellion. Inside the bi-polar scheme of love-war (emotions vs. cool cruelty), there is a clear notion of democracy and liberty. Linguistically, the notion of service/slavery is included in Čapek's neologism. The continuity and tension between automats/slaves/robots lie in conceptualising, criticising and fighting for democracy. In both R.U.R. and The White Plague, the theatre resumes the Ancient institution's role of performing democracy.

An Evaluation of AI and Autonomous Robots to Prevent the Dehumanisation of the Live Stage

Azime Aydogmus / researcher, performer, instructor, Turkey-USA

The Robotic Theatre is part of live stage productions and it is going to grow. It involves AI (Artificial Intelligence) and autonomous robots, which may seem like another way to foster artists' creativity and to explore the possibilities of the stage. However, AI and the autonomy of robots endanger the fundamental nature of theatre by threatening its quality of "liveness." In my paper, I claim that AI and autonomous Robotic Theatre can cause an existential problem for theatre by endangering its liveness, which might, in turn, lead to the dehumanisation of the stage. I show the likelihood of this claim by analysing the dehumanisation of the authenticity of the relationship between the audience and human actors, human actors' acting capabilities, and the possibility of AI taking over the stage. By demonstrating the immediacy of my claim, I wish to encourage theatre professionals to create policies that will protect the authenticity of the live stage.

The Ethical Dilemmas in Slovak Drama with the Theme of Utopia in the First Half of the 20th Century

Hana Lacová / Department of Slovak Literature, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University, Slovakia

This subject of this paper is Slovak theatrical productions dealing with utopian subject matter and the theme of catastrophe or apocalypse, which date from the first half of the 20th century. Several Slovak authors will be discussed, including Jarko Elen (Tragedy of Earth), Vojtech Letz (Finis), Jozef Zavodný (Superhuman), Peter Karvaš (Meteor), Július Barč-Ivan (The End) and Juraj Váh (The First Ones and the Last Ones). Their plays were published only in magazines, staged only occasionally and literary science has paid them almost no attention at all. I would like to clarify the reasons behind this indifference and also re-evaluate the quality of these dramatic works from the viewpoints of contemporary theatre and literary research. I would like to introduce the ethical and existential social dilemmas in these plays, where imminent doom prompts humankind to try to re-evaluate its moral norms. Real progress is possible only on the basis of radical change. The old type of human must be replaced by a new type. These and other conclusions are brought up and discussed in these plays.



Part IV

NOW: Current Czech and International Stagings of R.U.R. and The White Plague

AI: When Robot Writes a Play – A Drama Entirely Written by Artificial Intelligence
David Košťák / Dramaturge of Švanda Theatre Prague & Rudolf Rosa / Institute of Formal and Applied Linguistics, Charles University, Czech Republic

On 26 February 2021, Švandovo Theatre will premiere a play about humans (and robots) written by an artificial intelligence called THEaiTRobot. It was made possible by computational linguists joining forces with theatre experts for this unique research project who will explain the whole process in their talk.

Cakes and Puppets company: R.U.R. 2020

Marek Bečka / Cakes and Puppets Company and Theatre Faculty, Academy for Performing Arts, Czech Republic

The outstanding Czech puppeteer, director and author Marek Bečka will explain why and how to present Čapek's play R.U.R. in contemporary puppet theatre

How to Look at Čapek's Robots in 21st Century – R.U.R. at the Josef Kajetán Tyl Theatre in Pilsen

Vladimír Čepěk / dramaturge of Josef Kajetán Theatre in Pilsen, Czech Republic

The dramaturge Vladimír Čepěk will explain dramaturgical choice and interpretation key for the production of R.U.R. in the Josef Kajetán Tyl Theatre in Pilsen in 2019.

R.U.R. and The White Plague – Portuguese Depictions in Performing Arts for the 21st Century

Patricia Paixão / Teatro Estúdio Fontenova, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nova University, Portugal

In 2019 and 2020, Portuguese theatre company Teatro Estúdio Fontenova staged both R.U.R. (with a new translation from English and Czech by Patrícia Paixão) and The White Plague. It was the first time a professional Portuguese theatre company staged Karel Čapek. This presentation aims to approach three topics: the particularities of each staging and reasons they took place; an attempt to contextualise the lack of connection to these plays and to Čapek in Portugal; and the justification for staging them only now. R.U.R. – Robots Universais Rossum premiered on 30 October 2019. Directed by José Maria Dias, the production featured a choir (conducted by a Czech maestra) and a set design by the renowned José Manuel Castanheira, a former PQ jury member. Details such as casting a Black actress in the role of Helena, having a set that recalls a circus tent, choosing to have almost no reference to technology, and eliminating the character of Fabry are some of the points that will be approached. Doença Branca – Bílá Nemoc – Enfermedad Blanca, created by Anna Luňáková, Eduardo Dias, and Patrícia Paixão, premiered at the height of the quarantine in Portugal, on 23 May 2020, in a live-streamed online performance. In this staging of excerpts of the text, actors from different locations and origins (Brazil, Portugal, Spain, Canada and the Czech Republic) were brought together.

Just as the pandemic is both general and global, so too was this staging. Just as we are advised to "social distance", physical distance was performed. Just as Čapek exposed war and conflict, and the weaknesses of a health care system, so did we. We did not know if it was theatre, if it was a performance, if it was new media. It was an expression, a manifestation, and a reconnection to create.

Zlín City Theatre: The White Plague Podcast 2020

Katarína Kašpárková Koišová / Dramaturge & Vladimír Fekar / Dramaturge & Patrik Lančarič / Artistic Director in Zlín City Theatre, Czech Republic

This contribution will discuss the specific practical and dramaturgical preparation of The White Plague during the period of special measures brought about by the coronavirus pandemic, the interpretation and adaption of Čapek's play, the casting of women in a number of key roles and the influences of these changes on the play's overall resonance in the present moment.

The White Plague – A Staged Reading at the Theater SPIELRAUM in Vienna

Nicole Metzger / Theater Spielraum, Austria

The working conditions for such a small theatre as SPIELRAUM in Vienna are more challenging than usual due to the current SARS CoV2 pandemic. Director Nicole Metzger describes her search for a theatrical way of staging Karel Čapek's play THE WHITE PLAGUE despite/under these conditions. She chose the hybrid form of a Play-Reading Performance with six actors, integrating short scenes from the 1937 Hugo Haas film. The presentation is complemented with photos by Barbara Pállfy.



AFTER: Historical and Up-To-Date Set Design Concepts for R.U.R. and White Plague Stagings

Under the Weight of Time: Hofman's Scenography for Productions of Karel Čapek's Plays The White Plague and R.U.R.

Věra Velemanová / Czech Theatre Studies Department, Arts and Theatre Institute, Czech Republic

The architect, painter and scenographer Vlastislav Hofman (1884-1964) is rightly considered by his younger colleague Josef Svoboda to be the first Czech scenographer to pave the way for modern scenographic expression. His concept, which began to be promoted in Czech theatres after the First World War, was far removed from the traditional emphasis on descriptive and illusive decoration and transformed scenography into a true support for dramaturgy and directing. In the turbulent time of the late 1930s, Hofman created sets for two productions of Čapek's plays directed by Karel Dostal at the National Theatre in Prague: *Bílá nemoc* (The White Plague, 1937) and *R.U.R.* (1939). For understandable reasons, both productions were soon withdrawn from the repertoire, but evidence of Dostal's and Hofman's approach, which combined their expressionist backgrounds with strong civilist elements, remains. In their direction and artistic design, both productions reflect dark times full of anxiety about unknown dangers for which one can never be entirely prepared.

Presentation of National Museum's Collection Related to Čapek's R.U.R. and The White Plague

Libor Vodička / Head of Theatre Collection, National Museum, Czech Republic

This contribution will introduce spectators to the scenographic designs for Czech productions of *R.U.R.* that are held in the National Museum's collections, including set and costume designs by Bedřich Feuerstein, Vlastislav Hofman, František Muzika, Zbyněk Kolář and other Czech scenographers. I will attempt to outline the artistic key to staging Čapek's play.

Reflection of the Results of the PQ STUDIO: Common Design Project on The White Plague

Markéta Fantová / Artistic director of Prague Quadrennial, Czech Republic & Patrick Du Wors / Scenographer, pedagogue and curator, Canada

In light of this unprecedented period of self-isolation in the wake of Covid-19, the Prague Quadrennial, in collaboration with Prague's Arts and Theatre Institute (ATI), launched the PQ STUDIO: Common Design Project Special Edition – The White Plague. The goal of this project was to offer students who may have found their summer and fall creative projects cancelled a chance to find artistic inspiration through a play that eerily anticipated – over eighty years ago – many of the dangers the world is facing today. The PQ STUDIO special edition started in the spring when eleven creative teams composed of young and beginning designers immediately applied for the summer semester. Thirty-nine creative teams signed up for the autumn semester. It shows us the interest in online education for performance designers and scenographers as well as the great enthusiasm of universities and students to join international projects. After weeks of consultations and intensive work on the final projects, the jury selected 16 projects which are exhibited in the PQ STUDIO online gallery launched in January 2021. Markéta Fantová and Patrick Du Wors will reflect the project trajectory.

Friedrich Kiesler's R.U.R. in Berlin in 1923 – Modern Multimedia Show Avant la Lettre

Veronika Ambros / Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Centre for Comparative Literature, University of Toronto, Canada

In 1924 Kiesler organized the Internationale Ausstellung neuer Theatertechnik in Vienna and arranged the world premiere of the 16-minute film *Ballet mécanique*, directed by Dudley Murphy and Fernand Léger, in collaboration with Man Ray.

Kiesler was invited due to his set design for Čapek's *R.U.R.*, in which he laid bare the complexity of the text by suggesting a fictional world in motion, eliminating the traditionally fixed backdrop and juxtaposing the dystopia of the future with a colourful theatrical space using film projection and a fairground sideshow device of the 1890s known as *Tanagra*, which, through an array of plain and concave mirrors, created the illusion of miniaturized live actors playing on a miniature stage. Kiesler thus translated what Čapek expressed through his text and his polyphonic dialogues into another semiotic system by using visual means and the difference between two-dimensional and three-dimensional actor figures.





Conference Coordination
International Cooperation Department / PerformCzech

Coordination Committee
Martina Pecková Černá, Markéta Fantová, Ondřej Svoboda, Hasan Zahirović

Production Manager: **Barbora Comer**

The Arts and Theatre Institute is a state contributory organisation that was established by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic in 1959. Its mission is to provide the Czech and international public with comprehensive services in the field of theatre and individual services relating to the arts (music, literature, dance, and the visual arts). The International Cooperation Department's mission is to promote Czech performing arts abroad and to share information about developments in international theatre with the Czech professional scene. A fundamental part of the department's work is participation at international performing arts platforms such as festivals, markets or other gatherings, coordination of professional events such as exhibitions, talks, conferences, showcases, presentations, lectures, and symposia in the Czech Republic and abroad, information portal PerformCzech about Czech performing arts in English and research focused on current performing arts in the Czech Republic and Central European region. It collaborates with partners, such as international professional networks and organisations, national and international independent or state-run cultural organisations and projects.

www.PerformCzech.cz
www.idu.cz



Conference Partners

The Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space

PQ was established in 1967 to bring the best of design for performance, scenography, and theatre architecture to the front line of cultural activities to be experienced by professional and emerging artists as well as the general public. The quadrennial exhibitions, festivals, and educational programs act as a global catalyst of creative progress by encouraging experimentation, networking, innovation, and future collaborations. PQ aims to honor, empower and celebrate the work of designers, artists and architects while inspiring and educating audiences, who are the most essential element of any live performance.

www.pq.cz

The Čapek Brothers Society

The Čapek Brothers Society has existed continuously since 1947. Its aim is to associate and acquire friends and admirers of the Čapek brothers' creations, to develop and deepen knowledge of their work and life and to support, morally and otherwise, research into the Čapek Brothers and related personalities and topics.

www.bratri-capkove.cz

Czech Centres

As a contributory organization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Czech Centres are the core instrument of public diplomacy of the Czech Republic's foreign policy, and strive to support the reputation of the Czech Republic in the world. They present our country in a wide range of cultural and social areas: from art through the creative industries to the achievements of Czech science and innovations. They also provide Czech language courses in foreign countries. At present, there are 25 branches across three continents – in addition to Czech Centres these also include the Czech Houses in Moscow, Jerusalem and Bratislava.

www.czechcentres.cz

Cultural dramaturgy with a focus on theatre, Silesian University

The Department of Cultural Dramaturgy with a Focus on Theatre provides students with theoretical and practical education in the field of theatrical dramaturgy and also in the application of dramaturgy to other areas of culture (film, radio, cultural events etc.). Graduates gain a general cultural overview of the areas of literature, cinematography, media and other social sciences.

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