

Repertoire of Travelling Comedians

El repertorio de los cómicos ambulantes

Le répertoire de comédiens itinérants

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Resumen: Ida Hledíková escribe sobre el repertorio de los cómicos ambulantes en Europa Central y explica el contexto de la existencia del títere itinerante en el centro de Europa. Fueron principalmente cómicos italianos e ingleses los que vinieron a esta región de Europa en los siglos XVI y XVII. En el siglo XVI aparecieron en Europa Central cómicos ingleses con personajes cómicos como, por ejemplo, Pickelhaering y la comedia improvisada. Desde antes del periodo de la Guerra de los Treinta Años y dentro del mismo (1618-1648) hay documentos que confirman la existencia de grupos de teatro italianos e ingleses en ciudades como Viena, Munich o Praga. En la tradición titiritera centroeuropea predomina el teatro de marionetas influido por la ópera barroca italiana y por la *commedia dell'arte*, con producciones de comediantes ingleses que especialmente jugaban un repertorio isabelino. Estos inspiraron el nacimiento de una nueva tradición teatral de la comedia popular vienesa en el siglo XVIII como un género dual de teatro, representaban tanto en vivo como a través de marionetas de hilo. Aparecen conexiones entre el género alemán histórico de teatro conocido como *Haupt- und Staatsaktion* (1680-1730) y el teatro de marionetas, principalmente por su coincidencia en la negación del valor de lo literario y por el atractivo uso de los héroes cómicos. Titrereros checos establecieron el teatro de títeres en la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII, eslovacos y húngaros, lo hicieron en el XIX. Ján Strazan fue el primer titiritero de Eslovaquia que apareció con sus títeres de hilo y con el llamado "repertorio barroco", todavía presente en el centro de Europa durante el siglo XIX. La autora analiza el repertorio utilizado por los titiriteros de centroeuropeos hasta el siglo XX, cuando se incorporan títulos dramáticos contemporáneos y se adaptan obras literarias. Trata de las obras de teatro de títeres representadas por el último titiritero ambulante eslovaco Anton Anderle (1944-2008). Anderle, como seguidor de Jan Strazan, usó su repertorio. Como resultado de lo anteriormente apuntado la base del repertorio de los títeres ambulantes eslovacos tiene mucho en común con el repertorio europeo que las compañías extendían de un país a otro. La autora también señala los aspectos específicos del repertorio de los titiriteros itinerantes de Eslovaquia.

Palabras clave: Cómicos ambulantes, teatro de títeres, marionetas, repertorio, Jan Strazan, Europa Central, Eslovaquia.

Abstract: Ida Hledíková writes about the repertoire of strolling comedians in Central Europe and explains the context of the existence of strolling puppetry in Central Europe as well. There were mainly Italian and English comedians who came to this European region in the 16th and 17th centuries. English comedians appeared in Central Europe in the 16th century entrenching comical characters like e.g. Pickelhaering and the extemporised comedy. From the period before and during the thirty years war (1618-1648) there are documents confirming the existence of English and Italian theatre groups in known Central European towns like Vienna, Munich or Prague. In Central European puppetry tradition of which marionette theatre dominates there are influences of Italian baroque opera and *commedia dell'arte*, productions of English comedians, which especially played Elizabethan repertoire. These inspired the birth of a new theatre tradition of Viennese folk comedy in 18th century as a dual theatre genre, played both live and through string

puppets. Connections appear between the German historical theatre genre named *Haupt und Staatsaktion* (1680-1730) and string puppet theatre, mainly in the phenomenon of negation of literary value and attractive use of comical heroes. Original Czech puppeteers established puppet theatre in the second half of 18th century, Slovak and Hungarian even 19th century. Author of the contribution introduces first Slovak puppeteer Ján Stražan who appeared with his string puppets and with so-called "baroque repertory" still existing in the 19th century in Central Europe. The author analyses out the repertoire used in Central Europe puppeteers' practice until 20th century when co-opting contemporary drama titles and adapted literary work. Introduces puppet plays of the last Slovak strolling comedian Anton Anderle (1944-2008) with reference on the new published collection of his repertoire. Anderle as Jan Stražan's descendant presented the repertory of Jan Stražan. As a result from appointed contexts the base of repertoire of Slovak strollers has a character of full-area European repertoire and was handed over from groups of a particular country to another. The author indicates also specifics of Slovak repertoire of strolling comedians.

Key words: Strolling comedian, puppet theatre, marionette, repertoire, Jan Stražan, Central Europe, Slovak.

Résumé: Ida Hledíková écrit sur le répertoire des comédiens ambulants en Europe Centrale et explique le contexte de l'existence de la marionnette itinérante dans le centre de l'Europe. Ce furent principalement des comédiens italiens et anglais qui vinrent dans cette région de l'Europe dans le XVIe et XVIIe siècle. Au XVIe siècle en Europe centrale, apparurent des comédiens anglais avec des personnages comiques tels que Pickelhaering et la comédie improvisée. Depuis la période avant la Guerre de Trente Ans et pendant celle-ci (1618-1648) on trouve des documents qui confirment l'existence de groupes de théâtre italiens et anglais dans des villes telles que Vienne, Munich ou Prague. Dans la tradition de la marionnette en Europe Centrale prédomine le théâtre de marionnettes influencé par l'opéra baroque italien et par la *commedia dell'arte*, avec des productions de comédiens anglais qui jouaient un répertoire spécialement élisabéthain. Ceux-ci inspirèrent la naissance d'une nouvelle tradition théâtrale de la comédie populaire viennoise dans le XVIIIe siècle comme un genre double de théâtre, qui était représenté en direct tout comme à travers des marionnettes. Des connections apparurent entre le genre allemand historique de théâtre connu comme *Haupt- und Staatsaktion* (1680-1730) et le théâtre de marionnettes, principalement par leur coïncidence dans la négation de la valeur du littéraire et par l'intérêt de l'usage de ses héros comiques. Les marionnettistes tchèques établirent le théâtre de marionnettes dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle, et les slovaques et les hongrois dans le XIXe. Jan Stražan fut le premier marionnettiste en Slovaquie à apparaître avec ses marionnettes à fil et ce qu'on appelle le « répertoire baroque », toujours présent dans l'Europe centrale pendant le XIXe siècle. L'auteur analyse le répertoire utilisé par les marionnettistes d'Europe Centrale jusqu'au XXe siècle, moment où sont incorporés les titres dramatiques contemporains et les œuvres littéraires sont adaptées. Il s'agit des pièces de théâtre représentées par le dernier marionnettiste ambulant slovaque Anton Anderle (1944-2008). Passionné de Jan Stražan, Anton Anderle utilisa son répertoire. Comme résultat de ce qu'on a indiqué précédemment, la base du répertoire des marionnettes ambulantes slovaques a beaucoup en commun avec le répertoire européen que les compagnies répandaient d'un pays à l'autre. L'auteur signale également les aspects spécifiques du répertoire des marionnettistes ambulants de Slovaquie.

Mots clés: Comédiens ambulants, théâtre de marionnettes, marionnettes, répertoire, Jan Stražan, Europe Centrale, Slovaquie.

The Slovak marionette puppet theatre can be traced to the 19th century. Its origins are associated with the name of the first Slovak puppeteer Ján Stražan (1856 – 1939).¹ His puppet theatre was part of the movement of travelling theatre companies that travelled around Europe and performed theatre plays with puppets. In the 19th century they performed the European, so-called Baroque repertoire for adults as well as plays from the Romantic period, particularly about robber barons. Realistic drama is another matter. It is a special chapter in the repertoire of folk puppeteers introduced to their repertoire at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.



*Photo of Jan Stražan's family. Slovakia.
Turn of 19th/20th cent.*

The Central European marionette theatre of the 17th and 18th centuries produced the same plays as those at actor theatres. Comedians often had a dual role, performing the same play with and without puppets. The Austrian puppeteer Matthias Unger of Graz, for instance, performed plays in Austria, Slovakia and Bohemia in the 18th century. In those days the marionette plays also included non-verbal scenes and gymnastic or acrobatic acts. In addition to the mainstream,

¹ HLEDÍKOVÁ – POLÍVKOVÁ, Ida. *Komedianti, kočovníci, bábkari / Comedians, Travelling Actors, Puppeteers*. Bratislava : Theatre Institute and the Academy of Performing Arts, 2006, p. 90.

representing the 17th to 19th century Central European marionette theatre, there were other forms of puppet performances. These included older hand puppets, mechanical and optical demonstrations, galanty shows and Laterna Magica.

The marionette theatre was introduced to Central Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries by English and Italian theatre companies, and followed two main routes. One of them led from England via the Netherlands and Germany to Bohemia, the other from Italy to Austria and Hungary. Their more or less common platform of form and repertoire was based on free movement and the mutual influence of travelling foreign and later domestic theatre companies of folk comedians.

The first documented record on marionettes² in Europe comes from England and dates back to 1500. It is about a religious mystery play, *The Resurrection in Whitney*, called the marionette play for the first time in the history of European puppet theatre. The sketchy information about the English puppet theatre goes back to the records on marionettes in medieval miracle plays performed in the streets, whereas marionettes were manipulated from the pageant wagons.

At the end of the 16th century Italian puppeteers began to travel abroad with the companies of the actors of commedia dell'arte. The earliest record on an Italian, probably marionette performance in England comes from 1573³. English comedians spread marionette performances on the European continent during the Thirty Years' War in the 17th century, adding Elizabethan drama to their repertoire.

The first preserved description of marionettes and the puppetry stage in Europe comes from the Baroque period. The theologian Domenico Ottonelli published it in his book *Della christiana moderazione del teatro (On Christian Moderation in Theatre)*⁴ in 1652. He called the puppeteers manipulating marionettes *comedianti pupazzani*.

Writings on theatre history by contemporary historians and theorists of Italian puppet theatre provide new insights into the Italian puppeteers and their repertoire. These sources confirm that the 16th and 17th centuries were very important for the development of puppetry in Italy. It is possible to identify the shape, stage and puppet design and technology from the archive documents and the works of contemporary Italian artists and paintings. These materials enable us to easily identify, for example, the scenes⁵ from the Italian commedia dell'arte according to a typical artistic stylisation of costumes and masks. In the 17th century the repertoire of Italian puppeteers⁵ included the bible stories from the Old and New Testaments. They performed the stories about Moses (Crossing the Red Sea, Water from a Rock, The Destruction of Sodom, The Patience of Job, and so on) and opera.

² Marionette is a puppet suspended and controlled from above using wires or strings.

³ McCORMICK, John, CIPOLLA Alfonso, NAPOLI, Alessandro. *The Italian Puppet Theatre. A History*. Jefferson, North Carolina : McFarland and Company, 2010, p. 10.

⁴ OTTONELLI, Domenico. *Della christiana moderazione del teatro*. Op. cit. vol.III, pp. 462 – 463. In JURKOWSKI, Henryk. *The History of European Puppetry from Its Origin to the End of the 19th Century*. USA: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996, pp. 94–97.

⁵ It is impossible to retrieve information contained in some documents about the type of puppet theatre. Descriptions of 17th century puppet theatre show that hand puppets were frequently used.

In the 17th century different companies of puppeteers, particularly Italian puppeteers came to Central Europe. In the 18th century, however, puppetry dynamically developed in this region thanks to German comedians. The repertoire of travelling marionettists included mystery and miracle plays, Elizabethan drama, and two plays with the well-known eternal themes of Faust and Don Juan.

The popularity of marionette theatre in Central Europe reached its peak in the 18th and 19th centuries. The archive materials reveal that Austrian, German, Italian, Czech, Hungarian and Swedish (with Czech roots) comedians performed with puppets on the territory of present Slovakia.

The Slovak puppeteer Ján Stražan performed in Slovakia in the 19th century. Although his large family still give puppet performances⁶, no classical plays have been preserved from his bequest. However, Stražan's repertoire can be reconstructed from the preserved posters or their photographs.

Stražan's repertoire can be roughly divided into three groups. The first includes the oldest plays from the repertoire of European puppeteers. As confirmed by the posters⁷, the following 18th century plays appeared in Stražan's repertoire: *Faust*, *Don Juan* and *Prince Maximilian*. In the 19th century the classic marionette repertoire of Central European puppeteers included *Victorious Maiden (The Bogus Count Belengardo)*, *Merry Charcoal Burner (Oldřich and Božena)*, *Kermesse at Hudlice*, *Travel to America* – the play *Turkish Island* produced in Bohemia under the title *Turkish Border*.

Plays about Faust and Don Juan were the most famous performances given by travelling European puppeteers for centuries.

The well-known German legend of Doctor Faustus inspired the Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe to write a play based on the story of popular reading in 1588 – 1592. It became a favourite theme of travelling theatre companies, including puppeteers. Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* was brought to the continent by English travelling comedians in the 17th century. This philosophically multi-layered work, raising questions about the frontiers of knowledge, was played by European puppeteers using conventional expressive devices of the marionette theatre. The legend of Faust, who made a pact with the Devil, exchanging his soul for unlimited knowledge and worldly pleasures, was interesting for German puppeteers in particular. Puppet plays about Faust appeared in Germany and Bohemia. They had a simplified storyline, smaller cast and limited philosophical dialogue. This principle naturally resulted from the conditions and expressive devices of the puppet theatre. In Bohemia, puppet versions of plays about Faust were produced under various titles such as *Doctor Faust*, *Johannes Doctor Faust*, *Faust and Helene* or *Bride from Hell*, and similar titles.⁸

⁶ Ladislav Stražan jr. (born 1952) often performs with puppets. He lives in Bratislava.

⁷ Existing Stražan's posters come from the 20th century. There are no posters from the early career of Ján Stražan from the 1880s onwards.

⁸ DUBSKÁ, Alice. *Dvě století českého loutkářství / Two Centuries of Czech Puppetry*. Prague: AMU, 2004, p. 62.

Mit hoher Bewilligung

wird heute Mittwoch den 7. März 1804.

Johann Brat der Ältere

mit seinen mechanischen Kunstfiguren
auf vieles Verlangen

die Ehre haben aufzuführen:

Doktor Faust.

Ein allegorisches Drama in vier Aufzügen.

Die mir zugeflossene Güte meiner gnädigen Sönnet überzeuget mich Ihres Wohlwollens, und versichert mich im voraus heute auf dieses mit schönen Flugmaschinen versehenes Stück ein volles Schauspielbus. Ich werde keine Kosten, noch Mühe sparen, Sie bestens befriedigen zu können, um fernerhin mich Ihrer Gunst und gütigen Unterstützung zu versichern. Der kleine Pimperl will heute nebst dem Kosakentanz zur Abwechslung des Vergnügens, als ein Bettelstudent, Vogelfänger, und lustiger Nachtwächter seinen hohen Sönnern vieles Lachen verursachen.

Zum Beschluß folgt ein böhmisches Nachspiel,

genannt:

Amotr Mrdšlek a Amotr Čuchálek.

Preise der Plätze:

Standespersonen zahlen nach Belieben.

Auf dem ersten Platz	—	—	—	—	18 Kr.
Auf dem zweyten Platz	—	—	—	—	12 —
Auf dem dritten Platz	—	—	—	—	6 —

Der Schauplay ist bey der golden Weintraube.

Der Anfang ist um 5 Uhr.

Poster of the first known Czech puppeteer Jan Brat promoting performance of Doktor Faustus, 1804.



Portrait puppets of the first Slovak puppeteer Jan Stražan and his son Viliam. Slovakia, beginning of 20th century. Author: František Brežňanský.

Ján Stražan performed this play under the title *Dr. Faust*.⁹ František Suchý¹⁰ provided a fairly detailed description of Faust in Stražan's rendering. This also includes the description of "vartovačka"¹¹, a comic end showing two hired peasants, called Matthias and Martin in his production. It was a typical scene from the productions of Czech puppeteers who spread the puppet play *Faust* on the territory of today's Slovakia. The oldest literary sources with puppet subjects include a fragment of *Faust*, a puppet play from the end of the 19th century, performed by the Moravian puppeteer Dubský in the Small Carpathians. The text was discovered in the early 20th century by a Czech researcher, the founder of the magazine *Loutkář* (Puppeteer) Dr. Jindřich Veselý, later published with commentaries by Dr. Milena Cesnaková – Michalcová,¹² a theatre historian at the Art History Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. It is remarkable because the Czech play performed by the Moravian puppeteer Dubský, who also showed it in Slovakia, was documented, translated and published in Hungarian and Czech, with an authentic description

⁹ According to documented posters.

¹⁰ SUCHÝ, František. *Stražanové a jejich „Faust“ / The Stražans and Their Faustus*. In: *Loutkář*, 1921, vol. 5, no. 5, pp. 72 – 73.

¹¹ The term *vartovačka* designates a comic scene of two peasants guarding Faust against devils so he would not be taken to Hell. Instead of receiving money they are beaten and the devils take Faust anyway. Originally, Faust was supposed to be guarded by his servant Kasperl, but this cunning little man asked dumb villagers to do so.

¹² CESNAKOVÁ—MICHALCOVÁ, Milena. *Česko—slovenská bábková hra o Faustovi / Czecho—Slovak Puppet Play about Faust*. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 1979, vol. 27, no. 1.

of the Hungarian folk culture enthusiast Vilmos Tolnai. He published his commentary and part of the play in the Hungarian magazine *Philologiae Közlöny* in 1896. Tolnai was interested in the dramatic text of Faust, so he visited the Dubský family in Modra, where they played. Tolnai managed to get only part of the text, the first and second acts. He presented the other three acts in a relatively detailed description of the performance. An interesting feature of this version of Faust by the puppeteer Dubský is the missing crucifixion scene, considered a typical element of the Czech puppet play about Faust, a comic scene at the end of the play so-called "vartovačka". In Dubský's production this comic scene of peasants Štetka and Fikulka with Kasperl is the last scene.

Henryk Jurkowski assumes that Czech plays about Faust have a Catholic character unlike German plays that are Protestant¹³ in character. This view partly coincides with that of the Czech researcher Alice Dubská who writes about the crucifixion scene in which Faust reflects on his repentance¹⁴ and points out that this scene is missing in most German plays from the Protestant territories. We can therefore assume that Dubský's Faust documented by Vilmos Tolnai and called a Slovak puppet Faust¹⁵ has a close affinity with the German Faust.

Prince Maximilian was a play performed by German puppeteers in the 17th century, and by Czech puppeteers in the 19th century. The information about the play performed by Ján Stražan can be found on the poster of 1901.

It is apparent that marionette puppet plays by folk puppeteers were often varied and this resulted in different variants of the well-known titles. This process resulted from several facts. The plays were often handed down in the family of puppeteers from generation to generation by word of mouth and naturally there was a shift of text and arrangement. There was much improvisation and a few motifs, situations, passages and characters were added or omitted. There were also shifts in storylines and names of characters. With a degree of simplification, it can be concluded that every puppeteer somewhat modified his repertoire. This also concerns the play *Emperor Maximilian*. Its basic plot was rivalry between Prince Maximilian and Knight Roderych over Judith, the graceful daughter of Prince Albert.

In 2010, the book *Plays by the Anderle Family of Folk Puppeteers from Radvan*¹⁶ was published in Slovakia. It includes part of the Anderle family repertoire in the form of published transcripts of audio recordings of marionette puppet shows performed by the father of Anton Anderle, the folk puppeteer Bohuslav Anderle in the first half of the 20th century. It is known that Eva Kouřilová, later the wife of Michal-Václav Anderle, was the founder of the Anderle family of marionettists who started giving performances after the First World War. She grew up as an orphan in the family of Ján Stražan and mastered puppetry thanks to him. It is more than likely that some of the plays performed by the Anderle family were from the repertoire of Ján Stražan or are their versions. These Anderle's plays also include *Emperor Maximilian*, in which the motif of

¹³ Jurkowski, Henryk. *Antologia klasycznych tekstów teatru lalek*. Wrocław: PWST, 1999. p. 12.

¹⁴ DUBSKÁ, Alice. *Dvě století českého loutkářství / Two Centuries of Czech Puppetry*. Prague: AMU, 2004, p. 65.

¹⁵ *Tót bábjáték Faustról. Philologiai Közlöny 20, 1896*, pp. 217-227. In CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, Milena. *Česko-slovenská bábková hra o Faustovi / Czecho-Slovak Puppet Play about Faust*. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 1979, vol. 27, no. 1.

¹⁶ HAMAR, Juraj. *Hry ľudových bábkarov Anderlovcov z Radvane / Plays by the Anderle Family of Folk Puppeteers from Radvan*. Bratislava: Slovenské centrum pre tradičnú kultúru, 2010, 656 p.

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* can be found: Judith seemingly dies after learning the 'bad' news about the death of her beloved Prince Maximilian.

The process of modifying puppet productions was natural.

In addition to the oldest plays in the repertoire of folk puppeteers – *Faust*, *Don Juan* and *Emperor Maximilian* – Stražan also produced other plays from the classic repertoire, performed by the Czech puppeteers in the 19th century. *Victorious Maiden* is a play with the subject of banditry, performed by puppeteers under several titles such as *Anton Belengardo*, *The Bogus Count Belengardo*, and others. It is a play about robber barons with romantic features popular with audiences. Such plays were often about raids of castles.

Oldřich and Božena had an unusual position in the repertoire of Czech travelling puppeteers and, like most plays by folk puppeteers, had several titles. It was very popular in Bohemia in the 19th century and had a long run. According to historical facts (Duke Oldřich and his wife Božena) it was assumed that this play with a Czech subject originated in the Czech environment and therefore required further research. The puppetry historian Jaroslav Bartoš studied the play, but Alice Dubská¹⁷, a contemporary historian of the Czech marionette puppet theatre, shed more light into its origin. The story is about the king who lost his way in the forest while hunting and was rescued by an ordinary man, the poor charcoal burner Matthew. His generosity was rewarded with knighthood.

The story of the play appears in many European adaptations in English, French and German dramatic texts. Its history goes back to the Renaissance writer Matteo Bandello (1485-1561). An identical basis of the story similar to the Czech puppet play appears in his short story *The Noble Muslim*. The theme became the basis of the libretto by B. Guldener for Antonín Dvořák's opera *King and Charcoal Burner* in 1874. *Kermesse* at Hudlice was published in the book *Comedies and Plays* by Matěj Kopecký in 1862.

The Slovak version has been preserved in the publication of the Anderle family. The storyline corresponds to other works of the known theme.

Turkish Island and *Vilfink Stubenberský* were among typical puppet plays adopted by Slovak puppeteers (Stražan's and Anderle's families). Stražan produced the latter play under the title *Bilfing Štumberský*.

These classic marionette plays were the most popular performances of travelling puppeteers in Bohemia and Slovakia, included in their repertoire until the mid-1950s. They were intended for the classic marionette puppet repertoire because they followed the conventions of folk marionette theatre, which was highly stylised in the expression of wooden puppets, their declamatory character, striking expressiveness, poignancy and simplification instead of psychological acting.

The drama produced by Stražan in the theatres of Central Europe can be considered the second-line of his repertoire. The staging of drama in marionette theatres is associated with the tendency

¹⁷ DUBSKÁ, Alice. *Dvě století českého loutkářství / Two Centuries of Czech Puppetry*. Prague : AMU, 2004, pp. 79 – 89.



Anton Anderle (1944-2008), the last original traditional puppeteer in Slovakia.



Marionettes from performance of A. Anderle "Don Juan". Puppets from 19th century.

of the puppeteers to innovate traditional marionette theatre in Central Europe, which was becoming anachronistic at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries in the context of the development of theatre, and faced competition from film as a medium that attracted large audiences. Apart from Austrian, German and Czech puppeteers who broadened

the classic puppetry repertoire, including older and new drama, Ján Stražan used this method as well. However, he also produced new Slovak plays that make up the third group of his repertoire.

Közkivánatra még egy magyar előadás!

NAGY BÁB-SZINHÁZ.

Előadásaimat Besztercebányán, az Árpád-téren tartom.
Ma csütörtökön, október 8-án
Szinre kerül:

DR. FAUST

Dráma 4 felvonásban.

Személyek:

Faust János, doktor	***	I. minister
Vágner, szolgája	***	II.
Gáspár	***	Mefisztó ördög
Perzsa király	***	I. paraszt
Matild, leánya	***	II.
		Ördögök, szellemek, angyalok.

Kezdeté este 8 órakor.

Vasárnap van két előadás d. u. 4 és este 8 órakor.

Belépti díj: I., II., III. hely 60 fill., IV., V., VI. hely 40 fill., VII., VIII. hely 30 fill., állóhely 20 fill., gyermekjegy 20 fill.

Igen tisztelt közönség! Előadásaim mindenütt a legnagyobb sikert aratták, azért remélem, hogy n. é. közönség előadásaimat nem fogja összehasonlítani a közönséges báb-színházzal.

Maradok kiváló tisztelettel **Stázsán János**

Plagát Jána Stražana v maďarskom jazyku propaguje predstavenie tradičnej hry *Doktor Faust* v Banskej Bystrici.

Poster promoting performance *Dr. Faust* of Slovak puppeteer Jan Stražan; beginning of 20th century.

The second group, originally drama repertoire, mainly 19th century pieces, includes relatively successful and frequently performed foreign plays: *Der Müller und sein Kind* (*Miller and His Child*) by the German writer Ernst Raupach, frequently staged in Central Europe and in 1911 a silent film

was made in Austria; *Der böse Geist Lumpacivagabundus oder Das liederliche Kleeblatt*, a famous play by the Austrian playwright Johann Nepomuk Nestroy of 1833; social drama – dramatization of the novel *Le Maître de forges (The Owner of The Ironworks, 1883)* by the French writer George Ohnet, popular with European theatres.

Stražan's posters also advertise plays by the Austrian playwright Ludwig Anzengruber, *Das vierte Gebot (The Fourth Commandment)*, staged in the Josefstädter Theatre in Vienna in 1878, and *Der Meineidbauer (The Perjuring Farmer)*¹⁸, a folk play with music in three acts premiered at the Theatre an der Wien in Austria in 1874.

Stražan's posters also advertise *Der Wildfang (A Bird of Prey)*, the play most frequently produced in the 19th century, written by the German playwright August von Kotzebue in 1798.

It is quite apparent that these plays were widely performed and Stražan's repertoire reflected the productions of major Central European theatres, drawing from foreign travelling puppeteers or Slovak amateur actors.

Czech drama had a specific position in Stražan's repertoire. The production of Slovak drama can be considered the third line of Stražan's repertoire. It is obvious that Stražan was not the author of any Slovak puppet plays for the so-called Baroque marionette puppet theatre. It was impossible in the light of the development, and logically, there were no other dramatists.

Historicising plays performed in the Slovak amateur theatre and puppet stages of folk puppeteers were popular 19th century subjects. *Podmanínovci*, one of those plays produced by Ján Stražan, appeared on the Anderles' poster in the 20th century. If we compare its importance in theatre and travelling puppet theatre, we come to the conclusion that its success was particularly associated with the puppet theatre, because it was most appropriate for this type of theatre in all dramatic literature as well as Slovak drama. The play written by a member of the Štúr movement, Mikuláš Dohnány in 1848 "received poor reviews by literary critics",¹⁹ though it met the criteria of literary conventions of the classic marionette play. It is the type of play about robber barons with romantic features, corresponding in subject, structure and narrative with the plays from the classic marionette repertoire of travelling puppeteers. Stylised classic marionette theatre conventionally accepts a certain amount of simplification and is devoid of the psychology of characters. Since this play complied with the conventions and principles of traditional marionette theatre, it was more suitable for puppet theatre than actor theatre for which it was written. Amateur actors in Liptovský Mikuláš also performed the play. It was premiered in 1863 when the future puppeteer Ján Stražan was only seven years old.

The storyline of the play *Podmanínovci* takes place in the mid-16th century Silesia and Hungary.

Stražan's posters from the 20th century²⁰ advertising Slovak drama promoted the plays by Ferko Urbánek, one of the most prolific Slovak dramatists from the period of Realism and Stražan's peer. Stražan preferred Urbánek's plays from the rural environment, popular with the audience of

¹⁸ The original title of the play is *G'wissenswurm*.

¹⁹ ČAVOJSKÝ Ladislav, ŠTEFKO Vladimír: *Slovenské ochotnícke divadlo 1830 – 1980 / Slovak Amateur Theatre 1830 – 1980*. Bratislava : Obzor, 1983 p. 43.

²⁰ All the posters of Ján Stražan's puppet theatre come from the 20th century. No posters have been preserved from the pre–1900 period.

folk puppeteers²¹. It can be seen in the marionettes dressed in Slovak traditional clothes. They are an important part of Slovak folk culture. A frequent production of Urbánek's plays in Stražan's repertoire reflects their popularity with audiences. The productions had similarities with the classic marionette play in the degree of idealisation, division of characters into heroes and villains, and a certain amount of simplification.



*Portray puppets of Stražan's family.
Slovakia, beginning of 20th century.
Author: František Brežňanský.*

Stražan also adapted plays from the repertoire of Slovak amateur actors about the violent Magyarization of Slovaks: *The Slovak Orphan* of 1889 by Marína Oľga Horváth, and *Conscience* of 1897 by Terézia Vansová.

Slovak drama and marionettes in Slovak traditional clothes formed a separate line of Stražan's productions. It had immense importance between the 1890s, the period of national oppression,

²¹ The term *folk puppeteer* is used to label a travelling actor with puppets. The word *folk* reflects the social position of the performer and the audience.

and the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, and played a major role in popular Slovak culture.

The popularity of Slovak repertoire as well as the classic marionette repertoire of travelling puppeteers can be seen in the poster of 1903, presenting a different play performed by Stražan every day of the week. In this case, three plays were from the classic marionette repertoire (*Doctor Faust*, *Prince Oldřich*, *The Blaník Army*), three by Ferko Urbánek (*Heretic*, *Witch from the Grove*, *Devil in the Marriage Paradise*), and Neumann's *Walled up Maiden* and Dohnány's *Podmanínovci*. This poster provides a representative sample of the repertoire.

Despite the popularity of realistic plays from the Slovak and European repertoire in Central European puppet theatres at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, it should be noted that it was largely intended to innovate the classic marionette theatre because its form had been obsolete. On the one hand this trend brought a fresh repertoire. On the other hand, however, it required adaptations that led to simplification, limited subjects and simplified characters. This partly suited conventions of the classical marionette theatre, but the realism of plays deprived the marionette puppet theatre of its original poetic, particularly of the attractiveness of puppet plays. As a result, such purpose-made applications of realistic plays to the puppet theatre proved to be a limiting factor.

However, the establishment of the Slovak puppet theatre, which began to produce plays during the rise of Realism, had its benefits. One of the most important was the establishment of Slovak puppet tradition through original plays, although not intended for the Slovak puppet theatre. Ján Stražan established the Slovak puppetry tradition, which has its origin in common European cultural contexts. Travelling puppeteers in Europe became an integrating element of Europe's culture over the past centuries. Their theatre was based on common literary, religious, art and theatre traditions. With hindsight, the traditional marionette puppet theatre as a cultural phenomenon has become part of common Europe's cultural heritage.

Anton Anderle, a puppeteer from Banská Bystrica, deserves the credit for reviving this tradition after the democratic changes in society in 1989. Although his traditional marionette puppet theatre and its repertoire has long been a closed matter in the context of the development of Slovak and European puppetry, his cultural mission had an impact on the whole society in the integrating Europe of the 1990s after the fall of the Iron Curtain.