

SPECULUM

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AMERICA AND THE NON-EUROPEAN WORLD IN THE PLAYS OF JOSIP KOSOR'S "PARISIAN CYCLE"

Josip Kosor's dramatic work is well known to both Croatian and European readership and theatre public. First of all, common reader is well acquainted with the author's so called 'rural dramatic cycle' – especially his most 'specific' and the most appreciated modernistic play, *Flame of Passion*. This paper will try to interpret – using the critical concepts of literary anthropology, intercultural studies and theatre sociology – the so called 'Parisian phase' of his literary work, his intercultural dramas *In Café du Dôme* and *Rotonda*. After positioning his dramas in their cultural, historical and literary context, after analyzing their performative background, we will try to (1) discover the so called 'extraliterary alusiveness' that is present in Kosor's dramatic cycle, (2) read out some of the concepts of social, gender and, especially, ethnic stratification, as well as their function in producing cultural stereotypes about American and non-European, especially Far-Eastern world of the early twentieth century.

I

Among Josip Kosor's plays *Flame of Passion* and *Reconciliation*¹ are often mentioned as paradigmatic. Unlike these plays, bluntly naturalistic, with some elements of the expressionist dramaturgy, but with utterly rural themes, theatre pieces of the Kosor's so-called *Parisian period* are characterised by certain metropolitan liveliness, international spirit and an interest for the exotic, "for the black Africa, yellow East, India, Japan, China, Babylon, Greece, mysticism, philosophy, esoterica, old aristocratic Europe faced with a mythic phenomenon – America, and its main greatest asset – cap-

¹ It should be mentioned that *Flame of Passion* was written in German during the author's stay in Vienna. The play was first published in Munich in 1911. It was published in Croatian in 1912, shortly after its first performance in the Croatian National Theatre on the 30th August 1911. First German performances also took place in the same year, in Mannheim and Munich. In 1914 Kosor's *Reconciliation* was premièred in the same theatre, but it was not published until 1923.

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ital.”² Of course, these are the plays *In Café du Dôme* and *Rotonda*.³ The first was published in Zagreb in 1922, premièred the same year in the then National Theatre for Dalmatia and it was directed by Rade Pregarc. On the other hand, *Rotonda* was published in 1925 and has not been staged so far.⁴

Our primary interest here will be the author’s dramaturgical shaping of the picture of “the other”, that is the characters that come from the American continent, India and Far East. One should briefly present the basic plot characteristics in Kosor’s plays. *Café du Dôme* is a two-act play that takes place in a Parisian café of the same name, on the day when “the Germans were pushed further back from Marne”, that is on September 13, 1914. The play begins with an empty conversation among several bohemians and their sporadic skirmishes with the waiters. Almost simultaneously, on the other end of the café, Djem, a rich American entrepreneur, is courting a lady whose name is not mentioned. She rejects him at first, indeed, she mocks him for his rude materialism. After one of the bohemians steals Djem’s wallet, the American threatens them with a gun. The climax of the play, needless to say, is a fight among the Apaches, who have attacked the American and thus protected the bohemians. However, such a course of action is interrupted by the lady who persuades Djem to test his boxing skills in a match on the corner at rotonda. If he wins, of course, she will be his and go to America with him. The end of the play is marked by the American’s symbolic entrance into the café, accompanied by the sound of Bizet’s *Toreador’s March*. Namely, Djem wins the boxing match and takes the lady to America.

On the other hand, Kosor’s *Rotonda* has a much more complicated plot. In four acts, the playwright introduces a whole range of characters onto the scene, members of various ranks of society, and with various cultural and geographical backgrounds. Miss Mathilda Dormeck, a whimsical daughter of an extremely rich Mr. Dormeck, does not want to marry a rich American businessman, but “searching for compensation, she connects with a potent jockey, a Don Quixotic grotesque poseur Hern Max von Poser”.⁵ The first act of the play is a lament of three bohemians who notice the differences between the Rotonda before the war and after the war. At the moment when the three policemen burst into the café in order to arrest the bohemians, a fakir enters the stage. Namely, the fakir begins to levitate, “begins to raise and flies high in the air” (95),⁶ that creates panic not only in the whole café, but in the whole Montparnasse as well. Furthermore, Max von Poser tries to win Mathilda’s hand, her money as a matter of fact, but she says she will say yes if he wins the race in Saint Claude. After Poser’s

² Paljetak (2002), 195.

³ Branko Hećimović points out that this so-called *international period* of the playwrights includes three plays, *In Café du Dôme*, *Rotonda* and *Humanity*. Cf. Hećimović (1976).

⁴ On the critical reception of these plays cf. Hećimović (1968), Jelčić (1988) and Paljetak (2002).

⁵ Paljetak (2002), 214.

⁶ All quotations come from the new edition of Kosor’s plays *In Café du Dôme / Rotonda*, Zagreb 2002. Therefore the numbers in brackets come from this edition.

failure to do that, Mathilda does not want him any more and the main action of the play switches to "Quat'z – arts", a big ball under masks with artists in the amusement park in Montparnasse. Miss Dormeck is there, says one of the participants,

... in a modest, human and all-social way in front of the board of the 'Quat'z-arts ball' – has a phenomenal million-dollar check written out for the poor bohemian artists, and that causes the most shaking and dramatic cyclone of elation in the very rich hall, that my words are unable to convey, perhaps only inspire pious awe!... (190).

Such an ecstatic mood is suddenly interrupted by a stultifying shot. The patron has, completely unexpectedly, not being able to bare such (class) humiliation, shot himself with a gun, symbolically – at the moment when the second floor starts to resound with "Black melodies" and while "the hungry Russian Jew (howls accompanied by a jazz band): U u u u u u!..." (192).

We see that the plots of Kosor's plays are completely simplified. The playwright's intention was symbolical portrayal of pre- and post-war atmosphere in a European capital. However, the author displays favouritism in these symbolical layers at the same time, the layers are in the so-called *foreground* and it frequently seems that the characters' rebuttals are utterly overdone and artificial, totally in the function of the playwright's *thesis*. But it is exactly this structure of the Kosor's text that supports our *reading*. Namely, every type of culturally (or anthropologically) directed reading aims at *reading* those elements out of a play's text (and performance) that represent moments of its (and the playwright's) out-of-the-literary allusiveness. A wide spectrum of characters in these plays is, of course, symptomatic. Namely, a reader or viewer of Kosor's theatrical pieces cannot avoid noticing some kind of *cultural disintegration* present in the dramatic tissue of *Café* and *Rotonda*. Following Duvignaud's statement about a theatre as a certain *harnessing* of the social act,⁷ we tried to understand the constructive elements of the Kosor's imaging of America and of the non-European world.

II

Kosor placed the action of his two plays in the real *historical* time of the twentieth century. Luko Paljetak mentions that "the first one (*In Café du Dôme*) was marked by the beginning, and the second (*Rotonda*) by the euphoric ending of World War I, so that is the thing that differentiates them when it comes to the atmosphere and theme, which is, since the setting is the same – Montparnasse – the same only at first glance."⁸ Furthermore, the space between the two cafés, represented in the very title, is also a real *historical* space. Namely, centres of Parisian cultural life during and after World War I were its cafés, especially those in Montparnasse, that is – Café du Dôme, Rotonda and La Coupole. One should also mention that, of course, the playwright's stays in Paris,

⁷ Cf. Duvignaud (1978).

⁸ Paljetak (2002), 201.

first in 1915 and later in 1918, influenced a great deal his shaping of the atmosphere present in the above mentioned dramatic cafés. Boško Tokin mentions that “beside Trotsky and other less important Russians” Rotonda was also frequented by

... a proud Mexican Ortiz de Zarate, a Japanese Fuzita [...] Modiliani, one of the most beautiful people, a strange Russian Mark Talof, a Christianized Jew, who slept in ‘Rotonda’ and used to say in his exceptional Russian accent ‘I am Catholic vu save’, and Maks Jacob, Picasso, Salmon, Carlo, Lipshiic, Kissling, Shanna Orlof, Fels, Vlamenk, Deren, together with a whole army of models led by a black woman Aisha, then the Scandinavians, Americans etc. [...] Everything under the receptive eye of the owner Libion, and the waiters, among whom Andre was very nice, who was able to judge a situation right away asking if we wanted our coffee ‘avec sukup’ which meant if wanted to pay some right away or some other time when we would have the money. [...] The whole ‘Rotonda’ was like a happy family and everyone, so to speak, at least then shared the good and the bad.⁹

We realize that a café over time became a *style of living*, a special semantic field, a meeting point for different classes and ethnic groups.¹⁰ It should be noted in the beginning that a café is a *sociopetal* space, or – totally simplified – a space for the socialization of more characters.¹¹ In the opening scene of the first act Kosor describes the interior of Café du Dôme like this:

At some round and square tables in the colour of stone, on sofas and chairs, sit several fantastic guys – future artists – lounging with the ladies of the night. At a small round table by the window that overlooks the noisy street sits a rich American around the age of 30, who came to Paris to ‘let himself go’. (7)

Namely, it is a Parisian café, Rotonda or Café du Dôme, that will become the main space for the *writing* of history into a dramatic text. Naturally, the “big” history is not the only semantic field in which a drama can be completely exhausted, but it enters the play in various ways, mostly *allusively* through replicas, one could say, of the marginalized social groups. Thus, the bohemians speak about historical changes that grasped *the atmosphere* of Parisian cafés:

Besides, ‘Rotonda’ became a fornicating house of international pervert junk from the whole country... Of everything that escapes the horrible impact of laws in its own country, that escapes to Paris and chooses ‘Rotonda’ for the favourite place to spend time. What a shame for the tradition of the generations of artists from Montparnasse... (69–70)

or enthusiastically shout revolutionary slogans:

The café returns to life, people cough, laugh, pleasant tensions becomes stronger, they whisper, there’s murmur, live gestures. –The waiter and a friend bring champagne to his “future ones”, corks fly, the air is filled with shouts: ‘Long live the porridge! Allons enfants. (33)

⁹ Tokin (1928), 398–399

¹⁰ For a short history of European cafés cf. Cindrić (2003).

¹¹ For the notions of *sociopetality* and *sociofugality* in theatrical *proxemics* see Elam (1980).

It is interesting that in such a symbolic cry artistic, ideological and political movements (otherwise related anyway) are semantically aligned, but ironically too of course.

"Long live cubism, futurism and bolshevism!" (33)

This ironical approach is completely justified also since many members of the already mentioned political and avant-garde movements, like Trotsky or Lenin, really frequented Parisian cafés in Montparnasse.¹²

On the other hand, the time of "great war" (as well as the after-war crisis) regularly creates apathy and pessimism in Kosor's drama characters. One of the bohemians describes the unenviable position of an artist at the onset of World War I:

You have explained to me precisely why a man in these times is unfit to work: *pro primo*, devastating moral depression. Secondly, there is no prospect of selling an artist's work, since the squares of Europe are vanishing perfectly in the black blizzard of war... Thirdly, physical exhaustion caused by lack of food, and fourthly, something is in the air, something bacillic, unpredictable and cruel, something that strangles and does not allow to breathe. Influenza! In Shakespeare's 'Macbeth', at the point when Macbeth murders king Duncan, it is said that Macbeth does murder sleep, Chief nourisher in life's feast, great Nature's second course, and this war, Europe and its rotten world, murders the divinely oxygen, the food of all food and of all the lives of our planet!... (7-8)

The after-war period is, although in a much more condensed manner, described in the same way, with strength and symbolism. The character, a member of the same social rank, a bohemian from *Rotonda*, exclaims the following:

"Our époque has gone crazy!..." (123)

The reasons for such pessimistic visions of the modern capitalist society need to be looked for in the previous époque.

That is to say, as we perceive the era of globalisation as represented by liberal capitalism, so did the culture of the Twenties differentiate its time from the previous periods exactly by its definition through capitalist way of manufacture and distribution, that is, by manifestations that have a recognisable dependence with this definition: by the condensing of social life in large cities, by the swing of industry and technological development or by the forms of social stratification characteristic to bourgeois society.¹³

Michael North, for example, notes that in a great number of contemporary theoretical discussions the guilt for the collapse of modernism as an, in Habermasian words,

¹² Cvijeta Pavlović mentions that Kosor's characters in their frequent slogans cry out and repeat the names of the following movements – impressionism, cubism, Dadaism, bolshevism, socialism – but expressionism only once. It is interesting that the playwright's dramaturgy, stylistically totally heterogeneous, is perhaps closest to the expressionist poetics. Cf. Pavlović (2001), 216–217.

¹³ Kravar (2003a), 5–6.

incomplete project is blamed on technology, liberal democracy, cultural modernism and other attainments of Enlightenment. In the aftermath of such *contemplative resistance* certain forms of *political aesthetic* emerge, that is, specific forms of artistic (aesthetic) modernism that can be defined precisely by their *antagonism* to other elements of modernity, such as rationalism, capitalism and material progress and the like.¹⁴

Furthermore, although it seems to us as semantically extremely closed and to a certain degree homogenous, the café area, such as that of *Rotonda*, is clearly *stratified*. What we see on the stage is actually the lower floor of the café, the area that takes over the largest part of the plot and within which coexist a multitude of most varied drama entities. If we count up only some, for example, – a Lady, an American, Bohemians, Half ladies, Apaches, Waiters (in *Café du Dôme*) Americans and English Ladies, Fakir, Hindi, Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Blacks, Algerians, Perverted types (*Rotonda*), we shall realise that there is a completely specific type of *stratification* at work here. We could, of course, conclude that the author's *intercultural matrix* in the choice of characters creates three basic types of stratifications.

We could call the first stratification a *social* one. Mate Ujević points out that during the performance of *Café* in Split “the hungrier part of the audience applauded when [Kosor] beat capitalism, and the fuller part of the audience – Philistine-Bourgeois seated in the mezzanine – when he stressed that the solution lay in compromise”.¹⁵ In one scene of the play one of the bohemians says that “it is in the spirit of the time that all social and material values become equal” (29). But such view can, of course, be held by a member of a *bohemian stratum*, that is – an extremely anarchic social phenomenon that considers capitalism to be its most extreme adversary. Thus, robbing Djem, the American, means to resist, to take revenge on “beastly capitalist America” (27). The primary initiator of social stratification within the plays is, of course, money. At one point, at the peak of the act of asking in marriage, the American from the *Café* defines a specific *power* of money as “an agency of divine power and universal powers of the cosmic laws on our planet!...” (37) On the other hand, the characters of Patron or the Manager from *Rotonda* are members of the newly formed middle-class that has made its fortune quickly, mainly during the war, and that is trying to keep that economically above all favourable status. For example, at one point the Manager talks of “poverty that is the worst vice, it is the axiom of millions!...” (83)

A second type of stratification we could call *gender* stratification. Although, specifically, there are some indications of the author's specific *sexually-discriminatory* viewpoint, we shall be interested in the way in which the *sexual* (gender) perspective shifts the acting lines of force within the play, or more precisely how it affects the other types of stratification. The most dominant female character in *Café* is Lady, described in the index of names as “a beauty, 25 years old” (6), alongside café characters

¹⁴ See North (1992) and Kravar (2003).

¹⁵ Ujević (1922), 2.

of *female bohemians*, Žaneta and Suzeta. The Lady is at the onset an extreme opponent of the rigid materialist philosophy of life embodied by America, and a fierce advocate of the European cultural heritage. Finally, she nevertheless goes to America to the estate of a rich entrepreneur, symbolically reconciling eternally opposed poles of *idealism* and *materialism*.

Let the opposed poles reconcile in front of my tearful eyes, the poles that hate each other and fight one another from primordial times: Materialism and idealism, reality and dream, blood and soul, since there is no life for one without the other!... (*Groaning*): Oh, oh, there is no life without a compromise, without a little shame! There is no home for a pitiful soul without a body!... Nature, you ancient ruffian, damned be you!... (65)

Apart from the already mentioned Lady who creates the basic twist of *Café du Dôme*, and Miss Mathilda Dormeck, her symbolic counterpart from *Rotonda*, over the stage of the Parisian café life a whole set of female characters passes, but the civic demi-mondes are the ones who contribute the most to the wanton atmosphere of play, dancing in delirium, spitting and raising their skirts at the slightest sign of verbal conflict or a fight.¹⁶ Female characters are therefore the basic *plot factors* present in both plays. Both in *Café du Dôme* and in *Rotonda* the female characters are active participants in a multitude of sexual intrigues (Lady and Djem, Mathilda and Poser), thefts (Žaneta and Suzeta), verbal and physical conflicts.

We could observe the aforementioned *stratification strategies* from a completely different viewpoint. At this moment, an imperative question arises: what are the fundamental differences between critical allusions to modern liberal and capitalist society, whether direct or indirect, that the characters of *Rotonda* and *Café* produce? For instance, Lady's incessant emphasizing of a specific American cultural *handicap* possesses a completely different meaning from the one, of course, capitalist aspect of modernity given by the bohemians. Conservative attacks on the so-called capitalist modernism are, of course, directed at the *past*, and are visible in almost all of Lady's replicas that tend to defend something we could call *culture* or even *heritage*. To Djem's constant proposals of love she once replies:

You are an Indian, a redskin! Your soul is dying with hunger cramps right next to full plates of rich, most fluid, aromatic eatables! Go to the Notre Dame and if you possess an atom of sense for the grandeur of human spirit, race, époques, you will become aware that only one 'Notre-Dame' is more valuable, by all standards, from all of America, with all its goldmines and spiritually limited dollar billionaires!... Even if France did not have a Napoleon, a Molière, A Victor Hugo, a Maupassant, etc. but only cathedrals à la Notre-Dame, they alone would make France great! (23)

Furthermore, the sharpest criticisms of the poorer aspects of a capitalist economy as well as the liberal model, both in *Rotonda* and *Café*, are given by the members of

¹⁶ In stage directions we regularly learn that demi-mondes "rub their chests [...], splash, lift their skirts, rub thighs" and let out inarticulate noises: "Brrr, brrr!" (117)

bohemian (cultural) milieu. On one occasion, at the climax of the play and immediately before a physical showdown with Djem, the absolute representative of the so called “vampire soul” (50) of capitalism, the bohemians symbolically define their role in society:

Do you know that if there was no us, the humanity would rot in soul and waste away in over-satiety, inveteracy and muddy materialism, and you attack us so viciously, you- [...] Do you know that we are to human society what air, azure, light and saint are to a man!... [...] Do you know that we open the eyes of the stupid masses, and particularly of the capitalism animalized from over-satiety, to its daft vampire soul we present divine thoughts, images and symbols!... So the sleepy loafer in him awakens and the vampire regains consciousness and opens its eyes to the daylight, and you- [...] Do you know that if there was no us, that the man would remain equal to a common beast, he would not know how to think, how to speak or how to express himself about the day, the sun, the night and the star!... We are the ones who gave the language, pathos and the passion!... He would remain primeval and would eat food four legged like a dog with its snout, like a bear with its paw, like a bird of pray with its claws, and you low creature – [...] (50–51)

Of course, the reader is perfectly aware that their basic intention is passively to wait for what they advocate. They talk of class, totality, of a kind of a better world “with a healthy currency” (71–72). Although their periodical and unmotivated proclamation of revolutionary slogans, followed by their verbal, but also physical (alongside a group of Apache Indians) showdown with the American boxing champion Djem, from whom “truculently sprays [...] poisonous capitalism!...” (55), sometimes seems humorous and to no purpose, the characters of the bohemians do actually power a certain mechanism of *social critique*. They are actually representatives of some type of undeveloped, illusionary and (auto)ironic *pre-Marxist thought*. In one of the first scenes of *Café* the author directly, of course, through Lady’s mouth, lucidly describes them as “the disinherited children of the fateful step-mother’s art” (32). Patron and the Manager, the central characters of Kosor’s *Rotonda*, in one of their interesting conversations *sort* the bohemian *clientele* in the following manner, “perverse types”, “menagerie”, and then “café-crémians” and “Bockblondians”, mostly by the type of cheap drinks they order.

And what is with the café-crémians and Blockbondians, did the number of their fatal visits to the café decrease? I cannot tell you, manager, how much they hurt my eyes and how I suffer from nervousness, since they constantly stink and rot in ‘Rotonda’. (82)

The final triumph of the bohemians is, of course, initiated by the political authorities. The city has decided that tonight the bohemians should not be expelled! Asked by the manager to leave the premises of the café, “since the patron is in dangerous state” (191), the bohemians defy him with words:

“Did you not hear that the Republic and Paris are on our side tonight?!
I command you [the jazz-band], be loud!” (191)

So there are two basic types of the so called *political aesthetics* of Kosor's Parisian plays.¹⁷ The author on one side dramatises the whole set of forms of extra-literary (direct and indirect) allusiveness, of which the most dominant model is the one aimed at so-called capitalist modernism. On the other hand, such type of direct communication with a socio-political context produces a completely specific model of *stereotyping*, mostly *nationally* (ethnically) conditioned. We will, in the following chapters, be primarily interested in the so-called *ethnic* stratification present in Kosor's "Parisian" plays, of course – not without the insight into the social background of such authorial strategy. We shall bear in mind also to an extent separate *entities* of such stratification – the members of the American continent on the one side and the rest of non-European world on the other.

III

The American world of *Café du Dôme* is presented through the character of Djem. He is a character who simply *is* in that café, but does on no account belong there. It is perfectly clear that it is Djem who is a member of a completely different semantic field, in itself a specific *newly-determined* (capital) that is trying by all might to *force* itself under the roof of the *old determiner* (pre-war café). He regularly tends to pay in large bank notes of one hundred Francs to show his material advantage in these café surroundings. Furthermore, the bohemians and the café ladies, not aware of his real name, often call him the *all-American* name Sam.¹⁸

Just look how ugly this Sam is. Americans are usually pretty people, prettier than the stunted Spaniards, Italians or the French, but this horse thief from the prairie is ugly. [...] He looks like he's not even from America but from New Zealand and belongs to a wild tribe of cannibals, just look at those cheek bones and the jaw: he could surely bite through a piece of elephant meat. (11)

And while the Parisian lady rejects him at the beginning and figuratively calls him an Indian, the bohemians describe his initial courtship in the following manner:

As if a beast from a primeval forest will throw itself onto a wild horse to fly like a thunder down the prairie!... [...] His nostrils shiver like those of a stallion and wide-open mouth lustfully slurp the perfume of her divine tan and 'lusciously' rustling dresses... [...] His knees tremble with passion, the fingers cramp like predator's claws clinching its prey... [...] Animal thrill bends his spine... it seems that the beast is perverse... [...] All-antediluvian man, a living example of an ape disguised as a man... when, all hot and blinded with passion, moves closer to the female whose scent he detected... Yuck, to hell, nature is disgusting... (19)

¹⁷ I took the concept of *political aesthetic* from Michael North who uses the said term in his analysis of literary opus of W. B. Yeats, T. S. Elliot and E. L. Pound. See North (1992).

¹⁸ This is an excellent example of the linguistic or, more precisely, onomastic founded stereotyping.

First and foremost symptomatic is the scene in which the American manages to ask for the Lady's hand in marriage. At the same time he asks the waiter for the receipt. The symbolism of this *simultaneous* intervention (*money for the drinks, hand in marriage for the money!*) cannot be resisted by the bohemians who comment:

“Do not interrupt this pure ceremonial moment with a banal receipt!...” (43)

The treatment of the American world in *Rotonda* is, of course, quite similar, if not identical to the one in *Café*. The central character of those post-war capitalist surroundings is Miss Mathilda Dormeck, “American billionaire” who is “taking in marriage, you understand me, is not being given in marriage, but is taking in marriage a horse-riding teacher from Zürich, whose entire estate is one old mare” (85). It is the American women, of course, who disrupt the civic *hypocrisy* of Europe. For example, one of them enters a café without a hat, which invokes a turbulent reaction with the manager since “a visit of a lady to ‘Rotonda’ with a hat on is the custom” (120):

“If our patron was to see this, he'd have a stroke, totally stressed-out and shaken up that he is!... (119);

to what the American man that is accompanying the lady lucidly answers, provoking a storm of approval with the strangers present in the café:

“Well, a hat does not cover the prostitutions of Paris, nor the prostitutions of Europe!...” (119)

One of the interesting characters in café *Rotonda*, who is from a non-European region, is most certainly the industrialist Mr. Dormeck, Mathilda's father. In scene eight of the second act he confronts his daughter's husband-to-be, Herr von Poser, with threats:

“You will first work in American mines as the lowest worker, a few meters below ground, so you'd get to know life, its astringency and bitterness. All you did through all of your life must have been riding?” (125)

This confrontation marks the end of the second act, but at the same time *initiates* a specific turn in the author's *treatment* of the American world. John Schwartzmantel, for instance, points out that the American socio-political model [after the revolution] is extremely *individual*, and within it “everyone can, and really should, dedicate themselves to work, commerce and profit. [...] Politics was considered, as an instrument, the means for advocating the search for personal interests that are common to all citizens. The republic and the consumer society went hand in hand.”¹⁹ The aforementioned form of capitalist individualism had to be a specific *novum* in the atmosphere of the European (as well as Parisian) after-war period, and, in that way, invoke some reactions in bohemian, idealism inclined, circles.²⁰

¹⁹ Schwartzmantel (1998), 52.

²⁰ It is worth mentioning here the often stated theory on the conflict of opposite sexes, idealism and materialism, and the final *compromise* of the aforementioned, as a central *resolution* moment of the analysed dramas. See Hećimović (1976), Jelčić (1988), Ježić (1993), etc.

Non-European, mainly far-eastern world in Kosor's plays is presented with a wide palette of characters. In *Café*, for example, only four Apache Indians are mentioned, while in *Rotonda* Fakir, Hindi, Indian, Japanese, Chinese, blacks and Algerians all take part. The characters of the Apache Indians in *Café du Dôme* enter not until scene three of the second act, of course, with a sole intention to partake in the physical conflict with Djem. Their part is reduced to partaking in the scenes of mass bar brawls and, to an extent, in the denouement of the play. They shout out revolutionary slogans when they read a news story on "catastrophe of the German army":

"Vive le socialisme et l'anarchisme!..." (63)

In *Rotonda*, on the other hand, the non-European, far-eastern world enters through Eurocentric replies of the waiter, the manager and patron. Japanese or even Chinese customers in the café regularly talk in a "dry, slightly parrot-like" voice, producing extremely unarticulated, almost animal sounds, for example, "Pih, cik, keko-kiki-kikikiriki!" (92). Entering *Rotonda*, tall and slim Hindi "rises and holds his arms up," saying:

And a white elephant, divine visionary miracle of Ceylon and all India flies in triumph galloping, along scented leopard jungles, crystally magically and abundantly intertwined with sound of bird throats... He flies to Adam's hill carrying a large Buddha, to receive the announcement of Krishna, Vishna and all immortal gods and make an agreement with eternity and Nirvana about the fate of the earth and the humanity!... Hahaha! (92)

Limping Indian adds to that:

"Python wraps himself in circles of wisdom around the tree of all knowledge... He will wrap himself in circles of horror around your degenerate, beastly soul!... (92)

The previously mentioned Fakir, probably preparing for his magic act, "makes large signs in the air to invisible ghosts by twisting his face into an incredible expression" (93). It is interesting that it is just the character of Fakir that becomes a certain *threat* to the economic stability of the café, jeopardizing with his *esotericism* café profit, therefore the basic principles of European capitalism. But just as interesting is the way in which the patron describes him, *articulating* his views completely in accordance with the oriental stereotyping of the time:

And if we, to a certain extent, have to believe in his magical powers, it is said, that these sons of the jungle, Buddha and Nirvana, in their dark mystical power are capable, focusing all their hellish will – god knows after how many and what type of dark psychic exercises – of killing a man on the spot with a single, like a serpent's sting ice-cold dirty look!... [...] You will find him in some cavern, where he drinks a stale stinking beer with yellow, ghostly, white-dress-clad Mohammedans from Algiers!... (102–103)

Edward W. Said notes that the Orient has always "been a European invention and from the ancient times has been a place of romance, exotic creatures, memories and landscapes that haunt like ghosts, a place of unique experiences".²¹ For Said, the direction of imperial power, and by that a direction of stereotyping, is perfectly clear

²¹ Said (1999), 7.

since, of course, orientalism exists, but the occidentism does not. Therefore, every *investment* into Orient or, for instance, an attempt of narrative definition, is necessarily discriminative. Such Orient is actually *orientised* and mediated by a string of occidental paradigms – it can by no means be *presented* by pure knowledge, but only functionally *represented* and marked by a particular manipulative reading and contextualisation strategy.

Exceptionally interesting scene of the fourth, final act of *Rotonda* is the one in which, in the middle of carnival madness Quart's arts ball, Hindi and Indian talk about their material poverty, but at the same time give a strong critique of a dominant European and capitalist society. Their critique is theoretically organised completely *ecologically*. The Indian within the same scene says that “not by an atom can the nature or cosmos be fooled! [...] An atom punishes and rewards an atom...” Hindi adds to that:

All nature is damaged and the Earth in its axis is dangerously upset from the war carnival of massive death, slaughter, annihilation, earthquakes, explosions and general poisoning, and a grave moral insult has been made... [...] And the humanity insults, maims a weak one, lames and blinds nature itself... morally, psychically and chemically!... So that she, at the end, like an abused tiger, lion or an elephant, enrages and returns the favour in the form of earthquakes, volcanoes, cyclones, floods, geological reformations and even a perfect catastrophe of planet!... (177)

We realise that in the final scenes of the play the critical meaning turns around somewhat. Now the non-European world will become the lens of mediation of truth about the corruption of Europe, America and the western system of values.

They are – all they want is to stretch out in a bar like pigs – for pleasure and debauchery, and to think that enjoy their nature and question through their prism the universal divinity, not a bit about that!... [...] They are only for consummation: hap, hap, and then into the bed with a woman, and: hup, hup, hup!... (178–179)

At this moment we should ask ourselves: in what way does the world outside Europe penetrate the tissue of the drama text? Firstly, it is completely clear that the drama characters and the corresponding replicas are the basic *carriers* of the problem. On the other hand, some of the philosophical thoughts that the bohemians speak out are of eastern origin. Furthermore, some of the performance elements, e.g. music, dance, Apache-Indian battle with knives or Fakir's magic act, also belong to that climate. What, then, are the basic mechanisms of the manufacture of stereotypes that are present in Kosor's *international* plays? Patrice Pavis, a well known French theoretician of performing arts, notes that the *intercultural* theory paradigm should not be used for the purpose of comparing cultural identities, differences, common motifs and such like, but solely for interpreting specific *cultural transpositions of performance* such as, for instance, Brook's production of the exotic *Mahabharata* or Barba's *Faust* for Indian and Japanese actors and dancers.²² On the contrary, we hold the opinion that in our case exactly such theoretic strategy would be truly useful since, for exam-

²² See Pavis (1996a).

ple, the characters of Fakir, Hindi, Indian, Algerians, Japanese and Chinese, the *most dominant* drama characters *in the performance*, bringing their own *performance customs* into the play, at the same time change the entire cultural field of performance. Thus, more strategies of the so-called *stereotype production* are at work, all connected into a sort of a circle of theatrical *representation*. That circle could be defined with the help of three key moments: (1) *taking possession*, (2) *adaptation* and (3) *irony*.

The first is created at the moment when one of the elements of the so called cultural field "two," such as the language of the Japanese, the magic of Fakir, philosophical thought of India is *taken*, brought into the text. Then that same element is *adapted* to the new, European cultural field, for instance, bohemians speak out to the wise Indian sayings that, when spoken by their mouths, sound banal or semantically empty; and there is an attempt to banish the Fakir from Paris, and if not, then to try create a source of income out of him as a circus attraction.²³ Of course, such a discriminative position of the European world is at the end skilfully *made ironic* by the author through a compromise solution in *Café* or perhaps by a triumphant orgy, as well as through a specific class and ethnic *melting pot* in *Rotonda*. Kosor's view of "the other" is extremely exceptional. He uses the symbolic inventory of the *culture of the other* – their tradition, that what other characters make a mockery or a parody out of – but by such action of the author, the discriminative viewpoint of the dominant culture is being *stripped down*. Therefore, the introduction of "the other" as well as "the culture of the other" is dramaturgically completely motivated. It is exactly by that procedure that all the paradoxes of Euro-centrism are *theatrized* and one totally outstanding colonial viewpoint is revealed.

IV

If we at this point examine closely some key *performance* moments of the two of Kosor's plays, we shall realise that they to a large extent contribute to the *representational strategy* we tried to interpret in the previous chapters. The area of the *Café* is clearly defined by meaning. It is an extremely *illusory* area, sort of a *theatre within theatre*, within which "future artists", bohemians, ladies of a questionable morale, rich entrepreneurs and others meet. The author constantly reminds us by the means of *closed dramaturgy* that *Café du Dôme* is one particular semantic field within the area of the city. The American, for instance, observes the outcomes of diseases, war and human poverty through the window of the café:

"Hearse passes in front of the window, rattling along with black undertakers and a black coffin." (9)

His obvious uneasiness (and intention to leave the café) is lucidly commented on by the waiter in the following manner:

²³ See Pavis' *appropriation*, *ibid.*

But if you are leaving just because of that, because the dead make you feel uneasy, you are gravely mistaken that you'll escape them on the outside. From every street, at all the cross-roads, a black hearse and the dead will block your way... (10)

Café area keeps its autonomy even after the scene of mass fight when it is, of course, expected that some of the partakers of the conflict will leave the scene. Instead of that, instead of the expected denouement, the author strives to retain the *proxemic autonomy* of the café by specific *simultaneous invasions* on stage. Almost at the same time into the café “enters a lovely lady and, having observed the scene, raises her arm in horror”, and then – “[i]nstantly everything dies down, stiffens and goes quiet.” (60), and a boy brings the newspaper with the news of the German military catastrophe, at which point “everyone grabs a newspaper, [...] passionately read, cramp, exclaim with hands in the air: Vive la France! Vive la France! Vive la Monde!...” (63)

In *Rotonda*, the scene is also completely closed. Specifically, the first, second and fourth acts take place in the café, while the third is *moved* to a horseracing track in Saint Cloud. At the beginning of the play, in its introductory stage directions, the author describes the interior of the café in the following manner:

Café ‘*Rotonda*’ on Montparnasse in Paris. On the walls, pictures by impressionist, cubist and futurist artists. In front, Varlaine’s bust. The space is divided into three parts. To the right, a buffet, to the left, the café, at the back, on the left, stairs rise up to the restaurant. Sofas on both sides against the wall, in front of them tightly placed tables, down the middle another set of tightly placed tables... (69)

At this moment it is important to point out that the complex and multi-meaning proxemics of café *Rotonda* are marked by two *opposing* scenes: the first, in the foreground, downstairs, where most of the play takes place, and the second, in the background, on the second floor, from which the sounds of “Black melodies” of a jazz band, or the music of a “Russian Jew” can be heard. The performance *simultaneity* is often suggested in stage directions:

All guest rise to their feet. A mutiny. [This refers to the lower floor]. On the first floor, the dancing to the wild jazz band is more and more passionate, accompanied by the murmur of voices and screams: hip, hip, hip, hip!

In one place in Kosor’s *Rotonda* the café’s “upstairs” is defined as “hell, where syphilis, cancer and scrofula swirl around”, a place where its characters find their “oblivion” in “other person’s fog of alcohol and blunt drunkenness of miracle, in two-step, foxtrot, tango and chimic strokes” (103). Café atmosphere soon becomes *pars pro toto* of the whole Montparnasse. And so the manager at one point adds:

“Montparnasse n’est pas plus que la Mont des tipes perverses!...” (118)

The racetrack on which the plot of the third act takes place totally takes over the semantics of the café. In that place, all lines of force of the conflict that the reader (spectator) is already familiar with from the café are *reactivated*. Only the scene of the racetrack in Saint Cloud is presented *in absentia*, “forwards over the audience, invisible”

(127). The atmosphere, all social conflicts and almost all *ethnic elements* present in cafes are here only proxemically dis-placed, by no means moved, neither physically or symbolically. The last act also confirms this, the grand return to *Rotonda*, which "bathes in white electric light", and from which the café masses "observe [costumed and stylised] guests of honour and visitors of Quart'z-arts ball" (159).²⁴

The last act of *Rotonda* completely drains itself in wanton carnival lunacy. Exactly for the reason of a specific predominance of *performed* over *spoken* it is possible to read a whole string of sign-systems present in the described scenes. During the Quart'z-arts ball, throughout the café spreads "commotion, nervousness, murmur, wave, abundance, light, flash. Waves of light, the clamour and scream of the masses hit the room from the outside" (159). And while the waiters "haul different drinks; all over the place there is toasting, drinking, shouting, singing, yelling" (166) and one bohemian, "all in feathers, steps out with a guitar in hand into the centre of the café and, accompanied by strings, sings. [...] All of a sudden, the jazz band roars from the above. Demi-mondes, half naked or naked but scarcely protected in certain parts, fantastically stylised, descend down the stairs into the café and form a long row of pairs. All of the café jumps to their feet and all of a sudden there is patron on the stairs, naked but for the required parts; he put some shaggy black leather on the front, and on the back, a peacock's tail that spreads, rises, lowers, wiggles with him in all directions. Behind him roars the jazz band. All of the café bursts into thundering shouting, screaming, clapping, giggling, into an earthquake: 'Bravo patron, bravo patron!' An immense curious crowd breaks in from the balcony through the door to watch, flap their arms, kick their legs and suffocate with laughter. A little space opens in the middle of the café, the jazz band strokes some black melodies, and the patron dances some sensual belly dance, bending, grotesquely kicking his feet and wiggling the peacock's tail in all directions and sweeping the floor with it. The whole place roars with approval and laughter" (167–168). It is completely clear that *auditory* signs dominate the play, primarily the background music of the *jazz band*, then the atonal singing of the "Russian Jew" and the howling, screams, shouts and yelps of the drunken café masses.²⁵ But, on the other hand, the system of lightning is of great importance to the café space. Described in detail in stage directions and, in that way, compositionally clearly motivated, it is primarily in the function of *enhancing* audiovisual moments of play. At the moment when, for instance, Djem the American threatens the bohemians with a gun "the doors suddenly open and in flies a fluttering flash of gunfire, explosion and thunder of bombed buildings" (59). Such instantaneous so-called *lateral lighting*, rhythmically interrupted, definitely contributes to the dramatic tension, creating at the same time a particular *dramaturgy of light*.²⁶

²⁴ In the scenes so called *informal scenes* dominate, the ones that act extremely *cohesively* on actors and audience. Scene distance between the actors in the final scenes of the drama is completely *intimate*, and this contributes to already noticed *sociopeality* of the scene. See Elam (1980).

²⁵ For the systematic overview of scene signs see Elam (1980) and Fischer-Lichte (1992).

²⁶ The already mentioned Patrice Pavis talks comprehensively about this and notes that it is the lighting that is often responsible for more or less rational interpretation of events by the audience. See Pavis (1996), 176–181.

At this moment a question arises: in what way can the so-called semiotic research of the author's play settings *make* our interpretation of the picture of the non-European or American worlds *complete*? That is, most of the semiotic systems present on the scene are of non-European origin, most often colonial, and therefore completely *stylised*: i.e. fashionable Parisian dances, black music upstairs, carnival *mimicry* of the Patron, etc. At one moment in *Café*, the Lady says the following:

“Your [American] talent for art only came to light when you, together with red, meaty English, looted black melodies and now dance ‘Cancan’ to them!...” (25)

Furthermore, Branko Hećimović notes that these two of Kosor's plays could have been created by looking up to some form of the so-called *musical theatre*, for example opera or ballet, as most of the multimedia elements within the performance would suggest. This is particularly so during the final intonation of the aria from *Carmen* in *Café du Dôme* (sung by Toreador, after beating the bull, and returning to Carmen... [64]) or the previously mentioned black music in Rotonda.²⁷ However, we are of the opinion that the listed audiovisual signs, mimicry, gesture, different dance sections, as well as extreme artificiality of the acting expression, carnivalisation of *ritual* behaviour and such like, primarily in function of clear *staging* in previous chapters of analysed cultural stereotypes.²⁸ Mathilda Dormeck, having selflessly drafted a million dollar cheque for the benefit of Parisian bohemians, becomes a goddess in their eyes, “a grand woman”. One of them describes Mathilda's *carnival state* in the last scene of the play in the following way:

And she wept and wept the tears of prayer, flexibility, fertility and inspiration, until at the end she fell into a hysterical, religious cramp and started dancing some devout black and Indian dances to the sun, the matriarch of all-life, while here all-too-lovely moves, twists and jumps, spilling enormous, stupefiable luxury, intoxicating scent of tan and charm – she gave a warm intimate stroke all of, with beauty and sweet pain a drunken jungle Buddha old Indian hall of Quart'z-arts ball!... (189–190)

From all that was said it can be deduced that the basic procedure that the author uses for the building of his drama tissue is a sort of an assembly. Kosor's dramaturgy is extremely discontinuous, that is to say, it is put together from a string of scene pictures, simultaneous scenes and powerful audiovisual *invasions*, which have as a basic aim the *removal* of the drama subject, *dispersion* of the centre of performance and

²⁷ See Hećimović (1976). It is worth noting at this point that the colonial viewpoint of the Twenties of the last century today, albeit with a different meaning, shows through within the phenomenon *postcolonial* and *intercultural* theatre, such as the one of Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba or Ariane Mnouchkine, as well as in more and more present interest for the so called *world music* movement.

²⁸ At this moment we need not talk about the importance of dance and music in the ritual theatres of Africa, India, etc.

complete *destabilisation* of meaning.²⁹ It seems to us that the characters in *Rotonda* and *Café* are just dramaturgy *possibilities*, therefore – the representative, symbols or embryos of meaning of some more solid social phenomena.

V

By interpreting the model of social and ethnic stratification, therefore the strategies that are also all-present in Kosor's plays, we tried to interpret some of the key models of the so-called *extra-literary allusiveness*. Duvignaud's claim about (necessary) comparative history of literature, theatre and social occurrences was to us, of course, the guiding thought. Theory paradigms of the American *new historicism* or British *cultural materialism*, which were completely established in the Eighties of the twentieth century, are witness to the so-called *new actuality* of thesis of the mentioned French sociologist. In our interpretation of *cultural imagology* of American and non-European world in Kosor's plays of "Parisian phase" we primarily delved in the types of *production, writing*, and finally *theatralisation* (or *staging*) of omnipresent cultural, political and many other stereotypes. The social projects of modernism, and then capitalism, and early liberalism were *broken up* into a number of levels in the interpreted drama texts, but author's allusions acquired the markings of the already mentioned *pre-Marxist thought* with time. That is to say, older Marxist theories interpret capitalism (or even capitalist modernism) as the organisation of production or the *resultant* of the relations between the two opposing dominant economic classes – bourgeois (which owns the means for production) and the proletariat (which possesses only their personal ability to work).³⁰ The characters we find inside the two Parisian cafés are mostly clearly defined by *class*, but – of course – the mentioned social stratification is by no means *all-present* or the only valid one. We are, however, of the opinion that the author's critical allusiveness does *go in that direction*. However, it is extremely hard to interpret the meaning of such underlying *concept of thought*, and the complete *auto-ironisation* contributes to that, but the author's direct advocacy of the communist ideology in *Humanity*, the play that was created almost during the same period, supports our claim.³¹

Furthermore, there are two very powerful performance moments present in both of Kosor's plays, two sides of modern capitalist society, the revolution and carnival. The ideas of revolution, political or artistic *avant-garde* of the twentieth century – "impressionism! futurism! cubism! Dadaism! bolshevism! socialism! anarchy!" – in

²⁹ Listed markings Elinor Fuchs connects to the so called *aesthetics of absence* in theatre of the Eighties of the twentieth century. We hold the opinion that such embryo of *new theatrical textuality* should be looked for in the *avant garde*. See Fuchs (1989).

³⁰ See Edgar/Sedgwick (2002).

³¹ See Hećimović (1976), 256.

Kosor's plays assume the markings of *great meta-stories*, absolute truths that are made ironic and semantically completely empty in the mouths of bohemians. Carnival and wanton atmosphere of *Rotonda*, on the other hand, represents a final *abolition* of all social customs, ethic, relational and class.

I am sober from hashish and opium, into whose intoxicating dreams a thought of tonight's great celebration had taken me!... After him! My soul freezes in horrific fear at any thought!... [...] Carnival, carnival, carnival!... Prince carnival speeds on the apparition of Ash Wednesday!... But quickly after him, after him! (174)

In the carnival fever the hidden historic constant that all social classes are equal "does not succumb to periodical resurrection".³² Carnival *modus operandi* is focused "against every withdrawal of borders, for instance, between art and life or between partakers and the observers, regardless to which period this demarcation belonged".³³ Heterogeneous identities, ethnic, political, economic or cultural, in the final scenes of Kosor's Parisian plays are unified in the rottenness of human nature – in the symbolic wedding compromise between the idealism and materialism, culture and capital (in *Café du Dôme*) or within bestial orgies and café's melting pot (*Rotonda*).

"All life and world – is a spectacle, last night's night a miraculous chaotic spectacle and everything is a multicoloured spectacle." (168)

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³² Biti (1997), 171

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