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The  
**ITALIAN  
OPERA  
LIBRETTO**  
and  
**DUBROVNIK  
THEATRE**

(17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY)

HOLLITZER



**THE ITALIAN OPERA LIBRETTO AND DUBROVNIK THEATRE**  
(17<sup>th</sup> AND 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY)



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Translated from the Croatian by  
Graham McMaster

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Ivan Frana Gundulić: *Ariadna, tragedija* [Ancona: Marco Salvione], 1633.  
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VIKTORIA FRANIĆ TOMIĆ, SLOBODAN PROSPEROV NOVAK

**THE PECULIARITY OF THE CROATIAN  
RECEPTION OF DRAMATIC MUSIC  
IN THE 17<sup>th</sup> AND 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY**

1. THE CROATIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE LATE  
RENAISSANCE THEORY OF DRAMATIC MUSIC FROM  
FRANJO PETRIĆ (FRANCESCO PATRIZI)  
TO PASKO PRIMOVIĆ AND IVAN GUNDULIĆ

We are going to start off by asking a general historiographic question that will help us get to the main point of our research into the peculiarities of the Croatian reception of dramatic music, as well as of the relations between drama and music in general, which, in the case of Croatia, refers to drama and the libretto in the literature as well as in the theatre of the Early Modern Age, especially in Dubrovnik, where the form of dramatic music solidified into a distinct genre.<sup>1</sup>

The question is: how does one determine the maturity of individual modern-age national European literatures? By maturity we primarily refer to the level of the inner constructedness of individual national literatures, then we refer to the complexity of their genre image and to their use of the vernacular and, finally, to their outward autonomy in the face of other social acts and institutions. The thus-defined maturity of individual modern-age national European literatures depends primarily on the date of the breakthrough of the said literature, that is, of its period of emancipation from the medieval type of literary culture. There is no need to highlight the fact that, in most countries of the Abendland, and therefore also in a portion of some Slavic countries – most particularly in today's Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the Ukraine and Slovenia and Croatia, this period is termed the Renaissance, the term denoting an epoch that started no later than some time during the fifteenth century. Here we are aware that we have defined this period by a term that cannot, by any means, encompass all the characteristics of this epoch of the spirit, but it can at least chronologically limit

1 Slobodan Prosperov Novak: *Vučistrah i dubrovačka tragikomedija* [*Vučistrah and Dubrovnik Tragicomedy*], Split: Književni krug, 1979; Franjo Švelec: "Tragikomički i komički teatar u Dubrovniku XVII. stoljeća" [Tragicomical and Comical Theatre in Dubrovnik in the Seventeenth Century], in: *Zadarska revija* 38/5–6 (1989), pp. 387–411; Nikola Batušić: "Elementi scenske fantastike u dubrovačkoj drami 17. stoljeća" [Elements of Scenic Fantasy in Dubrovnik Drama of Seventeenth Century], in: *Hrvatski književni barok* [*Croatian Literary Baroque*], ed. Dunja Fališevac, Zagreb: Zavod za znanost o književnosti, 1991, pp. 249–266.

the time period in which it is possible to describe and determine the processes of emancipation that appeared in an unsynchronised manner in all the different parts of Europe between the beginning of the fourteenth century and the second half of the eighteenth century, when Voltaire's company of philosophers completed the process of assimilation and interpretation of the epoch in which the emancipation from a medieval type of culture was carried out and completed; this is an epoch for which the term Renaissance is more of a chronological than a stylistic determinant.<sup>2</sup>

It is not necessary to highlight this here, but still let it be said that in the majority of national literatures new languages called vernaculars took the place of the old and often not-folk literary languages of that period. The vernaculars were folk languages which in most cases survive even up to this date. This is what the Italian humanist theory rightly termed the *questione della lingua* early on, while in conjunction with this process the medieval repertoire of literary forms which had come into place fourteen centuries earlier was completely removed in that period of emancipation, passing into marginal literary communication channels, whereby the mainstream of literature was taken over by renewed forms of the literature of classical antiquity (especially in dramatic literature, and then also in the libretto form and the accompanying opera music). Of the new forms, created however under a less dominant influence of antiquity, different forms and also emotions of lyrical love poems were established, inspired by somewhat retrograde, not classical, but medieval troubadour lore and courtly poetry. The aforementioned process of new genealogical formations of hierarchies revived, with great frequency, the form of the classical eclogue, which helped considerably in promoting dialogic forms – this transformed dramatic forms first and foremost into new comedy and tragedy, which would later be close to pastoral dramas and in Croatian literature, based on Moresque archetypes, and finally to the opera libretto form as well.

The aforementioned process restored the great epic and it was all part of what the theorists of the time called the *questione della poetica* which, as a matter of language and genre, entered European thinking on poetry through the famous study *Prose della volgar lingua* (Venetia: Tacuino, 1515) by Pietro Bembo (1470–1547). This process strengthened a whole system of expert, let us say poetic, knowledge, which from then on accompanied literary production to an even greater degree, perceiving it as a specific working process, autonomous and self-creating. The disjointedness of the medieval literary craft thus gave way to new rules of the lit-

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2 Riccardo Picchio: "Renaissance Drama and the Formation of Modern Slavic Literary Systems", in: *Il teatro italiano del Rinascimento*, ed. Maristella De Panizza Lorch, Milano: Comunità, 1980, pp. 637–653; Novak: *Slaveni u renesansi* [*Slavs in the Renaissance*], Zagreb: MH, 2009.

erary and poetic game. From then on, the elite text makers and their interpreters had to know not only the new rules, but also their audience.<sup>3</sup>

The framework for a new literature was formed, its latent classicism emerged, and from then on one could mainly be a writer only if one accepted the principle of imitation as the production principle or, in a later period, which was only later termed the Baroque, if a writer decided to upgrade the original system with embellishments and *concetti*, to mediate it in a completely unexpected and new way but still within the conventions of a stylistically marked speech and of the genres established in the sixteenth century, which were determined more or less in antiquity. A new genre of poetics was thus born and it took over the hierarchical evaluation and placing of literary works. During the sixteenth century, Roman rhetoric and Aristotle's poetics were placed at the very center of literary consciousness and those who were unfamiliar with or unwilling to accept them could only write against the current, on the margins – they remained outside the literary community. Very early on in the Renaissance a relative balance was thus achieved among literary genres, a spirit of novelty was established, what used to be known and in time ceased to exist was now reaffirmed and placed in a position in which it would contribute to the reorganization of literary life, which was this time, more than ever before, realized through a consensus of literary generations and genres, customs and accomplishments.

This process led to a reduction in the differences between national literatures, whereby genres and their revival were starting to play an increasingly prominent role. The consensus and the homology of various national literatures used to stop at national borders, before their ethnic and linguistic particularities, but it used to stop even more so at the borders which separated national and regional literatures at the level of social circumstances and the cultural lives of different classes. This new Renaissance system was forged more increasingly under the influence of power structures and their organization of public life. Neither music nor the theatre was considered an esthetic activity in the Renaissance – they were perceived as a metonym for society, as its necessary expression and confirmation of the forms of social behavior.<sup>4</sup>

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3 For Baroque genres, see Pavao Pavličić: "Problem žanra u hrvatskoj baroknoj književnosti" [The Problem of Genre in Croatian Baroque Literature], in: *Forum* 15/9 (1976), pp. 449–465; cf. for the same issue the fundamental work of Zoran Kravar: *Das Barock in der kroatischen Literatur*, Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1991.

4 Lodovico Zorzi: *Il teatro e la città: Saggi sulla scena italiana*, Torino: Einaudi 1977; Cesare Molinari: "Les rapports entre la scène et les spectateurs dans le théâtre italien du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle", in: *Le lieu théâtral à la Renaissance*, ed. Jean Jacquot, Paris: CNRS, 1968 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 61–71. The oldest and most comprehensive discussion of this issue are the works of many hands by the same publisher: *Les fêtes de la Renaissance* (1936, 1960, 1975); *Le lieu théâtral à la Renaissance* (1967, 1968).

*Totus mundus* had not yet arrived on the scene, or in works of literature. Writers were satisfied with the imitations of their predecessors, but not with the creation of new autonomous worlds. Metonymy ruled over metaphor. The spirit of the time was one thing in terms of Renaissance relations, and its social direction and determinateness were something completely different. Changes did not occur quickly. It was as if they were incorporated in their own precedence.

As this was the case with Croatian literature, how was it not going to be the case with the greatest ones? Towards the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century, greater European literatures – Italian, Spanish, French, English – with certain differences in the level of their constructedness, were self-oriented and self-centred institutions in possession of autonomy, which featured a series of self-confident literary generations, with certain differences regarding their inner development. Although minor in size, Croatian literature abounded in features which can be compared, with certain reductions, to all the major European literatures and it is this knowledge that guides us in this research as well.

Many will certainly say that this is a known fact, but many will be wrong in making such a claim once we demonstrate that what is known as the literary corpus of the West is not cognisant of Croatian literature having assimilated all the better Italian libretti of the Seicento and Academism and that a specific form of musical theatre was created – unlike the opera, but representing a very important reduction of it.

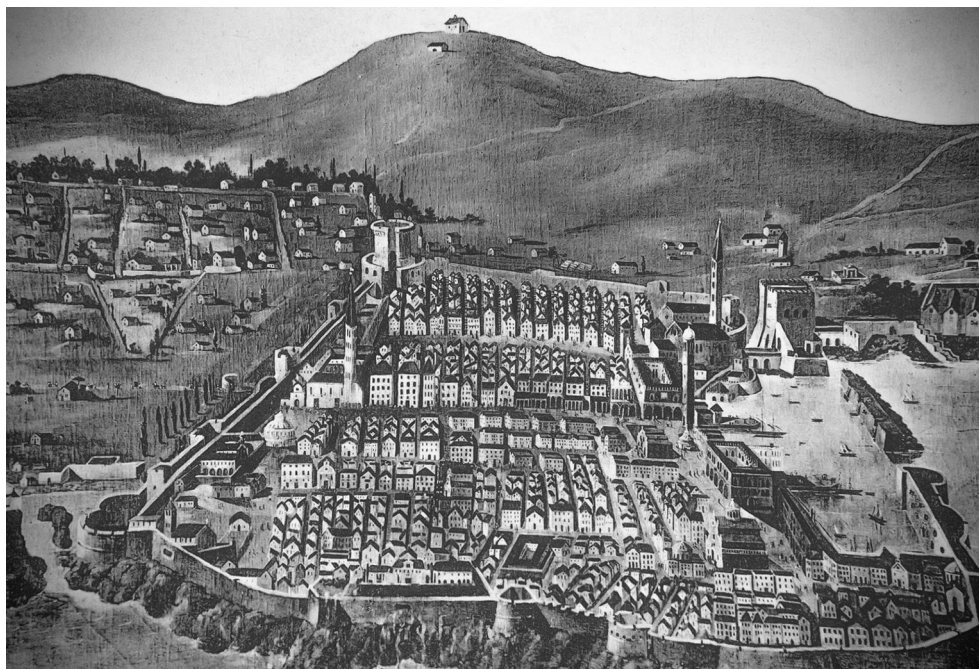
If we add to this the contribution of the Croat Franjo Petrić (Francesco Patrizi), (1529–1597) from the island of Cres to theories on sung classical dramas, which directly influenced the rise of the opera spectacle on the cusp of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we will have touched upon a very important and a very obscure feature of the older Croatian cultural heritage.<sup>5</sup>

Along with the literary activity in the Poland of the Renaissance and the Baroque periods, the Dalmatia-Dubrovnik epoch of Croatian literature proved to be the liveliest literature among the Slavs, the status of which is similar to and yet considerably more developed than that which German, and even Dutch literature enjoyed at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

In order to approach our topic, which is the issue of drama and its relation to music, we have to stress that the most important field regarding the differentiation in the literatures of the West around the sixteen-hundreds was the one associated with a generic repertoire. This is precisely where national literatures

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5 For the Croat Franjo Petrić (Francesco Patrizi) as part of Italian thinking about the music theatre, see Claude V. Palisca: *Humanism in Italian Renaissance Musical Thought*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985; Jacomien Prins: *Echoes of an invisible world. Marsilio Ficino and Francesco Patrizi on cosmic order and music theory*, Leiden: Brill, 2014.



Unknown author: Dubrovnik before the earthquake at 1667  
(Dubrovnik, Cloister of the Franciscan Monastery)

came into contact but also set themselves considerably apart. We could list right away negative but also positive examples, that is, absences or hypertrophies of certain genres and forms exported from one literature into another. In Italy, for example, there was a characteristic absence of epigrams, which stands in complete opposition to their popularity with the Germans and the English, then in France the cult of the classical Euripidian drama, which differed from the cult of Seneca in English or Croatian literature; atypical was also the destiny, that is, the absence of the sonnet in older Croatian literature, as well as the importance of *drama per musica* in Italian literature and the acceptance of the genre in Croatia, especially in Dubrovnik, with, however, a very restrained musical component. Such inconsistencies in the history of world literature were visible in various epochs and the fact is that this phenomenon is perceptible precisely in literatures that share a common morphology.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of whether the highly reputed forms in the developed European literatures had supranational reputations or whether they remained within the

<sup>6</sup> For the best insights into issues of the theory of literature and comparative Croatian literature, see works of Zoran Kravar: *Studije o hrvatskom književnom baroku* [*Studies on Croatian Baroque Literature*], Zagreb: MH, 1975; Idem: *Nakon godine MDC* [*After the Year MDC*], Dubrovnik: MH, 1993.

frameworks of their narrow national borders, they always safeguarded the genealogical features established in accordance with classical models.

In Dubrovnik, the cause for these peculiarities can be identified in the specific style of rule and in the intentional reduction of the central power of the Duke to a series of puppet rulers who succeeded each other on a monthly basis. Such a perception of the ruling mechanism inspired neither the will nor the need to solidify the courtly character of its power, nor did any of the wealthiest *casate* have the need to express publicly their power in the way of theatrical or musical celebrations. They found the monthly election of the Duke theatrical enough!<sup>7</sup>

If there were any professional writers, they were not intellectuals who, owing to their artistic reputation, occupied a decently paid position adjacent to the ruler. In Dubrovnik, there were no writers holding the office of chamberlain, and musicians who had that status were external with respect to the state apparatus and they catered to a minimum of its needs, not the maximum. When they did come close to an opera spectacle it was out of their own need, dealing with companies of young actors, rather than out of the need of the authorities to recreate their power through opera spectacles and to transfer their endeavours from the political into the esthetic sphere. In Dubrovnik, there was nothing like the Cavalier poets in the court of Charles I in London or those that were honored with official positions such as Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600–1681), Luis de Gongora (1561–1627) or Giambattista Marino (1569–1625).<sup>8</sup>

In the Dubrovnik of the seventeenth century, literature was most often a pre-occupation of the nobility, lawyers and clerks which, of course, imposed restrictions upon their writing as well as upon its connectedness to its celebratory function within society. The church was still the center of literary activity and it is no wonder that Ivan Gundulić (1589–1638), the author of the first *drammi per musica* of the time, even without music, destroyed them, claiming that he wanted to be a *krstjanin spjevalac* or a Christian versifier, and that such works were for him *porod od tmine*, which means the *brood of darkness* which he then released back into darkness by destroying them.<sup>9</sup>

7 Milan Rešetar: “Stari dubrovački teatar” [The Old Dubrovnik Theatre], in: *Narodna starina* I/2 (1923), pp. 97–106; Nella Lonza: *Kazalište vlasti: Ceremonijalni i državni blagdani Dubrovačke Republike u 17. i 18. stoljeću* [The Theatre of Power: State Ceremony and Feasts of the Dubrovnik Republic in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century], Zagreb, Dubrovnik: HAZU, 2009.

8 Dragoljub Pavlović: “Melodrama i počeci opere u starom Dubrovniku” [Melodrama and the Beginnings of the Opera in Old Dubrovnik], in: *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta* 2 (1952), pp. 243–254; Nada Beritić: “Iz povijesti kazališne i muzičke umjetnosti u Dubrovniku” [From the History of Theatre and Music in Dubrovnik], in: *Anali Historijskog instituta JAZU u Dubrovniku* 2 (1953), pp. 329–357.

9 Rafo Bogišić: “Uvod u studij Gundulićevih melodrama” [Introduction to the Study of Gundulić’s Melodrama], in: *Anali Historijskog instituta JAZU u Dubrovniku* 13–14 (1976), pp. 31–51.

This should, of course, not be taken literally to mean that most Dubrovnik writers were priests but, rather, that even the lay writers were more closely connected to the centers of ecclesiastic than to state power. As a consequence, their works performed a utilitarian function and expressed collective interests, which is by all means discernible in the most sublimated drama *Dubravka* by Gundulić, executed on the principles established on the experiences with opera libretti. This drama is the most direct expression of the collective political attitudes of the Dubrovnik state-building apparatus. It is logical that this drama sublimated, on the one hand, the parlance of the preceding local pastoral tradition – the local poetics akin to the poetics of *Aminta* and *Pastor Fido* which had been translated and released more than once by Dubrovnik people, and on the other hand the poetics of libretti, that is, of texts that came close to the idea of drama in music (*dramma in musica*) of the kind written by Ottavio Rinuccini (1562–1621) and his later followers. In either case, there was at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and Gundulić's *Dubravka* premiered in 1628, a certain measure of typological coincidences and contacts on which the idea of the unity of the literary West was based, especially concerning dramatized music.<sup>10</sup>

It is therefore no coincidence that a small group of musicians took part in the performance of in the libretto-styled *Atalanta*, the first work of dramatist Junije Palmotić (1607–1657), a late author who earned the title of Croatian Lope de Vega (1562–1635) with his kindred dramatizations. Certainly, the specific treatment of the esthetic function in the wider literary territorial context of Europe, which appeared and took hold precisely at the time of the appearance of the first operas, is an achievement that was conceived for the first time much earlier, during the last decades of the sixteenth century. We could now list a series of testimonies according to which music existed and was the *sorella naturalissima* of poetry, and very soon precisely of dramatic poetry.

The Italian influence on other European literatures which spread early in the Renaissance was even stronger than that which set out from Italy during its crisis period, at the time of the creation of the opera spectacle and of its immanent libretto drama structure. This is why it needs to be pointed out that we are not just talking about the theoretical thought of the period which was able to contemplate literature directly as art; it is not only about something which survived to this date while in the Renaissance it had just started to germinate but not to strengthen. We are talking about the idea of a theatrical spectacle which was transformed

<sup>10</sup> Arturo Cronia: "Ascendenze della *Tirena* di Marino Darsa nell' *Dubravka* di Giovanni Gondola", in: *Ricerche slavistiche* 9 (1961), pp. 39–66; Rafo Bogišić: "Problem Gundulićeve *Dubravke*" [The Problem of Gundulić's *Dubravka*], in: *Forum* 14/7–8 (1975), pp. 115–149; Pavao Pavličić: "Kojem književnom žanru pripada Gundulićeva *Dubravka*" [To which Genre Does Gundulić's *Dubravka* Belong], in: *Republika* 32 /11 (1976), pp. 1235–1251.