

## The Place of Čechov's Dramas in Peter Szondi's *Theory of Drama*

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### *Abstract*

The paper examines Peter Szondi's theory of drama from two perspectives: 1. what traces of his new approach – i.e. textual interpretation – can be found in his early works; 2. to what extent are Szondi's conclusions valid and original with respect to Čechov's dramatic works? I identify common characteristics of Szondi's conception of literature, formalist poetics, and phenomenological approaches. I also analyse two features of modern drama, epicization and the role of the intimate Self, through interpretations of Čechov's dramas. I come to the conclusion that monologues acquire a narrative function in Čechov's works, while through inner speech they also preserve the linguistic compactness characteristic of lyric poetry, i.e. the sound effects (alliteration, assonance and richly metaphorical language), which generates meaning-producing processes in the dramatic text.

Keywords: *Čechov's drama, formalism, languageness, poetics, theory of drama*

In *Einführung in die literarische Hermeneutik* (1975 [1967-1968]), Peter Szondi argues for the necessity of an as yet non-existent “material, that is, practical hermeneutics”<sup>1</sup> which would apply the conclusions of philosophical hermeneutics to the interpretation of literary texts, while also considering the artistic and aesthetic features of these texts. According to Szondi, literary hermeneutics should be adopted as an approach to the interpretation of literary texts. Neither Gadamer's concept of interpretation nor Jaus's reception theory is sufficient, in his assessment, for the interpretation of literary texts. The transition from the philosophical aesthetic horizon to textual interpretation,

<sup>1</sup>Szondi 1975, 24-25: “Die Überlegungen und historischen Exkurse haben gezeigt, daß und warum eine literarische Hermeneutik im Sinn einer materialen (d. h. auf die Praxis eingehenden) Lehre von der Auslegung literarischer Texte heute fehlt”. All translations are by the author.

which can be observed in Szondi's early theory of drama (*Theorie des modernen Dramas*, 1978a [1956]), suggests a marked change in approach, which, however, is in line with the general trends of literary criticism in the 1960s and with the notion that the text should be placed at the centre of interpretation. Szondi's lecture given in January 1962 (*Zur Erkenntnisproblematik in der Literaturwissenschaft*) and the new concept of interpretation formulated in the written version of this lecture (*Hölderlin-Studien. Mit einem Traktat über philologische Erkenntnis*, 1978b [1970]) played a defining role in this evolutionary process.

As a literary theorist and scholar of Slavic studies, I intend to address two questions in this paper. Firstly, what insights prompted Szondi's turn toward textual interpretation, and what traces of this new approach can be found in his early theory of drama? Secondly, to what extent are Szondi's conclusions valid and original with respect to Čechov's dramas, and how can these conclusions be connected to current literary theory and the study of literature?

*1. From historical aesthetics to phenomenological poetics (the principle of form, time and subject)*

Szondi sets out to define the internal crisis of drama as a genre by outlining the ideal type of drama. The crisis as a starting point can also be interpreted epistemologically, which proved to be a productive viewpoint in the critical approach to other *genres* in the 1950s (Benn 1954 [1951]; Kayser 1955). Szondi defines the crisis as a *problem of form*, i.e. as the contradiction between two kinds of form – the adopted one and the form required by the content – and the collision of new and old forms within the dramatic work.

Although the methodological introduction to the theory of drama is based on the “science of spirit” (*Geisteswissenschaft*) and aesthetics, it already contains the germs of *poetic (a)* and *phenomenological (b) moments* which anticipate the approach of later “literary study” (*Literaturwissenschaft*).

(a) One such poetic moment comes when Szondi approaches the problem of form from the point of view of the createdness of the work. He criticizes the naïve opposition of form and content, which regards form as a given, ready-made *ergon*, while it considers the material as a historical variable. Nor does he accept Hegel's solution, who argued for the dialectic unity of form and content (the transformation of content into form and of form into content), which eliminates the opposition of content and form. Szondi describes the dialectic relationship between form and content as a *contradiction*, a contrast of meanings: form acquires an independent meaning, which is in contrast with the meaning required by the content. This contrast of meanings leads to “internal antinomy”, which makes the artistic form historically problematic. In emphasizing the tension between meanings, Szondi's approach resembles

that of the formalists. In formalist poetics, oxymoron, “the reconciliation of irreconcilable elements”, lends dynamism to form and meaning, and becomes the fundamental principle of a literariness that is based on production instead of product (Eichenbaum 1927 [1925])<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, Szondi – as opposed to Hegel – derives the problem of historicity from the opposition between formal and content-based semantics. At the same time, he emphasizes that this has to be demonstrated *within the work of art itself*: “The contradiction between dramatic form and the issues of the present age must not be constructed *in abstracto*, but grasped as a *technical moment inside the concrete work*, i.e. as a ‘difficulty’”<sup>3</sup>. With this statement, Szondi distances himself from the aesthetic view of historical materialism and the Marxist view of historicity, opening up a path to the interpretation of the individual work<sup>4</sup>. The idea that historicity must be built on the concrete aspects discovered in the interpretation of the work later became the thesis statement of his lecture *Über philologische Erkenntnis*: “... the only approach suitable for grasping the work of art is the view that *sees history in the work* rather than the one that believes to see the work in history”<sup>5</sup>. I believe that our current view of literature has still only partially accommodated this outstandingly important principle of literary hermeneutics and its methodological consequences, even though this forms the basis of Szondi’s conclusion concerning the history of literature: literary history or genre history “can only be based on a combination of understood individual works, and exploring a concrete case must not be confused with subsuming it under the historically general”<sup>6</sup>. This is the point – the singularity of the literary work and the need to understand this singularity in itself – where no historian of spirit would follow Szondi: this principle could rather form the starting point of a poetic approach. It

<sup>2</sup> I refer here primarily to Zhirmunsky’s view, who productively employed the legacy of historical poetics in laying the foundations of comparative literature. Zhirmunsky is also associated with the translation and reception of German formalism – Oskar Walzel, Leo Spitzer, and others – in Russia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>3</sup> Szondi 1978b, 286: “Die Widersprüche zwischen der dramatischen Form und den Problemen der gegenwart sollen nicht in abstracto aufgestellt, sondern im Innern de konkreten Werk als technische, das heißt als ‚Schwierigkeiten‘ erlaßt werden”.

<sup>4</sup> György Lukács certainly influenced Szondi’s theory of drama, as seen for instance in their shared Hegelian starting point and the indisputable influence of Lukács’s early theory of the novel (see below). However, Szondi does not follow Lukács in his turn towards Marxism. On the connection between Lukács and Szondi, see Thouard 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Szondi 1978b, 275: “[...] so daß einzig die Betrachtungsweise dem Kunstwerk ganz gerecht wird, welche die Gesichte im Kunstwerk, nicht aber die, die das Kunstwerk in der Geschichte zu sehen erlaubt”.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, 276: “Diese Überschau indessen darf erst aus der Summe des begriffenen Einzelnen hervorgehen, keineswegs sollte die Erkenntnis des Besonderen verwechselt werden mit dessen Subsumption unter ein historisch Allgemeines”.

is important to emphasize that this principle was already anticipated in the *Theorie des modernen Dramas* in the practice of exposition, which followed an inductive logic: the exposition of the crisis of the drama was preceded by a series of literary analyses: the practice of interpretation served as the foundation of the theoretical principle.

It is a rather forward-looking proposition that the most important characteristics of absolute drama become transparent at the very time of the unravelling of the form and the emergence of new forms<sup>7</sup>, that is, to use the terminology of Yury Tynyanov, in the period of “deformation”. According to Tynyanov, the poetic need for deformation was brought about by the exhaustion of literary form and its transformation into a routine (automatization), which opened a new receptive horizon for the work<sup>8</sup>. Szondi detects a similar deformation in Čechov’s dialogues: the monologues revealing the essence, which develop within the framework of superficial (disguised) dialogues, are in fact born of the *negation of dialogue*, which questions the dramatic form itself (Tynyanov 1927).

(b) As far as phenomenological moments are concerned, these are manifested in the description of the dramatic genre itself. Although Szondi contrasts modern with classical drama as an ideal type, adding a certain historicity to his conception, it is nevertheless conspicuous that “absolute drama” in fact represents a postulated unity (drama as such) which must be distinguished from and purified of all *external* aspects. Where are these external aspects found? Drama is interested in the act: everything that precedes or is beyond this is external to it. This is also true in the case of dialogues, which represent the verbalization of interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, drama must be distinguished from the *author* (i.e. the words uttered in a dramatic situation must not be attributed to the author), as well as from the *spectator*, who is doomed to passivity, which has to be transformed into irrational activity. Similarly, drama must be distinguished from the subject portrayed: the *a priori*, primary nature of drama manifests itself in the fact that it is not the representation of something, but of itself. It, in fact, constitutes self-creation: acting creates the drama’s own space and time on the stage. Therefore, the time frame of drama is always the “here and now,” the actual present, and the passing of time is only shown as an absolute sequence of such presents. This description of absolute drama is reminiscent in several respects of Roman Ingarden’s ontological model, with which Szondi must have been familiar (Ingarden 1931).

<sup>7</sup>Szondi 1978a, 14: “Weil aus der Form eines Kunstwerks immer Unfradwürdiges spricht, gelingt die Erkenntnis solcher formalen Aussage meist erst einer Zeit, der das einst Unfradwürdige fragwürdig, das Selbstverständliche zum Problem geworden ist”.

<sup>8</sup>The formalist approach was widely known by this time due to the publication of Wellek and Warren’s *Theory of Literature* in 1948. Thus, Szondi may have been familiar with the approach and practice of formal poetics, which is also suggested by a remark in his paper on Schleiermacher. Wilkinson also mentions the similarity to Russian formalism. See Wilkinson 1997, 6.

Szondi interprets the crisis of drama as the transformation of the subject-object relation, and indeed he sees its origins as lying in the opposition between subject and object<sup>9</sup>. This is what happens in Ibsen when the present (the object) is relativized by the past (the subject); in Strindberg, interpersonal relationships appear as the object, which is seen through the subjective lens of the Self; the *internal change* of the subject in Čechov or Maeterlinck objectivates and relativizes the external events, i.e. the plot. Time plays a central role in the transformation of the subject-object relationship: it manifests itself as the negation of the dramatic present, i.e. the negation of the present-like character of interpersonal relationships.

The central role of the subject-object relation and of the category of time makes it obvious that Szondi's theory of drama was directly and decisively influenced by György Lukács's early theory of the novel (*Die Theorie des Romans*, 1920). The objectivation of time can be regarded as a sign of crisis in drama precisely because – as Szondi writes citing Lukács – only the genre of the novel is capable of directly representing time. Time is the constituting principle of the novel, not of drama. There are especially suggestive parallels with the chapter *Die Desillusionsromantik* in the theory of the novel, in which Lukács attempts to define a characteristic type of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel through the connections between subject, time, and the novel form. In this chapter of the theory of the novel, Lukács discusses the intimate subjectivity (*Innerlichkeit*), which considers itself the only true reality, the essence of the world, and which does not come into conflict with the external world because it strives to create the world from itself. This derives from the conviction that the soul (the intimate self) is wider and more spacious than the destinies that life can offer. For this reason, the subject does not even attempt to come into conflict with the external world or to realize itself through actions in the external world. Instead, the subject renounces the external world, withdraws into itself, flees the present and dooms itself to passivity. If it nevertheless engages in conflict, it becomes comic and ridiculous, and loses any and all gravity. Therefore, the form of its expression is not action, but reflection and mood, which Lukács characterizes as an extreme gradation of lyricalness, which “is not even suitable to express the purely lyrical”<sup>10</sup>. This subjectivity, which carries its values exclusively in itself, is threatened by only one thing: the *continuous passing of time as durée*, which continuously deprives it of the possibility of self-justification, and – as the invisible and movable essence of reality – forces on it foreign contents. Lukács emphasizes that this is not the

<sup>9</sup> Szondi 1978a, 71: “Indem diese drei Faktoren [gegenwärtigen, zwischenmenschlichen, Geschehens] der dramatischen Form als Subjekt oder Objekt in die Relation eintreten, werden sie relativiert”.

<sup>10</sup> Lukács 1920, 122: “Es ist die Stimmung der Desillusionsromantik, die diesen Lyrisismus trägt und ernährt”.

mystical time related to the “transcendent homeland”, but a time deprived of the transcendental, and coexisting with the novel form. The plot of the novel is constructed by the need to search for the essence and the impossibility of finding it, and time represents this formal essence in the fate of the hero. Therefore, time is always opposed to the presence of meaning, it deprives the present of meaning, so that “the internal plot of the novel is nothing other than a fight against the power of time”<sup>11</sup>.

Recognizing the dominance of time, Szondi sees the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century crisis of drama in two marked transformations. The first of these is the exclusion of *the intimate Self*, i.e. of the subject, from interpersonal relationships. The formal equivalent of the lonely Self is the internal monologue or the “lyric” of silence. The second is *the epicization of the drama*, its turning toward the epic (social theatre, epic theatre). These two tendencies apparently cannot be separated: the process of epicization of drama goes hand in hand with its lyricization (in the internal monologues). Dramas such as Hauptmann’s *Das Friedensfest*, Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*, or Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* can be interpreted as productive combinations of these two tendencies, and as a consequence of the ways in which they meld these two tendencies, each of these plays foregrounds the “*epic I*” (the narrator). Let us examine these two transformations through the example of Čechov’s dramas.

## 2. Epicization and/or lyricization in Čechov’s dramas

In his analysis of Čechov, Szondi makes the important observation that the renunciation of dialogue and plot is isomorphic with the consistent renunciation of life by Čechov’s heroes, the renunciation of both the present and communication. In other words, the unravelling of the dramatic form derives from the poetic construction of the figure of the hero. Szondi also suggests that this hero is the heir to the Romantic hero, who lives in exile and inner loneliness and whose single aim is to return to the lost homeland. Let me note here that Lukács’s description of the subject of the so-called romantic novel of disillusion seems indeed suitable for understanding the world of the Čechovian hero.

I will now explore these two phenomena: (a) the elimination of a unified plot (renunciation of life and plot); (b) the monologue embedded in dialogue (renunciation of dialogue). As the topic of Szondi’s microanalysis is the *Three Sisters*, I make it the focus of the investigation below.

(a) Szondi claims that in the *Three Sisters* we may see “the mere vestiges of the traditional plot. [...] This juxtaposition without connection of certain

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, 130: “Im Roman trennen sich Sinn und Leben und damit das Wesenhafte und Zeitliche; man kann fast sagen: die ganze innere Handlung des Romans ist nichts als ein Kampf gegen die Macht der Zeit”.

plot moments [...] reveals [...] that they were included in the drama without any actual meaning in order to lend a little eventfulness to the topic"<sup>12</sup>. The question is how the elimination of a unified plot relates to the previously formulated requirement of epicization (novelization, narrativization).

The answer is probably that the elimination of the plot goes hand in hand with emphasis on a different kind of epic character. The key to this is the reassessment of the category of *event*. Previously, the event was at the centre of the dramatic plot. Thus, it formed part of the narrative logic: the occurrence of the event was preceded by a state of equilibrium of the world, which was altered definitively by change or an extraordinary turn of events, and this change formed the plot of the drama. In Čechov, however, the event does not lead to fundamental changes in the world, it changes nothing and resolves nothing (conflicts, for example), nor does it create new situations (Chudakov 1971). The event is accompanied partly by a lack of motivation and partly by chance and insignificance.

In the *Three Sisters*, though the characters go through various changes, the beginning and the end of the play resemble each other: the drama begins with remembering the death of the father and ends with the death of Tuzenbach. The connection between the two deaths is emphasized by the motifs of *military music*, the *clock*, and *snow*. The circular structure itself suggests that nothing has changed in the world. Indeed: Irina does not begin a new life, Masha's love for Vershinin remains unfulfilled, Olga does not marry, and in fact she does what she never wanted to do: she becomes a headmistress. The duel between Soleni and Tuzenbach, which seemingly prevents Irina from starting a new life, could bring an event-like change into this world. However, Tuzenbach and Irina's new life together is compromised even before the duel, partly because Irina's attempts to start anew have always failed before and partly because Tuzenbach's ideological yearning to "start a new life and find work" is in fact a cliché-like repetition of Irina's "old" slogan, which also detracts from the authenticity of this new life. It is obvious that Irina is not in love with Tuzenbach, and thus their lives together may only be an ideological construction (like the trip to Moscow) doomed to failure from the very start.

<sup>12</sup> Szondi 1978a, 35: "So zeigt das Stück *Drei Schwestern* Rudimente der traditionellen Handlung. [...] Schon dieses beziehungslose Nebeneinander der Handlungsmomente und ihre seit je als spannungsarm erkannte Gliederung in vier Akte verrät, die Stelle, die ihnen im Formganzenzukommt: ohnt eigentliche Aussage sind sie eingesetzt, um der Thematik ein Weniges an Bewegung zu verleihen, das dann den Dialog ermöglichen kann". Positing the epic character of Čechov's dramas and the elimination of the plot are ideas that also appear in Čechov-criticism. Čechov's dramas are often called novels written for the stage and even "dramatic novels" in secondary literature (including contemporary criticism and the current approaches of literary theory). See Roskin 1946; Ishchuk-Fadeeva 2002, 44-54. On the other hand, lyricism was also quite early recognized as a peculiarity of Čechov's dramas. See Rayfield 1999, 213-226.

Finally, the duel is also alluded to in advance. There is nothing unexpected about it: Soleni – assuming the role of a romantic epigone of Lermontov, which further detracts from the weight of the conflict – predicts as early as Act II that he will kill his rival; moreover, in Act I he introduces himself as the one who will “slam a bullet” into Chebutikin’s head. Lastly, Tuzenbach calls the duel “trivial” and “silly” which also contributes to the degradation of the event<sup>13</sup>. Thus, the dramatic event becomes insignificant, meaningless, and even ridiculous. “Event” and “non-event” are equally present in this world, and the event does not fit into any coherent, plot-like unity (Faryno 1994).

The formal component of this new epicness is time, as the event is based on temporal change. What concept of time can be associated with this “non-event”? The consensus in the secondary literature is that the specific features of Čechov’s dramaturgy are related to a new interpretation of stage time. Time is turned into a topic in the drama by the characters, who continuously thematise their relation to time, reflect on the passing of time, and experience it as a continuous distancing from “true, beautiful life,” i.e. they objectify time as a loss of value. In Act I, the theme of time is transformed into the motif of *remembrance* and *forgetting*, two important instances of which are the death of the father one year before and the move from Moscow, which took place eleven years earlier. The nostalgic image of the past is questioned by the uncertainty of remembrance (Masha does not remember Vershinin and Vershinin does not remember the girls). Time also appears in the drama in the form of signals: partly in the authorial instructions (“Clock strikes twelve”, which Olga, the narrator of the story, also thematises: “And the clock struck just the same way then”<sup>14</sup>), and partly in the gestures of the characters, who continually look at the clock, which is carried to an unbearable extreme in Act IV. Nevertheless, time cannot save the characters because, as we know, the beginning of a new life never comes. Čechov conveys this by making the quasi-events marked by time (the duel, the departure of the regiment) happen at a distance, with only their sounds heard onstage: the more frequently the characters glance at the clock, the more they exclude themselves from the present, which takes place far away from them, in another space. Or, to put it in another way, the closer the connection of the characters to time (in their reflexive monologues and their involuntary gestures), the more they are excluded from their own reality. *The characters experience time as the category of non-presence.*

<sup>13</sup>Tuzenbakh: “It is curious how silly trivial little things, sometimes for no apparent reason, become significant. At first you laugh at these things...” (trans. by West in Čechov 2014; Čechov 1978 [1900], 181: „Какие пустяки, какие глупые мелочи иногда приобретают в жизни значение, вдруг ни с того, ни с сего. По-прежнему смеешься над ними, считаешь пустяками...”).

<sup>14</sup>Trans. *ibidem* (*ibidem*, 119: “Часы бьют двенадцать”; “И тогда также били часы”).



In this way, time becomes part of the objective world, the world of involuntary gestures and unuttered signals. Its semiotic status is increased, and it no longer functions as a category of the characters' consciousness (as time lived and experienced); instead, it is "materialized," and it becomes a textual motif in its sign-like appearance. This transformation is realized in the shattering of the porcelain clock inherited from the mother. The shattering of the clock partly foreshadows the fact that the projected future will not take place and the imagined changes will remain impossible, while at the same time it also becomes a peculiar kind of "response," a manifestation of the irregular Čechovian dialogue. If we also consider that the motif of the clock's "striking" (strike, in Russian: *b'iut*) in Act I ("Clock strikes twelve") is repeated in Act III when the "fire-alarm is ringing" (in Russian: *b'iut nabat*, i.e. 'the watch-bell tolls'), we may come to the conclusion that these two signals (strikes) are not only interconnected, but also mark a significant transformation, which results in the *transformation of meaning*. The fire serves to destroy the pretended reality, one of the dominant elements of which is the relation of the characters to time. That is, in addition to the broken and fragmented nature of the plot (the fabula), there is a story above the plot outlined in the textual motifs, which forms the true subject of the drama, the story of the efforts to regain life (the present, reality).

Thus, we cannot confirm Szondi's suggestion that "individual plot moments are juxtaposed without connection" or that "they [the individual plot moments] were included in the drama without any actual meaning". The story (the subject) lies not in the fabula, but rather in the semiotics of the text, waiting for exposition, i.e. it requires the hermeneutical activity of the reader/spectator. Grasping this *semantic story* was of course beyond the scope of Szondi's investigation, due in part to a lack of a definition of text in the *Theorie des modernen Dramas*.

(b) As Szondi puts it, Čechov portrays the impossibility of dialogue by retaining the dramatic dialogue form in a rather original manner: he includes a hard-of-hearing servant in the drama who thematically represents the motif of not-hearing, whereas his form-generating function is to motivate the transformation of dialogue into monologue. Thus, the response becomes a "disguised monologue" within the dramatic dialogue (as opposed to Hamlet's monologue, for example, uttered by a character who is on his own)<sup>15</sup>. In the meantime, dialogues become increasingly weightless, insignificant, and even absurd. However, Szondi clearly distinguishes superficial, empty dialogues from the self-revealing monologues which touch upon the essence. "These

<sup>15</sup>This refers to the scene in which Andrei delivers his monologue in the presence of the deaf servant, Ferapont, counting on the fact that Ferapont cannot hear what is being said, which gives him the opportunity to reveal his inner world.

resigned self-analyses, uttered by almost every character individually, bring the work to life – and the work was in fact written for their sake”<sup>16</sup>.

How should we interpret the Čechovian monologue, and what is the relationship between these monologues and dialogue? Čechov-criticism associates the anomalies of communication primarily with the phenomenon of the so-called “subtexts” (*podtekst*) (Silman 1969). The fragmented responses, nonsensical speech, and literary quotes and phrases mostly represent silencing, unutterability, and inexpressibility in the drama: everything that is not verbalized in the dialogue, the suppressed text, acquires greater significance than what is said on the stage. The subtexts also include the pauses frequently interrupting the dialogues and monologues, the gestures of the characters, as well as the authorial instructions.

One can distinguish several types of monologue in Čechov: *narrative monologues* (see for example Olga’s monologue at the beginning of the drama, which carries a specific narrative function), *confessional monologues* (e.g. Andrei’s aforementioned monologues in Acts III and IV are followed by further, clarifying monologues on the empty stage and in front of the drunken Chebutikin), and *ideological monologues* (such as Vershinin’s or Tuzenbach’s utopias about the meaning of the future). The internal monologue of the protagonist acquires a comic-parodistic tint, even if it is uttered in the moments of deepest crisis. The characters repeatedly attempt to narrate their lives, i.e. to turn them into a plot or into a formally organized story, and this attempt is manifested in their monologues. In fact, the characters engage in a peculiar form of self-narration, which may give new meaning to the concepts of epicization and the “epic I”. Nevertheless, these attempts continually end in failure, and this creates farcical situations on stage.

What could be the reason for this failure? The hero actualizes certain patterns of expression, empty phrases, and schemata, and he applies this language to his own lifeworld (the language used by Kuligin is overflowing with clichés, an aspect of his speech style which is underscored by the Latin phrases). These patterns of expression recur with high frequency in the drama: the characters “transfer” their slogan, monotheme, or words to one another, as it were, which also lends a cliché-like character to their individual utterances. During the act of utterance, furthermore, the characters themselves perceive that the exhausted, schematized language is not suitable for descriptions of their specific life situations. Thus, they frequently interrupt themselves, and this gives rise to the self-irony of the protagonists<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, the quasi-di-

<sup>16</sup> Szondi 1978a, 35: “Und aus diesen resignierten Selbstanalysen, die fast sämtliche Personen einzeln zum Worte kommen lassen, lebt das Werk, um ihrer willen ist es geschrieben”.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Vershinin: “Forgive me, I’ve dropped into philosophy again. Please let me continue. I do awfully want to philosophize, it’s just how I feel at present. [Pause] As if they are all asleep.

alogues of the drama represent the linguistic difficulty of uttering a narrative of the self. The absurd dialogues and the pauses not only demonstrate the impossibility of understanding; their poetic function as dramatic digressions is to interrupt and break the ideological or psychical unity of the utterances. For example, in the opening scene of Act I, Olga's narrative monologue of the past is interrupted by Masha's whistling and by the inappropriate gestures of other characters (e.g. laughter, words out of context, such as "nonsense"). The projection of Olga's future fate and its transformation into a narrative is contradicted by Tuzenbach's remark addressed to Soleni ("I'm tired of listening to the rot you talk")<sup>18</sup>.

Thus, the characters' utterances do not account for the entire text of the drama: interruption and silence and recurrences in different situations also acquire meaning in the text. The utterances of the characters must be distinguished from the text of the drama, which creates a new unity of meaning above the level of utterances.

The interrupted monologues prepare the way for the transition to a new kind of language in the characters. The protagonists are either silenced completely (cf. Masha's confession: "I've confessed, now I shall keep silence [...] Like the lunatics in Gogol's story, I'm going to be silent [...] silent"<sup>19</sup>) or they switch to a *reduced internal speech*, the symptoms of which include, for example, whistling, singing, occasionally reciting quotations and fragments, and nonsensical dialogues, like the one Masha conducts with Vershinin in Act III (Masha: trum-tum-tum... Vershinin: Tum-tum... Masha: Tra-ra-ra? Vershinin: Tra-ta-ta). Alternatively, the characters initiate a dialogue with themselves. What Szondi calls the "loneliness of the lyrical"<sup>20</sup> is nothing other than the phenomenon of self-communication. This can be observed in the example cited above: the deaf Ferapont is merely a formal accessory to the attempt at self-understanding by Andrei, who is in fact conducting a dialogue with himself. This is also shown by the fact that the characters' speeches become self-reflective, and they start analysing their own utterances (see Irina, for example: "I was always waiting until we should be settled in Moscow,

As I was saying: what a life there will be! Only just imagine" (trans. by West in Čechov 2014; Čechov 1978, 163: "Простите, я опять зафилософствовался. Позвольте продолжать, господа. Мне ужасно хочется философствовать, такое у меня теперь настроение. (Пауза) Точно спят все. Так я говорю: какая это будет жизнь! Вы можете себе только представить").

<sup>18</sup> Trans. *ibidem (ibidem)*, 122: "Такой вы вздор говорите, надоело вас слушать").

<sup>19</sup> Trans. *ibidem (ibidem)*, 169: "Признавался вам, теперь буду молчать... Буду теперь, как гоголевский сумасшедший... молчание... молчание").

<sup>20</sup> Szondi 1978a, 36: "Diesem steten Übergang aus der Konversation in die Lyrik der Einsamkeit verdankt die Tschechowsche Sprache ihren Reiz".

there I should meet my true love; I used to think about him, and love him. ... But it's all turned out to be nonsense, all nonsense"<sup>21</sup>).

Moreover, at a certain point in their self-interpretation, the characters deconstruct their own language, as it were, and start reflecting on their own words, that is, they begin analysing the schemata of their self-expression. One can observe this in the case of Masha, whose internal speech revolves around a well-known quote from Puškin's *Ruslan and Ludmila*. At the last occurrence of the quotation, however, the text changes, and this transformation is accompanied by the disintegration of Masha's monotheme:

There stands a green oak by the sea, / And a chain of bright gold is around it ... / An oak of green gold. ... " I'm mixing it up. ... [Drinks some water] Life is dull ... I don't want anything more now ... I'll be all right in a moment. ... It doesn't matter. ... What do those lines mean? Why do they run in my head? My thoughts are all tangled."<sup>22</sup>

On the one hand, this is obviously intended as a comic text, as Masha *confuses the words*, and on the second occasion says "green *cat*" instead of "green oak" (which is unfortunately missing from the English translation of the drama). This is what her remark "My thoughts are all tangled" (in the Russian original: "My thoughts are *mixed*") primarily refers to. It is even more important, however, that Masha questions the meaning of the words she utters. I will quote this in a literal translation: "What does 'On seashore' [in Russian: *u lukomor'ia*] mean? Why do I have this *word* in mind?"<sup>23</sup>. The heroine clearly enters into a new relationship with the words she utters, breaking the monotony of repetition and embarking on self-interpretation. This is exactly where the deeper meaning of lyricism is revealed: through engaging in her lonely lyric monologue, the heroine participates in language, and thus she is rewritten (i.e. reintegrated) into the totality of Being, or, as Szondi puts it, into "community"<sup>24</sup>.

One should also consider the consequences of so-called lyricization here, i.e. that the increasing role of linguistic expression makes it almost impossible to translate the dramatic text, or at least requires a very thorough interpre-

<sup>21</sup> Trans. by West in Čechov 2014 (Čechov 1978, 168: "Я все ждала, переселимся в Москву, там мне встретится мой настоящий, я мечтала о нем, любила... Но оказалось, все вздор, все вздор").

<sup>22</sup> Trans. *ibidem (ibidem)*: "У лукоморья дуб зеленый, золотая цепь на дубе том... Кот зеленый... дуб зеленый... Я путаю... (Пьет воду.) Неудачная жизнь... Ничего мне теперь не нужно... Я сейчас успокоюсь. Все равно... Что значит у лукоморья? Почему это слово у меня в голове? Путаются мысли").

<sup>23</sup> Trans. *ibidem (ibidem)*: "Что значит у лукоморья? Почему это слово у меня в голове?").

<sup>24</sup> Szondi 1978a, 36: "[...] die Teilhabe an der Einsamkeit des andern, die Aufnahme der individuellen Einsamkeit in die sichbildende kollektive, das scheinbar Möglichkeit schon im Wesen des Russischen, des Menschen wie der Sprache, enthalten zu sein".

tive translation. We can see that monologues acquire a narrative function in Čechov's work, while through inner speech they also preserve the linguistic compactness characteristic of lyric poetry, i.e. sound effects and metaphorical language, which generates meaning-producing processes in the dramatic text.

### 3. Conclusions

Szondi's theory of drama is based on specific aesthetic and philosophical categories. According to Thomas Sparr, Szondi does not construct an entire proper theory, but rather only questions the "construction plans" of his age (Sparr 2013). One may perhaps agree that in the *Theorie des modernen Dramas* Szondi "doesn't move from dialectic to philology, from 'theoretical' books to concrete studies" (Thouard 2015, 40). However, Szondi focuses on the poetic characteristics of the works in each of his drama analyses, and he makes several brilliant observations. His profound study of the works and his practice of analysis point far beyond the theoretical conception. By combining formal analysis with theory of understanding, Szondi played a significant mediatory role between the poetic and hermeneutic approaches. Signs of this can already be found in his early theory of drama. This is why these analyses still seem valid and worth pursuing from the point of view of the poetic and semiotic practice of literary interpretation, which I have attempted to achieve in this paper.

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