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English-language Translation

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Translation of the Theatre of the Absurd

Master's Diploma Thesis

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I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently,
using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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Author's signature

List of abbreviations

O – original by Václav Havel
B – Translation by Vera Blackwell
N – Translation by Jan Novák

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Introduction

This thesis will focus on the translation of the Theatre of the Absurd in *The Garden Party* (1963) by Václav Havel. It will analyse the translation solutions of two translators, Vera Blackwell, who first translated the play in 1967 (published in 1969), and Jan Novák, who adapted it as *Office Party* for American audience in 2006. This play works with the concept of the language that has lost its function as a communication tool and became rather the means of misunderstanding. This loss of meaning of words creates two main translation problems on which this Thesis will focus on. First, there is the paradox between the need to transfer into the target text the meaning of the source text, which distinctively works with meaninglessness of the language. The second problem stems from the way this use of language affects what happens on the stage – the less is said by words, the more is expressed by how they are uttered on the stage. The thesis will take up and react to similar bachelor's thesis of Pavla Stejskalová, who focuses on the linguistic aspects of the same translations, hopefully extending the analysis beyond this sphere.

The thesis will introduce the genre of Theatre of the Absurd as characterized by Martin Esslin in his book of the same name. In order to understand the contrast between the need to translate the meaning of words and the loss of meaning and communicative function of the absurdist plays, it will describe the new possibilities of language use this genre offers; it opens a room for experiments with its repetitiveness and meaninglessness, as well as nonsensicality. Thesis will also summarize what is typical for the translation of dramatic texts. It will keep in mind that Esslin defines The Theatre of the Absurd as "pure", having abstract scenic effects. This reflects its non-literary approach, its turn from the language as a tool of communication. Absurdist plays are meant primarily to be performed, reading them does not have the same effect, because the action on stage often expresses more than the language could. This corresponds with the notion of

performability, which is hard (or even impossible) to fathom or define; many theoreticians feel that there is something more than just the plain text in plays – they come to life on stage, by being not just said out loud (than they could be easily compared to poetry), but also performed. The thesis will introduce various stances toward this concept, as well as the related notion of speakability.

In the analytical part, the thesis will examine the translations to discover how various translation strategies work. It will foreshadow some characteristic problems the translator might encounter when dealing with the specific use of language in Havel's play. It will describe these strategies and their effect, evaluating their influence on the overall impression. Firs part will focus on various wordplays that are typical for *The Garden Party*, such as contamination of idioms or empty phrases. The second part will focus on repetition of phrases and situations, which is also a typical feature that can be seen in multiple plays by Havel. In the third part, the thesis will consider some problems that arise from the notions of speakability, touching upon the related notions of readability and performability. It will discuss whether certain translation solutions have the potential to have the same effect on the target audience as the original had, considering relevant cultural, historical and political differences between English/American and Czech audience. The thesis will examine what translation strategies enable the transfer of the specific way Havel uses language in his plays and how the concept of performability projects into translators' solutions.

1. Translation of Drama

It may seem that the dramatic text is just another type of literary text that shares many similarities with other text types, such as novels or short stories. It can be performed on stage as well as simply read; but even though one can understand and study a play merely by reading it, Esslin claims that "theatre is always more than a mere language. Language alone can be read, but true theatre can become manifest only in performance" (329). The first chapter of this thesis will focus on some elements that are specific for drama, inspecting the differences between the act of reading a theatre text and watching the performance. The following subchapter will deal with this topic in general, examining some of the problems these characteristic features of theatre texts pose for translators. The second subchapter will introduce the issues of speakability, performability and playability, discussing their history and relevance for theatre translators.

1.1. Specifics of Theatre Texts

Translator of theatre texts must be aware of the specifics of drama in order to be able to create a translation that is fit for the stage. This chapter will closely examine the aspects of dramatic texts that make these stand out compared to other forms of literature. It will focus on what problems the translation of drama poses because of these aspects, highlighting certain consideration the translator must take into account when approaching drama.

Susan Bassnett indicates that there is a different approach in reading a play, as opposed to other literary texts, since "it is read as something *incomplete*, rather than as a fully rounded unit," (*Translation Studies,* 120). In one of his articles, Havel talks about his current situation in which he writes plays for reading only. He could not write for Czech theatres since his plays were not allowed in communist Czechoslovakia, and although some of these plays were performed in foreign countries, he could not leave the country to see them.

> Hry nejsou na čtení, ale na hraní; lidé je většinou číst neumějí (a proč by to také měli umět?) a já si až příliš často a až příliš bolestně musím uvědomovat – když se svými čtenáři mluvím –, kolik nejrůznějších a zcela zbytečných nedorozumění, od těch nejbanálnějších až po ta, jež se dotýkají samotného smyslu hry, vzniká z toho, že si nedokážou "přimyslet" k mým textům jejich divadelní provedení a že svůj čtenářský zážitek si neumějí v duchu nahradit kolektivním (a už proto radikálně jiným!) zážitkem divadelním.
>
> [Plays are not meant for reading, but for performing; in most cases, people are not able to read them (and why should they be?) and I have to realize overly often and overly painfully – when talking to my readers – how many different and often completely needless misunderstandings, from the most trivial ones to those that

> touch on the very meaning of the play, arise from the fact that they cannot "surmise" to my theatrical texts their performance and that they cannot substitute their reading experience with the collective (and therefore radically different!) experience of the theatre.] (*Daleko od divadla* 638, Own translation)

Havel sees the reading of dramatic text as a challenge and a possible source of misunderstandings. Readers must interpret every sentence, stage direction or description themselves, which results in many different interpretations by many different readers. Of course, in the theatre, much of the interpretation has already been done, mostly by the playwright and the director, but also by actors, producers or even light technicians, and all of these interpretations affects the way the viewers interpret the work for themselves.

Readers, it may seem, are influenced only by the interpretation of author or a translator, but at the same time, they are deprived of many theatrical properties and non-verbal aspects, since the text can only provide the reader with a narrative description. As pointed out by Mark Batty, the text itself is only one part of a performance as a whole:

> "[P]laywright only provides the material for a first register in performance (that of the imaginary; the narratives and messages embedded in the linguistic structure of the text) but relies upon others, through a translator-like operation, to find and apply a second register (that of mimesis; the collection of symbolic structures that contain and aid the transfer of information from stage to auditorium) and it is usually considered the director's task to find an appropriate balance between the two registers." (68)

Keir Elam, in studying the semiotics of theatre and drama, indicates that "[t]he written text, in other words, is determined by its very need for stage contextualization, and indicates throughout its allegiance to the physical conditions of performance … and its ability to materialize discourse within the space of the stage" (209). This fact might be

why readers might end up interpreting the play in a very different way than the author intended. Readers can read the stage directions, but they do not see the actual movement of the characters, they do not see their costumes, hear the music in the background, they can only imagine the gestures of the actors. Zdeněk Hořínek compares the reading of dramatic text to an inner theatre: the reader must imagine what is otherwise performed on the stage, he or she must perceive the action as a sequence of situations in which the perspectives of various characters blend together. Without this "scenic imagination", the reader perceives the text inadequately as a mere sequence of alternating lines of characters (71).

On the other hand, viewers in theatre will have an extra difficulty regarding focus. It can be argued that the focus of the reader is guided mainly by the order in which the text and non-verbal aspects present themselves, which is a linear process; as the reader first reads which character speaks, then with which tone or emotion, then what is said, and which actions other characters perform. Spectators, however, will see and hear everything happening at once. Especially in scenes where many things happen at the same time, different spectators will focus at different characters and happenings on the stage, which causes members of the same audience to experience the play in different ways. As Havel points out:

> Divadlo je ze všech uměleckých žánrů nejtěsněji vklíněno do konkrétního prostoru a času; je do něho vklíněno doslova fyzicky: existuje buď 'Tady a teď'(respektive 'tam a tehdy') – anebo vůbec; (...) Tahle triviální pravda má ovšem mnohem hlubší důsledky, než se na první pohled zdálo a než si leckdos uvědomuje: nejenže tak či onak – jednou přímo a jindy velmi zprostředkovaně – ovlivňuje nejrozmanitější aspekty divadla, ale je přímo klíčem k pochopení estetické specifiky toho, co je obvykle jeho základem, totiž divadelní hry.

> [Out of all artistic genres, the theatre is the one most wedged to a particular space and time; it is literally physically wedged to it: it exists either "Here and now" (or "there and then") – or not at all; (...) But this trivial truth has far deeper implications than it seemed at the first glance and than anybody realizes: not only that it, in one way or another – sometimes directly and sometimes very indirectly – influences diverse aspects of theatre, but it is actually the key to understanding the aesthetic specifics of what is usually its foundation; the play itself.] (*Daleko od divadla* 635, Own translation)

Readers have one extra layer of interpretation compared to audiences, but spectators will have to decide on which part of a scene they should focus on, which causes readers to experience the play differently compared not only to an audience in general, but also compared to specific members of that audience. During a performance, members of the audience only have one chance to see and remember everything that happens on stage. When discussing the attention of the audience, Esslin also points out that "[d]rama builds its representation on reality in a non-linear, non-systematic manner: the spectator has to be alert to pick up the basic elements of the 'exposition' and the subsequent concatenation of events, and to integrate them into a total picture. If the attention flags or is distracted, an essential link in the chain may be missed and the whole structure fails to cohere, to 'make sense.'" (*The Field of Drama* 129).

The written text influences the stage performance, and the fact that the work is written to be performed influences the writing process of the text. This balance is determined further by Esslin, while discussing the signs of drama: "in texts originally created for performance a proportion of the verbal element will remain obscure without an imaginative reconstruction of the performance that the text was destined to evoke" (79-80). Theatre theoretician Milan Lukeš (13-15) claims that theatre is directly and

indirectly involved in the genesis of a theatre text. He claims that the experience with theatre is a crucial part of the complex experience of an author of dramatic text. He talks about the importance of the passive and active knowledge of theatre, referring to the fact that many playwrights work in a theatre as actors, directors, but also technicians, as was the case for Havel. This experience encourages their creativity and talents, some are even creating the plays for the specific ensemble or an actor. In such cases, the text can generate freely, using a combination of the text with improvised action. Just as it is crucial for the playwrights to have this connection to and experience with theatre, it is equally important for the translator of dramatic text, especially if he or she is a part of the production and works closely with its director. Alinne Balduíno P. Fernandes comments on this subject:

> In order to ensure that the translated play functions in the way that a translated play can – speaking of there, of the source culture, as well as of here, of the target culture –, the translator can and should play an active role in the production of the play – a role that is as important as the considering of issues of cultural transfer in the actual process of translating. This affirmation, in a way, refers back to Bassnett's concept of collaborative translation. However, the main difference lies in the fact that what I want to propose that the translator can undertake an active role in the overall production of the play, and that this active part refers to understanding the mechanisms of the theatre (127).

Fernandes also claims that translated text is asymmetric in relation to its original, which can be seen as a result of the fact that "a translated play is not the exact reflection of its original, that is, it does not equal its original because it is crafted for a different purpose and for a different audience" (127). The translator can choose his strategy for dealing with the original: "the translated playtext can easily foreignize or domesticate a play depending on the translator's choice of location, rhythm and cultural milieu" (127).

Because of the fact that in theatre, the language is only one constituent among various others that promote meeting of different cultures, which is why "instead of linguistic encounter, theatre translation could be described as cultural encounter" (127).

It is the translator's choice whether to foreignize or domesticate as a method of his translation. Sirkku Aaltonen explores why these strategical choices are accepted in some cases and criticised in others. She believes this to be due to the fact that the text is performed in framework of various contexts that surround it: "the literary context (the whole theatrical tradition of the country where the play has been written), the social context, the moral context, the cultural context in the widest sense, and the geographical context (…) In consequence, foreign theatre texts which have been transported from another framework of contexts need to be adjusted to be able to respond to their new environment, and take part in the discourse of the target society" (75). As a result, there is no such thing as a complete equivalency of the translated text and the original.

Aaltonen also talks about the cultural asymmetry, claiming that the relationship of the source culture and the target culture in unequal, due to the fact that the source culture is often perceived as source of "desirable cultural goods" and is often considered superior to the target culture (73).

Apart from this, problems can also arise on the level of ideology, universe of discourse or poetics, and the translator must choose an appropriate strategy for dealing with different levels of problems. Lefevre suggests the following hierarchy for solving them "in descending order of importance: (1) ideology, (2) poetics, (3) universe of discourse, (4) language" (87). He goes on to say that this order might seem contrary to what translation is usually considered to be – mere substituting of a word or phrase in source language for a word or phrase in target language, but Lefevre strongly disagrees with this prejudice. He also claims that theatre translator must regard the cultural

difference between the audience: "[c]ertain features of the authors universe of discourse may have become unintelligible to the target audience, either because they no longer exist or because they have acquired different meanings. Translator must either substitute analogous features from the target cultures universe of discourse or try to re-create the authors universe of discourse as best they can…" (Lefevre 87).

Theatre translator must not only define and address the target audience, he is also faced with a challenging task. Carole-Anne Upton and Terry Hale point out that: "the form [of theatre] itself demands a dramaturgical capacity to work in several dimensions at once, incorporating visual, gestural, aural and linguistic signifiers into the translation" (2). When considering all these elements, the process of translation is closely linked to *mise en scène*.

Mark Batty claims that all *mises en scène* need to be ideotextual to a certain degree. This is due to the fact that a dramatic text is essentially the product of a particular culture at a particular time in its history.

> "Any act of enunciation of a non-contemporary or foreign play will always involve, therefore, the act of finding equivalencies for the intended and encoded thematic and dramatic material in the arena of the target audience's cultural vocabulary. (…) [A]s translators, we seek to transcribe a dramatic work into a target language by finding linguistic equivalencies to the material of the source text and attempt to group these in a manner that evokes the same or similar theatrical potential of the original. Out of necessity we are producing an original work of art." (Batty 69)

This, of course, brings out the question of how far we can divorce the text from its prescribed form. In the context of this thesis, we might ask ourselves whether an adaptation, such as *Office Party,* is set in and American corporate culture, will have the

same effect on American viewer as *The Garden Party* had on a viewer in communist Czechoslovakia; but simultaneously, we might question its effect on contemporary Czech reader.

Another specific attributes of theatre translation are discussed in Pavel Drábek's *České pokusy o Shakespeara.* Drábek (54-69) introduces five criteria; the first two are literary and cultural one, which are typical for all literary translation and therefore were often discussed elsewhere. He expands on acoustic, actor and stage criteria: Acoustic includes the tempo of the speech, euphony and cacophony, or a poetic function; Actor criterion includes speakability, breathability or rhythm; and finally the stage criterion is a sum of the above, which creates new categories, such as theatre acoustics or irony or situational determination.

Rhythm is another critical feature one must focus on while translating a dramatic text. In connection with the translation of theatre, we can talk about the rhythm of the dialogue. Jiří Levý characterizes theatre dialogue as a "particular instantiation of spoken language; therefore it is in functional relationships (a) with the general spoken norm i.e. colloquial style, (b) with the listener (addressee), i.e. the other characters on stage and the audience, and (c) with the speakers, i.e. the dramatic characters" (129). Translator must always keep in mind that theatre dialogue is primarily a "spoken text intended for oral delivery and aural reception (…) sequences of sounds which are difficult to articulate and which the audience may mishear are unsuitable" (Levý, 129). Anthony Vivis claims that the rhythm is "a complex and living organism (…) Variations in rhythm alter emphasis, pace and through them, at times, meaning" (39). The rhythm not only greatly affects the placing of words in the most effective order, it must also work between lines within a scene as well as between multiple scenes (40). André Lefevere also emphasizes the relationship between the rhythm and syntax: "Syntax affects readers by regulating not

just the sequence in which they are given information and exposed to the illocutionary power of the text but also the rhythm at which both information and illocutionary power are dispensed" (78).

Another interesting issue concerns the life span of a translated dramatic text. While the original, it might seem, can be performed without any major changes to the text essentially indefinitely, Bassnett estimates that a translation is only performable for 25 years at the most and then it needs to be replaced by a new translation (*The Case Against Performability* 111). On the other hand, Levý believes that the translation "retains its validity within a specific linguistic and culturally homogeneous epoch (…). The more rapidly the language changes the sooner translations become dated" (74), adding that recently, English evolves slowly, as opposed to rapid changes in some Slavonic languages. For this reason, there is a constant need to translate theatre texts, or to at least bring the existing translation up to date.

Two very important aspects of theatre translation are performability and speakability. These two notions are very complex and have been often discussed by theatre translation theoreticians. The history of these notions and various attempts at their definition will be introduced in the following subchapter.

1.2. Speakability, Performativity, Playability

Translation theoreticians took a great interest in investigating the particular characteristics of dramatic texts which differentiate them from other types of literature in order to discover their effect on the translation process. The most famous and often discussed of these characteristics are performability and speakability. These conceptions are often considered essential and typical of dramatic texts, and they depict oral/acoustic and gestic/action dimensions. For more than forty years, there was a lively debate about this issue, and it still remains a source of many disagreements today. Many theatre and translation theoreticians undertook to define the character of the relationship between the written text of a drama and the gestic facet of it that emerges during the performance.

Susan Bassnett argued that theatre has so far been disregarded by the translation studies, calling it "one of the most neglected areas" (*Translation studies* 120). In this context, Drábek calls it "the Cinderella of translatology". Bassnett believed this this was due to the fact that it was common to translate plays using the same methodology used for any other kind of prose. But these cannot be treated the same way, for one must approach even the act of reading differently, as something incomplete; Bassnett finds this completion only in the performance. She poses that the central problem for the translator of drama is "whether to translate the text as a purely literary text, or to try to translate it in its function as one element in another, more complex system", and she is quick to assert that "the linguistic system is only one optional component in a set of interrelated systems that comprise the *spectacle* (…) it is impossible to separate *text* from *performance*" (*Translation studies* 120). Bassnett also brings the reader's attention to the fact that this artificially created distinction resulted in the written text to be perceived as more significant, which was pointed out in an article by Anne Ubersfeld. Thanks to the higher status of the written, Ubersfeld believes that the performance is often perceived as a mere

‘translation’ into reality. She explains the problems of approaching the text as more important than the performance; in other words, when using the text as the starting point for translation:

> The task of the director, therefore, is to ‘translate into another language’ a text to which he as a prime duty to remain ‘faithful’. This position is based on the concept of semantic equivalence between the written text and its performance; only the ‘mode of expression’ in the Hjelmslevian sense of the term will be altered, the form and content of the expression will remain identical when transferred from a system of test-signs to a system of performance-signs. (qtd. in Bassnett, *Translation studies* 120-121)

Bassnett supports Ubersfeld’s view by indicating that the result of Ubersfeld’s argument would be that “when a literary text acquires a higher status than its performance counterpart, there results the misconception that there is a single right way of reading, and hence performing, the text, in which case the translator is bound more rigidly to a preconceived model than is the translator of poetry or prose“ (*Translation studies* 121). As a result, any deviation from the written text by either the director or translator is seen as an offense to the sanctity of the original text. Bassnett points out that the written play is only a part of the process that constitutes theatre as a whole. She indicates that certain features of the written dramatic text are distinctive, referring to Jiří Veltrusky, who pointed out that dialogue “unfolds both in time and in space and is always integrated in the extralinguistic situation” (*Translation studies* 121).

> The relationship between the dialogue and the extralinguistic situation is intense and reciprocal. The situation often provides the dialogue with its subject matter. Moreover, whatever the subject matter may be, the situation variously interferes in the dialogue, affects the way it unfolds, brings about shifts or reversal, and

> sometimes interrupts it altogether. In its turn, the dialogue progressively illuminates the situation and often modifies or even transforms it. The actual sense of the individual units of meaning depends as much in the extra-linguistic situation as on the linguistic context. (Veltrusky, qtd. in Bassnett, *Translation studies* 121)

The dialogue is characterized by components that will probably not manifest by a mere act of reading the isolated text, such as "rhythm, intonation, patterns, pitch and loudness, all elements that may not be immediately apparent from a straightforward reading of the written text" (Bassnett, *Translation studies,* 122). According to Nikolarea, Bassnett was one of the first scholars to point out that because of this, "theater translator must meet two criteria more than the translator of prose or poetry. The first criterion is that of *playability* or *performability*, and the second is that of the function of the text (translation) itself" (Nikolarea II.1). Bassnett believes there is a gestural patterning encoded in theatre text that renders it performable, and theatre translator must be able to recognize it:

> A theatre text, written with a view to its performance, contains distinguishable structural features that make it performable [and] the task of the translator must be to determine what those structures are and translate them in to the TL, even though this may lead to major shifts on the linguistic and stylistic planes. (*Translation studies* 122)

She also adverts to another issue that accompanies performability: the concept of theatre, our definition of what constitutes a performance, changes over time – acting style, playing space, the role of the audience. They can also differ considerably in various national contexts, and translator must consider these temporal and local specifics of as well (*Translation studies* 122-123).

Bassnett concludes that because of the fact that the dramatic text is only one of the elements that constitute the complex theatre discourse, the problems of theatre translation "take on a new dimension of complexity" (*Translation studies,* 132). She claims that the language of the written dramatic text functions as a sign, referring to the network of auditive and visual signs of a Polish semiotician Thadeus Kowzan. His system followed the teachings of the Prague Linguistic school and he tried to establish and define the categories of signs used in theatre. Firstly, he divided signs into two groups, natural (those are manifested involuntarily) and artificial (which are results of volitional efforts to signal or to communicate).

Nikolarea suggests that Kowzan's proposed model for determining the constituent parts of theatre, which he created by establishing thirteen sign systems as the basic components of theatre and which he divided into two categories, *auditive* and *visual,* can be further divided into five categories:

1) Auditive signs, which, being part of the spoken text, are emitted by the actor and exist only in time. Such signs are *word* (system 1) and *tone* (system 2).

2) Visual signs, which, classified as "the expression of the body," are located in the actor and exist in both time and space. Such signs are *mime* (system 3), *gesture* (system 4) and *movement* (system 5).

3) Visual signs, which, codified as "the actor's external appearance," are also situated in the actor but exist only in space.

4) Visual signs, which, called "the appearance of the stage" (…), are placed outside the actor and exist in both time and space. Such signs are *props* (system 9), *stage scenery* (system 10) and *lighting* (system 11).

> 5) Auditive signs, which, classified under "inarticulate sounds" (…) can be found only outside the actor and exist only in time. Such signs are *music* (system 12) and *sound effects* (system 13). (Nikolarea, I.3, emphasis changed)

These elements are always the same in any given theatre text, and they change only after one interprets them in some way; either in the process of reading or staging a play. Because of this system of signs, the dramatic text "contains within the *undertext* or what we have called the *gestural* text that determines the movements an actor speaking the text can make" (Bassnett, *Translation studies,* 132). As a result of this, the language of the play contains a "coded gestural patterning" within itself, and the translator must take this added plane into consideration in order to avoid any risks. Theatre translator must consider not only the text itself, but the function of it as well:

> One of the functions of theatre is to operate on other levels than the strictly linguistic, and the role of the audience assumes a public dimension not shared by the individual reader whose contact with the text is essentially a private affair. A central consideration of the theatre translator must therefore be the performance aspect of the text and its relationship with an audience, and this seems to me not only to justify modifications (…) but to suggest that the translator must take into account the *function* of the text as an element for and of performance." (*Translation studies* 132)

The previous paragraphs summarized Bassnett's early stance on performability and translating theatre texts. These changed drastically in 1985; regarding the issues of performability, she declared:

> The term 'performability' is frequently used to describe the indescribable, the supposedly existent concealed gestic text within the written. (...) It has never been clearly defined, and indeed does not exist in most languages other than English.

> Attempts to define the 'performability' inherent in a text never go further than generalized discussion about the need for fluent speech rhythms in the target text. What this amounts to in practice is that each translator decides on an entirely ad hoc basis what constitutes a speakable text for performers. There is no sound theoretical base for arguing that 'performability' can or does exist. (*The Case Against Performability* 102)

In the same article, Bassnett elaborates on the idea of a gestic text. The translator is being asked to treat a written text that is part of a larger complex of sign systems, including paralinguistic and kinesic signs, as if it were a literary text created for the page and read as such. The gestic text only comes to life in performance. But the task of translating a priori incomplete source text containing concealed gestic text into target language text, which also contains concealed gestic text, would call for a superhuman translator; for he or she must imagine what normally only performers create. And even though the theatre text is an incomplete entity, translator is somehow supposed to transform an unrealized text, which is by itself almost impossible task. But in spite all this pressure, he or she is still often perceived as inferior to directors and actors.

This economic, aesthetic and intellectual inferiority of the translator is often a problem, but in theatre translation it is even more obvious, because very often, the credit, and also much of the income, goes to playwrights and directors. Therefore Bassnett believes that the economy is the key factor, rather than the ethics of translation: "ethical considerations are diminished; texts are cut, reshaped, adapted, rewritten and yet still described as 'translations'" (even though she admits that sometimes the word "version" is used) (*Case against Performability* 102). She claims that the notion of performability as something that describes the concealed gestic text only causes problems; it is

impossible to define, and this may contribute to excusing the previously mentioned practices above.

Bassnett (*Case against Performability* 103) believes that this generalizing and oversimplifying notion of performability, whose criteria change over time with each culture and language, came to existence because of naturalist plays, mainly because of the fact that there was nothing like fixed text and detailed stage notes in pre-naturalist plays. The actors improvised and created plays with only a 'rough' guidance by the script, but there is now a tendency to remake these plays in a naturalistic way. Naturalism saw an increase in author's fame, rendering him more important. She also points out that stage notes became more often and detailed, but questions for whom they were meant and whether theatre text is incomplete without these. She claims that performance itself is always a certain interpretation of the play, a translation into material reality by the artists, and it may betray the author's original design. But on the other hand, there is a high degree of fidelity to the text on the stage, for even the actions and costumes of characters are present in the notes, which often makes actors servants of the dramatic text. Bassnett believes that the theatre translators were in the same position as servants to the original, which is why they came up with the idea of performability, which created a room for their interventions into the text and justified them.

Bassnett's radical stance toward the notion of performability led other theoreticians to reflect on this issue. For example, Eva Espasa examined the notion from various perspectives, asserting that "from a textual point of view, performability is often equated with 'speakability' or 'breathability', i.e. the ability to produce fluid texts which performers may utter without difficulty" (49). She also claims that the terms performability, theatricality and theatre specificity are interchangeable, as pointed out by Patrice Pavis: "theatricality is sometimes synonymous with theatre specificity, a notion

which is aesthetically and ideologically loaded, and about whose definition it is impossible to agree" (qtd. in Espasa 49). Given this interchangeability, Pavis's definition of theatricality can be applied on performability as well:

> Theatricality does not manifest itself (...) as a quality or an essence which is inherent to a text or a situation, but as a pragmatic use of the scenic instrument, so that the components of the performance manifest and fragment the linearity of the text and of the word. (qtd. in Espasa 52)

Espasa points out that the concept of performability is usually analysed from a textual or a theatrical viewpoint. According to Basnett, this concept applied to:

> 1) (From a textual viewpoint) the intention of underlining the fluency of the translated text, so that performers can utter it without unwanted effort. As mentioned above, this is often equated with 'speakability' or 'breathability';
>
> 2) (From the viewpoint of the *mise en scène*) a whole set of strategies of cultural adaptation, such as replacing dialectal features of the source language by others of the target language, or omitting passages which are considered to be too rooted in the cultural linguistic context of the original (…) Thus, from the viewpoint of theatrical practice, playability, or actability, are used as synonyms for performability. (qtd. in Espasa 50)

As emphasized by George Wellwarth, because of similarities between the translation of poetry and drama, the sense of rhythm is essential for these types of translation. Translator must take into consideration the rhythm of speech patterns and take into account "speakability (…), the degree of ease with which the words of the translated text can be enunciated" (qtd. in Espasa 53). For example Landers perceives speakability as an essence of theatrical translation, and he favours the performable, acoustically suitable means by stating that "[e]ven style, which is by no means unimportant in dramatic

translation, sometimes must yield to the reality that actors have to be able to deliver the lines in a convincing and natural matter" (104).

Joseph Che Suh adverts that the issue of the performability and speakability of the theatre text simply cannot be jettison as promoted by Bassnett in her later works. He quotes Cameroonian playwright and scholar Bole Butake: "*the ultimate aim of writing a play is usually to see it performed even though it is not always that a play script which is even published finds its way on stage for a number of reasons*" (qtd. in Suh 174). Suh refers to Sophia Totzeva, who believes that drama is "*a text conceived for possible theatrical performance*" (qtd. in Suh 175). She explains the issue of theatrical potential:

> In a dramatic text this semiotic relation is already to some extent present as a concept through given theatrical codes and norms, although the performance does not need to follow it. (…) Theatrical potential (TP) can be seen as the capacity of a dramatic text to generate and involve different theatrical signs in a meaningful way when it is staged. (…). The problem for translation as an interlingual transformation of the dramatic text is therefore how to create structures in the target language which can provide and evoke an integration of nonverbal theatrical signs in a performance. (qtd. in Suh 175).

But rather than to continuously examine the notions of speakability or performability and the (impossible?) efforts at their definitions, the best thing to do for theatre translators and translation scholars might be to inspect and analyse closely the specific theatre practices typical for each country or culture.

This subchapter introduced the concept of performability and speakability as one of the most widely discussed issues of theatre translation. It provided an overview of various stances of scholars, as well as their attempts at defining or disproving these

concepts. The following chapter will focus on the history and specifics of the Theatre of the Absurd.

2. Theatre of the Absurd

The Theatre of the Absurd is a term first used by Martin Esslin as a collective name for a genre that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. Since it is not easy to provide a clear definition of what this genre includes, this chapter will closely examine the specifics of absurdist theatre in order to understand distinctive textual aspects and, consequently, how these might have influenced the strategies of Havel's translators.

British journalist, dramatist, translator and critic Martin Esslin was the first one to inquire into plays of several playwrights across Europe who shared similar traits in their works. In 1961, he published *The Theatre of the Absurd*, coining the term a year earlier in an essay of the same name. It was the first book to identify this new avant-garde style and given the fact that his theory was not surpassed ever since, it is considered one of the most influential theatrical texts and crucial dramatic work for anyone studying The Theatre of the Absurd. Although it was a relatively young genre which was, at the time of Havel's beginnings as a playwright, still developing and discovering its limits and possibilities, being approached differently by each of the authors, it is possible to define the aspects characteristic to this genre.

Before further exploring absurdity in drama and defining the Theatre of The Absurd, let us first introduce the historical circumstances of its creation and its predecessors. The first plays in which absurd elements may be noticed are the nineteenth century plays by Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, and most notably Alfred Jarry. His puppet play *Ubu Roi* (1896) is often considered a predecessor of the Theatre of the Absurd. According to Esslin, Jarry "created a mythical figure and a world of grotesque archetypal images", and he describes Ubu as a "savage caricature of a stupid, selfish bourgeois seen through the cruel eyes of a schoolboy (...) He is a terrifying image of the animal nature of man, his cruelty and ruthlessness" (357). The surrealists expanded on

Jarry's experiments in the 1920s and 1930s, drawing inspiration for their artistic theory in Freud's teachings, especially his emphasis on the role of the subconscious mind.

James Joyce and Franz Kafka are also considered as predecessors of this genre by Esslin. Joyce's Nightgown episode from *Ulysses* in the form of a dream play and his preoccupation with language and "its attempt to penetrate to the deeper layer of the mind" in *Finnegans Wake* anticipate some of the characteristic features of Theatre of the Absurd (353-354). Kafka's short stories and novels, which Esslin describes as "meticulously exact descriptions of nightmares and obsessions – the anxieties and guilt feelings of a sensitive human being lost in a world of convention and routine" (354), are famous for absurd situations and they were an inspiration for many of absurdist playwrights. Esslin even considers the dramatization of Kafka's novel *The Trial* "the first play that fully represented the Theatre of the Absurd" (356). It opened at the Théâtre Marigny in 1947 and it deeply stirred its public, since his vision of the world as absurd and irrational was proved a highly realistic assessment. Esslin claims that the play "anticipated many of their [absurdist's playwrights] scenic inventions and united the traditions of clowning, the poetry of nonsense, and the literature of dream and allegory" (356).

Kafka was not the only one who pursued the idea of absurdity. As pointed out by Stejskalová in her thesis, Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard took a different stance than Kafka[1] when he saw the absurd as being synonymous with "the religious level of existence" and „incompatibility of rationality with religious belief" (Darrow iii).[2] In the context of Theatre of the Absurd, the term absurd was not understood as ridiculous as its common usage would suggest. Esslin provides a definition made by Eugène Ionesco, a

[1] Their different views are discussed in: Darrow, Robert Arnold. *Kierkegaard, Kafka, and the Strength of "The Absurd" in Abraham's Sacrifice Of Isaac*. 2005. Wright State University, Master's Thesis.
[2] For more information about Kierkegaard's notion of absurd (in contrast with the philosophy of absurd of Albert Camus) see: Bixler, Julius Seelye. "On Being Absurd!" *The Massachusetts Review* [online], vol. 10, no. 2, 1969, pp. 407-412. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25087871?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

Rumanian author and one of the first absurdist playwrights: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose … Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless" (qtd. in Esslin 23).

Kierkegaard and Kafka influenced forthcoming philosophical school of existentialism. Esslin compares the genre of the Theatre of the Absurd to dramas of existentialist authors, such as Sartre or Camus, in that they share „a similar sense of the senselessness of life, of the inevitable devaluation of ideals, purity, and purpose" (24). But Esslin claims that while these plays express similar notion of "irrationality of the human condition in the form of highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning" (24), absurdist plays express „sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought" (24). And while existential drama uses classic theatrical means, absurdist playwrights take it a step further and abandon the form and rational devices: "The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing *about* the absurdity of the human condition; it merely *presents* it in being – that is, in terms of concrete stage images" (Esslin 25, author's emphasis).

Additionally, Esslin indicates that the Theatre of the Absurd "tends toward a radical devaluation of language, toward a poetry that is to emerge from the concrete and objectified images of the stage itself. The element of language still plays an important part in this conception, but what happens on the stage transcends, and often contradicts, the words spoken by the characters" (26). The language of absurdist plays often contradicts the action on the stage and abandons "discursive logic for the poetic logic of association or assonance" (406), it loses its communicative function and becomes meaningless. According to Ionesco, "the words themselves must be stretched to their utmost limits, the language must be made almost to explode, or to destroy itself in its

inability to contain its meaning" (qtd. in Esslin 191). Esslin (408-409) also talks about the language used in the totalitarian countries, which applies to communist Czechoslovakia, where people know "most of what they are told is double-talk, devoid of real meaning", which is why they learn to "read between the lines" and guess "the reality the language conceals rather than reveals. Language is shown as unreliable and insufficient, it loses its value as a means of communication.

For example in Becket's *Waiting for Godot*, Niklaus Gessner has observed ten modes of disintegration of language, ranging from "simple misunderstandings and *double-entendres* to monologues (as sign of inability to communicate), clichés, repetitions of synonyms, inability to find the right words, and 'telegraphic style' (loss of grammatical structure, communication by shouted commands) (…) and the dropping of punctuation marks" (Esslin 87). Esslin claims that one of the ways in which absurd drama disintegrates language is by "transcribing reality with ruthless accuracy" (301), since vast majority of real human conversations is incoherent, ungrammatical, illogical and elliptical, which is why absurdist drama incorporates the genuine speech with all its flaws. As Jan Culík summarizes in his article:

> By ridiculing conventionalised and stereotyped speech patterns, the Theatre of the Absurd tries to make people aware of the possibility of going beyond everyday speech conventions and communicating more authentically. Conventionalised speech acts as a barrier between people: in order to come into direct contact with reality, it is necessary to discard the false crutches of conventionalised language. Objects are much more important than language in absurd theatre: what happens surpasses what is being said about it. The hidden, implied meaning of words assumes primary importance in the Theatre of the Absurd over what is actually being said. (I.)

This anti-literary attitude, the "turning away from language as an instrument for the expression of the deepest levels of meaning" (Esslin 328), is connected with another aspect typical for the Theatre of the Absurd – the element of 'pure' theatre. Esslin claims that plays can be manifested only in performance and that the Theatre of the Absurd goes back to the abstract scenic effects that have deep, even metaphysical meaning and are able to express more than a mere language ever could. In this context, Esslin points out the similarities between absurdist drama and performers such as jugglers, acrobats, tightrope walkers, animal trainers and especially clowns, all of the above being artists who do not use words in their performances.

Clowning, fooling and mad scenes are other traditions in which absurdist playwrights drew their inspiration from. These traditions often overlap, clowning relies on abstract scenic effects and verbal nonsense. Last of these traditions that Esslin lists is "the literature of dream and fantasy, which often has a strong allegorical component" (328). Derived from these traditions of miming, the silent film comedy emerged in the twentieth century. Charlie Chaplin or Buster Keaton and their gags were one of the decisive influences on the Theatre of the Absurd. Esslin explains that the grotesque comedy of the silent cinema had fundamental impact on the Theatre of the Absurd, because it of its following characteristics:

> It has the dreamlike strangeness of a world seen from outside with the uncomprehending eyes of one cut off from reality. It has the quality of nightmare and displays a world in constant, and wholly purposeless, movement. And it repeatedly demonstrates the deep poetic power of wordless and purposeless action. (335)

Esslin explains that after the introduction of sound to the cinema, the tempo changed, but there remained some sources for inspiration, such as Laurel and Hardy or

Marx Brothers, who Ionesco admitted had the biggest influence on his works. As Stejskalová pointed out, even Václav Havel inquired into the structure and formation of a gag in this context in his article *Anatomy of a Gag* (*Anatomie gagu 1963*). He claims that gag "je složen nejméně ze dvou základních fází, které samy o sobě nemusí být ani komické, ani absurdní, které však začínají probouzet pocit absurdity a smích v okamžiku, kdy se setkají"[3] (*Anatomie gagu* 170). He illustrates this on the following example:

> Když honí strážník Friga, není to gag. Když stojí strážník a Frigo na přechodu a čekají, až bude volno, také to není gag. Když ale honí strážník Friga, Frigo přiběhne na přechod, zastaví se, strážník se zastaví půl kroku za ním, oba klidně čekají, a jakmile dostanou od dopravního strážníka pokyn, honička divoce pokračuje, je to gag. [4] (*Anatomie gagu* 170)

The first phase is a police chase, the second one a pedestrian safety, and as we can see, these two situations only work in contrast with each other. The two joint situations make each other peculiar and that makes them seem absurd.

But despite the fact that many absurdist playwrights incorporated this clash of contrasting situations into their plays, these create only micro-situations. According to Zdeněk Hořínek, there are two ways in which the Theatre of the Absurd achieves its absurdity: either the starting point is an ordinary situation, which becomes more and more absurd through the course of the story, or the characters are thrown directly into an absurd situation and must face it (*O divadelní komedii* 115-116). Overall, absurd plays typically lack dramatic conflict and plot. The Theatre of the Absurd does not intend to tell a story, but rather to communicate a pattern of poetic images. Unlike in most well-made plays, it

[3] "is comprised of at least two elementary phases, which themselves might be neither comic nor absurd, but which begin to evoke a sense of absurdity and laughter once they encounter" (own translation)
[4] "When the Officer is chasing Frigo, it is not a gag. When the constable and Frigo stand at the croswalk and wait for it to be free, it is also not a gag. But when the Officer is chasing Frigo, Frigo sprints up to the croswalk, stops, the Officer stops half a step behind him, both calmly waiting, and as soon as they are instructed by the traffic guard the chase wildly continues, it is a gag." (own translation)

does not aim to present a line of development, but to make in the spectator's mind a total, complex impression of a basic, and static, situation (Esslin 403). Absurd dramas are essentially lyrical statements:

> abandoning [of] psychology, subtlety of characterization, and plot in the conventional sense, gives the poetical element an incomparably greater emphasis. While the play with a linear plot describes a development in time, in a dramatic form that presents a concretized poetic image the play's extension in time is purely incidental. Expressing an *intuition in depth*, it should ideally be apprehended *in a single moment*, and only because it is physically impossible to present so complex an image in an instant does it have to be spread over a period of time. The formal structure of such a play is, therefore, merely a device to express a complex total image by unfolding it in a sequence of interacting elements. (Esslin 404)

Theatre of the Absurd works with the presupposition that not all human behaviour is motivated. It depicts world that is senseless, lacks a unifying principle and "expresses the anxiety and despair that spring from the recognition that man is surrounded by areas of impenetrable darkness, that he can never know his true nature and purpose" (Esslin 425-426). Esslin (403) also explains that Theatre of the Absurd lacks objectively valid characters, so there is no place for a dramatic conflict, it cannot show clash of opposing temperaments or study human passions locked in conflict. Many plays have circular structure and end in the same situation as they began. Whatever the characters do and however they act, nothing changes in their existence. According to Marketa Goetz Stankiewicz, "the characters are presented as having become prisoners of a social reality which has emptied them of all but irrational, automatic responses" (*The Metamorphosis* 58). Esslin claims that since absurdist plays pursue a different goal than traditional theatre, they must use different methods than traditional plays. And since Esslin describes this

difference so strikingly accurate, his entire description of the essence of absurdist theatre will be presented here:

> If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of; if a good play is judged by subtlety of characterization and motivation, these are often without recognizable characters and present the audience with almost mechanical puppets; if a good play has to have a fully explained theme, which is neatly exposed and finally solved, these often have neither a beginning nor an end; if a good play is to hold the mirror up to nature and portray the manners and mannerisms of the age in finely observed sketches, these seem often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares; if a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, these often consist of incoherent babblings. (Esslin 21-22)

Despite his meticulous effort in identifying the characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd, Esslin was often criticized for his selection of authors. Even though he states in the very introduction of his book that Theatre of the Absurd is not self-proclaimed or self-conscious movement or school of thought, many of the listed authors objected to their works being called absurd. According to Trtílek, Samuel Beckett refused to talk about his dramatic text in connection with the Theatre of the Absurd and had taken a negative stance towards Esslin's work. Ionesco was leading countless discussions with Esslin, but his stance was not as reserved as Beckett's (16). That is why he delimits himself from the criticism in the introduction to the new edition from 1968. He claims that the term was coined only to "describe certain features of certain plays in order to bring out certain underlying similarities" (12), but he wishes it would not be used as a term describing some organized movement. He perceives it as simply a working hypothesis, a helpful device that allows for a discussion of present works of many dramatists by identifying some shared features.

This chapter introduced the genre of Theatre of the Absurd and its history, discussing some of its predecessors and mental roots. It provided overview of the most distinctive attributes as characterized by Martin Esslin. The following chapter will focus on the life of Václav Havel and his relationship to Theatre of the Absurd, especially with the focus on the genesis of *The Garden party*. It will also describe the political and cultural context of his work with focus on his absurdist theatre.

3. Václav Havel and the Theatre of the Absurd

Václav Havel is surely the most famous absurdist playwright in Czech Republic, and this chapter will focus on his attitude toward the Theatre of the Absurd. It will describe Havel's background and his journey to theatre and authorship, as well as the position of the Theatre of the absurd in Czechoslovakia with respect to the communist regime.

Václav Havel was born on October 5, 1936 in Prague to a well-situated and educated family. He was a famous playwright, experimental poet, dissident, and later the first president of Czech Republic. Given the intellectual tradition of his family, it was not surprising when he pursued writing, but as Libor Vodička states in his monography about Havel's work, he primarily considered himself to be a poet and wanted to write poetry or philosophical essays, and he later inclined towards film (13-14). Since he was not admitted to Academy of Performing Arts (AMU), he had to enrol in the military service, where he co-wrote his first play, *Život před sebou* (1958), with his friend Karel Brynda. He made his debut as a publicist in 1956 in a magazine *Květen*, and he later published his articles in other, mostly literary and theatre magazines, such as *Divadlo*, *Host do domu* or *Literární noviny*. After he was released from the military, Havel started to work as a stage technician in theatre Divadlo ABC after he was not admitted to AMU for the second time.

In 1960, after one season in Divadlo ABC, he transferred to Divadlo Na zábradlí (Theatre on the Balustrade) as a stage technician, but he slowly took on another creative tasks. When director Jan Grossman became art director there in 1962, Havel was already working as dramaturge and assistant director, not just in Theatre on the Balustrade, but in other theatres as well – most notably with Alfred Radok. The same year, he was also finally admitted as a student of dramaturgy to AMU. In 1963, Theatre on the Balustrade hosted critically successful premiere of *The Garden party*, Havel's first play and one of

the most famous Czech plays of the genre. It later produced another absurdist plays, but Havel states in his interview with Karel Hvížďala that "absurdní divadlo jako takové, totiž jako určitý směr v dramatické literatuře, nebylo bezprostředním uměleckým programem žádného z malých divadel šedesátých let, dokonce ani ne Divadla na Zábradlí, které k němu mělo asi nejblíž"[5] (50).

Absurdist plays became rather popular in Czechoslovakia, and Havel assumes that the reason behind the positive reception was the fact that „Absurdní divadlo bylo něco nového, něco, co se přesně strefilo do nervu té doby (…) Najednou pojmenovávalo věci pravými jmény a bylo schopno říci, že všichni čekáme na Godota a všichni čekáme marně, protože Godot není"[6] (qtd. in Žák 199-200). This applies to other countries of the Eastern Bloc, where the Theatre of the Absurd reflected the totalitarian communist regime. Unlike their western counterparts, who focused mainly on the existential dimension of the absurd, authors from communist countries draw their inspiration from the reality they lived in, and as a result, their plays became much more realistic in this political context. As Marketa Goetze-Stankiewicz noted, this genre deals with the "burning questions confronting men who have been denied the truth, whose minds have been choked with slogans, and who have to comply with absolute values which dictate their lives although they are beyond their comprehension" (*The Metamorphosis* 55). This brilliantly describes the man trapped in communist regime and proves that this genre was very fitting for the time. As Havel reflects on this topic, he reveals his attitude towards and the importance of Theatre of the Absurd for his work:

[5] The absurd theatre itself, as a certain movement in dramatic literature, was not an immediate artistic program of any of the small theatres of the 1960s, not even of the Theatre on the Balustrade, which probably came closest to it. (Own translation)
[6] It suddenly called things by their real names and was able to say that we are all waiting for Godot and we are all waiting vainly, because there is no Godot. (Own translation)

Ostatně na absurdním divadle si nejvíc cením právě toho, že dokázalo zachytit to, co je 've vzduchu'. Neodpustím si dokonce trochu provokativní bonmot: mám pocit, že kdyby absurdní divadlo neexistovalo už přede mnou, musel bych si je vymyslet.

[After all, what I really appreciate about the Theatre of the Absurd is its ability to capture what is 'in the air'. I cannot help myself but add a slightly provocative witticism: I feel that if the Theatre of the Absurd did not previously exist, I would have to invent it.] (Havel and Hvížďala 50)

As pointed out by Pavel Trtílek, "[p]oetika absurdního divadla se neztotožňovala s kulturním směřováním tzv. reálného socialismu, které propagovala tehdejší československá totalitní vláda"[7] (126), which is why Havel became one of the censored authors after the Prague Spring was supressed. But as Havel explains, theatre is a form that reflects its time and place, the *here* and *now*, and therefore "jestli všechno lze dělat *do šuplíku,* pak divadlo určitě nikoliv, a spoléhat na budoucí osvícenější generace je v jeho případě nonsens. Své věčnosti dosahuje výhradně svou aktualitou, historického uznání jen prostřednictvím uznání okamžitého, všeplatnosti jen skrze platnost *místní"*[8] (*Zvláštnosti divadla* 807-808). He also explains that as a result of this, theatre is fundamentally political in its essence, it is a concentrated expression of its time that reflects the current political and social issues.

This reflects the very complicated position Havel found himself in as a dramatist, because his plays were inherently political, they could not be published and performed in Czechoslovakia, but they were still published and performed abroad, often having

[7] The poetics of the Theatre of the Absurd did not identify with the cultural direction of so-called real socialism, which was promoted by the totalitarian Czechoslovak government. (Own translation)
[8] If everything else can be *written for the drawer*, then theatre certainly cannot, and to rely on the future, more enlightened generation is a nonsense it the case of theatre. It reaches its eternity solely through its topicality, its historical recognition only through its immediate recognition, its universal effect exclusively through its local effect. (Own translation)

premiere there, but he was not allowed to see them and to see the reaction of the audience and the critics, which was very important for him as an author. But it must be mentioned that given his fame and hallmark of a banned, curbed author, his plays were translated rather quickly. The following chapter will focus on the English translations of *The Garden party* and the circumstances of their origins, as well as the lives of its translators and their relationships with Havel.

4. Translations of *The Garden Party*

This chapter will introduce Vera Blackwell, who translated Havel's plays into English between 1963-1985. It will describe the collaboration between Blackwell and Havel and focus on the origin of the first translation of *The Garden party* into English, as well as some issues Blackwell had to face. It will also introduce the author of the second translation that was adapted for American audience, Jan Novák.

Vera Blackwell, neé Jakeš, was born in Czechoslovakia, but she became a political emigrant when she came to Germany in 1952. She started working for Radio Free Europe in Munich, and she met her husband, Lane Blackwell, an American television producer. She started to translate Czech plays for BBC radio at the request of Martin Esslin, originally intending to translate other Czech authors as well, but ultimately translating only plays of Václav Havel in the following twenty years. (Woods 34, 78-89)

Blackwell claims she never wanted to become translator, but she changed her mind after reading *The Garden party*. Havel's play took her by surprise, since she did not believe anything of the sort could have originated from the communist Czechoslovakia in 1960s. She felt she had to translate Havel's plays herself, since there were not many Czech native speakers able to do them justice:

> I honestly don't believe anyone in the US (any more than in England) could find another translator who could do justice to Václav's plays. This is (perhaps an unfortunate) fact, not a boast. (…) I translate Václav's plays only because I like Václav, I like his plays and I'd hate to see them distorted by hacks. (Blackwell, qtd. in Woods 78)

Blackwell was not only translating the plays, as Woods points out, she also took it upon herself to promote them among English speakers, exchanging letters with producers and publishers and creating other materials, such as introductions in theatre

programs and articles (79). She eventually returned to Czechoslovakia (with American citizenship) and met with Havel in person. She was however forced to leave after the Soviet invasion and labelled as a spy by communist government. Havel's plays were banned in Czechoslovakia, but were still published and played in foreign countries, many of them having their premiere there, and he was entitled to collect foreign royalties. In an effort to thwart the distribution of his plays in English speaking countries and to deprive Havel of this income, Blackwell was added on the "Index" of forbidden authors, among other things. She eventually managed to keep translating Havel's plays with the help of their mutual friend, Karel Just, who was not deemed as dangerous by the communist regime and let them use his name in any future contracts. (Woods 89-93)

The cooperation between Havel and Blackwell ended in 1985, most likely because of frequent complaints of literary agent Klaus Juncker, who represented Havel until 1989. From the beginning, she had an agreement with Havel that they will split the earnings in half, which seemed fair to them, but Juncker considered 50% to be too much for a work of a translator. (Whether or not this is the case is not in the scope of this work, although it is an interesting question worth discussing.) Juncker also deemed her translations to be "linguistically inadequate" and blamed her for the lack of success of Havel's plays in English speaking world (Woods 35).

Let us now focus on the genesis of English translation of *The Garden Party*, which was at the beginning of this twenty-year long relationship. Blackwell was first asked to translate only few pages of it by John Roberts, director of The Royal Shakespeare Company. He had seen the play in Czech and wanted to understand it, but he feared that the reception of the play in the Anglo-Saxon environment could suffer due to internal allusions that only Czechoslovak viewers could decode. The partial translation confirmed his fears, but he decided to produce the play anyway and asked Blackwell for a complete

translation, with the condition that "it should be given a universal meaning and not be either a play about Czechoslovakia, or even to be set in that country" (qtd in Woods 58). He even wanted her to write to Havel and explain to him that: "so long as local references are left out, an English audience will find his tilts at bureaucracy extremely funny and be able to identify them with our own administration" (qtd. in Woods 58).

Woods claims that Roberts misjudged the situation when assuming the play should not take place in a specific country and contain specific political or geographical references. As Marketa Goetz-Stankiewitz points out when talking about the issue of relevance of contemporary theatre:

> It is fair to say that most critics and scholars, eager to point out Havel's incontestable political relevance, have tended to shortchange the wider implications of his plays and pay insufficient attention to his artistic qualities. Even those who seem aware of the universal appeal of his work have – quite understandably – been side-tracked by the surprisingly original way in which he expresses his criticism of a systematized society (…) that they have spent their energies on the political (though Havel might call it antipolitical) aspects of his work (…) none has really tried to formulate the relevance of Havel's work for a Western democracy. (*The Silenced Theatre* 39)

Another one of Roberts conditions was that Norman Simpson, British playwright, will assist Blackwell with the translation, which pleased neither Blackwell nor Havel. Blackwell realized that the play must be adapted, especially in the area of cultural references, but tried to prevent the changes from affecting the final result too much. According to Woods, Roberts wanted the play he had seen, without understanding a single word of it, and which he perceived mistakenly as political farce, hiring a professional farce writer (59). But neither of them understood the universalism in the

original play and the role of the language as a main character, as a deconstructive force; Simpson worked with mere puns. This resulted in a strong adaptation of Havel's original, in fact, a completely new play was created: *The Centre*, which was not staged in the end. The premier of *The Garden Party* in English was staged by and amateur ensemble of Coulsdon Youth and Social Centre in 1970, using Blackwell's translation. (Woods 57-61)

Although the British adaptation did not become established, there was another attempt to translate Havel's play in 2006, almost 50 years after the premier of *The Garden party.* The author of this second (and as of now most recent) translation is Jan Novák, established writer, screenwriter and translator who emigrated from Czechoslovakia in 1969. This was not the first time Novák translated one of Havel's plays; he translated two plays from the Vaněk trilogy, *Audience* and *Unveiling,* in 1986 and *Protest* in 2006. He also made two films about Havel: *Občan Havel jede na dovolenou* (*Citizen Václav Havel Goes on Vacation*) about his persecution by police, and a documentary film *Občan Havel přikuluje* (*Citizen Havel Is Rolling Barrels*).

Novák's adaptation of the *The Garden Party*, also known as *Office Party*, is a slightly updated version of the original play, tailor-made for the American corporate culture. As the new title implies, Hugo is no longer a guest of a garden party of the liquidation office. Instead, he attends a party of American business company, which emphasises bureaucracy as well as capitalistic ideas, so the shift away from the communism is rather substantial. This "radical transposition", as Novák calls it, is changing the frame of reference of the communist regime, which is outdated even in Czech republic and hardly understandable for a culture that was not affected by the communist regime, such as the American one, and replacing it with references known to a wider audience. Despite the fact that his adaptation is set in a very different time and place, it works surprisingly well, since it holds up a mirror to the American corporations

in the same way Havel did for the communistic regime in Czechoslovakia, proving once more that his play is more than just a political farce only Czech people understand. It is timeless and universal in its core, because it points out the meaningless and uncertainty of existence, which was of course relevant in the times of communist regime but is applicable in other contexts as well. In his foreword to *Office Party*, Novák says about the corporate culture:

> [I]nformation is power, so you hoard as much of it as possible, and then you wink and bluff to pretend that you know even more. You always suck up to your superiors, adopting their diction whenever possible. You are never sure of anything, because nothing is ever definite, so you endlessly qualify everything you say, never sticking your neck out. Your job is not fully clear, not even to yourself, so you are in a permanent state of anxiety and never cease checking which doors the latest corporate drafts may be about to slam. And you're always shaken up by any display of independent thought or confidence. (10-11)

As we can see, there are many similarities to be found with the communism, nevertheless, apart from this change of setting, Novák stays faithful to the original throughout most of the text, preserving Havel's style. Unlike Simpson, Novák understood the way Havel uses language and aimed to update only necessary references while keeping the universal message of the play the same, making his characters prisoners of the language that governs them. His adaptation was staged by the New York's Oracle Theater in the Brooklyn Brick Theater in the fall of 2006.

This chapter introduced both translators, describing the circumstance of the origin of the first translation of *The Garden Party*, as well as the context to which the second one, *Office Party*, was put into. The following chapter and its subsections will focus on analysis of said translations from various points of view.

5. Analysis of Translation Solutions

Theatre of the Absurd works with language in a distinctive way, as was pointed out earlier. It often uses language of nonsense and its characters tend to contradict themselves, use empty phrases without any informative value and repeat themselves. The language of the Theatre of the Absurd loses its communicative function, it becomes the bearer of misunderstanding.

In order to analyse the translations of *The Garden Party*, one must understand the way Havel uses language. As Paul Trensky explains, it is the most important part of the play, since, "lacking a real plot, conflict, and a set of characters, the play rests on a highly complex verbal structure, and it is actually the language which is its primary moving force" (44). Language has lost its main function, since it is unable to communicate or to formulate meaningful thoughts and it "points up not only the impossibility of communication between people, but the very corruption of the intellect by language. People cannot understand each other because they simply do not say anything" (Trensky 44). Havel himself admits that his use of language and its meaning changes depending on the specific play. In some cases, it only functions as necessary means of communication, while in other cases it plays a primary role, as is the case for *The Garden Party*. His characters often talk in standard language that can be for example found in newspapers, and if they resort to the use of slang, it has justifiable meaning; usually to emphasize automatized and estranged folksiness and joviality.

Havel talks about his work with language and his authorial style in the interview with Karel Hvížďala, and he explains some of his techniques and approaches. One of the most important features is phrase:

> "Zajímá mne fráze a její význam ve světě, kde verbální zhodnocení, včlenění do frazeologického kontextu, jazyková interpretace jsou mnohdy důležitější než

skutečnost sama, a stávají se tudíž samy tou hlavní skutečností(…) Fráze organizuje život, fráze vyvlastňuje lidem jejich identitu, fráze se stává vládcem, obhájcem, soudcem i zákonem."[9] (Havel and Hvížďala 167)

He also talks about his tendency toward analogous structure of dialogues: rotation of lines and their repetition, borrowing line of one character by a different character and their reciprocal exchange, reverse or counter-running dialogues, emphasizing the rhythmic alternation of conversational motives (Havel and Hvížďala 166). This results in what he describes as 'mechanization of dramatical form'. This is related with the repetitiveness, which is one of the means as to how achieve said mechanization. Another characteristic of his plays that manifests itself the most in *The Garden Party* is the loss of identity. Hugo goes to the party to find himself, and on his journey, he encounters the phrase as a central principle. He learns and adapts from the phrase, becoming more important as he masters the phrase, and finally losing himself in it (Havel and Hvížďala 170). It is therefore important to realize the role this atypical use of language has in order to understand and to be able to translate Havel's plays. Aside from that, Havel's plays also contain communistic phraseology; void and clichéd language of the establishment of power that was used in communistic Czechoslovakia.

[9] I am interested in the phrase and its meaning in the world where verbal evaluation, incorporation into the phraseological context, and linguistic interpretation are often more important than the reality itself, and thus become the ultimate reality (…) Phrase organises life, it dispossess people of their identity, phrase becomes the ruler, advocate, judge and the law. (Own translation)

5.1. Absurd Estrangement: Wordplays, Phrases and the Language of Nonsense

This chapter will focus on various uses of wordplays and phrases in Havel's original, examining the way they operate in order to create an absurd impression and nonsensical language. It will comment on selected translation strategies of both translators, as well as some mistakes they commit. Hopefully, this chapter will outline the way Havel uses language in *The Garden party* and how these pose certain challenges for their translators.

According to Grossman (311), the phrase is the main character of *The Garden party*. But it is not the man who governs the phrase, rather the phrase governs the plot and ultimately the characters themselves[10], which must be taken into consideration by the translator. The phrase engineers and complicates the plot, it moves the storyline, it creates and enforces its own fresh reality. Grossman claims that phrase takes on various shapes and forms: "Vznikají celé frazeologické kompozice a schematizují – paradoxně – skutečnost tím, že ji zamotávají do nepřehledných, fiktivních a přitom logicky promyšlených vztahů" (315).[11]

It is important to realize that phrases in *The Garden Party* must be approached differently, since they are not used in a way that makes any sense. Kačer identifies that the use of phrases in Havel's original is parodical (220). As pointed out by Stejskalová (39-40), the characters utter these phrases with great confidence and gravity in order to induce the impression that they contain some meaning within. They seem to be real, but there is no real meaning or logic present behind them, they are completely fictious. In order to strengthen their seeming authenticity, Havel uses semantic actualisation or

[10] Translation by Rambousek, 162.
[11] Whole phraseological compositions are created and they – paradoxically – schematize the reality by entangling it in confusing, fictitious, and yet logically thought-out relationships. (Own translation)

contamination. This term by Čechová means "směšování nebo ještě lépe křížení dvou frazeologických jednotek tak, že se uplatní z každé frazeologické jednotky jedna část: z jedné první, z druhé druhá část (…) Užitím kontaminovaného frazému se může zdůraznit nelogičnost určitého postupu"[12] (181). As we can see, Havel not only created new phrases, he made them even more absurd by combining them into units that made even less sense (Stejskalová 39-40).

In this respect, Kačer talks about 'absurd estrangement', and he claims that this element might be considered a distinctive device of semantic composition of *The Garden Party* (219). In his article "Notes on Translation of Václav Havel's Plays", Jiří Rambousek concludes:

> None of these puns, trivial as they may seem, are superfluous in the text. They support the feeling that the whole play is language-driven: the development of a dialogue is determined by random similarities between words rather that the logic of conversation. (…) With such texts, losses are inevitable in translation, though they can be minimized by a thorough study of the source text and its cultural and linguistic references. (…) [T]he text retains its message as long as the main function of the wordplay is recognized and preserved: the distortions in communication are more important than the actual puns themselves. (165-166)

We can demonstrate Havel's strategy on the following example from the second act. Plzák is introducing himself for the first time, and he wants to give the impression of an ordinary guy, a man of the people.

O: [J]sem totiž docela obyčejnej člověk z masa, krve a mlíka – (23)

[12] Mixing, or even better crossing of two phraseological units by applying one part of each phraseological unit: one part of the first one, second part of the second one (…) By using a contaminated phrase, one may emphasize the illogical nature of a particular procedure. (Own translation)

B: You see, I am quite an ordinary chap made of flesh and bones, milk and blood… (13-14)

N: I'm just your regular Joe, your meat'n potatoes'n milk man – (33)

Here, Havel combines two Czech idioms, "člověk z masa a krve" ("man of flesh and blood") and "holka krev a mlíko" ("girl like blood and milk", used to describe chubby girls). Blackwell operates with words that are parts of English idioms, such as "flesh and bones" or "flesh and blood", and Novák uses only one idiom "meat and potatoes", but both translators decided to translate the milk part as well, even though it carries no covert meaning in the target language. But Havel does not only use combinations of two phrases. In the following example from the same line, we will focus on a phrase which draws its absurdity by mere swapping of words:

O: [V]íte, mně fakticky nic cizího není lidské! (23)

B: You know, really, nothing foreign is human to me. (14)

N: Nothin' that's human's foreign to me! (33)

As we can see, Blackwell translated this wordplay well, while Novák translated its original, unchanged meaning of "nic lidského mi není cizí". This is important, because, as is typical for this play, these phrases often repeat, so Novák should be consistent with his decision. But for some reason, when Hue starts to take over Slug's phrases, he translates the original wordplay as intended: "nothin' that's foreign is human to me!" (50). But to be impartial, it must be mentioned that Blackwell also sometimes fails to understand the failed logic behind Havel's phrase. For example, when she translates "Čím ukázněněji se zařadíte, tím dříve budete na řadě." (21) as "The sooner you start queuing, the sooner you get in." (12). This assumption is logical, but Havel works with the idea of moving as fast as disciplined one is, which creates the sense of absurd.

Plzák proclaims that he hates phrase-mongering and rejects all sterile cant (translation by Blackwell, 13). Despite this declaration, he is actually a man of phrases, as Rambousek points out, he is "incompetent – he does not know what is really going on" (164), Havel's work with his speech is supposed to characterize him as a stupid, but very flexible man. In the examples above we can see that Novák often uses contracted forms for Slug' utterances. As a result, he manages to make him sound very simple. This way, Novák substituted for the misuse of grammar in the original, rendering his translation more befitting to the character than Blackwell's version.

On the other hand, I feel like it must be mentioned that he also uses these contracted forms in the speech of the parents, which can be sometimes problematic, especially when concerning phrases Hue later repeats since, as we can see, he does not contract it in Hue' line:

O: Pludek: Obrok je obrok a hrách je hrách (19)

N: Ollie: Horse feed's horse feed is horse feed and pea's a pea (28)

O: Hugo: Obrok je obrok a hrách je hrách

N: Hue: Horse feed is horse feed is horse feed and pea is a pea (29)

It is true that the use of contraction helps with situating the parents to the middle class, but it sometimes makes the parents sound different than in the original; when Hue repeats this line without the contracted form, it creates a sense that he is more intelligent and educated than his parents – and even though this might have been the intention of the translator, it is certainly not depicted in such way in the original.

Let us now pay attention to the way translators changed names of the characters, since it is often an important part of some wordplays and situations. As pointed out by Stejskalová (44-45), Novák chose to work with the name Mark because of the idiom he used to substitute Havel's Czech original:

O: Pludková: Petr je černá ovce v rodině!

Pludek: Černý Petr! (11-12)

B: Mrs Pludek: Peter is the black sheep of the family.

Pludek: The blackguard! (3)

N: Bea: Mark's the black sheep of this family.

Ollie: He's the black Mark! (16)

While Blackwell decided to translate this wordplay using the name of the game that Havel refers to, Novák replaced it with an English idiom.[13] Let us now explore another translation solution by Novák. He chose to name the male executive Jim Daly, as can be seen in the third act, when he repeatedly introduces himself to Hugo (72). Havel named him Josef Doležal, and Novák made a mistake in one instance by giving him another name. At the end of the second act, after the two secretaries had gotten close together, Havel uses Czech hypocorism for the name Josef:

O: Tajemnice: *(smutně)* To je všechno, Pepíku, co mi teď řekneš?

Tajemník: Buď ráda, že je zase klid! A pojďte likvidovat, ať nepříjdem pozdě! (36)

N: Exec. 2: *(Sadly)* Is that all you have to say to me now, Joey?

Exec. 1: Be glad everything is quiet again! And let us go downsize, we do not want to get there late! (53)

Not only does Novák's translation lack the change in their relationship, which is radically cooled down when 'Pepík' regresses to 'vous' form, he confuses the reader, since Jim and Joey are both hypocorisms of English names, James and Joseph respectively, which gives impression there is another character. We have outlined the situation in Novák's translation, so let us continue in this line of thought and advert to

[13] For detailed analysis of this translation choice, see Stejskalová 44-45.

one missed opportunity. In the third act, Exec. 2 and CEO recite the lyrics of a song, which is substitutes for a Czech poem in the original:[14]

O: Tajemnice: Anebo: Slyš ty mne, čtyřlístku, slyš ty mne, jeteli –

Ředitel: Nyní mu nesmím už říkati příteli –

Tajemnice: Ach bože! (Rozpláče se) (39)

N: Exec. 2: Or: hey, Mr. bartender, one Bourbon, one Scotch –

CEO: And one bill!

Exec. 2: (Breaks into sobs) Oh, my God! (58)

The female secretary, or Exec. 2, is clearly having trouble getting over her feelings toward the male secretary, which is demonstrated multiple times throughout their conversation (even though Stejskalová incorrectly interprets her burst of emotions as feelings for the CEO, author of this thesis believes that they are the culmination of the relationship she had with Exec. 1, as is suggested in the previous example as well). Given the cultural appropriation chosen by Novák for his translation, he missed a huge opportunity. He could have been working with the name William deliberately from the start, the same way he did with Mark, in order to retain the reasoning behind the emotions of the female secretary. While in Novák's translation, her reaction seems unjustified, it would be understandable if she would break down crying because she was reminded of her love interest. This is of course because the hypocorism of the name William is Bill.

In this context, it should be also mentioned that Novák's decision to translate both secretaries as genderless Exec. No. is felicitous, because it does not impose any differences in their occupation, while Blackwell' Clerk and Secretary can suggest a different position. The word 'secretary' can be translated as 'tajemník' and would

[14] For detailed analysis of the translation of this culturally specific reference, see Stejskalová 61-62.

therefore suffice, but in contrast with 'clerk', it might suggest a less prestigious meaning of 'sekretářka'.

One demonstration of Havel's ability to combine two situations into one is famously shown in the gag with telegrams that Amálka brings and reads to the Pludek family. Instead of the mere contents of a telegram in a form of capital letters without any diacritics, Havel also includes personal (and sometimes even intimate) details from Kalabis's life, allowing us to "overhear" what was said in his office while dictating it to his secretary, who unconsciously wrote down these words Kalabis addressed to her. Kačer says that "[v] těchto telegramech se tak vlastně prolínají dva významově spolu vůbec nesouvisející jazykové kontexty (…) ozvláštňují se tím však nikoliv tyto kontexty samotné, ale jejich společný nositel – František Kalabis – a jeho prostředí – úřad" (221).[15]

These fragments of personal conversation are written in a normal manner, in small letters and with diacritics:

O: Amálka: *(čte)* MILY OLDRICHU, NEMUZU K TOBE PRIJIT, MUSIM DNES VECER NA ZAHRADNI SLAVNOST LIKVIDACNIHO URADU. Máte to, Aničko? Není vám zima? Proč? Aha. V půl osmé, ale určitě! Můžu dál? MRZI ME TO A DOUFAM, ZE SE SEJDEME JINDY. Moc! Dělají vám krásnou postavu! Jak vždycky vystupovala paní Kantůrková, na tom rohu. Věčně zpívají lesy. A v neděli bychom mohli do Nespek na borůvky, co říkáte? ZDRAVI TE TVUJ – No tak! Přece nejste z porculánu! – FRANTA KALABIS. (17)

The difference between the normal or the capitalized record can be only observed by the reader, but the diacritic is important for the stage performance. Unfortunately, this

[15] [I]n these telegrams, therefore, two meaninglessly unrelated language contexts actually intertwine (…) but this does not make these contexts alone peculiar, it tells us something about their common bearer - František Kalabis – and his environment – office. (Own translation)

vital part of this gag is untranslatable, given the lack of diacritics in English, and neither of the translators managed to come up with a compensating solution. As pointed out by Stejskalová (53), Blackwell decided to differentiate the part addressed to the Pludek family by making it rather formal in tone, unlike in the original, while the conversation with the secretary is informal and more colloquial, using contracted forms and phrasal verbs. This way she was able to create two parts that are more distinguishable from one another:

> B: Amanda: (Reading) MY VERY DEAREST ALBERT, YOU CANNOT IMAGINE HOW VERY PLEASANTLY I WAS SURPRISED BY THE NEWS THAT YOUR HUGO – Only yesterday he had a full drawer of carbons! I didn't eat them! What? You'd be wanting a mink coat next! Carry on, will you! – WAS ASSIGNED THE EXTREMELY HONOURABLE AND IMPORTANT TASK OF CONSTRUCTING ON THE RUINS OF THE FORMER LIQUIDATION OFFICE…" (48)

Of course that it seems impossible to substitute this use of language in any way in a language without diacritics, and it is good that Blackwell tries to draw the attention toward a difference in register of the two contexts in which Kalabis "talks". But if she was to follow Havel's pattern, she would have to switch the registers in this last telegram that is quoted above, since in its last instance, Havel once again mixes up the order of things which he himself set by adding the diacritics to the text of the telegram and removing it from the words addressed to the secretary (while the capitalization is preserved the way it was in the previous telegrams). Given the content of the conversation between Kalabis and his secretary, who start to fight about her alleged pregnancy, it seems unimaginable for Kalabis to use a formal registry in such situation, and if Blackwell

indeed made this turn, the result would most definitely had impact on the meaning of the play.

Let us now focus on the translation of Novák – and in continuity to this, let us start from the last telegram. The two contexts climax in alternation of friendly goodbye and insults:

O: TVŮJ STARÝ – Lharko! – VĚRNÝ – Devko! – FRANTA. – Kaceno! (59)

B: YOUR OLD – Liar! – FAITHFUL– Whore! – FRANK. – Silly goose! (49)

N: "Your old" – Liar! – "Faithful buddy" – Slut! – "Frank." – Bitch! (89)

While Novák uses arguably more modern insults, his addition of the word 'buddy' totally undermines the point, since it is wedged between two words that are supposed to contrast one another. As we can see, he abandoned the idea of capitalized text altogether and he uses quotation marks to differentiate the two contexts. He also chose to change the telegram for an e-mail in an effort to make the play more current, which may seem as a good idea. But there are some logical problems, the first being that he decided change the method of the recording, instead of dictating to his secretary, Kanabis dictates his message to a modern device, possibly a mobile phone with voice recognition. Said device than inserts a note: "Dictated, but not read", but despite that, the device manages to mark the two contexts by adding quotation marks to the parts meant for Pludek, which is unrealistic. One could argue that Havel's original is also unrealistic, since a telegram would probably be written in capital letters as a whole, but in the case of the original, we can at least see the reference the author made to a real-word phenomena and the way he works with it, I would argue, excuses this logical lapsus of the original. Plus, in the original, it makes sense that some parts of the conversation refer to the process of writing the message down, for example: "Máte to, Aničko?" (17). After these questions, the speech usually turns to another topic as Kalabis gets distracted. But in Novák's

adaptation, it no longer makes sense to keep this part in there. Novák also mistranslates one part of their conversation that is important for the development (or at this point, rather the downfall) of their relationship, when Kanabis says that ”He ’ll never agree to a divorce” (86), when he is more likely referring to his wife and argues why he will not leave her for the secretary: “Chápej – mám děti!” (57).

Also, Alma would probably not bring them an e-mail in the first place. Of course, that this might be the reason for Novák to mention later on that she is a daughter of an alderman who has high-speed internet. But in the last act, she is with Mark in the pantry “sorting e-mails” in the dark, even though “the light bulb popped”, which does not make any sense, since the display of any modern reading device would suffice her not only as a source of light in a dark room, but it would also enable her to read in a room without other sources of lighting. In the original, Havel of course uses this to insinuate about the relationship between Amálka and Petr and what was actually going on in the dark, which is why Mrs Pludek exclaims: “Žárovka! Jestli si Petra nevezmete –“ (57).

There is also a very interesting moment, when Amálka brings the telegram, all characters exclaim in expectation of the word letter. This is given by the fact that Havel uses structure which rhymes with “psaní”, and the characters, who have been tensely waiting for the whole day, cannot hold their excitement:

O: Pludková: Co tady děláte?

Amálka: Paní, nesu vám –

Všichni: Psaní!

Amálka: Ne, telegram! (17)

B: Pludek: Is something the matter?

Amanda: There’s nothing the matter. Here is a –

All: Letter!

Amanda: No, telegram! (9)

N: Bea: What are you doing here?

Alma: Ma'am, I'm bringin' you–

All: A letter!

Alma: No, an e-mail! (24)

While Blackwell tries to translate the word play by creating a rhyming structure, she than misappropriates the guestion to Mr Pludek. Novák does not try to translate this wordplay, instead, he compensates for this loss in a previous line, when he translates Havel's "Petře, do špajzu! Kalabis je tady!" (17) as "John, get into the mark! I mean, Mark, get into the john! Kanabis is here!" (24). But since he did not translate the original word play, it no longer makes sense for all to exclaim "A letter!", given that in the original, it is a rhyming game.

Havel also very often works with the use of 'tu' and 'vous' forms. As Levý points out, "[a] special study could be devoted to (…) the way relationships between characters are defined according to the choice of 'tu' and 'vous'" (159). In the following scene from the third act, these forms are used in what is essentially a power play for dominance between Hugo and Ředitel:

O: Hugo: Vždycky jsem rád, když se setkám s někým, kdo mi je tak nějak názorově I pocitově příbuzný! Klidně mi tykejte! Kouříš?

Ředitel: Ne, děkuji. A ty?

Hugo: Ne, děkuji, taky ne. A ty?

Ředitel: Ne, děkuji. A ty?

Hugo: Není zač. Víš, klidně mě chápej tak nějak jako svého tátu!

Ředitel: A ty mě zase jako svou mámu! (43)

B: Hugo: I'm always glad to meet somebody who's sort of close to me. I mean in the way of opinions and emotions. Go on, call me Hugo! Do you smoke?

Director: No thanks, Hugo. And you? Do call me Ernie!

Hugo: Thanks, Ernie, neither do I. And you?

Director: No thanks, Hugo. And you?

Hugo: Not at all. Listen, Ernie, why don't you think of me as sort of your father!

Director: And you of me as your mother! (34)

N: Hue: I'm always happy to run into somebody who is, so to speak, a relative of mine in terms of opinions and emotions. So you can call me Hue! Do you smoke?

CEO: No, thank you. And you?

HUE: No, thank you, I don't either. And you?

CEO: No, thank you. And you?

HUE: You're welcome. You know, you may view me as a kind of a father figure, if you want!

CEO: And you can view me as your mother! (65)

In Blackwell's translation, the offer to use 'tu' form was substituted by getting on first-name basis, whereas Novák only introduces Hue. Both translations are sadly missing the moment when Hugo offers 'tu' form usage to Ředitel, but he himself uses it without permission, which is considered rather rude. Perhaps, this could have been achieved by him calling the character of the Ředitel by his name in the first line, for example: "Hugo: You can call me Hugo! Do you smoke, Ernie? – Director: No thanks, Hugo. You can call me Ernie. Do you smoke?"

This exchange is preceded by another one in which Havel uses and interesting grammatical wordplay:

O: Ředitel: (…) Kouříme?

Hugo: Ne, děkujeme. Brzy to opravdu bude tak nějak náš druhej domov, myslíme. Vy nemyslíme?

Ředitel: My souhlasíme. Kouříme?

Hugo: Nekouříme – víme?

Ředitel: Provedeme! (41)

B: Director: (…) [D]o we smoke?

Hugo: No, thanks. Soon this'll be sort of our second home, we believe. Am we right?

Director: We am. Do we smoke?

Hugo: No, we don't.

Director: Oh!" (32)

N: CEO: [D]o we feel like smoking?

Hue: No, we thank you, though. This place will soon become a home away from home for us, we imagine. You – don't we imagine that?

CEO: We agree. Do we feel like smoking?

Hue: We don't smoke – don't we know?

CEO: We'll implement it all completely! (61-62)

Instead of second person singular and first person singular, the characters use first person plural, and in one case even a combination of second person singular with first person plural. Blackwell manages to translate this grammatical wordplay extremely well, especially "Am we right?", but she left out the last part where Hugo insinuates to director. Novák's translation seems a bit less impactful, especially with the way he decided to

formulate the question. In the original, the question is clearly relating to the characters being smokers or non-smokers, which is later used as a gag. But Novák's translation can be interpreted only in relation to the temporary desire to have a smoke. Unlike Blackwell, Novák translated Hue's insinuation, but the reaction of CEO is too long and specific, it might be better in some more vague, shorter form, such as "Roger that!" or "Will do!".

These were some examples of the way Havel works with language in creating wordplays and phrases. With some exceptions that are analysed above, it can be concluded that both translators generally managed to translate most of the wordplays. It is especially important that they understood the way Havel works with phrases, and they tried to convey the essence of the play. In the following chapter, we will focus on the repetitive structure, another important aspect of Havel' plays which sometimes merges with the use of phrase.

5.2. Repetitiveness

One of the characteristic features we can often see used in The Theatre of the Absurd is repetitiveness – whether it is a repetitiveness of lines, activities or initial situations. It can be frequently used as either the means or an expression of another typical attributes of The Theatre of the Absurd that were introduced before. Since one of the most distinctive element of absurdist theatre is the language that has lost its meaning as a tool of communication and became rather the source of misunderstanding, this following chapter will focus on the way repetitive sequences and lines create a certain atmosphere in the original, discussing various translation solutions used. This chapter will also focus on the Chiastic structure, which is a phenomenon often found in Havel‘s plays, focusing on whether the translation solutions stay true to the original intent.

The first act begins with a famous scene in which Hugo plays chess with himself while his parents wait for their friend Kalabis, who is supposed to help Hugo find a good job, since he holds a high function in and unspecified institution. The situations repeat themselves, as well as the dialogue: The parents try to hide their second son, Peter, as to not cause a stir in front of Kalabis, while trying to inform Hugo about his impending arrival.

While Hugo plays chess, his parents wonder whether Kalabis will arrive and ruminate on the various reasons why he might have gotten delayed. In this exchange, which is repetitively used in the first act, they follow a given pattern. Havel uses the following structure: Suggesting he met X – suggesting the common background of Kalabis and X – refusal of the suggestion for he had no such background – twisting the explanation. We can demonstrate this on one of the scenes:

O: Pludek: Třeba někoho potkal a zapovídal se –

Pludková: Ale koho?

Pludek: Přítele z mládí –

Pludková: Víš přece, že mládí žádné neměl!

Pludek: Mládí neměl, ale měl v mládí přátele! (13-14)

B: Pludek: Well, he might have met somebody and forgot to watch the time.

Mrs Pludek: But whom?

Pludek: A childhood chum.

Mrs Pludek: You know very well he had no childhood!

Pludek: He had no childhood, but he had childhood chums. (5)

N: Ollie: Maybe he ran into somebody, got to talkin' –

Bea: Like who?

Ollie: Like some ol' buddy from his younger days –

Bea: But you said he ain't never been young –

Ollie: He ain't never been young, but he had buddies back then! (19)

Blackwell translated the point about "having no childhood" more appropriately, given the pattern that Havel chose. Her point is much clearer and has the same intended effect. Novák, on the other hand, translated the first line more appropriately, and his style of speech is consistent with the way he decided to characterize the parents, providing them with a colloquial, less formal language.

Hugo seems interested only in his play of chess, and each time the parents think they heard the doorbell ring, they ask him about his game. Hugo changes places each round – each time his mother asks him, he is on the winning side, while when father asks him, he is on the losing one. At the end of his game, both parents ask him who won, but thanks to the way Havel phrases the question, both translators mistranslated this part:

O: Pludek: Prohrál?

Hugo: Ne, vyhrál.

Pludková: Vyhrál?

Hugo: Ne, prohrál. (15)

B: Pludek: You lost?

Hugo: No, I won.

Mrs Pludek: You won?

Hugo: No, I lost" (7)

N: Ollie: Did he lose?

Hue: No, I won.

Bea: Did he win?

Hue: No, I lost. (22)

From the context it is obvious that in the original both parents ask about the opponent and Hugo gives them an answer that also refers to his non-existing opponent. Blackwell changes the subject in all the sentences, shifting the focus to Hugo. As a result, this translation is inconsistent with the previous action, but at least it makes sense. Novák translated the questions of both parents correctly, but he changed the subject in Hue's answers. As a result, this exchange of lines does not make sense, since one of the parents ask the question, to which Hue says no, treating it as a false presupposition, only to subsequently confirm its validity. The missing logic behind this solution is even emphasized by Novák's decision to accentuate Hue's wining position by translating Havel's "Výborně, mami" (15) in much modern and informal way: "I'm kicking ass, Mom!" (22) right before his check mate.

In the second act, Hugo gets to the garden party, where he observes two secretaries, one female and one male, who are forced by Plzák to interact 'as humans', which makes these strictly bureaucratic characters obviously uncomfortable. In an effort to compliment the female secretary, the male one repeats various phrases and awkward

compliments. Havel emphasizes his nervousness by mixing up various sayings. Havel for example takes the phrase "oči jako dvě studánky" (eyes like two wells), but he uses it in context of the secretary's breasts:

O: Tajemník: A ňadra máte –

Tajemnice: Já vím!

Tajemník: Jako dvě – dva – jako dva ty – dvě studánky – totiž promiňte, míče – jako dva míče jsem chtěl říct – promiňte –

Tajemnice: To je dobrý –

Tajemník: A oči jako dva – dvě – jako dvě ty – dva míče – totiž ne míče – ale blatouchy – (27-28)

Both translators decided to keep this Czech saying, Novák translating it as springs and Blackwell as founts. But the question is whether these solutions will have any effect on the target reader or audience, given that neither of these translations carry the same associations for the target culture. As the character of male secretary sinks into repeating these compliments, his tongue often slips. As we can see in the following example, Blackwell tries to compensate for a loss in her translation in a previous segment by mere switching of letters (which creates only one real word and the other one is just nonsensical, which is not necessarily bad). Novák on the other hand substitutes the verb using the same principle as Havel:

O: Tajemník: Povídám: vrabci letí – mech kvete – louky čumí – (27)

B: Clerk: I say, sparrows are flying – the boss mlossoms – the meadows are a-humming – (B18)

N: Exec. 1: I said: sparrows are flying – moss is blooming – the prairie is fuming – (39)

The insufficiency of Blackwell's solutions however transpires in the following section, in which two repetitive structures merge; the one discussed above with a dialogue about the family, children and spouses of both secretaries (neither of whom seem to have any). This culminates in a nonsensical exchange of phrases:

O: Tajemnice: A co doma? Co doma?

Tajemník: Ale to víte – příroda – respektive pomněnky –

Tajemnice: A co míče? Zlobí? Zlobí?

Tajemník: Ani ne – ani ne – kvetou –

Tajemnice: Vy nejste vdán?

Tajemník: Totiž šumí – ne vrabci – mech – mech čumí jako dva – dvě – dva pomňouky – totiž ty – Hergot! (28)

B: Secretary: How are things at home?

Clerk: Well, you know – nature – I mean, forget-me-nots –

Secretary: How about the footballs? Quite a handful, eh?

Clerk: Not really – they blossom – you know –

Secretary: I see, you're not married!

Clerk: I mean they are humming – No! Sparrows – moss – boss – like two – two – To hell with it! (18)

N: Exec. 2: And how's the family? How's the family?

Exec. 1: Well, you know – nature – or rather the forget-me-nots –

Exec. 2: And how are the balls? Causing trouble? Causing trouble?

Exec. 1: Not too bad – not too bad – they're blooming –

Exec. 2: Are you not married?

Exec. 1: I mean they are humming – I mean sparrows – I mean moss – moss fuming like two – two – forget-me-balls – I meant to say – Damn it! (40)

We can see that Blackwell failed to translate the culmination of this situation, while Novák manages to stay faithful to the original when he creatively translates pomňouky as forget-me-balls.

But Novák often does not follow the structure of Havel's original as meticulously, which may lead to the loss of the impression of repetitive patterns. For example when the character of Plzák forces the secretaries into a repetitive discussion about the technology and art, Havel strictly follows a sentence structure: "Jako bychom neměli například v takové technice ještě celý pytel setsakramentsky palčivých problémů!" (30). While Blackwell keeps the structure intact when repeating this sentence, Novák changes the verbs, first: "Like we didn't have a shitload of problems with technology already!" (43) and then: "Like we ain't got a shitload of problems with technology already!" (44).

This turn from repetitive sentence structures is quite frequent in Novák's translations. For example in second act, Plzák says "Copak nejsme, sakra, všichni tak nějak z jedný český mámy?" and later Hugo and the director repeat that phrase. But Novák's translation weakens the repetitiveness by using different verbs, 'share' and 'come from'. He does the same in Hugo's final monologue, where instead of the Czech verb 'být', he uses either 'to be' or 'to exist'. Another example of this tendency can be seen when Mr and Mrs Pludek argue whether Hugo should have accepted the job in the fourth act, Havel uses exclusively verbs 'přijmout' and 'odmítnout', while Novák uses verbs 'turn down', 'refuse', 'take on' and 'accept', seemingly at random. His strategy leads to omission at the end of this exchange:

O: Pludková: Měl to odmítnout –

Pludek: Naopak: měl to nepřijmout!

Pludková: Naopak: měl to neodmítnout!

Pludek: Neměl to zároveň přijmout a neodmítnout?

Pludková: Spíš odmítnout a nepřijmout!

Pludek: V tom případě radši nepřijmout, neodmítnout, přijmout a odmítnout!

Pludková: A kdyby to zároveň odmítl, nepřijal, neodmítl a přijal?

Pludek: Těžko říct. Co myslíte vy?

Hugo: Já? No tak já bych řekl, že to měl nepřijmout, neodmítnout, přijmout a odmítnout a zároveň odmítnout, nepřijmout, neodmítnout a přijmout. Anebo naopak. Nezvonil někdo?

Pludek: Ne. (56-57)

N: Bea: He should've refused it right off the bat –

Ollie: Nah, the other way around: he shouldn't've accepted it!

Bea: Nah, the other way around: he shouldn't've refused it!

Ollie: Maybe he should've accepted it and not refused it at the same time! Or the other way around. Hey, didn't I just hear the door bell?

Ollie: No. (85)

As we can see, this omission led not only to the loss of the repetitiveness and nonsensicality of the original, but also to erroneous assignment of replicas, resulting in a situation in which Ollie asks about the door bell and answers himself. This is not the only instance Novák failed to assign a corresponding line to a character as a result of his omission. Novák for example also lets the character of Mark enter twice without ever leaving by a mistake, adding stage directions on page 19 and correctly translating the

same directions on page 24. But he is not alone in doing so, Blackwell also rearranged the order of lines in the following repetitive sequence:

O: Pludková: Chápejte – žena tím nechtěla říct, že by oba úřady neměly být ve zdravé míře zachovány –

Pludek: A zároveň oba ve zdravé míře zlikvidovány –

Pludková: Ukáže-li se to strategicko –

Pludek: Taktické –

Hugo: No tak všichni –

Pludek a Pludková: No tak – copak? (58)

B: Mrs Pludek: Please try and understand, my husband didn't mean to say that both institutions shouldn't be in good measure preserved –

Pludek: And at the same time both in good measure liquidated –

Mrs Pludek: Or the other way round –

Pludek: If this turned out to be –

Mrs Pludek: Good strategical –

Pludek: Tactics –

Hugo: Well, we all –

Mrs Pludek: Well – what? (48)

Although she added two lines, she did not change the overall meaning of the original, In this context, it is even harder to understand why she decided to appropriate the last line to Mrs Pludek only, when in the original, both parents say it at once. Another deflection from the original is the mistranslation of 'my husband'. In the original, this incorrect denomination is just another one of the ways in which Havel plays with language in repetitive sections. Firstly, both husband and wife are used to describe the

corresponding sex, but in this last instance he intentionally changes the denominator that has meanwhile lost its meaning as a result of constant repetition of empty phrases.

As pointed out by Stejskalová, another repetitive situation that poses a problem is when the director and the female secretary talk about norms and forms in the third act (46). In the following situation, speakers are acting mechanically as if they were computers who use these words according to a certain formula (Kačer 222).

O: Tajemnice: Ale soupis likvidačních forem je bez soupisu delimitačních norem neplatný!

Ředitel: A to by nestačil soupis likvidačních norem podložený soupisem delimitačních forem?

Tajemnice: To by zneplatnilo likvidaci.

Ředitel: Není to trochu formální norma?

Tajemnice: Naopak: je to zcela normální forma. (50)

B: Secretary: But the list of the liquidation forms is invalid without the list of the delimitation norms!

Director: Wouldn't a list of the liquidation norms supported by a list of delimitation forms be enough?

Secretary: That, I'm afraid, would make the whole liquidation invalid.

Director: Goodness, isn't this norm a bit formal?

Secretary: On the contrary, it's a perfectly normal form. (29)

N: Exec. 2: But the list of the downsizing forms is invalid without the summary of the delimitational norms!

CEO: But isn't the list of the downsizing forms enough if it's based on the summary of the delimitational norms?

Exec. 2: That would invalidate the entire downsizing.

CEO: Isn't that a bit of a formal norm?

Exec. 2: On the contrary! It is a perfectly normal form. (21)

Stejskalová claims that when translator considers this formula, translation of these wordplays should not pose any difficulty. She points out that while Novák, unlike Blackwell, preserved the parallel construction of phrases of the original (adjective + noun), which accentuates their contrast, he did not variate and combine them the same way as the original, which for a change Blackwell managed to achieve (47). If we take into consideration the overall impression these translation solutions will make on a spectator, Novák's solution seems to have a bigger impact, since it seems next to impossible that any viewer would be able to notice this slight change, while for a reader, it is more realistic to register this in Blackwell's translation.

In the third act, Hugo and the male secretary meet in the director's office and they introduce each other, and they do so repeatedly. While Novák stays faithful to the original and translates these repetitions, Blackwell either leaves them out or translates them in a slightly different context. This happens at the end of their joined speech, where instead of them introducing all over again, she interprets their names as attesting to their agreement with what was previously said by adding "Signed" in front of their names (39).

From our analysis, it can be deduced that while both translators were aware of the importance of the repetitive structures, they were not always able to create the same effect as the original. They often chose different attitudes toward translation of the situations, and as was shown, sometimes they manage to transfer only parts of what was originally intended. It can be said that Novák has often problems with consistency of his solutions when it comes to repeating certain word that Havel deliberately uses in his repetitive structures. At times, both translators are lost in the meaning of some repetitive exchanges,

and in rearranging them, they miss some point or wordplay of Havel, and at times even put the reader in a confusing situation when the characters speak out of turn.

5.3. Performability

The concept of performability, or playability, is rather complicated and this is highlighted by its necessity to adapt to changing concepts of performance. Not only has the translator have to treat the dramatic text differently than any other type of text, he or she must also consider the intention of the original, and to do so, they must understand what makes the genre in question characteristic. Bassnett claims that this added criteria of performability and its phenomena can influence the final form of the text rather fundamentally on the language level. "The difficulty of translating for the theatre has led to an accumulation of criticism that either attacks the translation as too literal and unperformable or as too free and deviant from the original" (Bassnet, *Translation studies* 123). The translator must deal with this criticism as well as with the difficulties that the concept of performability poses. According to Robert Corrigan "the translator must *hear* the voice that speaks and take into account the 'gesture' of the language, the cadence rhythm and pauses that occur when the written text is spoken (qtd. in Bassnet, *Translation studies* 122).

Translators must take into consideration the actors, who often criticized the speakability of translated plays. As Havel explains, "bez herce není divadlo. Herec je to nejdůležitější. Na divadle je strašně zajímavé to, že přežilo film a přežilo televizi a existuje pořád. A jeho existence spočívá v osobním kontaktu"[16] (in Žák 109). As pointed out in Stejskalová's thesis (10), the speakability is very important for the actor, because, as Steve Gooch explains, it is very important for them to feel good in the text: "[T]he real point is that the actors must be able to wear the language of the play like clothes. They

[16] There is no theatre without the actor. The actor is the most important part. What is very remarkable about theatre is the fact that it survived movie and television and still exists. Its existence resides in the personal contact. (Own translation)

must be able to put the text on and feel they can breathe in it, move around freely and find its physical expression from within themselves" (17-18).

In her translation, Blackwell often tends to prolong the lines by opting for an exact translation of the original and all of its meaning, instead of focusing on one component. This can be demonstrated on the following example:

O: Tajemnice: Vášnivě nesouhlasím! (28)

N: Exec. 2: I totally disagree! (41)

B: Secretary: I do disagree! Most empathetically! (19)

As we can see, Novák's translation suffers from a certain loss, but it serves its purpose and is easier to enunciate. Blackwell's solution, on the other hand, sounds very formal and is significantly longer than the original. Another example is seen in the part where Secretary and Clerk discuss their personal life:

O: Tajemník: Tak co doma? Co děti? Zlobí? Zlobí?

N: Exec. 1: So how is the family? How are the kids? Causing trouble? Causing trouble? (33)

B: Clerk: Well, how are things at home? What about the children? Quite a handful, eh? (14)

Both translations result in a much longer line. The important thing is that Novák maintains the repetition and his question also follow the pattern of the original. This pattern is later used again, in a merging of two previously individual and unrelated situations, as is typical for this play, and the word choice of Blackwell results in a very formal feeling in what was supposed to be a forced small talk, and also in prolonging each following repetition.

Blackwell also very often prolongs the lines by adding various filler words, such as 'well', which can also be seen in the previous example. She also very often uses

exclamations, such as 'Goodness', 'For God's sake!', 'Oh God', 'Heaven forbid', for example when she translates: "A nepřej si, aby ses toho strašného dne dožil!" (17) as "Heaven forbid that you should still be about when that terrible day arrives!" (8). Especially these religion-related exclamations are of no additional value, quite the opposite; their excessive usage decreases their effect in instances where they were used in original. In contrast, Novák' translation of "Ježíšmarjájozef!" (54) in the last act as "GoodGodAllmighty!" (81) has much more impact, because he did not overuse these exclamations the way Blackwell did, he only translated these when they occurred in the original.

At the beginning of the second act, Hugo is greeted by two secretaries who represent characters that are bound by their obsession with rigid bureaucracy and bureaucratic conservatism. Havel achieves this impression by describing the organisation of the garden party in a very formal matter: there are various sections for various types of social activities, and there are strict rules about joining them:

O: Tajemnice: Máte-li zájem o použití rozmarných rekvizit, jako papírových kloboučků, veselých lepenkových nosů a podobně, můžete si je vyzvednout přes tajmeníka vaší sekce v sekčním skladu a veselit se s nimi můžete v okruhu Malého parketu C. (21)

B: Secretary: If you are interested in making use of Aids to Amusement, such as paper hats, gay *papier-mâché* noses, etc., you may pick them up via the Head of your Section in the Sectional Warehouse and then you may go and amuse yourself with them within the area of Small Dance Floor C. (12)

N: Should you be interested in merry-making with humor boosters, such as funny hats, fake noses and so on, you may pick these up in the sectional warehouse, provided that you have consent form from your sectional

superior, and you may put these humor boosters to any use in and around the Small Dance Hall C. (30)

We can see that Blackwell chose a strategy in which she translated the important passages, such as Aids of Amusement or Sectional Warehouse, in a manner that they give the impression of a very formal institution, highlighting them for the reader by capitalizing them the same way Havel did with the dance floor. Her use of 'etc.' suggests either that the text is primarily meant for reading, but it can be also a tool that accentuates a formal style in the spoken version, but this might be arguably a problem for the performer, since it is commonly read as etcetera, and by uttering it, one would go against this possible intent of translator. Novák, on the other hand, chose a slightly less formal translation, making it easier for the actor to deliver, but at the same time, the bureaucratic formality has a lesser impact.

In this example, let us point to the translation of 'veselých lepenkových nosů'. Blackwell translates it very faithfully, although it could be argued that the use of word gay seems too formal nowadays and probably would not be used, her translation is exact, if not too formal. Novák translates it as fake noses, which seems insufficient, since the original intends to put these 'boosters' in contrast with the formality of the rest of the dialogue, as well as the real nose is in contrast when worn on stage. In addition, Novák translates it in the stage notes as a clown nose, which is something different and therefore might have different impact on the viewer (but arguably not such a big one on the reader). It is also worth mentioning that, when describing various events taking place at the office party, Novák leaves out the details about different sections of the Downsizing Office taking turns at the dance hall in specific times:

O: Tajemník: Opatříte-li si povolení organizačního výboru, můžete si zatančit, a to na Velkém parketu A mezi půl dvanáctou a dvanáctou a pak

mezi tři čtvrtě na jendnu a půl druhou. Předtím je totiž Velký parket A vyhrazen likvidačně metodické sekci, mezitím komisi likvidátorů z lidu a potom delimitační subkomisi. (21)

N: Now if you obtain the permission from the Office Party Committee, you can go and dance in the Large Dance Hall A between eleven thirty and twelve o'clock, and then again between twelve forty-five and one thirty.

But when Hue suggest transferring the dancing to the Smaller Dance Hall C, he refers to these sections even though they were not mentioned before in his adaptation:

O: Proč tedy nepřesunout zábavu s rozmarnými rekvizitami na Velký parket A a tanec sekcí na Malý parket C?

N: [S]o why don't you transfer the levity with humour boosters to the Large Dance Hall A, and why don't you put the **sectional** dance into the Small Dance Hall C? (31, emphasis added)

Let us now return to the issue of speakability. In contrast to the overtly formal language used by the secretaries, there is the character of Plzák, whose lines "překypují rozšafností, bodrostí (…) často používá fráze 'člověka z lidu' (Štěrbová, 17).[17] Štěrbová also claims that Havel deliberately questions the denotation possibilities of a language by disturbing the postulate of a normal communication. In such instances, the situations that are realized contain contradictory relationships between the characters and the validity of information that they communicate to one another. But in Havel's *Garden Party*, the dialogues have no foundation in the psychological difference of characters, which is why the emphasis in such dramatic text shifts away from the relationships of character and is instead placed on the relationship of utterances. Havel almost mathematically rhythmizes

[17] are overflowing with jolly and joviality (…) he often uses the phrases of the 'man of the people' (Own translation)

the dialogue using semantic twists which are once again intended for the sphere of the utterances. (Štěrbová, 17)

In the following example from the second act, Plzák is trying to get some information from Hugo and he is very friendly and casual in his speech. Hugo, on the other hand, is very vague and evasive:

O: Plzák: A jak jsi uvízl na Likviďáku? Křivda minulosti?

Hugo: To tak někdy vítr člověka zavane –

Plzák: Nebo úkol?

Hugo: Každý máme své úkoly – (33)

B: Falk: Goodness gracious, how did you get stuck in the Liquidation Office? Some injustice from the past?

Hugo: Well, you know how it is, one gets blown this way and that –

Falk: Or an assignment, perhaps?

Hugo: We all have our assignments – (23-24)

N: Slug: So how'd you get stuck in Downsizing? Got some issues in your background?

Hue: Sometimes the current carries you along to some place that –

Slug: Or were you sent there on assignment?

Hue: We all have our assignments – (48)

As we can see, Plzák is the one who deduces something from Hugo's vague answers and Hugo does not disprove any of his assumptions. Both translations failed to render the connection Plzák deduces from Hugo's answer. They also tried to transfer the joviality of Plzák, Blackwell in the way Plzák insinuates in the second line and Novák in the first line by "abbreviating" and leaving the word office. Perhaps Novák compensates

for this loss when he manages to transfer the tone of Plzák's querying in the following exchange:

O: Plzák: Chápu, nechci vyzvídat –

Hugo: Klidně vyzvídej

N: Slug: I hear ya. It ain't like I wanna be nosey, or nothin' –

Hue: Go ahead, be as nosey as you want – (49-50)

B: Falk: I see. I don't want to pry –

Hugo: Pry away –

On the other hand, Blackwell's translation stays true to the original and I feel that the choice of the verb 'pry' is much better in this case.

As for the general impression of the translations and their speakability, it must be noted that Blackwell's version is slightly disadvantaged by being older, and as pointed out by Bassnett, translations tend to age faster. Her language is predominantly more formal than the language of Novák's adaptation, which at times seems more natural. On the other hand, given the nature of the play, Blackwell's use of formal language is at times more fitting, for example in the bureaucratic characters of Secretary and Clerk. The same applies for Novák, whose use of modern language sometimes has different connotations than the original. On the other hand, it is very befitting for the character of Slug, where Novák goes above and beyond in trying to create the notion of him as a simpleton hidden behind the empty phrases.

Conclusion

This thesis focused on the translation of the Theatre of the Absurd in *The Garden Party* by Václav Havel, analysing translation solutions of its translators, Vera Blackwell and Jan Novák. In the first chapter, it focused on the differences in reading a dramatic text and its performance, and how these may affect one's perception of the work. It pointed out that it is important for the playwright to have experience with theatre, and that the same applies to the translator of dramatic texts. It also discussed the asymmetric relation of the translated text to its original, explaining how the translator must consider the target audience and culture, and why rhythm is important for the staging of the play. It introduced some of the approaches towards translating for the theatre and proposed how to prioritize various planes of the dramatic text. The chapter also dealt with the issue of limited life-span of a translation, as proposed by Bassnett.

The second subchapter introduced the issues of performability and speakability, focusing on the historic development of the academic debate. It concentrated mainly on the stances of Susan Bassnett, translation scholar whose stances on these issues radically changed over time. It also presented attitudes of other scholars, such as Pavis, Espasa or Totzeva, and their attempts at defining what constitutes a performable text.

Second chapter introduced the genre of the Theatre of the Absurd as characterized by Martin Esslin in his book of the same name. It introduced the historical context of its genesis, as well as some predecessors of the genre. It discussed the specifics of the genre, especially on the use of language as a means of misunderstanding for absurdist characters who are lost in their existence, and the way absurdist playwrights use it to create this atmosphere. It also commented on the relationship of communist regime to the absurdist drama. Lastly, it focused on the lack of plot and character development and also the circular structure and repetitiveness, which are also typical for absurdist plays.

The third chapter inquired into the life of Václav Havel, focusing on his beginnings as a writer, his journey to theatre and on the genesis of *The Garden Party*. It also discussed the political and social circumstances of the communist Czechoslovakia and his reception in the time of totalitarian regime. The fourth chapter introduced the translators, Vera Blackwell and Jan Novák, both Czechoslovakian emigrants. It described their cooperation and relationship with Václav Havel, focusing mainly on the genesis of the first translation by Blackwell and its historical circumstances.

In the analytical part, the thesis focused on solutions of selected issues, often comparing different approaches of both translators and their results. Both translators understand the way Havel works with language, and they managed to convey the essence of the play. Some of the solutions that were pointed out were naturally problematic; both Novák and Blackwell sometimes fail to transfer the intentionally distorted phrase correctly, and they instead provide a logical, non-nonsensical solution. Novák tends to use more informal language, especially for some characters, but in some cases, it can backfire, as was shown in the case of Hugo's parents. Blackwell often prolongs the lines, which can be problematic in repetitive structures. To remind reader of this thesis of Rambousek's important note: "losses are inevitable in translation [of such texts], though they can be minimized by a thorough study of the source text and its cultural and linguistic references. (…) [T]he text retains its message as long as the main function of the wordplay is recognized and preserved: the distortions in communication are more important than the actual puns themselves." It is important to emphasize that both translations work well as a whole, each having different virtues.

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