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Research Article

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# The Croatian State Theatre in Zagreb and Cultural Policy in the Period of the NDH 1941 - 1945

Snježana Banović\*

This paper explores the hitherto underexplored activity of the Zagreb theatre in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), which served as a central point for the presentation of the regime's arts and culture. The aim of the paper is to further explore the developmental tendencies of the closely monitored cultural politics in the Independent State of Croatia which placed the theatre high on the list of priorities of ostensibly authentic Croatian artistic expression. Numerous examples are listed in order to illustrate how, despite frequent spectacular performances and intense international cooperation, artistic freedoms were limited by the narrow principles of the Ustasha movement and the new "moral outlook of the Croatian people" that was valid at the time. The goal of this article can be summarised as an exploration of the complexity of theatrical activity conforming to the programmatic guidelines of the new "propaganda, education and morals" of the Ustasha state. In conclusion, the paper suggests an extremely important role for theatre as a crucial educational and propagandistic institution in NDH.

**Keywords:** Independent State of Croatia, Croatian State Theatre, Mile Budak, international liaisons, Dušan Žanko

## Introduction

From the first days of the newly established NDH, the regime of Ante Pavelić<sup>1</sup> demonstrated an exceptional interest for culture, prioritising the task of shaping the new spirit in its programmatic postulates for creating the entire state policy. National cultural institutions, as major carriers of the Ustashi movement programme, were supposed to undergo a unified ideological transformation through which politics would take over the role of creator, whereas culture should play "the role of a consequence or a derivate of political will and its instrument."<sup>2</sup> Theatres were thus ideal

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<sup>1</sup> Ante Pavelić (14. July 1889-28. December 1959) was a Croatian fascist leader ("Poglavnik," which means Führer) and politician who led the Ustaše movement and who, during World War II, ruled the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), a puppet state of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in part of the occupied Kingdom of Yugoslavia, pursuing genocidal policies against ethnic and racial minorities.

<sup>2</sup> Bosto, Sulejman. 2008. *Konflikt ideoloških paradigmi: Crveno versus crno*, in *Kultura sjećanja: 1941. - povijesni lomovi i svladavanje prošlosti*, edited by Bosto, Sulejman and Tomislav Cipek. Zagreb: Disput, 22.

sites for embodying the “new Croatian awareness and sentiment.”<sup>3</sup> A Zagreb theatre that was immediately baptised with a new name - the Croatian State Theatre (HDK) - was to become a central venue for the presentation of “the new era in the resurrected state of Croatia.”<sup>4</sup> Yet in no time it was subjected, together with other cultural institutions, to a solution by which artistic diversity and freedom of creation became hardly attainable. Nevertheless, there were a significant group of “disruptive” elements in the Theatre: the strongest resistance came from the activists of the Communist party, whose number grew day by day, especially as the organisation *Narodna pomoć* (Public assistance) grew stronger and following the arrest and execution of several members of the Theatre during 1941, in accordance with the racial laws of NDH which allowed for terror against “undesirable” groups: communists, Serbs, Jews, masons.<sup>5</sup>

This paper deals with those segments of theatrical activity within the autocratic system of the so-called “cultural policy of Budak<sup>6</sup> and Pavelić,” which had a high priority among the goals of the new Ustashi culture. There is a particular emphasis on the important segment of international collaboration, which was among the primary activities of the management of HDK led by Dušan Žanko,<sup>7</sup> from April 1941 until the beginning of the collapse of the NDH in autumn 1943.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Founding of NDH and the Issue of New Culture in the New State - the Principles of the Ustashi Movement and Culture**

Following the collapse and the occupation of Yugoslavia, a new Independent Republic of Croatia was established in April 1941 as a satellite co-dominium of the Axis powers, under the dictatorship of Ante Pavelić, the leader of the Ustashi movement.<sup>9</sup> The newly established

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<sup>3</sup> Načela hrvatskog ustaškog pokreta. *Hrvatski narod* (HN), 20. June 1941., 2.

<sup>4</sup> Načela hrv. ust. pokreta, HN, 20. June. 1941., 2.

<sup>5</sup> For more about resistance in the Croatian State Theatre in Zagreb 1941-1945, see: Afrić, Vjekoslav. 1970. *U danima odluka i dilemma*. Beograd: Vojno-izdavački zavod; Banović, Snježana. 2013. *Država i njezino kazalište*. Zagreb: Profil.

<sup>6</sup> Budak, Mile (30. August 1889-7. June 1945) was a Croatian politician and writer best known as one of the chief ideologists of the Croatian Ustaša movement, which ruled the Independent State of Croatia from 1941-45 and waged genocidal campaigns of extermination against its Roma and Jewish population, and of extermination, expulsion and religious conversion against its Serb population. When the Independent State of Croatia collapsed, Budak was captured by British military authorities and handed over to Tito's Partisans on 18. May 1945. He was court-martialled (before the military court of the 2nd Yugoslav army) in Zagreb on 6. June 1945 and was sentenced to death by hanging the same day and executed the next. During the trial, Budak claimed that he was not guilty of anything.

<sup>7</sup> Žanko, Dušan (10. November 1904 in Trilj-23. January 1980 in Caracas) was a theatre critic and the general *menager* (intendant) of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb from 1941 to 1943.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the organizational and artistic activities in the Croatian State theatre in Zagreb 1941-1945, see: Banović, *State and its Theatre*.

<sup>9</sup> The Ustasha-Croatian Revolutionary Movement (*Ustaše-Hrvatski revolucionarni pokret*) was a Croatian fascist and terrorist organization active before and during World War II. Its members, Ustaše (pronounced [ûstafɛ], also anglicised as Ustashe, Ustashes or Ustashi) were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of citizens of Yugoslavia, particularly Serbs. The ideology of the movement was a blend of Fascism and ultra-

order took as its initial premise the fact that for two decades Croats had been held “in forceful captivity”<sup>10</sup> by the former state, in which Croatian culture could not evolve in its true scope, and that, following the liberation from the *enforced chains*, a *new culture* was required so that the Croatian *cultural level* and its *vital force* could finally be manifested. The sole orientation of the new rulers was towards enabling a *full swing* which, according to the contemporary press, would

*“provide the nation with the necessary impulse [...], purify many notions that were lately obscured by the indeterminacy of democracy and the promotion of Communism and Marxism, which began increasingly permeating our entire cultural and political life.”*<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps it was the future director of the Croatian State Theatre (HDK) Dušan Žanko who most accurately illustrated the mood among Pavelić’s followers when, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the founding of the NDH, he evoked on the stage of the theatre the memories of his generation who had endured *slavery* under Yugoslavia and were instigated by the flame of the Ustashi movement so that the idea of a state matured to such an extent that, as Žanko points out, “in the final ethical instance the choice was between death or state.”<sup>12</sup> As Žanko was extremely fond of pathetic rhetoric in his public appearances, he arduously expressed this need for a revolutionary *tour de force*:

*“Our cry for freedom that rose to the skies was so utter that it had to set in motion God’s right fist and exterminate our tyrants [...]. And our yearning, our centuries-old Croatian yearning for a liberator rose to the extent that, in a metaphysical sense, it had to bring on our Poglavnik! And he is here!”*<sup>13</sup>

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conservatism. Ustaše supported the creation of a Greater Croatia that would span to the River Drina and the border of Belgrade. The movement emphasized the need for a racially “pure” Croatia and promoted persecution and genocide against Serbs, Jews and Romani people. Fiercely nationalistic, the Ustaše were also fanatically Catholic. Following Croatian nationalism, they declared that the Catholic and Muslim faiths were the religions of the Croatian people. The Ustaše also saw the Islam of the Bosniaks as a religion which “keeps true the blood of Croats.” The movement functioned as a terrorist organization before World War II, but in April 1941, they were appointed to rule a part of Axis-occupied Yugoslavia as the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), which has been described as both an Italian-German quasi-protectorate, and as a puppet state of Nazi Germany. The Ustaše were chiefly responsible for the Holocaust in the NDH. Around 300,000 were killed by the NDH government’s racial policies, which condemned many Serbs, Jews and Roma to death in concentration camps alongside Croat resistance members and political opponents. When it was founded in 1930, Ustaša-Croatian Revolutionary Organization was a nationalist organization that sought to create an independent Croatian state. When the Ustaše came to power in the NDH, its military wings became the Army of the Independent State of Croatia and the Ustaše militia (*Ustaška vojnica*). The NDH collaborated with the Italian and German occupation forces in Yugoslavia in fighting an increasingly unsuccessful campaign against the resistance forces, the Yugoslav Partisans, who were recognized in late November 1943 as the military of the Allied Yugoslav state. As German forces withdrew from Yugoslavia in 1944/1945, the Ustaše mostly left the country. Of those who remained in SFR Yugoslavia, as a resistance group known as the Crusaders, large numbers were killed without trial by Yugoslav forces (the Partisans) after the end of the war.

<sup>10</sup> Lukas, Filip. 1945. *Kultura na udaru rata. Hrvatska revija* (1-2), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Nova Hrvatska. 1944. (NH). 7. January 1944.

<sup>12</sup> 1942. HN, 8. April 1942.

<sup>13</sup> 1942. HN, 8. April 1942.

From that time until the very end of the NDH, Pavelić's cultural-political workers made no distinction between educational and cultural activities. According to them, "spirit may be influenced only by spirit,"<sup>14</sup> and it was precisely the work in the cultural field that was meant to become the most important link in the creation and realisation of the ideology uniting the personality of the Poglavnik, the Ustashi movement and the Croatian people. At the onset of his mandate, Dušan Žanko was fond of speaking of this new spirit. Thus, he qualified Pavelić's return to Croatia as well as his own appointment to the position of director as the advent "of the new era and the new spirit" that transformed Croats and Croatia in the Easter of 1941.

It was natural for the new government that only after April 10 could

*"a genuine fundament [...] be created for pursuing unobstructed and free Croatian cultural development, which has to connect the cultural striving of the Croatian present with that created and accomplished in [...] the cultural past."*<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the four years of the existence of the NDH, it was permanently emphasised that the safety and the progress of the state were "the best and most solid fundament for developing a nation's culture."<sup>16</sup> As was pointed out on numerous occasions, the reason for establishing "the Ustashi Croatia" was to enable "the development of all creative capacities of the Croatian people."<sup>17</sup> Culture, and especially theatre, was an ideal site for pursuing these goals and it was only through the interweaving of cultural and educational activities that "a construction of a solid basis for further spiritual development of the nation"<sup>18</sup> was made possible. This could be achieved only with "the spiritual permeating of the whole of literature and art with the Ustashi understanding of life."<sup>19</sup>

In the newly founded state, compared by Slavko Kvaternik<sup>20</sup> in the founding declaration on 10. April 1941 with the resurrection of the Son of

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<sup>14</sup> 1941. NH, 17. December 1941.

<sup>15</sup> 1944. NH, 14. July 1944.

<sup>16</sup> 1944. NH, 14. July 1944.

<sup>17</sup> *Svečani tjedan hrvatske umjetnosti-10-15 kolovoza*. The programme flyer on the occasion of the celebration of Croatian harvest, from the unsigned introductory text. Theatre archive of the Croatian Academy of the Science and Art (HAZU). file: 1941.

<sup>18</sup> Hrvatski državni arhiv [Croatian State Archives] (HDA). fund 234. Main Directorate of Propaganda, The Government Presidium, box 6: General Department 1942, the speech of Mile Starčević, the-then Head of *Institute for National Education* in the eve of the manifestation *The Days of Croatian Literature* in September 1942.

<sup>19</sup> Hrv. drž. arhiv [Croatian State Archives] (HDA). fund 234. Main Directorate of Propaganda, The Government Presidium, box 6: General Department 1942, the speech of Mile Starčević, the-then Head of *Institute for National Education* in the eve of the manifestation *The Days of Croatian Literature* in September 1942.

<sup>20</sup> Kvaternik, Slavko (25. August 1878-7. June 1947) was one of the founders of the fascist Ustashi movement, and one of the persons most directly responsible for the Holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia. Kvaternik was a Croatian military commander and Minister of the Armed Forces (*Domobranstvo*). On 10. April 1941 he declared the creation of the Independent State of Croatia (*NDH*). Kvaternik was an officer in the Austro-Hungarian

God (as that year Easter fell on April 13), all social activities in each cultural institution were to be organised according to Ustashi Principles (*Načela ustaškog pokreta*), the fundamental programmatic document assembled in 1933 by Ante Pavelić himself, while he was still abroad. As Pavelić's state never had a constitution, Ustashi Principles were considered from the onset to the breakup of the NDH as the fundamental law by which the entire life of the nation in the Ustashi state should be organised. As Fikreta Jelić-Butić points out, the most important premise of Ustashi Principles was the emphasis on the historical rights of the Croatian people. Hence the newly established totalitarian state, guided by that "core idea of the Ustashi movement" which contained "the soul of the Poglavnik,"<sup>21</sup> was "the sole secure perspective for the survival of the nation."<sup>22</sup> In brief, the main goal was to turn the entire new Croatian culture into Ustashi culture as "Croatian literature became Ustashi literature, Croatian artists became Ustashi artists, Croatian writers became Ustashi writers, Croatian musicians became Ustashi musicians."<sup>23</sup>

This époque could also be described as a period of radical social upheaval; a time in which numerous printed matters and literary publications were swarming with big words and proclamations by writers, the majority of which were published in *Matica hrvatska (Matrix Croatica)*.<sup>24</sup> Marko Čović,<sup>25</sup> the young writer and secretary at Budak's Ministry of Religion and Education, published in the spring of 1942 in *Hrvatska revija* an article with programmatic political guidelines aimed at writers, entitled *The Duties of Writers in the Ustashi State*. For him, cultural action was a struggle:

*"for achieving total freedom for the people and the independence of the state to which all other values, aspirations and demands must be subordinated, since during the times of struggle they can only be considered as second-rate or third-rate needs that will gain their true*

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Army and fought in World War I. After the collapse of Austria-Hungary he joined the National Council of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs and became Chief of the General Staff of the unrecognized State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (*Država Slovenaca, Hrvata i Srba*). He later transferred to the Royal Yugoslav Army (*Kraljevska Jugoslavenska Vojska*) and remained there until 1921. In the 1930s he was one of the founders of the Ustaša-Croatian Revolutionary Movement in Italy. After Germany invaded Yugoslavia in March 1941, he declared the creation of the Independent State of Croatia on 10. April 1941 with the support of the Axis. In the newly created state, he became the Minister of the Armed Forces, and in 1943 he retired.

<sup>21</sup> Crljen, Danijel. 1942. *Načela hrvatskog ustaškog pokreta*. Tiskara Matice Hrvatskih akademikara, 3.; comp. Crljen, Danijel. 1943. *Naš poglavnik*. Zagreb: Knjižara Velebit; Blaž, Lorković. 1942. Etička vrijednost ustaških načela. *Prosvjetni život* VII-VIII(1-2), 9-12; Bogdan, Ivo. 1944. Smisao ustaških načela. *Novo doba*, 1. January 1944.

<sup>22</sup> More at: Jelić-Butić, Fikreta. 1975. *Ustaše i NDH*. Zagreb: Globus; Tomashevich, Jozo. 2001. *The War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, Occupation and Collaboration*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press; Crljen, *Načela hrvatskog ustaškog pokreta*.

<sup>23</sup> HN, 4. August 1942.

<sup>24</sup> *Matica hrvatska (MH)*. One of the oldest Croatian cultural institutions, dating back to 1842.

<sup>25</sup> Čović, Marko. 1942. Dužnost književnika u ustaškoj državi. *Hrvatska revija*, 3-112.

*meaning and find their true place only once the main goal of national life has been achieved.*"<sup>26</sup>

This is the kind of cultural revolution that Mile Starčević also liked to refer to: at first, he was an Ustashi official and then the third NDH Minister of National Education. He stressed that the Ustashi spirit did not set in motion just "the economic and the social" but also the cultural revolution that was heading towards the breakdown of "Slav-hood and Yugoslav-hood" and that brought Croatians to their "Golden Age."<sup>27</sup>

The regime of each totalitarian state shows a particular interest for culture because of its potentially rich propaganda machinery. Hence the newly established rule of the NDH decided to intensively engage in that area applying to it the fundamental postulates expressed in the Principles of the Ustashi Movement. The word "culture" appears in this small document only in the 16<sup>th</sup> principle, in which cultural progress is directly connected to educational progress, stressing that "it is based on the people's natural talent and it has already proven capacity in the field of science and education." The word "art" is not mentioned at all, but it is important to point out that the Principles actually speak of the moral power of Croatian people, culture being its integral part. According to the movement ideologists, its actors have "only now, in the liberated Homeland, obtained all the necessary preconditions for free artistic creation."<sup>28</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> Principle also speaks of public activities specifying that "harmonious nurturing, promoting and perfecting of all national virtues and areas of national life" is the task of "public activities and the state government as such."<sup>29</sup> "The state must genuinely care for culture," wrote the ardent ideologist of the Movement Drago Čepulić,<sup>30</sup> therefore activities in the field of education, literature, arts and science have been positioned high on the list of priorities among state and political activities. The essence of that task "was supposed to be the accomplishment of a so-called *deep cultural revolution*; this syntagm implied "the ideological transformation of basic national cultural institutions as the main carriers of the programme of the Ustashi movement in the field of culture," with the aim of realising a total overturn "in the area of the spiritual, moral and intellectual life of the Croatian people."<sup>31</sup> In the aforementioned inauguration speech in HDK, Žanko was even more concise and direct, saying that the Zagreb theatre scene "will be the pride of everyone from the river Drava to the Adriatic Sea, to the joy of Croatian people and to the pride of the Poglavnik and Vice-Poglavnik."<sup>32</sup>

Although the NDH was at war for its entire duration, all propagators of the Ustashi movement called the arrival of the Poglavnik and the

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<sup>26</sup> Čović, *The Duty of the Writer*, 3-113.

<sup>27</sup> NH, 11. August 1942.

<sup>28</sup> Čović, *The Duty of the Writer*, 3-114.

<sup>29</sup> Načela hrv. ust. pokreta, HN, 20. June. 1941., 2.

<sup>30</sup> Čepulić, Drago. 1942. Politika i kulturne veze. *Hrvatska smotra*, 5. January 1942, 25.

<sup>31</sup> Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i NDH*, 203.

<sup>32</sup> HN, 25. June 1941.

activities according to his Principles “liberation.” This “liberation” demanded sacrifices in all areas of life, including (national) culture as the expression of “a soul of a particular nation.”<sup>33</sup> Marko Čović exclaimed in this name: “Until yesterday, our first and foremost attribute was: the fighters’ spirit and sacrifice! But now our main attribute is: duty and sacrifice! This is the order of the Ustashi state, the daily call of the Ustashi Croatia that applies to all Croats including writers.”<sup>34</sup> As a consequence of such attitude, the Index of Banned Books (*Indeks zabranjenih knjiga*) was published at the beginning of 1942. Due to the lack of “new spirit” in their works, there was a ban on numerous authors and their books - for instance, Gjalski, Leskovar, Tucić and Krleža, as well as those who were previously executed, deported to concentration camps or escaped to join the Partisans - Adžija, Cesarec, Dončević, Galogaža, Kikić. Their books were also burned and any possession of them “might lead to deportation to the camp.”<sup>35</sup> Following the examples of Germany and Italy, where language was systematically utilised for spreading and consolidating ideology, the Ministry of Education soon issued the Ministry Decree on Croatian Orthography (*Ministarska naredba o hrvatskom pravopisu*). This decree emphasised the “linguistic self-substance”<sup>36</sup> of Croatian language, an important element in the creation of the new Croatian cultural policy.<sup>37</sup> The decree on the pure Croatian language was signed by Pavelić himself, who explained on the occasion of the first Parliament assembly in February 1942 that the Croatian language must be pure and “no one has the right to maim, spoil or defame it.”<sup>38</sup> Soon the Croatian State Office for Language was established (*Hrvatski državni ured za jezik*). August saw the issuing of the Legal Stipulation of the Croatian language (*Zakonska odredba o hrvatskom jeziku*), signed by Pavelić, Budak and Žanić, specifying its pureness and orthography.<sup>39</sup>

All the aforementioned moves by the Ustashi authorities are merely an example of activities by which, according to Lasić, “on the strategic level this collective “I” counts only on Itself and the world built according to its model.”<sup>40</sup> It is thus obvious that the Ustashi leaders were cherishing “utterly anti-intellectual views,” although they counted among them intellectuals such as Lorković, Košak or Budak; yet these belonged

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<sup>33</sup> The statement of Julije Makanec, the Minister of People’s Education. NH, 17. October 1944.

<sup>34</sup> Čović, *The Duty of Writers*, 113; Hergešić, Ivo. 1945. O nakladnom radu i cenzuri pod ustaškim režimom. *Republika* 3, 12-14.

<sup>35</sup> Lasić, Stanko. 1982. *Krleža, kronologija života i rada*. Zagreb: Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 299.

<sup>36</sup> Ministarska naredba o hrvatskom jeziku. *Narodne novine* (NN), 25. June 1941, 2.

<sup>37</sup> More in: Samardžija, Marko. 2008. *Hrvatski jezik, pravopis i jezična politika u NDH*. Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada.

<sup>38</sup> Poslanica Poglavnika NDH dra A. Pavelića članovima sakupljenima na Hrvatskom državnom saboru u glavnom državnom gradu Zagrebu na dan 23. II. 1942. NN, 23. February 1942., 1-2.

<sup>39</sup> Zbornik zakona i naredaba Nezavisne države Hrvatske 1941-1945. Zagreb: Zakonodavno povjereništvo pri Poglavniku, 425-426.

<sup>40</sup> Lasić, Stanko. 1993. *Krležologija*. Zagreb: Globus, 88.

exclusively to the model that Stanko Lasić (1989) calls *the radical affirmation* of the regime from among the Clericalists, “and their intellectual intolerance and closed-mindedness were well known.”<sup>41</sup> Equating the (free) state and (national) art was the favourite subject of conversations among the leading figures of the movement, even the Poglavnik Pavelić himself, who had no intellectual pretensions whatsoever. He simply used each cultural subject as an important instrument in the celebration of his ascent to power. His long speeches were full of common places and regularly stressed the enormous historical contributions of Croats to the course of history, among them also those in the area of culture where, according to him, “the destruction was the hardest”; yet “even in the worst of circumstances in the past, Croat artists were spreading with their works the name and the glory of the Croatian people to the outer world [...], affirming the soulful ability of the Croatian people, presenting to the outer world through their spiritual work the beauties and the values of the Croatian people and the Croatian homeland.”<sup>42</sup>

As the stance of Pavelić (following the example of Hitler and his cultural policy) was that the muses should speak even louder during the war, already six months after the proclamation of the NDH the best-selling daily newspaper *Croatian People (Hrvatski narod)* claimed that in this short period, thanks to the Poglavnik, a great deal had been done “in all areas of human creation.” As this was wartime, these merits were considered “a double success of the Poglavnik’s iron will and the Ustashi movement, that in spite of everything managed to do so much that we can already now feel the happiness and well-being that awaits us when the big battle is over and the victory of the spirit of New Europe is finally achieved, with NDH taking up the position it deserves.”<sup>43</sup>

### **The Minister of People’s Education Mile Budak and his Influence on the new Cultural Order**

In the first period of the newly established policy of cultural and spiritual renewal, the most important man in Croatian politics after Pavelić was his long-time co-fighter and the First Deputy Poglavnik, the writer Mile Budak. Immediately upon taking over the position of Minister of National Education, he stated that he intended to make his sector “the hearth of Croatian culture.”<sup>44</sup> That is why in the first year of his mandate Žanko often pointed out onstage that “the Theatre is overwhelmed” with the opportunity to “embrace” its “first Minister who is entirely free in his sector.”<sup>45</sup> According to Matičević, Budak’s fame at the time was untouchable and his primacy over everyone else was regularly

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<sup>41</sup> Tomashevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 349.

<sup>42</sup> HN, 24. January 1942; NH, 14. July 1944.

<sup>43</sup> HN, 16. December 1941.

<sup>44</sup> Rabadan, *Vojmil*. 1941. Pogovor prvom izdanju adaptacije Budakova *Ognjišta*. Zagreb: Suvremena knjižnica Matice hrvatske-kolo VI, 3-12.

<sup>45</sup> Novi list (NL), 6. May 1941.

emphasised and particularly stimulated.<sup>46</sup> Pavelić's general and Minister of National Defence Slavko Kvaternik claimed that, guided by Pavelić's direct suggestions and powers, Budak "turned into an Ustashi machine, endlessly wound and re-wound by Dr. Pavelić's whim."<sup>47</sup> Some other authors claim that, for the entire duration of the NDH, Budak did not take part in any important political decisions. For many members of the artistic community, especially those involved with theatre and literature, the name of Mile Budak, honoured with accolades for the novel *Ognjište* (*Hearthstone*) - the spectacular adaptation of which was staged by Žanko in the autumn of 1941 - embodied a synthesis of "a tumultuous and magnificent period of Croatian history, crowned with the resurrection of the NDH and the setting of foundations for a whole spiritual and material renaissance of Croatian people."<sup>48</sup> His numerous supporters could be found all over the cultural institutions of the NDH, as for a significant number of theatre people he was the one who "expressed a prophetic premonition, ideological credo and a victorious anthem of the new Croatia" through his literary work.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, in spite of his great influence and fame among the public, the German authorities had significant complaints about his work in the Ministry.<sup>50</sup>

Budak remained Minister for a short while - only six months, since the Poglavnik's antagonism towards Budak's popularity grew on a daily basis, even to the point of becoming obvious in public. In his diary, Josip Horvat testifies that Pavelić was "allegedly having a love affair with Budak with a pipe in-between." That is why "his pictures had to disappear from newspapers overnight - there is only one God, thou shall have no other Gods than me!"<sup>51</sup> Yet Budak, characterised by Krleža as "crazy and distracted,"<sup>52</sup> had a significant influence on the events in the HDK and culture in general even after the beginning of his long political fall: in the beginning of 1942 he was proclaimed a member of the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences (*Hrvatska Akademija znanosti i umjetnosti*), in June he was given an Award for the Best Novel by the State Institute of National Education (*Državni zavod za narodnu prosvjetu*), and in July of the same year he became a President of the renewed Society of Croatian Writers (*Društvo hrvatskih pisaca*).

The majority of new staff employed in the shaping of "the new spirit" of the state was organised within the committees of *Matica hrvatska*, whose members, as Budak's men, were to be positioned highly in the new government, especially in the institutions connected to culture."<sup>53</sup> Dušan

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<sup>46</sup> More in: Matičević, Ivica 2007. *Prostor slobode-književna kritika u zagrebačkoj periodici*. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska.

<sup>47</sup> Kisić-Kolanović, Nada. 1997. *Vojskovođa i politika, sjećanja Slavka Kvaternika*. Zagreb: Golden marketing, 103.

<sup>48</sup> Rabadan, *Afterword to the first edition of the adaptation of "The Hearth,"* 79.

<sup>49</sup> Rabadan, *Afterword to the first edition of the adaptation of "The Hearth,"* 79.

<sup>50</sup> Petrinović, Ivo. 2003. *Mile Budak-portret jednog političara*. Split: Književni krug, 90.

<sup>51</sup> Horvat, Josip. 1989. *Preživjeti u Zagrebu-Dnevnik 1943.-1945*. Zagreb: Sveučilišna naklada Liber/JAZU/Nakladni zavod MH, 10.

<sup>52</sup> Čengić, Enes. 1985. *S Krležom iz dana u dan*. Zagreb: Globus. IV, 44.

<sup>53</sup> Aralica, Višeslav. 2009. *Matica Hrvatska u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 109.

Žanko was also one of the *Matica* committee members, his appointment for General Manager of the National Theatre being accepted with delight, as he was undoubtedly a man who belonged to the Movement with all his “heart and soul” and was at the same time one of Budak’s most important collaborators. In their view, the new spirit was:

*“the Ustashi spirit of clear principles and tasks, a spirit of immeasurable faith in oneself and a deep awareness of responsibility before the people, but first and foremost a spirit of full authority together with the fanatic trust in the genius of its Poglavnik, which also entered under the roof of the Croatian State Theatre in Zagreb on April 22, 1941.”*<sup>54</sup>

Even before Žanko’s appointment in the theatre, his predecessor Aleksandar Freudenreich organised a manifestation *Celebratory Week of Croatian Dramatic and Music Art (Svečani tjedan hrvatske dramske i glazbene umjetnosti)* to demonstrate that, like other cultural and educational institutions, the HDK was on the side of new authorities “with delight and elation.” On that occasion, it was stated that “the HDK was for a full hundred years on the frontline of the battle for Croatian nationality, language, education and art” and “it awaited the act of resurrection of the State of Croatia [...] together with the delight of the entire Croatian people.”<sup>55</sup>

As for Pavelić, during the four years of his reign he was never involved in theatre affairs: apart from three visits that were representative and of protocol nature, he attended only one full-length show in the HDK. This was the celebratory production of Lisinski’s *Porin* on the occasion of *The Week of Croatian Academia* in April 1944. This is why the introduction of the “pure Croatian and ethical orientation of Croatian theatre in Zagreb both regarding the staff and the repertoire”<sup>56</sup> in the HDK was carried out under Budak’s supervision from day one. This statement, although originating from Žanko, was Budak’s typical phraseology. Together with the announcement of the establishment of national theatres in Sarajevo and Banja Luka and opera houses in Osijek and Split, it was inevitably emphasised that only those people who were “ready, worthy and deserving to work in the interests of the Croatian people” would be given a chance to “live out their talents on the theatre and concert floors.”<sup>57</sup> Yet the leading echelon itself did not work in that spirit. On the eve of the beginning of Budak’s conference on April 1941, Ante Pavelić and Benito Mussolini signed the *Roman Treaties*. According to these treaties, a great part of the Croatian coast and islands was handed over to Italy, which meant the acceptance of Italian political, economic and military supervision over a part of NDH, while the Croatian crown was offered to

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<sup>54</sup> Teufel, Đuro. 1941. U povodu nastupa novog intendanta prof. Dušana Žanka, *Hrvatska revija* br. 5., Zagreb, 27. IV. 1941.

<sup>55</sup> HN, 17. June 1941.

<sup>56</sup> The first statement of the new intendant D. Žanko, the day after Budak’s appointment. HN, 24. April 1941.

<sup>57</sup> NL, 18. May. 1941; 25. May. 1941.

Aimone di Savoia Aosta, Duke of Spoleto. The conference on NDH theatres began a day after Pavelić's surrender of Dalmatia to the Duce. To make things even more absurd, during the first day of the conference there were debates on the problems of the Split theatre, but the conclusions signed on May 23 did not include the Split theatre since, thanks to the Treaties (attended by Budak himself) the biggest Dalmatian city fell out of the corpus of the State, including its theatre.

Budak's programme of the reorganisation of theatre was extremely ambitious: its task was to penetrate all aspects of theatrical life, from increasing the budget to creating a clear-cut human resources policy within the strict ideological frame. His views were faithfully dispatched by the daily *Croatian People* extensively elaborating on Budak's ideas on pure Croatian theatre in which "generations of young and talented singers, musicians and actors [...] will have the opportunity to build themselves as strong authors valuable to our theatre life [...], authors with healthy principles."<sup>58</sup> As it was not possible to engage everybody in the HDK, all theatres were presented as equally valuable, filled with new people who "deserved it with their working abilities and ethical qualities" and who did their job "deprived of obsolete methods and principles."<sup>59</sup> Therefore at the very onset of the cultural-political campaign aimed at theatres there was no doubt:

*"Only our people will perform, those who carry within them the love for their people besides their artistic talent."*<sup>60</sup>

### **The Promotional Function of the HDK as an Important Segment of the New Cultural Policy of the NDH in the International Field**

The primary task of all institutions within the administrative system in the NDH was to promote and stimulate patriotism or, in Budak's formulation, every theatre was supposed "to work for its people."<sup>61</sup> But that was not enough - parallel with this, it was necessary to "further spread the high theatre art already known across the borders of our state."<sup>62</sup> This new Europe - as the Ustashi liked to call it - "in the spirit of the new order joyfully saluted the introduction of the NDH into the community of free and cultural European countries."<sup>63</sup> This was because, in the opinion of Ustashi leaders, Croats belonged to "the community of the leaders of the world" and were hence facing "greater responsibilities and duties than many other nations world-wide."<sup>64</sup> In a state like the NDH, led by strict centralistic principles, the Poglavnik was the central figure of the state in its entirety as well as the central figure of the accumulation of, according to many, impressive results of cultural

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<sup>58</sup> HN, 15. December 1941.

<sup>59</sup> HN, 24. June 1941.

<sup>60</sup> NL, 18. May 1941 and 25. May 1941; HN, 25. May 1941 and 27. May 1941.

<sup>61</sup> HN, 24. April 1941.

<sup>62</sup> HN, 24. April 1941.

<sup>63</sup> The programme of the celebration of the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of NDH. HAZU, file 1943.

<sup>64</sup> Oršanić, Ivan. 1942. Vodstvo Europe u svijetu. *Ustaški godišnjak*, 110.

policy.<sup>65</sup> The general manager of Žanko in the name of all the Croatian State Theatre (HDK) thanked Pavelić countless times because “in spite of difficult war conditions, he helps Croatian cultural creations and endeavours by all means,” which logically led to the conclusion that “Croatian theatre art had to be greatly thankful to the Poglavnik.”<sup>66</sup> On the occasion of the tour of the Zagreb Opera in Italy, which was reviewed as triumphant - hence for many this success was also the success of all Croatian people - besides thanking Mussolini and Hitler, the HDK also thanked “their people and the Poglavnik” by giving them “the most beautiful gift an artistic house may produce.”<sup>67</sup> Theatre was expected from the onset to “enter the international arena” in an exemplary manner and to represent the NDH with dignity among the Axis states. As the Poglavnik stated, the Zagreb theatre “has to maintain a standard. It will represent us in front of the whole world, which is looking upon us.”<sup>68</sup> This form of cultural action (especially until the summer of 1943, prior to the economic collapse in the NDH) held an extremely important place in the overall international politics of the NDH. According to Čepulić, in wartime, when “fighting for survival is the priority,” it is precisely the cultural liaisons that “may become the most solid ring in the chain, the most intimate moment of bonding, friendship and collaboration among nations.”<sup>69</sup> The code for a successful international collaboration was simple: “small nations have [...] other interests than big nations” who “need the small ones, but at once small nations should tie themselves to big ones because they cannot survive without them.”<sup>70</sup> As the spirit of Croatianhood of that time strove to rise above the spirit of the nation with which it was forced to co-exist in the former state for 23 years, those ties were not considered important, since “the Croatian people adopted a lot from others in the past and yet retained their identity.”<sup>71</sup> Thus the attitude was established that, for instance, Croats and Serbs were “two formed and distinguished nations” of entirely different spirits, therefore the Ustashi regime strove from the onset to connect through the similarity of spirit with the countries that were leading the European Axis.<sup>72</sup> Stronger ties were found there, as “their interests were closer” and “cultural liaisons between them stronger.”<sup>73</sup> As the policy of the Ustashi leadership was from the very beginning limited by the strong influence of Nazism and Fascism, the international activities of cultural institutions were mostly counting on collaboration and cultural exchange with the Reich and Italy.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> More in: Kovačić, Vladimir. 1944. Poglavnikova briga za napredak hrvatske kulture. *Nova Hrvatska*, 14. July 1944, 12.

<sup>66</sup> NH, 14. July 1944.

<sup>67</sup> Hrvatska pozornica (HP). Zagreb. No. 34. 10. May 1942, 4.

<sup>68</sup> HN, 2 August 1942 and HP: covers of all issues in 1941-42.

<sup>69</sup> Čepulić, *Politika i kulturne veze*, 27

<sup>70</sup> Čepulić, *Politika i kult. veze*, 27.

<sup>71</sup> Lukas, *Kultura na udaru rata*, 4.

<sup>72</sup> Lukas, *Kultura na udaru rata*, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Čepulić, *Politika i kulturne veze*, 28.

<sup>74</sup> Compare: Starčević, Mile. 1942. Ustaška država i kulturno-prosvjetnadjelatnost. *Prosvjetni život* (1-2), 29-33, 4-8.

### German Reich

The intensive work of collaboration with the Reich began in the summer of 1942, when the Senior Advisor of the Ministry of Promotion Reich Gerhardt Scherler came to Zagreb, where he, together with Žanko and the Director of Opera Jakov Gotovac, made “a plan for intensified artistic collaboration and artistic exchange between the Great German Reich and the NDH.”<sup>75</sup> Only a few months later, in December, the Viennese *Staatsoper* twice performed Mozart’s *The Wedding of Figaro* in Zagreb. Six months later, following long preparations, a reciprocal visit to Vienna was organised: the Zagreb Opera toured from 11 to 13 May 1943, but in the Viennese *Opernhaus der Stadt Wien* - today’s *Volksoper Wien*.<sup>76</sup> This tour was also to Budak’s merit, although at the time he was no longer Ambassador in Berlin. Preparations for this tour were long and exhausting for both sides, as they lasted from January 1942. As many as 250 members of the HDK, led by leading actor and director Tito Strozzi, embarked on a journey organised by the “travelling” agency *Croatia-put*. The orchestra was boosted by twelve musicians from the Poglavnik’s Special Brigade, the General Headquarters orchestra, the Domobran Music School and the Air Forces orchestra.<sup>77</sup> A poster with the motif of the old Croatian wattle was designed by the renowned theatre set and costume designer Vladimir Žedrinški; there was also a catalogue printed in German. Members of the ensemble received *Travel Provisions*,<sup>78</sup> a set of guidelines that everyone had to “follow unconditionally.” There was a special requirement applying to all members to “observe discipline, both their own and that of their colleagues” followed by a strict warning “that the dignity of this task must not be compromised by anyone and therefore any excess will be penalised accordingly.”<sup>79</sup> The first production on the programme was Zajc’s *Nikola Šubić Zrinjski* whose content is associated with Vienna; hence there was a prevailing opinion that “the production was expected by many with special sympathy.”<sup>80</sup> The HDK Ballet also achieved great success with its production of *The Devil in the Countryside* and “our leading ballet dancers Ana Roje and Oskar Harmoš have had an exceptionally warm reception.”<sup>81</sup> The third evening of this by all criteria successful tour was dedicated to Gotovac’s *Ero the Joker*, which was attended by the Austrian composer Richard Strauss. He expressed his pleasure with the music, the *perfect orchestra* and the singers, and especially with the conductor Gotovac. Besides many members of the diplomatic corps, the new NDH Minister of Foreign Affairs Mile Budak, who had just taken over the new position, also attended this *triumphant success*.<sup>82</sup> That evening was certainly Budak’s triumph, both as the envoy and as the leading person in culture in the

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<sup>75</sup> NH, 8. July 1942.

<sup>76</sup> HP, 23. May 1943, 3.

<sup>77</sup> Memos to the Command of the Poglavnik’s Special Brigade and MINORS (Ministarstvo oružanih snaga). HAZU, 8583, 24. April 24. 1943. ok

<sup>78</sup> Travel regulations for the tour of the HDK Opera in Vienna, copy of the document signed by Ana Roje was preserved. HAZU. file 1943.

<sup>79</sup> *Hrvatska revija* (HR), 13. May 1943.

<sup>80</sup> HR, 13. May 1943.

<sup>81</sup> NH, 13. May 1943.

<sup>82</sup> NH, 15. May 1943.

NDH. This is why he paid another visit to the theatre within the frame of his stay in Zagreb in October 1943, “as he wished to acknowledge the artists who took part in the highly successful German tour”, after which he organised “an intimate dinner for the artists who were on the German tour.”<sup>83</sup>

The staging of classical German drama and opera were considered the greatest hits of Žanko’s mandate. He even invested the greatest effort as a producer to stage two Wagner operas. The production of *The Flying Dutchman* was renewed in November 1941, followed by *Das Rheingold* in February 1943. They marked the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Richard Wagner’s birth and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, but also displayed the intention of the management to perform the entire Wagner’s tetralogy *The Ring of the Nibelung*. With the same overambitious zeal, Žanko announced the renewal of *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* and Strauss’ *Rosenkavalier*, yet none of these plans were realised due to understandable financial and organisational reasons. Instead, the Croatian premiere of the opera *Columbus* by the contemporary German composer Werner Egk took place with great pomp at the end of the season 1942/43.

German classical drama was an even bigger success among the demanding Zagreb audience and critics. The biggest projects of Žanko’s mandate - and, according to many, great artistic events - were Goethe’s *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the Croatian premiere of Lessing’s *Minna von Barnhelm*, “full of patriotic urges and sentiments,”<sup>84</sup> as well as Schiller’s *The Robbers*. All three productions were distinguished by the “creative” direction of the first director of HDK Branko Gavella, and were considered by professional circles as “representative successes”<sup>85</sup> of the entirety of art in the NDH. The Zagreb premiere of Goethe’s *Faust*, translated, adapted and directed by Tito Strozzi, was held in “a most sumptuous form”<sup>86</sup> only a month after the premiere of *The Robbers*, and was yet another of Žanko’s repertoire and production aces, which served him to convince the public both of the great potentials of the Zagreb Drama of the HDK and of the generous funding by which the NDH authorities were supporting the positioning of Zagreb theatre on the artistic map of the so-called *New Europe*. The day of *Faust*’s premiere was qualified in the press as “a first-rate sensation”<sup>87</sup> and “a day of pride for our theatre.”<sup>88</sup>

German plays and comedies were the repertoire basis of the Zagreb Theatre. Some titles that were often more popular among audiences than with the critics are worth mentioning. Those were in the first place the comedies *Cherries for Rome* by Hans Hömberg and *Love in the Spring* by

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<sup>83</sup> NH, 27. October 1942.

<sup>84</sup> HP, 1. January 1943, 5.

<sup>85</sup> HN, 11. February 1942.

<sup>86</sup> HP, 22. March 1942, 11.

<sup>87</sup> Prosvjetni život (PŽ). 1942. 1-2, VII-VIII, 60.

<sup>88</sup> *Spremnost*, 5. April 1942. Compare: Šnajder, Slobodan. 2007. *Faust’s Bet*. Zagreb: Prometej. 14-17.

Friedrich Schreyvogel, but also the family tragedy *Dies Irae* by the contemporary Viennese poet and playwright Anton Wildgans.

### Italy

To initiate the beginning of “the lasting and fruitful”<sup>89</sup> collaboration between the two countries, a grandiose tour of the Rome Royal Opera with *Aida* and *Madame Butterfly* was organised in Zagreb.<sup>90</sup> Accompanied by unprecedented public interest, the tour took place in July 1941 - paradoxically, a month and a half after the surrender of Croatian territory to the Italians. Žanko stressed that Zagreb has experienced “the greatest artistic sensation imaginable” and precisely at the moment “when the great Italy bequeaths to the Croatian capital its most wonderful gift and the crown of its beauties.”<sup>91</sup> The famous Italian tenor Begnamino Gigli became the star of the Zagreb audience, although the tickets for all performances (two of *Aida* and two of *Madame Butterfly*) could not be “sold to anyone and without control” and were distributed with the utmost protocol precaution and control.<sup>92</sup> The Poglavnik received the Italian artists in the Ban’s Court (*Banski dvori* - the official seat of the head of the Croatian State), thanking the Duce for this tour and remarking that Italian culture and civilisation were “so dear and close to the entire Croatian nation.”<sup>93</sup> Minister Budak organised a formal dinner in honour of Italian artists (who walk the world carrying “the torch of education”), and he even began his long speech in Italian. He went on in Croatian, typically using figures of speech referring to the countryside and the land; hence he welcomed the artists to “the sacred and revolutionary soil of classical Western culture,” which, especially after the arrival of Pavelić, became “the most suitable field for further development of Western culture.”<sup>94</sup>

The reciprocal tour of the HDK in Italy took place in April 1942. This was truly the largest project in the field of international collaboration during the entire existence of the NDH.<sup>95</sup> The Zagreb Opera performed Gotovac’s *Ero the Joker* in Venice, Florence and Rome. The grandiose tour, which included 232 members of the HDK, was already announced in the press in July 1941<sup>96</sup> while the negotiations between the Ministry of Education and the Department of Journalism and Cultural Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the participation of the NDH Embassy in Rome, began in November. Finally, the decree on the tour was signed by Pavelić himself. The Minister of National Education

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<sup>89</sup> Mile Budak in a speech on 2. July 1941. at the official reception in the honour of Italian artists in the Hotel *Esplanade*. HN, 4. July 1941.

<sup>90</sup> HN, 12. and 22. June; 3, 4, 5, 6. July 1941, NH, 28. and 30. June: 4, 6, 7, 9. July 1941.

<sup>91</sup> HN, 6. July 1941.

<sup>92</sup> NH, 30. June 1941.

<sup>93</sup> Ante Pavelić in a speech on 5. July 1941, on the occasion of the reception of Italian artists in Ban Court (*Banski dvori*). HN, 6. July 1941.

<sup>94</sup> Mile Budak in a speech on 2. July 1941, at the official reception in the honour of Italian artists in the Hotel *Esplanade* HN, 4. July 1941.

<sup>95</sup> NH, 28. April 1942., HN, 29. April 1942, HP, 10. May 1942., Hrvatska smotra (HS). 6-1942; PŽ, 1-2, VII-VIII 1942.

<sup>96</sup> NH, 17. July 1941.

Stjepan Ratković signed the authorisation for preparations<sup>97</sup> and the tour expenses were covered by The Department of Arts and Literature (*Odsjek za umjetnost i književnost*) within the Ministry of Education.

The theatre performed in Venice in the renowned opera theatre La Fenice. While there were applauses on the open stage, at the end of Act One the artists had eight curtain calls, the same as after Act Two. At the end of the performance, they were honoured with long standing ovations in front of “a packed theatre” that could accommodate 1200 people. Pere Dulčić, the Chief Secretary of theatre who kept a travel diary and later published an extensive text movingly describing the moment of ovations when “the Croatian soul fluttered, the rhythm of our hearts spilled over, the colours and patterns of our sunny homeland beamed.”<sup>98</sup> All interpreters were showered with flowers. The theatre magazine *Croatian stage (Hrvatska pozornica)* published an extensive review of the “triumph” emphasising that “the language barrier was conquered by the freshness of the work and our healthy folk humour, the ravishing tenors and sopranos, the depth of Marjana Radev’s mezzosoprano, the lusciousness of Josip Križaj’s bass and the softness and fullness of Pichler’s baritone.”<sup>99</sup> Obviously elated, the author of the text, Vladimir Ciprin, was also exaggerating when he claimed that “La Serenissima spoke of nothing else but Croats and our art.”<sup>100</sup>

In Florence, they performed in the Teatro Comunale with as many as 4500 seats, in the frame of the festivity Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. The enthusiastic reception continued; as a matter of fact, it already began during the national anthems and was followed by frequent applauses on the open stage while the ballet had to perform the final dance for the encore. Dulčić didn’t try to conceal his pride when reporting on the enthusiasm of a number of audience members and music experts who were “delighted with the success” of which “Florentine newspapers spread the news” the following day.<sup>101</sup> The members of the HDK managed to visit Rossini’s tomb in the church of Santa Croce, where the choir (accompanied by Antun Gnezda on organs) sang the Croatian anthem and placed a wreath on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. *Ero the Joker* also triumphed in Rome, with the encore of the final scene of the opera. It was performed in the Teatro Reale dell’Opera, and the following day the artists were received by the mayor at the Capitol. Žanko held a speech in which he thanked the hosts for organising this reciprocal tour and concluded with cheering Italy, the Duce and the mayor. In return, the mayor presented Croatian artists with a bronze medal depicting the goddess of the city of Rome as a “token of remembrance of the resplendent centre of civilisation,”<sup>102</sup> while Minister Pavolini’s present was that of the head of the young Augustus. An important encounter happened in the Vatican, where Croatian artists

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<sup>97</sup> Intendant Žanko’s memo to Minister Ratković. HAZU, 12061., 14. April 1942.

<sup>98</sup> Dulčić, Pere. 1942. *Hrvatska opera u Italiji*. HS, 6-1942, 375.

<sup>99</sup> HP, 10. May 1942, 3.

<sup>100</sup> HP, 10. May 1942, 3.

<sup>101</sup> Dulčić, *Hrvatska opera u Italiji*, 376.

<sup>102</sup> HN, 1. May 1941.

met the head of their church, Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac, and together with him “bowed to the Holy Father.”<sup>103</sup>

Dulčić stated that, with this tour, the NDH became “an important international factor in the cultural and artistic field and in the building of the New Europe.”<sup>104</sup> He was particularly enchanted with the thought that the small Croatian nation took “its own opera right into the nest of its great and famous mother [...] to pass the maturity exam and to launch itself on the path of victorious ascent and glory.”<sup>105</sup> And while Minister Pavolini was somewhat more restrained in his telegram to Žanko, merely making a courteous remark that “we remember with sympathy and camaraderie the recent tour of the members of Croatian theatre in Italy,”<sup>106</sup> *Hrvatska pozornica* concluded exultantly that the tour has paved “the road for the Croatian State Opera to all opera stages world-wide” and placed *Ero* “on the world opera repertoire.”<sup>107</sup> In the fall of the same year, following the invitation by Pavolini, Žanko paid another visit to Venice where he attended the Venice Festival and negotiated a new tour by the Italians in Zagreb, though this was never realised. Partly due to the economic crisis and the overall exhaustion of both countries by the war, and partly due to permanent tensions between them, the exchange with the Italians was practically terminated even before Mussolini’s fall and the retreat of Italian troops from the territory of the NDH.

Besides the regular presence of Italian operas on Zagreb stages, until the autumn of 1943 there were frequent stagings of contemporary Italian authors. There was a great interest for the Croatian premieres of Traversi’s adaptation of Louis Napoleon Parker’s novel *The Cardinal*, Niccodemi’s drama *The Teacher* and the spectacular renewal of “the dramatic poem” by Sem Benelli *Heartless Joke*, a *d’annunzian* piece on love and revenge in the époque of the Florentine ruler Lorenzo the Great. In Zagreb, a city in which, due to the curfew, the performances throughout the season began at 7 pm, one could glimpse “medieval cruelty polished with Roman elegance.”<sup>108</sup>

### Conclusion

According to Ustashi Principles, all cultural and educational institutions in the NDH were to encourage both individual and collective contributions to the enrichment of the cultural life of the Croatian people. The “cultural revolution” of Ante Pavelić, so frequently evoked in speeches by himself and his minister for education Mile Budak, was to create remodelled “new men” who would replace those “old by mentality” and incapable of participating in the “creation of new generations” and the “new spirit of Europe.” Their concept of propaganda, education and

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<sup>103</sup> Dulčić, *Hrvatska opera u Italiji*, 377.

<sup>104</sup> Dulčić, *Hrvatska opera u Italiji*, 377.

<sup>105</sup> Dulčić, *Hrvatska opera u Italiji*, 374.

<sup>106</sup> NH, 12. May 1941.

<sup>107</sup> HP, 10. May 1941.

<sup>108</sup> HN, 13. October 1942.

new morals, as the basis of their cultural policy, had to be implemented both in the repertory and in the organisation of the Croatian State Theatre. The cumbersome and expensive theatre mechanism, programmed and abundantly financed by the authorities until 1943, was the instrument for their ideas and goals and became the main channel for expressing the aspirations and visions of the new society, both domestically and internationally. The mandate of Dušan Žanko, as the head of the Croatian State Theatre from 1941 to 1943, marked a period of unambiguous leaning towards the ideological orientation of the new totalitarian government. The period saw many segments of the theatre's complex mechanism striving to maintain creative continuity by performing classical pieces dominated by the so called "ethical repertoire" built upon the traditional dramatic and musical expression of Croatia and the Axis forces. Following the example of Hitler's cultural policy, the Croatian State Theatre in Zagreb became a central arena for celebrations, festivals and events, including international performances sponsored by the state, which were an important instrument for the promotion of the regime. International cultural exchanges were established with all the Axis states, primarily with the Reich and Italy. Opera ensembles and orchestras from Berlin, Rome and Vienna performed in Zagreb and vice versa. The Zagreb Opera and Ballet performed their Croatian national musical repertoire (composed by I. Zajc, K. Baranovic and J. Gotovac) "with triumph" in Vienna, Venice, Florence and other locations. At the same time, numerous classical and contemporary German and Italian operas and dramas were staged in Zagreb as part of the regime's goal to position the State Theatre on the artistic map of the so-called New Europe. Observed from a cultural-political perspective, it could be argued that the NDH benefited from the Theatre until the autumn of 1943, but became a burden thereafter, once Pavelić's system began collapsing.

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