



world drama on the threshold of the 21st century:
tradition and avant-garde

le drame mondial au seuil du XXI^e siècle

das drama der welt an der schwelle zum XXI jahrhundert

el drama mundial en el umbral del siglo XXI

7 · 2002 · vol I

interlitteraria

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KIRJASTUS

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Ce bon vieux Molière, lu à la lumière des écritures contemporaines



The emblem of the 4th International Conference of the EACL
(an indian-ink sketch by Lembit Karu)

Introductory Note

The present monothematic volume of *Interlitteraria* gathers the papers of the EACL 4th International Conference "World Drama on the Threshold of the 21st Century: Tradition and Avant-garde", held in Tartu, September 23–26, 2001. We include also the papers of those who against their will and plans either had to cancel their travel to Estonia, in the immediate aftermath of the sad events of September 11 in the US, or could not attend the event for personal reasons.

Even though a number of scholars who had initially announced their participation, finally could not come, the conference turned out to be a major success, being in fact the largest ever held in the series of Tartu international conferences of comparative literature. We are thankful to the Estonian Science Foundation, our traditional sponsor, but in this case especially to Kultuurkapital (Estonian Cultural Endowment) which at the very critical moment, when our conference budget seemed to be definitely broke, lent us its generous hand. And we are grateful to the ICLA research committee on Eastern and South Eastern Europe, lead by professor Monica Spiridon, for its moral support and valuable suggestions.

It was not uncommon at the conference to hear a speaker commence his/her paper by apologizing for not being properly a drama or theatre specialist, but rather a literary scholar in general. I do not think there was really a need for apologies. On the contrary, our historical epoch with its ever growing specialization — under the pressure of the mega-machinery of science&technology&industry&commerce — calls urgently for new philosophical and synthesizing visions of the state of things in the world and its culture. Several articles of the present issue of *Interlitteraria* brilliantly show that drama and theatre in our days are overwhelmingly submitted to the same patterns of development as other arts, while a detailed analysis of drama and theatre, in its own turn, can efficiently contribute to general (inter)cultural and (inter)literary studies.

We also learn from a number of articles of the present issue of *Interlitteraria* that despite important coincidences in the post-modern mainstream throughout the world, there is still a considerable room for individualities, varying from country to country, from one cultural space to another. While in some parts of Europe drama and theatre seem to have lost almost all of their national character — to respond to the claims of those Western theoreticians for whom national culture and literature have become little more than historical relicts —, in other parts of the same Europe national topics, even though elaborated in the postmodern vein, still continue to occupy an essential position on the national stage. There are also huge cultural regions in the world — like India — where the supranational tendencies have deeply merged in the national-ethnic folklore and mythology, so that the synthesis may provide wonderfully surprising and unpredictable results. The same invigorating ethnic roots seem to make a sudden refreshing appearance even in the areas traditionally considered as the very core of the globalizing Western discourse, like the US.

Mighty as the postmodern zeal to deconstruct former political and intellectual systems may be, in the final account there seems to be little doubt that even in the postmodern drama and theatre the greatest achievements are still those originating from truly individual creative constructs and, as such, cannot be controlled by theories, at least *a priori*. The genial observation of Friedrich Schlegel about one of the most important features of the romantic *Universalpoesie*, namely that the supreme poetics of a creative work is the work itself, still seems to be fully in force. Even though Shakespeare's *Hamlet* may be played through in all possible cues and codes — one wonders what about the copyrights, was Shakespeare alive! — for a genuinely talented stage-director there still remains an undefined number of margins to interpret the text.

This is a piece of evidence that great authors are never dead (whatever Roland Barthes and his followers might claim). They feed the imagination of the posterity, choose stage-directors, translators, actors and the public for their plays. They choose metatexts and meta-metatexts, to complement their creation. What a pity that one man, Shakespeare, has to bear such a heavy burden of the

posterity's fancy! There are other classics — not only European — who are fully forgotten, while many excellent playwrights from modernity, as can be seen from several articles of this *Interlitteraria*, have never had their international due, for reasons seemingly as banal as having their work in other than “international languages”.

Let us hope that our present monograph, centred on world drama and theatre in our days, may not serve only theoreticians and literary critics, but also stage-directors, actors, and why not the public — all those attracted by the ever-lasting magic of the “great world theatre”, both in its Calderonian and literary sense.

The present *Interlitteraria* will be followed, as our tradition goes, by a *miscellanea*-number. The deadline for submitting the MSS will be January 15, 2003. At the same time we shall be shifting our focus from drama to contemporary narrative fiction. The 5th international conference of the EACL, “The Novel Genre at the Start of the 21st Century: A “Leap” or a Standstill?” will hopefully take place at the end of September, 2003. By the way, information about the EACL, its conferences and *Interlitteraria*, is now available at: www.ut.ee/inlit

Jüri Talvet,
Editor

Theatre — Five Futures or Fuwtuwrews ...

JOHN ANDREASEN

We carry at least five general, personal images of world fuwtuwrews in our minds. And we may or may not agree on either their general or actual, detailed contents:

Nostalgias: Life as an ideal childhood with only sweet, sweet memories — a land of ultimate love and laughter — a place to long for, where no one has ever been — Arcadia, Shangrila.

Dystopias: Where communities and societies fall apart — where human beings are lonely singles seemingly fighting about any physical and mental space in an ultimate ecological imbalance.

Utopias: Where the world is no narrow, global village and the law of the jungle does not mean survival of the fittest and cruellest but the ultimate prosperity and diversity of species, habits and exchange of expressions.

Realities: No worse than today — if we are lucky!¹

Improved Realities: Better than average life today in numerous tiny or giant ways.

*

Maybe it would be most comfortable to combine these rather abstract images of futures directly with certain kinds of general theatre like for instance:

¹ This line is a translation from John Andreasen (1984).

Nostalgic theatre: Theatre with too obvious and easy solutions to serious problems. Theatre with sudden happy endings without depths.

Dystopic theatre: Theatre where existence is ultimately degraded.

Utopic theatre: Where dilemmas are tough and impressive. Where humanity is celebrated and mankind 'sacred'. Where the bravery and will to exchange, understand and respect productive differences is ultimate. Not all utopian visions may be unrealistic.

Reality theatre: Theatre presenting deep and detailed views and visions combining nostalgic, dystopic, utopic and (improved) reality subjects and forms.

Improved reality theatre: Theatre that is more simple or complex than now ranging from single genres and medias to numerous artistic and cultural cross overs. Any improvement in content, drama structures, acting techniques, creations of space etc. among professionals as well as amateurs or combined. And improved networks of local and touring productions and ticket systems etc., etc.

*

But instead I will move on to five other ways of looking at different versions of theatre futures — some of which are already part of a contemporary theatre landscape in 2002. And very individually we can all place parts and segments of these in the categories of Nostalgia, Dystopia, Utopia, Reality or Improved Reality.

Some futures may be competing, but in reality they may not be mutually excluding each other — and certainly not only “wishful thinking”. The following five futures may be seen from different angles representing respectively 1) Exclusion, 2) Diversion, 3) Assimilation, 4) Antagonism, and 5) Specialization:

(silenzio)

1st

The first one is *silence*. An anxious or resounding silence, because there is no more theatre. Theatre has died out or been rejected or directly banned & forbidden.

Or a silence because there is too much theatre. Too much superfluous theatre, and too much roleplaying and existential distance between people in general to raise enough interest for more on stage. Times where all the world has become too much a stage.

2nd

The second is an enlarged or reduced *copy* of the present times, of contemporary theatre around what was once called the turn of the second (Christian) Millenium. A large mixture of not only exciting experiments and marvelous mainstream performances indoor or outdoor in theatres or non-theatres, but also very many:²

routine repertoires
repeat concepts
heritage industries
military show parades
doping sport matches
cases of ritual virtuality of politics

Around the threshold of the 21st century most people at least in Western Europe, do not go to the theatre for different reasons: Lack of family or social group traditions, lack of time, money or actual possibilities to experience something interesting at a reasonable distance from home.

In 1998 the Swedish dramatist Per Olov Enquist said that ticket sale had gone drastically down in Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Sweden and Denmark. An exception was the British theatre as a tourist magnet (Davidsen, Rehling 1998). Friends in Poland and the Czech Republic tell me that theatre has had hard times since

² A translated and adapted excerpt of examples from John Andreassen (1998).

the fall of “The Wall” in 1989 — financially as well as artistically. New markets, new audiences, new realities — new or old art? But of course interest in theatre may change again — positively or negatively.

Friends in Estonia (Saro 2000) and China tell me that copies of Western shows have become very hard competitors for the theatre of local aesthetics. In Canada it seems mainly to be the same, but there has also been a dedicated attempt for the last twenty years to develop a modern, ‘national’ repertoire in a good sense. But I do not know if that has meant an increase in theatre interest or it has decreased because of the competition from other art forms or leisure time offers. In Denmark most people go to urban entertainment — more women than men and especially better educated and better paid persons (Fridberg 1997). And a lot of people — not only in Denmark — seem to look for a ‘total experience’ — artistically and socially — where the performance is only one part of the actual arrangement.

In 2001 two different tendencies are obvious on the “official stage” for different reasons: time demands individuality, and *individuals* are in focus, and often in competitive forms like theatre sports, poetry slam or solo dance performances. And story-telling — without a real competitive element — seems to have got a revival. The single, skilled performer is ultimately in focus.

But at the same time rather large *teams* are attractive to many people. Either to watch and hear or to participate in themselves in large sceneries and unusual, non-daily experiences in order to have a lifting feeling of fellowship in a fragmented world. And hopefully get a good feeling of being able to create something by “yourself”. Especially in large, musical performances.

Or in historical plays, some of which are called ‘community plays’ especially in North Western countries. But also in relatively new nations some people may want to produce ‘community plays’ as a part of their ‘newborn’, modern work for identity. Not as old-fashioned, sentimental, nostalgic, heroic and nationalistic self-glamouring, but as serious contemporary attempts to connect and understand the past and the present in urgent and exciting cross-

overs between good, traditional and new forms as an attempt to develop new bridges to multiple futures.³

And on the “unofficial stage” young people’s autonomous role plays, senior citizens’ self-organized theatre etc., etc. may increase.

3rd

The third is a much harder *competition* from the electronic media. Or *mixture* with electronic expressions — perhaps even world-wide via internet at the same time. (Nelson 2000) Contributions via satellite mixed into live performances, where humans interact with electronics or are used as (minor) aesthetic creators — giving some movement and voice to pictures, which can change colours, textures and forms?⁴ And even more may happen, if we follow for instance the visions of Steve Mann’s Cyborgs or the Greek-Australian artist, Stelarc, who goes even further in *his* hope for a hybrid body.

4th

The fourth is an enlarged *gap* between “business” and “living” on the “official” as well as on the “unofficial” stage. Not only a gap between the profit and non-profit theatre, but a question of

³ An adapted excerpt from John Andreasen (December 2000).

⁴ In the late 1960s I dreamed of three-dimensional pictures, that could be projected almost anywhere in the scenic space — in totality or in zoomed extracts — to interact with the real actors in flesh and blood. At the beginning of the 1970s I began to worry about the actors’ possibility to stand against the growing amount of technical kit around the performer — and later directly on, and nowadays also directly in the actor, dancer or performer. Will it still be a help, a supplement, a good extension or will it drown the actor? To me the living actor is still the absolute centre of theatre concretely and symbolically as a human representative. (John Andreasen).

basically uncommitted work for a personal career — a commercial ousting of a life dedicated to art and humanity.

Much theatre seems to be becoming more of a job providing social and economic security, and a trade rather than vital, aesthetic and existential expression and communication — more a time killer or a part of a repetitive social ritual, that does not make the participants happier, angrier, wiser or whatever.

Sponsorships and/or public funding support theatre in many ways and to different limits in different countries, and today most theatre is expensive to produce. Even much amateur theatre because of attempts to copy professional standards or being forced to do it by audiences' unexplained demand of quality.

Another future gap may be between "rich" and "poor" theatre. Not only as a question about funding or sale, but more as an ideological — idealistic or pragmatic — gap between the overwhelmingly well equipped "entertainment palaces" and the far less-equipped theatres or site specific performance areas in apartments, old factories, streets etc. And it may also be a question about huge "eye-and-ear delights" in casting, scenery etc. vs small or spare productions focusing on the performers' skills and will to express something urgent and of concern for the theatre people as well as for the spectators or spect-actors⁵.

And in future special VIP lounges or clubs or arrangements may oppose ultra-democratic productions intended in principle for everybody or especially exposed groups in society.

5th

The fifth is a specialized theatre. Respectively a theatre of *niches* for ultimate "Feinschmeckers" and a theatre to satisfy 'universal'

⁵ Spect-actor is a term by the South American director and theatre pedagogue, Augusto Boal, referring to the situation where members of the audience can be active, directly parts of a performance — change between watching and acting.

needs in a society where maybe too much has become “-tainment” (Schultze 1992): Enter-tainment, edu-tainment, poli-tainment⁶ etc.

A) *Niches* may be almost *science* fiction or *social* fiction like for instance:⁷

- theatre as punishment and penalty
- private war games
- fakir-like gladiators
- outlawed storytellers
- biochip robot puppet plays
- gén-manipulated animal circuses

Or theatres of special delivery like:⁸

Tamagotchi Ensembles

Rolling Ritual Teams

MacBirthday Theatres

Escort Theatres

Jumbo Arena's Amusement Theatre for Happy Overweighters

Handy Handicap Theatre for Onelegged, Triple Bypassed, Half Heads

Seed Science Theatre Unlimited

Safe Theatre with Dry Weave Surface

B) *Universals* may be huge, transcultural⁹ and transnational performances or actions that create new, common symbols for a dignified living all over the world — yet unseen combinations of popular and avant-garde theatre to reflect common hopes.

In times of longing for new ideological or spiritual orientations and security, in times of the seemingly growing secularisation or

⁶ Jesper de Neergaard, director, and leader of Entré Scenen in Aarhus characterizes contemporary politics as mainly politainment.

⁷ An adapted excerpt from John Andreasen (1988). Originally written for an international conference in Copenhagen called *Theatre in the Future* in 1985.

⁸ Adapted excerpt from John Andreasen (1998).

⁹ Denise Agiman distinguishes between three terms, intercultural, multicultural and transcultural in Denise Agiman (March 2001).

the opposite, in times of enormous cultural and other alterations many people long for greater forces, powers, relationships or leading ideas that seem greater than themselves in order to find a meaning in life, in existence. Man is far from sheer intellect and straight rationality, and freedom is far from getting rid of all traditions and responsibilities in a super individualistic manner as already Buber, Fromm and Riesman pointed out in the first half of the 20th century. (Buber 1922, Fromm 1941, Riesman 1950)

It may call for new religious or secular rituals or ritual-implied performances. Or demand performances with new combinations of a “*micro niveau*”, where drama is inside or closely between a few people, a family, on job, a small community and the like, and a “*macro niveau*”, where drama is a matter in nations or even between nations or regions and greater economical, political and technological structures and powers.¹⁰

Coming up!

No matter what: futures will bring new *identity problems*: A new variety of culture and family affiliation in a new Great Era of Migration, where new nations are created and become part or not of larger unions in times, where women can be pregnant in ten different ways including the former most well known as one of them¹¹.

And new or old epidemics may bloom and blossom. And societies and communities may be “forced” to have social and ecological public duties and conscriptions because of increasing catastrophes from time to time. Theatre has to reflect that. Theatre has to encourage those on duty.

Summing up: theatre has to use all its imagination, power and concrete presence to create all thinkable and almost unthinkable

¹⁰ Inspired by the Norwegian peace researcher, Johan Galtung (see 1983, 1985).

¹¹ According to the Danish newspaper, *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, on August 4 2001.

exciting, touching, suggestive, funny, friendly and thought provoking experiences!

And then a *third kind of silence* may occur. A silence of shivering admiration, when theatre is so overwhelmingly beautiful or tough, so unexpectedly committed and concerning, that only breath-taking silence can match it — before acclamation breaks loose and turns the world upside down and inside out, when one experiences the best of¹²:

Shaman's Drum

Storyteller's Circle

Dancer's Space

Mask's Mystery

Puppet's Power

Actor's Pulse

(*silenzio*)

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¹² An altered version of the end of John Andreasen (2000).

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Hamlet + Shylock. Revis(it)ing Modernism or Surmounting Postmodernism?

MADINA TLOSTANOVA

“At present, when there have appeared so many new trends, schools, movements, various principles of directing a theater production, it is really funny to ask someone if he saw *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*... on the stage only to receive an answer: “Yes, I have seen it, why?” Well, because the question implies, what kind of Hamlet did your interlocutor see, and if he answers that it was the Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, such an answer immediately discourages from communicating with this utter ignoramus. For who does not know that lately our theatres have bred such a vast number of Shakespeare’s *Macbeths*, *Lears* and various *Henries*, that equals only the present immense amount of stage innovations, aspirations, statements and theatrical credos. In short, there are as many Hamlets now as the number of directors — innovators, who interpret any play as they wish...” (Yevreinov 2000: 16) This quotation can be easily applied to the postmodern theatrical situation with its characteristic re-makes of classical repertoire. Shakespeare certainly is one of the over-used by postmodernists classical figures and his works continue to inspire many theatrical productions throughout the world, including Russia, where in the last season the general enthusiasm for Hamlets has given place to intense interest in Macbeths, Shylocks and Othellos. These are signs of an “era of exhumation”, a quest for cultural roots and revitalizing of traditions, often in “retro” style, a specific incrustation of the old and the past. It is symptomatic that this quotation is taken from a slapstick script *Hamlet in the Plural*, written by Nikolai Yevreinov about 70 years ago. And it is not a

chance that his ironic contemplation on Shakespeare's interpretation is definitely echoed in the present time's revival of interest in the works of the British playwright.

Theatricality as one of the key aesthetic/epistemologic characteristics of postmodern sensibility has drawn the attention of many theorists today. Theater theory itself has become one of the vulnerable nerves, reacting to anything going on in the postmodern area. It is a distorted mirror, reflecting the powers and weakness of postmodernity as such.

The over-heated discussion of the crisis in theater culture and efforts to formulate and conceptualize its possible future have never ceased in the last decade both in the West and, surprisingly, in Russia as well, although the nature of such arguments is obviously very different in these two locations. Many western theorists are preoccupied with finding a way out of the impasse of postmodern theater aesthetics, attempting to offer constructive, not only negativist components, as well as looking for some productive replacement of the irretrievably lost, "done with" author, theater director, character and psychological analysis. Post-structuralist theories of theater have been fighting to eliminate any wholesome personage or imagery, while the main enemy of theatrical postmodernism remains psychological analysis as such. The latter is connected with the declared (at least verbally) aim at to free the audience's completely and make it an active agent, replaying the well-known ideas of the death of the author and the subject (i.e., A.-J. Greimas' "actant" model and Roland Barthes's ideas). That is why a number of theater theories today accentuate the over-all theatricality and carnivalesque nature of social and private life in the postmodern times, connecting it with the idea of the "society of spectacle" and with theories of performance, re-conceptualizing the very nature of theater as a socio-cultural, and not as aesthetic institution, stressing the typically postmodern eroded oppositions between the word and the world, the text and the body. It is obvious that today it is more likely that the spectator goes to the theater not because he wants to hear answers to the life-important questions, but just because he is looking for entertainment, not for empathy or any serious spiritual work. And even that simple craving for delight is slowly dying — the

carnavalesque performances in the vein of Mikhail Bakhtin are no longer that popular, and Yuri Ljubimov's brothers Karamazov in jester's hats at "Taganka" look anachronistic at best. This specific atmosphere breeds such characteristically the 1990s theories as S. Melrose's semiotic theater model (Melrose), connected with efforts at the final de-politicization of theater and the removal of its overt social-political engagements, in contrast with the theatre radicalism of the 1960s.

In connection with this one could recall J.-F. Lyotard's interpretation of performance as something that determines the borders and boundaries of subjectivity and identity, neutralizes the poles of the sender, giving the privilege to the pole of the listener or spectator, who must be able to reproduce the communicative message, addressed to him. According to Lyotard, this position denies a characteristic for romanticism and high modernism privileged situated-ness of the speaker — the author, but at the same time, paradoxically, does not completely destroy in its anti-authoritarianism the individuality as such (Lyotard 1998: 29–33).

Derrida's analysis of Antonin Artaud's theater and "its double" (Derrida 2000: 370–399), based on the substitution of the word, the text, "l'écriture" with rhythm, hieroglyph, jest, body has also influenced almost all of the contemporary western theater theories, for reflections on the theatre magic are definitely based to a large extent on his idea of destroying the humanist border of the classical theater, de(con)structing of the usual role of the author, doing away with structural hierarchies like "author-actor-audience". Thus comes the Derridean transfer of attention from rational meaning of the word to its body, which brings theatre back to the pre-verbal, pagan state, opening the way for the postmodern visual-plastic theatrical "l'écriture". It is the non-verbal signs and non-linguistic ways of signification that are in the center of attention in theater semiotics today. That is why the accents are being changed to the theater of jest, music, bodily movements, not words. In the Russian context this shift has also been noticed, though formulated within a different and out-dated discourse, e.g. in Oleg Yankovsky's lamentations that in contemporary theatre "the word has lost its power, the dramatic art has gone underground, directors are making no headway... the psychological

theatre is in a blind alley” and “the pictorial image on the stage determines more than the actor’s word. Maybe theatre has to keep silent for some time, i.e. nurture that specific magic word that would affect the audience unfailingly” (*Teatral’naja Zhiz’n* 7: 28).

The politically engaged theatre in this situation was deconstructed almost to a zero degree when it became clear that the denial of tradition, the classical repertoire, the notorious meta-narratives themselves have their particular political and ideological coloring and determinants as well. That is why in Western theater criticism and practice of the late 20th century, there emerged again the insoluble question of final de-politicization of theater and creation of a certain yet poorly defined “postmodernist theatrical magic”, based on ludic meta-semantics, that Melrose described in *Semiotics of Dramatic Text* (Melrose 1994: 40).

De-politicization inescapably leads to diving into the unconscious — individual as well as collective, and in theater theory and practice of the 1990s there emerged a revival of interest in post-Freudism in all its postmodern varieties — from Michel Foucault’s “cultural unconscious” to Frederick Jameson’s “political unconscious” and Jacques Lacan’s “libidinous unconscious”.

However in all these reasonings there is definitely a certain tinge of dreary uncertainty, an unstable positioning of a cold and detached observer of the irreversible entropy of cultural energies. In the world of simulacra and phantoms, is it possible that theater also becomes “cold seduction”, as television does? And the nostalgic retro-production of a classical play then, almost according to Baudrillard (Baudrillard 2000: 277–278), would have to be interpreted as an effort to “heat” an irretrievably cold historical or aesthetic event in the microwave of the exhausted theatrical experimentation.

The postmodern theory of theater, as is obvious, largely bases itself and relies on the audience as a new creator. Because the show has to be born at its destination, in the unstable and undefined, vague communicative space of performance. This is probably one of the most vulnerable points of all recent theories. According to Derrida, any theater is “l’écriture”, a letter that never reached the addressee. This phrase can be applied to the interpretation of Robert Sturua’s Shakespeare productions on several

Moscow stages — they never reached the addressee ... because of the ignorance and lack of readiness to understand and accept it on the part of the audience and theatre critics still brought up exclusively on Stanislavsky, who take the psychological theatre to be the norm. In reviews of Shakespeare productions, directed by Sturua, his shows are too often called “strange and belonging to a different theater generation, as if staged in a different époque”, though his aesthetics is in fact more postmodern than that of many younger directors, only repeating the day-before-yesterday discoveries of Western theater, largely because Sturua takes the postmodern theater itself ironically enough.

It turns out that theatre — the most postmodern of postmodern arts — in fact acquires a certain hindrance in self-realization, theater practice cannot keep up with theory, and a major obstacle is the non-readiness of the audience, its inability to co-create, and the non-absolute nature of its proclaimed freedom.

In his *La Représentation Émancipée* a French theorist Bernard Dort calls for the death of the tyrant director, suggesting that the time for the return of the actor's theater might have already come. On the stage we will see a personage or a rhetorical figure, which are never wholesome, but rather permeable, non-homogenous, because there is always an actor hiding behind the characters and the spectator realizes that. In Dort's view, at the moment when the body and the voice of an actor are being dissolved in the fiction created on the stage — they stay right there, to remind us that whatever metamorphoses happen, the actor does not just boil to it, there is more to the situation (Dort 1988: 173–184). The audience cannot help realizing that it is an actor, familiar to us in a certain recognizable part, in a certain “line of business”, it is a sign in a way. In this case it would be Konstantin Raikin playing Hamlet or a Kafkaesque bug from *Metamorphoses*, or Alexander Kaliagin, impersonating Shylock, through whose image there shows his Chaplin from the farce *Hello, I am Your Aunt*. The audience cannot help realizing that it is an actor, familiar in a certain recognizable role, self-reflecting within the space of this role, giving information about himself, sharing his opinions on life in general and this show in particular, erasing the difference between his playful/fictional and documentary existence. The actor is not

even being transformed outwardly, but, in V. Mikhajjev's words, "demonstrates his face or even image as a document, as an evidence of himself, stressing the distance between himself and his part (Mikhajjev 2000: 53).

Sturua, making a start from modernist concepts of theatricality, finds in a way a compromise, following V. Nabokov's commandment, and remaining the "God" in his show, but giving a restricted freedom to Menippean characters, like Konstantin Raikin's Hamlet and Alexander Kaliagin's Shylock, who are not simply images, but rather spaces, where various functions, power fields and vectors struggle and come together. In this respect Sturua proves a widely spread opinion, that the 20th century in theatre culture belonged to directors, at the same time questioning a timid and vague hope that the 21st will put the actors back in the center.

Direct political engagement and consequently the de-politicization of theater acquire specific overtones in Russia due to a number of obvious cultural-historical factors, and largely the death of the director never happened in this context, although new commercial times undermine the basis of permanent theatre and stable schools and systems, destroying the very possibility of either volatile or steady creative unions and groups. But metamorphic and flexible nature of contemporary actors and directors in Russia, their ability to adapt to any system, obviously have limits and lead to a quick satiation with the status of a lonely comet, and to willingness to take up once again a stable position in a permanent theater within a respected constellation of stars. Political emphasis as well as avant-garde defiance sickens Russian theatre audiences and critics, who have already had too much of it. A sophisticated spectator occupies an ostrich's position today, trying to disown any leftist and destructive sentiments, experiencing a not always fully realized as postmodern "yearning for the classics" or for "retro".

In Russia this opposition of avant-garde stylistics and the long-rejected by Western theorists psychological theater is especially painful today. But the psychological theater is still silently considered to be the norm, even though it is more often than not substituted for naturalistic plays of manners or by Meyerholdian stylistics, still regarded as the only possible representation of

avant-garde. In Russian theatre the already vague and poorly defined boundary between modernism and postmodernism is hardly being conceptualized or noticed at all. And it is not just a sign of its narrow scope and lack of theoretical grounding, but a reflection of diffusion of this dichotomy in theatrical culture as such. A Russian specialist in postmodernism Ilja Iljin is quite right, when he says that "postmodernism in theory proclaims equality of all styles, but in practice remains within the modernist paradigm. That is why aesthetic tolerance and peaceable disposition of postmodernism can be hardly conceptualized by avant-garde theater theorists, who in the 20th century have been steadily identifying themselves with political opposition to the bourgeois spirit and capitalism, traditionally rejecting its spiritual and aesthetic values. That is why on the one hand there is an admittance of the social and political nature of theater and its influence on the collective unconscious, but on the other hand, there is also a new tendency towards theoretical de-politicization, existing at the expense of the simultaneous presence and interconnection of mutually exclusive impulses. Efforts to accentuate the audience as the main deciphering and interpretative force in the complicated mutual imposition of various signs, creating a specific tension in the process of signification and negating the sovereign power of theatre director, release various components of performance for its activation by the audience, giving birth to a new theatre, not just presenting a text or improvising a slapstick, but critiquing the very process of signification. All these are in fact efforts at not particularly persuasive polemics of postmodernist theater theorists with structuralist interpretations of theater" (Iljin 1998: 193).

In this respect it is possible to interpret Sturua's Shakespeare productions as largely manifestations of postmodernism in post-soviet theatrical culture. These shows are seemingly based on well-known ideas of stylistic eclecticism and collage, sometimes, on ironically re-conceptualized Brechtian "Verfremdungseffekt" (alienation effect) and negation of empathy and identification with characters, on retaining of the audience's ability at critical judgement, on quotation-based modus, on a shift of usual accents even in the way the key and unimportant monologues are chosen and arranged, on a specific "past-future-ness" and the use of tragic

farce as the main genre. Sturua's rendition of postmodernism however becomes extremely self-ironic, self-negating and self-reflective, in a way it is an overcoming of postmodernity through partial, ironic, nostalgic rev(is)iting of modernism. It seems that Sturua's productions in this sense are close to the model of postmodern aesthetics, described by Umberto Eco. For him the post modern answer to avant-garde is admitting the impossibility of destroying the past and invitation to its ironic re-conceptualization. We live in the époque of simplicity forever lost, in Eco's interpretation, experiencing a permanent attack of the past, attack of everything said before us that we cannot undo and can not ignore either. That is why there is the inevitability of quotations as a postmodern mode of existence, that is why the irony and game as an existential trick (Eco 1989: 461). Precisely for this reason it is almost impossible to stage *Hamlet* today, even with *Shylock* it is easier to do, because the play has received a second life relatively recently, with the activation of fashionable "otherness" problematics. As in Eco's well-known example of two postmodern characters' declarations of love, where a declaration of love remained a declaration, even though a playful and quotational one (ib.), Sturua's *Hamlet* remained a *Hamlet*, even though he scratches himself, picks his nose, and gabbles his monologue "to be or not to be", with his back to the audience. In a sense one can speak here of a new understanding of the ludic space, different from classic interpretations. The effect of theatrical conventions is often still technically intact, as in Sturua's *Hamlet*, but there is a more and more intimate confluence of fiction and reality, a mutual dissolving of theater and life, actively involving the audiences in the performance.

According to Derrida, the tragic fate of representation in contemporary theater ends with the festival of violence, destroying the difference between nature and culture (Derrida 2000: 372–373). The actor then is not just organic, he is television-like documentary, true-to-life. He reaches a specific degree of "public solitude", when practically anything can happen on the stage, eroding the boundary between theatre and other types of art. But even so Sturua's *Hamlet*, as a combination of certain signs, did not stop to generate particular meanings, the same way as it happened in

avant-garde performances of the early 20th century that Yevreinov tried to mock in his script. Then and now artistic revolutionaries, proponents of eccentricity, pointed out that theater should be regenerated through minor forms, where the sense of theatricality is still alive, such as the music-hall, the circus, the cinema. Then and now it was fashionable to modernize the classical repertoire, if too often in a kitsch form. Already in the 1920s there were Hamlets in sports costumes, playing football, and their re-appearance in the 1980-s, e.g. in a number of Moscow highly politicized and modernized Shakespeare productions, was only a shallow remake. Sturua's productions are something different indeed, not just modernizations of classics, but rather recreations of a specific sense of time-less-ness and space-less-ness, of mutual penetration of times and cultural topi, of various traditions, of cultural-aesthetic hybridity, characteristic of late postmodernism. This "past-future-ness" in a sense stands for the eschatology of modernity. Computers and monitors in Shylock's office are needed not to modernize the story of the *Jew of Malta*, but to point out the possible simultaneity of alternative realities, multiplicity of various time-spaces, the unstable freedom of shifting from one reality to another, from one virtual space to another — from computer virtual reality into a literary and finally into a theatrical one. They are needed for Sturua as a possibility of an-*other* world. Thus, in *Shylock*, where there are all necessary elements for the destruction of the psychological effect of empathizing with characters, Shylock's servant appears first on the TV screen, and only then in the reality of the show and asks a question: "Is this Shakespeare? *Shylock*? Did I come to the right place?" There emerges a complicated mutual imposition of various fictional planes, and somewhere on their criss-crossing there still exists the real tragedy of Shylock, which remained untouched, un-changed, in spite of the tragic-farcical way of its interpretation.

Sturua is practicing a certain variety of a tragic farce, which is usually based on the grotesque and here the director seems to be following the logic of G. Kozintsev and L. Trauberg who pointed out a subtle difference between the eccentricity of Mack Sennet's cinema and later, that of the Marx brothers, with their meaningless gags and *Die Lust am Vernichten* (joy on the occasion of

destroying the “topsy-turvy” world), or later verbal eccentricity of alogism and paradox on the verge of the absurd, as opposed to putting an additional layer of meaning into ex-centricity in Chaplin’s films, when instead of joyful destruction we see a serious effort to put the world back on its feet again, or maybe even «set back the joints of time» (Trauberg 1984: 131, Kozintsev).

It is not a chance that in Sturua’s *Hamlet* there is a definite visual-palpable allusion to F. Dürrenmatt — the author of many brilliant tragic farces in the 20th-century fiction, who once noted that “grotesque is necessary for contemporary literature. Tragedy presupposes blame, necessity, measure, responsibility. In the slaughter-house of our century there are no guilty and responsible left. Everything broke loose from its usual place. Our world had led to grotesque as it did to the atomic bomb... But the grotesque is just a sensual expression, a sensual paradox, the image of the image-less, the face of a faceless world” (quoted in Zatonsky 1979: 99). Dürrenmatt’s world grows on the outskirts of Sturua’s *Hamlet* in the image of a miner’s car, rolling out of a gloomy, dark tunnel and revealing a sleeping Hamlet in its depths, and rolling back the same way in the end, taking the character to nowhere, into the unconscious. This allusion to Dürrenmatt’s favorite image of the tunnel, the underground, the unconscious appears in Sturua’s show as a link to the aesthetics of tragic farce, so favored by Dürrenmatt. Sturua also pointed out that tragic farce is the genre of his *Satirikon* production and a result of not seeing the world in one particular angle. Dürrenmatt is a key figure for *Shylock* as well. Even the *Shylock* theatre programme opens with his words, shedding some light on the director’s interpretation of the main character’s dilemma: “I refuse to see any difference between peoples and speak of good and bad nations, but I have to stress the difference between individuals, this was hammered into my head, and with the first blow that forced its way into my body I began to tell the torturers from the tortured... If there is a God, then on Judgement Day there will be people in front of him, not nations or ethnicities, and he will judge everyone by his own measure of personal crimes and justify by the measure of his justice.” (Theater Programme)

In an interview to the *Russian Jewish Journal* Kaliagin is echoing Dürrenmatt's idea stressing that art should unite and not disunite people. Opposing persistent attempts of an interviewer to present Shakespeare's play, as a text "about the position and treatment of Jewish people by other nations", Kaliagin suggests that for him, as well as for Sturua, Shylock is first of all an individual and only after that a Jew. "A great internationalist, philosopher, Georgian Sturua was directing a production not about the problem of Jewish-ness and not about Shylock as a sign of this problem. We made a show about a man, who has a Jewish name, and has to live in a hostile environment. We followed this man because the most interesting thing is not "to raise a problem", but see it through a person, as it happens in Chaplin. Shylock is offering his contract, jokingly at first, or rather he knows from the very start that he is going to lose the case, and he consciously does that to prove to everyone how imperfect their world is" (Kolmogorova 2000: 13). That is how Shylock is transformed from a stilted villain into a ex-centric and absurdist, almost in the vein of Trauberg and Kozintsev.

The meta-linguistic and meta-symbolic games in Sturua's productions do not always follow the logic of a presumably democratic postmodern theater "text", which should ideally allow the most unsophisticated of spectators, who would take everything at it's face value, take part in it. According to Melrose, a whole array of elements are being mutually imposed in the postmodern performance, including the re-evaluation of what already took place on the stage. It is a certain slippage, constantly switching attention from what is immediately happening to the time past, both fictional and real (Melrose 1994: 308), enabling the audience to make comparisons between Shakespeare's text, in this case, and other Sturua's productions, as well as with established images of Raikin and Kaliagin. But the unsophisticated audience (and it is only this audience today who can afford to go to the theater) laughs at *Hamlet* because Raikin is funny as a representation of himself. It is his tricks that are funny, his physical plasticity, which hardly corresponds in the audience's mind with any intertextuality, much less with his subtle parody on the postmodern "performative behavior" (ib. 266), superceding psychological insight, and

connected with the sphere of unconscious. It is not a chance that the ironic re-conceptualizing of psychoanalytic symbols is characteristically stressed in both productions. This refers to almost all "shoe-symbolism", presented in a mockingly fetishist way: Hamlet, Ophelia, Antonio, Portia and her Mauretanian fiancé alternatively put them on, take them off, throw them at each other. In *Shylock* there is also an important symbol of mocked, dethroned and yet re-established authorship, personified in the baton, a magic wand of a sorts and a symbol of agency and creativity, migrating from the hands of the ennui-ed Antonio, imagining this whole "happening", to Portia, impersonating the lawyer, and finally, to Shylock. Such is also Shylock's umbrella that has migrated into the show either from a Freudian dream or from Charlie Chaplin's imagery.

The energy of agency, not insight, or interiorization, which according to Melrose's theory of "somatography" (Melrose 1994: 308), should supercede the psychological theater, is connected with "performative behavior", with an accent on muscle work, jests, bodily movements, that are coming to subdue the word, aggressively dictating the organization of the spectator's visual attention. For instance, Sturua's Hamlet has literary no rest on the stage, moving physically without stopping even for a second. Shakespeare's text, which is a collage of various existing translations of the play (in *Hamlet* Sturua uses B. Pasternak's and M. Lozinsky's, A. Kroneberg's, A. Radlova's and P. Gnedich's versions), paradoxically resonates with this character's bodily movements. Hamlet pronounces his monologue in a monotonous way, while climbing the balustrade with a great effort and, it seems, absolutely meaninglessly, to remain poised in mid-air, upside down. In *Shylock* the bored Antonio, sick with life itself, would violently beat his friend Graciano with his feet, simultaneously pronouncing in a purely "Clockwork Orange" way Shakespeare's text in a nonchalant tone: "Why are you here? Everybody is looking for you!"

Discussing the future theater of the 21st century, both western and Russian theorists, directors, actors accentuate similar problems — the necessity and inability as yet to find a certain emotional basis and humane element, instead of exhausted psycho-

logical theater, to transform it somehow, maybe even give it a new life. Humanism discourses no doubt sound discredited in today's postmodernist environment, additionally acquiring in the post-soviet cultural context a specific ideological connotation. Contemporary Russian theatre is especially sensitive in its reaction to deconstruction of such ideologically overloaded notions as humanism, internationalism, compassion, etc. These words sound as if they come from a different époque, and many directors feel it necessary to deconstruct and turn them inside-out to find their unexpected, overlooked and possibly unblemished overtones. Can it be possible, that not being able to quite absorb postmodernism, we are already yearning for the return of discredited humanism? What is it — a curse word or a newly resurrected ideal? Yet the values that lost their meaning are the only ones that we are left with. And it is important not to stop at their destruction, but go further and create something anew. This newness is being born in Sturua's productions in an unexpected way. Trans-culturation and ethic-aesthetic diversality and polyphony function on various planes and combine different kinds of art, levels of perception and expression, so the general effect is almost impossible to discern on either the textual level or the actors' performance, the music or the scenery. It exists only as a complex, volatile, almost non-verbalized sensation — that very "theatre magic", that is creating a new wholeness and, unexpectedly, a new complicity out of patch-like self-reflective un-coordinated-ness. It is not a chance that for a theater critic Natalia Staroselskaja the most important thing in Sturua's *Hamlet* is yet a transformation through suffering and as a result — a new unity (Staroselskaja 2000: 57).

In Sturua's productions theatrical principles and styles of different times, traditions, trends and schools all come together in a peculiar and unpredictable way, creating a specific oxymoronic effect of organic eclecticism. The unifying powerful presence of the director's individuality and his clearly defined intention dictates not only the way the actors play, but also the way the audience interprets them. And this interference of high modernist authorial positioning into the postmodern chaotic element is a brilliant and the only appropriate decision in the postmodern Russian theatre today, faultlessly found by Sturua. In *Hamlet* and *Shylock* the

audience faces a peculiar mutual superimposition of several cultures and different traditions in the multidimensional space of these spectacles. Wonderful and subtly Georgian music by Gija Kancheli combines with picturesque collage of costumes by George Alexi-Meskhishvili, each of which brings a certain train of quotations. Kaliagin in a black three-piece suit with a black umbrella and a bowler hat resembles simultaneously Charlie Chaplin and himself, playing the part of a tramp in *Aunt Charley*, Ophelia is dressed as a Tbilisi resident of fin de siècle, Jessica looks rather like Lolita in white socks and a school uniform, Hamlet — a permanent student almost in the Chekhovian sense, is dressed in a well-worn greatcoat, the Prince of Aragon appears on the stage in a military Mussolini-like uniform, followed by his bodyguards. Sturua is also trying to change to the opposite the ethnic-cultural stereotypes of Shakespeare's times, yet again mocking their frigid stability and tenaciousness to this very day.

Russian and post-soviet culture brings a certain set of values into these performances as well, especially, in connection with specific interpretation of otherness and othering (and anti-Semitism as its concrete manifestation). That is why there are some very risky quotations in *Shylock's* theatre programme, borrowed from Vassily Rosanov and F. Dostojevsky, each with his own "Russian idea", based on the discrimination of an "other". That is why in *Hamlet* we encounter a more encrypted and less obvious than in *Shylock* performance of a very "Jewish" actor Konstantin Raikin, whose Hamlet is physiological, almost to the extent of Joyce's Leopold Bloom, and is bound to be read through the palisade of quotations, building into a particular line of symbols and metaphors. Hamlet's bodily plasticity evokes Franz Kafka's *Metamorphoses* (already done by Raikin). The over-stressed Freudian complexes and compensations, his self-assertion at the expense of others — all demonstrate the character's repulsive and un-Hamletian features. This is an "other" Hamlet, not the one the theater audiences and readers are used to. The multiplicity of existing interpretations reverberates in the body of Sturua's productions and requires a substantial intellectual preparation and alertness from the audience. Even *Shylock's* theater programme is

a typically postmodernist collection of facts, taken out of the historical and cultural context, it is a collage of juxtaposed and opposed points of view on the questions of difference, diversity and otherness.

In this context it is interesting to see how Sturua plays on one of the devices of avant-garde theater, when a character is going off the rails of the performance, falling out of its general stylistics. This refers to *Hamlet* but even more so to *Shylock*. In avant-garde performances of the early 20th century, e.g. in the so called bio-mechanical show "Give us Hamlet", a "Distorted Mirror" theater parody on Meyerhold's constructivism, the actor playing Hamlet, pronounced his text with the classic howls of the tragedian that contrasted with the every-day, ordinary intonations of superintendent Polonius and a career girl Ophelia (Kholmshkaja 2000:15). This simple and effective device is used by Sturua as well, although on a much more nuanced and subtle level. Shylock is falling out of the show because he is very different from the rest of identical, almost Brechtian characters-stereotypes. Kaliagin is an actor of the psychological school, who is really living out his Shylock, resonating with a completely different atmosphere of the rest of the performance. He is the only really *acting* persona on the stage, an agent, not a self-reflecting subject or a stereotype. Another Russian director A. Zhitinkin, who staged *The Merchant of Venice*, simultaneously with Sturua in Mossovet Theater with Michail Kazakov as Shylock, seemingly uses the same (post)-modern device, juxtaposing Shylock's solo to the rest of the show, based on the principle of video clips. But Kazakov's solo is yet a caricature, a cartoon-ish embodiment of aggression and hatred, which is only structurally, superfluously opposed to the show. Kaliagin's Shylock is more subtle and diverse, he is a talented dissembler, saying and doing everything to impress the audience around him, but he is at the same time a loving father, for whom his daughter's treachery is the tragedy of his whole life, and someone ready to sacrifice himself, testing the very ethics of this world. Shylock does not hate Antonio, but only the world, that he represents, and he is trying to play, according to the rules of that hostile world where he has to survive.

A very accurate director's decision, in a sense wiping out the dichotomy of justification/ non-justification of Shylock's behavior, is the episode with a spilled cup of coffee. In Kaliagin's words, Shylock is a really talented businessman, who takes his religion or any religion for that matter as a businessman. His employee accidentally spills a cup of coffee on his master's suit — Shylock removes the young man's "kipa" and wipes the spilt coffee with it. It is a pragmatic logic of sorts: I don't care what all the religious symbols and attributes are about if my suit was spoiled. "Shylock seriously recalls that he is Jewish only when he gets into a trouble. His favorite daughter was kidnapped, she herself robbed him — and at that moment he kisses his "kipa", puts on his "tales" and addresses his God and his people" (Kolmogorova 2000: 14).

Sturua's *Shylock*, as well as his other productions, if only in a more graphic and visible way, plays on the postmodern idea of de-centrality. It is not even called *The Merchant of Venice*, but rather just simply *Shylock*. The show lacks the center, it is principally fragmentary, somehow getting more and more out of order, as it unfolds, increasingly spreading about to the end. In fact, there is no end, no denouement per se. This open-ness and unfinished nature can be interpreted as a representation of a salutary post-modern myth of ambivalence, and even purposeful self — contradiction. And today we can hardly ask more from theater. Otherwise we are risking to slide back into the simplicity of monologous and logocentric interpretations.

But no device is ever consistent in Sturua's shows. Rather he is replaying, remaking the already known, contemplating it on the way. This errant way of a theatrical performance à la Sturua is filled with a barely perceptible weariness with worn-out devices and decisions, which marks the actors, the director, the sophisticated audiences. An embodiment of this weariness is of course no one, but the merchant of Venice himself — in a sense the director's alter ego, even though de-centered and displaced by Shylock. Antonio is not presented just as a bored director of the "performance within a performance", conducting everything that is happening on the stage and imagining the rest of the characters.

He is also a man of the First Modernity, familiar with anguish, weariness, a specific feeling of dwelling in the waste land, self-destructive inclinations, which will become the tragic signs of modernism and an ironic common-place in postmodernism. Antonio — a thinking and suffering representative of totality, its “same-ness”, is consumed with western tedium, which is not an individual position, but rather a civilizational one that makes him Hamlet’s brother. Sturua tried to bring out in Shakespeare the signs that would lead to T.S. Eliot’s *Waste Land*, William Faulkner’s *Quentin Compson*, Edward Albee’s *Zoo Story*. Only instead of a knife, put into the hands of a chance interlocutor and used by Jerry to commit a suicide, Antonio tries to do it with the help Shylock the only acting subject in the show. Sturua’s power is not in modernization, but rather in the fact that he understood and tried to expose, as he saw them, the roots of othering and otherness, tracing them 500 years back in time, and juxtaposing the energies of agency and inertia, personified by Shylock and Antonio, a conflict lying at the basis of the much-discussed weariness of the Western subject, and on the contrary, a thriving pragmatic, utilitarian attitude to life, understood already by Shakespeare as a sad and threatening prospect for the next half millennium.

One can easily interpret a revival of interest in *Shylock* as a fad. *The Merchant of Venice* is a play that has not been staged that often even in England, only in the last decades it has received specific attention precisely because of the aesthetization of otherness. In Western scholarly journals one can often come across articles denouncing Shakespeare as a racist and an anti-Semite. Sturua and Kaliagin interpret this play in a more nuanced way, not in shallow stereotypes of political correctness and angry theater of accusations still typical for many multicultural playwrights and directors in the US. They also faced the danger of playing too hard on the “Jewish question”, the difficulty of finding just the right tone to interpret the now fashionable being persecuted in the past. And they coped with their difficult task. It is not a chance that famous Shylock’s monologue about the equality of all nations, the same way as Hamlet’s key monologues, becomes a passing,

seemingly unimportant one, and is moved off the center. Kaliagin's Shylock is obviously dissembling square, in a quite demonstrative way, when he speaks of the equality of all nations. But unexpectedly it is this same hypocrite that turns out to be organic and sincere when he reacts to the words of doomed Antonio — "I am ready", with an astonished, but quiet question: "And that is all?" Kaliagin interprets this favorite place in his part as an interference of the other, the outsider, necessary to demonstrate to the same, how monstrous their life is, how easily they let one of them die, because of mere negligence and simple thoughtlessness. In the center of the director's attention then stands the opposition of the other and the totality of the system, never questioning itself, and not the notorious Jewish question.

Sturua's theatre is not political in the Western postmodern understanding of the term. In *Shylock* there are no straightforward assessments of Jewishness or anti-Semitism. But there is an effort to go away from bare political conceptualism and create a post-post-modern, post-post-avant-garde theatre, to find an elusive third way, which would not be coming back to psychological theater or a replica of the theatre of absurd. Sturua paradoxically continues to focus on the individual, even when it is denied, and precisely on the individual as a strong and even sometimes violent and violently ironical authorial presence and intention. In this sense he can be interpreted just as well as a late modernist and definitely as someone, fearlessly stepping over the prolonged period of theater with dead directors, authors and eliminated characters, to re-proclaim his position as a demiurg, restoring the order in the show in some unexpected ways, and fathering an illusive and transient theatrical magic, a marvelous effect, yet impossible to rationalize in any of existing theories.

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The Politics of the Postmodernist Theatre in China

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Jürgen Habermas, the German historian-sociologist, proposes to study the rise of the modern bourgeois society in relation to the emergence of the public sphere, by which he means "first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens. ... Citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion; thus with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely" (Habermas 1991: 398). The relevance of Habermas's idea of the public sphere to the study of contemporary Chinese cultural forms lies in its analysis of the opposition between the authority of the state and the autonomy of society, in which the public sphere serves as the basis of political institutions legitimized from below by informed discussion and reasoned argument. In other words, the public sphere is seen as the social foundation of the modern Western style of democracy and the process of public opinion making, which is often referred to by Habermas as the bourgeois public sphere. The idea of the public sphere in relation to the rise of oppositional discourse and ideology is particularly useful in the study of changes in the contemporary Chinese culture, as Julia Kristeva has convincingly argued that the change in an art form or style is often a result of the change in ideology (Kristeva 1984: 165). Habermas's idea of the public sphere is useful in the study of the public opinion, particularly in relation to the structural transformation of society and cultural change.

It is beyond doubt that contemporary Chinese culture constitutes an institution of public sphere Habermas has described, in which there is the public space for the use of dramatic situations to satirize current political and social events in opposition to the authority of the state. This tradition of culture, especially the theatre, as an institution of public sphere has been extensively used as a revolutionary tactic in various periods of modern Chinese history, first by the late Qing intellectuals against the Manchu regime, then by the Nationalists against the warlords, and later by the Marxists against the Nationalists. The theatre has actually become the contested ground for opposing ideologies in traditional as well as modern China.

The Chinese Social Problem Play as an Oppositional Discourse

One of the hallmarks of the modern Chinese theatre is its unreserved acceptance of realism as a preferred mode of representation. This realistic mode of theatrical representation bears a political imprint in modern China as it relates the theatre to social life and current politics in such a way that the theatre serves the purpose of providing a public sphere for oppositional ideology against state authority. It might be useful, at the outset, to clarify the nature of modern Chinese theatrical realism with reference to the various notions and practices of realism in Western culture, before any discussion of the relation between realism and contemporary Chinese politics and ideology. With its experiments of the Japanese *shingeki* and *shimpa* in Tokyo by the Spring Willow Society in the 1910s, the modern Chinese theatre began with a tradition as political and cultural critique, in which the social and ideological implications of the theatre were emphasized. However, the theatre reform in China since the May 4th Movement in 1919 focused mainly on the technical aspects of stage management and playwriting with the aim of achieving the political effects desired by the revolutionary enthusiasm of the time in the style of the Enlightened Theatre [wenming xi]. None of the early modern

Chinese playwrights had any idea of realism and their reform was the revolutionaries' reform, rather than the artists'. The real effort to set a realist framework for the Chinese theatre was made by Hu Shi who published an essay "Ibsenism" [Yibusheng zhuyi] in *New Youth* in 1918. The original intent of this essay was to introduce Western concepts of individualism and the romantic revolutionary spirit to the Chinese. However, in his attempt to relate individualism to Ibsenism, Hu Shi had to spend a great deal of effort on discussing the philosophy of Ibsenian drama. Hu Shi's understanding of the Ibsenian style was later taken to be the only realistic mode by many Chinese dramatists, and became the theoretical foundation of modern Chinese theatre. Hence, the early modern Chinese theatre as an institution of the public sphere bore much of the ideological imprint of realism, with a superficial understanding of which was restricted mainly to Hu Shi's view of Ibsenism, as he says,

There is a passage in Ibsen's last play *When We Dead Awaken*, which shows clearly the essence of his dramaturgy. The protagonist of the play is an artist who spent most of his energy for a sculpture entitled "The Day of Resurrection". The artist says the following about the history of the sculpture:

With no experience of life. I envisaged Resurrection as something perfect and beautiful — a pure young girl, unstained by life, awakening to light and glory without having to free herself from anything ugly or clean. ... In the years after, ... I gained experience and knowledge. I began to envisage "The Day of Resurrection" as something bigger, something — something more complex. ... I portrayed what I saw with my own eyes in the world around me. I had to. I had no choice. ... I enlarged the pedestal, I made it broad and spacious. On it I set a small lump on our curved and fissured earth. And out of the fissures swarmed people, with the faces of beasts beneath their human masks. Women and men, as I knew them, from life. (II, 250–51)

This is the Ibsenian method. The portrayal of the girl unstained by life is idealized literature, while that of people with the faces of beasts beneath the human masks is realistic literature. Ibsenian literature and Ibsenian philosophy can be summarized in the word of Realism. In 1882 he wrote a letter to his friend, in which he says: "The purpose of my writing is to let people feel from the bottom of their hearts that all what they read are truth" (*Correspondences*, No. 159). (Hu Shi 1918: 589-590)

The impact of Hu Shi's view on the modern Chinese intellectuals was so explosive that the general Chinese reader in the 1910s, as well as later theatre critics and theorists, was led to believe that the political issues and social critique raised by Ibsen were the only material in his plays, and they regarded the theatre as a place for moral-social didacticism, which was later accepted uncritically as a definition of realism. In Hu Shi's idea, realism is inseparable from the social truthfulness of subject matter, and is thus equated with the playwright's moral-political attitude. In this way, realism is not conceived as a theatrical style in its technical sense. Hu Shi's idea of realism is apparently very different from Ibsen's original intent, since when Ibsen says that his purpose of playwriting is to let people "*feel*" that all what they read is truth, what he means is that it is only a style that can make the subject of drama seem true, which in reality may not necessarily be so. That is to say, Ibsen defines realism as an illusionistic effect created as a result of theatrical technique, while the subject matter may not be based on real events in life. As a matter of fact, Ibsen had denied many times throughout his life that his plays were based on real events.

Similar to Hu Shi, Zhou Zuoren also argues on the primary significance of subject matter as a determining element of realism. In his seminal essay "Ren de wenxue" [A humanistic literature], which was published in *New Youth* in the same year and had been regarded as the manifesto of the New Culture Movement, Zhou says, "What we should promote as new literature is simply a humanistic literature, . . . which keeps record of and studies human problems" (Zhou Zuoren 1918: 578). Although Zhou Zuoren did not use the term realism, it is apparent that he attempts to define

the modernity of Chinese literature as realistic in subject matter. The result is that Chinese playwrights and critics in the 1920s and 30s generally followed the tradition established by Hu Shi and Zhou Zuoren in their assessment of the theatre and consideration of a play based on the presence or absence of the realistic mode.

On the issue of "human problems," both Hu Shi and Zhou Zuoren examined man not as an individual, but as part of a socio-moral system. Thus the idea of a literature for man is no different from social criticism, and is virtually an inheritance of the nineteenth-century positivism, in which there is the belief in the possibility of representing social reality through the playwright's perception. This is philosophically an essentialist view, which believes in the existence of reality and also that reality can be grasped by a rational mind. Having laid its foundation on positivism, the modern Chinese theatre was re-formulated in the 1930s as a theatre of the social-problem play based on Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *The Pillars of Society* as models structured on the elements of "exposition", "complication", "crisis". and "discussion". The discussion scene in the plays of Guo Moruo, Tian Han, and other political playwrights became a very powerful means for the dissemination of revolutionary ideas in the 1920s and 1930s. This was particularly the case with the theorists of the "wenxue yanjiu hui" [Association for literary studies], who were concerned with the political function of the theatre as an oppositional ideology. With the general emphasis on the primacy of subject matter over form, it follows that the technical aspects of realist drama have often been neglected. This indirectly reflects the over-emphasis on the playwright's realistic worldview.

The Socialist Problem Play as an Ideological State Apparatus

When the oppressed came to power in 1949, the Marxist theatre as an institution of the public sphere immediately lost its oppositional effect. Zhou Yang, the Chinese Marxist literary authority and chief exponent of socialist realism in the 1950s, believed that the central

and most important task of literary and artistic activities, as defined by socialist realism, is to portray, on the one hand, the new generation of people and their new ideas and, on the other, to oppose the enemies and their attitudes. The party policy stressed that the theatre as a political discourse should create positive, heroic characters who were to be held up as political models to educate the people. There was a general belief among Chinese Marxists that the task of portraying revolutionary (therefore positive) heroes is inseparable from the task of exposing reactionary (therefore negative) forces. Writers, moreover, must show that the backward and the reactionary would inevitably be overwhelmed by the invincible, new forces (Zhou Yang 1954: 31).

All these discursive elements of the socialist problem play described by Zhou Yang can be considered as reiteration of elements in Ibsen's social problem plays, if they be abstracted from their context and generalized as a political discourse. In *A Doll's House*, Nora and Helmer are read by the Chinese socialist critics as a pair of opposites in acute confrontation with each other: the former is positive, and the latter negative. The conflicts must be resolved in such a way that the negative (villain) is overwhelmed by the positive (hero/heroine). This of course is not the original intent of Ibsen's play. Zhou Yang's idea of socialist realism was further developed by Li Jianwu, a notable Chinese dramatist and critic in the 1950s, who defined the socialist theatre as a stage reflection of socio-political conflicts. Li Jianwu held the view that tragedy was a product of feudal or bourgeois society and that a socialist society would only produce comedy. The death of the hero should never occur in a socialist play because in socialist society the hero always dominated over the villain. With this notion of realism Li Jianwu further pointed out that socialist drama had a structure of "exposition, complication, crisis, and resolution" (Li 1980: 56). Li Jianwu believed that socialist drama should not have a discussion scene because the socialist society was so superior and fair that nothing was irresolvable, and no compromise was needed. Li Jianwu's view of socialist drama was typical of the Chinese idea of socialist realism in the 1960s.

Contemporary Chinese dramaturgy as a stage reflection of class struggle was concretized into a coherent dramatic theory by Gu

Zhongyi, a professor at the Shanghai Drama Institute and a famous dramatist in the 1960s. Gu asserted the interrelationship between conflicts in life and conflicts in drama, although he thought that they were different in degree. Dramatic conflicts, he said, had to reflect those in life, and conflicts in life form the basis of dramatic conflicts, which in turn were concrete, figurative presentations of conflicts in life after they became typicalized, generalized, and elevated (Gu 1981: 100). To give an example to explain this relationship between conflicts in life and those in drama, Gu cited scenes from Ibsen's *The Pillars of Society* and *A Doll's House* to stress that many of the events and characters in these two plays originated from real life (ib. 101). Gu believed that some of Ibsen's plays were based on real people and real events, and Ibsen's job was only to recapitulate the real events in the form of art. In this way, Gu claimed that *A Doll's House* was a dramatization of the social contradictions between male dominance and women's emancipation (ib.).

In Chinese Marxist dramatic theory, which had been experimented with in the 1950s and 1960s, it was believed that dramatic conflicts constituted drama of great social significance, and it was concretized on the stage as conflicts of will between characters. The conflicts between characters materialized on the stage as a series of actions, which generated the drama (Li 1980: 56). In another sense, the theatre was a stage for the reenactment of social conflicts. Thus in contemporary China it has become a tradition for critics to look at art primarily as a social product, which is subject to class struggle and power relations. There is some truth in this view, but it becomes mechanical once all aesthetic considerations are replaced by power relations. The overemphasis on dramatic conflicts as the essence of drama and the confusion of dramatic conflicts with social class struggles resulted in many playwrights' general approach to life from a politicized perspective. Once the abstract principles deduced from the social problem play are taken as truth for playwriting, it simply means that politico-philosophical concepts and artistic creativeness will become a process of mechanical application. This perhaps explains why Chinese audiences always complain that most contemporary plays in China share the same structural pattern and their endings

can often be predicted according to the socialist logic. It is the presence of a politicized universal plane on which all events are projected that makes drama cease to be a (re)presentation of life, but become a formula. In other words, the method of political logical deduction affects the creative process and thus takes away from drama the qualities of life, which can only be presented as a figurative and plastic art on the stage. Hence, realism is no longer realistic in the sense of being mimetic of life but in the sense of being true to a formula, which represents absolute truth only to the philosophers but never to the spectator.

The socialist criticism of the use of the "discussion scene" as a dramatic technique evasive of a resolution led simply to a return to the dramatic structure of "exposition, complication, crisis, and resolution", a conventional structure popular in the nineteenth-century French well-made play. In this respect, the Chinese socialist interpretation of realism was thus a departure from the Ibsenian problem play and signified a return to the nineteenth-century positivist notion, from which orthodox Marxism originated, that there was resolution for every social problem. In fact, one of the modernist elements in Ibsen's drama lies in that there is not always an answer to every question. However, it is exactly for this skeptical attitude that the Chinese Marxists and other socialist critics find fault with Ibsen. The change in structure from an ending with a "discussion scene" to an ending with a resolution scene in the Chinese socialist problem play demonstrated exactly how the change in political situation affects the immanent development of literary structures (Fokkema 1978: 5). The Chinese Marxist notion of the socialist problem play solely as a maneuvering of social and moral conflicts also had its origin in the nineteenth-century French dramatic theory. In his famous definition of drama as the conflict of wills, which had always been cited as a doctrine by Chinese Marxist dramatic theorists, Ferdinand Brunetière said,

Le drame, en général, c'est l'*action*, c'est l'imitation de la vie médiocre et douloureuse; c'est une représentation de la volonté de l'homme en conflit avec les puissances mystérieuses ou les forces naturelles

qui nous limitent et nous rapetissent; c'est l'un de nous jeté tout vivant sur la scène pour y lutter contre la fatalité, contre la loi sociale, contre un de ses semblables, contre soi-même au besoin, contre les ambitions, les intérêts, les préjugés, la sottise, la malveillance de ceux qui l'entourent.

(Brunetière 1893: 152–153)

Viewed in this way, the Chinese idea of a socialist theatre was an extension and modification of Brunetière's concept of "dramatic conflicts." From an orthodox Marxist point of view, the theatre served as a mirror of class conflicts, which were represented by the differing wills of the characters on stage. Although Brunetière did not make it clear whether dramatic conflicts could be equated with class struggles, his idea was extended by the Chinese Marxists to include stage reflection of the course of revolutionary social change. Any social change, in the view of Chinese Marxists, must be a result of the resolution of conflicts. Thus, Brunetière's definition of drama suited well the Chinese Marxist mode of thinking. In this way, a system of socialist theatre came to shape with Brunetière's idea of dramatic conflict as its theatrical foundation, Ibsen's social problem play as its structure, and Stanislavsky's "method" as its style. Because of its powerful impact, the socialist theatre as a political discourse had been used as a means of social intervention during the Chinese course of revolution, as well as a means of power struggle during the Cultural Revolution. Examples can be found in the three socialist realistic plays, which were very popular in the 1950s and 1960s. They were *Lie huo hong xin* [Raging flames and glowing hearts, 1958], *Hang long fu hu* [Taming the dragon and the tiger, 1958], and *Qian wan bu yao wang ji* [Never never forget, 1963], all of which share the same characteristic of politicizing minor affairs in daily life to reflect ideological conflicts and class struggles.

The substitution of class conflict for dramatic conflict as a theory of the theatre in China was actually an attempt to turn the theatre into a state machinery for the propaganda of an authoritative ideology, which in Habermas's view is to "position" people according to some imaginary relationships. In this way, the Chinese theatre in the 1950s and 1960s lost its power as an

institution of public sphere in its opposition to state authority. Instead it became an SIA (state ideological apparatus).

With regard to the stage conventions in contemporary China, Ibsen's social problem play and "the fourth wall" mode of presentation, together with Stanislavsky's acting style, became the mainstream of Chinese theatre in the 1950s through the 70s; it was also accepted by many drama critics as a universally true principle, which excluded other possibilities of stage style. For decades in China, the socialist problem play in the vein of Ibsenian drama, but modified and coloured with socialist realism, was the only form of modern drama known to audiences and critics. And such a practice was in full operation until 1976 when the political discourse of the socialist problem play collapsed.

New Chinese Theatre as an Institution of Public Sphere

The politicization of the theatre in China in the 1960s and 70s led to a crisis in the Chinese theatre in the 1980s because of the decreasing interest among the audiences in any play that was based on a formula and could be predicted in a mechanical way. This crisis further led to a general rethinking of the Chinese theatre in terms of its nature and function among the critics and theorists. The first systematic reconsideration of the socialist realistic theatre took place in 1983 in a nation-wide debate on the essence of the theatre [xiju xing]. Tan Peisheng, a professor at the Central Academy of Drama, Beijing, introduced a new view of drama based on William Archer's idea of the dramatic, which has been generally regarded as the opposite of Brunetière's theory. Tan thought that conflicts alone did not constitute the essence of drama. Instead, "crisis" did. Under this new view of drama, a play was defined as a "rapidly-developing crisis in destiny or circumstance, and a dramatic scene is a crisis within a crisis, clearly furthering the ultimate event. The drama might thus be called the art of crises, as fiction is the art of gradual development" (Archer 1944: 36). Archer placed more emphasis on crisis because he wanted to ask what interested the audience most: the conflict or the crisis? Tan

Peisheng's purpose in introducing Archer's idea of crisis and the dramatic was to remind the Chinese audiences, as well as the dramatists, that there was an alternative theatre that might not be constituted of conflicts.

This new notion of drama and theatre was accompanied by a new interpretation of Ibsen's drama, most of which was based on post-World War II Anglo-American views on the Norwegian dramatist. The new interpretation of Ibsen provided the Chinese with new insights to Ibsen's skepticism, symbolism and absurdism. The Chinese writer and critic Xiao Qian's change of attitude toward Ibsen provided a good example. In 1949 Xiao Qian severely criticized Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* as a play that promotes selfish individualism, but in 1981 he reassessed the play with a positive view of individualism. Furthermore, in 1983 when *Peer Gynt* was put on stage, the director Xu Xiaozhong interpreted it as a symbolist and absurdist play. This movement in the re-interpretation of Ibsen provided the Chinese dramatists with new energy and a new view of the theatre.

The critique of the narrowly restricted understanding of Ibsen in China in the 1980s is indicative of the emergence of a new trend in playwriting, which opposed rigid political control and the use of social problem plays to illustrate a political philosophy. With regard to the stage conventions in contemporary China, Ibsen's social problem play and "the fourth wall" mode of presentation, together with Stanislavsky's acting style, became the mainstream in Chinese theatre; it also affected the perspective of drama critics, who gradually and unconsciously formed a fixed view of drama that excluded other possibilities of stage style.

How should we account for the change in the Chinese theatre in the past ten years with the emergence of the non-realistic style? Let us look at some figures and facts. Before the 1980s, there were not many theatre journals in China. Plays were written as scripts for the stage rather than for reading. Since the late 1970s there has been a growing number of theatre journals and other literary and translation journals, in which plays in their original or in translation can be published. Furthermore, the publication channel is no longer monopolized by the Cultural Bureau. In the higher educational institutions there are "little theatres," which provide venues

for experimental plays. In the area of translation, in 1949-1979 40% of the plays translated into Chinese were from the Soviet and Eastern Europe, but since the 1980s most of the translated plays are from Western Europe, the Americas, and Japan (Guojia chubanshiye guanliju banben tushuguan 1980: 20-269). In 1984, *The Death of a Salesman* was staged in China and gave the Chinese audiences an opportunity to see how the stream of consciousness could be put on stage. In 1986, as well as in 1992, the Shakespeare Festival in Shanghai was an attempt to adapt Shakespearean drama in the style of traditional Chinese opera. All these experiments are attempts to break from the socialist realistic theatre established in the 1960s. In 1988 the O'Neill Festival and International Conference succeeded not only in introducing a major Western dramatist to the Chinese audiences, but also in broadening the Chinese perspective on drama. In the same year, *The Death of a Salesman* and *The Streetcar Named Desire* were all staged. In 1988, 40 % of the productions by major Chinese theatre companies were translations, of which 60% were Anglo-American drama. These facts and figures show that every two or three years there have been large-scale festivals of Western drama, which is evidence of the diversity in theatrical productions in China in the 1980s, as well as a final departure of the theatre from its being an SIA (state ideological apparatus).

Such a departure also leads one to consider those changes that have taken place in the Chinese theatre in the face of a large number of translations. The appearance of the nonrealistic style of drama in China and its reception on the Chinese stage are worth noting. First of all, there is inevitably a dialogue between productions of the translated plays and the indigenous productions. In the West, Brechtian theatre first emerged as a reaction against the "illusionistic style" of Aristotelian theatre. The Theatre of the Absurd originated in philosophical skepticism and the existentialist questioning of religious faith, which in technique has absorbed both from Ibsen the open-ending style without providing a resolution and from Chekhov the ideas of indirection. But in China, the attempts to introduce the Brechtian theatre are not based on any reaction against the Aristotelian or Ibsenian theatre as what had happened in the West.

In the 1960s after the experiments by Huang Zuolin there has been a gap of 20 years without any production of Brechtian drama. The reason for this sudden halt in production in the Brechtian style is due to the fact that Brechtian theatre is critical and anti-illusionistic in its effect, and is therefore not in line with the illusionistic didacticism of socialist realism. In 1979, when Brecht's *Galileo* was produced by the Beijing Youth Arts Theatre, the intent was to serve a political purpose by supporting the idea that "practice is the only criterion in the test of truth." But when it was put on stage, the Chinese audiences considered it an alternative theatrical style. The Chinese absurdist playwright Gao Xingjian says, "Brecht is the first dramatist who let me know that there can be an alternative dramatic style" (Gao 1986: 93). From this we can see that sometimes the emergence of a new style is not because it is a reaction against the old style, but simply because the old style itself has become exhausted and failed to appeal to the audience. The reception of Brecht is a matter of adoption, rather than a linear historical development of the Chinese theatre, and today more than ten plays have been translated into Chinese, which include *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *Galileo*.

The other type of theatre that has exerted a great influence in China in the 1980s is the Theatre of the Absurd, which was first introduced to China by Zhu Hong in 1978 with a long essay in *Shijie wenxue* [World literature], which is appended with a Chinese translation of Harold Pinter's *Birthday Party*. In 1980 there was a collection of absurdist drama published in Shanghai, and it includes the Chinese translation of *Waiting for Godot*, *The Zoo*, and *Dumb Waiter*. From then on, there have been numerous essays on the Theatre of the Absurd in major Chinese theatre and literary journals. For instance, in 1986 there was an essay "Albee and the Theatre of the Absurd" by Guo Jide published in *Waiguo wenxue yanjiu* [Studies in foreign literature]. Thus one may conclude that both the Theatre of the Absurd and the Brechtian theatre mainly serve as alternatives to the realistic tradition, but not as replacement. The realistic theatre continues to exist as a dominant mode, although it has become very different from the socialist realistic theatre in its recognition of realism mainly as a style of (re)presentation. In China today, various forms of modern theatre co-exist

with the traditional operatic theatre, and this is a sign the collapse of a dominant political discourse and the bankruptcy of political manipulation.

The Politics of the Postmodernist Theatre

Although the majority of contemporary Chinese plays are still modeled on realistic concepts, there are signs of a breakthrough in indigenous playwriting and productions in the 1980s. Against the SIA convention of the contemporary Chinese theatre, signs of a breakthrough begin to emerge and they are indicative of possible further diversities in the future. New dramatic forms are being experimented with on the Chinese stage. These innovative plays, in comparison with Ibsenian drama, exhibit a greater degree of structural variety and flexibility than the plays written in the 1960s and early 1970s. Contrary to the rule of "three unities" of time, place, and action, these plays have multiple scenes, which move from place to place. Departing from the law of structuring actions around a central dramatic conflict, the new plays are more capable of using a loose structure, with much fluidity to produce an effect more or less like the Western absurd plays. The increasing use of narrative elements and transition of scenes to stimulate the audience's imaginative and reasoning faculty is characteristic of these experimental productions. And this shows the influence of Brechtian theatre. The new plays also experiment with the use of secondary characters, who may not be directly related to the central action of the drama, to show the complexity of contemporary life, which cannot be summed up as lineal relationships among just a few characters. All these innovations are indicative of the direct influence of contemporary Western drama, resulting from the growing contacts between China and the West, as well as a return to the traditional Chinese dramatic style. These new Chinese plays have been sometimes referred to as "loose-structured drama," which is evidently a break from the socialist convention of unities.

As a political discourse heavily charged with political messages and intended to perform a function of ideological repression, the

socialist problem play has been used as a means to providing the masses with a direction in political movements so that a dominant ideology could be formed to achieve a positioning effect in the realms of culture, morality, and politics. The non-realistic forms that have emerged since the 1980s serve as an oppositional discourse, which is critical, skeptical and self-reflexive in nature. The cross-dialogue between the characters and the audiences shows this break from the belief in the hero as an authority. Examples of this style can be found in Gao Xingjian's *Jedui xinhao* [Warning signal, 1982] and *Che zhan* [Bus-stop, 1983]. A further departure from conventional characterization is the appearance of characters who are incomplete and contradictory in personality and are involved in an interaction, which focuses on the subjectivity of the characters. The presentation of characters from multiple perspectives in Brechtian drama has been used by Chinese dramatists as a way to explore the multiplicity of the human subjectivity. This exploration into the human psyche can be seen in Sha Yexin's *Jia ru wo shi zhen de* [The imposter, 1979].

A consciousness for the present is another characteristic of the contemporary Chinese theatre that can reflect changes in China. In such plays as Gao Xingjian's *Bus-stop* and Sun Weiqu's *Gua zai chang shang de lao B* [The old B hanging on the wall, 1984], there is the attempt in presenting contemporary life with a critical reference to the soul-searching questions on the fundamental structure of society and culture. The use of absurdist techniques in dialogue is related to the philosophical inquiry in such a way that the cultural implications of every-day life are brought into focus. What is presented in the new plays is a world in which everything is falling apart.

Another change in contemporary Chinese theatre that deserves closer attention is the tendency to treat theatre as a forum for cultural critique and rethinking. Sha Yexin's play *Yeshu, Kongzi, peitoushi Leinong* [Jesus, Confucius and John Lennon, 1987] is a very good example of the post-modernist technique of collage, which juxtaposes different spatial and temporal dimensions into a new contradictory space. Sha's other plays, *Yi ge shize dui shengze de fangwen* [A corpse's interview with living people, 1985] and *Xunjiao nanzihan* [In search of man, 1986] also experiment with

the cultural values in psychology and social consciousness. Gao Xingjian's *Ye ren* [The wild man, 1985] presents a satire on the modern man and raises questions about human nature. His *Bi an* [The other world, 1986] is a skeptical repudiation of rationality. The audiences and critics who are used to the techniques of realism tend to criticize Gao Xingjian as a nihilist whose plays are mere abstractions of form. However, for the non-realist dramatists, form is content. It is in its non-realism and non-rationality that lies the critical power of form, which is emerging and in which one can see the rise of the theatre as an institution of public sphere, with the possible emergence of an oppositional discourse in China. Wang Shuo's screen plays published and produced in the 1990s, in which there is a great deal of political and cultural critique, are obvious examples of an oppositional discourse.

The Chinese theatre in the 1990s, after the collapse of the socialist ideology as a dominant mode of thinking, grows out of a structural change in its social function as cultural industry, as well as in its being an institution of the public sphere that gives rise to an oppositional discourse to the SIA. Such a change actually results from a corresponding change in social structure in post-Mao China with the emergence of the bourgeoisie, which provides the ideological foundation for a new theatre as diverse in subject matter as it is dynamic in artistic style. The cultural industry, which includes the theatre, television, film, and other forms of mass communication, is coming into shape as institutions of a bourgeois public sphere in China today, and it plays a more and more crucial role in opinion making, as well as in the (re)formation of ideology.

The postmodernist theatre can be defined, in Jean-Françoise Lyotard's term, as a theatre based on the "performativity" of a theatre language, which is completely divorced from its previous representational function, in its becoming a product of the culture industry. As an attempt in breaking away from the Aristotelian theatre based on a totalizing reason which believes in a reality that can be imitated, the postmodernist theatre sees itself as concerned with the "practices of representation." In his book, *The Idea of the Postmodernism: A History* (1995), Hans Bertens summarizes the major tenets of postmodernism as an attitude developed from the

counterculture in the 1960s, which is both "anti-representational" and "self-reflexive." By being anti-representational, postmodernist art is self-referential, with its significance lying not in any external referent, but in itself. And by being self-reflexive, postmodernist art is concerned with the metalanguage of its form. Put it in this way, the postmodernist theatre is a theatre in which only performance counts; and this performance is meant to be deconstructive of itself.

Considering art as an institution, which involves the power of shaping in cultural formation, the postmodernist theatre with an emphasis on self-reflexivity explores the relation between discourse and power in the constitution of the subject and identity. It is this concern of postmodernist art with practices of representation, image and identity, and the formation of the subject that much of it has to do with cultural politics. As institution and as discourse, the postmodernist theatre itself can be seen as a matter of cultural practices that necessarily entail the power of constitution. Hence, in the study of the postmodernist theatre, the discursive function of art form must be discussed. In so doing, an understanding of the postmodernist theatre must begin with an examination of subject formation in relation to the theatre arts as institution.

In terms of its art form, the postmodernist theatre lays great stress upon the contingency of performance, rather than upon an "abstraction of the idea of the work-in-itself" (Connor 1989: 134). The Aristotelian structure of "beginning-middle-end" is thus seen in postmodernist performance as a process, the purpose of which, as Ihab Hassan says, lies in "a poetics of unmaking." The postmodern theatre is a theatre which does not believe in the possibility of an essence, and in which only performance remains, as Weinsheimer says: "The playing of the play is the play itself" (quoted in *ib.*). In this way, it can be said that the postmodernist theatre has its origin in Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty, in that theatrical performance is given importance over ideas, and silence over language. The postmodernist theatre is a theatre of performance, rather than a theatre of the abstraction of idea, for performance itself is form, essence and idea. As Steven Connor comments, "The result of this is a theatre theoretically coiled in

upon itself, in which work, performance and audience-effect fission together in a powerfully externalized unity" (ib. 135). Hence, in the postmodernist theatre there is a heavy reliance on parody as a device in critiquing the practices of representation.

As a theatre depending on the contingency of performance, the postmodernist theatre is reflexive of its form and existence, "calling attention to the fact that it [is] being made and how it [is] made" (Brockett and Findlay 1991: 430). It is a theatre of performance, as well as a theatre about itself. Considered in this way, the poetics of unmaking in postmodernism is particularly meaningful in that in the theatre the world is seen as being unmade into a world in the making, in which the human subject is unfolded as a process of subjectivity in the making as well. Previous concepts of plot and characterization, no matter whether they are in the Aristotelian or in the modernist sense, no longer exist in the postmodernist theatre. Critical categories of the psyche, dream, distortion and plotlessness in modernist poetics are no longer the defining qualities of the postmodern theatre, which offers a new poetics of collage in playing with discontinuities and inconsistencies always in the making and unmaking.

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Co-opting Globalization: Transition and Native Identity in the American, Polish, and Estonian Avant-garde Theatres

SUSAN LITGATE MACE

It is regularly assumed that rapid globalization will result in the decomposition of national myths and, hence, in the erosion of national theatre. This paper rejects such an assumption, arguing that in the case of three avant-garde theatre practices (the American, the Polish, the Estonian), each retains a resilient identity despite the pressures of globalization. All three theatres, I contend, owe their contradictory robustness to their ability to adapt themselves to transition (here, globalization) by co-opting it. Appropriating global influence — even intermixing “global” matter with native or indigenous material, — each practice keeps its integrity intact.

In the American case, Samuel Bernstein makes a compelling argument that the US theatre is at core a theatre of social problems — albeit an increasingly “hybrid”¹ (or composite) one, having adopted experimental techniques and borrowed language either from the absurdist or mass culture. Accepting Bernstein’s formulation, I posit further that cultural pluralism affords American practitioners their best weapon against globalization: they turn to minority and emergent theatre (Latino, African-American, Asian-American, Native American, feminist and gay performance) to locate a resistantly American idiom and material.

¹ Bernstein’s assessment of US theatrical tendencies (1980) still holds good, although there is a very large omission: he failed to anticipate fully the place of minority and emergent theatre artists.

For its part, Polish avant-garde theatre has always weathered external stress (often by going underground). It now fends off globalization by retaining its aesthetic of performance autonomy (anti-realist staging) and absorbing oral folk tradition, ritual, and expedition into its practice.

In Estonia, meanwhile, Jaak Rähesoo finds a theatre that has rebounded from its “doldrums” of the early 1990s. Here, too, there are signs that native culture forms a line of defense against globalization: avant-garde practitioners have sought out ritual in indigenous Estonian folklore and Finno-Ugric sources; there is ethnographic stylization in the dance theatre; work rooted in subarctic culture has been performed; there are new experiments in documentary, environmental, and gendered theatre.

Turning first, then, to new American drama, I take up Samuel Bernstein’s formula for a “hybrid” theatre that borrows its language from mass culture. In his caustic play *Valparaiso* (premiere 1999), Don DeLillo formulates an insidious techno-culture that terrorizes and finally does in his bewildered protagonist, Michael Majeski. When Michael boards a plane on a routine business trip to Valparaiso, Indiana, he lands instead in Valparaiso, Chile. Aloft, the eerie babble of recorded announcements utterly unnerves him: the anonymous voices sound all alike (just as DeLillo’s fictional characters talk alike²) — barking out messages devoid of all private meaning in an undifferentiated (but absolutely American!) monotone. Slyly, the mechanical voices (mimicked by a chorus of flight attendants) begin to play tricks on Michael; the muddled message, a sexy jingle at first,

Chorus:

Cappuccino in a foaming cup
Anonymous sex with the armrests up
That’s your overnight flight on Air Reliance
(De Lillo 1999: 69)

terminates in the fit of techno-cultural dismay that overcomes Michael in the end:

² The monotones of DeLillo’s fictional characters are often remarked upon. Even his child characters tend to speak in adult monotones.

Chorus:

Then place the mask over your nose and mouth
 ...Has anyone told you confidentially
 Was there ever a moment on the foggy tarmac
 When you thought that nothing mattered

(Ib. 69–70)

There are many means by which US dramatists exploit the language of mass culture (as DeLillo does here in the brilliant flights of techno-language that undermine his hero). Documentary theatre serves these means ably, since its language is derived entirely from mass culture — that is, the speech of real people, narrating and responding to actual events. Such a local incident — a random American murder that became national news — shapes *Laramie Project*, the 2000 documentary that caught the critics' urgent notice. The murdered man was Matthew Shepard, a twenty-one year old student, openly homosexual; the two murderers, both roofers by trade, robbed Shepard of twenty dollars, then beat him brutally and left him to die, tied to a buck-rail fence. The play, written by Moisés Kaufman, could have made Shepard (or his killers) its subject; instead, *Laramie* (the town) does double duty as both subject and setting. (Hence, the work is a fusion of two forms: documentary drama and community drama.) As for *Laramie* (population 26, 687), it is a usually sleepy university town in Wyoming's high plain.

Since the interview is the technique of documentary drama, Kaufman gathered his actors (Tectonic Theatre Project) for a round of visits to *Laramie* lasting thirteen months. There two hundred interviews were conducted with townspeople of all types. The result is *Laramie Project* (the performance): a dialogue of American voices responding to a murder in a small town. Kaufman himself notes very shrewdly that a local event has entered the American national dialogue:

I think that Matthew Shepard became this moment in our history where we had to take stock and say, 'What is it that we are doing?' And I'm not talking only about homosexuality. You know, when an event like this happens, then all of those forces and ideas

and ideologies and currents of dialogue and discourse come together around this one event, and it captures the nation's imagination.³

One can only add that *Laramie Project* dodges global appropriation, as well, by means of its untainted documentary style: its inflections and opinions echo straight out of Wyoming's red-rock plain.

If American voices (as those we hear in *Laramie Project*) assert their regional idioms to fend off encroachment from without, so do ethnic theatres in the US bolster themselves internally against global pressures. Their method is self-referential. Latino theatre, for instance, is a theatre of self-contexts: it dramatizes Latino problems, themes, values, myths — even as it co-opts and exploits its own cultural clichés. Not surprisingly, this theatre deploys humor to vent its socio-politically resonant messages. Two such performance groups that wield weight with critics and the public (both of them Chicano; both based in California) act as counterweights in the Latino community dialogue. Teatro Campesino was launched in 1965 by Luis Valdéz as an agit-prop improvisational company. Valdéz' revolutionary "actos" (skits) — improvised pieces that argued for the labor cause and the civil rights of farmworkers — gave shape to his performances. Directorship of the company passed to the young members of the Valdéz family in the 1990s: six first cousins now form the core group, whose performances are still built on Luis' radical "actos."

If Culture Clash supplies the counterbalance to Teatro Campesino, it does so by shedding some of Valdéz' strategies and reshaping others. A newer group composed of three performers (Richard Montoya, Ric Salinas, Herbert Siguenza), Culture Clash eliminates some stock features of the earlier "teatro movimiento": e.g., it rejects the cliché of the Latino as staged dupe of a white male villain. Yet it borrows the Movement's comic technique (while broadening the contexts) to achieve a more complex cultural criticism. In their "urban-scene" improvisations, Culture Clash delivers what their name promises: a sophisticated collision

³ See "*Performing Arts Magazine: The Laramie Project*", p. 4. Los Angeles: Performing Arts Network, July 2001.

of American ethnicities and subcultures — rendered as documentary farce. *Radio Mambo: Culture Clash Invades Miami* (1996) presents twenty sketches of actual people interviewed by the group: Cubans, Jews, Blacks, Haitians, and three Florida ladies on the town (done in drag!). These mock-documentary impersonations are each as localized as *Laramie Project's* Wyoming voices: impervious to the “global” — and just as American.

It turns out that some African-American performers exploit documentary impersonation with as free a hand as Culture Clash's. This is no coincidence, since the black and Latino theatres share the same self-referential urges. Anna Deavere Smith is a black solo performance artist who uses black voices — and other ethnic voices — to probe ethnic identities and the tensions that separate ethnic groups. Her show *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn* gathers its material from a street riot in Brooklyn, New York (1991) that erupted after a black boy was killed by a car in a Lubovitcher rabbi's motorcade and a black mob then killed a Jewish student in retaliation. Smith's *Crown Heights* impersonations result from extensive interviews with members of both communities. Her staged voices demonstrate the gaps of language and advantage that divide black and Jew. Bad Boy, a black (“Anonymous Young Man #2” in Smith's show), knows that he has no future:

Like, mostly the Black youth in Crown Heights
have two things to do —
either DJ or be a bad boy, right?

(Smith 1993: 102)

Whereas Smith's counterpoised Rabbi Joseph Spielman impersonation presents a man whose sensibilities have been subdued by long study and rabbinical habit. His telling of the killing of Yankel Rosenbaum (the student) fades into euphemism:

... and he was accosted by a group of young Blacks
about twenty of them strong
which was being egged on by a Black
male approximately
forty years old and balding,

telling them,
 'Kill all Jews,'
 ...They stabbed him,
 which later on the stab wounds were fatal
 and he passed away in the hospital. (Ib. 71)

Smith is not the only African-American performer to construct a dialogue of ethnic American voices as a statement on American life. There is a popular form of black urban theatre whose voices and themes are entirely African-American, as is its audience. It is commonly called the Chittlin Circuit, and it is a theatre so controversial as to draw public comment from Henry Louis Gates, Jr.⁴ The Circuit performances are melodramas. Staged in all large US cities with sizeable black populations, the shows take up issues significant to that community: matriarchies, male teen gangs, crack cocaine, violence, police entrapments. On stage (in keeping with melodrama), two opposed power figures — the preacher and the drug lord — entice the young. What the Chittlin Circuit (which may, by intention or not, offer its audience a forum for community healing) and black avant-garde performance like Smith's share in common is an indisputably American script that re-enacts the crisis of ethnic identification and interethnic tension. Such self-contextualized material, it goes without saying, escapes external influence: nothing in it hints at the global.

When we look at Asian-American performance, we see the same pattern of self-referential scripting that marks other minority theatres. In the 1970s this theatre launched a radical dialogue on Asian-American identity, with playwright Frank Chin (author of *The Chickencoop Chinaman*, 1972) calling his work "Chinaman backtalk." Still engaged in ethnic and political concerns, Asian dramatists in the US now bring other issues to the stage — issues that trouble an ethnic community long in place. A crisis of relocation, for example, now unsettles the Japanese-American community of Hawaii, and Edward Sakamoto puts it first in his

⁴ There is nothing controversial in the Chittlin Circuit's melodramatic material. Gates' complaint is with the drug lords who enrich themselves by acting as "producers" of the Circuit's lucrative shows. See *The New Yorker*, February 3, 1997.

plays. *Aloha Las Vegas* (premiere 1992) lingers anxiously on the opposed concepts of “home” and relocation (displacement): here, Sakamoto’s hero Wally Fukada, a retired baker, must choose between home (the faded Japanese-American neighborhood where his attachments are) and Las Vegas (that hub of risk and opportunity where the cash poor Wally can live in comfort by sacrificing [selling] his Honolulu house). Wally’s practical friend Harry delivers the decisive argument — in pidgin⁵:

W’en I was young, A’ala Park was one lively place. Used to get softball games on weekends wit’ special men teams, even wahine teams, and dey had deir own uniforms too. Lodda people would come watch dem playToday nuttin’. I wonda where all da people went. Now A’ala Park so sad, so quiet. No mo’ life. You see, Wally, ‘s why you betta come to Vegas. Not our Hawai’i anymore.

(Sakamoto 2000: 167)

Wally departs for Las Vegas. As the lights fade, Gracie, his wise-cracking “housekeepa,” sits alone in Wally’s empty house — clutching the boxed guava pie that he rose early to bake for her.

It isn’t Wally’s Hawaii anymore; “home” has somehow slipped away from him. But for Sakamoto’s Japanese-American characters with their pidgin inflections, even displacement can send them only as far as the US mainland. Globalization leaves but a faint imprint on these very American lives.

If Asian-American theatre turns out to be a dialogue on identity and “home,” then “home” is quite differently configured in the identity dialogues of Native American performers. Since America is home to indigenous dramatists, what counts in the performance dialogue is the assertion of a living native culture — one that refutes the cliché of a culture relegated to history and the museums. Although few Native American dramatists are engaged in literary theatre (others having turned instead to ritual theatre or

⁵ A small dictionary of pidgin is appended to the play. It includes Hawaiian Creole English (standard pidgin), as well as specialized phrases from Filipino, Chinese, Japanese, and Portuguese pidgin.

to tribal dance, as Hanay Geiogamah has done), Gerald Vizenor nimbly exploits this form in *Ishi and the Wood Ducks* (1994)⁶ — re-enacting at the same time the polarity of living tribal culture and museum culture. The trickster-storyteller of Vizenor's text is Ishi, the last surviving member of the Yahi tribe, who in 1911 was brought by anthropologist Alfred Kroeber to live and work at the Anthropology Museum of the University of California (then located in San Francisco). In the play, Kroeber becomes Ishi's "Big Chieft" (chief) — a "lonesome museum talker who wanted to be like me with stories out of the mountains" (Vizenor 1994: 303). Ishi slyly infers that it is the anthropologists whose artifacts should fill the museums — not those of the tribesmen whose life-giving stories they steal: "Anthropologists never had their own stories ... That's why they started so many museums" (ib. 305).

Even in Native American feminist theatre, the performance dialogue pivots on tribal identity. Spiderwoman Theatre, a New York City-based traveling troupe founded in 1975 by three Rappahannock-Cuna sisters (Lisa Mayo, Gloria Miguel, Muriel Miguel), creates a story-weaving technique: a fusion of improvisation, tribal myth, and broad slapstick. Their play *Winnetou's Snake Oil Show from Wigwam City* (1988) blasts New Age shamanism ("Plastic Shamanism") as yet another white man's expropriation of tribal culture. Here, the identity dialogue rises to a forceful denunciation of "Indian Museums":

Gloria:

See me. I'm talking, loving, hating, drinking too much, creating performing ... (Turning around, as if showing herself, her real self, to the audience.)

Lisa:

We are not defeated. (Shaking her head adamantly.)
All our bones are not in museums.
We are still here.

⁶ For a fuller treatment of Ishi as trickster, see my article, "Negotiating Spaces in Native American Comedy: *Ishi and the Wood Ducks*, or Gerald Vizenor's Disappearing Trickster." *Sel. Papers of the 3rd and 4th International Tartu Conference on North American Studies*. Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2000.

Muriel:

(Hitting her chest with open palms on each phrase.)

My stories. My songs. My dances.

My ideas.

(Haugo 1999: 138)⁷⁷

The point is, Spiderwoman and Vizenor both engage themselves in a very American dialogue: the assertion of living tribal culture in its own continent. The impetus of globalization remains quite outside this discussion.

Turning our gaze once again to Spiderwoman as a feminist theatre, we note this group's focus on the contemporary place of the tribal woman. In a wider social context, Paula Vogel also addresses feminist issues of great currency, but her plays feature at times a "universal" American woman who undergoes the rituals common to all US females.

How I Learned to Drive (1998) is a case in point, for this play re-enacts the seduction of a young woman. Using the car (a very American icon) as a mechanism for memory ("first gear" leaps forward in time; "reverse" shifts the memory back to the past), Vogel puts her protagonist, Li'l Bit, through the driving lessons given her by her Uncle Peck. As the girl re-enacts the lessons, she recollects her sexual initiation (also by Uncle Peck). The play, then, offers a subversive subtext: a lesson on how any American girl becomes an adult. In the end, Vogel implicates her audience in the seduction as well. In a voyeuristic photo-shoot of girl and uncle, she makes Li'l Bit a simultaneous victim of the lewd uncle and the unwitting spectator.

Once again, we have in *How I Learned to Drive* an American text that presents an American scenario (teenage-girl-seduced-in-car). The play's very American mix of matter, character, and inflection offers a more than sufficient bulwark against the onslaughts of globalization. What complicates Vogel's position as

⁷⁷ As a Native American performance text, Spiderwoman's *Wigwam City* play is not a "fixed" text. The text cited comes from a special performance given by Spiderwoman at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (1996).

a feminist playwright is her habit of crossing the borders of "feminist drama" at will to engage in gay drama. Her play *Baltimore Waltz* (1992), both an AIDS text and a gay text, originated as a tribute to Vogel's own brother Carl who died an AIDS victim. It turns out that this sort of crossover of type and form is common in dramas that exhibit a hardy resistance to globalization. Thus, Spiderwoman Theatre is both a tribal and feminist performance group. *Laramie Project* is a fusion of documentary drama, community drama, and gay drama. The Chittlin Circuit blends melodrama and community drama in its shows. The Polish and Estonian theatres, too, turn to an intricate blending of forms and techniques to thwart global appropriation. Seeking out indigenous Polish cultures, the Gardzienice group has conducted numerous expeditions to remote settlements of Eastern Poland to investigate native folk practice and share performances with villagers. In Estonia, Merle Karusoo fuses documentary, feminist, and environmental strategies in recent performance.

In the Polish case, the theatre has been a chronically embattled institution: one that has robustly resisted political occupation, censorship, and economic crisis — often by going underground. The current Polish artistic theatre is fending off the new menace of globalization, again with considerable success and, again, by its usual means. I propose that the "means" is a specific aesthetic that is original and ingrained in Polish theatre. I have called this aesthetic "process theatre"⁸: it dictates that the drama has its own internal logic, and that the reality of a play is its performance. Hence, process theatre signifies the autonomy of the performance as a self-affirming continuum.

To illustrate the autonomous style, Leszek Mądzik, Artistic Director of Lublin-based Scena Plastyczna, stages his shows with an innovative rejection of the performance text in favor of "mental tapes of images": "The most essential thing I can say about a spectacle is one word only: its title."⁹ He chooses unconventional (and often very Polish) environments: *Wilgoć* (*Moisture*), for

⁸ See my paper, "Coming Up For Air: Submergence, Innovation, and Re-Emergence in the Post-Communist Polish Theater" (IREX 1996).

⁹ Interview with Leszek Mądzik. (May 16, 1996).

example, is mounted in the Salt Mines of Wieliczka to invoke mystery three hundred metres underground. Mądzik uses both “animators” (objects; plaster sculptures) and actors, adding a creative (and globally-resistant) mix of inanimate and Stanislavskian elements to his performances.

Gardzienice, cited above for its expeditions to indigenous Polish settlements, works in a complex autonomous style developed by Włodzimierz Staniewski, its founding artistic director. The style rests in the intense concrete training that the actors undergo. There are vocal exercises (singing, with a rigorous integration of movement and breath) and physical exercises (e.g., “night-running” in remote terrains; “mutuality” training: arduous movement designed to build trust and accord between partners). The resulting performance (the newest show is *Metamorphoses*, derived loosely from Apuleius and chosen for its subtext of ancient rites) is a spectacle so concentrated that “circuits of energy” (Babb 2001: 78) pass between actors and audience. At once organic and autonomous, Staniewski’s *Metamorphoses* eludes globalization altogether by means of its seamless enactment of ritual. As for Gardzienice’s expeditions to native Polish territories, they are not alone in this spiritual and cultural rite. Węgajty Theatre, too, leads expeditions from its remote rural quarters to the “closer homelands.” There, far from the lures of globalism, they offer and gather the songs, dances, and customs common to indigenous villagers.

There is another feature of Polish theatre that bodes well for its continuing integrity. Environmental theatre is visibly coming into practice. The MALTA Festival in Poznań has just run its tenth year. Held on the site of what was once a “cheerless grey excavation” (Obębowska-Piasecka, Tyszka 2001: 319) and its derelict, litter-strewn surroundings, MALTA espouses serious environmental and community principles, among them:

1. To rehabilitate city spaces whose cultural functions are degraded.
2. To invite public participation in culture.
3. To create a “theatre sacrament,” with performing artists and spectators as co-creators.

Standing up for artistic independence, MALTA has encouraged unconventional artistic projects and unconventional use of space from its inception. A fringe festival was added in 1993, all to the good of experimental performance. With as many as 130,000 spectators now attending MALTA, detractors are more audible. There are complaints that the whole affair is unwieldy — a bit of a sideshow. For all that, MALTA does offer us two boons: a rehabilitated Polish civic space and a rehabilitated public culture. Nor is the emergence of environmental theatre restricted to Poznań. In fact, the impulse is widespread. In Warsaw, the Piotr Borowski Theatre Studio, a radical Stanislavskian group, spends most of its time in rigorous physical training. Their infrequent performances, such as *Miasto (The City)*, are staged in the reclaimed spaces of a backyard slum building in a disreputable part of the city. In these unconventional spaces, the Studio's productions (like MALTA's) are quite out of the reach of global influence.

Turning, finally, to the Estonian theatre, we take up again Jaak Rähesoo's astute remark on the recovery of performance since the "doldrums" of the early 1990's. A void or impasse in theatre set in after the abrupt collapse of both communism and the Soviet Union. In a time of political and economic chaos, the theatre had to reassess itself and find its audience. As Marvin Carlson argues, too, part of the new vigor in the theatre rests with the training of actors. For decades, the Higher Drama School of the Estonian Music Academy controlled the actors' market. By 1993, two alternative actors' training programs were launched (at Viljandi Culture College and the Estonian Humanities Institute, respectively). This meant that actors could now pursue alternative performance techniques, and that more young actors could be trained. Importantly, new private theatres have been established, most of them in Tallinn. These new theatres have inspired new experiments in performance, inviting a composite style that resists globalism. The Von Krahle (founded late in 1992), prefers mixed-media experiments, in which a single show might utilize puppets, actors, video images, computer operations, and music (both live and recorded).

There has been a submerged interest among Estonians in indigenous folklore and Finno-Ugric sources. These native urges have certainly found their way into the dance theatre, where Lea Tormis has noticed ethnographic stylization (using Estonian folk dance) in the productions of Ülo Vilimaa at Tartu's Vanemuine ever since the 1970s. By the 1990s, the native impulse finally touched Estonian actors and theatre directors. When Priit Karm staged Margaret Craven's *I Heard the Owl Call My Name* (*Öökull Huikas Mu Nime*) in 1999 at the Theatre Vanemuine, he used a rich composite style, mixing such elements as tribal robes and masks, dance, tribal chant, lights, and drums to create the ambience of a Kwakiutl community. Craven's text, rooted in North American subarctic culture, traces a native tribe's painful acceptance of a young Anglican vicar who ministers to their troubled village as Western decadence overshadows it. In invoking subarctic culture, Karm has clearly cast his lot with the tribal world, not the global one.

With more women playwrights and directors now active in the Estonian theatre, feminist and gendered drama has emerged as a performance form that defeats globalization by means of its matter. Documentary and environmental theatres, too, use their factual and spatial contexts, respectively, to subvert globalizing pressures. Since Merle Karusoo is a documentary playwright who successfully fuses documentary, feminist, and environmental techniques in her revolutionary shows, a look at her method is warranted. Karusoo has been creating social documentary productions such as *Olen 13-aastane* (*I Am Thirteen*) and *Meie elulood* (*Our Biographies*) ever since the 1980s. Her recent production on murderesses (staged in 2000 in an abandoned warehouse) concerns itself with female murderers only: hence, it is a feminist text. Its disused performance space (an isolated and rather frightening building) makes it an environmental drama. Its narratives, of course, are in straight documentary style. Karusoo's intricate fusion of triple forms is quite impenetrable to the assaults of globalization.

The pace of globalization may continue to accelerate, but as we assess the American, Polish, and Estonian avant-garde theatres, we find three theatres who turn resourcefully and repeatedly to co-

optation, adaptation, and their own native roots to keep their art intact.

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Within the Picture: The Last Ten Years in Estonian Theatre

JAAK RÄHESOO

We are in the habit of dividing history into periods, each with its own distinctive set of features. Often these divisions look somewhat arbitrary. However, we cannot avoid the procedure, because a vision of history as unchanging flow is even less credible. By way of precaution against premature generalizations it is sometimes suggested that these distinctive features become visible only in retrospect, at a distance. Is a ten-year period enough of a distance, or are we still hopelessly within the picture, unable to discern its lines?

Indeed, is it a ten-year period? In other words, where is the most important of those lines — the division line itself? The year of the re-establishment of our political independence, 1991, almost automatically offers itself. But that may again be simply a matter of habit. It is true that cultural history often doubles political history, especially in the case of small nations who have mostly lived under oppressive foreign government. The history of Estonian theatre generally confirms this rule. Its birth in 1870 came on the crest of national awakening, the founding of our first professional troupes in 1906 was in some ways a by-product of the Russian revolution of 1905, and the subsequent political watersheds of 1918 (proclamation of independence), 1940 (Soviet occupation) and 1953 (Stalin's death) were also watersheds of cultural history. Nevertheless, there are exceptions. The first that comes to mind is the year 1929, when the enormous success of Hugo Raudsepp's comedy *Mikumärdi* turned the Estonian theatre towards realism (or what was thought to be realism) and a greater

interest in native playwriting became noticeable in the repertoire. Perhaps one would be tempted to say that such "autonomous" watersheds tend to come in democratic circumstances, when the influence of political pressures is diminished. But then we are faced with the year 1969, the last clearly marked watershed in Estonian theatre history, which ushered in what came to be called "metaphoric theatre". That movement did have a political connection in the sense that its initial violence and hysteria reflected the impotent rage of the then younger generation, who saw its hopes crushed in Prague. But from another point of view the theatre renewal of 1969 was simply the last in a series of renewals that all Estonian arts experienced in the 1960s, and that means putting it in a less political perspective. Political factors influenced the course of those renewals in a more indirect way: changes began in the less obviously ideological (i. e., less logocentric) and more formal arts of music and painting, then spread to poetry (which could use its age-honoured claim of greater subjectivity in slipping away from under official restrictions), and finally reached the more "social" arts of fiction and drama. At the same time the whole direction of these renewals was in obvious contrast and contradiction to the slowly creeping political repression that had set in after the removal of Nikita Khrushchev in 1964. In Estonian theatre the 1970s offer an even more glaring contrast: while repression grew and economy stagnated, it seems in retrospect a time of rich theatre harvest.

These two examples of 1929 and 1969 remind us that the arts may have their own development cycles, not quite reducible to political history; and that may be true even under totalitarianism, at least tottering totalitarianism. A theatre revolution can come in times of social stagnation, and the theatre (or the arts in general) can stagnate during periods of social upheaval.

I certainly would not call the period after 1991 a time of stagnation in Estonian theatre, but neither is it a time of radical change. The most general cause probably is that there has been no radical change, comparable to that of the 1960s, in the whole of Western theatre. By "Western theatre" I here mean the entire field of European theatre (including Russia) as well as that of the Americas. The 130-year history of Estonian theatre is part and

parcel of that wider structure. Our dependence on international currents was perhaps less obvious in the initial stages, say in the first fifty years (1870–1920), when the very framework for the theatre was being built and the tasks were pretty elementary. Although I do believe (and it must necessarily remain a matter of belief, as actual proof is hardly possible) that the rapid growth of Estonian theatre was aided by the fact that its formative years fell into one of the great ages of Western drama, initiated by Ibsen. That upsurge simply raised the overall importance of the theatre, which must have been reflected somehow in our own humble beginnings. Anyway, the more a national theatre comes to resemble the average institutional “norm” of Western theatre, the more certain it is to follow general movements within the whole field, although these may have local peculiarities.

Again, it remained true even in conditions of Soviet repression and isolationism. Fifteen years of brutal Stalinist terror were not able to replace that basic pattern in Estonian culture. They simply made an “historic hole” — to use an expression from Juhan Smuul’s 1968 play *Pingviinide elu* (*The Life of the Penguins*). The worthless rubbish that was used to hide that “hole” — say, the ideologically rigid and lifeless plays of August Jakobson — quickly disappeared after Stalin’s death, and a slow movement towards the general trends of Western theatre began again. In some of the so-called “people’s democracies” of Eastern Central Europe that process was so successful that by the time of the next great upheaval in the 1960s they could already play a significant role in overall development — a much more conspicuous role than any they had played in previous Western theatre history. It applies primarily to Poland, but to a certain extent also to Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In this wider perspective the Estonian theatre revolution of 1969 was simply a geographically marginal instance of a wider movement. Its main interest for an outside observer may lie in the fact that it looked somewhat exceptional on the narrower Soviet background, being much more radical than anything that happened at the time in Moscow or Leningrad.

For the last twenty or twenty five years of Western theatre history words like “retreat” or “stagnation” have often been used, especially by people who remember the tumultuous 1960s. I think

there is a certain difference between Western Europe and Eastern Europe in this respect — a difference that shows both the force and limits of political factors. In Western Europe (and America) this “retreat” or “stagnation” seems to have run pretty evenly, while in Eastern Europe the political tremors of around 1990 introduced some oscillations into the graph. They were not sufficient to bring about a full theatre revolution, for I believe that revolutions in the arts should still be seen as primarily “stylistic” revolutions, described in terms of various artistic trends and movements. But these tremors did very much change the external conditions of the arts, which naturally came to be reflected in the works produced. So, instead of one strong division line, we have two weak division lines, one (in Estonia, at least) around the year 1980 and another around 1990. And we still lack a term for the whole twenty-year period. For the smaller segment from 1990 onwards there is indeed the word “transition”, so much used in all spheres of life. In theatre history it could conceivably be broadened for the whole period. Except that it is somewhat embarrassing to speak of a twenty-year transition which still does not seem to be quite over.

In a more local perspective this twenty-year “transition period” in the Estonian theatre has had both internal and external causes (or “contributing factors”). Among the external causes is the fact that, with the death of Leonid Brezhnev in 1982, a political interregnum set in, bringing about uncertainties concerning the future course of events. These uncertainties were perhaps even heightened in the first years of the Gorbachev *perestroika*. In the theatre it was reflected, for example, in the repertoire: as often in times of uncertainty, stage directors turned to the classics as a safe option, while waiting to see which direction the wind would take. When the so-called “singing revolution” erupted in Estonia in 1988, a couple of deportation plays (by Jaan Kruusvall and Rein Saluri) and other politically sensitive subjects kept the theatres in the public eye for a year or so; then the rapidity of events turned people’s interests elsewhere. This and the growing economic chaos emptied the audience rooms, so that the re-establishment of political independence in 1991 found the theatres in a state of deep crisis. For a couple of seasons their main response was desperate

entertainment: a wave of commercial comedies swept the stages. Troupes were cut and the number of productions increased. Fortunately that time of acute crisis was soon overcome. What followed has generally been described in words like "stabilization" and "normalcy". They imply that "good theatre" has again become possible, but obviously exclude radical changes.

Among the inner causes the most important was a wide-spread feeling that the "metaphoric" trend, a novelty in 1969, had largely spent its force, but no new clear-cut movement had come to replace it. This of course corresponds to the feelings of "retreat" and "stagnation" in the whole of Western theatre. Characteristically critics often spoke of "eclecticism" and "fragmentation", although sometimes the derogatory tendency of these words was given a more positive turn by the fashionable new term "post-modernist". A sense of transition was made even more acute by the fact that in a convergence of circumstances long-serving artistic directors of most Estonian theatres relinquished their posts to younger people in the early 1980s. Together with the coming social upheaval it could have led to a significant renewal; instead, it made things look even more insecure. And that feeling was carried over into the 1990s.

It may be that in future the 1990s will look much more of a separate entity, as fundamental changes in all spheres of life must have affected the theatre on a subterranean level more than is visible at present: we are still to wait the harvest of these processes. In some ways the situation resembles that of the 1920s. Comparisons between the initial decades of the first and second Estonian independence are actually a common-place in the press. Indeed, there simply is no other period to which we can compare the 1990s. But the parallels are often taken too much for granted. In the theatre, anyway, the overall situations and tasks of the two periods offer more differences than similarities. The main achievement of the first independence period in the field of the theatre was a growth of professionalism, both in creating a network of about ten repertory companies, pretty well covering the whole country, and in establishing solid artistic standards. Luckily that network and those standards survived even Stalinist times. Consequently there was no comparable challenge for the 1990s:

that task had been performed once and for all. There was, it is true, the task of defending that network of professional repertory companies against calls to replace it with Broadway-style one-production "project theatre". But fortunately nobody took those calls too seriously, so the task was not very hard.

In organizational matters the only significant novelty of the 1990s was the appearance of various small groups. In international theatre such groups became prominent in the turbulent 1960s, but the rigidity of official Soviet attitudes absolutely excluded the idea of any "free troupes" here. The only option for the experimentalists was to work with a group of like-minded actors within the framework of a big institutional theatre. We can be grateful that Kaarel Ird gave the young leaders of the 1969 renewal, Jaan Tooming and Evald Hermaküla, that opportunity in his Vanemuine theatre. The small groups of the 1990s, born in a less revolutionary theatre time, are less experimental in spirit and have mostly found a niche in children's productions. A few, like the Von Krah! Theatre and the Theatrum, have more ambitious aims, but still hover somewhere in the fringes. So the overall Estonian theatre structure has remained largely unaffected.

The only sphere where the comparison between the 1920s and 1990s seems to work is the repertoire, in the sense that both periods were largely dominated by translations. I do not think that the ups and downs of native drama can always be adequately explained: too many chance factors seem to influence the process. So, thanks to the plays of August Kitzberg and Eduard Vilde, the very first decade of professional Estonian theatre (1906–16), still spent under the repressive tsarist regime, was actually one of the high times of Estonian playwriting, and the qualitative (though not quantitative) drop of the 1920s came very much as a surprise. In retrospect one does see that the predominance of translations helped the Estonian stages of the 1920s in their historic task of building a "normal" European theatre. Maybe in future the end of the forced Soviet isolationism and the re-entry into European theatre discourse will be seen in the same way. But such considerations are certainly not the "causes" of the relative weakness of native drama in the two periods. It may be, of course, that in future the picture of the Estonian drama in the 1990s will look

less bleak. After all, it was the time of the massive coming of the plays of Madis Kõiv, physicist by profession, philosopher and playwright by vocation. Certainly his plays form the most significant body of work in the corpus of Estonian drama since the time of August Kitzberg. But most of them had been written decades before; it was only now that theatre directors finally overcame their doubts about the “technical” stageability of Kõiv’s visionary dramas. So these plays were only partly a product of the 1990s. And leaving the special case of Madis Kõiv aside, native playwriting of the last ten years or so offers (or offered until quite recently) a sparsely populated landscape. Leading playwrights of the previous decades, like Enn Vetemaa, Vaino Vahing, and Rein Saluri, have largely withdrawn from the field. Younger authors, like Andrus Kivirähk, Mart Kivastik, and Jaan Tätt, are still in their formative stages. A couple of drama competitions did yield a surprising number of manuscripts, but there were few really encouraging texts among them.

In the mass of translated plays the one great obvious change came, of course, already in the late 1980s, when Soviet officialdom lost control of the arts, and all tacitly observed quotas and proportions for Soviet and foreign plays in the repertoire were dropped. Unfortunately the former predominance of Soviet plays soon came to be replaced by equally one-sided Anglo-American predominance. In other respects it is difficult to single out any thematic or stylistic preferences. All observable tendencies seem to have been only short-time trends, and their inner causes are open to different interpretations. There was, for example, a spate of romantic heroes five or six years ago: Edmund Kean, Don Quixote, the three musketeers, and many others were strutting and fretting upon the stages. It would be easy to see this as a protest against rampant materialism. But it would be equally possible to interpret it as a celebration of the adventurous spirit of re-discovered capitalism. Curiously this romanticism existed side by side with quite another tendency — an interest in the drama of the absurd. The latter could be taken as a belated course in recent European theatre history, for that kind of drama, at least in its “classic” form, was practically excluded from Soviet stages (the 1976 Tallinn production of *Waiting for Godot* was a conspicuous

exception). So its sudden flowering would present a parallel development to the massive invasion of abstract painting in the Estonian art of the 1990s: there, too, an important chapter of earlier Western cultural history had to be gone through in a crash course. On the other hand one could interpret this wave of the absurd as a reaction to Soviet and post-Soviet absurdities — as something more than a predominantly formal exercise. But all such attempts to establish direct links between those trends and the so-called “everyday reality” seem to me slightly dubious. It is also worth noting that many of the most acclaimed productions of the 1990s were revivals of the classics. The reputation of Elmo Nüganen, for example, is almost entirely built on that material. Naturally something of our present concerns always enters into our interpretations of the classics; but usually this relationship is still different from that established with contemporary plays. And on the whole our recent revivals of the classics have not specifically stressed their modern connections. Rather, directors have been interested in their more “transcendental”, universal features. So the overall conclusion of a survey of the repertoire is that its basic tendencies are hard to figure out — a typical characteristic of transition periods.

A similar observation could be made about the work of stage directors. At a first glance their ranks seem to have changed dramatically: a new generation has taken over. But on a closer look the change looks less thorough-going. The generation of the 1960s is still very active. So, after an interval of a couple of years, Mikk Mikiver made a forceful comeback. And there is the curious case of Mati Unt, who as a fiction writer and theatre dramaturge stood in the very centre of the innovations of the 1960s, then slowly developed into a notable stage director in the 1980s, and now is usually cited as the prime exponent of “postmodernist” irony and intertextuality in the theatre. As far as the next generation (Priit Pedajas and Elmo Nüganen) or the very young (say, Jaanus Rohumaa and Katri Kaasik-Aaslav) are concerned, each really talented artist naturally has a new world of his or her own. Nevertheless, all of them have entered the theatre without causing particular trouble and strife; all have quickly found wide-spread cross-generational

recognition. So the renewal they have brought can hardly be described as radical.

This is not a criticism, but a description of the state of affairs. Every successful production certainly deserves favour, and looking around in post-communist Eastern Europe we can be glad that the actual crisis years in our theatre were so short. Besides, criticism is generally powerless to change the inner processes of art. But this is not a call to fatalism and resignation: one's attitudes, critical or not, should always be expressed. And viewing the whole of our cultural scene one cannot avoid noting that in this age of "post-modernist" transition and fragmentation Estonian literature and visual arts have undergone deeper changes than the theatre. The usual explanation is that the theatre with its institutional inertia tends to move slower. It was certainly so in the Estonian arts of the early 1900s and again during the innovations of the 1960s, and it may be that we have a similar time-lag now. But it is expressly a comparison with the other arts that has induced some younger critics to attack our present theatre "establishment" for being out of touch with the modern world.

These attacks again bring to mind similar accusations from the 1920s. And it is true that the one trend which has been noticeably absent in the Estonian theatre of the 1990s is raw realism and social criticism. In this decade of fundamental social changes the theatre has chosen not to confront them but to create a reservation and oasis for more abstract and personal concerns. The sociologically oriented productions of Merle Karusoo are conspicuous because of their exceptionality. I do agree that a certain inward-looking quality has become too pronounced in our present theatre. But the experience of the 1930s also makes me suspicious of the calls for a more outward-looking attitude. Then, with the success of Raudsepp's *Mikumärdi*, the Estonian theatre did turn towards realism, which at the same time was a turn to native drama. In some ways it was a progress and widening of interests; but in other ways it signified a retreat from former readiness to experiment and restricted the stages to two basic types of play — folk comedy for the village milieu and drawing-room drama or comedy for urban settings. Being pretty conventional genres, their "realism" was actually often questionable. This is a kind development I certainly

would not want to be repeated. And in general history rarely repeats itself. But the past always remains our main source of comparisons: so in trying to define our present condition we inevitably look for earlier analogies.

Norwegian Drama at the Turn of the Century

DRUDE VON DER FEHR

Although I think that the best way to address art is inductively, through each manifestation, in order to cope with the largeness of the theme of this essay, I have, contrary to my beliefs, chosen to present current Norwegian drama through a theoretical question — the question of the epistemological position or representational position (or mode) in five dramatic texts.

A Danish aesthetician, Morten Kyndrup, in *Aesthetic Theory*, a book he edited in 2000, points out what we of course know — that art is perceptually dependent on its formal aspects and that these formal aspects make the aesthetic work available. It is characteristic of a work of art that it somehow makes itself available to us. Kyndrup points out that the question of representative effects in all works of art have long been banned, because a) of its relatedness to the Platonic view of mimesis, in which art is seen as the expression or the performance of the actual production, as a copy of something metaphysical, and consequently b) because of the postmodern loss of belief in any epistemology. He maintains, however, that it is difficult not to operate with the question of *representational effects*, exactly because any artwork and thus all dramatic plays, somehow make themselves available to a public (Kyndrup 2000: 18–19). According to Kyndrup, the history of art has itself made impossible the most simplifying connections between representation and truth. Especially, he says, with modernism art became intransitive. The work became intransparent, autonomous; language started to signify language, sound signified sound etc., but at the same time art was an image, not necessarily

of something, but rather seen as image effects, rhetorical effects upon the world. This is where and how texts make themselves available. According to him, these representational effects are somehow both very formal and abstract and at the same time the place where reality makes itself felt in art. Like Hal Foster in *The Return of the Real*, Kyndrup talks about representational effects as the "comeback of the real" (Kyndrup 2000: 22).

What I argue in the following is that there is a tendency in Norwegian drama towards dramatic expressions which does not ask epistemological questions. These dramas are not concerned with insight or meaning, nor with character. I therefore ask if at least one tendency in current Norwegian drama could be seen as truly postmodern? Elinor Fuchs in *The Death of Character* ends a very interesting discussion on the partly de-substantiated character of modernist drama. In modernistic drama, she argues, "the very act of putting character into question still marks its place as central". She says that

This strikes me as a core dilemma of modernist drama, which repeatedly introduces *as a humanistic problem* its own very questioning of the human image on the stage. If there is any clear watershed between modern and postmodern in drama, it is that the postmodern normalizes and shrugs off as "merely conceptual" the sense of terror (or novelty) associated with posthumanistic thinking.

As a consequence of what I see as a postmodern tendency in contemporary Norwegian drama, reality cannot be understood in terms of the epistemic subject, nor in terms of nationality. What kind of reality then do we find in this drama? And how is this reality made available to us?

I have chosen to present four dramatists in this essay, and I use primarily one drama by each as an example of what I see as a tendency in their dramatic production. Four of the dramas are written by very well established dramatists in Norway today, Jon Fosse and Cecilie Løveid, the two others are written by authors who are slightly younger and less established; A. I. S Lygre and Erling Kittelsen.

I start with Jon Fosse both because he has conquered a privileged position in Norwegian drama today — people look at him as a sort of a new Ibsen — and there are already imitations being written of his plays. Fosse's drama is a good starting point also because lately there have been some very interesting scholarly writings on his drama, while there is still very little written on the others.

Jon Fosse

In Fosse's drama *Dream in the Fall* we are confronted with a symbolic space, a churchyard in which the most important persons in one man's life meet. The story of this man's life in the past is in a sense staged analytically (in the sense of Szondi), the past is being reactualized in the present in some kind of consciousness, and in this sense the drama is a bit Ibsen-like. It has a certain linearity, but the historicity of the play is very weak. The characters have a certain nameless abstractness; they are man, woman, father, mother, etc. The dialogue is semantically correct, and as such gives a certain impression of everyday realism, but the traumatic amount of non-communicative repetitions in the dialogue makes it clear that the play cannot be understood in terms of a mimetic representation.

In Norway Unni Langås in a very influential essay has argued that Fosse's drama performs a confrontation between a desire for meaning and an actual loss of meaning. She sees his drama as allegories pointing to the tough existential situation in which humans live — a situation of existential chaos and "angst" — a situation between "nothing and being", to quote her. Man seems to be, in a Heideggerian mode, "thrown" out into the world, without any existential possibilities of choice. Subjectivity and being, she says, are inscribed in verbal language and therefore in the dramatic dialogue, but in a negative way, which pictures simultaneously the creation of subjectivity and the loss of subjectivity. Langås sees Fosse in the light of a combination of Heideggerian phenomenology and the philosophy of Blanchot.

In Fosse's language we find both negation and the negation of that negation, according to Langås (Langås 1998: 110). Lars Sætre, another Norwegian scholar, has a different interpretation. He talks about "the murder of the subject" in Fosse's plays. His reference on this point is Adorno's terminology when discussing Beckett. Sætre, contrary to Langås, finds no ontology in the play. According to him, the ontology of the subject has been reduced to obscurity. It has been reduced to a repetitive language; a language which automatically repeats itself and in this repetitive language, ontology and history are both lost. Sætre argues that verbal language in Fosse can no longer represent being, and there is the tendency in the plays towards an automatization of consciousness, as a whole the situation in the drama tends towards alienation from the human. The phenomenal subject is reduced and emptied, but on the other hand there is also in Fosse's drama, Sætre insists, a tendency towards a construction which keeps the world together. Sætre looks at this as a paradoxical movement typical of the modernity of Fosse's plays. The paradoxical movement oscillates between metonymic difference through the verbal repetitions and an emblematic or symbolic construction (Sætre 2000).

The Danish scholar Niels Lehmann neither understands Fosse's drama as phenomenological, ontological nor epistemological. He calls Fosse's drama a *postphenomenological drama of effects*. According to Lehmann Fosse's dramas are not grounded on any existential situation or phenomenological subject. These dramas are not epistemological according to the three most frequent epistemological categories, maintains Lehmann. They are neither 1) *naturalistically empiricist*, 2) *Artaudianly phenomenological* nor 3) *metafictional sceptical*. The dramas retain, however, some characteristics from literary phenomenology. The descriptive linearity — the texts rest on the surface of the phenomenon — and the rhetorical effect, the pathos, carries with it a phenomenological rest. But, in Fosse, the rhetorical strategies (which Sætre described and which we could call metonymic *déférence* — linear movement — and emblematic construction on the other side) have neither ontological nor epistemological implications. How is this possible? Lehmann sees Fosse's rhetorics as constructivist. The repetitive language makes pathetic effects and affects, and these have a

certain *constructive presence, and a reality effect*, but at the same time their reality aspect does not represent any insight nor carry with it any existential weight. How can we understand this? And where do we find a philosophy, Lehmann asks, that can do without epistemology?

There are few places to look, but in the American neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty's philosophy Lehmann finds an attempt to make philosophy without epistemology. According to Rorty we should stop asking epistemological questions, altogether. We should not ask art questions concerning meaning, but instead look for use, what use we can have of a given play. Use has to do with life practices: How to live a good life. If Fosse's dramas are not epistemological, their representation is not a question of how the formal aspects of the texts communicate meaning. The plays' descriptive attitude and verbal reality effects must be considered not as ontological statements, but as aesthetic constructions, "which invite us as readers to consider ethical rather than epistemological questions". Something is being actualized in the drama, created there and then, in the reading process or on the scene, but not as a copy or a representation of a former state. The descriptions have a character of presence, a sense-oriented pathos, but, as I have said before, without epistemological pretensions or the empathic presence of the phenomenological drama. The drama's invitation is an invitation to turn our perceptual engagement with a specific theatrical situation into useful strategies for our own lives. According to this view, Fosse's drama do not thematize any loss or negativity. We are simply not in the world of a Beckett or a Blanchot.

Rather, I think that it might be fruitful to look backwards in the theory of drama and consider Nietzsche's influence. In Fosse's very last drama *Deathvariations* the eye meets an allegorical form. The different characters, a mother, a father and husband, a daughter and her husband, her daughter and a friend of hers, are both themselves and doubles of each other. We could say with Fuchs, when she presents the influence of Nietzsche upon post-modern drama, that "individual subjectivity now becomes not a gateway but a barrier to deep connections with universal psychic forces" (ib. 27). Like in all of Fosse's plays, we find in *Death-*

variations a very emotionally effective level of communication which is being experienced by the public in the theatre or by the reader of the text as realistic. At the same time, however, in *Deathvariations*, it is clear that the doubling of the characters leads us to a *thematization of time and intensity*, rather than a thematization of personalities. We find in *Deathvariations* a Nietzschean tendency towards the reality of *paradoxical time* rather than chronological time, and towards *intensities* rather than truths. We could say of time that in this drama "the present is never identical to itself, is doubled with the virtual image of the past it will become" (Ropars-Wuilleumier 1994: 556). The daughter and the mother are different and one at the same time. The mother is the daughter's possible future and the daughter the mother's actual past. The poetic and emotional intensity of the mother's granddaughter who takes her own life and breaks the realistic illusion by telling us that she regrets it, can be seen as a *healing gesture* which makes the paradoxes and inconsistencies in human existence bearable.

Cecilie Løveid

Could we talk of a general tendency in a Norwegian drama which is not ontological, nor epistemological? In Cecilie Løveid's drama, I think, we find the same anti-epistemological tendency as we did in Fosse, but contrary to Fosse's work, her plays are deeply embedded in ontological questions.

Cecilie Løveid's drama has been characterized by Knut Ove Arntsen as neo-expressionistic and image-oriented (*Vinteren revner* 1983, *Balansedame* 1986). In the Norwegian context this position is exclusively hers. Her drama is fragmented and oriented towards "tableaux", or "stilleben" images. Like other expressions of expressionist art, Løveid's dramas are symbolic, at the same time both concrete in their playing out of human energy and desire and abstract and "frozen". Female gender and sexuality are visualized in her drama. The movement in Løveid's drama is, contrary to Fosse's drama, not a movement between metonymic difference through repetitions in verbal language and emblematic construc-

tion, or according to Lehmann between "a self-constructed" presence and its possible use. Rather, we have a movement between the presence of a phenomenological body and the symbolicity of the artifacts and the frozenness of the tableaux. Bodily movement versus immobility are key-words in connection to Løveid's drama¹.

In *Lady of Balance* from 1986, according to Oatley, we find a problematization of bodily representations of experience and a poetization of the dramatic language — bodily movements and rhythms in language work together — in order to actualize an ontological quality. In Løveid's drama, the frozenness of the tableau with its conventional representational mode is being contested by the phenomenological presence of rhythmic movement; verbally and bodily. What Løveid attempts to create, I think, is an *ontological quality* which can only happen as an event, in the reading or in the theatre. As such it happens again and again, but each time slightly differently, and this specific event can never be domesticated in an epistemology. Løveid's dramas have no codified meaning, but they might have, if their invitation is accepted, *the effect of a bodily felt quality*.

A. I. S. Lygre

In Lygre's drama, *Suddenly forever*, from 1999 we find ourselves as onlookers to a drama of the sitting room. A sitting room which, however, is dedicated to the reality of telecommunication. The sitting room is dominated by a huge television screen and the family which inhabits this room does not belong to any known society. They are placed outside history, outside normal time. More than a thousand years elapses during the play. What we meet in the sitting room on the top of a skyscraper is virtual reality. We see there in the text or on the stage, spelled out large, our future; a future which, however, is embedded in our present time. This present of ours is pregnant with an uncanny, possible future. This

¹ See the References, where readings done by Diane Oatley in *Livsrutaler* or in a paper by Wenche Larsen, is enlisted.

future has the characteristics of what Mario Perniola has called *video-narcissism*. With video-narcissism he meant a cultural pathology. He describes it this way:

We are witnessing a strange inversion: humans are becoming more similar to things, and equally, the inorganic world, thanks to electronic technology, seems to be taking over the human role in the perception of events (Perniola 1995: viii).

What is peculiar to the times in which we live, according to Perniola, is that video as a narcissistic mirror has proved a theoretical paradigm. He maintains that today we find a profound break with the psychological subject, narcissists lack the capacity to experience intense, personal emotions. Their affective lives are empty; they exercise no real interest in life, energy is used in a vast amplification of the self-image. We can talk of a virtuality of the human image, Perniola goes on, and the subject or self has become a surface, unendingly changeable. Subjectivity is only a question of manipulating one's image in the way which is most efficient in the marketplace. We find evidence of this video man or woman in art, Perniola says, but just as much in people's daily lives: art and reality seem to coincide.

The play has associations with dystopia, it is a *Brave New World*, a negative vision of the development of western society, but its representational mode — pointing as it does to the future — is not mimetic. I would rather say that we find here a production of simulacra — copies without any original (see Deleuze 1990) — the characters are stereotypes, interchangeable, alienated from themselves. Occasionally, they talk of themselves in the third person. The characters show only themselves as surfaces, paradoxically both unendingly changeable (they manipulate their facial look) and unendingly unchanged (they live forever). As such, they are without proper meaning or epistemology. The characters are deprived of any ontological substance or substance in time. Although their existence or reality lies only in *virtual possibility*, the drama's invitation to us is made in an *ironic mode*, including the reader in a common situation of laughter and horror, both at the same time.

Erling Kittelsen

Maybe we can read Kittelsen's drama *On Heaven* (2000) as a metaphysical "Lehrstücke" or a moral fable, in the tradition of the post-Inferno plays of Strindberg? The Norwegian scholar Knut Ove Arntzen sees a striking parallel between Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata* and the young Brecht. Brecht with his "Lehrstücke" — technique has something in common, according to Arntzen, with Strindberg's post-Inferno plays as moral parables or even metaphysical "Lehrstücke". From this there is a link to Heiner Müller's use of the "Lehrstücke" and his *Bildbeschreibung*, first staged in Graz in 1985 (Arntzen 1992: 166).

The action of *On Heaven* is situated in cosmos. Three women move downwards from heaven towards earth, looking for their dead husbands. Like the heavenly gatekeeper in Dante's *Divine Comedy* — also a cosmology — we find here the character Person (maybe a persona, a mask) placed at the entrance of the paradoxically earthly existence of the dead. Before the women are let into this earthly sphere, Person submits the three women to different questions. The play undoubtedly has associations with the *Dream Play* by Strindberg but it is lyrical in its utterance. The sound of their language, however, is not attached to the women, but at times separated from them. In the sidetext the use of loudspeakers is suggested. I think that we find here lyrics without a central perspective; pieces of monologues uttered in heaven. But the monologues are not epic, they are more like prose-lyrics, epistemological prose, according to an article on this drama by Lars Sætre; prose-lyrics uttered by the women, but being put into play by Person, the persona or the mask (Sætre 2001: 38). The epistemological (personal and collective) perspective of the women (ib. 39) is being contested, played with and enlarged by the Person, into something which we maybe could call a new cosmic creation. Maybe we could talk of a phenomenological anti-anthropomorphism, in the sense of Robbe-Grillet's use of the concept, anti-metaphoric and anti-humanistic? But at the same time this heavenly existence (which is far outside our epistemological reach) as a whole does not seem to have any phenomenological presence connected to it. Rather, I conceive of it in terms

of the lyrical. It is almost as if we as readers are being transported back to a cosmic lyricism of the type we meet in Dante's "Paradise". In *On Heaven* we find a cosmos on the verge of poetic recreation, maybe through the Augustinian trinity of memory, intelligence and will. Lyrics is comparable to the structures of the universe. Lyrics is heavenly music in Dante. But in contrast to the "Paradise", in *On Heaven* there is no theology, no metaphysics. There is a sort of materiality, but without epistemological or existential pretensions or metaphysical pretensions. Maybe we can talk of a material reality in the play, a reality which comes to us as a sound, as lyrics, as a sort of heavenly rhythm? It is difficult to find any meaningful category for this play. Let us call it a *performative utterance of lyrical creativity*.

Conclusion

To sum up the hypotheses that I have presented here as a tendency in current Norwegian drama, I want to say the following: this tendency does not point to any stability in the conception of subjectivity or in the conception of human existence. It is rather the paradoxicality of the human which is thematized, but as we see explicitly, for example in Løveid's drama, human life has substantiality, rhythm and movement. Common to the plays that I have presented, is an orientation towards the problematics of the postmodern, however, *without the typical sceptical epistemology of the avant-garde*. I think that we find in all the dramas an aspect of some reality, even as realism as such is opposed, the primary mode of reality does not lie in the epistemological, but rather in the virtual, affective or poetic mode. Themes concerning nationality are not addressed. The space of dramatic action is abstract, that is without clear historical or geographical boundaries, but at the same time specific for each dramatic universe. As a type of utterance, this tendency in Norwegian dramas has an open and inviting attitude towards the world.

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Postdramatic Memory and After

MALGORZATA SUGIERA

Ever since Romanticism, historical drama was a privileged genre which functioned (alongside historical painting) as the basic source of collective memory, making it possible to conjure up on stage the key moments of a nation's past, endowing it with a material presence and meaning. Historical drama depended on the images of the past existing in the collective memory, but could also modify them, give them an altered sense, structure them into new patterns of understanding and interpretation. For the requirements of the living theatre, always existing 'here and now,' made it necessary to cancel the distance dividing the audience from past events through faithfulness to historical detail and sources (in decor, costume, relations between characters, etc.) For this device to be credible, the audience had to make use of their historical knowledge. Historical drama, dominating in 19th-century theatre after having deposed (in the Romantic era) classical tragedy as the most exalted genre, paid a high price for this prominent role. Early 20th-century avant-gardes relegated it to the scrap-yard as an embodiment of the outmoded traditional poetics, as something worthy at best of ironical sneer and often of gross jokes in the mould of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi*.

But as Hayden White points out, the shape and meaning of the past is inasmuch a result of our genuine discoveries, and accumulated and still accruing facts, as it is a product of our inventiveness ordering bygone events (White 1980). For to unwrap the meaning of some sequence of events is necessarily to discover some specific narrative in their combination, and that means the use of one of the many patterns of fabulation available. Thus when

historians write their 'true' accounts and combine events into a logical whole, turning them into facts, in effect they follow the procedure of the playwright, who orders his material in accordance with the requirements of his genre. So it was not only that the artists of theatre sought material suitable for historical drama in the works of 19th-century historians. Also the picture of history embodied in the works of historians was partly transposed through the accepted conventions of historical drama. Hence the dramatists from early 20th century were able not only to entertain the audience to the cost of known conventions, as did Alfred Jarry. They also showed in their plays that we always view the historical past in terms of dominant stage scenarios, that historical memory does not exist independently of the form in which history is presented, and that this phenomenon can affect life as it is lived.

And this is what happens in *Henry IV* (1922) by Luigi Pirandello, where historical events become only a handy scenario for contemporary life. Although the plot, told by the anonymous protagonist, recounts the story of the German Emperor Henry IV, the anathematised enemy of Pope Gregory VII, before whom he had to humiliate himself in Canossa, one of the main motifs of the first act is that members of the audience do not need to possess historical knowledge, so crucial for historical drama. The author introduced for this purpose the figure of a new servant who has to be taught his duties. This scene not only functions as an ingenious exposition, but is also enriched with a hilarious *quid pro quo*, unnecessary from the point of view of plot development. Preparing for his new job, Bertoldo had conscientiously studied the life of Henry IV, but not the one to appear shortly on stage. Instead he had read about Henry IV, King of Navarra and France who lived four centuries later. Pirandello thus makes it manifestly clear that it is absolutely unnecessary for the viewers to know their history in order to verify what they see before them, to possess any information other than that presented to them on stage. Thus the old historical drama, purporting to be a faithful recreation of the past, sanctioned and verified by the audience's historical expertise, in *Henry IV* turned into a spectacle undisguisedly acted out on stage. And what had been offered as a trustworthy reflection of the past, was exposed as a deliberate fiction, creating only a 'reality effect.'

Likewise, the viewers of *Janulka, Daughter of Fizdejko* by the Polish playwright Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, written in 1923, that is one year later than *Henry IV*, will find that their knowledge of the history of Medieval Lithuania is quite useless. Although the title points to an established tradition of historical drama, already in the remarks about the setting a "certain chronological confusion" (Witkiewicz 1997: 240) is suggested, later to be kept up by the coexistence in decor and costumes of elements typical for the 12th and 18th centuries, as well as for the 1930s. Similarly to *Henry IV*, Witkiewicz's protagonist, the ruler Fizdejko, wants to eliminate from life chaos and contingency, the inseparable features of reality, by forcing his life into a pattern of a literary scenario. In order to carry out this design, he had to recognize that his life had a theatrical character, and even deliberately project it into the future, which also meant a deliberate reconstruction of a selected fragment of the past. Witkiewicz combined it with a complete turnover of the historical data. Hence the Teutonic Knights, who once wanted to subdue Lithuania, help the Lithuanian ruler, who becomes their mirror image, to realize his imperial aspirations. The process of 'turning over' is vividly expressed in the often repeated words of Janulka herself: "History has turned its butt towards the snout and it is devouring its own tail" (ib. 257). This means not just a deliberate deformation of life through outrageous defying of verisimilitude, but also the creation of a privileged place outside time where, like in a theatre prop-room, all life scenarios and models experienced so far are within reach of an eager hand.

The blatantly parodistic features of Witkiewicz's historical tragedy serve his main purpose which was to ridicule the intentions and inaptitude of these last 'people of yonder times' (sometimes calling to mind today's Postmodernists) who are only able to compile known forms and cannot achieve anything new. What is important here, in their plays written in the 1920s both Pirandello and Witkiewicz use the same opposition between life and historical drama, shown as an opposition between disorderliness and the resulting absurdity of life, and a picture of history which makes sense, as it is ordered along the lines of a theatrical scenario. They both perceive the former in positive terms, while they disapprove of the latter once it becomes a model to be

faithfully copied by life. In contemporary times this juxtaposing of life lived 'here and now', and a vision of history forced into literary and para-literary scenarios assumes a somewhat different meaning.

Just as we did not need to know much about Henry IV or Medieval Lithuania in order to appreciate these two plays, when reading Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* we need to know very little about the life and work of Lord Byron in order to understand what happens in Lady Croom's estate in Derbyshire one April day in 1809. In scenes taking place in our time Stoppard skilfully exposes the tricks of professional historians, who fill out factual gaps with their own guesswork, blurring the line between documentary material, its interpretation and the conjecturing which it makes possible. In the process of exposing the manipulation of historians, who try to hide their attempts at fictionalising the past, Stoppard makes excellent use of the other plot line. For in *Arcadia* we are witnessing not only contemporary events, but also, in accordance with the conventions of traditional historical drama, also ones that happened at Lady Croom's estate in early 19th century. These two plot lines initially intertwine, and later the present and the past gradually merge, as the author wants to make clear that there is no difference between attempts at conceptualising the past and attempts at conceptualising life as it is lived now. The drama is being composed in *Arcadia* not only by those who run away from real life, as character's in Pirandello and Witkiewicz do. The drama is being composed by everyone who tries to make some sense of what is going on around him. For then one inescapably takes refuge in patterns of interpretation which are stored for us both in old myths and in works of high and popular culture.

In *Arcadia* Stoppard is still Modernist in separating the contemporary picture of history from its interpretation and from contemporary life, drawing a lesson from their gradual joining together. Moreover, he shapes the two plot lines using a traditional realistic style. Equally traditional is his way of unfolding events through exposition, peripety and climax, although he deliberately exposes their rhetorical character. The Austrian playwright using the pen-name Franzobel, thirty years younger than Stoppard, and brought up on comic books and Disney cartoons, in his two plays

based on historical themes, *Kafka* (1997) and *Mayerling* (2001), in a typically Postmodernist way treats on equal terms the myth-en-shrouded past and the present, weaving them into his own theatrical story, only off-handily appealing to traditional poetics.

It is Max Brod, a writer and a friend of Franz Kafka, who is responsible for one of the greatest paradoxes of modern literature. Brod went against the last will of Kafka and did not burn the manuscripts entrusted to him, but devoted his life to their ordering, footnoting and publishing. He not only wrote a biography of his late friend and in several books attempted to set forth his 'credo and doctrine,' but also made him the protagonist of one of his novels. Thanks to this manifold betrayal of trust the work not meant for publication has become the subject of countless publications, in their own way expounding the mystery of Kafka's existence and the meaning of his works. The life of Kafka also became the subject matter for one of the most eminent Polish dramatists, Tadeusz Różewicz. His play *The Trap* (1982) is worth taking note of here, as it makes for a perfect backdrop to the Postmodernist piece by Franzobel, appealing to the same historical material, collective and individual memory and to our present times. In the play by Różewicz Kafka's case functions as a preview, on the level of an individual person, of what was soon to befall all European Jews. For that reason it is both strongly anchored in the historical facts of the writer's biography and the cityscape of early-20th-century Prague, and unmistakably raised to the level of symbol or even allegory.

Events in *The Trap* unfold in a roughly chronological order. Stage directions show a concern for historical and realistic exactitude which is more typical for a novel than for a play. But the very first scene presents us the six-year-old Franz not only in the powerful shadow of his formidable father. The accusations flung at him by his playmates made Franz aware of the burden of belonging to a particular nation, a nation which crucified Christ. For Różewicz wrote the entire play from the perspective of Franz Kafka who is making corrections in the manuscript of *The Hunger Artist* just before his death. This Kafka has ceased to believe in the saving power of literature and has begun to interpret his own writing as an unacceptable fleeing from life, for which one must

expect justified punishment. "The thing I have trifled with is really approaching," Kafka writes on one of the little pieces of paper he used to communicate with his friends and family after losing his voice. This is the key moment from the standpoint of which Różewicz asks us to look at the author of *The Trial* (Różewicz 1991: 11). His chief aim is for us better to see the red line connecting the oven in which some works of Kafka, put there by himself, are burning, and the ovens of Auschwitz; the red line connecting his literary holocaust with the historical one.

Through this broadening of perspective, the individual memory of the character of Franz Kafka is turned into the collective memory of late-20th-century people, thus enhancing the picture of our most recent past as marked by World War II and the Holocaust. Therefore, although Różewicz does not observe the conventions of historical drama, arbitrarily encrusting his play with expressionist, grotesque or eerie scenes, *The Trap* expresses a similar ideology to that of historical drama. For it chooses a story of an individual, and at the same time a literary myth well-known to the audience, in order to skilfully and convincingly connect the act of burning some of his manuscripts with the historical Holocaust, through using only selected elements of the biography of the real Franz Kafka, while transforming or omitting others. This procedure aims to show to the audience a vision of history invested with a particular meaning. But unlike other authors of historical drama and traditional historians, Różewicz does not attempt to convince us that this vision is objective. He clearly points at Kafka as a person who has perceived analogies between his own life and 20th-century history. Franzobel uses a similar trick in his *Kafka*, but to an altogether different purpose. We watch Kafka's life not through his own eyes, but through the memory of Max Brod, who becomes a kind of symbol of all those myths which he himself started and which now shroud the biography and work of Kafka.

In his very first appearance Franzobel's character of Kafka asks a characteristic question: "What will our descendants think? Great Kafka Franz? What will remain of my myth?" (Franzobel 1997: 9). Max Brod has just pushed him, seated on a chair, onto the stage, like some remarkable specimen from a wax-figure museum. He

pushed him onto the stage which Kafka immediately identifies as such, as a place “stinking with dialogue” (Franzobel 1997: 5). The first lines spoken by Kafka also constitute a kind of introduction to the basic stratagem of Franzobel’s comedy. In the character’s words, and later in the scenes focused on the arrival of his fiancée Felice and on another of their break-ups, we easily recognise three commonly known aspects of the life and work of the real Franz Kafka: his difficult relations with women, his father and literature. So what is changed once we have looked at Kafka’s life through the eyes of the character of Max Brod? In Franzobel’s play Brod reiterates that in his opinion entire reality inevitably has the nature of a quotation. He himself never speaks his own unique language, but always imitates the style of other writers, including those, like Thomas Bernhard and Werner Schwab, who theoretically do not yet exist. And it is thanks to this Max Brod that Franz Kafka’s family, awaiting the arrival of Felice, the fiancée, seems to come from a wax-figure museum owned by some Postmodernist Madame Tussaud.

In the extravagantly bourgeois living-room, cluttered with smaller-than-life or larger-than-life furniture, and battery-driven parrots, there appears Mother, dressed in foam-rubber and led on a long leash by Father, armed with DIY tools and a hot-water bottle pressed to his belly. Her motherly devotion soon takes on a typically ‘capitalistic’ character of a complex “network-inter-marketing” (Franzobel 1997: 12) system for recruiting clients who recruit further clients. She casually explains the rules of making money in this way, using an idiom typical for Schwab’s *Woman-Presidents*. Franz’s pretty sister, Ottla, unexpectedly becomes a staunch feminist, while her Freudian slips reveal latent homosexual urges. The “even prettier” (Franzobel 1997: 4) Felice, with a gingerbread heart in her breast, besides the expected cunning in the prenuptial bargaining, turns out to be a lover of animals, especially of the rough tongues of homeless dogs. Of course, this kind of digging up the unknown truth is not spared to Kafka himself, whom Franzobel presents with a faithful sexual companion in the shape of a tailor’s dummy gracefully named Amelia.

In Franzobel’s play we get an appearance of a plot, which turns around a fictional story of a letter delivered by Max Brod, lost in

the turmoil of the break-up, and then found again, containing the historically untrue information about Kafka being awarded the prestigious Fontana Prize. This plot-line not only creates an appearance of some movement, but also reveals the meaning of the principal literary device used by Franzobel, who significantly subtitled his play "A Comedy." For as Herbert Lindenberger points out, conspiracy and secret intrigue form the backbone of the majority of traditional historical plays, from Ben Johnson and Shakespeare to Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Heinar Kipphardt's *Hearing of J. R. Oppenheimer* (Lindenberger 1975: 30–38). Furthermore, there exists a seemingly paradoxical similarity between historical drama and comedy. In both these genres plot development depends on intrigues woven by one side and the more or less successful countermeasures by their opponents. In historical drama we accept such a scheme of events, for it seems to be sanctioned by history, by the 'real' turn of events documented in sources which have been preserved and explicated by experts; while in comedy some of the aesthetic pleasure for the audience comes from appreciation of the ingenuity of the playwright, who quite openly winds up the machinery propelling the plot forward. The dissimilarity can be explained by the different character of the pact struck between the theatre and the audience. In the case of comedy basic terms of reference are dictated by the rules and conventions of the genre, while in the case of historical drama they are provided by the principles governing the presentation of the past, functioning outside the world of theatre.

We can say, then, that using the intrigue focused on a letter lost and found again, typical both for historical drama and low comedy, Franzobel turns the possible historical drama about Franz Kafka onto its comedy side, changing the character of the pact with the audience. He put the blame for it on Max Brod and his fallible memory, which cannot recall anything from the past without endowing it with a literary form, without forcing authentic experience into hackneyed, quoted shapes. This is why Felice had already carried onto stage an enormous box of whose content she only told Father. In the final scene only Kafka remains on stage and with a joyful smile climbs into the cardboard box, closing the lid behind him. "There is nothing of one's own any more, all is an

exactly the same reflection, imitation. There is only one thing left for me, my last step. This is the last stylistically unoccupied space" (Franzobel 1997: 77), he says before hiding in the box. His last step is a planned discreet disappearance which in real life was foiled by Brod. Hence after a short pause the others come back, now dressed as street sweepers. They throw into the bin not only the Amelia dummy, but also Kafka's *Diaries*, the greatest source of information about his life and thinking, and they just kick the box aside. "People are terrible swine," says one of them. "Boo. Fie" (Franzobel 1997: 79), others support him unanimously.

The life and thoughts of Franz Kafka, filtered through the memory of the second-rate writer which Max Brod unfortunately was, turn into a grotesque, into a farcical theatre of posturing, masks and quotes. One can only ask what would happen if instead of taking Brod's perspective, one were to look at Kafka through the eyes of his common fellow-humans, such as those who appear in the finale of the play as street-sweepers. Franzobel gives an indirect answer to this question in his most recent play, based on the history of late-19th-century Austria and entitled *Mayerling*. Again we are dealing with a mystery which it is difficult to unravel and which still vexes historians and biographers, namely, the apparent suicide of the Archduke Rudolph, the only son of Emperor Franz Joseph, committed in the eponymous Mayerling. But this time Franzobel did not write a comedy, significantly titling his play „Austrian tragedy" (Franzobel 2001) Yet by tragedy he does not seem to mean the fate of the Archduke and Maria Vetsera, his companion in death who was found with him.

The picture of late-19th-century Austrian past as painted in *Mayerling* is somewhat remindful of the Medieval Lithuania in Witkiewicz's tragedy, for, like in Franzobel's *Kafka*, all epochs and styles intermingle. Joseph Haydn appears alongside Yoko Ono, the Archduke might just as well have been poisoned by Bismarck's secret agents as by terrible food in McDonald's, while Peter Handke and Guenter Grass are shortlisted together with Goethe for the title of the greatest-ever German-language writer. All characters are purest grotesques. The Austrian Emperor does not part with a tube of mustard to go with his beloved sausages, and at his leisure copies gems of human wisdom from Brockhaus's

encyclopaedia. The Empress Sissi, with a huge hat-box and bathroom scales in hand, suffers from quite contemporary anorexia, while the Archduchess Stephany is inordinately fat and always munching something. Also this time Franzobel names those responsible for such a vision. At the end of the list of characters he puts a group of supernumeraries who all the time “stand agape as onlookers” (Franzobel 2001: 17). The crowd of onlookers from *Mayerling* irresistibly calls to mind another image, one of Greek satyrs forming a circle on stage, described by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In his view they were representatives of the audience. In the name of the audience they dreamt up the cruel stories of the heroes of ancient tragedies. In Franzobel’s play these semi-divine satyrs are replaced with common onlookers standing with their mouths agape. Ancient tragedy thus turns into Austrian tragedy worthy of these dumb faces. For as it turns out in the finale, the Archduke Rudolph did not commit suicide. Disguised as Count Hoyos, he appears on stage with 40 million Austrian crowns which he extorted through blackmail from his father in order to escape to South America with Mizzi, an exclusive prostitute and his lover. As we can see, historical events presented in *Mayerling* take the shape of a lurid television series, for in collective memory history returns in a dwarfed form, suitable for contemporary imagination feeding on mass culture. What constitutes the Austrian tragedy for Franzobel is the way his compatriots perceive the past of their nation.

In an anarchic gesture of liberation from the burden of school education, the cult of the past and high culture, Alfred Jarry parodied models offered by Shakespeare and historical drama in his *Ubu roi*. One hundred years later Franzobel returned to the formal rules of tragedy only to show how tragic it is that we live in a world of one-sided perspective typical for mass culture and of ever more endemic amnesia. His diagnosis seems obvious: there is no after after post-dramatic memory.

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L'achèvement théâtral de Babel

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Que vient donc chercher le public si ce n'est de l'avis de Gao Xingjan, prix Nobel de littérature 2001, "une rencontre authentique" (Gao Xingjan 2001: 102), une rencontre fondée sur la communion entre le texte, ce que proposent les spectateurs et ce qu'apportent les comédiens. La nature de cette rencontre attire, de fait, vers la scène théâtrale, un public à l'attente duquel les autoroutes contemporaines d'internet ne peuvent aujourd'hui répondre: l'écran d'un ordinateur crée une distance beaucoup plus irréductible que "l'écran brechtien de la tranche de boeuf", cité par Pierre-Aimé Touchard. Il n'est qu'un objet, outil insensible à l'opposé extrême de la représentation théâtrale, essentiellement sensible et présente. "Vouloir la présence au principe d'un art, telle est l'essence du théâtre. Le mystère est celui d'une présence réelle avant d'être celui de la métamorphose" (Gouhier 1943). Dans notre monde où de plus en plus souvent le factice tend à remplacer le réel, la représentation théâtrale, parce qu'elle résulte de la communion d'un public et de comédiens réunis en un seul lieu, propose une situation authentiquement conviviale au sein d'une société souvent aliénante et isolatrice. La convivialité suppose la reconnaissance de l'altérité. C'est à ce titre que je tenterai d'analyser le fait théâtral, tout à la fois parole d'autrui écrite, dite, reçue et mise en scène. On connaît les débats sur la finalité didactique, voire idéologique d'une telle parole. Sans remettre en question ce que les "professionnels" ont pertinemment discuté, je m'interrogerai sur l'acte de résistance culturel posé par des représentations proférées simultanément en plusieurs idiomes. Enfin la dernière décennie a tendance à éclipser le théâtre

d'auteurs à l'avantage d'un théâtre de metteurs en scène, qui réanime le texte autrement, plus attentif à la chorégraphie qu'au verbe, au caractère unificateur du mythe. Comment envisager dès lors "l'achèvement théâtral de Babel"?

Le théâtre ou l'art de la présence

Henri Gouhier, en écrivant que "le mystère est celui d'une présence réelle avant d'être celui d'une métamorphose "[...]représenter c'est rendre présent par des présences"(Gouhier 1991: 121), songeait sans doute plus aux comédiens, voire aux personnages qu'aux spectateurs; mais le premier mystère n'est-il pas celui de la présence des spectateurs, qu'ils soient japonais venus assister à une prestation de *sarugaku* (Martzel 1982: 327), anglais, fidèles du Globe shakespearien, ou encore grecs, le regard tendu vers l'*orchestra* d'Epidaure, pour entendre la défaite des Perses, comme la raconte Jacques Lacarrière:

Été 1962. En approchant de la colline qui cache le théâtre, je n'en crois pas mes yeux: des milliers de paysans sont installés parmi les arbres, les marbres du sanctuaire, sur l'esplanade d'Asclépios, venus de tous les coins du Péloponnèse pour assister aux *Perses*. Nous jouons en français et aucun d'eux certainement ne comprend cette langue, mais il faut dire qu'à l'exception d'une représentation donnée avant la guerre en 1936, par ce même théâtre antique de la Sorbonne, c'est la première fois qu'on joue sur ce théâtre depuis 25 siècles... Il est midi, les victuailles sont installées un peu partout. Des musiciens ont pris leurs instruments et la fête commence [...]. J'ai l'impression de voir revivre une fête antique: ce désordre vivant, ces foules bigarrées [...]. une sorte de foire, de liesse bruyante où chants humains, cris d'animaux se mêlaient à l'odeur des viandes sur la braise, des grains brûlés sur les autels [...]. Oui, Epidaure devait être ainsi quand des milliers de malades accouraient près des temples miraculeux.

Cette foule paysanne m'accorda ce jour-là, par le miracle de sa présence inattendue, de retrouver la grande liesse des temps païens." (Lacarrière 1975: 159)

Le "miracle" de cette présence se produisait certes dans des lieux ouverts qui se sont fermés au cours des siècles — je songe aux salles à l'italienne. Les raisons, d'ordre politique et historique, ne seront pas rappelées ici. Toutefois l'évolution de la configuration du lieu théâtral n'a pas modifié la réception de son objet par le public. Ce dernier fait acte de présence dans le respect de l'altérité de chacun, prêt à accueillir des présences autres et immédiates, celles des comédiens, investis de celles des personnages, différées. Au fond, le lieu où se déroule le spectacle, ouvert ou fermé, circonscrit et matérialise l'hospitalité. Il en assume la fonction, il en extériorise la leçon. Invité à donner une définition du mot "hôte", Michel Etcheverry, un comédien célèbre du Français, ancien élève de Louis Jouvet, déclarait:

Le mot hôte est "bifrons". Il dit à la fois celui qui reçoit et celui qui est reçu. Je pense que le personnage reçoit et que le comédien est reçu. Il faut avoir envers celui qui vous reçoit la politesse qu'on a envers celui qui vous invite à dîner; au second vous offrez des fleurs; au premier votre talent. Je me suis toujours senti un invité parmi des hôtes parfois très surprenants. Quand Auguste, le Cardinal d'Espagne ou *Anne Vercors* sont venus m'ouvrir la porte et m'ont salué, j'ai été très intimidé et j'ai redouté de ne pas être à la hauteur. La notion d'hospitalité nourrit toute recherche spirituelle, chrétienne comme musulmane. Elle conduit au respect mutuel: je respecte celui que je reçois et celui qui me reçoit; les liens se créent entre les deux hôtes. Si le comédien sait bien se comporter à l'égard de son hôte ce dernier le lui rendra. Je songe encore à ce couvert qui sur les tables de campagne attendait tout visiteur éventuel. (Etcheverry 1996-1997)

Comment un écran de cinéma ou *a fortiori*, d'ordinateur, pourrait-il matérialiser cet échange émotif, instantané, vécu dans une salle de théâtre? Louis Jovet lui-même, "le patron", refusait de laisser filmer ses mises en scènes. De fait, la dynamique théâtrale jaillit des sentiments et des sensations, ce dont témoignent les mises en scènes ou plus exactement les mises en espaces contemporaines fondamentalement sensibles. Une telle flèche sensible est tendue de surcroît sur un arc temporel effectivement synchronique. La présence du public se décline sur le mode de la simultanéité, indissociable du temps du jeu des comédiens, mais é-vocatrice (au sens étymologique) d'un temps souvent éloigné. Je songe au théâtre d'Eschyle ou, plus proche de nous, à celui de Shakespeare-voire détourné d'une lisibilité contemporaine; je songe au théâtre de Bernard-Marie Koltès. Les personnages revivent devant le public mais en différé. Le fragile équilibre temporel alors instauré, exigeant tant intellectuellement que sensiblement, avoue une ambivalence métaphorique, me semble-t-il, de celle qu'affiche une actualité préoccupée par son affranchissement des limites spatio-temporelles mais néanmoins sans cesse en quête de son passé, comme le manifeste la passion de nos contemporains pour leur patrimoine ou bien la promotion des recherches archéologiques virtuelles. Pour me résumer, voici donc par le truchement théâtral créé entre individus, réels comme imaginaires, une situation authentique de rencontre. Sa réussite dépend, nous le savons bien, d'une faculté proprement humaine: celle de la parole.

Parole théâtrale et leçon d'altérité: tolérance et résistance

Les spectateurs comme les comédiens sont mis en situation, les premiers de recevoir, les seconds d'offrir et de transmettre. "Dès que je suis assis devant le rideau, je cesse d'être acteur sur la scène du monde sans devenir acteur sur la scène de théâtre: je suis figurant et surtout confident." (Gouhier 1943: chapitre: "l'action") Ce dernier terme doit retenir notre attention. Qualifier le spectateur de confident, n'est-ce pas lui imposer une attitude réceptive passive, assez semblable finalement à celle d'un internaute? Pourtant

la dénotation du terme révèle l'aspect positif d'une telle attitude: l'accueil de la parole d'autrui détermine aussi sa reconnaissance voire son influence. Naturellement-pardonnez-moi ce truisme-le verbe théâtral diffère de notre langage quotidien. Christian Schiaretti, metteur en scène des *Visionnaires* de Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin (1595–1676) au Théâtre des Quartiers D'Ivry, en 2001, fait judicieusement remarquer que "comme c'est une langue qui est antérieure à la codification classique du dix-septième siècle, elle nous paraît à la fois étrangère et extrêmement proche. Il est important de connaître ses cousins pour comprendre ce que l'on est dans sa famille? De la même façon, il s'agit d'entendre une langue dissonante pour mieux entendre la nôtre." (Schiaretti 2000: 29) Découverte ou re-découverte, la langue proférée sur le plateau est artificielle, sans nul doute. "Contester aujourd'hui l'indépendance d'une représentation qui "n'est pas plus soumise au vraisemblable qu'au vrai: Néron parle français et des servantes s'entretiennent en alexandrins." (Gouhier 1943: chapitre: "L'univers de la représentation"), nécessiterait de rappeler des débats esthétiques qui ont eu large audience en leur temps; ce n'est pas mon objectif. Beaucoup plus essentielle me semble l'invitation faite par Schiaretti au spectateur à apprivoiser l'étranger. L'exemple de Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin situe l'étranger dans le familier, mais l'écoute du public — et des comédiens- concerne de plus en plus souvent dans notre dernière décennie, une langue autre que sa langue nationale. Le surtitrage d'un *nô* (Martzel 1982: 323)¹ représenté à la Villette; les spectacles bilingues, franco-tunisien des *Troyennes* de Sartre au théâtre du Rond-Point en 1994 et franco-khircize de *La Toison d'Or* aux Quartiers d'Ivry en 2001 exigent de ce fait un effort auditif extrêmement qualitatif. La réception d'un spectacle de *nô*, fondé sur l'esthétique du *yûgen* ou "charme subtil", repose sans doute plus sur une curiosité

¹ *sarugaku*: "singeries, genre de danses, pantomimes et de saynètes de caractère populaire, effectuées au cours des fêtes ou *matsuri*, dans des temples et des monastères. Kan.ami, le fondateur du *nô* appartenait à une confrérie de *sarugaku*. *nô*: terme signifiant talent, genre théâtral, long poème lyrique, mélange de chant, danse et mime sur un thème poétique.

esthétique que sur la reconnaissance d'une autre culture; en revanche l'idiome arabe retenu pour jouer le rôle des Troyennes et les accusations de la Caucasienne Médée proférées en khirgize, revendiquent non seulement le droit de l'opprimé contre l'opprimeur mais le droit à exister des différentes cultures. Le linguiste Claude Hagège nous mettait récemment en garde contre la disparition des langues, métaphore de la disparition de civilisations (Hagège 2000). Le théâtre au XXI^{ème} siècle n'est-il pas appelé à défendre la diversité des cultures et de ce fait à poser un acte de résistance dans un monde contemporain trop souvent -on me pardonnera le terme- assujetti à des pratiques anglophones? Louis Jovet eût-il apprécié le travail expérimental du Sfumato, franco-bulgare? En son temps sans doute pas, mais aujourd'hui? N'affirmait-il pas -je résume ici son propos- qu'une mise en scène est réussie si de fait l'accord entre le son et la vue est parfait de telle sorte qu'un sourd comprend tout ce qui se passe et qu'un aveugle sait tout ce qui se passe, à l'instar de Gloucester qui, rappelle Craig, "voit sensiblement" dans *Le Roi Lear* de Shakespeare. J'ai utilisé tantôt les termes "revendication" et résistance" en les connotant surtout esthétiquement. Non pour les vider de tout contenu politique, autrement dit civique, mais parce que le débat sur l'influence de la parole théâtrale sur les consciences est fort ancien et qu'il n'est pas dans mes prétentions d'y porter réponse. Jean-Paul Sartre, connu pour un théâtre à thèse, à la question que lui posait Bernard Dort: "Le théâtre peut-il, selon vous, intervenir directement dans la vie politique?" répondait en ces termes: "Je ne le pense pas. Le croire, c'est complètement oublier ce qu'est l'imaginaire et ce qu'est le réel" (Sartre 1992: 255) La tirade d'Ulysse dans *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* de Jean Giraudoux, en 1938, ne réveilla pas les consciences et, si la représentation d'*Errances* par la comédienne grecque-éthiopienne Dido Lykoudis dans les décombres du théâtre de Cluj en 1996 a profondément ému le public, n'est-ce pas prioritairement par la force du mythe, celui de Io, autrement dit par la force poétique de la fable, plus susceptible d'éloigner chacun de la catastrophe présente que de lui dicter une conduite? Le théâtre de Meyerhold n'a pas directement fomenté des actions révolutionnaires.

Certes Georges Steiner remarque avec raison que "c'est à travers *Les Troyennes* que Sartre a dit ce qu'il pensait de la guerre d'Algérie" et que "*Les Bacchantes* ont servi une génération cherchant à envisager symboliquement la culture de la drogue et l'enfant-fleur, à leur donner un sens" (Steiner 1997: 198), mais la parole théâtrale ne se situe-t-elle pas hors de l'actualité? Après l'échec humain de la seconde guerre mondiale, dépouillé de sa fonction première, humaniste, le langage a subi un véritable démantèlement sous la plume de Beckett jusqu'à être atteint du syndrome de Méduse sous la plume de Ionesco. N'en faut-il pas rendre responsable une confiance occidentale aveugle dans le Verbe?

Parole scénique: le retour au rituel

Dans *Le Théâtre et son double*, daté de 1938, Antonin Artaud (1896–1948) proclamait: "Le théâtre doit rompre avec l'actualité. [...] Son objet n'est pas de résoudre les conflits sociaux ou psychologiques, de servir de champ de bataille à des passions morales, mais d'exprimer objectivement des vérités secrètes." (Artaud 1964:109) Ces propos exultent la fascination avouée du poète pour le théâtre extrême-oriental; Artaud, le militant d'un dialogue culturel, oracle lucide et possédé "vaticinait" encore: "Il ne s'agit pas de supprimer la parole au théâtre mais de lui faire changer sa destination, et surtout de réduire sa place [...] or changer la destination de la parole au théâtre, c'est s'en servir dans un sens concret et spatial [...] dans le théâtre oriental à tendance métaphysique opposé au théâtre occidental à tendances psychologiques, il y a une prise de possession par les formes de leur sens et de leur signification sur tous les plans possibles [...] C'est parce que le théâtre oriental ne prend pas les aspects extérieurs des choses sur un seul plan, qu'il ne s'en tient pas au seul obstacle et à la seule rencontre solide de ces aspects avec le sens, mais qu'il ne cesse de considérer le degré de possibilité mentale dont ils sont issus, qu'il participe à la poésie intense de la nature et qu'il conserve des relations magiques avec tous les degrés objectif du magnétisme universel. C'est sous cet angle d'utilisation magique"

-rappelons nous Epidaure- "et de sorcellerie qu'il faut considérer la mise en scène, non comme le reflet d'un texte écrit..." (Artaud 1964: 111). Sans suivre Artaud sur les voies d'un magnétisme universel, ne devons-nous pas être attentifs au caractère spectaculaire et oraculaire qu'il attribue à la parole théâtrale et que les metteurs en scène de la fin du XX^{ème} siècle et du début du XXI^{ème} siècle s'approprient? L'auteur de *Un Théâtre de situations* nous mettait en garde contre leur "pesanteur": "Le metteur en scène est un homme du réel, non de l'imaginaire. Il est du côté de la chaise. Et des chaises, il en place partout, même quand le théâtre n'en a que faire? Ce théâtre est un tohu-bohu où la réalité, mais une réalité douteuse, fabriquée, a le pas sur l'imaginaire." (Sartre 1992: 126). L'avertissement, s'il n'est pas inutile -la sortie de scène de Bérénice, traînant une valise, après avoir dit adieu à Titus, n'enrichit pas indubitablement le texte racinien- me semble pourtant daté. De fait, dans un monde quasi-prisonnier du virtuel, plastique théâtrale et poésie" composent" sur scène, débitrices des conceptions artistiques de Stanislavsky (je doute que le fait de creuser les rames et de les remplir d'eau pour parvenir à une meilleure perception du clapotis, dans la mise en scène d'*Othello*, interpelle très remarquablement les spectateurs) mais tout autant de celles du Théâtre d'art d'Appia et de Craig dont nous pouvons lire l'influence dans ces propos de Claude Régy: "le langage n'est pas exact, plein d'à peu près d'ambiguïté, de malentendus, de flou, d'ambivalence et c'est là que la poésie se loge, c'est à dire dans cet écart qui orne des signes" (Régy 1999: 67). Installant ses mises en scène dans cet écart, Claude Régy écrit encore:" la matière d'un spectacle n'existe pas plus que la matière de l'écriture [...] on ne vit que d'imaginaire. Et seuls ne sont pas artistes les gens qui ne font pas travailler leur imagination. Ils ne peuvent pas être spectateurs non plus. Si le spectateur n'a pas d'imagination, il s'ennuie" (Régy 1999: 93). Une telle position, fondée sur l'extrême tension du spectateur, comme l'a montré sa mise en scène de *Quielqu'un va venir?* de John Fosse, au théâtre des Amandiers de Nanterre en 2000, prend le risque effectif d'ennuyer le spectateur mais mise aussi sur la relation étroite qui l'unit au spectacle et qui dépend non de sa seule présence attentive mais aussi de sa faculté "maîtresse (d'erreur et de fausseté?)":

l'imagination. Christophe Perton estime que la mise en scène de *Lear* d'Edward Bond doit interpeller le spectateur: "Une phrase, dit-il, peut donner une clef: il y a ce soldat qui, couvert de sang, va violer Cordélia. Il dit à peu près: "J'aurais eu quelque chose à écrire à ma mère" (Perton 2001). Est-ce qu'il parle alors de son désir, de sa propre satisfaction, ou d'un devoir vis à vis de ses parents? Que veut entendre le public? Quel personnage veut-il rencontrer?" Depuis Pirandello, nous ne pouvons ignorer que l'auteur, propriétaire de ses personnages, ne l'est pas de son oeuvre... La situation intellectuelle et psychologique dans laquelle le théâtre d'auteurs place le public devient authentiquement viscérale par le truchement d'une parole scénique sémiotiquement fondée sur des codes gestuels, vocaux, voire instrumentaux (identifiable). Si je prends l'exemple de l'oeuvre de Bernard-Marie Koltès, souvent jouée sur les scènes parisiennes ces dernières années, le spectateur de *Combat de nègres et de chiens* perçoit incontestablement une dénonciation du colonialisme, mais plus encore un problème relationnel humain où l'identité africaine se manifeste dans la mise en scène de Jacques Nichet (2001, théâtre de la Ville) non par le cliché sonore d'un tam-tam ou par un décor "exotique", mais par la voix humaine, le son d'une mélodie en hommage à l'ouvrier noir défunt, évocateur de l'omniprésence des ancêtres sur ce continent. Vsevolod Meyerhold affirmait qu'un spectacle authentique ne peut être construit que par un metteur en scène musicien" (Meyerhold 1975: 221). Le son des *côor* (flûtes) qui accompagnent les lamentations du chœur khirgize lors du rituel funéraire d'Absyrte, le frère de Médée dans *La Toison d'or*, sur la scène du théâtre d'Ivry, provoque un effet incantatoire inhérent à la parole primordiale selon Claude Régy: "Le travail sur les sonorités et les rythmes, explique t-il, vise à définir le rythme, à la suite de Meschonnic, comme l'organisation du mouvement de la parole dans le langage. Tout cela peut faire que le langage-sans perdre de sa spécificité ni faire perdre la sienne à la musique-parvienne de quelque façon à atteindre les spectateurs dans la région de l'être où la musique atteint ceux qui l'écoutent"(Régy 1999: 92). Un soin comparable doit encore être accordé au geste afin d'installer (instaurer) une tension émotive, familière à la théâtralité russe ou extrême orientale, plus récemment honorée par

la théâtralité française. Vsevelod Meyerhold affirmait dès 1928 que "tous les gestes ne sont jamais qu'une signalisation, qu'un geste est nécessairement un mot" (Meyerhold 1975: 220) comme a pu l'illustrer la mise en scène de *La Noce* de Tchekhov par Piotr Fomenko au théâtre des Bouffes du Nord en 1999 mais il a fallu attendre les recherches de Jean-Louis Barrault, de Jacques Lecoq ou d'Ariane Mnouchkine (d'origine russe de fait) pour orienter le travail théâtral français sur cette voie. Tous les trois ont reconnus l'importance du travail des comédiens avec un masque. J'évoquais tantôt l'omniprésence des ancêtres en Afrique; le masque y participe matriciellement. Odette Aslan souligne que "l'Africain ne respecte pas un masque-objet, mais l'esprit qui y est enfermé. Le masque rituel, mémoire mythique, réunit la cosmogonie, relie l'homme à la force sacrée des ancêtres et des dieux, permet de renaître" (Aslan 1985: 279). Je retiendrai ici les termes "mythique", "relie", "renaître". Au-delà de l'exercice salutaire de dépossession de lui-même que le port du masque impose au comédien, il l'invite selon Jean-Louis Barrault "à se dépasser". Le terme grec ancien, *prôsopon*, signifie comme chacun sait, masque et personne. Lorsque le maquillage du visage de Dido Lykoudis, déjà citée, le métamorphose en celui de Io ou bien que celui des visage des comédiens du théâtre du Soleil ne les distingue plus du masque maudit des Atrides, la tension émotive du public s'intensifie. N'est-ce pas précisément parce qu'il se trouve convié à un rituel unificateur du corps et de l'esprit, présent sur l'*orchestra* d'Epidaure évoqué au début de ce travail, et redécouvert dans le théâtre oriental?" Je dirai, expose Ariane Mnouchkine, que l'acteur va tout chercher en Orient ...cette fameuse autopsie du coeur par le corps. On y va chercher aussi le non-réalisme, la théâtralité" (Féral 13), cette théâtralité qu'annonçait le mythe. Je voudrais ici rappeler la définition du mythe que donne Denis de Rougemont dans son essai: *L'Amour et l'Occident*. "(de Rougemont 1939: 19). Le mythe, écrit-il, est une histoire, une fable symbolique, simple et frappante, résumant un nombre infini de situations plus ou moins analogues. Il permet de saisir d'un coup d'oeil certains types de relations constantes. Le mythe traduit des règles de conduite d'un groupe social ou religieux. Il procède de l'élément sacré autour duquel s'est constitué le groupe." Sur les

scènes parisiennes, ces dix dernières années, les mythes, pour pasticher Odette Aslan, sont "réactivés" que ce soit celui de Médée qui a été accueilli par le festival d'Avignon 2000 ou celui d'Oedipe. Pourquoi? Est-ce en raison de leur fonction archétypale, parce qu'ils racontent ce qui construit chacun de nous depuis l'origine des temps? Pourquoi sont-ils souvent projetés sur la scène dans leur essence tragique? Est-ce par mimétisme avec les événements contemporains ou bien parce que le genre tragique est le plus propre à re-liaison le comédien comme le spectateur avec l'au-delà, ce que Louis Juvet appelle "l'envers de cette vie où nous sommes placés?" (Juvet 1954: 270). Quels mythes nous proposons les dramaturges du troisième millénaire? Le langage n'est-il pas en train de devenir un mythe?

Le mot "théâtre" implique avant tout dans la langue française une dynamique corporelle que contiennent les expressions "aller au théâtre", écouter, jouer, voir une pièce de théâtre". Cette dynamique instaure une "culture de l'expressivité corporelle" (Meyerhold 1975: 61) partagée par les comédiens et les spectateurs. Les premiers comme les seconds, unis par une rencontre authentique, incarnent de "réelles présences" inaccessibles actuellement aux autoroutes informatiques et pour un temps durable, peut-être souhaitable. Cette rencontre instinctive et intuitive se veut néanmoins complexe dans la mesure où elle repose sur le langage, écrit par l'auteur, incarné par les comédiens, mis en espace par le metteur en scène, reçu par les spectateurs. Dans ce creuset subtil s'opère une alchimie avant tout sensible qui métamorphose chacun en hôte de l'autre respectueux de toute altérité, tant ethnique que linguistique donc culturelle. Le fait théâtral peut-il se targuer de militantisme humanitaire sans devenir prisonnier d'intentions idéologiques, tout aussi généreuses soient-elles et qui courent le risque d'être vite obsolètes? De fait la théâtralité occidentale de cette dernière décennie accepte de reculer ses frontières et d'apprendre, à l'école de l'Orient, à redevenir vitale en revalorisant le geste et la voix parfois oubliés au profit de l'intellectualisme et de la psychologie. Il s'agit d'une reconnaissance d'un principe afférent au fait théâtral, écrit, joué, ou reçu: celui de l'union recherchée par tout être humain avec l'univers dans lequel il se trouve placé. "Une danse au cours d'une noce

touareg mobilise tout aussi bien les danseurs que les assistants? Sans être du théâtre, elle est théâtre au sens où les premiers proposent aux seconds un témoignage que ces derniers sont en état de recevoir et d'apprécier? L'intellect n'entre absolument pas en jeu. Il s'agit d'un exercice culturel, de tradition, qui correspond, je pense, à un besoin vital" affirmait le comédien Michel Etcheverry déjà cité. Quel sera l'exercice culturel théâtral du troisième millénaire? En accueillant sur scène l'énonciation simultanée de différents idiomes, en développant un discours gestuel et sonore — le silence même s'entend —, le théâtre contemporain affirme des intentions culturelles réconciliatrices et capables, espérons le, "d'achever la tour de Babel".

Références

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Playing with Classics in Contemporary Estonian Theatre

LUULE EPNER

The share of world and national drama classics in the repertoire of Estonian theatres has been comparatively high in the past decades, with certain preferences standing out. In the 1960–80s the proportion of classics among the premieres was about one-third. The most popular authors were Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekhov and Brecht. The dramatic political and cultural events of the 1990s brought about no major change in this respect. The share of classics in the repertoire of Estonian state theatres remains approximately the same: 25–30%. Widely recognised classics from the realm of European culture like Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekhov are still preferred, as well as national classics, like Anton Hansen Tammsaare (1878–1940) and Oskar Luts (1887–1953) — authors from the first half of the 20th century, who have been all-time favourites of the Estonian theatre but are famous for, in the first place, their fictional prose works). Such a selection seems to be quite conservative and risk-free. One can, of course, also find some repertory discoveries (in the Estonian context) — for instance Calderón's *Life Is a Dream*, translated by Jüri Talvet and staged by Ingo Normet in 2000; or French writers like Paul Claudel (*The Exchange*, produced in the 1920s, reappeared after a long time on the stage in 1999), Jean Giraudoux (the first production of his dramaturgy in Estonian theatre was that of *Ondine* in 1996), and the surrealist writer Roger Vitrac (*Victor, or The Children Take Power* in 1998). The entrance of Polish avant-garde classics like Witold Gombrowicz into Estonian cultural space with Mati Unt's two remarkable productions — *Iwona, Princess of*

Burgundia (1994) and *The Marriage* (2000) — is also worth mentioning. Although generally the Estonian theatre has not been very assiduous in excavating from the “graveyard of forgotten texts”. It seems that classics are often required as magnets with which to attract an audience, since such works, being a sign of high culture, stimulate prestige-fuelled consumption. The absence of annoying copyright problems also probably has some influence. However, according to Jean Alter, an author’s control over his work does not disappear even in the case of a classic, as the source of his “power” is the interpretative canon: “... the authors of “classics” become symbols of the past and traditions and, as such, heroic figures to be studied and respected.” (Alter 1990: 23).

Literary classics are a part of the cultural heritage of the past or, if one is guided by Yuri Lotman, the mechanisms of culture as collective memory. The contemporary post-modern cultural situation is shaped largely by new types of relationships with the past, memory and heritage. Post-modernism is allegedly characterised by a fear of the past and alienation from history — “the past is a foreign country” is a typical phrase. This phrase is also the title of a study by David Lowenthal who writes that the past is perceived as something distant and alien; no longer revered or feared, it is swallowed up by the ever-expanding present (see: Middleton — Woods 2000: 22–23). On the other hand, postmodernism is at the same time characterised by an inability to identify itself outside the enormous heritage of cultural texts that have already been created, in other words — by a rampant memory, an impossibility of forgetting, as an Estonian stage director puts it (Unt 2001: 123). With respect to the theatre, this relationship has been examined by Patrice Pavis. He argues that post-modern theatre recuperates by reworking the classical heritage and needs classical norms to establish its own identity; the relationship of post-modern theatre to the classical heritage can be compared with a computer memory or memory bank from which one may select any texts or cultural elements, on the basis of which new and new productions can be compiled (Pavis 1992: 66).

However, memory is something quite mysterious and insidious. Mihhail Lotman offers another, more precise metaphor, saying that memory is not a warehouse, but more like a magician’s hat, into

which a handkerchief is inserted, but a rabbit is taken out (and it is sincerely believed that a rabbit was put in) (Lotman 2001: 219). Indeed, meanings are not carried safely through time. Meanings cannot remain unchanged. Post-modern art borrows from the art of the past but such intertextual practice inevitably modifies the meanings of borrowed and quoted cultural elements, alters their interconnections and places them in new connections.

One presumably cannot consider the whole of Estonian contemporary theatre to be post-modern. However, in the theatre of the 1990s several productions of well-known classics (including the texts on which they are based) attract attention due to non-traditional, post-modern textual strategies. (Nevertheless, these productions do not represent the mainstream of Estonian theatre nor are the following dramaturgical strategies predominant). Instead of exhibiting the great works of the past on stage, with the attitude "we are presenting classics", the active **rewriting** of classical texts is taking place, being motivated by the attitude "we are just playing with the classics". Matei Calinescu has pointed to post-modern sensitivity to the phenomenon of rewriting, although he also argues that this practice is by no means a monopoly of the post-moderns (Calinescu 1997: 247–248). (In Estonian theatre it dates back to the so-called theatrical renewal of 1969–71). The concept of rewriting covers different far-reaching thematical and diegetic transformations, resulting in texts that stand in a complicated inter- and metatextual relationship with the primary text and sometimes even tend to function as an autonomous literary work (ib. 243). Close to rewriting is the concept of theatrical adaptation, which is particularly rich in the methods (including radical staging) available for remaking the meaning of past works (Fortier 1997: 90). Of course, rewriting/adaptation starts with (re)reading. It is remarkable that in most cases the adaptations are created by the directors themselves and they are guided and "controlled" by a vision of the future theatrical production. A director (as well as other theatre artists) has specific reading strategies. Jean Alter speaks of the reading, focused on the vision of the stage, which among other things requires knowledge of theatrical styles and stagecraft, and is practiced rarely by anyone others than theatre people (Alter 1990: 164). The Polish

director Kazimierz Braun considers the main attitudes of the director as reader to be his subordination to the text or the use of the text as (raw) material for an autonomous stage production. These attitudes may be combined: deferential reading plus bold conclusions. This formula applies especially in the case of prose: the director reads the novel or story very attentively, yet after that he should tear himself away from the structure and means of expression of the text and create a new structure that is guided by its own rules and in which he uses his own means of expression (Braun 1986: 115).

This article will observe how classics have been rewritten in the Estonian theatre of the turn of the century, and how textual transformations are influenced and shaped by theatre play. For this purpose, there is no need to keep dramas and prose texts separated — differences of *genre* are not determinative here, as both can be adapted.

Apart from such widespread and widely accepted practices like cutting or the story-true dramatisation of a narrative text, one may begin with a free translation of world classics: in this case the adapter uses artistic licence to change to a remarkable extent the lexical structure and phrasing of the original work. This is practised by Mati Unt (born in 1944), an outstanding Estonian writer who began his career of stage director in the late 1970s. For instance, he replaces the alexandrine verse of a French classical drama — Pierre Corneille's *Illusion* — with non-rhyming free verse (modifying also the title of the production — *Näitleja näitab ja vaataja vaatab ehk Illusioon* ('The Presenter Presents and the Viewer Views, or Illusion', 1996)); or translates the verses of *Hamlet* into prose, significantly modifying the rhythm and style of the work making it more suitable for its rather "prosaic", emphatically impassionate interpretation (1997 production); or, *vice versa*, translates some of the text of the Sławomir Mrożek's *Tango* (2002 production) into iambi in order to differentiate between the characters' ideological statements and routine dialogues. His translations or versions of pre-existing translations usually contain a great number of "modern" foreign words; this lexical layer effectively estranges the texts like *Illusion* or *Hamlet* from the age and style of Renaissance. Another example is the dramatisation of Franz

Kafka's short story *Metamorphosis* by Peeter Raudsepp (produced in 1998), which is written in verse; in other respects it remains relatively traditional.

The cast of characters is restructured in many ways. Sometimes reversed gender casting is used, as in the production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House, or Nora* by Mati Unt (1995): the gender of all roles was reversed, and since a man became the main character, the title was also changed — *A Doll's House, or Norbert*. In this way the contraposition of a strong emancipated woman to a weak feminine man came to the forefront in a slightly updated environment; but since Ibsen's original characters undoubtedly existed in the spectators' memory and these characters were estranged by the inverse character system, the influence of culture on gender roles became visible. One year previously, in 1994, the same technique was used by Merle Karusoo in the contemporised new version of the Estonian writer Eduard Vilde's comedy *Pisuhänd* ('The Hobgoblin', written in 1913), entitled *Second-hand*.

In *Täna õhta viskame lutsu* ('Tonight We Play Ducks and Drakes', 1998), a comprehensive montage of several works by Estonian classic Oskar Luts, Mati Unt consistently melts two or more characters from different works by Luts into one, constructing in this way a kind of psychological joint portrait of Estonians. Fusing different characters, he reinforces their psychological dominants; so, individual qualities of character recede and the characters are perceived as some kind of ethnic archetypes. An interesting way is the use of one and the same actor in different roles in the same production — in this case, different characters mutually reflect against each other and get related to each other through the actor's body. In this way Mati Unt creates surprising connections between characters in the stage version of Tammisaare's epic novel *Truth and Justice*, entitled *Taevane ja maine armastus* ('Heavenly and Earthy Love' 1995), and also in Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* (2000). In the latter case the actor playing two or more roles also connects different levels of time and reality — Moscow in the 1920–1930s and Jerusalem at the time of Christ. Characters are blended together in yet another manner in contaminations of two or more classical works. For instance, in Margus Kasterpalu's text *Night of the spirits* (1995,

staged by Priit Pedajas), the novel of the same name by the Estonian exile writer Karl Ristikivi (published in 1953) and Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf* are woven together; the main character of Ristikivi's novel fuses with Harry from *Steppenwolf*, and his existential exploration of self-consciousness in a strange dead man's house blend with meetings with Hermine and the scenes of "magical theatre" from Hesse's work. The Estonian theatre also offers examples of the transposition of classical stories into contemporary situations, such as the so-called transition-period version of Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, entitled *The Three-croon Opera*, according to Estonian national currency (text by Vladislav Koržets, 1994), the above-mentioned *Second-hand*, etc. One could also mention that the director Mikk Mikiver, staging *War and Peace* by Lev Tolstoi, added a level of personal commentary — his own text inspired by the work and performed by himself. The commentary associated the novel with the problems of the end of the 20th century.

By continuing, we run the risk of getting mired in a simple enumerating of different classes of Genette's *la littérature au second degré* (second level literature). Instead we will examine more closely two directors' "games with classics", in which dramaturgic activity and the staging practices are most directly connected. The directors in question often write and/or rewrite texts for their own productions. The period of improvisational theatre (approximately 1995–1998) is particularly interesting in the work of the young producer **Jaanus Rohumaa** (born in 1969). His production methods have become more traditional now. In this period, the text was created through teamwork, largely in the process of rehearsal, and the actors' improvisations were used and encouraged. Still, Rohumaa values the word and the story. He believes that the story should all the time be retold through improvisations that take place during rehearsals (Rohumaa 2001: 357–358). He also explains the need to cooperate with the troupe by his sensitivity to the word: together it is possible to endlessly improve the wording and reformulate the text until the premiere (ib. 331). He calls himself a text person and says that he is more into telling stories using the theatrical medium than into powerful visual imagery (ib. 330). A blending of many fragments of diffe-

rent origin, which are quite loosely united into some basic pattern, is characteristic for his texts and staging.

Impro 1. Põhja konn ('Impro 1. Northern Frog', 1995) follows the basic pattern of a fairy tale. Into the well-known fairy tale *Northern frog* by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, a writer from the period of Estonian national awakening in 19th century, several fragments from Estonian classic authors (August Gailit, Oskar Luts, etc.) and contemporary literature (e.g. Arvo Valton's Oriental-topic novel *Journey to the Other Side of Infinity*) are inserted, as well as Indian folklore, some allusions to Shakespeare, Molière, the Bible, etc. A joyful journey is made along the paths of Western and Eastern mythology and folklore. During that journey various stories are narrated, like fairy tales, folk tales, ancient legends, etc. Through the surprising associations between them, a figure of the Estonian, belonging to the cultural borderlands between West and East, begins to take shape — thus the issue of national identity also comes into play.

The structure of *Impro 2. Nanseni pass* ('Impro 2. Nansen's Passport', 1996) is structured by the pattern of the game: it begins with a television game presented in a parodical tone, which is followed by the episodes from the magic theatre of Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, and then by a long scene of story-telling about the Norwegian polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen, based on his diaries. Due to turning a TV game into a magic theatre, characters change their roles, e.g. a TV presenter becomes Pablo from a novel by Hesse, etc. The performance opposes routine one-dimensional mass culture to a game exploring the real depths of life and broadening the worldview of the characters who gain inner freedom. It is symbolised by the so-called Nansen passport. "This is people's freedom to step off the road that gets them nowhere and to choose a new path. Experience, push and flight. /---/ Be free!" That is how Rohumaa ends his play.

The basic plot pattern of the *Noorem Edda ehk Meresõitjad* ('Younger Edda, or the Seafarers', 1998) is a sea journey a thousand years ago, during which the stories from ancient Scandinavian epics are told. Seafarers pass many countries that are designated by sound arrangements and iconic cultural signs on a video screen: e.g. the signs for Norway are Grieg's music and

Munch's pictures, Sweden is marked by an episode from an Ingmar Bergman film, etc. The ancient mythological world meets also with the icons of popular culture, for instance John Lennon. The spiritual meaning of the path is again self-exploration and the quest for higher values. What is achieved in the *Younger Edda* is love. The basic pattern of Rohumaa's productions is, in conclusion, a story-telling during a journey in (culturo-)mythological landscapes, which is at the same time a road to expanding self-consciousness and awareness, with the aim of achieving spiritual freedom.

Slightly different is the open-air production *Öö hommik* ('The Morning of the Night', 1998), in which the story of an old painter is assembled from two works — John Fowles' *The Ebony Tower* and Hesse's *Klingsor's Last Summer*. Events set in Italy only follow the main motives of the original works replacing and modernising them relatively freely (e.g. Fowles' art critic becomes an obtrusive TV producer who wants to make a film about a lonely artist). The imaginary centre is the medieval morality play *Everyman* which is brought into the performance using the "theatre in the theatre" technique and which puts the characters (and audience) face to face with death and eternity.

Mati Unt's stagings encompass both the "core texts" of Estonian literature (Tammsaare and Luts) and of world literature (Shakespeare, Ibsen, etc); yet he has also staged productions of works previously unknown to Estonian readers, such as Corneille's *Illusion*. The distance of his dramaturgical versions from the original text is considerably increased by the productions themselves, i.e. directorial solutions continue where dramaturgic work leaves off. In *Illusion* (1996) and *Tragedy of Hamlet* (1997) the director creates a temporally and spatially ambivalent fictional world in which signs of past ages and of modern pop culture freely co-exist; he also uses copious allusions and quotations from diverse cultural texts. To give a few examples — the world of the classicistic comedy *Illusion* is in Unt's stage interpretation populated also by brave musketeers from the novel by Alexandre Dumas, at the same time a boastful hero Matamore wears a Batman costume; the verses of both the pre-Corneille era poet

Theophile de Viau and the contemporary Estonian poet Juhan Viiding are quoted, etc.

A *tour de force* of the rewriting of classics is Unt's *Tonight We Play Ducks and Drakes* (1998), based on the works by Oskar Luts — mainly on the cycle consisting of prose works *Springtime* (1912–13), *Summer* (1918–19) and their continuations, up to *Autumn* (1938). The characters of *Springtime* are schoolboys from the end of the 19th century; their life stories are followed in the sequels of the novel. Jaan Undusk has called Luts' cycle a grand myth of the seasons, and an Estonian national allegory of the dance of life. *Springtime* has become a kind of mythologeme of national discourse, referring to the "golden past", to the childhood of a nation, and archetypal Estonians.

Unt opens this "golden past" to history, letting the historical events of the 20th century, such as both world wars or Estonia's two periods of regained independence (1918 and 1991), etc, fuse into each other. The crucial moments of national history are played out as a series of variations on the same themes. The borderline between past and present is deliberately blurred. With the help of joined characters and playful manipulations of time and space, Unt manages to display the overall story of the Estonian people — that of an unending fight for freedom, rebuilding and the search for the self — in a comical and ironic manner. It is deserving of notice that *Tonight...* has appeared in print together with another play, *Inimesed saunalaval* ('People in the Sauna'), which is derived from the works of Luts as well, and has been accepted as an original work by Mati Unt. From *Springtime* is also derived the drama *Winter* (1996) by the distinguished playwright Madis Kõiv. It is in some way a continuation of Luts's cycle: Kõiv inscribes the characters, these archetypal Estonians, into the period of the occupations and repressions of the 1940s. Some of them become forest brothers, deportees or refugees, some others — communist potentates. Under the pressure of history, the myth of the "golden past", presented in the work of Luts, disintegrates. The Luts-based texts of Unt and Kõiv belong to the transitional area between the rewriting and the original work, where boundaries are, after all, based on public agreement.

The Master and Margarita, a play published by Unt on the basis of Bulgakov's motives was staged by Unt in 2000. Apart from the picking, cutting and reassembling which are inevitable in the case of a novel (and which reduce the share of the satirico-fantastical plot line associated with the tricks of Woland and his companions), at least three important interpretative strategies are employed. First, the Master's novel is replaced by a play, which brings about theatre in the theatre and thus complicates the ontology of the play. Bulgakov's literates become theatre people in the play by Unt. Second, the system of characters is rearranged based on this change: double and treble roles appear, where different characters meet and are mutually reflected in the same actor. Thus, the same actor plays Aloizi and Jude; the actor who plays Ivan Bezdomnõi also has the part of Jeshua but in his insanity he imagines that he is Jesus' apostle Johannes. Third, text additions and repetitions (plus visual and audible stage signs) create motive chains, of which some are actualised or bring in modern backgrounds, others amplify mythology and/or remain in people's memory simply due to their poetical power. For example, the subject of KGB and repressions that is hidden between the lines in the novel by Bulgakov, is written and played in the performance. Sending the Master to a prison camp and electric shocks in the psychiatric hospital also recall the recent persecution of dissidents. The other associative line creates an alien aura fitting in the modern time around Woland and his companions who are archetypal strangers. It is created by music (the tune of the *X-Files* series) and the language of visual images (using the fiction film *Space Odyssey 2001* as a video background for ulterior flights) rather than text.

In the above-mentioned rewritings / adaptations of the classics, the "presence" of the theatre is noteworthy; these interpretations contain clear signals that tell the audience: this is a play. Rohumaa's improvisational theatre is grounded in an unconcealed **game** involving texts and textual fragments found in cultural memory. The situation of the theatre, which is clearly brought to the fore, serves as a foundation of Unt's stage worlds. Thus in *Illusion* the opposition between showing — viewing as the basis of the theatrical semiosis is thematised: the father searching for his lost

son follows the events that the powerful magus shows him, sitting on the proscenium with his back to the audience. There is a video camera on the stage, and on the screen in backstage the audience can see his face and his reactions in close up — the actor “reflects” himself as the spectator to the “real” spectators sitting in the hall. The framing level of the production *Tonight...* is created by the figure of the author, i.e. the character of Oskar Luts, which introduces the topic of the created, constructed nature of the world on the stage. In *The Master and Margarita*, the Master’s novel has become a play that is being rehearsed in the theatre; although gradually the boundaries between play and reality disappear. We encounter the “play within a play” technique and the estranging distancing of actors from their roles in several interpretations of classics. According to Genette (1982) these interpretations could be referred to as semantic transformations in a play-like regime. In this manner an additional level of meta-theatrical reflection is built into the production, and the play’s dialectical relations with reality are brought more sharply to the fore.

Rewriting is coupled with meta-theatricality. In his article “Theater im Spiel — Spiel im Theater” Klaus Schwind emphasises that theatre play is an ambivalent, dynamic and genuinely dialogical process in which the spectator is an active co-player. It tends to complicate the structures and elements used in the game rather than simplify them. The theatre can play with texts, and also with classics, using them as game guidelines and playthings — playthings in the sense that during the game they acquire new meanings, different from those that were valid before (Schwind 1997: 425, 434).

In playing with classics, the theatre acts like an “engine”: with interpretatively active performances the text is pulled out of the still life within the canon and the semiotic energy contained in the text is released. Playing as an explicit fundamental attitude motivates and permits the fragmenting of texts and the placement of elements in new contexts, created during the play, that are associated with the audiences of the new era. The action, defined as a play in a ludic space of the theatre, makes it possible to easily deconstruct and reconstruct fictional worlds. The energy of the

play splits cultural myths, opens new reaches therein, and makes classics flexible, ready to generate new meanings.

Returning to the memory — playing with classics rests to a large extent upon the spectators' memory: the spectator is able to enjoy this kind of play, to evaluate the shifting of meanings and to make associations — briefly, act as the co-player — provided the original work of literature (the story, the characters, maybe the most famous phrases) are present in his memory, if he remembers the text he has read before or studied at school. To use the above-mentioned metaphor of Mihhail Lotman in a slightly different context: when the spectator sees the rabbit, he is surprised or interested, and reacts, provided that he remembers the handkerchief put inside. That is why the core texts of classics seem to tolerate more radical transformations than works less known. Playing activates the audience's memories, calling in the mind the original text, fragments we are seeing on the stage remind us of the integral whole.

Theatre play (with the programmed position of spectator as co-player) may be seen as a model of cultural reality; "theatre can be understood as an act of self-presentation and self-reflection on the part of the culture in question." (Fischer-Lichte 1992: 10). Core classical texts considered as cultural myths, memory and play are closely interconnected. Myth lives in the memory, from where it must be drawn forth — acknowledged, perceived — and for this the stage offers a place with its *here and now*. Through play cultural myths of the past begin to speak to the present. In the play *Kokkusaamine* ('The Meeting') by Madis Kõiv, play is spoken of as memory that only through playing begins to remember (Kõiv 1997: 122). Indeed, the post-modern theatre's playful relationship with classics cannot *a priori* be considered a lightweight activity or the irresponsible destruction of cultural values. By fragmenting and restructuring the classical heritage in various ways, the perception of the whole is sharpened; by shifting meanings and creating new meanings, the classic is kept alive. Play is actually a very serious matter. There is memory in play.

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Theatre as a Market

ANNELI SARO

In the text that follows I will examine the issues of theatre as a market and theatrical productions as goods, and will briefly analyse the preferences of the Estonian consumer (i.e. audience) and advertising strategies of producers (i.e. theatres). I will draw on Estonian summer culture as empirical material for the illustration of my arguments.

One peculiarity of Estonia as a small culture is the scarcity of market niches and products intended for certain target groups, or at least the very vague advertising of those products. The theatre, which generally involves large expenditures of money, is greatly dependent on the size of its audience and the revenue earned from performances. Almost all professional theatres operating in Estonia are subsidised by the national government or municipal governments. Since theatres are financed on the basis of the size of their audience, it is not always the quality of the theatrical experience but the largest possible audience that is important.

In the mid-1990s the production of so-called summer culture or popular culture in Estonia underwent a boom; these open-air events targeted the general public, combining art, the natural environment and food and drink. In addition to various folk festivities, I also have in mind classical music concerts in small towns (e.g. the Tamula Lake Music concerts in Võru) or in rural areas (e.g. the Leigo Lake Music). Many open-air performances, one of which I will later examine in greater detail, could also be included in this category. One notable feature of these events is their nation-wide exposure, especially in the case of new and unique projects.

As in the summer of 1997, for instance, when people from all over Estonia gathered by Lake Tamula in Southern Estonia to listen to G. F. Handel's *Water Music* and *Music for the Royal Fireworks* and see the accompanying fireworks display. According to organisers, 18,000 tickets for the event were sold, and roughly 25,000 people were gathered around the lake to partake in the music and fireworks. Summer culture is often consumed by people who would not attend an indoors performance of classical music and would probably not go to the theatre either. Such extraordinary and "exclusive" events have, as mentioned above, become a compulsory component of the vacations of the nascent middle class and a natural part of their lifestyle, thereby acquiring a considerable symbolic importance. Open-air events often take people to new, naturally beautiful parts of Estonia and provide an opportunity for pleasantly spending time with family or friends and maybe even, with a little luck, an artistic experience. Since many summer events are indeed quickly prepared commercial projects, it is not always worth expecting much of the artistic side of the event.

To illustrate this tendency in the area of the theatre, I will use a typical and also striking example — the performance of the production *2000 aastat elu Eestimaal ehk Piknik Reiu jõel* [2000 years of life in Estonia or Picnic on the Reiu River], by Jaan Tätte, an outstanding young Estonian playwright, on the banks of the Reiu River in 1999. This kitschy populist project presents, on a grand scale, seven periods from the history of the Estonian people: prehistory, the Viking period, the Middle Ages, the Tsarist period, the War of Independence, the Soviet period and finally contemporary times. The performance was given coherence by a young man and young woman who met in different periods and fell in love. In every case the relationship was ended by the young man's death, deportation to Siberia or military service. The director Raivo Trass had aimed at making the performance a grand spectacle: a cardboard mammoth, wigwams, a church and the suburb of Lasnamägi appeared on the banks of the river; rafts, boats and a motorboat playing the part of a fish paraded up and down the river, and battle scenes were brought to life with pyrotechnical effects. In addition to the actors of the *Endla* theatre,

200 volunteers (including soldiers) were incorporated into the performance.



The five performances of this production were visited by from 15 to 17,000 spectators according to different estimates, i.e. each performance was visited by an average of 3,000 people, which is a notable achievement in the contemporary Estonian theatre. Despite, or perhaps thanks to, its flexible pricing policy, *Piknik Reiu jõel* (adults 100 EEK = 6,4 Euros, but children and pensioners 25 EEK) was a profitable business project for the *Endla* theatre, surpassing the ticket revenues of all other summer performances. The performance itself cannot be considered particularly successful in artistic terms, which leads one to ask how the event's enormous popularity among summer performances can be explained. (The next 1999 summer performances in the ranking of number of spectators, M. Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper* and W. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, each gathered under 10,000 spectators, but with 24 and 29 performances respectively.) In addition to the relatively inexpensive tickets and the

almost unlimited seating capacity of the venue, in my opinion an important part was also played by the national subject matter expressed in the production's title. In the art market an evocative name influences the consumer to a great extent, because one generally cannot sample the goods before purchasing them.

The media has frequently expressed the opinion that after independence Estonian collective national idealism was replaced by an individualistic society dominated by subgroups based more on shared interests than on nationality. In the theatre (and in art in general) there is, however, also a noticeable tendency towards the continuing actualization (or sometimes also deconstruction or parody) of national epics and national history and identity. Such works are very popular among middle-aged and older spectators. Is this an example of routine in work and consumption or does national consciousness still occupy a dominant position in the Estonian identity?

In his article *Postmodernism and Consumer Society*, Frederic Jameson argues that the so-called nostalgia films "do not reinvent a picture of the past in its lived totality; rather, by reinventing the feel and shape of characteristic art objects of an older period (the serials), it seeks to reawaken a sense of the past associated with those objects." (Jameson 1983: 116) The theatrical actualization of national epics and their popularity among Estonian audiences may be a sign of a nostalgic yearning for national ideals and a feeling of solidarity. The large numbers of spectators at open-air performances are intensified by a feeling of solidarity that was so strongly felt in the recent past yet has been all but forgotten in everyday life, and confirm the existence of certain traditional ideals. In the mediatized and globalizing world theatrical events like *2000 Years of Life in Estonia* have a strong ritual and therapeutic value, at least for a big part of the Estonian population.

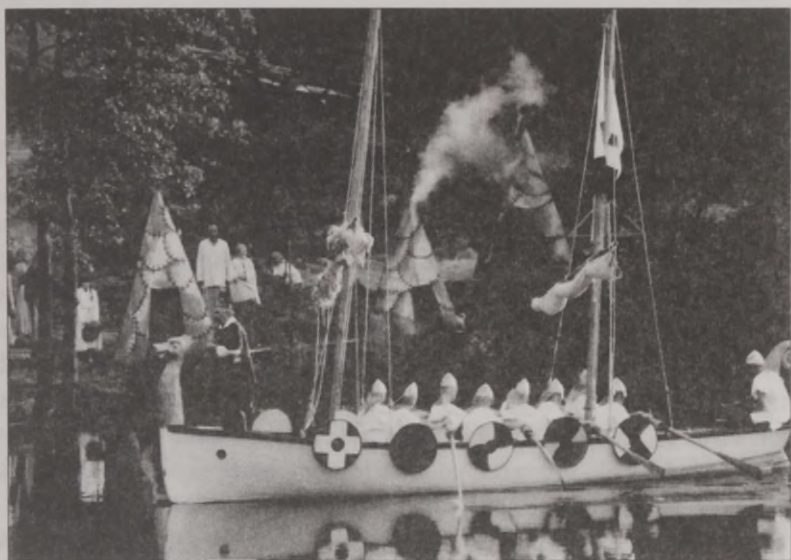
F. Jameson continues: "It seems to me exceedingly symptomatic to find the very style of nostalgia films invading and colonizing even those movies today which have contemporary settings: as though, for some reason, we were unable today to focus our own present, as though we have become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experience." (Jameson 1983: 117) This quote is extremely telling in the context of the

Estonian theatre in the 1990s, since playwriting and the theatre are not particularly interested in the artistic portrayal or analysis of the contemporary period, and younger critics quite consistently accuse the theatre of this. As the social dimension is relatively well represented in Estonian literature and art, the fact that the theatre has shut itself in an ivory tower can be seen as a kind of deference to popular taste and a desire to offer an escape from the harshness of everyday life. It does appear, however, that social stratification has led to the reduction of common social values and a fragmentation of everyday realities, so that it is increasingly difficult to associate the general public with local topics.

In the past couple of years, a large number of niche events, i.e. elitist cultural events intended for a narrower public and held in rural areas have developed as counterweights to mass events. Examples of this are country estate-theatre (at Palmse or Keila-Joa) or farm-theatre (a production in a Southern Estonian farm in the local dialect or a production in the form of a leading theatre critic M. Kasterpalu). Such events usually involve relatively inaccessible locations, a small number of spectators and a high ticket price. This leads to a repercussion for the theatre in the form of a reduced number of spectators and perhaps also reduced revenue. Both a greater and a smaller number of spectators, however, raise the importance of an event and of the artistic aspect for individual people. In addition, particular events intended for a narrow public also create new identities and sub-groups. One could compare this with the experience of the Tampere Theatre in Finland, where it was attempted to prepare a repertoire of specific productions for different target groups. Whereas the overall number of spectators initially fell, in the long-term spectators who had found their respective niche in the theatre developed a broader interest in the entire theatre repertoire and in the art form more generally, and the institution as a whole won a new public. (Ellonen 1999)

Conclusion. In the Nordic countries, where the summers are short and often also cold and rainy, one has to catch every sunny day and ray of sun. (*Carpe diem!*) One must also emphasise the implicit connection with nature felt by Estonians, who are for the most part first or second generation city-dwellers. This is manifest in many pantheistic features of their worldview and, more

specifically, in the summer cottages in the countryside that are owned by almost every family. This also applies to our neighbours the Finns, who have a very long and widespread summer theatre tradition. Finnish open-air productions are also based mostly on national literature, that reinforces consistency of audience with each other, with nation and with nature. (Silde 2001)



Thus one could argue that the consumption of culture in a natural environment is an attempt by an urbanised primitive or at least rural people to blend nature and culture. The symbiosis of nature and art, the low and the high, the everyday and the elitist appear to the Estonian living in a 21st century post-modern society to be the most natural possible combination. Whereas the members of the Young Estonians movement at the beginning of the 20th century cried: *Let's remain Estonians but become Europeans!*, 100 years later this paradox appears to have found a unique solution. Tõnu Tamm, owner of Leigo tourism farm, explains the local lake music concerts as a desire to create additional beauty. "When one enriches beautiful nature with beautiful music, the result is even

greater beauty. [---] In combining the two, the result is perhaps even greater than their arithmetic sum.” (Mihkelson 2001)

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Some Connections between the Mythical and Postmodern World-View in Theatre Today

KRISTEL NÖLVAK

The purpose of this paper is not to deal with the slippery definition of postmodernism¹, nor to determine the indeterminable profundities of myth, but to show how the postmodern world-view predominant today lets us see much that is characteristic of the mythical world-view. Even more — to show the similar, maybe even identical, concern of the above-mentioned two world-cognitions that at first sight may seem to be divergent. The following tries to be only a short introduction to the wide theme of the mythical world concept and its expressions in theatre and not to draw any incontrovertible or fundamental conclusions.

To begin with, a very general explanation must be given of what is meant by the term world-view here. It is not easy to define a world-view, but let us confine ourselves to saying that it is a mental picture in a subject's consciousness that treats the whole world and where a regulating knowledge system is added that helps to understand this picture with all the almost unimaginable that comes with it. (Kasak 1999: 41) There are various types of world-view — religious, scientific, philosophical etc. (possibly there are as many of them as there are subjects). We used to say

¹ The *postmodern* notion here comprises the most generally agreed characteristics attributed to it (that probably need no iteration here) and is used first of all, in its literal meaning, that is, as the subsequent phenomenon to modernism, therewith primarily opposing the latter. Neither postmodernism nor modernism are used here as common denominators for certain artistic styles but as denominators for certain ways to perceive the world.

that the scientific world-view replaced the mythical one, yet for some time now now we have been considering the mythical approach again. Nonetheless, most of the world-pictures are believed to exist concurrently, and all of the presumptions made in this paper are based on the premise that the mythical cognition of the world has never ceased to exist but has only lain hidden to a higher or lesser degree behind the dominant world concept. Let us surmise that the essential points of the postmodern world view are quite similar to the mythical one, even to the extent even that will allow us to consider these world-views, in spite of their divergent attitudes to Myth, as flowing into the same issue — Emptiness. I use the Buddhist term because it includes the notion of the permanent present and full perfection. Emptiness is a state in which a believer in the mythical eventually hopes to find him/herself in, it is satisfaction that is attained through the belief in the sameness and wholeness of the world. What are those essential points that would make a believer in the postmodernist world-view find him/herself in the similar, if not the same, state of world perception as s/he would have in the state of Emptiness?

The keyword here is, paradoxically, belief. There is no such thing as myth if there is a lack of belief in it. "Myth is not a fiction, it does not represent the ideal, it represents the reality" (Kasak 1999: 39). The mythical world-view permanently recreates the myth, yet the priority here does not belong to one certain myth, one certain story, but to the belief in the existence of a story as such, and through this to the belief in the regularity of the world, in the whole, in the existence of solutions. The basic story of the mythical world is about the World Being One (Lotman 1990: 344), a belief that everything is present in everything. The postmodern world-view, on the contrary, does not believe in the existence of the story any more, it does not believe in the whole, it doubts everything, but accepts the world of chaos, where one meaning is no more valid than the other, and everything is in a permanent stage of alternation. "If no concrete meaning is preferred to another, but the ceaseless flow of meanings is made the principle in itself, the concept of meaning becomes substantial" (Undusk 1998: 20). Hence, postmodernism does not believe in solutions but finds solutions in the absence of solutions, in the situation, where

everything is possible. The mythical world view reaches the same point through the belief that everything really is possible.

The mythical way of thinking comprehends the illogical. The postmodernist, media-centred world, where the infinite flood of information almost suffocates man, at the same time blurs all boundaries and invalidates the logical base in perceiving the world that has been so important for modernism. The mythicity of media lies also in its emphatic visuality and iconicity that contrasts with the logocentricity of modernism.

The constitution of identity is not actually a primary problem for either the mythical or the postmodernist thinker. Representatives of the mythical world-view have the identity beforehand, given by their belief in the whole. They are aware of belonging to the whole (no matter how self-identity is expressed there), so there is no need to search for it, but only to confirm it. The postmodern man, on the other hand, is not even interested in a definite identity and constructs self-definitions as s/he pleases, considering him/herself non-belonging to anywhere, thus — constituting his/her identity in Emptiness, where all identities are of equal value. That actually makes the self-identification of the postmodern man as stationary as it makes it dynamic for the mythical one. It is comparable to what D. T. Suzuki says about the Self in Zen: "It is a zero which is a staticity, and at the same time an infinity, indicating that it is all the time moving" (Suzuki 1970: 25). Claude Lévi-Strauss has once confessed to his inability to perceive his identity, claiming to be a mere place to himself, a place where something is happening but declaring it impossible for himself to use words like *I, me, myself* etc. So he suggests that somehow we are all like crossroads where something is happening, while the road itself stays passive. (Lévi-Strauss 1986: 1510) This kind of passivity or rather active passivity is substantial in both the mythical and the postmodern world-view.

The time definition of Emptiness is rest, infinity, certain opened closure, in which the believer in the mythical is always present, in the eternal mythical present time, where also the past and the future are simultaneously reflected. However, the postmodern is in constant motion and alternation but it also interrupts this reaching somewhere by unbelief. Therefore it also constitutes

itself in the permanently lasting present, placing the passing fragments of the present not next to one another but onto one another. As we know, postmodernism does not recognize the dualisms typical of modernism, instead it declares all meanings and natures equally invalid or valid, as does the mythical world view — in Emptiness everything is equal.

But let us proceed to the theatre.

A discussion of postmodernist theatre does not comprise under this notion all theatre existing at the present moment (the time we tend to call postmodernist). We have never talked about mythical theatre but we do talk or have talked about the ritual one that is assumed to convey the mythical world-view. Still, ritual theatre had in its heyday, in the 1960s, much that could be determined as modernist in the part that concerns the spirit of political struggle, or the purpose of fighting for or against something. This is not any longer the mythical love for life as a diverse whole, nor the postmodern (or cynical, if you will) acceptance of all the forms by which life expresses itself. Yet here I see simply the indeterminate usage of names, not the proof of the non-existence of the so-called real ritual theatre, just as everything that could be included under the name of postmodernist theatre is not that by far. The interesting aspect is that the beginning of postmodernist theatre (because of the ideological closeness and partly even the sameness with *performance-art*) coincides with the beginning of ritual theatre. Even further, many of the followers of ritual theatre (Grotowski, Schechner, Wilson etc., not to mention Brook) have at least afterwards been labelled postmodernists.

To what extent, then, can postmodern and ritual theatre be connected or separated? Instead of a long theorization I will explain it on the basis of one certain example where in one play undoubtedly staged in the postmodernist key the postmodern and the mythical world-view are expressed at the same time. Namely, these conclusions will be based on the Vanemuine Theatre production in Tartu of *Master and Margarita*, directed in the 2000/2001 season by Mati Unt, who is among Estonia's leading postmodernist directors.

The production is of the play written by the director himself based on the novel by Bulgakov and that in most parts corresponds to the novel. But there are some changes: the novel's literary circle

of Moscow has been replaced with theatre circles of Moscow, and the story about Pilate's mental agony (Master's play) has been staged in the form of *theatre within theatre*, as rehearsals of the play. Thus the theme is mythical, and the basis of the production is a myth. The reproduction of the Christian myth, to which the director adds additional meanings, widens the range of possible interpretations, and thus offers the viewer nothing complete. This postmodern attitude towards the audience means that the stress in postmodernist (as well as in ritual) performance has moved from referential towards the performative and to feeling instead of thinking; the spectator must be in sync with the performers, open to the emotions and actions as they happen. In this aspect ritual theatre is more active and the understanding of the message by the audience is a prerequisite of an act of common ritual. But a degree of indifference is involved here in the case of the postmodernist performer, because unlike the ritual one, this performer does not have to reconfirm the belief of the audience but leaves the perception of the performed free for interpretation. Play used by ritual theatre to open the deeper psychic levels of the spectator as well as of the performer works in the postmodernist theatre partly due to the pleasure of playing itself.

Although ritual theatre also profanes the holy, it is only a means to achieving catharsis, but in the case of postmodernism there arises the more critical question — does the notion of “holy” fit into the postmodern world-view at all? Does deconstruction eliminate every kind of transcendence that is naturally involved in the mythical? While the mythical world-view inevitably comprehends the sacred dimension, the belief in the supernatural and at the same time in the superable boundary between natural and supernatural, the postmodern world-cognition is based on unbelief that nullifies dogma. Still the unbelief here easily turns into belief — into the belief in unbelief, for a human cannot exist without the least need of substance². Is it not possible that the transcendental for a postmodern man has been substituted with

² See J. Undusk's convincing arguments on the theme and the assertion that if there is anything that a human takes seriously, it is the urge for substantiality (Undusk 1998: 16).

something that is no less transcendental though called by another name and not canonized³?

It seems to me that this certain production is observable from the standpoint of negative theology (if it is valid to all of the postmodern canon is not the issue here). The myth in the production of *Master and Margarita* is deconstructed by different acts of profanation. Jeshua in the play is being performed as a simpleton, even as a silly fool, whose dumbly inadequate actions elicit laughter in the audience. The real actor in the production is playing the actor Ivan Bezdomnõi, who at the beginning embodies Jeshua (in the rehearsals of the Master's play) and later his disciple John, at the same time wearing the strait jacket as mad Bezdomnnõi. It is an obvious profanation of the myth of Jesus, and the defilement of the icon is being conducted in the literal meaning as well: John/ Bezdomnnõi takes the life-size golden figure of Jesus from the cross standing in the emptiness in the depths of the stage, and begins to dance with it on the empty stage as pop-music plays. At that very moment the assertion is being proved that the denial of God is approved and thus the unconscious purpose of breaking the icon might be the acceptance and the worshipping of the whole by the closer observation of the fragments.

The principle of one actor performing several roles almost simultaneously is characteristic of the whole production. It includes, on the one hand, the schizophrenic duality, typical of postmodernism, and the intact nature of the myth on the other hand — one is in everything, everything is in one, especially when the contrasting features find themselves together in one character. For example, the transformation of Margarita from the screeching witch to the reserved young lady takes place in a matter of seconds.

A mythical world does not have a real centre, neither is it accepted by postmodernism; both of them are similarly acentric and illogical. Still, the mythical at least includes the organizing principle, but in the case of the other, the denial of it is not so

³ According to Eliade there is no such thing as pure profane existence, a human can never get totally rid of the religious behaviour no matter to what a degree s/he desacralizes the world to (Eliade 1992: 55).

simple: in this production the place of God remains empty and so the organizing principle here is Evil itself, Woland, and surprisingly or not, the result is the same. In this Woland there is as much goodness as there is badness and even the gray wig that the actor wears symbolizes Woland's obvious empathy for humans. One modernist dualism — good vs. evil — has been cancelled again. In the domain of that Satan, justice prevails — dumbness will be punished and goodness righteously rewarded.

The mythical present expresses itself not only through the time of Woland which is fixed at midnight but never reaches it, but also through the way the director unites the profane, everyday life of the theatre circles of Moscow with the myth from the time of Jeshua. Unt lets the characters stay in the same room and in the same moment of time — therefore in the permanent mythical present. At the same time, the quick change of the moments of the present characteristic of postmodernism has not disappeared. The most vivid examples occur at the beginning and the end of the play. The production sketches the opening scene, the first meeting of Master and Margarita, as a flash of lightning, just slipping over it to leave the impression of no beginning at all and so interrupting the framing of the whole story, attempting to force it into the boundaries. At the play's conclusion, when Master and Margarita have just found Peace, there is no pause in action, no time to draw an expected conclusion. A song from the tape blares and the actors rush down stage to receive the applause, as if they needed to continue the action in no time. This is the moment when the mythical and postmodern meet — it is an end and yet it is not.

The examples given above show only the primary connections between the mythical and postmodern world-view in theatre, but hopefully will convince us that the effective performative power of the mythical-based ritual theatre (theatre that is generally referred to in the past tense, at least in Estonia) may still be findable in postmodern productions, and that the boundaries between the ritual and postmodern theatre may not be as clear as they seem at first sight.

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Stage Adaptation as a Phenomenon (St. Petersburg Theatre at the Turn of the Century)

ELVIRA OSIPOVA

St. Petersburg theatre is currently witnessing a curious phenomenon, namely, an obvious interest in presenting stage adaptations. Roughly speaking, they make up no less than one third of the whole repertoire. This phenomenon asks for interpretation. Its reasons may be manifold:

- the inadequacy of contemporary dramatic material, in the eyes of stage directors, or its lack of philosophical treatment of social and human problems;
- the eternal value of classical literature which poses fundamental questions of life;
- the preparedness of stage directors to take up challenging tasks, and reveal contemporary senses in prose works, which would address particularly acute problems of Being and Time.

The theatre, which gives greatest preference to stage adaptations rather than plays, is the St. Petersburg Maly (Small) Drama Theatre, which holds the title of “Theatre of Europe”. It is most sensitive to the challenges of time and true to its message — educating the souls. The predominant part of its repertoire is made up of Russian classical literature — Turgenev and Dostoyevsky, Andrey Platonov and Fyodor Abramov, contemporary writers, such as Sergey Kaledin and Venedict Erofeyev.

There is a uniting theme in the novels and stories, which are being staged: they all assert liberty, both social and individual, as the greatest human value and, conversely, show slavery and servility in their different guises as detrimental to life. Among the

successes of the Maly Theatre is a piercing performance of *Moo-Moo*. It is a stage adaptation of Turgenev's famous story, complemented by extracts from his book *Notes of a Sportsman*. The theatre dramatizes the story of a deaf-and-mute peasant Gerasim, who at a whim of his landlady had to drown his dog. In the microcosm of the story the plight of Russian serfs at large (before the abolition of serfdom in 1861) may be gleaned. The performance presents a visual tragedy, staged with great power, virtuosity and skill.

Incidentally, the theme of serfdom in Russia is taken up in a non-repertory theatre named after Andrey Mironov. It has masterfully staged one of the most famous Russian epics, Gogol's *Dead Souls*, a "prose poem" which is called an encyclopedia of Russian life. It shows various psychological types and sensibilities typical of Russia earlier in the 19th century. But the types are recognizable even now, since they have become part of the texture of Russian life.

Several years ago the Maly Theatre undertook a huge task of showing Dostoyevsky's *The Devils*, the performance running for ten hours on one day. It is based on the novel, which was banned in Stalin's times, for its obvious political implications. The novel reflects actual events of the pre-revolutionary times in Russia, namely the case of Ivan Nechaev, the author of the *Catechism of a Revolutionary*, which inspired Lenin. Both the novel and the script are hinged round a plot (a successful one) to kill a member of a revolutionary group. The plot was engineered by "big devils", Stavrogin and Verkhovensky, who drew into it several "smaller devils". They are all "possessed" by an *idée fixe* — to uproot the existing system, to start a revolution, which could allegedly solve all social problems. Instead they breed chaos and destruction. This is the message of the theatre. The performance is intended to help us reassess our own history, which is still greatly mythologized.

By accomplishing this adaptation the theatre's director Lev Dodin has continued the long-standing tradition of enacting Dostoyevsky's works. It was laid down in the 1970s by Igor Vladimirov, the director of the Lensoviet Theatre by his adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. About the same time Dodin

himself brilliantly staged Dostoyevsky's *The Humble One* (Krotkaya) in the Bolshoy Drama theatre.

It is an interesting phenomenon that Dostoyevsky, much more than Tolstoy, is featuring in the repertoires of St. Petersburg theatres. As to the latter, two recent presentations of his works can be mentioned. A successful stage adaptation of Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* is currently on in the theatre named after Andrey Mironov. Emphasis here is laid on the destructiveness of jealousy, but Tolstoy's message of the necessity of chastity in marriage is obscured.

One of the leading stage directors Gennady Trostyanetzky has made an attempt to stage the first part of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* in the Lensoviet Theatre. The performance entitled *Karenin. Anna. Vronsky* does not do justice to the novel. It fails to render the complexity of the plot and its main characters and follows in its concept a traditional interpretation of Tolstoy's work, featuring Anna as an innocent victim of social prejudices, and Karenin as just a repulsive jealous husband. To justify such an interpretation the director distorts the material he works with, causing Anna to die at childbirth. In fact, the end of volume 1, showing the reconciliation of Karenin and Vronsky in the face of Anna's possible death, is the most piercing episode of the novel. The theatre is not only out of its depth here but sets an unseemly precedent of dealing with literary material.

Successful stage adaptations in the repertoire of the Maly Drama Theatre are numerous. One of them is *Chevengur*, made after Andrey Platonov's anti-utopian novel. It shows the events after the Bolsheviks took power. Their attempts to create a utopia on the Russian soil turned out to be a disaster. Lev Dodin and his actors present the absurdity of a communist dream in action — the barrenness, and misery of life, narrowness and hostility towards the whole world, which are implanted in the minds of simple people who believe in the slogans — too familiar for several generations of Soviet people. That is why the performance, extremely difficult for presenting on stage, is so pertinent.

The emblem of the Maly Drama theatre is their long running *Brothers and Sisters*, a stage adaptation of Fyodor Abramov's novel, written in the 1960s. It is a bitter narration of the plight of

Russian peasants in the Stalin era. The performance is done in a harsh realistic manner, showing what hell on Earth could be like. It truthfully renders the novel's central point — a stark contrast between the official demagoguery and the miserable life of collective farmers in Russia after the Second World War.

The theme of slavery, or a modern form of serfdom in the Russian army is most poignantly represented in *Stroibat* (Construction Unit) based on Sergey Kaledin's story. It was given a highly ironic title in its stage presentation — *Gaudeamus*. Most excruciating forms of violence, destruction of personality, absurdity as the reigning principle of army life are artistically reflected in this tragic performance. It ends with the death of nearly all the characters, the soldiers of the construction unit. Suicide and homicide are shown as results of being caught in a vicious circle in which we still find ourselves. The choice of the dramatic material is exact.

On the same stage we can see a vision of modern sensibility presented in Venedict Erofeyev's famous "prose poem" *Moscow — Petushki*, some episodes from which were adapted for the stage. They are a part of the theatrical trilogy entitled *Claustrophobia*. The book and the performance based on it present another facet of life in Russia in the time of "stagnation", picturing its hidden tragedies, and psychological autism in the form of alcohol addiction. This was one of the ways of protest against political demagoguery and the general rottenness of the regime. A full-time performance based on Erofeyev's book can be seen in *Priyut komedianta* (Comedian's Shelter). Alexander Obratzov and Georgy Vasilyev wrote the play based on the book. They called it "A journey over the poem of Venedict Erofeyev", and entitled it *On the cable works in autumn of 1969*. The theatre succeeded in rendering the main meaning of the book, its deep rootedness in the national consciousness, its recognizable satirical targets, and subtle sophistication of its grim humour.

Recently Grigory Kozlov together with the students of the Theatrical Academy have successfully carried out a challenging task — staging episodes from the autobiographical book of Tamara Petkevich *Life is a strange thing* (Zhiz'n' — Sapozhok neparny), which may be regarded as a pendant to Solzhenitsyn's

GULAG Archipelago. Very well acted and staged are scenes in jail, questionings and spiritual tortures, a more than Kafkaesque absurdity of the system of total suspicion and harassment of the Stalin's regime, destructive not only for its victims, but for the captors and torturers. These episodes leave a lasting impression on the few spectators who have the chance to see the performance.

Stage adaptations of West European literature are much less numerous than those of Russian literature in the repertoire of St. Petersburg theatres, and not so successful. Among the writers, whose prose works have been recently staged are Oscar Wilde (*Star-Child*), and E. T. A. Hoffmann (*Little Zaches*, and a stage adaptation of some of his *Kreisleriana* pieces. The performance is entitled *P.S. by Kapelmeister Johannes Kreisler, his author, and their beloved Julia*). The atmosphere of Oscar Wilde's fairy-tale *The Star-Child* is exquisitely reproduced in the Maly Drama theatre. It has managed to render not only the obvious moral of the tale, but vividly present its decorative settings. The sarcastic implications of Hoffman's *Little Zaches* were revealed in the Children's theatre (T'UZ). The German Romantic's subtle understanding of mass psychology, of the persistence of popular myths and dangerous delusions help contemporary Russian spectators to understand their own life — and delusions.

Among guest performances worthy of mention are two versions of Michail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*. They were presented by Moscow Taganka theatre directed by Yuri Lyubimov and Krasnodar Drama Theatre. The novel which may be considered the best Russian novel of the 20th century, has two intermingling planes — an ancient one showing the story of Pilate and Yeshua (Christ), and a modern one, with the Master, the author of a novel about Pilate and Christ, his Muse Margarita, Satan and his retinue appearing in the Moscow of the 1920-30s. The famous Taganka theatre unsuccessfully attempted to stage the unstageable, the phantasmagoric effects of the novel connected with Satan and the tricks played by his retinue on rogues of all sorts. The Krasnodar theatre chose another approach. It concentrated on the two parallel plots and reduced the number of characters to twelve, played by six actors. This device enabled the director and actors to concentrate on the philosophic purport of the

novel, that of the interconnectedness of evil and good, relativity of these notions. Satan, alias Woland, passes judgment on the vicious of every sort and acts as the highest arbiter. Woland and Ivan-the-poet, Pilate and his betrayal are in the focus of the performance, which is entitled *A Gospel according to Woland*. (A theatrical version of the novel is written and directed by Rudolf Kushnaryev). Particularly poignant was the performance of Pilate, whose love for Yeshua, and hatred of Tiberius, the Roman Caesar, the inevitability of his betrayal the wandering preacher and self-disgust after it, are rendered with the highest possible skill and genuine feeling.

This short review of stage adaptations, which can be seen in St. Petersburg may throw some light on tendencies in the Russian theatre at the beginning of the new millennium. Among them the following can be mentioned:

- Russian classical literature is much more resorted to than West European literature as a source for stage adaptations.
- Theatres are interested in stage adaptations, because they help reveal contemporary meanings in books, which address eternal problems of Time, and raise important issues of Russian life.
- There seems to exist a certain rationale in why theatres choose to adapt a work of literature to stage: the higher the artistic level of the theatre, the more often it takes up a challenging task of staging a work of fiction.
- Theatre directors choose mostly books with a deep social content. Their preference for politically or philosophically laden works characterizes in a way the state of theatrical art in St. Petersburg.

Tradition and Avant-garde in Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*

MOHIT K. RAY

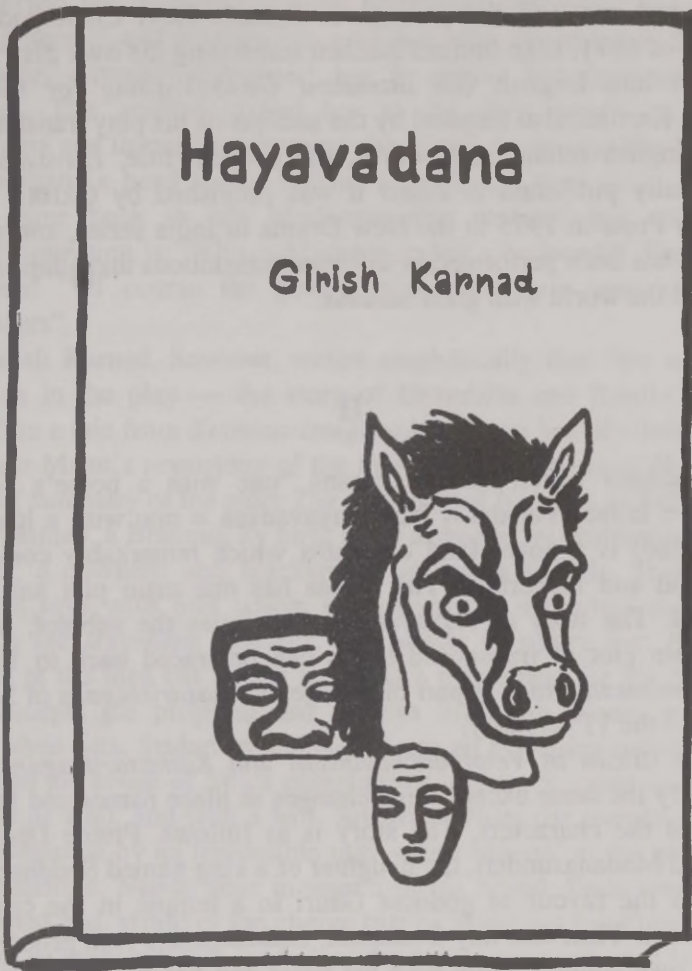
I

Girish Karnad was born on 19 May 1938 in Matheran, a town near Bombay. He comes from the semi-Marathi and semi-Kannada Saraswat community. While growing up in the small village of Sirsi in Karnataka he had abundant opportunity to have firsthand experience of the indigenous folk theater. He used to go to the Company Nataka performances with his father who being a doctor had a free pass. But to the Yakshagana performances — a form of folk theater — he used to go with the servants because his father considered it beneath his dignity to witness these plays. His encounter with the Nataka companies left a lasting impression on his mind and the effect of that is evident in various theatrical technicalities such as lighting, setting etc. of Karnad's plays. In this connection Karnad writes: "I loved going to see them and the magic has stayed with me"(Karnad *NTQ* 1995: 360). The technical aspects of these two varieties of drama have gone into the making of Karnad's plays. During the formative period Karnad went through diverse influences. He was exposed to a literary scenario where there was a direct clash between the Western and the native traditions, between the new modernistic techniques, a legacy of the colonial rule and cultural nationalism, a bid for a return to and discovery of tradition inspired by the search for roots and a quest for identity. There was a growing trend to look more closely at the native tradition and explore its contemporary relevance. Karnad writes:

My generation was the first to come of age after India became independent of British rule. It, therefore, had to face a situation in which tensions implicit until then had come out in the open and demanded to be resolved without apologia of self-justification: tensions between the cultural past of the country and the colonial past, between the attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions, and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved. (Dodyia 1991: 21).

It is only natural that a sensitive artist who absorbs both the tensions would eventually turn out to be a dramatist in whose plays tradition and avant-garde are wonderfully reconciled into a harmonious whole.

After graduating from Karnataka University, Dharwad, in 1958 Karnad went to Bombay for further studies. Meanwhile, on receiving the Rhodes scholarship he went to England for further studies. On his return to India in 1963 he joined Oxford University Press, Madras (now Chennai). However, first and foremost he is a playwright. Between 1961 and 1998 he has written nine plays and most of them have been successfully produced on the stage. He has translated many of his plays into English and has also translated some of the plays of Badal Sarkar, whose influence he also publicly acknowledged, into English and has also written with great critical acumen on drama and theater. In 1974 Karnad went to Pune as the Director of Film and Television Institute of India. And soon, acting, directing, script-writing etc. came as grist to his mill as he began to appear in Hindi films and T.V. serials. In 1987 he went to USA as a fulbright scholar — in-residence in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilization, University of Chicago. From 1988 to 1993 he served as Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (National Academy of Performing Arts). In 1994 he was awarded Doctor of Philosophy (*Honoris Causa*) degree by his alma mater, Karnataka University. At present Karnad is Director of the Nehru Center in London. Such is “the versatile personality like the ideal Renaissance man” (Dhanavel 2000: 15) whose particular play, *Hayavadana* we are going to discuss.



The cover picture of the Oxford University Press edition
of Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*

Hayavadana, a play in two acts, is Karnad's third play. Originally written in Kannada the play was an immediate success on the stage and received the prestigious Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay award of 1971. Like Samuel Beckett translating his own play from French into English (*En attendant Godot/Waiting for Godot*) Girish Karnad, also inspired by the success of his play translated it into English retaining, however, the original title, *Hayavadana*. Originally published in *Enact* it was published by Oxford University Press in 1975 in the New Drama in India series, and since then it has been performed in different translations and adaptations around the world with great success.

II

Hayavadana which literally means "one with a horse's head" (*haya* = horse; *Vadana* = face; *hayavadana* = one with a horse's face/head) is a novel kind of drama which remarkably combine tradition and modernity. The drama has one main plot and one subplot. The story of *Hayavadana* constitutes the subplot, while the main plot of transposed heads can be traced back to *Vetal-panchavimsati* which is part of a larger *Kathasaritsagara* of Soma Deva of the 11th century.

The stories in *Vetalpanchavimsati* and *Kathasaritsagara* are basically the same except some changes in place names and in the caste of the characters. The story is as follows. Prince Dhavala married Madanasundari, the daughter of a king named Suddhapata, through the favour of goddess Gauri in a temple in the city of Shovabati. Then one day Svetapata, Suddhapata's son, proceeded to his own country along with his sister and her husband. On the way he came to another temple of goddess Gauri. Dhavala went into the temple to pay homage to the goddess. Through some irresistible urge he cut off his head with a sword which he chanced to see there, and presented it to the goddess. As Dhavala did not come out for quite some time Svetapata went inside. When he saw that Dhavala had killed himself he also cut off his own head and offered it to the goddess. Then Madanasundari, realizing that her husband and brother had been away for a long time, went into the

temple and saw their dead bodies lying before the goddess. She also decided to cut off her own head. Just when she was about to kill herself the goddess appeared before her, prevented her from killing herself and promised to give her what she wanted. Madanasundari naturally requested her to revive her husband and brother. The goddess asked her to set their heads on their shoulders and through excitement she mixed up things. She joined her husband's head to her brother's head and vice-versa. When they came back to life Madanasundari realized her mistake. Vetāl's question is: "Who is Madanasundari's husband?" The king answers: "Of course the person with Dhavala's head on his shoulders".

Girish Karnad, however, writes emphatically that "the central episode in the play — the story of Devadatta and Kapila — is based on a tale from *Kathasaritsagara* but I have heavily drawn on Thomas Mann's reworking of the tale in *The Transposed Heads*." A brief summary of the story *The Transposed Heads* is as follows.

Sridaman, a Brahmin by birth but Vaishnava by profession, and Nanda, a cowherd and blacksmith, are close friends. Sridaman falls in love with Sita whom he happens to see when the two friends are travelling together, and wants to marry her. Nanda laughs at the idea but agrees to act as a messenger for his friend. Sita accepts the proposal and marries Sridaman. Some months later when Sita, Sridaman and Nanda are all travelling together in a cart to the house of Sita's parents they lose track, come across a temple of Kali, and take a halt. Sridaman visits the temple alone, and overcome by an irresistible urge offers himself to the goddess as a sacrifice. Nanda goes in search of his friend, finds what has happened and, afraid of the charge that he killed his friend because he was in love with Sita, and also because he does not want to live without his friend, kills himself. Sita realizes what has happened and prepares to hang herself. The goddess appears before her, chides her, and grants life to the dead bodies asking Sita to fix the severed heads on the respective shoulders. Sita in her excitement fixes the heads wrongly. Now the problem is: who is her husband? The hermit Kamdaman whose advice is sought decides in favour of Sridaman's head. Nanda's head (with Sridaman's body) therefore, decides to become a hermit. Sita is happy to have the

best of both worlds. But gradually Sridaman's head begins to control Nanda's body and the body becomes refined. Sita begins to pine for Nanda so much that she sets out to meet him, carrying the young child Andhak with her. They spend the day and the night in heavenly bliss. Next morning Sridaman appears on the scene. He suggests that they should kill each other in a combat and that Sita should perform *Sati*. Sita thinks that if she lives the life of a widow Andhak's future will be doomed, but if she performed *Sati* Andhak would be a *Sati*'s son and his social image will improve. So she gives her consent and burns herself on the pyre of her two husbands.

Mann avoids the incestual aspect but obviously acts on the solution offered by *Kathasaritsagara* that since the head represents the man the person with the husband's head is the husband and brings his relentless logic to bear upon the solution. As Karnad points out:

If the head is the determining limb then the body should change to fit the head. At the end of Mann's version the bodies have changed again and adjusted themselves to the heads so perfectly that the men are physically exactly as they were at the beginning. We are back to square one — the problem remains unsolved. (Dodyia 1991: 32).

Mann writes the story of *Kathasaritsagara* to use it as a vehicle for the expression of his favourite idea of mind-body dualism and the ironic confrontation between opposites in human life. But Karnad's focus is on the psychological and sociological dimension of human desire for completeness, the unattainable complete happiness. So while on his own account Karnad broadly follows the outline of Mann's story he introduces many changes both in the form and content to highlight the contemporary relevance of the story. The most important change, of course, is the change of form: from story to drama and the introduction of the subplot. Even in the story there are some minor changes, but it is quite significant the way Karnad has changed the names. Sridaman, Nanda and Sita of Mann have become Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini in the Karnad play. By changing the names Karnad has on

the one hand been able to make them generic or representative and thus give them a sense of universality and timelessness. The name of Devadatta (given by gods) reveals the Apollonian aspects whereas Kapila (dark and therefore earthy) reveals Kapila's Dionysian tendencies. Padmini, like a lotus, seeks to be a delicate bridge between the earth and the sky. Rooted to the earth and the flower turned skyward, Padmini symbolizes the fundamental nature of the human body: it is torn between the downward earth and the upward sky, fury and mire of the blood and the spiritual aspirations. Furthermore, in order to project his vision Karnad has introduced a new character, Hayavadana, a man with a horse's head, to the story of the transposed heads. In his version Karnad, like Mann, avoids the incest theme that lies at the core of the *Vetalpanchavimsati* version. The story of Hayavadana introduces a subplot, an original invention of Karnad, and it is thematically integrated to the main plot, so far as the theme of the identity crisis is concerned. The very fact that the title of the play is derived from the subplot or the story of Hayavadana suggests its thematic importance, and it is Hayavadana who raises the identity question more dramatically and more authentically than anybody else in the play. The subplot enables Karnad to provide a double perspective to the problem, at the metaphysical level and at the socio-cultural level. Karnad, in other words, handles the moral problem in the main plot and the philosophical problem in the subplot.

While writing the play Karnad felt that it would take the shape of a folk drama chiefly because of the change of heads which could be easily managed on the stage with masks. Here a brief reference to the genesis of the play may be quite relevant. Karnad writes in this connection:

By the late sixties any seminar you went to in India, the question was what to do with folk theatre and this problem was endlessly debated and people said this was relevant and this was not relevant, what to do with it etc. ... All this meant that folk theatre was very much in the air and one day I was telling the story of transposed heads to my friend B. V. Kamath. I said here was a beautiful story, and why don't we make a film and he said why a film, it could make

marvelous theatre. The moment he said I knew it would make a very good play. So while one confesses that one went consciously to some of the folk theatre, Yakshagna and others, one cannot deny that Brecht as well as Badal Sarkar were haunting one, and that went some way in the shaping of *Hayavadana* (Karnad IL 1989: 98–99).

Thus while *Hayavadana* ostensibly uses the folk form. Karnad assimilates into it the tradition of Indian classical drama, the Western dramatic conventions to convey his perception of contemporary reality and thus the play is suffused with modern sensibility: search for completeness and search for identity, existential anguish, the predicament of the liberated woman in the contemporary Indian society. As a result the play reverberates with echoes of Indian classical drama; Freudian id¹, Lacanian notions of desire and lack² and profuse use of symbols and symbolic episodes. The play opens with the offering of worship accompanied by singing to the Lord Ganesha. This is perfectly in keeping with the Indian classical tradition where at the beginning of a drama some god or goddess is invoked for blessing. In Yakshagna it is Lord Ganesha, the god of success that is invoked. At the beginning of the performance a mask of Ganesha is brought onto the stage and kept on the chair. *Pooja* is done. In this song Ganesha is addressed as “single tasked destroyer of incompleteness” (73). The choice of the elephant-headed god is significant because Lord Ganesha with human body and animal head properly suggests the central theme of incompleteness of being. Yet it is paradoxical that Lord

¹ The mistake in the transposition of the heads of Devadatta and Kapila can be explained in terms of Freudian slip activated by id. In other words, the subconscious desire for Kapila's body makes Padmini put, albeit unconsciously, the head of Devadatta on Kapila's body. Furthermore, the ‘mistake’ also absolves her of the responsibility of transgressing the codified morality of her society.

² Always in a state of lack the Lacanian subject is engaged in a constant struggle for unity, completeness, fulfilment. The desire for recognition fuels the search for completeness and precisely is one of the main themes if not the central theme of *Hayavadana*.

Ganesha who seems to be an embodiment of imperfection is worshipped as the "destroyer of incompleteness". The Bhagavata rightly comments: "An elephant body, a broken tusk and a cracked belly — whichever way you look at it he seems to be an embodiment of imperfection, of incompleteness"(73). In this connection Karnad comments: "... the elephant head also questioned the basic assumption behind the original riddle: that the head represents the thinking part of the person, the intellect" (Dodyia 1991: 33). By invoking the Lord Ganesha and by attributing the pivotal role to the Ganesha myth in *Hayavadana* Karnad achieves an admirable equation which accommodates the classical and folk conventions within the frame of contemporary theater strategies, and thus reconciles the tradition and the avant-garde into a harmonious whole.

The Bhagavata who introduces the story is the Yakshagna version of the Sutradhara or the stage manager of the classical Sanskrit drama. By using the Bhagavata Karnad conforms to the folk form of Yakshagna but the kind of role he assigns to the Bhagavata far outgrows the traditional role. However, in keeping with the folk tradition he narrates the story in the manner of a folk tale: "Our duty is merely to pay homage to the elephant-headed god and get on with the play" (73), and he begins: "This is the city of Dharmapura, ruled by King Dharmasheela whose fame and empire have already reached the ends of the eight directions..." (73). The Bhagavata who is a godlike omnipresence in the play is involved intimately with every character. Like Tiresias he presides over the everyday reality that keeps turning into the problem of the play. He initiates the discussion and invites responses to the actions of the characters. He expresses sympathy for Kapila when he is forsaken by Devadatta and Padmini after the transposition. It is to the Bhagavata's charge that Padmini entrusts her baby before she performs *sati*. He takes charge of the play's opening when the Nata, frightened by a speaking Hayavadana, creates a commotion on the stage. He also decides the time when the half-curtain must be brought in or withdrawn, symbolic for a god who decides the amount of illusion to be purveyed. It must be pointed out, however, that although the Bhagavata of Yakshagna folk drama is modelled on the Sutradhara of classical drama there is a difference

between the two. The Sutradhara of classical Sanskrit drama does not play such an active role as the Bhagavata does. In fact, after appearing at the beginning of the play to invoke the blessing of gods and to conduct the formalities with the audience he is rarely seen on the stage. In contrast, the Bhagavata remains on the stage practically all the time and controls the action in a significant way. In Karnad's play the Bhagavata becomes a Brechtian type of narrator, and this is not surprising because we have already pointed out that Brecht has been a major influence on Karnad. Brecht himself, however, drew heavily on the Eastern theatrical tradition.³

We have already noted that Karnad uses masks in the play. The first mask to be used is that of Ganesha. Later Devadatta, in the opening of the play appears on the stage wearing a pale coloured mask and Kapila a dark mask. Later in the play masks are transposed to indicate the transposition of heads. Kali appears in a terrible mask, and Hayavadana at first appears wearing the mask of a horse's head and later when he becomes a complete horse he wears the mask of a complete horse. About the use of mask Karnad writes:

... the story initially interested me for the scope it gave for the use of mask and music. Western theatre has developed a contrast between the *face* and the *mask* — the real inner person and the exterior one presents, or wishes to present to the world outside. But in traditional Indian theatre the mask is only the face 'writ large': since a character presents not a complex psychological entity but an ethical identity the mask merely presents in enlarged details its essential moral nature (Dodyia 1991: 32–33).

³ In this connection Balwant Gargi writes: "Among contemporary Western producers Bertolt Brecht borrowed much from Eastern theatrical traditions, used music, mime, stylization, and by mixing them with the vigorous realism of the West created his Epic Theatre, full of intensity, poetry, earthy speech and song, a theatre larger than life" (Gargi 1962: 235).

In this respect Karnad's use of mask has an interesting affinity with the mask in Japanese Noh plays.

Another important device drawn from the folk theatre tradition is the use of the half-curtain. The stage direction in the very First Act runs like this:

Two stage hands enter and hold up a half curtain, about six feet in height — the sort of curtain used in Yakshagna or Kathakali (77).

Half-curtain is used throughout the play as a very important stage prop. It is effective in the presentation of *Hayavadana*. By gradually bringing down the curtain the horse is exposed and concealed a few times. In the meantime the "all-knowing spectator" has moved in and out of illusion and reality by virtue of the half-curtain. The fact that it can reveal and hide even as the spectator is all eye makes the half-curtain the most visible symbol of the play's theme. Thus Karnad, while using the folk strategy of the half-curtain, modernizes it by giving it a symbolic significance like Virginia Woolf's perception of life as "a semi-transparent envelope". In a play dealing with complex states of minds arising out of confused relationship the half-curtain comes in very handy.

Incidentally Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel laureate — who was engaged in a lifelong experimentation with dramatic form and its evolution in the Indian theatrical tradition — arrived at the conviction that painted sceneries often impaired the theatrical effect of a play. He wrote:

Poetic drama lays a claim on the reader's imagination; sceneries reduce that claim. The loss is the spectators'. Acting is a forceful, vivacious, dynamic matter. The scenery is just the opposite. Unlawfully entering into its dynamics it remains mute, inert and static. It narrows down the imaginative vision of the spectator by putting a fence around it as it were. The practice of putting a scenery in a place which should be better filled by imagination is a new feature introduced in this industrial age. In our country, in the traditional *jatras* there may not be enough room for the crowd of spectators, but there is no dearth of

room for imagination, because it is not constricted by scenery. That is why in a production where I have a say I don't allow the childish act of frequent shifting of scenes, because a painted scene is on the one hand a mockery of the realistic truth and on the other, is inimical to the realization of the ideational truth. (Tagore 1961: 1033-1034)*

Unlike other Indian plays *Hayavadana* is a play where Karnad uses the female chorus. It is a notable innovation of Karnad and is quite congruent with the subject of the play which has for one of its themes the woman question. Karnad might have got the idea of the female chorus from Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* or even from Euripides, but he puts it to a completely different use. In Euripides's *Medea* the chorus of Corinthian women is in sympathy with Medea and in *Murder in the Cathedral* the chorus sings its suffering and helplessness as Thomas Beckett is going to be murdered while in *Hayavadana* the chorus ironically celebrates Padmini's desire and voluntary death by fire. The chorus in *Hayavadana* is not the voice of traditional wisdom as in Greek plays but only an externalization and objectification of the passionate feelings of Padmini and it merges with the protagonist as an integral component of the character.

Some other important folk devices are the use of mime and the use of the painted curtain. The action of the play is often mimed, for example when the three characters proceed to Ujjain, a cart does not really appear on the stage. We are just told: "Kapila followed by Padmini and Devadatta enter miming cart ride. Kapila is driving the cart". The play in fact is replete with instances of miming. But what is significant is that even this simple act of miming the cart driving assumes symbolic significance when looked at from the Freudian angle. In other words, Padmini's comments on the occasion lend a symbolic significance to the cart-driving: "How beautifully you drive the cart, Kapila! Your hands do not even move, but the oxen seem to know where to go" (95).

* Translation from Rabindranath Tagore's original Bengali into English is by the author of the present article.

The sexual overtone of the remark cannot be missed. This is further reinforced by what follows:

What a terrible road. Nothing but stones and rocks — but one didn't feel a thing in the cart! You drove it so gently — almost made it float. I remember when Devadatta took me in a cart — that was soon after our marriage — the oxen took everything except the road. He only had to pull to the right, and off they would rush to the left. I have never laughed so much in my life. But of course he got very angry, so we had to go home straight. (96)

Once we break the sealed metaphor it becomes conspicuous that Padmini is comparing her coital experience with Devadatta which was a failure and unsatisfactory with her experience with Kapila which was perfect and gave her a sense of fulfillment. Naturally Padmini celebrates the body of Kapila. As Kapila climbs a tree to collect the Fortunate Lady's flower to please Padmini we see Kapila through the eyes of Padmini:

How he climbs-like an ape. Before I could even say 'yes', he had taken off his shirt, pulled his *dhوتي* up and swung up the branch. And what an ethereal shape! Such a broad back — like an ocean its muscles rippling across it — and that small feminine waist which looks so helpless (96).

This celebration of the body reminds one of Lawrence. It is not for nothing that Karnad uses animal imagery ("like an ape") and Padmini looks upon Kapila as "a Celestial Being reborn as a hunter". In the *Aside* Padmini admits: "No woman could resist him" and this is immediately echoed by Devadatta in his *Aside*: "No woman could resist him" (96). Devadatta realizes how passionately Padmini loves Kapila: "I see these flames leaping up from those depths... Look at those yellow, purple flames. Look how she is pouring her soul into his mould". Thus through Karnad's masterly treatment the scene becomes charged with sexuality and modern sensibility.

The simple story of *Vetalpanchavimsati* enables Karnad to see in it the seed of a story of a search for completeness. She would like to have both a strong body and a strong mind in her husband. So her careless mixing of the heads is seen by Karnad as an instinctual solution to the problem of incompleteness. In a bid to have a complete husband, as it were, she puts Devadatta's head on the body of Kapila. But to bring home his point Karnad introduces a subplot — the story of Hayavadana — which is a pathetic story of search for identity and search for completeness. Hayavadana tells the Bhagavata:

My mother was the Princess of Karnataka. She was a very beautiful girl. When she came of age, her father decided that she should choose her own husband. So princes of every kingdom of the world were invited — and they all came. From China, from Persia, from Africa. But she didn't like any one of them. The last one to come was the prince of Araby. My mother took one look at that handsome prince sitting on his great white stallion — and she fainted. ... Her father at once decided that this was the man. All arrangements for the wedding were made. My mother woke up and do you know what she said?... She said she would only marry the horse!... Yes, she wouldn't listen to anyone... No one could dissuade her. So ultimately she was married off to the white stallion. She lived with him for fifteen years. One morning she wakes up — and no horse! In its place stood a beautiful Celestial Being, a *gandharva*. Apparently this Celestial Being had been cursed by the god Kuvera to be born a horse for some act of misbehavior. After fifteen years of human love he had become his original self again. ... Released from his curse, he asked my mother to accompany him to his Heavenly Abode. But she wouldn't. She said she would come only if he became a horse again. So he cursed her... He cursed her to become a horse herself. So my mother became a horse and ran away happily. My father went back to his Heavenly Abode. Only I —

the child of their marriage — was left behind. (79–80)

Now coming back to this brief story of *Hayavadana*. Karnad tells the story in the manner of a folk tale where curse and transformation are quite common. But as Bhagavata says, “It’s a sad story” and the Actor also confirms, “Very sad”, and *Hayavadana* appeals to them: “You must help me to become a complete man”, the story acquires a new dimension: existential anguish. The mother of *Hayavadana*, the Princess of Karnataka, might be happy with a horse — and this also has a strong sexual overtone — evident in the fact that after becoming a horse she ran away “happily” — but the story of *Hayavadana* is the story not only of an abandoned child but also of one whose identity is endangered. He is neither a horse nor a man, and he wants to be a complete man. *Hayavadana* says he tried everything to “accept his fate” and took interest in the social life of the nation, Civics, Politics, Patriotism, Nationalism, Internationalism, but everywhere he has been a misfit because he has no society. While Karnad satirizes the contemporary politics through a carnivalesque treatment of *Hayavadana*’s various enterprises, he also does not miss the opportunity to express his atheism — another important modern sensibility — through this pathetic figure. When the Bhagavata tells *Hayavadana* that he should go to Benaras and “make a vow in front of the god there” *Hayavadana* rattles out names of various places sacred to different religions, where he had gone but in vain. His search for completeness took him to all kinds of saints as well but all this came to nothing. Thus through an ironic presentation of *Hayavadana*’s enterprises Karnad demonstrates his rejection of gods and godmen and his avowed atheism. Karnad admits: “I was an atheist and am still one. But my atheism stemmed from a resolute ideological stance. Sartre’s atheism was very much in vogue then. ... Relationship between God and men has been one of my preoccupations in my play” (Karnad IL 1995: 128). The demystification of religious beliefs and practices, which must be seen as a reflection of modern sensibility, is at its highest in *Hayavadana*. Lord Ganesha is presented as a symbol of incompleteness and imperfection. *Hayavadana*’s authentic experiences of wasteful pilgrimage only reveal

the sham and hypocrisy of religious ritual. Karnad's treatment of Kali is no better. In the first place when Padmini visits her temple she is just sleeping, and she wakes up only when Padmini's turn for suicide comes. The goddess puts all the three characters into great suffering on account of confused relationships and finally drives them to death. And when Hayavadana comes to her temple to pray for becoming complete man she does not wait for Hayavadana to complete the sentence, "Make me complete man", and Hayavadana, ironically, becomes a complete horse.

She said 'So be it' and disappeared even before I could say 'Make me a complete man'. I became a complete horse (36).

But that is not what he wanted. Unlike his mother he wanted to become a complete man and he became a complete horse on account of the capricious behavior of the goddess. The sarcastic treatment of the divinities arising out of Karnad's atheism makes a significant departure from the classical and folk tradition of theater and makes it eminently modern. The simple story of Betal becomes a rich and complex story of modern sensibility in which the Lacanian notions of desire and lack, Freudian id, Sartrean existentialism and atheism, Brechtian expressionism and Strindbergian symbolism, Bakhtinian carnivalization and feminism and above all a search for identity and completeness are all fused in a harmonious whole. The theatrical conventions of classical drama and folk drama, particularly Yakshagana, are ostensibly used, and they are made dramatically functional in projecting the fabric of Karnad's perception of modern existence. The form is traditional and the content is modern and Hayavadana is a play that remarkably reconciles tradition and the avant-garde as much in its structure as in its texture. In this connection the very pertinent observations of Victor Turner are worth noting:

Theatre is one of the many inheritors of that great multifaceted system of preindustrial ritual which embraces ideas and images of cosmos and chaos, interdigitates clowns and their foolery with gods and their solemnity, and uses all the sensory codes to produce symphonies in more than music: the intertwi-

ning of dance, body languages of many kinds, song, chant, architectural forms (temples, amphitheaters), incense, burnt offerings, ritualized feasting and drinking, painting, body painting, body marking of many kinds, including circumcision and scarification, the application of lotions and drinking of potions, the enacting of mythic and heroic plots drawn from oral traditions. (Turner 1998: 65)

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***Cad Baniker Pala*: The Return to Ritual and Folk Form in Avant-garde Indian Drama**

RAMA KUNDU

Certain ritual aspects of theatre have been increasingly appearing in the avant-garde drama in India, particularly since the 1970s, which Victor Turner would have called 'performing ethnography' (Turner 1998: 63). In his essay "Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual and Drama?" Turner, who had first hand experience of Indian drama, discusses the "developmental relationship from ritual to theatre" and maintains that "both ritual and theatre crucially involve liminal events and processes and have an important aspect of social metacommentary" (ib.). In this context Turner also rightly points out that theatre is the inheritor of that great multifaceted system of preindustrial ritual which embraces ideas and images of cosmos and chaos, interdigitates clowns and their foolery with gods and their solemnity, and uses all the sensory codes to produce symphonies in more than music: the intertwining of dance, body languages of many kinds, song, chant, architectural forms, incense, offerings, ritualized feasting and drinking, body painting, as also the enacting of mythic and heroic plots drawn from oral traditions. (Ib. 65)

Cad Baniker Pala (1978), the swan song of Sambhu Mitra (1915–97), an outstanding playwright-actor-director of post-Tago-rean Bengal, offers an excellent example of the way the characteristic elements of an ancient ritual can be harnessed by means of enacting a mythic plot drawn from the folk tradition in order to create an avant-garde drama of our own times. In *Cad Baniker Pala* that for the first time Mitra turned to folk literature and folk rituals for dramatic content as well as theatrical devices. Over a

long period, — nearly ten years — even as he was busy writing the script and staging his other plays, Mitra had been slowly writing this play bit by bit. Here he used a popular folk legend, *Manasa-Mongol*, which was and is still sung in rural Bengal during the monsoon as part of religious festivals of common people, and deconstructed the old legend, re-inscribing it with new meanings.

Manasa-Mongol songs or *palas* were composed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, though there is evidence that the cult of Manasa already existed in the 10th century [see Picture 1]. All *Manasa-Mongol* songs follow one particular story-outline which shows that Manasa was envisioned by the popular imagination as a terrible and habitually ill-tempered deity who forced people to worship her, and if refused, could carry her revenge to any extremes. The story is about one Cad Sadagar, a sea-faring merchant, who was a devotee of Lord Shiva [see Picture 2], and had refused to worship Manasa, and consequently lost his six sons at one stroke, lost his vessels and people, also wealth and reputation — all due to the wrath of the snake-goddess. Still, he did not yield to Manasa but finally he had to relent when his youngest and only surviving son was killed by snake-bite in the nuptial night, and the young bride took out the corpse on a raft, floated up to the gods' haven, pleased them with her dancing skill and won her husband back along with the other lost people and lost wealth of her father-in-law, on the condition that henceforth Cad would worship Manasa. Moved by the girls' misery Cad at last agrees to offer *pūja* to Manasa, though with his left hand only (a positive sign of disrespect according to the Indian custom); the songs conclude with the affirmation that they lived happily ever after.

Into *Cad Baniker Pala* Sambhu Mitra has subtly written an intertext of this legend, and has created a superb tragedy out of a familiar folk tale of Eastern India. Apparently it is the same story retold with only a few variations — among which one is very important though, it is at the end where Cad's son and daughter-in-law commit suicide. The backdrop, personae, story outline are the same, even the language Mitra adopts is not the current standard Bengali but a dialect slightly archaized and essentially of rural Bengal, specifically of the district of Midnapore which was known for its seafaring merchants. He carefully gives it a mould and twist

that effectively conjures up the atmosphere of an earlier era, with its own society and culture. At the same time Mitra projects the story in such a way that the reader/audience is inevitably reminded of his own time and world as well as of various millennia and civilizations in the history of mankind. Thus the legend is made to acquire a kind of timelessness through the author's treatment.



Picture 1. Shiva the ascetic.



Picture 2. A 10th-century idol of Manasa found in the Kantalipara village, Burdwan, West Bengal.

All along Sambhu Mitra had chosen plays with some “symbolic figures who had, at some historical time or other, fought for the cause of truth” (Mitra 1971: 141). In *Cad Baniker Pala* all these heroes, the conscientious, suffering, bleeding individuals of his previous plays, get merged in the figure of Chand. It is against this background that one has to approach this last play of the author in order to understand the spirit behind it.

Mitra finely interweaves in this play familiar myths and archetypes from both the Eastern and the Western traditions, including the (1) Greek myths of vengeful gods and cursed houses, (2) the Promethean myth of the indomitable spirit, (3) the Odyssean myth of voyage, (4) the agony of faith, face to face with despair as epitomised by Job and Jeremiah, (5) the myths in *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* involving the suffering and destruction of the good. However, it is the Indian myths of Siva and Manasa which constitute the main thrust of the text; all the other inter-textual echoes revolve round this core, and it is interesting to see how the author uses his global heritage to transform a local lore into a tragedy of all times and places.

In his treatment Siva and Manasa cease to be just two deities in the Hindu pantheon. Mitra has used Siva and Manasa as two icons to indicate the guiding spirit of individual conscience and the pervasive spirit of evil that crushes it respectively. It may be noted that they never make a personal appearance on the stage as deities, actively intervening into human affairs as they do in the original story or traditional custom, rather their impact is to be felt through the respective attitudes and acts of their worshippers. Siva and Manasa are made to represent here two basically conflicting approaches to life — the opposed principles of good and evil, of benediction and vengeance, of 'suva' and 'asuva'. Siva is Cad's beloved god, his inspiration, and Siva means for Cad the positive values of truth, courage, decency, of disinterested striving for noble ideals and dreams, of sacrifice for one's country and posterity. On the other hand, Manasa stands in the context of the play for untruth, cowardice, vulgarity, for crass selfishness, violence, hypocrisy, cynicism, cruelty. The Siva spirit seems to promote individualism and dissent, whereas Manasa sanctions only ruthless authoritarianism and conformity. Thus it is the basic approach that sunders the respective worshippers — leaving Cad alone on one side and the rest of the society on the other as the power of evil gets increasingly mobilised: in the very unequal battle Cad, framed as 'the enemy of the people', is crushed, as expected.

The time-span of an entire life has been compressed within the three *parbas* (phases) of the play which runs parallel to the legend, with some minor deviations and the addition of some realistic

details in terms of personae and events which help to make the audience recognize one's own contemporary world and times in the scenes, while remaining faithful to the original in broad outline and major details. But at the last turn Mitra's play strikes a major departure from the legend. Instead of the wishfulfilment sequences of the legend here we are made to face grim reality. After the departure of Behula with Lakhinder's corpse Cad now becomes a completely broken old man with the last flicker of hope gone. Alienated, abused, pauperised, sick, and still hounded by a cruel society where Manasa has by now become rampant everywhere Cad nears the verge of insanity. Unable to bear the agony sometimes he would be screaming like a wild injured beast; during these days — a span of long years it seems — when everybody avoids him he is attended by his old servant who has not abandoned him. He is now so mauled and maimed, both physically and mentally, that he cannot even react to people's attacks or ridicule. Then one day Behula comes back. At this point the original story is subverted. The audience is shocked to learn that Behula has reached no heaven and pleased no gods, but has simply been forced to take to prostitution. Mitra has so far tried to meet the demands of realism; for example, in the *Manasa pala* the deity appears at the helm of Cad's ship during the sea-storm, and angrily demands *puja*, whereas in the play the crew only offer a frenzied prayer to Manasa. But at this point the author allows a sequence of magic realism — which is in conformity with the original tale of course — in which Behula returns to inform her father-in-law:

I've brought back your son. He will again walk on this earth; but there's one condition; you'll have to worship Manasa. Will you? (Mitra 1982: 139–40)*

Remarkably, the exhausted girl does not press Cad: "I am in two minds; one mind says do it; the other mind asks what's the use?" Cad agrees. Lakhinder enters, restored to life. But the bliss is fragile. He insists on knowing how Behula succeeded in bringing him back to life; and both realise that after such knowledge —

* The English versions of all the Bengali texts have been done by the author of the present paper.

Behula had to bargain with the gods for Lakhinder's life at the cost of her own chastity — happiness is an absurd proposition. In a touching scene of love they die together by mutual consent, taking poison. As the world darkens for the two Cad enters the stage; he has already offered *puja* to Manasa and in frenzied agony appeals to Siva to witness his Manasa — worship for the sake of the young couple. Then he notices the two reclining figures. The ending remains a superb feat of imagination. Cad invokes his Siva to crush him: "You are my naked god Siva. Is that the reason why you want to strip me of everything, to erase all the identities of Cad like patterns drawn in water! Then do it! Batter me! Crush me! Still Cad had sailed out" (ib. 144). He calls out to his dead comrades who had been lost in the sea long ago: "Friends, you had once believed in voyaging; that is our only true identity". As he calls their names one by one in a sequence of superb magic realism the dead sailors come back like shadows." The shadowy figures enter the backstage. Moss had gathered on their bodies; the algi, tangling sea-weeds of the deep seas cover them. Their dead eyes stare wide. They come with the swaying motion as if carried on the crest of waves." Cad calls out to them: "Come, come along. I have no identity without you, nor do you have any without me. Take up the oars ... We shall voyage again — this time for eternity... We've no one, nothing. Siva has cut off the anchor. Are you ready? Haiiaah! Break the waves. Sail out. Amidst pervasive darkness Campaknagari still sails on in its search for Siva. *Padi deo-Padi Deo*". The dead sailors take their seats on an imaginary board and take up imaginary oars to row. This remains the only lighted image on an otherwise dark stage; then it slowly recedes in the background to disappear into darkness. (Ib.)

As one follows the persecuted hero's insistent self-searching and anguished thinking about his hostile intolerant society, one is inevitably reminded of the long bleak history from Socrates's trial to Pontius Pilate's judgment, from the Inquisition burning Bruno to Stalin's Gulag. As Cad, because of his devotion to the Siva principle, is alienated, threatened, and assaulted from all sides by the forces of Manasa, the reader also seems to realise with Cad that those who are for the good, are crucified by the society again and again, are lynched, cheated, thwarted by all means.

The contrast between the Siva and Manasa principles has also been rendered in the play in terms of light and darkness, — the familiar Christian symbols for godliness and godlessness, as also the Vedic symbols for truth and untruth, wisdom and ignorance. Here one notes another significant addition to the original text. The prayers people offer to Manasa at different points in the play are carefully worded to evoke the idea of an atavistic surrender to darkness and its association of ignorance and terror. Manasa is thus envisioned as 'dark' in this symbolic way, whereas Siva is imagined as serene luminosity. The Manasa principle involves a willing surrender to darkness. As the play progresses one finds the cult of Manasa getting more and more firmly entrenched in the land. In the third phase the victory of Manasa is complete. Here the author introduces a scene of grotesque rituals. A band of men and women carry onto the stage a huge image of a naked dark green deity, with huge breasts and thighs. People make human sacrifice before her, smear the blood on their faces, and start a hypnotic dance while singing the praise of darkness. This atavistic scene of the celebration of ignorance, cruelty, superstition sends thrills of terror through the audience by means of the dance and song of the performers. The song they sing in the monotonous tone of people under a spell is:

Break down my pride mother
Darken my eyes which have been sullied by light.
We are born in darkness, and return to the same in death
Why should we long for light then?
Break down my pride mother, darken my eyes... (Ib. 139)

In the monotonous rhythm of the repetitive song the above line comes back like a refrain. Thus the prayer that people offer here to Manasa is the reverse of the Vedic prayer to be led out from darkness into light; it is rather to be led from light into darkness.

While the folk legend with its myths of Siva and Manasa remains at the core of the play Mitra also weaves cross-cultural myths into the texture of the play, and thus transforms the simplistic folk-legend in such a way as to stir endless evocations and yield layers of meanings. Thus (1) the snake, an association of Manasa and supposed to be her special favourite

according to folklore, here acquires symbolic dimensions by calling up the Biblical meanings as well as by stirring chords in the racial memory. (2) The Christian and Vedic connotations of darkness as contrasted to light are also thus subtly intertwined with the multilayered connotations of the snake image in the context of Mitra's play: evil, vileness, treachery, reptilian baseness, pain and death. (3) Again, in his defiance against the dictum to surrender to darkness, and the consequent suffering, Cad Sadagar reminds one of Prometheus. (4) Also, with his unflinching commitment to his Siva, which he keeps up with great difficulty, pain and sadness, Cad's angst sends echoes of the lamentations of Job and Jeremiah in the Old Testament, who had been relentlessly subjected to uncalled for suffering and yet struggled hard to retain their faith. Like Job Cad loses his children, relatives, friends, reputation, property in spite of, or perhaps because of his devotion; and to all his prayers his Siva remains silent like God to Job and Jeremiah. As in his last invocation to Siva on the eve of death Cad murmurs: "I see Siva, you are my naked Lord. Is it the reason why you want me to be stripped of the last solace?" (ib. 144), one may catch the echo of another anguished prayer: "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief". Cad's persistent agonised struggle of a stubborn sad soul to retain its faith in good brings him in line with these pagan and Christian mythical figures. (5) One may also trace an echo of the Greek myth of the cursed house (of Atreus, or Thebes, for instance), in which, due to the wrath of some god, an entire family tree is made to wither. The total destruction of Cad and his family at the end of the play marks a major departure from the original story; by means of this departure Mitra creates a similarly stark tragedy with no scope for any consolation left excepting the final assertion of the nobility and dignity of pure souls as Behula and Lakhinder prefer suicide to the ignominy of a life at the cost of self-respect. (6) The author makes frequent allusions to events in *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, which is a common practice among folk-narrators /artists in India; this is their way of sharing responses with the audience who know these epics by heart. However, the author alludes to familiar events in the epics from a fresh perspective in order to show how ultimately Manasa, i.e., untruth-meanness-slovenliness triumphs over the honest, the

striving, the enterprising in this material world. Sita's exile in *The Ramayana* — various voices allude to it recurrently in the text (ib. 18; 19; 20; 54; 103) — is used as evidence of the triumph of the Manasa principle in the Ramayana society as well, by which the pure is cynically slandered and trampled by the gloating vulgar. Similarly, in order to underscore the vulnerability of the good and the right allusions have been made to the last phase of Krishna and Arjuna, the two great heroes of *The Mahabharata*, who had fought for 'dharma', i.e., truth/right, and yet ended so ignominiously.

An instance of intertextuality that particularly reverberates through the text is the archetypal motif of voyage. For Cad, the voyage constitutes the only meaning of life; it is not just trade. He dares and risks and finally loses everything for the sake of the voyage. Still at the end, by the dead bodies of his youngest son and his bride, Cad invokes Siva to make his only claim: "*Tabu Cad padi diechilo*" (still Cad had voyaged). This he claims to be his only identity; all his other identities he sees fading out like names written in water (ib. 144).

Cad Sadagar's voyage echoes the Upanishadic call — "Charaibeti" (go ahead) — implying in the context of the play the message that so long as individuals or races are endowed with vitality they dream, aspire and go ahead; the moment they start stagnating — the process of decadence and degeneration begins. This stagnation and rot, as opposed to the symbolic voyage and vitality, are related to the negative spirit of the Manasa principle.

Sea voyage is one of the many events in Cad Sadagar's life in the legend, though a major one of course. In Mitra's play voyage becomes the most important theme as well as a symbol. The play opens and closes with the same call "*Padi deo*" (Break the waves! Sail out!) It is the call for fearless venture, the call for going ahead instead of getting stagnated. Mitra himself had alluded to the play as the common story of all searchers who make their perpetual voyage — from darkness to light, ignorance to knowledge. As Mitra said: "Take it as a fragmented history of the experience of any lonely individual, which is like some sketchy configurations of a long, unending journey." (Mitra 1997: 44).

A few words about the devices Mitra uses in this play which marks it out as an avant-garde Indian play of our times. In *Cad*

Baniker Pala Mitra has not only gone back to a folklore for intertext, but also to certain practices of a particular folk form, i.e. the *Jatra*. Mitra's use of the term *pala* in his title might seem a bit misleading; because in his hand it becomes a rich modern drama meant for the modern theatre, along with its technical aids, including the light and the sound that Mitra uses exhaustively. At the same time his selfconscious use of the term aims at evoking the atmosphere of the *Jatra*. *Pala* means the text of *Jatra*, a traditional form of folk theatre in Bengal. (Every zone in India has its own unique tradition of folk theatre.) *Jatra palas* were much more deeply embedded and deeply entrenched in the popular imagination than the city-based modern theatres which largely imitated Western models since its beginning in the 19th century till the late 1940s. *Pala* also means a long narrative — usually unsophisticated, and drawing from a common pool of folk memory for its subject — either sung out or performed on the stage with a lot of songs and dances.

Mitra exhaustively uses certain common devices of this folk form in *Cad Baniker Pala*. In our country rural audiences can sit and watch the same story over and over again with unflagging attention. There are stock situations and stock responses which are shared by the bard/the performers/the audience. Even the illiterate people know the stories of these folk dramas by heart and automatically respond to specific sequences and stylizations in a specific and adequate manner. When Sanskrit theatre declined and ceased to be a force after the 12th century, plays in the regional languages, based on the two great epics and popular legends and myths, continued the tradition. Most of India has not yet been touched by modern playwrights and producers who perform in city theatres. The folk theatre had an uninterrupted life in the rural areas and preserved its form for centuries. Modern playwrights and producers are slowly waking up to this potential audience of many millions. Sambhu Mitra — especially in his last play — proved himself to be one of the avante-gardes in Indian theatre in this direction, who revived folk forms and gave them new content. He brought back things which had been discarded by the elite city theater as relics of the ancient past, including choric voices, narrators, commentators, *Judis*, *Sutradhars*, — including dance

and music, both vocal and instrumental — which were simple but rich in their traditional associations and evocative power and incorporated them with fresh significance. In traditional Indian theatre — both classic and folk — vocal and instrumental music accompanies the play, stringed instruments and drums accentuate moods and feelings. The *Mridangam* (a kind of drum) was an essential part of any dramatic performance. So skillfully is the skin mounted and the face stitched that a range of notes can be produced by manipulating the fingers on it. A skilled drummer can follow the conversation of characters, underlining and accentuating it; he can make it break into the roar of a fighting army and fade into the rustling of leaves and murmur of waves. Mitra used these traditional accessories along with his own innovative additions. He had even invented his own special musical instruments, — a variety of drums of various shapes and depth, cymbals, improvised indigenous harps of one and two strings, and also heavy iron chains which were dragged on a metal sheet or wooden board at the backstage — in order to create the appropriate music on specific occasions on the stage. (Mitra 1971: 157). Again, he dropped the practice of strict scene divisions by drop-curtain, — a Western imitation — rather he followed the *jatra* convention of a continued uninterrupted performance. In the classical as well as the folk theatre no time was wasted on scene shifting. Changes were suggested by stylized gestures; for example, a few steps on the stage and an actor has entered the house; he makes a round and he has gone to a different land. An act had no sudden endings as in modern plays, but “lingered on like twilight, fading slowly as the character (here *judis*) described the scene or the action.” (Gargi 1962: 10). Mitra precisely follows this practice in his play; there is no scenic division, nor acts, but only three successive phases covering the long span of Cad’s life from youth through middle age to senility.

As part of the same practice Mitra has used a mythic tale which has become part of the collective memory like the two great epics, and which is still widely sung and performed in rural Bengal during the monsoon as part of religious rites of common people, and he transforms it into a modern classic. As Balwant Gargi observes, “even today it is hard to draw a line between ceremonies

and dramatic pageants — the former are ritualistic moments which could easily be fragments of a larger symbolic drama” (ib. 103) Suresh Awasti describes the process: “When these religious dramas left the temple and came on the streets ... they took roots in the life of the people... Interludes and interpolations in the pageants cover the entire social life of the people” (quoted by Gargi, ib.). Mitra’s use of the myth may be considered from this perspective.

Sambhu Mitra was aware of the advantage of using indigenous forms (Mitra 1971: 142) in order to reach the subconscious layers of the minds of his audience. He had also noted that in Japan people were still enraptured by Noh, Kabuki, whereas the Japanese plays cast on the Western models had not been able to gain that level of acceptance. He used to say: “Let us accommodate foreign ideas: but let the basic frame be indigenous” (ib. 197). At the same time he also liberally uses one equipment of the modern stage, that is, lighting. It is through fine, sparse, and highly artistic use of lighting — as substitute for drop-curtain and that he achieves accentuation of effects; for example, the last scene may be cited.

Sambhu Mitra had also noted with interest the mix of real and unreal in sequences of magic realism in the indigenous tradition of drama. Thus Destiny would speak to Karna, Vivek would warn an aberrant king, or Bharatmata [mother India] would appear on the stage to curse Nadir Shah. He had perceived that these plays which were neither symbolic nor fantasy, could yet achieve a kind of expansion — from the very life-like dialogism of the common villagers to the profundity of symbols. Mitra’s own play becomes progressively magic realistic and closes with a superb feat of magic realism.

J. L. Borges tells the story of one ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*’ who “did not want to compose another Quixote — which is easy but the Quixote itself” (Borges 1987: 65). Borges further clarifies Menard’s intention which was, according to him, not to copy the original text but to produce a few pages which would coincide — word for word and line for line — with those of Miguel de Cervantes (ib. 66); it was the ambition “to go on being Pierre Menard and reach the *Quixote* through the experiences of Pierre Menard” (ib.). This is precisely what Mitra achieves here —

to go on being Sambhu Mitra and reach Cad Banik through the experiences of Sambhu Mitra.

In his last play, when the author was already over sixty years of age, he had thus delved into the collective memory of Bengal and picked up the icon of Cad, to tell Cad's story, his own story, and the story of the angst of all honest searchers through all times.

One may conclude with an observation of Wole Soyinka (made in the context of African drama) about the continuing relevance of the mythic and ritual archetypes in the evolving consciousness and perception of the modern dramatist as he falls back upon his heritage of the 'mythic inner world' in his search for adequate form and meaning which should revitalise his own art.

What we call the mythic inner world is both the psychic sub-structure and temporal subsidence, the cumulative history and empirical observations of the community. It is nonetheless primal in that time, in its cyclic reality, is fundamental to it. The inner world is not static, being constantly enriched by the moral and historic experience of man ... The means to our inner world of transition, the vortex of archetypes and kiln of primal images is the ritualised experience ... In the symbolic disintegration and retrieval of the protagonist ego is reflected the destiny of being. This is ritual's legacy to later tragic art, that the tragic hero stands to his contemporary reality as the ritual protagonist on the edge of transitional gulf... (Soyinka 1976: 36)

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The (Im)possibility of a Postmodern Calderón?

JÜRI TALVET

¡Miren qué dulces jilgueros!

Calderón

In January 2000, four hundred years from the birth of Pedro Calderón de la Barca, the great Spanish Baroque playwright (1600-1681), passed. The mere biographical fact has become — as it has been in the case of so many other celebrated and not celebrated writers — a culminating point burdened with an enormous cultural-historical responsibility. Will the (inter)national intellectual-artistic effort be able to resuscitate Calderón from his position of a petrified and (in several historical periods, like the Enlightenment and Positivism, even despised) classic to a *vita nuova*, to a new phase of his epistemological-hermeneutic and receptive destiny in the 21st century? Can Calderón ever hope to occupy in the theatre the same place of an ever-green and timeless classic, with massive (re)presentations and (re)interpretations on whatever stage of the world, like Shakespeare? Or was the admiration for his work by some great spirits of the past, like Goethe, Shelley, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Pushkin or, in more recent times, Camus¹, a mere caprice,

¹ Thanks to Pascale Montupet, the French participant of the Tartu conference, I have found out that from Nov. 5 to Dec. 2, 2001, Calderón's *La vie est un songe* was staged at Théâtre des Quartiers d'Ivry, under the stage direction of Elisabeth Chailloux. In an interview, published in the programme of the play, Elisabeth Chailloux reveals that she had discovered Calderón through Pier Paolo Pasolini's play *Calderón* (1973).

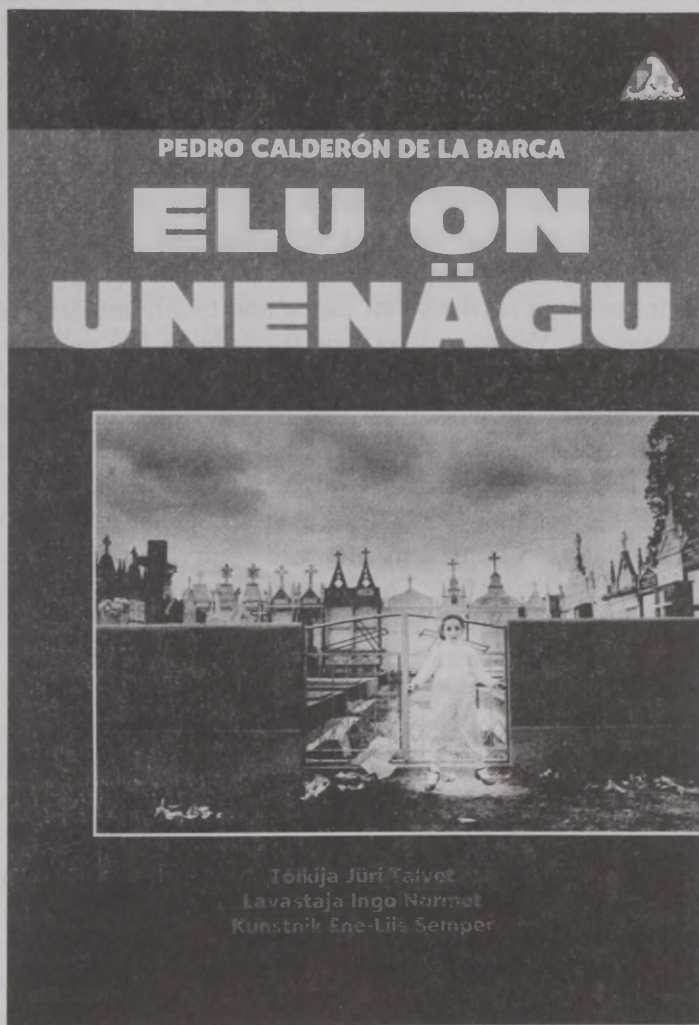
an impulse conditioned by some temporal-existential or, even more narrowly, personal circumstances?

In Spain itself, Calderón has always been staged at theatres, though it is also known that the low esteem for his work by Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, one of the most influential Spanish literary historians and critics of the times of Positivism, has added a good deal of ambiguity to Calderón's reception on the national ground along the 20th century. There has been a strong tendency to identify Calderón, who really was the official drama-writer and the director of the Spanish Court theatre during the reign of Felipe IV — at the times of the ever-deepening political and social decadence of Spain —, with the ideologically orthodox Catholic-monarchist line, which, as is logical, could suit well the theatre stages of the era of Franco, but not really the newly democratic-liberal society, from the 1980s onwards.

This ambiguity was still fully present in 1981 when Calderón's tri-centenary of death was celebrated (Arellano 2000: 4; Reichenberger 1997: 30–31). However, by that time new interpretations of Calderón, like those by Francisco Ruiz Ramón (1967–1969; 1984) had started, and this meant also a gradual introduction of modern and liberal elements, with refreshing philosophical shades, in the stage representations of Calderón's work. This tendency has continued in modern Spanish theatre. There has been a series of attempts to create new stage interpretations of Calderón's drama, including his philosophical masterpiece *La vida es sueño* (*Life Is a Dream*). (About the modern history of Calderón's presentations in Spanish theatre, see Oliva 2000: 41–44).

However, a merely national effort in renewing Calderón's image would hardly do to make him comparable to Shakespeare on the international scale of (theatrical) reception. Calderón's interpretations by foreign scholars or hispanists (*hispanistas*), as they are called, still tend to have influence exclusively in the academic circles, thus working towards an “internal” (Spanish) rather than “external” (intercultural) dynamics. One can find but scarce data about new stage representations and even less so, about an interpretative break-through of Calderón's drama outside Spain (with a happy exception of, perhaps, of *El pintor de su deshonra*, staged from 1995 to 1997 successfully in Great Britain, by the

Royal Shakespeare Company). Likewise there is little news about any major advance in Calderón's translation dynamics despite the fact that translation may easily turn out to be a key issue in the international reception of not only of Calderón's work, but also of the Spanish drama of the *Siglo de Oro*, as a whole.



The poster & programme of Calderón's *Life Is a Dream*,
at Tallinn Drama Theatre (2000–2001).

Along the following lines I would like to meditate on some problems as far as Calderón's postmodern interpretation and theatrical reception are concerned. My points of departure are my own translation into Estonian of *La vida es sueño* or, *Elu on une-nägu* (Tallinn: Kunst 1999), the stage adaptation and presentation of the same by Ingo Normet in the Estonian National Drama Theatre in Tallinn (December 2000) and a (post)modern Spanish/Catalan scenic interpretation of *La vida es sueño* by Calixto Bieito and the Teatro Romea of Barcelona (March 2000), which I have seen as recorded on video.

First, about translation. As is known, the Spanish "Golden Age" drama, including Calderón, relies on a great variety of metric and rhyme patterns. To try to transfer them in a more or less rigid form to another language means a dangerous risk of distorting the original imagery of a work, not to speak about the equally looming risk of introducing rhythms that can sound totally artificial in the target language. Yet for a long time the opinion has prevailed, at least in the cultural area where Estonia is located — between German and Russian culture — that transmitting faithfully verse forms is a condition *sine qua non* of a successful literary translation, which aspires to convey to the reader / spectator the historical flavour of the original work. Thus Ain Kaalep, one of the most influential Estonian translators of world poetry, has followed that type of "homorhythmic" or "homometric" translation of Spanish "Golden Age" drama, established in the first half of the 19th century by German writers and translators (of Calderón), like Joseph von Eichendorf, August Wilhelm Schlegel and Johann Diederich Gries. (There are several modern German editions of Calderón, based on these translations, cf. Calderon 1965). Kaalep rendered in 1962 into Estonian the Spanish play *La Estrella de Sevilla*, attributed to Lope de Vega. It is an admirable piece of adapting Spanish into Estonian or even — as far as the rhythm is concerned — of introducing a kind of Spanish music to the Estonian ears (especially in the octosyllabic romance pattern, rendered by Kaalep in varied interior rhythms). In a way, in its rigidity the translation of Kaalep goes even beyond the examples provided by Eichendorf or Gries, as the latter, conditioned by the

German four-foot trochaic verse tradition, have had to follow a rather uniform rhythm.

However, such a "homorhythmic" principle apparently has its limits. To be thoroughly consequent, Kaalep should have used also a kind of interior variety in the case of other metric and rhyme patterns, besides the romance octosyllable, yet he has not ventured that. On the other hand, it is also significant that *La Estrella de Sevilla* in Kaalep's translation has never been staged, while some other plays by Lope de Vega, relying on somewhat freer Russian translation patterns, have been adapted for the Estonian stage. Until my own translation of Calderón's *La vida es sueño*, Kaalep's *Sevilla täht* was really the only work of the Spanish "Golden Age" drama published in Estonia.

The Russian translation of *La vida es sueño*, made by the outstanding symbolist poet Konstantin Balmont (see Kalderon 1989), follows, too, the general metrical and rhyme pattern of the Spanish original, but is definitely freer than the German translations by Eichendorf or Gries. Looser rhymes are used, there are transitions from one assonance type to another in the same verse cycle, and deviations from the metric length of the original line are not infrequent.²

Another different solution in rendering Calderón's *La vida es sueño* can be found in English. William E. Colford's translation, re-edited over the last decades, goes back to 1958 (Calderón, *Life Is a Dream*). It is really what the supporters of the "homorhythmic" translation principle could well ironically call "turning Calderón into Shakespeare", in the sense that throughout the drama the only verse pattern is that of the hendecasyllabic blank

² At the end of the 1940 and the beginning of the 1950, Calderón's well-known comedies *La dama duende* and *No hay burlas con el amor* were staged in Estonian. They were translated, to all probability, from the Russian, and have remained unpublished until today. August Sang, a poet and one of the translators of Goethe's *Faust*, has followed in his renderings of these plays the freer pattern of Russian translations, e.g., converting the assonance rhymes of the original into blank verse. Ain Kaalep has presented short extracts of these translations in the magazine *Akadeemia* (12, 1999, pp. 2597–2609).

verse, like the one used predominantly in the Elizabethan drama of the days of Shakespeare.

Thus, in the former case, the historical code of the "other" is respected fully, or as fully as possible (taking into account the differences of the target language); the formal faithfulness is supposed to be an additional source of exotic charm. In the latter case, the historical "other" is formally "nationalized" and culturally adopted on the ground that thus it could be better understood by the target public.

What is generally overlooked in the two cases, in my opinion, is that the verse forms employed by the classical drama were to a great extent merely formal conventions. They came into force by often extremely hesitant "negotiations" among the playwrights and the public of the time. One of the practical functions of employing verse and rhymes was that actors of a play could better learn by heart their texts. However, the most important factor seems to have been the inertia of the aura of the "high poetic genre" surrounding drama since classical antiquity. One can say, perhaps, that it was just as natural for the public of the days of Shakespeare and Calderón to read and watch a verse play, as it would be unnatural for the public of our postmodern days to do so. A clash of historical-cultural codes in the presentation of a translated classical play has become unavoidable, since at least the 20th century.

On the other hand, the contemporary code, however strong, could scarcely suppress individualities. Let alone the acute observation by Ruiz Ramón that Calderón was perhaps one of the first great playwrights who sought to create a tragedy without deaths, killings, and murders in their final act, also on the formal ground a possibility remains that Calderón might have transgressed quite consciously the conventional norm (code). Thus one of the best Spanish specialists in the literary styles of the *Siglo de Oro*, Francisco Rico, has mentioned that the verse of Calderón's plays, with a great number of syntactic transitions from a line to another, really shows a marked tendency towards prose speech. (Rico 2000: 21). Would it be, then, convenient to abandon verse as such in Calderón's modern translations, and render his dramas in prose? Would not this be a key to a postmodern Calderón par excellence, with prose speech itself in the function of neutralizing the

historical code into which Calderón, against his own will, had been squeezed?

Too good to be true. With Ignacio Arellano, José María Díez Borque and some others I believe Calderón was one of the greatest dramatic *poets* of all times. Like Shakespeare, he was able to blend into his dramas powerful lyrical images. His lyrical imagery redeems his best dramas from an intellectual scheme, to which his strong tendency towards the symbolic and the allegorical (the philosophical) otherwise might have conduced him. I also believe what William Wordsworth, more than two centuries ago, in his Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) had to say about the differences between a prose text and a versified text. Like Shelley, a few decades later, Wordsworth admitted that poetry can be written both in verse and prose, there is no essential difference between the two. However, while the prose speech creates a certain monotony and regularity of rhythm, the advantage of verse is that it provides a really unlimited pattern for sudden and unexpected transitions and changes of rhythm; it is more fitted than prose for the presentation of similar movements in our feelings. (Wordsworth 1950: 692).

The above said could have even a special relevance for the Spanish classical drama, with its great variety of metrical patterns. To suppress these rhythmical alterations and modifications and create, instead, a uniform pattern, either in prose or verse, would mean suppressing Calderón's poetry. Therefore, my own solution was to render *La vida es sueño* in free verse, only approximately and not rigidly following the length of lines; without rhymes, but adapting the verse still in a iambic rhythm, which by far more than trochaic patterns seems to be natural in Estonian, especially when pronounced by actors on the stage.³ As far as I dare judge from the critical reviews, which have appeared in newspapers after the publication of *Elu on unenägu* (cf. Kaus 1999: 7) and the opinions

³ Later I have found a similar translation option used by David Johnston and Laurence Boswell in their English rendering of *El pintor de su deshonra* (*The Painter of Dishonour*), whose stage success I mentioned before. Their translation relies, for the most part, on free verse, with casual rhymes here and there. (Cf. Calderón 1995).

of my numerous students of Western literary history who now (at last!) have been able to read this major piece of world drama in Estonian, the translation has achieved its goal. On the other hand, my impression of the stage representation of the drama has fully dissipated my fears that the actors might not catch the rhythm⁴. On the contrary, comparing the Spanish rhymed text, as pronounced by the actors under Calixto Bieito's direction, with my free verse version on the Estonian stage, I could really perceive little difference. Thus I believe my translation option has provided a possible linkage between two distant historical codes, not suppressing directly either of them.

The formal translation option, as far as I can see it, can never be too formal. In the end it becomes a substantial premise for transmitting ideology, philosophy, ideas. More exactly, in the case of great playwrights like Shakespeare and Calderón the form essentially creates the space in which philosophy is linked with the image — not appearing as a mere complex of ideas, but amalgamated with feelings, connected with the obscure “border zone” in every human being, open to the subconscious, the Other, and thus being capable of provoking in the spectator not solely brain reactions, but reaching — at least at times — his/her inner self. Calderón is just a perfect “semiospheric” writer — applying Yuri Lotman's terms: a great poet, yes, as Ignacio Arellano states (Arellano 2000: 5), but definitely not in opposition to a philosopher or a theologian. On the contrary, his poetical grandness, in difference, for instance, of Lope de Vega, seems to emanate directly from his essential philosophical-theological awareness of reality.

⁴ I was pleasantly surprised to read the impressions of the Estonian stage representation of *La vida es sueño*, by Nina Kotsarenko, a Russian critic living in Estonia (Kotsarenko 2001: 17). In contrast with the rather hesitant writings by the Estonian critics — excepting the review by Jan Kaus — Kotsarenko manifests her unreserved enthusiasm for Normet's stage version. This has probably to do with the great difference in Calderón's reception tradition in Estonian and Russian. While in Estonian the reception is only now starting, a great number of Calderón's plays are accessible in Russian translation and have been staged in Russian theatres.

Calderón moves on the fertile “border” between feelings and passion, the sexual and the biological, on the one hand, and politics, power, science, religious and moral codes — specifically human artefacts — on the other. He seldom makes that “border” explicitly unambiguous. I would claim that it has been rather the uni-directional critical and interpretative apparatus which at different historical periods has failed to grasp the multi-layer content in Calderón’s plays. In this, predominating “great narratives”, in the ideological sense, have always had their say.

I do not think our postmodern age is an exception. As irony, fragmentation and witty distancing seem to be the main means by which the previous “great narratives” have been neutralized, post-modern criticism and interpretation look hesitant, even perplexed when confronting Calderón, whose best plays and, especially, *La vida es sueño*, have skilfully avoided the introduction of any “too great narratives”. After the first performance of *Elu on unenägu*, an Estonian critic complained that Calderón’s political plane, that of condemning the ambitions of earthly rulers, was not accentuated to the point that it could be grasped — as a parallel with the egoism and individualism of Estonian politicians, nine years after Estonia’s regained political independence (Laasik 2000: 20B; 2001: 29-31). Another younger critic was apparently not satisfied with the stage director Ingo Normet for not making the central character Segismundo metaphysically “liminal”, but rather “predestining” him (Kolk 2001: 8-9). Both critics had the impression that Rosaura’s vengeance story — with less philosophical-meta-physical ambitions — had outweighed Segismundo’s existential search for liberty. Neither of them mentions at all the lyrical plane of Calderón’s work.

I am not going to discuss if these opinions are correct. However, as I have already alluded to in an article about the Estonian stage version (Talvet 2000: 12-13), there does exist a tendency in the postmodern criticism and interpretation to neutralize and to undervalue the complexity of great works of the past by imposing on them a kind of a postmodern “big narrative”. That means, an idea is always considered to be preferable to a feeling, and a conception — to a poetic image. A genuine “liminality” or a “semiospheric dialogue” is ignored more than often. Critics and stage

directors have overwhelmingly become deaf to poetry. Often they make actors "play playing" i.e. have distance, if not superiority, regarding their roles. The direct result of this is that the ambiguous "border" disappears from the stage, to be replaced by a rather one-level narrative, whatever the means of achieving it — something entirely contrary to what could be found in playwrights like Calderón.

To exemplify the above-claimed, I will limit myself to the associations Calderón provides by introducing the main female character of *La vida es sueño*, Rosaura. I am not sure at all that the historical role of women in Spanish plays and in the "Golden Age" literature, on the whole, has been exhaustively analyzed. Let us remind us of Cervantes' Dulcinea, who *invisibly* directs the entire tragicomedy of *Don Quijote*, or of his Preciosa, en *La gitanilla*, testing intelligently his high-born pretender in a "low" gipsy camp. We may also think of that rather strange fusion of the "high" and the "low", in Tirso de Molina's *El burlador*, when three young ladies, dishonoured by don Juan, meet on the road to Seville, to reclaim their "human rights" at the court. Not to mention young village maids who in Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* lead the revolt against the feudal lord, to take a passionate and pitiless revenge on the shameful deeds of that medieval symbol of mankind's unlimited power. (By the way, this play of Lope de Vega was staged in Estonia in 1923 under the title of *The Revolt of Women*).

Calderón's subtle symbolism, interpreting the historical woman, seems to have the widest possible implications. First, *La vida es sueño* is one of the few classical plays — even in the Spanish baroque drama —, in which the principle of the unity of action is fully ignored, as the author has introduced two almost equal action lines running in parallel throughout the play. I am inclined to interpret it as Calderón's intentional challenge — to confuse not only his contemporary public, but even his postmodern critics — of making the role of the main woman character, Rosaura, equal to that of the male protagonist, Segismundo. There are strong symbolic parallels reaching from Rosaura's action line to the story of Segismundo and his father, the old king Basilio.

In harmony with her androgynous appearance, Rosaura embodies both female and male features. In her long conceptualized ratiocinations, justifying her vengeance plan against the treacherous Astolfo — another symbol of the historical “rights” of man-kind — she displays herself as one of the first truly emancipated women in European literature and on theatre stage, a genuine forerunner of the womankind’s emancipation of our postmodern times. Like Basilio, Rosaura is a philosophically and scientifically orientated character, who adds even more shades to the central axes of the play, the complex and contradictory relationship between nature and civilization. In parallel with Basilio, she finally seems to embody the human mistake caused by ideas (science) which have lost contact with reality. (Basilio himself is like a postmodern actor who, obeying his stage director, imposes an interpretative monologue on the *nature* of the character he/she is playing: Basilio, in fact, never enters into a genuine dialogue with nature.)

In contrast with Basilio or Astolfo, Rosaura — like Segismundo, or the *gracioso* Clarín — is not alien to nature. Her female beauty, transcending the mere sexual attraction, irradiates even from behind her male mask, providing Segismundo the first cue to humane, if not Christian values. When Segismundo wakes up in his cave, after the miraculous day in the palace — not knowing any more if he is asleep or awake —, he admits that the only real feeling that still persists in his mind is the beauty of a woman. In the finely interwoven episode of Rosaura’s meeting with Astolfo, Rosaura efficiently demonstrates how a woman’s intimate (natural) intelligence can be superior to that of man. The symbol stressing humankind’s essential relation to Nature is further enlarged by the character of Clarín, the *gracioso* (fool), who in the play is Rosaura’s servant and companion. I think both directors, the Spanish and the Estonian, of the postmodern stage version of the play, have completely overlooked the subtle means by which Calderón achieves something unique in the world drama: the tragic dimension is achieved by the death of a comic character — as Clarín, among the main characters, is the only one who dies at the end of the drama. Despite revealing some egoistic features, Clarín at the same time shows openness to the simple and the natural

around himself, like in the episode when in a prison den he suddenly notices the beauty of small goldfinches:

Quien me hace compañía
aquí, si a decirlo acierto,
son arañas y ratones:
¡miren qué dulces jilgueros!
(*La vida es sueño*, the beginning of Act III)

Calderón encodes and decodes his characters on the great semiospheric stage of the play. If a stage director decides to make the action line of Segismundo excel at the expense of Rosaura's line, he risks to diminish the philosophical revolt of the historical woman against the tyranny of man-kind. He also risks to make less apparent the magisterially introduced theme of science as the main vehicle of progress of the Western civilization, and its human responsibilities. If he translates in Rosaura the quest of her honour into merely sexual terms, he risks to neutralize the essential lyric of the play, as well as to jeopardize the image of Segismundo's quest for liberty, in the widest sense. Above all, a lack of sensibility towards the philosophical image of Calderón would most likely lead to another example of a postmodern "big narrative", with its distancing apparatus crushing the polyphonic suggestions of the play. On the contrary, for a sensible, more deeply feeling postmodern mind, *La vida es sueño*, as many other works of Calderón and his contemporary Spanish playwrights, would provide a unique semiospheric theatre stage, open simultaneously to all voices and discourses, past as well as modern.

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Performing *Faust* at the Turn of the 21st Century. The 21-hour *Faust* and the Straightforward *Faust* at the Korean Goethe Festival

YOUNG-AE CHON

1. *Faust* — the text

Faust is the unparalleled *magnum opus* not only of a great writer, but also of a great dramatist, who was involved in the theatre for 26 years. Apart from its scale and poetic intensity, it is the theatrical richness, as well as the experimental character of the work, especially of the second part, which in the past led to its being considered unperformable.¹ Already as a text, *Faust* is the fullest unfolding and at the same time a transgression of the possibilities of theatre.

The work has nonetheless challenged producers time and again to stage it anew, and continues to do so. On the threshold of the new millennium it even marks an event in the history of the theatre, with the staging of a record 21-hour production. On the other hand, in far-off places *Faust* is staged in an almost pious manner. What power can this have? How can we interpret such a

¹ The second part of the play was first performed, in a greatly reduced form, a full 44 years after the death of its author, and the play in its entirety only in 2000–2001, that is, about 170 years after its completion. Translator's note: The translation of *Faust* cited throughout is that of Stuart Atkins, *Faust I & II*, which is volume 2 of the 12 volumes of *Goethe. The Collected Works*, originally published Cambridge, Mass.: Suhrkamp, 1983–1989, this edition Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

phenomenon in the midst of the expanding 'entertainment society' of the media age?

2. Theatrical challenges of the text

Even for the most willing and able producer the *Faust*-text would present a challenge. The producer will meet countless difficulties. To mention but a few (I will limit myself to the second part.):

Act 1: Having awoken from his hypnotic sleep, Faust is bundled off to a medieval court, and the wretched economic conditions there are set right by paper money.

So far all of this can be staged. However, those tasks Faust the magician must perform should also be staged in a plausible way, the events of the masquerade and the conjuring of Helen and Paris with all their allegorical and phantasmagorical wealth.

Act 2: Here the artificial human being Homunculus and the entire monstrous crowd of the world of the Hellenic night, in which the airborne Faust, Mephistopheles and Homunculus, each with his own goal, float about, and the somewhat boring discussion between Thales and Anaxagoras, but also the shattering of Homunculus against Galatea's conch should be visually rendered.

Act 3: The entire phantasmagoria of the 'Helen' act must be presented here in a temporally and spatially condensed form. For the most part, what this involves is a Greek tragedy being at once played out and subverted, as this act closes with a striking alienation effect, dispelling all illusion.² The *Singspiel* quality of this part of the work should also be given a strong emphasis.

Acts 4 and 5: Here the great world of the deed — from the battlefield to the sweeping strand and the harbour — is given form. The greed of the modern man that brings catastrophes, and the remainder of the 'good side', along with the frailty of the Faust-character should be given particularly effective illustration here.

² Cf. the stage direction at the end of the third act: "The curtain falls. Phorkyas, in the proscenium, rises to a gigantic height, then steps down from the cothurni, pushes back mask and veil, and stands revealed as Mephistopheles, prepared to comment on the play, as much as may be necessary, in an epilogue."

Finally the *Mountain Gorges* scene: This is about that place before heaven, into which Faust's soul is transferred. The deeper meaning and at the same time the shimmering ambiguity of the "salvation" should be conveyed with a certain operatic quality.

In short: Each act stands on its own and is as such already a severe strain on the possibilities of the stage. That said, this excess and diversity, the strands of which have been separated out here, should form an organism. In this respect the "Prelude on the Stage", which, along with the "Dedication" and the "Prologue in Heaven", forms the opening section of the drama, is remarkable. The "Prelude" points to the theatrical concept, whereas the "Prologue in Heaven" essentially indicates the content of the work. In the form of a discussion three different positions are illustrated here. The pragmatic or market principle of the producer ("I'd greatly like to satisfy the public" (line 37), "Spectators come expecting something they can see." (line 90)) collides with the idealistic position of the writer, who is concerned about posterity ("Spare me your public and its varied kinds — " (line 59), "What glitters lives for the moment; what has real worth, survives for all posterity." (line 73 f.)), and compromise is sought in the comedian, the player, who simply wishes to play ("who'd entertain the present generation?" (line 77)). The command of the stage manager, who after all makes theatre possible, is as follows: "Don't wait because your piece is still in pieces!" (line 99). And the argument to back it up: "Nor does it help to offer anything complete — / your audience will only tear it all apart" (line 102 f.).

3. Peter Stein's *Faust* production

This gigantic project, which generated much wonder and not a little criticism³, adheres very closely to the text. Not a single word of the 12,111 lines has been omitted. This unflinching loyalty to the text is proof of a reliable orientation, based as it is on a

³ This production has been criticized as, for instance, "an empty carnival" ("ein leerer Karneval" — *Die Zeit* 2000 No. 31) or "fairground spectacle" ("Jahrmarktsspektakel" — *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25/7/2000).

profound understanding of the text, and demonstrates new potential for staging the work. Stein's production dispenses to a great extent with the established tradition of stage management theatre. The artistic skill of the stage manager is now wholly concentrated on the stage performance. The production offers much, in full knowledge that the audience most wishes to see what corresponds to the conception of the manager in the *Prelude on the Stage*.⁴ Thus, the production is drama in the true sense of the word, indeed a truly manifold and glorious one. Especially magnificent in this sense are the mass scenes, such as that of the Easter-day walk, the masquerade and the chorus of the Trojan women in the 'Helen' act.

3.1. The stages and the audience

The main characteristics of this production, apart from the record length, are surely the diversity of the stages and the mobilization of the audience. The audience has no fixed seated position, but instead moves to a different stage after each scene. The spectator is included in the performance. He or she can join in with the actors and can turn him- or herself into a figure of the drama. One is led, for instance, from the study to the Easter-day walk, one stands as part of the crowd of people with the actors in the imperial palace, and one even enters the knights' hall, where tables are set for a feast for almost 500 people. (And the stage direction, which goes beyond the means of any usual stage, "Emperor and princes, with courtiers; there is much coming and going",⁵ can thus be carried out with the greatest of ease between scene-changes in the midst of the audience and actors.)

This production thus offers the audience first and foremost a magnificent stage experience: from the arena to the usual proscenium stage and the conspicuous box set stage, from the

⁴ Something is played, which of course also pleases the will of the 'player'. By realizing a monumental drama the production, however, also corresponds to the will of the playwright.

⁵ *Brightly Lit Rooms*.

impromptu stage in the foyer to the antique thrust stage. The stage designers had at their disposal an old wagon factory, which provided the space necessary for such elaborate stage arrangements. The plurality of stages in itself gives the drama, with its diversity, a further dimension and creates a specific theatrical effect, just as time in the novel has a specific effect by being expanded or contracted, or as the lyrical form of the sonnet sequence relates to the sonnet. These effects, which arise from, among other things, the contrast between the different stage sizes and forms, are remarkable. (For instance the constraint Faust feels at night in his little gothic study and his lack of zest for life are first realized by the stage-set with oppressively high shelving, and then sharply contrasted with the wide open stage of the Easter-day walk; the effect is thus heightened considerably. Two tiny box sets, which appear to the standing spectator at eye-level as if installed in the middle of the opposite wall of a large room, illustrate the narrowness of Auerbach's cellar and the fictitiousness of the witches' kitchen. As the scene changes the standing spectators turn 180 degrees on the spot.)

As regards the second part, the impression that it is a loose series of separate acts is actually accentuated by the production. Each act, which as a text is already independent, is provided with a different stage form, one which best suits its content.

The first act is a perfect example of the diversity of the stages. At the end of the opening recovery scene a fantastic rainbow becomes visible on the gauze curtain between the audience and the stage, which had until then remained invisible on account of the faint lighting. The audience, fascinated by this, is then immediately led to the imperial palace, in which they slowly realize that they themselves are forming the crowd of the play. Then on to the masquerade, which takes place in a long, large room. There one finds oneself as a spectator in a double sense of the word: as a participant in a magnificent festivity and as a theatre spectator. The scene which follows, *A Garden*, which is played in the light of the "morning sun", ends suddenly with a bang and is completely obscured by a large wall that falls down in front of it. The wall divides the stage horizontally into two parts so that the next scene, *A Dark Gallery*, can be played on the darker upper part. At that

point the audience is led to the knights' hall. On the way there is another impromptu scene in the midst of the crowd. In the spacious knights' hall the audience sits at set tables and before them the court is seated, that is, the actors. Thus both parties (actors in front, audience behind) wait before the curtain for a play within the play (the appearance of Paris and Helen). Faust appears, using the key to draw the tripod to the proscenium of a small classically decorated box set stage. This scene, and thus the whole first act, ends with an explosion. Faust falls unconscious, and all the court benches collapse. — All in all, plenty to see, hear, marvel at, enjoy and experience.

The second act is played relatively peacefully on just three stages. The act opens with the old study. The "classical Walpurgis night" is then played on a starkly abstract, completely black workshop-stage. The river Peneios is illustrated fantastically and lyrically with a long swathe of cloth. The scene *Rocky Inlets of the Aegean Sea* is rendered on the contrary with postmodern attractions; on a semicircular track the actors move quickly and elegantly on rollerskates, representing the movement of the sea. On the front wall, which runs along the track and hides it, a series of videos, like those in the work of the video artist Paik Nam Jun, can be seen. Later, after the shattering of *Homunculus*, these will synchronize the flames on the sea.

Helen opens the third act. She is standing in front of the palace of Menelaus and speaking in antique metre. The stage is, correspondingly, the antique three-quarter round. As Helen turns to Faust's fortress, the audience's seats are pushed out and opened like two wings by the actors. The direction of the auditorium is reversed in the next scene, *A Shaded Grove*, but still forms a three-quarter round, and the stage remains open from three sides to the audience. The stage is the place for the stage events, especially for the chorus. The exceptional choreography for the chorus of the beautiful Trojan women lends the relatively static monologue an antique splendour and effectively underscores the tragic aspect.

Act 4: With a pair of giant red boots (the seven-league boots) coming shooting down onto the stage and marching off, with the military music and the metallic sound of the tin soldiers hanging on a line to the left and right of the audience, the world of the deed

opens, a world dominated by violence and greed. Here the audience remains in the role of the spectator.

Act 5: The stage-set here is on the whole very realistic: the little chapel and the hut of the old couple Philemon and Baucis, as well as Faust's balcony opposite. The *burial* is represented even more realistically. The representation of the jaws of hell and of the lemures, with its utterly realistic features, goes beyond theatrical loyalty. This exaggerated representation, especially of the jaws of hell, has rather the effect of a caricature, close to kitsch. All in all this act conveys more than adequately the weakness of the Faust figure and the frailty of humanity itself.

In the final scene, *Mountain Gorges*, the metal framework of heaven (this is the framework on which the *Prologue in Heaven* was played; until now it remained pushed up against the roof) rolls in a spiralling motion down to the floor and serves as the path on which Faust's soul is carried up. The stages of the progress of Faust's soul are suggested by the appearance of people of different ages, from a child to a young man and so on. These figures on the spiral path all dressed in white seem — as in the *Prologue in Heaven* — to be space-travellers.

Both in scale and in form the performance under discussion transcended the limits of previous conceptions of theatre. That such a performance is even possible is a source of amazement in itself. But by mobilizing and employing every thinkable kind of stage and stage technique, theatre here apparently wants to return to its elementary function: that of illustrating, or rendering visible, the text on stage. It wants to return to the drama as "s h o w-play" ("S c h a u spiel"), to itself. This kind of theatre is thus not only loyal to the text, but also to itself, to theatre.

3.2. Interpretation using the example of the role of Mephistopheles

Especially noteworthy in terms of content is, in my opinion, the interpretation of Mephistopheles. Since the legendary Gründgens production there has been a tendency to put the main emphasis on the role of Mephistopheles. This is a remarkable phenomenon. (In comparison for instance with *Faust*) the interpretation of his role has become ever more nuanced and diverse. For instance in Weimar alone in the past few years, where the production of *Faust* is a touchstone for the competence of a stage manager: The workshop performance of *Urfaust* (1997, producer: Georg Schiedleiner) presents Mephistopheles as a woman (Susanne Lietzow), who appears now as a man head and shoulders above Faust, now as a seducer. In the Goethe-year production of 1999 (producer: Michael Gruner) the role was divided into a macho-Mephistopheles (Eckart von der Trenck) and a transvestite-Mephistopheles (Daniel Graf). And this year (producers: Julia von Sell and Karsten Wiegand) a "techno-boy-Mephistopheles" (Marek Harloff), a slender boy of the modern amusement society seduces the "knowledge-monolith"⁶, Faust (Thomas Thieme), out of apparently fatal boredom.

In Peter Stein's production, too, the role is shared between two actors: a stout burlesque (Adam Oest) and a gentle philosopher from hell (Robert Hunger-Buhler). The sharing of a role is in itself nothing new.⁷ It happens almost automatically on account of Faust's different ages. In the case of Mephistopheles, however, it is a question of interpretation. Of particular interest in Peter Stein's production is the interpretation of the role of Mephistopheles as an intellectual, who radiates calm and sovereignty.⁸ On

⁶ Cf. *Braunschweiger Zeitung*, 13/3/2001.

⁷ There were even twelve Gretchens (in Einar Schleef's production). But "ten Gretchens, ten Fausts do not make for a nice production!" ("Zehn Gretchen, zehn Faust machen die Inszenierung natürlich nicht schön!" — A. Schöne, cf. the "Programmbuch" for Peter Stein's production, p. 259 ff.) But this *is* a remarkable tendency.

⁸ Already in the *Prelude on the Stage*, in which the first of the many stages has the form of a ring-fight arena (and where the *Prologue in Heaven* continues), the player in the Harlequin costume distinguishes

the other hand, this also serves to further accentuate Faust's frailty, which this production already underlines. This gentle philosopher from hell, then, gives the traditional Mephistopheles figure a new facet by raising considerably the credibility of his general existence and bringing his more subtle and wider gamut of evil into play. This is also remarkable in the light of the history of staging *Faust*.

As for Faust, on the other hand, his weakness is emphasized for various reasons. One need only recall the many distortions of Faust: for instance Faust as a drug-addict (Frankfurt 1990, production: Einar Schleef) or as an alcoholic (Hamburg 1993, production: Christoph Marthaler). (Mahl 1999: 237ff) In Peter Stein's production Faust is apparently first and foremost portrayed as a human being with all his limits and weaknesses. And from both — young and old — actors alike (Christian Nickel and Bruno Ganz) the Faustian passion, among other things, is missing. In the other productions, too, one gets the impression that the actor playing Faust is not always equal to his role. This undoubtedly has to do with the *Zeitgeist*: a Faustian Faust-actor is an ever rarer find, a Faustian person rarer still, while our understanding of the figure of Mephistopheles becomes ever deeper.

4. *Faust* in Korea

Faust was first translated into Korean in 1958. Since then a total of 19 translations⁹ has appeared. The play has been staged four

himself by his sovereign calmness. Afterwards it becomes apparent that precisely he picks up the role of Mephistopheles.

⁹ In this context a number of things warrant a mention. The translation project of the Hamburg edition, which was enabled by, among other things, the private initiative of a retired professor of German studies; seven volumes have been published so far, the others are in the press. The Korean Goethe Society has been holding regular biannual meetings (on the date of Goethe's birth and death) for the past twenty years. And the smaller Goethe reading-group meets regularly on a monthly basis not only to read but also for intensive discussion. This group has already read *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*, the

times, but only the first part. Apart from these, a version of *Faust* by a young Korean dramatist, *Faust in Blue Jeans*, has been staged now and again since the eighties, especially by students. Both parts were first performed in 1999. It was a very straightforward performance, in a mixed form between reading and theatre, alongside *Iphigenia*, *Stella*, an evening of lyric poetry and a number of musical events¹⁰, which took place in the context of the 17-day Goethe Festival¹¹ in the theatre-complex of the Seoul Art Center (Director: MUN Ho-Keun).

The stage was of a usual form and size, with seating for approximately 700. Nonetheless a market orientation was vehemently resisted. The emphasis was on the conception of the writer. To this end, the simplest form was chosen: greatly reduced in length, the performance was to convey the essence of the play. The stage-set, too, was extremely straightforward. Ten actors and nine chairs, a bench, sometimes a small table, were all that was to be seen on the stage. Apart from that there was a backcloth to represent the portal of a medieval fortress. With that the attention of the audience was to be secured.

In short: It was a kind of minimal theatre. Lighting played an important role. For instance in the *Classical Walpurgisnight* only small sparks, hovering like May beetles, could be seen; the idea was to listen. Or: when Faust dreamed on the beach of the land that was going to be reclaimed, he just stood there alone on the empty stage in a full and fantastic dark-blue light, while the floor lighting, which was blue like the sea, turned slowly and in a circular sweep into desert-brown.

Eight chairs stood in a row in the background most of the time, a red upholstered bench was placed diagonally at the front on the

West-Eastern Divan, and *Faust* together and translated the first two of these works.

¹⁰ Among these were a performance of *The Damnation of Faust* by Berlioz (Conductor: MUN HO-Keun) and 'Lieder'-evenings with settings of poems by Goethe.

¹¹ The event was further accompanied by an exhibition in the foyer of books and stamps relating to Goethe, and night-time screenings of films relating to Goethe or his works.

left. This bench stood for all fictitiousness: for instance when Helen was sitting on it or standing near it; with the focus on the world of the deed, therefore, as in the fourth and fifth acts, the red upholstered bench disappeared. With their voices and minimal movements the ten actors or readers created the dramatic tension. When, for instance, Faust had uttered the words "*Tarry, remain! — you are so fair!*" the chorus, which until then had been standing in a line in the background, turned into the lemures, and shortly after that, in the *Mountain Gorges* scene, turned back into angels. As the lemures, they gathered in violent dance movements closely around Faust; as the angels, they withdrew quietly and once again formed a calm, pleasant line.

This straightforward performance fascinated audiences greatly. It was very well-attended and was often sold out.

*

Such a complex as *Faust II* ought to be performed either in a magnificent manner and in strict keeping with the text like Peter Stein's production or in a straightforward way that comes close to a reading and stimulates the audience's imagination to the utmost. In the wake of all sorts of experimental and commercial performances, rigorous loyalty to the text certainly presents another option. In the performances discussed above, which are extremely divergent, what the producers and actors of both have in common is that they, each in their own way, almost piously break through the thick wall and thus speak directly to the audience. The audience, too, deserves credit for willingly exerting themselves in this "marathon",¹² watching and listening intently. Whether there was an added attraction in the curiosity about such a monumental performance or about a monumental work, into which the author brought his whole life — at any rate the success of the performance confirms an ongoing interest in literature, but also the effectiveness of forces opposing the dominant distraction and sentimentality of the media age. The author is, of course, con-

¹² In both senses: the length of the production as well as the to-ing and fro-ing in search of a good seat.

sidered the “supreme product” of the “age of paper”. (Boyle 1991: preface)

The success of *Faust* on native soil as in distant lands is not only due, then, to the skill of the stage manager, but to his or her deep understanding of the text. Naturally the power of a classic work will not be bound by space and time. It will, I presume, point beyond the threshold of the century or, as it happens, of the millennium.

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Dionysos Agonistes

MARDI VALGEMÄE

Americans have a saying that nothing is certain in life, except death and taxes. This semi-sociological statement, when purged of its materialistic impurities, may be refined into a metaphysical axiom on mortality: of all perceivable entities, only death is eternal. Even the universe, according to the latest calculations of cosmographers, will eventually die and become, as if in a Samuel Beckett play, an abode of cold stones. Notwithstanding the ultimate futility of human endeavors, artists have been clutching for at least two and a half millennia at the straws of the aphorism *Ars longa, vita brevis*. As F. Scott Fitzgerald has so poignantly expressed it in another context, “we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past” (Fitzgerald 1925: 159). In the final analysis, however, *ars* is — ironically — only a little less *brevis* than *vita*. A smaller irony involves the living stage on the cusp of the 21st century. Though theater is one of the most ephemeral of the arts, it has survived competition from various other “entertainments” ranging from organized athletics to film, television and the electronic media. On the other hand, serious plays nowadays rarely make it to mainstream venues, being presumably too cerebral for the multitude, or, as Shakespeare has Hamlet phrase it on the threshold of the 17th century, because they are “caviare to the general” (2.2.433)¹

Friedrich Nietzsche, who makes perceptive observations about Hamlet’s state of mind, to which we shall return later, reintroduced Dionysos, the Greek god of theater, wine, madness, violence and

¹ This and all future references to *Hamlet* in the text of the paper give in parentheses the act, scene and line number(s) from The Arden Shakespeare edition (see Shakespeare 1982).

bodily fluids to the Western consciousness. Borrowing aspects of Hegel's dialectical approach (which he soon came to despise), Nietzsche explores in his first book, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872), the intoxicating dream world of the Apollonian-Dionysian duality that created Attic tragedy. Such "music made visible" (Nietzsche 1956: 89), he maintains, is eventually undermined by Socratic reason. Seventeen years later, in *Götzen-Dämmerung* (1889), a kind of revision of *Die Geburt*, Nietzsche is still wrestling with the problem of Socrates. This "repulsive" Greek thinker, argues the German philosopher just before his mental collapse, discovered a new kind of *agon* that led to the internalization of "agonal gymnastics" and to Plato's "dialectics" (Nietzsche 1955: II. 954, 1004) — and thus to everything else that is wrong with the modern world.

The term *agon*, which has given us the word "agony," originally meant an athletic, musical or dramatic contest, *agonistes* being a contender or contestant in such a competition. My phrase *Dionysos agonistes* alludes to two kinds of struggle. First, there is the internal conflict between the Dionysos of negation and the Dionysos of affirmation, the destroyer and the healer, especially as Nietzsche envisions it in his posthumously published *Ecce Homo* (Nietzsche 1955: II.1109–1111). Second, on a metaphorical level, *Dionysos agonistes* marks the conflict between tradition and the avant-garde in the theatrical arena of the new century. I will, therefore, focus on several productions of a well-nigh universally acclaimed play in an effort to suggest a model for presenting classical drama.² My prime exhibit, the *ne plus ultra* of Western

² In doing so I will refrain from dealing with the issue of globalization, for notwithstanding its presumed inevitability, indigenous cultural expression, especially in the performing arts, need not abandon its ethnic orientation. On the other hand, already Goethe argued that "National literature means little these days; the epoch of world literature is at hand." Though he mentions the literature of "the Chinese, or the Serbs, or Calderón, or the *Nibelungen*," Goethe prefers, of course, that of the ancient Greeks (Goethe to Eckermann, January 31, 1827; Eckermann 1964: 94). In the present context, the issues related to globalization become even more complex when we realize that "Estonian theater" is in fact an outgrowth of 19th-century (Baltic) German theater.

dramaturgy, is of course *Hamlet*. But there is something muddy, if not quite rotten, in the state of Shakespeare's Denmark. Therefore, before weighing the options, as it were, we need to glance at some of the untidiness (Jenkins 1982: 1–159).

The most vexing of the problems of *Hamlet* are textual. As there exist no manuscripts, the text of the play has to be pieced together from various printed versions. The earliest of these is the First Quarto of 1603. It is approximately half the length of the Second Quarto (1604–1605). The Second Quarto omits material that appears in the slightly shorter First Folio (1623) — and vice versa. Some of the First Quarto lines that are missing from the Second Quarto may have been cut because King James, who succeeded Queen Elizabeth in 1603, was opposed to regicidal revenge — and dueling — which would “have made *Hamlet* a politically dangerous play” (Ward 1992: 284). Furthermore, the First Quarto contains an entire scene (between Horatio and the Queen) not found in either the Second Quarto or the Folio. Some scholars (e.g. Irace 1992: 105, Melchiori 1992: 205) prefer this scene to the corresponding passages of the “standard” version, based mainly on the Second Quarto. Though all three texts include the “To be or not to be” soliloquy (3.1.56–88), their wording varies. Additional versions of *Hamlet* appeared later in the 17th century, but these do not alter the picture significantly. Nevertheless, there remains the puzzle of a German play called *Tragödia der Bestrafte Brudermord oder Prinz Hamlet aus Dänemark*. It was published in the 18th century from a now lost manuscript that probably derives from texts performed in Germany by touring English actors and that may contain material from the so-called *Ur-Hamlet*.

With the *Ur-Hamlet* we enter the confusion of Shakespeare's chief sources. The seeds of the Hamlet story can be traced to a few lines by a 9th-century Nordic bard preserved in the *Prose Edda*, but the first account of the main action appears in a history of Denmark, written by a 12th-century monk called Saxo Grammaticus who may have borrowed also from an analogous tale of a Roman avenging the murder of his father. Saxo's account was retold by François de Belleforest in his *Histoires Tragiques* in the 1570s. The Frenchman's work inspired in the 1580s a Senecan

revenge tragedy titled *Hamlet*, attributed to Thomas Kyd. Its production is documented, but we know practically nothing about its content, for the text has been lost. This is the ghostly *Ur-Hamlet*, which together with Kyd's extant revenge play *The Spanish Tragedy* is the most likely immediate source of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Another area that poses potential problems involves the conventions of the Elizabethan stage. The soliloquies and asides that are not supposed to be heard by other characters do not seem to bother modern theatergoers. The use of male actors in female roles (a convention in ancient Greece as well as in the performance of Japanese Noh plays) has hopefully also ceased to be a concern. What would be odd, however, is to be "historically correct" and follow the Elizabethan practice in costuming. Though some attempt was apparently made to approximate the dress of certain occupations and nationalities, suggested by the only extant drawing of a dramatic scene — from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (Shakespeare 1997: plate 9) — most performers of that period appeared in contemporary clothes. The text of *Julius Caesar*, for example, indicates that actors wore hats and that Caesar was dressed not in a toga but a doublet, a close-fitting Elizabethan jacket (Shakespeare 1963: 1.2.245,265). Hamlet, too, wears a doublet (2.1.78).

Finally, in addition to such inevitable questions as why does Hamlet delay his revenge and is so cruel to Ophelia or why the King does not react to the dumb-show, there are puzzling compositional lapses on the part of the Bard of Avon. But then Homer is known to have nodded, too. *Hamlet* begins on the battlements of Elsinore in bitter cold, which is mentioned twice (1.1.8; 1.4.1). This would place the action in midwinter or thereabouts. However, the King, who died one or at most two months earlier, was poisoned while sleeping in the "orchard" (1.5.59). As one commentator has put it, "Taking a nap in the frost would seem unwise for an elderly monarch" (Sutherland & Watts 2000: 16). There is also a Catholic Ghost — who, however, could be the Devil (2.2.595) — in a fiercely Protestant culture. Hamlet, after all, is attending the university at Wittenberg, the bastion of Martin Luther. Early in the play, Hamlet is repeatedly called "young" (e.g.

1.3.124; 1.5.16), but in the gravedigger scene we learn that he is thirty years old (5.1.138–157) as, by the way, was the actor playing him. Linked with other bits of evidence, this conjures up a completely different character. The first line of the first soliloquy in the Folio text has Hamlet wishing that “this too too solid” (and not “sullied”; 1.2.129) flesh would melt. In the duelling scene his mother calls him “fat and scant of breath” (5.2.290, though “fat” may mean perspiring). All of a sudden we thus have a princely college student who is possibly overweight and middle-aged. And if Hamlet is indeed a scourge of God, as he himself admits in a variously interpreted line (3.4.177), Horatio’s words at his death, “And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest” (5.2.365), must surely be ironic, for a damned soul thirsting for blood (3.3.381) will plummet straight to hell. These are just a few of the many examples of either the author’s postmodern ambiguity or his writing at breakneck speed in order to finish the script in time for an imminent performance. No wonder then that each Shakespearean editor or director is more or less at liberty to construct his or her own *Hamlet*.

Having seen various interpretations of this play, ranging from a Finnish approach with a female Prince to the German Heiner Müller’s deconstructed and abstract *Hamletmaschine*, reminiscent in principle, if not in genre, of Leonhard Lapin’s artwork “Woman-Machine X” (reproduced in McPhee 1994: 53), I will focus on three recent productions. These are the 400th-anniversary staging at London’s replica of the Globe Theater (2000), Ingmar Bergman’s Royal Dramatic Theater of Stockholm version (1988) and Paris-based Peter Brook’s rendition (2001).

Erected outside the jurisdiction of the anti-theatrical Puritan city government of London in 1599, the Globe Theater was undoubtedly the venue for the premiere of *Hamlet*. As for the date, which remains a knotty problem, the latest evidence suggests that the previously calculated time frame, ranging from 1599 to 1601, has now been narrowed to mid-1600 (“First Performance” 2000: 9). The purpose of the reconstructed Globe, the brainchild of the American actor Sam Wanamaker, is to give an Elizabethan flavor to productions of the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The building and its ambiance are as authentic as modern

ingenuity allows, from the mortice and tendon joints of oaken beams and a thatched roof covering a part of the structure to the food vendors wandering among the audience during the performance. The spectators who elect to stand in the pit are exposed to the weather, but (as was the case in former times) they pay less. The 400th-anniversary staging of *Hamlet*, in doublet and hose and with no artificial light, but with actresses playing Gertrude, Ophelia and the Player Queen, failed, however, to generate even a semblance of catharsis. The directing lacked imagination, and the acting was colorless. Dionysos was clearly absent from this London revival. What passed for authenticity was at best a museum piece redolent of the musty smell of Nietzsche's Socrates. Who can tell what constituted the true flavor of the Elizabethan theater, but whatever it was, it proved to be immensely successful in London and carried over to the Continent as well. The English revenge play tradition was chiefly influenced by the sexual violence of Seneca's Roman tragedies. It is attested to not only by the plays of Thomas Kyd, John Marston, John Webster and Cyril Tourneur, but also by Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, and it has little to do — even in *Hamlet* — with the genteel decorum that has governed Western theater during the last couple of hundred years.

The directorial approaches that have magically enhanced traditional texts include the Romanian Andrei Serban's staging of Euripides, the Cuban Maria Irene Fornes's tackling of Calderón, the Frenchwoman Ariane Mnouchkine's reinventing of Molière and the Flemish Ivo van Hove's imagining of Eugene O'Neill.³ [3] These directors have relied on modern or postmodern techniques with a vengeance, but they have always captured the essence of the work and brought to light some previously unilluminated aspect of the play. Above all, they have enlivened the theatrical process and made it interesting. To this company belongs as well the Swede Ingmar Bergman with his "reading" of *Hamlet*.

³ For the last two, see my commentary, respectively, in "Paradoksaalne Pariis", *Kultuurileht*, 23, June 21, 1996, and "Jälle häda O'Neilli pärast", *Sirp*, 43, Noveember 7, 1997.

I say "reading" because Bergman has obviously studied the First Quarto, which prints the play's key soliloquy earlier in the text than does the generally accepted version. The shifting of "To be or not to be" from Act Three, Scene One to Act Two, Scene Two (act-divisions are, of course, not by Shakespeare but were created by later editors) quickly focuses attention on Hamlet's questioning of the meaning of life after having heard shocking news from the Ghost. Father has not just died but has been murdered by Uncle, who has married Mother. Mother has committed adultery with Uncle while Father was still alive. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie* Nietzsche calls Hamlet a "Dionysiac man" who has been brought face to face with "the terrible absurdity of existence" and therefore falls victim to nausea and inaction (Nietzsche 1955: I.48). In *Ecce Homo* he adds: "I know of no more heartrending reading than Shakespeare... Is Hamlet *understood*? It is not doubt, it is *certainty* which makes him mad" (Nietzsche 1955: II.1089; original italics).

Ingmar Bergman's production, which begins with "The Merry Widow" waltz and ends with very loud heavy metal rock music, veers toward the darkly destructive aspects of the Dionysos of Euripides' *The Bacchae* with modern psychoanalytic overtones. Claudius, whom Hamlet calls "a thing" (4.2.27), a word that in Elizabethan English signifies the penis (Partridge 1960: 203), satisfies his lust with both Gertrude and the Player Queen. Hamlet becomes physically violent with Ophelia and almost rapes her. During her mad scene, Ophelia, whom Jacques Lacan has rechristened "O phallos" (Lacan 1959: 20), dispenses not flowers but large iron nails. When the Norwegian Fortinbras and his guerilla warriors enter carrying automatic weapons, the last line of the play, "Go, bid the soldiers shoot," which means that cannons should be fired in honor of the dead Prince, is turned into a cue for a general massacre, including the killing of Horatio. Fortinbras has indeed completed his revenge for Old Hamlet's killing of *his* father.

Shakespeare's play, however, is more subtle than that. It contains the full range of *Dionysos agonistes*, the destruction as well as the affirmation. It ends with an obvious restoration of civic order, the dying Hamlet casting his vote for Fortinbras as the next

king of Denmark. Tagged-on "tragic affirmation," however, has by now become highly suspect on the stage, and there is nothing wrong with the attempts of a director to invent a more acceptable conclusion for this play. The most ingenious — and poetic — ending of *Hamlet* that I have seen occurs in the Peter Brook version.

Brook, perhaps the most illustrious English director, who decades ago created a milestone production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, has staged several earlier *Hamlets*, most recently a French-language *Qui Est La?* or "Who's There?", the first two words of Shakespeare's play. He structured this experiment as a rehearsal, during which the play was presented as if directed in turn by five 20th-century theater giants: Konstantin Stanislavski, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Gordon Craig, Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud. His latest version is called *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, perhaps because the work was originally known by much longer — and conflicting — titles that include the two nouns Brook uses in his. In *The Tragedy of Hamlet* he distills the play to its essence by cutting about one-third of the text, reminiscent in a way of the First Quarto. "To be or not to be" is moved from its customary place, and the Player speaks his lines about the slaughter of King Priam in ancient Greek, thus reminding us of the Dionysiac origin of Western drama and the communal, ritualistic and cathartic purpose of theater. Because Shakespeare, resurrecting a classical art form and discarding the medieval world view, was undoubtedly exposed to new ideas by Nicolaus Copernicus, Niccolo Machiavelli and definitely by Michel Montaigne, *Hamlet* is often referred to as the first "modern" tragedy. This shift from absolutist concepts to relativistic thinking is summarized by the Prince's words to his fellow students Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "...there is nothing / either good or bad but thinking makes it so" (2.2.249–250). Here we have in a nutshell, to borrow from Hamlet's next line an image that has become a part of common speech, the birth of the soul of post-Renaissance man. We recognize the corruption and evil around us, and it makes us, as it does Nietzsche's Dionysiac Hamlet, nauseous. But if we refuse "not to be" and instead choose "to be," we need some sense of affirmation. Family, love and civic duty (after his father's death,

Hamlet should have been elected king; 3.2.331) have come to naught. The irony at the close of the play, for no angels will ever sing the murderer of Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to his rest, makes the canonical ending unsatisfactory. Peter Brook, however, found a way out of total nay-saying. Following the final carnage, the stage lights grow brighter, and the corpses rise to their feet. Horatio moves downstage, gazes with amazement over the heads of the audience and recites the two lines from the first scene of the play that announce the arrival of the dawn to the watch on the castle ramparts: "But look, the morn in russet mantle clad / Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill" (1.1.171–172).

Spoken at the conclusion of the action, these words balance the destruction that has taken place with the hope embedded in the arrival of a new day. Still looking skyward, Horatio then repeats the first two words of the play: "Who's there?" But the rest is silence. The final tableau becomes a perfect embodiment of the illusory comforts of *Dionysos agonistes*.

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Ce bon vieux Molière, lu à la lumière des écritures contemporaines

TANEL LEPSOO

I

D'après René Bray, moliérologue connu, «le monde de la comédie est un monde plaisant» et «l'écrivain écrit pour plaire» (Bray 1954). La façon dont le spectateur manifeste sa sympathie, s'il est charmé par l'auteur, ce n'est pas seulement son rire aux éclats, qui provient des situations drôles ou des mots d'auteur; il peut aussi rire — ou sourire — à cause d'un petit geste ou d'un simple regard, ou encore rester silencieux et pensif.

M. Jüri Talvet a insisté hier sur l'importance de la réception allemande par rapport à Calderón et à Shakespeare. Si l'influence allemande a été révélatrice par rapport à ceux-ci, il faut signaler que par rapport à Molière elle représentait plutôt une démarche réductrice. Je pense ici notamment à Lessing et Gottsched qui ont reconnu sa valeur *historique* et *comique* (voir à ce propos Sturges 1993, Rossel 1897), mais ne l'ont pas vraiment aimé. C'est peut être une des raisons pourquoi dans les pays scandinaves aussi bien qu'en Estonie Molière est traditionnellement qualifié comme auteur farcesque. Même ces grandes comédies sont souvent interprétées d'une manière «facile», censées à provoquer le rire fort et unanime du spectateur, en présentant des personnages *desquelles* on peut rire. La conclusion rapide que Molière ridiculise et critique les pêchés humaines et sociales est ainsi rapidement avancée. Ce genre d'argumentation, censée à confirmer la thèse d'une valeur historique de Molière, se trouve dans tous les manuels scolaires, et pas seulement en pays scandinaves ou en

Estonie, mais aussi partout dans le monde.¹ Molière est toujours la victime des professeurs.

Il faut remarquer ici que face à des textes étrangers on manifeste souvent la volonté d'apprendre d'abord — avant toute réflexion — où ils appartiennent; autrement dit, les classer, les codifier et les ranger: historiquement et idéologiquement; comme si l'étiquetage nous aidait à surmonter la crainte d'une éventuelle incompréhension. Cela peut créer des traductions réductrices qui à leur tour entraînent des interprétations réductrices. En cherchant du vrai Molière dans l'Histoire et pas dans ses pièces, on s'enfonce nécessairement dans un cercle vicieux: après avoir inventé les codes de lecture, on ne découvre évidemment que ce que les mêmes codes prescrivent.

Mais en France — et peut être juste à cause de la fameuse *explication de textes* — la contextualisation historique et thématique est également remarquable. Une des pièces qui a le plus donné la matière à des recherches intertextuelles est sans doute *Les Femmes savantes*. Cette pièce abonde en prototypes et citations, ainsi qu'en concepts philosophiques scrupuleusement définis. On y trouve explicitement mentionnés les noms de Vaugelas, Platon, Descartes, Malherbe et autres. Les personnages qui utilisent de tels noms — les femmes «savantes» et leurs amis — sont manifestement ridicules dans leurs propos, oubliant *le juste milieu* (encore un terme cher aux professeurs).

Pourtant, et c'est là où les choses deviennent intéressantes, on n'a pas le droit de faire l'amalgame entre le rire qui est causé par

¹ Rien de plus convaincant, paraît-il, pour les amateurs de l'Histoire, que les propos de Molière lui-même qui se trouvent dans la Lettre au Roi (voir Préface de *Tartuffe*.), par exemple, ou il dit: «Le devoir de la Comédie étant de corriger les hommes en les divertissant, j'ai cru que, dans l'emploi où je me trouve, je n'avais rien de mieux à faire que d'attaquer par des peintures ridicules les vices de mon siècle [...]» J'ai l'impression que pour certains l'importance de cette phrase «explicative» est telle qu'ils peuvent tranquillement fermer ses yeux devant toute autre chose, et surtout devant les pièces. On y voit, une fois de plus, comment à travers une lecture historiciste un metatexte peut prendre une valeur prioritaire et subordonner tous les autres phénomènes qui lui sont contradictoires.

le comportement des personnages et la critique que Molière peut faire des idées. Paradoxalement on oublie, même si on le répète souvent, que Molière ne critique pas directement des opinions, mais qu'il nous expose des schématisations, des excès, des cas spéciaux. Tout comme, dans *Tartuffe*, ce ne sont pas les hommes religieux qui sont attaqués, tout comme dans les *Précieux*, ce n'est pas la préciosité qui est attaquée, ce n'est pas, non plus dans *Les Femmes savantes*, un concept philosophique qui est objet de ridicule.

Arrêtons-nous au cas de Descartes. Son nom est clairement prononcé dans le texte par Trissotin. — «Descartes pour l'aimant donne fort dans mon sens» (v. 883). Il n'y a pas de doute que les «savants et savantes» se targuent de partager son point de vue. Bélise est formelle: «L'esprit doit sur le corps prendre le pas devant» (v. 546) et encore plus loin: «La substance qui pense y peut être reçue / Mais nous en bannissons la substance étendue» (v. 1685-1686). Mais, comme nous montre Jean Molino dans un article fondamental, «Les Nœuds de la matière, l'unité des Femmes savantes», les «savants» n'ont rien compris à Descartes, ou, plus précisément, ils n'en ont retiré que le seul principe de la primauté de l'esprit devant le corps: «[...] pour elles [«les savantes»], comme les en félicite Trissotin, «la nature a peu d'obscurités»; elles savent tout, et elles savent tout sans aucune idée de la vraie méthode en physique» (Molino 1976: 23-48).

Cela n'empêche que le discours des «savantes» ne puisse être parfaitement cohérent. Je cite encore le même article: «L'allusion de Philaminte au platonisme et à ses «abstractions» allait dans le même sens: platonisme, cartésianisme, et morale stoïcienne ont partie liée — et non seulement aux yeux de Philaminte —, en ce qu'ils privilégient l'esprit aux dépens du corps. [...]»

Ce qui lui fait ajouter plus loin: «Mais cette morale qui refuse le corps est invivable. Et les différents personnages dans lesquels elle s'incarne témoignent de la façon dont le corps se venge de ceux qui veulent — ou affirment vouloir — l'ignorer. La critique de Molière rejoint ici, dans le registre du théâtre, la critique traditionnelle — et commune à la morale religieuse aussi bien qu'aux libertins et gassendistes — de la sagesse stoïcienne.»

Pour résumer l'idée de Molino, sans risquer de la déformer: Molière se sert de la schématisation que les «savants» font des idées cartésiennes, ou d'autres, afin d'attaquer la sagesse stoïcienne. À mon avis, il faut faire ici attention à un point délicat: comment imaginer que des personnages qui sont tellement superflus et nous amusent avec leur bavardage pseudo-scientifique pourraient réellement être adeptes d'une philosophie à critiquer? On peut voir en effet, grâce à Molino, que le danger de confondre ce que les personnages *ont compris* d'une philosophie et ce que cette même philosophie pourrait représenter pour Molière est assez flagrant. Rien n'est plus facile, pour un spectateur ou un lecteur un peu superficiel, que de faire une conclusion erronée: ces personnages ridicules admirent Descartes, donc Molière attaque Descartes.

Il y a deux raisons pour que j'insiste autant sur cette différenciation qui peut paraître secondaire. La première est d'ordre théorique: on ne peut pas clairement définir l'intention de l'auteur. On y reviendra tout à l'heure. Si Molino nous montre Molière comme moraliste, c'est une des interprétations possibles. La deuxième raison de cette distinction provient du fait que Molière est certainement plus proche des idées cartésiennes que l'on n'a de coutume à croire.

Je n'ai pas le temps d'en faire une démonstration approfondie, d'autant plus que les pièces de Molière sont connues de tout le monde et familières à tous; il me semble qu'il suffit de trois exemples que j'aborderai très brièvement. Il s'agit de trois personnages qui sont Monsieur Jourdain dans le *Bourgeois*, Alceste dans le *Misanthrope* et Orgon dans *Tartuffe*. Tous les trois, et pas seulement eux, sont caractérisés par une certaine idée du monde qu'ils ont eux-mêmes fabriquée. M. Jourdain est convaincu qu'en s'emparant d'une technique il peut devenir, et qu'il *est déjà devenu*, gentilhomme; Alceste croit qu'il est seul à ne pas porter le masque et veut se distinguer des autres, et Orgon n'arrive pas à croire l'hypocrisie de Tartuffe. Il faut absolument signaler que tous les trois se sont enfermés par des moyens langagiers. Juste quelques exemples: Jourdain fait taire sa femme qui ne comprend rien à ses phrases prononcées en faux-turc, lesquelles pour lui sont rassurantes, car il arrive lui-même à donner un parfait sens à ce

galimatias; Alceste s'isole derrière les vieux dictons et les poèmes de l'époque d'Henri IV qu'il croit seuls véritables; Orgon refuse tout argument verbal jusqu'au moment où il a «vu, de ses propres yeux vu» que son protégé est un imposteur.

Cela est exactement ce que Descartes nous dit de la représentation du monde. Comme le *je* cartésien, ces personnages moliéresques donnent sens aux choses à travers leur propre compréhension, pour eux il n'existe pas d'autre réalité que leurs idées du monde. «Enfin je suis le même qui sens, c'est-à-dire qui reçois et connais les choses comme par les organes du sens, puisqu'en effet je vois la lumière, j'ouïs le bruit, je ressens la chaleur. Mais l'on me dira que ces apparences sont fausses et que je dors. Qu'il soit ainsi; toutefois, à tout le monde il est très certain qu'il me semble que je vois, que j'ouïs et que je m'échauffe; et c'est proprement ce qui en moi s'appelle sentir, et cela, pris ainsi précisément, n'est rien autre chose que penser» (Descartes 1991: 115). Ce qui caractérise ces personnages pré-cartésiens, c'est qu'ils sont privés de doute. Il n'y donc aucun moyen de leur faire croire que leur réalité est inventée.

Cela mène au résultat qu'ils n'arrivent pas à sortir de ce monde clos: Jourdain demeure heureux avec son titre de mamamouchi, Alceste quitte Célimène et la société pour son désert et même Orgon reste aveugle, il bascule dans le sens opposé, en accusant *tous* les religieux de la même verve avec laquelle les avait loués auparavant.

Comme l'homme cartésien, les personnages de Molière sont profondément seuls et si nous nous trouvions dans le registre de la tragédie, leur solitude se tournerait à la catastrophe. Dans la comédie, cette isolation crée deux choses: d'abord le rire qui n'est pas nécessairement rire sur leur ridicule, mais le rire rassurant du spectateur à qui on donne la possibilité d'être dehors de ce cercle vicieux. C'est fait pour nous plaire. Il faut ajouter que les vrais protagonistes, ceux qui ont été joués par Molière lui-même, ne sont jamais ridicules; qu'il s'agisse d'un Jourdain, d'un Harpagon ou d'un Orgon — ils nous font rire, mais ils ne sont jamais désagréables. Et ensuite le fait que le spectateur se trouve à la place du Tout-Puissant. Le spectateur par excellence pour Molière, c'est le Roi et le Roi, c'est en fait le Dieu. Et quand le Spectateur

ou le Dieu veut que Tartuffe soit puni, il sera puni. C'est encore une explication de la fin inattendue et beaucoup discutée de cette pièce. Comme d'après Descartes l'idée de l'existence pour l'homme est donnée par Dieu, l'idée de l'existence d'un personnage de Molière est donnée par le Spectateur.

Voilà pourquoi Molière ne me semble pas moraliste, mais plutôt philosophe. Il nous montre un monde où nous vivons tous et il ne donne pas des solutions pour en sortir, car il n'y a pas de sortie. C'est pourquoi je ne peux pas voir *les Femmes savantes* comme une critique des stoïciens, mais au contraire, une démonstration de l'homme cartésien, de l'homme moderne, si l'on veut dire, qui est privé de la grâce de Dieu. La meilleure explication que les «savants» n'ont rien compris à Descartes, c'est qu'ils sont eux aussi victimes de leur langue, de leur bavardage philosophique cohérent, mais cohérent parce que pour eux tout est clair et parfaitement compréhensible. Molière n'attaque pas Descartes, Molière attaque ceux qui ne doutent pas comme Descartes.

Nous savons que Descartes a ouvert avec ses *Méditations* la voie de la philosophie kantienne et surtout de la philosophie phénoménologique. En 1929 Edmund Husserl prononce à Paris ses fameuses conférences sous le titre de *Méditations cartésiennes*. Il est connu que les idées husserliennes ont été très chaleureusement accueillies par Sartre qui déjà auparavant avait fait un pas autonome vers la phénoménologie. Ce n'est pas le lieu ici de faire une comparaison des idées existentialistes de Sartre et de celles de Descartes, cela est bien connu. Mais je me permets tout de même de citer Georges Poulet qui montre dans son livre *Études sur le temps humain* à travers l'exemple de la *Nausée* que le *cogito* sartrien prend ses sources au *cogito* cartésien, avec cette différence: «Pour Descartes, dire Je pense, donc je suis, c'était d'abord percevoir et affirmer le surgissement de la pensée et de la vie; c'était découvrir ensuite que cette vie et cette capacité de penser nous sont conférées par un Créateur. Ici, au contraire, on a plutôt l'impression d'un affaissement, d'un échouage. Exister, c'est trébucher, rouler en bas d'une pente. Sorte de péché originel, sans juge, sans faute et sans coupable, qui ferait qu'on se découvre tombé dans l'existence» (Poulet 1964: 124).

Pour revenir encore un instant à Molière, on constate donc que le Dieu (le Roi, le Spectateur) est le garant de l'optimisme et de la béatitude qui règne dans les pièces. Il n'y qu'un seul personnage qui a l'audace d'ignorer le Dieu — c'est Don Juan — et voilà une pièce dont la fin n'est pas celle de la comédie, mais celle de la tragédie: une catastrophe. Il s'agit, comme le dit Jacques Guicharnaud, «d'une comédie à l'envers, une sorte de réciproque du genre comique proprement dit» (Guicharnaud 1963: 522). Certes, Don Juan «vit sans masques, sans illusions» (ib.), il ne croit rien d'autre que deux et deux sont quatre et quatre et quatre sont huit. Et pourtant sa vision du monde confirme «le cartésianisme» de Molière, qui ressemble fort au cartésianisme burlesque sartrien: la vérité n'est pas ailleurs, la vérité est dans le *moi*. Don Juan n'est donc personne d'autre que Roquentin, pour qui les autres sont seulement les objets de sa propre imagination, que l'on peut servir ou ne pas servir, et pour qui les objets inanimés se mettent à vivre et à réagir. Le résultat inévitable c'est que tous les deux sont profondément seuls.

II

Cette longue introduction pour établir un lien entre Molière et Sartre, si fragile qu'il soit, a été nécessaire afin d'aborder maintenant le théâtre contemporain sous le même angle. Je tiens à préciser que j'ai parlé de Sartre comme philosophe et pas de Sartre comme auteur du théâtre. Il est évident qu'entre Sartre et le théâtre d'avant-garde se trouve un gouffre primordial et il faut énergiquement récuser, avec Michel Corvin, toute idée de filiation entre Sartre et Ionesco ou d'autres écrivains qu'on a «artificiellement groupés en école et abusivement placés sous le vocable impropre de «théâtre de l'absurde»» et qui «pour l'essentiel procèdent par des voies différentes» (Corvin 1992: 922).

Pourtant la philosophie existentialiste de Sartre a beaucoup influencé le théâtre moderne, sinon du côté de la forme, alors du côté des idées, de la vision du monde. Ce n'est pas le lieu ici d'énumérer tous les changements importants que le théâtre a subis tout au cours du XX^e siècle dans le domaine du personnage, de

l'action, du langage, des catégories dramaturgiques ou autres. Je relève seulement trois phénomènes que je considère comme les plus importants, et qui caractérisent *l'écriture théâtrale* de ce XX^e siècle, trois phénomènes qui ont subsisté à travers toutes ces expérimentations et découvertes. Ce sont la mise en cause du *personnage*, du *réel* et de la *langue*.

Le premier nom qu'il faudrait avancer à ce propos est celui de Michel Vinaver. On voit par exemple dans son *King* (1998) trois acteurs composant un seul personnage (King jeune, King mûr et King âgé); en plus il s'agit de *trios*, appelés des *entrelacs de voix*, représentés «hors d'âge, hors temps, hors lieu». Le dialogue se présente donc comme un affrontement intérieur des actants, exprimant les luttes et les désirs d'un homme seul vis-à-vis de soi-même. De la même manière on retrouve dans une pièce d'Olivier Py intitulé *Théâtres* (1998), le personnage principal, appelé Moi-même. Ce personnage introduit dans la pièce deux moments: d'abord tous les autres personnages qui n'existent que grâce à lui, qui sont les fruits de son imagination, cela fonctionne comme la mise en cause du Réel — et ensuite les masques qui sont là pour relever la vérité des personnages.² Moi-même appelle certains hommes tartufes, «Tartufe n'a pas de masque en propre, il tombe un masque pour en prendre un autre. Tartufe ne ment pas, il vit dans la vérité des autres» (Py 1998: 55). La différence entre le tartufe de Py et de Tartuffe de Molière n'est pas dans le fond, mais dans la forme. Chez Molière, le spectateur est extérieur, omniscient, chez Py les masques sont là pour cacher d'autres masques. On n'arrive pas à voir derrière les masques. Le spectateur est donc, comme les personnages, condamné par le simulacre, il est intériorisé. Le Dieu a changé de place, il n'est plus dans les Cieux, ou dans la salle de théâtre, mais dans les hommes, «ils doivent chercher Dieu en eux-mêmes, et c'est comme voir le reflet du ciel au fond d'un puits» (ib. 54).

La mise en cause du personnage classique se traduit par son ouverture, on a affaire à un seul personnage qui fonctionne comme

² Je me réfère ici au mémoire de maîtrise de l'Université de Tartu de Eeva-Kaarin Ots, *L'Espace imaginaire dans Théâtres d'Olivier Py*, (2000).

le trou de serrure à travers lequel nous avons la seule possibilité d'observer le monde. La mise en cause du réel et du langage sont liées à ce changement du point de vue. Le réel devient ce morceau de cire dont Descartes nous parle dans ses *Méditations*³ ou ce «gros ver blanc» — la main d'Autodidacte (Sartre 1938). Il est naturel que ce changement de perspective soit accompagné par le changement de la langue. Depuis Adamov «personne n'entend personne», chez Minyana on observe le «bruit du monde», mais l'intériorisation qui se fait par la langue est à mon avis le plus marquant chez Koltès. Et ici encore je suis bien aise de faire un parallèle avec Molière. Il suffit de se rappeler deux scènes magnifiques des quiproquos moliéresques: la première se trouve dans l'*Avare*, entre Harpagon et Valère et l'autre dans l'*École de femmes* entre Arnolphe et Agnès. Comme les personnages de Molière dont j'ai parlé plus haut, et comme une grande majorité des personnages modernes, ceux-ci sont les victimes de leur vision du monde qui les empêche de comprendre ce qui se passe autour d'eux. Les deux protagonistes des deux pièces, Harpagon et Arnolphe, sont convaincus que les autres sont censés se soucier des mêmes problèmes qu'eux et se refusent ainsi à donner des indications explicites sur le sujet, ce qui cause les quiproquos. L'effet comique et dramaturgique est ici au second plan, comme souvent chez Molière. On rit sur l'entêtement des vieux barbons dont un appelle ses écus «*sang et chair*», et l'autre est si narcissique⁴ qu'il oublie de préciser que la jeune fille devrait se marier avec lui, et pas avec le bel Horace. Mais derrière le malentendu se cache le côté tragique des personnages, l'impossibilité de communication, les mots qui sont là pour créer des barrières entre les hommes. C'est bien cela dont nous parle l'œuvre de Bernard-

³ «Mais voici que, cependant que je parle, on l'approche du feu: ce qui restait de saveur s'exhale, l'odeur s'évanouit, sa couleur se change, sa figure se perd [...]» (Descartes ib.).

⁴ Je profite ici l'occasion pour signaler que toutes les interprétations d'un Arnolphe sarcastique, ironique, jouant un double jeu avec la jolie demoiselle, ignorent, à mon avis, complètement la vraie nature des personnages de Molière; Arnolphe rejoint absolument Orgon, Jourdain, Harpagon, Alceste et d'autres qui nous font rire, mais d'un rire compassionnel et dont le sort souvent nous chagrine.

Marie Koltès: «De toute façon, personne ne s'intéresse à personne. Personne. Les hommes ont besoin des femmes et les femmes ont besoin des hommes. Mais de l'amour, il n'y en a pas. «[...] Je crois qu'il n'y a pas de mots, il n'y a rien à dire. Il faut arrêter d'enseigner des mots» (Koltès: 48-49, acte VIII). Il s'agit ici de la scène centrale de *Roberto Zucco*, une pièce qui est comblée de quasi-soliloques dans le sens d'Anne Ubersfeld (Ubersfeld 1999), qui affrontent l'incompréhension de l'Autre. Si les quiproquos moliéresques mènent au rire, à la comédie, avec Koltès, dans toutes ses pièces, on touche à la tragédie dans le sens classique du terme. Ces personnages sont accablés par un désir qui ne peut pas se réaliser. C'est le désir de communication et d'échange. Et c'est pourquoi, peut-être, l'objet du désir n'est jamais explicité par l'auteur. L'importance pour Koltès n'est pas dans l'objet, mais dans l'acte. Mais comme cet acte, sans cesse sollicité, échoue, la solitude devient ainsi insupportable et mortelle. Ce qui, dans sa dernière pièce le plus explicitement mais avec la même vigueur dans les autres, mène à la violence, à la violence gratuite.

III

Mon objectif ici n'a pas été de trouver artificiellement des concordances entre Molière et le théâtre contemporain. On pourrait en effet dresser toute une liste de ressemblances entre la tradition et le contemporain, et creuser ainsi par ailleurs un Corneille ou un Racine. La chose à laquelle j'ai voulu faire attention, c'est le fond inébranlable du théâtre qui, malgré toutes les expérimentations passagères (du théâtre naturaliste jusqu'aux nouvelles technologies), s'exprime encore par l'écriture théâtrale. Et dès qu'il s'agit de l'homme et de la parole, il s'agit de la solitude. Voilà une idée qui mène de Molière jusqu'à nous; une idée qui nous est commune et qui fait de Molière un auteur moderne, tout en nous permettant aussi de saisir son œuvre.

Cela fait aussi de Molière un auteur classique. Il faut l'admettre avec Sainte-Beuve, qui a écrit dans un article de 1850: «[Un vrai classique est un auteur] qui a parlé à tous dans un style à lui et qui se trouve aussi celui de tout le monde, dans un style nouveau sans

néologisme, nouveau et antique, aisément contemporain de tous les âges» (Sainte-Beuve 1874–1876). Et il ne faut pas s'étonner si le classique par excellence pour lui, c'est Molière. On peut se demander à juste titre si les problèmes modernes que l'on trouve chez Molière sont là parce qu'il s'agit d'un classique (d'un génie, donc) ou si c'est la lecture que nous faisons de ses pièces qui nous fait nous reconnaître nous-même dans ses pièces. Vraisemblablement les deux sont hypothèses sont correctes. Le talent de Molière est indéniable, mais à côté de cela les hommes de théâtre ont depuis toujours su une chose à laquelle les théoriciens de la littérature ont fait attention ces quelques dernières décennies: un texte trouve son sens au moment de la lecture, et ce sens lui est donné par le lecteur et pas par son auteur, quelle qu'ait été son intention.

En plus, il est impossible de savoir quelle a été cette Intention; d'après Stanley Fish, ce n'est même pas la peine de demander: l'intention de l'auteur et l'intention du texte (*intentio operis* d'après Umberto Eco) sont assimilées dans le travail de réception des *communautés interprétatives*. Nous lisons Molière toujours avec notre connaissance particulière du monde et nous ne pouvons jamais y échapper. Voilà pourquoi les Estoniens ont du mal aujourd'hui à saisir Molière dans toute sa profondeur et sont enclins à mettre en scène ses pièces d'une manière caricaturale et farcesque. Paradoxalement, en cherchant le vrai sens des pièces on se cantonne dans le superficiel, dans les codes que nous-mêmes avons construits.

J'arrive ainsi à une conclusion qui me semble de première importance: je crois que les possibilités du théâtre ne sont pas si diversifiés que l'on imagine parfois. Le XX^e siècle a sorti la *forme* du théâtre d'une impasse où il a failli se diriger, celle de la stagnation, du déjà vu. Il a touché les frontières du possible par le changement des codes de la représentation et de la réception. Le nouveau, le néologisme dans le sens beuvien, a attiré notre attention et nous communiqué l'impression que tout bascule, que tout change. On me dira que la forme et le fond sont indissociables et qu'en modifiant la forme, le fond ne restera pas inchangé, ou que ce sont les changements dans le fond qui changeront la forme. Peut-être; mais il n'y a qu'un seul vrai changement du fond que l'on peut attester depuis Molière, c'est ce que J.-F. Lyotard appelle

le projet moderne: «à présenter qu'il y a de l'imprésentable.»⁵ On utilise donc de nouveaux procédés pour dire des choses par la négation, mais les choses, elles, restent les mêmes.

On comprend avec Paul Ricœur que cette négation moderne du paradigme est en même temps son acceptation: «[...] les coups les plus audacieux portés aux attentes paradigmatiques ne sortent pas du jeu de «déformation réglée» grâce auquel l'innovation n'a jamais cessé de répliquer à la sédimentation. Un saut absolu hors de toute attente paradigmatique est impossible.»⁶ Le paradigme dans le sens ricordial, c'est la *mimésis*, la cohérence qui est donnée à une œuvre par son lecteur. Les auteurs peuvent donc soit chercher des moyens pour provoquer cette cohérence, à partir de Beckett qui d'après Frank Kermode «marque le tournant vers le schisme»⁷, soit l'accepter plus facilement comme beaucoup d'auteurs de la fin du XX^e siècle, à une période déjà post-koltèsienne. Ceux-ci comme Vinaver, Py, Novarina, Lagarce, Gabilly ou Jouanneau cherchent tous une voie particulière, mais ne mettent pas en cause la cohérence lectorale.

Je dirais même qu'en France le théâtre postmoderne n'a jamais vraiment été accepté, et vu les programmations de cinq dernières années, on peut sans doute dire que l'intérêt des metteurs en scène ne consiste pas dans la recherche des nouvelles écritures, mais toujours dans une relecture des textes classiques. Il ne s'agit pas dans l'écriture nouvelle d'une opposition au paradigme, mais de la recherche d'un autre point de vue. C'est aussi la raison pour laquelle les mises en scène sont devenues plus simples, plus intimes, plus corporelles aussi. Le renouveau ne s'exprime pas par la technique des effets spéciaux, mais par la façon dont on raconte des histoires. Car on raconte de plus en plus des histoires. Le spectateur est d'une certaine manière libéré des anciennes conventions et les auteurs n'ont plus vraiment le besoin de le provoquer, plutôt de le rassurer et lui plaire. L'inintelligibilité ne pose pas tellement de problèmes, mais si cela cause de l'ennui, le spectateur s'en va.

⁵ Dit par rapport à l'art moderne (Lyotard, J-F. 1988: 22).

⁶ Dit par rapport au roman moderne (Ricœur, P. 1984: 50).

⁷ «The shift towards schism.». Cité par Paul Ricœur (Ricœur 1984: 52).

Voilà pourquoi il est facile de trouver des concordances entre Molière et le théâtre contemporain. Plus de trois cents ans nous séparent, qui ont seulement changé l'optique, le point de vue. Penser ne suffit plus pour exister. Le Dieu est mort, le Roi est décapité. Nous sommes seuls depuis toujours, mais en plus, il nous faut nous débrouiller seuls. À défaut d'une identification possible nous n'avons qu'essayer de regarder le monde avec les yeux de quelqu'un d'autre, dirigés par un auteur qui est lui-même comme Monsieur Jourdain, enfermé dans son imaginaire et sans savoir trop où il va. Et nous sommes enfermés dans le nôtre. C'est peut-être la leçon que Molière nous a donnée, car ce n'était pas quelqu'un dénommé Einstein qui a découvert la théorie de la relativité, c'était bien Jean Baptiste Poquelin.

Le pire qui peut nous arriver, c'est de ne pas pouvoir accepter notre éternelle solitude et imposer violemment au monde l'image que nous avons fabriquée de la communication, de l'entendement et de l'amour. Et finalement, nous n'avons pas ce bon prince qui vient nous dire: allez, le spectacle est terminé, arrêtons les voyous et vous pouvez rentrer chez vous le cœur tranquille!

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ISSN 1406-0701
ISBN 9985-56-608-7

interlitteraria
7 · 2002
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Ce bon vieux Molière, lu à la lumière des écritures contemporaines

TARTU UNIVERSITY PRESS
Tiigi 78
50410 Tartu
Estonia