Text in Contemporary Theatre

Text in Contemporary Theatre:
The Baltics within the World Experience

Edited by

Guna Zeltiņa with Sanita Reinsone

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PREFACE

Perhaps this will sound naive, because I, being a young playwright, have not got my fingers burnt yet. However, I would like to assert my belief that everything is going to be all right with the play and the theatre text as such in contemporary theatre. During the past few years, the playwright has turned from a lone, mysterious, mythic person into a social being, a conversation partner for not only the director, but also the spectator, reader, costume designer, lighting technician, actor, and other companions in the creation of a production.

I became more convinced of this by participating in the masterclasses of the 2012 *Interplay Europe*, held in Spain. Representatives of 11 countries were among the participants, providing a more extensive insight into the development of European drama. We tried to find answers to a question which is relevant and urgent for us: if the text of the play is created during the staging of the performance, can it even be considered as a play? The drama material of the Latvian National Theatre production *The End* was submitted for the masterclasses. It is the outcome of a joint work, involving two playwrights, a director and actors, and there it was read by 20 participants and 10 masterclass instructors. The work is seemingly saturated with local problems, adapted as much as possible for the stage, not for reading. Hard to believe, but this international audience understood everything. They accepted the text as a play, a proof that this dramatic material was created by professionals. Even the teachers from German classic drama schools, while reading the play, did not ask what came first, the performance or the text, because—does it make a difference?

The most important thing that Baltic playwrights should learn from their foreign brothers in craft is an awareness that different paths can lead to the creation of a play. The new Dutch drama, for example, shows that they know how to put together a play from a fairy tale, using the playwright's professional skills so that nobody even thinks of asking whether it is a play. If you are a professional playwright, you must be able to construct a play from a fairy tale, a story, an expressive event observed on the street, and more. The same applies where the director has the basic idea for the play, if the text of the play is created during the process of staging, if you see in the actors' improvisation a certain theme, if you see

and perceive something that can be used in the play. The ability to create a play under any conditions and terms is, to my mind, the main thing to aspire for. Perhaps then we'll be able to take a slightly sarcastic view of everything, like young playwrights from Spain or Poland, or a self-ironic one, like Estonian young playwrights, because writing and creating is so much more valuable than grumbling.

There are still playwrights who write at home, distant from the process of theatre, in the best case attending the first night of the performance. However, if the creative team of the production can constantly discuss and analyse even the classics, introducing amendments to them, then, if I am a playwright, practising in real time and space, why should I keep an offended silence as regards my own work? I assume that many playwrights do not wish to experience this process of joint creation because then one must be ready to hear harsh views about what has been written. However, if you feel convinced about what you have written, you must be able to defend your work and your opinion, to avoid verbosity; to understand more concretely which drama skills should be used to make the written text *work* on the stage.

And with this we arrive at an equally painful topic, whether drama is text only intended for the stage. It is a controversial issue, resting upon which is considered to be of greater importance—the staging or the printing of the text. Lately the boom in the accessibility of social portals and media has allowed all enthusiasts to publish their writings. Very few get their plays printed, because publishers consider it to be unprofitable. However, the possibilities offered by the Internet have their advantages: the playwright can send his or her work to anyone they wish. And playwrights gradually adjust to these changing times and specificities, using also the possibility to participate in international drama contests and masterclasses.

That is why I feel so satisfied that this collection of articles has been created, urging us to consider the diversity and difference of drama, which at the same time can be so unifying and relevant, if founded upon professional knowledge and understanding of the problems that contemporary people face.

Even though many playwrights still feel unappreciated and unaccepted —and not only in Latvia—there is no one to blame for this. The situation will change only when all those involved in the process are able to justify and defend their work, accept constructive criticism and find in themselves the conviction that amendments to the text are the path to a better total outcome: an outcome creating both the text and the context.

Rasa Bugavičute
Latvian Playwrights' Guild

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This collection of articles represents outcome of the two-day international conference organised by the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia, and held at the European Union House in Riga on November, 2011. Some authorities of the field, who had no opportunity to attend the conference, such as Russian expert in Shakespeare, Prof. Alexey Bartoshevich and Hungarian researcher Adrienne Gyopar Nagy, and some Latvian researchers were invited to join to this book in addition.

The conference with the same title *Text in the Contemporary Theatre*: *The Baltics within the World Experience* was organised in the cooperation with the Research Centre of the Latvian Academy of Culture and the National section of the International Association for theatre critics. It was sponsored in the framework of the project *Latvian Theatre and Theatre Science in Europe* realised by the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, and supported by the European Fund for Regional Development, as well as by the Latvian Academy of Culture and its Rector, Prof. Jānis Siliņš. The conference was planned and realised in accordance with the Baltic Drama Festival in Riga and the showcase of the best Latvian performances of the year with the aim to give an opportunity for conference participants and guests to get acquainted with the newest trends and tendencies in the Baltic theatre. It was possible due to the help of Latvian Theatre Union and its Head, Daiga Gaismiņa, the actress of the Latvian National Theatre, and her team, Māra Dzene and Undīne Preisa. My special thanks to the staff of the New Riga Theatre who found the possibility for more than 50 participants, experts and guests of the conference to see the performances of this theatre, among them—the work of Alvis Hermanis, internationally acclaimed Latvian director.

Prof. Bendikts Kalnačs and Ieva Struka from Latvia, Prof. Jurgita Staniškytė from Lithuania, Prof. Anneli Saro from Finland and Estonia, and Prof. Stephen E Wilmer from Ireland, who were active panel chairs and discussants, contributed in creating a stimulating and free atmosphere in the conference pulling together the actual and inspiring ideas of the papers presented. I would also like to express my gratitude to all the participants of the conference who prepared their papers for this volume and to all other authors who shared their research in its articles.

I am very grateful to Carol Koulikourdi and her colleagues of the Cambridge Scholars Publishing for cooperation, as well as for providing professional advice and assistance throughout the editing process of the book. I am particularly grateful to my colleagues Eva Eglāja-Kristsone, who was the greatest help during this project, Sanita Reinsone, who has worked on practical realisation of the concept of the book, and Dita Jonīte, who joined us on the last stage. I would like to express my gratitude to the translators of the texts, Ingūna Beķere and Ģirts Mergins among them. My special thanks to Ian Herbert for his assistance in the language editing work. I should extend my thanks to all theatre staff members and archivists from the Baltics and Northern countries for sending photos and granting us permission to reproduce those pictures. Finally, I am also very grateful to Dr. Dace Bula, the Director of the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, for her support.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

TEXT IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE: THE BALTICS WITHIN THE WORLD EXPERIENCE

GUNA ZELTIŅA

This book is dedicated to the complex relationship between text and performance in the contemporary theatre. The term *contemporary theatre* refers to the stage art of the 21st century. At the same time, the possibility of tackling vivid examples and essential trends from other periods that have had direct or indirect impact on contemporary processes is not excluded. The idea of this volume is to research the current process of creating and using the text and to highlight innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to theatre and performance. Since the end of the 20th century, the notion of theatre has been broadened to include other forms of structured behaviour—festivities, public ceremonials, political events, news broadcasts—any kind of reality which has been *staged* by means of theatre techniques. We are interested in the functionality of the text, not only in the dramatic and postdramatic theatre, but also in performative practice over the broadest spectrum.

We believe that the chosen theme offers at least three main directions of research. First of all is the question of the role of the text in contemporary theatre compared to other structural elements. The second issue refers to the sources of the texts used in contemporary theatre: (a) a play written by a playwright, (b) a script created by a playwright/director on the basis of other literary works or documents, (c) the text created by the creative team (actors-director), (d) other sources. Why is the play no longer the principal source of the text in many theatres? What now determines the theatrical potential of the text or its adaptability for the theatre? Third, what are the kinds of functionality of the text? How is the text transformed from the system of linguistic signs to the system of visual signs? How does the text function if it is recorded only in the corporeal

memory of the actors? What processes do terminological shifts point to—such as the use of the term "theatrical text" instead of "dramatic text"? Where and how does the contemporary theatre change the role of the actor and the audience during the performance by means of the text? How is the text perceived in the play, production and performance? How has the emancipation of theatre research from literary research affected attitudes to the theatrical text?

In this volume, theatre researchers from the Baltic countries, Sweden, Finland, Ireland, Hungary, Russia and China were invited to deal with the results of their research on the theme.

The 1st Part of the book, *Traditional Texts in Contemporary Theatre*, is devoted to an interpretation of traditional texts or plays in contemporary theatre. The noted Russian Shakespeare researcher, Prof. Alexey Bartoshevich, and Hungarian researcher Adrienne Gyopar Nagy, an author of several books on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, deal with analysis of the performing praxis of such a classical, *eternal* text as *Hamlet*. Bartoshevich points out that changing interpretations of *Hamlet* by Russian critics, writers, painters, composers and theatre artists mirror with extraordinary precision the evolution of Russian society and culture as a whole. For two centuries the Russian intelligentsia have regarded *Hamlet* as a reflection of their own essence and historical destiny. The author demonstrates how greatly *Hamlet* influenced and filled the lives of Russia's greatest theatre personalities, both those who actually produced the play and those who were only meditating on it. The theme of Hamlet, "the Christ-like figure", was interwoven with Konstantin Stanislavsky's life in art up until his last years, when he worked on the play with his Studio's young actors. Vsevolod Meyerhold was preparing to direct *Hamlet* all his life but his idea of doing this with stage design by Pablo Picasso and music by Dmitry Shostakovich was never realised. A recent production of *Hamlet*, interpreted by the director Valery Fokin at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St Petersburg (2010) and performed as a bitter, absurd grotesque and postmodern tragicomedy on the moral degradation of the national elite, reviving the traditions of active political theatre in Russia, is a proof of the never ending actuality of this text.

In her study of the 7th International Shakespeare Festival of Craiova in Romania, Adrienne Gyopar Nagy stresses that paradoxically, this international *Ham-let Feast*, structured by and upon the greatest Shakespearean text, used and interpreted by several different theatres from different cultures, East and West, in very different conceptions, styles and genres, could actually hold "a mirror up to nature" in its diversity alone, rendering even *the postmodern man of today* as unique in general terms.

Hamlet was also considered as the greatest basic text in world drama and theatre by the Latvian theatre director Oļģerts Kroders (1921–2012), who used to stress both in his everyday praxis and in interviews that all dramatic texts created after *Hamlet* are just variations on Shakespeare's themes, conflicts and motifs. He made four productions of *Hamlet* in his life, and these performances are no less important for their reflection of essential problems in the social, political and spiritual life of Latvian society, just as elsewhere in the studies of Alexey Bartoshevich and Adrienne Gyopar Nagy. And the first of his Hamlets, embodied by the actor Rihards Rudaks at the Valmiera Theatre (1972), was no less artistically strong and influential than the Hamlet of his famous contemporary, Vladimir Vysotsky, in the outstanding production at the Taganka theatre in 1971. The last of Kroders's Hamlets, Ivo Martinsons, in the production of 2008 at the Valmiera Theatre, could be placed together with Dmitry Lysenkov's hero in the production of Valery Fokin in St Petersburg (2010). The main difference is that *Hamlet* as interpreted by Oļģerts Kroders was created in a *small* theatre culture, *Hamlet* by Russian directors in a large and well known theatre culture. Due to this fact, the *big* theatre world will never get to know the accomplishments of Latvian theatre's senior director.

Two exceptional directors in Baltic theatre are the Lithuanians Eimuntas Nekrošius and Oskaras Koršunovas, whose productions of Shakespeare and other classics travel regularly to international festivals worldwide. But there is a local problem, which has been pointed out by Lithuanian critics for years: almost all their *established* directors turned their back on young playwrights and chose instead to stage Shakespeare or Chekhov for the third or fifth time per season (Jauniskis 2005).

One of the aims of this collection of articles is to provide a wider insight into the *small* theatre cultures of the Baltic States, their processes and the personalities leading them. In his 2007 book, *The New Theatre of the Baltics*, the American researcher Jeff Johnson begins with the presumption that the Lithuanian theatre is directors' theatre, the Estonian theatre writers' theatre, and the Latvian theatre actors' theatre (Johnson 2007). I could agree with such a characterisation five years ago but during recent years the situation has changed both in the Baltic drama and theatre. The artistic leader of the New Riga Theatre, Alvis Hermanis, has changed the balance of power in Baltic theatre and has moved into the limelight, along with the directors of Lithuanian metaphorical theatre and the Estonian director Tiit Ojasoo with his theatre NO99. Estonians have traditionally produced strong new drama during recent decades but, as was stressed in a preface by the young Latvian playwright Rasa Bugavičute,

positive changes can also be seen in the relationship between Latvian drama authors and theatres. When Elena Kovalskaya, a Russian expert of the new Russian drama, writes that the representatives of this new drama have brought a new energy and a new generation of directors and spectators into the Russian theatre, I can agree with her. But the situation in the Baltics is different: in all but a few cases, it is the young theatre directors and actors who have brought and created new drama and texts in the theatre, new relationships with spectators, and so on. Studies by Baltic researchers prove this fact, especially in the 2nd and 3rd Part of the book.

Following the 1st Part, Līga Ulberte in her article provides an overview of the most characteristic ways in which the relationship between texts of Latvian and world classics and stage productions has evolved. She concludes that the main method used in this process is theatre semiotics, which differentiates between the theatre text, the text of staging and the text of performance. Examples of Latvian productions in her study have been selected and examined in the discourse of *mise-en-scène*, using the six possibilities for contemporary adaptation of classical texts offered by French theatre semiotician Patrice Pavis: archaeological reconstruction; "flat reading" of the text; historicizing; treating the text as a raw material; reading the text in pictures or understanding the text through *mise-en-scène*; dismantling the text into separate elements. Three basic types of staging of traditional texts and their manifestations in Latvian theatre are outlined by the author, depending upon the treatment of the text: autotextual, ideotextual and intertextual.

Silvija Radzobe's article is devoted to an analysis of a production by the Latvian director Alvis Hermanis, who frequently works in the German-speaking countries of Europe and has received awards at prestigious international festivals. The author shows in her article that it is possible to analyse Hermanis's production of Ivan Goncharov's novel *Oblomov*, staged at the New Riga Theatre, as belonging to the postdramatic theatre, within the axes of modernist aesthetics and philosophy. Silvija Radzobe stresses that this production is characterised by surrealist playing with time, and other principles typical of symbolism: the method of *theatre within theatre*, performance as a subjective message, the principle of deliberate uncertainty, psychological masks, the method of grotesque acting, essential for expressionism. Thus, she concludes that the postdramatic theatre has a greater genetic link with modernism than we assume in everyday practice, even though Hans-Thies Lehmann has pointed it out in his book *Postdramatic Theatre*.

In her study of interpretations of one of the most popular texts by Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Edīte Tišheizere points

out that it was one of the few modern Western plays allowed to be staged in the Soviet theatre. She notes that the extraordinarily successful production of it at the Latvian National Theatre in 1969 was, in fact, breaking the rules of social realism, and the play has since become deeply rooted in the national consciousness. Society's historical memory and several other circumstances created the context, which made the text of the play sound quite differently. She concludes that productions of the same text in the 21st century, in their turn, have acquired new artistic and theoretical principles, which existed in the European cultural space—contexts of history, culture and theatre theory.

Ilze Šarkovska-Liepiņa in her article analyses productions of works by a younger generation of Latvian composers—not a frequent occurrence at the Latvian National Opera, although the last five years have seen marked changes in this respect. The season of 2012/2013 was launched with Andris Dzenītis's opera *Dauka* (based upon a classic work of Latvian literature, the story *Crazy Dauka* by Sudrabu Edžus). Dauka's theme clearly resonates with the range of narratives typical of many Western 20th century operas, centring on compassion towards the weak (often—an artist's fate in a society where material values dominate). Dzenītis's opera to a large extent continues the trend that allocates a rather significant place to the text, or narrative, revelation of the idea. *Dauka* reflects the main tendency in European opera houses, in which music is only one element among many, where the directing is based upon the interpretation of the idea and plot collisions, so that Latvian opera theatre is turning into a *theatre of directing*, rather typical of the 20th and 21st century, in which the dramatic theatre becomes enshrined in the *pure opera*.

Professor Peng Tao in his article emphasises links between speech and mind in classical Chinese aesthetics, where text and theme are unified, and both are manifestations of the artist's heart and soul. This study analyzes two cases: the first, *Peony Pavilion* (2004, produced by the well known Chinese writer, Pai Hsien-yung), is from a leading contemporary traditional theatre in China. In this production, as the author concludes, the original classical script is completely unaltered: performance and text are integrated seamlessly. It demonstrates the pursuit of *harmony*, the highest aesthetic value in the traditional Chinese theatre. The second example is *Three Sisters / Waiting for Godot* (1998, directed by the leading Chinese director Lin Zhaohua). In this drama production, the director has interwoven Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* into one play. Peng Tao notes that the performance gained artistic success even though it was a box office failure. He concludes that this experimental montage of texts characterised the director's own inner conflict and

division of loyalties, which is essentially the same inner conflict and anguish as that of other contemporary Chinese intellectuals of the 1990s.

The essay by the theatre researcher Pirkko Koski examines Paul Auster's *Mr Vertigo* at the Finnish National Theatre as an example of how the postdramatic discourse contributes to the understanding of a "dramatic" performance with "postdramatic" stylistic features. It first focuses on the space of the performance, then explores the story itself and the manner in which it unfolds through individual theatrical images, finally analyzing the performance through the concept of "stage presence". In *Mr Vertigo*, adapted and directed by Kristian Smeds, as the author points out, the audience is initiated into the process of artistic creation: the physical struggle, the overcoming of self, and the burden of stardom. The line between reality and fiction is revealed, blurred and erased, and, as she concludes, Auster's classically American story is reset in the context of Finland's national stage, overlapping layers of both history and show-business.

In the 2nd Part, *New Plays and Playwrights*: *Director and Actor as a Text-Writer*, researchers from different countries deal with the recent praxis of creating texts for the theatre, both by young authors/playwrights and theatres themselves. In her study, the Swedish researcher Charlotte Neuhauser gives an insight into the situation in Swedish theatre. She points out that the situation for Swedish playwrights is benefiting from the Playwrights' Grant, established by the Swedish government in 1999, emphasizing that the new grant has had an effect on the way the theatre looks upon both playwriting and playwrights, as well as on the actual work processes involved in writing new plays. In an attempt to demonstrate how a new classification or genre is being established in Sweden, the author has chosen to describe New Swedish Playwriting as a Bourdieuan sub-field of the larger field of Swedish drama and theatre, showing how the construction of the grant encourages a certain kind of playwriting.

The article by Ieva Struka, theatre researcher and literary advisor of the Latvian National Theatre, examines the situation in playwriting in Latvia through the results of a recent competition for playwrights organised by the Latvian National Theatre. The author informs us that the competition produced more than sixty new plays from established professional writers, young professionals and non-professional authors. She emphasises that the variety of texts reflects one common tendency: the need to turn and face the reality of life in today's Latvia. This is the main difference between the situation today and that which existed ten years ago, when a large number of Latvian plays reminded her of "a bunch of hen's eggs that had been matured in an incubator". The author concludes that the most recent

Latvian plays reflect true-to-life aspects involving Latvia and Latvians: perhaps they are not exportable, but in turn they offer an opportunity to feel what exactly the Latvia of the 21st century is, and how its citizens feel about living there.

The study by Latvian researcher Benedikts Kalnačs looks at how, during the latter part of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, the relationship between the dramatic text and its actual staging has undergone changes, as evidenced by practices in Baltic theatre. Special emphasis in this article has been placed on social content, which, following the restoration of independence in Latvia in 1991, has determined the development of its theatre and literary prose. The author observes how the local artistic process has been influenced by a new relationship with the global community and the wider theatre world. As an example, the approach of the stage director Alvis Hermanis and the New Riga Theatre (Jaunais Rīgas teātris or JRT) is examined. The author follows the process of structuring the performance, in which the sense of reality has been transformed, examining what rules have defined the theatre's artistic approaches and in what ways JRT's work has altered the audience's understanding of the significance of content in today's theatre.

Lithuanian researcher Jurgita Staniškyte in her article analyses the ways of staging personal memories in post-Soviet Baltic theatre. She points out that during the first years of Independence the Baltic theatre stage has served as a place to restore previously erased memories of the nations' past and to give voice to life narratives which had been banned from the stage for the last fifty years. With the arrival of a new generation of theatre creators, a shift has occurred on Baltic stages, from abstract and symbolic representations of collective memory to the more direct portrayal of subjective and personal experiences of the past. She provides an overview of strategies of staging personal memories in contemporary Baltic theatre, focusing on the most visible and innovative approaches to the communication of an individual's experience on stage.

Researcher Nomeda Šatkauskienė's study provides an overview of the text usage strategies employed in Lithuanian theatre over the past five years (2006–2011). The premise of the article is Hans-Thies Lehmann's proposition that there could be different degrees of radicalism in postdramatic theatre. The play *The Phonebook* (directed by Vidas Bareikis), performed by the Theatrical Movement No Theatre, is cited as an example of the postdramatic degree of radicalism in theatre, while the drama *Expulsion*, by a famous Lithuanian playwright, Marius Ivaškevičius, is presented as an example of the postdramatic degree of radicalism in drama. In terms of self-reflection, *The Phonebook* addresses the problem

inherent in all postmodern art—the identity of the theatre and its ability to express human needs. It is the first play featuring an entirely new format in Lithuania, an example where postdramatic concepts are discussed comprehensively.

In the 3rd Part, *Reality and Text in the Post and Post-Postdramatic Theatre*, some recent tendencies in the creation of the theatrical text are analysed, laying emphasis, as in the previous part, upon the role of the director and the acting ensemble in this process.

Swedish researcher Rikard Hoogland points out that one of the tendencies in the theatre of the past decades has been to reduce the importance of the dramatic text in favour of other theatrical elements. He sheds light on another recent tendency: the return of the narrative in the performing arts, arguing that in the performances of the groups SheShePop, Rimini Protokoll and Lola Arias the storytelling is central, with all of their productions using an elaborate aesthetic form. Stories are often told and performed by "real" persons, or relatives of the "real" person, sometimes by actors-performers. In some cases, the storytellers are trained actors telling their own story. The narrative is still there, but the author and the fiction seem to be missing. Rimini Protokoll has replaced the term "play" with "scripted reality". These performances are mostly built from team work, with the director giving them aesthetic form, often utilizing multiple media sources.

Researcher Anneli Saro in her study analyzes recent praxis in Estonian theatre. She relates that the *off-programme* of the Estonian Drama Festival in 2010 was called "the author's theatre" and under this title, the following types of production were presented: (1) dramas written and staged by the same person, (2) devised theatre, and (3) contemporary dance productions. The use of the term, "the author's theatre" can be questioned, mostly because of its semantic ambivalence and its claim to be an avant-garde form of theatre making. Since this term and these forms of theatre making are quite popular, they also deserve closer scrutiny. In this article, the functionality, ideology and aesthetics of "the author's theatre" is investigated. Anneli Saro concludes that because of the wealth of empirical material, only the first type of author's theatre and some of its representatives (Ivar Põllu, Urmas Vadi, Andres Noormets and Uku Uusberg) merit closer attention.

Estonian drama and theatre researcher Luule Epner in her article examines postdramatic textual strategies at work in the cycle of productions by the Estonian theatre NO99, directed by Tiit Ojasoo and Ene-Liis Semper: *Oil!* (2006), *GEP* (2007), *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (2009), *Unified Estonia Convention* (2010), and *The Rise and Fall of*

Estonia (2011). These productions deal with topical social and political problems, at both national and global level. They are created with the help of unconventional practices, constructed out of heterogeneous material without a pre-existing text. The article describes the particular practices NO99 has employed in creating these productions, essentially to achieve the general artistic aims of the theatre. It also analyses primary postdramatic strategies: recycling, intermediality, inter- and meta-discursivity, authentication (with regard to acting), and so forth.

The main focus of Latvian researcher Valda Čakare's investigation is directed towards the ways in which language metaphors have been staged in recent Latvian theatre productions. Drawing on two productions, one by Juris Rijnieks from 1994 and another by Valdis Lūriņš from 2011, she proceeds from the observation that language metaphors are frequently transformed into visual images which aim to reduce the figurative meaning of words or phrases to what we take to be their standard or literal meaning. The author points out that in order to clarify whether and how these attempts have contributed to the fulfilment of the artistic purpose, they need to be carefully examined. She does so by using Wittgenstein's view of language as *picturing* the world as a theoretical framework. Secondly, the conviction of logical positivists that all utterances can be reduced ultimately to protocol statements which can be shown to be true directly helps her to explain the meaning of the performances.

The article by Estonian researcher Madli Pesti looks at examples of postdramatic texts in Estonian, German and British theatre. Common traits between the writers in different countries are discussed in her study, and two young authors from Estonia are introduced. Madli Pesti stresses that Siim Nurklik's text *Am I Alive Now* and Kadri Noormets's text *Go Neo und Romantix* are both postdramatic, but carry different ideas. Nurklik's text has already been called his generation's manifesto. It could be seen as a collage of everyday statements, and it deals with the clash between society and the internet-based world of today's young people. Kadri Noormets's text deals with internal matters; it is like a stream of consciousness. The author compares the writing strategies of these young Estonians with those of some German and British playwrights. Reading Nurklik's text one will inevitably start comparing it with a classic of postdramatic writing—Heiner Müller's *Der Hamletmaschine*. Plays by Falk Richter, Roland Schimmelpfennig, Elfriede Jelinek, Martin Crimp and Tim Crouch are also discussed.

Stephen E Wilmer's article explores dramaturgical changes in Irish theatre at a time of dramatic cultural and economic change. Ireland has been undergoing huge social change, from one of the richest countries in

Europe *per capita* in 2007 to one subjected to virtual bankruptcy by 2011. As the author points out, at the same time the traditional literary theatre of such writers as J. M. Synge, Sean O'Casey, and Brian Friel, as performed by such theatre companies as the Abbey Theatre, the Gate, and Druid, has been transformed into a physical and multi-media theatre using verbatim, site-specific and postdramatic techniques. Stephen E Wilmer points out that many recent performances deal with current economic and social problems, and the changes in dramaturgy parallel the changes in social conditions. He focuses on some specific examples of this trend, notably the work of small independent theatre companies that are becoming more widely known internationally, such as Corn Exchange Theatre Company and Brokentalkers.

Nineteen different authors, nineteen different articles on the same subject. Perhaps their main conclusion could be this: the live process of drama and theatre does not depend on using *old* or *new* texts, methods and strategies. Live performance (in any possible format) happens when the director and actors are treating even classical, *eternal* plays and texts "as if Shakespeare had sent them to me that morning"—as theatre director Ivo van Hove has said. And when the creators of both new drama and theatre texts are not afraid to face real contemporary life, even if it is sometimes complex, disgusting and shameful.

We hope that this theme and collection of articles will enable our colleagues to discover particular features specific not only to Baltic theatre in the wider context but also to other theatre cultures. We hope, too, that this volume will stimulate professional discussion among both theatre theoreticians and also practitioners.

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PART I

TRADITIONAL TEXTS IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

CHAPTER ONE

THE RUSSIAN *HAMLETS*: COLD WAR YEARS AND AFTER

ALEXEY BARTOSHEVICH, RUSSIA

Abstract: The changing interpretations of *Hamlet* by Russian critics, writers, painters, composers and first of all, by the theatre artists mirror with extraordinary precision the evolution of Russian society and culture. The main tenor of the every important moment of all post-Stalin period was perfectly expressed by the theatre productions of *Hamlet*: from Grigory Kozintsev's production in the Leningrad Pushkin Theatre, Nikolay Okhlopkov's in the Moscow Mayakovsky Theatre (both 1954) and a decade later in Kozintsev's film with Innokenty Smoktunovsky as Hamlet (1964), Andrey Tarkovsky' interpretation (1979) till the recent modernised productions by Yuri Butusov in Moscow Art Theatre (2005) and by Valery Fokin in St Petersburg Alexandrinsky Theatre (2010). But the highest point of the Russian Hamlet's scenic history of 20th century's last decades was the Yuri Lyubimov's Taganka theatre production (1971). Hamlet played by Vladimir Vysotsky implicitly expressed the attitude of the generation that had experienced the rise and the tragic fall of the 1960s' social hopes.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Hamlet, Russian theatre, interpretation, tragedy, political history, Russian intelligentsia, stage design, acting, theatre directing.

The changing interpretations of *Hamlet* by Russian critics, writers, painters, composers, theatre artists, and others mirror with extraordinary precision the evolution of Russian society and culture. For two centuries the Russian intelligentsia have regarded *Hamlet* as a reflection of their own essence and historical fortunes. Hamlet filled the lives of Russia's greatest theatre personalities: those who actually produced the play and those who were just meditating on it.

The theme of Hamlet, "the best of men", "the Christ-like figure" is interwoven with Konstantin Stanislavsky's life in art right up until his last years, when he worked on the play with his Studio's young actors.

Throughout his life, Vsevolod Meyerhold was preparing to direct *Hamlet*. The more painful his life got for him, the more acute was his perception of the tragedy's meaning. In the middle of the 1930s he asked Pablo Picasso to be the set designer of his *Hamlet* production, Dmitry Shostakovitch to compose the music, and Boris Pasternak to make a new translation. The great director's idea wasn't and couldn't be realised. After the closing of his theatre in 1938, Meyerhold dreamed of writing a book—at least a book!—on *Hamlet*, but even for this he had no time: he was arrested and killed.

For more than twenty years, from 1932 to 1954, *Hamlet* was not performed in Moscow: quite atypical for Russian theatre history. At the same time Shakespeare was made an official cult figure in Soviet ideology. The best Moscow theatres produced *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet* and a lot of Shakespeare comedies; but not *Hamlet*. The main reason was that Josef Stalin, who generally favoured the classics, hated *Hamlet* as a play and Hamlet as a character. There was something in the very human type of this Shakespearean Prince that aroused "the great leader's" scorn and suspicion. His hatred of the intelligentsia was transferred to the hero of the tragedy—with whom Russian intellectuals always tended to identify themselves.

Stalin never publicised his feelings about Hamlet—except in one case. The Party Central Committee's famous Resolution (1946) launching a shattering attack on Sergei Eisenstein's film *Ivan the Terrible* accused the director of turning the great Russian Tsar into "a miserable weakling comparable to Hamlet". It is quite possible the document was composed by Stalin himself. Of course, the ban on *Hamlet* was not officially declared. The play became, silently, *non-recommendable* for the stage. The theatres had learned to catch these sorts of hints from the authorities.

Not surprisingly, the tragedy reappeared on the Moscow stage in 1954, immediately after Stalin's death. In the middle of the 1950s *Hamlet* was staged all over Russia. Two productions were most popular: Nikolai Okhlopkov's at the Moscow Mayakovsky Theatre and Grigory Kozintsev's at the Leningrad Pushkin Theatre.

In his recently published Diaries under the date October 1st 1953 (seven months following Stalin's death), Kozintsev points out: "The beginning of *Hamlet* rehearsals. Feel myself like a dog coming to a tasty cube of sugar. Can this really be true? May I try it at last?"

At last the ban was lifted—theatres were now permitted to *try* the Prince of Denmark. But there was a more important reason for the play's enormous popularity at that time than the desire to taste forbidden fruit. *Hamlet* happened to express perfectly the main tenor of the early post-Stalinist period: a sudden recovery of vision, the collapse of illusions, and the painful re-evaluation of values. In the 1950s the mood of the first post-Stalinist generation was expressed primarily in stagings of *Hamlet*, and only later was it conceptualizated by modern playwrights.

An apology for intellectual doubt as opposed to the official philosophy of unquestioning political faith, and a defence of *Hamletism* in the traditional Russian sense, were the central points in Kozintsev's theatre production—bold enough for 1954. To avoid official criticism, Kozintsev decided to finish his *Hamlet* in a most optimistic way. Fortinbras was cut—after Hamlet's death, the hero of the tragedy suddenly rose again to recite Sonnet 74. Behind the resurrected Prince the amazed audience saw the enormous shadow of Nike, Greek goddess of victory. The idea was: Hamlet is dead, but Shakespeare's art is immortal. Quite naive, of course, but these were just the first steps of the new era's theatre.

The director could not have foreseen the authorities' response. The Chairman of the Art Committee immediately demanded that the director present a detailed explanation why Fortinbras was cut. The reason was not any special affection for the Prince of Norway. State officials just performed their duty—to guard over a classical text, to defend it from any sort of free interpretation. This time perhaps they were not too wrong.

Ten years passed from Kozintsev's stage *Hamlet* to his cinema version of the tragedy (1964). The film was, and still is, extremely popular in Russia as well as abroad. The film is clear, clever, intelligent, and full of good taste. First of all, the director made a flawless casting choice—he had invited Innokenty Smoktunovsky to play Hamlet. Smoktunovsky performed Shakespeare's character as if it were written by the author of *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. A few years before *Hamlet* the actor had played his best role in theatre—Prince Myshkin, Dostoevsky's sainted idiot. The character of Prince Myshkin deeply influenced Smoktunovsky's Prince of Denmark. His Hamlet's soul was like a perfect musical instrument, which responded painfully to the slightest falseness in people and the world. The best moment in the film was the recorder scene: "Though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me"; Hamlet's soft voice here became low and firm. This was the voice of a young intellectual who did not submit.

New audiences, as well as the new theatres, rejected the pathetic romantic style of traditional Shakespearean productions. The times gave

way to more radical interpretations. All the silks, velvets and other romantic paraphernalia were gone. Shakespeare's characters appeared on an ascetic, empty stage dressed in worn-out leather and hand-woven robes. The directors of the new generation—Anatoly Efros, Yuri Lyubimov, Voldemar Panso, as well as some of their older colleagues (above all, Georgy Tovstonogov)—brought with them a rough, tear-free Shakespeare. They tended to see the Bard's plays from the standpoint of Brechtian political theatre. The *Histories*, previously dismissed as hard to stage, suddenly advanced to the forefront of the Shakespearean repertoire. The *Histories*' content become projected on to Shakespeare's other plays, bringing about a whole series of politicised versions of the tragedies in the 1960s and 1970s, including productions of *Hamlet*.

Almost all that period's Shakespearean productions—for example, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, even sometimes the comedies! —in different ways treated the same problems of human existence under the conditions of an all-powerful totalitarian state. They tended to demonstrate the ruthless and dirty machinery of a murderous political order. In particular, the final scenes were interpreted in the same Jan-Kottish manner which came to be known as "the rondo principle": Richmond and Malcolm followed in the footsteps of Richard and Macbeth and everything started all over again. Political history was moving in the same fatal circle. It was not important whether the directors had or had not read Jan Kott—the ideas expressed both by the Polish critic and the Soviet directors were in the air of the times.

The general trends of the period were represented in the *Hamlet* directed by Voldemar Panso at Tallinn's Kingisepp Theatre in 1965. In Soviet times the theatre movement in Estonia, as well as in Russia and elsewhere in the USSR, confronted the same socio-political realities and was characterised by similar artistic tendencies. The world of Panso's *Hamlet* was coloured in greys and blacks; lacking air or light. Silently tiptoeing across the stage were people in plain clothes spying on Hamlet, Ophelia, Laertes and even Polonius. Athletically built young men, dressed in black leather, marched self-confidently up and down, always ready to execute any order from anybody on the throne. The court of Claudius was reminiscent of a military staff—the military-bureaucratic machine functioned faultlessly, turning human beings into unthinking components of "the System". Neither Guilderstern nor Rosencrantz were born traitors and spies but the System, step by step, turned them into such—for they had once said "yes" to it.

The part of King Claudius was played by Yuri Yarvet, who some years later starred in Kozintsev's film *King Lear*. Claudius's fate was at the

logical centre of the production—maybe a little more than Hamlet's. The King found himself the most unfortunate human being on earth. He was not born a killer. It was not out of lust for power that this small, weak man had spilled his brother's blood. Being merely part of the System, a detail of the Grand Mechanism, had made him desperate. He craved freedom, and hoped to obtain it by ascending to the throne. Now that the crown was his, Claudius felt bitterly deceived, for nothing had changed. He was still a marionette of the System, a powerless component of the political machine, just a more important one. This stoop-shouldered king, his feet hardly touching the steps beneath the throne, presented a miserable figure. His wrinkled face expressed nothing except suffering and fear. He feared everyone, especially Hamlet.

Hamlet knew too well how the System worked. He knew that by pressing a button he could set the machine into motion. When in the final scene the Prince exclaimed: "O villainy! Ho! Let the door be lock'd: Treachery! Seek it out", the thugs in black leather immediately blocked off the entrance. They had got an order—that was enough for them. One of the lads grabbed Claudius from behind, so that Hamlet's sword easily struck the defenceless king.

Hamlet in Panso's production was nothing but an innocent youth. He had no illusions or hopes. He knew a lot and that knowledge was burdensome. He knew that political success could be swift and easy. All he had to do was press a button. But he also knew that touching this button would stain his hands and he preferred not to. At the end the young Norwegian towered above the bodies, holding the crown which had fallen from the head of the dead king. The cherished dream of Fortinbras had come true, but he felt no joy. He looked as grieved as Claudius did in the beginning. Fortinbras started his ascent at the point where Claudius had just fallen. The wheel of history had gone full circle. Nothing had really changed.

The most influential *Hamlet* of these times was Yuri Lyubimov's production at the Moscow Taganka Theatre (1971), the *Hamlet* of my generation. It appeared at one of the gloomiest moments in post-Stalinist history (Soviet tanks in Prague, dissidents in prisons, the KGB in full power…). Paradoxically, however, it was a time of real flowering in Russian theatre. The stage was fed with the energy of opposition to the regime—not necessarily expressed in the forms of straightforward political theatre.

Shakespeare productions now reflected society's prevalence of tragic sensibilities. In 1970 Anatoly Efros produced *Romeo and Juliet* at Moscow's Malaya Bronnaya Theatre. The production was permeated with