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1

FOCUS CHINA



FOKUS CHINA



FOCUS CHINA



Studii teoretice / Theoretische Studien / Theoretical studies

The Modern and Postmodern Form of Chinese Theatre since 1949

PENGLING HU
(Shenzhen University)

Abstract:

Chinese theatre can be divided into modern and postmodern forms since 1949. The modern form of Chinese modern theatre is undoubtedly influenced by Western realism and modernism, which takes the script and the literature as the centre, and introduces the theory of modernism. It is represented by plays such as *Tea House* and *Sang Shu Ping Chronicle*. The postmodern form of Chinese modern theatre is influenced by the Western postmodern drama and Chinese opera: it is represented by three directors, namely Lin Zhaohua, Mou Sen and Meng Jinghui.

Keywords:

Chinese modern theatre; modern form; postmodern form; Chinese opera

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, drama¹, along with fiction, poetry and prose, has been regarded as one of the four major literary genres. Initially, most attention was attached to scripts and their literary significance and playwrights held utmost importance. Later, with increasing attention on the dramatic and theatrical nature of drama, directors became the soul of drama, and the theatre morphology was thus evolving. However, Chinese modern drama history, according to the "trichotomy" of Chinese modern literature, is divided into three periods: the "seventeen years period", the "Cultural Revolution period" and the "new period". However, we believe that from the perspective of morphology,

¹ The Chinese drama has been divided into two parts, the modern drama and the Chinese opera. In this paper we only discuss the modern drama.

Chinese theatre since 1949 should be divided into modern form and post-modern form.

In the 1990s, two influential books of Chinese drama history were published: Ge Yihong's *Chinese Drama History* and Wang Weiguo's *Chinese Drama History*. Ge's book ended the discussion at the "seventeen years period (between 1949 and 1966)", while Wang further divided modern drama into two periods: the "seventeen years period" and the "new period". Since there was no serious development of drama during the Cultural Revolution decade, the "new period" thus becomes the focus of the discussion among drama historians. Since the new millennium, five major influential books about the history of modern drama were published:

1. Tian Benxiang's *Chinese Drama Art History*. This book explains the theatre in the "new period". Tian divides the "new period" into the "exploration theatre" in the 1980s, the "neorealism theatre" in the 1990s and the "co-existence of diversity" in the 21st century.

2. In *The Hundred Years History of Chinese Drama (Contemporary volume)*, the authors Huang Huilin and Gu Haihui argue that the "new period" theatre can be divided into the "exploration period" in 1980s, the "transitional period" in 1990s and the "co-existence of diversity" in the new century.

3. *The History of Chinese Modern Theatre*, written by Dong Jian and Hu Xingliang, is the most comprehensive and systematic history of Chinese modern theatre, including modern theatre, Chinese opera, opera, dance theatre, children's theatre, Chinese opera of ethnic minorities and modern theatre in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao. From the perspective of enlightenment reasoning and modern consciousness, the authors divide the "new period" theatre into the "golden period of 1980s" and "mediocre period of 1990s" and discuss in detail the features of Beijing style drama, Chinese exploration theatre, north-east style theatre and military background theatre.

4. *The Evolution of Chinese Modern Theatre*, written by Wang Xinmin, sustains the belief that the theatre before the Cultural Revolution was anti-realistic, a process from multiplex to single, while the theatre after the Cultural Revolution was the revival of realism and the rise of modernist theatre, a process from single to multiplex. Thus the theatre can be divided into biographical theatre, Beijing style theatre, Shanghai style theatre, north-east style theatre, experimental theatre and female theatre. Wang considers *Sang Shuping Chronicle* the maturity of Chinese theatre since the new era.

5. Fu Jin's *History of New China Theatre* integrates modern drama and Chinese opera by adjusting the structure of drama history and categorizing dramatists and drama from a viewpoint called "comprehensive drama".

Since 1978 the development of avant-garde theatre has been accelerating. At present, there are a number of monographies and doctoral papers that talk about avant-garde theatre: Chen Jide defines the avant-garde theatre from experimental, radical, logical and marginal perspectives in analysis of the productions of Lin Zhao-hua, Mou Sen, Meng Jinghui, Gao Xingjian and Guo Shixing. Zhang Xiaoping analyzed avant-garde theatre from three angles: cultural background, ideological theme and artistic form. Zhou Wen analyzed the theatrical aesthetic of the mentioned directors of avant-garde theatre, namely Lin Zhao-hua, Mou Sen and Meng Jinghui. Zhang Zhongnian also discussed these three directors and wrote about the development of experimental theatre in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The study of avant-garde theatre has just begun in China; there is still no convincing and precise definition of avant-garde theatre. Yet even so, we can notice from the above-mentioned papers that directors are stepping into the limelight in theatre research while the role of playwrights is gradually fading. This symbolizes the real transformation from modern form to postmodern form in Chinese modern theatre.

Therefore, we can divide Chinese modern theatre into modern and post-modern form: Modern form of Chinese theatre: script and literature significance are the core. It can be divided into two types: the first one created a realist illusion often based on political needs, represented by Lao She's *Teahouse*. Chen Zidu's *Sang Shu Ping Chronicle* represents the other type, which has made new attempts in the aspects of subject consciousness, artistic form and theatre noumenon. It creates a realistic illusion in a political unconscious state and then breaks the illusion by new drama forms such as stage technology, the alienation effect and so on. Therefore it can be called the fusion of realism and modernism.

Postmodern form of Chinese theatre: director and performativity are the core. It can be divided into three types: The first type is represented by Lin Zhaohua, similar to the work of Antonin Artaud, marked by the rebellious postmodernism and return to the tradition of Chinese opera. The second is represented by Mou Sen, similar to that of Jerzy Grotowski, marked by self-experimenting postmodernist lifestyles. The third is represented by Meng Jinghui, similar to that of Peter Brook, marked by Western style postmodern games.

The modern form of Chinese theatre, influenced by Western realism and modernism, centers on script and literature while introducing Western drama theories such as narrativity, de-familiarization, and expressionism. It can be divided into two types. One is influenced by realism. Three Western realism drama theories, namely Brunetiere's "theory of conflict of wills", John Howard Lawson's "social conflict theory", and William Archer's "theory of catastrophism" are among the most influential on theatre essence. These theories centre on the script creation and playwrights while the language of logocentrism is omnipresent. They consider literary significance as the foremost criterion when evaluating drama. Lao She's *Teahouse* is the representative of this realist theatre. The other is influenced by both realism and modernism. Modern theatre theories including Adolphe Appia's "symbolic stage design" and "ritual art conception",

Gordon Craig's "stage director theory", Bertolt Brecht's "narrative drama theory", and Meyerhold's "anti-illusion theatre theory" became theoretical sources for later Chinese theatre. However, due to the overwhelming status of realist drama, script and literary significance remain central and realism still prevails. A combination of realist and modernist theatre was thus created, represented by Chen Zidu's *Sang Shu Ping Chronicle*.

The modern form of Chinese theatre centers on script and literary significance and is often included as a part of literary history. Most Chinese scholars believe that literary history should be a structure focused on classic works, rather than on time sequences, and a literary value system for classics should be established². Some scholars believe that "the status of literary classics in the history of literature is very important as they deal with the fundamental problems of human spiritual life, both present and eternal and they can inspire and influence contemporary and future critics and writers"³. We can use two classic dramas, *Teahouse* and *Sang Shuping Chronicle*, to explain the modern form of Chinese theatre.

1. Realism theatre classic — *Teahouse*

Mao Zedong's *Speech at the Forum of Art and Literature in Yan'an* in 1942 had a great influence on Chinese literature, which gradually became a tool to serve politics, workers, peasants and soldiers. Under the influence of this ideology, there emerged three dominant types of scripts in drama, namely workers' script, peasants' script and soldiers' script. It was not until 1957 that a critique by Liu Chuan discussed the fourth type of script, a new drama focusing on political labels but reflecting people's real life. Lao She's *Teahouse* belongs to the fourth type and became a classic over time.

² Wu Xuan: *A Non-literary Proposition — An Analysis of the Limitations of the Chinese Concept Literature in Twentieth Century*, in: "Social Sciences in China", No. 5, 2000.

³ Huang Manjun: *Classics in Modern Chinese Literature: Recognition and Lasting*, in: "Social Sciences in China", No. 3, 2004.

First of all, we must admit that *Teahouse* was a reflection of political ideology. Its tendency to comply with politics was related to Lao She's use of drama aesthetics. Lao She wrote after its debut that "after watching *Teahouse*, you can understand why our life today is happy and therefore we should make our contribution for 'the Great Leap Forward' in all our work"⁴. It is clear that it represented the political ideology of the Great Leap Forward movement and showed that old China must perish. Despite its devotion to political ideology, it was still criticized: for example, Zhang Geng wrote that "Although Lao She hates old China, he is too nostalgic about some people in that time"⁵. Some critics even thought that Lao She was against the new society, judging by some nostalgic scenes, criticism for the de-privatization revolution and socialism written in his script. These criticisms led to the ban of *Teahouse* after its 1958 debut and the drama did not come into light again until 1979, when its value was greatly recognized. The fact that it was written to serve the political ideology, and yet was banned by the same ideology, is worth reflecting upon.

Secondly, *Teahouse* has a unique and eternal artistic charm. The artistic uniqueness is mainly manifested in its theme, language, and dramaturgy; it is even thought to be the paramount work of Chinese drama. *Teahouse* uses the method of "revealing political changes indirectly". Lao She reflected the changes in society through the changes in characters' lives, thus revealing political shifts⁶. The uniqueness of this drama is that, rather than describing big events directly, it does so through depicting characters coming into and leaving the teahouse and using their mouths to tell how things had changed. With regard to its dramatic language, the *Teahouse's* lines are extremely well written. As a representative of Beijing style theatre it not only excels at traditional action language – the language usually aiming at using conflicts to promoting the development of the plot – but also

⁴ Lao She: *The Discussion of 'Teahouse'*, in: "China Youth Daily", April 4, 1958.

⁵ Zhang Geng: *The Discussion of 'Teahouse'*, in: "People's Daily", May 27, 1958.

⁶ Lao She: *The Answer of Several Questions Concerned 'Tea House'*, in: "Script", No. 5, 1958.

employs vivid ordinary life dialogues to bring characters to life. Take the first scene for example: of all the twenty three characters involved, except Wang Lifa and Chang Siye, have only two or three lines at most, yet these few lines build up characters and their stage actions. Through the languages and humor of these ‘nobodies’, the spectators can perceive their intertwined connections to the imperial court, government officials, villains, fortune tellers and human-traffickers, as if they were located within that old traditional Beijing teahouse. Thirdly, with regard to its dramaturgy, the traditional “conflict theory” seems to be ineffective in *Teahouse*. Instead, it uses a way of displaying characters to promote plot development. In the history of Chinese and Western theatre, there has been the tradition of “one person to one matter”, but *Teahouse* has a multitude of characters. In this play, main characters sit throughout while peripheral characters come and go just as needed. Although the conflicts are not concentrated, as some minor conflicts are placed in the background, the drama still presents a profound sense of theatrical style and Beijing style. *Teahouse* has proved its unique dramaturgy and artistic value through its use of temporal background and highlighted narration of “nobodies”.

2. Realism and modernism — *Sang Shuping Chronicle*

After 1978, Chinese literature began a new chapter. In the field of drama, a discussion about theatrical view was launched. This discussion originated from Huang Zuolin, who proposed to integrate theories such as Stanislavski’s “producing life illusion — realistic”, Brecht’s “getting rid of life illusion — “free style” and Mei Lanfang’s “fusion of realistic and free-style”. Subsequently, many scholars got involved in the discussion, talking about the separation and integration of “realistic” and “free style”. The discussion never reached any conclusion, yet dramatists and scholars developed a consensus: theatre must return to the art noumenon. Theatre exploration in the early 1980s was based on this consensus. A large number of experimental plays, such as *Why am I dead?*, *Absolute Signal*, *Station*, *WM*, *Magic Cube*, *Death Visits the Living*, *B on the Wall Visits* and *China Dream*

were created. These theatre explorations, clearly an imitation of Western modern theatre, failed to create a masterpiece, yet they embodied both the philosophical thinking of human beings and innovation in theatre forms. The awakening of the subject consciousness, the innovation of theatrical means of expression and the return of theatre noumenon brought by these experiments were widely recognized and a masterpiece was then created following these explorations: *Sang Shuping Chronicle* (1988). The drama marked the peak of the modern theatre in the new period.

Cao Yu commented after watching *Sang Shuping Chronicle* that “[i]f we had more plays like this, we won’t have a theatre crisis”⁷. Theatre theorist Mr. Tan Peisheng wrote: “Over the past decade, Chinese dramatists have explored in two directions: stage language and the essence of human beings. The two directions were taken sometimes separately and sometimes together. In a sense, *Sang Shuping Chronicle* is a successful fusion of the two explorations”⁸. If we look back at the “Sang Shuping phenomenon” more than twenty years ago⁹, we believe that the greatest success of this classic work is to achieve the perfect blending of realism and modernism under the state of political unconsciousness, such as the combination of dramaturgy and narrativity, emotional resonance and estrangement effect, realistic and free style, presentation and representation, reality and super-reality.

Firstly, on the combination of dramaturgy and narrativity: the dramaturgy engages the reader or audience into dramatic conflicts to produce an emotional resonance, while the narrativity takes the audience out of the drama, leading to an estrangement effect between the subject – the people and the object – the characters. The emotional resonance and estrangement effect together enhance people’s spiritual and emotional experience. This is the

⁷ Cao Yu: *The Discussion on ‘Sang Shuping Chronicle’*, in: “People’s Daily”, March 23, 1988.

⁸ Tan Peisheng: *The Comment on ‘Sang Shuping Chronicle’*, in: “Literary Newspaper”, March 12, 1988.

⁹ Ding Tao: *The future of Drama – the significance of the ‘Sang Shuping Chronicle’ to modern theatre*, in: “Guang Ming Daily”, Jul. 15, 1988.

estrangement effect as Brecht describes it, whereby: “what audiences see on the stage is not unchangeable or cannot be influenced or cannot be decided. They are facing the presented human world and thus getting a standing point. This standing point is what he ought to have as a person in this era”¹⁰. This standing point is a politically unconscious state. However, *Sang Shuping Chronicle* did not use the extreme state of estrangement advocated by Brecht. Rather, this play employed Brecht’s way to break through the limitations of illusionist theatre form, and achieved emotional resonance and aesthetic experience through dramatic conflicts.

Secondly, on the combination of realism and free style: *Sang Shuping Chronicle* gave a perfect presentation of both realism and free style. There are many surprising episodes in this play, of which hunting becomes a ritual, and it produces a large number of poetic images. As its director Xu Xiaozhong wrote: “It does not create life illusion on the stage, but through the catalysis by symbolic images, it creates a regenerated poetic image rich in philosophical thoughts through the audience’s psychological synaesthesia and artistic synaesthesia; a complete vocabulary of symbolic imagery should be a philosophical one and embodied as an image of philosophy. Therefore, the poetic imagery may trigger the excitement of the audience in terms of philosophical thinking and aesthetic appreciation at the same time”¹¹. This philosophical thinking comes from the reality of both material and spiritual poverty and explains why the characters in the play brutalize each other under the feudal concept, family hierarchy and male dominance.

Therefore, the great achievement of *Sang Shuping Chronicle* is creating illusions by means of realism and breaking the illusions through narrativity, free style, estrangement effect, expressionism and other approaches. This play completes and concludes the modern form of Chinese theatre.

¹⁰ Bertolt Brecht, trans. by Ding Yangzhong: *The Drama Discussion by Brecht*, China Theatre Press, Beijing, 1990, p. 63.

¹¹ Xu Xiaozhong: *The evolution of compatibility and integration – an experimental report on the theatre ‘Sang Shuping Chronicle’*, in: “Drama Newspaper”, No. 4-5, 1998.

If *Teahouse* is a realist theatre classic, which uses political ideology as a political asylum, *Sang Shuping Chronicle* takes a further step from the basis of realism and becomes a classic play by integrating realism and modernism. These two classics may be criticized for their political factors, but it is these factors that make them insurmountable classic representations of the modern form of Chinese modern theatre. What is more, as Chinese theatres approach more mature postmodern forms, these two plays may find their position in the modern form of Chinese theatre, as irreplaceable and eternal.

2.1. Between postmodernism rebellion and return to traditional Chinese opera

The postmodern form of Chinese modern theatre is mainly influenced by Western postmodern drama and Chinese opera. Western postmodern drama refers to playwrights, including Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter, Jean Genet, Edward Albee, Tom Sheppard and others, whose plays usually show no discernable, singular theme, no plot, no logical or linear structure, and are considered anti-drama; and it also refers to theorists, including Artaud's "cruelty theatre", Jerzy Grotowski's "poor theatre", Peter Brook's "intuitive theatre", Schechner's "environmental theatre", and Augusto Boal's "theatre of the oppressed". These emphasize the openness of theatre, audience participation, the anthropological significance of the performance. The postmodern theatre, generally speaking, has three characteristics: non-linear play writing, play deconstruction and anti-grammar, as posited by Professor Jürgen Hoffman of the Berlin University of the Arts¹². This observation fits perfectly to explain the postmodern form of Chinese modern theatre represented by three directors: Lin Zhaohua, Mou Sen and Meng Jinghui. At the same time, perhaps influenced by the fact that Brecht, Artaud, Grotowski, Brook and Schechner all turned their attention to oriental theatres, or perhaps because of the inborn influence of Chinese opera and its traditional cultural spirit, the

¹² Cao Lusheng: *Foreign Post-Modern Art*, Jiangsu Art Press, Nanjing, 2002, p. 14.

three Chinese directors all inherited and developed traditional Chinese opera performance intentionally or subconsciously. If we call this the “second Westward trend”¹³, then it is clearly different from the first Westward trend, which totally denied Chinese opera. These directors, instead of discarding Chinese opera, embrace it and try to find the fitting point in combining Western postmodern theatre (modernism plays included) and traditional Chinese opera from artistic and aesthetic perspectives.

Since then, the Chinese modern theatre has not only learnt from the Western postmodern theatres, but also cultivated traditional Chinese opera performance and its cultural essence through the guideline of “adapting the past to serve the present and adapting foreign techniques to serve China”. Moreover, the postmodern form of Chinese modern theatre no longer centres on the script and literariness, but on director and performativity. Chinese modern theatre has truly become the art of performance rather than the art of language. Therefore, it is not the same as the modern form of theatre, which has been regarded a part of literary history. Instead, Chinese modern theatre now has a history independent from the history of literature.

Lin Zhaohua, China’s Artaud, initiated a postmodernism rebellion and returned to tradition Chinese opera. Lin Zhaohua had always denied that he was avant-garde or postmodern: “Some people say that I am ‘avant-garde’, ‘experimental’. In fact, it is wrong, I am a moderate reformist.”¹⁴ His use of modern theatre techniques, such as symbolism, expressionism, futurism, surrealism and postmodernist dramatic methods, such as non-linear play-writing, play deconstruction and anti-grammar action, all pointed to the performance tradition of Chinese opera and its cultural essence. Three plays, *Absolute Signal*, *Station* and *Savage* made Lin famous in the 1980s. The plays were written by Nobel Literature Prize laureate Gao Xingjian

¹³ Ma Sen: *The Two Westernization of China Modern Theatre*, Taiwan Culture Life and New Learning Press, Taipei, 1991.

¹⁴ Lin Zhaohua: *The Vitality of Theatre*, in: “Literature & Art Studies”, No. 3, 2011.

and showed strong literariness, yet Lin managed to push acting to its peak for the first time in Chinese modern theatre.

To begin with, Lin Zhaohua reduced the “god” status of the playwright in the theatre, making the stage no longer the place for the expression of the playwrights’ will but a free place to create. For example, when directing *Wild Man*, Lin Zhaohua only trained actors on their body expression and singing. Actors were encouraged to use their own understanding of the original state of life and improvise freely on the stage (using melody, body expression, dancing and other aspects). This was obviously similar to Artaud’s “cruelty theatre”: “Theatre, an art of independence, in order to resurrect or live, must be aware of the difference between the text, pure discourse literature, and what distinguishes it from other set ways of hand-writing.”¹⁵ Stage performance was everything and the stage was the soul for Lin Zhaohua, to the point that he even thought that theatre of the future must return to the origin of theatre by having acting at its centre, with stage performances first, coupled with other factors to create multiple possibilities for modern drama; and that is the soul of the theatre. Secondly, with playwright the “god” gone, Lin Zhaohua tried to create a new stage image and body language. Chinese modern theatre had always been based on dialogues with literary language at its core. But Lin Zhaohua used a large number of static long shots in the *Absolute Signal*, enabling the audience to see the psychological monologue through body languages. Also he used elements ignored by traditional theatre, such as posture, pantomime, gestures and sounds to show the unique beyond-language expressiveness of theatre. Finally, just as Artaud eventually returned to Balinese Theatre in the East, Lin Zhaohua returned to traditional Chinese opera. Lin Zhaohua had always been advocating the way of traditional Chinese opera. The temporal and spatial variation of the Chinese opera stage was created by

¹⁵ Antonin Artaud: *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. by V. Corti, Cald&Boyards Press, London, p. 106.

acting: “time and space changes come from the actors”¹⁶. Through studying traditional Chinese opera, theatre performance can break the “the fourth wall” and create a full theatre effect.

Judging from the above, Lin Zhaohua was not only a “Chinese Artaud”, but also the first modern Chinese director. He combined various techniques of Western modernist theatre; used the vision of postmodern theatre theories on stage, actors and performance; made the playwright, director and actor equal, and adapted the traditional Chinese opera, applying it to the theatre. He rebelled against both postmodernist deconstruction of art and traditional stage spaces, together with its focus on scripts, and he finally achieved the return to Chinese art spirit. However, due to his failure to fully recognise postmodernism, Lin, in his later days, made a u-turn from postmodernism as he started to pay more attention to Beijing Opera and its traditional spirits. His later directing works, including *Birdman*, *Restroom* and classics adaptations such as *Hamlet*, *Three Sisters*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Old Tales Retold* and *The Master Builder*, had their own characteristics and showed some traits of innovation; yet they failed to show enough freshness and innovation and he was thus gradually surpassed by new-generation directors.

2.1. Mou Sen, “China’s Grotowski”, a self-experimenting postmodernist

Mou Sen was an independent and unique director of Chinese modern theatre. Except his only commercial and artistic failure, *Confide*, his entire directing work was real experimental theatre, which distinguished him from Lin Zhaohua and Meng Jinghui. More importantly, his experimental approaches, his concept of theatre and even his lifestyle were similar to Grotowski’s.

In his experimental approaches, Mou created the “frog troupe” and “drama workshop”. His famous plays, including *Rhinoceros*, *The Other Shore*, *Zero File* and *Something About AIDS* were performed by his allies and followers.

¹⁶ Lin Zhao: *The Exploring Theatre*, Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, Shanghai, 1986, p. 98.

In these plays, the performance was no longer produced in the traditional way (with director giving instructions and actors performing accordingly), but in a way that both the director and the actors engage themselves in exploring, experimenting and performing together. This pure experimental approach won great acclaim: “Mou Sen’s ‘frog Troupe’ as the beginning of folk theatre experiment has become an indispensable part of Chinese modern theatre. It is because of them that Chinese postmodern theatre can develop from the trial in early 1980s to the revival in 1990s”¹⁷. Mou’s experiments were similar to that of Grotowski’s “theatre of 13 rows”. Grotowski asked the actor to be “holy”: “an actor must be good at creating his own voice, gestures and psychoanalysis language, just like when great poets create their own text language”¹⁸. Obviously they thought this kind of theatre was not for the public, because the presence of general audience would violate the sanctity of the theatre and an ideal audience was thus required. The ideal audience in Mou’s mind was of theatre experts from art festivals. His *Zero File* and other works had won numerous honors in nearly twenty art festivals around the world yet had not found success with mainstream audiences.

In his methodology, Mou, like Grotowski, completely removed scripts and other factors and focused on actors and audience only. The script for *Zero File* was just a poem; he gave up script when directing *Something About AIDS*, insisting that “the people who take part are being themselves, doing their own business, saying their own words, showing their own state of life, and expressing their own life attitude”¹⁹. The reason behind this was that he wanted to experiment with Grotowski’s “poor theatre” or “original theatre” as he claimed, meaning that “the theatre is independent. It is an art form with a self expressive language system. It is not an explanation or interpretation for literature or other arts, nor is it an attachment to

¹⁷ Ma Wenqi: *Postmodernism and Modern Theatre*, China Society Press, Beijing, 1994, p. 226.

¹⁸ Jerzy Grotowski: *Toward A Poor Theatre*, trans. by Wei Shi, China Theatre Press, Beijing, 1984, p. 25.

¹⁹ Mou Sen: *Writing on the Drama List*, in: “The Art World”, No. 3, 1997.

literature or other arts”²⁰. Grotowski argued that the essence of theatre was the relationship between the actors and the audience and Mou built a perfect practice on this belief.

Grotowski developed theatre into a ceremony, “an art as a vehicle”. He changed art into a contemporary way of life, claiming that the performers were no longer just performing for others but for enhancing themselves: “‘Performer’, with a capital letter P, refers to a person who acts. He’s not someone who plays another person; instead, he is a doer, a priest, a warrior. He is outside the aesthetic style”²¹. Mou did not go so far as to regard theatre as religion or yoga, yet he believed that theatre was a way of life: “We choose theatre as our way of life. In addition to the meaning of ourselves, we hope that our performances can enrich our audience’s aesthetic and emotional experiences. We are also constantly going through sublimation and purification like religion. In the process of sublimation, we pass the light of our own lives to the audience through theatre”²². The general audience did not accept Mou’s theatre experiment. Therefore, the greater value for the theatre experiment was to let performer experience an artistic life style. This way of life had gradually been recognized, even practiced in a variety of social performance fields.

To summarize, as a loyal follower and practitioner of Grotowski, Mou Sen’s postmodern spirit of self-experimentation stirred excitement in his contemporaries. However he quitted his directing career after the failure of *Confide* in 1997. Although in recent years he has appeared occasionally as literary consultant or event organizer, he has lost his vigour as a pioneer.

2.2. Meng Jinghui, China’s Peter Brook: a Western style postmodern game

Unlike Lin Zhaohua and Mou Sen, who had always denied their label as avant-garde artists, Meng Jinghui always considered his theatre avant-garde,

²⁰ Mou Sen: *What ‘Confide’ means*, in: “Drama film news”, July 3, 1997.

²¹ Jerzy Grotowski: *Performer*, trans. by Cao Lusheng, in: “Theatre Arts”, Nr. 2, 2002.

²² Wang Jifang: *The interview of Mou Sen*, in: “Lotus”, Nr. 2, 1999.

due to his inclination toward the West and postmodernism. He started his career as an actor in Eugene Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, directed by Mou Sen in 1987. Later, he directed Harold Pinter's *Lifer*, Ionesco's *Cantarice Chauve*, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Jean Genet's *Balcony*, and became a well-known director in China. His later directing works fell into three types: the first was an exploration of theatre aesthetics, such as *I Love XXX*, *Flower in the Mirror*, *Moon in the Water* and *Head Without Tail*. These were postmodern language games, stage games and symbol games. Another was social theatre focusing on mainstream lifestyle such as *Rhinoceros in Love*, *Amber* and *Affair*. These plays, created by aesthetic principles developed from experimental theatre, showed little innovation in terms of art form yet were extremely popular with the public. The third type was confrontational theatre, against the mainstream, such as *The Accidental Death of an Anarchist* and *Two Dogs' Opinion on Life*. Initial motives for this "confrontation" were not simple, but the confrontation itself was positively received by the audience because the public could see other possibilities of life in his plays. Meng was successful in presenting a playful and entertaining atmosphere for Chinese modern theatre through his humorous, ironic, romantic setup and techniques such as parody, collage and repetition. In his methodology, Meng Jinghui consciously imitated modern theatre master Peter Brook.

On "Deadly Theatre", Meng Jinghui imitated the first chapter of Peter Brook's book: *The Empty Space*, and wrote a paper: *Deadly Theatre around Us*. Meng explained his view of "Deadly Theatre" through five examples in National Centre for the Performing Arts, Beijing People's Art Theatre, avant-garde trying, independent production and college play. He wrote "deadly theatre is equal to inferior theatre, boring theatre and mediocre theatre"²³. This corresponded with the categories of Deadly Theatre, Holy Theatre, Rough Theatre and Immediate Theatre as proposed by Peter Brook. Meng Jinghui shared with Peter Brook the aim to create intuitive theatre; they held the same belief that theatre, though different in content, should be rid of other elements including script, language, politics, and

²³ Meng Jinghui: *The archives of Avant-garde Theatre*, New Star Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 75.

religion. Even dramatist, actor, audience and critics were leading to the deadly theatre. Thus, where Lin Zhaohua and Mou Sen considered very carefully the relationship between the actors and the audience, Meng was extreme in that he need not consider the audience, because he, just like Peter Brook, was mostly concerned about his own intuition.

On space consciousness on stage, Meng talked about his intuition: "As a space, anything can happen on stage. A person walking past is theatre. The key is how you can make the space more free, like birds flying in the sky. So I think theatre is the most free form of art"²⁴. This statement was a replica of the first sentences of Peter Brook's *The Empty Space*: "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged"²⁵. For Meng Jinghui and Peter Brook theatre should be this simple and free, but the dramatist, actor, director, audience and critics and too much non-artistic elements, like political and religious ones, were involved in the development of theatre. In this sense, the postmodern theatre was to leave out of the theatre these irrelevant elements and acquire new artistic vitality.

"Postmodern games" were the core of "Meng's thrill". This "game" was achieved by parody, collage and repetition. As Meng wrote in the fore pages of *Si Fan*: "The performance form of this play is of great uncertainty for the performance is improvised; the estrangement of gameful virtual world and reasoning; passionate performing and calm viewing; all these greatly expand theatre space". Likewise, we can read in Peter Brook's *The Empty Space* that "a theatre is a game". Although Peter Brook did not use terms such as uncertainty, improvisation, virtualization, estrangement effect, and other postmodern vocabulary in his book, many things that Meng wrote about reflected Peter Brook's intention.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 122.

²⁵ Peter Brook: *The Empty Space*, trans. by Xing Li, China Theatre Press, Beijing, 2006, p. 1.

Sadly, after *Rhinoceros in Love* and *Pirate Faust* in 1999, Meng Jinghui has gradually shifted toward commercial theatre. Although he claims that he is still practicing avant-garde theatre, it is obvious that he prioritizes catering for the market and pleasing the audience.

It is reasonable that we think Lin Zhaohua, Mou Sen and Meng Jinghui are like Artaud, Grotowski and Peter Brook in China respectively. Artaud, Grotowski and Peter Brook echoed each other in terms of theatre beliefs. Artaud marked the distinction between modernism and postmodernism in Western theatre; Grotowski's theatrical experiments were obviously influenced by Artaud; and Peter Brook, after communicating with Grotowski, immediately became his follower. Their relationship was similar to that of Lin Zhaohua, Mou Sen and Meng Jinghui. Lin was the first director in Chinese modern theatre; Mou used to participate in his "theatre studio" and make self-experiments while Meng started his own way of exploring theatre after participating in Mou's "frog troupe". On top of that, Lin, Mou and Meng all shared some coincidental or deliberate connections with their Western mentors on theatre concepts and ways of directing. However, to our disappointment, all three talented directors failed to persevere with pure theatre art due to commercialization and marketization. Though their choices cannot be simply denied, the question of where the future is after postmodernism remains the biggest concern for the three directors and the entire theatre world.

Conclusions

We can reach two conclusions from the above discussion of modern form and postmodern form in Chinese modern theatre:

The first conclusion is that Chinese modern theatre has evolved from modern to postmodern form, as chiefly reflected in two respects. Firstly, the explanation of theatricality is from literariness to theatricality, and then to performativity. The first and most comprehensive exposition of theatricality since the new period is Qian Peisheng, who wrote "theatricality is to take actions in a hypothetical

situation, and the situation can produce suspense and lead to conflicts; and audiences, attracted and guided by this suspense, can understand the nature of the character and character relationship through causal-result actions”²⁶. Actions, conflicts, situations and suspense are the core of theatricality. This statement based itself on hypothetical situations and was clearly talking about the essence of traditional realist theatre, namely the creation of realistic illusions. On this basis, Dong Jian pointed out that there were two kinds of theatricality²⁷. One was “dramaturgy” in literary components, which focused on the spiritual aura and the internal part with human thinking and language as the embodiment and showed as concentrated, intense and complex. The other was the “theatricality” in stage presentation, which focused on the material, physical, external part with human body and voice as the embodiment and showed as open, highlighting, proper exaggerating and transforming. On top of these statements, we argue that there is a third kind of theatricality: “Postmodern performativity”. Performativity is not to emphasize the theatricality but to break the limits in the theatre, break the separation of actors and the audience, break the traditional relationship between actors and audience, and even let the audience enter a postmodern performing state.

Performativity “is a characteristic of speech act, and the performativity of language depends on certain social norms and rituals”²⁸. Jacques Derrida argued performativity connoted deconstruction, split the link between words and objects and de-constructed the dominance of logocentrism. Judith Butler noticed that performativity constituted social performance norms based on gender. For dramatic art discussion, performativity not only has these linguistic, philosophical and feminist meanings but also serves a more important function, that is the introduction of theatre art into daily life: theatre is no longer a sacred art, but a way of life for ordinary people.

²⁶ Tan Peisheng: *The Dramatic*, Peking University Press, Beijing, 1981, p. 291.

²⁷ Dong Jian: *The Brief Comment of the Dramatic*, in: “Theatre Arts”, No. 6, 2003.

²⁸ Richard Schechner: *Performance Studies: An introduction*, Routledge Press, New York, 2002, p. 110.

Secondly, we can witness the transformation from the awakening of subject consciousness to the individual self-consciousness in the change of Chinese modern theatre. Since the new period, the awakening of subject consciousness was credited the noble value of pursuing modernity. Literary and artistic fields were also more concerned about the imagination, memory, psychology, and sub-consciousness of the subject. It had a great influence on Chinese theatre in the new period, during which there had been a surge of new realism. But this subject-consciousness still belonged to group-consciousness. The theatre was still dominated by playwrights, scripts and their literariness, mostly the reflection of group-consciousness. In this stage, directors, actors and the audience were passive and spontaneous receivers of this subject-consciousness.

When the director and performativity became central, especially when performativity made theatre art part of people's daily life, along with dramatists and critics, all other subjects including the director, actors and audience became active because each individual could consciously display their individual consciousness. The director can become an actor through exchanges and discussion with the actor; the actor can become a director through improvisation, the audience can become actors through participating in the performance. Each individual can enjoy free art or a free state like art through their individual consciousness and performance experience. This can even expand into people's daily life such as sports, lectures, games and other social performance fields. From breaking the "fourth wall" to breaking the boundaries between actors and the audience, to introducing theatre into daily life, the stage opens up from a closed state and eventually points to the future of theatre, where there is no need for any stage because our human society is a big stage.

The second conclusion: morphology is an effective approach to study Chinese theatre. The division of Chinese modern theatre into modern and postmodern form is only one branch in the morphology of the entire Chinese drama family. It aims to make a general description of Chinese

modern theatre from the perspective of morphology. The Chinese drama family also includes Chinese opera, opera, dancing, folk opera and other styles, and each style can be divided into many forms or styles. We believe that each form or style deserves the same respect and equal status. When it comes to Chinese modern theatre, we propose this theatre morphology because we hope that, after reflection upon concepts like literature evolution, modernization and nationalization, we can build a good ecological environment for arts and we can realize the pluralistic coexistence and equal development of Chinese modern theatre.

The concept of literary evolution came into being in the early twentieth century and its theoretical elaboration started with drama. Wang Guowei advocated the idea that every generation had its own literature in order to explore the artistic value of Chinese opera. However, in opposition to Chinese opera, Hu Shi suggested that we must adapt Chinese opera and study Western theatre. Hu's concept became a mainstream idea within Chinese theatre since the "May Fourth Movement" and set Chinese theatre on the road of modernization.

Through the process of social modernization in China, this kind of thinking had never been doubted. Consequently, Chinese theatre has lost its unique art standard and art value given the overwhelming pressure of national state modernization. Chinese theatre also developed a modern history view under modern expressions like enlightenment reasoning and modern consciousness. At the same time, in the context of the modernization and nationalization of literature, some scholars have further explained the course of modernization of Chinese theatre²⁹, and proposed the concept of "modern national drama"³⁰. We believe that grand concepts such as literary evolution, modernization and nationalization are not describing modern Chinese theatre as an art itself because they fail to analyze and summarize

²⁹ Dong Jian: *Chinese Theatre in Twentieth Century*, in: "Literary Review", No. 1, 1998.

³⁰ Hu Xingliang: *Chinese Theatre and Tradition of Chinese Opera*, in: "Social Sciences in China", No. 1, 2001.

the theatre art from aesthetic viewpoint. Exclusive artistic view and methodology bring more harm than good; therefore we should divide Chinese modern theatre into modern and postmodern form from the perspective of morphology. Such categorization not only enables us to understand the changes of Chinese modern theatre historically, but also helps us to find out the classic works and enrich the theory of theatres. More importantly, this morphology originates from the summary of Chinese modern theatre and adheres to the principles of coexistence and freedom of art, that is, no matter what form it might take, works by dramatists, by directors, by actors, by the audience – or even self-directed speeches or self-examination works – deserve an equal and fair show on the theatre stage.

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Tian Qinxin's *Ming*: A Chinese Adaptation of *King Lear*

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Abstract:

Ming is a popular drama performed in 2008 and directed by Tian Qinxin – one of the most famous and influential *huaju* directors in China today. It borrows the structure of Shakespeare's *King Lear* to illustrate the history of Ming dynasty in China. This paper aims to explore its formal and spiritual mimesis of Shakespeare from the following aspects: the use of *King Lear*'s structure, the interpretation of its political spirit, the protrusion of power, and tries to prove that *Ming* is a successful adaptation from form to content.

Keywords:

Ming, intertextuality, political spirit, power

Introduction

There are various ways to adapt Shakespeare's plays: the *huaju* adaptation, word for word, the Chinese local opera adaptation, Chinese actors performing in English, *huaju* adaptation with a Chinese version. Of these four types, the former two have had a great influence. According to *Textual Research of New Play* edited by Zheng Zhengqiu and Mingfei, the title of *King Lear* was often changed when staged (such as *Sisters Empresses*) in the early Huaju period (1907-1930s). Other adaptations are as follows: Gu Zhongyi's Huaju adapted *King Lear* into *San Qian Jin* (*Three Daughters*, 1944), Fu Jinxiang's Yueju adaptation is *Xiao Nv Xin* (*Dutiful Daughter's*

Heart, 1946), Beijing Opera *Luan Shi Wang* (*The King in Troubled Times*, 1948), Shanghai Theater Academy's *King Lear* (1982), Central Academy of Drama's *Li Ya Wang* (*King Liya*, 1986), Tianjin People's Art Theater's *King Lear* (1986), Liangning Art Theater's *King Lear* (1986), Hong Kong Modern Drama Troupe's *King Lear* (1993), Sixuanxi's *King Lear* (Stringed play, 1994), Shanghai Peking Opera Theater's *Qi Wang Meng* (*Dream of King Qi*, 1995), selected scenes of Han Opera (Hunan Opera) *King Lear* (2008)¹.

Ming was one of the top ten shows in 2008 directed by Tian Qinxin, one of the most famous and influential *Huaju* directors in China today. Tian likes Shakespeare, as "his plays are very subtle, refined and humanized... these are worth our consideration and learning"². Therefore, she hopes Chinese audiences will learn and appreciate Shakespeare through *Huaju*. But she knows clearly that it is hard for Chinese audiences to accept Shakespeare by performing his works directly and Chinese elements (literary ideas, national spirit, characteristics of the times, etc.) must be added in order to suit their tastes. Thus she borrows the structure of Shakespeare's *King Lear* to illustrate the history of Ming dynasty in China and she does not create a simple copy or imitation. Tian presents her understanding of Shakespeare on the stage. She used to say that "we should appreciate Shakespeare with the audience, and try to make a Chinese Shakespeare"³. Thus she modernizes and adapts *King Lear* to the Chinese world. This paper aims to explore its formal and spiritual mimesis of Shakespeare from three aspects: the use of *King Lear*'s structure, the interpretation of its political spirit, the protrusion of power, and attempts to prove that it is a successful adaptation from form to content.

Intertextuality

The story happens in the court just like in *King Lear*. The old Emperor of the Ming Dynasty thinks of abdicating the throne, but cannot decide

¹ Li Weimin: "Shakespeare on Chinese Stage: in One-Hundred-Year Anniversary of *King Lear* in China", in: "*Sichuan Drama*", No. 5, 2004, pp. 33-35.

² Tian Qinxin: *Tian Qinxin's Drama Field*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 218.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 219.

who he would choose to be his successor among his three sons: the effete eldest son, the cruel second son and the honest youngest one. In the race for power, people go crazy. Even if they are put in key positions, they are eager for the power regardless of their life and death. A eunuch suggests the Emperor read Shakespeare's *King Lear*, in which the King also faces the dilemma of how to carve up his kingdom among his three daughters when he decides to abdicate. Though the starting point of the two stories is the same, they lead to very different endings. But there is an obvious intertextuality, as *Ming* encapsulates the theme, content, structure and even the background of *King Lear*.

First of all, the similar background makes it possible for the playwright and director to connect *King Lear* with *Ming*. Playwright Shi Yue is known for a series of historical novels about the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), which set off a craze for anything concerning the Ming Dynasty. After reading this novel, Tian approached him and asked him to write "a play, both the story of *King Lear* and the Ming Dynasty, which is set in ancient times and is relevant today. And it may not be glorious, but will always live in people's hearts"⁴. He found parallels between the two worlds. The costumes change, but human nature remains the same. Shi struggled a long time to meet all these requirements, and eventually came up with a drama. Just as he said, "Shakespeare was the people of Ming Dynasty"⁵ which was the last period of Han culture in China. During that time, the social structure changed and popular culture flourished, the early capitalism appeared and sea trade bloomed, while the morality tended to fall and money worship infused social codes and principles. Shakespeare finished *King Lear* in 1607. On the one hand, its chorology concurs with the Chinese Ming Dynasty. On the other hand, the background of *King Lear* is similar to that period or even present China. Besides that, we can find similar characters and events

⁴ He Dong: "King Lear Travels to the East", <http://ent.sina.com.cn/j/2008-09-04/14382156460.shtml> [Sep. 4, 2008].

⁵ *Ibidem*.

in the history of the Ming Dynasty, thus it is “a precise combination”⁶. These concurrences favour intertextuality and parody between *King Lear* and *Ming*. But in *Ming*, characters are Chinese, as the story happens in the court of the Ming Dynasty. Obviously, this is a substitution of one text for other with an eye for performing a Chinese version of *King Lear*: “Some statements which come from other texts intersect and neutralize each other in one text”⁷. Through intertextuality and parody, *Ming* shortens the distance between England during the Renaissance and the Ming Dynasty, Shakespeare’s plays and modern Chinese *huaju*, the English court and the Chinese court.

Intertextuality has the feature of similarity and associativity among different texts⁸. With regard to this point, *Ming* just borrows its structure and main plot from *King Lear*. At the beginning, its plot is in accordance with that of the source text: the old Emperor of the Ming Dynasty thinks of abdicating the throne as he “faces the enemy – senescence”, but cannot decide who should get it among his three sons⁹. A eunuch suggests the Emperor read Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, in which the King also faces the dilemma of how to carve up his kingdom among his three daughters when he decides to abdicate. Then the old Emperor imitates King Lear and asks his three sons to perform *King Lear* and talk about “the love for their father”¹⁰. The eldest son plays Goneril, the second son Regan, and the youngest one Cordelia. Then they begin to play the first scene of *King Lear*, in these words:

The eldest son: I love you most... love you beyond words and expressions...beyond every rich and rare thing in the world,... It cannot be measured...¹¹我是最爱您的”, “这种爱, 是无法用语言来表达

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Qin Haiying: “The Origin and Development of Intertextuality Theory”, in: „*Foreign Literature Review*”, No. 3, 2004, pp. 19-30. p. 19.

⁸ Xu Guozhen: *Study on Fang and Ni*, Jiangxi People’s Press, Nanchang, 2003, p. 25.

⁹ Tian Qinxin: *Tian Qinxin’s Drama Script*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

的；……这种爱，超过了世间一切珍贵稀有的东西……这种爱是无法用衡量来算计的

Gon. Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter...

Beyond what can be valu'd, rich or rare; ...

Beyond all manner of so much I love you.¹²

The second son: I hate all the joys which can be felt, but the love to you is my highest and solely happiness.¹³我厌弃世界上一切可以感知的快乐，唯有爱您，他老人家，才是我的无上的幸福啊

Reg. Myself an enemy to all other joys

Which the most precious square of sense possesses

And find I am alone felicitate

In your dear highness' love.¹⁴

The youngest son: I can only give you half my love as I shall carry half to my husband in the future.¹⁵我只能给您一半的爱，因为我要嫁人，我要把另外一半的爱分给我的丈夫

Cor. That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry

Half my love with him, half my care and duty:

Sure I shall never marry like my sisters,

To love my father all.¹⁶

We can find that the above-quoted words are mainly from Shakespeare. With the play progressing, the three sons all die. The old Emperor cries for his youngest son just as Lear does for Cordelia:

The old Emperor: O, my son! O! He is as dead as soil! Why a dog, a horse and a rat still can breathe? But you have no breath at all? My poor son!

¹² William Shakespeare: *King Lear*, in: Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Shakespeare (second edition)*, W.W. Norton&Company, New York&London, 2008, I.i.pp. 47-53.

¹³ Tian Qinxin: *Tian Qinxin's Drama Script*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 8.

¹⁴ William Shakespeare: *King Lear*, in: Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Shakespeare (second edition)*, W.W. Norton&Company, New York&London, 2008, I.i. pp. 65-68.

¹⁵ Tian Qinxin: *Tian Qinxin's Drama Script*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 8.

¹⁶ William Shakespeare: *King Lear*, in: Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Shakespeare (second edition)*, W.W. Norton&Company, New York&London, 2008, I.i.pp. 90-93.

My heart!¹⁷老三啊！我的孩子啊……我的孩子，像泥土一样死去了！为什么一条狗一匹马一直耗子都有他的生命，你却没有任何一丝呼吸？我可怜的孩子啊！我的心脏啊！

Lear. Howl, howl, howl, howl! O! you are men of stones:

Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so

That heaven's vaults should crack. She's gone for ever.

I know when one is dead, and when one lives;

She's dead as earth.¹⁸...

Lear. And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life!

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,

And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,

Never, never, never, never, never!¹⁹

In the end, Lear makes Kent and Edgar “twain Rule in this realm, and the gor'd state sustain”²⁰. Kent says: “I have a journey, sir, shortly to go; My master calls me, I must not say no”²¹. Albany replies: “The weight of this sad time we must obey”²². While in *Ming*, the eunuch announces: “you two help the Emperor to rule this realm and rebuild the injured country”²³. And also the general says “I have a journey right now as my lord calls me”, and then the consultant says he shall “shoulder this heavy responsibility”²⁴.

¹⁷ Tian Qinxin: *Tian Qinxin's Drama Script*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 60.

¹⁸ William Shakespeare: *King Lear*, in: Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Shakespeare (second edition)*, W. W. Norton&Company, New York&London, 2008, V.III, p. 252-254.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 299-302.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 313-314.

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 315-316.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 317.

²³ Tian Qinxin: *Tian Qinxin's Drama Script*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 60.

²⁴ *Ibidem*

The director of *Ming* says that this story, modeling its structure on *King Lear*, just changes three daughters into three sons²⁵. At last, it goes back to Ming Dynasty through the parallel “play within a play”. After a series of struggles, the old Emperor says: “Come on! Please say the love for father according to the scripts of *King Lear*”²⁶. This makes the audiences back to *Ming*.

Ming bears an intertextual relationship to *King Lear* in terms of theme, character, plot and structure. But all these elements have been reassembled with the Chinese element into another text. The audiences can find their similarities and differences between the two plays. Generally speaking, we believe that *King Lear* is a tragedy with fewer elements of irony and humour, while it pays attention to the tragedy of human nature. At the same time, *Ming* sets similar plots, but lays emphasis on the struggle in the court of ancient China, which weakens its tragic force. The director changes the tragic atmosphere of *King Lear* into irony in *Ming*. As Simon Critchley observes, “comedy is the eruption of materiality into the spiritual purity of tragic action and desire”²⁷. He further says: “Tragedy is insufficiently tragic because it is too heroic. Only comedy is truly tragic. Comedy is tragic by not being a tragedy”²⁸. Tian’s attempt to add comedic elements to *King Lear* takes new thought to the audiences who are exposed to a humorous environment.

The Illustration of Political Spirit in *King Lear*

According to Abraham Lincoln, the hardest task to politicians is not to construct but to maintain the political system²⁹. People believe that

²⁵ Shi Yan: “Tian ‘play the gallant’ to King Lear”, <http://www.infzm.com/content/18825> [Oct. 22, 2008].

²⁶ Tian Qinxin: *Tian Qinxin’s Drama Script*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 59.

²⁷ Simon Critchley: *Ethics Politics Subjectivity*, Verso, London, 1999, p. 230.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 235.

²⁹ Abraham Lincoln: “The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions”, Address Before the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois. Jan.27, 1838 <http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/lyceum.html>

Shakespeare considered monarchism as the best regime in Britain at that time, and the highest goal of monarchism is to make Britain peaceful and unified. In this regard, only *Henry V* is very close, but King Henry V lacks validity. In *King Lear*, Lear appears as a great monarch at the beginning because there is no war and conflict at home or abroad. In fact, we may view King Lear as the king who faces the important task and challenge of maintaining his prefect rule. Although many critics have observed that *King Lear* is one of Shakespeare's greatest plays, few regard it as one of their favourites³⁰. According to Coleridge, one can "omit the first scene in *Lear*, and everything will remain: the first scene is a simple story just like a road toward the house but not the foundation of the building"³¹. He also says the attraction and scenes of *Lear* derive from an obvious impossibility³², and "[i]t was not without forethought, and it is not without its due significance, that the triple division is stated here", it shows that "as already determined and in all its particulars, previously to the trial of professions, as the relative rewards of which the daughters were to be made to consider their several portions"³³. Bradley observes that it "seems to have escaped the attention of Coleridge and others"³⁴ and that Lear's original plan was not so absurd as it has been taken to be. For example, Lear never intended to live with his three daughters in turn, but with Cordelia only. He then concludes as follows: "[Lear's] whole original plan, though foolish and rash, was not a hideous rashness or incredible folly. If carried out it would have had no such consequences as followed its alteration. It would probably have led quickly to war, but not to the agony which culminated in the storm upon the heath"³⁵. In fact, Lear is not fatuous. Kent probably agrees with his plan. If the two agree this plan, it is not foolish to measure up the rule of realm. On the other hand, according to the universal principle of

³⁰ A. C. Bradley: *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Macmillan, London, 1905, p. 234.

³¹ Samuel Coleridge: *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, Vol. I. Thomas Middleton Raysor ed., Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1939, p. 55.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 59.

³³ A. C. Bradley: *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Macmillan, London, 1905, p. 226.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 250.

soul, Lear's partiality to Cordelia is a self-love whose foundation is love, in the same way we choose the one we love best³⁶.

Director Tian and playwright Shi understand this point thoroughly. We find that the old Emperor has a plan at first. *Ming* is a play within a play in which *King Lear* is just an excuse or a camouflage. The Emperor takes it to hide his true intention and train his successor. Thus he tells us clearly: "I must give all the things to one son who will continue my life and soul, or even the glory of our country"³⁷. When the Emperor worries about how to deliver land to his three sons, the second son points at the youngest one and says: "you can give it to anyone except him"³⁸. The Emperor answers: "if he is denied, you have no chance, either"³⁹, while the eldest son rejoices in the calamity, but the Emperor also answers: "you shall not covet it"⁴⁰. From these conversations, we easily find his plan is to choose the youngest son as his successor. So the two elder sons hate the youngest as they "cannot wait". There are also some words from the Emperor that can prove this point. He comments that the eldest son "is wicked" while the second son "is stupid", but says nothing about the youngest one⁴¹. In fact, the youngest son knows that "when I become stronger and stronger, learn more and more, my father will give me his crown... so it is unnecessary to compete with them"⁴². The Emperor's partiality to his youngest son is similar to Lear's preference for Cordelia.

As a great monarch, the Emperor defeats all the enemies and makes his realm peaceful and unified⁴³. The dialogue between the youngest son and

³⁶ Plato: *Gorgias*, Translated with Introduction, Notes, and Interpretive essay by James H. Nicholas JR, Cornell University Press, New York, 1998, 510B. Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*. Mineola, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1998, 1155a.

³⁷ Tian Qinxin: *Tian Qinxin's Drama Script*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 6.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 12.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

his woman echoes his father's ambition: "I want to bring peaceful lives to all, spread the great Confucianism to the world, and make this country strong and rich. I will find a right way to become a great monarch"⁴⁴. This commonality justifies the Emperor's preference to his youngest son.

King Lear makes the best plan for the realm and brings public benefits to his citizens. Any compromise on his part is based on reality and his regard for justice. But the intransigency and persistent honesty of Cordelia are in sharp contrast with his sacrifices. It is Cordelia's key role in his whole plan, when she refuses to play along, that annoys and even infuriates Lear. However, the endings of the two plays are totally different. Lear fails to pass down his regime, while the Emperor succeeds in doing so by making his youngest son his successor. The eldest son burns the second son to death, but he is killed by his youngest brother. The youngest son comes to know all these things and asks his father indignantly: "You plot all these things... You arrange everything... You manipulate everything!"⁴⁵ The Emperor admits it directly. As a matter of fact, Lear and the Emperor have the same goal of "the conservation of the country"⁴⁶. In other words, it catches the core of political spirit of *King Lear*. So after witnessing a series of struggles between brothers, father and sons, the old emperor laughs at last and finds his ideal successor. All the conflicts and conspiracies become essential in the process of becoming a great monarch. Thus the tragic theme of *King Lear* is changed into "a history of becoming men" which runs persistently in most of Ming's dramas⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

⁴⁵ Tian Qinxin: *Tian Qinxin's Drama Script*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 59.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

⁴⁷ Zong Bo: "How to Perform History well: Comment on *Ming*.", in: „*China Culture Pictorial*“, Nr. 11, 2008, p. 93.

The Emphasis on Power

Power corruption, as a prominent Shakespearian theme, can be found throughout *King Lear*. Excessive possession of material benefits makes people lose sympathy and ignore others' impoverishment:

Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just⁴⁸.

Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
Because he doth not feel, feel your power quickly;
So distribution should undo excess⁴⁹,

The afore-quoted lines suggest that plutonomy and material wealth are closely interrelated. When Lear is asked why he needs so many servants, he replies:

O! reason not the need; our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous:
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beast's⁵⁰.

Therefore, if anyone wants to get material wealth and sensual pleasure, he must get power. *Ming* highlights the attitude towards power and struggle, while *King Lear* emphasizes the tragedy of human nature. As the playwright Eugene O'Neill claims, "the tragedy of Man is perhaps the only significant

⁴⁸ William Shakespeare: *King Lear*, in: Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Shakespeare* (second edition), W.W. Norton&Company, New York&London, 2008, III.iv. pp. 30-33.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 64-67.

⁵⁰ William Shakespeare: *King Lear*, in: Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Shakespeare* (second edition), W.W. Norton&Company, New York&London, 2008, II.ii. pp. 418-421.

thing about him... the individual life is made significant just by the struggle”⁵¹. At the beginning of *Ming*, all the emperors of the Ming Dynasty walk on the stage, get seated on the chairs, and then talk about power: “I am the Emperor, the Emperor of the Ming Empire. All the people of this country should follow my order and demand. I master them in everything and they are in my hand”⁵². They believe that to rein the whole country is a kind of “pleasure, responsibility and power”⁵³. The chair in *Ming* is a symbol of power. As director Tian says, “in fact, the spirit of Chinese culture is a sort of competition... the best thing to symbolize power is the chair... thus, no king’s benches are on the stage, but many chairs. They fight for the chair on the stage, which is symbolic of the struggle for power”⁵⁴.

Sitting in the chair, the Emperor begins to hold court. After his leave, his sons start to fight for the chair – the power. In particular, the eldest son and the second one fight fiercely. But their struggle makes the chair drop on the ground, and the youngest son catches it. This action is symbolic of his final possession of power. Apart from the three sons, other people also have the ambition to gain power. After the general and counselor take the Emperor’s orders to solve the conflict between brothers, their first action is also to fight for the chair. They censure each other for their inability to “wait any more”, and admit it directly.⁵⁵

When King Lear enters the story of ancient China, he is no longer the King, but Tianzi (The Son of Heaven). It is not easy to be a monarch in ancient China. The emperors are very cautious of the inheritance of the crown. For one thing, they will not divide their power; for another, they will not choose their successor on the spur of the moment⁵⁶. So, how to

⁵¹ Raymond Williams: *Modern Tragedy*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1966, p. 116.

⁵² Tian Qinxin: *Tian Qinxin’s Drama Script*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 5.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 231.

⁵⁵ Tian Qinxin: *Tian Qinxin’s Drama Script*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 60.

⁵⁶ Shi Yan: “Tian ‘play the gallant’ to King Lear”, <http://www.infzm.com/content/18825> [Oct. 22, 2008]

measure the possession of power? The answer is Zhongyong (the mid-way). *Ming* refers to this at its beginning and ending: “There is a way, neither black nor white, neither right nor wrong, neither supercilious nor lowly”⁵⁷. This can be further explained by the road of power and human nature, reflected in the youngest son. A complex character, he reads many books, but lacks practical experience. He even pretends to be crazy for the sake of survival. But, by going through various experiences, he grows stronger. We can say that power changes his life, thus acknowledging the importance of power in the development of human nature and the growth of a nation.

Other Features

When talking about film adaptations, Lu Weifu points out: “the art of the movie is the art of the director. The author of the novel only provides the means and materials. It is a progress of recreation to adapt a novel into a movie. Thus the director must recreate it and rely on his own inspiration, emotion and the materials he masters”⁵⁸. This point rings true in drama adaptation. However different these patterns of performance are, drama and movie offer the audience different visual effects. When preparing the story for the stage, Tian pays attention to the Chinese-style methods of performance. She integrates Chinese traditional folk arts such as Xiang Sheng (cross-talk), Qu Yi (folk art forms), Er Ren Zhuan (song-and-dance duet) into *Ming*.

Moreover, Tian also shows traditional Chinese paintings on the stage. When she invited modern Chinese artist Xia Xiaowan, who is a designer of three-dimensional equipment, to set up the scenery, Xia painted a huge set which covered three sides of the stage. In this painting, Xia combined *A Boundless View* (《千里江山图》) of Wang Ximeng in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) with *Happy Fishing View* (《渔乐图》) of

⁵⁷ Tian Qinxin: *Tian Qinxin's Drama Script*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Li Gan: “Lu Wenfu's Comment on Movie Adaptation”, in: „*Movie and TV Study*”, No. 11, 1985.

the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). It was assembled by many pieces of film, as it was too heavy, and difficult for the audiences to wear three-dimensional glasses. However, Xia's painting enables the audiences to understand and appreciate the symbol of China and have a three-dimensional image of the country. By the end of the play, sixteen emperors walk through this painting until they disappear from the stage. This design, by stitching together the action and equipment, creates a beautiful ending.

From the perspective of performance, Tian attempts to use a new performing method, that is, "rehearsal drama". This method guides the actors to regulate their own performance condition in order to create a free, nimble and relaxing one, just as they have during rehearsal. Exchanging their roles from time to time, they may be audiences in one moment, characters in another. In this way, they appreciate the others' performances and make comments on them. Stagehands set up the stage and change props on the stage directly. We can find that this "Verfremdung" effect shrinks the distance between the actors and audiences and shortens the distance above and below the stage.

Conclusion

The theme of the 2008 drama festival was "Forever Shakespeare". "I love Shakespeare but want to explore his thoughts through a new Chinese story. *Ming* and *King Lear* have interesting and dramatic similarities and differences which remind me of the *Zen*"⁵⁹, says director Tian. "In China, the readers and audiences know Shakespeare in literary terms. Few on-stage productions can really express the spirit of Shakespeare"⁶⁰. Although Tian's story happens during the Ming dynasty, its dramatic spirit comes from Shakespeare. Just as Richard Wagner saw in the ancient Greek theatre a chance to forge the soul of the German nation – the Greek drama "was the nation itself... that

⁵⁹ Tian Qinxin: *Tian Qinxin's Drama Field*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 235.

⁶⁰ Zhu Meihong: "King Lear Comes into Ming Dynasty", <http://ent.sina.com.cn/j/2008-09-09/11102162115.shtml> [Sep. 9, 2008].

communed with itself, and, within the space of a few hours, feasted its eyes with its own noblest essence”⁶¹ — we can also say that Tian finds a chance to communicate with our nation, thus, to explore the noblest essence⁶². By using expressive methods and the communicative approach, Tian emphasizes his comedic attempt without changing the theme and structure, the audiences probably thinking about a philosophical topic within the humorous atmosphere⁶³. Different cultural backgrounds make different endings. During the performance of *Ming*, it is hard for Chinese roles to continue Shakespeare’s play; as the humorous saying goes: “Maybe Shakespeare doesn’t know the political and social conditions of China”. The Emperor says more than three times: “who writes *King Lear*? Put him in prison. He totally fails to know our condition and tradition”⁶⁴. Humorous as the saying sounds, it points out the codes for the adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays. That is to say, adaptation should be localized and nationalized as *Zen*.

All in all, in the process of adapting Shakespeare’s play, Tian blends Chinese culture and national features into the Western tragedy in order to give *King Lear* new contents and modern meanings. Through *Ming*, the audiences rediscover Shakespeare and learn the Chinese cultural tradition and aesthetic features. Although the effect of such an attempt may not be perfect, *Ming* is still a production full of creativity and new conceptions. As Tian said in one interview, “perhaps *Ming* will be a trend in the future”. And this is where the greatest and best value of this play lies. To quote Bixi, *Ming* is a play full of Chinese traditional elements under the spatial shadow of the classics⁶⁵.

⁶¹ Richard Wagner: “Cultural Decadence of the Nineteenth Century”, in: Albert Goldman and Evert Sprinchorn (eds), *Wagner on Music and Drama*, Da Capo Press, Cambridge, MA, 1988, p. 63.

⁶² ZongXiaopi: “How to Perform History Well”, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/j/2009-08-30/22472676540.shtml> [Aug. 30, 2009].

⁶³ Bai Yin: “Tian Qinxin’s *Ming* combines the history of *Ming* and *King Lear*”, http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-10/10/content_10172788.html [Oct. 10, 2008].

⁶⁴ Tian Qinxin: *Tian Qinxin’s Drama Field*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 61.

⁶⁵ Lai Bixi: “*Ming* just *Ming*, not *King Lear*”, in: „*Shanghai Theatre*”, No. 120, 2008, p. 14.

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Solvejg and Her Sisters — A Study on the Implicit Genealogy of Virtue- based Chinese Morality in Ibsen's Plays

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Abstract:

This paper argues that, in Ibsen's plays, there is an implicit genealogy of virtue-based Chinese morality formed by a few spiritually connected characters; Solvejg (in *Peer Gynt*) is one of the most significant characters. Rather a lonely being, she and her sisters have formed the branch of Ibsen's main female characters, which I refer to as the implicit genealogy of virtue-based Chinese morality – Solvejg herself as the original ideal of the Chinese moral, Nora (in *Et Dukkehjem*) and Beata (in *Rosmersholm*) as her counterparts (motsykke), Hedda (in *Hedda Gabler*) as her opposite (motsatt), and eventually, Rebecca (in *Rosmersholm*) as her potential (potensiell) alter ego – respectively, they embody different facets of Chinese moral thoughts and thus have revealed the ethic view of Ibsen's plays from three levels: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Ibsen's ethic view coincides with the traditional Chinese moral thoughts.

Keywords:

Ibsen, Solvejg, genealogy, Chinese morality

Introduction

In Ibsen's plays, there are a few typical types of characters. With distinct personalities and mutual connections, they have formed several genealogies. Solvejg in *Peer Gynt* is such a character. Rather than a lonely being in Ibsen's plays, she has become an inspiring ideal embodiment of morality, who has evolved continuously in Ibsen's later plays after *Peer Gynt* and, with her sisters, has formed Ibsen's main female branch – Solvejg herself

as the original ideal of the moral, Nora (in *Et Dukkehjem*) and Beata (in *Rosmersholm*) as her counterparts (*motstykke*), Hedda (in *Hedda Gabler*) as her opposite (*motsatt*), and Rebecca (in *Rosmersholm*) as her potential (*potensiell*) alter ego. This special distinct phenomenon is rather illuminating as it reveals an implicit genealogy of virtue-based Chinese morality. To delve into this phenomenon is not only helpful for the holistic comprehension of Ibsen's plays, but also conducive to people's cognition of aesthetic imagery.

Other than blood relationship (*Blutsverwandschaft*), close relationships between people are established also on the basis of ethics. The holy and promising image of Solvejg and the connections between herself and her sisters have reflected distinct thoughts and aesthetics. Together, they embody Ibsen's praise for kindness and tolerance, and for the virtue of selfless sacrifice, his reflections on the relationship between rights and virtue, his negation for desire infatuation and the impoverishment of morality, as well as his introspection of moral relativity and moral evolution. As an artist and humanist, Ibsen fully understood and demonstrated Solvejg and her sisters' complicated psychological states in extremely painful dilemmas. The Solvejg genealogy (Solvejg in *Peer Gynt* and her sisters in Ibsen's other plays) represents Ibsen's theatrical thoughts, offering projections of his artistic selves. The five images / characters / figures in the Solvejg genealogy (Solvejg, Nora, Beata, Hedda Gabler and Rebecca West) have formed a structure which provides mutual supportive power to each other, interact with each other and merge together. They have shaped a multifaceted world of aesthetics, and, at the same time, have conveyed or have implied Ibsen's exploration and deep thoughts on the implicit structure of the human minds. The actions, features and individualities of the characters in the Solvejg genealogy have formed different ethic conflicts and confrontations, which have revealed different values. If we take Solvejg and her sisters as a whole, we could perceive the great ethic power in the holistic system. As Goethe argued, "the different parts and the whole of a spiritual creation are moulded in the same spiritual crucible, they are blown by a breath of

life”¹. Ibsen himself also said that “Only through a holistic understanding of my works as a continuous linkage could the readers precisely perceive the image and connotation conveyed by each work”². From the above, we can conclude that Ibsen stresses the spiritually coherent nature of the inner connections of all his plays. The fact that I embark on a genealogy study of Ibsen’s plays confirms the aim and spirit of Ibsen’s personal thoughts. The establishment of the implicit genealogy in Ibsen’s plays is not only a method and pattern, but also the spiritual fusion of *Gantong* aesthetics and the introspective quintessence of Ibsenism³.

Solvejg: After Virtue

With Solvejg, Ibsen has “implicitly revealed his self expectation for true feeling and holiness”, “in essence, everything is demonstrated through the vision of Solvejg’s angelical mind. The image of Solvejg represents the innermost yearn of Peer Gynt. It is her existence that makes the final confession and salvation of Peer Gynt possible”⁴. We see that it is Solvejg’s self-sacrifice that makes Peer Gynt’s self-salvation possible, so that they both have achieved the self-realization and the supreme goal (*skopos*) of one’s survival. Solvejg’s mildness and benevolence come from her gentle and polite disposition and her quiet and refined temperament, which represent and embody a virtue-based ethics which focuses on “virtue” and its basis, “benevolence”. In this case, the noble personality and concealing philosophical thoughts embodied by Solvejg’s poetic firm insistence not

¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Johann Peter Eckermann: *Goethes Gespräche mit J. P. Eckermann*, trans. by ZHU Guangqian, People’s Literature Publishing House, Beijing, 1978, p. 247.

² Henrik Ibsen: *To the Reader, Preface to German and Danish version of Samlede Værker*, trans. by WANG Yuli, People’s Literature Publishing House, Beijing, 2010, p. 410.

³ For the theoretical roots, connotations, idea and methods of Gantong aesthetics, please refer to prof. PhD Yuli WANG’s book *Shuang Chong Zi Shen Yu Fu Xiang Shi Xue (The Introspective And Its Double: The Poetics of Polyimage)*, China Social Sciences Press, Beijing, 2016, pp. 206-222.

⁴ WANG Yuli: Revisit “the Quintessence of Ibsenism”, in: *Theatre Arts*, 2013, No. 5, p. 42.

only corresponds to the concept of “*Jing Xiu*” (silent retreat into the world of tranquility from the public eye) and “*Shang Shan Ruo Shui*” (the highest good is like water) in traditional Taoism, but also agrees with the idea of “*Ren Zhe Ai Ren*” (the benevolent man loves others) in Confucianism, both referring to the beautiful life which promises freedom⁵ and sunlight.

In Chapter VIII, *Tao Tè Ching* (*Dao De Jing, Laws Devine and Human*), Lao Tzu (LI Er) has compared virtue and water:

The highest good is like water.
Water benefits everything by giving
Without taking or contending.
It likes the place others dislike,
So it follows closely the divine law.
The place should be low,
The mind broad,
The gifts kind,
The speech trustworthy,
The rule sound,
The deed well-done,
The action timely,
Without contention,
*A man is blameless.*⁶

⁵ The “freedom” (*Zi You*) here refers to the freedom in the sense of morality and free will, rather than in the sense of rights. The conception of benevolence (*Ren*) by Confucius in “*Wei Ren You Ji*” (Benevolence depends on oneself rather than exterior force. *Yan Yuan*, in “*Lun Yu*”, *The Discourses and Saying of Confucius*) and “*Wo Yu Ren, Si Ren Zhi Yi*” (If I spare no efforts in benevolence, I could achieve it after all. *Shu Er*, in “*Lun Yu*”, *The Discourses and Saying of Confucius*) both have the meaning of “free will” and “moral freedom”, which emphasize the subjective initiative of the subject’s action.

⁶ Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching (Laws Divine and Human)*, trans. by XU Yuanchon, China Intercontinental Press, Zhonghua Book Company, Beijing, 2011, p. 14.

Solvejg chooses to retreat in the mountain and forest, to dwell in places others dislike, to stay low like water, to live her own poor and simple life, to tolerate and accept Peer with her selfless benevolence, to stay deep and quiet like sea water – her water-like quality, temperament and attitude “follow closely the divine law” and shape a supreme virtue-based moral power. Solvejg’s “supreme virtue” is not only a path to self-realization, which expresses her supernatural unconditional nobility, but also a path leading to Peer Gynt’s confession and salvation, which combines self-realization and altruism and thus reaches the most water-like realm of human virtue. Whatever the reason for Solvejg’s benevolence, her final *skopos* is for human’s happiness and is on the basis of essential human nature. Solvejg’s absolute benevolent will (unconditional virtue) has transcended human’s instinct in pursuit of happiness only to seek for nobler *skopos*, which has settled contradictions between the infinite desire and finite satisfaction of Gynt’s self, and thus has become the only proper way to achieve her protection for Peer in the denouement.

Solvejg’s virtue-based benevolence glows with enormous ethic power. Her noble virtue mainly consists in benevolence and inclusiveness, endurance and diligence, selflessness and braveness, and most importantly, in self-sacrifice. It is the lenient and extensive love for the world that makes the quintessence of her spirit so powerful. And it is this noble and powerful quintessence of her spirit that supports and redeems Peer and makes him return to human nature after various experiences of Troll’s “roundabout” “to thyself be-enough” (*vær dig selv-nok*) and finally achieve his man’s self (*Mand, vær dig selv!*). In this sense, Solvejg is exactly what K. Vasilev calls “the supreme absolute spiritual and abstract essence of love achieved in the realm of ideas”⁷ for Peer Gynt.

⁷ K. Vasilev: *On Love*, trans. by ZHAO Yongmu, FAN Guo’en and CHEN Xinghui, SDX Joint Publishing Company, Beijing, 1985, introduction, p. 5.

Solvejg's forgiveness and benevolence towards Peer Gynt also correspond with Mencius' thought of "*Ren Zhe Ai Ren*" (the benevolent man loves others). In the 28th chapter of the second part of *Li Lao*, Mencius says:

*That whereby the superior man is distinguished from other men is what he preserves in his heart; – namely, benevolence and propriety. The benevolent man loves others. The man of propriety shows respect to others. He who loves others is constantly loved by them. He who respects others is constantly respected by them.*⁸

Solvejg's love for Peer Gynt is selfless and profound which is expressed through her benevolence and propriety preserved in her heart. In action, she keeps on waiting for him permanently and faithfully, which implicitly reveals Ibsen's philosophical thinking for human's life and love – it is Solvejg's benevolence and propriety that warms Peer's heart and awakens his inner consciousness for life, and gives him the power to resist the "hobgoblin-thoughts" and to regain new re-birth.

Solvejg's water-like virtue essentially derives from her inner yearning for freedom and light, her insistence on her original promise for Peer Gynt being the poetic insistence on her own powerful "faith, hope and love". And all the above makes her an independent individual who possesses a kind of transcendental power – although her position is as low as water, she is supremely noble. In a word, this woman "who represents light with firm faith and fidelity towards love"⁹ embodies "the supreme *skopos* of one's survival" and Ibsen's sublime ideal after supreme virtue.

Nora and Beata: Rights and Virtues

Hailed as a Virgin Mary, Solvejg becomes a transcendental spirit and belief which embodies Ibsen's noble pursuit of virtue, whereas Nora and Beata

⁸ Mencius: *The Works of Mencius*, trans. by James Legge, SMC Publishing Inc., Taipei, 1991, p. 333.

⁹ Bjørn Hemmer: *Ibsen -- Kunstnerensvei*, trans. by SHI Qin'e, The Commercial Press, Beijing, 2007, p. 142.

further approach real life and embody Ibsen's reflections on the connections between rights and virtues in modern society. Nora and Beata are "Solvejg's sisters" mainly because the three of them have common features, that is, they have reached self-improvement in morality through selfless and fearless self-sacrifice, which makes their noble personalities glow with divine light and forms a kind of positive energy, which, like a high beacon, illuminates the world and liberates others with its greatness.

Obviously, Nora is more realistic than Solvejg. Her action of having forged her father's signature and deceived others comprises her flaw and guilt, but her efforts to make up for her action and to improve the situation have created a nobler virtue and spirit. The past guilt becomes history while the positive action has improved Nora's realistic self as well as her future will. Her discussion with Helmer and her leaving the doll's house alone reveal Nora's true and strong self. Her generous and true love for Helmer and her children is glorious, great and noble – she has not only fulfilled her duty and obligation as a wife and mother, but also has quietly shouldered the burden of paying back the debts and maintaining the family – her action of leaving the house alone represents her pursuit and exploration of individual freedom and rights¹⁰. However, the rights of the individual

¹⁰ The concept of "rights" in Confucianism has triggered much debate over the academic world. The American scholar Henry Rosemont claims that Chinese ethics not only lacks the concept of rights, but also lack the series of concepts of rights-based morality; while the Korean scholar Seung-hwan Lee argues that the concepts of "Ren" and "Yi" etc. not only have the connotations of virtue-based morality, but also have the meaning of rights and obligations. He maintains that although there exists not a special vocabulary / term on rights in Confucianism, we can definitely comprehend the concept of rights through the Confucian thoughts with validity; and another American scholar Justin Tiwald holds the statement that rights in Confucianism works only as a fallback apparatus concept and it works only when there appears crisis and negligence in the Confucian harmonious social relations and corresponded virtues. See Henry Rosemont: *Why Should We Treat Rights So Carefully? A Confucianism Criticism*. In: Leroy S. Rouner ed. *Human Rights and the World's Religions*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1988, pp. 172-173; Seung-hwan Lee: *Does the Concept of Rights Exist in the Virtue-based Morality of Confucianism?*, trans. by LIANG Tao et al. *Modern Philosophy*. May 2013. No. 3. pp. 84-91; Justin Tiwald: *Rights in Confucianism*

are the very premise of one's fulfillment of duty and obligation – without the assurance of one's rights, one will be hurt and one's subjectivity will be lost. Only when the rights of one's life and liberty are secured can one become the real and true “human being”, and can one be turned from a passive being into a self-act and self-motivated being. Nora's body, which can dance the tarantella very well but without her individual mind, makes Nora's self cease to exist and except in name and she herself no longer a human being. Hence, to leave or to return, this is the question. For Nora, this dilemma reveals Ibsen's reflections on the complicated connections between rights and virtues in reality after his simple praise for Solvejg's virtue. From this perspective, we could see the character and life of Nora glows with Ibsen's ethic thoughts. Ibsen hits the mark with a single comment “First and Foremost a Human Being” that in modern society, the tragic fact is that human being remains to be not free all the same, which implicitly corresponds with the Chinese conception that “Human being has the rights in himself and for himself”¹¹ proposed by KANG Youwei.

After Nora's leaving, Ibsen continues his reflections on the connections between rights and virtues. Beata, who sacrifices her own life for the happiness of her husband Rosmer and the fame of *Rosmersholm*, is absolutely selfless and altruistic. Different from Nora, she gives up her own rights of survival for the purpose of achieving her virtues. Beata's infertility makes herself feel constantly guilty with Rosmer. Thus, although she is the real hostess of Rosmersholm, she keeps herself rather far away from Rosmer and Rebecca psychologically. However, in reality, Beata's state of mind is always misplaced with Rosmer's understanding / misunderstanding of her, which dusts the harmony and privacy which she could have had in her matrimony. Her self-disappearance is her renouncement of time as well

as a *Fallback Apparatus*, trans. by LIANG Tao et al. *Academic Monthly*. November. 2013. Vol. 45. no. 11. pp. 41-49.

¹¹ Please refer to KANG Youwei: *Shili Gongfa Quanshu* (*A Collection of Practical Morality and Public Laws*), in: LIU Mengxi et al. Ed. *KANG Youwei Juan. Zhongguo Xiandai Xueshu Jingdian* (*The Works by KANG Youwei, Modern Chinese Academic Canonizations*), Hebei Education Press, Shijiazhuang, 1996, p. 6.

as her despair with life. It is the renouncement and the despair that make her lose her own soul, and naturally following this spiritual loss is the withering away and vanishing of her body. Beata's action of transforming her good will into her motivation of morality and actively giving her own position in Rosmersholm to Rebecca implicitly corresponds with traditional Chinese philosophy, that is, Lao Tzu's comparison of the noble man with water, that "water benefits everything by giving without taking or contending" (*Shui Shan Li Wanwu Er Bu Zheng*)¹² which the above Solvejg paragraph has already mentioned and Confucius thought "a man of noble character contends with nothing" (*Junzi Wu Suo Zheng*)¹³. In Lao Tzu's opinion, "no contending" is the disposition of water which makes it approach "Tao" and follow closely the divine law.

In Confucius' view, the saint should also "contend nothing". Coincidentally, Beata finally chooses to approach water and even to become part of the water – she throws herself in the mill-race (*møllefossen*) and jumps into the water to stay low with the water and to retreat from the world. Her self-restraint and tolerance are undoubtedly a kind of altruistic virtue, nonetheless, objectively speaking, due to her excessive tolerance, she has lost the thing she has the right to defend – her life. In spite of this, Beata bravely and decisively practices her virtue-based "law" and exemplifies this good by destroying her desire to live. It is her sacrifice of her own life, regardless of everything, that has protected and preserved the fame of Mr. Rosmer and Rosmersholm. Additionally, we see her moral light deep down in her heart shedding on the surrounding and illuminating the spirit realm of Ibsen's plays.

Hedda: Desire Infatuation and the Impoverishment of Morality

Contrary to the selfless and altruistic Solvejg, Nora and Beata, Hedda is so extremely selfish and egocentric that she would never sacrifice a little for others,

¹² Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching (Laws Divine and Human)*, p. 14.

¹³ Confucius: Chapter 7, *Ba Yi*. This saying is translated by the author of this paper.

and she even fears to bear her own child. Moreover, she has a rather strong desire to possess and dominate others, so that she is very ready to know that Løvborg has killed himself for her. She is also driven by an instinct to destroy all beautiful things, such as Thea's hair, which, at first, she is just "lightly stroking" (*strygerhende let over håret*)¹⁴, but later says "I think I must burn your hair after all" (*Jeg tror, jeg svi'er håret af dig alligevel*). Her desire to burn off Thea's hair is just the same as her desire to burn Løvborg's manuscript "dealing with the march of civilization" (*som handler om kulturgangen*). Hedda's desire to destroy everything has killed her own capability to love others, to love the world, and even leads to her loss of being able to love herself. She can't afford to sacrifice her own fame regardless the preconceptions and common customs for Løvborg's *oeuvre*. So, unlike Thea, she could not feel the meaning of Løvborg's love for her and instead waited for her inevitable death. In a sense, emptiness was overcome by boredom. Although her suicide (*selv-mord*) has resolutely killed the possibility of her cowardly and humble, she has demonstrated her heroic nobility and fearlessness and has also defended her poet-like personality in pursuit of freedom and dignity. The crucial fact cannot be covered. It is her cowardice and vanity that actually drive her to escape reality and destroy reality, and to give up true love and free will. Hedda's suicide in despair is a cowardly and negative way of disengagement and her death has confirmed her being as a negative in life.

Ibsen once said to his friend, the aim of the play *Hedda Gabler* is "to depict Hedda's disposition and narrate her tragedy"¹⁵. Hedda's disposition and character are indeed very opposite to Solvejg's. Her complicated and

¹⁴ For all the cited English texts from *Hedda Gabler*, please refer to William Archer's translation (1891), "Hedda Gabler", in: *Ibsen's Prose Dramas*, 5, Walter Scott, London, this version is based on the reprint in Henrik Ibsen (1909): *The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen*: Volume X, William Heinemann, London, pp. 1-185. And the corresponding original texts come from Henrik Ibsen (1890), "Hedda Gabler" based on Henrik Ibsen (1900): *Samlede værker: ottende bind*, Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag (F. Hegel & Søn), København, pp. 351-533.

¹⁵ PAN Jiaxun: "Haide Jiabule" *Yizhe Xuyan* (Preface by translator to Hedda Gabler), in: CHEN Dun, LIU Hongtao. Ed. *Xianshizhuyi Pipan: Yibusheng Zai Zhongguo (Realism Criticism: Ibsen in China)*. Jiangxi Universities and Colleges Press, Nanchang, 2009, pp. 77-78.

self-contradictory personality makes the play a modern tragedy. For the devilish part of her personality, Martin Esslin holds that the “deep down in her evil part” is “the other side of her restrained and reversed potential creative power”, in regarding her as the real tragic heroine¹⁶. In fact, Hedda’s suicide also corresponds with “the metaphysical will of death” proposed by George Ridge Ross, which in a certain sense is “to commit suicide for the purpose of extreme excitation”¹⁷, so as to get rid of the boredom and emptiness of daily life. Therefore, Hedda’s suicide with the noble and brave appearance actually confirms the meaning of her life in revolt against conventions and conformity and affirms her own survival in emptiness and paradox. If we admit that Hedda’s action is also after virtue but is different from the common “virtue”, then her “virtue” is a “private virtue” against the common good. To achieve her “private virtue”, she usually violates the moral norms and rules in the public domain and breaches the general laws of social behaviour. In addition, she seems to have no personal faith, nor any moral belief. If there is some “distinguished” point in her “love”, it is, she invariably desires to forcibly occupy the one she loves, which makes her “love” more similar to a desire to possess and to dominate others. As a conclusion of the above, Hedda displays the opposite image to Solvejg’s genealogy. She possesses no future due to her absence of love and virtue. However, her existence makes us reflect on “virtue of sacrifice for love”: Solvejg, who always waits for Peer Gynt and redeems him, could only exist as an ideal vision in the poetic realm. She can hardly exist in reality for once we enter the real world, a tragic storm is brewing if one insists on invariably sacrificing oneself and to giving up one’s own rights as Beata does. It is also problematic to act like Nora, who leaves the doll’s house after her “discovery” of the real self, because where she can go and what she could do remain unknown. In Hedda’s case, it is inappropriate to excessively undermine the rights and liberties of the individuals due to infatuation

¹⁶ Martin Esslin: *Ibsen, An Enemy of the People, Hedda Gabler, Master Builder*, in: *Reflections: Essays of Modern Theatre*. Doubleday, New York, 1969, p. 39.

¹⁷ George Ridge Ross: *The Hero in French Decadent Literature*, University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1961, p. 26.

of desire and impoverishment of morality, and to force the others, as well as herself, to self-destruction. The shedding of light of the four sisters on the conception of “virtue-based morality” in different degrees, makes us revisit and reconsider the “righteousness” of “virtue” in different contexts and situations. From this perspective, Hedda’s image has strengthened the ethic power of Ibsen’s plays from the reverse side.

Rebecca: Moral Relativity and Moral Evolution

Rebecca West in *Rosmersholm* insightfully construes excessive tolerance and patience as obstacles to one’s self-realization, yet she opts to sacrifice her happiness and even her own life to Rosmer’s oeuvre. Rebecca’s suicide (“selvmord” in the original text) deriving from her sense of guilt is more of atonement and less of penance. She chooses a path somewhat paradoxical to her own original idea – this choice retranslates and outstrips Beata’s self-sacrifice. This process of “the negation of negation” in her life particularly highlights its tremendous ethical power. In *Rosmersholm*, the close relationship between Rebecca and Rosmer is “like the sweet, mysterious love of two children for one another – free from desire or any thought of anything more” (*såbegyndte vortsamlivsomensød, løndomsfuld barneforelskelse. Udenkrav og gudendrømme*)¹⁸. There is no position for the concept of “righteousness” in between them¹⁹. When they are linked together through true love and emotions, their obligations and duties are all included in

¹⁸ The English texts of *Rosmersholm* cited in this essay come from Robert Farquharson Sharp’s translation of “Rosmersholm”, in: *The Pretenders, and Two Other Plays*, Dent, London, 1913. And the corresponding Norwegian original texts come from Henrik Ibsen’s “Rosmersholm” (1886) based on Henrik Ibsen: *Samlede Værker: Ottende Bind*, Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag (F. Hegel & Søn), København, 1900, pp. 1-165.

¹⁹ The author of this paper maintains that this sweet and mysterious love without desire and without dreams between Rosmer and Rebecca is inherited from the divine connections between Solvejg and Peer Gynt, and is proved from the reverse side in the relationship between Hedda and Løvborg – Hedda has the desire to monopolize Løvborg and also has even the dreams to bear his child, in *Rosmersholm*, the sweet and mysterious love is reverted but has transcended the pure spirit connections between Solvejg and Peer Gynt – It has certain realistic and humanistic foundations and thus is deeper than the general idealism.

the relationship of love and concern. This refined and courteous love admits the rights of the beloved, so it forgives the other's flaws and cherishes the rights of each other. However, the fact that it is Beata who stands as Rosmer's legitimate wife and the official hostess of Rosmersholm makes Rebecca, who loves Rosmer and acts as Beata's bosom friend, reflect on herself and her live with complicated emotional dilemmas and a strong sense of guilt. And because Rebecca has these moral dilemmas, she couldn't accept Rosmer's proposal of marriage thereby replacing Beata as the hostess of Rosmersholm. Rebecca's delay between sense and sensibility makes it hard for her to make an appropriate decision which is both reasonable and moral at the same time. In the denouement, after a conversation with Rosmer, she opens her heart to be frank and determines to face the end of life bravely and delightedly. Her action has erased the guilt gnawing at her conscience, has obtained Rosmer's understanding to achieve their consensus, and has paid the moral debts and emotional liabilities for Beata. Therefore, I argue that we can't use one-dimensional notions like noble or humble to judge Rebecca's action, for, in the imaginative realm of Rosmersholm, it is filled with moral relativity.

Rebecca's action and the moral relativity it reveals correspond with the conception of "Ren" (benevolence, manhood-at-its-best) and "Yi" (justice, righteousness) in traditional Chinese morality:

The king's son, Tien (Tien was the son of the king of Ch'i), asked Mencius, saying, "What is the business of Shi (a noble man, a sage, the very highest style of men)?"

Mencius replied, "Shang Zhi (To exalt his ideal)."

Tien asked again, "What do you mean by exalting his ideal?"

Mencius gave his answer, "Setting it simply on Ren (benevolence) and Yi (righteousness). He thinks how to put a single innocent person to death is contrary to benevolence; how to take what one has not a right to is contrary to righteousness; that one's dwelling should be benevolence; and one's path should be righteousness. Where else should he dwell? What other path should he pursue?"

*Ju Ren You Yi (When benevolence is the dwelling-place in his heart, and righteousness the path of his life), the business of a great man is complete.*²⁰

“*Shi Shang Zhi*”, a noble man exalting his ideal, refers to that man’s self-cultivation and self-accomplishment as consisting of his acts to make his ambition and action noble. And the norm of the noble is “*Ju Ren You Yi*”, which sums up the requirements of the noble person with its concise and comprehensive linguistic arts. “*Shang Zhi* (To exalt one’s ideal)” has always been kept as the spiritual belief for Chinese people, and “*Ren*” and “*Yi*” are the basic qualities in the Chinese virtue-based morality. That is to say, a noble person should be kind and benevolent, should respect others and not offend them, should not violate the rights of others and threaten the life of others, should fulfill his / her obligations with all his / her heart and keep the justice and righteousness over the interests and limitations of both the others and himself / herself. In this respect, the Chinese concepts of *Ren* and *Yi* and the Western concepts of benevolence and righteousness have some similarities as if they are in a kinship. In short, in the eyes of the Chinese, *Ren* and *Yi* are the general moral norms for all human’s action of giving or taking, which determine everybody’s rights and obligations on the basis of different situations under different circumstances. In Rebecca’s case, to tempt the innocent Beata into death makes her neither “*Ren*” nor humane, and to have the desire to replace Beata as the hostess of Rosmersholm and to obtain Beata’s position and identity, which never belong to her, make her so far away from the spirit of “*Yi*”. It is in her own self-introspection she found “neither *Ren* nor *Yi*”. She later made her decision to refuse Rosmer’s proposal and to relinquish the position and identity which could have been obtained based on the premise of “neither *Ren* nor *Yi*”. She has after all reverted to the state of “*Ren*” and “*Yi*” and has become a new noble person with “*Ren*” and “*Yi*” in her mind afresh.

²⁰ The English translation of this episode from *Mencius* is slightly revised by me on the basis of James Legge’s version: Tsin Sin (or Chin Hsin), Part I, Chap. XXXIII. In: *The Works of Mencius*. The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1895, p. 468.

Rebecca's following Beata's former footsteps appears to be a reversion but means far more than that – actually, she has transcended her past self so much that she no longer desires to be Rosmer's only lover (as Hedda desires to possess the love and even the whole life of Løvborg) nor to become the hostess in Rosmersholm – indeed, she has become such a fresh and new individual distinguished from her past self that her conscience has made her realize the existence of the moral laws lying deep down inside her heart and to examine herself so that she finally has become a Solvejgian person who possesses her own rights to make her own decision freely and to pursue her own happiness with / and virtue. Although this fresh and new Rebecca exists only in such a short moment that her later life disappears, like the galloping white horses, her new self has a much richer spirit power than her past self. She has made her life reach the phase of “synthesis” (return to the Solvejgian virtue) after the phases of “thesis” (altruistic self-sacrifice like Nora and Beata) and “antithesis” (desire infatuation like Hedda). The course of Rebecca's life has also corroborated the traditional Chinese thought in Yi-ology (*Zhou Yi, I-Ching*) that “Everything in the world changes at every moment, but only the change itself keeps unchanged and unchangeable” – Rebecca has changed herself so much that she has paid the price of her own life for the pursuit of the supreme virtue, but she has never changed her *Benxin* (original intention for freedom and noble love). Her sense of guilt never allows her to obtain satisfaction like Nora, nor has she had the pride in herself over everything and everybody like Hedda. All her life is a challenge to get rid of her sinful past, to gain freedom and, to discover the meaning and value of her life. Suicide is the special form peculiar to Rebecca to reach the freedom of life. Through the suicide, she has obtained the freedom which transcends time and experience. Death is what she has long been expecting as she subconsciously deems that she deserves to be punished in the form of suicide for her guilt, which is similar to the Chinese notion “*Baoying*” (measure for measure). She does not have the will to make herself a being of ontological reality. Her suicide is a cruel self-adjudication. It makes herself as an individual

turning to rational conscience (*Gewissen*) on the level of epistemology and moral philosophy. According to Rebecca's own words in this play, the *skopos* of her suicide is to "acquit" herself. In Act Four, Rebecca tells Rosmer: "If you know of anything that would acquit me in your eyes, I claim it as my right that you should name it" (*Véd du noget, som kan frikendemig dine øjne, da kræver jeg som min ret, at du nævner det*), "I am quite ready" (*Deter jeg redet il*), "The sooner the better" (*Jo før jo heller*). From these lines, we could see that the other *skopos* of Rebecca's suicide is to make Rosmer believe her; that she has the courage and determination to go the same way which Beata went. The *skopos* of both her atonement and her self-adjudication is to save the best that is in Rosmer". Her self-sacrifice deriving from true love retranslates and outstrips Beata's self-sacrifice and leads to the freedom of her own soul.

At the superficial level, the answer might seem obvious: Rebecca has demoniacally made her choice to follow Beata's footsteps and throw herself from the footbridge into the millrace which gnaws at her conscience. However, more complicated inner movements are hidden here. The striking metaphor indicates human's self-introspective thinking after the natural desire for the other sex, thus revealing the distinguished human nature of wisdom-loving and the unique ability of introspective thought, which can be reached only by noble souls.

Now let's make an assumption that if Rebecca continues to choose self-deception – if she does not believe it that she has forced Beata into death, nor does she believe she has ever had an incestuous relationship with her biological father, would she accept Rosmer's proposal and become the hostess of Rosmersholm and henceforth live a happy and peaceful life? The answer remains unlikely. Once a person has learned the truth, her soul and conscience will be affected thereafter and she will feel uneasy from time to time, as she must have known that she can't always live in the abyss of self-deception and survive in the Hell, full of a sense of guilt (*Schuldgefühl*). Hereby, to make the present self take responsibility for the

past self and also for the beloved person is the first transcendent moral enlightenment given by Rebecca.

Unlike Beata, Rebecca insightfully construes excessive tolerance and patience as obstacles to one's self-realization, yet she opts to sacrifice her marriage, her happiness and even her own life to Rosmer's oeuvre. In fact, Rebecca's attitude towards children is more similar to Hedda's. She maintains that "Believe me, it was best for him. Mr. Rosmer was never meant to be surrounded by crying children" (*Jo, De kan tro mig. Det var det bedste for ham. Pastor Rosmer er ikke skikket til at gå her og høre på ungeskrig*). Of course Rebecca's reason is quite different from Hedda's – she hates children not out of her fear for them, but out of her concentration on Rosmer's great oeuvre and devoted efforts to achieve their self-realization by means of this oeuvre. Although they have already thrown themselves from the footbridge into the millrace before their ideal is realized, they have done it neither simply repeating Beata's act nor dying just for ideal love, but going on a noble self-adjudication after their deep self-introspection and repetitive considerations. "To go the same way that Beata went" (*at gå den sammevejen, – som Beategik*) does not merely mean to do penance for one's sins, but to have the courage to be gladly willing to achieve the ideal of the "joyous and innocent" like a philosopher, regardless of human's deep-rooted conventions and traditions with pains and sorrows for the spiritual oeuvre of man-kind's liberation. This is the second transcendent moral enlightenment given by Rebecca.

Peter Szondi claims that at the moment Rosmer and Rebecca throw themselves into the millrace, "they are not led into the palace like the blind Oedipus, but are deserted by the nature of tragedy"²¹. As mentioned, Rebecca's tragic nature consists in that the "discovery" of her guilt is Oedipian. However, her fate is not doomed like Oedipus', who is led by an invisible force, but is chosen on her own. Nonetheless, I don't agree

²¹ Peter Szondi: *Theorie des Modernen Dramas* (1880-1950), Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1965. trans. by WANG Jian, Peking University Press, Beijing, 2006, p. 24.

with Szondi's opinion that "they are deserted by the nature of tragedy". On the contrary, I argue that the path which Rebecca has chosen for herself does not prove the nature of the tragedy in this play. Rather, I agree with Szondi's argument that "the tragic nature of the bourgeoisie derives not from death but from life itself"²². The tragic nature of Beata's, Rosmer's and Rebecca's fates all come from life itself, to be more specific, all come from their sacrifice for their selfless and fearless true love. Their courageous deaths are their choice to face the future and their doomed denouement, but not the cause for the tragic nature of their fates. Rilke holds that the life which leads to the tragic nature in Ibsen's works "retreats to human's inner mind, and conceals in the place we can hardly surmise"²³, which coincidentally proves that the transcendence of this play lies in its unveiling and revelation of the paradoxical inner human movements. It is because the characters themselves "could only bury themselves deep in their inner mind"²⁴ that their choice to cruelly kill themselves so as to achieve the realm of eternal tranquility has become possible. In this sense, Rebecca as "a snow-white lotus grown up from inside the marsh" (*Chu Yuni Er Bu Ran Zhi Bailian*, my own comparison) has demonstrated the complicated, rich and profound inner movements of the human mind, the level and realm of "synthesis" after the phases of "thesis" and "antithesis" has been revealed.

As Otto Weininger put it, "those concrete moments of the individual life always contain the self which transcends time", "each moment of life potentially embodies the complete human"²⁵. Death is the last moment of life's end, in which Rebecca's performance – gladly and bravely willing to throw herself into the millrace together with Rosmer – has transcended her past self and has elevated the value of her existence as a complete human

²² Peter Szondi: *Versuch über das Tragische*, Stanford University Press, Redwood City, California, 2002, p.108.

²³ Rainer Maria Rilke: *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, Wallstein Verlag, Leipzig, 1927, p. 101.

²⁴ Peter Szondi: *Theorie des Modernen Dramas*, p. 24.

²⁵ Otto Weininger: *Über die letzten Dinge (1904-1907) (On Last Things)*, trans. by WEN Renbai, Yilin Press, Shanghai, 2014, p. 115.

being. For Rebecca, it's better to get rid of the desire for life and to step gladly to the other world of eternity and freedom than to live in guilt and pain for Beata's death. The moment she takes this step she achieved both *mukti* and the reconciliation between her soul and love. This transcendence has made Rebecca a universal character for eternity. The dimension of humans speculative thinking, however, keeps itself away from physical life which has fallen into emptiness and paradox and has become the "impossible being" with the heavy burden of the cross (*Kreuzigung*) in life. Rebecca's transcendental spirit has renounced the rational worldly life but has returned to the *Benzhen* (human's initiative state of innocence and naiveté) of life and has found her noble self which *Zhi Qi Zhi Suo Wei* (knows her acts including guilt) and *Zhi Qi Guisu* (knows the home she finally returns to), which manifests the embedded ethic connotation of moral relativity and moral evolution and the quintessence of self-introspection in Ibsen's modern tragedies.

Conclusion

Solvejg and her sisters have indicated the ethics that the ideal "virtue" is not always opposite to the "rights" in reality. We should form a set of moral principles based on the premise that "human is the most precious": actions which take human being as the dominant factor and emphasizes the survival and well-being of people and attaches importance to improving the people's sense of happiness is virtuous. Otherwise, the action is evil; as the common "public virtue" should be above the "private virtue", which should be improved to seek common good and moral justification. This modern ethic appeal coincidentally corresponds with the humanistic spirit "*Shang Shan Ruo Shui*" (the highest good is like water), "*Ren Zhe Ai Ren*" (the benevolent man loves others) and the humanitarian thought of "*Ju Ren You Yi*" (benevolence is the dwelling-place of one's heart, and righteousness the path of one's life) as well as "*Tian Di Zhi Xing Ren Wei Gui*" (human being is the most precious of everything between the heaven and the earth) in traditional Chinese moral philosophy, therefore, I refer

to Solvejg and her sisters as the implicit genealogy of virtue-based Chinese morality. This female branch has revealed Ibsen's urge for virtue-based morals which have not been realistic as yet. I believe that to further explore the ethic connotation of Solvejg and her sisters is helpful for today's spirit-building oeuvre for humankind, which could be a refined cure for the moral diseases derived from individualism and egoism.

The distinguished spirit and romantic feature of Ibsen's Solvejg genealogy is so unique that it has become one of the landmarks of Ibsen's dramatic work. The image of Solvejg has foreshadowed the new development in characterization and a new direction in Ibsen's later modern plays. The images of Solvejg's sisters have respectively strengthened the ethic power of Ibsen's plays from three aspects: thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The Solvejg genealogy as a holistic system has manifested Ibsen's innermost self and has thus implied the way of self-movement in the artist's soul. After Solvejg, Ibsen continues to pursue a new development and evolution through her sisters to explore variation. The various poetics they embody endure on the basis of their kinship-like relations – they have either similar qualities or opposite dispositions, or have an even more complicated state of life. The solid genealogical system formed by Solvejg and her sisters allows Ibsen's plays to achieve the supreme aesthetic level and the realm of art, which not only illuminates the world of drama with its humanistic and glorious light, but also provides a brand-new dimension with its enlightenments for us to discuss Ibsen's plays from the perspective of genealogical studies.

In conclusion, the characters in the Solvejg genealogy not only keep close intercommunicative connections with each other, but also have their own distinguished characteristics respectively. They have together formed the implicit genealogy of virtue-based Chinese morality with their interwoven web-like relation structure which demonstrates Ibsen's deep exploration and reflective thinking on human's nature and his distinguished unique and integrated analysis for human's soul. In this way, the great ethic power dominating and running through Ibsen's human-centered plays is revealed

and the irresistible thickness and exactness of poetics of modern drama led by Ibsen's dramaturgy is represented. As WANG Zhongxiang put it, "Ibsenism is a kind of aesthetic humanism, which is filled with the aesthetic and utopian ideal of ethics"²⁶. The Solvejg genealogy which carries Ibsen's aesthetic ideal of ethics has also unfolded its powerful *Gantong* force. As one of the classic canon works, Ibsen's plays are read and reread from time to time and thus their ethic value is rediscovered and reconfirmed during the course. As a matter of fact, they require new elucidation so as to enter the hermeneutic cycle of comprehending and re-comprehending, to seek and discover the fresh value of Ibsen's plays and to further preserve its permanence as canonization.

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²⁶ WANG Zhongxiang: *A Reflective Thinking on Ibsenism*, in: *Foreign Literature Studies*, no. 5, 2005, p. 42.

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Chan and *Chou*: Buddhist Clowns in *Waiting for Godot*

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Abstract:

Contemporary Legend Theatre's 2005 *jingju* adaptation of *Waiting for Godot* displaces Beckett's metaphysical background with Chan Buddhism. Referring to Chan Buddhist philosophy, history of *chou* in China, and comic theory, this article evaluates CLT's adaptation strategies and see how they reshaped our understanding of the role type *chou* and the meaning of the original play.

Keywords:

Beckett, Chan Buddhism, *chou*, the comic

From the late 1970s, the cultural and political conditions for *xiqu* (otherwise known as Chinese opera) changed drastically because of the end of the Cultural Revolution in Mainland China, the lift of martial law in Taiwan, and their subsequent exposure to Western culture. *Xiqu* as a traditional art thus became a major site of the struggle between traditional and modern culture. Many *xiqu* practitioners in both locations started to reflect on the same issue: how to modernise the tradition in order to bring it closer to modern life and modern audiences? An immediate solution, to some practitioners, has been adapting world classics that are believed to be capable of offering alternative values useful for the modernisation of *xiqu*. The most representative case in this regard is probably Taiwan's Contemporary Legend Theatre (hereafter referred to as CLT), which was founded in 1986 by Wu Hsing-kuo, primarily a *jingju* (Beijing opera) actor, and his wife Lin Hsiu-wei. The group aims to 'transform *jingju*'¹ by assimilating

¹ Hsing-kuo Wu: "*Canque Yu Cibe De Xiaorong* [*Smile of Deficiency and Mercy*]," in: *Fujian Yishu* [*Fujian Arts*], no. 1 (2006), p. 54.

elements from modern dance, film, and spoken drama in their adaptations of world classics, such as *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Oresteia*, *Medea* and *Metamorphosis*.

One aspect is particularly notable about Wu's strategy in bringing modernity to *jingju*: he refreshes the audiences' understanding of characters through juxtaposing traditional values embedded in *jingju*, and Western values in those classics. In contrast to the Western theatre's understanding of it, a *xiqu* character is somewhat attached to the idea of role types. *Hang-dang* [role types] is a general classification of actors trained in a certain acting style and skills, which intermediates between the performer and the character, rather than equates one with the other. Given the shortage of actors in historical theatre troupes, actors were divided into several main categories by age, identity, personality, and disposition so that instead of one character, they could impersonate a group of typical characters. When theatre took on its didactic function, as was often the case, role types embodied ethical ideas embraced or dejected by the playwright. The four basic role types, *sheng* [male], *dan* [female], *jing* [painted-face male], *chou* [clown], had different ethical connotations. More often than not, *sheng* and *dan*, as protagonists in a play, argues Zou Yuanjiang, "functioned more as mouthpieces and representatives of first-person indoctrination to embody playwrights' orthodox reflection on tradition, especially feudal manners"². The subcategories of those four role types embodied even more specific personalities and moral values, yet one can hardly claim that each corresponds to a stereotype.

As the division of role types arose from the social, cultural, and ideological contexts in feudal China, the modernisation and Westernisation of Chinese culture and society since the twentieth century sometimes demands a shift of traditional division so as to portray characters previously unseen

² Yuanjiang Zou: "Geti Yizhi He Choujue Yishi [Awareness as Individuals and as Clowns]", in: *Xingzou Zai Shenmei Yu Yishu Zhi Tu* [Walking on the Road of Aesthetics and Arts], Jinan: Shandong Friendship Publishing House, 2007, p. 26.

or marginalised. During the encounter of *xiqu* and Western values, it is unlikely to translate one Western value and personality into a Chinese one without alteration. To tackle this problem, there have been two strategies: to flatten the characters' personalities into role types, or to blend role types. It is even more important, yet difficult to create new role types if the above strategies are unsatisfactory; especially during encounters between *xiqu* and Western high modernist or postmodernist plays whose characters diverge tremendously from those in traditional theatres (in terms of unrealistic psychology, personality, talking and behaviour styles). This challenged CLT to adapt *Waiting for Godot* (hereafter *Godot*) in 2005 to further its experiment on the portrayal of new types of characters.

This article studies how Beckett challenges CLT to reconsider *hangdang's* meaning through reinvestigating and reusing Chinese cultural legacies. To be specific, it deals with how the introduction of Chan Buddhism in this play has lent the *chou* role type a metaphysical implication, which conversely enriches our understanding of the original play. The following section is thus going to address the relationship between *Godot*, Buddhism, and *chou*, and finally offers a new interpretation of the original play derived from the displacement of philosophical context.

***Godot* and Chan Buddhism**

Beckett did not acknowledge the homogeneity between *Godot* and God³, yet Wu accepts this presupposition by replacing God with Buddha, because Buddhism seems to be the only Chinese philosophical counterpart to phenomenology and Christianity that one can situate in this play. Moreover, Beckett has been surveyed by critics from Buddhist perspectives: in *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin briefly discusses the relationship between the so-called Absurdist playwrights and Zen Buddhism that was popular in Europe when Absurdist plays were written, particularly with

³ See Dougal MacMillan, James Knowlson: *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol.1, *Waiting for Godot: With a Revised Text*, London: Faber and Faber, 1993, p. 87.

regard to “the rejection of conceptual thinking”⁴. Steven J. Rosen explores Arthur Schopenhauer’s influence on Beckett exemplified by *Proust*, noting that the German philosopher did owe a huge debt to Buddhism⁵. Beckett and Buddhism share insights on the critique of reason, language, habit, and desire. Paul Foster’s *Beckett and Zen: a Study of Dilemma in the Novels of Samuel Beckett* (1989) is the first systematic exploration of this topic. Analysing the cause of suffering, the issue of habit, time and memory in Beckett’s three novels, he remarks that Buddhism is “an opposite frame of reference and [...] a sharp critical tool [...] to expose the nature of Beckettian ontological impasse”⁶. While he pays little attention to *Godot*, his explanation of *dukkha* [all is suffering] and *samudaya* [the cause of suffering: egoistic desire] fits in with this play as well. John L. Kundert-Gibbs combines chaos theory and Zen Buddhism to analyse several of Beckett’s plays, and reaches the conclusion that after struggling through Beckett’s plays, we as readers “can understand No-thing [...] as the path to the plays’ (and our) enlightenment”⁷. Finally, *Godot* is interpreted from a Buddhist perspective by Mario Faraone, who displaces Foster’s methodology and terminologies to *Waiting for Godot*. Faraone reaches the conclusion that “Beckett’s text contemplates the human condition and elucidates [...] the first three Buddhist noble truths”⁸.

Given the above perceptions and explorations, it is tenable to replace Godot with Buddha. From a Buddhist perspective, because of their suffering after birth, the characters crave for salvation. The suffering lies in their

⁴ Martin Esslin: *The Theatre of the Absurd*, London: Methuen, 2001, p. 427.

⁵ See Steven J. Rosen: *Samuel Beckett and the Pessimistic Tradition*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1976.

⁶ Paul Foster: *Beckett and Zen: A Study of Dilemma in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, London: Wisdom Publications, 1989, p. 32.

⁷ John L. Kundert-Gibbs: *No-Thing Is Left to Tell: Zen/Chaos Theory in the Dramatic Art of Samuel Beckett*, Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999, p. 183.

⁸ Mario Faraone: ‘Pity We Haven’t a Piece of Rope’: Beckett, Zen and the Lack of a Piece of Rope, in: Daniela Guardamagna and Rossana M. Sebellin ed., *The Tragic Comedy of Samuel Beckett: Beckett in Rome, 17-19 April 2008*, Rome: Università degli Studi di Roma, 2009, p. 168.

avidya [ignorance] of the emptiness of their ego and Buddha. There are many approaches to becoming enlightened and finding relief from suffering, the most direct method being through Chan Buddhism.

A branch of Mahayana Buddhism, Chan Buddhism came into being in sixth-century China and reached its peak in the period of Huineng (638-713), the Sixth Patriarch of Chan Buddhism. In Japan it is called Zen Buddhism. It distinguishes itself from other Buddhist schools in China with its preference of transmission from mind to mind and thus “the suppression of all concepts”⁹ that human beings cling to. It proclaims that Buddha nature is within oneself and the mind is pure itself, so that “the mind adheres to no object”¹⁰, such as the Buddha, sutras, language, religious doctrines and practices that other Buddhist branches stick to. Adherence and differentiation lead to the obsession with ego; therefore, as long as one sees through the emptiness of all phenomena, one becomes enlightened, or becomes Buddha. But in order to teach and preach, objects have to be referred to, but instead of “straightforward expository language, paradoxical replies and inexplicable counter questions, gestures and physical demonstrations, and even the shocking and painful tactics of shouts and blows”¹¹ are preferred as demonstration. These eccentricities define Chan Buddhist masters, of which more will be detailed later.

Wu’s interest in Chan Buddhism predated this adaptation. In 2002, he was invited by Gao Xingjian, the first Chinese Nobel laureate in Literature, to play the role of Huineng in *jingju Bayue Xue* [*Snow in August*] written and directed by Gao. Wu agonised over adapting Beckett for eight years. According to Wu, the turning point came during a three-day mediation that he was practising in a Buddhist temple to treat his illness. During this

⁹ Heinrich Dumoulin: *A History of Zen Buddhism*, trans. Paul Peachey, New York: Random House, Inc., 1963, p. 92.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ John R. McRae: *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*, Berkeley, Calif. and London: University of California Press, 2004, p. 76.

time, he not only recovered, but also saw with his mind's eye the road and withered tree from *Godot*. He finally found the answer after eight-year's contemplation of how to adapt this play¹². It is therefore no coincidence for Wu to have interpreted and refigured *Godot* through a Chan Buddhist perspective.

***Chou* and Chan Buddhism**

Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon trace their origin to circus clowns and slapstick / vaudeville / music hall actors, who find *chou* as the counterpart in classical Chinese theatre. Wu chooses the role type *chou* as the basis for Kuku (Estragon), Titi (Vladimir) and La Ji (Lucky), but he also employs other role types' conventions in characterising Kuku and Titi. Po Suo's role type is *jing*, also called *hualian* [painted face], which always denotes the explosive personality of people with higher status. Yet, centuries ago, *jing* also had the function of performing buffoonery. Therefore, in this play Po Suo is also very comical and his performing style is influenced by *chou*'s conventions. La Ji's role type is *wuchou* [martial clown] because he exhibits myriad acrobatics and martial movements in his thinking dance.

The origin of *chou* is highly contested¹³, but according to theatre historians it originated with court jesters and tricksters¹⁴, similar to the origin of clowns in Western theatre¹⁵. The clown in Western theatre is a general and unspecified term for fools, jesters, tricksters, *zanni*, and their variants in

¹² See Hsing-kuo Wu: "Xingsu Xin Zhongguo Xiqu [Reshaping Classical Chinese Theatre]", in: *Ershiyi Shiji [Twenty-First Century]*, no. 112 (2009), p. 94.

¹³ In its most common literal meaning, *chou* means ugly or ugliness. But due to the complicated history of Chinese characters, there are many interpretations. See Ashley Thorpe: *The Role of the Chou ("Clown") in Traditional Chinese Drama: Comedy, Criticism, and Cosmology on the Chinese Stage*, Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007, pp. 47-62. "Clowns" in Western theatre is translated into *chou* in Chinese.

¹⁴ See Lirong Luo: *Xiqu Mianmian Guan [Aspects of Classical Chinese Theatre]*, Taipei: Kuo Chia Publishing Co., 2008, pp. 182-188.

¹⁵ See Enid Welsford: *The Fool: His Social and Literary Story*, London: Faber and Faber, 1968.

other performing arts, such as slapstick, vaudeville, burlesque, and music hall. Despite clowns' culturally varied and specific performing techniques, they share the spirit of making fun of normality. Take the Chinese clown as an example: comical performances in traditional Chinese theatre invariably had a satirical bloodline¹⁶, and "the most enduring type of Chinese humour has been that which contains some kind of moral message"¹⁷. Such a convention is preserved in *chou*. *Chou* could not only represent flawed figures such as worthless thieves, stupid rulers, arrogant scholars, and even conservative saints so as to mock them, but also decent officials, innocent salesman, and honest thieves, who are comic but without moral flaws. Such positive roles exist to contrast with the negative ones. Although *chou* can hardly be the lead in a play and is seldom taken seriously by audiences, its socially subversive yet comic words and action are rarely downplayed. From time to time, they criticise reality and reveal the naked truth by feigning fools.

The tramps in *Godot* are, however, largely detached from making moral judgement. While downplaying *chou's* satirical function, CLT highlights its spiritual function in revealing existential truth, which is in fact in line with *chou's* "inherent resistance to the prevailing order"¹⁸. Weitz argues that clowns "occupy a metaphysical level of being detached or detachable from the rest of the stage world and straddling the divide between fiction and real life"¹⁹. He is emphasising the clown's precarious position in and out of the performance. As for the clowns in *Godot*, Styan holds that

They not only seem to wear the masks of circus clowns [...] And behind the comic mask the actor is released and freely exaggerates his points to the audience [...] This freedom is not, paradoxically, at odds with our sense of

¹⁶ See Luo: *Xiqu Mianmian Guan [Aspects of Classical Chinese Theatre]*, p. 190.

¹⁷ Thorpe: *The Role of the Chou ("Clown") in Traditional Chinese Drama: Comedy, Criticism, and Cosmology on the Chinese Stage*, p. 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

¹⁹ Eric Weitz: *The Cambridge Introduction to Comedy*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 112.

the clowns as characters fixed in their roles: the paradox on the stage represents precisely Beckett's philosophy of illusory freedom²⁰.

By using role-playing, clowns reveal the illusory nature of life and stage, which is foregrounded in the Chinese adaptation. The separation of actors and roles facilitates actors' detachment from the plot to become an observer. In *xiqu*, *chou* can "serve as a direct link to the audience, clarifying and commenting upon the actions of other characters"²¹. In this adaptation, they are, in effect, commenting upon their roles. Through the self-mockery and jokes of Kuku and Titi, one perceives transient enlightenment and epiphanies consisting of self-questioning, self-commenting or even self-oblivion. Or, if one perceives them as role types, they, "as the laughable personifications of nonsense and folly, can serve, in their own buffoonish way, as agents of awakening and illumination"²².

Chou is also related to Buddhism. Many scholars have delved into holy fools in world religions, and have argued for their prevalence. Paul McDonald, for example, contends that holy fools "use clowning, grotesquery, and extreme behaviour as a way of shocking people out of conventional ways of thinking in order to make them more receptive to the otherness of religious experience"²³. This is also typical of Chan Buddhist sages. In his *Origin of Nuo Theatre's Arts*, Kang Baocheng meticulously compares *jing*, one ancestor of *chou*, with a role type in Buddhist ritual as well as the exorcist in the *nuo* theatre²⁴ – both primitive theatrical activities – and

²⁰ J. L. Styan: *The Dark Comedy: The Development of Modern Comic Tragedy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 226.

²¹ Elizabeth Wichmann: *Listening to Theatre: The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991, p. 11.

²² M. Conrad Hyers: *Zen and the Comic Spirit*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974, p. 122.

²³ Paul McDonald: *The Philosophy of Humour*, Penrith, CA: HEB Humanities E-Books, 2012, p. 96.

²⁴ The *nuo* theatre, dating back to antiquity, is a popular folk performance in southern China. Its function is to expel devils, diseases, and other negative things, which explains why the performers wear ferocious masks. It is still practiced in many rural areas in China, especially during festivals. Recent years have seen an increasing interest in its relationship with classical Chinese theatre.

concludes that the *chou* role type originated from both²⁵. In *Zen and the Comic Spirit*, M. Conrad Hyers examines clowns' relationship with Zen Buddhist masters. By studying these masters' portraits, accounts, and legends, he maintains that these masters were accustomed to violating rationality and common sense by talking and behaving eccentrically so as to "evoke the spiritual awakening and development of [their] disciples"²⁶, which shares the spirit of comic fools and clowns defined by "queer antics and strange attire" or "crazy sayings" and "divine madness"²⁷. Intrinsically, their similarities lie in their "blurring of distinctions and conventional discriminations, and the unpredictability of their behaviour"²⁸. Although Hyers has not mentioned *chou* in *xiqu*, *chou*'s characteristics fall within

²⁵ Before discussing his argument, it is necessary to introduce an early theatrical form popular during the Tang dynasty: *canjun xi* [adjutant plays]. Two characters, a stupid *canjun* [adjutant] and a clever *canggu* [grey hawk], performed with words and gestures. Making fun of *canjun* was meant to be politically and socially satirical. The performance had three parts. In the beginning, *canjun* utters stupid words, and is scolded by *canggu*. Then, *canggu* asks *canjun* questions which the latter can hardly answer, so, as punishment, *canggu* hits him with a stick similar to slapstick. Having been scolded, *canjun* makes an illogical excuse or behaviour to conclude the performance. According to theatre historians, despite their variations in different theatrical genres, *canjun* and *canggu*, both played by *jing*, were the prototypes of *chou*. When *chou* gradually came into being, it became independent from *jing*. Kang's argument is as follows: *jing*, which meant clean in Buddhism, referred to secular benefactors and labourers working in the temple to indicate their potential for religious cleanness. In Hinduism, the Brahmins (in ancient Chinese: *jing*) were regarded by Buddhists as heretics. Therefore, in the Tang dynasty, *jing* played the brahman in plays mocking them. Different from other role types, *jing* used face paint, which derived from the *nuo* theatre, from which *jing* also appropriated certain walking style and a bamboo stick for exorcism. Travelling Buddhist monks and exorcists behaved in the same way by going from one house to another, so *jing* was a combination of these monks and exorcists. See Baocheng Kang, *Nuoxi Yishu Yuanliu* [Origin of Nuo Theatre's Arts], Guangzhou: Guangdong Higher Education Press, 2005, pp. 188-211. From this line, one can also deduce that *chou* inherited these features of Buddhist monks and exorcists. In fact, in the *zaju* of the Yuan dynasty, the clown figure was sometimes pursued and hit by a rod (made by leather into the form of a melon), presumably a variant of previous slapstick. See Wenhui Sun, *Wu Nuo Zhi Ji: Wenhua Renleixue De Zhongguo Wenben* [Rites of Shamans and the Nuo: Chinese Texts of Cultural Anthropology], Changsha: Yuelu Press, 2006, pp. 151-154.

²⁶ Hyers: *Zen and the Comic Spirit*, p. 39.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

his description. Buffoonery, predominantly practiced by *chou*, differs from other comic means because “its performing movements and language deviate from daily and conventional normalities”²⁹.

This principle of abnormality leads to a number of variations such as in looks. In *Godot*, the two tramps’ appearances and the appearances of Buddhist masters are astonishingly similar. A case in point is the legendary monk Ji Gong (1133-1209), nicknamed “Ji Dian [Crazy Ji]”, whose wisdom, laughter, peculiar behaviour and tattered clothing permeate Chinese folk literature and art. Such cases are not difficult to find of enlightened masters³⁰. They behaved thus to challenge people’s biased assumption that monks should be holy, decent and clean. In *Godot* Kuku and Titi also look wild and ragged. Moreover, at a first glance, their names appear very unusual. It seems that they denote the desolation of existence in a universe of nonsense and abandonment: Vladimir is translated to Fei Dimi [abandoned and depressed], and Didi to Titi [cry]; Estragon is translated to Ai Taigang [love to argue for the sake of arguing], and Gogo to Kuku [weep]; Pozzo is translated to Po Suo [broken shuttle], sometimes also called Dead End as a replacement for Cain; Lucky is directly translated to La Ji [rubbish]. While Wu manages to reserve characters’ original pronunciation, from the Chinese characters one sees multi-dimensional meanings. Their living conditions are implied by the names: negative, depressed, disharmonious, broken, and forsaken. It is dramatic irony to name them in this way, because from a Buddhist point of view they lead miserable lives on earth, unaware of their poor situation. On the other hand, one can also see the performative aspect of those names: by thus calling them, the adaptor highlights the importance of abnormality, as opposed to holy and dignified names conceived by people with secular bias, which could be a departure from convention. Nevertheless, their eccentric look and names are less significant and revealing than peculiar speech and behaviour patterns.

²⁹ Shouzhi Wang: *Yuan Zaju Xiju Yishu [Yuan Zaju’s Comic Art]*, Hefei: Anhui Art and Literature Press, 1985, p. 105.

³⁰ For stories of other masters, see Hyers: *Zen and the Comic Spirit*, pp. 44-50.

In Chan Buddhism language is not valorised, for dharma or Buddhist truth is ineffable. Once written down or uttered in words, truth tends to be flattened, corrupted, and distorted by language. Language that pre-determines people's way of semantic perception is thus more a barrier than a stimulator in breaking customary mind-sets. However, due to the necessity of spreading dharma, language must be used, but in an unconventional way, "not embedded in or correlated with any common-sense ontological structure which is its framework of reference"³¹. Hyers argues that such illogical speaking characterises both clowns and Chan Buddhist masters. Linguistic strategies such as "irrationality, contradiction, incongruity, absurdity, irrelevancy, triviality, nonsense, distortion, abruptness, shock, sudden twist, reversal or overturning"³² are, in themselves, absurdly comic, hence the myriad of similar cases of *chou's* speaking styles.

Beckett also believes in the futility and, paradoxically, necessity of language in depicting a real world. In his *Three Dialogues with George Duthuit*, he expresses his preference for the "expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express"³³. To Beckett, despite likely failure, to express with language is nevertheless indispensable or inevitable. Wolfgang Iser asserts that, "the characters can speak to each other without communicating anything, for the experience has become incommunicable"³⁴, yet the spectator could feel something indirectly and non-referentially. In the study of linguistic strategies in Chan Buddhism, Wang Youru argues for indirect communication as a chief

³¹ Chung-Ying Cheng: "On Zen (Ch'an) Language and Zen Paradoxes", in: *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (1973), p. 91.

³² Hyers: *Zen and the Comic Spirit*, p. 142.

³³ Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit: *Proust; [and] Three Dialogues: Samuel Beckett & Georges Duthuit*, London: John Calder, 1976, p. 103.

³⁴ Wolfgang Iser: *Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Language*, in: *Modern Drama* 9, no. 3 (1966), p. 251.

means, which include paradoxical, tautological and poetic languages³⁵. By way of *Godot*, we have an irrationally unconventional question and answer at the very beginning of the play:

Titi: ... So there you are again.

Kuku: Am I?

Titi: I thought you were gone forever.

Kuku: Me too.

In the beginning, this conversation sounds paradoxical in terms of statement and reality: Titi acknowledges Kuku's presence while Kuku questions it, although he is indeed physically present. But taken seriously from a different perspective, it also reveals significant Buddhist insights: "The lack of continuity, but at the same time the substantial oneness amongst the various 'selves' generated by the ravaging activity of the 'yesterdays'"³⁶. If one explores deeper with Buddhism, this casual talk could lead to the realisation of the annihilation of time or even self in Buddhist philosophy. Such questioning could continue, if one goes deeper than the comic skin, in search for the hidden truth.

Besides the paradox of reality, there is another paradoxical strategy in Beckett's work: self-generating metalinguistic paradox. Rolf Breuer has elaborated and discussed such paradoxes³⁷, but here I will only refer to one of them: recursion. The following dialogue could exemplify its connotation:

KuKu: (*pretending to search*). Popo... Po Zhuo...

Titi: (*ditto*). Bobo... Bo Duo?

Po Suo: Hear me: PPPOSSSUO!

³⁵ See Youru Wang: *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism: The Other Way of Speaking*, London: Routledge Curzon, 2003, pp. 175-186.

³⁶ Faraone: 'Pity We Haven't a Piece of Rope': Beckett, *Zen and the Lack of a Piece of Rope*, p. 162.

³⁷ See Rolf Breuer: *Paradox in Beckett*, in: *The Modern Language Review* 88, no. 3 (1993), pp. 562-569.

Kuku: Ah! Bubu... Bu Duo...

Titi: Duoduo... Duosuo...

Structural recursion is a common feature of Beckett's fiction and drama, but in the case of Po Suo's name, recursion works on a metalinguistic rather than metanarrative or metadramatic level. His original name "Po Suo" becomes a starting point of somewhat changed recursion and quotation, and the point here, according to Breuer, is "the question of sameness in difference, the question of identity and difference"³⁸. From a comic perspective, this is a classic gag that uses homophony and incongruity to evoke laughter, but certainly it lends itself to a Buddhist interpretation. As mentioned above, a name to some extent defines a person and gives him / her a superimposed identity. In Buddhism the self is non-existent because everything is impermanent. The joke on Po Suo's name indicates this idea of *anatta*, or the negation of self. It is further endorsed by Po Suo's obliviousness to everything that has happened and his name in the second day, which contrasts with his insistence on the correct pronunciation of his name on the first day. His obsession with his name brings him to a dead end. Echoing Breuer's comments, in Buddhism the obsession with discrimination is a hindrance to the path of spiritual liberation; all those dichotomies are *lakshya* [phenomena] as human beings' projection of their own belief system. Intrinsically they are unreal and delusional.

In order to inform people of the essence of non-duality, Buddhist masters often behave against normality. Likewise, the essence of clowns lies in their eccentricities, which permeate through *Godot*. Kuku and Titi's hat game is rich in interpretation. This game, possibly from Marx Brothers' film *Duck Soup* (1933)³⁹, is displaced by Beckett into a metaphysical context, which is also implemented in this adaptation to showcase *chou's* antics. One would question the point of playing with the hats: in the source play

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 579.

³⁹ See McMillan and Knowlson: *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett. Vol.1, Waiting for Godot: With a Revised Text*, p. 157.

they are metatheatrically performing the hat game common in Western comic arts so as to kill time. Comical as it is, a Chinese spectator might fail to see this allusion but find it absurdly strange. If one cares to think further within the Buddhist context, this game could imply the instability and delusion of the differentiation between Kuku, Titi and La Ji: all of them are tied and thus suffer, and the relation between Po Suo and La Ji is a metaphor for that between Guotuo and the two tramps. Edith Kern argues that the change of hats “is made not only comical, but in its context conveys a sentiment of the homelessness of man and of his ultimate namelessness in the universe”⁴⁰. The namelessness here indicates the absence of the self.

A most impressive and absurd scene in this play is Kuku’s proposal that they hang themselves, after being asked by Titi what to do next to kill time. It is abruptly unconventional; what is even more absurd is that Titi accepts this proposal, which, to borrow Tatiana Chemi’s comment on Beckett’s comedy, “disorients the audience or reader with a cognitive shock”⁴¹. A second thought reveals the unwitting wisdom in this. Both of them seem very excited about hanging themselves, knowing that they are playing the game of hanging, rather than actually doing it. Metaphorically, by killing themselves, they kill time, so that time relies on the subjective ego; by eliminating the ego, they terminate their waiting. Hanging implies a way to relieve the self from the impasse: to get rid of the obsession with the ego. As a radical means of illumination, the hanging game thus becomes a metaphor situated properly in this context.

Interestingly, in this play, Kuku is always foolishly wise with provocative nonsense, while Titi gradually perceives the emptiness in their waiting. But as characters, they are by no means wise. The similarities and differences between the two tramps and Buddhist masters can be analogised with a well-known saying. There are three levels of wisdom: on the lowest level, one sees mountains as

⁴⁰ Edith Kern: *Beckett and the Spirit of the Commedia Dell’arte*, in *Modern Drama* 9, no. 3 (1966), p. 263.

⁴¹ Tatiana Chemi: *In the Beginning Was the Pun: Comedy and Humour in Samuel Beckett’s Theatre*, trans. Julia Campbell Hamilton and Tatiana Chemi, Aalborg: Aalborg University Press, 2013, p. 27.

mountains; on the middle level, one sees mountains as something else; on the highest level, again one sees mountains as mountains. If Buddhist masters are on the highest level where things are perceived in their own right, then Kuku is on the lowest level where he unwarily sees truth that has no impact on him, and Titi is heading towards the middle level because he uses his intelligence to explain the extra meaning in their waiting. An irony locates itself in the similitude of visible factors. Bert O. States argues for a phenomenological division of actors into the storyteller and the character⁴². This applies well to this play: characters in this adaptation are trapped, whereas the *chou* role type is emancipated as the one who sends performative message to audiences for them to transcend the second level and reach the epiphany. The performative gags and antics function to entertain and, more importantly, to enlighten the audience.

CLT deliberately creates a respite from bustling performance for both audiences and roles to contemplate previous fury in invaluable silence. When tension in their conversation and movement culminates, a short peace follows. It is peace after clamour, surrender to the failure of pretending to control the self and the environment. During such occasions, a short passage of *gugin* will be heard as a respite from earthly sound and fury to signify a possible moment of epiphany because “[m]uch of what Beckett has to say in his drama lies in what is omitted”⁴³. *Gugin*, a seven-stringed Chinese musical instrument with a history of more than three thousand years, is often associated with history, stillness, nature, seclusion, and metaphysics, and it is seldom used in *xiqu*. Because of this, *gugin* establishes a metaphysical atmosphere in the performance. The two tramps stand in stillness, frozen. The stillness denies all their make-believe activities of inventing meaning out of nothing. This is similar to the notion of Buddhist emptiness, “a powerful, mysterious, blissful nothingness, full o

⁴² Bert O. States: *The Actor's Presence: Three Phenomenal Modes*, in Phillip B. Zarrilli ed., *Acting (Re)Considered: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 23.

⁴³ Ronan McDonald: *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 36.

potentiality and life”⁴⁴. Silence and stillness are a positive negation of their previous meaning-creating hustle and bustle. In realising the futility of waiting, both are expected to perceive the truth of emptiness⁴⁵. Wu writes,

In Beckett’s text there are many crucial moments of silence, which resemble blankness in Chinese painting, or epiphany in Chan Buddhism. [...] Can the characters’ frequent motionlessness after their bustle point out that “dharma is beyond motion”?⁴⁶

By contrasting bustle and silence, Wu reveals that dharma or Buddha will fall under neither, but stem from perception in the individual’s mind that transcends this discrimination. If Beckett’s characters end in loss of reason, chaos, meaninglessness, and despairing inability to change or even narrate the above predicaments, then Buddhist explanation is the ignorance of the ready exit. Wu’s interpretation of *Godot*, as demonstrated in his article *The Smile of Deficiency and Mercy*, reveals more: deficiency implies the four major characters’ physical and spiritual incompleteness; mercy is a detached Buddhist viewpoint that every suffering human being deserves mercy from others, including Buddha; smile denotes the fact that the play has a comic spirit within itself⁴⁷. A combination of the above observations, the theme of this adaptation is: imperfect human beings’ suffering in a meaningless world; mistaken belief in their upcoming saviour and ignorance of the right way to change their condition; feigned happiness in empty gags, tricks and games. The contrast of the tragic essence and comic appearance contains the darkness of this play.

⁴⁴ Hyers: *Zen and the Comic Spirit*, p. 90.

⁴⁵ There are several moments when the tramps are on the verge of becoming enlightened in such emptiness, but their meditation is soon interrupted by their impatience, or the advent of Pozzo, Lucky, and the Boy. In Buddhist legend, the Buddha found the truth under a tree. The creator of this play purposely hangs a branch high above the stage. It could be interpreted as a parody of the Buddhist tree. Ironically, day after day, they are stuck in their old habits. As long as they fail to forsake habits, they will never be saved, or Buddha will never come.

⁴⁶ Wu: “*Canque Yu Cibe De Xiaorong* [Smile of Deficiency and Mercy]”, p. 56.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Because of the in-depth interaction, the potential of the role type, Beckett is simultaneously realised through such an intercultural encounter. When Beckett is displaced in a Buddhist context, many signs start to take on new meanings by themselves. The encounter between Beckett's metaphysical clowns and *chou* actors unearths *chou*'s facets as holy fools covered by moral teachings rooted in Chinese literature and art. What *xiqu* could obtain from intercultural adaptation is not only progression to the other, but a return to the self.

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The Reception of Beckett's Drama in China

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Abstract:

China has experienced the reception of Beckett's dramas since 1962, more than half a century. The paper collects comprehensively, combs systematically, and analyzes deeply the translation, researches and performance of Beckett's dramas. The paper attempts to find the achievements and shortages of the studies on Beckett's drama in China.

Keywords: Beckett, drama, *Waiting for Godot*, China, reception study

One of the greatest dramatists in the 20th century, Samuel Beckett won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969 for “his writing, which – in new forms for the novel and drama – in the world of modern man acquires its elevation”.¹ The researches on the reception of Beckett's drama in China, including the recognition or rejection, understanding or misunderstanding, imitation or appropriation in translations, studies and performances, can clarify the circumstances and to what extent his drama was accepted. Meanwhile, it will also help us to analyze the variation and misreading in the process of reception, caused by the different subjectivity's choice. Furthermore, we will better understand the influences Beckett brought to China's theatre and literature. It is of great academic value and realistic significance to explore the law of communication between China and western culture, literature and theater, to deepen the mutual absorption

¹ Karl Regna Gierow: *Award Ceremony Speech*, 1969, *Nobelprize.org*. Nobel Media AB 2014. Web. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1969/press.html [April 2, 2016]

and rejection between China and western literature and theater, and to develop the mutual recognition and complementation.

1. The academic history

As a mark or milestone, Beckett imposes wide-spread influences all over the world. Thus there is an abundance of research on his plays, both domestic and abroad. In Western academia, he has already been canonized. As for the reception of Beckett in China, there are some scholars who have touched upon comparing his international fame and with mature researches in Europe, but it is far from enough. Zhang Helong accounts of how Beckett's works were translated and studied in three different historical phases (1960s, 1980s-1990s, 21st century), and points out their achievements, insufficiencies and future prospects.² Zhang holds that despite the achievements of the past 30 years, researchers did not communicate and catch up with the hot and important issues of international Beckett studies, lacking personalized or localized studies as well. Wang Yangwen discusses the translation, studies, reception and influence of Beckett in China.³ He points out some blind points, which are the lack of studies on his film and television works, and the studies on self-translation. In his masterpiece *The Relationship of China and Ireland: The Cross-cultural Perspective*, Cao Bo reviews the studies on Beckett's novels and dramas. All of the above mentioned researchers took their studies as a whole, including novels and dramas. Taking a step further, Cao separates the novel and drama studies on Beckett⁴ as he summarized the criticism of his drama in five aspects and six microsystems. According to Cao, these are the following: art of time and space, art of language, art of the plot, psychoanalysis and politics of the body and, history of dramatic art – all five are the results of four turnings.

² Zhang Helong: *The Samuel Beckett Studies in China*, in: Foreign Literature, Nr. 3, 2010.

³ Wang Yangwen: *The Literature Review of Beckett Studies in China*, in: Jianghuai Forum, Nr. 6, 2010.

⁴ Cao Bo: *Beckett's Dramas in China*, in: Foreign Literature Studies, Nr. 3, 2011.

In the recent years, there seems to be a fifth turning which result in a sixth microsystem, which is the comparison of Beckett with other playwrights or dramatists. In *The Reception of Beckett's Dramas in China*, Liu Xiuyu introduced the main features of the reception history of his drama from the perspectives of theatrical theory and practice, reflecting on the China's reception in contrast with the research results in foreign countries.⁵ Cao and Liu's researches are of value to a certain extent, however, the former focused only on criticism of Beckett's drama, excluding translation and performance in it, which are two very important aspects of the reception. The latter included the translation, studies and performances; however, some historical facts need to be verified and clarified.

2. The studies abroad

So far, in Western academia, there are hundreds of masterpieces and thousands of articles on Beckett. There are also two special periodicals—*Journal of Beckett Studies* and *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*. Generally speaking, the Western academia studies on his *oeuvre* went through the philosophical stage in 1960s and 1970s, the theatrical art stage in 1980s and 1990s, and the multiplied research stage in the 21st century. The most influential works in the first stage are Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), Eugene Webb's *The Plays of Samuel Beckett* (1972), and James Knowlson's *Light and Darkness in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett* (1972). These books discussed the playwright's drama on many levels from the diverse perspectives, but especially from the perspective of philosophy and literature. The focus of the second stage was mainly on the artistic expression of his plays. For example, Linda Benzvi's *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives* (1990) and Anna McMullan's *Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett Later Drama* (1993); both provided the systematic and theoretical prerequisite for the later researches. The third stage witnessed broader visions and multiple levels of Beckett's dramatic researches which carried on from the

⁵ Liu Xiuyu: *The Reception of Beckett's Drama in China*, in: Literature and Art Forum, Nr. 7, 2013.

aspects of post-structuralism, reader response criticism and feminist criticism and so on. The typical representatives are *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (2010) by Anna McMullan in 2010, and *Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland* edited by David Tucker *et al.* in 2016. In recent years, there is the rising of what Alain Badiou called "Ethical Turning" in Beckett's drama research and his idea imposed strong impact on criticism, causing the trend of ethical research on Beckett.

3. The studies in China

3.1. *The translation and introduction of Beckett in China*

A decade after the debut of *Waiting for Godot* won international reputation for Beckett, China opened the road to know about it. The introduction of the Irish playwright and his *Waiting for Godot* came before the translation, and 1962 the author was introduced into China for the first time by Cheng Yisi. His article *The Anatomy of French Avant-garde Theatre* published in *People's Daily* introduced briefly the plot of *Waiting for Godot*. In 1963, Dong Hengxun published *The Degeneration of Theatre Arts – On French Anti-Theatre School* in the journal *Frontier*. In 1964, *World Knowledge* published Ding Yaozan's *The Avant-garde Literature and Arts in the Western World*. Both Dong and Ding criticized severely the so-called Theatre of the Absurd represented by Beckett and *Waiting for Godot* as ridiculous and malicious.

It was Shi Xianrong (1927-1993) who translated *Waiting for Godot* from English into Chinese for the first time, published in 1965 in the form of "yellow-covered book", referring to the negative textbook, being criticized as "the Western bourgeoisie anti-revolutionary arts trend". The "yellow-covered book", marked as "internal publication", was available to leaders above a certain level and some famous writers only, who were considered as having established a firm attitude that wouldn't been polluted by the Western degeneration. Shi's translation had been the only version

for a rather long historical period for it was not until 2006 that another translation from French by Yu Zhongxian was published. Because of the Cultural Revolution for a decade, the late 1960s and 1970s witnessed a blank period of translation and introduction of any foreign literature. When the Cultural Revolution ended, or at least weakened, in the early 1980s, Chinese people's interests in Western modernism works were aroused, and some publications of foreign literature came out. Shi's translation was included in many selected works, such as *The Collected Works of the Theatre of the Absurd* published by Shanghai Translation Publishing House in 1980, *The Selected Works of the Theatre of the Absurd* by Foreign Literature Publishing House in 1983, *The Selected Works of Foreign Modernism* in 1984, and *The Vault of Nobel Prize for Literature* published by China Society Publishing House in 1998.

The first person who introduced *Waiting for Godot* after the Cultural Revolution was Zhu Hong. In 1978, World Literature published Zhu Hong's *Review on The Theatre of Absurd*. The article introduced the meaning of absurdity, Beckett and *Waiting for Godot*. In November of 1978, Foreign Literature Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences held a National Meeting of Foreign Literature Researches and Planning". In the meeting, Liu Mingjiu, a famous scholar of French literature, took *Waiting for Godot* as example, pointing out that the Theatre of Absurd revealed the realistic contradictions of the Western world after WWII, and showed people's hope of the future. Therefore, this kind of work has some positive significance. This meeting promoted, greatly, the introduction, dissemination, and studies of Beckett in China. Apart from *Waiting for Godot*, some other works began to be translated. Jin Zhiping translated *Happy Days* from French, and it was included into the *The Selected Works of the Theatre of the Absurd* by Foreign Literature Publishing House in 1983. Shu Xiaomei translated *Krapp's Last Tape* from English and was published in *Foreign Literature* in 1992. In 2006, in order to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of Beckett's birth, Hunan Literature and Art Press published *The Selected Works of Samuel Beckett* in five volumes, all from French. *Waiting*

for *Godot* translated by Yu Zhongxian from French was included. *Endgame* and *Act Without Words I & II* were translated by Zhao Jiahe and included into Book 4 *Comment C'est*. These were the volumes that included the most of Beckett's plays at that time and later on, more and more plays were beginning to be included in the collection of his complete works. In 2012, Hunan Literature and Art Press republished *The Selected Works of Samuel Beckett*, eleven volumes this time. Apart from Yu Zhongxian's translation of *Waiting for Godot*, in Book 7, *The Collection of Plays*, it included Zhao Jiahe and Xie Yang's translation of *Endgame*, *Act Without Words I & II*, *Rough for Theatre I & II*, *Rough for Radio I & II*, *What Where* and so on, ten plays in all. In April 2016, the 110th anniversary of Beckett's birthday, Hunan Literature and Art Press bought the copyright of the works from France, Britain and the United States, etc. covering his poetry, novels, plays and literary criticism. The 33 plays by Beckett were collected, including Yu and Zhao's translation from French and Fang Songhua's translation of *Eleutheria* and Liu Aiying's translation of *The Collection of Short Plays I* and Xie Qiang's translation of *The Collection of Short Plays II* from English. Having 22 volumes, this set of books has been the first set, and the only set of complete works of Beckett so far in the whole world. The studies of Beckett's drama in China

The starting point of the reception of Beckett's drama was 1962, the year in which Beckett and his *Godot* were first introduced. The studies of his drama included different features in different historical periods.

In the 1960s, China adopted the "left" ideological line, implementing CCP's absolute lead of the literary policy – "political standard in the first place, artistic standard in the second place". So, the prevailing thing then was translating and publishing the works of Soviet Union or other realistic or socialism works. In 1962, the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued the document *Opinions on Some Problems about Current Literature and Arts*, announcing explicitly that "we should take on a critical attitude to adopt the cultural achievements of foreign countries, which is

the inseparably important work in our socialism culture development”.⁶ Under this background, the French “avant-garde theatre,” represented by *Waiting for Godot*, was introduced into China as targets of criticism. On the 21st of October 1962, *People’s Daily* published *The Anatomy of French Avant-garde Theatre* by Cheng Yisi, which criticized the French avant-garde theatre represented by Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco, and introduced, briefly, the plot of *Waiting for Godot*. It called Estragon and Vladimir the “walking dead”, and the play “complete anti-theatre”, the “most ridiculous” avant-garde theatre. In 1963, Dong Hengxun published *The Degeneration of Theatre Arts – On French Anti-Theatre School* in the journal *Frontier*. The article summarized three features of “anti-theatre school”, which are deviations from realistic dramatic tradition, thematic and artistic absurdity, and pessimistic outlook. It pointed out that *Waiting for Godot* especially showed these features, which “filled with mystery, some of which were not understood by even Beckett himself.”⁷ The article threw a poignant attack on this kind of anti-theatre, deeming them as “malicious insult to human progressive tradition and progressive forces of today’s world”.⁸ In 1964, *World Knowledge* published Ding Yaozan’s *The Avant-garde Literature and Arts in the Western World*, in which, Ding thought that Beckett was a typical representative dramatist of, and *Waiting for Godot* the earliest of the Theatre of Absurdity. He thought the theme of the play showed that “it is impossible for human being to find out the real meaning of life. Life is a tragedy, which is filled with endless hope and endless disappointment, the ultimate result being waiting for death”.⁹ However, this strong attack lasted for only several years. The afterwards

⁶ The Central Committee of the Communist Party, *Opinions on Some Problems about Current Literature and Arts*, 1962. http://www.china.com.cn/guoqing/2012-09/12/content_26747193.htm [April 2, 2016]

⁷ Dong Hengxun: *The Degeneration of Theatre Arts --- On French Anti-Theatre School*, in: *Frontier*, Nr. 8, 1963.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Ding Yaozan: *The Avant-garde Literature and Arts in the Western World*, in: *World Knowledge*, No. 9, 1964.

Cultural Revolution closed the door to the outside, “Godot” faded to silence for more than ten years.

At the end of the 1970s, with the Cultural Revolution coming to an end, Chinese society launched a high-powered “campaign of ideological liberation”, the core of which was the discussion about “the issues of standard of truth”. In December 1978, the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the CPC made a clear-cut announcement that practice is the only standard to testify the truth. It imposed great influence upon the circle of literature and arts. Under such background, the literature and arts circle broke the past critical standard of “politics in the first place, arts in the second place”, stepping into a new historical era. With the adoption of the policy of Reforming and Opening, Chinese writers and artists’ interests in Western modernism works were aroused, and “Godot” entered China with a different destiny from the simple and violent ideological criticism to *Waiting for Godot*. In the 1960s, 1980s and 1990s, more and more readers and scholars began to read it in detail and study it in depth. Because of the limited translation, the studies in 1980s were mainly focused on *Waiting for Godot*. Yin Yuebin’s *Rough Discussion of Waiting for Godot* (1983), Chen Jia’s *On the Absurd Play Waiting for Godot* (1984), Wu Changxiong’s *Simple Analysis of Waiting for Godot* (1986), Luo Jingguo’s *Beckett and Waiting for Godot* (1986), Yang Rongli’s *Waiting for Godot and Bus Station* (1988), Hong Xin’s *Beckett and Waiting for Godot* (1989) restricted by historical condition and research vision, the studies of this period were in the starting stage, mainly analyzing the themes and means of artistic expression. Thematically, these articles held the agreement that *Waiting for Godot* showed the capitalistic degeneration and bourgeois spiritual crisis of the West. As for the means of artistic expression, they focused on the anti-theatre structure and language meaninglessness. So, the attitude towards this play was still “cautious, analytical, and critical”, and we

“must make appropriate analysis and criticism to avoid the spirit pollution of the unhealthy stuff to our circle of literature and arts and readers”.¹⁰

Entering the 1990s, with the marketization transition of Chinese society, the culture and value concept tended to be diversified. The culture in this period attempted to break through the monolithic situation, recovering literature's anatomy. So the researchers of this period began to discard the stance of “class viewpoint” and acknowledge the artistic value of literature. Because of the translation of more of Beckett's works, some researchers could study his drama from new perspectives, and employ new methods to do the researching. In the researches during this historical phase the following have been made clear: the features of broadening visions, increasing numbers, detailed analyzing, and deeper researches. Apart from the continuing studies on “Godot”, there appeared studies of Beckett's other dramatic works and comparison with other dramatists or subjects. Cheng Ge¹¹ analyzed the correspondence and complement between Sartre and Beckett. Shu Xiaomei argued that in order to express the irrational content, Beckett adopted the ambiguous and abstract spatial and temporal structure to create the illusionary and absurd stage, in which the characters would feel displaced and lost, one of the playwright's most important subjects.¹² Long Xin compared Beckett and ancient mythology in their subject, background, and expressive ways, concluding that human's literature art experienced the spiral recycle from irrational to rational, and then from rational to irrational.¹³ Ancient mythology falls into the first recycle of irrational, and the contemporary Irish writer belongs to the second recycle of irrational.

¹⁰ Chen Jia: *Talk on the Play of Theatre of Absurd Waiting for Godot*, in: Contemporary Foreign Literature, Nr. 1, 1984.

¹¹ Cheng Ge: *On the Dramatic Creation of Sartre and Beckett*, in: Journal of Northeast Normal University, Nr. 4, 1996.

¹² ShuXiaomei: *On the Spatial-Temporal Structure of Beckett's Dramatic Works*, in: Foreign Literature Studies, Nr. 2, 1997.

¹³ Long Xin: *Beckett's Drama and Ancient Mythology*, in: Foreign Literature Studies, Nr. 2, 1999.

The beginning of the new millennium witnessed a resurging in the studies of the “Theatre of the Absurd”; the number of related articles expanded to several hundreds. In 2006, the year of the one hundredth anniversary of Beckett’s birth, set off the rush of studies on his works, during which there were nearly one hundred essays studying *Waiting for Godot*. The study upsurge gradually faded after 2010, but there still continued to be dozens of articles into 2016. As a whole, researches in this period tended to be more comprehensive, the field of vision more widened, the methods more various, and the studies more diversified. First are the studies on the meta-theatre. The typical ones are Ran Dongping’s *Breaking the Boundary of Modernism Theatre: On Samuel Beckett’s Static Drama* (2003) and He Chengzhou’s *The Studies of Beckett’s Metatheatre* (2004). Ran talked about how Beckett dissolved the theatricality through his static drama, forming a non-unified, decentralized dramatic structure and discussed the features of his drama, including “play in the play”, “self-consciousness”, and “review on the play”. As a result, the author broke the boundary of Western drama tradition, forming his unique dramatic style and mode. Second are the linguistic studies. Huang Lihua’s doctoral thesis was *A Cognitive Study of Metaphors in Beckett’s Dramatic Texts*, in which he explored the use of metaphors in Beckett’s plays, including emotion metaphor, space metaphor, image-scheme metaphor, and non-verbal metaphor, drawing to the conclusion that the characters are meaningless victim of uncontrollable power. The third is the study of inter-textuality. He Chengzhou, in his article *Beckett: The Rewriting from Novel to Drama* (2003) held that Beckett’s plays are the rewriting on his novels, the creation of characters, languages and images being the references to his earlier novels. Zhang Shimin’s *The Transformation and Parody of Genres: Beckett’s Fiction and Drama* (Foreign Literature, 2009) addresses the use of interplay and parody to explore contemporary “human conditions” and the “mind landscape” of characters.

3.2 *The stage performance of Beckett's drama in China*

It is true that the study of the dramatic text is an important aspect of Beckett's reception in China. But what makes a dramatic text different from the other literary genre lies in that it is an unfinished work. It is ultimately finished on the stage. Therefore stage performance is also an important part of reception studies. It will tell how a director interprets the play and how to present it on the stage.

Of all the staging of Beckett's drama, *Waiting for Godot* has always been the most presented. His other plays are very rarely seen on stage. It was in December 1986 that *Waiting for Godot* was staged in China, in Changjiang Theatre, Shanghai, for the first time, directed by Chen Jialin, then professor in Shanghai Theatre Academy. Chen adopted the combination of east and west, tradition and modernity, realism and imagism, concrete and abstract, comedy and tragedy. This was the first investigation and experiment of the combination of western absurd theatre with traditional Chinese freehand performance. This production got high praise from some famous dramatists such as Cao Yu and Huang Zuolin.

On December 31st, 1989, Meng Jinghui wanted to put on *Waiting for Godot* on the coal pile beside the playground of Central Academy of Drama, but due to some reason, the performance was cancelled. In June of 1991, Meng directed *it* as his graduation production for Master Degree, put on in the Small Auditorium. The most widely-known part of Meng's version is in the end: Godot appeared, Gogo and Didi strangled him violently and they shattered the glass of the window, using an umbrella. The production showed the confusion, bewilderment, rebellion and agitation of the youths in the late 80s and early 90s, just as what Meng Jinghui said, "What we present is not *Waiting for Godot* in the air, but that of our present time. I put in it all of the youth's depression, anger, irritation, and contradiction of that age. If you want to know what young people look like in 1990 and 1991, you can watch *Waiting for Godot*. It expressed utmost of the spiritual

state then and those people. Yes, it became the generation's thinking"¹⁴. This production had been Meng's first work which produced wide influence and exerted important influence on his later dramatic road. In 2003, Meng planned to reproduce a unique *A Hundred People Waiting for Godot*, but due to SARS explosion that year, the performance was cancelled.

On January 26th, 1998, Ren Ming, director of People's Art Theatre, Beijing, produced small theatre drama *Waiting for Godot*. This production had the setting in a pub, with female Gogo and Didi dancing on the bar stools, repeating "Boring, how boring!" Ren Ming's production incurred much criticism then, and deemed a failure. Jiao Er, a famous drama theorist remarks, "The director of *Waiting for Godot* is regretful as he rejected the logic of the original work, and didn't construct his own logic. He didn't convey Beckett's idea accurately, but also has nothing to say to the audience."¹⁵ But Ren Ming is quite satisfied with his own production till today. "My starting point is to express modern man's waiting from modern man's point of view. Though it incurred much controversy, this version is definitely different from others."¹⁶ Ren Ming's production is away from Beckett's play for a certain distance, but when we see it today, we should recognize that it has its own value. From it, we can see that in the time that tradition was broken while new order and faith have not been established, young people got lost, confused and agitated. For them, everything was "Boring! How Boring!"

In April, 1998, Lin Zhaohua, who was called Great Director because he had occupied an unshakable position in theatrical circles, mixed and collaged Chekhov's *Three Sisters* with Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, putting on *Three Sisters·Waiting for Godot* with seven characters. The two male actors were Gogo and Didi when they were in the front middle; when they crossed the

¹⁴ Wei Lixin: *Do The Plays: What The Dramatists Say*, Culture and Arts Publishing House, Beijing, 2003, p. 84

¹⁵ Jiao Er: *To Be Exact, And Then Create*, in: China Drama, Nr. 5, 1998.

¹⁶ *Tonight, We are Waiting for Godot*, 2004, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/2004-05-16/1104391301.html> [April 2, 2016]

water and entered the three sisters' space, they became Captain and Baron who had relationship with Marsha and Irina. The director attempts to interpret "different times, similar fate", highlighting the theme of waiting. Lin Zhaohua pointed out that "it was because of waiting that the three Russian sisters encountered the two Parisian tramps in Beijing... We can say that it was the waiting that connected Chekhov and Beckett in connotation."¹⁷ The production went on for 19 times, and did not continue due to too few audiences. The audience's responses were of two extremes: during the performances, some exited from time to time, and some fell asleep. There were many responses of "I can't understand that", or "It's boring" or even "Is this drama?" On the contrary, what formed sharp contrast was the high praise from some experts and scholars. The famous writer Yu Hua said that "It's amazing and enjoyable as it put Chekhov's gloomy elegance and Beckett's somber vulgar into the same space and time."¹⁸ Ye Tingfang, an expert on Kafka in China deemed that it was Lin's creation to combine *Three Sisters* and *Waiting for Godot*, who grasped the "essence" of the two plays. In fact, the theme of waiting experienced by people in 20th century has already been touched in Chekhov's play in 19th century. So there is a communicative channel between three sisters and two tramps, as all of them experience the helplessness of waiting.

In March, 2001, a female's version of *Waiting for Godot* was put on in Zhenhan Coffee Theatre in Zhaojiabang Road, Shanghai, with four actresses. The director, Zhang Xian, who is also a famous playwright, thought that traditionally, there was a set pattern for drama and literature, that is, male-centered. The meaning would be different if females appeared. According to Zhang Xian, though it was a female actor, in fact it was a desexualized body. The actor is a jujitsu performer. The use of it was not to display the gender, but dispel the human body, the mortal body, being

¹⁷ *Chinese Drama Calls for Audience*, <http://www.gmw.cn/01ds/1998-05/27/GB/200%5EDS1410.html> [April 2, 2016]

¹⁸ Yu Hua: *Conversation by Writing of Three Sisters – Waiting for Godot*, <http://www.kanunu8.com/book3/7200/159185.html> [April 2, 2016]

an object, just like a doll, a landscape, which was displayed and consumed, and also the object of materialism, the object of desire.

In 2006, in order to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of Beckett's birth, Taiwan Contemporary Legend Theatre put on *Waiting for Godot* in the form of Beijing Opera in Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre. The production changed the religious background from western Christianity to Buddhism familiar to Chinese, "change the concept of God is dead to the question of becoming a Buddha"¹⁹ according to Wu Hsing-kuo as the cross-cultural experiment got warm responses. Walter Asmus, who once was Beckett's assistant director, watched the production in Shanghai and said to Wu: "What I see is your explanation of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in your own culture... When you perform in this form, there is a kind of rhythm that expresses the innate, metaphysical, and what has never been found before"²⁰. By integrating traditional arts with contemporary arts, Wu Hsing-kuo steps on the world stage by using world classics.

On November 3, 2014, *Waiting Godot* directed by Luo Wei, was put on in Longfu Theatre, Beijing. As what is conveyed in the title, Luo Wei divided the theme into two, highlighting his interpretation of power. Luo Wei suspended traditional waiting, and put more emphasis on the relationship of Pozzo and Lucky. He said, "I think the play's profundity lies in the revealing of a series of relationship in our time – the relationship of man and thing, man and man, man and environment. For us, these relationships carry a kind of threat, or a potential crisis. Based on such understanding, I want to make a completely new production"²¹. The rethinking of power relationship reflects a certain part of the social reality.

Feng Yuanzheng is a well-known actor in China, not only because of his excellent performances, but also because he once learned Grotowski's

¹⁹ Wu Hsing-kuo: *The Directing Code of Waiting for Godot*, in: Fujian Art, Nr. 1, 2006.

²⁰ Li Yanshi: *Should We Wait for Waiting?*, in: Shanghai Theatre, Nr. 9, 2015.

²¹ *Waiting for Godot: It is the Absurdity Losing Spiritual Care That is our Reality*, http://culture.ifeng.com/a/20141130/42607114_2.shtml [April 2, 2016]

performing school in Germany. In August, 2015, Feng Yuanzheng's production was put on in Tianjin Grand Theatre. All characters are female except Lucky. Feng put some elements of current events then, such as the sinking of the Liner Year and the disappearance of the airplane MH370. Through the use of these concrete images, Feng made the audience understand the absurd and obscure play more easily, drawing the metaphysical and abstract waiting close to ordinary life, understanding waiting in our ordinary life.

Apart from these famous directors' versions, there are numerous campus drama societies creating productions with different styles and features, based on *Waiting for Godot*. The representative ones include *Godot Arrives* adapted by Li Ran, Feinaer Society of Shanghai International Studies University; *Dou'e Yuan· Waiting for Godot* adapted by Pengman Society of Xi'an University; *2012 We Wait for Godot* created by Film, Television and Theatre College of Jilin Animation Institute. In addition, there's a dance drama directed by Chen Tao.

From what is mentioned above, we can see that the productions of *Waiting for Godot* in China are not only so many, but also with various forms and artistic techniques. Comparatively, Beckett's other dramatic works are staged relatively few and later. In 2005, *Endgame* was put on in Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre, collaborated by the German director Walter Asmus and Chinese actors, in Mandarin. And it restaged the next year, to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of Beckett. In November 2015, Shanghai held The Contemporary Arts Festival, where the Alice Theatre from Hongkong put on *Endgame* in SDAC, in Cantonese. In 2015, Beijing Xinchuan Theatre and Scotland Tron Theatre held *The Interconnection of China and British Literary Theatre*, lasting from March to September. *Beckett En Bref* was collaborated by British director Gerry Mulgrew and Chinese actors, put on in April, both in Beijing and Shanghai. It included Beckett's seven short plays: *Act Without Words I & II*, *Come and Go*, *Play*, *Rockaby*, *Footfalls*, and *All That Fall*. In July, 2016, *Happy Days* was put on

in National Theatre of China in Beijing, translated and directed by Zou Shuang. This is the first performance in Chinese.

In addition, there are also the performances of foreign companies or actors invited to China, receiving different remarks. In May, 2004, Ireland Gate Theatre brought *Waiting for Godot* directed by Walter Asmus to China, touring Beijing and Shanghai. This was the first time that a performance was given by a theatre group from a foreign country, and especially the homeland of Beckett. It was commented as the most original and authoritative. In 2006, in The Centennial Anniversary for Beckett, Ireland Gael Company gave a performance of the combination of *A Piece of Monologue* and *Molloy* adapted from the novel. Rong Guangrun, then president of Shanghai Theatre Academy remarked that it “found the subtle balance between poetization and theatricality”²². In 2014 Beijing International Olympic Theatre Festival, there was a play of Beckett staged, *Krapp's Last Tape* by Robert Wilson. It was not received very well because of the theatrical rhythm which is considered to be too slow. In June and July of 2016, two versions of *Waiting for Godot* were staged, one from Limoges National Theatre Center in French, and the other one from Deutsches Theater Berlin in German. The former featured the use of Faceless Clown, highlighting its tragic side; the latter featured its scenic design, with a big hole in the middle of the stage.

Conclusion

We can see that there are still some space of blank or insufficiency which need to be improved. The publication of *Complete Works of Beckett* marks the first set of all of the writer's works, but the translation studies of his works, especially the dramatic works are still blank. As an important part of reception study, it is necessary for the researchers to study the translation strategies and the gains and losses of translation, with the purpose

²² Ma Rongrong: *Beckett in Six Days*, Lifeweek Online, 2006, <http://www.lifeweek.com.cn/2006/0522/15253.shtml> [April 2, 2016]

of discussing the generation or missing of meaning from the aspects of drama translation, literature reception, and culture communication. The studies on Beckett expanded around 2006, but drop to a low point after that. This phenomenon shows that to a certain degree, Beckett studies in China are whims in a certain historical period and need more sustainable researches. The studies on the stage performance are far from enough, detailed sorting and deeper studying of stage performances are needed. We can put the performance into the context, such as historical background, director's technique, the audience's reception, and China theatre development, etc. to get a better understanding. Beckett's drama exerted long and widespread influence since it entered China, for more than half a century. It influenced many aspects including theatrical notion, novel creation, artistic creation, cultural life, and so on. All of these provide enough space for further researches.

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The Multiple Transmedia Narrative in China: Literary Text, Drama, Games, Films and Television^{*}

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Abstract:

This article is an attempt to examine the multiple transmedia narrative ranging from literary text, drama, games, to films and TV plays in China. It tries to sketch out the characterization of relevant phenomena. A transmedia production should provide a new narrative experience, which will develop the advantages of various works of art under the restrictions of their attributes, and constitute a dynamic narrative system. The audience becomes more interactive in the spread of transmedia narrative, which forms the participatory culture in various ways. Different levels of the texts create the interactivity and mobility of textual meaning, which form a rich aesthetic feeling in the convergence.

Key words:

transmedia, intertextual narrative, audience, participatory culture

In the development of contemporary Chinese culture, the cultural practices of transmedia are getting more and more popular. The spread of multiple transmedia in particular has become an important cultural phenomenon. Focusing on the transmedia narrative with three or more texts such as literature, drama, film and TV plays, even digital games, this article sketches out the characterization of relevant phenomena in a convergence

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culture horizon, and discusses this topic from the perspective of media characteristics and intertextuality. Additionally, through the investigation of the audience, the audience's texts as well as participatory culture, this article studies the spread of transmedia culture and discusses the generated text meaning and aesthetic feelings in multiple platforms.

An Overview of Transmedia Narrative in Contemporary China

Through investigating the transmedia narrative with three or more texts such as literature, drama, film and TV plays, even digital games, these cultural phenomena in contemporary China can be divided into following categories:

1. The Multiple Transmedia Initiated by Traditional Print Media

To Live by Yu Hua was originally published in the magazine "Harvest" in 1992, and then the book was published by the Changjiang Literature and Art Publishing House in 1993. The adapted versions include the film of the same name, which was directed by Zhang Yimou in 1994, the 33-episode TV series *Fugui* by Zhu Zheng in 2006, the drama of the same name directed by Meng Jinghui in the National Centre for the Performing Arts theatre in September 2012.

Wang Anyi's novel *Everlasting Regret* was serialized in *Zhongshan* in 1995 and the book was published by the Writers Publishing House in 1996. Guan Jinpeng directed the film of the same name in 2005. Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre produced the drama version in 2003, the revival edition in 2015. Shanghai Hairun Movies & Television Production Company produced the 35-episode TV series in 2006.

Maijia's *Wind Talk* was originally published in the magazine "People's Literature" in 2007. The film of the same name is supervised by Feng Xiaogang, directed by Gao Qunshu and Chen Guofu in 2009, and earned 270 million RMB at the box office, it became the commercial film

milestone in China. Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre produced the drama in 2009. The novel was adapted into TV series *Wind Legend* in 2011.

White Deer Plain written by Chen Zhongshi was serialized in the magazine “Contemporary” in 1992 and 1993, the book was published by the People’s Literature Publishing House in 1993. The literary text was adapted into Shanxi Opera (Qinqiang), which was performed in 2000. Li Zhiwu drew the strip picture books, which were published in 2002. Beijing People’s Arts theatre produced the drama in 2006, the revival edition in 2013 and 2014, directed by Lin Zhaohua. There are some other drama versions such as Shanxi People’s Arts theatre edition, Xi’an International University edition. Wang Quan’an directed the film of the same name in 2012. Additionally, there are dance drama, pottery sculpture and other art forms of the same name.

Zhang Ailing’s novel *Red Rose and White Rose* was adapted into film in 1994, directed by Guan Jinpeng. The National Theatre of China produced the drama version in 2007, and a fashion drama version in 2010, directed by Tian Qinxin.

Li Bihua’s novel *Green Snake* was adapted into film in 1993, directed by Xu Ke. Tian Qinxin directed the drama of the same name in 2013.

2. The Multiple Transmedia Initiated by Network Literature

Tonghua’s time-travel novel *Treading on Thin Ice* was serialized online in 2005, leading the wave of online time-travel novels. The book was published in 2006, and is known as the best Qing dynasty time-travel novel. It was adapted into TV series in 2011. Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre produced the drama of the same name in 2012. Zhejiang Xiaobaihua Yue Opera Troupe performed the Yue Opera in 2013.

The Grave Robber’s Journal was originally serialized online in 2006, and a total of nine books were published during 2007–2011. The drama series were performed in 2013, 2014, 2015, touring in some big cities in China

until now. In 2015, the novels were adapted into a network season play. Additionally, there are cards of the same name, films, web games and so on. The adaptation of the novel *Ghost Blowing the Light* is similar to *The Grave Robber's Journal*.

Empresses in the Palace (The Legend of Zhen Huan) was originally serialized online, and a total of seven books were published during 2007 – 2009. In 2011, the TV series of the same name yielded great results, and the comics series were published in 2013 and 2014. Beijing show limited company produced the drama in 2015. Additionally, there are Yue opera versions by Shanghai Yue Opera House in 2013 and 2014.

There are other samples of various adaptation of internet novels, such as *So young*, *Double Sided Adhesive Tape*, etc.

3. The Multiple Transmedia Initiated by Film and Television

My Own Swordsman, an 80-episode ancient costume sitcom, was produced in 2006, written by Ning Caishen and directed by Shang Jing. Chinese dictionary publishing house published the book of script in 2006. The drama of the same name was performed in 2007 and 2013. It released 100 sets of the animation in 2010. The sitcom was adapted into film with the same cast in 2011. As for novels, there are some fan fictions, such as Ye Xiaodao's *The Story of Mr. Bai* and *The Story of the Chivalrous Town* and so on, which were created by fans of *My Own Swordsman* in the network.

4. The Multiple Transmedia Initiated by Games

As for Chinese games, the most typical practice of multiple transmedia is *The Legend of Sword and Fairy*, which is a game series issued by Softstar Entertainment Inc. in Taiwan. It is acknowledged as the classic role-playing game (RPG) in China. It is a story about ancient Chinese martial art and the mythical realm. It has been released as single role playing games of eight versions as well as many other online games and mobile games.

In terms of screen adaptation, the first TV play adapted from *The Legend of Sword and Fairy* was released in 2005. It was produced by the Shanghai Tang Dynasty Co., Ltd. In 2009 the company produced *The Legend of Sword and Fairy III* and broadcast it in China and Malaysia. In terms of print media, the cartoonist Yi Shuixiang drew the comic of the same name which was serialized from 1999 to 2002 with a total of nine books. The second, third and fifth version of *The Legend of Sword and Fairy* series were published in cartoon version. In August 2001, the Third Wave of Information Co. Ltd. published novels of the same name written by Chu Guo, totalling five volumes. In May 2002, it was published again in mainland China by the Chinese Press, named as *The New Legend of Sword and Fairy*. From 2012 to 2015, authorized by the Softstar Entertainment Inc, Guan Pingchao wrote six books of *The New Legend of Sword and Fairy*, which adapted from all previous single-player games. Additionally, there are also sequel games or adapted novels made by the fans spreading on the internet. The stage drama of *The Legend of Sword and Fairy* premiered in Shanghai Cultural Square on April 15th 2015. The stage drama of *The Legend of Sword and Fairy III* premiered on April 14th 2016 and the second round began in May 2016, which is considered to be highly performed like the game and created a fantasy visual effects of the magic world of sword and fairy. Besides novels, cartoon, TV plays and stage drama, there are also some relevant productions such as the seiyu drama and cards. *The Legend of Sword and Fairy* has become the important intellectual property (IP) brand of Softstar Entertainment Inc.

Through investigating the various types of cultural phenomena of multiple transmedia, one can find that most of the original texts have got a good reputation, no matter which media they are initiated with. Only a few texts are known because of adaptation and then become popular. The early cultural phenomena of multiple transmedia which started with traditional print media are based upon the recognition of original texts' aesthetic values as well as the demand for iterating the stories through new media. On the other hand, the phenomena started with online literature, films and

TV plays, as well as digital games clearly show that the context of producing and consuming these products is the urban fashion culture. This kind of phenomena mostly originates from the demand for fusion of cultural resources under the new media revolution and it has a specific economic motivation behind it. Some types of narrative spreading through various media have become a trend of the development of cultural industry in China.

Media Characteristics and Intertextual Narrative

When the multiple texts emerge, the transmission between different media based on the original text actually constitutes an extension of the narrative experience and creates a grand intertextual narrative system. How to deal with transmedia intertextual narrative? Syd Field, the Hollywood screenwriter once said: “The verb *to adapt* means ‘to transpose from one medium to another’. *Adaptation* is defined as the ability ‘to make fit or suitable by changing, or adjusting’ – modifying something to create a change in structure, function and form.”¹ No matter which form of media transits, it does not simply mean the reusing of the original text as source material, but also needs to consider the characteristics of different media at first, and then deepens and expands the story world.

In contrast to written literary works, the narrative of the film and television contains double narrative behaviors, including the combination of the camera language and non-screen narrative factors (voice-over, music, sound and even subtitles, etc.), which work together to complete the narrative and presentation of the story. The various audio-visual words are necessary elements of transmedia when transformed or transferred from literary works to visual arts. Wang Quan'an, the director of the film *White Deer Plain*, once talked about the film adaptation: “Creating has two-tier meaning: one is when some words are not suitable for being translated into

¹ Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, revised edition, Bantam Dell, New York, 2005, p. 259.

images because of the differences in expression between words and image. The other is when choices are not made, promoting inactiveness. The result will be a failure if there are no changes made in the novel.”² Although the film was widely critiqued because of only focusing on the love history of Bai Xiao’e, it still deserves recognition for its presentation of traditional culture and regional culture. The author Chen Zhongshi uses some classical parts of Qinqiang opera, which is the symbol of the yellow land culture. The film shows the advantage of audio-visual media and makes a tremendous presentation of Qinqiang Opera on screen.

Drama has more limits than literature, film and television in narrative space or plots, due to its stage characteristics, therefore, scriptwriters and directors should fully consider that during the process of transforming the original text. But the live performance in front of the audience is the advantage of drama, which literature, film and television cannot replace. It is its most attractive characteristic. The stagecraft of the drama *Empresses in the Palace* got high praise; however, “[T]he whole show looks like a summary of the story and there is no room for expansion. And in order to put most of the original story on the stage, a lot of plots relied on asides, hence it seems to lack drama characteristic and boring”³. The Yue opera *Empresses in the Palace* of Shanghai Yue Opera House made its plot simple by combining the Queen and Consort Hua into one character. The playwright caught the main plot that Consort Hua did not want other women to give birth in the palace, and so the character of Consort Hua is more prominent. In TV plays, Wen Shichu had a crush on Zhen Huan. Considering the relationship cannot be complex in stage drama, the Yue opera *Empresses in the Palace* changed the plot. The film *Wind Talk* changes a lot of the original story, but the drama version has the same structure with the novel. “Lao Gui” refers to Li Ningyu and Gu Xiaomeng. The drama director Chen Xinyi said: “Many cruel scenes in the film are cleverly

² Zhang Peng, *I have the courage to film White Deer Plain*, in: Film, No. 9, 2011.

³ Yang Yang: *Empresses in the Palace is performed, four Zhen Huan tell a modern fable*, in: Beijing Times, January 12, 2015.

hidden in the drama, it is not only torture and punishment which can show fear, real fear is buried in the heart. Only after studying people's inner world can one really feel the fear.”⁴ In order to emphasize the richness of the story, Chen Xinyi adds a new special character – Longchuan's wife: “She is the person who hides in many people's hearts and her appearance is to add to a suspicious atmosphere. It is not only the suspense of external plot, but also reflects the mysterious changes of each person's inner world”⁵. Yu Hua's novel *To Live* uses calm words to describe a cruel and painful story, but there is a different ending in the film directed by Zhang Yimou. Characters such as Fu Gui, his wife, his son-in-law and grandson are alive at the end of the film, which leaves aside some of the plots in the novel. The drama *To Live* directed by Meng Jinghui strictly obeys the novel in plots and characters' fate, most of the people surrounding Fu Gui died. It designs an opening ending for Fu Gui's grandson. The leading role, Fu Gui, jumps in and out of the drama constantly, the actors' lines totally copy the long dialogues in the novel. On the whole, the drama shows “an expressionistic realism”⁶. It is obvious that a successful adaptation from literary texts to drama means proper plots and character choosing, new stage show of the dramatic combination.

The Drama *White Deer Plain* by Beijing People's Arts theatre in 2006 is considered a successful example of literary adaptation. It is undeniable that it is difficult to adapt a 500000-word novel into a drama which lasts less than three hours. When opening the curtain, it presented barren loess plateau and cave dwelling. Under the huge canopy, a group of folk artists began to roar. The scene is solemn, stirring and moving. It not only rendered the atmosphere, but also set the tone as in the original novel. The performance of Qinqiang opera and Laoqiang opera actors went through the whole drama, showing the rich and attractive inner world of characters.

⁴ Niu Chunmei: *Drama Wind Talk, a faithful literal adaptation, “Lao Gui” is not changed*, in: Beijing Daily, November 13, 2009.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ Wan Jiahuan: *Drama To Live, not narrate misery, narrate the people suffering*, in: *China Newsweek*, No. 37, 2012.

The director Lin Zhaohua needed actors to make use of Shanxi dialect for acting from the beginning to the end, which presented the regional characteristics of Guanzhong area more vividly. Although the narrative level and angle of the novel is more complex, the drama still kept the key point of the original text with the inevitable limits of stage time and space, which presented disputes and resentment between Bai's family and Lu's family after simplified the main plots and relationship between characters. As the intuitive drama art, it reflected historical changes during fifty years in the grand national epic atmosphere with the scene, music and dialect.

As a result, the transmedia narrative should take full advantages of media's characteristic to provide new experience and opinions for audiences in new works of art. The film *Red Rose and White Rose* used a lot of words from the novel many times for presenting Zhang Ailing's style. It was considered to be an unsuccessful work which has little space for filming and recreating, too much subtitles for introduction destroyed coherence of the film. The 2007 version of drama *Red Rose and White Rose* directed by Tian Qinxin is great because it presented a creative stage space and characters. The stage is divided into two parts by a transparent glass corridor, one side is the apartment of Red Rose and the other one is White Rose's apartment. One is in the past, the other is at present. Tian Qinxin concluded the stage as following: "It is like a man's heart: left atrium, right atrium. One is for lover, the other is for wife. The glass corridor is the penis or vagina"⁷. To further underscore the division, Zhenbao is played by two actors, so does "Red rose", "White rose". One plays the struggling inner self, the other plays the public persona. They shuttled through two time spaces. Six persons acted the three characters which showed dissociated, contradictory personality and psychology. In the 2010 fashion version, the original relationship between characters is transformed into one woman with two men in the contemporary world. It changed from the male perspective into a female perspective and showed the emotional life of young men and women.

⁷ Shi Yan: *Cheek to Cheek with Zhang Ailing*, in: *Theatre of Tian Qinxin*, Peking University Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 183.

There is another kind of transmedia narrative which makes an extension on the basis of the original work. It explores the undiscovered elements of original plots or tells story of minor characters with some new roles. It likes the extra episode. For example, the drama *My Own Swordsman* is actually a prequel of the TV plays. In the TV plays, the main characters are Tong Xiangyu, Mo Xiaobei, Bai Zhantang and so on. Mo Xiaobao appeared only one time in a dream. But he became the main character in the drama. Although the same name drama seems to be a new story when comparing to the TV plays, there are a lot of questions in the TV plays which had their answers in the drama.

More attention should be paid to the interaction between the audience and the theatre. It is an advantage of drama as a comprehensive visual art which cannot be replaced by other types. The stage drama *The Legend of Sword and Fairy* used holographic and multimedia technology which makes a naked-eye 3D effect of showing the scene in the original games. For example, there is a classic scene in which a winebibber teaches Li Xiaoyao how to use the swords. Audiences praised the wonderful scene for the combination of actors' performance and multimedia technologies. It highly represented the similar scene of games. A fan of *The Legend of Sword and Fairy* once said: "The production of this drama is very sophisticated, the details contain the humor that only old fairy fans can understand, the opening of the second half uses the game loading scene is really moving"⁸. The drama made full use of the space of theatre to allow audience to participate in the play. For example, when Li Xiaoyao went shopping with Zhao Ling'er to buy sugar coated haws on a stick, actors as the peddlers or pedestrians went through the hall and communicated with the audience. The theatre is just like a busy market. The drama version of *The Grave Robber's Journal* and *Ghost Blowing the Light* also used multimedia technologies and interacted with audience.

⁸ Zhang Liyun: *The stage drama The Legend of Sword and Fairy first show, fans shouting of the fascinated reduction*, in: *Eastday*, 2015, <http://enjoy.eastday.com/e/20150416/u1ai8671775.html> [April 16, 2015].

Regardless of the form of the original text, its meaning for the intertext is that it provides the basic image, plot, scene-structure of narrative. The intertext may derive a story based on the basic structure, which increases or decreases, extends and propels on the basis of the original text and then constitutes a spreading narrative system. This system can contain related plots and various characters in different forms of media. The narrative system surrounding the original text keeps a dynamic trait. "In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. Any given product is a point of entry into the franchise as a whole."⁹ Therefore, completely duplicate content is not necessary for the transmedia narrative. What is important is how to avoid weaknesses and provide a new narrative experience under the constraints of different media attributes, and finally showing a text which is linked to the original text but relatively independent. If the text series can be relatively self-contained and great, it can get synergistic effect in the end.

Audience, the Audience's Text and Participatory Culture

In literature, drama, film, television and some other forms of multiple transmedia conversion, the audiences' experience and loyalty are the important factors for producer's decisions. The film and television have a relatively wide range of audiences. The coverage of traditional print media gradually declines when compared with network literature. The game is targeted at specific gamers. The number of audiences of drama is the minimum. But it does not mean that all the audiences of the original level can become positive, comprehensive participants in those transmedia cultural practice.

⁹ Henry Jenkins: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, New York, 2006, p. 96.

In the transmedia narrative initiated by traditional print media, producers often consider the audience experience unilaterally and modify the narrative of the original text. For example, it tends to weaken the brutal tyranny, such as in the ending of the TV plays *Double Sided Adhesive Tape*. It is a tragic ending in the novel that the husband fiercely beat his wife and killed her. But in the TV plays, the wife brought her son to visit her mother-in-law and the old woman passed away in peace. The problem between the wife and mother-in-law was solved by the ties of kinship when facing life and death. The television director admitted that he had initially shot two ends, but he chose the warmer one. The drama version also avoids the original cruel ending. Through the emergence of a new family, the audience can feel the life circle and understand some principles of life. In these transmedia conversions, the audiences still read and watch as consumers.

With the development of new media, there is a significant fact that audiences as traditional consumers have gradually become more active participants in culture production and they are also actively engaged in cultural practice. There are two forms of the active participation.

The first is that audiences respond to contents of the cultural products in various forms and produce their texts related to the original text. During the spread of transmedia, the special part of intertextuality is that the extension and recognition of meaning depends on the participation of audiences. The differences of the ability of grasping the intertextuality, culture, memory and even personality between audiences will affect the acceptance of the current text. In fact, it has become a creative behavior to seize the trait of the intertextual operation in the text through pursuing and collecting information and then look for the relevance. Therefore, the audience's text has an important meaning for us to understand the cultural ecology, the process and the track of the generation of meaning in transmedia narrative. In transmedia intertextuality, the audience's perception of intertextuality might be changeable and subjective. They may construct when they deconstruct. It brings an aesthetic experience which is rational

and enjoyable, different from traditional literature. Pierre Lévy, a French scholar, proposed the concept of “collective intelligence”, “Lévy draws a distinction between shared knowledge, information that is believed to be true and held in common by the entire group, and collective intelligence, the sum total of information held individually by the members of the group that can be accessed in response to a specific problem”¹⁰. The collective intelligence refers to the knowledge and skills existing in individuals which can be shared through the virtual communities and help people understand certain cultural text.

The spread of *The Grave Robber's Journal* offers a classic example. Shao Yuchen, a student of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics uploaded the full twelve sheets map of *The Grave Robber's Journal* made by himself to websites in April 2013. The fans of *The Grave Robber's Journal* downloaded the map and compared it with the novel. They found that these maps were very true to the spaces in the novel and the maps have detailed annotations which are good for understanding of the original text. The fans had a close communication with Shao Yuchen and the maps also brought a lot of new fans. In the transmedia narrative, while the audience searching for relevant information, their excavation and creation of the original text constitute the intertextuality. It also shows the important effect of the audience's text for meaning generation and aesthetic feelings.

There are various forms of fans culture to respond to the cultural products, fan fiction is one of them. “Around any given media property, writers are constructing a range of different interpretations that get expressed through stories. Sharing of these stories opens up new possibilities in the text.”¹¹ The new texts made by fans have actually become derived products of original text. This kind of new products is different from the original one. The network provides a place for active participants creating. It can achieve a communication

¹⁰ Henry Jenkins: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, p. 27.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 255.

between audience by recombining the original elements (words, pictures, sound, videos, etc.) and uploading to the websites to share with others.

The second form is that audiences facilitate and take part in the transmedia narrative which is made by cultural organization.

In the transmedia cultural practices mentioned above, most texts are popular and have their own fans. Most fans have the expectation psychology of the transmedia storytelling. The series of *The Legend of Sword and Fairy* have been used as an example of IP operation and fan economy. Gaming is a virtual world. Game players participate through the computer screen and network. Once transforming into other media, the new text will embody the virtual space of games and stories and be more strong and tense in expressing emotion. Therefore, a lot of game players are interested in transformation, which encourages producers to take further action. There is an obvious relation between producing novels, comics, TV plays and the expectation of fans.

In the case of stage drama *The Legend of Sword and Fairy*, the final plan of transmedia production was created by producing team and audiences. The producer Liang Yibing emphasized in a speech at “Peking Performing Art” expo in April 2016 that their team had an idea – “having a relationship with fans”. The reason why the stage drama is different is that audiences can participate in the creation. The producing team kept close contact with fans. The producer said: “We hold fan salon and ask audiences how they think of stage drama and what kind of stage drama they want to see in every activity. The whole producing process is full of interaction with fans”¹². “*The Legend of Sword and Fairy III* has multiple endings. Because it has five endings and we think it is hasty to choose any one of them. We prepare a plan to make fans vote for an ending during the show. Audiences give a vote before the show and we act the ending which audiences choose.

¹² Daolue Performing Arts, *Liang Yibing: A producer lead the team to make a fascinating stage drama, The Legend of Sword and Fairy*, in: *Wxzhi*, 2016, <http://www.wxzhi.com/archives/059/09h22hk451o7er6k/> [April 21, 2016].

We hope this is a good try to interact with audience.”¹³ The colours of characters’ clothes were designed on the basis of investigation of audiences’ opinion. Fans write essays and make videos on their own which are as the existence of their texts; audiences totally become the participants of trans-media in the producing of stage drama. Cultural producers will satisfy the participant need of consumers more in the future.

Fans formed participatory culture and they were not the passive recipients of textual meaning. As for popular texts, they do not only have their own experience, but they also adapted and reproduced them. They transformed from passive consumers into active cultural producers or appropriators. During the current cultural practice in China, audiences’ productivity and participant needs will lead to more transmedia practices.

The cultural practice of multiple transmedia shows the changes of contemporary culture. This revolution is not only the change of cultural operation mode. The related production companies, especially large industry giants, distribute the content through a variety of media channels, not limited to one single medium anymore. The demand of transmedia narrative is the important trend of integration of cultural resources. The world in which the story is actually formed is no longer presented in single medium or work, and with the help of different forms of media, many aspects of the text are expanded and the original text is continually extended through different media. Henry Jenkins uses the term “convergence” to refer to “a situation in which multiple media systems coexist and where media content flows fluidly across them. Convergence is understood herein as ongoing process or series of intersections between different media systems, not a fixed relationship.”¹⁴ Not only the work itself, but also the discovery, interpretation and creation from audiences, all these are the extension of the narrative. The intertextuality of various media texts makes narrative become an open system. In the process of dynamic expansion of the text,

¹³ *Ibidem.*

¹⁴ Henry Jenkins: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, p. 282.

the dialogicality of all different media texts, the reading ability, audio and visual perception of audiences, their ways of participating and creation lead to the intertextuality and mobility of textual meaning.

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2

FOCUS SHAKESPEARE



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2.1. Studii teoretice / Theoretische Studien / Theoretical studies

The Censorship of *Sir Thomas More* and the Performability of History

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Abstract:

The manuscript of the history play *Sir Thomas More* is famous for its inclusion of Shakespeare's hand. The present essay discusses Edmund Tilney's censorship of the play. The author investigates the role of the censor in Elizabethan England and the subtle relationship between dramatic censorship and state ideology from the perspective of the performability of history through a comparative study between the historical text and the dramatic text. The censorship of *Sir Thomas More* indicates that the Master of the Revels was a convenient tool of the theatre as well as a necessary instrument of the state.

Key words:

Sir Thomas More, dramatic censorship, Edmund Tilney

Introduction

The topic of this essay is the censorship of *Sir Thomas More* – not *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, as many often call that play; “Book” means, David Scott Kastan points out, “script” or “promptbook” and is therefore not part of the title¹. The manuscript of the history play *Sir Thomas More*

¹ David Scott Kastan, “‘More’s my only title’; or, *The Book of Sir Thomas More* and the Elizabethan Theater”, manuscript, p. 3. The more recent editions by Italian scholars Gabrieli and Melchiori (1990) and by John Jowett (2011) are properly entitled *Sir Thomas More*, instead of Greg’s *The Book of Sir Thomas More* (1911, 1961, 1990).

had remained obscure since its completion at the turn of the 17th century². It became famous when scholars discovered in the 19th century that a section (about 147 lines) of the manuscript might have been written by William Shakespeare himself (known as Hand D since Greg). Before the discovery Shakespeare's extant handwriting included only six signatures and two words. Obviously the new discovery, if confirmed, would be exhilaratingly significant. Ever since Alexander Dyce (1844) and Richard Simpson (1871) in Victorian England, generations of paleographers and Shakespeareans, notably Sir W. W. Greg (1911), Sir Edward Maunde Thompson (1916), A. W. Pollard (1923), R. W. Chambers (1931), and R. C. Bald (1949)³ pursued one after another constantly and established in the middle of the 20th century the handwriting and authorship of Shakespeare in the said manuscript. The conclusion has stood the test of time, for now only "a small minority" still persist in denying the identification, and the passage is declared to be "almost certainly" in Shakespeare's hand⁴. The most recent computational stylistics further confirms the identification⁵. Michael L. Hays attacks the paleographic argument fiercely, but chooses to

² The dating of the manuscript is a controversial topic. According to Harold Jenkins, *Sir Thomas More* was composed in about 1590-3 and revised circa 1594-5. See his "Supplement to the Introduction", *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Sir W. W. Greg, 1961, p. xliii. The editors of the Oxford Shakespeare date the original composition to the early 1590s and the revisions to shortly after Queen Elizabeth's death in 1603. John Jowett (2011) dates the original to 1600 and the revisions to 1603-04. The third edition of *The Norton Shakespeare* (2016) believes that the play was originally composed either in about 1593-94 or around 1600 and revised "almost certainly in 1603-04" (p. 2159).

³ Sir W. W. Greg (ed.), *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, Oxford: The Malone Society, 1911 (rep. 1961, 1990), esp. Greg's "Introduction". Sir Edward Maunde Thompson, *Shakespeare's Handwriting: A Study*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1916. A. W. Pollard et al., *Shakespeare's Hand in the Play of Sir Thomas More*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923 (rep. 1967). R. W. Chambers, "Some Sequences of Thought in Shakespeare and in the 147 Lines of 'Sir Thomas More'", in: *Modern Language Review* 26.3 (July 1931): 251-80. R. C. Bald, "The Book of Sir Thomas More and Its Problems," *Shakespeare Survey* 2 (1949): pp. 44-61.

⁴ Stephen Greenblatt (gen. ed.), *The Norton Shakespeare*, 1st ed. (1997), p. 2012; 3rd ed. (2016), p. 2159.

⁵ Timothy Irish Watt, 2009, pp. 134-61.

ignore all the other grounds of identification. His attack can hardly shake the well-established conclusion. As a matter of fact, since the inclusion of the entire *Sir Thomas More* edited by Harold Jenkins in Charles Jasper Sisson's *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (1954), major editions of Shakespeare's complete works, such as the Riverside Shakespeare, the Oxford Shakespeare, the Norton Shakespeare, and the Arden Shakespeare, all incorporate *Sir Thomas More* in whole or in part⁶. Jeffrey Masten argues for including the full play, instead of only the Shakespearean part, in editions of Shakespeare in order to preserve the unity of the work⁷. John Jowett, an editor of the Oxford Shakespeare, has edited *Sir Thomas More* for the Arden Shakespeare Third Series (2011). In 2005-2006 the Royal Shakespeare Company performed *Sir Thomas More* at Stratford-upon-Avon and elsewhere⁸. *Sir Thomas More* has been established in the Shakespearean canon. This is why the expanded Chinese edition of the complete works of Shakespeare includes two excerpts from *Sir Thomas More* translated by Sun Fali.⁹

This essay will not recount the Shakespearean identification, but explore the censorship of the play, which is a disputed issue as well. I shall investigate the role of the censor in Elizabethan England and the subtle relationship between dramatic censorship and state ideology from the perspective of the performability of history through a comparative study between the historical text and the dramatic text. The history play *Sir Thomas More*

⁶ *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. G. Blakemore Evans, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997. *The Oxford Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor, and Stanley Wells, Oxford: Clarendon, 2005. *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt, New York: Norton, 2016. Before Alexander Dyce's edition (*Sir Thomas More: A Play, Now First Printed*, London: The Shakespeare Society, 1844) the play was never printed. John Jowett's edition for the Arden Shakespeare Third Series (2011) is the most up-to-date edition of the play.

⁷ Jeffrey Masten, 2001, pp. 109-31.

⁸ Walter Cohen, Introduction to *Sir Thomas More*, *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed. (2016), p. 2166.

⁹ Zhu Shenghao and Sun Fali (trans.), *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, expanded ed., Nanjing: Yilin Press, 1998, *Romances and Poems* Part II, Appendix I, pp. 403-13.

centers around the life of the titular hero Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), a famous Renaissance humanist and the author of the celebrated *Utopia* (1516). It portrays how More successfully puts down the London citizens' rebellion against the foreigners and how he is imprisoned and beheaded by Henry VIII for his refusal to support the king. A major source of the story of *Sir Thomas More* is Raphael Holinshed's 1587 *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*¹⁰. To what degree was history allowed to be performed on stage? What differences lie between the book-performance and the stage-performance of history? Regarding the same genre of history, what is the relationship between the censorship of the book and the censorship of the stage? Janet Clare describes theatrical censorship and literary censorship as two "largely unrelated" and "separate" systems¹¹—is that true? Are there any common principles followed by both? This essay attempts to tackle these questions through a comparative study of the texts and censorship of *Sir Thomas More* and Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Finally, the author will briefly reflect on the role of the critic as a performer of history.

Edmund Tilney's censorship of *Sir Thomas More*

The story all begins with the marginal marking by Edmund Tilney the Master of the Revels on the first page of the manuscript of the play, which is currently collected in the British Library (MS Harley 7368). Tilney's is the seventh hand in the manuscript, in addition to the hands of Anthony Munday, Henry Chettle, Thomas Dekker, William Shakespeare, Thomas Heywood, and a playhouse book-keeper.

Leaue out... / y^e insurrection / wholly w^t / y^e Cause ther off & / begin
w^t S^r Th: / Moore att y^e mayors sessions / w^t a reportt afterwards / off
his good servic' / don being' Shriue off Londō / vppō a mutiny Agaynst

¹⁰ Raphael Holinshed "was only one of nearly a dozen persons who contributed to the project over two decades and in two quite different editions, the first appearing in 1577, the second, expanded version of 1587 largely produced after Holinshed's death" (Patterson 3). "Holinshed's *Chronicles*" is a conventional way to refer to the history.

¹¹ Janet Clare, 1990, pp. 16, 20.

y^e / Lūbards only by A shortt / reportt & nott otherwise / att your own perilles / E Tyllney.¹²

Diana E. Henderson designates the passage as the only extant manuscript of Tilney's "editing" and marginal notes¹³. Perhaps the least discussed part of this famous inscription is the last phrase "att your own perilles", on which William Long takes care to comment: "I take his emphasis on *your own* in 'att your own perilles' as an indication that he himself [i.e. Tilney] was unwilling to take the blame for the playwrights' possible indiscretion."¹⁴ Quite right; but at what perils? Why such a wording? I contend that Tilney's wording came from the Queen, just as the censor's punitive warning derived its authority from the royal commission. In a special commission dated December 24, 1581, Queen Elizabeth appointed "our wel-beloved Edmunde Tylney" as Master of the Revels, whose duties included censoring plays for performance and punishing any offending players with imprisonment. Toward the end of that document, Elizabeth said, addressing "our Iustices, Maiors, Sheriffes, Bayliffes, Constables, and all other our officers, ministers, true liege men, and subiectes":

Wherefore we will and commaunde you and euery of you that vnto the said Edmunde Tylney or his sufficient deputie bearer hereof in the due execucion of this our auctoritie and commaundement ye be aydinge, supportinge and assistinge from tyme to tyme as the case shall require, as you and euery of you tender our pleasure and will answer to the contrarie *at your vttermost perills*¹⁵.

We may read Tilney's "att your own perilles" as a diminished echo of the Queen's "at your vttermost perills". In the two cases the exercise of authority

¹² For the third line, most scholars follow Greg's reading "wholly &". But Gabrieli and Melchiori, the Italian editors of *Sir Thomas More*, adopt the reading "wholly w" after checking the manuscript on the point (Introduction, p. 17 and note 60). I follow Gabrieli and Melchiori.

¹³ Diana E. Henderson, 2004, p. 246.

¹⁴ William Long, 1989, pp. 46-47.

¹⁵ E. K. Chambers, 1951, pp. 285-87; my italics.

assumes the same linguistic mode, which registers two pairs of analogous structural relationship, both being unequal: the censor to the theatre is the Queen to her subjects. Clearly the source of the theatrical censor's power resides in the court, the Master of the Revels being subordinated to the Lord Chamberlain, head of the royal household. The Queen here endorsed her support for the authority of the Master of the Revels by commanding the civil officials to "aid, support and assist" Edmund Tilney in his duties. In the frictions between the municipal authorities and the Master of the Revels, the Queen stood on the side of the latter. That explains why the Lord Mayor of London must bow to the authority of the Master of the Revels while feeling impeded by him in the attempt to close down all theatres in the city. The Lord Mayor sought the help of John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury (see his letter to the latter on February 25, 1592 in E. K. Chambers, pp. 307-08). This triangular structure of power – the court, the city, and the church – is best displayed in the plan of the Privy Council to set up a Commission of Theatrical Censorship, which consisted of the Master of the Revels, one appointed by the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, and one appointed by the Lord Mayor of London (see the Privy Council minutes of November 12, 1589 in E. K. Chambers, pp. 306-07). Therefore the position of the Master of the Revels as theatrical censor was not a static or simple one, such as Edmund Tilney the Master of the Revels from 1579-1610¹⁶; rather, it was a contested field in the complex Elizabethan power network. Tilney lived not without his own perils.

The emphasis on "your own" puts Tilney in a dialogic relationship with the acting company and actors. What is the nature of this relationship? Was Tilney an authoritarian disciplinarian or a liberal confederate to the actors? The answer to this question determines to a considerable degree our assessment of the nature of Elizabethan theatrical censorship. I think Tilney was a convenient tool of the theatre as well as a necessary instrument of

¹⁶ Before 1581 the main duty of the Master of the Revels was to provide apt entertainments for the court; after the 1581 commission, the Master of the Revels assumed the office of dramatic censorship. See Richard Dutton, 1997, p. 294.

the state. Tilney made a steady income out of the licensing of plays and playhouses¹⁷. It was against his personal interests to restrict the theatrical activities too tightly. Once we abandon the mechanical point of view and adopt a humanist one instead (i.e. Tilney was not a mere part of state apparatus, but he was also a human being with human desires), Tilney would naturally concede to, or even conspire with, the players for his personal gain. The frowning “att your own perilles” is in fact a veiled real concern for the actors: do as I say; otherwise you either could not play or play at the risk of punishment. It demands the fine ear of a subtle mind to hear this hidden concern in the apparent reprimand.

Furthermore, the local reading of “att your own perilles” as a mere frown or a hidden concern reflects two global views of history: Whig or revisionist. The truth is that the censor did not forbid the production of the play. William Long, after a careful study of Tilney’s comments, concludes, “The assumption of draconian censorship cannot be supported by the recorded actions of the Master in the *More* playbook. His notations are intended to avoid problems, not to forbid production”¹⁸. I readily agree with Long on this point. This simple fact tends to be forgotten when people diagnose Elizabethan censorship as Stalinist and repressive. Recent scholars begin to take notice of the fact and develop revisionist evaluations. T. H. Howard-Hill, for example, says, “[Tilney’s] relationship with the players although ultimately authoritarian was more collegial than adversarial”¹⁹. Richard Dutton follows Howard-Hill and Long when he remarks, “Yet, with specific changes, Tilney was apparently willing to see it appear on stage (though we do not know if it ever did so). This suggests that Elizabethan political censorship was a good deal more liberal than it is sometimes given credit for being”²⁰. I find these judgments instructive. The three scholars all oppose themselves to the traditional Whig view of history, which takes “the

¹⁷ Richard Dutton, 1991, pp. 53, 79.

¹⁸ William Long, 1989, p. 54.

¹⁹ Qtd. in Richard Dutton, 1991, p. 80.

²⁰ Richard Dutton, 1991, p. 86.

development of the Tudor and Stuart despotism” as virtually an article of faith²¹; instead of a uniform hypothesis, the three scholars negotiate their revisionist assessments through the pragmatic, often fragmentary facts of censorship. The present writer, having read all the three scholars, manages to locate a fissure in the very heart of Tudor despotism, a mildness covered under the stern surface. He voluntarily joins the camp of revisionists.

The metamorphoses from history to history play

This essay does not carry out a source study, but is based upon the source study by other scholars. In 1954 Harold Jenkins thought that the Ill May Day scene in *Sir Thomas More* originated from Edward Hall’s chronicles²². This view has been abandoned. In their “A Table of Sources and Close Analogues for the Text of *The Book of Sir Thomas More*”, Italian scholars and editors of *Sir Thomas More* Melchiori and Gabrieli point out that a primary source for the play is Holinshed’s 1587 *Chronicles* rather than Hall’s *The Vnion of the two noble and illustre famelies* (1550)²³. In addition to comparisons in wording and punctuation, they provide a list of spellings in the three texts:

More – Lincolne, Sherwin, Standish, Spittle, S Martins, Mewtas, etc

Holinshed – Lincolne, Shirwin, Standish, spittle, saint Martins, Mewtas, etc

Hall – Lyncoln, Shyrwyn, Standiche, Spyttell, saynct Martynes, Mutuas, etc

The obvious coincidences with Holinshed and the obvious deviations from Hall convince us of Melchiori and Gabrieli’s conclusion. Their opinion has been adopted by the editors of the Oxford Shakespeare and the Norton

²¹ Richard Dutton, 1997, p. 288.

²² Charles Japser Sisson (ed.), 1954, p. 1235. The Ill May Day refers to the London citizens’ riots against the foreigners on May 1, 1517.

²³ Giorgio Melchiori and Vittorio Gabrieli, “A Table of Sources and Close Analogues for the Text of *The Book of Sir Thomas More*”, in: T. H. Howard-Hill (ed.), *Shakespeare and Sir Thomas More*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 197-202. The following list of spellings appears on pp. 197-98.

Shakespeare²⁴. The present study will not (re)prove which text serves as the source of *Sir Thomas More*, but will examine how the play departs from its source and the significance of the departures to censorship.

In the 1587 edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, we read:

And thus he [i.e. Dr. Beale] subtilie mooued or rather vndiscreetlie prouoked the people to rebell against strangers. By this foolish sermon, manie a light person tooke courage, and openlie spake against strangers²⁵.

How shall we understand the words "vndiscreetlie," "foolish," and "light" here? What kind of ideology lies behind them? I think they embody the official or "right" ideology by condemning the rebels. Please compare with Queen Elizabeth's proclamation in 1559:

...that they permyt none to be played wherin either matters of religion or of the gouernaunce of the estate of the common weale shalbe handled or treated, beyng no meete matters to be wrytten or treated vpon, but by menne of auctoritie, learning and wisdom, nor to be handled before any audience, but of graue and discreete persons²⁶.

Graue – light, discreete – vndiscreetlie / vndiscret (The marginal heading calls Dr. Beale "An vndiscret preacher" [A240]): the perfect counterpoint of antonyms indicates the degree to which Holinshed faithfully conformed to state ideology as well as the extent to which that ideology permeated

²⁴ The editors of the Oxford Shakespeare believe that *Sir Thomas More* was based on Holinshed's *Chronicles* and Nicholas Harpsfield's biography of More. The editors of the Norton Shakespeare (1997) designate as sources of the play Holinshed's 1587 *Chronicles*, Nicholas Harpsfield's biography of More, and Thomas Stapleton's Latin biography of More. But the third edition of the Norton Shakespeare (2016) maintains that the play draws "primarily" on Nicholas Harpsfield's Catholic biography and "secondarily" on Holinshed's Protestant *Chronicles* (p. 2160).

²⁵ Quotations from Holinshed's *Chronicles* are all in Appendix A of Gabrieli and Melchiori's edition of *Sir Thomas More* (1990). See p. 230. Quotations from the same source are documented in the text hereafter; the page number is preceded by the capitalized "A" in citation.

²⁶ E. K. Chambers, 1951, p. 263.

itself²⁷. Dr. Beale's provocative sermon is "foolish," while Dr. Standish "wisely" refuses Lincoln's request to preach the bill (A228): these value judgments side the historian with the ruling class. In the same vein, the rebels are variously called "the yoong and euill disposed people", "the euill dooers", "the misdooers" (A231, A233). None of these are neutral, objective terms; all are value-loaded, negative terms. If some kind people believe "light" and "vndiscret" to be of a mild admonishing tone, our comparison with the sovereign's decree discovers the historian's secret and slavish alignment with the ruling ideology. In addition, the historian cunningly manipulates the voice to cover the agent of the stranger, thus downplaying the outrage and avoiding the offence:

After, when hir husband knew it, he demanded his wife, but answer was made he should not haue hir: then he demanded his plate, and in like manner answer was made that he should neither haue plate nor wife. (A228)

The Lombard Francis de Bard disappears behind the passive voice, as if nobody were there to take the responsibility. After imprisonment – beheading in some cases – for disorder, the abused, wronged, oppressed English commoners meet the cold linguistic wall in the *Chronicles*, branded as "euill dooers". But the government loved the right position and the right ideology. Now we understand why the *Chronicles* was allowed to go to the market.

Surely no passive voice or obliteration of the agent appears in *Sir Thomas More*, which plays out the outrageous actions of the aliens directly on the stage. Besides the immediacy of the medium, several important changes occur in the play: concentration of the plot; the addition of the female figure Doll Williamson; the combination of presentation and report (showing and telling); the moving of the scene from the pulpit to the street.

²⁷ For an opposite view, see Annabel Patterson, who argues the compilation of the *Chronicles* to be a civic enterprise, a citizen project.

This last point is noteworthy. In the *Chronicles*, Dr. Beale declares Lincoln's bill in the pulpit in Easter week; in the play, Lincoln himself reads the bill to the public on the street (Dr. Beale's reading is just mentioned as a shadow): Lincoln usurps the role of the divine preacher and becomes the sole "author of the insurrection" (A240). Instead of Dr. Beale, Lincoln "subtilie mooued... the people to rebell against strangers" (A230). The most eager to take revenge, Lincoln is nevertheless the only one who suggests patience: "We may not [beat them down], Betts. Be patient and hear more" (I.i.30)²⁸. The broker knows when to cool to fan the fire more fiercely. All this happens on a City street. If the pulpit in the *Chronicles* is doubly enclosed – the enclosed space of the pulpit further enclosed in the book, then the street in *Sir Thomas More* is doubly exposed – the open space of the street presented on the public stage²⁹. The rebellious actions are practically the same, but a vast social, political, and ideological difference exists between the double enclosure of rebellion and the double exposure of rebellion. Richard Dutton argues that "Probably the anti-alien element was decisive" in Tilney's consideration³⁰. I would argue that the Master of the Revels ordered the first scene to be wholly deleted not only because of the anti-alien representation, but also – and even more – because of the high note of the open defiance of the authorities – defying simultaneously the trio in the power system: the city, the court, and the church.

In view of the fact of double enclosure, we may say that the performance of history in the book is a kind of de-performance, especially in contrast with the performance of history on the stage. The *Chronicles* makes a de-performance of history also because the writing of the book was bound up

²⁸ All the quotations of *Sir Thomas More* are from Gabrieli and Melchiori's edition (1990). The act, scene, and line numbers refer to that edition.

²⁹ No evidence indicates that the play was ever staged in the early modern period (but this fact does not affect my discussion on the performability of history). In the recent century there have been about 15 known productions of the play (1922, London; 1938, Canterbury; etc.). See Sisson (ed.), 1954, p. 1236; *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., p. 2166.

³⁰ Richard Dutton, 1991, p. 85.

with state ideology and the deciphering of the book demanded literacy, the literacy rate being low in the Elizabethan period. If the pulpit is a space of hierarchy, then the street is a space of democracy. The street liberates, whereas the pulpit represses; Dr. Beale's pulpit liberates and represses at the same time. The open street vibrates with the true spirit of revolution, as with the Paris Commune in 1871. The common people rise up consciously against the oppressors, whatever they are. The stage-performance of such a self-conscious revolution cannot but alarm the ruling class. The subversiveness of the street consists in its democracy. The seemingly small change from the pulpit to the street is in fact a revolutionary one, declaring a new way, a new order, a new world.

The play voices a forward lawlessness through the mouth of the newly added woman character Doll Williamson. An anti-alien heroine, Doll is the first to speak in the play. In a sense Tilney excised the first scene to silence the bold-speaking woman. Doll is introduced for the concentration of plot: she is seized by a stranger, while her husband is robbed of doves by another – in the *Chronicles* these are two separate events. The mild and meek things, woman and dove, are selected to set off the cruelty of the strangers. It is Doll who utters an uttermost contempt for strangers (“yet whatsoever is mine scorns to stoop to a stranger” [I.i.6-7]) and a lawless rebellion: “If our husbands must be bridled by law, and forced to bear your wrongs, their wives will be a little lawless, and soundly beat ye” (I.i.65-68). Here we see a fine contrast of attitudes between “bear” and “beat”. “A little” is an understatement, and “soundly” a pun – reasonably as well as thoroughly – justifying the lawlessness. Even at the moment of death Doll sticks to her anti-alienism and nationalism: “So long as I an Englishman can see, / Nor French nor Dutch shall get a kiss of me... / I died in scorn to be a stranger's prey” (II.iv.129-132). In a word, the introduction of Doll Williamson greatly strengthens the subversiveness of the play, not only in the anti-alien sentiments, but in the alteration of the patriarchal woman image: Doll is chaste, but far from silent.

Tilney's dictation of "A shortt reportt" is already well employed in the play. The wrongs on the goldsmith and his wife are briefly reported by Doll (I.i.9-13) and later discussed in detail by Sir Thomas Palmer, the Earl of Surrey, and others (I.iii). The presentation of the Williamsons and these reports reinforce each other, substantiating Francis de Bard's shameless "once more": "My lord ambassador shall once more make your mayor have a check if he punish thee not for this saucy presumption" (I.i.37-39). Likewise, Lincoln's declaration of the bill on the street and the reported Dr. Beale's declaration in the pulpit reinforce and supplement each other, demonstrating more convincingly how the insurrection has started.

To sum up, the play adapts and reforms the history with various dramatic techniques. As a result the book-performance – often de-performance – of history is transformed into the stage-performance or the real performance. The play contains non-performance as well, notably the care not to specify the Articles (presumably the Act of Supremacy, by which Henry VIII became head of the Anglican Church), which scene was not censored by Tilney. What the censor objected to is neither de-performance nor non-performance; he forbade precisely the performance of the anti-alien insurrection, although not the production of the whole play. His dictation of "A shortt reportt" actually intends to turn performance into non-performance. Shakespeare's line in sonnet 66, "art made tongue-tied by authority", describes the situation. But I think "art" refers to theatrical performance or acting as an art, not literature as we understand today³¹.

Having thus surveyed the subversiveness of the play especially as compared with the history, we can critique William Long's weird argument that *Sir Thomas More* was commissioned by the government to teach the people an example and relieve the threat of violence. A stupid government that

³¹ Cf. Katherine Duncan-Jones' annotation: "Though 'art' normally alluded to skills generally, not especially to creative art, the image of it as *tongue-tied* suggests a reference to censorship of literature, to which Elizabethan dramatists were frequently subject" (242). Here "literature" is an anachronistic and misleading concept; it should be "censorship of the theater or the play".

would be to let the people watch the exciting scene of anti-alien riots, especially when all the offenders are pardoned except John Lincoln. Long says, "All citizens must pay for their mistakes. This example of the great can hardly have been lost on the lesser"³². I think surely it will be lost. Along with Richard Dutton³³, I consider this astonishing, tenuous supposition of Long's nothing short of absurd.

The censorship and publication of Holinshed's *Chronicles*

Now let us turn to the publication and censorship of the history. The first edition of the *Chronicles* was entered into the Stationers' Register only after it was fully printed, for all extant copies bear the 1577 date, while the entry date is July 1, 1578³⁴. Considering the extraordinarily large registration fee (20 shillings and a copy), I think it possible that the book had already gone into circulation before registration, the large fee being imposed as a fine as well. The second edition had been planned since 1584³⁵, when it was registered twice, on October 6 and December 30³⁶. The latter was entered to Newbery and Denham by the Queen's grant, showing that the history was expanded and revised with official approval. If the first edition circumvented the regulations to some degree, the second edition certainly tried to legitimate itself well before the publication. We have evidence that Holinshed and his successors were aware of the pressures of censorship³⁷. Therefore they must have exercised self-censorship before the formal censorship. Despite all that the Privy Council interfered with both editions of the *Chronicles*.

³² William Long, 1989, p. 52.

³³ Richard Dutton, 1991, p. 86.

³⁴ Annabel Patterson, 1994, p. 11; Edward Arber (ed.), 1875-, II.329.

³⁵ Annabel Patterson, 1994, p. 12.

³⁶ Edward Arber (ed.), 1875-, II.436, 438.

³⁷ Thus begins Holinshed's "Preface to the Reader": "It is dangerous (gentle reader) to range in so large a field as I have here undertaken, while so manie sundrie men in divers things may be able to control me" (qtd. in Patterson 15). Abraham Fleming, one of Holinshed's successors, discusses censorship by adding two anecdotes to the second edition. See the interesting extracts in Patterson, 1994, p. 235.

On December 5, 1577 the Privy Council wrote a letter to the Bishop of London, restraining the further printing or selling of the history, for its records of certain events of Ireland were contrary to the ancient records of that realm. After the compiler Stanyhurst's explanation, the reformation of the faults, and the Lord Treasurer's intervention, the Privy Council allowed the book to be sold again³⁸. The second edition came out in mid-January, 1587³⁹. On February 1, 1587, the Privy Council issued a letter to John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, stopping the sale of the *Chronicles* until a further examination was completed⁴⁰. The Privy Council found fault with the "sondry thinges" added "as an augmentation to Hollingsheades Chronicles", particularly "reporte of matters of later yeeres that concern the State" and "mention of matter touching the King of Scottes". The result was a "castrated" edition with cancelled pages including references to the house of Cobham, John Stow's account of the Babington plot of 1586 and his discussion of recent events in Scotland and Ireland⁴¹. Instead of the long account of the Babington plot the censored text offered only a brief summary of the event⁴². This reminds us of Tilney's decree to replace the first scene with a short report.

From the above information gathered from various sources, we can see that the Privy Council acted primarily out of political concerns. They were anxious that the historical account of a disturbing area was correct and that matters of topical interest were excluded. The censorship of *Sir Thomas More* was probably driven by the anti-alien tide in the early 1590s⁴³. Both the censorship of the stage and the censorship of the book show a pre-eminently political orientation, with a particular concern for matters of

³⁸ Annabel Patterson, 1994, pp. 11-12.

³⁹ Annabel Patterson, 1994, p. 237.

⁴⁰ *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, 1897, pp. 311-12.

⁴¹ Janet Clare, 1990, p. 26.

⁴² Annabel Patterson, 1994, p. 261.

⁴³ Richard Dutton, 1991, p. 85.

immediate moment⁴⁴. Theatrical censorship and literary censorship seem to follow some common principles. The two systems were more closely related than some grant. The 1551 royal proclamation on the control of the press, for instance, juxtaposes printers and players: “notwithstanding the good order taken for the Church... Divers Printers, Booksellers and Players of Interludes do... whatsoever any light and fantastical head doth invent”⁴⁵. The publication of plays was censored in the same way as that of histories. Sometimes the two genres were forbidden together. On June 1, 1599, the Archbishop of Canterbury (John Whitgift) and the Bishop of London (Richard Bancroft) ordered the master and wardens of the Stationers’ Company “That noe Englishe historyes be printed excepte they bee allowed by some of her maiesties privie Counsell / That noe playes be printed excepte they bee allowed by suche as haue aucthorytie”⁴⁶.

Conclusion

There are two sides of the coin. On the one hand, the performative nature of the play differentiates it from the history. What is allowed in the book is disallowed on the stage. The Master of the Revels forbade the Ill May Day scene for the immediacy and subversiveness of the medium. Paradoxically, the performability of the play is problematized by its very performativeness. Tilney performed his duty. On the other, Tilney performed his duty not without collaboration with the players. For economic and personal reasons he did not forbid production of the whole play. The censor was not so tyrannical as some have believed. To conclude, the censorship of *Sir*

⁴⁴ See, for example, Richard Dutton: “As we shall see, a high proportion of the interventions made by Tilney and his successors seem to relate to matters of immediate moment, to the over-specific shadowing of particular people and current events, rather than to considerations of doctrine” (1991, 85). See also Janet Clare: “There are no consistent political, moral or cultural criteria to be discerned; instead, the historical moment determined the censor’s response in each case” (211). But Dutton’s and Clare’s discussions are confined to theatrical censorship.

⁴⁵ Qtd. in Annabel Patterson, 1994, p. 250.

⁴⁶ Edward Arber (ed.), 1875-, III.677.

Thomas More indicates that the Master of the Revels was a convenient tool of the theatre as well as a necessary instrument of the state. As a by-product, the essay discusses the common principles observed by stage censorship and book censorship.

Performing history, whether dramatically or critically, requires reason, passion, and imagination. Plodding through the fragments of the past, critics are not necessarily better than the several collaborators of *Sir Thomas More*, Shakespeare being the most celebrated among them, Tilney the least noted.

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Hamlet and Shakespeare's Poetics of Refining Gold – Also on the Significance of Shakespeare's Poetics of Refining Gold

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Abstract:

The author of this paper argues that, in the view of Gantong aesthetics, Hamlet plays the roles of both the implicit artist and the alchemist in *Hamlet*. Hamlet not only possesses many characteristics of an artist (especially of a dramatist), but also carries out the missions of an artist and thus functions as an artist / alchemist. Starting as a youngster who is fond of plays, Hamlet, who has experienced the phases of melancholy, weakness and split personality, has gradually grown up into an autonomic artist; he has fought hard and fiercely in every respect against himself, others and social circumstances, and has finally achieved his own rebirth in the course of becoming a real man and bringing others to the realm of beauty. In the meantime, he has also fulfilled the mission as an artist – to build up a perfect gold-like soul and to set right the universe of humanity. Theoretically speaking, the tragedy *Hamlet* typically reflects Shakespeare's poetics of refining gold. Shakespeare's poetics of refining gold has indeed influenced American contemporary theatre, and it could also enlighten contemporary Chinese drama out of the wrong way, so as to improve the quality and the value of contemporary drama and to set it right to the way of aesthetic drama.

Keywords:

Shakespeare, implicit artist, the poetics of refining gold

To study the implicit poetics in plays and to draw valuable dramatic thoughts from them are the issues of great significance in the contemporary international field of Shakespeare studies. The research of this kind directly points to Shakespeare's poetic pattern of thinking and his artistic wisdom, which amounts to the most secret and vague part of the fortress of Shakespeare studies. Take

the well-known play *Hamlet* as an example. Vissarion Grigoryevich Belinsky praised it as “the most glorious shining diamond in the crown of the king of the dramatic poets that no one before or after him could surpass”¹. But how is the diamond refined, purified and polished? This is a question that undoubtedly causes curiosity. If the question can be solved (even partly solved), it could give some certain suggestions of great use in dramaturgy.

In my opinion, it is particularly significant to dig out the implicit artist² in the play from the perspective of Gantong aesthetics³. To find out the

¹ Belinsky: Гамлет. Драма Шекспира. Мочалов в роли Гам-лета (1838, циклостатей), *The Selected Works of Belinsky I*, Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing Group, Shanghai, 1963, p. 442.

² The implicit artists refer to the “undercover agents” sent by the author in the narrative works (sometimes they are the leading roles) who appear as the same figures or roles with other characters in reality but in fact are more positive and innovative, and sometimes they act completely according to the artistic pattern of thinking (or include the surrounding people and things into their own creative pattern of thinking). In plays of canonization, the implicit artist is usually the very wit and innovative key member or being who secretly leads the work to achieve the essence of art (or the intention of the creator); he / she can be a unique character, or they can be two or more characters, or even, sometimes it may be a certain mystic image. Different from the concept of “implicit author” proposed by the American literary critic Wayne Booth, “implicit artist” is neither the “ideal incarnation” of the author, nor the “collection of the selected stuff” of the author; rather, it is a unique part of the artwork and forms a part of the artistic soul of the author, with the main mission to achieve the intention of the writer or to fully embody the essence and the value of art (the art of being human and to reach the realm of beauty). The “implicit artist” is an image created by the “implicit author”, to a certain degree, the former “partly share[s]” the latter’s pattern of thinking and spirit; the relationship between the two is similar to the kinship between children and their mother, whereas they are relatively independent from each other. See in details in my book: *Double Self-examination and Polyimage Poetics*, China Social Sciences Press, Beijing, 2016, p. 23.

³ Gantong Criticism refers to a new aesthetic criticism which is based on traditional Chinese life aesthetics and Gantong theory. See in details in my book: *Double Self-examination and Polyimage Poetics*, China Social Sciences Press, Beijing, 2016, pp. 15-21. Only one thing is explained here: an important feature of Gantong Criticism is focusing on discovering the character of “implicit artist”, grasping the main idea and mind through analyzing the “implicit artist”, and revealing playwrights’ artistic thinking patterns and poetic wisdom by interpreting the artistic features and multiple meanings of their works.

implicit artist in the play is like having got the key to the door of the art chamber of *Hamlet*, so as to further understand artistic wisdom. Then who is the implicit artist in *Hamlet*? After reading the play again and again, I argue that Hamlet is precisely the implicit artist⁴ in *Hamlet*. Furthermore, he is also the alchemist in the play. Shakespeare's Hamlet possesses little political wisdom and mainly acts following the artistic patterns of thinking. Due to his rich artistic wisdom, he amazes us with his every move and places himself in the dilemma which is becoming increasingly dangerous. However, it is just in this process he has fought hard and fiercely in every respect against himself, others and social circumstances that he has elevated others as well as purifying his very self, and he has also fulfilled his mission as an artist – to build up a perfect gold-like soul and to set right the universe of humanity. While Hamlet fulfils his mission, Shakespeare also refines his work into a “diamond”. From this point, if the implicit “proceed of refining gold” can be studied in detail, then Shakespeare's “poetics of refining gold” can be extracted, so as to further enlighten the contemporary dramaturgy. I will illustrate this argument in details in what follows.

1. The Implicit Autonomic Artist and the Shining Glory of Real Gold

The main reason why Hamlet is considered as the implicit artist and alchemist is his artistic thinking and behavior, which put him into an increasingly dangerous plight – the crucible – In order to refine the old self into a new one.

Not long after the curtain rises, Hamlet is mired in a rather severe dilemma – his father has been poisoned to death and his mother has remarried to his uncle who has thus usurped his own throne. What is more, Hamlet, himself, could possibly be assassinated by his uncle who has just murdered his father while Hamlet was merely a student dreaming about love and beauty in his youth, and all of these happen in such a sudden way that anybody

⁴ Hegel and Harold Bloom have both pointed out that Hamlet is an artist who is seeking liberty, but neither of them has given any detailed analysis.

would feel hard to accept. However, the dilemma is just the crucible in which Hamlet's gold-like nature is refined. It is the extremely cruel dilemma that reveals Hamlet's temperament as an autonomic artist and purifies his spirit into real gold.

Hamlet's artistic temperament maintains a close connection with his noble ideal, fecund imagination, liberal personality and creative artistic pattern of thinking. Distinguished from his archetype Amleth⁵ (Saxo Grammaticus recorded him as a politician with both wit and courage in *Gesta Danorum*), Shakespeare's Hamlet possesses little political wisdom and mainly acts in accordance with his artistic pattern of thinking. In this rough time, he does not think of his own way out, yet has the intention to "set it right". He avoids facing the cruel reality, imagining himself as "the king of infinite space"; instead of striving for allies, he acts and speaks in insanity and pushes others away; rather than pondering upon the strategies for his revenge, he directs the play-within-the-play which stirs up continuous troubles. It is because Hamlet is an artist deep inside his heart that he tends to detect Claudius' soul via directing a play. To probe into the human nature by experiment is precisely what dramatic artists repeatedly do. All of the above have revealed the temperament of Hamlet as an artist. But all these moves have undoubtedly exposed Hamlet's innermost secret which is "horrible", thus Claudius soon determines to kill him. In this way, Hamlet has forced himself into a more dangerous situation, which has also demonstrated the intensity and particularity of his activity of "refining gold".

For Hamlet, the process of refining gold is extraordinarily cruel, as if placing the weak and potentially evil body into a crucible to undergo calcination and fusion. During this process, Hamlet has experienced the key

⁵ According to ZHENG Tu-sheng, after the disastrous suffering of his father's death and his mother's remarriage, Amleth managed to gain support from his mother and also from his girlfriend, and succeeded in taking revenge on Fenge, who had killed his father, and then Amleth regained his own throne as the king of Denmark. See ZHENG Tu-sheng, Shashibiya: *Shakespeare: Study and Textual Research*, Jiangsu Education Publishing House, Nanjing, 2005, pp. 165-166.

phases such as personality split⁶, fighting with his inner self, and self-negation etc., which are of vital significance in the human being's artistic composition (refining gold). Hamlet's personality split happens right after his communication with his father's ghost. He has formed a more clarified knowledge of "the world of mortals" from the perspective of the ghost. As a person who maintains a noble ideal of humanity and sober self-consciousness, having clearly understood the truth of people's minds in the world of mortals, Hamlet has gradually changed his lifestyle: to communicate with the ghost while lurking in the world; to act like an insane person, whereas disguising his thoughts of revenge. He uses his vision to observe all mortal beings including himself; and he understands them as well as understanding his own potential evil. As he goes further, the nature of his revenge has gradually experienced a fundamental change. By comparison, Hamlet's prototype Amleth soon seized the opportunity and killed his enemy Fenge, but Shakespeare's Hamlet delays so much – his delay is not because he has forgotten the revenge, but because in his eye, what is more important is to set the whole humanity right rather than to simply kill Claudius the only person. The question is not how evil a bad man can be, but how incredible an esteemed person can be, and what an unfathomable black hole with surging undercurrents deep down in his or her human nature can be! It is precisely the existence of the black hole that makes it rather important for "setting the whole humanity right". Such is the case in Hamlet's mother. He admires his mother so much that he has never anticipated that she should be locked in the tight embrace of the nasty person Claudius! The ugliness of humanity is beyond Hamlet's imagination. Therefore, the reason for Hamlet to "set it right" is not only because Claudius has killed the king and jeopardized the rules of royal court, but also lies in his introspection and perspective of "the black hole" in human nature. Let's see Hamlet's introspective thinking: "for virtue cannot so inoculate our old

⁶ Here "personality split" refers to the fact that, on the basis of full self-examination, the implicit artist Hamlet splits himself into several different parts, or into two or several "selves" which counteract each other, or Hamlet thinks that he himself has some telepathic links with many people possessing different personalities.

stock but we shall relish of it... I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious; with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in.”⁷ Again, his rigorous analysis of himself and the depth of his thoughts reveal his nature as an artist⁸. It is this kind of rigorous introspection and self-analysis that makes him brood over humanity and foreshadows his almost cruel “enlightenment” and harsh self-negation towards himself.

Hamlet’s words towards Ophelia and Gertrude are as painful and poignant as an incision in the living flesh. On one hand, the words have expressed his intense and gloomy emotions; while on the other hand, they have underlined his intention as an artist to elevate the level of human morality. His bitter words are to diagnose their illnesses out of his deep love for them. In Scene 4, Act 3, Hamlet speaks to his mother: “O shame! Where is thy blush? Rebellious hell! If thou canst mutine in a matron’s bones, to flaming youth let virtue be as wax, and melt in her own fire: proclaim no shame when the compulsive ardour gives the charge, since frost itself as actively doth burn, and reason panders will.” After Gertrude’s being deeply moved by him and having seen clearly the blemish of her own soul, Hamlet keeps speaking to her: “Refrain to-night; and that shall lend a kind of easiness to the next abstinence: the next more easy; for use almost can change the stamp of nature, and either curb the devil, or throw him out with wondrous potency.”⁹ This indicates that he still remains hopeful for human’s “renoncer au mal et faire le bien”. Rather than instructing and denouncing his mother from a higher position, Hamlet almost kneels down at her feet

⁷ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Trans. by ZHU Sheng-hao, People’s Literature Publishing House, 1977, p. 55.

⁸ As the well-known Chinese writer Can Xuesays, “great artists are usually introspective and self-critical.” See *The Literary Views of Can Xue*, Guangxi Normal University Press, Guilin, 2007, p. 123.

⁹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Trans. by ZHU Sheng-hao, People’s Literature Publishing House, 1977, p. 78.

and earnestly implores her: "Forgive me this my virtue; for in the fatness of these pursy times virtue itself of vice must pardon beg, yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good."¹⁰ This is so moving. The whole conversation between Hamlet and his mother is like a soul with love and grief wailing miserably in the tempest, and his passion is like a bolt in the air and takes aback everybody. Gertrude is not angry with her son's denouncement, but discovers Hamlet's "innocent nature" and "glory of true gold" from her deep inside¹¹. Of all ages, the brilliant and philanthropic artists are all endowed with deep emotion for human nature and in hope of elevating the level of morality of humankind; they strive for the liberty and nobility of every individual, even they were repeatedly experiencing the tragic story of Sisyphus pushing up the huge stone very hard every time yet only to watch it rolling down eventually. For those artists, nothing could change their determination to keep on pushing the stone upwards.

With his deep insights into humanity and extreme hatred of nastiness, Hamlet never gives up his pursuit of ideal, gradually foring himself into the hell-like crucible with raging fires and burning flames, and then stepping forward to the path of complete self-negation. In the crucible, Hamlet has directly or indirectly killed Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Ophelia and Gertrude. In Hamlet's mind, their weaknesses also potentially exist in his nature, and he kills them as if to pick and throw away the nasty part of his own soul. Virtually speaking, for Hamlet, to scoop out malignant tumours of humanity is the essential phase to pursue the perfect ideal of human nature. As the famous Chinese writer Can Xue puts it: "Each of the killed persons is a part of the prince, for him, to kill them is to cut off his connection with the worldly world. [...] When he highly holds his sword to break a siege, he is actually slashing at his own body."¹² This process is indeed an important phase of removing the evil root and refining the real gold.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

¹² Can Xue, *The Lone Wolf Crossing the Hell*, SDX Joint Publishing Company, Beijing, 2003, p. 143.

Hamlet knows so well of his own sins that he makes ready beforehand for his self-adjudication. After his manslaughter of Polonius, Hamlet feels that: “But heaven hath pleas’d it so, to punish me with this, and this with me, that I must be their scourge and minister. I will bestow him, and will answer well the death I gave him.”¹³ Here to “bestow” and “answer well” “the death I gave him”, to a great extent, means to implicitly take one’s own life alongside with another’s. Afterwards, he merely maintains his attitude of living “in the face of death”. Due to his focus on the beauty of human nature and his love and hope based on that, Hamlet could not bear the ugly sight of anybody, including his own. An invisible power forced him to eliminate the ugliness. In Act 5, he is rather clear about the dangerous trap behind the challenge to a duel with Laertes. Nonetheless, he decides to accept the challenge intending to choose his horrible fate by and for himself. On one hand, he feels guilty about what he has done and believes he should shoulder the obligations; on the other hand, taking the challenge is a valuable opportunity for him to take revenge. At this moment, he has already achieved reconciliation with his doomed fate, thus tranquility reigns inside him: “there’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, ‘tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all: since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is’t to leave betimes?”¹⁴ Therefore, he stepped into the trap set by Claudius without any hesitation. During the duel, Hamlet is severely poisoned while he puts up his deathbed struggle at his last gasp and seizes the chance to kill Claudius. For Hamlet, to kill Claudius is never the most important task; what is more important is to overcome the weakness as much as possible in the process of revenge and to scoop out malignant tumours of humanity. In essence, the perfect Kingdom of spirit in Hamlet’s mind can only be established in the process of abandoning the physical body.

¹³ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Trans. by ZHU Sheng-hao, People’s Literature Publishing House, 1977, p. 79.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

In short, Hamlet has been a person who pursues the extreme perfection ever since the very beginning (in his mind, “the dram of eale doth all the noble substance often doubt, to his own scandal”). It is foreordained that Hamlet would be on the bitter path of “moulding souls” and would be led to his complete self-negation. Hamlet knows this very well, and he completely understands his own fate — before victory was won he died; after him remains only long silence. In fact, only when his body is removed (negated) can the perfect soul he pursues stand up rising from the blood. And the perfect soul is just the pure gold Hamlet has been refining all this way. Gertrude knows this very well; thus she insists on drinking the poisonous wine to celebrate Hamlet’s victory¹⁵. At this moment, Gertrude has been enlightened by Hamlet, and what she pursues is also a perfect soul. She insists on doing so probably out of her true maternal love for her son and of her own sense of guilt, or she intends to purify herself and overcome her animalistic instincts in order to become a real human. Up until now, Hamlet, as an artist, has elevated his mother’s level of morality via his cruel love, and make her a beauty in spiritual sense. At the same time, Hamlet, in the course of “making others more beautiful” and in his own process of complete self-negation, has purified himself and achieved the rebirth of his own soul.

¹⁵ Claudius tries to persuade Gertrude not to drink the wine but she insists on drinking it. She knows very well of Claudius’ plot as well as his character. She must have anticipated the result, yet she insists on doing so. Besides, we could easily draw from the details in the play that Gertrude knows (at least doubts) the wine is poisonous. At the very first point, after the scene of play-within-the-play, when Hamlet has tested out Claudius and found him to be the murderer, he has told his mother that Claudius would murder him later; since that moment, Gertrude begins to try to protect her son’s life; the second point is that when the king and Laertes are plotting secretly in the castle to poison Hamlet to death with sword and wine, Gertrude is next door to them, it is probable that she has eavesdropped on their conversations; the third point is that when Gertrude toasts to Hamlet’s victory, she deliberately chooses the wine from the king to Hamlet but not the one without pearls, so it is clear that she would like to drink the poisonous wine for Hamlet; last but not least, when the king reminds her not to drink it, she still insists, which shows her decision and determination. So why would Gertrude drink the poisonous wine? The first reason is to protect her son’s life, and the second reason is to atone for her own guilt.

Generally speaking, Hamlet's actions in the play are a process of refining gold with himself and his fellows as the material. The life of Hamlet is the typical life of an artist; also, his fate is almost the fate of all great artists. In reality, humanity has not evolved much since the ancient times till today, which results in the endlessness of the artists' work of "revenge" and "rebuild". Throughout all these years, what artists have done, in a certain sense, is precisely to which Hamlet devotes himself – the spiritual career of taking revenge against the evil part of humanity and rebuilding a beautiful spiritual kingdom. Shakespeare has seized the essential part of artists, and he used this essence to shape a typical image of the artist to live his life within and through thousands of people's lives. Everybody who cherishes this ideal and passion would feel himself like Hamlet at a certain moment of his life or feels connected with Hamlet to some degree. This is the reason why Shakespeare is so great, and also the important reason why *Hamlet* is "the most glorious shining diamond in the crown of the king of the dramatic poets that no one before or after him could surpass".

2. Shakespeare's Poetics of Refining Gold and Contemporary Playwriting

If there is some kind of "implicit poetics in the concrete practice of playwriting"¹⁶, we could find an implicit "poetics of refining gold"¹⁷ in *Hamlet*. To put it concretely, the poetics of refining gold metaphorically refers to an artistic

¹⁶ E. Miner: *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature*. Trans. by WANG Yu-gen, SONG Wei-jie et al. Central Compilation & Translation Press, Beijing, 2004, p.18. E. Miner maintains that "poetics mainly studies the ambiguous in poets works" (p. 17.), "none of the poetics could include everything", and "each system of poetics is unavoidably partial" (p. 25). All these opinions are true to facts. They inspire me so much that the second part of this essay is based on these opinions.

¹⁷ The main foundation of the proposition of "poetics of refining gold" is the play *Hamlet* and other tragedies by Shakespeare. The author intends to put forth a poetic thought directly from Shakespeare's tragedies rather than finds out foundation from other theoretical works. The American expert in Shakespeare studies, Stephen Greenblatt, has written a monograph *Hamlet in Purgatory*, which is on the basis of his own comprehension for the text of *Hamlet*. If we take the perspective of reality, we would feel that Hamlet has never been in purgatory at all; but if we take the perspective of aesthetics, Hamlet is indeed placed in purgatory. Or in other words, he is placed in the crucible.

pattern of thinking and method of playwriting: to set the protagonist in some very harsh dilemmas (like the crucible), and make him / her strive for his / her way out; during the process, the weakness of humanity is revealed on one hand, while on the other hand, the human being's inner wisdom and nobility, or strong will, determination and strong nerves, or inclusiveness and kindness are squeezed out. In other words, the process of striving one's way out of a dilemma is just like getting rid of the impurities and refining gold for one's own great soul. Without the raging flames or the extraordinary dilemma, there would never be real gold or glistening souls. The key point for refining gold lies in the setting of the crucible and continuing to blow into the fire. The person who sets the fire, adds fuel to it and blows the fire is usually regarded as the implicit artist in the play. That is to say, the method to place this person into the crucible is the significant method of refining gold. As Antonin Artaud puts it: "the principle of theatre and the principle of alchemy, in essence, are mystically similar. [...] Alchemy and theatre are both an art which possesses potential possibility, the fact they are themselves its purpose."¹⁸ Alex Grey also says: "artist's mission is similar to alchemist's work. The greatness of alchemist's work is transforming the rough materials into spiritual substances. [...] To fill such transforming strength into art is the goal of artistic alchemy, which is creating great works or masterpieces."¹⁹ It is just in the process of refining gold that Shakespeare created his masterpieces.

From the analysis on *Hamlet* above, we can come to the conclusion that Shakespeare is an artist who knows very well the "technique of refining gold". His aim of writing the play *Hamlet* is not to reflect the past or his contemporary real life²⁰, but to express his deep concern for the human

¹⁸ Antonin Artaud: *Théâtre de la Cruauté: Le Théâtre et son Double*, Trans. by GUI Yu-fang, The Commercial Press, Beijing, 2015, p. 47.

¹⁹ Alex Grey: *The Mission of Art*, Trans. by GAO Jin-ling, Yilin Press, Nanjing, 2015, p. 168.

²⁰ What the play *Hamlet* is talking about is neither the historic facts recorded in Saxo "*Gesta Danorum*", nor the palace coup which Shakespeare or his contemporary experienced. (See Stephen Greenblatt: *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, Trans. by GU Zheng-kun et al. Peking University Press, 2007: 226.) Therefore, we could draw the conclusion that reflecting real events is not of Shakespeare's main interests.

soul. His plot deviates so much from the historical facts that the leading character is trapped into an increasingly dangerous dilemma, so that he could “set it right” to the greatest extent, i.e. to “refine the gold” in the play. Although Hamlet has made such a theoretical statement as “for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as’twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own image, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure”²¹, we could not reach the conclusion that it is Shakespeare’s drama theory. According to Shakespeare’s concrete practice of playwriting, most of his works are not limited to reflect nature or to describe the portrait of the characters. They are, in a way of retrospective intercommunication or telepathic communication, to write out “the ideal human” and “the beautiful and new realm of art”. The Bard’s tragedies in particular have demonstrated the evil side of humanity, thus having cast light upon what humanity should be seen like from the other side. Whether we call it retrospective intercommunication or cast light from the other side, they are both closely related with the process of “refining gold”. To put it more theoretically, “the poetics of refining gold” is more appropriate to the essence of plays than the method of “mirroring the nature”, and it brings us more of the theatricality and poetic quality. When the character is placed in the crucible where he strives hard to make the breakthrough, the spectators are usually on tenterhooks; when the fire in the crucible gives out much heat, and the conflicts between the characters and inside the protagonist’s mind reach their climax, theatricality turns out to be the strongest; the time when the bright light and glory deep down in the character’s heart are gradually revealed is usually the most poetic moment. We could say that “the poetics of refining gold” is in great unison with the essence of theatre. By comparison to the method of “mirroring

²¹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Trans. by ZHU Sheng-hao, People’s Literature Publishing House, 1977, p. 59.

the nature”, the poetics of refining gold is more appropriate to the practice of Shakespeare’s tragedy creation; thus it is worthy of further exploration²².

Although the poetics of refining gold in Shakespeare’s plays remains implicit all the time, it does not restrain its influence on playwrights of later generations. The contemporary American playwright Arthur Miller, who is familiar with Shakespeare’s plays (especially *Hamlet*) and has performed some of the Bard’s plays himself, is obviously much influenced by Shakespeare²³. His play *The Crucible* typically embodies the “poetics of refining gold”. In this play, Arthur Miller sets a rather severe dilemma for his protagonist John Proctor, for whom the way is becoming narrower and narrower as if the fire in the crucible is blazing up. At the very beginning, John’s problem is whether or not to disclose what Abigail has done. Allowing her to spread ill rumours is indeed repugnant to his conscience, while the fact that they once had a love affair makes him rather hesitant. Later, the problem turns out to be more embarrassing and humiliating for him, so that he has to admit his crime of adultery publicly if he intends to rescue his wife Elizabeth. In the end, he screws up his courage to admit everything. However, the devilish Deputy Governor Thomas Danforth still holds him so tightly that he does not let him go. At this moment, he either has to survive in the world in extreme degradation against his conscience, or to completely despise those devils and make his decision to die for justice. John once showed his weakness when he feels like that he wants to compromise, but finally the courage and nobility deep inside his heart are squeezed out – he chooses the gallows and thus has “saved his own kindness and nobility”. On the whole, John is far from perfect. He is as common as everybody else; however, after the phase in weakness, fear and hesitation, he finally steps forward to the way of nobility. The glorious

²² The other tragedies by Shakespeare (especially like *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*) also reflect his “poetics of refining gold”. I have written other essays to discuss them, so I will not discuss much in this essay.

²³ According to Arthur Miller, *Timebends: A Life* (Trans. by LAN Ling, LIANG Yan, et al. East China Normal University Press, Shanghai, 2016), he has repeatedly scrutinized *Hamlet* and has taken participation in the performance of the Bard’s plays on stage.

light shining from deep down in his soul is particularly moving. If he had not been thrown into the crucible whose temperature is becoming higher and higher by Arthur Miller, his weakness as well as the shining light deep in his soul would not have been seen by us. It is the crucible that purifies him and refines his soul into real gold which moves generations and generations.

Shakespeare's poetics of refining gold is very illuminating for the contemporary playwriting in China. In my opinion, contemporary Chinese theatre has got three serious diseases as Chondropathy, Hydropsy and Anemia²⁴. Among them, Hydropsy is the most severe epidemic disease in these years' Chinese dramas, and the treatment to it should be paid immediate attention. To some extent, the disease popular in China has something to do with Brecht's theory of "epic drama". Once due to the influence of Brecht's theory of "epic drama", the "epic drama" and its variation "documentary drama" dominate the theatres in China. Some playwrights and directors seem so passionate about telling a story or demonstrating a phase in history that they have forgotten that a play should be centred on the human being and help to achieve people's ideal, and a play should be moving via its vivid and catching images and concrete scenes of strong action. Although playwrights could go their own way to achieve their own aesthetic ideal, and different types of plays have their own advantages respectively, yet I still feel that the theory of "epic drama" tends to lead Chinese drama to a wrong path in a certain sense. I argue that a play should neither narrate nor demonstrate, neither explain nor illustrate, but should try its best to do the work similar with "refining gold". On stage, once the dramatic situation is

²⁴ In this essay, the so-called "chondropathy" refers to the plays without strength. These plays cannot raise up like a noble life but kneel down or half down like an ugly flunkay; the so-called "hydropsy" refers to the plays which lack of active, theatrical, and poetic scenes yet make fool of the audiences with some narrative plots; the so-called "anemia" refers to the plays that are over-conceptualized, of which the themes are tedious, or the plays that pay emphasis on publicity instead of aesthetic, or which lack fine scenes of emotional lives. The playwrights cannot extend a multi-meaning theme from a rich emotion, so they cannot create vigorous and animated plays.

formed (the fire in the crucible begins to burn), the characters would interact with each other as if they were in an eddy. At every moment, new productions are born, or we could say, unknown things are revealed. In this process, we should not produce too much material which has nothing to do with theatricality, that is to say, we should not narrate or explain much because they will reduce the sense of strong action. The narrative could be one of the methods of theatrical expression, but it should not be the main body or dominate the style of any play. The mistake of much narration in a play is usually made by green hands who have not mastered the form and rules of theatrical arts, and they usually do this in the name of “revolutionary innovation”. Fundamentally speaking, the form of narrative fits fiction better than theatre. The poetics of refining gold, which underlines the action and anti-action of the characters in the cruel situation as well as the transition process of human inner life, so to speak, fits the ontology of theatre arts exactly. This does not mean that all playwrights should try their best to “refine the real gold”, yet I believe that if there are some playwrights who, like Arthur Miller, have successfully learned the alchemic arts from Shakespeare and return to the ousia of drama with unique innovation in their works, it will be very possible for them to produce some aesthetic plays²⁵ of high purity in the future, and to create beautiful sceneries once again for contemporary Chinese theatre arts.

²⁵ “Aesthetic play” is an important concept proposed by the famous Chinese theatre theorist Prof. TAN Pei-sheng. In his article titled “*Playwriting and Aesthetic Spirit*”, he pinpoints that: “to call upon aesthetic play is to underline the aesthetic spirit is a revolution in theatre arts, rather than a hollow slogan in vogue”. (See *The Collected Works by TAN Pei-sheng*, V, China Theatre Press, Beijing, 2005, p. 151) As far as I am concerned, the “aesthetic play” proposed by Prof. TAN refers to the plays which are to and for the human self and the plays which truly return to the ontology of theatre arts. Those plays must be born according to the “rules of aesthetics” and must contain the aesthetic value or the aesthetic universality and the artistic authenticity as well. They should be the perfect infusion of the human being’s inner movement of life and the perceptual outer form, that is to say, the perfect infusion of “the meaningful content and the beautiful form”. See my essay “A Theoretical Analysis on TAN Pei-sheng’s Theory on “Aesthetic Play”, *Forum of Arts*, 2 (2009), pp. 35-42.

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2.2. Critică de teatru / Theaterkritik / Theatrical review

Shakespeare-Festtage in der armenischen Hauptstadt Eriwan¹

DIETER TOPP

(Berlin)

Was können wir noch von Shakespeare lernen, wie aktuell lässt er sich aufbereiten? ... Theater und Shakespeare in Yerevan, ein Erlebnis von Menschen, Orten und Emotionen ...

Recht passend zum 12. Yerevan International Shakespeare Festival legte sich vor heiteren Sonnenschein ein neblig grauer, regnerischer Schleier über die armenische Hauptstadt und ließ einen viel zu früh eintreffenden Winter erahnen. Just eben ging die Nachricht vom plötzlichen Schneefall über die Ticker, gerade recht um einen Augenblick über die unglückseligen Potentaten des Dichters in einem Festival zu seinem 500. Todesstag zu reflektieren. Shakespeare und viele andere Klassiker wurden jetzt in der von Erdogan diktierten Türkei verboten. Die Erinnerung an ein düsteres Zeitalter in Deutschland, in dem Bücher verbrannt und alle Kunst zensiert waren, erwacht aufs Neue. Unfreiheit der Meinung in Russland und im europäischen Ungarn, die anstehenden Wahlen in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika lassen ein Horrorszenario am Welthimmel in tiefstem Schwarz aufkommen. Hatte Shakespeare nicht all das schon einmal in seinen Herrscher-Tragödien niedergeschrieben, tausendfach kopiert und wieder und wieder neu interpretiert einem Weltpublikum vor Augen geführt? Was können wir noch von Shakespeare lernen, wie aktuell lässt er sich aufbereiten? Zum Abschluss des Gedenkjahres resümierten Festivaldirektor Karo Balyan und Regisseur Hakob Ghzanchayn als künstlerischer Leiter

¹ Der zugesandte Text wurde durch unsere Presseagentur PPS (KulturForum Europa) in der vorliegenden Form freigegeben.

in großer Breite acht Oktobertage lang über das Phänomen Shakespeare. Der georgische Altmeister der Regie, Robert Sturua, wartete mit der Interpretation von *Julius Cäsar* auf, der aktuellen Version eines erfolgreichen Potentaten, der einem demokratischen System entgegensteht und unausweichlich fallen muss. (Shota Rustaveli State Drama Theatre, Tiflis). *Macbeth*, ein Monodrama von Petr Cizmar, *Divadlo Kontra* aus der Slowakei, ließ den Krieger auf dem Müllhaufen unserer Zeit darüber nachdenken, ob er wirklich ein Mörder war oder alles nur Reflektionen in seiner Imagination. Bei *Was ihr wollt* durfte man aufatmen. Eine temporeiche Komödie des Eriwan Ghaplanyan Theaters verführte das Publikum mit seiner Preis nominierten Inszenierung. Xodikyans *Yago and Tractate about the Handkerchief* aus dem russischen Ulyanovsk, ein Drei-Personen-Stück, analysierte aufs Neue, was vor Jahrhunderten in Zypern geschehen sein könnte. Satire und Drama wechseln in rascher Folge. Yagos Selbstreflexion verrät, dass es doch besser sein könnte, aus Liebe zu sterben, als intrigant zu leben wie vorherbestimmt, mit überraschendem Ende. Aus Kiew steuerte das Wolodimir Zavalnyuk „Peretvorennya“ Theater einen *Hamlet* bei: Die ewigen Fragen in zeitgenössischer Sprache ausgezeichnet interpretiert von vier Darstellern.

Der Tragödien großes Finale kam in diesem Jahr aus dem russischen St. Petersburg.

„Masterskaya“ Theater gab *Hamlet, es war einmal in Elsinore*, in einer Szenerie der 50er Jahre des letzten Jahrhunderts eine sehr bürgerliche Familie, ein großer Clan durch Kriminalität miteinander verflochten. Unter den tragischen Figuren dieser Rock'n'Roll-Tragifarce erschienen Shakespeare höchstpersönlich und der Übersetzer der Tragödie Boris Pasternak als Visionen des verrückten Prinzen. Und dazu rockte der ewige Konflikt zwischen Vätern und Söhnen die Bühne.

Die tragikomische Shakespeare Seite verkörperte Harutyun Galfayan als *Clown* von Karine Xodikyan. Regisseur Hakob Ghazanchyan inszenierte *Prospero*, Theaterkultur verschiedener Nationen (Algerien, Armenien,

Brasilien, Mogolei, Nigeria und Rumänien) auf einer Bühne. Die sehr jungen Darsteller, Profis in den Heimatländern, waren angeleitet, nach der „Stanislawski Methode körperlicher Aktion“ zu arbeiten und überzeugten ihr Publikum zu den Themen weltweiter Migration, Flüchtlinge und deren Sicht auf die EU. Aus Rumänien war dazu Prof. Dr. Alexandru Boureanu, Chef des Nationaltheaters Craiova und Leiter des bekannten Shakespeare Festivals angereist.

Eines der Highlights bot Zara Antonyan mit Studenten ihrer Abschlussklasse der Theateruniversität: die rasante Collage *The Best of Shakespeare*. Die großen Dramen wurden hierbei auseinandergerissen, auf Wesentliches konzentriert für den Moment wieder neu gestaltet und der gesprochene Text dabei in einer komplexen und körperlich anspruchsvollen Landschaft von Mise-en-Scène verflochten. Dies schaffte die physiologischen Impulse und endlosen Assoziationen, um den Besucher mit auf die Reise von Traum, Realität, offenen Fragen und Dialogen zu nehmen. Dabei waren die unsterblichen Zeilen Shakespeares zweifelsohne der „Jungbrunnen“ für die Bühnenkreationen, die ungeheuren physischen Leistungen, die stets hinterfragten, was es heute bedeutet, ein menschliches Wesen zu sein. „Fragen und Antworten auf der Bühne vom Sein oder Nicht Sein transferiert in den Zuschauerraum, verrauschen in den Stürmen der Zeit wie lebendiges Leben, das sich ständig ändert, weggefegt wird. So bleibt der Mensch in seinem Kampf gegen die Zeit ohnmächtig. Alles, was er tun kann, ist nach etwas Zeitlosem zu suchen, um dadurch Schöpfer einer eigenen Unsterblichkeit zu sein, über Sein oder Nicht-Sein selber zu entscheiden.“²

Dem gleich kam die Inszenierung *SHAKESpeare it* von Vahan Badalyan. In einer Choreografie von Toma Aydinyan präsentierte das Team des Kleinen Theaters Yerevan zusammen mit körperlich behinderten Darstellern eine polyphone Reise über vier Stücke des großen Meisters und zeigten die Parallelen zwischen Hauptfiguren, Situationen und Szenen auf. Die Kombination verschiedener Stücke werden in einem Werk durch die

² Vgl. Zara Antonyan, Shakespeare-Festtage Eriwan 2016.

intensive Farbpalette der menschlichen Natur verstärkt, die in jedem einzelnen sichtbar ist. In *SHAKESpeare it* wurde Inklusion nicht nur anthematisiert, sondern erfolgreich produziert. Es ist zu hoffen, dass diese Arbeit in anderen Ländern und auf unterschiedlichen Festivals zu sehen sein wird. Der „King of Monodrama“, der Engländer Pip Utton, hatte eigens für dieses Festival ein neues Stück geschrieben. In *King of Tragedy* erweckte er für 50 Minuten Leben und Leiden des großen englischen Bühnendarstellers Edmund Kean, der mit Shylock, Richard III., Hamlet Othello, King Lear und Macbeth die Zuschauer im 19. Jahrhundert hin- und hergerissen hatte; das Publikum, von dem er geliebt wurde und mit dessen Schicht er eins sein wollte. Er verlor diesen ständigen Kampf um Anerkennung und ertrank in Alkohol. In diesem zutiefst beeindruckenden Melodram eroberte der Star Pip Utton auch die Armenier, wie er es rund um den Globus als Hitler, Churchill, Margaret Thatcher und die Päpste seit Jahren immer wieder schafft. Mit *King of Tragedy* hinterfragt er das Spektakel des Theaters, dessen Hybris und die der Zuschauer und entlarvt so den gesamten Theaterzirkus. (Sein Workshop und der von Emre Erdem waren zudem die Renner des Festivals.) Versöhnlich erklangen Sonette bei *Shakespeare A Capella* des polnischen Jazzsängers Stanislaw Soyka. Mit den Cracow Singers gelang ihm eine neue 16stimmige Interpretation in modernem Englisch, Choralarrangements von Chorleiter Karol Kusz und Solo für Jazzstimme, ein musikalisch ästhetischer Genuss. Theater und Shakespeare in Yerevan, ein Erlebnis von Menschen, Orten und Emotionen. „Die armenische Hauptstadt hat seit dem Ende der Sowjetzeit einen großen Sprung nach vorne gemacht. Statt Tristesse herrscht Aufbruchsstimmung. Ein paar schüchterne Plastikstühle und -tische standen Ende der 90er-Jahre auf den Grünflächen nahe der Eriwaner Oper. Heute ist der Ort, besonders in den warmen Monaten, bis in die Nacht ein einziger Tummelplatz. Seit etwa fünf Jahren ist ein Boom ausgebrochen in Armeniens Metropole. Eriwan, die traurige, die dunkle, die geheimnisvolle Stadt am Fuß des ewig mit Schnee bedeckten Ararat, hat sich gehäutet. Ein Café neben dem anderen, dem internationalen Stil komfortabler

Korbmöbel verpflichtet, und überall elegant ihre Tablett zwischen den Tischen balancierende Kellner. Früher sah man hin und wieder ein vergilbtes Bild von Charles Aznavour – dem berühmtesten aller Armenier – irgendwo verloren im Fenster hängen. Es sollte den Traum von westlicher Lebensart verkörpern. Heute ist es realer levantinischer Geschäftssinn, der französische Lebensart ins wirkliche Leben transportiert hat.“³

Berechtigter Weise setzt Armenien auch mit Theater auf den Wirtschaftsfaktor Kulturtourismus. Die Verantwortlichen haben begriffen und reagiert. Shakespeare 2017 in Eriwan ist sicher eine Vormerkung im Jahreskalender wert. (www.shakefest.am)

³ Rolf Hosfeld, in: *Welt*, Nr. 24, 12. 09. 2010.

Shakespeare, *Sonett 66*

Leonie HARDT

(HKS – Hochschule für Künste im Sozialen Ottersberg)

In der Inszenierung von Shakespeares 66. *Sonett* am Ungarischen Staatstheater „Csiky Gergely“ Temeswar (Vorpremiere: Dezember 2016, Regie: Kokan Mladenović) werden aktuelle und immerwährend aktuelle Themen wie Schmerz, Unterdrückung, Flucht und Macht symbolhaft in aneinandergereihten Szenen zum Ausdruck gebracht.

Eröffnet wird dieses performative Schauspiel durch ein Ansammeln aller in Folge für den Abend wichtigen Figuren. Macbeth, erkennbar durch eine Krone in der Hand, die auf einem Kissen liegt, taucht auf. Die Lady Macbeth, seine Gattin, wird sichtbar durch eine Figur, die sich manisch die Hände reibt — sie will sich das verschüttete Blut von den Fingern reiben. Der Esel aus dem *Sommernachtstraum* erscheint, zwei Totengräber schleifen einen schwarzen Sack symbolhaft als Sarg hinter sich her, ein Paar mit Gasmasken, welches Romeo und Julia verkörpert, kommt auf die Bühne; auch eine Ophelia, die, sich mit den Händen an etwas Unsichtbarem festkrallend, durch den Raum irrt. Des Weiteren ist da z. B. ein selbstverliebter Engel alias Hamlet da, nackt, Selfies von sich machend und ein Othello, immer rennend.

Das Bühnenbild ist schlicht und klar. Je nach Strophe des Sonetts ändert sich das Bühnenbild; es hängen Stricke von der Decke, es werden Stellwände auf die Bühne geschoben oder es kommen Gitter hinzu. Nichts, was nicht benutzt wird, stört den Bühnenraum.

Dieser Schlichtheit folgend, sind auch die Kostüme in einer klaren Ästhetik gehalten: schwarz und weiß dominieren. Alle tragen die gleiche Kleidung: weiße Hemden und schwarze Hosen mit Hosenträgern daran.

Im Folgenden wird die Bühne selbst zum Spiel mit Raum und Zeit. Sie ist anfangs leer, wird mehr und mehr eingenommen von verwirrten Shakespeare-Figuren und automatenhaften Menschenansammlungen, die es bis zur hektischen Undurchsichtigkeit treiben, bis die Bühne letztlich wieder in Stille zurückgelassen wird und nur die herumliegenden Requisiten noch an das vorherige Chaos erinnern. Immer wieder schaukelt sich das Spiel von Bewegung zu Stillstand und umgekehrt.

An der Decke wird ein für die Dauer des Stücks permanent sichtbarer Countdown von 66 Minuten eingeschaltet. Jeweils ein Vers des Sonetts wird illustriert, der Vers selbst wird zu Beginn der Szene an die Rückwand projiziert.

Durch zynische Verwendung von Requisiten, wie z. B. einer Bohrmaschine, werden Grausamkeit und Folter auf den Punkt gebracht. Figuren werden mittels Bohrmaschine oder Hammer symbolisch an Boden und Wänden festgenagelt, angeschraubt, es scheint, als sollten Körperteile mit einer Säge abgeschnitten werden. Quälerei wird lautstark bis ins Unermessliche thematisiert.

Eine Figur, die mit einer großen Fahne schwenkend, sich der Gleichförmigkeit einer Gruppe widersetzt, wird brutal dazu genötigt, zum Hund zu werden und zu gehorchen. Durch laute Geräusche, Megafon und Musik bzw. Gesang soll der Zuschauer emotional noch stärker in diese Szenerie gezerzt werden.

Die Verbindungslinie zwischen Gewalt und Sex und einer irritierend ekelhaften Paarung von Gleichförmigkeit und angestrebter Perfektion wird durch synchrone Choreographien gezogen und geht, wieder mittels übertriebener Symbolik, durch Mark und Bein.

Thematiken wie Konformität, Erniedrigung, Täter-Opfer-Beziehungen, Perfektion, Schönheitswahn und Terrorismus werden mit den jeweiligen Versen des Sonetts in Verbindung gebracht.

Gegen Ende hin wird die Thematik von Flucht und Migration und Europa als Festung aufgegriffen. Sakraler Operngesang und ins Lächerliche abdriftendes, gleichsam erschreckendes Verschenken von Puppen an das Publikum zeigen die Perversion in diesem dargestellten Konflikt auf. Die Kinder der Flüchtenden, in Puppenform, werden den selbigen erst liebevoll abgenommen, dann aber gewaltvoll abtransportiert und schließlich an Fremde verschenkt. Die Illustration der Frage, wer hier wem hilft oder Schaden zufügt, wird überdeutlich.

Die Inszenierung lässt wenig Spielraum für Interpretation der Szenen. Jedwedes verwendete ästhetische Mittel wie beispielsweise die Synchronität in den Choreographien, die Lautstärke und Art der Musik, die Verwendung der Farben oder die Verwendung der Requisiten wie Hammer, Bohrmaschine, Klarsichtfolie und Stricke, zwingen zwar zur Aufmerksamkeit, aber entlarven allzu oft das Abstrakte in der jeweiligen Thematik hinzu zu einer Offensichtlichkeit. Die Idee der Transformation des Inhalts in aktuelle Bildsprache ist sichtbar. Das Verwandeln von Alltagsgegenständen in Symbole der Macht und Unterdrückung, geschieht direkt und ohne Rätsel. Die Gasmasken des Liebespaares Romeo und Julia, die sie dabei hindern, sich näherzukommen, übersetzen deren Konflikt des Nichtzueinanderkommens in einen anderen Kontext. Das letztendliche, plötzliche kommende Absetzen derer und der folgende Kuss falten das im Kopf entstandene Bild, das eine Wahrheit innehat, wieder ein und es verschwindet.

Die Bohrmaschinen bohren uns das Problem buchstäblich ins Auge. Die Symbolik versteht sich als Stellvertreter einer Darstellung der Situation.



William Shakespeare *Sonett 66*,
Ungarisches Staatstheater „Csiky Gergely“ Temeswar
(Vorpremiere: Dezember 2016,
Regie: Kokan Mladenović; Foto: Bíró Márton).



2.3. Dosar foto / Photo Dossier / Photo File

Shakespeare through the Looking Glass

DANIELA ȘILINDEAN

(“Victor Babeș” University for Medicine and Pharmacy,
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West-University of Timisoara)

“DramArt” continues the journey into the work of the Romanian artist Mihaela Marin, photographer of live arts. For this issue, Mihaela Marin has been behind the lens, accompanying different shows based on Shakespeare’s plays. By means of the photographs we gain access to the Shakespearean universe, as seen, first of all by international directors and theatre companies, then through the photographer’s lens.

The geographical spaces overlap the cultural ones and, while watching the photographs we explore an aesthetic map of theatrical productions.

The impressive variety of means and the different visions in reading and staging *Hamlet* by five directors – Eimuntas Nekrošius, Richard Schechner, Thomas Ostermeier, Monika Pęcikiewicz and Elizabeth LeCompte – carry not only the personal stylistic mark but they also offer the solid ground for cultural dialogue (Europe, Asia, U.S.)

The viewers look can notice the pictural scenes depicted by Silviu Purcărete in *A Tempest* or *Julius Caesar*, the keen observation of details in the Japanese *Richard II* directed by Yukio Ninagawa, the poetic images in *Measure for Measure* directed by Yuri Butusov or the poetry contrasting with powerful pulp images in Oskaras Koršunovas’ *Miranda*, the use of humour and dreamy atmosphere in Victor Ioan Frunză’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

One distinct category could include Robert Wilson's "paintings" as he transposes *Shakespeare's Sonnets* on stage.

The thought can accompany the pictures deciphering signs, noticing elements of the aesthetics, comparing and differentiating our own mental pictures rendered by Shakespeare's texts, by our own expectations and today's theatre makers.

Mihaela Marin's mediates the meeting, by means of her lens, while we accept the challenge as to watch the details through the looking glass.

All photographs in the *Photography File* are taken by Mihaela Marin.
Photo selection by Daniela Șilindean

Shakespeare Photo File

MIHAELA MARIN





Hamlet by William Shakespeare
“Meno Fortas” Theatre, Vilnius, Lithuania
Directed by Eimuntas Nekrošius





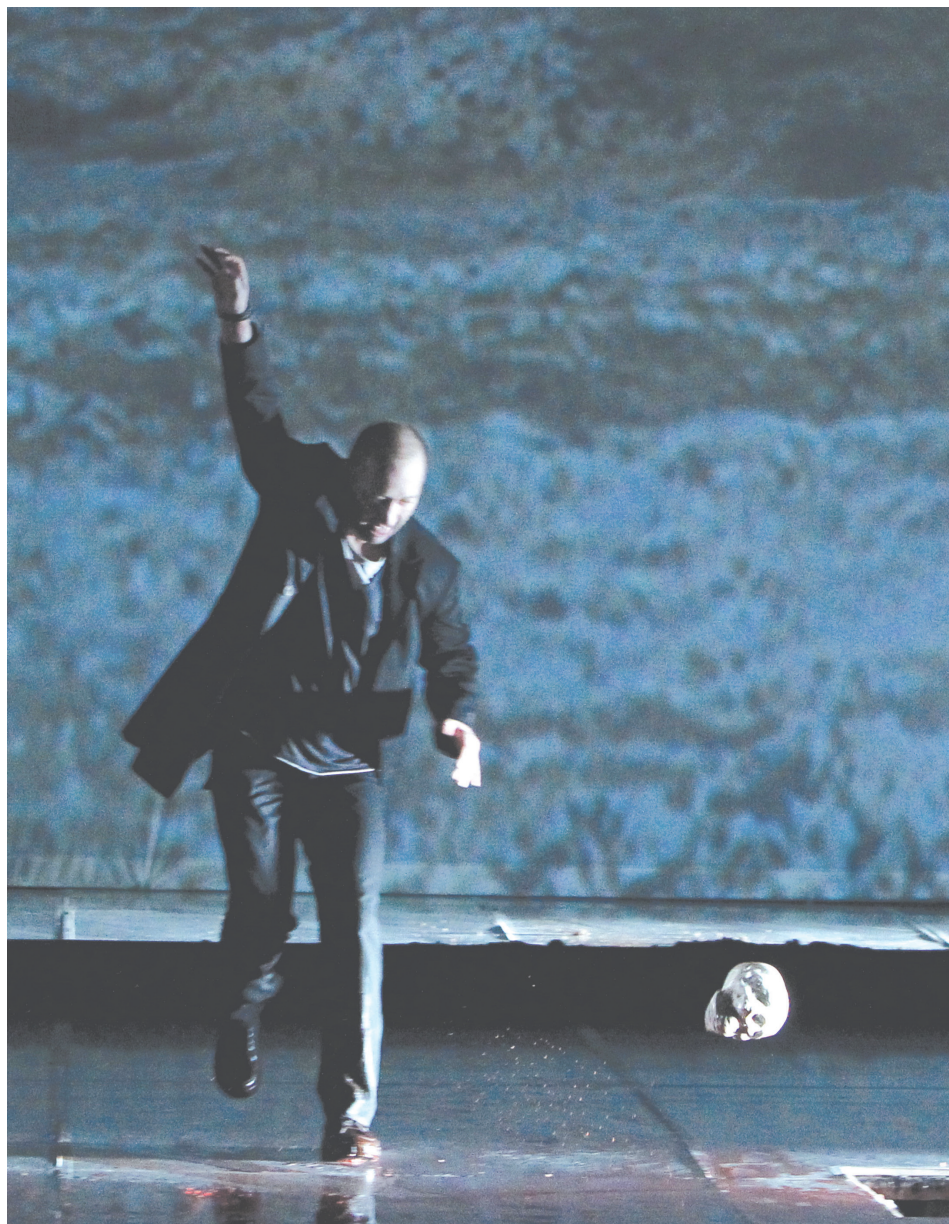
Hamlet by William Shakespeare
Theatre Academy, Shanghai, China
Directed by Richard Schechner





Hamlet by William Shakespeare
Schaubühne, Berlin, Germany
Directed by Thomas Ostermeier





Hamlet by William Shakespeare
Polski Theatre, Wrocław, Poland
Directed by Monika Pęcikiewicz





Hamlet by William Shakespeare
The Wooster Group, New York, U.S.
Directed by Elizabeth LeCompte





Julius Caesar by William Shakespeare
The Hungarian Theatre of Cluj, Romania,
Directed by Silviu Purcărete





Measure for Measure by William Shakespeare
“Vaghtangov” Theatre, Moscow, Russia
Directed by Yuri Butusov



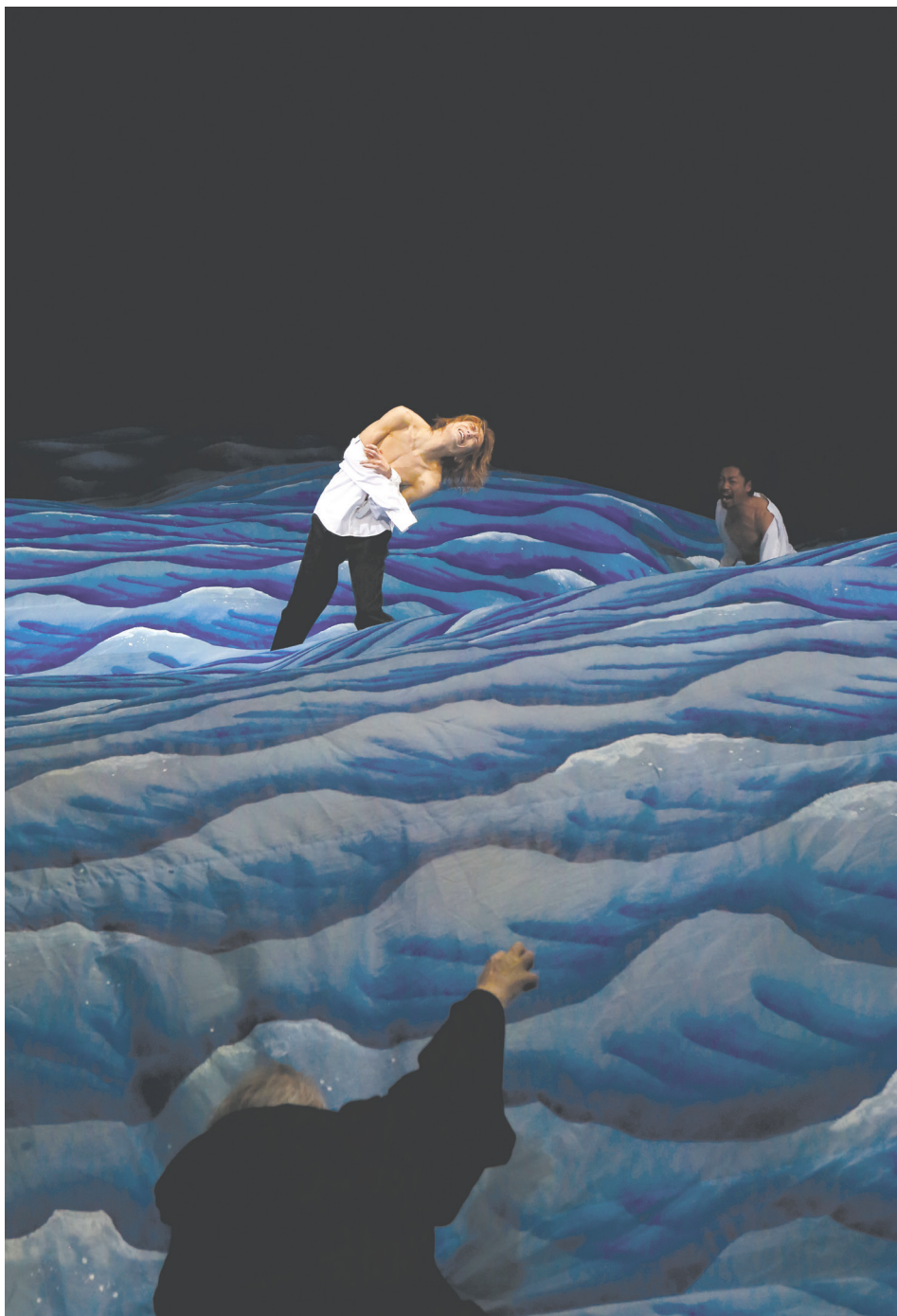


Miranda (based on *The Tempest*) by William Shakespeare
OKT/Vilnius City Theatre in Vilnius, Lithuania
Directed by Oskaras Koršunovas





A Tempest by William Shakespeare
“Marin Sorescu” National Theatre of Craiova
Directed by Silviu Purcărete





Richard II by William Shakespeare
Saitama Arts Theatre, Tokyo, Japan
Directed by Yukio Ninagawa





Richard III by William Shakespeare
Schaubühne, Berlin, Germany
Directed by Thomas Ostermeier





Shakespeare's Sonnets
Berliner Ensemble, Berlin, Germany
Directed by Robert Wilson





A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare
Metropolis Theatre, Bucharest, Romania
Directed by Victor Ioan Frunză

3

TEATRU ÎN DIALOG



THEATER IM DIALOG



THEATRE IN DIALOGUE



Mihail Sebastian and the Theatre of Literature

TIBERIUS VASINIUC

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Abstract:

This study aims to examine the relationship between Mihail Sebastian's literary works and his autobiographical writings. Even though his life was influenced by several watershed events of the twentieth century, this particular author defended both his moral integrity and his cultural options. Sebastian's diaristic writings are thus relevant to each and every one of us and demand to be re-assessed through our own individual lenses. Keeping a journal, the confessing self is definitively committed to writing "to the moment". This type of discourse has all the makings of analytical drama, from which the "protagonist", in the purest sense of the word, is never absent.

Keywords:

Mihail Sebastian, literature, drama, journal, ethics

Sebastian had all the features of the ideal critic as described by Ionesco in *Nu [No]*: "a representative of public taste, a middleman that is both skilful and just. [...] I do not mean to say that literary works create him (this would be far from ideal) [...], but that he invents, in discussing various books, something that the readers' imaginative and spiritual yearning impel him to"¹. As an exercise of imagination, Eugen Simion responded to a survey proposed by Constantin Trandafir, in an attempt to answer the question: what would have been Mihail Sebastian's literary destiny if he had not died tragically at the age of 38? Providing a very brief overview of

¹ Eugène Ionesco: *Nu*, Editura Humanitas, Bucureşti, 1991, pp. 190-191. The translation of quotes belongs to the author.

the fate of writers from the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, Eugen Simion suggested that there would have been several alternatives to which the writers of those times would have adhered willingly or by force. Taking into account the way in which Sebastian had reacted during his lifetime, in various situations and, especially, under extreme circumstances, we shall accept one plausible alternative: “Having experienced a right-wing dictatorship, Sebastian, with his talent and high prominence in the literary establishment, would not have engaged in politics and would have never accepted the brutal interference of politics in literature. He would not have overtly resisted the totalitarian regime (in order to avoid marginalization or detention, etc.), but he may have accepted some compromises so as to save his work. So did other writers, like Marin Preda, for instance. He would have taken refuge in the past and looked for acceptable themes that he could address as a writer. In other words, he would have resisted the interference of the political in his works through aesthetic means. This would not have been to the liking of ideologues à outrance, either in Eastern or in Western Europe. Political analysts in Paris would have accused him that he had mistakenly chosen the Academy over the Dungeon: in other words, that he had preferred to avoid political insurgency in order to preserve the aesthetic integrity of his work. The Communists would have suspected him of escapism, of circumventing the themes officially approved by the regime, of showing barely any political commitment, etc. All in all, he would have minded his own writing, making as few compromises as possible, and carried his literary projects further. Post-revolutionary moralists would surely have had much to bicker and complain about today.”²

Literature as Truth and Illusion

What Sebastian’s literary works convey is a sublimated version of reality rather than a critical stance on facts. This writer did not have a penchant for the insights of analytical psychology (unlike Camil Petrescu, Anton Holban and others). Moreover, at the beginning of his activity, in the pages

² Eugen Simion: “Mihail Sebastian. Ipoteze”, in: *Cultura*, no. 87, 30 August 2007.

of *Fragmente dintr-un carnet găsit* [*Excerpts from a Found Booklet*], the author confessed that it was impossible for him to spend his life “carrying an observation sheet in hand”³. This suggests that at the level of the subconscious, he had completely insulated himself from painfully experienced events. In fact, Sebastian’s autobiographical “discourse” – which is present both in his journal and in his novels and plays – fully complies with the requirements of confessional literature, gaining “greater or lesser documentary significance, depending on both what he says and what he attempts to suppress or to convey in a considerably stylised form.”⁴

On the other hand, the involuntary theatricality in Sebastian’s intimist writings can be identified at the level of his *themes*. At times, when theatricality targets scenic *expression*, the writer cautiously attempts to prevent the distortion of events. Likewise, in pages devoted to character sketches the author oscillates, with the same care for the veracity of the plot, between eliminating details and placing under a magnifying glass features that are barely visible to the naked eye. Thus, in his journal entries where he discusses the process of writing the novel *Accidentul* [*The Accident*], the author is afraid of slipping into unnatural descriptions that might contradict reality and distort the workings of the characters’ minds: “In the version I wrote this morning, when she [Nora – our note] put her skis on her feet, she was calm, peaceful, serenely contemplating the following day. However, for Nora, at that moment, there was no ‘following day’. If I don’t get this right, I will botch the whole incident and depict her meeting with Gunther in an entirely artificial manner. I must not forget that the whole Gunther episode has something artificial about it and that I need endless tact to avoid presenting her character, which is a little too bookish, a little too ‘counterfeit’, as completely and utterly hollow.”⁵

³ Mihail Sebastian: *Fragmente dintr-un carnet găsit*, in: *Opere*, vol. I, *Proză*, Editura Fundației Naționale pentru Știință și Artă, București, 2011, p. 7.

⁴ Romul Munteanu: *Cultura europeană în epoca luminilor*, vol. II, Editura Minerva, București, 1981, p. 75.

⁵ Mihail Sebastian: *Jurnal, 1935-1944*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1996, pp. 219-220.

For Sebastian, the purpose of confession is not that of verbiage, expressing the thoughts and sentiments that the writer does not wish to maintain private, revealing a plethora of details or admitting “everything”. What he wishes to do is throw the balance out of kilter and to explore numerous ways of understanding life by teasing out the profuse meanings of words. Incidentally, there is no indication that the author wanted to say *everything* or that his journal pages do not accommodate concealed meanings. This is what Anatole France highlighted, in *The Garden of Epicurus*, as the inability of confession to encompass the entire space of memories: “What interest would a confession arouse if it were absolutely sincere! But since the beginning of time, nothing of the kind has been heard of. No man has told everything, not even the zealous Augustine, more concerned to confound the followers of Manes, the heretic, than to lay bare his soul; and not even the great Rousseau, whose haughtiness led him, alas, to vilify himself.”⁶

At the same time, Sebastian displayed a sort of scepticism and disbelief in man’s ability to avoid superficiality in speech. Words trigger action and reaction. In using language, the author appears to have relished the experience of being at odds with himself and also with the world. Striving to extricate himself from the realm of language, Sebastian felt lost among words, abandoned by any landmarks that might guide him towards others, towards an Other; simply put, he found himself thrown into the gregarious “negativity” of existence. As a result, his journal and novels with confessional undertones do not attempt to justify his existential choices, but are simply means of self-expression: they chart his desire to be released from the grip of this duality of self (the *double* could be a topic of study in approaching Sebastian’s life and work).⁷ The author validates the expression of his innermost thoughts as the fundamental *logos* of life. (Perhaps it is here that we should look for an explanation as to why Sebastian adopted

⁶ Anatole France: *Grădina lui Epicur*, trans. by Raul Joil, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1983, p. 35.

⁷ This motif was reiterated by a whole generation of writers. See the topic of the “dual man” in Eugene Ionesco’s work, the *topos* of *coincidentia oppositorum* in Mircea Eliade’s writings, and so forth.

a few undemocratic, self-sufficient ideas from his professor, Nae Ionescu. An example would be the requirement to limit the number of subsidised places in the higher education system.)⁸ However, in Sebastian's case, "strong" ideas sprang not from a personal or collective revenge plan, but from the ambition not to get lost in indecisions and ideological hesitations. Basically, to avoid getting swept into the *maelstrom of history*, he headed toward what Patapievici calls – in a different, but extremely useful context for our analysis – "ceaseless conversation", "an experience that holds people captive, tied to one another, hypnotized by one another, united in an exaltation that lays the grounds not only for exploration, but also for love, self-dedication, enthusiasm, investigation, irony, gossip, chit-chat, serious dialogue, and mockery, why not. All these, however, are joined together in the experience of writing in one's soul [...]"⁹.

In the same manner, we may wonder if this actually reveals the essence of theatrical dialogue itself – a dialogue that is close to the sensitivity, the options, the beliefs and, ultimately, the life of the spectator. In other words, if it may lead us to a *confession* that we may accede through words and through gestures. Because dialogue cannot steer us along a single line of argumentation, it draws us into an *iocari serio*, that is, into a dispute that is as innocent as it is serious and deeply transformative for the audience. Turning the encounter with the characters into a privileged "time of *agape*" the dramatic dialogue seeks to inculcate in our minds the thought of joining the circle of knowledge and entering the "site" of creation.¹⁰ Again, dialogue becomes a "ceaseless conversation" which "always unfolds face to face"¹¹.

⁸ Cf. Marta Petreu: *Diavolul și ucenicul său: Nae Ionescu – Mihail Sebastian*, second revised edition, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2010, pp. 67-68.

⁹ Horia-Roman Patapievici: *Partea nevăzută decide totul*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2015, p. 33.

¹⁰ The word "site" is used in the sense described by Mircea Eliade, as an *ongoing process*, never to reach its end, constantly making room for subsequent reassignments of meaning.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

Literature – between banal Facts and the Ultimatum of Existence

The purpose of literature is the truth, as Sebastian believes. Moreover, the written truth also becomes the truth of the reader only insofar as words and utterances are the outcome of an act that is not necessarily *fecund*, but that was born at the right time, via a gesture that the author calls “abdication,” i.e. a relinquishment of forms of expression that are different from those chosen by the writer.¹² The author notices the improper use of the adjective “fecund” in the literary criticism of the time, attempting to disqualify it from a cultural perspective and, in particular, from a literary perspective. The author’s reflections (at a time known and understood by himself alone) are the only ones that can give the true measure of the heart’s truths.¹³

Pompiliu Constantinescu believed that André Gide profoundly influenced Sebastian’s writings. Surely, this association between the two writers is legitimate, at least up to a point. However, we believe that the author of the famous *Critica literaţilor* (*Towards a Critique of Men of Letters*, 1938) had exaggerated the connection¹⁴, because Sebastian’s essayistic interest in Gide’s creation (as well as in the modern European novel, which he analysed in five issues of the review *Cuvântul*, in 1927) influenced his novel and short story writing technique only to some extent. Gide’s impact on Sebastian’s dramatic skill was even lower. What Gide referred to as the “free act” was to be reconfigured in the Romanian writer’s work as inner freedom. Sebastian insisted on the authenticity of his characters, especially in his most accomplished novels, such as *Oraşul cu salcâmi* (*The Acacia Tree City*, 1935) and *Accidentul* (*The Accident*, 1940), but also in novels that have been less acclaimed by critics, such as *Femei* (*Women*, 1932) or *De două mii de ani* (*For Two Thousand Years*, 1935): “We”, Sebastian stated as early as 1927, “believe that the free act is an

¹² The idea is taken from Mircea Eliade. See “Cartea lui Mircea Eliade”, in: *Cuvântul*, VI, no. 1833, 31 May 1930, p. 1, reproduced in: *Opere*, vol. IV, *Publicistică (1930-1932)*, Editura Fundaţiei Naţionale pentru Ştiinţă şi Artă, Bucureşti, 2013, p. 131.

¹³ See Mihail Sebastian: “Dicţionar de termeni literari, I”, in *Opere*, vol. IV, pp. 103-106.

¹⁴ Cf. Dumitru Micu: *Istoria literaturii române. De la creaţia populară la postmodernism*, Editura Saeculum, Bucureşti, 2000, p. 298.

acte manqué. Perhaps if we were to approach it in a psychoanalytical key, its mysteries would be unlocked”¹⁵. Thus, if we take a look at a character like Paul from *The Accident*, we will notice that his predicament is the result of a recrudescence of “banal facts”. These are the secret details of his life, as they are outlined by the complicated “history” of the other characters. However, unlike Lafcadio, the protagonist of Gide’s *The Vatican Cellars*, an individual with unalterable self-identity and consciousness, Paul succumbs to the banality of everyday life, on the basis of a personal decision that is never carried through and of a self that is convinced of the difficulties (or even futility) of the physical act. Paul abandoned himself altogether to “the Gidean demon”¹⁶ (to use a syntagm from his own review about Jacques Rivière). What Sebastian had in common with the French author and with the “pure” novel advocated by Proust was the experience of an inner crisis. It was a crisis that could not be ignored, as its roots lay in his relationship with the others and in the never-ending struggle with himself. He was aware of the overwhelming duality of identity, even though the signs of this inner split might be difficult to detect in the subtext of his diaristic texts. In *Ficțiunea jurnalului intim* (*The Fiction of Intimate Journals*, I) Eugen Simion points out the “audacity” that André Gide displayed in his diary. We can identify the same boldness, albeit somewhat toned down, in the Romanian writer’s confessions: “The twentieth century unfolded under the sign of his ‘audacity’ [Gide’s, our note]. Above all, he had the courage of expressing the inexpressible, that inner Inferno, intelligence, and then also of regarding the intimate journal as a literary genre that defines the modern spirit. He introduced the genre of the journal into the discourse of the novel and created a technique that was to be emulated by many modern prose writers. Finally, it is thanks to Gide that the *deep self* (the man who writes) is no longer embarrassed to show on the surface and

¹⁵ Mihail Sebastian: “Considerații asupra romanului modern”. See “Romanul pur”, in: *Cuvântul*, no. 914, 2 November 1927, p. 2. See *ibidem*, in: *Opere*, vol. III, *Publicistică* (1926-1929), Editura Fundației Naționale pentru Știință și Artă, București, 2013, p. 52.

¹⁶ Mihail Sebastian: “Jacques Rivière”, in: *Universul literar*, XLIV, no. 13, 25 March 1928, p. 211 (see in *idem*, *Opere*, vol. III, p. 192).

no longer hides its sibling, the *biographical* or *superficial self* (the man who lives in the shadow of the work), from the eyes of the world.”¹⁷.

On the other hand, George Călinescu approached Sebastian’s work with malice and accused him of lacking talent and imagination. However, the literary critic did admit that the author of *The Acacia Tree City* was a lucid observer and that he “seeks refuge in self analysis and erotic scenes [that] are influenced by Stendhal rather than by Gide”¹⁸.

From Drama to Performance

Between the two World Wars, the theatre was increasingly perceived as the meeting ground of the arts, in keeping with the romantic aesthetic theory of Richard Wagner, who, in the mid-nineteenth century, had considered that as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the “theatrical art work” could be the result of a syncretic creative effort. In this space of encounters, the poet and the musician “become one, for each one of them knows and feels just like the other. The poet becomes a musician, while the musician becomes a poet. Together they can form the artistically integral man.”¹⁹ Thus, after the radical turn of dramatic discourse, gesture, movement, the spoken word, the sound of music, the colours and shapes of the set design: all these could become merged in a staged performance, reinforcing the aesthetic regime of the theatre²⁰. In Wagner’s words, drama “consists of a chain of [...] organic members, conditioning, supplementing and supporting one another: exactly as the organic members of the human body, which then alone is a complete and living body, when it consists of all the members

¹⁷ Eugen Simion: *Ficțiunea jurnalului intim*, [vol.] I: *Există o poetică a jurnalului?*, second revised edition, Editura Virtual, București, 2010, p. 6.

¹⁸ George Călinescu: *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent*, second revised edition, Editura Minerva, București, 1988, p. 963.

¹⁹ Richard Wagner: *Opera și drama*, trans. from German by Cristina-Maria Crăciun, Editura Nemira, București, 2011, p. 327.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 327.

whose mutual conditionings and supplementing make up its whole; where none are lacking to it; but, also, when none are too many”²¹.

In the interwar Romanian theatre, the theatrical image is seen as an “open system”. By and large, theatre is a “total art” that synthesizes all the other forms of artistic creation. Alongside Sebastian, V. I. Popa and Radu Stanca also championed the idea that the stage should accommodate artistic elements that were not specific to drama. Perfectly synchronized with the European theatre movement, Radu Stanca, leader of the Literary Circle of Sibiu, wrote a few texts that are important to theatre studies today. The author of *Aquarium* (“the last Romanian director who comes into the theatre from the outside world, as a ‘superior dilettante’”)²² became familiar with the contemporary trends in the art of performance, which insisted on the need to obliterate the dialogical function and the realistic dimension (of Stanislavskian origin) of theatre and to lay emphasis on direction and “scenic metaphors”: “Ever more clearly we may find that, in the absence of his own means of expression, the director resorts to the insights provided by the other arts. Of course, not just any other arts: only those arts that may be subjected to ‘theatricalization’ in the sense of a substantial transfiguration *sub specie teatralis*.”²³

Along the same lines, Tudor Vianu resumed the Wagnerian ideas, showing the benefits of syncretism and welcoming the opportunity of unifying the arts. He also drew attention to the fact that this should not involve, under any circumstances, a heterogeneous juxtaposition of competing elements. The *side-by-side* presence of various artistic forms must be envisaged as a fertile means of “elevating” some integrated and stable constructions, leading to a “totalizing effect”. As Vianu put it, “If the arts can radically separate themselves with such difficulty, even though in reality they are in contact with one another in so many points and relentlessly merge with

²¹ Richard Wagner: *Opera and Drama*, trans. by William Ashton Ellis, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 1995, p. 342.

²² Ion Vartic: *Cuvânt înainte*, in: Radu Stanca, *Aquarium. Eseuri programatice*, Cluj-Napoca: Editura Biblioteca Apostrof, 2000, p. 7.

²³ Radu Stanca: “Metafora în arta regiei”, in: *Aquarium*, pp. 152-153.

each other, the idea of their coming together is as natural as it is far from new. [...] But if the unification of the arts is a plan designed to integrate its partial manifestations within the totality that ensured its great accomplishments in the past, it must be conducted in such a way as to truly recompose a totality effect”²⁴.

In like manner, Sebastian was to take the Wagnerian insights farther and, like Adolph Appia, he was to invoke the “bankruptcy of pure genres”, favouring “visual music” and the *poetry of colours*,²⁵ supporting the notions of syncretism and synaesthesia, as these assisted stage creators in reaching the “organic” quality of theatre performance. The theme of the separation from “pure genres” had been addressed by Sebastian in 1927, in *Considerații asupra romanului modern* (Considerations on the Modern Novel). This process, the author thought, had begun with the end of French classicism. It had fully come to fruition in the nineteenth century and, in particular, at the turn of the twentieth century, when many writers advocated the necessity of a “Renaissance” of the arts. “The purity of genres is a mere prejudice today”²⁶, Sebastian wrote in the first of the eight chapters he dedicated to the modern novel and to the evolution of narrative works.

Sebastian justly believed that theatre had played a major role in culture. However, even if his plays largely respected the existing theatrical canons, his aesthetic achievements had several innovative features. On the one hand, because he was familiar with the directorial doctrines of the time (Edward Gordon Craig, Nikolai Evreinov, Konstantin Stanislavski, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Max Reinhardt, etc.), the author positioned himself on the side of stage-centrism, announcing the “death of drama”²⁷. This phrase should be understood as the need for *de-literaturizing* performance and for removing

²⁴ Tudor Vianu: *Estetica*, Editura pentru Literatură, București, 1968, pp. 145-146.

²⁵ Mihail Sebastian: “De la dramă la spectacol,” in: *Cuvântul*, no. 971, 31 December 1927, p. 1. (See *ibidem*, *Opere*, Vol. III, p. 101).

²⁶ Idem, “Considerații asupra romanului modern. I. Declinul genurilor,” in: *Cuvântul*, III, no. 887, 6 October 1927, p. 1. See *ibidem*, in *Opere*, vol. III, p. 28.

²⁷ Mihail Sebastian: *Jurnal II. Jurnal indirect. 1926-1945*, Editura Teșu, București, 2006, p. 42.

the theatre outside the conventions suggested by the theatre *à l'italienne*. Like Vsevolod Meyerhold and Edward Gordon Craig, Mihail Sebastian insisted on “going beyond” the proscenium and extending the space of dramatic action into the spectators’ hall. The text acquires thus the features of *representability* and is *spectacular*. In other words, to use the expression of Roland Barthes, the text may include theatricality at the level of verbal expression: “Evreinov, Stanislavski and Reinhardt aimed not to go beyond the text, but especially to go beyond the stage. [...] Theatre is becoming *de-literaturized*. At last. After all, it was not made for the book and the library, but for the lights of a performance hall. [Theatre] is creating bridges of understanding that can connect the ground floor and the backstage”²⁸.

However, the attribute of *representability* should not be confused with the function of *representation*. An explanation is greatly needed: the transition from drama to performance is achieved by resuming a part of the play’s text into the text of the performance or representation. To what degree the text may be considered redundant is, as a rule, entirely up to the director. Once they are uttered on stage, words (the characters’ “speech”) will confirm that the function of language is “representation.” In other words, the *analysis* extends to the action performed on stage (implicitly, also to the nonverbal elements). It also includes secondary meanings, which are distanced from the discourse of the *mise en scène*. This forces us to make a distinction between two types of writing: the text produced by the playwright, on the one hand, and the text uttered on stage, on the other hand²⁹.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

²⁹ We are using the two concepts of “interpretation” and “identification” in the sense provided by Arthur C. Danto, in: *Transfigurarea locului comun. O filozofie a artei*, trans. by Vlad Morariu, Editura Design & Print, Cluj, 2012, pp. 155-181. Thus, in the case of theatre, interpretation is preceded by the effort of identifying the elements that give structure and meaning to the compositional and dramatic ensemble: “Interpreting a work means proposing a theory that explains what the work is, which is its subject”, *ibidem*, p. 161. See also Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier: “L’image dans le langage”, in: Henri Meschonnie (à l’initiative de), *Le langage comme défi*, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes (Université Paris VIII), Paris, 1991, p. 150.

The same cannot be said when it comes to the gestures, facial expressions, movements, etc. of the actors, who need no mediating or accompanying elements. They describe themselves *ipso facto* and assert themselves without resorting to verbal means of signification. Gestures ensure the actor's sovereignty in relation to the creation on stage. Moreover, as Eugeniu Coșeriu shows, they express "entire situations; they have [...] a function of 'expression' (communication) and 'appeal' (they elicit reactions from the recipients), but they do not have a function of representation"³⁰. In theatre, gestures are *interpreted* forms (or, to be more precise, forms with already assigned features!), and they do not risk disappearing into the performance.³¹ Still, the gesture reveals itself to us as a means and as a chance for theatre to reassert its primacy over everyday life and *interpretable* reality. In the process of identification, spectators experience a major crisis: each one of them manages this crisis in a different way, wavering between two poles – *identification* (*mimesis*) and *distancing* (denial of appearance), or between the absolute faith in the reality of the action on stage and a disbelief in the authenticity of the staged events. In other words, they hover between André Antoine's notion of dramatic authenticity and Bertolt Brecht's critical aesthetics of "epic theatre". In Sebastian's case, however, the harmonizing of conflicting elements also represents a threat to the theatre, an instability which has its own risks: "When one sets out on a

³⁰ Eugeniu Coșeriu: *Istoria filozofiei limbajului. De la începuturi până la Rousseau*, trans. into Romanian by Eugen Munteanu and Mădălina Ungureanu, București: Editura Humanitas, 2011, p. 469. See also idem, *Introducere în lingvistică*, trans. by Elena Ardeleanu and Eugenia Bojoga, Cluj, Editura Echinoc, 1995, p. 97.

³¹ *In extremis* we may refer to the Anglican Bishop George Berkeley's theory, which linked the existence of objects to their perception, because "we see real objects of sight, and what we see we know". George Berkeley, *Teoria vederii. Eșeu cu privire la o nouă teorie a vederii. Teoria vederii justificată și explicată*, trans. by Anda Oprișor Fournel, Editura IRI, București, 2006, p. 138. In the art of the theatre, this form of perception will regulate the relationship between two major attributes of creation: *universality* and *singularity*. See Luigi Pareyson: *Estetica. Teoria formativității*, trans. by Marian Papahagi, Editura Univers, București, 1977, p. 193.

quest, one is doomed to failure. When one torments oneself, one commits to inequality”³².

“Theatre is becoming de-literaturized. At last.”

Let us remember that Blaga saw in the “new theatre”, as opposed to the naturalist one, which had “succumbed under the burden of its own excesses”, the trends towards spiritualization and the metaphysical strain (as in Paul Claudel’s theatre), the efforts to convey the “essence of human nature” (with Strindberg or Wedekind), the so-called “strong ideas” (Georg Kaiser) or the “problems of modern life” (in the works of Bernard Shaw and Luigi Pirandello). As Blaga stated, “The new theatre no longer depicts characters; it creates characters, going beyond a mere imitation of nature. The playwrights’ interest has thus shifted from the *detail* to the *essential*, from the *concrete* to the *abstract*, from the *immediate* to the *transcendent*, from the *self-apparent* to that which is *problematic*”³³.

Like Lucian Blaga and V. I. Popa, Sebastian rejected the solution of *mimesis* and that of unrestrained verism, tapping simultaneously the ideational universes of Gordon Craig and Antonin Artaud. Moreover, like Artaud, who firmly demanded that we should do away with literature³⁴, Sebastian stated that theatre was the “counterpart” of life and claimed that the principles of pure literary genres associated with naturalism should be discarded. He paved the way for scenic “creativity”. In 1927, Sebastian positioned himself in favour of Artaudian stage-centrism. Thus, in the article entitled “From Drama to Performance”, he rejected the notion of a theatre that was

³² Mihail Sebastian: “Elvira Popescu”, *Universul literar*, XLIV, no. 13, 25 March 1928, p. 202 (See *idem*, *Opere*, vol. III, p. 186).

³³ Lucian Blaga: “Noul stil”, in: *Zări și etape*, Editura Minerva, București, 1990 (1968), pp. 106-107.

³⁴ “We must put an end to this superstition of texts and written poetry. [...] It’s time to finish once and for all with these manifestations of closed art, selfish and personal.” See Antonin Artaud: *Teatrul și dublul său*, *Teatrul lui Séraphin* and *Alte texte despre teatru*, trans. into Romanian by Voichița Sasu and Diana Tihu-Suciu, Editura Echinox, Cluj-Napoca, 1997, pp. 64, 65.

melting away in the vat of literary genres: “Theatre is becoming *de-literaturized*. At last. The space of theatre is not the book or the library: it is the performance hall, where it casts bridges of understanding that connect the ground floor with the backstage. [...] The road from drama to performance is not blocked. On the contrary. The stage has given us the first successful synthesis of the *arts*.”³⁵

In outlining the “roots” of this idea, we should not forget I. L. Caragiale, one of the first Romanian authors who described the special place that theatre occupied among the other arts and emphasized the need to distinguish drama from literature. Thus, Caragiale believed that literature and words, in general, should cease to be considered the bearers of truth: “Theatre, in my opinion, is not an art genre, but an art in its own right. It is as different from literature, in general, and from poetry, in particular, as any other form of art – like architecture, for instance. [...] Theatre is a constructive art, which teases out the conflicts that arise between people because of their temperaments and their passions. The elements it operates with are the vivid and immediate manifestations of these conflicts.”³⁶

Of course, in the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century, opinions were divided, and *parti-pris* were sometimes most passionately expressed. Thus, G. M. Zamfirescu defended the idea of theatre as literature, believing that words activated the springs of scenic action and that the other spectacular elements (the actors’ performance, gestures, pantomime, silences) represented merely supporting tools, meant to convey an artistic

³⁵ Mihail Sebastian: “De la dramă la spectacol”, *Cuvântul*, III, no. 971, 31 December 1927, p. 1 (see *idem*, *Opere*, vol. III, p. 103).

³⁶ Ion Luca Caragiale: “Oare teatrul este literatură?”, in: *Opere*, vol. II: *Teatru. Scrieri despre teatru. Versuri*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 2000, pp. 831-832. Under the “spectacular” mantle, theatricality is also encountered in the prose of Caragiale. An example is *Grand Hôtel “Victoria Română”*, in which the hero confesses about his state of utmost nervous excitability: “My capacity to feel is enormous and my sight is monstrous” – in *Opere*, vol. II: *Teatru. Scrieri despre teatru. Versuri*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 2000, p. 78.

expression³⁷. By contrast, Sebastian argued that in order to transpose the essential data of life into theatre, the real had to be “revealed” and not reproduced on stage. This idea was also shared, during the same period, by V. I. Popa, Felix Aderca, Camil Petrescu, Haig Acterian, and George Călinescu. However, even they gave in, reluctantly, to the temptation of theatricality (which emphasized the importance of the characters’ movements and gestures). This was probably due to a simple logic: they all defined themselves, first and foremost, as writers and only then did they envisage themselves as artists of the stage. That entitled them to defend the virtues of plays and the role of playwrights. Thus, Camil Petrescu and I. M. Sadoveanu strongly defended the pre-eminence of the dramatic text and the role it played as a platform in the process of scenic creation³⁸. These critical ideas were also embraced by Tudor Vianu and even by Mihail Sebastian. The years that elapsed between 1927 and 1939 determined the author of *The Accident* to reconsider his previous aesthetic positions and to rethink his cultural priorities³⁹.

In the 1950s, Eugène Ionesco, an admirer of Caragiale, was to borrow the latter’s concepts when he wrote a seminal text for *La Nouvelle Revue française*: “Experiența teatrului” (The Experience of Theatre)⁴⁰. In this article, wondering how performance *is* perceived⁴¹, Ionesco discovers that theatre is surprisingly different from other art forms. It is vivid, immediate, direct, even though “the

³⁷ See George Mihail Zamfirescu: *Tehnica decorului*, in: *Mărturii în contemporaneitate*, Editura Minerva, București, 1974, p. 88.

³⁸ See I. M. Sadoveanu: “Drama și textul”, in: *Scrieri*, vol. V: *Reflecții și disocieri. Teorie teatrală*, Editura Minerva, București, 1978, pp. 104-105.

³⁹ See Mihail Sebastian: “Notă despre Pirandello”, in: *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, VI, no. 1, January 1939, pp. 177-181.

⁴⁰ See Eugène Ionesco: *Note și contranote*, trans. by Ion Pop, Editura Humanitas, București, 1992, pp. 43-63.

⁴¹ It should be acknowledged that the copula “is” is very important. We must recognize its quality of transforming, through its metonymic resources, the features of the artistic object, without us straying from the path of recognition. The examples given by Arthur C. Danto are relevant: “‘is’ [...] intervenes when we state that a blotch of paint is Icarus, that a surface of blue paint is the sky, that a certain actor with crooked legs is Hamlet or that a specific musical passage is the rustle of leaves” – *Transfigurarea locului comun*, pp. 168-169.

truth of fiction is deeper and filled with greater significance than the reality of everyday life”⁴². However, Eugène Ionesco speaks about the “truth of fiction” from a disenchanted perspective. He does not address the process of fictionalization, which remains unnoticed as the creation becomes objectified. Thus, the author shows that the imagination is under threat because of the scenic reality, which grants vitality to the theatre performance (i.e. thanks to the characters who appear in “flesh and blood”)⁴³. Implicitly, there should be no dialogue between the performance on stage and dramatic fiction. It is impossible for two discursive orders, namely *language* and *speech*, to coexist within the space of representation: “Two levels of reality existed [in theatre – our note]: on the one hand, the concrete, material, impoverished, bare, limited reality of these people, who were very much alive, a mundane reality, the reality of people who moved and spoke on stage; and on the other hand, the reality of the imagination. They faced one another, never overlapping, never becoming identical: they were two antagonistic universes unable to unify, to merge”⁴⁴.

Conclusions

In the realm of theatre, the writer’s critical sense became visible since his adolescence and continued throughout his entire life. Sebastian regarded drama through the lens of the performance stage. By and large, he believed that the success of a play depended on the way in which the author imagined the *mise en scène*, whose theatrical and representational elements were more important than the literary aspects. For Sebastian, a theatre performance was not an extension of everyday life. It was not intended to convey “real emotions”. It was a lucid game, which could highlight the dramatic functions of the play. He emphasized the theatricality of the characters and the possibility of compensating the illusion of verism by “developing the actor’s scenic presence”⁴⁵. Sebastian did not uphold the notion of an artifi-

⁴² Eugène Ionesco: *Note și contranote*, pp. 45-46.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

⁴⁵ Justin Ceuca: *Teatrologia românească interbelică (Aspecte teoretice)*, Editura Minerva, București, 1990, p. 79.

cial, conventional theatre. He advocated an art of performance that would not abandon naturalness, simplicity and spontaneity on stage, that would foster a ceaseless dialogue between actors and spectators, and that would revive the sincere, undistorted confession of the characters and, through them, of each and every one of us.

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The Golden Ratio in Today's Society — Perfection or Standardization?

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Abstract:

Andres Serrano is one of the controversial artists of the contemporary stage. His outrageous style of creating art became extremely disputed, allowing him to denounce social hypocrisy. From morgue photos to iconic items submerged in human fluids, Serrano pushes the limits of understanding by forcing the viewer to step out of the comfort zone. The American artist gained international recognition after the NEA government financed a show in which his work *Piss Christ* was exhibited. Far from being a blasphemous act, the photo of a crucifix drowned in urine, became a way of questioning as the interest of the artist goes beyond the shocking effect and extends to the awakening of the critical mind.

The German playwright Marius von Mayenburg is also known for his sharp point of view regarding limits and prefabricated patterns. His writings criticize today's social morals in a satirical, almost surrealistic way that brought him worldwide appreciation – UK, Germany, Romania, Australia. *The Ugly One (Der Häßliche)*, a sardonic drama which presents the fatal consequences of the obsession for physical perfection, brings up one of the most important questions of the contemporary world – how do we define ourselves?

The paper intends to focus on both artists and their controversial works.

Keywords:

contemporary art, Andres Serrano, Marius von Mayenburg

1987 is the year that shakes the contemporary art world due to Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ*, a controversial photo of a crucifix submerged in a glass of urine. The piece became one of the most disputed art works, placed at the border between defiance and freedom of expression. The artist denied

any blasphemous content, declaring it should be perceived as a statement against impenetrable norms. By deepening the relationship between body and soul, Serrano came to the conclusion that the existence of predetermined patterns compromises the human being as a whole. The submerging of the sacred in a psychological fluid is a symbolic condemnation of a society where evolution led to a spiritual paralysis. This drowning process stands for the numbing of our senses.

Serrano's photography became also a haunted enemy of the aspirational publicity which invades every day our private space. Art historian Carol Duncan concludes that "such images wield great authority, structuring and reinforcing the psychic codes that determine and differentiate the real possibilities of woman and men."¹ We are suffocated by a *must-have* flawlessness, which dictates us how to dress, how to look, or how to behave with our own bodies.

Normal Glazer, owner of Patina V, a Californian mannequin factory explains full of confidence: "I will tell you this and most woman hate when I say this, there are no perfect bodies out there, we make the perfect bodies".² The statement was made in a short movie directed by Jesse Epstein in 2009, 34x25x36. Jesse documents the prefabricated beauty as a result of the fine combination between art, manufacture and business. We are shown the means by which perfection is obtained, while the designer of the Patina V factory compares the replication of a feature with the Christian strategy used in the creation of the saints' statues. By inoculating the image of a saint in the conscience of people, the Christian faith produced faces that represented the purity of the soul and a kind of perfection that people could aspire to. The modern world turned the desire for eternal salvation into carnal aesthetics. But what happens when perfection becomes another word for series?

¹ Carol Duncan, 'The Esthetics of Power in Modern Erotic Art' (1977), reprinted in: *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 206.

² Normal Glazer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzqNB076sdY&t=24s> [12.06.2016].

A possible answer is given by the German play writer Marius von Mayenburg. His play *The Ugly One*³ presents the failed race for perfection. By bringing on stage the drama of those who loose themselves in prefabricated standards, he creates a distopy of the perfection without perfection. Premiering in 2007 at the Schaubühne Berlin, *The Ugly One* creates a debate around beauty parameters. The constant change of the perfection standard leads to insecurity, while identity markers are questioned: Who am I? How do I differentiate myself from the others?



Der Häßliche, Marius von Mayenburg,
 Director: Theodor-Cristian Popescu
 Foto: Fehérvári Zsolt;
 (German State Theatre Timișoara, Premiere: 15.10. 2011,
 Performers: Horia Săvescu, Silvia Török, Konstantin Keidel, Rareș Hontzu)

³ Marius von Mayenburg, *Der Häßliche*, Henschel Schauspiel, Berlin, 2017.

Spiced with plenty of black humor, Mayenburg's text reveals a social, imagological carnival where humans prefer masks, so they lose their true identity in a constant struggle to be "different".

If Serrano is destroying the perfection myth by connecting the sacred image of perfection to a human need, Mayenburg is making the opposite: he turns the human need into divine power. The human becomes the creator, the maker of his own perfection.

The main character, Lette, the inventor of a high voltage connector is prohibited by his boss to take part in his product presentation because of his ugliness. Scheffler, the owner of the company where Lette works, explains they will not be able to sell or promote anything if his face will be associated with the product. Such ugly features overshadow any scientific explanation and therefore the commercialization will be a total failure.

"SCHEFFLER: But why do you think we're doing this? The stupid convention and all that nonsense.

LETTE: So people can see that we've done a good job, so that they get to know our product.

SCHEFFLER: So that they buy it.

LETTE: Yes, if you like, buy it.

SCHEFFLER: Buy, buy, buy, not if I like.

LETTE: Yes, so?

SCHEFFLER: Buy.

LETTE: Yes, you're right.

SCHEFFLER: You need to sell the high voltage connector.

LETTE: Fine, I'll sell it.

SCHEFFLER: You're not serious.

LETTE: Why not?

SCHEFFLER: You must be aware that –

LETTE: What?

SCHEFFLER: You must know that –

LETTE: What?

SCHEFFLER: That it's out of the question.

LETTE: Aha. Why?

...

SCHEFFLER: [...] You can't sell anything with this face."⁴

The ugliness which seems to be the only thing that represents Lette as a human being influences his decision to get a plastic surgery that will change his life forever. After the operation he becomes the perfect incarnation of beauty and the new look brings him fame and all the benefits that come with it. His surgeon, doctor Scheffler (the boss and the surgeon share the same name, they both represent a fake authority) sees the great success of his work and begins to make replicas of the perfect face. You hear different voices, you identify different body types, but you see only one face, Lette's. The individuality is lost in a bunch of identical flawless features, that make the unique essence of each human to be devalued. Lette is not a particular

⁴ Marius von Mayenburg, *Der Häßliche*, pp. 8-11: „Scheffler: Aber was meinen Sie, warum wir das machen? Den albernen Kongreß und den ganzen Firlefanz./ Lette: Damit die Leute sehen, daß wir gut gearbeitet haben, damit sie unser Produkt kennenlernen./ Scheffler: Damit sie es kaufen./ Lette: Ja, von mir aus, kaufen./ Scheffler: Kaufen, kaufen, kaufen, nicht von mir aus./ Lette: Ja, und?/ Scheffler: Kaufen./ Lette: ja, ist ja richtig./ Scheffler; Sie müßten den Starkstromstecker verkaufen./ Lette. Dann verkauf ich ihn eben./ Scheffler: Sie scheinen das wirklich ernst zu meinen./ Lette: Warum nicht?/ Scheffler: Ihnen muß doch klar sein -/ Lette: Was?/ Scheffler: Sie müssen doch wissen -/ Lette: Was muß ich wissen?/ Scheffler: Daß das gänzlich unmöglich ist./ Lette: Aha. Warum?/ .../ Scheffler:[...] Sie können mit dem Gesicht nichts verkaufen.” *All play references from this text are translated by the author of this paper from the original German version.

individual, but a product that works based on commercial standards. The inventor becomes the invention, an “economical and efficient” gadget representing the solution of today’s society, a dysfunctional soul compensated by an aesthetic body.

“SCHEFFLER: And here ladies and gentleman we have Lette in flesh and bone. Let all his features transcend your inner core. Abandon yourself in the clearness of the lines. And respond yourself, honestly, to the question I am about to ask: can there be a face more flawless then this one? Wouldn’t you sacrifice anything to look alike? Wouldn’t you spend an amount of money for such a face? Today, I tell you, it is possible. I give you this unique chance. Make a step ahead and become another person. Now listen how Lette’s life has changed thanks to my art. Mister Lette how do you feel?”⁵

The subtle references that the playwright is pointing out are extremely vast. From attacking the big corporations whose policy relies on esthetic criteria, to questioning the need of plastic surgery, Mayenburg offers a vision of a world ruled by fake codes that base their beliefs on visual appearances and where identity is sacrificed in the name of a prefabricated, artificial perfection. The satirical play criticizes the superficial view over beauty by challenging the idea of the universal truth regarding perfection — can we define perfection? A fake happiness is reached by the end of the play, while the characters are still struggling with disappointment and self doubt. A final, ironic-rhetorical question asked by Fanny, Lette’s wife, invites us to meditate about the real harmony between body and soul.

⁵ *Idem*, pp. 40–41: „Scheffler: Und hier meine Damen und Herren, ist Lette in eigener Person. Lassen Sie diese Züge auf Ihr Innerstes wirken. Geben Sie sich der Klarheit der Linien hin. Und antworten Sie sich selbst so ehrlich? Sie können auf die Frage, die ich Ihnen jetzt stellen werde: Existiert ein makelloseres Gesicht? Würden Sie nicht alles dafür opfern, ihm zu gleichen? Würden Sie dafür nicht viel viel Geld ausgeben? Ich sage Ihnen heute: Es ist möglich. Ich biete Ihnen diese einzigartige Gelegenheit. Machen Sie einen Schnitt, und werden Sie ein anderer Mensch. Aber hören Sie jetzt aus allererster Hand, wie ich das Leben von Herrn Lette mit meiner Kunst verändert habe. Herr Lette, wie geht es Ihnen?“

“FANNY: Can we go to bed now that we are rich and beautiful? So that we can be happy and get to sleep?”⁶

Andres Serrano and Marius von Mayenburg are the contemporary rebels who scandalize by the way they point out to the need of authenticity. Self discovery and the cultivation of one's own identity may be the only form of perfection that can be reached by humans. The radical means both artists are using to express similar ideas, are ways of destroying in order to recreate. Lette needs to destroy his ugliness, because it's the only way he can rediscover his inner voice and the unestimated value of being unique. Serrano uses the destruction of the sacred image of perfection to prove that even the image of Christ (not Christ himself, but his image) is contaminated with stereotypes that create boundaries and separates the flesh from the soul in an inequitable manner.

One more time it is proved that visual art and theater work hard in order to unmask the hypocrisy of today's world. They are some kind of balance keepers that intervene when the individual coherence loses ground when it comes to the inconsistency of the contemporary discourse.

⁶ *Idem*, p.63, “Fanny: Wollen wir nicht langsam ins Bett gehen? Jetzt, wo wir reich und schön sind? Damit wir glücklich werden und schlafen können?”.

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INTERVIURI



INTERVIEWS



INTERVIEWS



Cristina Maldonado: I design for your body

LUANA PLEŞEA

(RRI Bucharest)

Cristina Maldonado, leading artist of *The Stranger Gets a Gift Service*, is a Prague-based Mexican with background in body movement. Her work unifies experimental theatre, dance, participatory art, new and old media. She works alone or in collaboration with artists from different disciplines. The artist performed in Mexico, Eastern Europe, New York and Montreal. Since 2003, she has directed many different performance projects in the Czech Republic.

The Stranger Gets a Gift Service – Interruptor (one of the three performance-installations of the project) was presented in Bucharest, Romania, at the National Dance Centre (CNDB), during Regional Choreography Biennale — the pilot edition of the Central and East European Choreography and Contemporary Dance Biennale.

Luana Pleşea: How would you define your work, especially this project? It's very different from what I've seen or what somebody who's coming to a dance event is expecting to see...

Cristina Maldonado: It's funny how people play with these definitions, like with these names, because it's already for some years that it's not possible to name the work of many artists. But some colleagues are talking about "expanded choreography", coming from "expanded cinema". It's not exactly the label I would use, but I think that, in a way, the work I do is something in between an installation, an interactive situation, a video, a performance... And all these together. I think that all of these disciplines I touch, from choreographic mind, because I was a dancer before and a

choreographer. I think that the body is always like the centre of my work. That is why I couldn't give you a definition about what it is this...

Could you try to provide a description?

If we want to be concrete, it's an installation, it's a space where you arrive at, you are there on your own, alone. You find a video installation, which is a table with many ordinary objects, from everyday life and then there is a video projection on the table that you can use to communicate with another person who is not in this room. How do you communicate? Using your hands, the objects and only through the images you start to have like a visual conversation with the other person or like just completing or proposing or whatever... spending the time together. So, in concrete, this is the experience. The other person is me, in another room and I am just opened to build something with each guest, so it's never the same. You notice I say "guest", not "audience member". It's like inviting people to have this experience, to use the installation.

Which was your intention when you created this experience?

For many years I have been interested in creating experiences that give you the opportunity to have other ways of relating to things. So, it's not that you go, sit there and watch something. Also, it's not that you go somewhere and someone is asking you to stand up in front of everybody and participate. I really dislike this. I have no need of that. Instead, it's more like inviting someone to have dinner, to taste things that you like or things that you can cook or to create an environment where the person can suddenly get surprised of something which is simple and he sees it every day, but suddenly it becomes interesting or a little bit magical, but it's something that the person will discover. So I'm interested in creating a space where the person can have that situation like an environment where the person can observe, reflect... It's like a time for yourself, to get in contact with your own thoughts or your sensations. I have this project, "The Stranger Gets a Gift". It's like a platform. And I have several performances.

All of them create this atmosphere, this situation where you can experience something through sound, through video...

How is this experience connected with the concept of choreography?

I don't know if I can explain it general terms, but... When you make a choreography, you are thinking about the body and the space and the relationship between bodies or objects and the body and so on... There already have been a few years since I feel that I make choreographies for the inner space of the people. Because I use elements that you read with the body. I mean when you go to see a choreography you see someone moving – that is some kind of communicating to your body some freedom or other feelings, but it's like a direct message to your body, you feel it. With this other work that I do, it's more like you also get this direct information to the body. Like if someone – this virtual hand – is getting in contact with you or not, this is really a bodily sensation. And I have another performance that works with sounds. It's recorded in binary microphones. It means that if someone in the recording was walking around you, when you replay that in your headphones, you might be alone in this room, but you hear this recording and you really feel in your body that this person is walking around you. For me it's like I am creating my material for designing things with the body sensations. And dancers are all the time using this on stage. Like this perception of where the space is, where the other person is. And we are using this all the time. So, it's a body language. It's not a trend, it's not an official way of calling it, but it's my personal way of thinking about it: that I design for your body. Not for a dancer, but for the body of the guest. And this person will feel all these things, hopefully.

Ivo Dimchev — Taboos, Borders and Limitations

LUANA PLEŞEA

(RRI Bucharest)

Ivo Dimchev is a choreographer and performer from Bulgaria, now living in Vienna. His work is an extreme and colourful mixture of performance art, dance, theatre, music, drawings and photography. Dimchev has received numerous international awards for dance and theatre and has presented his work in Europe, South and North America.

In May 2016, he was invited to Euroregional Theatre Festival Timisoara with his show *I Cure* — an interactive healing performance, a coproduction of Humarts foundation, Impulstanz Vienna, Mousonturm Frankfurt, Rotterdam Schouwburg.

Luana Pleşea: *Is this a performance about healing or is it the therapy itself?*

Ivo Dimchev: It's a mixture between many things. I try to meet my own way of working, with my performative body, dealing with the audience. Being on stage and at the same time incorporating the context of healing and seeing how these two contexts can meet somehow. Is it possible for them to meet? I found out it is possible, though I was pessimistic sometimes during the creation, because I was like: "well, probably I have to be very kind to the audience, because, being a healer means being kind"... But it's not always like this. During the process I met my own taboos, my own borders and limitations in the context of healing and being positive. And I try to explore those taboos. I think the show is healing not so much on a very physical and literal level, but it's more a therapy against our own limited

way of thinking about positivity and health. Because it's very, very obvious that, when we start to become healthy, when we try to become healthy or when we try to think positively, we immediately surround ourselves with a huge number of enemies. So, being healthy, being positive is practical a very negative way of living and thinking. It's a kind of dangerous place to be. I realized that the only way to escape this danger is just to allow those that fall out of our healthy prison, the enemy of this perspective to be part of it. That is why, I incorporate in the performance all these taboos and I am trying to make people deal with dirt, sexuality, violence, death in a way that they can accept them, they can see they are part of life, and not something negative. They have to be understood because they are part of life, very natural things. We can still find beauty in those things and not judge them. This way, the performance is a kind of therapy. Of course, it's not possible to change those perspectives in one hour, but at least people can see like the light in the tunnel. There is a possibility, there is a door out there. But it's a very heavy door. It takes a lot of practice, a lot of energy, a lot of patience, a lot of love to open this door and enter this freedom of not judging things in terms of good or bad, healthy or unhealthy and so on.

How did you choose the form to express all these ideas?

The forms are those that I am capable of operating with. My body is very limited and my aesthetic choice and performative vocabulary, my choreographic vocabulary, my vocal vocabulary, my dramaturgical vocabulary are all, of course, very limited and very subjective. So, the forms are not so different from the forms I probably use in other performances. Because this is the language I am able to speak. This is the way I write, this is the way I sing... I cannot really change this just because I am making a healthy performance. I have learned from this project to be better articulated, because I found out that those topics are very difficult for many people to deal with. So, if I am not clear enough, if I am not really precise and sharp in articulating them, people can very easily reject those ideas and reject me. I also think this project has made me more precise in dealing with forms.

I am much more precise, more careful of what exactly and how I deliver it to the audience, so that I'm sure the spectators are with me all the time. Since many of them deal with very personal things... You put yourself in a very vulnerable position as a spectator. And if I am not careful enough with this very private place, we can easily disconnect.

You push very far the limits of some of these forms. During the talks after the performance, you said it's the first time in the last ten years when you have been naked on the stage. Could you explain why did you feel to do this?

I thought it's essential to allow myself to not be afraid of the audience and not to be shy. For me it was very important to have a sexual scene in the show, because the sexuality can be judged very easily, especially gay sexuality. I'm sure that 80-90 % of the audience are heterosexual and when they see a kind of homosexual scene on stage they are going to judge it immediately. So, they have to overcome this. First, they have to deal with sexuality and they have to interpret it as healing, as something positive. Then, they have to deal with homosexuality and they have to overcome the judging while still being comfortable and feeling they are in a safe place. And finally they have to deal with Christianity – I kind of devaluate a little bit, sexualized the idea of Jesus... It's not an easy place to be for the audience. I realize that if I don't go for the sexuality as far as possible, if I just fake it... it's fake already, so I have to be as vulnerable, as open as possible. For me being naked was a very natural thing. I couldn't do the sexual scene if I wasn't naked. Even if I don't feel comfortable, if I am too shy and I never have been naked on stage, I have to do it, because it's so important that I go for this completely.

Maybe this is a therapy for yourself, also...

It's not just the nakedness. The easiest thing is to go naked on the stage. I think that all the other topics are more important. The most difficult is the last part: how do we deal with violence, for example? Are we able to

love in the context of violence, even if it is violence against us, against our children or violence in the media...? How do we deal with this? I give this perspective to the audience that if we learn how to love in the presence of the extreme pain and violence, then we can consider ourselves healthy; there is a chance for the next generations. But if we can't do this, there is no chance. And probably there is no chance. I still react with aggression or with sadness or pity or disgust when I see violence or when I experience violence. Even if I have performed the show for two years, just performing is not enough. It's really about every day practice, of how we incorporate those ideas. I think these taboos are the most difficult. Being naked or not being naked... this is nothing. That's why it's in the middle of the show. From the middle on it gets more and more difficult.

Jan Lauwers: Art is about failure, not about success*

ALINA MAZILU

(“Victor Babeş” University of Medicine
and Pharmacy Timișoara)

Born in Antwerp in 1957, Jan Lauwers studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent. At the end of 1979 he formed the Epigonensemble which later became the Epigonenensemble zlv collective. Lauwers took his place in the movement for radical change in Flanders in the early 80s, and also made his international breakthrough. Together with Grace Ellen Barkey he founded Needcompany in 1986 in Brussels. The group of performers they have put together over the years is quite unique in its versatility.

Over the last thirty years Lauwers has become best known for his pioneering work for the stage with Needcompany and he has also built up a substantial body of work which has been shown at BOZAR (Brussels) and McaM (Shanghai) among other places. From 2009 until 2014 Needcompany has been artist-in-residence at the Burgtheater in Vienna. Jan Lauwers was awarded the ‘Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic of Austria’ in 2012. In 2014, he was rewarded with the ‘Golden Lion Lifetime Achievement Award’ at the Venice Biennale.¹

Alina Mazilu: You are a very complex artist: you are both a stage and a film director, you write your own plays and scenarios, you are a visual artist, you are the leader of Needcompany. Could you please talk about the most important decisions in your life which brought you here?

Jan Lauwers: That’s a surprising question!

* *This interview took place in September 2011 in Brussels, at the head-quarter of Needcompany, Hooikaai 35, and is part of an extensive book-project I am working on.*

¹ See <http://www.needcompany.org/en/about/jan-lauwers>.

I hope I have only surprising questions...

The first important decision I took when I was very young, sixteen – seventeen years old: I was very much involved in politics and at the same time I knew I was an artist. I didn't know what to choose. Between sixteen and twenty I was really doubting whether going into politics and changing the world or becoming an artist. I was more and more into politics and then, suddenly I realized that in politics you have to make compromises. That was very hard for me. So, I left politics and I said to myself: "OK, let's go full time, hundred percent in the arts." But the political thinking has always influenced my work.

Then, the second important decision was when I was studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent, in '76. It was the time of conceptualism. It was a wicked time — art in language, all this stuff was going on... And I realized that my dream of becoming a painter was not interesting any more because painting was, at that moment, for me at least, past time somehow. I didn't feel any interest in painting any more, although I was very good at it. I decided to leave the visual arts scene and do something else, not visual arts, as I was confused by them. I started to do more and more performances. Performances which were very political, street performances, performances in front of factories, against capitalism — the very left wing. Along the performances I came to discover Joseph Beuys and then, further in the past, the reenactionists. I realized that what Joseph Beuys did was theatre. So, my first theatre experience was not Chekhov or Shakespeare, but Joseph Beuys. I started to do performances, the performances became theatre and I said: "Fine, let's do theatre for a while. For maximum five years." It was not repertory theatre, it had nothing to do with an official theatre, we were really on the outside of it. But it was very successful, we were invited immediately to international festivals. So, there I was into theatre.

And you decided to continue...

Yes. I started as a painter, I did theatre, but after those first five years I wanted to stop. I wanted to go back into my atelier. So, I started to combine. And

more and more I began to consider myself, in the first place, a theatre-maker. Not a director. I'm also a director, but first of all, I'm a theatre-maker. The difference between me and a theatre director is that the latter directs repertory plays; I write the plays and then I direct them. That is a huge difference in terms of time: when I do a repertory piece, it takes me maximum six – seven weeks to stage it. When I write a play, it takes me a whole year to write and direct it. It's a difference of scale, it's a difference in my brain. I make the set design, I even make the posters, the costumes, I do the writing. In theatre, my visual education has finally found its place. There, everything comes together. And then, when you work with actors, you also start to work with films... it means an evolution. I was very restless, I was always trying things out. All these different things I do, all these different media are one and the same thing: It's just me, trying to make something. I don't think: "Oh, I'm going to make a film, I'm going to stage a play" – it's like a bubble of energy. It was not a plan, I just rolled into it by making some decisions. But the most important one was: do I go into politics or am I an artist? That's why I was very much interested in *Caligula*. Caligula is an artist and an emperor. An artist who makes politics is very dangerous. Hitler started, also, as a painter... I realized that, being an artist, I would make a bad politician.

Why? Is it because you have another perception of power?

Yes, I think so.

Did you have any idols?

Yes! Jimi Hendrix was very important for me when I was young. Joseph Beuys was important for a while and John Cassavetes – the American film director is, probably, the most significant one. He's a musician, a visual artist and a film-maker.

Any writers?

Of course! A lot of writers have influenced me. From the contemporary writers I would name Don DeLillo and Ian McEwan. The English and the

Anglo-Saxon writers mean a lot, but also Houellebecq, for example. And from the past, of course, Homer, Shakespeare, actually almost all the classics. They are part of the realm of my being.

Are there also persons who have changed your life?

Yes, in my career there are some important producers I've met: Hugo de Greef, the founder of...

I'll meet him today.

Wonderful! He was very important when I was very young and also Ritsaert ten Cate, the founder of Mickery, in Amsterdam. Mickery was, in the '80s, the most significant organization for theatre and Ritsaert ten Cate was the first real international theatre producer. So, Richard asked me to make a theatre production. Thanks to him I started Needcompany...

You were 22 when you founded the first group and after that, the group changed its name. It was named Epigonenensemble, then Epigonentheatre, and then you started Needcompany. I would like to know if the people around this companies are still the same.

No, nobody from Epigonen is here anymore. I started politically, making theatre as a collective. After a few years of working with Epigonen, I realized that collectivity in theatre does not exist. With Needcompany I wanted to make my work and I became the boss. That was the difference. I tried it as a collective and then I realized that this is bullshit. I have to make all the decisions, so I stopped the idea of collectivism in theatre. That was my idea in politics. Politics and collectivism, solidarity, all these things don't exist in theatre. You work with people in a different kind of society. Why I like to work in theatre is because you work with people, you have a goal, you make something beautiful together. It is like a micro-society. I think that's why there are so many problems in the society, I mean in the big society: because we lose our aim, we don't know what the aim is any more. Is the aim to become self-rich or is it..., you know? Communism

died and capitalism is trying to kill somehow the planet. There are two systems in the world, communism and capitalism, which are both somehow destroying the planet and that's very confusing.

I think you are a person who is always changing, always raising and asking questions, so the company had to change too, because you changed a lot. Needcompany started in '86. What are its most important moments, its most significant changes?

One of the biggest developments is, for sure, that the first ten – twelve – fifteen years of Needcompany were much more hermetic than the second part. In the end of the '90s, the beginning of 2000, I tried to make my work less hermetic, more open. *Morning Song*, *Isabella's Room*, *Deer House* are very open performances. Before that, they were much more closed, much darker. There is a black period and a white period in Needcompany. In the form, in the way we do things. Not in what we say, but in how we say it. That has changed radically. I wanted to open the work of Needcompany more because I think that one of the mistakes in the 20th century is that art has become too hermetic, too far away from the centre of society. I think the task of the 21th century art is to bring art in the centre of society again.

How did you manage to get the space when you started? Was it the same place?

We have been here for maybe almost twenty years, I'm not sure. I started in Antwerp, moved to Brussels because I thought Antwerp became too xenophobic, it didn't work well: Grace Ellen Barkey, who is a co-founder of Needcompany, is born in Surabaya. She speaks Dutch, but in Antwerp they didn't like her. A big part of the inhabitants of Antwerp voted for racist parties, so I left for the anonymity of Brussels. I think Brussels is less arrogant. It's a very modest city. Antwerp is an arrogant city and I had to realize I was very arrogant coming from Antwerp. By moving to Brussels, I realized how arrogant Antwerp really was. Brussels is a very good space to work. And then I found this old factory and I started working here.

How important is the fact that you have a multicultural, multi-linguistic company?

I think that the most original part of Needcompany is the language. I started politically as being totally anti-nationalistic. I hate nationalism, I think nationalism only provokes evil. From the beginning, I write my texts in my language, in Flemish. I write in my mother tongue, but I never hear them in my mother language. I think Needcompany is important because we were the first, maybe even in the world history of theatre, to work with three languages on stage. Nobody did that before. At least I don't know anybody before us who did that. That was at the beginning totally unacceptable. When we played in French, English, Spanish in Germany, they were yelling at us: in Germany – German, or in France they yelled at us in the '80s. They left the hall, you know? Now, they don't leave anymore. This is something that we've won and I think it's still very unique, there are still not so many theatres or companies which do that.

How many people are working now for Needcompany? Twenty, more than twenty?

Around twenty, actors included.

How you are as a leader?

Well, of course, it's a bit schizophrenic. When I write a play, I do that in a perfect solitude. Downstairs I have a working place where nobody is allowed to come in. So, the space is for me alone and there I make my paintings, my drawings, I write, I make music. There I make everything alone, just like an artist does when he works. Then there is another me, who is working with people. I like to work with people, I like to confront my ideas with others. The only way I can motivate these people is to write something good. The most important thing for me is when I present the idea of what I want to do to the others and I have to motivate them and to convince them. When I come out of my atelier, I become more like a collaborator. When I work with the ensemble of Needcompany, I'm not really

a director, I'm much more the guy with ideas, a sort of coach. And that's why I developed more and more a fixed ensemble. That's, also, one of the most important decisions that Grace and me took together. [*Grace Ellen Barkey is entering the space*] That's Grace, she's upstairs making a film now. All the actors are upstairs, in the film studio. So, they work also without me. There is a very nice balance. I worked for twenty years with Christel, she is the manager, and she has to solve the problems. I try to be as much as possible an inspirer, but concerning all financial questions, you have to ask her. I don't know anything about the financial stuff. I'm not interested in money at all, but I understand its importance. You have to surround yourself with the right people. An artist who is a manager... I think it's not the right statement, I think an artist is an inspirer of the management.

Are you a leader who tries to convince his collaborators by arguments, to 'seduce' them or to impose his opinion?

It's everything! What is important is the passion. I'm a very passionate man, so if they feel my motivation, my passion, they are convinced. I don't have to seduce them, I have to convince them of the quality of the work. For example, I write a play and I know the actors for whom I'm writing. If I make a play for eight actors, I know the eight actors, I have a Polaroid of every actor on my desk downstairs and I make them talk for myself. I write six months and then I have a fully written play. Then I come to this table and I say to everybody: "This is your part. Read it. If you don't like it, go." We read it together, that is the most important moment. There we decide if we do that. If they don't want to do it, they have to leave...

The company or that particular performance?

The performance. If they leave... But it never happened, in fact.

Have there also been moments of rebellion? How do you handle them?

Absolutely. There are people who are leaving, of course, people who are against things, but they leave, because Needcompany is made by free spirits

and it is based on freedom. Freedom is only interesting when it is connected with responsibility. All the people in Needcompany are people who take responsibility, they make a choice when they decide to join Needcompany. They have decided: "I want to be in Needcompany" and not "Oh, there is a place available, so I go there." If somebody comes in for an audition and he doesn't know my work, the discussion is already almost over because such people just go from one group to another, and they don't have a real opinion. I want people with opinions. All the people in Needcompany are persons with very clear and radical opinions, otherwise you can't survive here, because we work with something you cannot control or sell. Making art is a spiritual thing. It's a very dangerous point of view when you make theatre and say "Collectivity in art doesn't exist"... But they respect me as the authority. I take all the final decisions. The freedom of the performers is to understand the code of what I develop and then to fight my authority with their *métier*, with their knowledge. And that's a dialogue we have. So, when I work with Grace or when I work with Viviane De Muynck, who is a very experienced, very good performer, I don't have to tell her how to act. I have to give her the situation where she can act, where she can show her best fortes. She knows how to do that, I only have to create the possibility. That's her freedom, the other one is mine.

What do you think about the pervert relationship between dictatorship and liberty, freedom – in art and in your work?

I try to create a positive conflict, not a negative one. There are a lot of artists I know personally who try to provoke negative conflicts. I don't want that at all! If there's a tension, I have to solve it immediately.

How?

By kicking people out. If people work against it, they go. We have to trust each other, it's all based on trust. You can only have this freedom if there is trust. Trust is based on respect. I show my respect to an actor by being good as a writer or as a director and the performers show their respect by investing

as much as possible. This is the trust: they know I will make them shine and I know they will try to be as good as possible. If there is no trust, we cannot work. Needcompany, as an ensemble, is very famous because of that. The same was valid for Pina Bausch, the Wooster Group. Now it happens with Needcompany. Most of the time, for instance, in Burgtheater, in Vienna, you go to the theatre for an actor, not for an ensemble. The ensemble doesn't exist, there are individual actors who meet sometimes on stage with a director they don't know. They hardly know each other. I know this, since I worked with them. Here we know each other very well and that's why the ensemble is so strong. Very strong repertory ensembles, like Lupa's in Poland, are rare. Most of the time in a big institution, like Burgtheater, where there are hundred-forty actors with full salary, they don't know each other. So you cannot name it an ensemble. No, those are just well-paid actors who sometimes work together and that's a totally different convention.

Are you against this?

I don't want to judge that. I have chosen another way. You can compare it more with a rock and roll band or a jazz group whose members work years and years together. With the ensemble that we have now it would be very difficult for everybody if someone wanted to leave. If someone says "I don't want to do a production" or "I don't want to do anything, I want to take a few months off", this would be a shock for everybody... it's a big thing if somebody goes or if somebody new is coming.

Is there no danger in being so close one to each other?

It's full of danger, but we love danger.

What kind of danger?

That you know each other too well... It's very unique what we have here. We travel a lot together, we are on the road two hundred days a year, so there is a danger for everybody in it concerning the social behaviour. I mean, if you are on tour, your social life, your husband or your wife,

your girlfriend or your boyfriend, your children are home and you are gone with another group. That's very intense, very extreme. So, that is a big danger. You play with your life, you risk your life when you do that, you're signing with your blood by joining Needcompany. The most difficult thing for everybody is to keep the private life as private. That's very difficult because you are full of passion, you work with love, so everything goes to your work which becomes your life. You have to find your balance and I feel that this isn't easy for everybody. But this is a choice you make and you make this choice in a total state of freedom.

How do you feel about having success?

I don't feel like having success at all.

OK, but if someone sees your CV, he or she will think: "Wow, what a successful man!" I would like to know how you deal with the idea of failure.

I fail everyday.

And what does it feel like?

It's painful. It is! Art is about failure, not about success. Art is asking. If you find something, you didn't look well, you didn't search well. Art is the time between two mistakes... If you take a decision, you know already that's a mistake, otherwise you stop. If you make the perfect play, why should you do a next one? So, the evolution in art is that you always go further, asking more and more questions. If you cannot ask questions anymore and if you have the answers, then the routine comes in and maybe the success, but that is death. Art is, by definition, asking questions and being as clear as possible in your obscurity. And that's why doubt is very important. You have to doubt every second. To decide that your work is finished is the most difficult thing. A work is never finished. If you think it's finished, then it's dead. So, it is a different approach. In that respect, there is a very big difference between Needcompany and the conventional theatres. They make the well-made plays, it works and it directly goes away. We try to

produce every day, we try to present every day something new. We don't try to represent, like a conventional system: on Monday you play Chekhov, on Tuesday you play Shakespeare, on Thursday you play Molière – that's how they do it. We have few projects, *Isabella's Room*, *The Lobster Shop*, *Deer House*, *The Bear*, we have twelve – thirteen projects which are hanging in the air, but we work with them, we always try to renew the questions that we are posing on stage. That is a very big difference.

So, success or breakdown is totally uninteresting... as an artist. As a manager you can say, of course, "I hope that we can sell it". The management of Needcompany is there to sell it and the more we can sell it, the more we can pay the salaries. And the more the success is there, the better for us, but it doesn't change the quality of art at all. You know the word "blasé"? You have to protect yourself from being *blasé*. I still feel totally unsuccessful. It's not a happy feeling, that's why a lot of artists become bitter. Even when they have the biggest success, they feel they've failed. I feel it with all the great artists, most of them end up feeling they have totally failed. We translate that, as outsiders, as: "Oh, they have so much success and they still are grumpy old men". It is not that, it is just that they are still in confrontation with the questions until the end of their life, they still feel: "I didn't write the book I wanted to write. It's all failure, failure, failure". That's what you feel, but that is the power of art. The power of art is to play its role in the centre of society without having power. So, we doubt having real power, that's the power of art and it's very complex. I think the question about success is, with all respect, a naive question...

For sure, but maybe sometimes naive questions bring very interesting answers.

Yes, absolutely. You ask very good questions.

I'm not afraid of naive questions. If you cannot be naive, then you already have all the answers, I think.

Naivety is indeed important.

What are your most important qualities? What are those qualities which brought you here, where you are now, with Needcompany...

I don't know. I think one of the qualities I have is, for sure, that I can motivate people. I can convince people. I always take the initiatives, in my private life, in my professional life. I'm always the engine of things. I've always been like that since I was a child. I've always invented things. I also have a strong, natural authority and this strong, natural authority fights against an unnatural authority. When I work as a director, when I feel I have to use my professional authority because I'm the highest in rank, I feel that I fail. I want to be as naive as the actors I work with, at the same level with them.

Have you ever had the feeling of being unfair to your collaborators?

Unfair? That I treated them badly? Yes, it sometimes happens that you failed totally.

And do they accept it or do they fight it?

If I fail, it's very dangerous. If I really go in the wrong direction, then I lose people, because the intense relationship we have here triggers also intense farewells.

Do you accept advice?

Of course!

What is, for example, Elke Janssens' role?

Elke is a good example of how we work, because she is a dramaturg, she's also playing the violin, she does productions, she is my personal assistant and also the first reader of my texts. But, at the same time, she is just Needcompany. So, it is very difficult to say what Elke is doing. Christel is the big manager. Or look at my relations with Grace, we have two children together. At the same time, she makes our productions; when she's filming upstairs, I'm not allowed to go in there, she wants to work totally in private. I also work totally in private, so everybody influences everybody, but the roles aren't limited... For example, sometimes, when I'm starting to write a play, Christel has this sense:

“He’s working on that, I give him this book”. And it’s always the right book. How does that work? I don’t know. It’s a coincidence. Or it is that you work with the right people. It is the serendipity that you meet people, that you know these people you work with. That’s how Needcompany is built. Needcompany is not built by the professional quality of the people, it’s much more intuitive, like I have never studied for being a director, I’ve never studied theatre. Christel has never studied management. But at a certain moment we did it and we grew in that together and that is the power of Needcompany. We find the people and we try to fight against some kind of specialization. Everybody knows a bit from everything and together we know it all.

That’s how you deal with borders?

That’s a logical consequence. I’m against borders. For example, when we did *Goldfish Game*, our feature film, and I said “Let’s make a film”, nobody said to me: “Jan, that’s impossible, we never make films”. Everybody said immediately: “Yes, why not? Let’s see how that works”. You know? That’s the spirit. So, we are not afraid of always asking questions, all the time. And what Needcompany says to the people is: “Don’t be afraid of freedom”.

But you have to know what to do with your freedom...

Freedom demands a lot of responsibility. Freedom without responsibility is hell. The more freedom in your life, the more responsibility you have. There has to be a balance.

Could you please describe me a normal working day?

There are no normal working days.

One working day, then.

Every day is very different, so it is very difficult to find repetitive actions. There is some systematic in it, like seven o’clock – wake up, make some breakfast for my children. That was until last year, because they are grown-ups now, so I don’t have to do it anymore. Seven o’clock waking up, at eight o’clock I start to write;

from eight to eleven I write, then I do some office work. Then we may have a rehearsal, then I go to my atelier to work on a drawing or a painting. Let's say there is a situation where I am not on tour. When I'm here, it's working from eight o'clock in the morning until the evening. Somewhere it has to stop, but that depends. Every day is so different! There is only one system in it. I always work short periods... like two – three hours writing, two hours painting, two hours management, dramaturgy, whatever. I like to jump from one thing to another. Every day there are four – five things at the same time. Always. Also, when I'm on tour, I perform, I build up, at the same time I write, I give interviews. So, it's the variation of it. It is very important for me that there is never a routine. Every day you "make" other problems. That's what we do, we create problems all the time. I think that's what we do with Needcompany, that is what an artist does: he creates problems.

There is a cliché that an artist is a chaotic person, but in fact...

Let's take writers, for example. Almost all the writers I know wake up very early, they write until one or two o'clock and then they stop. But they have to be at that moment, at eight o'clock, or seven thirty or whenever they decide behind their desk to write and nobody is allowed to disturb them. If you don't have this discipline, the self discipline, you cannot succeed as an artist. If an artist is only chaotic and has no self discipline, he or she will never be able to make some kind of career as an artist. Nobody asks me to paint, nobody asks me to write a text, so I have to force myself to do it and I have to have the discipline for it. I mean, a book of ten thousand or twenty thousand or a hundred thousand words – you have to write them. That's discipline! It's ten percent creativity and ninety percent discipline. That's art. And almost all the artists I know are absolutely not chaotic.

What is the craziest decision you've ever made with Needcompany?

Wow, that's difficult, everything is quite crazy. But, for example, to say let's make a feature film and go to the Biennale in Venice – what we did with *Goldfish Game* – that was very crazy. To make a good film during

the holiday time. That was a very crazy moment for everybody. But every production is a bit crazy and I think one of the most exciting moments was also the first time I performed in BAM, in New York or the first time I played in Theatre de la Ville, in Paris. As a manager or as a leader of an organization, it was very important to have those moments. *Isabella's Room* in Avignon... that was so beautiful! But there are so many beautiful moments and they are all a bit crazy.

Do you have regrets?

No, I still have dreams. There are so many things we could do. But regrets, I don't think so. There were a few moments in my life when I regretted not having more control, when I had wrong fights. Some moments are very wrong, like the first Needcompany group exploded because of me, because I was too authoritarian. I had to learn how to deal with my ambitions. There are moments in Needcompany or in my career when I did really wrong things, fighting for the wrong causes, for instance. So, there are some moments that I really regret, but not so many. Most of the time the decisions were necessary and I don't live so much in the past.

In the future?

Either.

But you have many dreams...

Yes, there are still so many things we have to do: a thousand books to write, a hundred films to make. I think it is important to give something of your knowledge to new generations. Now I am fifty four², I have changed from when I was thirty. I've realized that a lot of young people come here to ask me questions and I say: "OK, let's give them things". That's important, I think – to pass the knowledge.³

² In 2011 when the interview took place.

³ Interview transcribed by Andrada-Lucia Bucurenciu.

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RECENZII



REZENSIONEN



REVIEWS



Deutsche Theatertexte auf dem Gebiet Rumäniens vom 18.-20. Jahrhundert

NORBERT SCHMIDT

(Dortmund)

Fassel, Horst (Hg.): *9 mal vergessenes (Bühnen) Leben. Deutsche Theatertexte auf dem Gebiet Rumäniens vom 18.-20. Jahrhundert.* Stuttgart: Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung des Landes Baden-Württemberg, CD 2014 (225 S.).

Eine neue Quelle für die Dramengeschichte in Südosteuropa wird durch diese CD erschlossen, deren Herausgabe durch die Initiative der Donauschwäbischen Kulturstiftung Stuttgart (Senator E.h. Hans Beerstecher, Geschäftsführer Dr. Eugen Christ) ermöglicht wurde. Von den 9 Texten stammt ein einziger aus der Bukowina, es handelt sich um das bislang früheste deutsche Schauspiel des Buchenlandes aus dem Jahre 1825. Von den übrigen sind 4 in Temeswar und Hermannstadt gespielt worden, ein Hinweis darauf, wie eng die Theaterkontakte zwischen dem Banat und Siebenbürgen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert waren, als sogenannte Theater-Unionen die Städte Temeswar und Hermannstadt, ebenso aber auch Arad und Hermannstadt, Temeswar und Kronstadt miteinander verbanden. 1 Stück ist in Pest und Temeswar aufgeführt worden. Die übrigen 3 Schauspiele waren nur im Banat zu sehen. Die sieben Autoren werden ausführlich vorgestellt und das heißt, sie werden in den Literaturgeschichte des Banats, der Bukowina und Siebenbürgens fortan berücksichtigt werden müssen, denn Theater galt seit dem 18. Jahrhundert (anders als heute, wo es als Darstellungskunst gilt) Teil des literarischen Lebens und vermittelte

ethische und pädagogische Themen. Was wir sonst meist als regionalen Bezug betrachten – historische Stoffe – sind in dieser Auswahl nur in zwei Fällen vertreten: Franz Xaver Girzik, der vorwiegend in Pest auftrat und für das dortige deutsche Theater schrieb, hat *Die Erstürmung des Prinzen Eugenio Thores oder Temeswars Befreyung* (1713) verfasst und in eine sehr spannende Abenteuergeschichte eingebaut (Entführungen, Befreiungen, mit edlen und mit hinterlistigen Türken, mit tapferen Walachen und mustergültigen deutschen und österreichischen Offizieren). Franz Groschel hat auch ein historisches Thema gestaltet, aber mit überregionalen Ansprüchen: sein Stück lässt William Shakespeare auftreten und dafür sorgen, dass eine Theaterreform stattfindet. Wenn bis dahin Männer in Frauenrollen auftraten, so wird in dem Schauspiel *Die Geistreichen* (1893) die Julia in Shakespeares „Romeo und Julia“ zum ersten Mal von einer englischen Lady verkörpert, was zu dramatischen Verwicklungen führt. Alles anderen Stücke entsprechen dem Zeitgeist: Anton Cremeri, dessen Lustspiele *Die Wahl nach der Mode* (1773) und *Man prüfe ehe man verurtheilet* (1774) in Temeswar gedruckt wurden, ist ein bekannter österreichischer Aufklärer, der in Temeswar und danach in Hermannstadt Theaterdirektor war. Seine Stücke setzen sich mit Vorurteilen auseinander und künden vom Sieg der Vernunft. Der aus Ödenburg stammende, aber in Temeswar tätige, Franz Xaver Hirschfeld hat einerseits gegen die Ungleichbehandlung von Frau und Mann und gegen die fehlende Disziplin plädiert. Seine Lustspiele *Die Kirschen* (1818) und *Jugendfleiß* (1820) können heute noch Interesse beanspruchen. So kann man die bisherigen Informationen der Theater- und Literaturgeschichte des Banats ergänzen und einigen Stücken in neuen Inszenierungen zu einem Erfolg verhelfen. Das war wohl auch das Interesse des Herausgebers, der ein erläuterndes Vorwort beisteuerte.

Mythos Prinz Eugen von Savoyen und seine Inszenierung

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Elisabeth Großegger, *Mythos Prinz Eugen. Inszenierung und Gedächtnis*, Böhlau Verlag Wien – Köln – Weimar, 2014, ISBN 978-3-205-79501-8, 406 Seiten.

„Prinz Eugen ist eine der schillerndsten österreichischen Identitätsfiguren. Seine ungebrochene Präsenz im kulturellen Gedächtnis lässt ihn als Mythos erscheinen. Die Untersuchung macht deutlich, dass seine Erinnerung an historischen Eckpunkten immer wieder neu inszeniert wurde. Von den ersten militärischen Erfolgen bis zur Gegenwart formte sein inszeniertes Gedächtnis performativ kulturelle Identität und ließ Prinz Eugen zu einem integralen Bestandteil des österreichischen Gedächtnisses werden.“
Elisabeth Großegger

Die zusammenfassenden Worte der Autorin, die auf dem Cover ihrer 406 Seiten starken Publikation zu lesen sind, verführen den Leser, die akribisch geschriebene, mit unzähligen Litographien, zeitgenössischen Fotos, Theaterzetteln, Zeitungsberichten und vielen anderen Dokumenten, die alle die Persönlichkeit des Prinzen Eugen von Savoyen glorifizieren, bereicherte Studie zu erobern. Das Porträt seiner Identitätsfigur ist aus dem Kontext seiner Epoche und auch darüber hinaus zu erfassen. „Prinz Eugen als Gedächtnisort“ (S.16) – eine Bezeichnung Großeggers, die

eine Verbindung zwischen Mensch und Ort herausarbeitet, in direkter Beziehung zur kollektiven bzw. kulturellen Erinnerungskultur.

Prinz Eugen, vor 350 Jahren in Paris geboren, ist eine der vielseitigsten Identitätsfiguren für Österreich und Europa. Er war ein Meister der Inszenierung, der bereits zu seinen Lebzeiten das Gedächtnis seiner Leistungen, die in die Geschichte eingegangen sind, zu organisieren wusste. Wie, wann und warum der Mythos Prinz Eugen ins kollektive Gedächtnis aufgenommen wurde und welche Manifestationsformen er erfahren hatte, untersucht Elisabeth Grossegger am Beispiel der Inszenierungen, der historischen Fakten, der sämtlichen überlieferten Zeugnisse, angefangen vom 18. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart. Exemplarisch zeigt sie, wie wichtig die performativen Darstellungen für die Prägung der kulturellen Identität gewesen sind, wobei es der Autorin gelingt eine umfangreiche Publikation aufzustellen, die den Geist des genialen Menschen und Herrschers hervorhebt, dessen Persönlichkeit sich zwischen dem Paradigma „Renaissancemensch“ (Rezeption in Italien u.a. Ländern) und „Barockmensch“ (Österreichische Rezeptionsform der Historiographie) plaziert.

Überraschend sind die erwähnten Beispiele von unzähligen Autoren, die sich im Laufe mehrerer Epochen der schillernden Persönlichkeit, dem militärischen Strategen, dem Bauherrn, dem Diplomaten und dem Kunstmäzenen schon während seiner Lebzeiten genähert haben, um ihn unter anderem als dramatischen Helden auf die Bühne zu bringen. Die Überlieferungen, Erfahrungen und Darstellungsformen durch die Jahrhunderte werden verfolgt – insbesondere im Bereich des Theaters. So erfährt der Rezipient von den dramatischen Texten, die über Jahre im Repertoire der namhaften Theater präsent waren, u.a. im Wiener Burgtheater, aber auch auf den peripheren Vorstadtbühnen Wiens gespielt wurden. Die meisten Theaterstücke inszenieren Prinz Eugen als dynamischen Charakter oder behandeln Themen, die mit seinem Leben und Werk assoziiert werden. Grossegger bringt diesbezüglich detaillierte Analysen

einzelner Textpassagen und insistiert zugleich auf die Rezeption der Theaterstücke und anderer Kunstformen, die sich mit der ins Rampenlicht gelangten vielseitigen Persönlichkeit auseinandersetzen – Prinz Eugen als Held historischer Dramen, Volksstücken, Operetten, Opern, Hörspielen bis zu gegenwärtigen Komödien. Darunter wären einige zu erwähnen: der Einakter *Eugen der Zweyte, der Held unserer Zeit* (1796) von Karl Friedrich Hensler, die Dramen *Prinz Eugen von Savoyen* (1845) von Johann Priem und *Prinz Eugen* (1846) von Otto Prechtler, die Oper *Prinz Eugen oder die Belagerung von Belgrad* (1847) von Franz Pokorny, das Volkslied *Prinz Eugen der edle Ritter*, das 1847 Gustav Schmidt inspirierte eine gleichnamige Oper zu komponieren, Therese Megerle das militärische Volksdrama zu schreiben (1849), Anton Langers Volksstück mit Gesang (1863) und nicht zuletzt Carl Teumanns Operette (1863); Josef Strauß komponierte den *Prinz Eugen Marsch* (1865), der ins Festspiel *Am Tag der Oudenarde* von Joseph Weil eingeflochten wurde. 1863 entstand Erik Nessls Operette *Prinz Eugen*, eine Festvorstellung zum 200. Geburtstag des Prinzen. Es folgen nur noch sporadisch andere Bearbeitungen – z. B. Martin Greifs Drama *Prinz Eugen* (1880), sämtliche Essays, Erzählungen, Kinderbücher, historische Romane und Komödien. Hugo von Hofmannsthal bringt seine Faszination in seinen *Worten zum Gedächtnis des Prinzen Eugen* (1914) zum Ausdruck und verfasst ein Kinderbuch über *Prinz Eugen, der edle Ritter* (1915). Felix Salten veröffentlicht 1914 den Roman *Prinz Eugen*, ebenfalls als Kinderbuch konzipiert, der biographische Stationen beschreibt und ein wertvolles Charakter-Vorbild schafft. Georg Terramares Komödie *Die stille Stunde* (1914) bringt das Bild eines gealterten Prinz Eugen. Das Medium Radio bringt die Hörfolge *Eugen von Savoyen. Ein Wille und seine Zeit* (1933), gestaltet von Robert Michel und sein Hörspiel *Prinz Eugen von Belgrad*. Hans Sassmann verfasst das historische Drama *Prinz Eugen von Savoyen* (1933), das nationale Stereotypen einfließen lässt, wie auch Josef Feiks Schauspiel *Ein Reiterlied* (1937). Nach 1945 findet eine Distanzierung von der NS-Instrumentalisierung des Prinzenbildes statt, wobei Großegger den Versuch der Entmythisierung des „edlen Ritters“

signalisiert – der monologische Theatertext von Erwin Riess *Der Zorn der Eleonore Batthyány* (2003) gewährt einen Blick hinter die Erfolgsfassade des Heldenbildes.

Schlussfolgernd sei festzustellen, dass Elisabeth Großeggers Untersuchung beeindruckende Informationen über zeitgenössische und gegenwärtige Auseinandersetzungen mit dem Mythos um Prinz Eugen bietet, ausgehend vom historischen, sozialen, kulturellen Kontext. Die Interpretation und Rezeption zahlreicher Theaterstücke, die Berücksichtigung der sozio-kulturellen und politischen Entwicklungen ergeben ein mosaikartiges Bild eines Mythos, der durch die Epochen verschiedene Inszenierungen erfahren hat. So entsteht über die Zeit ein komplexer Mythos, der sämtliche Facetten verknüpft: der militärische und christliche Held, der siegreiche Feldherr und die Inkarnation des Türkenbesiegers, die Personifizierung von Gerechtigkeit und Ordnung, der Diplomat der Habsburger, der nationale Held Österreichs, der alternde und einsame Prinz Eugen. Großegger beschreibt diese Teilaspekte des Mythos und begründet die unterschiedlichen Darstellungsformen, ausgehend von der zeitspezifischen Erinnerungskultur und deren Instrumentalisierung aus gesellschafts-politischen Positionen. Ein wichtiges Augenmerk gilt den besonderen Anlässen, den historisch markanten Eckpunkten, den Jubiläumsjahren, die Inszenierungen des Gedächtnisses von Prinz Eugen als „Ausformung kultureller Identität“ darstellen.

Regieanweisungen — eine periphere Komponente des dramatischen Textes?

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Dragoş Carasevici, *Die fiktive Inszenierung. Friedrich Dürrenmatts Bühnenanweisungen*, Vasiliana '98, Iaşi, 2014, ISBN 978-973-116-391-8, 138 Seiten.

Der junge Germanist Dragoş Carasevici versucht in seiner Publikation über das theatersemiotische Instrumentarium Friedrich Dürrenmatts dramatische Texte zu durchleuchten, indem er sich vordergründig mit der Rolle der Bühnenanweisungen des Schweizer Dramatikers auseinandersetzt. Zu diesem Zweck bringt der Autor sämtliche literatur- und theaterwissenschaftliche Begriffe zur Diskussion, belegt seine Argumentation für den Gebrauch des Terminus 'Bühnenanweisung'. So gelingt es ihm die Bedeutung bzw. die Funktion der Bühnenanweisungen zu klären, die von den meisten Theoretikern in ihren Untersuchungen der Dramen und der Theaterproduktionen als eine Randerscheinung behandelt werden. Die Positionierung als ein peripheres Element im Damentext ist unberechtigt und in diesem Sinne bemüht sich die Untersuchung den Dialog Dramatiker – Regisseur aufzudecken, der einer Dekodierungs- bzw. Rekodierungsarbeit gleicht. Dabei stellt sich die Frage inwieweit die Bühnenanweisungen bzw. der Nebentext, auch unter dem Begriff 'Didaskalien' (Anne Ubersfeld) bekannt, von den Theatermachern in der Praxis berücksichtigt werden.

Anfangs vergleicht Carasevici zwei *Wallenstein*-Inszenierungen (1969 Köln, Regie Hansgünther Heyme und 1979 Ost-Berlin, Regie Friedo Solter), ausgehend von den im Suhrkamp Verlag veröffentlichten Regiebüchern, gefolgt von einer Gegenüberstellung der Gustaf Gründgens Inszenierung *Der heiligen Johanna der Schlachthöfe* (Hamburg, 1959) mit Georgio Strehlers Produktion (Mailand, 1970) – wobei aus diesem Vergleich klar hervorgeht, dass Regisseure ihre eigene ästhetische Vision durchbringen, die Bühnenanweisungen mehr oder weniger beachten. Diese Vergleiche intendieren die dramaturgische Werkstattarbeit Dürrenmatts zu motivieren, bzw. die Begriffe „fiktive Inszenierung“ und „reale Inszenierung“ aus der Perspektive des Dramatikers zu erklären. Dazu dient die Werkgenese von *Achterloo*, das sämtliche Bearbeitungen erfuhr und schließlich, in der vierten Variante uraufgeführt, Zürich 1988, in der Eigenregie von Dürrenmatt den *work-in-progress*-Charakter hervorhebt.

Nach einer ausführlichen, manchmal zu sehr verzweigten Präsentation der verschiedenen theoretischen Grundlagen, bezogen auf die Bühnenanweisungen und ihrer Realisierbarkeit, folgt eine punktuelle Untersuchung am Beispiel der dramatischen Texte Dürrenmatts. Der Bezug zum Bühnenraum, zur Dekoration, zu den Requisiten, zum Licht, zur Erscheinung und zur Tätigkeit des Schauspielers, zu Maske und Frisur, zum Kostüm, zur Mimik und Gestik, zur Proxemik, zur Paralinguistik, zu non-verbalen akustischen Zeichen und schließlich zur Musik bietet ein umfassendes Bild zur Rolle der Bühnenanweisungen in den Dramentexten bzw. zu ihrer szenischen Realisierung. Interviews und Notizen, die während der Arbeit an den Theaterstücken entstanden, vervollständigen Dürrenmatts Konzeption der sogenannten „fiktiven Inszenierung“, die als Stimme des Dramatikers fingiert und vom Regisseur erhört werden sollte. Eine gewisse Vorliebe des Schweizer Dramatikers für ausführliche Beschreibungen geht hervor denn in seinen Bühnenanweisungen sind sämtliche Details vorhanden, die manchmal die örtlichen und zeitlichen Grenzen der Bühnenhandlung mit dem Ziel sprengen, das Geschehen im Jetzt, in der Gegenwart spielen zu lassen. Ein

Charakteristikum ist der ganz besondere Ton der Bühnenanweisungen, der über die eingefügten Kommentare des Dramatikers seinen Hang zur Ironie und Groteske zum Ausdruck bringt.

Die Publikation von Carasevici ist ein Versuch, das Verhältnis zwischen Dramentext und seiner Inszenierung dahingehend zu klären, als sie, vorwiegend über die dramaturgische Tätigkeit Dürrenmatts, Fragen aufstellt, die ihre Antwort eigentlich in der Theaterpraxis finden.

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