

PART II

DRAMA / CHOREOGRAPHY

1. HAMLET – *TO BE OR NOT TO BE* AND THE TELEVISION THEATER

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Abstract: *To be or not to be, the famous monologue that is very present in the actors' repertoires, has suffered many changes overtime which either gave us extraordinary moments or it was simply transformed into dialogue, it was fragmented, moved into different acts other than where the author put it. All these changes were based on a directorial vision. In the television theater this scene (and even the whole show) has a different impact due to filming, editing and directorial vision. So the same show that has been watched at the theater it can be different on a television theater. In the performance hall we can watch the show as a whole, we have the chance to focus on a specific actor, on a specific image, which is something that we can lose in the television theater. In the filmed show we only see which is on the tiny screen. From this perspective, I've watched the famous monologue, To be or not to be, in some shows that are considered landmarks for this text only to watch it afterwards when has been taken over and edited by television.*

Key words: *theater, Shakespeare, television, Hamlet, monologue*

1. Introduction

The television theater dates back in our country to 1957. For more than 60 years, viewers benefited from watching theater shows filmed and edited in the Romanian television studios or the takeovers from various Romanian theaters. TVR (Romanian Television) has been doing TV theater since 1957. The ones who staged here were Liviu Ciulei, Lucian Pintilie, Cornel Todea, Tudor Marascu, Alexandru Tocilescu, important names in the romanian stage directing. TVR accomplished something extraordinary: it managed to keep on film the memory of the Romanian theater. Gina Patrichi, Dan Nutu, Irina Petrescu, Liliana Tomescu, George Constantin are just a few names from the Romanian theater gallery and their images have been recorded in the TVR Archive¹⁵¹.

However, the televised theater show had a decrease regarding the number of shows and theater productions. "Television theater has been an undeniable achievement of public television back in the days when it was a subject of communist censorship. After '89, the productions of television theater appeared occasionally in the grid. If today the public channel it is not a subject of "golden age" censorship anymore, however the presence of financial censorship is felt. It is known that the theater is an ephemeral art, shows are dying when they are not shown to the public and television theater can save those which are remarkable."¹⁵²

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¹⁵¹ <http://www.tvrplus.ro/emisiune-teatru-5612>

¹⁵² <http://ileanalucaciu.blogspot.ro/2013/11/teatrul-tv-televiziunea-publica-tvr-2.html>

2. Discussions

What is in fact television theater? The critic Ileana Lucaciu clearly outlines its particularity: “Television theater is a special step located between stage theater and film, due to the technical capacities of the television that are applied to ordinary theatrical convention. Capturing images of a show can be an advantage given by specialized operators for this kind of theatrical “channel”, also by film editing professionals for stage spots selection – general spot and close-ups, essential ways for the success of a television theater show. The place of action, background set, costumes, make-up are also important things into achieving a convincing presentation of a theater show on that tiny screen. The concept and the actors are still, without doubt, the most important elements of this process, which is necessary to be speculated by the technical professionals of the television. Above all, a television theater project must develop a special repertoire.”¹⁵³

Television theater has a repertoire consisting mainly of shows taken from the cultural institutions(theaters), but it also has its own productions which are increasingly rare because of the low-budget that is allocated to this section. In the case of the shows taken from the professional theaters we actually find the actual stage show but from a different perspective.

3. Results

Hamlet’s monologue usually appears in a *gros-plan (GP)*¹⁵⁴, in a *foreground (PP)*¹⁵⁵, in a *close-up (PD)*¹⁵⁶, or in an artistic mix of stage spots (*Hamlet*, directing Tompa Gabor, directing Liviu Ciulei, directing Victor Ioan Frunza). These film techniques allow viewers to see the actor in the foreground and his whole emotional process. If during a monologue on a theater stage we have a general image, in television theater we can see the actor’s feelings better. Basically, nothing could distract us anymore, not even the decorations or the costumes or any other present elements on that specific scene.

In Tompa Gabor’s show, this monologue is created in complete silence which we can also find it in the radio-theater show (*Hamlet*, directing and acting by Adrian Pinteă). The television theater offers us Adrian Pinteă’s image on various layers. The camera captures the whole scene, but the focus is on the actor’s face, on his gestures, going into a small frame, so *To be or not to be* has an emotional impact much greater than into the performance hall: “Created based on the idea of mirror playing, of theater-in-theater, *Hamlet* opens the stage with the “rehearsal” scene. The white utterance of the lines, the make-up table, the light on the guards’ faces, everything opens a road into the depths of tragedy. “Who’s there?” – Who’s there who is hidden in an impenetrable darkness? Who’s there and it’s leading our actions? What kind of reality is that which is beyond human and which it hunts Hamlet until the end? Is it the Self? Is it the Absolute that leads Hamlet to a great test, that brings him into a mad game on life and death and in

¹⁵³ <http://ileanalucaciu.blogspot.ro/2013/11/teatrul-tv-televiziunea-publica-tvr-2.html>

¹⁵⁴ Gros-plan = a framing way from film technique in which the photogram has only a specific detail or the actor’s face, the face being shown almost all, without forehead or without chin but basically not without any of them

¹⁵⁵ Foreground = the face, with a part of the neck and chest, the most common framing from TV

¹⁵⁶ Close up = a detail from an object or face (nose, mouth, eyes – but not the face without forehead or chin)

which Hamlet could lose everything and the Absolute could lose its mystery.”¹⁵⁷

Compared to the monologue scene from the stage, this close-up is a benefit for the show and also for the actor. The framing¹⁵⁸ is a cinematic method. Let’s not forget the fact that at the theater, on stage, we see a *live* show, the actor has to communicate his feelings, a tear or a smile in the actual moment, not later. From this point of view, the monologue on open stage is far more difficult than it is on a television show, radio or on a cinematic production. The difference between stage show and the show taken from television is easily noticeable. The first show’s impact fades out, even if the editing part of the television studios gives it a *refresh*. The monologue scene has an advantage in the television theater because of the framings. On this scene usually the camera focuses only on the actor, leaving aside the background set or other characters. The main role of the television theater is to keep memorable shows in the archive.

Going back to Adrian Pintea’s *Hamlet*, we have the seemingly calm image of a wandering son among palace’s mirrors. Sad, disappointed, the director Hamlet slowly recreates the murder. We permanently see two places on stage, two folded by the mirrors that are in the background. If throughout the show we always see Hamlet’s black suit, the end lights it up. Hamlet dresses up a white fencing coat: “This is the moment when he realizes that the moment of revelation comes. It is time to fulfill the mission. It is time to end the game. «The rest is silence». Like a guillotine, the heavy curtain slowly falls and only Horatio saves his guitar and gets out to tell the story further to the world. Tragedy and darkness remain «beyond». Balance has been restored and the stage is being shown as a new beginning. The story can anytime begin again.”¹⁵⁹

Unfortunately, the story didn’t begin, *Hamlet* merged with Adrian Pintea into the show or maybe it happened on reverse. Craiova National Theater’s show died at the same time the actor did. “It’s a big chance to play Hamlet. There are many actors who deserve to play Hamlet and maybe they could have done it better. But I was lucky. I would say that it is a moment of grace in an actor’s life when if he plays his character in a good way, he can calmly say: «I am Hamlet! ». *Hamlet* meant an essential experience to me! I am not a hypocrite: it was a conscience shaking that appeared very clear to me. It produced many changes in my system. While I was reflecting on the life path and the gestures of this character, I rebalanced my own values regarding relationships with others, with career, with the libraries I ravaged until the age of 40. Yes, it was an earthquake.”¹⁶⁰

Hamlet still searches and rediscovers himself. Liviu Rebreanu was saying that “*Hamlet* has to be present in any respectable theater’s repertoire. Not only to be present but to be on poster. *Hamlet* always saves it when you need it, *Hamlet* always brings public. Only when you’re thinking about *Hamlet* having over five thousand words in original and twelve hundred in Romanian...”¹⁶¹ It’s true that

¹⁵⁷ Monica Andronescu, *A fost odata Hamlet la Craiova*, Yorick.ro online magazine, no.72

¹⁵⁸ Framing = mean of expression from cinema

¹⁵⁹ Monica Andronescu, *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁰ Andra Gavril, *Hamlet*, a comment before broadcasting the theatre show, source: tvr.ro, 2014 April 27th

¹⁶¹ Interview with Liviu Rebreanu, TV producer Dem Theodorescu, Romanian Radio, broadcasting date 1941 September 19th

it's a show that's being looked for even now and *To be or not to be* is on the top list of any actor's desires. The critic Magdalena Boianiu observed: "It is likely that not only the actors want to play Hamlet, as Carl Sandburg wrote, but also the directors want to communicate what they have understood about life staging what it is considered to be their mind and theatrical expression."¹⁶²

Liviu Ciulei's show from 2000 was another expected show, with Marcel Iures as the main character, show that has been staged at Bulandra Theatre. Maybe a little *too expected*, as the critic Doru Mares remarked: "A double risk occurs when it's about the classics: one risk refers to the receiver and the other one refers to the play that's being received. When two classics meet in a show by chance, the risk doesn't halve but doubles itself. The same thing happened also to the last staging of *Hamlet* at Bulandra Theatre's "Izvor" Hall: Shakespeare seen by Liviu Ciulei."¹⁶³ In a so-called multifunctional background set (composed by columns with tips that seem endless), with a few furniture items from different centuries, a stylish Hamlet dressed up in a black suit, a misunderstood poet, sad, fragile, sensitive, the modern world's Pierrot, torments himself.

To be or not to be hardly comes from afar, from somewhere behind the columns. The floor creaks, the musical illustration gradually fades away and silence comes in. From the first words, the acting technique reminds us of a radio version from 1942 (with George Vraca as the main character). It almost has the same speech technique even if we're talking about two shows that are more than fifty years apart. We find in the speech a sort of theatricality, the text is being fragmented, pauses are long, everything is still, the monologue seems like an Eminescu's philosophical poem. A lonely prince who's looking for his peace and justice, who's not crazy, although he directs his delusional moments, who's in love and he cries for his love.

The proposal of *Hamlet's* concept seems unfinished, you're permanently waiting for something that's about to happen which can give a sense to the idea. However, *the rest is silence*. We think that it was kind of late giving this character to Marcel Iures. The young prince of Denmark in Liviu Ciulei's show is a grown-up, mature man. This maturity gives us another image of *Hamlet*. The character's philosophy comes now like a wisdom that has been integrated in the last years.

From this perspective, we think that choosing Marcel Iures for this character could have happened earlier, maybe earlier than *Richard III* from 1993. The critic Magdalena Boianiu analyzes Bulandra Theatre's show: "What happens in Denmark is first of all a personal dilemma which becomes universal through its intensity. Iures fits in the general picture of the show with his anti-rethorical rhetoric. No intelligence, nor art, nor love can stop evil, this seems to be Liviu Ciulei's message who is solidary to the director *Hamlet*."¹⁶⁴

Even for the great directors, Hamlet is a risk. Tompa Gabor says in an interview: "If the great plays could manage to stage themselves and a great text would be a guarantee for a show to be great, then all the shows with Shakespeare's

¹⁶² Magdalena Boianiu, *Forma si limitele vremii*, "Romania literara", no.28/2000, source: http://www.romlit.ro/forma_i_limitele_vremii

¹⁶³ Doru Mares, *Hamlet la Bulandra. Un spectacol prea asteptat*", "Observator cultural", no.17/2000

¹⁶⁴ Magdalena Boianiu, *op. cit.*

plays would be great...But, in fact, 95% of Shakespeare shows are boring – true examples of “dying theatre”. Therefore, staging any Shakespeare play is a challenge and also like taking a risk: only a powerful show concept that’s coming from the text’s spirit but also attached to the contemporary world, could have any success. But, of course, with the risk of failing...”¹⁶⁵

Searching the television’s archive, we find a different perspective for *Hamlet*, maybe the best show staged by Vlad Mugur, like the critic Marina Constantinescu said: “This *Hamlet* is so modern, alive, intense, pithy that almost becomes a manifesto for the valuable theatre’s power, a study proposal that is beyond biological limits and it leads us to performance.”¹⁶⁶ Vlad Mugur’s show won the “Best show” prize in 2002 at the Uniter Gala, National Prize for the young actor Sorin Leoveanu, AICT the Romanian Section’s Prize for the best actor (Sorin Leoveanu) and the National Prize for decorations, costumes and masks (Helmut Stürmer, Lia Manțoc și Ilona V. Járo).

To be or not to be becomes a theatre-in-theatre monologue and is being said by every actor from Hamlet’s theatre group. Paradoxically, precisely the prince of Denmark doesn’t say a word from his own monologue. He forgets to speak, he’s stuck between *to be or not to be*. The monologue’s scene is like a lesson for every actor who wants to discover himself, to learn, to meditate and to enlighten himself up. “The solution for Hamlet’s monologue is extraordinary in the deepest theatre spirit way. The prince seems to be one of the actors from the group that arrived at the castle. They rehearse a play, but when the main character has to say the famous speech, he shuts up, he forgets it (the actors’ deepest fear). The other ones try to whisper it to him like an ancient choir, an ad-hoc unified.”¹⁶⁷

Vlad Mugur’s whole show appears as a seen rehearsal from stage, from backstage, from anywhere. A show rehearsing inside a show. The “theatre-in-theatre” idea works in every scene. Through chalk buckets and scaffolds (the scenery is an actual building site), the actors learn to be actors, they recreate a world. Claudius’s new world, the modern world, the cruel and painful world for Hamlet. Full of chalk, permanently dirty, Hamlet will destroy this new order, the new and false structure. Nobody will build anything and nothing will move until the guilty ones will be punished and the murder will be exposed.

The show has been taken by TVR from Cluj National Theatre and it was presented at the fourth edition Craiova Shakespeare Festival in 2003. The most present play by Shakespeare in Romania (and not only) is still *Hamlet*. Unfortunately, in the Romanian television’s archive we can’t find the whole shows that have been on all Romanian stages.

We would have liked to reach in this study a moment to talk about a special *Hamlet* that was played by Ion Caramitru (Bucharest National Theatre, direction Alexandru Tocilescu, 1985). There are no chances to see this show, for now. It is likely for us to (re)watch it if it exists archived somewhere: “At the moment, TVR

¹⁶⁵ Magdalena Popa Buluc, *Dacă e luni, e Teatru Tv!*, ”Cotidianul”, 2014 April 27th, source: <http://www.cotidianul.ro/daca-e-luni-e-teatru-tv-236651/>

¹⁶⁶ Marina Constantinescu, *Hamlet sau despre moarte*, ”România literară”, no. 27/2001, source: http://www.romlit.ro/hamlet_sau_despre_moarte

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem

searches for solutions to bring out the archive to the digital world in order to protect this part of the history for the next generations.”¹⁶⁸ In 2006, the English weekly *The Times* was calling Ion Caramitru one of the best actors for this character: “The Royal Shakespeare Company’s director considers the Romanian actor one of the best actors for Hamlet. Michael Boyd supports Ion Caramitru in an article from *The Times*, a magazine in which English actors are nominated among whom are Michael Redgrave also (nominated at the Oscar for *Mourning becomes Electra – 1947*), Alex Jennings (who played the Shakespearean character at RSC in 1998), Lithuanian Andrius Mamontovas and David Warner.”¹⁶⁹

The only kept recording was on radio (only the *To be or not to be* monologue), it is found in *Hamlet after Hamlet* series created by the critic Ion Parhon and the editor Mariana Ciolan. These series with an important historical value were put on 3 CDs and launched inside of the Craiova Shakespeare International Festival, in 2010. It must be mentioned that Ion Caramitru also played this character back in 1963 in a show directed by Costache Antoniu at Casandra Studio. However, there is a sequence from a workshop coordinated by Ion Caramitru and Michael Pennington (director, actor, founder of English Shakespeare Company) in which are being searched similarities of sound of the *To be or not to be* monologue in different languages, starting from the original language to Russian, Italian, Romanian. The funny game has a surprising result. *To be or not to be* has an approach regarding sonority to the Romanian version.

Starting from the original text’s game and from the Romanian version we find it important to remember the BBC Television Shakespeare series produced by British Broadcasting Corporation and adjusted for television by Cedric Messina. Starting 1978 December 3rd until 1985 April 27th, the British Television produced and broadcasted a number of seven televised theatre shows series that contain the entire Shakespearean dramaturgy. Also, the whole collection is on DVD and it’s on the market all over the world.

4. Conclusions

Unfortunately, in our country many shows have been lost over time and future generations will know nothing about them. The productions of the television theatre of Romania have become increasingly rare and the same thing happens to the takeovers. Shakespearean dramaturgy, although frequently staged in Romania, isn’t found in any television theatre productions.

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¹⁶⁸ An announcement from TVR’s archive, source: http://www.tvr.ro/arhiva-tvr_1588.html#view

¹⁶⁹ *Ion Caramitru, în topul Hamlet -ilor internaționali*, source: <http://www.ziare.com/shakespeare/hamlet/ion-caramitru-in-topul-hamlet-ilor-internationali-5110>

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