

Collision of History with Reality: the Tendency of Adaptation of Shakespeare Plays in the Contemporary Russian Experimental Theater

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Abstract—This article analyzes the state of the productions of Shakespearean scenes in experimental theaters. The main examples of experiments with Shakespeare's plays in various theaters, as well as the periods of time with which these productions are associated are given in this paper. Particular attention is paid to the production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" by Kirill Serebrennikov, who attracted attention not only by the originality, but also by the person of Kirill Serebrennikov, who became the center of the recent scandal about the "non-existence" of this production.

Keywords—Shakespeare; "A Midsummer Night's Dream"; "Hamlet"; experimental theater; Kirill Serebrennikov; Gogol Center

I. INTRODUCTION

As one of the most famous playwrights in the history of mankind, William Shakespeare's roles are not only accepted by people, but also caused conjectures and controversies in some scope, he is a writer surrounded by secrets. There was a theory that Shakespeare did not exist as a specific person, behind his name was a group of writers who wanted to stay in the shadows.¹ But this is only a guess, the only thing that can't be taken away in Shakespeare's works is the vitality and the incomparable drama, which makes generations of audiences can get the most exciting and memorable impressions from Shakespeare's performances.

Every actor knows that the best character to show the full potential of drama is still the role of Shakespeare's play. Therefore, every actor dreams of playing characters in Shakespeare's works such like Romeo, Hamlet, Othello, Lyra, Juliet, Ophelia, Desdemona, Cordelia and Macbeth.

II. REALITY AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TIMES

The development of play brings us a question worth exploring: How does the theater perfectly present Shakespeare's plays? In fact, the answer is very simple: Shakespeare's plays can change at any time to adapt to the

new stage conditions and the background of the times. The focus of Shakespeare's plays is to show some important and profound things to the audience of the new era. Because in Shakespeare's life, the theater has a different form in comparison with play, the culture of play has undergone many changes and of course, these changes are also reflected in the interpretation of Shakespeare's plays. So no matter how does the time changes, what Shakespeare wants to express can be presented on the stage with different interpretations (see in "Fig. 1" and "Fig. 2").



Fig. 1. Play "Hamlet" Taganka Theater.

In each new statement, public sentiments of conflicts between different eras, societies and ideologies are vividly expressed. This is why Shakespeare's "distortion" is interesting and important to the audience. For example, Ethan Hawke plays "Hamlet", in which all actions take place on the corporate giants representing the "morbid" body of the United States of America, who are all eroded by capitalist ideas, and the giant itself is the typical example of capitalism. In Gus Van Sant's film "My Own Idaho", he is based on Henry IV Heinrich is a gay suffering from narcolepsy in the film. It is worth noting that in the 1990s of the United States, they were the symbol of the LGBT movement and the fight against narcotics.

¹ Erstein MO's announcement published in Chelyabinsk State Normal University in Russia in 2015.



Fig. 2. Play "Hamlet" Taganka Theater.

This is why the experimental performance of Shakespeare's plays has appeared. Considering the example of Hamlet's production in Russia in the 21st century, he should focus on the views of Alexei Bartošević, the professor of the Russian Academy of Dramatic Art. He gave a speech on Shakespeare and his connection to modern Russian play at the end of January 2017. Speaking of the importance of Shakespeare's plays, Alexei pointed out in his speech that "Shakespeare is not the author who was only remembered on the anniversary of his death. To some extent, Shakespeare is still alive, representing a part of Russian play tradition, just like Chekhov is a part of the tradition of English play. Shakespeare plays have always been a part of us. We call on his plays not only to understand the thoughts and lifestyles of the sixteenth century, but also to understand ourselves, who we are, what is our lives and how we should live."²

III. BREAKING THROUGH HISTORICAL RESTRICTIONS

As for the modern interpretation of Hamlet, it is worth mentioning the speech of Alla Demidova and the Theodore Terzopoulos with Greek origin, and they placed their interpretation of Hamlet in Athens. In Moscow, this work was sold on two (and only) nights during the International Theatre Olympic Games on June 25 and 26, 2001. Currently, Alla Demidova's performance has been included in the repertoire of the Attis Athens Theatre.

After the long vocation in 2005, Yuri Brusov first directed a play, he re-interpreted Hamlet and Chekhov at the Moscow Art Theatre, and this innovative performance sparked different comments. Brusov used the first version of Pasternak translation which produced in the 1930s according to Meierkhold's order. Brusov specifically mentioned the character of Horatio. He refused to be historical, but used clowns to reinforce the tragedy of the play; therefor the audience was very surprised and novel about this

performance. To a certain extent, this is relatively early example for experimental play to appear in Russian performances.

The artist, Alexander Shishkin, chose to place the play in a Scandinavian landscape, performing a play in Helsingor, where has frozen sea and coldness, and surrounded by the sea and beach. Meierkhold once represented Hamlet, and the ocean is consisted of metal fragments, wires and empty cans. In his memorable monologue, Hamlet raised a large metal standpipe on the stage, leaning to the public to reveal a cross made of thick lines. According to the director, the ghost in the silver armor must walk from the bottom of the sea to the audience and fight the quicksand. He returned to the audience, Hamlet in a black cloak had to hide his father behind him, showing his shining armor to the audience, and finally the black prince and silver prince changed the place. As the experimental play sprouted in the Russian theaters, the directors had different ideas and methods, and did not stick to the imitation. The innovation of experimental play was very popular at that time.

In his version, Brusov got rid of the wording and discussion of obsessiveness, and had a simple explanation for everything, rather than the cynical irony of the classics. His performance has an intermittent structure, including many themes that the director has performed without development. The ironic version of Hamlet in his version chuckled at the time of death and the afterlife, he chatted with his old father at the boat in front of the fire, and Shakespeare's prince was frozen for fear of hellish ghosts. This is a friendly dialogue between father and son, not a dialogue with death in the atmosphere of divine terror.

Hamlet Brusov does not try to understand the secrets of life and death. However, Brusov managed to present many interesting details and situations, and most viewers and critics also appreciated this unique interpretation and the outstanding performance of the actors. These are the new play feelings based on his own unique insights after the director broken through the historical restrictions.

Valery Fokin also directed this play in 2010, and he chose to place Hamlet in the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg. In the strange landscape design of Alexander Borovsky, the action took place on a difficult football field, patrolled by guard dogs and soldiers, who threw the bodies into a huge pit, or shot and killed politicians with different opinions. Hamlet was drunk, the degenerated young Horatio was a hitchhike student, Laerts was a football player, Gertrude became the cool initiator and organizer of the assassination of Hamlet's father, the image of giant Gertrude was the key to this play. She despised men, leaving Claudius in a terrible obedience status and hiding from her dangerous son.

The extremely nervous Hamlet, played by Dmitry Lissenskov, was full of complaints and hysteria. He rushed through the stage and the auditorium with drooping spirit and low mood; he not only murdered Polonius in a crazy mood, but also pierced the old man with a kitchen knife, and dragged his body to the stage violently. Fokin tried to determine the characteristics of modern Hamlet through their

² "Leaving Hamlet!" Wrote by Alexey Bartoshevich on Teatral magazine. Website: <http://www.teatral-online.ru/news/15134/>

mad desire for truth, rejection of father's lies, and reluctance to continue the original path. He seems to express sympathy for them, and they bear the responsibility of their parents, because these boys have become so angry. The performance ruthlessly analyzes the status quo of Russian society and gives an uneasy portrait of modern youth. According to J. Givens: "Hamlet Fokin has encountered the deception and hypocrisy caused by other works in Russia and the Soviet Union over the past 200 years, and they have the courage to tell the truth of power."³ All of the above are all kinds of innovations and breakthroughs made by the directors in experimental theater when they try to break through various historical conditions and old performance methods and ideas, and to a certain extent they have made quite a few achievements.

IV. MAPPING OF REALITY

The dramatic adaptation of Levanov for the translations of N. Polevoy, M. Morozov, B. Pasternak and M. Lozinsky, who all gave the text a radical non-academic meaning. Levanov left the original text, so Fokin's postmodern tragedy comedy has acquired an absurd culture. At the end of the game, a neatly combed, but completely indifferent teenager, Fotin Blas, get on the stage to replace the angry and crazy Hamlet. The new ruler would not sympathize with the victim, nor would he mourn the person who inherited the power, he ordered the servant to discard the body without shame. His obedient servant immediately responded to the command of the new ruler — the body was thrown into the pit. The modernization of the Kingdom of Denmark has begun.

Valery Fokin's Hamlet largely broke the traditional view of Shakespeare's plays. This sparked a heated debate about the inconsistency of the statement with Shakespeare's text and hinted at the general theme of modern Russian politics. According to Bartošević, "Hamlet has once again fulfilled his usual mission, at least for Russia as a mirror of historical moments and a tool for self-awareness of national destiny." This also positively affirmed that the certain changes and adjustments have been made during the rehearsal of experimental theater, or the director's interpretation, which also made it have obvious realistic characteristics.

As for Hamlet's latest work, we should mention Valery Sarkisov's play in the theater. After meeting with young actor Alexander Petukhov in 2013, Yermolov gave him the idea to play the "Hamlet", Oleg Menshikov, the artistic director of the theatre, also saw the shadow of Hamlet in him. The play originated with a story about a young man being broken by the environment at the time, and he was a man who was intertwined between life and death. Hamlet tried to answer a simple question with every step and every action: "Why, why did I come to this world?". What is presented to us is that they let us see the growth and development of personality, the boy grows into a man, a warrior. This kind of performance has brought the characters to the extreme, and also allows the audience to watch this excellent work more

stereoscopically, and make the audience more into it, which undoubtedly increases the exquisiteness of the script (see in "Fig. 3" and "Fig. 4").



Fig. 3. Stage Photo of New "Hamlet" Director: Valery Sarkisov Yermolova Theater.



Fig. 4. Stage Photo of New "Hamlet" Director: Valery Sarkisov Yermolova Theater.

The premiere of the play is scheduled for December 20, 2013, according to Vera Kopilova: "This is truly successful, undisputed and obvious. The performance deserves public attention and applause, although Hamlet's role is played by a very young and unknown actor Alexander Petukhov plays, the performance should also be called an important event."⁴ Director Valery Sarkisov also showed amazing taste and good performance in this play. It is worth mentioning that in Sarkisov's "Hamlet", everything is real, which is very unusual and difficult for modern production. Alexander Petukhov also became a veritable, ideal Hamlet: an active person who can assess the behavior of him and others.

On March 11, 2015, the ballet "Hamlet" and Shostakovich's music were staged at the new stage of the Bolshoi Theatre of Russia. The performance choreographer Radu Poklitaru performed on the opening and closing ceremonies of the Sochi Olympic Games, and the director Declan Donnellan was the winner of the Golden Mask and Crystal Turandot Award, his permanent collaborator British drama designer Nick Omerode also participated. More than a decade ago, at the Bolshoi Theatre, they launched their ballet, "Romeo and Juliet", and this creative alliance once again

³ Shakespearean Tragedy in Russia: In Equal Scale Weighing Delight and Dole. Published by John Givens on The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy in 2016. Oxford University Press. P. 761-776.

⁴ Hamlet's news report "One Power Point" from the Yermolova Theatre Website: <https://ria.ru/20131221/985613104.html>

collaborated to play Shakespeare's plays. Last year, six cinemas released Hamlet's theatrical performances, which left a deep impression on the artists of the Bolshoi Theatre: they also participated in half of the rehearsal with the director, and the director was one of the greatest Shakespeare experts- British Declan Donnellan. These powerful camps together contributed to a great work.

For the World Ballet Theatre, Hamlet is not a new theme. It has been in the genre since 1788: Polish dancer and dance director Bronislaw Nijinska Performed at the Opera de Paris in 1934, French ballerina Serge Lifar performed in 1957, and Maurice Bejart, John Neumayer, Soviet ballerina and dance director Rudolf Nureyev all played the character of Danish prince. Even Maris Liepa had participated in a ballet movie and sang D. Shostakovich's music. But the absolute champion of "Hamlet" should be Mikhail Barishnikov, the main character of this ballet troupe is Konstantin Sergeyev, Maurice Begart and John Newmayer. There is also a variant of Shakespeare's play in the Bolshoi Theatre: Boris Eifman's ballet — "Russian Hamlet". The play is about Prince Paul, the future emperor Paul I, and his contemporaries learned a lot about the personality and destiny of the characters in Shakespeare's plays.

It takes three years to create a script for the ballet "Hamlet", and as a result, the story of the ballet is much wider than the story of Shakespeare. Everything in this ballet began in Hamlet's childhood. His childhood background contains further development events and experiences as well as all motivations and reasons. "If I feel lack of words, everyone will ask me, the answer is: I am very happy to finally not have them! All great writers Pushkin, Chekhov and Shakespeare know that these words are not really useful. We will not repeat this tragedy here, and let us pass emotions through dance, which is not restricted at all." Declan Donnellan said this.⁵ Director spent too much time searching for music and finally found that the connection between Hamlet and Shostakovic had always existed, so his music was chosen as an accompaniment. The reason is because both of them live in an era of "repression and concealment." According to the choreographer Radu Poklitaru's statement and interpretation, Shostakovich's fifth and fifteenth symphonies were selected, the music and the script are perfectly matched. It is the precisely demanding of the details and the intention of the content so that this work can not only reflect the social reality, but also perfectly interpret the story of Hamlet. The two have reached a wonderful balance. This success has left more interpretation ideas and performances methods for Russian experimental play. At the same time, this new interpretation also allows Shakespeare's dramatic performances in Russia, and even the world to re-emerge.

The main focus of this story is the loss of loved ones. Ballet dancers not only need to perform eight deaths in two hours, but also need to show their survival. According to Donnellan, in Hamlet, Shakespeare raises a global question

to study the loss a person suffers in life. Pavel Yashenkov noted the magnificent performance of Denis Savin and all the actors who participated in the play — Anastasia Stashkevich (Ophelia), Anna Balukova (Gertrud), Yuri Klevtsov (Claudius) and Alexander Petukhov, as well as Igor Tsvirko, Denis Medvedev, Viktor Barykin, Yevgeny Sazonov and Yuri Ostrovsky, as usual, the great Pokritaru perfectly manages the crowd scene, reflecting the emotional state of the court: slavery, yielding, fear of the ruler.

The experienced Russian audience saw Hamlet dancing on the stage, which gave the ballet a positive evaluation. This proves once again that the directors need to continue to rethink Hamlet and recreate his story. The audience is still watching him and sympathizing with him.

V. CONCLUSION

Shakespeare's legacy is still active now, although this may not be the form Shakespeare expected. However, when performing Shakespeare's plays, it is necessary to interpret according to the current situation of the times and the social environment. It is also necessary to express the social value orientation of the present and the creators' own interpretations, giving the audience a new experience and feeling. Attracting the audience with a bright, quirky and even shocking stage makes it possible to understand more of the highlights and greatness of William Shakespeare's work from multiple levels, no matter how many centuries have passed ,these are extremely important.

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⁵ "Don't Let Us Down" Published by Marie Claire in 2015 on the most important cultural event of the year, <http://www.marieclaire.ru/stil-zizny/ne-podveli-2015-samyie-znachimyie-kulturnyie-sobyitiya-goda/>