Shakespeare's Poetics in theatrical practice

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Résumé: Cet article vise une présentation de l'œuvre de Shakespeare à travers la perspective de George Banu, un projet d'exploration des textes qui met en évidence les éléments d'une poétique diffuse, jamais affirmée en tant que telle. L'anthologie est structurée comme un instrumentaire pour l'acteur, avec un enchaînement logiques des composantes propres au théâtre. Le déclin du motif du «monde comme théâtre» est intimement lié à l'apparition de la conscience de l'être moderne.

Mots-clés: Shakespeare, théâtre, discours dramatique, structure discursive, poétique.

1. Shakespeare – the world is a stage

Shakespeare, the world is a stage, referring to the famous monologue from the play *As You Like It*, is an exploration of Shakespearean texts that was inspired, as the author states, from the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Silviu Purcărete, and is intended as a reconstruction of the diffuse poetics never stated as such by William Shakespeare, but always delegated to the voice of his characters. Very subtly translated by Ioana Ieronim, the dramatic fragments evince a theater writer whose texts are quintessential in anticipating everything that followed on the European stage.

To demonstrate Shakespeare's philosophy, which is based on the idea that the small theater stage is nothing but a reflection of the great stage of the universe, and to emphasize the relevance of this philosophy in an attempt to knowing and discovering the universe, the author makes a small but necessary detour, a return in time to the days contemporary to

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the great playwright. Most London theater names during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and then King James I – The Red Lion, The Rose, The Swan, The Fortune, The Red Bull, The Hope, etc. refer to elements of the outside world, especially animals, or abstract notions, virtues, etc. Compared to them, the names of the two theaters where Shakespeare's plays were staged, The Theatre and The Globe, are notable exceptions, the first being self-referential, the second allegorical. So the place itself where Shakespearean creations began to come alive bear the generic name of this art of "true lies", of the art of illusion, where ambivalence and the permanent tension between referential representation and distance, between mimesis and styling are not only constitutive elements but definitive. In fact, to an extent greater than Brecht, Shakespeare never ceases to remind us about the anchoring of theater as fiction, into the most palpable, concrete of realities, building a fictional universe within the parameters of reality, the materiality of the wooden boards on which actors play invented stories about the true history of the world and of human passions.

The author then shows how the Shakespearean drama, moment by moment, denounces the theatricality that founds it, being well aware, at the same time, of the ambiguity of their theatrical art: real action – in its double dimension, voice and gesture – and sham, artifice, deceptive appearance. In one and the same play, often even within the same monologue, the protagonist goes from asserting the spectacular powers of theater to the fanciful or grotesque consciousness of its "falsehood", its ability to pretend, to imitate, to deceive, all due to the desire of creating an "illusion of truth".

The particle reflects the whole, theater reflects the world. In fact, the Globe gable used to read: *Totus mundus agit histrionem*, the translation of which, terse and devoid of any ambiguity, is found in the beginning of the most famous soliloquy in the play As you like it – All the world is a stage (Act II, Scene 7). The whole world's a stage, and men and women alike are just actors playing on it, the indissoluble link between theater and life, that is George Banu's target within this research.

On closer analysis, the anthology, as the author himself calls it, begins with a chapter on the development of the theater, so as to establish a background, a work method and a code of conduct, specific to the Elizabethan age. Also in this introduction, the author locates "datele unui dublu discurs, despre teatru şi, deopotrivă, despre viaţă, ambele – teatrul şi viaţa – reunite prin metafore" ["the data in a double discourse about theater and, equally, about life, both – theater and life – combined by metaphors"] (p.12). According to the author's findings, notable is that joining them together, they do not emit consistency, but rather a set of contradictions: "La Shakespeare nimic nu e sigur, totul se poate transforma în contrariul

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său" ["With Shakespeare nothing is certain, everything can turn into its opposite"] (p. 24). This is the meaning of the Shakespearean discourse that George Banu is in pursuit of.

So, having established these pillars framing his research, the author continues over the next four chapters, entitled The actor and his double status, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – rehearsals preparing the play, Costumes and identity uncertainties and Spectator and public. We note that the anthology is structured like a guide for the actor, following a natural ordering and a brief description of all components related to theater. Giving us a wide variety of quotes as support for his argument, the author focuses on the presence of direct references to Shakespearean theatrical practices, always made in the context of concrete situations, from where either the actor emerges very well defined, or how a theatre group should function, or the "deceptive power of garments" from Shakespeare's perspective, and the role of the audience: "Publicul este iubit, adulat, curtat la teatru, dar numai la teatru" ["The public is loved, adored, courted at the theater, but only at the theater"] (p.120). Covering much of the basics of theatrical art, the author extracts the possible lessons and tips that Shakespeare would have sprinkled in his works, placing first the actor in relation to his work – "Vina cea mai gravă a actorului este aceea de a întrerupe brusc, din pricina insuficientei stăpâniri a textului, continuitatea iluziei – prima garanție a reuşitei scenei" – ["The most serious fault of the actor is to suddenly interrupt the continuity of the illusion because of failure in remembering the text – the first guarantee for a successful scene"] (p. 68) – and then the actor in relation to the guild and his theatrical group – "Se confirmă un prealabil al teatrului: prezența obligatorie a tuturor membrilor" ["A vital condition is confirmed: the obligatory presence of all members"] (p.75).

The following chapters – The power and derision of theater, Hamlet, and Prologues and epilogues: convention and dream – have a more broad, general perspective, researching what Shakespeare would have granted theater as a phenomenon in itself, its mission and its consequence. The true, unconfessed purpose of performance, theater devaluation due to its simulated, fictitious nature, the theatre's dependence on its public, Hamlet's reaction to the actor's arrival, all these aspects are extensively explained and interpreted by the author, with sincere emotion and passion.

The last two chapters, Life as a stage and man as an actor and *The world is a stage*, conclude George Banu's research, weighing heavily as a verdict, stating that the decline of the symbolical world as a stage is closely linked to the emergence of modern consciousness, "ființă responsabilă şi nesupusă, ființă revoltată şi demnă" ["a being that is responsible and disobedient, a being that is indignant and dignified"] (p. 285). Beings who

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abhorred the idea of "playing" a predetermined part. The secure order of the world as a stage is about to disappear altogether, either because of the increasing ravages of madness, either because of the intrusion of dreams. "Când lumea e un vis, singura noastră soluție salvatoare rămâne somnul. Să mori, să dormi" ["When the world is a dream, our only salvation remains to sleep. To die, to sleep"] (p.132).

Theatrical space is a concentrate of the world and human life is but a fictional drama, as evanescent and ephemeral as a theater play. Each of us is assigned a role, or rather several roles, as arbitrary as they are uncertain. This is essentially the worldview underpinning and representing all of Shakespeare's work, a philosophy of life that would be later stated, even more systematically, through the work of Calderon de la Barca, whose most well known auto sacramental is called El gran teatro del mundo (The great stage of the world) and whose most often represented comedy is La vida es sueno (Life is a Dream). This vision of the world as a stage, appears in the Elizabethan era (and after), in almost all the texts that form the array of Renaissance literature: the familiar epistles, sermons, gnomic poetry, comedy, tragedy or religious dramas. This is indeed a common ground for humanism, to which Shakespeare gave the most perfect expression and truly memorable formulations.

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say without reserve, that the project remains constantly within the privacy of theatrical practice throughout its development, and shows step by step what this practice has caused as actual Shakespearean poetics; the anthology also brought forth some memorable texts, in fact genuine transpositions of Shakespeare's poetics. The parts under discussion ally exemplary theoretical reflections with concrete observations of theatrical nature. The book is an excellent guide for actors, performers and amateurs of Shakespeare's poetry in general.

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