

SUMMARY

Street theatre in the Western world is most often associated with counter-cultural movements, social and political protests, and a form of theatre that is committed politically. Companies which represented this current created their own texts for their performances, treating literature (including dramas) at most as an inspiration. The beginnings of Polish street theatre, with groups such as Akademia Ruchu (Academy of Movement), Teatr Ósmego Dnia (Theatre of the Eight Day) and KTO at the forefront, were similar.

At the same time, many of these socially and politically committed theatres used or referred to the theatre forms associated with folk theatre. Classical, word-based productions of dramatic works did not quite fit in this current; although at the same time the dramas of Shakespeare found their place quickly on the street scene (Footsbarn Theatre, Théâtre de l'Unité). This was perhaps because the theatre of the Elizabethan era and the works created for it had the strong characteristics of folk theatre, and were only much later "captured" by the bourgeois theatre and acquired the fossilized features of "classical work".

The papers collected in this volume clearly indicate that the texts of two authors: Shakespeare and Molière were the most popular in street theatre or outdoor theatre. This can be explained quite simply: both playwrights did not create their dramas "at the desk", but were practitioners of the stage; their thorough practical knowledge influenced the shape of their plays.

When we stage classical dramas and adaptations of classical epic works in drama theatre, it is clear and obvious that we produce a „spoken performance" in which the text and its interpretation will be of significant importance. In such a theatre, the most important thing is the staging of the text. It is the location of the text in stage situations, in acting, in the stage design which determines the reception of the theatrical work and shapes the metaphysical, cognitive, existential and aesthetic experiences of the spectator.

In street theatre, the text is not as important, because its delivery faces a number of obvious obstacles. The spectator has more freedom here, and his/her contact with the performance is dependent on a number of things. Similarly, the precision of actors' actions, elaborated at the rehearsals, is threatened by a huge number of uncontrolled, accidental events. They can disrupt the performance and destroy the spectators' concentration on the course of the action. In extreme cases, such distortions may simply cause the spectator to withdraw from further participation in the performance.

How to adapt a classic text to the street context? How to tame the element of the street life so that the message of such a text – often ambiguous – could reach everyone who is present and conscious?

The important thing is to take into account the cultural specificity of such a unique place as the street. It is available to everyone, constituting a space in which public discussions take place – even if they are not verbal, but performed. The street is almost an archetype of a public place, both in the sense based on the concept of the public sphere formulated by Jürgen Habermas, and on the concept of Hannah Arendt in which the street becomes the "space of public appearance".

So how to stage classical literary masterpieces on the street or, more generally, in public space? How to give them the value of essential public appearance so that the words and messages of the most valuable texts of world literature can be heard, properly understood and experienced? How to translate the sense of outstanding literary works into the sense of place, environment, time of day and/or night, current weather and cultural specificity of spectators, which is determined, among others due to their previous experience in dealing with art, performance, game and play?

This volume is an attempt to answer these questions. It is a collection of papers presented by a group of researchers from Poland, UK, Italy and France at the conference *Klasycy na ulicy* (*Classical Works on the Street*) organized by the Department of Performance Studies (which is the part of the Institute of Cultural Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland) together with Teatr Biuro Podróży. The opportunity for this international meeting was the pre-première show of the street production of *A Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare created by this company.¹ The conference was held in Poznań, on October 5-6, 2016.

How are “classical works on street” different from classical works staged in a theatre hall? The authors of the texts gathered in this volume emphasize several differences: the first significant feature of street performances is their subversiveness and their revolutionary potential. Street – a “space of public appearance”, of meetings and discussions, can always become a space for expression, acting, and finally for the active implementation of rebellion. Theatre on the street, or more broadly, in the open air is (as every theatre performance) a public event happening both in the sphere of fiction and real *hic et nunc*. But a performance played in the context of public space generally reorganizes our experience and ways of thinking and thus gains a huge subversive potential.

This potential is significant mainly due to the presence of spectators who feel “at home” on the street and in the open air in general, welcoming exceptional guests – the artists who invited themselves into the everyday space of their public. In this context, “being seen and heard” in public space is gaining great intensity. The reception of the performance is no longer just a “feast for the eyes”, the theatre is perceived with all senses, it becomes a real experience for the spectator-participant. A performance becomes a common “being” in public space and everyday environment is renewed and radically modified.

In this context literary classics appear to us as creators of extreme versions of human fate and attractive, dynamic plots. The heroes invented by them and the actions composed by them, wisely adapted for the meeting with the audience of street performances, can significantly help a fascinating process of performative unification of theatrical fiction with reality.

And with the spirit of rebellion which is always lurking somewhere in close proximity, behind the corner.

¹ The official première of *Winter's Tale* by Teatr Biuro Podróży from Poznań, Poland, took place on September 29, 2017 in the ruins of the Coventry cathedral during the Festival of Imagineers.