

Създадохме с участието на сценографите Силва Бъчварова и Васил Рокоманов материално аскетична и в същото време визуално богата образност. Тази куклена визуалност бе определена от идеята, че за лишените от всички придобивки старци-мускетари мечовете се явяват единствено оръжие в променящия се модерен свят и едновременно единствено средство да съхранят идеала на своята младост – *мъжете-шпаги*.

Така шпагите от действителността се превърнаха в кукли на младите мускетари, а групавите им знамена – в кралски одежди, дворци и кръчми, кораби и коне – фон на бурната им младост. И когато на финала неумолимата действителност изтрива и тези визуални илюзии, остава само тя – любовта, подкрепена от „ръка на приятел със шпага на края“.

Спектакълът бе отличен със седем наши и меж-

дународни награди и представен на редица фестивали у нас и в чужбина.

Така методологията за поставяне на спектакли за възрастни, осъществени в жанра на романтичната грама и мелодрама, трагедия и трагикомедия, се превърна в основен фактор при формирането и творческото израстване на трупите на ДКТ–Пловдив (в миналото) и Театър „Ателие 313“–София (днес) като трупи от единомишленици, съавтори и експериментатори, творчески колективи със своя художествена физиономия и естетическа платформа.

Тя бе приложена и при обучението на някои класове по актьорско майсторство и режисура в НАТФИЗ „Кръстьо Сарафов“, както и на редица квалификационни семинари и образователни курсове извън Академията.

Deeper Meanings And Their Visual Equivalent

Petar Pashov

In my ongoing and consistent work on puppet productions for adults based on classic works of world drama and literature, along with years of experience with collaborators and like-minded colleagues such as scenographers Silva Buchvarova and Vasil Rokomanov, composers Petar Tsankov and the actors from the Plovdiv Puppet Theater and later Atelier 313 in Sofia, I have discovered certain principles and objective laws, whose application successfully resolve difficult production problems.

The most important of these principles is the mandatory discovery and creation of a healthy, organic connection between the logical and ideological messages of a dramatic work and their behavioral-visual equivalents.

The second and no less important realization was that the primary prerequisite for this organic connection, and the fundamental reason for puppet imagery as a whole, has to be sought in the basic dramatic situation abstracted from the dramatic work itself.¹

It follows from the above principles that we do not simply introduce a puppet personage and seek empathy for his joys and sorrows in order to convince the viewer of the organic-ness of his life, but rather the opposite: we present a living person, a

character in an intensely dramatic situation, which forces him to act, struggle, transform and create something new out of the material environment around him. And we provoke the viewer's empathy mainly through his relationship to this newly created dramatic subject, through his experiences and his experiencing along with the puppet.

The viewer is not expected to believe that the puppet is alive, but to believe that the living hero creates the puppet before his eyes because he desperately needs through the puppet and with the puppet – and sometimes even despite the puppet – to solve his life-and-death problems.

Of course, there are puppet genres for adults such as the puppet show, puppet opera, ballet, cabaret, parody, and so forth, where the application of the above-mentioned principles is entirely unnecessary. In such genres, the actors' intent is to entertain the viewer, thus the mastery with which they bring the puppets to life creates an organic connection in and of itself. But when it comes to puppet performances and characters that touch deeply dramatic and even tragic layers of the human soul and existence, what then?

I have often observed the reactions of adult viewers and have seen how they are delighted and moved by

the small puppet. But for the performances in question and given the time period in which we staged them, it was crucial for us that they shock, rather than delight, the audience. We had to extract from the dramatic works and construct drastic and even extreme dramatic situations which would be able to convince the adult viewer of the hero's need to transform and bring to life the material world. Just as in the musical, when speech exhausts its possibilities, forcing the actor to sing, in the performances discussed above the hero reaches toward the puppet, bringing to life an object or material when the hero alone is not sufficient, or when his position or ideas seem so unreal and at odds with the surrounding reality at first glance that he is forced create something new, like a god creating a new being, in order to express and defend himself.

Even in the first production we created for adults, Don Quixote, we drastically enhanced the hues of the exit situation, making it into a situation of life or death. In it, the Inquisition threw the author and his work into the hands of degenerates who had lost their human appearance and were given over entirely to their basest passions, desires and impulses. In his frantic attempt to save the book and himself as well, and to escape if only

¹ A distinction should be made between the concept "dramatic situation" and the working term "opening situation", whose misinterpretation has led to the appearance of many puppet performances in which all sorts of random characters such as "bakers", "railroad men" and so on act out fairytales with puppets.

for a moment the horrifying sentence, the Poet began a mad dance between life and death, a naive play about the crazy hidalgo, creating out of his book an improvised but visually attractive puppet of Don Quixote.

This act of creation became the hero's strongest weapon and the key not only to the appearance of his puppet equivalent, but also the reason for the appearance of all the other puppet characters.

At the same time, however, it was also his greatest weakness, because it demanded an exceptionally high level of empathy, concentration and mastery of materials by the actor. Even the slightest slip in concentration or lack of sufficient psychophysical energy could provoke a sense of fakery and falsehood, discredit the dramatic situation, and destroy belief not only in the antagonists, but also the viewers' faith in the magic of puppet theater action. In that sense, it is a very "dangerous" type of theater. With its open pretenses to authorship and improvisation, with the unrepeatability of its flowing "here and now", it is very easily destroyed. In this type of theater, dramatic situations are often constructed such that if their dramatic content is not played out in full, it is impossible for the dramatic story and action to continue on from there.

This required a new approach and working method for the actors. According to this approach, the actor must truly take on the problems and fate of the hero as something deeply personal and cherished, as something deserved, if not a self-sacrifice, then at least a sacrifice requiring enormous effort, energy and time. With the help of the director, the actor must be educated and trained to possess within himself psychophysical skills and virtuosic abilities such that he can always convince the viewer of the unrepeatability of the creation. This means the actor should be not only a kindred spirit, but to a certain extent also a co-author who takes equal part in the resolution and construction of the dramatic situations, in the search for adequate visual solutions and means, as well as in their masterful display and manipulation.

This way of working at the same time reveals to the play's authors the inexhaustible possibilities for surprising and daring dramatic solutions,

ways of reaching exceptional depths of the figures and characters and their unique presentation, which is not possible in any other kind of theater.

For example, when unable to explain his absurd belief in the power of love, Don Quixote creates the gentle and noble puppet of Dulcinea, using Aldonza the prostitute's sexually provocative scraps of paper. Once again, the creation of the puppet in front of the other characters and the audience, as well as the puppet's visual efficacy, creates the momentary resolution of the complex figure of Aldonza-Dulcinea, in its form and content. This resolution makes it possible to create a whole range of conflicting feelings in the heroine; it also allows for a sharp contrast in actions, which range from vulgar jokes to reverence; it allows the entire subsequent process of Aldonza's transformation into Dulcinea.

The viewer is provoked not to sympathize with the paper puppet Dulcinea's problems, despite her liveliness and grace, but rather sympathizes with something much more human: Aldonza's struggle with the puppet – that is, with the idealized image of herself and with her deeply suppressed desire for love and admiration. What results is a single, complicated dual image of a person and a puppet, each unimaginable without the other, not because of the principle of animation, but because both are actively, logically and visually inseparable faces of the new dramatic figure.

When the play reaches the moment when the degenerates rape Aldonza, despite the fact that we do not see the actual rape, just the shredding and tearing of the paper puppet – the shocking effect of what has happened is evident. The viewer is affected not so much by what he sees, as by what he doesn't see, by the dualistic essence of the image; the viewer's sympathy and imagination have led to the emotions and to his awareness of what has happened.

Here is the place to emphasize the difference between theatrical illustration and the visual equivalent of logical messages and action.²

Illustration visualizes the staged story in the most accessible way possible, while the visual equivalent is more like a key to complicated, multi-layered, figurative and emotional apprehension and understanding of

that which is taking place.

I will use one more example from the production *Don Quixote*. The fact that the Don Quixote puppet sets its own head on fire, turning it into a torch during the luminous fight with the Inquisition, is not simply an illustration of Don Quixote's resolution to defend his belief and his love, but rather a psychophysical act unaccompanied by words, the visual equivalent of the hero's readiness to sacrifice himself. The poet is not pretending, he does not use the theatrical darkness to fool us into thinking that he set himself on fire, but rather the spontaneous act of destruction of the figure that he himself created, which is at the same time his most precious creation, his book, allows us to understand that he has reached such a stage of engagement and fusion with his creation that he is indeed capable of committing such an act. The phenomenon of open theatricality is created, while at the same time the full immersion and belief in the events is achieved, a combination possible only in this kind of theater – which not coincidentally is called by certain theater critics and theorists "Theater of the Third Kind" (Elena Vladova, Nikola Vandov).

This kind of theatrical presentation has become the final refuge for the disappearing romantic theater. It does not avoid deep philosophical or socio-political insights about modern life, but rather reaches them through the path of empathy, depending on the a priori emotionality and disarming naivety of the puppet theater.

The principles and objective laws mentioned above were gradually formed within the methodology of creating productions for adults and were realized in the genres of romantic drama and melodrama, tragedy and tragicomedy.

As an example I could point to my recent work on the production *Chestna mysketarska*, or *The Musketeers' Word of Honor*, which was the first successful production of Valeri Petrov's play on the puppet theater stage. Together with the director and our artistic brother-in-arms Slavcho Malenov, we successfully applied and developed the principles discussed above in contemporary Bulgarian dramaturgy.

We created a new theatrical troupe, which had received its theatri-

² I have nothing against theatrical illustration as an artistic approach and have used it myself in many children's productions.

cal education in more recent times, but which, thanks to its work on this production, was educated in the spirit of unanimity and authorial responsibility.

With the participation of scenographers Silva Buchvarova and Vasil Rokomanov, we created a materially ascetic but at the same time visually rich imagery. The visual idea behind the puppets was that they should be devoid of everything recalling old men-musketeers, their swords were their only weapons in the ever-changing modern world and at the same time the only means of preserving the ideal of their youth: men of the sword.

Thus, real swords were transformed into the young musketeers' puppets, while their tattered banners became royal vestments, palaces, taverns, ships and horses: the setting of their wild youth. And when at the end, cruel reality erases even these visual illusions, only one thing remains: love, sustained by "the arm of a friend ending in a sword".

The production won seven national and international prizes and was presented in a series of festivals in Bulgaria and abroad.

Thus, the methodology for creating productions for adults realized in the genres of romantic drama and melodrama, tragedy and tragicomedy, has been a fundamental factor in the

formation and artistic development of the troupes of the Plovdiv Puppet Theater (in the past) and of Theater Atelier 313 in Sofia (today), bringing together like-minded actors, co-authors and experimenters to form creative collectives with a distinctive artistic physiognomy and aesthetic platform.

Сцена от „Дон Кихот“, ДКТ–Пловдив, режисьор Петър Пашов

„Don Quixote“, State Puppet Theatre – Plovdiv, directed by Petar Pashov

This methodology was also included in certain acting and directing classes at NATFIZ Krustyu Sarafov, as well as in a series of qualifying seminars and educational courses outside the academy. ■

Translation by **Angela Rodel**



Размисли Върху едно безкрайно пътуване

Проф. Румен Рачев

Винаги съм възприемал кукленото изкуство като пътешествие из вселената на възможните други светове – на насекомите, на животните, на растенията, на странните куклени герои. Светове, изпълнени с противоречия и хармония. Пътешествие, в което пътуващият в един и същи момент е изследовател и репортер, който предава “на живо от мястото на събитията”.

Пътува духът на твореца върху крилата на творческото въображение, а тук, в командната зала на нашия реален свят, е останал разумът, който в своето величие е способен да анализира и синтезира получената информация от далечния свят и в същото време да селектира най-ярките, пестеливи и конкретни изразни средства, чрез които да изобрази живота на невидимия за неполетелите земни хора свят.

Живи ли са цветята, имат ли дух, разбират ли когато се отнасяме с обич към тях? Има теория, която твърди, че е така! И това твърдение е доказано чрез опити.

А дали не е същото с предметния, нежив свят? Не е ли органично свързана неживата и живата материя в единство и хармония, наречена всемирен живот?

Трептенията на неживата материя не са ли непозната за нас форма на живот? Има ли трептения, значи има енергия, а тя е синоним на духа. Какви качества трябва да притежава и възпитава в себе си творецът-кукленик, за да усети живота в неживата материя? Да го осмисли за себе си, да го разгадае и да го изобрази със средствата на изкуството, които са достъпни като понятност за хората, лишени от тази Божия гарба.