

„Montecchi – Capuleti“ at the puppet theater – Bialystok, Poland

Victor Boychev

It is easy to find advertising materials of the puppet theater in Bialystok and see or suggest its level and abilities. But it is an entirely different experience to be there and feel the most interesting thing, the spirit of the theater. It is alive, eager to live and meet new challenges even when showing death, as is the specific case with „Romeo and Juliet“, titled Montecchi – Capuleti with 14 actors on the stage. For an hour and a half it tells the entire story of feud and love without words.

The author of this version of the old story, narrated by Lope de Vega as a fairy tale and existing long before Shakespeare wrote the play, is Ruslan Kudashov. And although I missed the words and poetry of Shakespeare, this tale, sculptured in a postmodern version, touched me deeply and made me think about the level and techniques of our Bulgarian theater, which are in great contrast and, sadly, not to our benefit. „Being determines consciousness“, but desire determines being. In fact, we should be proud that we still have theaters. We must congratulate ourselves for the efforts invested in asserting this. Because they can only be (become) good, if they exist.

I once wrote that the theater is what we make it, but it does not take money only to make it better. We need to struggle for its place in the layers of public consciousness, we need to see whether it was better financed in the period of its creation and national upsurge, during the wars and after them?...

Let's stick to the point however. I am here in Bialystok to learn things and try to change what is satisfactory to us and we are happy about. The spirit of this theater, besides its building and many halls, is relaxed, serene and self-confident. You can feel it in every person working there with feeling of satisfaction and in the best possible way – the dream of every manager. The manager's name is Marek



*Монтеку - Кавьяему
Montecchi - Capuleti*

Vashkel. He has polyvalent thinking and combinatory consistency. It is not by chance that the theater has undertaken the cultural mission of representing Poland to the world, during its presidency of the EU and its budget allows it. I envy his calm anxiety about having many tasks and ranking them in an orderly dependence on the priorities and desires of the entire staff that appreciates his efforts and supports him in his new initiative.

Montecchi – Capuleti is one of them and the meeting of his 14 actors with the Russian team, composed of Ruslan Kudashov (director), Andrey Zaporozhki (stage designer) and Vladimir Bichkovski (music) is one of the most successful.

At first glance the stage looks ascetic with its iron profiles reminding of a prison's frame and creating the idea of space, divided into rectangular territories, fortified by the contrast of its black colour and the white nylon

ropes that give life to the characters; their „armours“ protecting them from the alien and hostile on the other side of the dividing line; the squares on the floor where everyone has his or her own space with the name written by father Lorenzo. At the beginning of the performance he hits the floor with his two hands with all his might to pain and shudder by their (of the hands) „antagonism“.

All the actors appear on the stage and turn into characters of this „narrative“ when they put over their black ascetic costumes resembling the stage decoration „protective hollows“ made of metal nets and covered in white paper – different for each one depending on their rank and societal position. When the dressing is accomplished, they start shouting the opponent's name and expressing their attitude to him. Romeo, roaming and searching for himself among his friends Mercutio and Benvolio who

are giving him booze and drinking themselves while gaming with the pawn of a slap on the forehead of the loser. (It should be mentioned that the few words that the actors pronounce are the characters' names and their clans). Along the axis of dividing the property of the two clans who are neighbours there is a dividing „glass“. The meeting of Romeo and Juliet (who prior to that was subject to grave family manipulation that across them was the deplorable enemy clan) is unexpected and begins suddenly. It is like waking up from your sleep and looking in the mirror glass against you. It transforms into a kiss, while a second before that happens the glass „disappears“.

The nanny Marta is presented wonderfully and actively with nice humour and shadow theater behind a screen of laundry she has hanged. She tries to lure Romeo behind it for a kiss but all she gets is a note stuck in bosom. The scene between her and Romeo's friends transforms from laughter and jests to the row of Tibald, Mercutio, Benvolio and Romeo. And it ends with stabs where Death courteously hands the murderer a sponge taken out of a large tin bucket, soaked with red paint and the victim takes it from him and thus the bloody bodies and souls hit their road together, charged with guilt as a result of the events.

The characters' position after they have transcended beyond the outlined boundaries where hatred and confrontation are not welcome is very interesting. The hollows left behind „on earth“ – bitterly mourned and provoking even greater hatred – hit their road (most likely to the grave) in the hands of the clans. Meanwhile the barrier between Romeo and Juliet, between the two families is erected again along the bloody line, drawn by the abbot with the help of „death“ and getting together again requires much more effort from the two young people. In their final embrace however the father's words „In the name of the Father, Son... Amen“ resound (in Latin, of course).

The response of the duke, who is related to Romeo's clan, to the bloody conclusion forces out the Capuleti clan's claim for vendetta with its power and chases Romeo away from

the outlined space with a broad gesture. Romeo's mother makes a very strong scene of her lonely separation and cry after her son departs in exile without having said good bye. Paris appears demanding to marry Juliet but her desperate resistance is categorically interrupted by her unyielding parents with the word „Thursday“ which sounds familiar but much more determined in Polish. This is the day when she takes the sleeping pill that brother Lorenzo unwillingly gave to Juliet and she falls on the dividing line between life and death. Paris is heart-broken and so is Romeo who has arrived. In their fight Romeo kills Paris and Death reemerges with its burden (the bucket full of the victims' blood). But Romeo drinks the poison and steps beyond, while He follows his victim immediately leaving a last icy kiss to Juliet. In spite of abbot Lorenzo's attempts to bring her back to this world by pulling her hand Juliet jumps up, snatches Romeo's knife and stabs her earthly hollow. Then she steps across the line beyond

which the Montecchi – Capuleti conflicts looks like a grain in the sand and where love knows no limits. Romeo's mother is also there and welcomes and hugs Juliet together with Romeo.

A performance gives rise to numerous associations and speculations. This is a beautiful love story, brilliantly told by the young actors without words. To make it happen, tender and noble as it is, the remaining actors contribute with the strength of hatred and repulsion to the obnoxious enemy with the precision of their physical gestures, disclosing crude and primitive manners that we often (continuously) witness at home today.

I envy the Bialystok theater for having succeeded in accomplishing this challenging and controversial in its means performance, which has united the actors for publicly executing a sacrifice to love and hatred. ■

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