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Maria Magdalena Ożarowska

And the sea mocks our frustrate search on land

The Tempest, dir. Alessandro Serra, Teatro Stabile di Torino – Teatro Nazionale, Italy

Alessandro Serra put forth a musical and, and the same time, ironic rendition of *The Tempest* – the director performs an intriguing analysis of the sounds of the island, reminding us that Shakespeare is not only beautifully written poems about the want of power and domination over all that crawls on this planet permeating throughout all members of the body, but also simple, crude even, sense of humour which highlights the ubiquitous circus-likeness of the world.

It starts spectacular – with chaos and noise. Undefined sounds coming from everywhere, like words babbled in a hurry, sometimes more akin to rustles or whistles. Each will hear something else in this cacophony. The curtain goes up, and in the middle of the stage lies a man shrouded in black material. The sheet rises and transforms into a restless surface of the water, the sounds of which are being suppressed – by much clearer now – dialogues. As it turns out, this is Ariel's doing, who puts a spell on the crew of the ship with his dance. Played by a woman, he will gracefully wander between the characters and daintily make mischief, following the orders of his master Prospero.

It is Ariel, as well as Caliban – the most disadvantaged and marginalized char-

acters in the play – whom the director gives the floor to. Ariel in motion and Caliban in song show their imprisonment and toxic attachment to Miranda's father in a very subtle way. When Prospero finally walks out of the picture and Ariel is left to fend for himself, it turns out that he cannot enjoy the freedom for which he fought so fiercely. On the other hand, Caliban (portrayed by a black performer, which sets up a postcolonial

Alessandro Serra's interpretation, Prospero is not an innocent wizard, but a director and a demiurge who knows how to manipulate. Each of the characters falls under the influence of black magic. Altered states of consciousness, however, are induced by witchcraft, and not romantic blindness. The characters become comical puppets deprived of agency. The wedding scene is straight out of a country fair. Male actors dressed



All photos by Dawid Linkowski

narrative as an addendum to reflecting on violence as such), seemingly only liberated, endures constant insults and vituperation from Prospero's mouth. Accustomed to servitude, he chooses the pair of friends – pathetic drunkards, insignificant in the social hierarchy – as his new masters.

The love story of Ferdinand and Miranda has not been omitted but seems insignificant in the broader picture of the play. Their rapid romance and nuptials of awesome speed are only a part of Prospero's plan. This emphasizes his overwhelming desire for revenge, which can overshadow everything, even unconditional love for the being closest to him – not only his daughter but also the person with whom he spent over a dozen years on the desert island. In

in white and beige corsets, petticoats, lingerie, and stockings run amok around the stage in a total trance. Their motion is artificial, automatic even. *The Tempest* is Prospero's play, wherein everyone is a fool.

Magic manifests itself not only in the choreography and the acting but also in the minimalist set design. The aforementioned sheet, animated during the performance in various ways, constructs a background for the events taking place. The use of spotlights creates an effect of faux fog, making what is happening on the stage seem less real. Although not a single drop of rain fell, *The Tempest* performed by the Teatro Stabile di Torino – Teatro Nazionale troupe from Italy dazzled the audience, setting the bar very high for other productions.

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Iga Szczodrowska

A dreamy contemplation on the turbulent human condition

The Tempest, chor. Antonio Quiles, Glad Teater and HamletScenen, Denmark

Featuring only three actors, this intimate yet powerful variation on Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is a first co-production between two Danish theatre groups, Glad Teater and HamletScenen. The performance focuses on themes of getting lost in the storm and the process of rebirth and starting anew.

If London has the Globe, and Poland has the Gdańsk Shakespeare Theatre, Denmark has its HamletScenen. A theatre located at stunning Kronborg Castle (immortalized as Elsinore in *Hamlet*) regularly features top Shakespearean shows. Moreover, Glad Teater (it's worth mentioning that 'glad' in the Danish language means 'happy') is a production company successfully delivering numerous performances involving cooperation between people with and without various disabilities. How does this collaboration translate onto the stage? The outcome is a surprisingly meditative dance spectacle rooted deeply in the physical expression of raw feelings masked in rituals and repetitions.

Despite its short duration, the show seems to test the audience's patience a couple of times only to reward it afterwards with a slow but satisfying build-up and release. The sparseness of scenography is recompensated with dynamic shifts in the set design such as music and light play. But the core of the performance lies in the movements of actors – both together as a group and individually. It's worth mentioning two names here: Janick Pihl Nielsen and Dan Roland Lund, who undertook these parts without having any prior dancing background and executed them impressively. Antonio Quiles, a Spanish choreographer working primarily with non-conventional spaces and street performances, conveys his vision using unusual techniques such as the breathwork of actors.

Opting for a more intuitive rather than intellectual approach, the production

only loosely weaves components of the source material. The original characters have been treated in a completely abstract manner. The three figures on the stage could potentially represent particular roles from *The Tempest*. Perhaps outcasts lost at the sea. But which ones? Or, in a less literal understanding, maybe the three parts stand for the inner struggles of a single person. But again, whose? Caliban's? Prospero's? All of them? Or, maybe, we're looking at the more universal human experience? This rendering steers clear of any definitive answers.

With its abstractive, open-to-interpretations performance, *The Tempest* also poses questions of how much Shakespearean knowledge (or theatrical knowledge in general) is actually needed to fully express the meaning of the text and to move the viewer. If a bit of a far stretch for Shakespearean traditionalists, the Danish production is a great treat for fans of expressionist modern theatre. And for the rest of us, the show offers a chance to collectively meditate on how to carry on being human after the storm passes.



Maria Magdalena Ożarowska

Rape of Ukraine

L_UKR_ECE, dir. Tetiana Shelepko, Ukraine

It is difficult to speak of *L_UKR_ECE* as a theatre performance – it is rather a sung manifesto that uses Shakespeare's text to talk about war from a woman's perspective. Fragments of the poem intertwine with Ukrainian folk songs, and photographs of bombed Ukrainian cities have been juxtaposed with European iconography – graphics, prints, and oil paintings depicting war crimes recorded on the pages of history.

As many people have already written, even in the pages of "Shakespeare Daily" – it had seemed that after the COVID-19 pandemic nothing would surprise us anymore. And, shortly after the new infection count had begun to decrease, a war

broke out in Ukraine, which has been going on uninterrupted for four months. Some managed to find shelter outside the borders of their country, while others remained to bravely face the Russian occupier. War triggers the lowest of instincts in people, which is why articles about attacks on civilians, residential buildings, even hospitals and kindergartens being bombed, and rapes began to appear quickly on news sites.

Each of the voices of our Ukrainian neighbours is unique. Each is a voice that should be listened to carefully and that we cannot be indifferent to. That is why Tetiana Shelepko's project presence at this year's edition of the Shakespeare Festival cannot but make one glad. The artist invited a young student from Kharkiv, Kristina Bila, to participate. The actress entered the stage dressed in a white and red costume and started the performance off with a very dynamic dance to a song by Drakha Brakha. At the same time, she kept recalling numerous threads from the history, or, more appropriately, the herstory of Lucrece in the original language, subsequently followed by a Ukrainian nursery rhyme about a girl wearing a blood-coloured ribbon.

It's hard to put a finger on Bila's identity. On the one hand, she enacts what happened to Lucrece, while on the other, she very subtly tells us about herself – a young girl full of life and vitality, who at the very beginning of her career found herself surrounded by war. There's a tremendous force radiating from her that knows no bounds. It is very much a shame that she has to present her acting talent in such circumstances. Her colourful testimony is not only an auto-theatre spectacle; it also gives back subjectivity to all victims of violence – both at home and at war.

What happened after Lucrece's death is upraising. A power that was supposed to last forever collapsed. Let us not forget that Shakespeare retold an authentic story from the 6th century BC, with one of Ovid's poems as a reference. Sextus Tarquinius, son of the King of Rome, raped Lucrece, who then committed suicide. Consul and politician Lucius Junius Brutus decided to exhibit her body at the Roman Forum, which started the revolution... The royal family was banished and so the republic was established. Dictatorships should not fall due to rape or other similar atrocities. But *L_UKR_ECE* gives hope that Vladimir Putin's rule will also come to an end.

A statement of life

Tetiana Shelepko – Ukrainian artist and theatre director – in a conversation with Viktoria Dulak

Whose idea it was to create *L-UKRE-CE*?

We didn't know each other with Kristina – the actress – before. When the war started, I realized that it will be a long time since I have made any theatre work in Ukraine, so I texted the artistic director of Craiova National Theatre, where I was a resident in 2019, and asked him if by any chance they will be doing any projects, and if so, I will be happy to be a part of them. He called me in 3 weeks, showed Kristina on a video conversation and said "We have a Shakespeare festival in 3 weeks. Do Shakespeare". At that moment I was working in the Kharkiv region where there were many cases of rape. I was talking with women that told me their stories about sacrificing themselves to save people's lives. I started thinking of that paradox. And then I found *The rape of Lucrece*. When I read about the whole history, that night they were allowed to take any women they wanted, I just knew. So, I called Kristina and asked her if she wants to work on this. We started working online and I realized that I can't leave her somewhere, in another city, with a play you go and perform. So, I came to Romania. At the festival, which was about 18 minutes long, I met Joanna; we started talking and she said we should perform it here, at the festival in Gdańsk, but we must develop the play first and make it longer. And that's how we're here.

Shakespeare wrote this play about one night in Rome and you rewrite it and create a story of one – still ongoing – night in Ukraine. What do you want to convey with it?

On the 27th of March, I went to my theatre in Kyiv. We did a play. Before the premiere, I had a speech and while preparing for it I was thinking: what am I actually doing? I am making a play –but why? To entertain people? And while I was speaking, I realized that art is not an escape – it is a statement of life. When people can create, they state the fact that they are alive. When people are destroying – it is about death. But we are alive and we're creating. That's the main

idea of *L-UKRE-CE*. For me, it is about the part of your soul that is dead after such an experience. But the idea is to accept this fact and to keep living anyway. To keep living well. And to keep creating. It is a statement of life.

You mentioned your play – *New World Order*. Do you want to say something about your experience of theatre work in a city and country in which hostilities are taking place?

I was lucky and privileged to sit in a basement with a few actors, stable internet, a musician, and time at night. Looking at this now – it seems super crazy what we've done. At that moment it felt simply wrong. We spent days helping people, volunteering, buying medicines, getting food, and delivering it to the soldiers. I was working with teachers – trying to help them out because all their books burned in a fire, and they still were conducting classes. But during the night we couldn't just go to sleep. We were playing guitars, we had to somehow take off this pressure and feel that we're people. While working we asked ourselves: what the hell are we doing? Feeling privileged felt wrong. The show was the strangest. I can't even name this feeling. The building was shaking. There was a bombing right during the performance. The only thing I was thinking about was if they hit the internet cable, and we would go off and nobody would see that we had been preparing so much, I would kill them. It is so wrong to think that, but it's like you give birth in all of this and when it finally is born you see how scary it is and that it can not survive. And how important it is because it is something about life. I don't know how it influenced people who saw it but for us, it was an insight that this is what matters, this is what people should be doing instead of what they're doing now. I can't take a rifle and defend my country like that, but I can save this part that is alive and kicking.

And what did the process look like? And how did it feel to work with Kristina?

I think that we are all a little bit more mature after this experience. The level of understanding is the same, no matter how old you are. Kristina is a student so there were clashes between some of my techniques and the techniques she was taught. Yet, there was a complete understanding of what to do. She actually had



amazing suggestions. She worked out choreography – the first piece is fully her, made without any choreographer. I was just saying "I need it to feel like this" and she was creating it.

My last question is about you. You've started as an actress and now you're the director. But you are also connected with pro-English theatre, you were a journalist. Where do you see yourself?

I am a theatre director. I used to be a ski coach, English, Ukrainian, and world literature teacher; I worked on TV, I was a museum senior researcher, waitress, and journalist and all of it led me to being a director anyway. But I can't just direct. I have to find how it works in life to take this life and put it on stage. It's like when you're here, in the Shakespeare Theatre, and the roof opens, and you see the sky and you cry. You see this sky every day but when you're in the theatre and you see the sky which is performed to you, it's different.

Aleksandra Haberny

Path to perdition

*Lear, for f**k's sake!*, dir. Marcin Herich, A Part Theatre, Poland

King Lear is considered to be one of the most outstanding and significant of Shakespeare's plays – it should be no surprise that it is constantly being reinterpreted and re-done. A Part Theatre is also very familiar with this show – after doing it once, they've decided to take it up again, in a slightly different manner – not nicely, but ruthlessly; without giving a f**k.

These days, *King Lear* is still up-to-date – despite the passing of time, we can still see the things portrayed in the play in today's world. We are still surrounded

by despotic rulers, humane crud, and vengeance. And although the show is not based on current events and does not refer to them, it surely is modernized. What makes the performance special, is that the director told the actors to base their characters on their personal experiences. This made the show and its reception much more intimate.

Simultaneously, it's not this kind of *Lear* that will give the audience everything they would normally expect – there's more dynamism, brutality, condemnation, and mockery; however, it does not lack dignity, nobility, and inevitable, omnipresent tragedy. Marcin Herich in his play took the worst from the characters and reached into *King Lear's* deepest and darkest parts. And, ironically, even though it doesn't get outside the box and definitely doesn't show anything new, it does a great job following the plots that have been chosen to be shown. The show consequently stands by chosen schemes and follows the characters through changes, deepening madness, or sick desire for power. Watching the performance is like following a path to perdition. Despite its expressiveness, it's not too metaphorical – it can be painfully literal at times. It portrays everything as it comes, doesn't make any exceptions, and doesn't have any mercy.

It is a truly graphic performance that goes all the way – both with the over-the-top scenography and stage props (scaffolds, stilts, fire) but also very suggestive acting. Unfortunately, the style is more important than the substance. Even though the show is very effective and can take one's breath away, it could use some toning down to pass the story better – it feels as if it got lost somewhere along the way. However, *Lear*, for f**k's sake is strongly grounded in its deliberateness and the fact that it stays with the audience long after the last applause.

Iga Szczodrowska

Violence poisons victory

Andronicus-Syneccdoche, dir. Grzegorz Bral, Song of the Goat Theatre, Poland

After the successes of *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*, Grzegorz Bral chooses one of Shakespeare's bloodiest tragedies, *Ti-*

tus Andronicus next. He does it in his signature style, setting the chorus on stage, using emotional music by Maciej Rychły and an intertextual script by Alicja Bral. This results in a reflection on the nature of violence, revenge, and the murderous desire for power. Fortunately, Bral avoids the trap of falling into a moralistic tone.

For a long time, *Titus Andronicus* has not been considered a very successful work. Hailed as a master of psychological tragedies, Shakespeare seems to be only experimenting with the genre in *Titus*. The slow building of tension is replaced by an almost 'quantity over quality' approach towards the number of occurring atrocities. There is an average of 5.4 scenes of violence per act including numerous murders, brutal mutilations, rapes, and even cannibalism. The 20th century puts the play in a new perspective, though. Both post-war and feminist critiques shed a different light on the marathon of evil that takes place in the text, reading it as a deeper reflection on the human condition. How does Song of the Goat deal with such material?

Andronicus-Syneccdoche stays surprisingly faithful to the source in terms of the chronology of events and the pace of the story. The script is essentially a very artful and poetic summary of the intricate plot. Simultaneously, Song of the Goat once again achieves an on-stage ambiance that gives the impression of near-perfect coordination of various elements: dynamic choreography, poignant singing of the chorus, emotional acting, and impressive, yet minimalist set design. Bral has undoubtedly succeeded in creating his distinctive theatrical language, based on a very specific aesthetic, playing with different conventions and incredible synchronicity of the visual layer with the music and text. This contrast between form and content in the case of *Andronicus* creates cognitive dissonance in the audience.

At one point, the narrator Markus, Titus' brother, finds his niece Lavinia raped, with her tongue ripped out and hands cut off by her abusers. This is an important moment, highlighted by the chorus, in which Markus, at the sight of such a derogatory state, is unable to contain his unhealthy fascination with the woman's suffering. A metaphorical mirror is placed in front of the viewers – are we just taking part in a collective act of voyeurism?

The aforementioned accuracy to the original, results in certain overstimulation towards the end of the play, quite like when reading Shakespeare's text. One gets overwhelmed by the impossibility to comprehend evil, increasingly illogical, unnecessary murders and atrocities. In a way, *Andronicus-Syneccdoche* desensitises the spectators until the lights go out and the music dies down. The actors come out onto the stage, still partly smeared with red paint carrying evidence of the play's gory nature. The applause starts, and sunflowers are being handed out. The actors hug each other, celebrating their shared success. Everything returns to normal. It's hard to shake off the surreal impression that we have just jointly participated in a bloody sacrifice that we can slowly move on from. We have awoken from a nightmare experienced together, glimpses of which will stay with us forever.

Aleksandra Haberny

The rest is laughter

Hamlet on the Road, dir. Joanna Zdrada, Divadlo Radost, Czech Republic

Hamlet, being one of the most popular Shakespeare plays and, dare I say, one of the most popular plays of all time, has stated some of the most significant archetypes and schemes in the world of culture. Everyone remembers the tragedy of an extremely conflicted prince of Denmark. Radost Theatre's *Hamlet*, however, in a way leaves the big dilemma behind and takes the audience on a racy, eventful journey full of music, dark humour, and surprises. After all, not every adaptation of this play includes Hamlet asking Polonius whether he wants to have a candle lit up at his grave.

The show follows the actions of a traveling theatre consisting of actors and puppeteers led by Horatio himself, since, as we know, it is he who has to tell the story of Hamlet. The actors are trying to put out *Hamlet*, despite various inconveniences – they bravely deal with missing actors, dead birds, and uncooked dinner. In their wagon, the story they're

trying to act out blends with their lives. The troupe is accompanied by a gravedigger, who keeps an inventory of the dead, while occasionally playing the trumpet.

The short trumpet parts are just a small amount of the musical side of *Hamlet on the Road*. All of the famous monologues, that we have probably seen done in a thousand different ways, are beautifully sung and accompanied by actors live on stage. And when the audience's ears have already been blessed, our eyes are not left with nothing – actors do not only use puppets, but also dance around and include typical for the time circus and cabaret elements. The scenography is extremely detailed, functional, and ravishing; styled in an époque-accurate way to fit the traveling theatre aesthetics. Props are used creatively as well – at one point, Yorick's bones become instruments in one of the songs.

This play is something you cannot just pass by without taking a greater look at it. Because everything – from scenography, stage props, and costumes to acting, movement, and songs – is phenomenally balanced and the group outstandingly plays every single minute of it. The emotion and passion are felt in every single move, every single chord, and every single sound. It draws from different genres and has a great amount of crude, absurd humour that perfectly fits the show's aura, giving the spectators a fresh view of the story. However, the added humour does not mean that the story has been fetched to stupid and funny – it preserves its meaning and imagery, just presents it differently.

What's extremely charming about Joanna Zdrada's *Hamlet* is its amazing self-consciousness and honesty. It didn't feel like the show was trying to fool the audience or give some new, falsely deep metaphors and symbols. They were so natural and genuine in their work that they didn't need to try to buy the audience – they had them from the very first sight.

The show completely carried the audience away, and for a good reason – it was amazing to finally see someone fiddle with the original text while staying historically accurate and saving and conveying all of the archetypes that we remember, but in a different, great style. It didn't steal anything from the *Hamlet* that we all know and adore but added amazing diversity and freshness.

The need for storytelling

John Stanisci – comic artist, playwright, writer, actor, theater producer, and jury member of this year's Festival – in a conversation with Viktoria Dulak

You draw, write, you are an actor, a producer, you have your own theater company and now you are taking part in the Festival as a jury member. So, I start with the question, who are you?

Ever since I was a kid, I still feel that writing is what I was called to do. My childhood wasn't easy. But I was lucky enough to come to school with a very strong arts program. That led me to this comic industry, where I stayed for a long time and had a pretty good career. But then came the point where I realized that I didn't want to die without first taking care of what I was made to do. I started to find the right opportunities and met people who often worked in movies or TV. All this has enabled me to write professionally.

Now you're joining all the professions. However, each medium has its own peculiarities. I wonder what parallels you see between comic books, writing, and your work in the theater?

That's a very good question. One of these you answer first and then wake up at one o'clock in the morning with enlightened with what you should have said. I think the key word is storytelling. The theater is one of the most difficult forms. You get an empty, black room, and it's up to you what you do with it. I am an actor, and the experience of the scene changes a lot. On the other hand, you can observe people and see how they react or fall asleep – this is a clear sign of the quality of the art. If I create good dialogues when I write, it comes from practice. I know how the language is on stage so that I can incorporate it into my writing. My work in the theater has taught me a lot about the construction of stories.

And how have drawings and comics changed your understanding of theater? It seems that these media require a completely different perception, for instance, space or time.

I always talk about Aristotle and his *Poetics*. When he wrote about drama, he was actually describing the art of creating stories. It's about the purpose – why do we do it and for whom? Because not for myself. Just so you understand, it's not like I'm doing anything for the public. It's not about people liking it. It's about touching them, communicating what made me say something to them.

Please tell us something about the poster you drew for this year's festival. Where did the visual form come from?

I hate to talk about it, but the idea for the poster wasn't mine. When Agatha Grenda first asked me for a project, I drew something completely different. Then she told me the motto of this year's Festival. *Between heaven and the stage – after the tempest?* She also suggested an actor standing alone on a stage. From this came the protagonist – a lonely traveler, on the edge of the stage, but at the same time on the stormy sea. The colors of the Ukrainian flag were also a conscious decision. I must admit, it made it easier for me artistically. I didn't have to worry about pulling something out when I applied the colors.

The Tempest is reminiscent of post-apocalyptic and science fiction, especially considering it's the last of Shakespeare's works. This year's motto of the Festival is: Between heaven and the stage. After the tempest? Do we want these kinds of non-realistic stories?

I wouldn't say we want them. But for some reason, we need them. This need is rooted in human nature. The Egyptians created hieroglyphics and pyramids. There are many mysterious phenomena, but they put our world in order. This was later investigated by Joseph Campbell. Myths. He determines everything, arranges everything, and explains the course of history. Campbell's entire analysis, everything he said about constructing history, has its origin in myth.

And what is your perception of The Tempest? What do you see in this play, and what are you looking for in it?

I must confess, it's not my favorite piece. I don't know why, because it's very good. Emotionally, I am more attracted to *Othello* or *Macbeth*. What I love about Shake-

speare is his ability to lead characters. For example, we never know why Jagon hates Othello, and there is no monologue where he comes out and says, "Oh, you terrible Othello, he did this to me, this and that." He tells the story with very dynamic and economical means. It doesn't explain a lot of things, but it works.

What do you think of modern productions of classical works? Including Shakespeare.

Let's put Shakespeare aside for a moment. We can take *The death of a Salesman*. Any classic work. If the author includes the plot at certain times, it is not necessary to modernize it. On Broadway, there is a trend to re-read old, classic musicals. They modernize it and completely overhaul it. What's the point? Many of them are terrible. Everything loses its power and is not so much fun anymore.

My final question is, what's next? What happens after your visit to Poland? Are you back to drawing or writing?

The day before me and my wife left for Poland, I received a phone call with an offer of working on a script for a major film producer in Hollywood. Besides, I'm still working on my science fiction novel. So, these two things are waiting for me while I'm at the festival, and I plan to take care of them as soon as I get home.

Reviews by Penny Shefton

The Tempest, dir. Alessandro Serra

Interpretation, inspiration and visual statement are, as ever, clearly in evidence in the festival. Shakespeare as a source from which to explore spiritual, moral, political themes, express contemporary issues as well as face ourselves/each other often outnumber productions which set out to 'play a Shakespeare,' namely, put on the play itself.

This could be said of the National Theatre of Turin's production of 'The Tempest' since the director Alessandro Serra took

it upon himself to translate the standard English Shakespearean text into a vernacular that approximates more closely with the Italian translation from which the actors were working. This wise decision allows the nuances, intonational qualities and idiosyncrasies of the Italian spoken in different regions to come across more effectively as evidenced in the Neapolitan used by the actors playing Trinculo and Stefano [Massimiliano Poli and Vincenzo Del Prete – both themselves from the city]. The choice also shows that Serra has listened to and chosen to be led by Shakespeare as opposed to using a play by Shakespeare to fly their own flag.

Enough of the verbiage, now to the production – a production rich in images, tableaux, colour and, thankfully, devoid of unnecessary mess. Sitting chatting, getting comfortable, looking at the rest of the audience, an audience, rather like Alonzo [King of Naples], Gonzalo, Antonio, Sebastian and Ferdinand with the comic duo of butler Stefano and sidekick, Trinculo, blissfully unaware that something is about to happen, and in case of the audience, that something has already started. Mist has been imperceptibly creeping into the auditorium long before the lights fade out. The wind starts its cacophony of moans, the seagulls screech and the curtain inches its way up – drawing us into not quite darkness. Not quite – no people, just sounds but peer into the dimness and there's something there, a heap from which gradually rises a wall – a curtain that begins to buffet against the elements. Under that heap has been a creature, a white-clad dervish whose antics now reveal that it is them that is whipping up the movement – they are the conductor – a conductor who is having a jolly good time in the tumultuous storm of elements they are creating. We are in the Tempest.

Nothing is as it seems – this is theatre in theatre – with a director, Prospero, a disgruntled stage manager, Ariel who is distinctly unhappy with working conditions [no days off!], a stage hand, Caliban, whose bitterness towards management is roared out the first time he enters – dramatically silhouetted against a misty background in a gap in the back wall. Actors – can ask questions – 'Why did you start this storm,' they might get a reply or, equally, the director can choose to put to sleep when in the way. Artifice, Art – the power of what Prospero has leant

from his precious books – as precious as his daughter – is the temptation that makes him guilty of negligence – ignoring his responsibilities as ruler of Milan and which allowed brother Antonio in cahoots with Alonzo, King of Naples to usurp him, cast him and Miranda out to sea [NB: survival rescue package of food and magic books hidden in boat by honest Gonzalo]. The good guys are in white, the others in various darker shades. Prospero brings with him light, when he exits the colours darken.

However, as Serra points out in the words of Simone Weil, "Whoever is uprooted himself uproots others." Serra chooses to juxtapose Gonzalo's benign vision of a 'commonwealth' of 'no servitude' with a vision of Caliban in servitude famed dramatically in a doorway of light bearing a peacock-like throne arrangement of branches as his working load. It underlines his dignity and the injustice he is the victim of. Prospero is guilty of robbing Caliban – heir to Sycorax, whose island he 'invades,' usurping him then later enslaving him – hence the bitterness. Prospero releases Ariel from Sycorax's punishment only to use Ariel's magic for his own production. A working imbalance that Chiara Micheli [a refreshingly playful Ariel] tackles with a levity of tone along facial gestures / vocal mimicry which give spirit and vitality in highlighting the 'bond' between them. At one point she and Prospero bicker like two stereotypical Italian matriarchs – which perhaps helps lend understanding to the final scene of this production – Ariel alone in a shaft of light – released and then...

On a stage devoid of set, the guilty and the innocent are brought together. Richly dressed in period jackets to emphasise their status, and, as the ever gentle compromiser Gonzalo notices, the fact that the sea water has not damaged but indeed, given their clothes new colour. These cannot hide the rotten nature of their natures. Cast away on this island, Prospero's brother Antonio encourages Sebastian, younger brother to Alonzo, to grab this opportunity – alone on a desert island – to usurp his brother and seize the crown of Naples. History repeats. The fact that they are on an stranded in the middle of nowhere only heightens their guilt. By contrast, Alonzo thinks only of his son Ferdinand, lost to the elements. Revenge is not on his mind – remorse, regret – a worried, grieving parent is a bet-

ter description with Gonzalo helping to ease his mind as best he can. Redemption is possible for some.

Hypnotised by Ariel's 'Full fathom five,' Ferdinand is enslaved by Prospero to prove his worth. With Brooke like simplicity, the plank of wood he bears as his burden becomes a sloping climbing board for a flirtatious Miranda, and next a tool for the antics of Trinculo and Stefano's slapstick routine – from see-saw to a slap in the jaw board. It's a compact device using both the horizontal and vertical to break up the space and entertain. Fun is allowed – farts and hiding under skirts, too. The slapstick serves to show how easily the clowns can be tempted by nothing – as evinced later through money they seeming get from selling their ill-gotten prizes and too realise that the coins are nothing. Insubstantial as the visions they have been fooled by – including a rack of costumes headed by a combination of red and white [a comic touch for this performance?] Serra shows by this Caliban's ability to distinguish between the magical qualities of the island, the 'sounds and sweet airs that hurt not' and that of the clowns' fripperies. In an arresting moment, Caliban [a strong Jared McNeill] roars in protest at his new master, Stefano's ignorance, rebelling in a trance of African-style dance – a physical powerhouse of dignity.

That plank invents itself as a banquetting table on which dishes of delights are set, around which in an elegant parody of courtly dance, Serra and Shakespeare hypocrisy within artifice against the integrity of truth. 'Our revels now are ended' – left disorientated, despairing and pitiable, it is Ariel who reflects 'that if you beheld them, your / would become tender' with the final impact of 'Mine would, were I human' here directly prompting Prospero to 'drown my book.' It seems that their working relationship has taught both of them – slaver and enslaved – uncomfortable lessons.

The three keys players end the production – Prospero, director – enslaver, relinquishing his power, acknowledging his neglect, Caliban – invested with his dignity and status – a message all the more pertinent in light of the current overdue exchange on slavery. However, it is Ariel, now released, whose manic display of confusion and loneliness ends with a despairing cry of liberty – despairing into a puff of 'nothing.' Gone.

Penny Shefton

L_UKR_ECE, dir. Tetiana Shelepko

[According to the Merriman dictionary – ECE originates in the Greek word *oikos*, meaning house – home]

Rome February 24th – after the Rape of Lucrece or in 2022 read between the lines. Ukraine 24th February, 2022 – the Rape of Ukraine, the invasion of Ukraine. Invasive violation – since countries are often personified as female, the metaphor is not lost. The intimate playing space which Okna offers brings the proximity of the action very much close to home.

A young woman dressed in Roman style female drapery, her left breast encased in a red corset which might be red on many levels as defilement, suffering, Poland's position in terms of distance and support – enters and starts dancing, swaying gracefully – reminiscent of figure from an Attic frieze or vase painting. Gradually, the dancing becomes more exaggerated developing into a Bacchic like frenzy. Over this come can be heard a hauntingly plaintive female chorus of polyphonic Ukrainian folklore singers – it's visceral statement which might work even more powerfully without its musical accompaniment.

Another memorable section of this 30 minute performance comes in the form paintings from across the centuries [Thomas Cole, Nicolas Poussin, Pablo Picasso, Otto Dix] in a display of massacre, destruction – killing fields in paint juxtaposed to key photographic images taken from the invasion of 2022. Images of bloodied women, disorientated, displaced, dishevelled which forcefully brings home the injustices and victims of war – predominantly women – vulnerable to attack – outside and inside. As high art and photographic reportage show – we are excellent at destroying each other and all around – it's a recurring theme – timeless.

In the midst of all this is performer, Kristina Bila fighting valiantly to convey the plight of her country in extracts, the programme tells us, from Ovid, Taras Shevchenko, Lesa Ukrainka and Bila herself – given in English and Ukrainian. Apart from the technicalities of being heard, combining physical movement and word, the main challenge within Tetiana Shelepko's piece is the amount of material, the messages and the images that she wishes to pack into a very short space of time resulting in a well-mean-

ing, passionate concoction of leaps from one thought to another – never allowing time for both the audience and performer to develop these. Or is this analogous to an attack where there is no time, the focus is survival from moment to moment?

Penny Shefton

*Lear, for f**k's sake!*, dir. Marcin Herich



For a staging of *Lear*, Plac Zebrań Ludowych is no bad choice. Already as one winds ones way up from the Al. Grunwaldzka, away from the traffic, enters and crosses the empty wastes that used to be Gdansk's fairground, there is a sense of distance from the tamed actual to the exposed, unpredictable artificial.

What greets the audience are three, skeletal scaffolding structures raised high above the ground thus easily visible which, practice must have taught this company, let the audience get to exercise their eyes and senses more than just looking comfortably straight ahead. Moreover, to augment this activity in the audience, most of us were standing so involving subtle interaction – audience brushing up against audience, reminiscent of how most of the Elizabethan audience saw their Shakespeare. Convenient for slinging the odd apple core [or worse] should a performance fail to satisfy. Back in Plac Zebrań Ludowych seating was a single row of chairs around the parameter of the rectangular acting area.

Three women, dressed in black, enter, scale the platforms which are pivoted into various interlocking positions by an entourage of savage looking men, also dressed in black. Elemental in black. Thus begins a cacophony of declarations – or are they incantations. Are we in the Scottish play? Are these hags instead of attractive ladies? Are these witches meeting on a barren heath to orchestrate the fall of a man? Three women, in the gloom – ranting, encircling an imaginary cauldron? To delightfully bamboozle,

they acrobatically switch places – these magical three.

Meantime, Lear appears at one end – a craggy, frail, stick-legged figure winching up to a perch high up on a platformed throne – A Part from the action. Beady eyes watching, assessing, regretting? A crown squashed on his head – decrepit in form and reason. Connections are made – witches can be daughters, can't they? It's a novel approach with a lively streak of black – humour underneath which is no bad thing.

Teatr A Part – have done what their name suggests, very sensibly taken a small part of this toweringly magnificent play, and honed in on 'Nothing', for what can Cordelia say? Goneril already declares 'All that is ours is yours;' Regan that 'only You count, only you.' Case stated, done and dusted. Fathers and daughters – complicated – even in a setting where the 2012 Euro cup was televised years ago with hordes of Fathers and sons communing in testosterone.

'How can you say that' – Lear responds to Cordelia. 'Nothing will come of nothing' – which of course it does as far as the Shakespeare goes. Blood baths, electric language, harrowing expressions of revenge, greed, lust, rendered in some of the greatest verbal creations in the English language.

In Plac Zebrań Ludowych, instead three actresses share their personal memories and feelings towards their own fathers. Technically, this suffers as not much could be heard – especially for those standing in the back. To address this, the company did supply a script – helpful. Frustrating as the notion of hearing the voice and confession of each actress as herself in close proximity to us sharing own parent/child story in contrast to the character she is playing up on the platform is a pertinent one. Sadly, this was marred, yet perhaps that was the intention – to hear, we the audience, were required to work for it – strain, jostle and

make audio connection in order to get insights into three contrasting relationships, three unique journeys; real life against the backcloth of a theatrical icon. Their own stories naturally are relatable, emotional, human; their bond to their father complicated and true. A stark contrast to the bonds determined by money and power, even 'Nothing.'

When the spidery husk of Lear negotiates his way down from his perch with the help of the shoulders of the grim looking entourage and crutches appear from nowhere, a cascade of curses blast forth spawned by the reflection.

'Who the fuck am I? Who?'

Who were the fathers of the actresses in themselves, who is a ruler who abdicates power, who is a father who screeches 'oh you bitches' at his offspring? Who is worthy of the name?

The world falls A Part as bestial, wolf / hyena forms on stilts – masked, naked – 'unaccommodated man' [or woman], under gangster style long leather coats, confront, parade, challenge; order is entering into a world of disorder. Filial loyalty, care and pity, in a society where God and the fear of damnation were ever present, has been subverted. Though the world Lear seems disconnected from the latter, the audience of the time were. The wolf pack looming down from their stilted height are the same actors, in different guises, who play Goneril, Regan and their entourage. Cordelia could be there, too. Subliminally, Lear's summation of mankind reverberates in the truth on stage: 'Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.' Unlike 'Poor Tom' to whom Lear addresses these words, the visions in *Lear*, *Fuck* are another version of man's choice.

Here, the overused, and thus inconsequential, effect of nudity seen so often on stage locally is justified. It's nasty, it's base, it's carnal. Lear, *Fuck* curses 'You bitches [a

female dog], you whores' in a mantra of verbal fucks. What has he unleashed, was he wise and good? Indeed, is he wise and good. 'Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile; filths savour but themselves.' Morality is dead – ion the barren heath of Plac Zebrań Ludowych it's a 'fucked' up world, Lear.

Metal teeth rotate, platforms spin into line as sides in the power struggle are taken and changed. Health and Safety officers switch to red-alert as the entourage power up chainsaws. High up on a gangway of ramps and scaffolding a deadly confrontation staged as a stylised courtly-dance is taking place. In contrast to the intimate confessional, Lear's demands and the earlier tri-partite fusion of sisters, this is a frenzied study of greed, lust, disloyalty and confusion. The power tools emphasise the clash of political and sexual power houses. At one point, in a visually striking scene, a masked female wearing a headdress – wedding train trailing fire enters in an eerie display of light against the surrounding gloom – 'if only to go warm were gorgeous, ... nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st.' In the choice of images and confrontation that A Part have honed in on, the company have 'rippled' out into connections with Shakespeare's actual text. One subtly triggers the other.

Unlike other more established companies performing this year, A Part understand the necessity for vocal modulation, a change in pace and eye level – they require the audience to physically commit to the experience [standing, turning, peering, eye levels] in the [dis]comfort of a wind-swept, chilly piece of wasteland.

The venue fits the nature and impact of the piece – 'Humanity must perforce prey on itself, Like monsters of the deep.' *Lear, for fuck's sake!* – what have you released?

Penny Shefton

EDITORIAL TEAM

Translation: Rafał Kamiński, Editors: Aleksandra Wach, Zuzanna Chamera, Proofreading: Zuzanna Chamera, DTP: Katarzyna Lemańska

