

**Bojana Cvejić:**

## **HAMLET DE-MORALIZED**

When 't Barre Land meet Jan Ritsema

### **Hamlet multiplied.**

*For us and our tragedy,*

*Here stooping to your clemency,*

*We beg your hearing patiently* (Shakespeare, "Hamlet", Act III, Scene II, 144-6)

– are the words of the prologue of the theatre-play *in* "Hamlet" which 't Barre Land and Jan Ritsema begin *their* performance of "Hamlet" with. Indeed an invitation for both Prince Hamlet's and 't Barre Land's audiences to prick their ears up and strain their eyes for what comes is a playing 'through' Shakespeare's text integral. Seven actors all take up scene by scene, each role played by two or three actors at the same time, not only exchanging roles within the play, but also in the scenes fragmentized below speech-lines- or even sentence-level. Lavishly dressed in uniform male and female XVII century Protestant gowns and Sunday-for-church clothes, gradually revealing many layers of different fabrics, colours, patterns, and original usage, from the black clear-cut cloaks and aprons to the inside prints of nervous system and other human organic structures (costumes by Elisabeth Jenyon), they briskly move about on a wooden floor platform, fractioned into equal but slanting in different directions boards somewhat like taking positions on a crooked chess-board (set-design by Herman Sorgeloos), so as led to unfold the text as a thinking process projected in space.

**Klangfarbenmelodie.** A seemingly well-known play is first formally disordered, reorchestrated in a way Webern would rewrite Beethoven anew by not changing one note, but where all heroism, romantic undertones and even more specific meaning-labeling interpretative baggage turn as white as possible in order to show the structure of the play as various thinking-routes. Then do many colours appear: characters dissolve in multiple voices coming from constantly shifting positions in space and supposed roles. Not only musical are these continuous changes from one voice to another, and as such surprisingly coordinated and supple, but they also open several entries in what is commonly brooded from a fixed point of view, so that even a lengthy rhetorical speech can appear broken into many directions, one actor voicing an affirmative statement, followed by another one questioning it, meanwhile the third reflecting its illusory character.

**Seeming vs. truth** – From the first moment when Hamlet mocks his mother over the forms of mourning for his father: "Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not 'seems'," the scenes follow as essay-demonstrations of various kinds of seeming that blur Hamlet's moralistic quest for truth. Could the Shakespeare's text have suggested it? A ghostly apparition to reveal the treachery, then a theatre-play illusion as a means to test, confirm or deny this 'truth'? Not only plots of furtive watching of one another, benevolent or trickery, but also Hamlet's strategies meant to bring the truth, are shown as deceitful and self-deceptive. No conclusion

can be drawn, least of all some agnostic relativism, but a certain praise of faculty of reasoning which cannot produce the essential or true, but can distinguish different positions and clarify the conditions, motives and logic by which a point of view or a truth-making is pursued. More significantly, there is neither a distinct tendency to disclose an analysis or frame or underline it with a comment – the way of acting is eloquent enough. To lift a Shakespeare's sentence in the air so that both the audience and other 'Wittenberg-brains' on the stage can bounce it off, most of the text is spoken in a non-conclusive questioning manner, intoned as a proposition over the stage to the auditorium. The direction forward (to the spectators for verification, and in the progress of the play) is further emphasized by a demonstrative mode of presentation, a lot of gestures and gesticulation bodily supporting a polyphonic discussion within one character, which sometimes literally pictures an alienation, in this case, of the text – from the presumptions on the character who is delivering it in the play.

**Always anew.** Every evening "Hamlet" is performed anew, that is, although it may have not been likely to suspect that such a complex structure could be interwoven in improvisation, actors operate with rules invented to allow them more freedom, choosing to take part, begin, continue, interrupt each other on the spot. As if they have gathered to remember Shakespeare which then, of course, brings them to think outloud and write the play again.

**Group-structure-organization.** The remarkable virtuosity and lightness with which the normally heavy ball of "Hamlet" is thrown among its players, never to drop, renders this group organization a society-model. The people that are 'doing' "Hamlet" we don't identify as representing character-roles, a hesitant intellectual prince or a king craving for power, but within a superstructure of functions they spontaneously take up in a collective performance, for instance, one acting as an organizer, the other being an initiator, a third one playing a porte-parole etc. A society that allows free choice does not have to become 'casual', for even when all individual differences are preserved, there is a high degree of responsibility that every actor takes, an intense quality of presence, even when one does not speak, he/she is tuned "in" to reflect the other and always be ready to take over the activity. What is new and admirable about responsibility cooperating with solidarity here, is that it is possible to strive for quality in equality, which is in the socially engaged theatre practices often reduced either to populist standards or to the comfortable self-assured position of romanticizing otherness. The concern of Jan Ritsema and 't Barre Land is not, however, intended as social, but it is motivated by an intense drive to carry out a clear reasoning, that sometimes makes the actors look like people enthusiastically impatient to come up with their thoughts.

**The humming of the play.** Many times during this performance I was reminded of Roland Barthes's experience of the flippergame-halls in Japan, where thousands of small balls were feverishly spinning in a humming sound. So was for me Shakespeare humming in plural pleasure as 'the hum of something that works well'.

("Hamlet" directed by Jan Ritsema and played by 't Barre Land, first night performances: January 17, 2001, Kaaitheater, Brussels and January 23, 2001, Utrecht, for more information about touring schedule visit: [www.barreland.nl](http://www.barreland.nl))

Napomene za prevodioca:

1. de-moralized ne treba prevesti kao demoralisan, obeshrabren, već uvedena crta, kao da je reč o složenici, označava postupak suprotan moralizaciji, dakle, reč je o oslobadjanju hamleta od zahteva za moralizacijom; **nadam se** da postoji na slovenačkom adekvatan izraz ili način da se ovo značenje iskaže
2. humming potiče od srpskog: brujanje, a hum = bruj, i treba ga prevesti onako kako je na slovenačkom preveden tekst Rolanda Barthesa: "Brujanje jezika"; nažalost, ne znam kako glasi originalni naslov na francuskom ili prevod na engleskom; ako ovaj tekst nije preveden na slovenački, molim vas, stavite u zagradu originalni Barthesov naziv, jer je u pitanju teorijski pojam