

Žiga Divjak: The Bailiff Yerney and His Rights

The Bailiff Yerney and His Rights touches a neuralgic point of the contemporary Slovenian society: the precariat. In a system where workers are depersonalised to the point they don't even have names. They're just stories, stories of stevedores, cleaners, construction workers, drivers, architects, newsagents, nurses, chambermaids ... of different ages, education levels, genders, but all the same, all pushed to the edge of human endurance and emptiness; a carousel of confessions that repeat, pile up, swirl faster and faster in a sinkhole of capitalist squeezing and exploitation. A text that doesn't analyse, doesn't explore sources, but mercilessly makes us accomplices, participants and observers of human suffering and loss. And all the while we're observing the rage that is rising inside us all; the rage of powerlessness that also inhabits the reader; the rage leading towards an uprising that is nowhere to be found – there's only pain, and production norms to be achieved. And the modern bailiff Yerney reminds us of and links us to Cankar's Yerney who says (and this is the text's subtitle): "I speak not of mercy and forgiveness at all – I speak of justice!".

The Bailiff Yerney and his Rights is a refined piece of writing, with precise dramaturgical emphases and repetition used to increase the effect of integration and insolvability of human lives in contemporary production environment. A text that hurts.

Nejc Gazvoda: Silent Breath

Silent Breath is a drama in one act. A drama of an average Slovenian family somewhere in the Slovenian countryside. A family slowly slipping towards the margins of society.

The place of the action is "a living or dining room of a suburban house, which can be located anywhere within a 90-minute radius from Ljubljana," as the author states in the opening didascalia. The time of the action is "here and now, except when it isn't". Respecting the classical Aristotelian principle of triple unity, the action is concentrated into one day.

Katarina, a mother of three adult children – son Marjan and daughters Petra and Kiddo, is saying goodbye to her youngest child on the anniversary of her husband's death. Kiddo, the teenager, is leaving to study medicine in Ljubljana, accompanied by her sister Petra and Petra's partner Janez. The crumbling family home reflects the cracks in family relationships. Katarina is hiding her fears about the insecure future of her progeny behind maternal advice,

rooted in the values of past times. Despite the loving past, her current relationship with her son Marjan is quite tense. Having completely left the parenting of his adolescent son to his ex-partner Maja, Marjan leads an aimless existence on the family sofa, beer in hand and pain in the lower back. He is trapped in the macho stereotypes and turns his feeling of powerlessness on everyone and anyone. After an initial writing success, daughter Petra takes a job in a bookshop, because bills have to be paid. Kiddo thus remains the only hope for the family's bright future, because as a future doctor she will restore the family's social status. But unlike her sister Petra, who suppressed her artistic ambition to live a mediocre existence, Kiddo, some time in future, chooses art over medicine. In a few brief jumps into the future, Kiddo hints at the continuation of the story.

The seemingly verbose Chekhovian communication is based on pauses. The silence between the lines reveals the increasing fears, the powerlessness in the face of new social circumstances, the frustration in personal relationships, the claustrophobic closeness. The play offers dramaturgical and directorial challenges – two key family members are missing, the deceased father Marjan and the absent grandson Tijan – and will also fulfil acting ambitions. The skilful characterisation through stylistically perfect dialogue will certainly encourage multiple creative readings of future stage interpretations.

“Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way,” is the thought that opens Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. In the play *Silent Breath*, nothing as tragic happens at first glance as in Tolstoy's epochal novel, but because of the sensitivity to the small shifts towards hopelessness, there are many breathless moments in it.

Jure Karas: *Realists*, a cabaret for five actors, a drunk and an audience

Ever since its beginnings in the early 20th century, cabaret is a theatre genre that through a series of gags, songs, witty remarks and monologues has allowed its authors an emphasised socio-political and artistically critical expression of the zeitgeist. To work, the humour and word plays must tackle pressing – as well as provocative and burning – topics, so that the laughter they elicit is always a bit bitter.

Realists masterly fulfils every single one of the genre requirements and brings a good amount of freshness into the Slovenian theatre space, not only through the genre, but also in themes and language. Although the text was written for specific actors, their voices, characters and a

very precise chronotope, it rises above the possibility of a defined staging with its linguistic skill, subtle self-reflection, multiple layers and wit; it works self-sufficiently and independently, and at the same time pokes its satirical point into the neuralgic spots of our everyday life.

It presents eternal theatre themes (neighbourly relations, jealousy, infidelity, envy, etc.), but shows them in a fresh and youthful way and with a good measure of self-irony. Through the thoughtfully organised gags, the themes and motifs exchange smoothly, thus we perceive them as connected into a single story, framed by a self-ironic metatheatrical mousetrap. The author establishes elliptic connections between the thematically linked scenes, spaced apart just enough that we forget about them, which because they're so daring elicit a little bit of self-reflection alongside the laughter. In a certain moment, we recognise a nosy neighbour who loves eavesdropping, and in another, neighbours who find just the right proverb for every occasion – but we always feel that they are also a little bit us. At the same time, the method of staging every theme is always dangerously close to the abyss of the tragic, perhaps the most in the last gag, when the agents supervising waste separation passionately yell: “Re-zygle! Re-zygle! Re-zygle!” while explaining to a man, in a mixture of German and Slovenian, how to remove the plastic foil from an envelope with scissors.

We must particularly point out the songs, for example, the tunes of the “L’Internationale”, “Kaj ti je deklica” and “Bohemian Rhapsody”, etc., which round up the individual themes and are not only linguistically perfect, but above all (as is the entire text) full of postmodern intertextual irony, dissolving the tension with wit, without slipping into cynicism. *Realists* is funny, because it's real. If it wasn't funny – and that's probably the common core of this cabaret that draws attention to the paradoxes and injustices of our everyday life – it'd be tragic.

Žiga Divjak, Gregor Zorc, Katarina Stegnar, Vito Weis, Iztok Drabik Jug, Alja Kapun:

6

When it comes to the use of theatre means, *6* is a minimalist documentary drama; the opening stage direction prescribes the need for five actors, five chairs and five microphones. In its content and message it delves into some key questions of the reality today and thus becomes Europe's great tragedy. The text brings us the reconstruction of the events that took place in

February 2016, when a student dormitory in Kranj wanted to accept 6 minors seeking asylum. It successfully intertwines two levels of events with two levels of discourse: the actors represent the view of the five employees in the hostel – the janitor, the assistant principal, an educator, a cook, a porter, who are at first in favour of the arrival of the youth. At the same time, the actors' speeches into the microphone convey documentary materials, such as official papers, the decisions of the city council, the principal's communications, the emails from concerned parents, etc. This second level thus brings the responses from the public that represent the extremely negative attitude regarding accepting asylum seekers. Although the text sources its material from the refugee crisis, it speaks more about us than about the refugees – who don't even appear in the text, but are rather represented by a recording – it talks about our convictions, fears, concerns for our economic safety, but also about the careless attitude towards the fellow humans and the lack of sense of solidarity. The play thus originally and thoughtfully researches the mechanisms of xenophobia, as well as conformism in the thematic sense; and in the formal, it morphs dry documentary material with an intelligent and sensitive dramaturgy into a touching story that goes beyond mere reporting. Although the events come from the concrete situation of the local environment, the text addresses us all, the fellow citizens and the newcomers: "it takes place in Kranj, and also elsewhere, in fact, it takes place everywhere ...". With this, it puts in the forefront also the questions of political theatre and its power in the world of incessant media pressure.

Vinko Möderndorfer: Eeny, meeny, miny, mo

The play *Eeny, meeny, miny, mo* is not a counting rhyme for children, although it counts the fragments of a completely traumatised child psyche. It counts them because it's broken and must be put back together, because we all need a mirror, that is, other, in which we find a confirmation of our own existence and worth. Because it reveals the layers of the traumatised child psyche, *Eeny, meeny, miny, mo* is a psychological drama, and its cold style and linearity show that its goal is not merely to evoke sympathy, but in the first place to shock the reader/spectator – both emotionally and intellectually.

The nine-year-old Emir is a victim of unspeakable horrors, family and peer violence, and neglect. He's sexually abused by his stepfather and the school janitor. The only person Emir can identify with is his imaginary friend. The latter is the smallest possible support that Emir clutches on in the utmost distress. Emir follows him to the occasional stealing of sweets, the

killing of the janitor; finally, they plan the murder of Emir's newborn half-sister, but don't follow through, because they're interrupted by the girls from Emir's class, who only accept Emir as their equal when they see him with a baby. But at the very same moment we see a fire behind the school playground ... Emir's cries for help go unheard, nobody establishes a real connection with the protagonist and we only recognise the characters by the roles they have, and not personally, by their names.

The story is fragmentary: thirty-five scenes don't create clearly separated actions, although the narrative contains the exposition, rising action and climax, the characters are not named and we even only learn the protagonist's name in one of the final lines of the play, when he might already be dead. From the introductory note to the text, which evokes a real case of a traumatised child whom an imaginary friend has steered towards murder, it is clear how the plot will develop. Following this unimaginably anxious current is shocking, because it leaves no doubt, no other interpretation, no way out. In this hopeless situation we want to hug the child who murders in extreme distress and is even prepared to commit infanticide, so that at least he'd feel a little bit of human warmth. But the final paradox of this drama is that this warmth, the glimmer of light in the mirror that he does get in the end, shows him his own image and the unbearableness of his own actions. In the end, the experience of validation and worth is what destroys him.

Eeny, meeny, miny, mo is a shocking staging of violence that happens to a child and its consequences, yet its emotional charge doesn't come from the shock, a surprising denouement or screaming pain, but from the anxiety achieved through short lines, direct and at times vulgar language, and above all the closed inambiguity that doesn't allow us to turn away, to find an alternative, softer explanation. It's a play that cannot leave anyone indifferent.