

# Theatre and poetry in William Shakespeare`s and Vasile Voiculescu`s sonnets

- Synopsis -

The thesis "Theatre and poetry in the sonnets of William Shakespeare and Vasile Voiculescu" proposes the exercise of interpreting Shakespearean and Voiculescian sonnets in a dramatic key, based on the unity of substance present in the two cycles of poems, on their common stylistics and on the permeability of the poetic structures, from the point of view of the acting approach. The aim of the paper is to instruct and educate the young generation of actors, especially acting students, in the direction of approaching poetry, using a variety of tools, designed to raise awareness, fascinate, intrigue and shape the appetite for dramatizing poetry, especially the classic one. In this sense, the main objectives of the research aim at: bringing the student-actor closer to the thematic and literary universe of the two authors; highlighting the possibilities of scenic exploitation of the two cycles of sonnets and poetry in general; textual, literary decipherment of sonnets in preparation for the dramatic approach; finding the technical formulas for the vocal and theatrical approach to Shakespearean and Voiculescian texts; conducting a case study on the possibilities of approaching the sonnets by the young generation of actors, both directly and in the absence of specific guidance, with 12 student-actors from the Department of Theater Arts of the "Lucian Blaga" University in Sibiu.

The motivation for choosing the theme has multiple springs. Starting, in the logic of the demonstrative scaffolding, from the idea that the theatrical show is built from the text and that the exercise of decoding the meanings and comprehension is decisive for the next stages of preparing a show, but being also aware of the low appetite for reading and especially for reading poetry (where the degree of encryption is higher through symbolic language), we set ourselves three research objectives: to find ways to help the acting student to decipher the lyrical text, to approach the interpretation of the poetic text as a formative exercise in speech education and in the art of the theatre actor and to highlight the generous offer of poetry regarding the construction of the theatrical show.

Theater can benefit from poetic textual support in multiple forms of expression: theater in verse, poetic theater, metaphorical theater. In the mentioned situations we have to deal either with the

prosodic disposition proper to poetry, or with the high degree of ambiguity and symbolization of dramatic language, but the textual ensemble is dramatic and the text aims towards the scenic representation. The poetry show, which tends to become more and more intensely experienced in Western Europe through a theatrical formula that accentuates its syncretism, theater-poetry, is provocative and stimulating as an imaginative exercise precisely because it aims to generate the dramatic act through nondramatic text, through lyrical poetry. By "poetry show" we mean a coherent spectacular ensemble, meant to convey emotion, but also the message of an aesthetic synthesis of lyrical essence and to clarify or enhance it through the art of the actor (the most appropriate transmitter of meaning). We consider that such an ensemble can be offered through theme, style, vision, by the textual support of the sonnets of William Shakespeare and Vasile Voiculescu, the theatrical means having the role of coagulating in a revealing artistic product the poetic suggestions through the science of expressive utterance, through stage play, through contextualization.

The structure of the thesis is imprinted both by the stylistics of the theoretical research, as well as by the imagistic plasticity and the directorial perspective given by the researcher's artistic formation, highlighting a guiding thread, similar to Ariadne's, such as the gallery of archetypes (in the first chapter dedicated to the literary and identitary dimensions of the two authors), the individual creation laboratory of the artist (in the second chapter, aiming to find formulas for dramatic approach to sonnets through the one-person-show technique and what we will generically call *spoken word sonnets*), the classroom of the pedagogue (in the last chapter, regarding the actual formulas of dramatic interpretation of poetry - exploring the meanings, the vocal and acting dimension). Merging the existing premises in the argument with the conclusions highlighted at the end of the work, we highlighted the need for poetry in the theater, as a means of awareness and education, through the increased degree of encryption and, at the same time, the need to dramatize poetry as a tool for approaching young generations to this stylistics.

As, in his book, *The Spectacle of Poetry*, the guide of this paper, Professor Constantin Chiriac, states - "Thus, above all, the concept of creative (poetic) energy can be put in direct and active relationship with the appropriate dimension, spectacular energy ", and joining the idea of Antoine Vitez, quoted by Didier Plassard in his study about the absence of the limits of theatricality in contemporary theater - " You can make theater out of anything ", the first chapter, entitled *William Shakespeare and Vasile Voiculescu - the poetic universe and means of scenic exploitation*, explores the theatrical essence existing in Shakespearean and Voiculescian poetry,

insisting on the creative personalities, emphasizing the character of literary case or paradoxical phenomenon of the encounter, in a suspended space and fictional time, on the "realm of eternal ideas", of two spirits equal "in beauty and genius." (Vasile Voiculescu, Sonnet 170).

The first part of the paper proposes the definition of the artistic universe of the two creators and the voices driven by thought, verb and emotion they propose, establishing intersections, parallels and congruences through common mythological sources and reflections and highlighting the same archetypal vision and biographical information in such a surprising meeting of seemingly so different spirits: that between William Shakespeare and Vasile Voiculescu. *The last imagined sonnets of William Shakespeare in imaginary translation by Vasile Voiculescu* continue the play with eternity that Shakespeare imprints on his sonnets, unique creations in which the troubadour momentum intertwines with the particularly deep vision of life and death, constituting true hymns of love. To this most passionate celestial love, Voiculescu adds, practicing, under the tension of the pen, complicated scores full of initiatory symbols, resulting from the poet's obvious concern to extract the sacred from the profane and to confirm, throughout his work, the mythical and magical character of life, the ultimate and defining attribute for the analysis of the imaginary dialogue between the two, that of archetypal love, which transcends the centuries towards rediscovering and reconfirming the principle of the common substance of mankind, "one is in all, as all are in one."

The chapter opens with a plea for reading and knowledge, offering the reader graceful details about the physical and literary universe of the two authors who, beyond spatial and, especially, temporal boundaries, link common themes and motives, exploited, in the case of the first, in poetry and dramaturgy, in the case of the second, in poetry, stories and novel. The subchapter *Homo ludens and homo magus. The mythology of the space* proposes a review – towards capturing the reader and, especially, the target audience - the actor student – of the literary motifs present in the literary work of the two authors, corroborated with relevant information from their biography. The belief of the author of this thesis refers to the fact that a separation between the opera of an author and the author itself cannot be achieved and that, from this perspective, understanding the depth of the spirits that generated works of such value, the actor-researcher can enrich and facilitate his work of interpretation and exploration of the poetic texts. At the same time, the subchapter aims to highlight common themes and, through a detailed analysis of the works of the two authors, sources of mythological inspiration, associating the Hellenic space and Celtic space with the first author, and the Romanian mythical and archaic universe with the second. While in Shakespeare's work, Greek deities and fantastic beings

harmonize and coexist in the dramatic and poetic universe, towards the revelation and exploitation of human nature, with its depths and heights, in Voiculescu's case, a favorite theme consists exactly of the exploitation and extraction of the sacred from profane, by appeal to fantastic.

The second subchapter, *The Sonnets of William Shakespeare and Vasile Voiculescu. Dialogue over the centuries*, aims at an analysis of the two cycles of sonnets, insisting on the point of congruence between the ontological structures of the two authors. Along with Shakespearean sonnets, Vasile Voiculescu's creative approach in the volume *The Last Imagined Sonnets of Shakespeare in imaginary translation by Vasile Voiculescu* does not aim at a stylistic exercise of restoring a Renaissance species in the twentieth century, but refers to an act of *imitatio Dei*, adopting a competitive attitude towards the model, creating not only towards Shakespeare, but also towards himself "a high and heavy demiurge" (Sonnet CCXXXIV). It is what determines us to see the sonnets of both creators as a unitary corpus, not to establish axiological steps, on the contrary, to offer to the theatrical means the material of a homogeneous lyrical universe, behind which resides a single productive instance - creative love, transmitted through multiple and nuanced lyrical and dramatic voices. These dramatic voices, outlined by characters such as the poet, the muse, the lovers, represent the center of interest of the dramatic discourse that we have tried to build through the technique of the *one person show* and the poetry show.

Of interest in this chapter is also the dissemination of the idea according to which poetry can be a textual support as valid as the dramatic one in the realization of the theatrical show, analysis made through the interview technique, having as reference personalities theater people from Romania, UK and USA, professor and actor Constantin Chiriac, actress Corinna Seeds and teachers Mark Charney and Jan Koene. The result of the analysis highlighted the fact that, while the West secularizes poetry, enriching it with small interpretive or directorial artifices and presenting it in innovative formulas that attract the attention of young audiences, such as poetry performances, poetry slams, spoken word poetry, the eastern part of Europe follows, in the exercise of scenic exploration of poetry, the sacredness of the poetic act, the original meaning, the depth of the message, transfiguring thought into word and word into emotion.

The second part of the thesis aims at the exercise of discovery and theatrical creation of the utterance of sonnets and makes the transition to theater as a pragmatic art, to the transformation of poetry into a stage act, into a show. The target forces the following approach: carrying the message disembodied from the body and packed in the spirit and disseminating it under the imperative sign of meaningful utterance. The chapter aims at the capacity of the two works to

make their place in the artistic consciousness of the actor and the capacity of the actor to become a transporter of sign - message, through the exercise of uttering the sonnets. Such an analysis, as well as such a creative approach, based on the research of the multiple possibilities of interpretation, represents a study base for the actors or student-actors who want to approach the Shakespearean and Voiculescian sonnets.

As the poetic language and the scenic utterance are in an organic, land collaboration, we want to rediscover this primary, sacred organicity through the exercise of disambiguation of meanings, by studying the voice's ability to preserve and transmit truths, through theatrical experiment. The issue also targets the young actor, who is offered through the poetry show the dose of innovation in approaching the theatricality that youth needs and, at the same time, the opportunity to ennoble the spirit by meeting the perennial values of culture. We believe that the utterance of the poetic text forces the shift of attention towards the theatricality springing from the latent drama of the word, it creates a significant reversal from writing to orality, it highlights the dialogic intention existing in any act of communication. As a matter of language, poetry is often more generous in stage effects than dramatic text. According to Michel Corvin's vision of the legible made visible through metaphor, "the dramatic potential of the text is examined starting from a core of images (metaphors) that develop in networks and reflect both the fable as a whole and the relationships between characters, scenery and other scenic elements. In this sense, the staging as an embodiment of the work is already inscribed in the text ". This deposit of scenic suggestions developed by the poetic imaginary urges us to a conception aimed at a circularity of the dynamics of the dramatic act, which starts from the first sense of dedication and returns to itself, nourishing the spirit of the world, preserving, through the transmission of experience become fable and manifestation , the collective energies of solidarity that make the artistic act an Eucharistic act.

Observing the young actor's situation towards poetry, which, in most cases, exclusively completes the recitative horizon, occupying the last places in the actor's portfolio and noting the need to discover innovative ways of approaching poetry in the local artistic reality, we proceeded to analyze two methods of scenic approach of Shakespearean and Voiculescian sonnets. The first formula consists in bringing sonnets, in the construction of which the Renaissance stylistics cannot easily cross the cultural horizon, unfortunately, limited, of more and more young people, close to this generation whose references in poetry can be found in adjacent formulas, such as texts used in spoken word poetry, rap, hip-hop. In this sense, we deciphered the rhythmic and musical construction of the sonnets, joining their spiritual

dimension through interpretation, in a dramatic exercise based on the formula of the spoken word, of the performative poetry, entitled *Spoken word sonnets*. In carrying out with this exercise we benefited from the creative support of Reinhardt Bhur, a young composer from South Africa, famous for the spiritual altitude of his compositions. The second formula of scenic exploration of the sonnets materialized in the realization of the structure of a one-person-show based on the textual support offered by the Shakespearean and Voiculescian sonnets. Eliminating the axiological prejudice, we placed Shakespeare's and Voiculescu's poems on the same level of value, focusing exclusively on the thematic affiliation generating dramatic conflict, on the thematic nucleus represented by the symbol of universal, perennial, transfiguring love.

In order to demonstrate the viability of the scenic potential of the poetic text, the sketching of a theatrical project whose variables are the subject of a reflective diary was documented, in order to highlight how a single lyrical hypostasis (that of the lover in the sonnets) multiplies in a variety of dramatic voices, equally convincing, abolishing the distances imposed by historicity, the fictional or real character of the characters, the aesthetic formulas and recipes. Through the eternal and universal themes of the sonnets (*Eros* and *Thanatos*), the Renaissance poem can be very well transplanted and contextualized in contemporaneity, in unconventional spaces, in innovative dramatic approaches, our option going to solo performance or one-person show and spoken word. What is particularly interesting is the fixing of a continuity in discontinuity or the demonstration of the existence of a single speaking principle, through multiple voices. Selecting from the gallery of immortal love stories some telling cases, we evolved a dramatic conflict over five ages of humanity, correlated with five seasons and five attitudes towards life and love identified in the poetic texts, transferring the communication of a diversity of voices dramatic, real or fictional human hypostases from the history, culture and literature of the world. The motive for such a staging is the demonstration that the speech about love, life, creation, eternity does not belong to the poet or actor, creative instances that synthesize in language (poetic or theatrical) the bright or sad songs of the world, but is the speech with archetypal valences, whose consistency lies in the message, and the sender of the message can be any character who, in life or in art, gives a deep dimension to existence.

The third chapter includes the construction of an instrumentary in the technical, specialized approach of the sonnets, including the practical aspect of the pedagogical act dedicated to the training of student-actors, acquiring an extra quality through the exercise that uses the poetic text as support. The material of the sonnets was the source for three types of relationship of the

actor with the text and for three analytical operations that we consider essential, in this order: the analysis of meanings, the analysis of the scenic utterance, the analysis of the actor's art elements.

According to the idea that any text and, especially, poetry (through its semantic and imagistic richness, but also through the emotion it transmits) encompasses dramatic latencies, a first step on the road to the artistic act is the comprehensive approach to the foray into text semantics and of the analysis of the relationship between image, representation and language, between idea and expression. Only after the student becomes, in relation to the supporting text, an informed and assumed reader and understands the instance of the uttering self, does he move on to the next stage, of adopting an appropriate voice and utterance, in the sense of meaningful utterance. The elements of stage speech aim at accentuating, phrasing, rhythmic, intonation, nuance, adopting the appropriate register, the plasticity of the word, paraverbal cues, the expressiveness of the voice. In the same idea, of the primacy of meaning in the practice of the actor's art, the analysis of the theatrical potential of the sonnets is related to the stage play, based on a methodical skeleton that aims at disambiguation by attributing personal meaning. In order to give concreteness to the topic, we used the case study method, by preparing a poetry show that capitalizes on the sonnets, based on individual research of students, directed by the preparatory analytical stage, the resulting observations allowing the evaluation of methodical action.

We have formulated three subchapters, highlighting three obligatory operations in the preparation of the dramatic interpretation of sonnets and, in general, of poetry. The first subchapter aims at discovering the meanings through an analytical and comprehensive approach; the second - the exercise of utterance, aiming at the technical correctness and expressive nuance necessary to convey the message, and the third - finding the right character with the authorial intention, for the actor to give life through his art, helped by a tool of techniques from the method of Ivana Chubbuck. These techniques overlapped with the exercise of acting interpretation of the sonnets, aiming to model the feeling and emotion and highlight the scenic truth.

The chapter ends with a case study on the theatricality of Shakespearean and Voiculescean sonnets, which was attended by 12 student actors, receptive and surprised by the possibilities of dramatic construction of poems.

An innovative feature of theatrical micro-productions was generated by an objective reality - the restrictions imposed by the pandemic context, which led to the replacement of the workshop

studio with a variety of spaces (intimate or outdoor) and the enrichment of theatrical instruments with specific means of cinematic perspective.

Through the recourse to poetry as a source of theatrical performance, the aim was to demonstrate that the syncretic, indestructible connection between the two fields, poetry and theater, can be exploited in scenic situations specific to contemporaneity, that art has not lost its sacredness and creative source in despite the identity crises of modernity, that contemporary man can be sensitized to artistic truth through modern artistic formulas, regardless of the era and expression of that truth, as Vasile Voiculescu was seduced over the centuries by the Shakespearean sonnet, that an exercise in sincere admiration for a cultural value is an act of humility and mental and emotional hygiene and especially that theatrical means, through the high degree of accessibility of receivers and the educational and transformative potential, can offer a way of interpreting sonnets that directly deliver to the audience their meaning, message and emotion.

The conclusions reconfirmed the following ideas: the student-actor needs specific tools to "make friends" with poetry, to penetrate the high degree of encryption and to be able to perform it; the theatricalization of poetry or, rather, its exploitation, especially of sonnets, through theatrical means, facilitates the understanding of the meanings and facilitates the contact of the young generation with this genre; the poetic textual support is as valuable, in the theater, as the dramatic one, enriching, through symbol and metaphor, the creative universe of the artist or of the director and the mental universe of the receiver, of the public. The research also aims at a more detailed exploration of the circulation of artistic means from one field of creation to another, through a thematic sphere that can be formulated as poetry of theater and theater of poetry. On the other hand, the experiment of working with students orients us towards a direction that aims at a concentrated practical applicability, towards which it determines us to direct the need to fly over the objective obstacles that the theatrical art of the present, limited in its conventional manifestation at the global level presents: the poetry theater as a theater-film (an artistic area still in the stage of probing, which deserves attention and which can become extremely fruitful).

We also have in mind a controversial intention, starting from the fact that the contemporary theme of the theater's relationship with the community, as well as the extended thematic area of contemporary theater, considered postdramatic, draws attention to a properly articulated semantic field, including social, political and documentary theatre, formulas understood as tools of community, tools of social intervention, aimed at involving citizens in debates on

contemporary issues through interaction, role transfer and exchange of ideas and even by exchanging remarks between stage and audience or by the descent of art from the consecrated pedestal in the public space, in the streets, in the schools, in the hospitals, in the prisons. Without contesting the immediate beneficial effects of addressing current issues in lucid, receptive and involved contexts, it can be seen that all forms of community theater are based on the effect of the mirror, awareness of the problem and the attempt to solve it, emphasizing by metatextual means the seriousness even of texts from news bulletins, which actually leads to the aspiration of philosophy and poetry in the theater. Assuming that social theater is a dramatic manifestation of a warning signal about the depreciation of contemporary human life, in a permanent state of emergency due to threats felt as pre-apocalyptic (health crises, social, economic, political, armed conflicts, nature degradation, alienating technologicalization, threats to the freedom and rights of citizens, sufficient grounds for controversy and opportunities to challenge and protest), our proposal is to reorient the target of the dramatic approach.

We considered that it is not enough to mirror and sound the alarm and that it is beneficial to educate the contemporary public by regaining sensitivity to beauty and the spiritual dimension of existence. One can reorient the path from logic and argumentation of debate to the return of poetry in theater, to resizing the aesthetic of dramatic art, to the reconfiguration of original syncretism and the resacralization of art, to the use of images and emotions in a cathartic combination, all leading indirectly to healing society. The question is whether the contemporary audience can be contemplative after learning to be participatory, whether the appetite of theater people for updates and revisions generated by the exit of theatrical discourse from symbiosis with literary discourse can allow the revitalization of roots, whether the return to mythical, archaic, as the expressionists understood it, as a reaction to the destructuring of modern civilization, it is still opportune and interesting. There are voices that claim the death of poetry and its drowning in the prose of everyday life, there are manifestations that measure and experience how poetry is drawn by the contemporary reader, seeking adaptations and flexible contexts, poetry being placed in cafes, accompanying exhibitions, diving in unconventional spaces and situations, in endless pro-reading campaigns. Poetry can and must be found in the theater, in complex performances, grafted on the unity of meaning and vision, embodying, through the meeting between Homo Ludens and Homo Magus, the truth.

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