Państwowa Szkoła Filmowa, Telewizyjna i Teatralna w Łodzi – Film School in Łódź

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„Four of them” by Gabriela Zapolska – scenic method of modernization of the text – based on the self-directed performance at the Jaracz Theater in Łódź

A summary of the doctoral dissertation

In the course of my doctoral dissertation, I am trying to analyze the adopted tactics of working on the modernization of Gabriela Zapolska's text "Four of them", according to which a performance was to be created using Zapolska's original language with all its archaisms, remaining faithful to Zapolska's text (without any added texts). The performance was supposed to give the appearance of a costumed performance using the almost 19th-century canon of theatrical means. The plan was as follows: to invite the viewer to a performance that will become such a "theatrical gem", so that viewers get everything they love in the theater : perfectly tailored roles played with a slight exaggeration, so that they do not fall out of framework of psychological acting, but at the same time they were a bit "theatrical in the old style", a bit "characteristic", plus beautiful costumes, colorful decorations (almost fairy-tale), music played live, which according to the principle: "We like the songs we know the most" consists of Christmas carols, and most importantly, let the audience get a lot of laughter and a lot of emotions.

 I wanted to use Zapolska's " Four of them " to create a magical, fairy-tale and funny world, so that when the viewer becomes comfortable in this world and feels safe, I would tell him, dressed in a fairy-tale costume, but an extremely painful and tragic story about the break-up of a certain world, the break-up of a family , the breakup of a man and the harm of a child.

 The process of updating Zapolska's text in my staging was to involve shifts in the interpretation of events and the modern interpretation of the characters, so that today's viewers could see themselves in their behavior, motivations, fears and emotions. A historical (or rather stylized as a historical) costume is not only not to disturb this, but also to facilitate this identification by creating a distance.

In this dissertation, I describe the individual elements of the presentation and present and analyze the changes I made in the interpretation of events and characters.

 In the introduction, I present Zapolska's views on the novelty of her drama and explain the adopted tactics of working on the production. I also briefly present the main emancipation trends of Zapolska's times and the dominant reflections on marriage.

 In the first chapter entitled: "Mandragora" I discuss the function of the prologue - Mandragora's monologue - existing in Zapolska's art and the ending of the play, which also belongs to Mandragora. By removing Mandragora at the same time I treated her words as a motto. I understand them as follows - the viewer has to laugh during the performance in order to feel responsible for the tragedy taking place in the world presented.

 In the second, third and fourth chapter, I discuss sets, costumes, and dolls, respectively. Zapolska placed art actions on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. Scenography is supposed to erase the magical atmosphere of these days - to be like a picture from Dickens' fairy tale "A Christmas Carol". The scenography is not realistic - there is artificial snow on the furniture and the floor, the stage is closed with Christmas trees hung with lamps instead of walls. Fedycki's world is created through a change - made in front of the viewer - consisting in the removal of elegant covers covering the furniture. Fedycki's world is a poor room with shabby and damaged furniture. The costumes are stylized as historical, very richly decorated. As time passes, the costumes become contemporary by taking off individual items of clothing. Husband, Wife and Child are reflected in the dolls Lila plays with. They have the same costumes. Lilka plays at home with them, unconsciously recreating the mechanisms of the real world - screaming, violence, insults.

 The first intuition of my work on " Four of them " was a strange energetic resemblance to Marco Ferreri's film "Big Food". There is something in this film that I found important for the contemporary reading of Zapolska's text - greed for life, the need for emotions, love that cannot be satisfied, break into their own parody, pushing the characters towards self-destruction. Middle crisis. Boredom. The fifth chapter tells how the basic relationships between the characters were derived from these intuitions.

Chapter six - Erotic scenes, that is, playing with convention - it can be said that modernizing Zapolska's text in my direction is giving this text a scenic spiciness, that is, showing this, which the contemporary theater Zapolska could not show. The sex scenes are pathetic, idiotic, funny and sad in the same time.

In chapter seven, I discuss deleted and added scenes. The only scene added is the final scene, which is a repetition of the first scene - only instead of Wife, Mania sits at the table with Husband and Child.

 Chapters 8 to 13 are devoted to the analysis of the characters, in turn: Wife, Husband, Fedycki, Widow, Mania, and Child, with an emphasis on the differences between stage interpretation and interpretation resulting directly from a thorough analysis of the text. Zapolska called this play the tragedy of stupid people. I try to understand their motivations and make them tragical - which does not ignore the humor of the show.

The Wife is the most important figure in the scenic world - her tragedy, her ultimate defeat, should be clear from the very beginning. We watch the moth fly towards the fire. The wife suffocates in the world of bourgeois marriage and does everything to destroy it. Her betrayal is a simple consequence of not being relevant to anyone.

The Husband is written by Zapolska as a victim to be sympathized with. I decided not to agree with that. I treat wife’s betrayal as a cry to her Husband - notice me, see me as a woman. He didn’t do anything so he is also quilty.

 Unlike the one described in Zapolska's text, Fedycki is not a lover that no woman can resist. He's more of an "easy boy" - used by women. He is frustrated and bitter.

The widow is not his victim either. She is a woman who knows that she has to pay for the love she expects from Fedycki. So she pays and it requires.

 Mania - as in Zapolska's text - is an ambiguous figure, difficult to define. It is important for me that the viewer does not treat her as a cynical women.

 The most important figure in this production is the Child. Adult tragedies can seem funny, idiotic, grotesque. A Child suffers. The “Four of them” is a show about how much we can't talk about our own feelings, how high standards we set for others and how they cannot meet these requirements. It is a play about the breakdown, fall and loneliness of this world. And it's a comedy.

Małgorzata Bogajewska