

## ROBERT STURUA'S INTERPRETATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S ANTI-TYRANTS (FROM TEXT TO STAGE)

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### ABSTRACT

In the above mentioned article, "Robert Sturua's interpretation of Shakespeare's anti-tyrants (from text to stage)" Shakespeare's three plays: "Hamlet", "Julius Caesar", "Richard III"- their original versions, Georgian translations and Robert Sturua's stage versions textual interpretations have been studied. According to the comparison and analysis, the transformation of Shakespearean text and the characters that appear to be the bearers of the idea of liberty and the fighters against dictatorship were studied. The analysis of Shakespearean texts, their Georgian translations and Robert Sturua's stage interpretations on the one hand, presents the author's point of view about his characters that fight against the tyranny and on the other hand, how Georgian contemporary director Robert Sturua sees Hamlet, Brutus and Richmond and their aims in the context of Soviet and Post-Soviet reality.

**KEYWORDS:** Shakespeare, Sturua, Anti-Tyrants, Rustaveli Theatre

### INTRODUCTION

Some works of literature are universal and timeless. They are genuine to every society and nation's life. But of course the original work undergoes some changes and it's quite natural because with the flow of time humans attitude, and forms of expression change towards different themes and subjects. Accordingly, the text must adjust to the epoch and society's problems and various challenges, moreover if it's a play.

There is a long- standing tradition of translating and staging Shakespearean plays in Georgia. At first his plays were translated by Ivane Machabeli. These plays gained him an honorable place in the history of Georgian Literature. His outstanding translations are very close to the original works, and masterly portray Shakespeare's language.

The history of The Rustaveli National State Drama Theatre starts towards the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Georgia. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was large number of performances about Shakespeare's plays in its repertoire and the theatre had prominent artistic directors, such as Kote Marjanishvili, Sandro Akhmeteli, Dimitri Aleksidze and Mikheil Tumanishvili. From the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century till now, Robert Sturua becomes the artistic director of the theatre.

Sturua is known as the paradoxical interpreter of Shakespearean plays and in fact, if we find very little differences between the original versions and translations of the plays, they are closely related with each other in the stage interpretations and are mostly, radically different. The character's speech is contemporary and theatrical at the same time.

We have to assume that, this half-contemporary conversation which is reflected in the stage versions, portrays the universality of Shakespearean themes and once again marks out that nowadays, people have to overcome the same obstacles and challenges as it was earlier in Shakespeare's time.

To illustrate the fact that the stage version is often very different from the original and translation we will examine Robert Sturua's interpretations of Shakespearean anti-tyrants.

## **HAMLET**

The first anti-tyrant, whom we are going to talk about, is Shakespeare's widely known character Hamlet, who, despite the time never loses actuality. He is eternal fighter against injustice and the circumstances in which he exists. Shakespeare's Hamlet is overwhelmed by the loss of his father and he is not concerned the crown any more. Hamlet's tremendous grief is intensified by this lack of feeling by those around him, and more significantly, by the cold-hearted actions of his mother, who married her brother-in-law and the uncle of Hamlet who is now the king of Denmark. Though, we have to mention that sometimes we meet the hidden points and puns that indicate who the real heir of the crown is. Sadly Georgian translation could not portray this kind of ambiguity.

### **“Claudius**

How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

### **Hamlet**

Not so, my lord; I am too much i' the sun.” (Act I, Scene II )

We meet the word “sun” several times which often resembles phonetically identical word “son”. In this case Hamlet more likely hints his uncle that he is the legal heir of the crown but not his tyrant uncle. The suggestion is absolutely clear when he talks to Rosencrantz.

### **“Rosencrantz**

Good my lord, what is your cause of distemper? you  
do, surely, bar the door upon your own liberty, if  
you deny your griefs to your friend.

### **Hamlet**

Sir, I lack advancement.

### **Rosencrantz**

How can that be, when you have the voice of the king  
himself for your succession in Denmark?

### **Hamlet**

Ay, but sir, 'While the grass grows,'—the proverb  
is something musty.” (Act III. Scene 2)

Nevertheless Hamlet fights for the ideals and sacrifices himself in this battle.

As we mentioned earlier, Robert Sturua's Shakespearean interpretations hold an immense part in the history of Georgian Shakespeareana, and we can entitle his creations as "Sturua's World of Shakespeare", while expressing his Shakespearean interpretations we already know that, the spectators are expecting something different and special from him and his performances are the clear examples of this statement.

For example, "Hamlet" that was staged in 2001 on the stage of the Rustaveli Theatre is the innovative interpretation of romantic, idealistic hero, who in the 21<sup>st</sup> century doesn't deliver long philosophical monologues. As one would expect, during the staging process the text itself must change according the director's concepts and general intentions. Actor's articulation, was mostly but not always, are different from Machabeli's language, which might have several reasons.

First and most important is that, the language of drama is different from colloquial layer and it can't be contemporary. Secondly, we have to take into consideration that the play is translated in 19<sup>th</sup> century therefore it fits 19<sup>th</sup> century language norms and regulations. It's often said that Hamlet is the everlasting play and in every century when the time will be "out of joint" is becoming actual. If we look through other versions which were staged previously in Rustaveli Theatre we notice that, epochal problems and challenges are reflected there, so we can state that Sturua's Hamlet is partly the hero from 21<sup>st</sup> century. That is why, his suffering and grief is mostly expressed in his gestures and movement. Surely, in some parts of the monologues, we meet the translations of Machabeli, in order to intensify the actors' emotions.

Sturua also marks out that, something is rotten, not only in the state of Denmark, but also in the whole contemporary world. That is why, the director unchangeably conveys the original phrase "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" which is sadly lost in translation and is conveyed like "Something disastrous might happen in Denmark." We must also point out that in the performance this phrase is produced not from Marcellus but from Hamlet. After his entrance on the stage he touches his shoes and feeling the odor articulates the sentence. So, we might think that, he himself touches the dirt and will be the participant of the future events.

If the translator in Georgian version could not manage to convey the doubt that existed in Hamlet's personality and the hatred towards Claudius means that the shadow must appear and Hamlet will utter the phrase "O my prophetic soul! My uncle!" (Act I, Scene 5) in the stage version we realize from the beginning that Hamlet is full of doubts.

Apart from the differences in language level, in some occasions phrases are taken out or changed with the ones that do not exist in a play. As for example, when in Sturua's version, the performance starts with the appearance of the ghost, Bernardo asks Horatio -"Is it not like the king?" and He answers: "Like two identical water drops." We have to take into consideration that we could not meet the phrase not only in Machabeli's translation but in original version. Instead of this we read: "As thou art to thyself"(Horatio). We might think that, by using this phrase Robert Sturua and Lily Popkhadze (translator and author of the stage version script) wish to indicate and point out the noticeable resemblance, between father and son. We must also remember that, their names are identical and in one scene they move absolutely the same, like two water drops.

The important fact is that, Hamlet's famous soliloquy which is regarded the most valuable part of the play throughout the centuries is taken out from Sturua's version. What's more is that, we clearly see how he burns down these

words that are written on the paper. In the beginning when Hamlet is about to start his soliloquy other actors behind the mirrors dictate him the words.

**“HAMLET:** To be or not to be, that is the question.

**ACTOR:** Wait a second, wait a second! I am sorry! Please!

To be or not to be, that is the question.

**EVERYONE:** To be or not to be?

**ACTOR:** To be or not to be? That is the question.

**HAMLET:** Words, words, words...

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all...”

For Hamlet who lives in modern world to be or not to be isn't important any more, but to speak or not to speak. Because even this monologues are useless and humans are not able to understand each other. Likewise, Queen Gertrude could not manage to express her desires and feelings. Instead of talking she abruptly produces sounds “io, io io” which we hear several times, throughout the performance. Hamlet's gesture (the unpleasant odour on his shoes) that we have mentioned earlier is the stage director's hint for us to realize that, Hamlet is already into the game and what is more is that, he might be the future Claudius. This argument is strengthened by the fact that, in one of the scenes he produces the monologue with Claudius' scarf on his neck. Another important fact is that the actor Zaza Papuashvili, who played Claudius in Zhordania's “Hamlet” later in Sturua's version, performed Hamlet himself. Also in one scene Hamlet mentions - he lives like a chameleon. Characters in Sturua's performances change colours and play different roles, for example Polonius after his death appears to be one of the grave-digger and he himself is very much alike Sturua's another famous Shakespearean character – Richard III (Ramaz Chkhikvadze) (1979).

## **BRUTUS**

Another Shakespearean anti-tyrant is Brutus who fears that Caesar aspires power and dictatorship. For this reason he is involved into the conspiracy against him. In the play we find many passages that state the same opinion. Brutus is against an oath as he regards that is for cowards and treacherous people who get along sorrow and torment without resistance. The person, who he loved immensely, was doomed to death by Brutus and we see his torment and anxiety throughout the play.

Robert Sturua turns his attention towards Brutus, in another Shakespearean interpretation “Julius Caesar” (2015). Throughout the play we see his collisions and doubts whether to sacrifice or not the man he loves and take responsibility over the country or remain silent and endure the future dictatorship, compromise the free will and live in prosperity.

Brutus wants to hold the dagger of justice and fight but as Cassius mentions he could not or does not want to realize that authority and honesty are incompatible notions. Torn between his loyalty to Caesar and his allegiance to the state, Brutus becomes Hamletish hero. He, like Hamlet wants to conceive the essence of man and in the beginning of the performance, metaphorically tries to tear the soothsayer to pieces in order to see his inner personality and desires. To illustrate that, he is very much alike the Hamletish hero, the following examples would be enough. The most important one

is in the beginning when Brutus is alone on the stage with the dead soothsayer beside him, he touches soothsayer's shirt and disturbed by the unpleasant smell turns his face with disgust. We might regard that Brutus as well as Hamlet realizes that "something is rotten" but by touching the man he metaphorically becomes the participant of the future events. Injustice and immorality are spread everywhere declares Brutus and adds that they'll sacrifice themselves for the republic because they are truthful and this truth will lead them but not vengeance. However he at the same time is aware of the fact that Cassius made him play dangerously violent game but he could not manage to perceive that Politics is full of dishonest, unscrupulous people and man in power can't be honest himself. With the help of honorable Brutus this terrific murder may turn into the act of heroism that's why they try to convert Brutus. He himself declares in the performance "O' Caesar, you will be betrayed by your beloved friend". Might we assume that by this phrase, Brutus subconsciously thinks about power and superiority? What might be hidden into human's consciousness, who sacrifices man whom he loves, even though he thinks that, by killing and betraying him saves the republic?

In the end Brutus like Hamlet desperately refers to the spectators and tries to prove his innocence. He declares that Rome stands above all other things and Caesar's death was inevitable.

### **Brutus**

"Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Caesar were living and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him: but, as he was ambitious, I slew him" (Act III, scene 2) Brutus doesn't want people to remember him as an ordinary cold-blooded murderer who craves for authority. Nevertheless the final scene of the performance clearly shows that the main role on the stage of the real life is indented for murderers and treacherous people who can easily manipulate others, so they simply replace each other in order to fulfill their intentions.

### **Richmond**

The third character who fights for justice is Richmond from Shakespeare's play Richard III. He has dignity, honour and all other habits that Richard III lacks. We mostly hear his monologues towards the end of the play. Richmond declares that truth and innocent souls fallen in the battle against tyranny are on their side. After finishing the battle Richmond is tolerable to those who bend the knee. What he desires is peace and unity. Richmond stands among anti-tyrants in Shakespeare's plays. Unlike the original version Richmond appears in the first scene in Sturua's Richard III (1979). While Richard arrives from the total darkness and starts his famous soliloquy:

"Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace, Have no delight to pass away the time, Unless to spy my shadow in the sun And descant on mine own deformity" (Act I, Scene 1)

Suddenly stops and calls for Richmond. While he appears the sound of delicate music accompanies him and we also have to mention the fact that unlike Richard, Richmond is handsome and attractive, what is more, he holds the sword of justice like Hamlet and Brutus. As if, Sturua wants to emphasize the idea that, Richmond is the one who can free the country from the future dictatorship. Throughout the play, Richmond remains silent and carefully observes the ongoing events as well as Richard's plans that he shares with Richmond without having a slight doubt that he will revolt against him. In the end of the performance before the main battle Richmond addresses Richard and his words are very much alike Brutus': "O, my country, give me the strength to overcome the vicious tyrant." ("It's Rome I have to save" – Brutus).

**RICHMOND:** “God is on our side, we serve the sacred purpose.”

**BRUTUS:** “We serve the rightful values and purpose.”

However after the battle Richmond does not smile any more, carefully observes the crown, then heads towards the pedestal in order to look down the stage and spectators, coronates himself like Richard did once, spreads his hands as if he remarks that this was his only purpose and the performance is over.

## CONCLUSIONS

To sum up we should say that all three characters are anti-tyrants in original Shakespearean version and this can be partly said about Sturua’s performances but he somehow points out that, humans consciously or subconsciously are driven towards the glory, fame and authority. What is more - all of them might be the future tyrants, if they’ll become the future rulers of the country as it happened in case of the real prototype of Richmond – Henry VII the king of England. Likewise Sturua manages to manifest Brutus bloody murderer like Cassius and Casca, which if we look through the history might not be the surprising fact at all.

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