

PREFACE

THE THEATRE OF EIMUNTAS NEKROŠIUS

Interviews, reviews, articles / 2012–2018

While collecting and preparing these texts, which were supposed to expand on a similar collection prepared a decade ago, no one thought that 2018 would be the last year of Eimuntas Nekrošius' life and work. Coming out another five years later, this set is also a memorial tribute to the director.

Unfortunately, the times have changed irrevocably compared to those recorded in the dates of these publications. However, reading the reviews of the performances staged in Lithuania in 2012–2018, and especially quotes from Nekrošius, it feels as if the director and his works were still here with us. Such was the nature of his productions – not so much theatrical, but human, which helped them transcend time and space. Such was the director himself, living here and now, yet also in eternity, feeling extremely sensitively the fragility and brevity of a person's journey on this earth.

As it happens, in his final years, the director's performances had seemingly become even more detached from reality. *The Divine Comedy, Paradise, The Book of Job, A Hunger Artist, Sons of a Bitch* reflect, examine and imagine the boundaries between existence and non-existence, the human and the divine, this world and the afterlife. Having acquired both very material, and transparent, translucent forms, even back then, these performances often left the audience with a sense of incredible simplicity, and simultaneously a profound understanding of the human soul, which we have been missing in our stage productions to this day. Perhaps the director's last productions in Lithuania, as well as his desire (which did not come true very often) to meet the audience, share his thoughts, and devote more time to students, were his tribute to us. Therefore, even as time passes, we keep coming back to the theatre of Nekrošius, which there are [almost] no opportunities to experience live anymore.

In 23–24 November 2023, The State Youth Theatre showed the last performance of Nekrošius – *The Marriage* (Polish: *Ślub*) by Witold Gombrowicz, premiered on 15 June 2018 at the National Theatre in Warsaw. In the Lithuanian programme of the performance, one can find the 'Final Cover' by Audronis Liuga. It comprises fragments from his notes taken when Nekrošius was working with second-year

students (from 2014 to 2018, he supervised the directing class at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre) on etudes based on the oldest known literary work, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (the Sumerian poem *He Who Saw All*):

‘Let’s try this travel theme. Does anyone know where to get a wooden stretcher? The kind they used to have in construction. They were used to transport sand, gravel... After all, this story of Gilgamesh was passed from hand to hand, from mouth to mouth... And those construction stretchers are just like a stage. The stage deck. And those tablets of the epic... what’s the weight of each one? What’s their size? I have a feeling it can be shown through the carrying. Two people take a stretcher and carry it ever so carefully... [...] After all, someone brought this story over the ages... Not the wind, but a person. So, this epic came to us in this way, and this way only. How can we talk about it as simply as possible? The simplicity should even make you laugh. [...]

Where is the stretcher? Bring a stretcher and some stones. Wrap a book of engravings in some nice material and put it on the stretcher. At first, the stage is empty. Two actors take a stretcher. Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Carry it in a circle. The carrying is as if they have been carrying for many years, maybe even centuries. That would be the initial theme. They keep going and going, sometimes in sync, sometimes out of rhythm. You need to create this carrying. What kind of music is playing? This should be kept in mind right away. Sometimes you take a break from carrying. Not necessarily on the ground. You can depict resting in a different way. Maybe they have a drink. The question is, from what? Not from a bottle. Maybe from an indented stone. So that there’s no realism. And the carrying shouldn’t look like construction work... You need to find many facets of this carrying to show how special it is. This can be shown through an actor’s relationship with space. You must put the actors in situations that are comfortable and interesting for them. If the circumstances are dull, so will be the scene. What is their relationship with space for these two carrying people? A sense of time must also emerge through it. They walked and walked, and suddenly it started to rain. They put down the stretcher. One covered the book with his body, then the other... I can understand that these people are protecting a precious thing. The most important thing is the load on the stretcher. There are no stones in the scene yet. Someone brings a stone and blocks the path with it. The carriers retreat. Someone places another stone there. The bearers climb over it and continue walking. Stone barriers keep being built but they keep going. Make a ring out of those stones, and a mountain landscape will appear. The musical theme changes. Finally, they have brought it somewhere. They sit with their backs to each other. Gilgamesh and Enkidu. The narrator comes to

the front. She combs her hair. Draws glasses around her eyes with a pencil. Very precisely. Then wipes her hands. New musical theme. She approaches the book. The right approach must be found. After all, you will carry out dead Enkidu on the same stretcher as that book, only in another transformation... She takes the book, unwraps it, the stretcher is left empty. She comes with the book to the centre of the stage. First, some reflection on history and time. Someone brought a stone to sit on. Gilgamesh and Enkidu take out their little books. They kind of follow what is being read in the foreground. The first cover of the book. What is it? Maybe knock on it. They also tap on their books as if to answer. She [the Narrator] opens the first cover of the book and begins the story. The cover would be like a door opening to those engravings... Read. [...]

Take a pause, take out your pipe, find two-or-so at home. And while Gilgamesh and Enkidu are carrying over another engraving, she fills both pipes with tobacco... She pre-empts the events... She looks at the engraving again, sees some ant, moves it onto Enkidu, he puts it on Gilgamesh, he shakes it off... then someone catches the ant on the ground, brings it over, puts it in a book... Like a child. There must be humour, but also sadness when some beings escape from the engravings, are caught, and returned... it's like a dream, but not a dream. This should be shown very lightly. And the door is the final cover of the book. It closes everything. Still, there is a white sheet of paper before it. This is the death of Enkidu. The sheet must be very white, like a tomb... The stretcher is cleaned, the white sheet is placed on it. All the previous ones are left weighed down with a stone. Some kind of black velvet should be placed under this white sheet of paper. Again, the two pick up the stretcher and carry it all the way back over the mountains. The narrator wipes off her drawn-on glasses, approaches the engravings under the stone, takes a somehow insignificant look and walks away... 15 May 2016.'

This is, I have no doubt, the kind of web of thoughts the director would hand to his students to continue weaving, and not only to them, but also to all the actors who worked with him, and later the audience. May it also act as an introduction to the following pages of this collection ...

Editor