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## The Training Strategies in Lithuanian Religious Theatre

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## **The Training Strategies in Lithuanian Religious Theatre**

The history of the religious theatre of Christian Europe is measured by centuries. Medieval Europe saw the creation of institutional structure of religious theatre, which consolidated evangelic collaboration of priests, monks and seculars. In the length of time, while preparing religious performances, the Church, being the initiator of most theatrical representations, transferred organizational and part of creative work to seculars.

The paper holds the review on the expression of religious theatre in theory as well as indicates characteristic of training strategies of the religious theatre.

The two types of sacral performances – the ones based on the lives of the saints, and the ones re-enacting Biblical events – are viewed within the historical and theoretical context of the sacral theatre. The comparisons are drawn not only between the training strategies of repetition and recollection but also the strategy of reconstruction sacral events, histories, plots and metaphors in sacral performances, modern man's attitude towards the realm of modern concept *Ordo amoris* and the classical strategy of repetition *Theatrum Mundi*, formed by the Jesuit baroque theatre.

The aim of the paper is to explore and present creative training strategies of contemporary Christian theatre by representing the world of *Theatrum Mundi* and *Ordo amoris* as the theatre of memory.

The Jesuits, who arrived to Lithuania at first in 1555, in their university and college practice firmed the theory of *Theatrum Mundi* and created an outstanding history of sacral theatre. The most significant achievement of this movement is the university or in other words – school theatre which separated the place not only for new stagings of sacral drama but also for the (theoretical) claim of spirituality tied to educational and artistic practice of the Jesuits. The features of Jesuit drama and of acting in Jesuit theatre are presented and discussed in the works researching the poetics of theatre and literature by the authors like Maotiejus Kazimieras Sarbievijus, Jacob Pontanus and Francis Lang.<sup>1</sup> Sacral

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<sup>1</sup> L. POGLAR, *Bibliographie sur l'histoire de la compagnie de Jesus*, Rome, Institutum Historicum S.J., 1983, p. 396-399.

performances, with reference to these above mentioned theoreticians, had to motivate the pupil of college to nurture their spirit by transforming their life into the striving of redemption and devotional voyage to the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ. This is the main strategies in Jesuits education and in Jesuit baroque theatre.

The most outstanding part of the Jesuits heritage is the contemplative acting method which saw the light during the spiritual practice and was devoted to rebuild the human spirit and binds engaging God and the man. In the world of *Theatrum Mundi*, which effectively was unfolded by the baroque theatre stage of Jesuits, a man dwells in the presence of God. The source of the spiritual training method is the book “Spiritual practices” by St. Ignacio Loyola. In this book, published in 1583, not only the spiritual style and method appears. It also highlights the self-atoning man.<sup>2</sup> The acting method applied to the baroque Jesuit theatre was based on contemplation strategy there so the creation of the characters recalled a man rebuilding his soul during the spiritual practice.

Let us now turn the pages of the procession playbill of the God’s Body feast chronicled in 1624 by the “Jesuit academicians”.<sup>3</sup> There we can find the strategy of restoring the “sixfold shrine of God and His people”. The mentioned shrine both concerning the time and space speciality is universal scenery of *Theatrum Mundi*. The scenery accommodates the characters of Old and New Testament accompanied by the rich number of allegorical figures. In the sixth part the participants of the procession accompanied by the saints, martyrs, and brothers Jesuits finds their way to the New Jerusalem, “descended to the world from heaven”. This New Jerusalem was revealed to St. John during the prophetic visions: “Thy is the dwelling of God amongst people. He will inhabit amongst them and they will be the nation of his and the God himself will stay with his people. He will swipe every tear from every eye and there will be no death, no sorrow, neither wail, nor pain, for what was first – now has already passed.”<sup>4</sup> The participants of the procession vacate *Theatrum Sacrum* in comfort and consolation. The mnemonic processes are finish, the playwrights, directors, and actors of Jesuit theatre unfold the world full of Gods presence.

In the comparison of the reflections on classical theatre traditions with the spiritual situation of the human being in modernity, the contemporary religious theatre is presented as a strategy of *ordo amoris* reconstructions. Czeslaw Miłosz notices that the contemporary creative arts become mental acts, serving creativity that involves “phantoms of the mind”.<sup>5</sup> The author negatively

<sup>2</sup> Lojola IGNACAS, *Autobiografija*. Dvasinės pratybos, Vilnius, Aidai, 1998, p. 95-107.

<sup>3</sup> N. GRIFFIN, *Jesuit school drama*. London, Grant, P. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Naujasis Testamentas. Vilnius, Lietuvos Biblijos Draugija, 1993, p. 608.

<sup>5</sup> Cz. MIŁOSZ, *Apie eroziją*.//Šiaurės Atėnai.1999.03.20.Nr.11(452).P.1.

assesses this latest trend. Based on his personal experience, he claims that only efforts to rethink reality in the light of hierarchical values without refuting the powers of mimetic creativity saved him from spiritual erosion. The *ordo amoris* strategy refreshes and inspires artists of the third millennium for reflections of the religious experience.

The road that an author envisages in the creativity of the sacral theatre is designated for those persons who, according to Erich Fromm, are suffering through loneliness and their need to overcome it by making some contact. This need for love, as per the psychologist, does not differ in the least from a form of religious love, named the love of God.<sup>6</sup> The feeling of love and the experience of unity with God seem to fill in the space of the sacral play, revealing personal maturity and creating a fusion with "... an indescribable life force, leading to a unification, lying beneath the world of phenomena, and to the foundation of all existence."<sup>7</sup> The sacral theatre seemingly becomes an opportunity, according to philosopher Max Scheler, to comprehend and sense the world as a form of Godly order and live through it by way of love, by *ordo amoris*. Love of God is a dynamic formation of things, a growth, a thrusting towards one's own primary vision which, as Max Scheler notices, are contained in God. The experience of the love of God is specifically that important aspect of personal upbringing, possible for the modern person. This is so because a being, experiencing "...love as a primary act, while still remaining a limited being, crosses over one's own limitations to participate within another being like an *ens intencionalis*."<sup>8</sup>

Poet Czesław Miłosz beholds the phenomena of sacral theatre as a sign of the universal life of humankind, from the perspective of the evolution of the theatre.

In his narrative on sacral theatre, discerns the concept of a Messianic attitude by a person in the process of maturing. In the topographic map of memory, a person who is regenerating Christian identity interconnects the stylistic variety of sacral theatre, rejuvenates lost time and recreates a meditation on metaphysical time.

Miłosz identifies the theatre of the future with the poetic tradition of sacral theatre. The poet associates a thematic expansion of Christian drama in the theatre of the future with a vision of the collective theatre as the universe in which the supernatural light of the world is reflected. A minimization of theatrical means in the vision of the theatre of the future is based on the meanings, born from the thing – object that has sprung forth from the environment, regenerating

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<sup>6</sup> Fromm Erich. *Meilės menas*. Kaunas: Verba Vera, 2004. P. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Šeleris MAKSAS, *Ordo amoris forma/ Gėrio kontūrai*. Iš XXa. Užsienio etikos. Vilnius: Mintis. 1989. P. 201.

<sup>8</sup> Šeleris MAKSAS, *Ordo amoris forma/ Gėrio kontūrai*. Iš XXa. Užsienio etikos. Vilnius: Mintis. 1989. P. 202.

it in the passage of cited time. The completeness of the universe disseminates through things – objects. Meanwhile the sense of awesomeness that leads the citations by some person seemingly recreates a universal dimension that is nearly impossible in naturalistic visions of the theatre.

Miłosz enriches the meditation of metaphysical reality, validated in the vision of the theatre of the future, with the personal experience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century person who has come in contact with new challenges. Under conditions of spiritual erosion, Miłosz urges saving *homo religioso* with one's own immortal soul and a meditative search for the mystery and meaning of the universe. In the creative work by Miłosz, sacral theatre is reflected as the love of God in a form of action and sensation, based on mimesis, in the development of a hierarchical reality.<sup>9</sup> The poet sees the designation of sacral theatre, under conditions of crisis in Christian identity, in the creative arts, which serve to save a person from loneliness and regenerate the contact of a person with God by means of *ordo amoris*.

In contemporary Lithuanian theatre the world of *Theatrum Mundi* is reconstructed in a number of performances. Though the most frequent case appears when *Theatrum Mundi* is implicated into the reflection of the loss of *Ordo Amor*.

The world consecrated to God (*Theatrum Mundi*) is being re-created in allegoric scenes of pilgrims in Šiluva, theatrical representations of the participants of Eucharistic Congress in Kaunas, performances after Biblical events and plots created by laymen in various parishes, St. Matthew school theatre in Kaunas “Millennium tail” (directed by Tomas Erbrederis) as well as staged stories of vocations at the houses of monks. Theatrical metaphors of the memory about the revelation of Virgin Mary in the stagings of the Mykolas Linkevičius’ drama “The Temple of Mary”, performances of the *Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Putnam* and theatricalised meditations of the mysteries of the rosary by children fostered by sisters of the congregation of the Sisters of the Eucharist Jesus performed in Šiluva all have consolidated the identity of people who experience the mystery of God.

Religious motifs in professional performances are represented with the obvious use of contemporary theatre language that is quotes of religious places, the plot of the Gospel and Christian symbols while staying in polemics and constant re-creation of the forms and contents of classical religious theatre. That is the strategy of creating of the new signs of Christian identity.

The reconstruction of *Theatrum Mundi* in contemporary Lithuanian theatre is based on the metaphor of the flight to the Gods dwelling. So let's overlook the fountainhead of this theatrical representation of flight drawn to the baroque

<sup>9</sup> Cz. MIŁOSZ, *Lenkų literatūros istorija*. Vilnius: Baltos lankos. 1996. P. 245.

Jesuit. The aim of the present part of study is to examine both the semantic and the formal significance of flight metaphor in the following productions: "The Fire-Proof City" (directed by Kęstutis Jakštas), "Idiot's Mass" (directed by Rolandas Atkočiūnas), and "Crime and Punishment" (directed by Gintaras Varnas). The fly to sacral locus within the space of theatrical performance is the predominant sacral motif in the referenced productions. A sacred locus here is identified with a temple in which performance is enacted, or with its image conjured up in the space of enactment inside the theatre building.

In the course of researching the epistemological aspect of the process of sacralisation of theatrical space and interpreting its sacral locus symbols it is possible to discern a metatheatrical tendency. Here performance serves as an occasion for a discourse on phenomena of soul, as an invitation to a God-man dialogue.

### Conclusions

In the world of *Theatrum Mundi*, which effectively was unfolded by the baroque theatre stage of Jesuits, a man dwells in the presence of God. Though the abyss of the sin is very deep and cunning, the man owns will, mind and memory. With reference to St. Ignacio, these factors enriched during the spiritual practices can evoke the yearning of Gods home, the thirst of eternity and the bliss of redeemed soul. The redeemed man travels to the eternal life by the medium of faith, hope and love.

Czeslaw Miłosz comparing the traditions of classical sacral theatre to the situation of a man in the age of modernity, the author built the bridges of mind and spirituality midst the classical and modern sacral theatre. In the creative work by Milošas, sacral theatre is reflected as the love of God in a form of action and sensation, based on mimesis, in the development of a hierarchical reality. The poet sees the designation of modern sacral theatre, under conditions of crisis in Christian identity, in the creative arts, which serve to save a person from loneliness and regenerate the contact of a person with God by means of *ordo amoris*.

The contemporary reconstruction of religious performance of Baroque, denoting the underlying souls training strategies The plays, staged by the Lithuanian Theatre of Drama, are exceptional for metaphor of spiritual *flight*. The methaphor of *flight* are singled out in performances of directors Kęstutis Jakštas, Rolandas Atkočiūnas. Though by developing the metaphor of *flight* there are altogether developed the links to the spiritual practice referring to the baroque Jesuit theatre. The visual metaphors of *flight* reflect the stories of falls and resurrections of contemporary human soul.

The theatrical representations of the self-concept of *Homo religiso* in the Jesuit baroque theatre created the strategy for the resurrection of the soul. In the

stagings of the Šiluva miracle this strategy was supplemented with the attitude towards the reminiscence as memorisation.

The manifestations of a training strategy in theatre theory and theatre productions emphasized as the leading aspect characteristic of the search for religious identity.

Meta-theatrical representation based on the metaphors of the memory is created while re-enacted, remembered, memorized and repeated world of *Theatrum Mundi*. In the course of the present analysis the sacral theatre is treated as *a theatre of memory*, the training strategies of which represent the transformation of repetition into recollection.









