

UNDERCROWN



Based on Escorial by M. de Ghelderode

The axis of our play is the renowned motif of the King and the Jester, known in its most accomplished form from **King Lear**. The protagonists can be found in an extreme moment of their lives, at a time when self-examination of conscience simply appears. The fact that they have spent long years of rule and service together means that they know each other all too well.

The King is a bitter man, trying to conceal the fact that nothing has truly happened in his life by using the notions of power. His splendour is dwindling, he walks around barefoot, has no sceptre, his crown is made of suede, an old, threadbare chair lends itself for a throne and the times of brilliance of his gown are long gone.

The Jester has also lost his harlequinesque trumpery. All he has left is a mousy cap and the entire sharpness of his wit has disappeared forever. He is losing his mind, because the woman he loves is dying whilst he, in his helplessness, knows only that this love is the only thing that gives him human dignity.

The Queen is an absent protagonist of this story. Other characters sense her death. Their conflict and escalation of hostile feelings towards each other is caused by the Queen. The King had once strived for her love but was rejected. The Jester was lucky enough to surprisingly have her love bestowed upon him.

If we remained only on this level of relations, we would tell a story of a human life in its final moments. A story of the significance of love and solitude, of all things superficial (power), which are never quite enough...

When the play comes to an end, the King asks the Jester for one more joke. And it is thanks to that anecdote that we transcend over the context of a courtly story. For a moment our protagonists lose their social faces, they are trying to encompass those three stages of life, the same stages of which the Sphinx asked his victims. It is here that for one time only we address the audience directly, speaking with the words of Franz Kafka 'perhaps people really are the way they appear in the evening?'

Acting is diverse, from delicately balanced questions through to physical violence. What we have managed to regain is the intensity, in both protagonists, that is emphasized also in the vocal spectrum. The play opens with a song interspersed with King's sobbing, based on 'Edge', the poem by Sylvia Plath. Subsequently, the audience are bombarded with extremely varied dialogues.

In fragments of reviews below you can read what impression has Undercrown made on its audience.

A tiny space of Waterloo Gallery did not constitute a problem for The Bones Theatre. On the contrary, the intensity of their adaptation of M. de Ghelderode's play has nearly made the ceiling of the exhibition area collapse. (...) what seemed striking from the very beginning, was the style of acting of both actors: their presence, talent, charisma. Everything that separates mediocrity from uniqueness manifested itself that night (...) The King's dark features seemed to be trying to stop the Jester who was approaching on his wiry legs? those two were dancing and jumping through each other, making a travesty of each other, hugging and then fighting each other with their fists, which does not mean that the space between them was used inappropriately, the choreography was prepared skilfully.

The fragments of melody could be heard from behind the stage, the King's sobbing, the moving song of the Jester, all this maintained the tension and intensity of the play. The relations between the protagonists have been clear all the time, even when they swapped roles. Numerous important notions in the story have been delivered to the audience by the body language, change of intonation or symbols. The play is also interesting with regards to the structure of steps whose alternating tempo varies from legato through to staccato and everything is placed in a clear context. Even though the actors are sometimes constantly moving, they do not lose sight of each other. 'Stop love, return my crown' shouts the King towards the end of the play. The Bones Theatre received both that night - a long and honest applause from the audience.

The author of this text is Marek Kazimierski, a poet, journalist, Londoner, founder of Art-Apart, an organisation uniting Polish artists who have emigrated.

There is a huge strength in your play. I especially like to composition of the art and the way you build the progress of action using objects: the throne, King's gown, headpieces, or even Jester's stick which becomes the sceptre, the sword, the whip, etc. It is inspiring how you derive from the simplicity of those items. Your work with the space is also a great achievement. You fill the space with meanings, some of its elements begin to have their own independent atmosphere and everything is born in front of the eyes of the audience in a very spontaneous manner. The skilled combination of dialogue and stage action means that even when the pace of the action increases, the clarity of what is being said does not disappear, which is a rather significant achievement, especially when you perform in a foreign language. The closeness of your relation, which is transcribed into the struggle for power between two characters, is undergoing continuous change and it is astonishing how wonderfully you release the increasing tension. What I will not forget are the moments of silence during which a decision to do or say the important things would mature inside you.

Text written by Thomas Bacon, British Butoh dancer, teacher and performer, who has performed on stage in London for a number of years.