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YURI BUTUSOV'S PRODUCTION OF THE SON AN ANALYSIS OF EXISTENTIAL CRISIS AND METAPHORICAL VISUALIZATION

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Abstract: This article provides an analytical review of Yuri Butusov's theatrical production of The Son (Syn) at the Russian Academic Youth Theatre (RAMT), examined through the prism of contemporary theatrical language, directorial decisions, scenography, and acting techniques. Drawing on relevant sources, the article analyzes the musical and plastic solutions of the staging, as well as the psychological transformations of the characters.

Keywords: Experimental theatre, biomechanics, super-objective, conditional theatre, poor theatre, mise-en-scène, synthesis, artistic integrity.

Yuri Butusov elevated French playwright Florian Zeller's play The Son beyond the boundaries of a conventional family drama, scaling it up to an existential and universal tragedy. According to the director, this piece is essentially "about the Hamlet inside each of us." The central idea of the performance revolves not merelyAdaptation to adolescent depression stemming from parental divorce, but rather around the global breakdown of human connection and the "disjointed time" (time is out of joint). Adopting this principle of temporal collapse, Butusov illustrates the disintegration of the world.

Pierre (A. Devyatyarov): The father figure is depicted as extremely plastic; his movements are mechanical, often resembling a marionette. He attempts to conceal his guilt behind ceaseless dances and awkward, disjointed gestures.

Anne (T. Matyukhova) and Sofia (V. Tikhanskaya): The mother's profound loneliness and helplessness, alongside the stepmother's futile attempts to preserve life, complete the emotional landscape of the performance.

Scenographer Maksim Obrezkov constructed a cramped and uncomfortable apartment space bounded by three black walls and a white ceiling. This "black room" functions both as a literal and metaphorical prison for the characters.

During the performance, these black walls shift to reveal a surreal landscape featuring columns perched with crows and an immense bird skeleton. This "otherworld" serves as a visualization of Nicolas's soul drawn toward death.

Aleksandr Sivayev's lighting design removes the action from traditional boundaries of time and space. Cold lighting and focused spotlights illuminate the haunting beauty within the characters' inner worlds.

One of the most striking directorial choices lies in the unexpected casting distribution: the seventeen-year-old adolescent Nicolas is portrayed by the experienced, mature actor Evgeniy Redko.

Nicolas (E. Redko): His character resembles a child aged prematurely by internal anguish. Redko portrays Nicolas as taciturn, static, and fixed upon an inner void. The black cap he wears serves as a symbol of youth. This characterization suggests that the severe psychological trauma and depression he endures have ripped him out of adolescence, plunging him into a vortex of existential suffering.

The Alienation Effect (Verfremdungseffekt):The noticeable age gap between Redko and Devyatyarov creates a distancing effect for the audience. It underscores that Nicolas is not merely a specific teenager, but a universal "Hamletian" condition—a soul sensing the disconnection of time.

The performance's musical director, Faustas Latėnas, defined the overall rhythm of the staging. Here, music is not merely a background element, but acts as the screaming soul of the characters.

The Singing Man / Meta-Commentator (Denis Balandin):Introduced by the director, this character comments on events while fulfilling the role of Nicolas's alter ego.

Alter Ego and Voice of the Soul: Linked to Nicolas through his cap, this figure is interpreted as the main character's unrealized potential or his soul crying out in pain.

Musical Range: He observes events from the outside, lending emotional and philosophical depth to the stage action through musical performances ranging from classical arias to rock compositions.

Boundary Between Reality and Illusion: Near the finale, this character reads dialogues between the parents and acts as the psychiatrist. This device demonstrates how Nicolas perceives the world—where those around him are reduced to mere "text" or mechanical figures.

Plastics and Choreography: Nikolay Reutov's choreography expresses the unutterable anguish of the characters through movement. The actors' body language transforms into a farewell concert executed "upon their own spines."

Metaphorical Props: The Aesthetics of Illusion

The cardboard guitars and synthesizers held by the characters serve as vital elements in Butusov's "metaphorical theatre":

Inauthenticity of Life and the Play Aesthetic: The cardboard instruments signify the fragility and artificiality of the world the characters inhabit. This implies that while the characters attempt to hide their pain behind loud music, their "weapons" are unreal.

The Body as an Instrument:By using cardboard props, the director shifts the emphasis to the actor's body. The characters move as though playing upon their own spines; their bodies transform into screaming saxophones or weeping violins.

Imaginary Reality:The overall atmosphere of the performance is built on a dream-like (oniroid) aesthetic. The cardboard instruments serve as a reminder that within this world, genuine elements (music, dance, happiness) exist only in dreams or imagination

Finale Through The Son, Yuri Butusov exposes one of society's most painful wounds: mutual incomprehension among loved ones and existential solitude. The director aims not to entertain the audience, but to plunge them alongside the characters into an "emotional hell," provoking a moral awakening. The final tragedy is interpreted as the defeat of a human being unable to restore harmony.

"The Hamlet Within Us": According to Butusov's definition, this play is about "the Hamlet inside each of us." In Nicolas, the director depicts a spirit seeking internal harmony, unable to endure the injustice and falsehood of the world.

Disjointed Connections:The production transcends a simple father-son conflict to address a broader scope—the severance of global bonds ("Time is out of joint"). It is not merely about adolescent struggles, but about humanity's inability to hear one another and its shared existential loneliness.

Existential Pressure: Nicolas's line, "Life is pressing down on me," holds a central position in the production. The director reveals the inherent unhappiness of human existence and the weight of living in this world.

The Frenetic Rock 'n' Roll Dance: The intense dance near the end symbolizes liberation from all worldly constraints, suffering, and guilt. This dance implies that the characters meet not in reality, but in a metaphysical realm—in freedom beyond death.

Illusion vs. Harsh Reality: The scene near the end where Nicolas survives and becomes a writer is merely a figment of his father's (Pierre's) imagination or Nicolas's unrealized dream. Pierre imagines his son alive, but the bitter truth remains that death waited for no one, as Nicolas took his own life.

The Final Abyss: At the conclusion, the stage walls slide apart to reveal a dark, terrifying abyss. This represents the infinite void within Nicolas and the ultimate destination of his spirit, which gravitated toward death.

Yuri Butusov delivers a clear message to the audience: we must learn to hear the internal cries of those closest to us; otherwise, the "bonds of time" will break, and the individual will perish in their own existential void. Ultimately, the performance is a poignant outcry regarding the defeat of the human spirit in a world where harmony can no longer be restored.

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