



HAL
open science

Crises of Our Time in Song of the Goat Theatre's Island

Agnieszka Romanowska

► **To cite this version:**

Agnieszka Romanowska. Crises of Our Time in Song of the Goat Theatre's Island. 2019. halshs-02268984

HAL Id: halshs-02268984

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02268984v1>

Preprint submitted on 22 Aug 2019

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Crises of Our Time in Song of the Goat Theatre's *Island*

Agnieszka Romanowska, Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie

Introduction

In the programme of Song of the Goat Theatre's *Island* we read that the performance has been inspired by Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Indeed, *Island* is not an adaptation of the play, but an independent theatrical project whose links with the Shakespearean romance are, at the same time, easily traceable and deliberately loose. Rather than offering a modern interpretation of the early modern play, Grzegorz Bral's ensemble uses references to *The Tempest* to establish a mental and emotional frame for their highly idiosyncratic contemplation on the condition of man in today's world. Their method is, aptly, similar to the trial Prospero devises for his wrongdoers – the tempest as a total experience. It consists in submerging the audience in a syncretic and synesthetic theatrical event which activates several channels of perception and enables a diagnosis and interpretation of our time's crises on many different levels. This immersive quality has been noticed by many reviewers, one of them suggestively describing the production as a "sculpture of vibrating air," and a "tempest of breaths and gestures" which sets the whole theatrical space in motion:

Everything around the Island is swaying. We are observing inflows and outflows – after the introduction the dominating energy is that of the polyphonic singing, then our bodies are hit by the wave of the air moved by the dance. Again. And again. (Pułka, 2016)

The visual and musical layer of the performance is irresistible, even hypnotic. What stays in the viewer's memory are the overwhelmingly impressive movements of the dancers, the once dynamic, once frozen images their bodies form with unbelievable acrobatic

skilfulness, and the powerful music of the songs. The verbal layer, on the other hand, does not get through easily in such density of non-verbal elements. This is mostly due to Bral's overall approach "characterised by a refusal to compromise with the idea that the text, or the story, is the most important element of performance" (Sakowska, 2014: 48). As a typical representative of what has been described as postdramatic theatre (Lehmann, 2006), he is not interested in developing characters or telling plots, but rather in creating for the viewers a sensory experience. Having this in mind, my purpose in this article is, nevertheless, to analyse the production's libretto in order to inspect the nature and function of the Shakespearean inspirations integrated in the performance. The nature of this integration is perhaps best illustrated with reference to Lehmann's definition of the performance text:

The linguistic material and the texture of the staging interact with the theatrical situation, understood comprehensively by the concept 'performance text'. (...) Consequently the significance of all individual elements ultimately depends on the way the whole is viewed, rather than constituting this overall effect as a sum of the individual parts. Hence, for postdramatic theatre it holds true that the written and/or verbal text transferred onto theatre, as well as the 'text' of the staging understood in the widest sense (including the performers, their 'paralinguistic' additions, reductions or deformations of the linguistic material; costumes, lighting, space, peculiar temporality, etc.) are all cast into a new light through a changed conception of the performance text. (...) it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information. (*idem*, 85)

Before "the linguistic material" of Bral's *Island* is presented, it is necessary to provide some insight into Song of the Goat Theatre's specificity.

Song of the Goat Theatre and their Method

Established in 1996 by Grzegorz Bral and Anna Zubrzycka, Teatr Pieśń Kozła [Song of the Goat Theatre] is nowadays recognized as one of Europe's most significant training-based theatre ensembles. Its name – alluding to the etymology of the Greek *tragōidia*, and commemorating the group's first production based on Euripides' *The Bacchantes* – *Pieśń Kozła. Dytyramb* of 1997 – indicates their fascination with ancient theatre. A distinctive feature of their practice and training is the integration of movement, voice, song, live music and text, which results in performances based on rhythmicality and musicality. Bral's artistic manifesto flows from his conviction that tragedy has its roots in the spirit of music. It is also in line with the postdramatic concept of the auditory semiotics, i.e. the view that “the intrinsic musicality of the text is as important as its dramatic content, and in many cases even more important” (Bouko, 2009: 28). Bral's theatre aims at affecting the viewers' senses holistically which is fostered by the performances' multi-mediality, in *Island* exemplified by exploration of various forms of stage expression, including dance, opera, pantomime, ethno-performance and elements of shadow theatre (Kowalski, 2017). While Bral repeatedly underlines his striving for connection and openness as the root of authentic theatrical experience, the effect of the synesthetic appeal is well illustrated by the following response to the group's 2012 “Songs of Lear”:

This is essence of *Lear*, desiccated and condensed; sensed rather than watched and absorbed until it hasn't just got under your skin, but right into your bone marrow. For the half hour that followed, I was static electricity, too knock-kneed to stand. It is a full-body detox; catharsis pure and simple and transcendent. (Trueman, 2012)

Song of the Goat Theatre's daily training goes beyond traditional acting techniques to include physical and musical exercises. They function as a laboratory theatre in the tradition of

Grotowski, in which the training and the performances are treated integrally as an ongoing creative process, open to discoveries and ready to employ new techniques and means of stage expression. An important part of the actors' work includes anthropological and ethnomusicological research conducted through various multicultural projects, which include travelling and seeking contact with local practitioners and preservers of ancient indigenous traditions that are dying out, as was the case with the hugely successful Scottish project "Return to the Voice" of 2014. Bral explains that his techniques are rooted in an understanding that true acting is born from a particular way of being, with every culture having its own way of performing. His Theatre does not limit itself to including traditional Georgian, Albanian, Russian and Greek texts and tunes. The cultural openness is also visible in its cast, half of which consists of actors from various places of the world, as well as in its cooperation with international, often multicultural, groups and ensembles. In *Island* the director enriched his stage movement method by including the modern dance ensemble led by Ivan Perez, a Spanish choreographer working in the Netherlands.

Linked to the Theatre's methods and interests is their role, since 2005, as organisers of the Brave Festival, an international event which offers an overview of cultures, traditions and rites which are on the verge of extinction. Recognised by its meaningful subtitle, "Against Cultural Exile," this festival brings together people from all over the world who, through their art, save forgotten, abandoned or otherwise neglected cultures. Bral's idea, as initiator and artistic director, was to create a space to show authentic art, cultivated and maintained by participants of communities living in unfavourable social, religious and political conditions, or which are endangered with a loss of their own culture for the benefit of civilizational assimilation. Four years later, the festival developed a branch focused on children, *Brave Kids*, the special mission of which is to teach children respect for other cultures and inspire them by

means of artistic experiences to strive for a better future for themselves and the communities they represent. The festival's most recent extension is *Brave Together*, which fosters integration of people with and without disabilities, using different artistic tools to help the participants find a common language. The *Brave Festival* supports underprivileged children and orphans from the poorest regions of the world donating the proceeds from tickets to the ROKPA charity organization.

Yet another integral part of Song of the Goat Theatre is pedagogical work, in which they propagate their technique called "Acting Coordination Method". In the years 2004-2012 they created, together with Manchester Metropolitan University, an MA acting programme, which from 2013 has been offered in cooperation with Bral School of Acting in London. Acting Coordination Method is an original practice based on the integration of all the acting tools, including text, voice, energy, movement into one common and organic unity, which enables the actors to explore the flow between song and word, rhythm and gesture, sound and character.¹

For almost a decade now the group's repertoire has included productions in various ways related to Shakespeare's plays. These performances belong to some of their most successful projects, acclaimed and rewarded worldwide. The first was *Macbeth*, featuring a multinational cast and prepared in cooperation with the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2010. Two years later *Songs of Lear* followed, which was awarded the Scotsman Fringe First, the Herald Archangel, as well as the Musical Theatre Matters Award during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2012. *Crazy God* inspired by *Hamlet* was first performed in July 2016, followed by *Hamlet. A Commentary*, which premiered in July 2017. In the meantime, *Island* was first performed in December 2016. In all these productions the Theatre typically interweaves text with choral singing, meticulously choreographed movement and live music. The effect is stunning and appreciated by audiences and reviewers.

Everyone is an Island: Analysis of the Libretto

Island offers a multi-layered theatrical mediation on the human condition created from songs, music and tightly orchestrated stage movement. The whole performance consists of fifteen pieces, both with and without lyrics. Most of the texts were written by Alicja Bral, while four texts quote lines from Sophocles' *Antigone* and Aristophanes' *Birds*. Such "palimpsestuous intertextuality," frequent in postdramatic theatre (Jürs-Munby, 2006: 8), is a characteristic feature of Bral's other projects as well, but *The Tempest* – with its fragmentariness and sketchiness² – lends itself to such a treatment perhaps more readily than other plays by Shakespeare. The other feature of the play which may have inspired the creators of *Island* to rewrite it into a series of songs is the importance of music and, more generally, sound. This aspect is highlighted in the music of Ariel's songs – the "sweet air" (1.2.396),³³ the "ditty" that Ferdinand rightly assumes must be "no mortal business, nor no sound / That the earth owes" (1.2.408-410) – and the "heavenly music" (5.1.52) of Prospero's magic. As Prospero's "isle is full of noises, / Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight (3.2.133-4), so is Bral's "Island." The performance's music, mostly written by Jean-Claude Acquaviva and Maciej Rychły, contains inspirations from traditional Georgian and Greek tunes. As for the language of the songs, *Island* has been performed in English, with the opening poem, recited as the prologue, in some performances spoken in Polish. The printed version of the libretto, from which I am quoting, is bi-lingual.

The songs' titles mention several characters from *The Tempest*: Prospero, Ariel, Miranda, the Monster. In the "Introduction" printed in the programme the titular Island is described as the mind of Prospero, a lonely aging man, imprisoned by his own unfulfilled desires, obsessions and longings. He creates all the characters that surround him, and he is all

of them at the same time. While the tempest exists only in Prospero's head, his imagination is poetic and magnetic, his narrative illogical, yet suggestive, and his story not easy to follow and describe (“Island...,” 10).⁴ The “Introduction” suggests that the production focuses on Prospero, but an analysis of the songs reveals that Prospero is not the only, not even the main, persona in the libretto. In the prologue “the identity of the speaking voice is never revealed, so we ponder whether it can be that of Caliban (...), or of Ferdinand (...) or of any one of us, human wrecks who need an encounter with life-preserving magic” (Bottez, 2017). In most of the other texts the speakers are of equally blurred identity. The speaker of the prologue poem, entitled *Prospero*, seems to be outside the island-prison. I read it as Miranda’s relation of her, apparently coincidental, meeting with the magician: “I met him in late autumn” (16). Formally, the text alternates between Miranda’s report and Prospero’s words as she remembers them, printed in bold type. Neither Prospero nor Miranda are identified until line thirteen, where Prospero introduces himself in direct speech: “I am Prospero, the King. I have Ariel and Caliban at my service. / I know man with his madness and love. Everything is in the Books /and it serves me, Miranda” (16). The opening lines highlight Miranda’s wretched state at the moment of the meeting: “I was despaired. / Pain would stick to my soul, like leaves to the wet ground. / I had no idea who I’d become. The world had no reason” (16). While we have much access to Miranda’s inner suffering, Prospero presented to us, as she sees him, is an old body without the spirit: “his soul was absent. / An aged man with a body like a cracked pine. / Only eyes – an island amid deep loneliness. / His heart pulsated. / He survived. (...) He would put a magic coat on and sob” (16). The focus is on the physical: the body, the intense look of the eyes, his pulsating heart, the sobbing. Prospero, an old survivor, meets Miranda, a person of yet unshaped, or lost, identity, a shipwreck of her own life, who initially does not see any hope for survival.

Yet the second part of the song brings a change in Miranda's perception of Prospero. She remembers his tantalising eyes gazing at her as he was providing his explanation, "Nothing bad happened. Nothing bad. I did it for you, for you. / You don't know who you are yet," uttering his promise, "You shall not die," and formulating his powerful command: "Go beyond. Go to the other side of things, Miranda. (...) You will wake up there" (17). Once Prospero has revealed his identity and his plan towards Miranda, she describes him as a guardian of hope, "an old druid. / Wizard of the wind tied to his cell" (17), the one who has shown her how to endure. His words sound like a mission when he is commanding her to tear the pine and free Ariel as "[e]veryone must survive" (17). This part of the poem, as I see it, is the core of the prologue because it poses the production's most important question – Is there a hope for survival in the world of global violence and wars? It also explains the islands in "Island." "Each time he met me he revealed a piece of this reality," relates Miranda, "He called them islands" (17). Each of us may be a lonely island on the sea of desperation, but the main instinct is to survive, and the survival may only be spiritual, effectuated by tearing apart the "cracked pine" of the body and letting out Ariel. Such hopeful interpretation of the exposition seems to be strengthened by the ending of the prologue. We learn that Miranda's retrospective report is delivered after Prospero's "good death", that he "died in his cell – happy" (17). May we take this as a foreshadowing of a happy, or at least cathartic, ending of *Island*?

In the songs that follow we get some insight into the reasons for, and nature of Miranda's initial unhappiness and desperation, although in them Miranda is not the speaker anymore. The songs entitled "Last Breath," "My hands," "Night" and "Silence" differ from the opening poem in their much looser connections with *The Tempest*. In the prologue the links are explicit: names of the characters, references to the play's plot and to several famous lines. Alicja Bral clearly alludes in it to Shakespeare's text, but never uses it *verbatim*. Her method is to

paraphrase, but echoes of phrases like “There's no harm done” (1.2.15), “a cloven pine” (1.2.277) or “master of a full poor cell” (1.2.20) are easily recognisable. Thanks to the dialogic form of the first poem and its narrative character we are transported to a quasi-fantastical world governed by the magician-ruler: the “old druid,” the “wizard.” The other songs’ common denominator is that they all bring us back to a reality easily recognised as today’s world and that their speakers seem to be modern alter egos of Prospero, Miranda, Ariel, and Caliban.

In the “Last Breath” there is a first-person description of a body infected with violence and killing that are brought daily by the news: “The shell of my heart crushed / By the breaking news / drowned in the aggression / Which I drink every morning” (21). The “venom of unclear games” poisons the speaker’s heart, while he breathes “the air polluted by cruelty” and chokes with the images brought by the media. Such permanent contact with atrocities, from which there is no escape, erases compassion, “My hands don’t shake / When I watch killing” (21), and has a degrading effect on the senses: “I see nothing / Deaf is my ear” (21). The song closes with an image of the persona standing numb under the sky covered with clouds of the victims’ dried eyes, while his last thought is a fearful question about the circumstances of his own death. The horrors of the surrounding reality contaminate life, cause emotional emptiness and make death the more frightening. In “My hands” the diagnosis of the bleak situation is completed by further elements. The speaker finds himself in a vicious circle of commercialised existence, in which the main force is the demand to live faster and faster in pursuit of prosperity. As conscience is constantly “invigilated by commercials,” greed is “the most cruel prison / In which the prisoner and the guard are one” (26). In a world thus controlled by the rules of market, in which one is ready to sell “body, speech and heart,” the speaker realises that his hands are, paradoxically, empty. This part of the song concludes with the speaker’s bitter observation that estimating the price of his life is “the very essence of this blind solitude” (26). Yet the rest of the song brings

an unexpectedly hopeful turn. As the miserable state of “humanity deprived of tenderness” (26) resembles a bad dream, there is a chance of waking up and opening oneself to a change. The last two stanzas suggest that a way out of the hopeless emptiness might be possible through noticing the other: “I see you there,” “We are the same /We breathe together (...) with the same love” (26). So perhaps compassion and tenderness can be recovered and the slavery of the profit-pursuing life can be overcome?

This feeble hope is crushed in the song entitled “Silence,” which continues the plural form introduced by the final lines of “My hands.” The progression from the single persona of “Last Breath” and “My hands” to the collective speaker in “Silence” reflects the fact that the process of degradation and dehumanisation is not limited to individuals, but corrodes whole societies. Of all the songs commented on so far, “Silence” reveals the most frustrated and desperate speaker, while the text contains some of the most graphic images. This is well illustrated by the opening lines, “Gagged with collective madness / False needs / We vomit with anger /And we eat it again” (36), and in the closing sections of the song: “Covered in furs of annihilation / We stuff our empty stomachs with slaughter (...) We are drowning in the swamp of artificial needs” (37). Some of the themes mentioned in the previous texts, like the pursuit of false needs, dependence on advertisement, or readiness to destroy others for the sake of profit, return with a double force. The main social concern, the most disconcerting result of the “collective madness” introduced here, is the corruption of law reflected in the image of criminals “changing paragraphs in order to hide their hands,” so that “in the light of the well-constructed law / Profits [could be] weighted with the life of the victims” (36). The final, most damaging, result is spiritual. The song finishes with a grim conclusion: “Our hearts embedded with pride / Crushed the Spirit into silence” (37).

Apart from the opening poem, there are two more texts whose titles allude directly to *The Tempest*. “Monster” and “Ariel’s Song” can be interpreted in the immediate context of the songs analysed above, as they extend and complement the themes of imprisonment, dependence, rejection, loneliness, longing and hopelessness which result from violence and/or spiritual estrangement. “They called me a monster / And my heart went silent (...) My rage is turned to whisper / My hopes are ruined” (50), complains the speaker. The addressee of the song “Monster” is a beloved with whom the speaker has been separated, or whom the speaker has lost, and longing for whom worsens the suffering caused by his captivity: “Your absence / Envelops me with the shadow of this prison” (51). The link between the branding inflicted on him by the unidentified enemies, “I can’t bear this change they made” (50), and the state of imprisonment is not clear, but the song can be described as a pleading for reunification (with its repetitive requests and imperatives “Would you come back?”, “Please take me there,” “Hear me love”), which seems to be conditioned on the addressee seeing beyond the speaker’s alleged monstrous identity, forced on him and, thus, false. The conflict suggested in this song has as its roots prejudice and/or hatred and as its effect – rejection, separation and loss of freedom. There are certain key words of the libretto that keep repeating in the songs, “Monster” included: ruins, corroded reality, solitude, prison. This song presents a figure of someone silenced by humiliation and suffering, whose “rage is turned to whisper” (50).

“Ariel’s song” is a complaint which begins with the song’s refrain – “I cannot choose to die. / I was given birth and I remain” (41). Ariel seems to be suffering from a different kind of imprisonment, one that consists in being suspended between life and death, perhaps forever. The endlessness of this state is highlighted with the repetition of the opening phrase in the closing line, as well as once in the middle of the text. Ariel’s attitude to his/her creator is ambiguous, as is his/her condition of a creature unfinished, and therefore utterly dependent,

with an unripe identity, unable to decide about its fate: “I have not had enough time to create myself outside your / body—I tremble with bliss and fear,” “I am a hostage of my unfulfilled dreams of grandeur,” “I am falling,” “I will not fall” (41). The creature is at the same time frightened, awe-stricken and grateful, while the full dependence on the creator seems to be the only imaginable way to go on living: “There is so much light within you— / It flows from your skin. / I want to cling to it and survive” (41). There is no way out of the state of being alive: “I remain / To live and breathe, to smell and remember” (41). This Ariel is not longing to hear the releasing command “to the elements / Be free (5.1.317-318) because it would mean annihilation.

The song “Night” stands out as perhaps the most topical and, at the same time, the most explicit, of all the texts written by Alicja Bral. It is also, in many ways, the most central to the director’s idea of speaking about the problems of today’s world with references to *The Tempest*. The opening stanza brings an image of a war survivor who has been deprived of everything he cherished and is left clenching a bullet in his fist. War has “shattered all [his] life’s bonds” and “chained [his] will to revenge” as he “lost love in a sudden gust of hate” (31). He sees himself as a figure “collapsed into ashes, unable to rise” (31), left with nothing, but the readiness to kill and/or die. The second stanza extends this catalogue of the war’s grim consequences to include exile, loneliness and loss of memory: “The winds of exile scatter my beliefs around this / cage of loneliness. / I try to reach memory, which is dispersed in tears” (31). As a result of the forced displacement, the speaker’s integrity has been shattered, with the values and rules that governed his life before having lost their meaning and significance. Being separated from the formative core of his previous existence, i.e. from his past, has a destructive impact. In the subsequent stanza the negative effects of this violent separation and forceful transfer to a place which is a “cage of loneliness” manifest themselves in the speaker’s impaired

physicality: his heart, “raped, beats without rhythm,” and his eyes cannot see as he is crawling “blindly, in search for light” (31). But, most importantly, the disintegrating effect of war and exile is visible in the speaker’s mind and psyche. He is disoriented, perceives the surrounding reality as chaotic and irrational, and feels deceived and abandoned by whatever guarding powers he used to believe in: “I beg for logic in this chaos. / You have deceived me, exiled god. / We have drowned on the way to the promised land – / My island does not exist” (31). Thus the song “Night” presents the darkest existential night of a person uprooted and displaced as a result of a military conflict, left at a loss and helpless, desperate and revengeful. The topicality of this song is highlighted in the penultimate line with the shift from the first person singular to the plural form “we,” which changes the speaker into a representative of a group that has not been lucky enough to reach the refuge land. This is a Prospero without his island.

Theatre of the Capacious Metaphor

Apart from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Grzegorz Bral mentions another important source that had an inspiring influence on his *Island*. It is the drama of the shipwrecks presented on Theodore Gericault’s 1819 *The Raft of the Medusa*, the gruesome story of the worst imaginable human behaviour in the situation of desperate fight for survival. The extreme emotions of the survivors maddened by mortal fear and the dead bodies scattered around the raft as depicted by the painter are easily associated both with the uproar on the board of Alonso’s sinking vessel and with the desperate situation of today’s refugees transported in overloaded boats and dying in coastal waters of the unwelcoming “promised lands.” Bral wants his Prospero to be one of such survivors.

And yet the strength of his performance lies in the fact that it is much more than a comment on topical events.⁵ Although it is inspired by the migration crisis – the acutest political

and social problem of the modern world – its appeal is more universal. This is achieved in two ways. One is that Bral's reading of *The Tempest* is existential rather than political. *Island* is not about the desire for power and about revenge, but about loneliness and death and, as such, it has been viewed by reviewers as “a contemporary treatise on man” (Szatkowska, 2017). As it “entangles the viewers in a dream about loneliness so desperate that no cleansing storm can be of any help” (Matuszewska, 2016), its message is rather grim: “as humanity we are still alive, breathing, and until it is so, there is some hope for the world plunged into loneliness, violence, maddening race and consumerism (...) but *Island* is, more than anything else, a lament” (Chojnowski, 2016). Maciej Rychły, the co-author of the music, commenting on the use of the old Greek and Georgian tunes, emphasizes the communal aspect of traditional music, its ability to interconnect people in mourning and loss, which is especially valuable in today's culture, when there is a tendency to eliminate sadness and lament from the public space (Szatkowska, 2017).

The other aspect that enhances the production's universality is Bral's method to reach the spectators' emotional sphere directly through metaphor. *Island* is contemporary in the very literal sense of the world, “not because of modern setting or costumes, but thanks to the directness of theatrical experience” (Pułka, 2016), the viewers being physically drawn into the swirl of movement and sound. One of the characteristic features of Brals' aesthetically refined theatre is simplicity of the means of expression. The actors, who wear “unflattering black jeans and turtlenecks, as if in a world of despair no body can be beautiful” (Bottez, 2017), are located in an empty space. Aurally, all is created by their voices. Visually, there are the actors' bodies on the dark floor, their shadows against the white walls, actors animating chairs and mirrors⁶ which, activated with the use of lights, create overwhelmingly suggestive images – all of this is based on sparsity of tools. This minimalistic approach is also visible in Bral's libretto, “being

not a foundation, but rather a distant background for the dozen or so loosely linked music-kinaesthetic impressions” (Karow, 2017), in which the characters are but sketched and their situations hardly signalled by a few phrases. The characters are not engaged in a linear plotline but become frozen in a series of metaphors. “‘Island’ operates on the abstract plane and impacts directly on the emotional sphere. It is a total experience” (Werpachowska, 2017).

Conclusions

“I see Shakespeare as creator of the basic European myths. We have nothing stronger than this, his plays are the foundation of the most important European universals,” says Grzegorz Bral (Olasz, 2016). Asked whether he wants his theatre to comment on current events, Bral observes that this happens automatically because each theatre operates within a specific context which generates references and associations. But he never forgets that the specific power of theatrical comment is metaphor. Alicja Bral’s songs depict a drama of a person trapped in chaos, violence and loss of identity which cause loneliness in the world of wars, migration and consumerism, but the key feature of her libretto is flexibility and openness to a variety of readings. Inspiration is a broad notion, but I consider the vagueness in the title “inspired by *The Tempest*” to be a very conscious decision that signals the production’s decidedly inclusive character. Bral sees his Prospero as an Everyman, while at the same time each of the characters is a Prospero – a refugee on an island of loneliness.

Works Cited

- Auden, W. H. (2002), *Lectures on Shakespeare*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton UP.
- Bouko, Catherine (2009), “The musicality of postdramatic theatre: Hans-Thies Lehmann’s theory of independent auditory semiotics”, *Gramma* 17, pp. 25-35.
- Bottez, Alina (2017), “Island (Wyspa)”, <https://playstosee.com/island-wyspa/>, accessed 15 February 2019.

- Chojnowski, Grzegorz (2016), "Wyspa", <http://chojnowski.blogspot.com/2016/12/wyspa-teatr-piesn-koza.htm>, accessed 20 February 2019.
- Fuller, John (1970), *A Reader's Guide to W. H. Auden*, London, Thames and Hudson.
- Island. Inspired by The Tempest by W. Shakespeare*, premiered 1.12.2016, theatre programme, available at <http://piesnkozla.pl/en/spektakle#178-island>.
- Jürs-Munby, Karen (2006), *Introduction*, in H.-T. Lehmann, *Postmodern Theatre*, London and New York, Routledge, pp. 1-15.
- Karow, Jan (2017), "Pod kreską 1", <http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/246334.html>, accessed 12 January 2019.
- Kowalski, Wiesław (2017), "Wyspa w Gdańskim Teatrze Szekspirowskim", <http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/245836.html>, accessed 12 January 2019.
- Lehmann, Hans-Thies (2006), *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. by Karen Jürs-Munby, London and New York, Routledge.
- Matuszewska, Małgorzata (2016), "Teatr Pieśń Kozła: piękna 'Wyspa'", <https://wroclaw.naszemiasto.pl/teatr-piesn-kozla-piekna-wyspa-recenzja/ar/c13-3941227>, accessed 12 November 2018.
- Olasz, Martyna (2016), "Grzegorz Bral: Istotą teatru jest prosty zachwyt dziecka w widzu", interview, <https://kultura.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/997043,grzegorz-bral-teatr-wywiad.html>, accessed 10 November 2018.
- Pułka, Leszek (2016), "Wyspa skarbów", <http://teatralny.pl/recenzje/wyspa-skarbow,1804.html>, accessed 5 February 2019.
- Sakowska, Aleksandra (2014), "The Many Languages of the Avant-Garde: In conversation with Grzegorz Bral of Teatr Pieśń Kozła (Song of the Goat Theatre)", *Multicultural Shakespeare: Translation, Appropriation and Performance*, vol. 11, nr. 26, pp. 45-63.
- Shakespeare, William (1992), *The Tempest*, ed. Frank Kermode, London and New York, Routledge.
- Szatkowska, Lena (2017), "Kto zabił Hamleta?", *Tygodnik Płocki* No. 34, 22-08-2017, <http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/246509.html>, accessed 20 February 2019.
- Trueman, Matt (2012), "Review: Songs of Lear, Summerhall, Edinburgh Fringe", <http://matttrueman.co.uk/2012/08/review-songs-of-lear-summerhall-edinburgh-fringe.html>, accessed 22 March 2019.

Werpachowska, Edyta (2017), "Bolesna synestezja", <http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/239710.html>, accessed 4 February 2019.

¹ More about Song of the Goat Theatre methods, workshops, projects and initiatives can be found on their official website, <http://piesnkozla.pl/en>; on www.octopus theatricals.com/songofthegoat, on www.songsoflear.com, and in the BBC Interview with Grzegorz Bral, full version of which is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25O7ZA gUr q4>. A documentary film on the project "Return to the Voice" can be watched online on <https://vimeo.com/102506709>.

² In his lecture on *The Tempest*, in which it is discussed as Shakespeare's successful mythopoetic writing, W. H. Auden talks about the play's relative frugality of poetic passages. Were it not for Prospero's monologues, the wedding mask, and Ariel's songs, he argues, "you could put *The Tempest* in a comic strip." He also observes that, similarly to "other mythopoetic works, *The Tempest* inspired people to go on for themselves," and gives examples of Browning's "Caliban upon Setebos," Renan's *Caliban*, and his own "The Sea and the Mirror" (Auden, 2002: 297). Bral's *Island* is another instance of such going on for ourselves, albeit on a different scale and in a different mode.

³ *The Tempest* is quoted from The Arden Shakespeare edition by Frank Kermode, reprinted 1992.

⁴ The numbers in brackets refer to the pages of the *Island* theatre programme available at <http://piesnkozla.pl/en/spektakle#178-island>.

⁵ Which can be related to *The Tempest*'s own capacity for the universal. As Kermode argues, "there is nothing in *The Tempest* fundamental to its structure of ideas which could not have existed had America remained undiscovered, and the Bermuda voyage never taken place. The New World stimulated interest in the great and perennial problem of the nature of Nature; but the fact that Shakespeare is at pains to establish his island in the Old World may be taken to indicate his rejection of the merely topical" (*idem*, xxvi).

⁶ There is nothing in Bral's performance to suggest any link to Auden's "The Sea and the Mirror." The poem is not referred to by the creators of *Island* as a source of inspiration or plane of reference. Although the mirrors are central to the stage design, they are never mentioned in the libretto. If one looks for any thematic closeness of these two works, it may perhaps be admitted in the very broad sense of both responding in certain extent to

contemporary crises, that of 1940s and of 2010s, respectively. In Auden, Prospero admitting his responsibility for Antonio's treason might be seen as "a suggestion of the failure of liberal humanism to avert Hitler" (Fuller, 1970: 159). There is, however, a formal similarity between Alicja Bral's series of songs and the shape of Auden's poem which is divided into "voices" of particular characters.