

DOI: 10.31866/2410-1176.41.2019.188641

УДК 792.028.64:7.071.1

ECLECTICISM OF “MULTIAGENT EFFECTS” IN THE INTERPRETATIONS OF SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDIES BY THE DIRECTOR E. NEKROŠIUS

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The purpose of the article is to identify the specifics of the interpretation of W. Shakespeare's plays *Hamlet* (1997), *Macbeth* (1999) and *Othello* (2000) by director E. Nekrošius, as well as to analyse the features of his creative methods and techniques. The research methodology. An interdisciplinary approach and the following scientific methods were applied. Typological-structural method is to structure the basic principles of synergies between peculiar elements of the director's tools of E. Nekrošius; the method of art history analysis is to identify the specifics of the main components of the directorial activity of E. Nekrošius, as well as to determine his contribution to the development of contemporary European theatre art; a method of artistic and compositional analysis of stage works is to justify the relationship between the director and the author of a dramatic work in the context of the formation of an artistic and integral canvas of a dramatic performance and other. Scientific novelty. The features of the techniques and methods for E. Nekrošius's directing have been determined on the basis of the art criticism analysis of the plays *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Othello* by W. Shakespeare; the unique and ambiguous use of metaphors and symbols by the director has been described. The specificity of innovative concepts and traditional methods of theatre directing by E. Nekrošius has been revealed; the structure and levels of scenic imagery in the interpretations of Shakespearean tragedies in the context of the transformation of the expressive means of theatre directing were examined and analysed; an art historical analysis of the elements of directorial expressiveness used by E. Nekrošius was carried out in the process of their transformation into compositional poetical and formative means. Conclusions. The director's interpretation of the Shakespearean tragedies *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Othello* by E. Nekrošius testifies to the dominance of his fundamental principle of creativity – the ability to convincingly and symbolically represent the relationship between ethnic Lithuanian and world culture, positioning contact with the dramatic text of W. Shakespeare as the most important factor. In the creative activity of E. Nekrošius, the symbolic in the object prevails over the word. The metaphors with which the director constructs a complex space of performances are ambiguous, they undergo a variety of interpretations and levels of reading. The same symbols and signs are constantly presented to the viewer with different perspectives. Each object on the stage is a sign and symbol, meaning holder.

Keywords: E. Nekrošius; theatre directing; interpretation; eclecticism; W. Shakespeare's plays

Introduction

Creative activity of the famous Lithuanian director E. Nekrošius (1952–2018) at the turn of the 20th–21st centuries showed that he is one of the leading European theatre directors of our time, which is associated with the success of the Shakespearean tragedies production – the performances *Hamlet* (1997), *Macbeth* (1999) and *Othello* (2001), which received high awards from international theatre festivals for best production and direction.

The creation of visual metaphors based on the literary source is a distinctive feature of E. Nekrošius theatrical direction, which is characterized by extremely developed complex forms. He reveals the world of the hero with all the elements of action in space and time of performance, referring to the Jung archetypes, carnival and tragedy, but presenting them in an unusual, non-standard form.

The relevance of the study is associated with the need to understand the creative concepts of E. Nekrošius, the specifics of his use of traditional and innovative directorial techniques and methods in the context of theatrical art development of the late 20th – early 21st century.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the fact that it reveals the features of directorial techniques and methods of E. Nekrošius based on an art review of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Othello* performances by W. Shakespeare; describes the unique and ambiguous use of metaphors and symbols by the director; reveals the innovative concepts and traditional methods specifics of E. Nekrošius theatre direction; conceptualizes the structure

and levels of stage imagery in the interpretations of Shakespearean tragedies in the context of theatre direction expressive means transformation; analyses elements of directorial expressiveness used by E. Nekrošius in the process of their transformation into compositional poetical and formative means.

The creative activity of one of the leading theatre directors in the world of the late 20th – early 21st century E. Nekrošius attracts the attention of many foreign and native researchers. For example, A. Maltseva in her research article “The performance of Eimuntas Nekrošius as a director’s play” (Maltseva, 2010) analyses the director’s involvement in “performing” – creating an image in front of the viewer, positioning the stage world of E. Nekrošius as a director’s play. I. Rukhliada (2016) in the research paper “Features of the directing of Eimuntas Nekrošius” defines some aspects of the director’s activity of the artist. Foreign scholars C. Pagani (Pagani, 2002) in the article “*Macbeth* play on the stage of the Nekrošius theatre” and P. Chura (2001) in the publication “Reclaiming Shakespeare: Eimuntas Nekrošius’s Lithuanian *Othello*” and others more thoroughly explore the issues of E. Nekrošius directorial activities. However, Nekrošius theatre phenomenon, the specifics of the director’s methods and techniques of the artist remain insufficiently studied and require thorough research from the perspective of modern art history.

The purpose of the article

The purpose of the article is to reveal the specifics of the director’s interpretation of Shakespeare’s plays *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Othello* by E. Nekrošius.

It is planned to consider the features of the directing techniques and methods of E. Nekrošius based on the art review of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Othello* performances by W. Shakespeare, to characterize the director’s unique and meaningful use of metaphors and symbols, as well as to reveal the specifics of innovative concepts and traditional methods of E. Nekrošius theatrical direction.

Research methodology. An interdisciplinary approach was applied, which allowed a comprehensive examination of E. Nekrošius direction phenomenon. To solve formulated tasks, general scientific and specified scientific cognition methods were used: typologically-structural (to identify and structure classification of the basic principles of the relationship between specific elements of E. Nekrošius direction tools) a method of art review (to identify the specifics of the main components of E. Nekrošius director’s activity and the artist’s contribution to development of contemporary European theatrical art); a method of artistic and compositional analysis of stage plays (to justify the relations’ system between the director and the author of a dramatic work from the point of view of an artistic and integral dramatic performance formation), etc.

Presentation of the main material

Innovative ways of expression, a unique worldview and vision of theatrical space, dramatic composition of character direction, establishing connections with modernity, performance autonomy as works of art, original, many-sided, emotionally influential metaphors and characters distinguished E. Nekrošius’s plays during the time of his work at the State Youth Theatre of Lithuanian (1977–1991). In 1998, the director created his own theatre Meno Fortas, the first years of which were marked by the premieres of famous Shakespearean tragedies – *Macbeth* (1999) and *Othello* (2001), as well as the staging of the play *Hamlet* – a staging by E. Nekrošius for the Lithuanian International Life Festival in 1997, where the artist offers innovative, unconventional conceptual solutions for theatrical direction and scenery.

Contemporary and foreign art and theatre experts consider as the characteristic features of E. Nekrošius direction the active use of the scene study method during play production; pronounced metaphoricity and symbolism; “play with a thing”; the presence of direct and figurative meanings; musicality; flexibility; “vivid” improvisation and vivid acting ratings; rich and multifunctional use of natural materials (sand, water, fire, ice, etc.), as well as unique poetry (Rukhliada, 2016, p. 1000).

In order to identify and comprehend the specifics of directorial techniques and methods of E. Nekrošius, the article uses the concept of “multiagent effects” – an allegorical concept. The performances of the Shakespearean tragedies by the Lithuanian director are considered as complex art systems, interacting, but independent (“multiagent”) processes that are created and coordinated by the artist. According to the Italian director E. Barba (Odin Teatret, Denmark), *Hamlet* is a play that made the name of E. Nekrošius well-known in the European theatre society.

E. Nekrošius stated that the theatre director “must know how to read the production vertically, as if it was a musical arrangement” (Valentini, 2000, p. 50), because, in his opinion, the performance should “speak”

at several levels thanks to the use of meaning systems to achieve a combined, single effect. For example, a powerful musical score develops simultaneously with many sound effects, expanding the range of non-verbal audio messages from the director to the viewer.

The elegant use of fire, water and soil is the characteristic feature of E. Nekrošius directorial style: “I don’t think about pagan culture, but I spend a lot of time in a Lithuanian village constantly seeing fire, water and soil, so it’s natural for me to use them in productions. Such an environment is closer to me” (Valentini, 2000, p. 50). In Hamlet’s monologue, the director creates an extraordinary atmosphere of suffering in which thoughts of suicide take on much more meaning than a philosophical hypothesis. A. Mamontovas (Hamlet) plays under a chandelier, which is made of ice crystals and burning candles – hot wax and ice water drip onto him during the entire monologue. The white shirt that the ghost brought to his son turns out to be paper – it falls apart on Hamlet, like a wet napkin. According to the director conception, suicide under such conditions seems to be a fairly calm alternative to Prince of Denmark.

Critics noted that the whole world of the Hamlet play is riddled with “the frozen idea of revenge, a total icy ghost that appears everywhere, at the tempo that slows down, in voices that whisper from nowhere, in the defencelessness of life, in the absence of a difference between alive and dead characters (Pesochinskii, 2018).

The director seeks to express maximum meaning with minimal use of stage means. Thus, there are definitions with many meanings in a continuous bias of the value from one semantic field to another. A symbol, like an image and colour, has a double meaning, physical and mental reality. According to D. Raboni (1997), the director performs the production together with Empedocles (a representative of mechanical materialism in ancient philosophy who professed the philosophy of fire) and Ballard, referring to the classical teachings of the Persocrats, spreading symbols around four elements (water, air, soil, fire) of naturalists’ philosophical tradition. The Italian theatre critic focuses on the fact that the productions of E. Nekrošius are deprived of the trivially symbolic: “objects, images and movements are to some extent inevitable as elements of symbolic necessity... the astonishment with which we perceive them is immediately doubled by the feeling of fatality, as if our subconscious already struck by them” (p. 29).

The philosophical stage of E. Nekrošius recalls and evokes an atmosphere of archaic, mythological times, a pre-Socratic state in which four elements are combined. K. Pagani (2002) notes that the indicated directorial technique for specific metaphors is very appropriate precisely in the process of Shakespearean dramaturgy production – verbal scenery or “scenes” of his tragedies go back to the ancient art of memory (p. 7). The memory theatre is a rhetorically imaginary mean that contributed to the materialization of mental phenomena and their transformation into words (the Shakespeare Globe Theatre was modelled on it). In the *Macbeth* play – a drama of conscience – dramatic intervention in the text was carried out by strengthening the narrative, concentrating it on the two main characters – Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, in whose images the feelings are polymorphically balanced with other components. According to V. Valentini, the narrative breath of E. Nekrošius productions approaches the breath of the novel, since its nonlinear time takes place in several orders or “temporary poly-modality” (Valentini, 1999, p. 88).

Staging of Shakespearean tragedies by E. Nekrošius does not provide an unambiguous and rationalistic interpretation – they are based on magic, mysterious, mystical and esoteric. The visual context of the director never disappears, but an original is visible through it, revealing to the viewer the specifics of the director’s rethinking of the work in parallel with the representation of the author’s idea.

In *Macbeth* by E. Nekrošius, Shakespearean tragedy is presented outside the framework of the codified tradition, distinguished by the presence of aesthetics, philosophy, emotion and cosmology. The visual element is represented by extremely strong image symbolism. Theatre critics defined the stylistic mixture and the aesthetic concept of the director’s performances as the style of the “baroque barbarian” – “this is the style that, when emptied, makes the production material dense, inspired and deformed. In this magical environment, the director fleshes out the sharp parables about two vulnerable creatures who cannot restrain the mind and feelings in contact with powers. He does not judge the reality of ghosts or the morality of his heroes, emphasizing that crime can never be justified” (Bloom, 1999, p. 145).

In his interpretation of *Macbeth*, E. Nekrošius created a picturesque universe, the elements of which are wood, stones, water, smoke, metal and mirrors. The aesthetics of silence dominates there, more vibrant than in other directorial productions of Shakespeare’s plays.

The main symbols of the performance, which have extremely strong dramatic significance, are a tree (the personification of wisdom and superhuman knowledge, which the main characters lost, as once Adam and Eve; during the banquet scene, Banquo’s shadow is represented by the tree), stones (in Christian symbolism they are associated with the death penalty – it is not by chance that the main character constantly finds himself

under a cascade of stone rain; in the main episode, when he reflects on the murder alone, the scene is covered with stones, symbolizing the burden of sin) and a mirror (the most disturbing metaphor, a demonic instrument, a symbol that appears in one of the visions caused by the witches, and when Macbeth decides to kill Duncan, he does this by directing the dagger into the mirror): “the eternal story of Macbeth and his bloody crown is presented like in a dark mirror” (Colomba, 1999). It is the mirror that is associated with the demonic and magical tradition, evil superhuman abilities: “in the background the mirrors are covered with an imitation of fairy castles, and two chests hang from the ceiling, which, combined with requiem music and birds chirping, convey the boredom of the passing time” (Quadri, 1999, p. 13).

The Italian critic V. Valentini, reflecting on the use of sound characteristic by E. Nekrošius, emphasizes that in his theatre hidden means of expression perform a function in which voices, whispers, cries are intertwined with opera arias, familiar quotes from classical works and specific nature sounds, which combines action and gives the play a plasticity, painting its moods in grotesque and lyrical tones (Tuliševskaitė's, 2000, p. 54).

For example, in *Othello*, the sounds of rain, thunder, a fiery wind, seagulls, doors that open and close, the sound of water, the sound of the piano, trumpets and squeezebox played by actors and a recorded symphonic score, are used by the director with different intensities in order to focus on temporary shifts in drama, showing psychological changes.

The movements of the actors are intensified, turning into powerful and intriguing postmodern dances. According to critics, the choice of E. Nekrošius for the role of Desdemona the 24-year-old Lithuanian ballet star E. Špokaitė emphasizes the obvious contrast of generations between the main characters and allows Desdemona to express strong emotions by means of choreographic expressiveness – her graceful movements are contrasted with Othello's soldierly appearance (V. Bagdonas). “The strong sexual nature of love between Othello (Bagdonas) and Desdemona (Špokaitė) is prompted in an erotically protracted duet that includes themes of violence and tenderness, domination and submission” (Chura, 2001, p. 26). Since forces that are beyond her control or understanding repel Desdemona from Othello, she uses dance to restore her power over the man.

Dominant in this performance are visual symbols: a significant number of metaphors (for example, Othello's sword), the contrast between light and dark, doors that do not open, four elements and opposite colours have universal significance.

According to theatrical critic G. Vasinauskaitė, *Othello* by E. Nekrošius is “a representation of visual contrasts – black and white, movement and stasis, horizontal and vertical”; the reviewer highly appreciates the interconnection of many forms of metaphors and their expediency as an expression of the general plan of the play (Vasinauskaitė, 2000, p. 3). However, some art experts reject the director's “generic eclecticism”, claiming that his efforts to “strengthen” or “materialize” the drama – a form of disguise and an insignificant substitute for the dramatic effect - a brutal attempt to indicate a meaning that is not actually presented on the stage. P. Chura emphasizes that there is more than one active locus of drama in the play – since not all of the many symbols and actions in the production are interpreted by the viewer - their influence is maximum at the subconscious level, the director pays considerable attention to textual substantiation (Chura, 2001, p. 28).

P. Chura notes that the dramatic text of W. Shakespeare is only one of many instruments that E. Nekrošius used to convey meaning, and this fact is emphasized by long moments of silence in *Othello* play – the play develops slowly, and with more than four hours of production timing less than half is reading the text (Chura, 2001, p. 29). The director uses the “play in play” technique in the process of staging which is built on an active ensemble movement to music or other sounds, as well as pantomimic rather long episodes taking place in silence: “Silence seems to the viewer as an appropriate moment of expression, combines sensations, feelings, comprehension, abstract and allegorical that describes and organizes the modern classicism of the Nekrošius's theatre” (Valentini, 2000, p. 51).

Since the directing of E. Nekrošius is aimed at supporting and preserving the national culture (in one of the interviews, the director emphasizes that he does not believe in a multicultural orientation, and people should develop their roots in their own culture, deeply immersed in it) (Valentini, 2000, p. 51), he organically combines objects of traditional ethnic Lithuanian culture with other elements of the director's typical dramatic vocabulary (we have in mind four main elements – soil, air, fire and water). Lithuanian gelds are traditional wooden mills; in the performance they are the most universal requisites, since all the elements are embodied in them.

The uniqueness of the author's interpretation of E. Nekrošius is manifested in the fact that he positions Othello's insecurity not as a result of his marginal social status: the director emphasizes that the protagonist is a soldier, not a moor from Venice (the skin colour of the actor does not change).

Macbeth play by E. Nekrošius was criticized by critics as an illusive interpretation of W. Shakespeare, touching on metaphysics – “metaphysical dream in black” (Marescotti, 1999, p. 7).

The Shakespearean tragedies directed by E. Nekrošius are distinguished by their symbolic attention to natural elements and their altered states. This almost magical alchemical operation affects the energetic state: if in *Hamlet* the demiurges of action are ice water, and fire turns into black dust of coal, and in *Othello* shapeless and airy objects such as water and wind dominate, then in *Macbeth* attention is paid to the earthly element, which is personified by wood and stones. State-changing objects become carriers of the primary power of elements, metaphors, the conveying of meaning, preserving the effect of occult presence – the director creates a unique atmosphere in which wood seems to be the most durable material.

Conclusions

The Nekrošius’s interpretation of Shakespeare’s tragedies *Hamlet* (1997), *Macbeth* (1999) and *Othello* (2000) speaks for the dominance of his fundamental creativity principle – the ability to convincingly and symbolically represent the relationship between ethnic Lithuanian and world culture, positioning contact with the dramatic text of Shakespeare as an essential factor. In the creative activity of E. Nekrošius, the symbolic in the object prevails over the word. The metaphors with which the director builds a complex space of performances are ambiguous, they undergo a variety of interpretations and levels of reading. The same symbols and signs are presented to the viewer with different perspectives; each item on the stage is a sign and symbol, a carrier of meaning.

The prospects for further researches are a comprehensive review of E. Nekrošius’s directorial activities from the perspective of contemporary art history.

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The article was received by the editorial office: 22.11.2019

**ЕКЛЕКТИЧНІСТЬ
«МУЛЬТИАГЕНТНИХ ЕФЕКТІВ»
В ІНТЕРПРЕТАЦІЯХ
ШЕКСПІРІВСЬКИХ ТРАГЕДІЙ
РЕЖИСЕРА Е. НЯКРОШЮСА**

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Мета статті – виявити специфіку інтерпретації п'єс В. Шекспіра «Гамлет» (1997), «Макбет» (1999) та «Отелло» (2000) режисером Е. Някрошюсом, проаналізувати особливості його творчих методів і прийомів. Методологія дослідження. Застосовано міждисциплінарний підхід і такі наукові методи: типологічно-структурний (для структурування основних принципів взаємозв'язку елементів режисерського інструментарію Е. Някрошюса); метод мистецтвознавчого аналізу (для висвітлення специфіки основних складників режисерської діяльності Е. Някрошюса); метод художньо-композиційного аналізу сценічних творів (для обґрунтування системи взаємин між режисером та автором драматичного твору в контексті формування художньо-цілісного полотна драматичної вистави) й ін. Наукова новизна. Виявлено особливості режисерських прийомів та методів Е. Някрошюса на основі аналізу вистав «Гамлет», «Макбет» та «Отелло» В. Шекспіра; охарактеризовано унікальне й багатозначне використання режисером метафор та символів; з'ясовано специфіку новаторських концепцій і традиційних методів театральної режисури Е. Някрошюса; розглянуто структуру та рівні сценічної образності в інтерпретаціях шекспірівських трагедій у контексті трансформації виражальних засобів театральної режисури; здійснено аналіз елементів режисерської виразності Е. Някрошюса. Висновки. Інтерпретація шекспірівських трагедій «Гамлет», «Макбет» та «Отелло» Е. Някрошюсом засвідчує домінування основоположного принципу його творчості – здатності переконливо й символічно репрезентувати взаємовідносини між етнічною литовською і світовою культурою, позиціонує контакт із драматичним текстом В. Шекспіра як надважливий фактор. У творчості Е. Някрошюса символічне в об'єкті превалює над словом. Метафори в постановках режисера багатозначні, вони піддаються різноманітним інтерпретаціям та рівням прочитання. Одні й ті ж символи та знаки представлені глядачу з різними перспективами; кожен предмет на сцені – це знак та символ, носій значення.

Ключові слова: Е. Някрошюс; театральна режисура; інтерпретація; еkleктика; драматургія В. Шекспіра

**ЭКЛЕКТИЧНОСТЬ
«МУЛЬТИАГЕНТНЫХ ЭФФЕКТОВ»
В ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИИ
ШЕКСПИРОВСКИХ ТРАГЕДИЙ
РЕЖИССЕРА Э. НЯКРОШЮСА**

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Цель статьи – выявить специфику интерпретации пьес У. Шекспира «Гамлет» (1997), «Макбет» (1999) и «Отелло» (2000) режиссером Э. Някрошюсом, проанализировать особенности его творческих методов и приемов. Методология исследования. Применен междисциплинарный подход и такие научные методы: типологически-структурный (для структурирования основных принципов взаимосвязи между специфическими элементами режиссерского инструментария Э. Някрошюса); метод искусствоведческого анализа (для освещения специфики главных составляющих режиссерской деятельности Э. Някрошюса, а также определение его вклада в развитие современного европейского театрального искусства); метод художественно-композиционного анализа сценических произведений (для обоснования системы взаимоотношений между режиссером и автором драматического произведения в контексте формирования художественно-цельного полотна драматического спектакля) и др. Научная новизна. Выявлены особенности режиссерских приемов и методов Э. Някрошюса на основе анализа спектаклей «Гамлет», «Макбет» и «Отелло» У. Шекспира; охарактеризовано уникальное и многозначное использование режиссером метафор и символов; выяснена специфика новаторских концепций и традиционных методов театральной режиссуры Э. Някрошюса; рассмотрена структура и уровни сценической образности в интерпретациях шекспировских трагедий в контексте трансформации выразительных средств театральной режиссуры; осуществлен анализ элементов режиссерской выразительности Э. Някрошюса. Выводы. Интерпретация шекспировских трагедий «Гамлет», «Макбет» и «Отелло» Э. Някрошюсом свидетельствует о доминировании основного принципа его творчества – способности убедительно и символически представлять взаимоотношения между этнической литовской и мировой культурой, позиционируя контакт с драматическим текстом У. Шекспира как важнейший фактор. В творчестве Э. Някрошюса символическое в объекте превалирует над словом. Метафоры в постановках режиссера многозначные, поддающиеся разнообразным интерпретациям и уровням прочтения. Одни и те же символы и знаки представлены зрителю с различными перспективами; каждый предмет на сцене – это знак и символ, носитель значения.

Ключевые слова: Э. Някрошюс; театральная режиссура; интерпретация; еkleктика; драматургія У. Шекспіра