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Drama year one
Introduction to Performance

Q 9.

"There is a saying that women have always made spectacles of themselves. However, it is only recently, and intermittently, that they have made spectacles themselves.(Kruger) Discuss."

"Women have long been the point of its (NB:of theory) spectacular exclusion at best a voice-off..."¹
"...that even women have not been able to hear and formulate our own questions to meet our own experiences. Women have been unable even to experience our own experience."²

Introduction

So far, in our civilisation, women haven't had the chance to make spectacles of themselves nor make one's themselves ,because they have so far been or embodied the spectacle(s)."Spectacle-making" is an important part of our existence, even if it is making a spectacle of one-self or saying this about another. It brings out certain revelations. These 'truths', however, do not always correspond with the person they are attributed to.

I Image of women by traditional Patriarchy
"Male Reason/female emotion(spectacle)?"

In the light of intellectual,artistic (both incl. Sexual-political) and economic (incl. Sexual and reproductive) domination by the Patriarchy we in fact have learned more about traditions of a culture of male dominance than we have of (the ideal[s]of) 'woman' through her representation in fiction.The reason I use the phrase 'traditions...dominance' instead of 'man' is because it is possible that in the canon of western male dominated literatures when talking of 'man' the meaning 'human' could be implied - an ideal which is supposed to be slightly separated from the culture which gives its gendered position of 'right(eousness)' and power (which oppresses woman).When talking of 'woman' in a descriptive, (and here -historically- immediately evaluative) male and often,to say the least, patronising voice, this woman is referred to as an attribute to man (ie. Not hu-man) with nedative qualities and so the essence of 'woman' is only discussed in negation³ to or as an attribute to 'man' which is the biological-cultural power behind 'human' (only originating from culture),which is supposed to be somehow male because of the 'male' cultural dominance behind it,but which to me seems ambivalent and indicative of a hypocritical crack or 'system' which is in essence based on a hypocritical

assumption.

To explain to us what we should really be and think, Strindberg expresses a similarly arrogant idea, in his 'Preface to Miss Julie'; and so presents us with 'The Half-woman'. Awkward as this term is (for what would 'The Full-woman' be since it is unattainable if always set up against Man-the-Ideal). "The half-woman is a type who thrusts herself forward and sells herself nowadays for power, decorations... as formerly she used to do for money." "So, evidently, there is no need for women to progress - in fact there is no way out as "she involves herself in an absurd struggle in which she falls."⁵

A general ambivalence pervades also in the whole idea of male supremacy over women -patriarchy -manifesting in 'Women as jokes or spectacles' - where as Freud and psychoanalysis would have it⁶ the making of women by men into jokes would in turn show their being objects of desire or reprimand (mother) for the men and could work as a mirror to show discrepancies in (ie. In their assertion and dogma of) their gender-identity, sexuality and position as 'being in the right' -being able to evaluate women as somehow ridiculous. Why should they be ridiculous? In other words when we read or experience a play such as "A Doll's House" or "Miss Julie", we will undoubtedly see elements in there which could be even taken as "Pro-woman" (eg. Miss Julie's or Nora's final decisive actions), but still nevertheless as defined by male standards will tell us more about the social conditionings of the author, ambivalence in his 'strong' argument in female characterisation, the power he exerts through this piece, his motives for the previous, and so on.

II Image of women by men who want to embody womanhood⁷

"There is a recognition that traditionally, when women have been allowed to partake of the dominant culture, they have been indoctrinated in masculine values and ways of seeing..."⁸

There is an opposition to the 'traditional' trend of thought presented in part I, be this theoretical-ideological, cultural, or creative. The war between the sexes has not only been one of 'binary-opposites'⁹, but with qualities in common, they have also influenced each other in an intertwining way, as have the sexes among themselves, men perhaps most notably - being the dominant culture. This would be seen as a type of underground movement while not necessarily consciously so, its active agency by men shouldn't be stressed upon too heavily.

What then are the images of woman as presented in opposition to traditional patriarchy? Will they correspond to real or useful images (even if ideal images) of women? What motives do men have in representing women in a BETTER light? How do the traditions of cross-dressing on and off-stage, all-male casts (sponsored by the Roman Catholic church, among others) treat the image of women and how do exceptions to the rule (in periods when gender presentation became more set and women were 'let' perform) such as the actresses Elizabeth Robins and Charlotte Cushman portraying male figures affect the gender-identities of the audience and creation of a new

positive, independent image towards women?

One could argue that the difference between a male actor embodying a female character today and before is that now we are increasingly realising that representing gender is not a matter only of presenting stereotypical, bias visual methods with which a (fe/male)majority will agree. Also, the splintering of the concept 'gender' into other than binary opposites and rather into a deeper understanding of complementary forces or elements shared by each to construct itself¹⁰ will allow for a multiple, more free and also visually more stimulating presentation. one can see this in the work of performance groups such as Split Britches. The sex of the performers should in our so-called post-modern era, to my understanding, not be of primary importance. Out-of-performance, the importance of all of Split Britches's performers being women (planned or not) will be of more political importance, though, and its statement(s) could be read in many ways.

However, as the possibilities increase and 'permission' (given by cultural standards) stretches, there will inevitably turn out to be images of woman represented by man, which someone or no-one will accept. Whatever the defining criteria or element in question, we are approaching the problem of representation or theory about some-body one is not¹¹, and the difference between a representation of a woman and a woman representing.

There is a definitive danger that in trying to contribute to a woman's movement what will eventually be the result will be a new form of patriarchy¹². As the saying goes, "the road to Hell is paved with good intentions", and in this new, exiting world of re-learning (about) each other and men and women exchanging and writing more openly we (and women could turn out to be the dominant side also) could slide into using one's own vocabulary, or staying on your side of the "difference" (ie. not acknowledging the need to step out of one's existence, so to speak, to discover the other [coproreality]).

III Image of women by women :should we see more unity from here than from the other side?

Nell: "You've heard Howard's had a heart attack?"¹³

Who are the benefactors of a theatre and performance by women and another labelled 'feminist'? Is it the everywoman or the 'woman as dissident'? Are the benefactors women at all and are they even born yet? Will (and I am not arguing that they won't) a majority of women understand the special nature of their condition¹⁴ - and if they conceive it not, will this give men more ammunition to draw attention to them as inferior (neglecting the male incapability to sensibly describe themselves either)? When represented on stage or screen, will the female audience automatically respond to what is being represented - should that be theatre made by women and possibly with a feminist message?

Something is being neglected here, though. In part I in traditional male images of women we saw a simultaneous reprimanding and fear of reprisal from and similitude with woman in men. In part II the possibility of a more complex gender-identity influencing (positively and negatively) the portrayal of women and the danger of this becoming 'new patriarchy'. Here, when considering the implications of the theoretical frameworks of our time (the postmodernist, semiotic, feminist, psychoanalytic and engaging/marxist/political views) while focusing mainly on spectacles by women and their respective reception, one will eventually see a familiar joining or melting together of enterprises and also uniting of 'form' to what Alice Jardine calls 'Gynesis'.¹⁵

This brings with it a new way of looking at things academically and artistically, whether one considers it to be more feminine than post-modernist, the idea of 'absence' and the 'non-savoir' and the "other-than-themselves, which has been coded as feminine, woman"¹⁶. In modern theatre and performance as with, especially, experimental groups such as The Wooster Group and Split Britches this has become definitive, if to say so is appropriate and no-pun-intending. The wish to create, as Roland Barthes would say, a polyphonic voice or 'polysemy' is one central element or method of performing gender and era in absence and thus a means to get to 'feminine/female'. Wanting to destroy all or most potential master narratives in case they would stunt possibilities of the (living) text, exposing the intertextuality of the event, the writing of the event, space-time displacement in playing with reality and stage/performance-space reality and hidden seriousness or lack of in the midst of self-referential irony and multi-cultural referentiality - all elements of expressing and experiencing different realities/bodies.

All of this flux of information and its baffling effect on the public - male or female - has an additional function. We all are accustomed to ways of reading through what is called the male dominated gaze¹⁷: not only to a desired feminine object but, in the whole construction of what is presented. In this way in its closed frame, film would so far be more masculine than theatre in its choice and lack of one-sided direct sexual ideology/orientation. "My meaning is in the piece itself... I don't have it." (Elizabeth LeCompte)¹⁸.

Conclusion

Bohr : "Not to criticise, Margarethe, but you have a tendency to make everything personal"¹⁹

Lysistrata: "[Myrrhines] I don't think much of people who come in late when such an important matter is to be discussed."²⁰

Demand for exactness and confused parody? In the opening paragraph of the book "A Woman speaks", Anais Nin, when asked what she would wish for, replies: "Faith". To me, this encapsulates at least one perception of what could be known as and sought after by 'écriture feminine', 'gynesis', mythical representations of 'l'Autre' as a way forward in 'free' (fe/male - I reserve the right to use here both identities) dramatic-

performative expression: something all-encompassing in its vagueness, a totality. Here, spectacles and writing by women purposely posit themselves over the previous world-order 'of explanation'. Irony is part of the inevitable reversal-process of some elements in this revolutionary stream. It could be possible that everything cannot be explained (at all or 'by theory').

"There is a saying that men have always made spectacles themselves. However, it is only recently, and intermittently, that men have made spectacles of themselves - and so by help of women."²¹ It may just be that for the male identity to develop or for either to survive it will have to in turn attach itself to 'the feminine'. To my mind, one of the weaker points of a male dominated tradition of science (incl. lit.) is the inability of the Scientific and literary method of analysis to go beyond the micro-level. As is the revelation that in 'male science'²² the unapproachable will inevitably come in the form of the point where all is exhausted, explained (in a 'system'). This is when and where from the male point of view an existentialist ("boxed-in") experience will take place - the system will reveal itself for what it is and usually what will happen will be a paradigm-shift. In place of a 'system', though, could be a genre or gender-identity.

So, all the assumptions made - incurious volume in the nineteenth century - about the passivity of the female and The activity of the male²³ will be reversed out of necessity only it will not be hu/man leading this change, it will Be one step further: a creator of human/ity.

Still, this is not enough - to stick with a purely un-analytical and 'unscientific' reality with another gender (male) In marginal status, as Kristeva puts it, would be to lose possible uses of the localised, the specific and bias. (of course the essence and possible use of these would be different in this 'even newer' reality as also perhaps the traditional concepts of woman and child-bearer/mother.)²⁴

- ¹ From "Feminist Literary Criticism" ,ed. Mary Eagleton (Longman, 1991) p. 204 Stephen Heath's essay "Male Feminism" : 'Theory, we know, ... speech on love.' Nota Bene my inclusion.
- ² Mary Eagleton, Ibid. p.5 ,quoting Mary Daly and Marguerite Duras (1973) on their views on 'theory'.
- ³ Reading Julia Kristeva's political reality 'side' of her refusal of gender categories, p.163 in Toril Moi's "Sexual-Textual Politics" (Routledge, 1995). Although Kristeva goes further, as I do, here it is important not to neglect this aspect of 'woman' as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has pointed out.
- ⁴ A. Strindberg's 'Preface to Miss Julie' p.60 in "Miss Julie and Other Plays", trans. M. Robinson, Oxford World's Classics 1998.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Loosely related to Freud's "Jokes and their connection to the sub-conscious" ,and is connected to the eastern idea (yin-yang) of a possibility of BOTH genders being inherent in a subject (as with H. Cixous), and the idea of gender's social-construction, in pt. II of the essay, How far the idea is Freud's, I do not know - disclaimer.
- ⁷ The heading or subtitle should be taken with a certain reservation. It does not propose to be exact in its terms: the last part - 'embody' - should be taken as also meaning 'can reach theoretically'.
- ⁸ Mark Fortier "Theory/Theatre - an Introduction" (Routledge, 1997), quoting Judith Fetterly in "An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre" by Gayle Austin (Routledge, 1995).
- ⁹ (- logic) nor ,I will argue, only of such opposing qualities, by Helene Cixous' term-use.
- ¹⁰ As offered in their own ways, in opposition to Freud, by Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous in particular. p.108 in Toril Moi: "Sexual-Textual Politics": 'Indeed one of the reasons why Cixous is so keen to get rid of the old opposition between masculine and feminine is her strong belief in the inherently bisexual nature of all human beings.'
- ¹¹ I am here consciously neglecting the previous questions of construction of gender-identity & eg. questions of representation by transsexuals etc. and focusing on the speculation on theory of essence of the feminine/female by male thinkers
- ¹² One of the ideas in Stephen Heath's essay "Male Feminism" , p .197 in "Feminist Literary Criticism" , the idea of fetishisation of feminism: "togetherness".
- ¹³ 'Nell' in Caryl Churchill's "Top Girls" p.66 (Methuen student edition 1991).
- ¹⁴ With this potentially explosive statement I am attempting to relate to Simone de Beauvoir's idea of the 'prison of child-bearing' (my paraphrase) and actualising the power of independence and personality gained from defiance or revolution against such conditions (now) which would fulfill what the -as I take it here - method or tool of 'feminism' is striving for in this cultural-political sense.
- ¹⁵ Alice Jardine: "Gynesis: configurations of woman and modernity" (Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), p.15
- ¹⁶ paraphrasing A. Jardine (on Derrida and Saussure) in "Feminist Literary Criticism", p.9
- ¹⁷ Laura Mulvey: "Visual pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in "The Sexual Subject" (Routledge, 1992).
- ¹⁸ Elizabeth LeCompte interviewed by Nick Kaye in "C20th performance reader", eds. Huxley & Witts, (Routledge, 1997), (She continues) "...I'm not going to now make meaning separately from that piece for you. Again, it's not a thing where I'm withholding that - I don't have it."
- ¹⁹ Michael Frayn: "Copenhagen" (Methuen Drama, 1998), Act two, p. 75.
- ²⁰ In Aristophanes' "Lysistrata" trans. H. Sommerstein in "Lysistrata/The Acharnians/The Clouds" (Penguin, 1995).
- ²¹ re-written from quotation by Loren Kruger in her essay "Dis-play's the thing", Theatre Journal, vol. 42, no. 1, March 1990, p.27. Reprinted in the keynotes of "Contemporary Feminist Theatre" by Elizabeth Goodman (Routledge, 1993).
- ²² Luce Irigaray: "Ethique de la difference sexuelle" in Finnish; "Sukupuolieron Etiikka" (Gaudeamus, 1996), p.142.
- ²³ eg. The like of direct ones by Strindberg and indirect and again ambivalent ones by one of his influences, Friedrich Nietzsche.
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