

Amateur Theatre

The Way to Oz

By Mihaela Iancu

February 3, 2011

The show had been over for fifteen minutes. We had descended to the basement, to change and drink a few bottles of wine. We were all troupe members and a few close friends.

The walls were spinning along with me in the colours I had painted together with her a winter before, when we offered to decorate everything and fell asleep on old sacks, after she had insisted on playing something by Nick Cave to me.

I rest on the only sofa in the room slightly larger than a living-room in a block of flats. I close my eyes and can hear her clear voice.

"But it is me there", she tells the new-comers. "Have you ever thought this Miriam, who is now drinking with you, might actually not be the real one?" Then she gives a ghastly laugh.

Before the show, I had signaled her with my finger from behind the curtain, attached with wire, separating the tiring room from the room where we were. I handed her out the book, I had leant against the discarded costumes huddled together and I asked her to read a poem by William Blake. I saw her blush as in the train of a confession I had made to her and only her. To know that she would think of me, that she would try to understand me, was a pleasure by which the elation definitively conquered me, no matter how petty I acknowledged in passing that was.

I look at her, exhausted, the leg of the glass propped on my knee. I wait for her to get the courage and turn the eyes to me, to find me and not to be able to stand my eyes for more than a second. I can see how she caresses the nearest cheek so that to make me understand that that caress is for me, if I want it, if I decide to say "Yes".

Miriam is twenty years old. She looks like the woman I would dream of in high school, when I used to wear flowery shirts and I was the best friend of the girls I wanted to kiss - in fact, only sheer approximations of hers, I must admit to myself. She seems unaffordable to others. She makes me feel privileged and important. How much I would have loved her if we had met in high school. I, full of desire and completely submissive, she, identical to that of today, almost a woman, without any secrets, with all that power on the stage, with this unbearable shyness when she returns behind the curtain.

We first met four years ago, on a train. She was going to an amateur theater festival, I was going home. We were both seating near the window. I got off ahead of her, in the same station. I reached out and helped her with the suitcase. She invited me to her show that night. I didn't recognize her. She looked straight into my eyes when she said "I no longer take it from scratch. For anyone." I didn't wait for her at the tiring room. I was looking for the girl on the train, and it didn't seem to me that I could find her too soon. I felt betrayed and an outsider.

For the next two years, I didn't see her. We met on that Sunday when I had an audition for the troupe, in the city where she had been living for ten years. I had no idea it was the troupe to which she belonged. We immediately recognized each other, but we did not say anything about the train window in which we had spied on each other's faces. After the director had commented on my monologue, she added, "Do not accept him. He isn't serious. He scares easily."

"Miriam, I accept him and it will be your task to tame him.", he said.

Soon after that episode we made a habit of sleeping on mattresses, on her seventh floor balcony, after sunrise. I would never set myself to talk about the things we would end up talking about. But she would ask me and lying to her was beyond me. What I now felt for her, after all we knew one about each other, I couldn't tell. I wasn't as foolish as to answer myself, though. We had never talked about what was between us, but a tension we would

both feel and which neither of us was ready to sacrifice.

For people like us, it is almost useless to fight the phantasms. You can deceive yourself that there are fewer than there used to be, that you can control yourself more, that eventually you know what to learn from every chance you defied because of all those phantasms. And then, suddenly, there comes a night when you get back in the same streets you would wander, before the same windows, or you simply see her in a car park, with the shopping bags in the hand. And you start afresh. You realize that everything you thought you had buried is more alive than ever. That you haven't forgotten anything, that you miss her presence as much as the day she left. That life goes on, but you always stay behind, like a child who walks too slowly.

I told her one night, although I knew that was wrong.

"You take much after Ana", I said.

She didn't answer. She drank up her glass of wine.

Miriam was actually a sheerer version of Anne. She wouldn't owe anything, she wouldn't insist upon pleasing anyone, she wouldn't hide her demons. But I wouldn't have been able to be near her while she was struggling to make her demons public in a form that you could immediately recognize as being personal. That would have meant to walk with her, holding her hand along the busy avenues, the same boulevards Ana and all the other women who had loved me would pass by, who had rejected me, who had known her from the theaters, from the days when she would struggle and struggle and seemed to remain in place. Tough luck, Miriam, you have too little confidence in yourself.

"Can you absolve me of any responsibility this night?" I ask her as she sits down next to me. She laughs. You would say she's an oasis of happiness. I cuddle and she allows me. What's wrong with that?

"Who are you, Miriam? What do you do to me on stage? Can you see what a plight you brought me in?"

I am a good man. There is nothing wrong.

"You've ruined me, you fix me.", I say.

"Now that everything is over today, I would like...", her voice sounds soft like a piece of plasticine. "I'd like to go out into the street and scream. I could

run all over the town and back. I could bend with my bare hands the copper beam from the head of the bed. Name anything and right this second I am able to do it."

I keep silent.

"I scare you.", she says. And she smiles at me.

"Can you see them? Look at them. They are my close friends and I do not understand why I am like that when I act. What shall I tell them? Shall I tell them the truth?" Shall I tell them that life is terrible and it's awful to thrust a towel into your mouth every time you cry, so that not to be heard by the woman in the next room? "

She drinks directly from the bottle and looks at its label.

"Three years ago, on this sofa, a boy sat in your place. Now he has a child of his own. He was in tears after every show. Often he didn't say more than two lines. We made friends one evening when he told me", she turns to me, "Kiss me. Please, don't judge me, but kiss me. Otherwise I will get terribly sad. And I'm too happy now to let that happen to me." She takes my glass and fills it. "And I kissed him. He cried like a baby."

She reaches it out, but I don't want any drop of alcohol.

"It's hard to just be here, with you, and not to let my mind run to what has happened, what will be, not to think this perfect second will get to an end.

Only when I act, I can really see. That's how I first noticed you. Do you understand? "

No, I couldn't understand.

"Only when I act someone shouts to me every second," Wake up! Look. Don't fancy, check. Look. Don't open your mouth until you have a look. Now say it." And I say."

She finishes the bottle and leaves it down by her feet.

"I've already felt more peaceful, though I've been sitting for only five minutes. Give me other five and everything will disappear. I feel it draining

away. It drains while I'm sitting with you on this sofa, bottle in the hand and I don't know how to stop myself, how to stay, how not to get back to the other Miriam. "

Neither did I want her to return, but what I wanted was subsidiary, even for her.

"Do you understand? What I do to you on stage goes by itself, my dear."

I was losing her.

Translated by: **Anca Iancu** and **Laura Bosnea**

MTTLC, Bucharest University

LiterNet.ro