

17th International Meeting of University Theatres (RITU)

Held in Liège, Belgium, between February 28 and March 4, 2000, this theatre festival presented 16 performances in the course of one week. RITU is the founder of the Association Internationale du Théâtre à l'Université (AITU/IUTA), which has already organized three international world congresses (in Liège, Valleyfield and Quebec). Since 1983 RITU has been hosting more than 125 troupes from 30 different countries, offering panelists a chance to hold intensive workshops and colloquia centering on the relations between the role of the university and the theatre – theory and practice, teaching and research.

The RITU encounter functions as a kind of turntable in which over 150 “actants” (actors, directors, observers, professors) come to exchange ideas and experiences, and to compare and analyze their respective works, related to university theatre and to drama in general. The dialogue between individuals encompasses their institutions, countries and continents. RITU also makes it possible for other international festival organizers to increase the possibilities of “marketing” the exchange and circulation of their troupes around the world.

The subject of this year’s symposium was “Transtheatre: a transcultural theatrical creation” – namely the practice of multiculturalism for the purpose of mutual understanding of peoples through the theatre, with the purpose of making plays accessible to large audiences across social, cultural and linguistic barriers. The performers who participated at Liège could be grouped into a) professionals; b) drama students; and c) students of other disciplines who perform theatre. The performances themselves were eclectic – all languages were allowed, all genres encouraged. This confirmed the openness of this festival to variety and “difference.”

Among the plays, two were from Latin America, and both were most favorably received. Sabina Berman’s *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* was performed by the Teatro Universitario, and the Escuela de Artes Dramáticas de San José, Costa Rica. Nora Glickman’s *Una tal Raquel* was presented by Teatrotaller, the only Hispanic student theatre group at Cornell University.

The performances were held in French, English, Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish and Senegalese. Some had strong emphasis on dance (Université de Nantes, France) and on hybrid explorations in multi-media (Jenny Wetters’ *Leaving Narcissus* from Australia); some were adaptations of classical works, such as Anton Chekhov’s *Three Sisters* performed in Bulgarian by the Educational Theatre of the University of Plovdiv; Heiner Müller’s *Herzstück* (Heartpieces) was performed by Dutch, German and Belgian groups in their respective languages; *Escorial* by Belgian Michel de Ghelderode, performed in Arabic by students from the National Institute of Dramatic Arts in Algeria. There were adaptations of Racine’s classical play *Phèdre* entitled *A Table avec Phèdre*, in French, from Portugal and *Gamlet*, of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, rendered as a surrealist play by Grefewald’s Student University Theatre from Germany. In Yukio Mishima’s *The Tree of the Tropics* (by the Compeigne Technological University group) each role was played simultaneously by two actors, one playing the voice, the other the body. Liège University Theatre closed the festival with *Fiesta chez Abdallah*, in French and Arabic, a collective creation about xenophobia. In addition, a little known play by Pablo Picasso, *Desire trapped by the tails*, was performed by Teatre de L’Entre’Acte from Cracow, Poland.

Professor Robert Germay, director of the University Theatre of Liège should be commended for his superb organization of the events. There were excellent facilities for all participants, as well as organized excursions to Bruges and Brussels. Many of RITU’s practices could profitably be adopted by the U.S. to encourage theatrical production at local universities, since encounters of this nature could make a significant contribution to university communities, as well as to the public in surrounding areas.

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