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Grotesque and the forms of grotesque in the set design of musical "Pippin".

Abstract

In my dissertation I write about a form of grotesque in my set design of the musical "Pippin" in the Musical Theatre in Poznań. I am interested in a grotesque which can be perceived by an audience either as an easier or a more complicated form.

"Pippin" tells a story about Pippin the Small, the youngest son of King Charles the Great. Despite the subject, it is not a historical play, but it simply deals with a problem of looking for the happiness in life. Pippin is searching for the meaning of life in various aspects, such as power, wealth, love or religion, but everything seems to be unimportant for him. He can't find fulfillment of his life. The performance is a grotesque vaudeville in the convention of a folk theatre. The storyteller also plays the main role, just like in the Voltaire philosophical stories. Pippin doesn't find happiness, and the storyteller urges him to set a fire on the stage in the spectacular final. When he doesn't agree, the storyteller rids him of all the magic of the theatre. Pippin stays alone on an empty and dark stage.

This story inspired me to use a grotesque as a style of the set design. The stage looks like a theatre grotto (word "grotesque" comes from the Italian word „grotta", because some ornaments from the times of Nero were found in the basement of his house in Rome), combined with attributes of a Variete theatre. The fair was my main inspiration, as well as a shooting range in an amusement park and nativity scenes. The scenery is battered as it should make an impression that it is used very often and that nobody takes care of it. A shooting range combined with a Variety theatre as a stage to discussing the most important problems of life, all in the convention of

a folk theatre, builds the effect of the grotesque as a main attribute of the performance.

The grotesque is a very strong theatrical mean and without a context grotesque performance may be considered a stupid farce or crank show, and yet Pippin musical is a philosophical drama. The grotesque as a theatrical mean can be recognized by a spectator only if he is properly prepared for it. And there exactly is a place for a stage designer, for the scenery, the props and the lightning. The suggestive setting and packaging will be the key to understand the language of the theatre of absurd and grotesque.