

International Theatre Institute ITI

World Organization for the Performing Arts

UNESCO, 1 Rue Miollis, FR-75732 Paris Cedex 15

info@iti-worldwide.org / www.iti-worldwide.org



Michel Tremblay 2000

More than two thousand years ago Euripides' Electra asked " How should I begin my accusation? How should I end it ? What should go in the middle ? " In this era of euphemism and empty rhetoric, an era in which it is considered better form to spare everyone's feelings than to call things by their names, the cry of Agamemnon's daughter has lost none of its relevance. To accuse. Denounce. Provoke. Disturb. Isn't this the role of theatre ?.

The trend towards universality at all costs and the incessantly harped-upon globalization now so much in vogue that is threatening to reduce our world to the size of a village where uniformity prevails, will certainly not facilitate the role of theatre in our increasingly aseptified society, subjected and ruled from on high by two or three powerful cultural monsters. The insatiable desire to make everything on earth alike will result in everything becoming like nothing on earth.

No, salvation at the beginning of this third millenium will come rather from those small voices being raised in all corners of the world, censuring injustice and, in keeping with the very foundations of theatre, extracting the essence of the human being, distilling and transposing it in order to share it with the whole world. These small voices are coming from Scotland, Ireland, South Africa, Quebec, Norway and New Zealand. They are making their cry of indignation heard everywhere. Sometimes they have a local colour and a distinctive flavour which, it is true, have nothing global about them but at least these voices are genuine. What is more, they speak to everyone because they are addressed in the first place to someone, to a particular audience capable of being moved as it recognizes its own turmoils and troubles, and able to weep for and laugh at itself. And if in the first place the portrait drawn is a true likeness, the whole world will recognize itself.

For the universality of a dramatic text is not to be found in the place in which it was written but in its humanity, in the relevance of its statements and in the beauty of its structure. Writers are not more universal because they are writing in Paris or New York rather than in Chicoutimi or Port-au-Prince. They are universal when, in speaking about something they know well to an audience that is prepared to be self-critical and see itself for what it is, they manage, through the miracle of theatre, yes, by the faith they put in it and by their sincerity, to describe and sing the human soul, delve into its mysteries and restore all its wealth. The universality of Chekhov does not lie in his being Russian but in the genius that enabled him to describe the Russian soul with which all human beings can identify. The same applies to all geniuses and even to simply " good " playwrights. Each line of dialogue written by an author somewhere in the world is universal by definition if it expresses the fundamental cry of Electra : " How should I begin my accusation? How should I end it ? What should go in the middle ? "