RESISTANCE THROUGH CULTURE – GEORGIA AND THE SHAKESPEARE EXPERIENCE

Interview with Professor Manana Anasashvili Georgian film director, theatre director, Professor, Expert of National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Head of Georgian Shakespeare Association, and Head of International Relations at Georgian Film Academy. The interview was conducted on the occasion of Georgia's presence at the Craiova Shakespeare Festival, held in May 2024, in Craiova, by prof. phd. Alexandra Radu in collaboration with Radio Craiova correspondent Claudiu Vasile.

Manana Anasashvili was born on June 16, 1952. In 1969 She graduated from Tbilisi 42nd Ilia Vekua Mathematical School with honors (Gold Medal). While at high school, She became the author and proved mathematical theorem "Determining the last digit of a new number obtained by taking any number into any exponent". In 1975 she graduated from Tbilisi State Medical University with the degree of Doctor-Therapist. Concurrently with the medical school, She studied Art History at the Faculty of Arts at Tbilisi State University (graduated with honors in 1976). After finishing the medical school, she worked as a doctor during for several years. In 1981 Manana Anasashvili graduated with honors from faculty of Theatre Directing at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film University (Lily Ioseliani's studio). Her diploma Stage Production at the Tumanishvili Film Actors Theatre, In The Dark Room (1982) had a very successful run and was periodically staged at the Tumanishvili theatre for 23 years (one of the longest theater production runs in Georgian theatre history). During 1981–2001 and 2003–2005, She worked as an assistant professor and then as a full professor at the Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film University, leading courses of TV/Film Directing and Acting. During 1983-1985 and 1988-2001 periods she worked as a TV/director and the host of TV-show Kinonostalgia at the Georgian Public Broadcasting Company. Between 1985 and 2001 She worked at the Georgian Film Studio Kartuli Pilmi as a cast director and then as a film director. During this period, she worked as a cast-director for an 69th Academy Awards nominated film A Chef in Love by Nana Jorjadze. In 2003 She graduated from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, USA with MA in Arts Administration. At the same time, she was leading the

undergraduate course of Acting by Stanislavski at the same university. In 2005 She won Scholarship from Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of US State department of State and Bradley Foundation scholarship for faculty development program in Liberal Arts teaching methodology and spent one semester as a visiting scholar at the Johns Hopkins University, USA. The same time she was invited as a guest lecturer to teach acting by Stanislavski at George Washington University, USA. Since 2005 she has been a professor of Michigan State University, Ilia State University and AGILE (American-Georgian Initiative for Liberal Education) Joint undergraduate program Liberal Arts , leading several Interdisciplinary courses as well as Shakespeare courses. In 2012 She has been consulting as an expert of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) at the NED Youth for Democracy Project. Between 2013 and 2015 she was the Deputy Head of the Georgian Union of Cinematographers. Since 2019 Manana Anasashvili is heading the International Relations of Georgian Film Academy. She was in 2020 Public Speaking and Voice Trainer at Euronews Georgia.

Professor's Manana's feature film "Only Once" was awarded at the many International Film Festivals.

AR: Dear Professor, you are the Head of the Georgian Shakespeare Association. Why did you take the initiative to establish this association in Georgia and what does Shakespeare represent for Georgia?

MA: - About a hundred years ago, the great Georgian director Kote Marjanishvili and the stage designer Petre Otskheli revolutionized the Georgian cultural world by introducing avant-garde performances of Shakespearean plays, translated into the Georgian language. Of course, their avant-garde initiatives did not please the Stalinist Empire, and Petre Otskheli became victim of oppression. However, Shakespeare continued to be translated and staged in Georgia, as demonstrated by the play that the Tbilisi Youth Theater presented at the May edition of the Shakespeare Festival in Craiova, which is also dedicated to the two great artists. Othello, in the presented vision, is a mixed performance of actors and puppets, which uses the sets and props created a century ago, and it is a production directed by Dimitri Khvtisiashvili and Giya Marghania. Shakespeare thus represents a dialogue between generations, being very current and

extremely often staged in Georgia, over 10 new Shakespearean productions per year. I had the initiative to establish this association some time ago, more than a year ago, and I started looking for conferences, festivals and other cultural events where we could perform with our own vision of Shakespearean theater.

AR: - In addition to the original staging of Othello, other Georgian initiatives and masterful works were presented at the Craiova Festival. Can you tell us what they are about?

MA: - Of course! We all visited with pleasure the exhibition of the Georgian Shakespearean Productions beginning from the 1898, organized and presented at the Festival by the Georgian Ambassade in Romania, trought her Excellency, Ms. Ambassador Tamar Beruchashvili. Thus, we were able to understand the importance of translating the works of the great playwright from English into Georgian and we were able to observe the power that cultural tradition offers. As part of the festival, we also presented a documentary film that we made in 2009 about the life of the great Georgian film director Robiko Sturua.

AR: - The screening of the film about the life and career of Georgian director Robiko Sturua, made by you, ended with a wave of cheers from a hall packed with young Romanians, Georgians, French, English, etc. Did you expect such a strong reaction?

MA: - I know the impact that the power of the example of dedication of an established artist has on young artists, but, I must admit, I was also pleasantly surprised by the euphoria expressed by young people from so many different cultures in one voice. It is illustrative!

AR: - Your film illustrates a line from the Georgian director Robiko Sturua: "I'm fed up with this theater... It seems to me that it squeezed out all the best in me!" (n.AR: the Rustaveli Theater, where the great director was the artistic director for most of his career). What did the great director mean?

MA: - As Robiko Sturua states in the beginning of the film, it is about a "tradition of burning", we artists have no other way than to "burn" at the stake of creation... which "squeezes out" all the best in us.

AR:- You also visited the tribute exhibition "Silviu Purcarete – 50 years of theatre" in Craiova. What feelings did this visit awaken in you?

MA: - The feeling of rediscovery. It is basically an evocation that I also made in my film, with the same instruments and through the same universal language of emotion. Another great European director, a different Shakespeare...or the same..

AR: - How will your collaboration with Romania continue?

MA: - We have already arranged with the director of the Shakespeare Festival in Craiova, Vlad Drăgulescu, for them to visit us in Georgia. (n.AR: The National Theatre in Craiova participated in the Georgian International Festival of Arts in Tbilisi in November 2024). I am sure that there will be many other initiatives. It is not just about Shakespeare...