

FEAST Review

***Regal Literar* – Florentin Streche – June 2026**

In a stage space that transforms the kitchen into a resonance chamber of theatrical memory, "FEAST: a play in one cooking", a text signed by Olivia Negrean and directed by Philip Parr, brings together six female Shakespearean characters in an impossible encounter, between fiction, domestic ritual, confession and discourse on destiny, in a show that starts from simple, almost everyday gestures, to open one of the most sensitive questions of contemporary theater: what happens to the characters after the page closes on them, after tradition fixes them, after the centuries repeat their story until their suffering becomes cultural heritage? Emilia, Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, Imogen, Lady Anne Neville and Isabella, six figures detached from different dramatic universes, arrive at a place without precise contours, called as if by a memory older than their will, and this meeting, which at first seems just the pretext for a dinner prepared together, acquires the density of an intimate judgment on history, on the author, on the canon and on the freedom to look anew at what literature has consecrated. Cooking metamorphoses into language, the table becomes a stage, the ingredients become signs, and each character brings their story, guilt, wound or amazement, namely their own way of understanding the relationship between the past and the possibility of a more just world.

From the very first moments of the show, the central idea is outlined. The characters do not understand exactly why they were called there. They repeat the annual ritual of the meeting, cook, drink wine, remember and discuss. Emilia is the only one who seems to keep the memory of all these successive reunions, becoming a kind of guardian of the collective experience. The question that constantly floats in the air is a fundamental one: if you could change something in your own story, would you do it? The text avoids quick answers and prefers to build a true tribunal of memory. Each character reanalyzes their existence, reevaluates their choices and looks lucidly at the way it has been interpreted over the centuries.

" Then the question is simple. If we could change everything, would we? If we could rewrite our stories? If we could avoid suffering? If we could save lives? If we could prevent mistakes? "

Isabella's monologue in "Measure for Measure" is among the most powerful moments of the show. She rebels against interpretations that have reduced her to the image of a rigid, emotionless woman and excessively concerned with morality. Her voice becomes the voice of all women who have been criticized for their firmness of principles. Isabella speaks about the price of integrity in a world dominated by the abuse of power and the impossibility of finding a solution that does not involve sacrifice. What is impressive is not so much the moral argument, but the vulnerability with which the character acknowledges her own doubts. The show thus manages to transform a character often perceived as abstract into a complex human presence.

" Maybe it's our destiny to be judged. I've been judged by those around me, by readers, by critics, by viewers. I've been told I'm too rigid, too moralistic, too self-assured. I've been told I've chosen principles over love and sacrificed people in the name of virtue. But no one has asked what it means to be put in that situation. No one has asked what it's like to find out that your brother's life depends on your body and an impossible choice ."

Lady Macbeth, in turn, appears freed from the clichés that have haunted her for centuries. She is no longer exclusively the ambitious woman who pushes her husband to murder. Her monologue speaks of guilt, of the impossibility of erasing the traces of the past, and of the mechanisms by which consciousness continues to inflict wounds even when the outside world seems to have forgotten. In this version, Lady Macbeth is no longer a monster, but a human being trying to understand the cost of her own choices.

" And I learned the cost of power. Everyone talks about ambition. Everyone talks about guilt. But very few talk about fear. Fear is what drives us. Fear of losing. Fear of being forgotten. Fear of not being enough. And from fear are born many of our tragedies . "

Perhaps the most moving path belongs to Ofelia. The character refuses the traditional position of passive victim and tries to recover the meaning of her own existence beyond the fragile image imposed by classical interpretations. Ofelia speaks about the need to be heard, about the difficulty of finding a voice in a world where others constantly decide for you, and about the hope that the experience of suffering can become a source of understanding. In her lines, one of the essential ideas of the show appears: memory should not be used to preserve trauma, but to prevent its repetition.

" Nobody asked me anything. My father spoke for me. My brother spoke for me. Hamlet spoke for me. Everyone had advice. Everyone had orders. Everyone knew what was best for me. And yet nobody ever asked me who I was. Maybe that's why this question still haunts me: if I had had a real voice, would anything have changed? "

Imogen brings up the experience of freedom. Her story about transvestism and the time she was treated as a man takes on a strong contemporary dimension. The character observes the difference between the way the world reacts to a man and a woman, between the automatic trust given to one and the suspicion reserved for the other. The reflection is not formulated militantly, but as an almost melancholic observation, which amplifies its force.

" I had the opportunity to see the world from two perspectives. I was a woman. I was seen as a woman. But I was also disguised as a man. That's when I discovered something I couldn't forget. People listened to me differently. They looked at me differently. They believed me differently. I wasn't smarter. I wasn't braver . "

Lady Anne in *Richard III* is presented in a very different key from the classical interpretation. Typically, audiences wonder how Anne was able to be persuaded by Richard to accept him after he had destroyed her family. In *FEAST* , Lady Anne speaks of this experience from the inside.

"I know what it's like to be judged. People say I was naive. That I was manipulated. That I fell prey to a man who built his power on lies. Maybe they're right. But I don't understand that manipulation doesn't just work through intelligence. It works through vulnerability. It works through pain. It works through loneliness. Sometimes people need to believe someone, even when that someone is destroying them . "

As the show progresses, the discussion moves from individual experiences to the issue of rewriting history. If the characters change their destinies, the world that resulted from those stories also changes. The text thus introduces a fascinating dimension of philosophy of history. Literature is seen as a mechanism that influences reality, and reality in turn influences literature. The characters understand that changing a detail produces effects that are impossible to anticipate. At this point, the show goes beyond feminist discourse and reaches a universal reflection on memory and responsibility. One of the recurring lines suggests that true power does not lie in eliminating the past, but in the ability to learn from it. The characters realize that their experiences, however painful, have become tools through which future generations can better understand the world. The ending does not offer a spectacular victory or a symbolic revolution. The choice not to rewrite the stories appears as a gesture of maturity and wisdom. The characters accept that memory is more valuable than the illusion of retrospective perfection. The dinner prepared together, to which the spectators themselves will be invited, thus acquires the meaning of a reconciliation with the past and a celebration of solidarity. In this dramaturgical light, "*FEAST*" becomes more than a show about Shakespeare. It is a show about how people relate to their own mistakes, about the temptation to change what was and about the courage to accept that painful experiences

contribute to defining our identity. The kitchen where the six women meet is transformed into a laboratory of collective memory, and the meal shared at the end, a form of agape, represents the image of a community built through dialogue, listening and mutual understanding.

Philip Parr's direction delicately approaches this fragile convention, maintaining a fine balance between theatricality and naturalness, between irony and melancholy, between the meta-Shakespearean game and the emotion of women who, once removed from the mechanism of tragedy or comedy, have the right to listen to each other. The show does not force the demonstration, does not transform the characters into simple carriers of a thesis, instead it offers them time, space, breathing and relationship, and from this freedom is born the major charm of the staging: the feeling that we are witnessing a conversation that could have always taken place, in an imaginary kitchen located somewhere between Stratford, contemporary London and all the stages on which Shakespeare was reinvented. Olivia Negrean's text has a warm intelligence, attentive to details and the humanity of the characters, managing to extract from each female figure a recognizable voice, without reducing her to the already known destiny. Ophelia is no longer just the image of fragility, Lady Macbeth is no longer just the emblem of devastating ambition, Emilia is no longer a witness to injustice, Isabella, Imogen and Lady Anne are not just pieces in a dramatic mechanism dominated by male wills; they become active participants in their own reassessment, and their meeting has the meaning of a symbolic recovery of voices that have been placed on the margins of great conflicts for too long. The choice of the song "I Put a Spell on You", in the memorable interpretation of Nina Simone, is an extension of the dramatic discourse. The artist's voice brings to the space of the Shakespearean kitchen an emotional tension in which love, power and memory become impossible to separate, amplifying the feeling that each of these women continues to live under the spell of their own past.

One of the great qualities of the show is the way in which the concrete gesture of cooking supports the ideational architecture of the staging. Food is communion, a mechanism of rapprochement and a way in which stage time settles into a natural flow. While cutting, mixing, tasting, waiting, pouring wine, preparing a meal, a provisional community is also built, one in which memory, guilt, courage, fear and hope can be shared without excessive solemnity. The international cast amplifies the meaning of this encounter, because the different accents, corporealities and energies of the actresses introduce an essential multicultural dimension into the show. Shakespeare appears here as a common language and as a disputed territory, as a common heritage and as a space open to rewriting, and the presence of actresses coming from different cultural contexts makes the question of Shakespeare's women go beyond the strictly literary area. A new question arises about representation, memory and the possibility of building solidarity across eras, languages and theatrical traditions.

"FEAST: a play in one cooking" also has a discreet feminist dimension, one formulated with elegance, humor and depth, without stridentness, without aggressive rhetoric, without reducing male characters to mere guilty shadows. The show looks at theatrical history with lucidity and affection, understanding that the force of change does not lie in the cancellation of the past, but in the ability to revisit it, to interrogate it, to recognize its mechanisms and to transform experience into an instrument of consciousness. The question of whether the characters should change their stories ultimately becomes a question addressed to the audience: what do we do with the stories we have inherited, how do we read them, how do we play them, how do we transmit them and what do we learn from them? The finale, built around the shared table, gives the show a rare warmth. After debates, memories, tensions and confessions, the characters reach a form of reconciliation that does not erase the suffering and does not simplify the past, but places it in a new order, more humane, more attentive, more solidary. The joy of mutual company becomes a scenic response, and the dinner prepared together acquires the value of a secular liturgy of the theater, in which the audience is invited to continue the conversation beyond the performance.

" FEAST: a play in one cooking " is, roughly speaking, a show about Shakespeare's women and, at the same time, about us, those who watch them, judge them, love them, read them and let them return to the stage over and over again. It is a show about memory and food, about destiny and solidarity, about literature that never ceases to produce questions, about theater as a common table at which characters, actors and spectators can sit together to understand that the past changes through the way we carry it forward. In a theatrical world often in a hurry to reinvent the classics through spectacular gestures, Philip Parr's staging provokes a rarer form of courage: the patience of conversation, the tenderness of listening and the trust that great characters do not need to be demolished to become contemporary, but simply freed for an evening from the mechanism of their story, seated around a table and left to speak... to the end.