

Ívar Helgason 05.05.-1976 - Musical Theater actor, Singer, singing Teacher

Personal memoirs on reading the dialogue “Dynamo” with co-actor Villi Bragason at the public meeting “Humour and Culture”. Caféteria of Amtsbókasafnið - Akureyri Municipal Library on the 19th of november 2025:

It was quite fun to perform with Villi Bragason, the awkward situations of “Dynamo,” written by my dear friend, prof. Giorgio Baruchello, from his book Thinking and Laughing. Apart from all the fun, me and Villi had (hopefully others too), it was interesting listening to other speakers in the meeting. Discussing diverse approaches of humour in connection to culture.*

Thanx Giorgio !!

Vilhjálmur B. Bragason - Actor

Performing Giorgio Baruchello´s short play “Dynamo” during the Round Table on Humour and Culture in Akureyri last November was a dynamic delight. Me and my fellow actor, Ívar Helgason, had read through the piece several times together in rehearsal, but it was not until the actual performance that I felt its many layers truly come alive in my head. Performing it in Akureyri, on the opposite end of the world to where you would normally find a kangaroo, like the one at the heart of the play’s crime scene, underlined for me the vital importance of absurdity in any work of humour. And there is a plethora of pleasing absurdity in “Dynamo”’s engaging theatre of ideas. I thoroughly enjoyed performing it and would very much hope to get further opportunities to perform Giorgio Baruchello’s texts for the stage.

* **Dynamo**[1]

One Act: Alice C. Ponyrev (carrying a water bottle and ad-hoc tools)

Hella B. Lutwidge (carrying transparent plastic bags and ad-hoc tools)

A third person (chiefly in the backstage)

A goat (other domestic or farm animals can do as well)

Officers Ponyrev and Lutwidge are hard at work on the verge of a road, close to More Square.

Alice:

(friendly and fairly matter-of-fact all the time) Would you believe it?

Hella:

(idem) I know!

A:

A kangaroo!

H:

Yep. And it's not like we're in Australia!

A:

Of all beasts...

H:

... Poor beast.

A:

Yeah. Poor animal! All the way up here from down under and...

H:

Yep. Driven over by a yellow bus! Just like that.

A:

And scattered all over the place! (*she sips water from her water bottle*)

H:

That’s the concertina effect... (*ironic*) More fun for us two!

A:

Yeah! Think of going home and say: “Darling, I’ve had a grand old day! I’ve been scraping and scrubbing teaspoonfuls of expired kangaroo all over the road. How’ve you been? Any fun?”

H:

(*smiling*) Well, you could use that one in one of your stories.

A:

Aye, right. Because people care about real stories. Come on!

H:

I know, I know... But there’s something... you know, *moving*, about a splattered kangaroo. It makes you all sappy inside. Makes you think about the meaning of life.

A:

(*serious*) ... Jumping from one tragedy to another, till you reach the final one...

H:

Yeah. That’s right. It’s like a metaphor, an aaaa... (*trying to recall the word*) ...allegory of life!

A:

(*ironic*) As long as it’s not another aaaa...utobiography!

H:

(*pause, very slightly irritated*) Why? Don’t you like them?

A:

No, I don’t. There’s no... *imagination*... They’re like... the bare minimum.

H:

What d’you mean, “*the bare minimum?*”

A:

It’s just... Writing only about the stuff *you think you know*. Never stretching *beyond*, never trying to *imagine* other lives, other paths, or playing with imagery and paths that you’ve fabricated, thrown together, and tinkered with... Or having fun with prototypes, symbols, personifications... You know, irony, *ideas*. That too is great, and fun. Fiction that’s not ‘reality.’

H:

I see... You like imagination... Ideas... So you write about *fiction*, not *reality*...

A:

That’s what all decent novelists and dramatists have been doing since Homer’s day. Why wasting time on... autobiographies, just ‘cos that’s the neighbourhood *you think you know!*

H:

... Interesting ... Not enough imagination, you say...

Shouts from backstage: “La duchesse de Pompierdur, la Marquise de la Pipe! Allons-y!”

H:

(surprised) What was that?

A:

(calm) A different play, *(reassuringly)* don’t worry... *Imagination*... Really, don’t worry.

H:

(a bit lost) ... Ok, ok... if you say so... So, well... So, imagination, autobiographies...

A:

Right! ... Also, in a sense, *all* works are autobiographic anyhow, including technical manuals.

H:

(puzzled) What?

A:

It's bloody old Kant, or Gestalt psychology...

H:

In what sense?

A:

In the sense that the universe orbits around the mind that studies it and looks at it!

H:

(even more puzzled) ... Explain, please. 'Cos you're making *no* sense at all now!

A:

You see... *(stops suddenly)* Here's the other half! YES!

H:

... Half of what?

A:

The library card! The one we found in the kangaroo's pouch! *(pause)* ... He's called *Socrates*.

H:

(glad) Socrates? ...Ok. That's good... Now, see if you can find the rest of that income tax

return form that... *Socrates* was carrying around as well! I've been looking for it everywhere...

A:

Right... Well, as I was saying. *All* works, *all* books, are autobiographic, in a sense. Because any author, and every author, can *only*, and I repeat, *only* create what she creates by using *only* her own ideas, images... figments. Everything that an author can write about, whatever it is that she's writing about, is stuff that she's processed inside *her own* brain. Mental stuff...

H:

... Like what?

A:

Gosh! What's *not* in there? *Everything*: Anticipations, beliefs, curiosities, desires, experiences, gut feelings, intimations, half-remembered jokes, memories, precise observations, questions, vestiges of very old studies, unforgotten umbrages, wild wonkeries... *Et cetera!*

H:

That's quite a list!

A:

As I said, *everything's* in there. In the head. In the spirit. And that's all you can write about.

H:

So, you mean... writers are always writing about themselves?

A:

Yes and no... Not just *that*... Writing is closer to confections than confessions.

A voice is heard from backstage shouting this line from Puccini’s La Bohème: “Ecco i giocattoli di Parpignol! / Ecco i giocattoli di Parpignol!” Hella looks at Alice with a perplexed face, but doesn’t say anything, and doesn’t stop the ongoing conversation between them.

H:

... So... You said... “*Confections*,” right? Not “confessions” ... What d’you mean?

A:

Well, what an author does is like... I mean... You throw all the ingredients into a shaker and mix them, and try and produce a cocktail. If the cocktail is any good, that’s a different issue.

H:

(sarcastic) Then all books should state, in the introduction: “Welcome to my little bar. I hope you’ll enjoy the evening!,” the way there are warnings about cancer on cigarette packs!

A:

(smiling) Yes, I think they should! And they should add a warning about multiple authorship...

H:

Ah? “*multiple authorship*”? I don’t understand... *(ironic)* What have you been smoking?

A:

(*serious*) Each and every author is a *plurality* of authors. Not only because, in their depths, all souls are... multiple, which is why one can laugh *at* as well as *with* some cruel comedian. But also and above all because nearly all authors come up with different narrators, characters, storylines, perspectives, colours. All based on stuff the authors have seen. That’s actually the *fun* of writing: Imagining, seeing, feeling the world from different *angles*. Especially odd ones.

H:

... Sorry, but, you keep saying “seeing”... Then... What about science fiction, or fantasy. You know, funky stuff that nobody can have seen in reality? Like green monsters, you know?

A:

It’s *all* been *seen*! All of it! Under the author’s silly pate! Inside the mind or soul... *Imagination*, you know? Then you blend all the bits and pieces, and try to do something with them. That’s how it works, basically. I know it sounds strange, but it’s like architects putting together mathematical abstractions and real stones to make a building out of them. Or tailors...

H:

(*quietly*) ...Stitching together...

A:

Yes! *Stitching*! And using the imagination... I mean... There’s no worst form of poverty than having no imagination. Think of that: Being completely and utterly devoid of imagination!

H:

(*ponders briefly*) Well, having no sense of humour is pretty tragic too. Or no self-irony... I recall an aunt who couldn’t stand jokes about menstruations, especially if a man made them!

A:

Fair point, no self-irony... (*pause, serious*) Still, having *no* imagination... It *scares* me!

H:

... It can't be good, I guess...

A:

No, never! That's what makes people petty, narrow-minded, intolerant, cruel, nasty. It can be worse than ignorance. Much worse! It's why people start throwing around words like “truism,” “bromide,” “inappropriate,” “inauthentic,” or “this-ism” and “that-ism,” making all sorts of illogical generalisations—which just mean that *those* people don't like what *they* have read.

H:

But why do they do that? I mean, they ruin their own game, don't they? ... Why doing it?

A:

Mainly it's because they can't even begin to imagine what the world could look like from other perspectives, including yours. They have only one pair of shoes that fits them. Some people can't fathom how it is even possible to *imagine imagining* what the world could look like from other perspectives. You see... HEY! (*lifts a blob of something and inspects*) What's this?

H:

(*intrigued*) ... I think it's a pancreas... No, wait. It's a kidney!

A:

(*smiling*) Socrates’ kidney! (*pause*) Left or right?

H:

(*shrugs*) No clue! (*fetches the blob and stores it in a transparent plastic bag*) But, please, let’s go back to your explanation. It’s really interesting. You think that these negative people want you to just, like, *see* things from inside one tradition, one perspective, and only one, right?

A:

Basically. Or the few perspectives that they’re familiar with. It’s probably the main reason why some people can’t really *engage* with your material, and dismiss it as being “just like” someone else or something else that they’ve read a long time before and they vaguely recall...

H:

Are these people... dumb? You know, just plain dumb?

A:

Well, some of them are. What is it that they say in Italy? ... “The mother of idiots is always pregnant;” and that’s a good one... But there are clever people who would simply and always want you to just preach and preach, like an apostle or a broken record. And repeat, you know, the party line—*their* party line! Squashing books and art into *one* person, *one* view. Squashing symbols into signs, polysemy into univocity... 1984’s Newspeak, that’s what they want!

H:

Critics, you mean, right? ... These people?

A:

Yes, those for sure, but readers too... (*she sips water from her water bottle*)

H:

Readers... Why? ... I mean, how can readers be a problem?

A:

Readers can be a real pain! Especially those who think that what *they've* understood—the few *bits* that *they've* been able to make some sense of—is both *right* and *all* that there is to it.

H:

Like it's *tiny bits of tiny bits* that they're stitching, combining, and think it's *all* your work, eh?

A:

Pretty much. Few, tiniest-tiny fragments, and they think they've got it all. Ah! The irony!

H:

(*reflecting*) I guess... Still, *you*, the author, have to stitch *all* the... *bits* together, right?

A:

(*enthusiastic*) Yes, and you can use *a lot* of imagination doing that! *Play* with those... *bits*!

H:

Totally unreal, then?

A:

A good part of it. Most, actually. Nearly everything. Reality is just a minor part, a starting point.

H:

So, there’s *some* reality in it, right?

A:

Much less than most people think. You know, *they* think that *they*’ve guessed this or that, but don’t realise that *they*’re off track, or that *they*’re missing 99.9% of what the author meant...

The same voice from backstage shouts: “La duchesse de Pompierdur, la Marquise de la Pipe!”

H:

(*less surprised*) ... The other play?

A:

Yes, precisely... *Imagination*: Hence yet another possible facet of the world... Don’t worry!

H:

Yeah, yes... I get it now. So, no reality, fantasy, imagination... “fiction,” as you said...

A:

Yep. Pretty much... And that’s the fun: *Fiction!* Besides, realism’s overrated! Screw that!

H:

(*curious*) What d’you mean, “realism is overrated?”

A:

(*serious*) Come on! Reality is... dull! Who would care reading about two police officers like us, for instance, scraping the remains of a dead kangaroo!? Cleaning up after the late jumper!?

H:

(*serious, puzzling things together*) You’ve got a point there...

A:

Or ordinary gangsters, nuns, talking bats, ex-cons, and run-of-the-mill porno stars!?

H:

(*positive*) Yeah, yeah... I see what you mean.

A:

Exactly, when you can have stories about, say, plumbers, bookkeepers, or periodontists!?

H:

Right. Right... You’re right... (*smiling*) Yeah. No doubt about that!

A:

What would *you* rather read about: Plumbers, or one of the many superheroes we’ve got in our town, and currently looking for a job? Some silly-named porno star, or pa and ma having lazy sex in the morning? Or the two octogenarians who live upstairs a’ your place ‘n wake up frisky?

H:

(declamatory) Plumbers, lazy sex, and octogenarians, *(normal)* naturally! Something exotic, exciting! Obvious, no? I’m no different than other people, who fantasise about how it would be like to live and... die in all kinds of ways... Not those they’re living, and will probably die.

A:

Precisely my point... Not to mention the real distorters and effective co-authors...

H:

(puzzled) What? “Co-authors”? ... Who are they?

A:

Those who distort the story, fill the gaps, read between and behind the lines, coming up with all kinds of interpretations... All kinds of crazy shit *you* hadn’t even thought about. That’s fun too!

H:

Oh? ... Ok, but... who are those?

A:

The readers, my dear, the readers! *(she sips water from her water bottle)*

H:

Ah? Again?

A:

Think about it. It's like putting a mirror in front of them. You, the author, make the mirror... You take the sand and all the reagents you need... You also make a nice frame... There you have it. The mirror's ready. That's your story, novel, poem, film... Whatever!

H:

Right...

A:

... And then you stick it front of the readers, the audience, the viewers, and so on.

H:

Uh ... So what?

A:

The readers will see *themselves*. Not *you*. Even if they are going to think that it's all about you, the world that you share with them, or both things. What they're seeing, though, is *themselves*.

A naked man with a fez on his head and a goat on the leash appear on stage, walking slowly from the right to the left, and only briefly interrupting the two main characters' conversation, which will then continue as though the man and the goat weren't there.

H:

So... Readers read your stuff and... (*ah-ah Erlebnis*) see their own reflection and think it's yours?

A:

Yes! *They* see *their* frustrations, hopes, dreams, memories, inhibited desires, old readings,

raw nerves, the few things *they* recall from school, *their* dogmas, fears, the films *they*’ve watched...

H:

(*more positive*) I see...

A:

...Reflected *in* yours and projected *as* yours...

H:

Hm...

A:

... The readers may even get offended and mad at you for things you didn’t say or didn’t mean. And that’s both funny and scary: They’re seeing *themselves* and they think it’s *you*!

H:

(*a little more puzzled*) ... But, why’s that? Why?

A:

Because, like it happens with the author, everything that *they* are and have, exists in *their* souls, *their* minds, and *they*’re going to see it in the mirror, in one way or another, and think...

H:

(*excitedly, with conviction*) ... That it’s either you or the shared world that you’re describing, right?

A:

Right! And the more fantastic is the story...

H:

...The more gaps they have to fill... And the more crazy interpretations they come up with?

A:

(satisfied) Yes! Of course! That’s it. And that’s the trick, you know?

H:

Clever... *(pause, cheeky)* And what’s the trick to finish scraping the kangaroo off the road?

A:

Hard work, my dear. Hard work! Elbow grease. Nothing else.

H:

(ironic) There’s nothing like an honest job well done...

A:

(playfully) You’ve got it, sis!

H:

... Hey! ... *(glad)* The income tax form!

A:

Wow! ... Great! That’s very good... Let’s...

H:

(interrupts, sombre) Oh! ... Wait a minute... *(even more disappointed)* Would you believe it?

A:

What’s wrong?

H:

This one belongs to a zebra. It’s not the kangaroo’s! ... *(upset, softly)* Bloody Socrates!

A:

(upset, loud) Damn! ... Bloody Socrates!

H:

(upset, softly) Damn... Bloody Socrates!

Curtain.

[1] Down under’s down under’s down... There’s brightness at the bottom.