

teorema

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A beautiful young guest arrives to stay with a well-to-do family. He bears a message of love and leaves behind unimaginable destruction.

This is the core story of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Teorema*. The 1968 film, subtitled "A geometry of love", caused a furore at the time for its oddball morality. Pasolini later expanded the tale into a novel. Though many today recall the film, few can say what it was about. Dramaturge Willem Bruls and director Ivo van Hove, intrigued by the ambiguous allure of the work, have created a new piece of music theatre based on Pasolini's classic for the Ruhr Triennale. *Teorema*, which opened on Friday in Bochum's cavernous Jahrhunderthalle, pares the story back to its bones.

Stripped of its social revolutionary context, *Teorema* becomes clearly visible as a modern-day *Bassarids*, a contemporary King Roger, a timeless myth. Pasolini's mysterious guest shocked the world by successively seducing each member of the family – housekeeper, wife, son, daughter and father. In negating his own ego, he unlocks each character's hidden desires in turn. The crisis comes when he leaves, and the family is confronted with its own emptiness.

Pasolini's film is almost without dialogue, his book tends towards polemicism. Bruls and van Hove's text has the characters speaking autistic narratives of their own actions or monologue accounts of their inner thoughts. In Jan Versweyveld's cold, spare sets and lighting, with the Blindman [new strings] quartet performing a counterpart of Beethoven, Webern and Eric Sleichim, the results are abstracted yet startlingly intimate.

Van Hove's Belgian cast performs in flawless German – an achievement in itself – and moves through this gut-wrenching trajectory of repression, release and ultimate crisis with assurance. The addition of string quartet and Sleichim's harsh electronic sounds serves to highlight the emotionally barren nature of the loveless world that the young guest's advent destroys.

The whole is infused with a trance-like atmosphere, an otherworldly chill that makes the inevitable implosion all the more shocking. *Teorema* is not comfortable viewing but it is strong theatre. This co-production with Amsterdam's Toneelgroep, bringing Pasolini firmly into the world of 21st-century performance, stands emphatically on its own merits.

Rating: 4/5