

# Bouvard and Pécuchet

Gustave Flaubert; dramatized and directed by Tuomas Rinta-Panttila

Takomo Theatre

Synopsis in English

In Gustave Flaubert's final novel *Bouvard and Pécuchet* (published in 1881) two transcribers meet by coincidence in Boulevard Bourdon, Paris. Immediately they become deeply attached to each other. It is an ethereal companionship. They start talking and eventually spend all their time together. Both of them are frustrated of how the world appears to them; too complicated, too hard to understand in full. They long for truth, but all they get is relativity. All of a sudden Bouvard gets patrimony and with that money they buy a property from countryside in France into which they move and start to work on endless research. Their field is nothing less than the whole world – all the sciences and all the arts! In every single subject they get disappointed harshly, but tirelessly they start again, from scratch, with a new topic and new discipline. Eventually after decades of studies they have found – nothing. No sobriety, not a single, specific truth. After all these comedowns their decision is stripped-down one: they simply start to transcribe their humongous library, start to write everything all over again. Not inventing, not researching, just writing. And this is the final picture of the novel, two transcribers bent over their desks, writing.

The stage adaptation of *Bouvard and Pécuchet* brings us two actors, Katja and Samuli, both of whom are deeply connected to Gustave Flaubert's novel.

They don't really know each other, but by coincidence they meet in a park, sitting on bench just like Bouvard and Pécuchet in the novel. They start talking and they learn that Flaubert's novel is an absolute favourite of both. Their relation to the world is deeply similar to Bouvard and Pécuchet's – they long for knowledge they could attach themselves to. The world seems all too complicated to them to be fully understood and yet that's what they both long for. They start to spend all their time together (though not in a romantic sense), then Samuli learns he has been awarded a grant. This opens an opportunity to the duo – they decide to rent a theatre venue and live there for six months to research the world in full; all the arts, all the sciences. But the grant requires a series of performances as well. So tonight, in this theatre they will start their grand research work and that's what the audience is invited to follow.

But before Katja and Samuli start their work they decide to, very quickly, brief the audience of how they have come together and what has happened so far. It is supposed to be just a few words but ends up being an hour-long journey through their existential anxiety, Gustave Flaubert's novel, their lives and the incredible similarities of their story compared to that of Bouvard and Pécuchet.

So, the first part of the show is Katja and Samuli telling their path to this particular evening. They bounce back and forth of their memories and present, they talk about Flaubert's novel and at times they become the characters of the novel, then, to their surprise, new characters (persons) join the scene. A drummer starts to carry his equipment to the stage. Katja and Samuli are told the artistic director of the theatre is so annoyed with their "operation" he has rented the venue to the drummer to practice in, telling him he can play his drums as loud as he wants!

Throughout the whole play there is the question of truth hanging above the storyline; is this really happening as a surprise, now, or is it all rehearsed.

The first part will take approximately one hour after which Katja and Samuli are in the point where they have told their own story and will start with their research. Katja and Samuli go to change into their "research clothing" and at this point Rebekka stands downstage. Rebekka is a student from Theatre Academy of Finland doing her internship in this particular production. In her monologue Rebekka reveals the mindless insanity of what has really been going on in the theatre leading to this very moment. And of course, the audience gets to know that the mindless insanity of Katja and Samuli has been very equivalent to that of Bouvard and Pécuchet. Rebekka is totally frustrated but cannot stop the internship either; she has to complete her studies and this production is a crucial part of them.

After Rebekkas monologue, finally, the long awaited research work will start. Katja and Samuli appear to the stage with new kind of dignity; they are now researchers! And then – nothing happens. Nothing visible anyway. For Katja and Samuli research work appears to be just the act of reading articles from their iPads. The very moment they start reading, the drummer hits his drums with his drumstick, loud. Rebekka is astonished; she didn't know what the research would be like, but not like this anyway. And people are watching! To give the audience even something to spend their time with, she decides to read about the research work of Bouvard and Pécuchet – from the actual novel.

At this point the scene will present the impossibility of finding the truth, one truth and nothing but the truth. It is in Flaubert's text, the accelerating frustration of Katja and Samuli and the bewilderment of the drummer's work. A new person joins the stage, a member of the audience, who is upset by the show. The whole sequence rises to a total chaos. And then – it ends. Nothing has been achieved, nothing is any clearer than before. Katja and Samuli are just numb.

The last part of the show starts. Rebekka remembers the trampoline she has built on stage during the show. She starts to read aloud about the empowering force of sports. Surely the truth of the body should be open to everyone. The final attempt starts just to end in a fiasco – the trampoline is built in a wrong spot and cannot be used. Everything collapses. The drummer leaves rudely stating Katja and Samuli have to be out of the venue before sunrise.

Finally, they return to a text they have already seen before but haven't read thoroughly. It is a writing revealing you can find the truth just by living your life with your loved ones.

Katja and Samuli understand the insanity of their mission and decide to leave the theatre and go home, disappointed. For the closing of the evening, they ask Rebekka to read the final paragraph of the novel. Rebekka reads a part where Bouvard and Pécuchet realise everything has collapsed and all they can do is to transcribe, simply to transcribe their whole library. "The last thing we see is two transcribers bent over their desks, transcribing", Rebekka reads. And as a lightning it strikes Katja and Samuli – they should read the whole novel as an audiobook. Everything has failed, they haven't found a single truth, but this novel is truth anyway, it is an existing object, they should read it on tape, over and over again. And to that they turn to. The last thing we see is two actors bent over their desks, reading.