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Nicola Pasqualicchio*

Introduction

The notion of short form, together with critical reflections on its specific features, has long been addressed by criticism, in particular from a narratological stance and has also been tackled theoretically by the writers themselves.[1] Such contributions have benefited from the clear conceptual separation between short story and novel, which has existed, at least in western literature, since the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is founded not only, and not simply, on the superficial evidence of a measurable difference, but also, and especially, on the recognition of more intrinsic and substantial reasons regarding the structural conception, the representation of the world, the development of characters, the features of the plot of these two narrative forms. All these ultimately depend upon different aims. In its few pages a short story neither can nor wishes to achieve what a novel does: its aim is not to 'miniaturize' a long narration by compressing a novelistic, or potentially novelistic subject into a limited space, but rather to offer a fragment, a glimpse, be it fantastic or realistic, of a limited portion of world and time. These samples of fictional life can hint at wider time spans and at more complex narrative situations, without explicitly containing them and more often drastically excluding them. The novel builds a world, the short story lets it appear through a fragment; the novel obeys a demiurgic temptation, the short story takes on an epiphanic attitude.

Such contrast may also present itself as a little more blurred, or may even be contradicted in single cases that try to force experimentally the barrier between genres and formats; this, however, may happen without questioning the principle of an ontological difference and an autonomous aesthetic quality of the short story compared to the novel. The

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[1] Reflections of numerous nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers and scholars can be found in Intonti (ed.) 2003.

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foundations of this theory had already been acknowledged at the beginning of the nineteenth century by August Wilhelm Schlegel, Ludwig Tieck, and Edgar Allan Poe (see Intonti (ed.) 2003: 43-64). However, it is especially in the twentieth century that literary theory discussed them in depth starting from Brander Matthews's *Philosophy of the Short-story* (1901). In it the American scholar lucidly analyses the inadequacy of purely quantitative criteria to define the short story which run the risk of mistaking the actual short story, understood as an independent narrative genre, with the novelette, that is, a short novel not intrinsically distinguishable from a common novel but for its length:

> A true Short-story is something other and something more than a mere story which is short. A true Short-story differs from the Novel chiefly in its essential unity of impression ... The Short-story is the single effect, complete and self-contained, while the Novel is of necessity broken into a series of episodes. Thus the Short-story has, what the Novel cannot have, the effect of "totality", as Poe called it, the unity of impression. Of a truth the Short-story is not only not a chapter out of a Novel, or an incident or an episode extracted from a longer tale, but at its best it impresses the reader with the belief that it would be spoiled if it were made larger, or it were incorporated into a more elaborate work. (Matthews 1901: 15, 17)

Matthews maintains that writing a short story does not require less artistic ability than writing a novel; on the contrary, this kind of talent seems to be necessary in the extreme degree because "[t]he Short-story is a high and difficult department of fiction" (ibid.: 25), for which specific skills are needed, in particular "brevity and brilliancy" (ibid.: 29). Even the skills that short story writers must share with the novelists, such as "neatness of construction and polish of execution" (ibid.: 30), and, in sum, "the sense of form and the gift of style" (ibid.: 31), must be there at the highest level, in order not to jeopardize the delicate balance between "originality" and "compression" (ibid.: 23) to which the short story owes its efficacy.

The short narrative form as something clearly identifiable qualitatively rather than quantitatively has since been the object of much analysis and discussion which towards the end of the twentieth century found, especially in the French criticism, an effective formulation in the semantic contraposition between two seemingly synonymic terms, *court* and *bref*. In particular, in his essay on *La notion de brièveté* (1991), Gérard Dessons observed that if the adjective *court* is characterized by its purely dimensional meaning, *bref*, in rhetorical and literary contexts, indicates instead a quality intrinsic in a text, that is, concision. Preserving the confusion between *court* and *bref*, the scholar explains, means erroneously to identify a measure with a modality of language: "s'agissant du langage, la perspective ne peut plus être celle de l'extériorité dimensionelle, mais celle d'un rapport

interne à la parole; ce que traduit la relation de synonymie instaurée par les lexicographes entre *brièveté* et *concision*" (Dessons 1991: 4) ["as regards language, the perspective cannot be one of dimensional exteriority, but rather of a relationship within the word, which translates the relation of synonymity between *brevity* and *concision* introduced by lexicographers"].

The size limit, then, takes on an artistic meaning only when it reveals itself as the necessary dimensional correspondence of a formal vision inspired by conciseness and the elimination of the superfluous. It must also be guided by those specific condensation and intensification techniques that originate the particular qualities of the greatest short stories of the nineteenth and twentieth century, that is, valorizing the instant, the existential fragment, the tendency of everyday moments to become revelatory of sense (or nonsense). In the twentieth century the most enlightening words on the intrinsic value of the short narrative form are perhaps those written by Julio Cortázar. The Argentinian author maintains that

> la novella gana siempre por puntos, mientras que el cuento debe ganar por *knockout*. Es cierto, en la medida en que la novela acumula progresivamente sus efectos en el lector, mientras que un buen cuento es incisivo, mordiente, sin cuartel desde las primeras frases ... Tomen ustedes cualquier gran cuento que prefieran, y analicen su primera página. Me sorprendería que encontraran elementos gratuitos, meramente decorativos. El cuentista sabe que no puede proceder acumulativamente, que no tiene por aliado al tiempo ... El tiempo del cuento y el espacio del cuento tienen que estar como condensados, sometidos a una alta presión espiritual y formal. (Cortázar 1971: 406-07)

> [the novel wins a technical victory, while the short story must win by knockout. It's true, in that the novel progressively builds up its effect upon the reader, while a good story is incisive, mordant, and shows no clemency from the first lines on ... Take any great story you prefer and analyse the first page. I'd be surprised if you found any gratuitous elements just there for show. The short-story writer knows he cannot work by accumulation, that time is not on his side ... The short story's time and space must be as if condensed, subjected to a spiritual and formal pressure.]

It is thanks to the application of this particular formal strategy that, according to Cortázar, the short story can convey to a short and simple episode the mysterious ability to irradiate a sense that totally transcends it,

> al punto que un vulgar episodio doméstico, como ocurre en tantos admirables relatos de una Katherine Mansfield o un Sherwood Anderson, se convierta en el resumen implacable de una cierta condición humana, o en el símbolo quemante de un orden social o histórico. Un cuento es significativo cuando quiebra sus propios límites con esa explosión de en-

> ergía espiritual que ilumina bruscamente algo que va mucho más allá de la pequeña y a veces miserable anécdota que cuenta. Pienso, por ejemplo, en el tema de la mayoría de los admirables relatos de Antón Chéjov. ¿Qué hay allí que no sea tristemente cotidiano, mediocre, muchas veces conformista o inútilmente rebelde? ... Y sin embargo, los cuentos de Katherine Mansfield, de Chéjov, son significativos, algo estalla en ellos mientras los leemos y nos proponen una especie de ruptura de lo cotidiano que va mucho más allá de la anécdota reseñada. (ibid.: 407-8)
>
> [so that a commonplace domestic episode, as is the case in so many admirable stories by Katherine Mansfield or Sherwood Anderson, becomes the implacable summing-up of a certain human condition or the blazing symbol of a social or historical order. A story is significant when it breaks through its own limits with that explosion of spiritual energy that throws into sudden relief something going far beyond the small and sometimes wretched anecdote it tells. I am thinking, for example, of the theme of most of Anton Chekhov's admirable stories. What is there but the drearily everyday, mediocre conformity or pointless rebellion? ... And yet, the stories of Katherine Mansfield or Chekhov are meaningful; something bursts forth in them as we read and offers us a sort of breakaway from the everyday that goes well beyond the anecdote summed up therein.]

In some way, albeit in the limited space imposed by shortness, the short story seems to be able to contain, as far as sense goes, even more than what can be contained in the wide and complex structure of a novel. This is because the extrinsic limit of shortness imposes the strenuous and rigorous application of brevity, with its effects of condensation and intensification that can make the world visible in a fragment, if not even the universe in a dot, as happens in *The Aleph*, the famous short story by another great Argentinian author, Jorge Luis Borges. In this way, in addition to its relation with rhetorical concision, narrative *brevitas* seems to suggest affinity also with other forms of condensation, including those verging on laconicism, such as philosophical aphorisms and mystic speech (or silence), as well as, with reference to the language of images, photography:

> la novela y el cuento se dejan comparar analógicamente con el cine y la fotografía, en la medida en que una película es en principio un "orden abierto", novelesco, mientras que una fotografía lograda presupone una ceñida limitación previa, impuesta en parte por el reducido campo que abarca la cámara y por la forma en que el fotógrafo utiliza estéticamente esa limitación. No sé si ustedes han oído hablar de su arte a un fotógrafo profesional; a mí siempre me ha sorprendido el que se exprese tal como podría hacerlo un cuentista en muchos aspectos. Fotógrafos de la calidad de un Cartier-Bresson o de un Brasai definen su arte como una aparente paradoja: la de recortar un fragmento de la realidad, fijándolo determinados límites, pero de manera tal que ese recorte actúe como una explosión

> que abre de par en par una realidad mucho más amplia, como una visión dinámica que trasciende espiritualmente el campo abarcado por la cámara ... el fotógrafo o el cuentista se ven precisados a escoger y limitar una imagen o un acaecimiento que sean *significativos*, que no solamente valgan por sí mismos, sino que sean capaces de actuar en el espectador o en el lector como una especie de *apertura*, de fermento que proyecta la inteligencia y la sensibilidad hacia algo que va mucha más allá de la anécdota visual o literaria contenidas en la foto o en el cuento. (ibid.: 406)
>
> [the novel and the short story may be compared, using an analogy, to cinema and photography, in that a film is in principle "open-ended", like a novel, while a good photograph presupposes a strict delimitation beforehand, imposed in part by the narrow field the camera covers and the aesthetic use the photographer makes of this limitation. I don't know whether you've heard a professional photographer talk about his art; I'm always surprised that it sounds so much as if it could be a short-story writer talking. Photographs as fine as Cartier-Bresson's or Brassai's define their art as an apparent paradox; that of cutting out a piece of reality, setting certain limits, but so that this piece will work as an explosion to fling open a much wider reality, like a dynamic vision that spiritually transcends the camera's field of vision ... The photographer or short story writer has to choose and delimit an image or event that's *significant*, not just in and of itself, but able to work upon the viewer or reader as a sort of *opening*, a fermentation that moves intelligence and sensibility out towards something far beyond the visual or literary anecdote the photo or story contains.]

What has been cited so far supports a clear and shared theoretical awareness of the artistic autonomy of the short story with respect to the novel. However, the shadow of prejudice has been around for quite a while because of a certain common feeling among readers and some critics alike, based upon the idea that the short story is somehow aesthetically inferior to the novel. How often has a good author of short stories been called upon to prove his value by writing a novel, implying this new task as a quality leap and a show of artistic maturation, which only a dimensionally longer composition would seem to attest fully? This is worth noting, because it is a (pre)conception that does not confine itself to narrative, but regards a more widespread aesthetic attitude, typical of western culture at least, where the 'smaller' on a scale suggests 'minority' at the level of aesthetic hierarchies. Size and complexity of articulation are considered if not indispensable at least more adequate requisites to pursue and achieve artistic 'greatness'. However, at this point it is also necessary to make it clear that for every expressive language that implies duration (as in the case of literary, musical, theatrical or cinematic works), the actual opposition is not so much between long and short, as between standard and short. It is not appropriate to establish a dichotomy, as well as a qualitative

hierarchy, between a long or a short measure, but rather between a standard measure and any other measure shorter than it. In sum, the aesthetic attitude mentioned above is not an indiscriminate praise of length itself, but rather the recognition of a length suitable to a given form of art so as it can contain and express what is expected of it. Such dimension is not so much recognized as long, but rather as normal: indeed, it is not typically connoted for its measure, as are instead those formats that visibly contravene the canonical dimension, mainly by shortening it. The English language (albeit not alone) is instructive in this sense: it is not the novel (standard format) that is indicated as a long story, but it is rather the narrative form that distinguishes itself because of its brevity, the short story, which bears the mark of brevity as a denominative element. Analogously, in cinema there is no long-film category and indeed the standard film (usually around eighty minutes or more) is called 'feature film' (the name recalls the role of main attraction held by 'normal-length' films among those playing in evening shows which included also shorter ones) or, less commonly, 'full-length film'. The latter does not indicate the film as long in itself, but simply long enough to fill up the time available during a dedicated evening. Even in languages, among which Italian, that contemplate a nominal distinction based on measure between *cortometraggio* [short film] and *lungometraggio* [full-length film], the latter term is used only on some particular occasions as it is usually substituted with 'film' *tout court* to indicate that it is seen not as a long film, but as a film of standard duration: the *lungometraggio* is the film *par excellence*. Again, it is the short format that gets nominally distinct by its dimension: *cortometraggio*, indeed, or, as recently widely accepted, simply *corto* (perfectly corresponding to the English 'short film', usually abbreviated in 'short').

I have thus far focused on the comparison between the short story and the novel for two reasons: because it is a relationship between short form and long (or standard) form within the same artistic language more historically and theoretically framed;[2] and because it poses questions and suggests interpretations at least partly useful to a reflection on this same relationship in other artistic settings, included the theatrical one, which is of particular interest here. Of course, the history of the short theatre form is substantially different from its analogous narrative form as is its relationship with the long form. However, it does show points in common with narrative, especially as regards its relation with the full-length play, here again not confinable to the dimensional aspect. Short

[2] A similar reflection on the cinema is more sporadic and more recent. In addition to the analyses included in publications linked to the numerous festivals devoted to short films almost everywhere, especially since the 1990s, further reference can be made, at least as regards the Italian setting, to Bevilacqua 2001.

theatre, be it in its written form or on the stage, is not at all a miniature version of the conventional length drama, and its concision provides reasons for a drama layout which is original in both content and form.

From a historical point of view, the short theatre form became an autonomous artistic object only at the end the nineteenth century, almost a century later than the short story. This of course does not mean that examples of short theatre did not exist or were only sporadic before that time. On the contrary, they had been a normal experience for theatregoers of all times, at least within those theatrical forms of entertainment of little or no official nature that make up the mottled world of street theatre and popular shows. Such forms were certainly widespread in ancient times, continued to be dominant for most of the Middle Ages and, regardless of the intellectual discredit and moral diffidence they had to endure, they were healthily well known and appreciated until not too remote times (puppet shows, to name but one example, have guaranteed centuries of life to a kind of popular short theatre). However, starting from the Renaissance and especially between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, short forms found a place also in more institutionalized genres of European theatre. These were interludes placed in between the acts of the main performance for precise reasons that were more or less emphasized according to the different national contexts: changes of settings, actors' breaks, dramatic pauses for the audience to relax in front of the great concentration required by the *pièce de résistance*. And a different stress was also placed on the intrinsic features of the performances as sources for entertainment: the comical character of these short performances, especially of the German *Zwischenspiele* or of the Spanish *entremeses,* was very much generalized; in the Italian *intermedi*, instead, the spectacular scenery and the musical part prevailed. Such performances took on increasing importance and often ended up being preferred by the audience to the play that was supposed to be the main attraction. For some time they even enjoyed the recognition of some sort of independent artistic quality, also thanks to the fact that their authors were often famous playwrights and important musicians. In any case, albeit with some exceptions, this type of performance continued to exist only in the background of dramas of a more extended dimension. Short forms, such as the Italian musical *intermezzo* which contributed to the birth of the *opera buffa*, played an important role in the development of standard forms, although they were often assimilated by them. The end of the various forms of interlude, nonetheless, did not coincide with the disappearance of the tendency to aggregate works of short duration to the main pieces. Once they lost their intermission role, in the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century they were placed mainly at the beginning of the performance (as 'curtain raisers') or at the end of the main piece (as 'afterpieces'). If these new forms of short the-

atre generally kept the function of supplying a comical relief compensating for the serious nature of the full-length plays, they obviously lost the technical purpose of 'cover' for the change of scenery (by then entrusted to the curtains) and allowed the high society to enjoy the intervals in the foyer. However, besides providing a good practical test for the young actors, they had the new psychological function of gradually acclimatizing the spectator to theatrical fiction or to a not too abrupt end of it. At the same time, they – especially the curtain raisers – allowed to mark a social divide within the public on the basis of what they chose to attend and the attitude they had towards the show:

> Les gens "chics" arrivaient soigneusement avec un retard de trois quarts d'heure, juste pour le début de la grande pièce. Mais le "vrai" public, celui qui venait moins pour se montrer que pour prendre du plaisir au spectacle, était dans la salle bien à l'heure et, pour rien au monde, il n'aurait manqué le lever de rideau. (Pierron 2002: 303)
>
> [The "chic" people typically arrived with a forty-five-minute delay, just in time for the beginning of the *grande pièce*. However, the 'real' public, those who arrived less for showing off than for enjoying the evening, were in the hall perfectly on time. For nothing in the world would they have missed the curtain raiser.]

Although these plays were often of good and sometimes excellent artistry, they were considered of 'inferior' value on an aesthetic level simply because their typical audience belonged to socially and culturally lower classes:

> Often these plays were little gems. They deserved much better treatment than they got, but those who saw them delighted in them ... the stalls and the boxes lost much by missing the curtain-raiser, but to them dinner was more important (MacQueen-Pope 1947: 23).

As regards their theatrical value, their being paired off with the long pieces could not possibly favour them, as they were crushed not by the actual artistic superiority of the main attraction (which was not necessarily the rule), but by the fact that the expectations and the attention of the 'learned' public were almost exclusively focused on it.

On the other hand, throughout the nineteeth century, obvious reasons of fruition and market made the 'uncoupling' of the short theatrical work from its long equivalent much more problematic than it had been for the short story. In the modern and contemporary western world, both the literary work and the theatrical performance are commercial products before being cultural objects, and so their existence is guaranteed by their saleability. The short form generally poses some problems in that respect.

Nevertheless, even if short stories do not warrant economic profit individually, modern publishers take into account the possibility of their publication, and consequent fruition, either in periodicals or in printed collections. This guarantees the reader's appreciation of a short narrative as it does not pit it against a longer narrative considered as the 'main' attraction. With very few exceptions, in modern publishing, especially in the nineteenth century, a novel is not preceded, spaced out or followed by a single short story; and even if it happens, the times of 'consumption' of the literary product are autonomously picked by the reader who can chose when to read the various parts of a book.

In the theatre world, at least the traditional one, this is not feasible; fruition times are not chosen by the spectators, rather they are imposed on them (the same happened with cinema, before the invention of home reproduction systems that allow viewing films in total freedom, repeated, spaced out or even 'reassembled'); and the only chance one had until the end of the nineteenth century to see a short performance was always in immediate continuity with the feature play. A substantial difference between literature and theatre is also the irrelevance of the place where one reads (usually at home) as opposed to the obvious need to go to a place specifically used for theatrical representations. Dressing in a socially accepted manner, crossing the town in a carriage and buying a ticket to see a show that lasted half an hour was not something to be expected from a nineteenth-century theatregoer. On the other hand, having substituted the carriage with the underground or the car and dedicating less time to get properly dressed, the game does not seem worth the candle even for today's spectator, with the exception of a handful of very motivated followers of experimental theatre. Thus, to provide material for a whole evening show, a short play is not enough. Yet, until the end of the nineteenth century, short plays did not even have the chance to feature in a *soirée* showing a series of shorts. This was in stark contrast to the practice of publishing collections of short stories existing since the Middle Ages. In fact, that theatrical opportunity was provided only in the parallel non-institutional forms mentioned above. In the eighteenth century at the Parisian 'théâtre de la Foire', where many types of popular performances were carried out (from acrobatics to pantomimes and puppet shows), it was the norm to see three one-act plays presented together or other kinds of short plays assembly. And yet, they did not aspire to artistic dignity and were considered by their own authors themselves as minor theatre, possibly useful as a sort of apprenticeship in view of their own entrance into the world of theatre as major authors (see Martin 2002: 176-9). The circle of the official theatres would never have considered it respectable to present a programme that included only short pieces, and, what is more, comical ones (it was almost exclusively in the comical, even the farcical genre, that the authors

of short theatre exercised themselves). Comicality and brevity, even more so if paired off, were index of artistic inferiority compared to a canonical theatre whose dignity consisted in respecting the standard dimension and in keeping with its seriousness, the latter being coincidental with the idea of drama itself and of the plots typical of bourgeois theatre, which was to be devoid of farcical excesses or vulgar bits in all genres, the comical ones included.

A decisive change took place in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when some authors, most of whom belonging to naturalistic circles, started to produce serious one-act plays with literary ambitions, in order to free short drama of the stigma of mere secondary entertainment. André Antoine's decision to debut his *Théâtre Libre*, a milestone of a new conception of theatrical *mise en scène*, with the representation of four naturalistic one-act plays was indeed a revolutionary move. For the first time outside the context of popular shows and in a theatre that wanted to distinguish itself because of its artistic and social commitment, the short theatrical form aimed at an autonomous recognition of its theatrical qualities, thus escaping the aegis of the multiple-act play and liberating itself from an ensuing sense of inferiority. The naturalistic poetics of the *tranche de vie* and the Zolian principle of *faire simple* favoured, at least in part, the short plays' emancipation from the complex plots of bourgeois theatre and from the need to have enough time to allow their disentanglement. This created the conditions for the development of works that were efficacious just because they were able to compress in a limited time span the drama of a social condition or of an existential situation. In the event, however, short plays did not quantitatively overtake the standard durations either in Antoine's repertoire or in the naturalistic dramatic production, which was in any case rather short-lived.

That, nevertheless, did not mark a step backwards in the recognition of the artistic peculiarity of the short forms, which immediately afterwards found in the Symbolist drama more substantial reasons for an autonomous life destined to long-lasting fortune. Indeed, they were already strongly in tune with those elements of crisis of nineteenth-century drama whose effects also included a more significant and diffused presence of short theatre in the twentieth century and at the beginning of this century; in other words, the phenomenon which is exactly the topic of this issue of *Skenè*.

An essay on Symbolist theatre seemed to me in many respects the most appropriate starting point for a discussion of contemporary short theatre. Two main dramatic trends, originated within the Symbolist movement, joined forces to make it a privileged soil for the short form to thrive: lyricism and oneirism. The former is not only an aspect linked to pure language, to the 'lyric' tonality that the word almost always takes on in

Symbolist dramas, but represents also, and mainly, drama's substantial tuning with the poetry. This concerns the condensation and intensification of meaning, as well as the substitution of the dynamic chain of events that makes up the actual dramatic framework with a basically static situation full of suggestions and emotional trepidations. As will be underlined below, the attraction exercised by lyric poetry on a large part of twentieth-century theatre was an important source of the playwrights' increased adhesion to the short form: it was indeed Symbolism that gave origin to this phenomenon. Moreover, in Symbolist theatre, oneirism was the strongest sign of reaction to the realistic tendency of nineteenth-century theatre, which had culminated in Naturalism; and it became an inexhaustible source of the indefinite suspension or of the destructuration of the dramatic action so typical of much of twentieth-century drama. Although dreams belong to a sort of non-time to which it would seem inappropriate to apply the dimension of duration, both the direct experience of dreams and their narrative or scenic retrieval seem almost necessarily to imply their belonging to the domain of brevity. Fragmentariness, condensation, instantaneousness, unrelatedness of the situation with respect to causes and effects conspire together to make the dream a paradigm of brevity. Maeterlinck's short theatre is an extraordinary example of it, so much so as to be a very important model for European drama, above and beyond the decline of the Symbolist movement. It played a great influence on, amongst others, the modernist Spanish theatre, whose short forms are the subject of Javier Cuesta Guadaño's "Forms of Short Modernist-Symbolist Theatre in Spain". The author indicates the one-acter as the privileged instrument of the Spanish *fin de siècle* drama, committed to overcoming traditional theatre forms and observance of conventional genres. The direction taken by the innovative Iberian playwrights was that of a lyrical theatre, a *Lyrische Drama*, to use the expression that Cuesta Guadaño borrows from Peter Szondi (1975), which was particularly influenced by Maeterlinck's early plays, but was also able to retrieve in a modernist key the autochthonous tradition of short forms like *entremeses* and *sainetes*. The recurrent notions, also as titles of edited collections of short plays, of "teatro de ensueño" and of "teatro fantástico" confirm the decidedly antirealistic perspective adopted by this dramatic production, both in an dreamlike direction and towards the creation of fabulous worlds, in which inanimate figures and objects acquire an enchanted life. They are Symbolistic features on a European scale; but the fact that they were confirmed and tailored on a specifically Spanish perspective, thus far very little known, is another reason of interest of this article.

It is Cuesta Guadaño himself who reminds us that Szondi considers the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century one-act play as a particular form of compromise between innovative requirements, ensued from the

acknowledgement of the crisis of traditional drama, and a conservative stance that, by concentrating on the short form, somehow tries to salvage that dramatic tension that cannot originate from the development of the plot and of intersubjective relationships (Szondi 1970: 90-5). According to Szondi, this would be, then, one of those blind alleys taken by playwrights while looking for a present-day dramaturgy, a "*Rettungsversuch*" ("attempt to salvage") (ibid.: 83) of a theatre that is by now outdated and residual. The persistence of one-act plays in twentieth-century theatre production and their more or less occasional use by a number of authors, from Pirandello to Sarah Kane, tells us instead that it was not a blind alley at all. In fact the one-act play did not remain the only form of short theatre, and not even the most emblematic, of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries for two reasons. The first is the typically twentieth-century development of a theatrical line that existed regardless of a written text, much more ascribable to a 'scenic writing' than to a traditional drama writing, whose short forms followed their own courses, only partially or not at all assimilable to the idea, still extremely and traditionally 'dramaturgic', of the one-act play. The second reason lies in the fact that the revolutionary perceptive, communicative, aesthetic mutations that increasingly characterized the twentieth century actually stimulated the creation and diffusion of works, texts, and performances of such lightning and unheard-of brevity that the dimension of the one-act play, compared with them, was felt as of a medium size rather than really short. The historical avant-gardes, Futurism at the front, certainly did not stand in awe of dimensional standards; on the contrary, they privileged them as a target of their iconoclastic battle. The variety, speed and brevity that specifically inspired the Futuristic poetics are known to have found in the invention of "synthetic theatre" their most emblematic expression. The Manifesto that enunciated its aesthetics, published by Marinetti, Settimelli, and Corra in 1915, required theatre to be

> SINTETICO cioè brevissimo. Stringere in pochi minuti, in poche parole e in pochi gesti innumerevoli situazioni, sensibilità, idee, sensazioni, fatti e simboli. Gli scrittori che vollero rinnovare il teatro (Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Andrejeff, Paul Claudel, Bernard Shaw) non pensarono mai di giungere a una vera sintesi, liberandosi dalla tecnica che implica prolissità, analisi meticolosa, lungaggine preparatoria ... I nostri atti potranno anche essere *attimi*, e cioè durare pochi secondi. Con questa brevità essenziale e sintetica, il teatro potrà sostenere e anche vincere la concorrenza col *Cinematografo*. (Marinetti, Settimelli and Corra: 12-13)

> [SYNTHETIC that is, very brief. Compressing innumerable situations, sensibilities, ideas, sensations, facts, and symbols into a few minutes, into a few words and gestures. The writers who wanted to renew the theatre (Ib-

> sen, Maeterlinck, Andrejeff, Paul Claudel, Bernard Shaw) never thought they would reach true synthesis and free themselves from a technique that involves prolixity, meticulous analysis, drawn-out preparation ... Our acts can also be *moments*, only a few seconds long. With this essential and synthetic brevity theatre will withstand and even overcome competition from *Cinema*.]

Futurism, and Marinetti in particular, was in fact less antithetical than is admitted towards the Symbolist authors (Maeterlinck especially), who were included, in the passage just quoted, among the 'fogy innovators'. However, if compared to Symbolist brevity this deviation is huge, not only as regards the drastic shortening required of individual texts, but also, and even more, for the dynamic idea that rules Futuristic theatre. The intention is to break off with the traditional dramatic action not through the 'staticness' of the situation but through the accumulation and intersection of diverse situations. It is no surprise that the authors of the Manifesto claimed that the competitor to defeat, the model to imitate in order to overcome it, is cinema: a new language, fruit of technological innovation, necessarily characterized at the time by brevity and authorized, through montage, to operate instantaneous changes of setting, which allowed it not to destroy, as happened in bourgeois theatre, "la varietà dei luoghi ... insaccando molti paesaggi, piazze, strade, nell'unico salame di una camera" (Marinetti, Settimelli and Corra: 13) ["the variety of places ... stuffing many landscapes, squares, streets, into the sausage of a single room"]. In Futuristic poetics, the notion of brevity seems strongly connected to that of variety, internal to individual *sintesi*, but above all to the outcome of their rapid and bamboozling succession in *soirées* that retrieved, at the level of avant-garde intellectualism, the popular spirit of the editing of the *montage des attractions*. Amongst other things, this explains the Futurists' well-known admiration for the variety theatre, which they perceived as an inexhaustible training ground for theatrical, musical, dance, circus short forms, often in conscious and provocative contrast with bourgeois theatre, whose forms and dimensions could be the object of burlesque turnarounds or vertiginous shortenings: "cumulo di avvenimenti sbrigati in fretta e di personaggi spinti da destra a sinistra in due minuti ('ed ora diamo un'occhiata ai Balcani': Re Nicola, Enver-bey, Daneff, Venizelos, manate sulla pancia e schiaffi tra Serbi e Bulgari, un *couplet* e tutto sparisce)" (Marinetti 2004: 698) ["a load of quickly-over events and of characters pushed from left to right in two minutes ('and now let's take a look at the Balkans': King Nicholas, Enver-bey, Daneff, Venizelos, claps on the belly and slaps between Serbs and Bulgarians, a *couplet*, and everything vanishes")]. And so here is Marinetti praising the 40-minute performance of *Parsifal* in a music-hall in London and launching the idea of performing "in una sola serata tutte le

tragedie greche, francesi, italiane, condensate e comicamente mescolate" (ibid.: 704) ["in one single evening all the Greek, French, Italian tragedies condensed and comically mixed"] and "ridurre tutto Shakespeare ad un solo atto" (ibid.) ["reduce all of Shakespeare to a single act"].

In this issue of *Skenè* the contribution of the avant-garde climate of the early twentieth century to short forms is not dealt with through a direct examination of types of drama, which have already been the object of a plethora of studies, such as indeed the Futuristic *sintesi* and the Surrealist or Dada theatre, but through its influence on two less studied and less well-known as well as very different experiences: *The Drama for Fools* by Edward Gordon Craig and *Tragedie in due battute* by Achille Campanile. The former, discussed in Didier Plassard's essay, is a cycle of mini-dramas for puppets (sixty actually written out of the planned 365, in view of a performance for each day of the week) that the great English theoretician, director, and scenographer wrote during the First World War and whose first edition was recently edited by Plassard himself in collaboration with Marion Chénetier-Alev and Marc Duvillier (Craig 2012). The scholar stresses the strong contrast between the almost gigantic scale of the overall project (which should not have remained on paper but was meant as to become the repertory of a touring puppet company) and the very short dimensions of each composition, whose average performance duration time is no more than fifteen minutes. Interestingly, Craig recovered here a traditional form of short theatre, the interlude, maintaining its function of separation between the various episodes that make up the main part, but not the size ratio: the episodes are sometimes shorter than the interludes themselves, indicating that everything has been drawn into the regime of fragmentariness and brevity. An avant-gardist *sui generis*, driven by a very strong desire to re-invent the theatre from its foundations, without however severing its deep-seated roots, and a careful observer of the Futurists' proposals, albeit strongly criticizing their generic anti-fogydom,[3] Craig found in the dimension of the short play a strong unifying element between some components of the best theatrical tradition and the re-

[3] On Craig's opinions on the Futurists (from his alternating declarations of curiosity and interest to caustic judgements of amateurship and superficiality), see also Lapini 1993: 125-30. The English director was particularly bewildered by the fact that, in their naive pretence of creating a new theatre from scratch, without any historical basis, they ignored the very precious Italian tradition of the *Commedia dell'arte*, which he considered a fundamental reference point to restore the theatre to its real extra-literary vocation. With reference to some of Craig's declarations published in his journal "The Mask" between 1911 and 1914, Lapini makes it clear that also the shared admiration for the variety theatre really has almost antithetical presuppositions for the Futurists and for Craig. The former considered it as the outcome of contemporaneity, unheard-of and free from traditions, whereas for the latter it was the only trace left of the *Commedia dell'arte*.

quirements of the radical revisions carried out by contemporaneity. On the one hand, this showed continuity with a great tradition of anti-literary and anti-psychological theatre, mainly the *Commedia dell'arte*, but also with its closely related and partial heir, the tradition of the Italian puppeteers, who boast simplicity and brevity as the essential ingredients of their art. On the other hand, we find the contemporary urgency of the aesthetics of synthesis, of which Craig, as it was to the Futurists, was offered admirable examples (but perfectible in the theatre) on the cinema screens, and even more so on the stages of the variety theatre. Nevertheless, according to Plassard, in the *Drama for fools* it rests on more personal reasons in the idea of a harmonious theatre that refuses conflict, albeit always containing its seed, and that shortens its own duration to stop its dramatic development.

Very different worlds, as I was saying, those of Craig and Campanile. And yet, the sensation is that the distance between them could be at least a little reduced when reading the shortest interlude of Craig's *Drama*, *Yes, or the Death of Aristocracy*, which Plassard quotes here in full. This mini-drama is almost entirely made up of a stage direction that describes the progressive approaching on a sandy beach of the only character, Philippe Godefroi Cristophe de San Luc; once he has reached the foreground, the man places a hand on his heart, says "Oui" and dies. The restrained irony and the laconic understatement used to represent a far-reaching historical event (the death of aristocracy) on a minimal scale, the dimensional disproportion between the lengthy stage direction, on the one hand, and the long and pompous name of the character, on the other, with respect to the brevity of his line, certainly bring such a mini-drama close to the purest spirit of the *Tragedie in due battute*. Campanile, the micro-dramatist (active from 1924), is not, as Craig before him, a distant and critical flanker of the avant-garde, but rather an immediate and playful descendant of it: in his 'tragedies' there is "l'eco di un futurismo disinnescato da qualsiasi miccia superomistica" (Siciliano 1974: v) ["the echo of a Futurism defused of any superhuman spark"], closer to Palazzeschi rather than to Marinetti and likely to be also influenced by the variety theatre. However, there is a vein of elegant and obstinate restrain that is undoubtedly his own. In "Just two cues: Achille Campanile's upside-down tragedy", Elisa Martini suggests an even older and higher-ranking precedent to Campanile's irony and even to his inclination to extreme concision, in Ludovico Ariosto. Throughout the puzzle of adventures of his poem, Ariosto scatters interludes of epigrammatic efficacy destined to keep his explicit, albeit affectionate, distance from the exploits of his "*cavallieri antiqui*" ["ancient knights"]. If the Emilian poet mocked the romance genre from within it, while practicing it with great mastery, Campanile's reference to the tragic genre is clearly oxymoronic; Martini underlines that everything is upside-down with regard to tragedy, starting from reducing the five acts to a few lines (the

official 'two' established by the author are actually an average, not a fixed rule. Even if the two-line measure is the most used, some plays have more than ten lines, others only one, and one extreme case, *Dramma inconsistente* [*Unsubstantial Drama*], has none). All of them revolve around a humoristic vein even when dealing with authentically 'tragic' issues, such as death, or with characters potentially ascribable to a tragic plot (sovereigns, princes, chamberlains, wet-nurses, and a tragic choir engaged in a funeral *planctus*). Whether these works make distant reference to the remains of tragedy or, as more often is the case, they concern common everyday situations, their target is almost invariably the empty formalism of social rites and the passive use of stereotypes. Nonetheless, as Martini's essay cleverly underlines, at the time of proclaimed ostentation and magniloquent rhetoric (most two-line tragedies were written during Fascism), choosing the short form also takes on the implicit meaning of political dissent.

Beyond the time of the avant-garde, short and very short theatre forms found new life around the middle of the last century in the new trends of dramaturgy, for a good part rightly or wrongly ascribed to the 'theatre of the absurd'. Once the last residues of the dramatic conflict were eliminated for good, the psychological development, if not the very identity of the characters were cancelled and the chronological props and the logical constraints were further frustrated, the first-time writers of the years immediately following the Second World War saw the short play as the most suitable instrument to shed just enough light on a moment of scenic reality to stress its emptiness and senselessness. It was a time when national radios offered important opportunities to enjoy short pieces, freeing them from the constraints of duration or of an assemblage sometimes forced and incoherent imposed by live theatre. The playwright of this generation who perhaps more than any other privileged the short form, Jean Tardieu, was not by chance the director of the cultural service of the *Radiodiffusion française,* devoted to experimentation, making it an important laboratory of radio drama. One of the definitions he used for his works, *drames éclair* (flash dramas) – borrowed from the early twentieth-century humourist Pierre Henri Cami, who had also authored *mini-mélos* and *tragédies-flash* – is especially suitable to define his meaning of short theatre: a sudden enlightenment of a dramatic moment that must not have the time to show its antecedents nor to suggest possible developments. Free from the horizontal chain of origins and consequences, somehow consolatory even within a tragic perspective, the dramatic situation revealed its substantial lack of meaning by showing the (ridiculous or despairing) absurdity of every single life segment considered in itself. Suggestively, Tardieu proposed a sort of Pirandellian theory about the genesis of characters, remodelled in order to justify the short form:

> Je percevais les fragments dispersés d'une comédie, les bribes incohérentes d'un drame. J'entendais quelques rires, des éclats de voix, quelques répliques furtivement échangées, et je voyais apparaître sous le rayon du projecteur quelques êtres ridicules ou aimables, touchants ou terribles, qui semblaient échappés d'une aventure plus ample et s'en venaient à moi comme s'ils avaient reçu mission de m'intriguer ou de m'inquiéter, en ne m'apportant, de ce monde pressenti, que de lointains échos. Je notais ces fragments, j'accueillais ces fantômes de passage, je leur offrais un minimum de logement et de nourriture, mais je ne me souciais pas de fouiller plus avant dans leur passé ou dans leur avenir, ni de savoir si ces apparitions fugitives avaient de plus profondes attaches dans l'atelier des ombres. (Tardieu 1966: 8)
>
> [I perceived the scattered fragments of a comedy, the incoherent crumbs of a tragedy. I heard some laughter, the sound of voices, the furtive exchange of a few lines, and I could see under the light of the projector a ridiculous or amiable being, touching or terrible, who seemed to have run away from a grander adventure and was coming to me as if his mission were to make me curious or uneasy and bring me, from that imagined world, nothing but a distant echo. I observed those fragments, I welcomed those passing ghosts, I offered them basic food and accommodation, but I did not care about going deep into their past or their future and neither about learning whether these fleeting apparitions had deeper links with the *atelier* of the shadows.]

Many other authors of short plays might recognize themselves, even partly, in these declarations of poetics, including maybe Beckett himself, whose *dramaticules* are undoubtedly the most elevated, enigmatic and radical outcome of twentieth-century short drama. The fourth article of the issue, Laura Peja's "Shorter and shorter: Samuel Beckett's Challenge to the Theatre", is indeed dedicated to the works of the celebrated Irish writer. Peja underscores, on the one hand, the coherence, even the inevitability, of the Beckettian aesthetics that lead him to embrace the short form, and, on the other, the reasons of absolute originality of his final, short or very short theatre production compared to standard-length drama, but also to his own previous and equally revolutionary works, such as *En attendant Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*) and *Fin de partie* (*Endgame*). More and more lucidly inspired by the conviction, shared with the great German architect Mies van der Rohe, that "less is more", Beckett moved with increasing decidedness towards lessening and subtracting at every level, size included. However, far removed as they are from mere scale reductions compared to regular drama, his short plays use brevity as the significant instrument for a new vision of the dramatic text, no longer interpretable according to the canons of theatrical representation – whether traditional or 'modernized' – but pushed towards the realms of performance and installation. In

sum, the last Beckett paved a way that would then be tirelessly trodden by much experimental theatre that makes brevity one of the privileged places where theatre can move away from itself, from the boundaries of its own identity, from its own linguistic specificities, and also from conventional spaces and modalities of fruition. Thus, Beckett's short plays can find in art galleries or in other non-theatrical spaces the most suitable place in which one can watch a single *dramaticule* without having to join at times unsuccessful assemblages just to fill the duration of a theatre *soirée*.[4] Hence arose the interest he excited in directors and groups coming from, or at least strongly inspired by, experiences related to the visual arts and to experimentation with new media, as highlighted in Peja's comprehensive and useful overview of the recent Italian avant-garde theatre.

As regards the short form, Beckett, too, received important stimuli from radio and television commissions that had a significant role for other distinguished dramatists of the second half of the twentieth century, such as Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard. Pinter, in particular, distinguished himself as a master of twentieth-century short form by producing a number of one-act plays for the theatre, short dramas for radio and television, but also comical sketches for revue shows. This less well-known part of his theatre production is looked at by Mark Taylor-Batty in his article, "Pinter's Early Revue Sketches". The sketches there analysed belong to the first period of Pinter's theatrical work (the end of the 1950s) and prove to be an important ground for the elaboration of the playwright's poetics and of his "straordinaria capacità di cogliere le irregolarità della

[4] Paolo Bertinetti underlines that contemporary western theatre can indeed do away with the canonical performance place, but also that within it "è certamente previsto un rapporto tra luogo teatrale, organizzatore, compagnia e spettatori che, non fosse altro che per l'aspetto economico, implica una durata minima, al di sotto della quale lo spettacolo teatrale semplicemente non può avere luogo. I *dramaticules* sono al di sotto di tale durata. Il problema è stato aggirato mettendo insieme, nello stesso spettacolo, tre o più testi teatrali beckettiani, ma spesso ... gli accostamenti sono stati insoddisfacenti, se non addirittura dannosi. I richiami, gli echi, gli aspetti comuni presenti nei diversi lavori, possono risultare ridondanti, impoveriti e come annegati nel calderone della 'serata' che li mette insieme ... Ogni singolo *dramaticule* è una creazione a sé stante, con un suo ritmo, un suo tema, una sua immagine: ha bisogno di essere offerto allo spettatore come tale, come opera completa in sé. E tuttavia il suo stesso formato glielo impedisce" (Bertinetti 1994: xli-xlii) ["there exists a relationship between theatrical place, organisers, company and spectators, all of which, if nothing else for the economic aspect, needs a minimum duration, below which the theatrical performance simply cannot take place. The *dramaticules* are below such duration. The problem has been bypassed by showing in the same representation three or four theatrical texts, but often … the assemblage was not successful, if not even harmful. The recollections, the echoes, the common aspects that could be found in the different works may seem redundant, impoverished and almost drowned in the melting pot of the *soirée* that puts them together … Each single *dramaticule* is a creation in itself, with its own rhythm, with its own theme, with its own image: it needs to be offered to the spectator as such, as a work complete in itself. And yet, its own format does not allow it"].

parlata popolare inglese e di reinventarla per il palcoscenico, sottoponendo a una tensione estrema e a un intenso lavoro di scavo i ritmi della conversazione quotidiana di cui si sottolinea la ripetitività, i vuoti, la mancanza di consequenzialità" (Bertinetti 2003: 163) ["extraordinary ability to catch the irregularity of the popular English way of speaking and re-invent it for the stage by digging into and putting under extreme tension the rhythms of everyday conversation, of which he emphasises the repetitiveness, the empty spaces, the lack of consequentiality"]. The shortness of the sketch increases the effect of such elements and, even more clearly than in the Pinteresque dramas, it reveals the fundamentally linguistic nature of his characters, decontextualized, and deprived of psychological and historical identity (although appearing as less neutral than in Beckett thanks to a more everyday, sometimes jargonistic, language). Among the features specifically inherent in the brevity of these theatrical works, which are highlighted by Taylor-Batty, emphasis can be placed on the particular dialectic between the freedom of inspiration and the strict discipline imposed on the playwright by the necessary limits of the play's duration. As regards creative freedom, Pinter explicitly remarked (similarly to Tardieu) that he accepted the characters as they came out of the darkness and then got back into it. In his plays he simply takes in their stories, or better, their situations, as he has no duty (nor time) to question their past and devise a future for them. In other words, he is not obliged to fabricate them as characters endowed with a proper dramatic dimension. Therefore such apparitions can flow more directly and more freely from the author's own unconscious. However, at the same time, the duration constraint requires that the playwright treats such material with special rigour and discipline, because what remains open and untold at the plot level has to find full justification at the level of form. The work, in sum, must open and close with convincing coherence, even if no story begins or end in it.

Two short texts by Stoppard, one for television and one for the radio, are the object of Carlo Vareschi's article "'...worth using twice'? Making a Short Story Long. Tom Stoppard's Two Early One-Acters". This article proves particularly interesting in that it tackles the analysis of two early pieces (*Another Moon Called Earth,* 1967, and *Artist Descending a Staircase*, 1972) through a comparison with two later long dramas for the theatre that Stoppard clearly derived from them. It is not unheard of for an author to transform his or her short work into a standard-length one. Actually, this may shed light on the specific features of the short form, allowing to determine what was added and what was taken away, also at a qualitative level, in going from one dimension to another. In Molière's times (to cite an author whose production includes such a phenomenon),[5] transferring

[5] The most self-evident case as regards the great French playwright is the wide use he

material from farces to comedies – that is, from a short to a long form – meant, and even the author was conscious of it, going from a genre without dignity and not worthy of particular attention in its finishing touches to a much higher and recognized artistic level. In the second half of the twentieth century, the reason for such a transfer could no longer be the ambition of a cultural ennoblement of the work, because the short form had already achieved its own aesthetic acknowledgement. Also, short works in general no longer functioned as the early ground on which to cut one's teeth, with the aim to create a repertory of themes and plots in view of more articulate productions expected by a more demanding public, as was the case for Molière's farces or, later on, for Beaumarchais's *parades*.[6] Therefore, the motivations for such operations were different in those days and could vary depending on the author. We leave it to the reader to evaluate the reasons that Vareschi suggests with regard to Stoppard's case. What we wish to underline here is that the article shows how increased complexity and ambitions or even an improved outcome cannot be taken for granted in the transition from short to long play, as shown, albeit with distinct modalities, in both cases here examined. The author's conclusion is that a playwright like Stoppard, far better known for his standard-length works, actually finds in the short form an emotional intensity and an ability to probe the human soul that are elsewhere cooled down or diluted by his linguistic brilliance and his meta-theatrical virtuosity.

Since the end of the last century and the beginning of the present one a further increase in the production of short theatrical works and performances has been witnessed. When browsing through web announcements and looking for information on short theatre festivals, the suspicion arises that a real fashion has exploded, with the negative corollary that one can be induced to think that short writing equals easy writing and, therefore, that almost everyone can turn their hand to playwriting. However, the success of this format has much deeper and more serious reasons in a society and within a communication system that increasingly push towards instantaneousness, fragmentation, variety, and brevity of stimuli and experiences, and at a time which senses with mounting dismay the escalation of the crisis of unitary principles, of lasting values, of persistent identities. Late twentieth-century French dramas are among the ones that most consistently turned short theatre into a mirror of the times, as also shown by the research that analysed a corpus of more than three hundred writers and one hundred authors, which Alexandre Koutchevsky carried out for

made of his juvenile farce *La Jalousie du Barbouillé* as dramatic material for the much later play in three acts *George Dandin*.

[6] On the apprenticeship function of the experience with those particular brief comic entertainments called *parades* for the young Beaumarchais, see Lévy 1996.

his doctoral thesis. In his article for this issue, "Repetition as a Zoom Effect. A Mechanism of Short Writing Played at the Level of Words", he focuses on something that has found strong confirmation since Symbolism: the relation between short drama and poetry. Some authors, for example the already mentioned Tardieu and more recently Matéi Visniec, have approached theatre after a long and prolific poetic experience, almost as if they were driven by a desire to make explicit the dramaticism they already felt as natural in poetry, without totally giving up the poetic qualities of the text. And that obviously led them to the short theatre form. Among the stylistic resources shared by both short theatre and poetry, Koutchevsky focuses in particular on the zoom effect, that is, the concentration of meaning on one word that continually recurs in the text. That word takes up the role of 'radiant nucleus' and takes on multiple meanings which become stratified at each new repetition and spread throughout the drama. The accurate analysis of a very short play by Roland Fichet, *Fissures*, convincingly shows the realization of this procedure, whose efficacy can be fully exploited only in texts of decidedly reduced length. This confirms, also as regards the specific level of writing techniques, the 'ontological' difference of short drama.

The over three hundred texts that Koutchevsky analysed have all been performed at least once by professional theatre companies. This means that the current short drama production is not destined to remain on the page but can actually find opportunities for being performed outside the conventional circles. The festivals specifically dedicated to the short form, which have recently multiplied in several countries, have perhaps become the most obvious venues. However, as already pointed out with regard to Beckett, the short works that are most experimental and bordering on the world of visual arts find opportunities also in spaces, times and contexts of site-specific art. It is the case of a large part of the Italian experimental theatre of the last fifteen years that often radicalizes some fundamental aspects of the idea of postdramatic, which have grown familiar since the publication of Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatisches Theater* in 1999: cancellation of narration, breaking with linearity, increased visuality, going beyond the idea of theatre as representation of something other than itself. It is the identity itself of theatre that the new Italian scene, especially through its short productions, is re-examining in depth, also thanks to the organizational contribution and visibility offered by some important festivals.

To one of these festivals in particular is devoted the last article of this issue: Simona Brunetti's "Ten years of *Short Theatre*. Rome and its 'short' Festival". The ten-year-old Roman festival is presented as a particularly interesting example of innovation as regards both the organization and the enjoyment of the shows, following a pattern in which the brevity of each

performance is functional to an articulate and complex event, which is not simply the sum or presentation in sequence of the shows but a proposal for interaction and intersection among and between shows, workshops, installations, conferences, and concerts. Brunetti verifies in the confined setting of a single festival the strong propensity of the short form to linguistic contamination between different languages, be they theatrical (word, image, dance, figure theatre) or extra-theatrical (video, photography). She also distinguishes different typologies according to whether the short performance is conceived as autonomous, as a preparatory work for a longer piece, or as an excerpt from it, or even as 'parasitic performances', that intrude upon other performances as alienating moments, contaminating them for a short time. The analysis is supported by references to a number of shows and by a detailed examination of two of them. It clearly emerges that between the short fruition of the single events and the complex, multilingual long fruition of the festival-system as a whole, what is superseded is indeed the conventional duration of an evening at the theatre. This shows how today short theatre truly acts as a sponsor of regeneration of the social forms of theatricality, out of the stale rituality of traditional spaces and times. And it also means that the story of the short play is destined to be rather a long one.

English translation by Giovanna Stornati

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Forms of Short Modernist-Symbolist Theatre in Spain

Abstract

The crisis of *fin de siècle* was for all of Europe an authentic theatrical revolution which – inspired by Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck's earliest pieces – set out to transmogrify the traditional forms of Naturalism and projected itself across all the arts as a *réaction idéaliste* to Positivism. Spanish Modernism also responded to this renovated perspective on drama by means of a kind of localized Symbolism which promoted the phenomenon of 'poetization' of the theatrical event along with a new conception of the stage. This new kind of drama responded to an interconnected relationship between poetry and theatre, gesturing towards idealism in the treatment of certain themes or atmospheres, and finding in the one-act structure, which replaced the category of action with dramatic situation, the most suitable conditions to develop. Amongst the examples of brief Modernist-Symbolist theatre in Spain, we encounter Jacinto Benavente's *Teatro fantástico* (1892-1905), Gregorio Martínez Sierra's *Teatro de ensueño* (1905), Santiago Rusiñol's and Adrià Gual's Symbolist works, the several texts published in journals by Valle-Inclán or Pérez de Ayala, as well as other less known plays authored by the Millares Cubas brothers, Zozaya, Francés, Goy de Silva and López Aydillo.

A complete theatrical revolution took place throughout Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century. This also coincided with a much more complex cultural phenomenon, that is, the aesthetics of the *fin de siècle* and, more specifically, the Symbolist movement (Balakian 1969, 1982), which set out to transform the traditional forms of Naturalism and affected all artistic expressions as a *réaction idéaliste* in front of Positivism (Knowles 1934). In Spain, Modernism responded to this renewed perspective on drama by means of an indigenous Symbolism whose greatest achievements – aside from the extensive theatrical and stage productions of the

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so-called *género chico* which was enormously successful in the early twentieth century – depended on a wide array of influences. Some of these influences were among Shakespeare's plays those most characterized by fantastic elements or ambiguities, the most innovative examples of European drama (for example Henrik Ibsen's 'theatre of ideas' or Maurice Maeterlinck's earliest works), and the revisited carnivalesque short pieces of the Spanish tradition. All these generally contributed to promoting a form of 'poetization' and 're-theatricalization' of the theatrical event, as well as the emergence a new conception of the stage which is essential in order to understand the artistic revolution of the avant-gardes.

In his *Theory of the Modern Drama* (1956), Peter Szondi investigated the changes that took place at the turn of the century in the works of several playwrights who transformed the European stage – Ibsen, Chekhov, Hauptmann, Strindberg, and Maeterlinck – and which instigated a renewal of conventional dramatic forms. In considering these changes, the Hungarian scholar identified several 'attempts at preservation' of the traditional play, amongst which we may observe a preference for single-act plays, in which the brevity of the text requires greater concentration and dramatic tension. Indeed, this curiously became a model for many European and Spanish Symbolists:

> The fact that, after 1880, dramatists such as Strindberg, Zola, Schnitzler, Maeterlinck, Hofmannsthal, Wedekind, and, later, O'Neill, W.B. Yeats, and others turned to the one-act is not simply a sign that the traditional form of the Drama had become problematic. It also often represents the effort to save "dramatic" style from this crisis by presenting it as a future-oriented style. (Szondi 1987: 54)

The dramatic intensity of these plays is not solely related to their overall brevity, but to the depths that can be sounded in a particular scene, situation or visual frame: "The modern one-act is not a Drama in miniature but a part of the Drama elevated into a whole. The dramatic scene serves as its model" (ibid.: 55). Likewise, Köhler pointed out that the structural model for the short pieces – focusing not only on the conception of the literary work but also on the impression that it leaves – is related to the "unity of inspiration" to which Edgar Allan Poe referred in one of his most famous essays on poetics: "Symbolist drama met with its greatest success in one-act plays. In this, we might see an analogy with Poe's famous theory about the unity of inspiration which can be guaranteed only by a poem of short duration" (Köhler 1982: 420).

As regards the early twentieth-century Spanish stage, the production

of short drama responded not only to the success of the *teatro por horas* or *género chico*, but also to the revival of traditional subgenres such as the farce or *entremés* which were drawn from Baroque and eighteenth-century theatre and were present in Spanish theatre throughout its Silver Age and the twentieth century (Huerta Calvo 1992; Peral Vega 1999, 2001; García Pascual 2006). Although I will limit my analysis to Modernist-Symbolist theatre, it is worth pointing out here that some of these pieces, which derived from farce, were reformulated from a Symbolist perspective. We may even go so far as to suggest the existence of a "farsa simbolista" (Peral Vega 2001: 93-131) ["symbolist farce"], with special regard to works starring characters (Pierrot, for example) drawn from the *Commedia dell'arte* (see George 1995; Peral Vega 2007, 2008). Given the idealism in the treatment of certain themes or the presence of Symbolist resonances, these dramatic examples acknowledge the interlacing of poetry and theatre and the single-act format becomes the best framework for its development since the 'poetization' of drama generally takes place in short texts. (An exception is Valle-Inclán, who was one of the few playwrights to offer more extensive examples of this aesthetic in his *Comedias bárbaras* [*The Savage Plays*]).

In order to explore the Modernist-Symbolist short play in Spain, we must take into consideration several characteristic features of this sort of theatre. In the first place, an intriguing point of connection between poetry and theatre lies in the idealist reaction connected with *fin de siècle* aesthetics (more specifically, Symbolism). In the second place, we have to keep in mind the significant influence the Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck exercised over the vast majority of these plays. Besides, the epoch's literary peculiarities and their widespread employment cannot be ignored if we are to understand the complex aesthetic traits of the theatrical forms produced in this cultural context. We must emphasize the fact that at the turn of the century the boundaries between literary genres, which had been until then more or less fixed, became blurred to such an extent that their features began to combine into a kind of hybrid genre whose purpose was to explore new expressive possibilities in order to enrich literary language. Yet, even though the Symbolist movement did acknowledge the artistic superiority of poetry as a genre, it also stressed that a poetic quality is not to be found only in poems: in their vision the "signo lirico" ["lyrical sign"] – to borrow the phrase coined by Pedro Salinas in a well-known 1940 essay – determines all the 'literary' expressions of an era, be they drama, novel, short story or essay.[1] In fact, Symbolist theatre ex-

[1] "Pues bien; para mí el signo del siglo XX es el signo lírico; los autores más impor

perimentations often gave rise to the production of closet dramas, whose composition was essentially looked at as a mere literary exercise. In such cases, the beautifully illustrated editions of these texts, published either in volume form or in magazines and journals, actually replaced their hypothetical staging (see Rubio Jiménez 1991). The expression "teatro para lectura" ["theatre for reading"] was invented and used as a derogatory term for the idea of a theatre that was not meant to enter the playhouse but to be 'staged' in our imagination. Indeed, these dramas 'shunned' the actual stage in order to attain a dramatic 'ideal' attuned with the Symbolist formulations of Musset, Hugo, Banville and particularly those by Mallarmé.

Much has been written about the relationship between theatre and poetry at the turn of century but criticism has not always clarified a framework for discussion, since the generalizing term 'poetic drama' has been frequently applied to texts almost exclusively in verse and of either historical or nationalist bent.[2] More recent critical perspectives have preferred the term "drama lírico" (Hübner 1999, 2005) ["lyrical drama"], a purely Symbolist expression drawn from one of Szondi's essays (1975) and specifically applied to one-act plays. However, there are also examples of longer pieces. Amongst the most representative instances of lyrical drama in Europe, we find a number of works authored by poets who tried their hand at playwrighting: Claudel in France, Maeterlinck and Verhaeren in Francophone Belgium; W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot in the English-speaking world, D'Annunzio in Italy, Hofmannsthal in Germany, Pessoa in Portugal, and, to mention just one poet-playwright beyond the European borders, Tagore in India. Mallarmé also wrote two dramatic scenes: the monologue *L'après-midi d'un faune* (1865), well-known thanks to Vaslav

tantes de ese período adoptan una actitud de lirismo radical al tratar los temas literarios. Ese lirismo básico, esencial (lirismo no de la letra, sino del espíritu), se manifiesta en variadas formas, a veces en las menos esperadas y él es el que vierte sobre novela, ensayo, teatro, esa ardiente tonalidad poética que percibimos en la mayoría de las obras importantes de nuestros días" (Salinas 2001: 35) ["In short; for me, the twentieth century is characterized by lyricism; the most important authors of the era adopt an attitude of radical lyricism when dealing with literary themes. This basic lyricism, essential (not lyricism in terms of words but of the spirit), is manifested in several forms, sometimes in the forms one would least expect and it is what gives the novel, essay, theatre that ardent poetic tone that we may detect in the majority of the most important works of our era"].

[2] Most histories of literature or theatre of the twentieth century refer to 'poetic drama' as a form of commercial theatre, written in verse and of a historical, mythical or nationalist nature. According to the late José Paulino Ayuso, these manifestations – represented by Marquina, Villaespesa, the Machado brothers, amongst many other authors – are a kind of "pacto … entre la tendencia del teatro hacia la lírica y los intereses sociales del público" (Paulino Ay uso 2014: 59) ["pact … between theatre leaning towards lyricism and the social interests of the audience"].

Nijinski's performance of Claude Debussy's musical version (1894), and *Hérodiade* (in its 1864 version), one of the first theatrical points of reference for the myth of Salomé. Nevertheless, it is Belgian dramatist Maurice Maeterlinck's earliest works that undoubtedly represent the most important contribution to short Symbolist 'lyrical drama'. I am referring here to the so-called "petite trilogie de la mort" ["little trilogy of death"] (*L'Intruse*, 1890; *Les Aveugles*, 1890; *Les Sept Princesses*, 1891) and *Intérieur* (1894), *Alladine et Palomides* (1894), and *La Mort de Tintagiles* (1894) [*Intruder*; *The Blind*; *Interior*; *The Seven Princesses*; *Alladine and Palomides*; *The Death of Tintagiles*.]. All these single-act *drames statiques* feature both the anticipation of death, which had already been formulated in Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*, and a conception of 'everyday tragedy', inspiring Hofmannsthal's short plays, W.B. Yeats's *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), and J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904), to name just a few writers who reprised the same compositional pattern.

Short "lyrical drama" redefines the traditional elements of drama with the intention of transferring the mechanisms of poetic discourse to the theatre whilst, at the same time, exploring the dramatic potential of poetry. Often defined as 'static', this theatre suggests a particular *état d'âme* or state of consciousness rather than a familiar dramatic plot, as the genre itself gives rise to a theatrical poetics which replaces the category of action with the one of dramatic situation. The *dramatis personae* are indeed the personification of ideas and feelings transmitted not only through words but also through gestures and pantomime, foregrounded either by the staging (set, lighting, etc.) itself or by the systematic use of a series of rethorical artifices. These artifices (such as repetitions of verbal structures, pauses and silences, ellipses, exclamations, and rhetorical questions) accelerate or delay the dramatic rhythm and endow it with musicality. Some characters are denied psychological individuality and a new orientation is also given to acting as happens with the idea of the "marionetas metafísicas" ["metaphysical puppets"] in Maeterlinck's early brief pieces (see Abirached 1994). In fact, he did not use puppets or marionettes, but rather he introduced new forms of performance especially based on gestures and body language which radically broke with the traditions of Naturalist theatre.

From the point of view of the dramatic structure, the presence of dialogue is one of the most relevant issues, given that in Symbolist plays it ceases to have a communicative function and becomes instead subjected to the effect that the play is designed to inspire in the audience. This is especially evident with reference to a series of speeches featuring a high level of 'poetization' which often do not relate to each other and yet con-

tribute to investing the texts with a semantic or affective unity; this unity does not necessarily have a repercussion on the advancing of the dramatic action which is customarily to be found in traditional theatre. Monologues, dialogues, and stage directions are not neatly separated since they are no longer functional from a purely dramatic perspective but are rather modes of expression of the 'poetic', be it in verse or in rhythmic prose. This is the case, for instance, of Maeterlinck's *Les Aveugles* in which we can clearly detect that "the dialogic form is insufficient as a means of presentation" (Szondi 1987: 33). Interactions are limited to a constant series of questions and answers which do not always obey a logical correspondence as they often take place simultaneously and are of a choral nature. The fact that the dialogues have no dramatic functionality indicates that the replies do not serve a communicative purpose either, but rather that they express a particular emotional state or the characters' general feelings as if this were a poem recited by many voices. Likewise, the lack of communication favours a theatre of silence, which underscores the sonorous and musical possibilities of the verbal signifier and assists the introduction on stage of other theatrical languages, such as music, mime, and dance.[3]

The staging possibilities for this kind of theatre may be associated with the 'theory of correspondences' coined by Baudelaire in a famous sonnet referring to reality as a 'forest of symbols'. He also alludes to the Wagnerian concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* [total work of art] and its application to theatrical practice in which all arts can coexist by means of a renovated stage poetics that seek to create "un marco dramático para la poesía" (Balakian 1969: 154) ["a dramatic framework for poetry"]. Baudelaire considered the German composer as the genial precursor of 'future drama' in his quest for new modes of expression by means of integrating all arts on the stage, even though in practice music became the dominant force. This was attuned with the idea of the musicality of poetry – "la musique avant toute chose" ["music before everything"] as Paul Verlaine had it in his poem "Art poétique" (1882) – which became the norm in the works of Symbolist-Modernist poets. In this sense, thanks to the synaesthesia of objects, colours, gestures, music, and even perfumes and in

[3] In his famous study *Theories of the Symbol,* Todorov alluded to a sequence of symbolically interpretative leads in Symbolist drama, for example by referring to Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Todorov's observations can be applied to the analysis of short drama. These leads are 'repetition' (words are repeated because they do not have a conventional meaning but rather a deep meaning), 'discontinuity' (dialogue does not serve a communicative function because questions go unanswered), and 'indeterminacy' (the negative sentences, extremely vague space-time references, ellipsis, etc.); see Todorov 1983: 34-5.

cense, as was done at Paul Fort's Theâtre d'Art (see Fleischer 2007), the expression of an emotional state and the ability to produce emotions were intended to be projections of human fear and loneliness facing the mystery of the unknown and death (see, for example, Maeterlinck's and other Belgian playwrights' works). The use of objects charged with symbolic significance as well as the mixture of light and sound (a clock striking the hours, the sound of waves or of the wind, variations in the colour of the setting or of backdrops, focalization of specific scenographic elements by means of a deliberate use of lighting, etc.) were intended to induce a 'dream state' in the audience and suggest the impression of correspondences between the material (the senses) and the spiritual (the mind). Perhaps the best examples of these new stage poetics can be found in the famous performances at Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Œuvre. (See on this Knowles 1934; Robichez 1957; Bablet 1965: 148-56, 156-67; Deak 1993: 134-83, 184-247).

The resonances of the Symbolist aesthetics in the forms of Spanish short drama gathered this varied score of influences in different aspects, all converging in a theatrical writing style, more than in stage practice, which is identified with the introduction of 'poetry' in the theatre as a dramatic and aesthetic category. In some cases the notion of "teatro de ensueño" (Rubio Jiménez 1993) ["dream theatre"] has also been used, in so far as it deals with attempts to employ an antirealist poetics closer to the world of dreams rather than to reality.

There are some precedents in the introduction of the 'symbolic' in Spanish theatre. Juan Valera's *Asclepigenia. Diálogo filosófico-amoroso* [*Asclepigenia. Philosophical-Amorous Dialogue*], included in *Tentativas dramáticas* (1879) [*Dramatic Attempts*], may be a suitable example. However, the first playwright to echo a kind of aesthetics that we may more precisely define as 'symbolist' was Jacinto Benavente, the author of *Teatro fantástico* [*Fantastic Theatre*], a small book first published in 1892, with a second version appearing in 1905. This book comprises texts that cannot be associated to a single theatrical tendency as they are an exploration of diverse dramatic forms. Benavente appropriated a new dramatic concept related to the dream state and fantasy taken from European Symbolism, which also included the sexual ambiguity of many of Shakespeare's comedies (I am referring in particular to *Twelf Night*, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and especially *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). These ideas formed the basis of Spanish theatre from the Modernist regeneration up to Valle-Inclán and García Lorca. This foundational discourse of a new type of theatre has been investigated by various critics. According to Serge Salaün, *Teatro*

fantástico is "la más temprana y la más explícita tentativa de teatro simbolista o por lo menos no realista en España" (1999: 54) ["the earliest and most explicit attempt at Symbolist drama, or at least non-Realist drama, in Spain"] and its modern editors agree that "no parece exagerado considerar el *Teatro fantástico* como el texto fundacional del teatro modernista (simbolista) en España" (Benavente 2001: 19) ["it is no overstatement to consider Teatro fantástico as the seminal text in Modernist (Symbolist) theatre in Spain"].

Four dramatic pieces, which were included in the 1892 edition, are representative of the most innovative dramatic forms of the day: *Amor de artista* [*An Artist's Love*], *Los favoritos* [*The Favourites*], *El encanto de una hora* [*The Charm of an Hour*], and *Cuento de primavera* [*A Tale of Springtime*]. The first one is a kind of poetic manifesto which consists in a metaliterary piece of commendation of Modernism. The second is an adaptation of the Shakespearian model (in this case of *Much Ado About Nothing*) intended here as a tool for dramatic renovation by means of a courtly comedy. The third employs puppet theatre (in this case represented by porcelain figures) as a stylized version of this ancient form of popular theatre and as an expression of a dehumanized or depersonalized art. The final play (beyond the scope of this study as it is a longer piece) is an anti-realistic piece of 'dream theatre', also inspired by Shakespeare, which clearly defines the triumph of juvenile fantasy over the reality of an outmoded bourgeoisie.

It is worth dwelling on two of these plays as they show two typically Modernist-Symbolist motifs. *Amor de artista* [*An Artist's Love*] presents a dialogue between the Poet, a rebellious and apathetic young man like all the artists of his generation, and Don Prudencio, a conformist who lives up to his name and with whom the young man shares his ataraxia:

> ¡Ah, la voluntad…! No creo en su poder. Necia pretensión del hombre que no se resigna a ser juguete de una fuerza invencible y ciega. ¿Qué acción hay en nosotros voluntaria? Desde el nacer, fatalidad que en nada depende de nosotros, hasta el morir.
>
> (Benavente 2001: 206)

> [Ah, willpower...! I do not believe in its power. It is the sad aspiration of man who will not resign himself to being the plaything of a blind and invincible power. Which of our actions is truly voluntary? From birth, an act of fate over which we have no control, to death.]

This general lack of willpower results into a preoccupation with poetic meaning itself, expressed in this case through the dialogue between the

Poet and the Muse and beneath which we may identify Benavente's own thought. This dialogue appears in the final scene of the play, in which the Muse confronts the Poet about the capacity of literary language to express feelings: "Por eso eres poeta, porque tus lágrimas tienen palabras" (ibid.: 212) ["That's why you're a poet, because your tears are words"]. Finally, in front of the Poet's concern for immortality, the Muse confirms his hopes of perpetuating in the future the same ideas and feelings which have inspired his works:

> Pero de tu inmortalidad, poeta, ¿quién duda? No sé si la conciencia de tu yo subsistirá a través de la eternidad. ¡Qué importa! Como en tus hijos hay carne de tu carne, sangre de tu sangre y, aun en la parte espiritual, ideas hijas de las tuyas y sentimientos que fueron tuyos; como por ellos luchas y te afanas, acaso porque sientes que en ellos continúas viviendo, y en ellos está tu vida futura, así, en tus obras transmites el espíritu que les dio formas, y a través de los siglos vivirás despertando, al contacto de otros espíritus, las mismas ideas, los mismos sentimientos que animaron en ti. ¿No es esto la inmoralidad? ¿Qué más quieres?
>
> (Ibid.: 215)

> [But who could doubt your immortality, poet? I do not know if your self-awareness will last through eternity. Who cares! As in your sons there is flesh of your flesh and blood of your blood and, in their spirit, ideas of yours and affections that were yours; as you struggle and toil for them, maybe because you feel that you go on living in them, and your future life is in them, so, in your works, you pass on the spirit which shaped them, and you will live through the centuries arousing, in contact with other spirits, the same ideas, the same feelings that they inspired in you. What is it if not immortality? Can you ask for anything more?]

El encanto de una hora [*The Charm of an Hour*] is a completely anti-realistic piece starring two porcelain figures that come to life and spend a night discussing the transience of existence and the fragility of emotions, which are as vulnerable as the very material they are made of. As we might expect, since we are dealing with a Modernist piece, the traditional puppets or marionettes, which provide the framework for this type of theatre, turn here into refined eighteenth-century Sèvres porcelain figures whose anxieties are rewarded with a night of love. Yet, dawn will come and show them the futility of their impossible longings:

MERVEILLEUSE. ¡Una hora de encanto!
INCLOYABLE. ¡La hora del amor…! La única que vale la pena de vivir … Si en este instante concluyera nuestra existencia y otra vez inmóviles quedara en nosotros solo la facultad de recordarla, ¿valdría la pena de recordar allí eternamente estos momentos de vida ficticia…? Pero no: estamos solos y, por diferentes caminos, hemos llegado al mismo sentimiento: el vago anhelo de algo, que es vida de la vida. (Ibid.: 96)

[MERVEILLEUSE. An hour of charm! // INCLOYABLE:. The hour of love...! The only hour worth living … If our existence were to end in this instant and once again motionless all that remained within us were the capacity to remember it, would it be worth eternally remembering those moments from a fictional life...? But no: we are alone and on different paths we have arrived at the same feeling: a vague longing for something, the life of life.]

Teatro fantástico was reprinted in 1905 and underwent some changes including the removal of one piece and the inclusion of several others that had appeared in journals and newspapers from 1892 onwards. Benavente set aside *Los favoritos* [*The Favourites*] and added *Comedia italiana* [*Italian Comedy*] (a humoristic farce starring Columbine and Harlequin), *El criado de Don Juan* [*Don Juan's Servant*] (a piece in which a servant tries to steal a conquest from the famous *burlador* with tragic results), *La senda del amor* [*The Path of Love*] (a 'comedy for marionettes' interlaced with metatheatrical elements and containing a libertine message), *La blancura de Pierrot* [*Pierrot's Whiteness*] (a subject for pantomime), and *Modernismo. Nuevos moldes* [*Modernism: New Forms*] (a metaliterary argumentative dialogue on Modernist aesthetics).[4] In this case, the playwright promoted the recovery of farce and puppetry as a means for renewal which sowed the seeds not only for Benavente's subsequent masterpiece *Los intereses creados* [*The Bonds of Interest*] but also for other playwrights' works. The direct influence of these farcical texts, which might as well have been pantomime or grand-Guignol shows in suburban Parisian theatres, became a kind of grotesque counterpoint to Benavente's symbolist dreams that would later draw their inspiration from Maeterlinck's theatre and poetic fantasy. Amongst these

[4] As suggested by Peral Vega (2012), this edition owes much to the publication of Martínez Sierra's *Teatro de ensueño* [*Dream Theatre*]. The contact between the two artists, who were close friends and collaborated on several projects, could have been the decisive factor for Benavente to recuperate the texts from a book he had published many years before and include them in a new volume which would be much more relevant with regard to Modernism.

pieces, *La blancura de Pierrot* [*Pierrot's Whiteness*] stands out as the first in a series of mime plays later cultivated by other playwrights. Pierrot moves away from his usual melancholic characterization and, as already occurred in some French mime dramas, ruthlessly commits a murder out of greed. This is foregrounded by an obsessive presence of chromatic symbolism linked to silence and absence:

> La idea del crimen se fijó negra, como cerrazón de tormenta, en el alma de Pierrot … Una noche de invierno salió Pierrot del molino y, como la luna clarísima blanqueaba su figura humana, internóse, arrastrándose casi entre los árboles, hacia la choza de la vieja. Antes de penetrar en ella tiznóse la cara y las manos con tizones de brasas … ¿Quién podría conocerle, negra la cara y negra el alma, en la negrura de la noche y del crimen? Roja la cara, rojas las manos, salía poco después apretando convulso un bolsón de cuero mugriento rebosante de monedas de oro … Ni el agua, ni el carbón, ni la harina, borraban ni encubrían la sangría roja. ¡Pobre Pierrot, rojo para siempre, espectro terrible del crimen! … Pierrot hubiera querido sepultarse en la blancura de la nieve inmaculada, deshacerse con ella en blancura; blancura del cielo, fría como perdón sin amor y sin misericordia. La nieve cubría su cara y sus manos con nueva blancura, borrada la negrura del tizón, borrada la sangre roja del crimen. Pero el calor más tenue fundiría la máscara protectora, y el mísero Pierrot, desde entonces, vive en la frialdad de una eterna noche. (Ibid.: 126-8).
>
> [The idea of the crime stuck in Pierrot's soul, black like a threatening storm … On a winter night, Pierrot left the mill and, while an extremely clear moon whitened his human figure, he headed to the hut of the old woman, almost dragging himself among the trees. Before entering, he painted his face and hands with charred logs of wood … Who could recognize him, with his face black and his soul black, in the blackness of the night and crime? He emerged after a short while, with his face red and his hands red, clenching a greasy leather bag, filled to bursting with golden coins. No water, no coal, no wheat could erase or hide the red blood. Poor Pierrot, red forever, terrible ghost of the crime. Pierrot would have wished to bury himself in the whiteness of the untouched snow, melting with it in the whiteness; whiteness of the sky, cold as forgiveness without love or mercy. The snow covered his face and hands with new whiteness, wiping out the blackness of charcoal, wiping out the blood of the crime. But the slightest heat would melt the protective mask and sad Pierrot, since then, lives in the darkness of an eternal night.]

Although this new edition of *Teatro fantástico* was not highly regarded by the critics, neither on its publication nor later, it did not go unnoticed

by Rubén Darío. In an article entitled "La joven literatura" ["Young Literature"], included in the column on contemporary Spain (later collected in a volume entitled *España contemporánea* [*Contemporary Spain*]) that he run in 1899 for Buenos Aires *La Nación* and published in 1900, he claimed:

> Dejo como última nota el *Teatro fantástico* de Benavente, una joya de libro que revela la fuerza de ese talento en que tan solamente se ha reconocido la gracia … Es un pequeño 'teatro en libertad' … Son delicadas y espirituales fabulaciones unidas por un hilo de seda en que encontráis a veces, sin mengua en la comparación, como la filigrana mental del diálogo shakesperiano, del Shakespeare del *Sueño de una noche de verano* o de *La tempestad*. El alma perspicaz y cristalinamente femenina del poeta crea deliciosas fiestas galantes, perfumadas escenas, figurillas de abanico y tabaquera que en un ambiente Watteau salen de las pinturas y sirven de receptáculo a complicaciones psicológicas y problemas de la vida. (Darío 2013: 117)[5]

Benavente's works were followed by the *Diálogos fantásticos* [*Fantastical Dialogues*], written by Gregorio Martínez Sierra (and his wife) and published in 1899. Immersed in the contemporary debate on the problematic and growing hybridazation of the literary genres, this volume includes nine "dialogues" – or prose poems? – representing a sort of experiment in poetic, narrative, and theatrical discourse. The titles of each of these texts (*Sursum corda*, *Hadas* [*Fairies*], *Obra de amor* [*Labour of Love*], *Rapsodia* [*Rhapsody*], *Musas* [*Muses*], *Vida* [*Life*], *Sirenas* [*Sirens*], *Esponsales* [*Betrothal*], and *Noche* [*Night*]) are related to oneiric Modernism in their reference to fantasy, in their being suggestive of various feelings, and in their ambition of creating instances of intellectualized beauty. In this sense, the most representative pieces may be *Sursum corda* (which features a Poet who enters a dialogue with Nature in order to recover his ability to dream), *Hadas* (inspired by the myth of Pygmalion, in which an Artist asks the Fairies to help him give life to a statue he has created), *Sirenas* (a piece that refers back to the mythological song of the sirens which, on this occasion, is

[5] "My final note is on Benavente's *Fantastic Theatre*, a gem of a book that demonstrates the force of a talent which has so far only been recognized for being funny … It is a small 'theatre of liberty' … These are delicate and spiritual fables linked by a strand of silk where you will often find, notwithstanding the comparison, the mental acrobatics of Shakespearean dialogue, the Shakespeare of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Tempest*. The shrewd and crystalline feminine soul of the poet creates delightful gallant parties, perfumed scenes, fine fan and snuffbox figurines that seem to emerge as if from an atmosphere created by Watteau and which act as receptacles for psychological complications and the trials and tribulations of life"

sung for a man striving for glory), or *Noche* (in defence of silence, which is allegorically introduced as the essence of poetry and necessary condition for various poetic creatures to find shelter at night).

Another notable example of Modernist-Symbolist drama is Martínez Sierra's 1905 *Teatro de ensueño* [*Dream Theatre*], which contains four pieces inspired by the turn-of-century aesthetics: *Por el sendero florido* [*Along the Floral Path*], *Pastoral*, *Saltimbanquis*[6] [*Tumblers*], and *Cuento de labios en flor* [*A Tale of Flowering Lips*]. As Serge Salaün has pointed out, "este libro ofrece un terreno privilegiado para 'observar', muy concretamente, la penetración de las corrientes modernas en España, la relación – estrechísima – del Modernismo con el Simbolismo europeo y cómo funciona el proceso de europeización de la cultura y del arte" (Salaün 1999: 13). ["this book is a vantage point from which to 'observe', very specifically, the penetration of modern currents in Spain, the (extremely) close relationship between European Modernism and Symbolism, and how the process of Europeanization of culture and art functions"].

This is perhaps the work that best summarizes Symbolist poetics, since it integrates multiple artistic manifestations, also perceptible in the typographic features of the book. These manifestations are completed by Rubén Darío's "Melancólica sinfonía" ["Melancholic Symphony"], which acts as a prologue, and the "Ilustraciones líricas" ["Lyrical Illustrations"] that Juan Ramón Jiménez wrote as an introduction to the texts. There are also constant references to the dichotomy between reality and dream, here identified with love, death, the transience of life or the impossible ideal. In particular, *Por el sendero florido* makes good use of the juxtaposition of the real world (Castile) and the world of dreams (identified with a cart run by disillusioned itinerant Hungarians); this combination refers to the topos of life as a road whose destination is tragically revealed by the death of one of the female characters. *Pastoral* depicts a confrontation between Alcino – who cannot see the beauty that actually stands beside him – and Rosa María – a young woman who wishes to relive her experiences in a fantastic dimension in the very moment they occur to her: "Si oigo cantar un pájaro, paréceme que tengo corazón de pájaro" (Martínez Sierra 1999: 189) ["If I hear a bird sing, it seems to me that I have a bird's heart"]. In the final piece, *Cuento de labios en flor*, two sisters, Rosalina and Blanca, although living in harmony, face each other showing a different perspective on life, which is also reflected by the sym-

[6] It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the world of circus, as its scale far exceeds the brevity of the texts analysed herein.

bolic opposition of chromatic fields. Nevertheless when a man comes between them, they choose to commit suicide in order to avoid conflict.

With regard to Catalonia, two figures prove fundamental in order to understand the dissemination of Symbolist ideas in Spain: Santiago Rusiñol and Adrià Gual. Both supported the launch of cultural initiatives, such as the *Festes Modernistes del Cau Ferrat* at Sitges (Barcelona) and the *Teatre Íntim*, and their work was a decisive step towards theatrical and artistic renovation. Amongst their dramas we may find Rusiñol's *L'alegria que passa* [*Passing Joy*] (staged in 1899 with music by Enric Morera), which examines the conflict between the poet-artist seeking an ideal (here represented by a company of strolling players) and a materialist bourgeois society. In its day, it was considered "una preciosidad; cliché maravilloso de un rincón de la vida en un pueblo; modelo de observación, de verdad y de arte, obtenido por Rusiñol en un momento de genial inspiración, y cuya lectura deja en el alma no sé qué voluptuoso pesar de vaga e indefinible tristeza" (Martínez Espada 1900: 125) ["a beautiful thing; a wonderful cliché from a corner of life in a village; it is a model of observation, of truth and art, obtained by Rusiñol in a moment of genius and whose reading leaves a residue in the soul of vague and indefinably voluptuous sadness"]. *El jardí abandonat* (1900) [*The Abandoned Garden*] is another of Rusiñol's interesting creations; it is set in a garden, once again symbolizing the conflict between the individual and reality, in which the world created by the artist is represented as set aside from a society insensitive to art. On the other hand, the painter and playwright Adrià Gual, better known for his work as stage director, also penned works which exemplify the assimilation of Symbolist ideas both in theoretical form and in their theatrical application. The most important of these are *Nocturn* (1895) [*Nocturnal*] and *Silenci* (1898) [*Silence*], two pieces which do not hide their debt to Maeterlinck's early works.

In addition to the introduction of idealistic currents in theatre, the other line of investigation on brief forms is indeed related to the reception of Maeterlinck's work (see Salaün 2002). Critics have emphasized the Belgian playwright's extraordinary ability to express "la lucha del hombre contra el vacío al darse cuenta del poder de la muerte sobre su conciencia" (Balakian 1969: 204) ["the struggle of man against the void on discovering the power of death over his conscience"].[1] Likewise, his interest in giving dramatic form to the invisible and the unperformable as well as to silence are at the source of his spiritually and metaphysically inspired theatre. His first pieces – *L'Intruse*, *Les Aveugles*, and *Intérieur* – display a symbolic dimension of reality and project a complex world of sensations, mystery, and unreality in which thematic concerns determine the creation of situations or

atmospheres to the disadvantage of dramatic action. There is no progression in the plots of these *drames statiques*, but on the contrary they contain a clear 'tension' caused by the imminence of death as an inexorable destination. Jesús Rubio Jiménez has identified the reasons for which Maeterlinck became an aesthetic model for Spanish Symbolists: "Sin extremar sus planteamientos como Mallarmé, su originalidad radicaba en unir las reacciones de los personajes, su drama interior, a los fenómenos naturales exteriores. Suprimía el decorado descriptivo (vieja aspiración de Banville) y renunciaba a cualquier análisis psicológico sistemático, sustituyéndolo por una sugerencia continuamente cambiante. Buscaba transmitir la interdependencia existente entre los fenómenos físicos y los espirituales. Voces y silencio, estatismo y movimiento, se combinaban de manera extraña. Sus personajes trataban de penetrar el misterio de la realidad, de percibir sus voces más profundas (recuérdese Baudelaire), una realidad enigmática y angustiosa a fuerza de ser hermética. El fatalismo maeterlinckiano impresionó a los simbolistas y generó toda una literatura derivada de sus cánones." (Rubio Jiménez 1993: 106) ["Without taking as extreme a position as Mallarmé, his originality stemmed from linking the reactions of the characters, their inner drama, to the external natural phenomena. He removed the descriptive scenery (Banville's old aspirations) and renounced any kind of systematic psychological analysis, replacing it with a constantly changing suggestion. He sought to transmit the interdependence existing between physical and spiritual phenomena. Voices and silence, static and movement, form strange combinations. His characters sought to penetrate the mystery of reality, of perceiving the deepest inner voices (remember Baudelaire), an enigmatic and anxious reality sealed off by force. Maeterlinckesque fatalism impressed the Symbolists and generated a body of work derived from his canons"].

Since the Catalan performance of *L'Intruse* during the second Modernist festival at Sitges (which took place in September 1893 in Barcelona and was supported by Rusiñol) and the staging of *Intérieur* at Gual's *Teatre Íntim*, the presence of the "poet of mystery", as Ortega y Gasset defined Maeterlinck in 1904, became a constant one. In those days, many articles were dedicated to him and his works and testify to the initial impact his theatre made on the Catalan media, soon followed by Madrid newspapers and journals. This interest coincided with the first translation of *L'Intruse* into Spanish in 1896, carried out by a young José Martínez Ruiz, known as 'Azorín'. In addition to Rusiñol, Gual, Benavente, and the Martínez Sierras, who were Maeterlinck's main translators in Spain, many others, such as Ramón Pérez de Ayala, recognized his contributions, if not totally

absorbed his influence in their theatrical projects. The first performances of his dramas (at small venues or before small audiences) and the 1904 visit to Barcelona and Madrid of his company, which included his partner Georgette Leblanc as the leading lady, are evidence of the modernity of his dramatic lesson, although much of the audience and many critics did not understand it.

His early influence on Spanish playwrights, deriving from his presence in the media a year ahead of his company's arrival, found expression in a series of pieces whose themes revolved around the anticipation of death. Valle-Inclán's *Tragedia de ensueño* (2006a), initially published in the first issue of the journal *Madrid* in 1901, is perhaps the most representative example of Maeterlinck's influence, since this work features an old lady who knits and laments the death of her seven children, knowing that the same fate will befall her grandchild. *Comedia de ensueño* (2006b) [*Dream Comedy*], published in 1905 by the same author, also contains elements of Decadentism and Symbolism. Ramón Pérez de Ayala's *La dama negra. Tragedia de ensueño* [*The Dark Lady. A Dream Tragedy*], published in the journal *Helios* in 1903, is set in a greenhouse in which a young man strives to forget a woman who represents death, while José Carner's *Cuento de lobos* [*A Tale of Wolves*], also published in *Helios* in 1903, insists on the notion of *le tragique quotidien* and contains scenic elements suggesting the inexorability of man's destiny.

The direct impact of Maeterlinck's darkest pieces is diluted in a singular volume entitled *Teatrillo* (1903) [*Little Theatre*], published by the Millares Cubas brothers, two intellectuals from Las Palmas de Gran Canaria who founded an important literary association and a *teatrillo*, a 'domestic' theatre based in their own house, and whose main concern was the dissemination of artistic novelties in the Canary Islands. This book includes short pieces which effectively summarize the aesthetic cornerstones of a Symbolism more closely identified with Christian idealism than with Modernist heterodox spirituality. It includes the inheritance of Maeterlinck's earliest theatre in the dramatization of several situations in which waiting for death is the central theme. The six texts contained in the volume are *José María*, *Espantajos* [*Scarecrows*], *¡Viva la vida!* [*Hurray for Life*], *La del alba* [*The Lady of Dawn*], *Pascua de Resurrección* [*Easter Resurrection*], and *Pura y sin mancha* [*Pure and Unstained*]. The most relevant piece is perhaps *Espantajos* which features two indolent old men who wait at a crossroads ("Toda nuestra existencia se ha pasado esperando" (Millares Cubas 1903: 77); "We've spent our whole lives waiting") for a stroke of destiny that may allow them to put an end to their dull and boring monotony of their lives and prove their Christian charity.

Also indebted to the Belgian dramatist, however indirectly, is Antonio Zozaya's volume *Misterio* (1911) [*Mystery*], a "tríptico campesino" ["rural tryptich"] composed of three independent pieces of Symbolist nature, here called "actos" and arranged as a tableau featuring stories which recreate a primitive and archaic world enveloped by a mysterious halo that causes unexpected twists in the dramatic action. The first "acto", entitled *Los relicarios* [*The Reliquaries*], is made up of thirteen scenes, and the second one, entitled *La vaca muerta* [*The Dead Cow*], has the same internal organization. The symbolism of the number thirteen alludes to the bad luck, normally associated with this number, that looms over the characters. The third "acto" is *Lo que lleva el correo* [*What Came With the Post*].

There are also several miscellaneous publications of short texts which represent a current of eclectic Symbolism. Amongst these we should mention novelist, playwright and renowned art critic José Francés. As happened with many contemporary volumes, the publication of his *Guiñol. Teatro para leer* (1907) [*Guignol. Theatre for Reading*] was organized both as a Modernist *retablo* (an altarpiece or polyptych) and as an imitation of wall paintings such as those by Julio Romero de Torres. The use of the term *retablo* is not casual, as *Guignol* is composed of five texts set out as if they were a harmonic painting divided into several parts: the longest one, *La leyenda rota. Drama en una tarde* [*The Broken Legend. Drama in the Afternoon*], occupies the central portion of the 'panel' which is framed by two shorter pieces. The book recreates mystical spaces which transport us to a ritual and tragic past reminiscent of Gabriele D'Annunzio in *La fuente del mal. Tragedia* [*The Source of Evil. Tragedy*]; of scenes of gallantry taking place in an imaginary Versailles-like country in with musics by Beethoven, Wagner and Grieg intertwine, in *Cuando las hojas caen… Paso de comedia* [*When the Leaves Fall... A Brief Comedy*]; of visions of a motorized and bohemian Quixote pursuing the unattainable, in *La leyenda rota. Drama en una tarde*; of childish romances and scenes of love within a convent, in *Una tarde fresquita de mayo… Sueño* [*A Cool May Afternoon... A Dream*]; and of the colourful strokes of rural Asturias where death is the only possible response to an idealized conception of love, in *Ofrendas de vida. Drama en cuatro estancias* [*Life Offerings. Drama in Four Stages*]. All is seasoned with literary, visual, and musical references that turn this work into a model of 'artistic theatre', although from a poetic rather than dramatic point of view since these were not meant to be performed.

The most interesting aspect of Francés's work is its close link to Symbolist poetics and to the aesthetics of Decadentism. Although the word 'Grand Guignol' initially suggests marionettes or puppets, in these pieces,

as in the theatre of Maeterlinck, the term takes on a metaphysical meaning; as Peral Vega has pointed out, the characters are "marionetas de un destino cruel – de diversa condición, aunque en su mayoría nacido de la imposibilidad para vivir en plenitud el amor – que manipula sus vidas sin que les quepa la mínima capacidad de resistencia" (2011: 14). ["marionettes of a cruel destiny – of a diverse nature, although mostly born of the impossibility of living the fullness of love – which manipulates their lives without the slightest resistance from them"]. In the same way, it is interesting to note the correlation between a number of dramatic situations – or plastic descriptions included in the stage directions which are similar to those written by Valle-Inclán – and early twentieth-century European and Spanish painting, since, one should not forget, Francés was one of the most important Spanish art critics of the day. This ongoing dialogue between writing and painting is one of the most innovative and original aspects of the book, in which the traces of a recognizable imagery and iconography may be easily detected: Gustave Moreau's and Franz von Stuck's sphinxes, the Pre-Raphaelite angelic faces, Modesto Urgel's sunsets, Ricardo Marín's Quixote sketches, Julio Romero de Torres' mystic or profane women, Ramón Casas' nuns, Santiago Rusiñol's morphine addicts, and Darío de Regoyos's rural landscapes.

Another miscellaneous volume, which has received little critical attention, is Galician author Eugenio López Aydillo's *País de abanico. Teatro de ensueño* [*Fan Nation. Dream Theatre*], published in 1912. The volume contains eight pieces which share a similar poetic style and evoke a 'dream theatre' which combines the themes and forms of Modernist-Symbolist imagery in the form of a poetic-dramatic tableau. *País de abanico* is dedicated to Jacinto Benavente, which is hardly surprising since it shares many similarities with Benavente's most antirealistic comedies, in particular with his *Teatro fantástico*. The title, *País de abanico*, refers to a 'nation' of fans which is indeed a space made of cloth trussed by ribs and embellished by floral motifs, landscapes, figures, and other decorative patterns. Symbolically, Aydillo's short dramas represent the embodiment of these same ornamental printings, which come to life on stage thanks to the dream-like and unreal dimension of dramatic art itself which allows us to accept that those painted characters come to a three-dimensional life. The multiple labels appended to the various texts (madrigal, comedy, tragedy, eclogue, legend, tale, etc.) are faithful reflections of the generic indeterminacy of that period and the variety of proposals into which the adherence to the fantastic was channelled. *País de abanico. Madrigal romántico* [*Fan Nation. A Romantic Madrigal*] dramatizes an evening encounter between a poet and a

countess. He woos her by reciting his poems and the whole scene expresses the relish of what is ephemeral. *Comedia de mininos* [*Comedy of Kitties*] is a kind of fable set in an eighteenth-century dining room and featuring three cats who at first seem harmless but whose evil characters gradually emerge as the text unfolds. Although the drama features animals – and we must not forget the symbolic importance of the cat as a sacred, mysterious, arrogant, idle, and feminine animal in the *fin de siècle* imagery –, the fairy-tale characterization of this piece makes it possible to ascribe human features and behaviours to its characters. *Tragedia de gnomos* [*Gnome Tragedy*] is set in a dream-like forest inhabited by fairies and princesses. *La humillación de Hércules* [*The Humiliation of Hercules*] is a dialogue between Classical statues and figurines which rest on a shelf, inevitably reminiscent of *El encanto de una hora* [*The Charm of an Hour*] from Benavente's *Teatro fantástico*. *El príncipe martirio* [*The Martyr Prince*] is a fairy-tale about a wanderer who seduces a young girl who lives in the hovel of an old *copla* singer. *Los esclavos lloraban* [*The Slaves Wept*] is a scene set in the ancient Classical world, but with a recognizable social backdrop referring to the contemporary pitiful situation of workers. *Idilio en la sierra. Égloga pastoril* [*Idyll in the Mountains. A Pastoral Eclogue*] is a dialogue between shepherds who speak of their loves. Finally, *La leyenda de Floridel. Cuento fantástico* [*The Legend of Floridel. A Fantastic Tale*] features Amarantina, a Princess who, against the will of her insensitive and tyrannical king-father, falls in love with a troubadour who once sang for her but later went his way and carried on wandering through the world. The young Princess kept thinking of him and waiting for him to come back to her until the Maga, a figure that draws on the Celestina, helped her understand that both art and love are unreliable and insecure:

> Un trovador! Un camarada mío; otro más de la caravana errante; uno que ama la libertad, que no reconoce patria ni reconoce rey, que no sabe dónde está el poder ni dónde el vasallaje. Sin patria, ni rey, sólo el amor, la belleza y el bien pueden dominar sobre nuestros pensamientos.
>
> (Lopéz Aydillo 1912: 117)

> [A troubadour! A friend of mine; one more member of the errant convoy; one who loves freedom, who has neither country nor king, who does not know where power or vasallage are. Without country nor king, only love, beauty and good can rule our thoughts.]

At the end of the tale, a melody reminiscent of the returning troubador's song is heard, and the young woman elopes with the man she loves going against social conventions and patrirachal rule in search of an ideal,

which in her eyes the troubador's himself embodies. And the Maga eventually declares the triumph of youth and love:

> ¡Oh, la mariposa de las alas de nieve! ¡Oh, la luz del amor, que atrae y mata con el poder de su brillo! ¡Bendita juventud, que así sacrificas el bienestar y sabes sustraerte a las ruindades de la vida!
>
> (Ibid.: 120)

> [Oh, the butterfly of wings made of snow! Oh, the light of love that draws in and kills with the power of its glow! Blissful youth, that thus you sacrifice comfort and remove yourself from the meanness of life!]

Finally, we should also mention two books by the poet and playwright Ramón Goy de Silva as examples of the oriental exoticism or mystical fantasy which is also characteristic of the genre: *Sueños de noches lejanas* (1912) [*The Dreams of Distant Nights*], including four single-act "poemas dramáticos" ["dramatic poems"], and *La de los siete pecados* [*The One of the Seven Deadly Sins*], published in 1913 but also known as *El libro de las danzarinas* [*The Book of the Dancers*] from 1915 onwards. The latter, in prose, consists in a selection of 'vignettes' on the legendary women of the antiquity (Mary Magdalene, Salomé, Cleopatra and Belkis, Queen of Sheba), who carry out pantomime dances, a theatrical form of expression closely linked to Symbolism (see, for example, its relevance in the theatres of suburban Paris).[7] Far from being mere examples of technique or bravura, these dances allude to the possibility of exploiting the movements of the body, here brought forward as a symbol, as a proper language or even as the expression of a state of mind. Among the most relevant examples of this 'theatre without words' there are Ramón Gómez de la Serna's well known 'pantomimas sensuales' (see Peral Vega 2008: 57-74).

The route initiated by Symbolism and its progression into theatrical Modernism later gave way to a series of contributions on the part of the avant-garde in which the presence of poetry on stage becomes a definitive fact, understood as an interdisciplinary relationship between the stage arts. I have here introduced only a few brushstrokes of a form which has not received much attention in the histories of theatre, but is of decisive importance in order to comprehend Spain's cultural context between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The idealistic currents, the relationship between poetry and theatre, and Mae-

[7] See, in particular, Emilio Peral Vega's interesting and recent analyses of this theatre (2007, 2008).

terlinck's influence must all be kept in due consideration in order to gain a full perspective of the characterization and meaning of the brief 'poetic theatre' inspired by Modernism-Symbolism, which must be looked at as an important step in theatrical history.

English translation by Simon Breden

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Didier Plassard*

Edward Gordon Craig and the "smallest drama in the world"[1]

Abstract

Edward Gordon Craig's *Drama for Fools* was planned as a long cycle of very short plays, to be daily performed in changing places. Based on the alternation between the episodes of a continuing story and its interludes, it systematically introduces disruptions: in order to bring a variety of atmospheres (with parodic rewritings as well as satirical miniatures), but also to comment what is happening on stage, from an audience-based point of view. Craig's predilection for short plays, interrupted by different kinds of micro-actions, can be interpreted in many ways. As a general feature of *The Drama for Fools*, extreme shortness reveals how much the author is aware of the contradictions between his gigantic project and his former utterances against spoken drama. But Craig seems also to be influenced by the traditional puppeteers, because he wants to leave some space for improvisation. Furthermore, from a dramaturgical point of view, briefness can be considered as a result of Craig's hostility against quarrels and debates on stage. Preventing his characters from speaking too much, he substitutes dialogue with non-verbal actions which anticipate the micro-actions of much later puppet theatre miniature performances.

> All these things & many more not put down for lack of time chase through the empty head of the Fool who loves the Theatre better than all the women, & how he loves them!
> (Craig 2012: 18)

A Very Long Cycle of Very Short Plays

Written mostly during World War I, as he was trying to set up new projects after the forced closure of the Arena Goldoni, his theatre school in Florence, Edward Gordon Craig's *Drama for Fools* (2012) is certainly one of the most paradoxical examples of puppet dramaturgy ever composed. Even

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[1] *Noa*, one of the interludes of *The Drama for Fools*, had first been called by Craig "the smallest drama in the world". After he had written *Yes, or the Death of Aristocracy*, he corrected his comment and substituted it with "Not the smallest drama in the world, but the second smallest" (Craig 2012: 320).

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if the English stage-director and theoretician wrote only a small part of the gigantic cycle he had dreamt of during the years 1914-18, the tensions and the contradictions we can find in this little known[2] and unfinished work simultaneously reveal the dynamics of his powerful imagination and the under-valued dimension of distance and humour with which he sometimes considered his own artistic statements.

One of the major paradoxes in *The Drama for Fools* lies between the unusual length of this project and the equally unusual shortness of its parts. Craig planned in fact a one year-long cycle of performances, beginning on 1 April – the Fools' day – and ending on 31 March. His intention was to write 365 little plays (or maybe 366, for leap years…) which would have been daily performed, moving each time from town to town and from village to village in the Italian countryside – with the result that nobody but he and his assistants could ever see the whole *Drama for Fools* on stage: the author wanted thus to prevent the audience from comparing different parts of his work. Called "The Globe", as an ironical reference to William Shakespeare, Craig's itinerant company would not have played in proper theatres, but in city halls, market places or in the open air, building three stages disposed in form of a U, a bar, and using multi-coloured flags for ornament as well as parades on bicycles to make announcements for the performances.[3]

As usually happened with his projects, when he began working on it Craig was fully involved in this matter and he enthusiastically thought over all its aspects: he accurately calculated the prices of the entrance tickets, wrote detailed notes about how to produce wonderful light effects, how to quickly change sets, how to move puppets on large stages, etc. But he was far too impatient to complete the *Drama* itself and, after a while, he gave up composing it: by the end of the war he had only written about sixty plays, half of them remaining at the stage of first draft versions. A half-dozen were published between 1918 and 1921 in his journal *The Marionnette* or in the London literary magazine *The English Review*. Craig also prepared a book edition of some of his plays at the beginning of the 1920s, but found no publishing house interested in it. Therefore he just carried on – his whole life long – rereading his typescripts, correcting them, writing comments or drawing sketches in their margins, and show

[2] A few parts of *The Drama for Fools* have been published by Craig himself, in his journal *The Marionette* and in *The English Review*. *Romeo and Juliet 300 Years Later* was republished in *Puck*, n° 1 (Craig 1988) ; *The Scene*, a first draft for a prologue, was included as an annex by Christopher Innes in his monography (1998). Marina Maymone Siniscalchi, who had access to Edward Craig's collection of manuscripts, translated some of them into Italian for her book *Il Trionfo della marionetta* (1980), the first one devoted to Craig's drama (see also Siniscalchi 1977-78). See the bibliography in Craig 2012: 424-5.

[3] See Craig 2012: 13-18.

ing to some of his visitors the coloured booklets and the handmade boxes where he kept them conscientiously. The author felt a strong attachment towards his collection of booklets for *The Drama for Fools*.[4] Despite the financial difficulties he suffered in the last decades of his life, they were among the few items never sold to private collectors or to public libraries, but left as a heritage to his son Edward Craig.

Meant for daily representations all along the year and kept as a precious material to be chiselled and crimped with delicate colourful illustrations throughout half a century, Craig's *Drama for Fools* is nonetheless composed of playlets which by their shortness vividly contrast with the monumental dimensions of the whole project. If the first part of the drama, *Hell*, would probably need an hour-long representation, the average length of the plays is closer to a quarter of an hour, and many of them could be performed in a few minutes. It is therefore difficult to imagine that Craig seriously retained his idea of an itinerant theatre performing only one play at each of his stopping places: more likely, he composed many parts of his *Drama for Fools* without taking further consideration of the performing frame he had previously intended.

This autonomy of the playwriting dynamics towards the original theatrical project is also revealed by the imbalance between the two components of the *Drama*: its main story and its interludes. *The Drama for Fools*, indeed, was originally meant to represent the adventures of three protagonists (the worm Cockatrice, a Blind Boy, and a parrot named Columbus), travelling through time and space from Genesis to the present. Craig only composed a few episodes of their story, the greater part of the plays he actually wrote being interludes to be performed between them: sometimes with the same characters (above all Cockatrice, the impersonation of hypocrisy, who really fascinated him), but much more often with completely different ones.

Strangely enough, there is no consistent difference in length amongst the dramaturgical materials meant for the two components of *The Drama for Fools*: as far as we can infer from the plays which Craig considered as finished, some interludes may be as long as the episodes, as well as some episodes remain very short.[5] Moreover, sometimes they involve the same

[4] Some other manuscripts for *The Drama for Fools*, mostly preliminary drafts or typescript duplicates, were sold to the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Département Arts du Spectacle) and to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (University of Texas, Austin). Other documents, mostly drawings, belong to private collectors and sometimes appear in art auctions. Craig's most important collection of typescripts for his *Drama*, in form of sixty-six coloured booklets with many handwritten annotations and illustrations, is now owned by the Institut International de la Marionnette in Charleville-Mézières.

[5] The episodes vary from 2,164 words (*The Painter and The Three Magics*) to 11,404

protagonists and sometimes they do not, as if their author did not want to make a clear distinction between the interludes and the episodes. But one could say nonetheless that the alternation between a continuing story and short disruptions produced by more or less autonomous fragments is structural for Craig's dramatic cycle, in which action often tends to split up. Just as the Kyôgen interludes in Japanese Noh theatre, but in a much more deconstructive and ironical way, the introduction of shorter events in a longer narrative development can be identified on two levels of *The Drama for Fools*: as a transition between two different parts (the so-called interludes) and as an inner rupture in some of these parts. Already in the *Second Prologue* of the drama, the very first line of the spoken text was immediately followed by the stage direction "*here an Interlude is performed*", which Craig later cancelled and substituted with this sole indication: "*music*" (1918a).

Most of these short actions, when conceived as interludes between the episodes of *The Drama for Fools*, are either very synthetic and parodic rewritings of famous plays, literary works or historical anecdotes (*Romeo and Juliet 300 Years Later*; *The Temptation of St Anthony*; *The Gordian Knot*…), or satirical miniatures of contemporary everyday life. Excepting *The Gates of Hell*, a meta-theatrical prologue about the way Hell should be represented on stage, and *Cockatrice*, a Worm's introspective monologue between two parts of *The Roman Adventure*, the interludes usually have no connection to the main story and instead evoke a variety of atmospheres contrasting with the dominating influence of fairy tales and children's literature which pervades the adventures of Blind Boy, Cockatrice, and Columbus.[6]

On the contrary, when included as inner ruptures into another action, micro-events act always as comments of what is happening on stage, from an audience-based point of view. These brief exchanges may come from some characters of the main story, who having looked at an interlude performed on the other stage,[7] react to what they have seen. At the end of *Uplifted Petticoats*, having just witnessed the murder of Mrs Lee by her lover, Ahha[8] and Blind Boy thus express their feelings:

words (*Hell*); the interludes from 189 words (*Yes*) to 5,213 words (*Democracy*), most of them being from 2,000 to 4,000 words long.

[6] In a 1921 note Edward Gordon Craig commented: "There is a suggestion in much of this of *The Blue Bird* – dam it – *burn it out*. / Away with the children – & the childish & the search for the Path. / *Candide* is the antidote – let them all grow up at once after the Prologue. / Avoid the "Fairy Play" & the Magic – make it more *REAL*. – except when ludicrous – / modernize Cockatrice all along – keep him *strong*" (2012: 85).

[7] Craig's project was to perform *The Drama for Fools* on two or three stages simultaneously, thus allowing the characters from the main story to witness the interludes and vice versa.

[8] Ahha is, in one of the first dramatic configurations for *The Drama for Fools*, a "modern puppet" which, contrasting with the "ancient puppet", Buddha, should have been

AHHA. [*Turning to the Blind Boy.*] But what a fearful thing.
BLIND BOY. Well, it's the new age you know. It's all the vogue, this uplift of the ladies, the liberty of free thoughts in the free man. My mother was blind thank God.
AHHA. But you didn't see how it ended.
BLIND BOY. Why should I? Have I missed anything?
AHHA. No, no. Come away.
BLIND BOY. All the better. Come on, let us get back in the past. Things are so clear there like Uncle Gloucester. The blind saw things feeling by them.
[*They go out.*]

(Craig 2012: 316)

But such comments may also come from other characters, utterly stranger to *The Drama for Fools' dramatis personae* as listed by Craig at the end of his introduction (ibid.: 58). These men or women, who are non-fictional figures borrowed from the artistic or the intellectual worlds, make short appearances only on these occasions. This is the case, for example, of Charles Darwin and John Ruskin in the interlude *Shopping*. They peer through the window into a shop where a "Real Lady" is choosing the "Perfect Gentleman" she will buy to act as a foil for her when visiting friends and relatives. Even though the play does not include any line for them, Craig included a series of drawings in one of the typescripts; there, in speech-balloons, we can read the two men's brief comments on what they see, apparently alluding to Ruskin's famous aversion against the theories developed in *The Origin of Species*. In one of the drawings we have:

RUSKIN. Ascended, I say.
DARWIN. Descended.

In another one:

DARWIN. Descended.
RUSKIN. Ay, descended.

(Ibid.: 311)

In *Romeo and Juliet 300 Years Old*, an almost futuristic parody of Shakespeare's tragedy, the Bard himself, in the company of Francis Bacon and Max Reinhardt, witnesses with despair the transformations of his masterpiece, before being chased and insulted by "three witches" – not the

one of the protagonists of the main story. It will be replaced by Cockatrice, just as the Blind Boy replaced Buddha. Ahha and Buddha appear mainly in the First Prologue (see Didier Plassard, "Des prologues sans fin", in Craig 2012: 65).

ones from *Macbeth*, but Germaine de Staël, Byron's wife Anne Isabella Milbanke, and the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Harriet Beecher Stowe:

> [*Enter William Shakespeare in front of Curtain.*]
> SHAKESPEARE.[9] — Wer has mein play re-written…my dear Romeo and Juliet? Wer has mutilated my Romeo? Wer has done it? Vat has 'e done it for? Vy has 'e done it?
> [*Red fire. Enter Madame de Stael, Miss Milbanke, and Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe.*]
> ALL THREE TOGETHER. — *We* did it… and if it was to do again we should do the same.
> SHAKESPEARE. — Mein Gott! Sie Three Witches!
> MADAME DE STAËL. — You sentimental old fool!
> [*Passing in front of him.*]
> MISS MILBANKE. — You liar! [*Ditto.*]
> MRS STOWE. — You villain! [*Ditto.*]
> ALL THREE TOGETHER. [*Turning on him*] — You Hun!!!
> [*Shakespeare faints.*]
>
> (Ibid.: 272)

The Discomfort of Becoming a Playwright

Craig's predilection for short plays, interrupted by different kinds of micro-actions, can be interpreted in many ways. As a general feature of *The Drama for Fools* in all its components, extreme shortness reveals how much the author is aware of the contradictions between his gigantic drama project and his former utterances against literary theatre or, more broadly, against spoken drama. Craig, who, long before Antonin Artaud, had denounced the power of literature over the Western theatrical stage and dreamt of silent movements made by human figures, sets and lights, was now discovering himself as a playwright, and a pretty profuse one, with real skills in writing funny dialogues, in playing on words, and in making use of intertextual jokes (Plassard 2014). The fact that he felt uncomfortable with this aspect of his creative work can be easily inferred from some handwritten annotations in the margins of the typescripts, where, for example, he counted how many words are to be found in one play, and then criticized it as being "too wordy". Preferring short dramatic actions was therefore a way, for him, not to become completely a playwright, even for puppet theatre: that is to say, to put a limit to his own writing impulse, to restrain his desire of satirizing his contemporaries in this way (a major aspect of *The Drama for Fools*, which often acts as a sound box for Craig's an-

[9] Shakespeare speaks with a heavy German accent. This was a real provocation given the war context and the occasion for which Craig wrote his interlude, that is, the official celebrations of Shakespeare's 1916 Tercentenary in Great Britain. See Plassard 2015.

ger, contempt and frustration in this period of forced isolation due to the war), of quoting and parodying William Shakespeare or Hugo von Hofmannsthal, of inventing gags, making his characters speak with strange accents or in invented languages, sing nursery rhymes or music-hall hits, etc. The richness and the variety of his theatrical inventiveness, during these years of World War I, is thus constrained in very short plays which he did not want to bring further, although he went on rewriting them on so many occasions, until the very last years of his life in Vence.

Since the time when he was dreaming of a theatrical company using *Übermarionettes* (Eynat-Confino 1980; Plassard 1992: 47-53), Craig had begun to study the history of puppet theatre, to experiment with different kinds of puppets, and to think over their artistic potential; yet, he was also aware of their limitations, and above all of their need for movement, concrete action, and partly improvised dialogues. As he wrote in his introduction to *The Drama for Fools*:

> Perhaps one of the chief distinctions between a Drama for Marionettes and a Proper Drama is this… that whereas a Proper Drama has to be vague and roundabout in its movements, a Marionette Drama has always better be direct and rapid and even obvious. (Craig 2012: 30)

The extreme shortness of Craig's plays was therefore programmatic and, linked to his definition of puppet theatre, it follows the dramaturgical codifications of its most popular forms, just as Alfred Jarry had done a few years earlier when rewriting *Ubu roi* in the Guignol version *Ubu sur la butte*. Although he was clearly an inheritor of the poetics of Symbolist theatre and an admirer of Henri Signoret's and Maurice Bouchor's Petit Théâtre in the Galerie Vivienne,[10] Craig could not imagine performing William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or Aristophanes's *The Birds* on a puppet-stage like they had done in the beginning of the 1890s.[11] His models did not come from literary circles, where puppet theatre was so often considered as a possible alternative to actor theatre for non-realistic dramaturgy,

[10] Among his various attempts to find technical solutions for moving life-size puppets which could lead to the *Übermarionette*, Edward Gordon Craig's experiments with keyboard-puppets (see the catalogue of the 2009 exhibition *Craig et la marionnette*, ill. 4 and 45, in Le Bœuf 2009) had been inspired by Henri Signoret's "excellent" figures to which he namely refers in some of his notes for *The Drama for Fools* (1916b), saying that in 1908 he brought some "additions" to them. For some other technical solutions envisaged by Craig, see Le Bœuf 2010.

[11] In one note dated August 1917, Craig imagined how to perform *Hamlet* with puppets: but he reduced Shakespeare's tragedy to a monodrama, with the main character as "a fine figure of a man" surrounded by "demi-animals, insects, etc. / Half-pigs – cats – rats – crocodiles – snakes – wasps – pelicans – vultures – owls – / When not speaking their lines we should hear their hissing – barking – mewing – gruntings –buzzings – and hootings" (2012: 396).

but rather from the Italian street puppeteers, with their little booths, their short shows, their naive plots, and their family audiences. Did he not, a world famous stage-director and theoretician of modern theatre, feel proud and delighted that a modest glove-puppet street performer, the *burattinaio* Enrico Ponti, whom he met several times in Bologna, expressed his approval of the drawings for *The Drama for Fools*?

> And the old man approved of my notes and designs for the Marionettes. I am no longer afraid of what the others may think.
> …
> We talked on, and I showed him, as I said before, a few of the designs I had made for my Drama of Fools, and explained one or two of the situations. His approval... appreciation of what was professional in them, was worth more to me than an article in The Nation or Il Corriere della sera. He put his finger on the pointed feet of Dr. Fell and drew his nail down the fat sides of the figure, and laughed quietly, and laughed again and pointed to the second design of the Blind Woman sitting on Dr. Fell's knee, and nodded his head quickly and continually. (Ibid.: 50)

Even his first project of performing this dramatic cycle with a touring company shows how much Edward Gordon Craig was influenced and fascinated by traditional puppeteers.[12] The shortness of his plays was therefore for him a way to follow their example: to de-sacralize the written text and to leave room for improvisation. Even though he compulsively rewrote and amended *The Drama for Fools*, Craig emphasized the fact that his plays would only be finished by their performers, when produced on stage. Reading them once more in the 1950s, he added this comment in the margin of a typescript:

> As I wrote this I avoided being wordy –
> But I left gaps where good talk (not necessarily good writing)
> could come in more <u>easily</u>
> The actors and producers can add
> all the talk <u>needed</u> –
>
> (Craig 1916)

Already during World War I, when he was collecting ideas for his drama, Craig sometimes left the major part of theatrical invention to the performers, as if puppet plays were for him necessarily linked with improvisation – be it

[12] When moving to Rome in 1917, Craig also thought of performing daily *The Drama for Fools* in his workshop, like many Symbolist writers and Nabi painters had done in the 1890s (for example Alfred Jarry with Pierre Bonnard and Claude Terrasse for the Théâtre des Pantins, or Paul Ranson with his performances of *L'Abbé Prout*) but this project too was soon abandoned.

verbal or non-verbal – as a kind of oral literature (what he calls "good talk" in opposition to "good writing"), as well as in movement and gesture. At the end of *An Incident*, a "marionette pantomime" which remained at the stage of a first sketch, after having briefly summarized the action (the poses and simpering airs of a young girl taking a bath by the seaside), he merely wrote "That is all. / A good marionettist should need no more to do good work with this" (Craig 2012: 374).

Refusing the Quarrel

From another point of view, Craig's short interludes stay sometimes very close to a modernist sensibility, as expressed at the same time by Italian Futurism. As surprising as it may sound, the poetics of Futurist theatre may have had some influence upon some aspects of the *Drama for Fools*: indeed, extreme shortness is here often combined with features (like iterative structures, *compenetrazioni* of various narrative levels, nonsense and absurd humour) which seem reminiscent of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's, Luciano Folgore's, Francesco Cangiullo's or Giacomo Balla's *sintesi teatrali*. Although he repeatedly criticized the Futurists in his journal *The Mask* before World War I and defined himself as an opponent to many points of their programme (Taxidou 1998: 54-8), Craig followed their activities with attention: he even published (with depreciating comments) Marinetti's manifesto *The Music-Hall* in *The Mask* and reviewed (negatively) Fortunato Depero's *Balli Plastici* staged in 1918 by Vittorio Podrecca with his Teatro dei Piccoli (Craig 1918b). The most evident example of this influence is the already mentioned *Romeo and Juliet 300 Years Old. Dissacrazione* of classic literature, modern transposition of the plot, iterative structure, dehumanized protagonists (Juliet appears as a dummy, Romeo as a mechanized war cripple): these processes follow exactly the dramaturgical principles we can retrieve from the intensive production of Futurists' synthetic theatre during the years 1915-16.

Yet, the shortness of the different plays composing *The Drama for Fools* derives from another theoretical statement too, that is, Craig's conviction that human conflict is an unnecessary ingredient for dramaturgy, and that it should even be banned from the theatre. This refusal of what he called "the Quarrel" was certainly one of his major dissentions with the Italian Futurists, whose productions were so often based upon antagonism, destruction and violence. Longing instead for universal harmony, order, and balance, Edward Gordon Craig was resolutely hostile against any idea of struggle or even debate – hence, for example, his disapproval of parliamentary government and democracy. Composing *The Drama for Fools* in the middle of World War I could only reinforce his convictions and lead

him to a complete renunciation of agonistic moments. As he declared in *The Marionette Drama*, an introduction he wrote for a planned edition of some of his plays:

> Let the Quarrel crawl, crawl away; but, Dramatists, don't lie on the floor and imitate its contortions in the delusion that there is nothing else in the world to serve your turn. (Craig 2012: 32)

It would nonetheless be exaggerated to assert that there is no quarrel in the many stories of *The Drama for Fools*; as a matter of fact, his main concern was to denounce hypocrisy, and making use of such materials as the Brothers Grimm's tales, Shakespeare's tragedies, historical or legendary figures Craig could not avoid bringing conflicts, treacheries or death menaces on stage, but he tried to abate them or, at least, to solve them with other means than direct struggle. In *The Three Men of Gotham*, for example, a "blithering interlude for *burattini*", which is a dramatization of a popular comic tale, two countrymen armed with quarter-staves quarrel upon the possibility of crossing a bridge, brandish their weapons and move around furiously, raising clouds of dust. Yet what they hit is "*the road, the bridge, everything except each other*" (ibid.: 264). Even on a glove-puppet stage, where quarter-stave fights are commonly the rule, the author does not want his characters to fight and he moves away from their expected behaviour with humour.[13]

Refusing the quarrel prevents Craig above all from bringing on stage any complicated plot – that is to say, any long dialogue. Although he likes to confront antithetic characters, the opposition between them remains oversimplified and usually ceases after a few minutes, because of one's departure (*Noa*; *Mr Fish and Mrs Bones*), one's sudden death (*The Tune the Old Cow Died of*; *The Rape of the Unicorn*), or of a third one's intromission (*The Three Men of Gotham*; *Simple Susan*). Yet, violence is not completely excluded and even killing may happen: in the already mentioned *Uplifted Petticoats*, a very cruel parody of Jennette Lee's *The Symphony Play* (1916), the female protagonist has her throat cut by her gardener and lover right before her husband's eyes. But this happens without any kind of preparation or motivation – one could even say without any conflict – for Mrs Lee's[14] "modern husband" appears to be remarkably understanding and tolerant in front of his wife's flirting with their gardener (Craig 2012: 316).

More generally, murder, death or departure within *The Drama for Fools* always occur as sudden and unexpected events, mere interruptions of an

[13] Protagonists of the traditional glove-puppet theatre, such as Pulcinella, Guignol or Punch, often hit the stage edge with their stick, but as a menace for the antagonist, and a prelude to the fight. In Craig's playlet, the two men do not fight at all.

[14] Craig gives to this character the playwright's name and mixes her own personality with the one of her protagonist as appearing in Act 4 of *The Symphony Play*.

action which has hardly begun. *Yes, or the Death of Aristocracy*, the shortest interlude of *The Drama for Fools*, is certainly the most accomplished example of such a strategy because it puts on stage only one character, who dies immediately after pronouncing his very first line:

> [*It is a sandy beach. There is a clear sky. The sea is heard but not seen.*
> *Enter afar off Philippe Godefroi Christophe de San Luc. He appears no larger than an atom. He approaches... approaches; he is half way; he stops... he turns and looks back; he continues to approach... to approach.*
> *He is now near to us. He is carefully dressed.*
> *Now he is quite near. He arrives.*
> *He stops. He rests upon the sand.*
> *He puts his hand to his heart.*]
> Philippe Godefroi Christophe de San Luc. Oui...
> [*He dies.*]
>
> (Ibid.: 260)

Verbal and Non-verbal Actions

Exactly as happens in *Yes*, many endings of the interludes in *The Drama for Fools* come from sudden transformations, acts or gestures. The interaction between the characters does not find its end through dialogues or dramatic events, but in an avoiding movement, a flight, a renouncement. Because he wants to restrain his own wordiness and to prevent his characters from speaking too much (and sometimes from speaking at all), Craig tends generally to substitute dialogue with non-verbal action in putting an end to the dramatic development. If there is a struggle in Craig's dramatic cycle, it seems therefore to occur between what has to be said and what has to be performed on stage, between the *logos* and the *opsis*: that is to say, also, between Craig as a playwright and Craig as a stage-director or stage-designer. This contradiction is thematized with humour in the already mentioned *Gates of Hell*, a meta-theatrical prologue to *Hell* where Tom Fool, the pseudonym under which Craig is writing *The Drama for Fools*, enters a discussion with a scene-painter about how to represent the underworld on stage:

> Tom Fool. But generally it begins with demons with pitchforks who come out and cry "Hew! Hew! Hew!"
>
> Scene-Painter. Well, sir, I didn't like to infringe. I thought I had to leave the literary part to you, sir.
> Tom Fool. Leave nothing to me – do you hear? Nothing! Why, man, do you take me for a fool?
>
> (Craig 2012: 88)

This dialogue is not only reminiscent of a famous quarrel in theatre history – the one which during the first decades of the seventeenth century divided Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones over the problem of authorship in court masques – but it is also an ironical allusion to Craig's hesitations in this same matter. Written under a pseudonym, composed of very short playlets, which exclude any complicated plot, sometimes presented as mere sketches which the stage-directors and the actors-puppeteers of the future should finish, the plays of *The Drama for Fools* tend also to substitute dialogues with non-verbal elements. For example with sound effects in *Noa*:

[*Outside the wind whistles.*]
THE WIND. Hooouuiiiee... Hooouuiiiiee... eeeuuiioohyouyouyou...
SHE . Noa.
[. . . *The sea roars.*]
THE SEA. Rrrrushushushushush... hush... hush.
SHE . Noa.
[. . . *a train rushes by outside.*]
THE TRAIN. Fuff... Fuff... Fuff... Fuff... fuffooooHoo! [*It whistles again.*]
SHE . Noa.
[. . . *The bell then strikes.*]
THE BELL. King... king... king... king.
SHE . Noa.
[*Immediately a pistol-shot is heard outside.*]
THE PISTOL. Ping.
SHE. [*Like a cock answering one afar off even before the sound has done.*] Noa!

(Ibid.: 320)

With hand gestures in the heath scene of *Once upon a Time*, a parody of *King Lear*:

KING. [*Holds up one finger.*]
FOOL. [*Holds up two.*]
KING. [*Holds up three fingers.*]
FOOL. [*Holds up four.*]
KING. [*Holds up five fingers.*]
FOOL. [*Holds up his fist.*]
[*The King runs out followed by the Fool.*]

(Ibid.: 284)

Or with a complete set transformation at the end of *The Rape of the Unicorn*:

[*Music. The Royal Arms, minus Unicorn, descends, the Lion growling, the mouth of the Lion moving and his tail wagging. The Unicorn is raised into position. The band takes up the strains of "Rule Britannia". The Royal Arms are raised again. Grand*

> *Apotheosis. As the Royal Arms go up again a Butcher's shop is attached to them and is drawn up, filling in the foreground and shutting out most of the Forest. A side-piece is pushed on right and left.*
> *The Figure of the Butcher is chopping… chopping. An Infant is ringing at his shop-bell.*]
> THE BUTCHER'S SON. [*Squeals out.*] Shop, mother!
>
> (Ibid.: 344)

Refusing speech and dramaticity, Craig takes an interest in scenes of everyday life which he sometimes transforms in short pantomimes. In *An Incident*, for instance, the author's light irony concentrates on the girl's behaviour caught in its smallest details, and presented as a show in itself:

> Anon out she bobs in a bathing-suit and a little cap with frill and ribbons. She turns once more this way and that way, and then this way again and yet again the other way. The hips again figure with effect.
> She goes down to the water. We hear splashing and splashing. Then she comes out and comes on to the stage wet. The marionette, its wood, tells plainly from under the wet clinging bathing suit.
> The water drips upon the real sand strewn very thickly on the stage. Every step she takes makes a wet imprint. She turns and poses this way and that a little and then goes into the cabin. (Ibid.: 374)

Meant for a few minutes' duration, such a minimalist action, here coloured with a slight hint of eroticism, is not more developed than those of the very short films which were available before World War I in the kinetoscopes. But the focus on such details, like the wet foot-prints on the sand, acts in a poetic and suggestive way which anticipates the micro-actions of much later puppet theatre miniature performances (e. g. Henk and Ans Boerwinkel's Figurentheater Triangel, Guido Ceronetti's Teatro dei Sensibili, and more recently Bruno Pilz's work). Because they invite the audience to a new kind of attention, both concentrated and dreamy, Edward Gordon Craig's playlets for *The Drama for Fools* must be considered as a major step in the invention of contemporary dramaturgies for puppet theatre.

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Elisa Martini*

Just Two Cues: Achille Campanile's Upside-down Tragedy

Abstract

A bonfire should "make this false and conventional literary world crash down loudly", since it cannot gracefully 'jest' and 'laugh' anymore. This is Achille Campanile's wish, the same he cultivates in his Tragedie in due battute [Tragedies in Two Cues]. These 'tragedies' are quick pieces of witticism which materially live in the narrow space of a slip of paper – the physical boundary of Campanile's 'tragic' writing – and whose brevity serves their author's purpose of meditating on the way of the world by humorously overturning the aulic genre par excellence, that is, tragedy. Campanile "distorts the rule" and consequently ushers in a "silly laughter" conducing to the discovery of a void that discloses, beyond the comic, an authentic human tragedy; it is the tragedy of contemporary bourgeois society, of its inane triviality, confined within its own formal conventions and doomed to a sterile and useless anticipation of Fascist triumphalism. Fascism relished on high-flown magniloquence and on the grandiosity of events and celebrations. Campanile overruled this pretentiousness through the tragi-comic velocitas of his two cues which became an alternative voice next to the régime's officiality. Campanile's outlook reverses the norm and sparely sketches out man's actual reality. Although belonging to a specific historical moment, his "cues" humorously portray the whole humanity that remains unchanged through the centuries, constantly play-acting and periodically in need of a purifying fire lit by a 'humorist-physician' in order to dispose of its false and conventional literary and social masks.

Ebbene, quell'incendio, con cui l'Ariosto quasi conclude le mille peripezie dei suoi eroi, che s'è divertito a far muovere pazzamente nel gran poema, quell'incendio gigantesco che divora un regno, è un gran falò, in cui crepita, si consuma e si distrugge tutto un mondo letterario di cartapesta, che crolla con fracasso: il mondo dei falsi eroismi inutili, coi suoi guerrieri di latta, il mondo dei poemi e dei romanzi cavallereschi, che prendevano sul serio la gran bontà dei cavalieri antiqui e che più tardi doveva far impazzire il generoso Hidalgo della Mancia. (Campanile 1933: 612)

[Well, in the fire by which Ariosto almost brought to an end the many adventures of the heroes that he had let loose with gusto in his masterpiece, in that gigantic bonfire a whole kingdom is devoured, an entire literary world made of *papier mâché* is destroyed and consumed, and boisterously

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> crashes down: the world of false and useless braveries, of tin soldiers, the world of poems and romances that took seriously the goodly truths of the cavaliers of old and later on were to spark the madness of the generous Hidalgo de la Mancha.]

This is how Achille Campanile concluded his lecture on Ariosto, given on Christmas Day 1928 in the Sala dei Giganti of the Castello Estense at Ferrara. It was a very important occasion, that is, the closing ceremony of the celebrations for the fourth centenary of the poet's death, which had been opened on 6 May of the same year by Ferrarese Italo Balbo[1] and whose proceedings were to be collected in the volume *L'ottava d'oro* [*The Golden Octave*].

On the day consecrated by Christianity to the birth of Jesus, young Campanile – perhaps inadvertently – promoted Ludovico Ariosto as a provocative humourist who shrewdly exposed the empty and ritualized formality of the paper realm of chivalry, presenting it as a pitiless mirror of reality. Indeed, Campanile showed to have perfectly understood the irony hidden in *Orlando Furioso* by consciously paraphrasing a famous passage taken from the first canto (1.22.1-6):

> Oh gran bontà de' cavallieri antiqui!
> Eran rivali, eran di fé diversi,
> e si sentian degli aspri colpi iniqui
> per tutta la persona anco dolersi;
> e pur per selve oscure e calli obliqui
> insieme van senza sospetto aversi.
>
> (Ariosto 1992: 1.10)

> [Oh! Goodly truth in cavaliers of old! / Rivals they were, to different faith were bred./ Not yet the weary warriors' wounds were cold – / Still smarting from those strokes so fell and dread, / Yet they together ride by waste and wold, / And, unsuspecting, devious dingle thread. (Transl. by William Stuart Rose)]

[1] Politician and aviator Italo Balbo was one of the four Fascist party leaders (the so-called 'Quadrumvirs') who guided the March on Rome that, in 1922, brought Benito Mussolini and Fascism to power. During World War 1, Balbo fought as a volunteer and, after the war, he became dedicated to politics embracing Fascist ideas. This earned him a position as party secretary in native Ferrara (1921, Balbo is also known for the organization of Fascist punitive expedition in the area). From 1926 onwards, he devoted himself to both the air force, undertaking several expeditions, and civil aviation, studying the employment of new technologies. He was appointed Marshal of the Air in 1929 and later on Governor General of Lybia. In the late 1930s, Balbo led a solitary opposition against Mussolini's racial laws and, together with Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano, the Duce's alliance with Hitler. He died on 28 June 1940 in the skies of Tobruk (Lybia), killed by friendly fire. See Berselli 1963.

With extreme lightness and grace, Ariosto drops an ironic comment within his own epic romance and a few lines only manage to enliven indelibly the chivalric world of his poem. Something has changed in this universe of knights and paladins: the strict rules of that system of values are soon to be stripped of their meaning and become empty boxes, just like the words of poets which, on the Moon, appear like burst cicadas. These lines powerfully unveil the inner reality of human society, and allow us to state that Ariosto disclosed, with scanty irony, the secret evolution of human tragedy. Only six lines, then, and it was this brevity – I think – that spurred and intrigued a fine humourist like Campanile, for whom two lines were enough to kindle his 'inner fire'.[2] In his 1928 lecture on Ariosto, we can spot two cues that anticipate, in disguise, his *Tragedie* [*Tragedies*]. Through the rapid exchange between the Viscount and the Baron, Campanile points out the importance of a good answer:

> Una buona risposta è quello che ci vuole per innalzarci di fronte agli avversarii. Sappiate rispondere bene: colui che vi parla resterà impicciolito e voi sarete talmente cresciuti da sentirvi oltremodo sicuri di voi. Sappiate rispondere bene: l'ammirazione delle folle sarà per voi, tutti gli elogi per la vostra saggezza.
> Una buona risposta a bruciapelo salva una reputazione e basta a far passare alla storia. Pochi passarono alla storia per il loro silenzio.
> …
> Insomma, signori, pochi passeranno alla storia per battute di questo genere.
>
> IL VISCONTE. Signore, che cosa state per fare?
> IL BARONE. Visconte, sto per uccidervi, voi e tutti i vostri, devastare le vostre terre, disonorare il vostro nome, incendiare le vostre castella, spargere le vostre ceneri al vento. Che mi rispondete?
> IL VISCONTE. (*tace*).
> …
> È la sua insipienza che lo perde. Se rispondesse bene, forse morrebbe, ma certo gli invisibili *reporter* della storia esalterebbero il suo nome nelle cronache dei secoli. Inoltre il visconte non ha presenza di spirito: ha bisogno di pensare per trovare una risposta, ha il cosiddetto *esprit de l'escalier*. Che muoia, dunque! (Campanile 1933: 608-9)

> [A good answer is what it takes to stand tall in the face of adversaries. Be ready to answer back: the person who is talking to you will shrink and you will expand and feel exceptionally self-assured. Be ready to answer back: the admiration of the people will be for you, all the praise for your

[2] On Campanile's humour, see Cavallini 2000; Maestri 2003; Ryan-Scheutz and Colangelo 2004; and Benzoni 2012.

> wisdom. A good answer at point blank will save a reputation and will be enough to let you go down in history. Very few people, if any, went down in history for their silence … In short, Gentlemen, not many will go down in history for cues like these. // THE VISCOUNT. Lord, what are you going to do? // THE BARON. Viscount, I am going to kill you and all your family, ravage your land, discredit your name, burn your castles, scatter your ashes to the wind. What do you reply? // THE VISCOUNT: (*silence*) … It is his foolishness that ruins him. If he responded suitably well, maybe he would die all the same, but of course, the invisible reporters of his story would exalt his name in the centuries to come. In addition, the Viscount has no presence of mind: he needs thinking before responding, he has the so-called *esprit de l'escalier*. Let him die, then!].

In these few lines brevity must be extremely sharp in order to come off 'incendiary' and obtain the looked-for effect. Here the comic core is already active and defined, as well as the author's ability to make it effective within a longer text, thanks to that mosaic or *collage* technique that will be a peculiar trait of his composing method. During his lecture, therefore, Campanile comments on Ariosto, but implicitly – yet making sure that a sensitive ear will get it – speaks about himself and his 'minimal' creations which will be collected in a volume significantly entitled *Tragedie in due battute* [*Tragedies in Two Cues*], published only posthumously in 1978.

In the 1920s (the first tragedy was published in the *Corriere Italiano* in 1924), Campanile began writing brief witty texts, consisting in rapid exchanges occupying the space of a slip of paper and configured as actual small theatrical pieces; even though they were not always perceived as such by the public precisely because of their rapidity, Campanile kept working on them for his entire life. A minimum writing time is then expanded so much as to occupy a whole life span, while the same ambivalence can be found in the performative standing of these short pieces, which initially inhabited the space of a slip of paper and ended up being performed first on stage and then on television. The monad of the slip of paper carrying a two-line piece is really "l'elemento modulare minimo" (Anglani 2000: 19) ["the least modular element"] of Campanile's journalistic, literary, and theatrical writings. Achille Campanile's son, Gaetano, wrote:

> Chi sa come avrebbe vissuto l'era del computer mio padre, lui che già utilizzava il 'taglia' e 'incolla' quando riordinava i propri lavori. Sì, quando li ordinava, perché quando sedeva alla sua scrivania aveva già tutto scritto. Ovunque si trovasse quando gli veniva un'idea la scriveva utilizzando ciò che aveva a portata di mano: foglietti di carta velina o buste per lettera aperte in tutti i lati, rivoltate e utilizzate all'interno; biglietti del tram e perfino foglietti dove precedentemente aveva disegnato qualche suo personaggio. Così allargava i suoi foglietti sulla scrivania aumentando,

> per quanto fosse possibile, la confusione, prendevale lunghe forbici, la coccoina in vasetto col pennellino, e cominciava a tagliare ed incollare, ogni tanto scriveva qualche frase per legare i periodi e faceva alcune aggiunte. Terminato il collage, radunava le carte e chiamava mamma, la dattilografa che ha ispirato *La caduta del ragno*, che trascriveva a macchina" (Campanile 2000: 11).
>
> [Who knows how my father would have coped with the computer age, since he already used the 'copy and paste' when he rearranged his own writings. Yes, when he arranged them, because when he sat down he had already written everything. Wherever he was, when he got an idea he wrote it down on anything handy: tissue-paper or envelopes turned inside out, tram tickets or even slips of paper on which he had already drawn some characters. He would spread all his papers on his writing-desk, increasing, if possible, the confusion, take a pair of long scissors, his tin of glue, and a little brush and start cutting and pasting; now and then he would write a sentence when some connection was needed, or would add something. When the collage was done he assembled his papers and called mum, the typist who inspired *La caduta del ragno* (*The fall of the spider*), and she would type them down].[3]

The slip of paper is the starting point of many ideas which will be later developed by Campanile in books and newspapers,[4] providing the long term basis of his writing: brevity becomes synonymous with longevity and stability, thus perfectly integrating itself with the game of opposites that constantly permeates Campanile's work. The anti-climax atmosphere is already perceptible in the oxymoronic title of the collection, *Tragedie in due battute* [*Tragedies in Two Cues*], which suggests how tragedy, the highbrow genre *par excellence* together with melodrama and opera, is going to be utterly reversed (see Maestri 2003: 94). The gravest of theatrical forms is indeed turned upside down in its every aspect, starting from its duration: Aristotle's canonical five acts are squeezed into comic brevity and a humorous swiftness distorts the features of characters and settings. Let us consider, for instance, the tragedy *Il Principe Pensieroso* [*The Pensive Prince*]:

[3] On this see also Maestri 2003: 79.

[4] "La commedia o tragedia in due battute è, dunque, una divagazione allo stato puro, presentata nei suoi termini essenziali di connessione insieme con gli elementi di ambiente o di azione indispensabile. E appare immediatamente evidente che la commedia o tragedia in due battute, in quanto tale, non è né giornalismo né teatro né narrativa; ma un materiale di costruzione polivalente che può trovare ogni tipo di impiego" (Calendoli 1980: 4434). ["A two-line comedy, or tragedy is therefore, a digression at its purest, reduced to its essential terms and presented with few essential elements regarding action and setting. It is soon obvious that a two-line comedy or tragedy is neither journalism nor theatre, nor narrative, but a multifunctional piece of building material that can be used in many different ways"].

Personaggi:
IL PRINCIPE PENSIEROSO
IL GRAN CIAMBELLANO

[*La scena si svolge nel castello del* PRINCIPE PENSIEROSO. *Salone antico. Dai finestroni gotici si vede la sterminata e nebbiosa campagna del Nord e l'uggiosa pioggia che malinconicamente i campi lava.*
All'alzarsi del sipario, il PRINCIPE PENSIEROSO, *avvolto in un mantello di velluto nero, è seduto nella poltrona a braccioli, sotto un baldacchino dorato e, la fronte appoggiata a una mano, è immerso in riflessioni.*
Entra il GRAN CIAMBELLANO, *gli fa un profondo inchino e s'accinge a comunicargli cose della più grande importanza.*]

GR. CIAM. [*esitando, per tema di disturbare il principe*] Altezza…
PRINC. P. [*riscotendosi dalle sue meditazioni: tristemente*] Un metro e sessanta.

[*Sipario*]

(Campanile 2008: 72)

[Characters: THE PENSIVE PRINCE // THE GREAT CHAMBERLAIN // *The scene takes place in the castle of the* PENSIVE PRINCE. *An old salon. From the Gothic windows you see the immense and misty countryside of the North and the dreary rain sadly washing the fields. When the curtain rises, the* PENSIVE PRINCE, *wrapped in a black velvet cloak, sits on a chair with armrests, under a golden canopy, his forehead resting on his hand, plunged in deep thoughts.*
The GREAT CHAMBERLAIN *enters, bows very low and is about to tell things of the greatest importance.* // GR. CIAM. (*hesitating for fear of disturbing the prince*) Your Highness... // PRINCE. (*emerging from his thoughts: sadly*) Five foot three. // (*Curtain*)].

The long stage direction – a device often used by Campanile in order to prepare the ground for the comic effect of his pieces – makes the audience's attention focus on an oppressive and meditative atmosphere worthy of *Hamlet*. Both the scenery and the actor's position on stage evoke the figure of the Danish prince in the minds of the spectators, prompting a feeling of anticipation that will be rapidly and deliberately disappointed. The quick exchange between the Great Chamberlain and the Prince shatters, in fact, the certainties of the public. The misunderstanding over the word "Altezza" (which, in Italian, means both 'highness' and 'height') produces a gap in the tragic dimension of the text: a prosaic reality enters and upsets the scene turning it into a comic sketch. In the printed edition of the *Tragedie*, *Il Principe Pensieroso* is paired with *L'impiegato pieno di delicatezza* [*The extremely thoughtful clerk*], which reflects a downward spiralling of tragic characters and situations. Real life interferes with the grandness of tragedy; and yet, in their turn, the rules of everyday life will

also be unsettled in the space of two lines. *Formalismo* [*Formality*] is another piece still dealing with the ambiguous use of aristocratic titles:

> Personaggi:
> Il vecchio Principe
> Il nuovo Servitore
>
> [*La scena si svolge nel salone rococò al primo piano del palazzo del* VECCHIO PRINCIPE. *Tappeti, arazzi alle pareti, mobili dorati, statuine.*
> *All'alzarsi del sipario il* VECCHIO PRINCIPE *sta interrogando il* NUOVO SERVITORE *assunto da poche ore.*]
> IL VECCHIO PRINCIPE.
> [*al* NUOVO SERVITORE] Com'è il vostro nome?
> N. SERVITORE. Giuseppe.
> V. PRINCIPE. [*con severità*] Non si risponde così nudo e crudo, Giuseppe. Dovete aggiungere sempre: Ecellenza.
> N. SERVITORE.
> [*vincendo la modestia*] Va bene: Eccellenza Giuseppe.
>
> [*Sipario*]
>
> (Ibid.: 125)
>
> [Characters: THE OLD PRINCE // THE NEW SERVANT // *The scene takes place in the rococo hall on the first floor of the* OLD PRINCE*'s palace. Rugs, tapestries on the walls, gilded furniture, figurines. When the curtain rises* THE OLD PRINCE *is questioning* THE NEW SERVANT*, who has been employed for just a few hours.* // THE OLD PRINCE (*to* THE NEW SERVANT): What is your name? // N. SERV. Giuseppe // OLD PRIN. (*sternly*) Do not reply so curtly, Giuseppe. You must always add: Your Excellency. // N. SERV. (*overcoming his modesty*) Be it so, then: Excellency Giuseppe. // (*Curtain*)]

Also in this case, the stage direction prepare the most appropriate background for the reader to receive the alienating effect of the final cue, whose epigrammatic power will also disclose – as is common in Campanile's style – the potentially paradoxical hazard contained in the very title of the tragedy: *Formality*. In the Old Prince's hall time has stopped and everything has crystallized into the encoded stiffness of the past. This formal adherence to etiquette is the sacrificial victim of the New Servant's line. He is, in fact, an alien in the world of the Old Prince and his newcomer's incomprehension of the importance of the title "Eccellenza" ["Eccellency"] exposes the vacuity of a system reduced to a mere ritual, destined to be endlessly reiterated in its sterile and void form. The Old Prince, with his etiquette, is by now confined in the mothballed museum life of his rococo salon and his statuettes.

The systematic repetition of empty formulas is the absolute protagonist of another tragedy: *Situazione senza uscita* [*Inescapable situation*]. The whole

play relies on the stage directions that guide the actors' performance and comically reverse the words of courtesy spoken by Battista, the butler, and the Grand Duke:

> Personaggi:
> IL GRANDUCA
> BATTISTA
>
> [*La scena rappresenta un'anticamera sontuosa.*]
> GRAND. [*Entra dalla comune, seguito dal domestico* BATTISTA, *che è in frac; senza voltarsi, gli consegna con aria stanca il gibus, il bastone, i guanti; poi gli getta il mantello, che* BATTISTA, *avendo le mani occupate dal gibus, dal bastone e dai guanti, riceve sulle spalle. Il* GRANDUCA *resta in frac*] Annunziate il Granduca… [*Si volta e vedendo* BATTISTA *col mantello, il gibus, i guanti e il bastone, gli fa un profondo inchino*] Pardon… Chi debbo annunziare?
> BATT. [*Gli consegna guanti, bastone, gibus e mantello*] Annunziate il domestico Battista… Pardon… [*Vedendo il* GRANDUCA *tornato il* GRANDUCA, *gli fa un inchino e si fa consegnare nuovamente guanti, bastone, gibus e mantello; così torna ad essere un elegante signore ed il* GRANDUCA *gli fa un inchino e riceve ancora i capi del vestiario, che passano dall'uno all'altro, fra gl'inchini reciproci, finché, fatta l'ora di chiudere il teatro, cala lentamente il Sipario*]
>
> (Ibid.: 173-4)

> [Characters: THE GRAND DUKE // BATTISTA // (*The scene is set in a magnificent antechamber*) // GRAND. (*Enters, followed by the butler* BATTISTA *wearing a tail-coat; without turning around, he gives him wearily the gibus, the stick, and the gloves; then he throws his cloak at him and* BATTISTA, *having his hands busy with the gibus, the stick, and the gloves, takes it on his shoulders. The GRAND DUKE is now in his tail-coat*) Announce the Grand Duke... (*Turns around and, seeing BATTISTA with the cloak, gibus, gloves and stick, bows very low*) Pardon... Whom should I announce? // *BATT.* (*Hands him gloves, stick, gibus, and coat*) Announce the butler Battista... Pardon... *(Seeing the* GRAND DUKE *turned into the* GRAND DUKE *again, he bows and takes back gloves, stick, gibus, and cloak; thus he turns into an elegant gentleman again and the GRAND DUKE bows and again takes the garments, which the two of them keep exchanging while continuously bowing to each other, until it is time to close the theatre and the Curtain is slowly lowered*)]

The exchange of the cloak and of the other aristocratic accessories between the two characters causes the constant exchange of their identities as well: a mechanism which is to be repeated indefinitely and uninterruptedly. The cloak, the stick, the gibus, and the gloves mark the authentic difference between the lord and the butler; they are both wearing tail-coats, therefore their identities are determined only by unnecessary

and external elements, that is, by mere form. The 'high' characters, who have been the protagonists of tragic theatre from time immemorial, are belittled and stripped of their substance to the point of becoming empty shells: nobility resides in the pieces of clothing and not in the characters who wear them, and thus tragedy becomes inexorably and irreverently comic.

Campanile centres his focus on reality and, in doing so, he exposes the fatuous exteriority of those countless human and social rituals, based on insubstantial appearance and formal vacuity (see Maestri 2003: 85-9). This is clearly exemplified by *Morto che parla* [*Dead Man Talking*] in which one of tragedy's recurring themes, death, is dealt with:

> Personaggi:
> IL MORTO
> I PARENTI E GLI AMICI DEL MORTO
>
> [*La scena rappresenta una camera ardente. Il morto è steso sul letto, fra le candele e i fiori; intorno, i famigliari e gli amici singhiozzano, strillano, si disperano, si danno le pugna nel capo, si strappano i capelli, si torcono le braccia, camminano avanti e indietro imprecando e minacciando di fare qualche pazzia.*]
> MORTO [*tra sé, intravedendo la scena attraverso lo spiraglio delle palpebre non ben chiuse*] Quante esagerazioni! Ma allora che dovrei fare io?
>
> [*Sipario*]
>
> (Ibid.: 180)

> [Characters: THE DEAD MAN // RELATIVES AND FRIENDS OF THE DEAD MAN //
> [*The scene is set in a funeral parlour. The dead man is lying on the bed, among candles and flowers; around him, relatives and friends sob, scream, beat their heads, tear their hair, and wring their hands, walking back and forth, cursing and threatening to do something crazy.*] // THE DEAD MAN. [*to himself, glimpsing at the scene through half-closed eyelids*] What an exaggeration! What should I do then? // (*Curtain*)]

This time the Grim Reaper has arrived among common people, not lords and grand dukes, without losing his peculiar tragic status. Once again the stage direction provides a detailed and extremely significant description of the wake. A proper tragic chorus, whose *pathos* is conveyed by a hyperbolic physical expression of pain, stand around the mortuary bed. It is the deceased man himself that cracks this archaic ritual with a single line centred on explosive pragmatism. The formality of the situation is denounced as excessive and empty. It reminds of the sudden gash in Pirandello's paper sky, yet – in this case – the stage is not taken up by the dark dilemmas of Hamlet, but is filled with the sarcastic laugh of comedy. However, what gets distorted here is not Death's tragic aspect but civil society's approach to it. It is worth noticing that the title of the piece

(*Morto che parla* [*Dead Man Talking*]) corresponds to an entry of the *Smorfia*;[5] the social ritual of death gets reversed by means of a popular reference to betting. It is not Death, then, that is made fun of, but civil society, here observed by one who, like it or not, has directly experienced death.

Campanile dismembers the pomposity of tragedy and turns it into comedy: in the minimum space of two lines, tragic characters and situations are emptied of meaning and reduced to the shadows of a fossilized and phony society. Yet, Campanile does not limit his exploration to aristocrats (topical characters of tragic theatre) or to common people like clerks, customers, or passengers, but he turns his gaze also towards objects, as the two locomotives of the homonymous tragedy: everything is twisted and inverted in just two cues. This comic brevity is subversive of all the rules of everyday life, regardless of class and social status. He "distorts the rule" ("deforma la regola", Taviani 2002: 11), originating what Pietro Pancrazi styled as Campanile's "riso scemo" (Pancrazi 1946) ["silly laughter"] and ultimately leading to a vacuum as happens, for example, in *Dramma inconsistente* [*Unsubstantial Drama*]:[6]

> Personaggi:
> NESSUNO
>
> [*La scena si svolge in nessun luogo.*]
> NESSUNO. [*tace.*]
>
> (Campanile 2008: 192)

[Characters: NOBODY // (*The scene is set nowhere.*) // NOBODY (*keeps silent*)].

The protagonist's name is Nobody and he does not pronounce any cue, therefore drama relies entirely on stage directions. Yet, while readers may have a glimpse at them, the theatrical audience is not prepared to the presence of an actor who remains silent on stage. Here Nothingness rules: an absolute emptiness that nears August Strindberg's dramatic dissolution and that was to inspire, with its extreme experimentalism, Samuel Beckett's theatre of absolute silence and, above all, Eugène Ionesco's *nonsense*.[7] As Masolino d'Amico pointed out, Ionesco was "anch'egli maestro nel raggiungere la comicità allineando battute di dialogo ineccepibilmente consequenziali le une alle altre, con sfruttamento malizioso e sottile della tendenza della lingua a non esprimere precisamente quello che vorrebbe,

[5] The *Smorfia* is a popular reference book that establishes a series of correspondences between dreams and the ninety numbers of the game of Lotto; incidentally, dreaming of a *morto che parla* corresponds to number 48.

[6] On *Dramma inconsistente*, see also Maestri 2003: 95-6.

[7] On Strindberg and Ionesco, see Taviani 2002: 9-15. For Campanile's use of *nonsense*, see Maestri 2003: 92-3.

prestandosi quindi a equivoci che sfociano nell'apparente assurdità" (D'Amico 2008: 3-4) ["A master himself in reaching a comic effect by lining up coherent dialogical cues, artfully using the tendency of any language not to say exactly what is meant, and thus creating the misunderstandings that produce an apparent absurdity"]. Still, one wonders what the secret of these tragedies may be. Indeed, these pieces transform into swift comedies which aim at absolute nothingness. According to Campanile's inverted vision, real tragedy is to be found in an empty and futile (bourgeois) society in which idiocy and ignorance are rife and people's lives are restrained by conventions and destined to a hopeless wait. This is all the more tragic because people go about completely unaware of their situation and thus becoming the butt of laughter. His originality derives "[From] his skill to turn inside out everything that is perceived as cliché or as a lexical or behavioural detritus. This technique of 'overturning' implies an apparent acceptance of past traditions and widely accepted attitudes, touches on common habits and facts of life (marriage, death, etc.), and requires an exasperation of tones and modes, while the sudden shift from the norm becomes the first step towards the creation of an estranged parallel universe" (1990: 60).[8] See also Cirio 1978: "His capacity of inducing laughter is often based upon sudden and nearly imperceptible shifts from a 'normal' (or, at least, abiding with some literary and theatrical stereotypes) universe to a parallel one, above, under or beside the former. That is why, instead of surrealism, we can talk of 'parallel realism"'.[9]

What Campanile portrays is a human community whose drama is expressed by the comical upsetting of both tragic dimension and everyday *mediocritas*. Therefore witticism establishes itself as a system in its own right within a society that, precisely in those years, wished to cheer the apotheosis of its grandeur, based on the cult of the leader, on the heroism of 'the new man', and on the "Pindarismo vincente" ["triumphant Pindarism"]. As De Caprio justly foregrounded, "If we accurately examine the peremptory messages issued by the press during Fascism, not only may we detect the limits of that epoch, but also the distance Campanile kept from the then triumphant 'trivial Pindarism'. In opposition to the myth, promoted by Mussolini, of the 'New man', ready to sacrifice himself

[8] "appunto dalla capacità di rovesciare dall'interno quanto *è* avvertito come luogo comune, detrito lessicale o comportamentale. Tale tecnica del "ribaltamento" prevede l'apparente accettazione di rituali appartenenti alle tradizioni del passato e di atteggiamenti diffusi e alla moda, coinvolge banali usi quotidiani o altri del privato (il matrimonio, la morte…), pretende l'esasperazione dei toni e di modi, mentre lo scarto improvviso della norma costituisce spesso il primo passo per la costruzione di uno straniato universo parallelo.

[9] "La sua capacità di fare ridere si appoggia spesso sugli scarti improvvisi e quasi impercettibili da un un universo 'normale' o per lo meno codificato come tale da certi stereotipi letterario teatrali, a un universo parallelo, sopra, sotto, accanto al primo. Per questo, invece di parlare di surrealismo si può parlare di 'realismo parallelo"'

for the common good, Campanile put on stage third-rate heroes, useless philosophers or common people, turning his texts, albeit in disguise, into a sounding board reverberating and amplifying what people already knew. Campanile turns an estranged look on stardom and makes fun of the columns of popular magazines that taught the rules for an acceptable social behaviour. These illustrated weeklies, cherished by that same urban lower middle class readership portrayed in Beltrame's colour illustrations, provided the backdrop setting for many of Campanile's writings. Yet, shrewder readers were required in order to see through the functional and educational purpose that informed both the easily accessible prose of these periodicals and the effective mass slogans: a new elite was emerging that started to grow weary of the most vulgar aspects of Fascism and considered its loud, 'Starace style' rhetoric as increasingly ridiculous" (1990: 91).[10]

During Fascism, as Oreste del Buono has pointed out, "l'umorismo è stato … uno dei pochi movimenti culturali, inconsapevolmente o consapevolmente, non del tutto arreso alla retorica del regime" (1989: 16-17) ["humour … has been one of the few cultural movements, either consciously or unconsciously, not to give in to Fascist rhetoric"]. In front of a regime that relished on large and pompous public events, Campanile's tragicomic swiftness voiced a different point of view, alternative to the official one.[11] His 'reversals' somehow escaped the prevailing rhetoric and the suffocating pressure of Fascist censorship. In fact, they kept an eye on the satirical pieces published in the newspapers for which Campanile wrote and he himself had to reckon with the situation, to the point that sometimes he even assumed the role of apologist of the regime.

[10] Dal puntuale confronto con i messaggi perentori, elaborati dalla stampa del Ventennio, emergono infatti non solo i limiti di un'epoca, ma soprattutto la distanza che Campanile mantenne da un 'pindarismo banale' in essi vincente. Contro il mito dell'"uomo nuovo', l'eroe che si sacrifica per tutti, invocato da Mussolini, l'umorista mette in scena premiazioni per eroi da strapazzo, rappresenta pensatori inutili o umili gregari, lascia che i suoi testi funzionino come 'cassa di risonanza' e di riproposizione, sotto altre vesti e con segno invertito, di quanto il pubblico sa già. Guarda con occhio straniato al fenomeno del divismo, mentre ironizza sui comportamenti da tenere in società, raccomandati nelle tante rubriche di 'Consigli utili' dei numerosi giornali per famiglia. È infatti l'universo dei settimanali illustrati, cari alla piccola borghesia cittadina proprio quella delle tavole a colori di Beltrame –, a situarsi sullo sfondo delle note di Campanile, ma per un lettore più smaliziato, pronto a rinunciare alle categorie dell'edificante e dell'utile, cui invece si informano e la prosa di divulgazione e, più visibilmente, gli slogan di massa demagogicamente efficaci, sempre più spesso, però ritenuti ridicoli da nuove élites insofferenti del pacchiano fascismo alla Starace".

[11] See Calvino 1985: "Il 'Bertoldo' apriva ai giovani 'un altrove' in cui rifugiarsi per sfuggire al linguaggio totalitario e in qualsiasi regime e in qualsiasi epoca l'importante è poter trovare un altrove". ["The (satirical magazine) 'Bertoldo' provided young people with an 'elsewhere', a refuge from totalitarian language and under any regime and during any epoch it is important to have the possibility of finding an 'elsewhere'"].

That is why Campanile's writings may not be considered as militant satire, even though some works show traces of it. Fascism is not the humourist's true target as it actually provides only a historical addition to his authentic objective. In fact, what Campanile truly voiced is, as De Caprio justly remarked, "[t]he ability to point to the playful behaviour of childlike human beings that are too busy taking themselves seriously to notice the ridiculousness of their own choices and myths which coincide with those of a society that wants to appear rational in its enterprises but actually proves muddled and confused, irresponsible and reckless. In order to show its inconsequence, the author revels, with seemingly childish delight, in changing the rules to which his characters-masks obey, thus making visible on a negative backdrop the well-known contradictions of everyday life" (1990: 14).[12]

In this way human tragedy gets off its high horse of grandiloquence and solemnity and embraces the entire society, with its rituals, its stylistic features, its repertoires, its purely formal practices, which are common to any age and social class, to mummified aristocrats as well as ordinary citizens aspiring to fame as, for instance, Campanile's own Gino Cornabò. In the complex scenario of Fascist mass organization and the equally endorsed heroic cult of the individual, Cornabò emerges – in his *Diario* [*Diary*] – as "[a] misfit (yet not a dissident) who, through his grim discontent and unrealistic delusions of grandeur, stresses the vacuity of a communicative system clearly based upon those premises" (Anglani 2000: 22).[13]

Even though Campanile surely took the resonant and all-pervading Fascist propaganda as a starting point, he then extended his scrutiny to a society permanently stuck into a childlike phase, regardless of the government in charge. Within the limited space of two cues, the author reproduced the reality of the civil community and indeed, from a single

[12] "[a] quella capacità di ravvisare i tanti giochi di un'umanità bambina, troppo intenta a prendersi sul serio per vedere il ridicolo delle proprie scelte e dei propri miti, in tutto coincidenti con quelli di una società desiderosa di apparire razionale nei suoi comportamenti, ma nella sostanza arruffona e pasticciona, irresponsabile e istintiva. Per farne risaltare le incongruenze l'autore indul*ge*, con un gusto apparentemente infantile, al gioco di modificare le regole cui i personaggi-maschera si atten*gono*, rendendo finalmente visibile su di uno sfondo negativo le comuni contraddizioni dell'ovvio e del quotidiano.

[13] "[U]n disadattato (non però un dissidente) capace di far risaltare, con il suo torbido malcontento e la sua velleitaria e frustrata mania di grandezza, la vacuità di un sistema comunicativo basato lucidamente su quei presupposti" Commenting on the hollowness of social conventions, Calendoli wrote: "Per appros-simazione, questo mondo si potrebbe chiamare 'borghese': di esso Campanile rap-presenta soprattutto ladistorsione provocata da una cieca e irrazionale soggezione a un complesso di convenzioni formali che non corrispondono più ai valori reali della vita, e che provocano risibili 'contrari' nell'accezione pirandelliana del termine" (Calendoli 1980: 4440) ["Roughly speaking, we could call this world 'middle class'. Campanile mainly depicts its blind obedience to a set of rules with no relation to the real values of life, and its ensuing distortions that produce Pirandellian comic 'opposites'"].

speck of truth we can build a whole portrayal. This monad could fruitfully grow into newspaper articles, novels or dramas as it already contained in itself the irreverent revelation of the futility of social conventions and roles. Campanile's two-line pieces succeeded in humorously representing human beings, who are timelessly playing a part and periodically need some 'Doctor Humourist' to help them get rid of social masks worn-off literary clichés (see Cacopardo 2002: 35). And this is probably what Campanile had in mind when he implicitly promoted himself as a new incendiary Ariosto:

> Ebbene, nell'approssimarsi del suo centenario, ricordiamoci dunque di lui, rileggiamo il suo poema immortale, che in fatto di letteratura chiude il Rinascimento e apre la porta dei tempi moderni; e auguriamoci, se non potremo farlo direttamente, che almeno scenda il suo spirito su di noi, il suo spirito che sapeva con tanta grazia scherzare e ridere, e faccia crollare con strepito tutto questo mondo letterario falso e convenzionale, di uomini malati e di sentimenti artificiali: così noi faremo di esso un allegro falò, come quello che, alla fine della gran fatica artistica, sorrise alla fantasia di Ludovico Ariosto. (Campanile 1933: 614)
>
> [Well, now that his centenary is approaching, let us remember him and re-read his immortal poem, which, in literary terms, closed the Renaissance and opened the door to modernity; and let us hope, if we cannot do it ourselves, that at least his spirit, which so gracefully joked and laughed, may descend upon us and noisily demolish this false and conventional literary world of sick men and artificial feelings: we will thereupon make a cheerful bonfire out of it, like the one that, at the end of his great artistic work, smiled at the fancy of Ludovico Ariosto.]

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Laura Peja*

Shorter and Shorter: Samuel Beckett's Challenge to the Theatre

Abstract

Samuel Beckett's poetics of "less is more" has anticipated and even partly shaped the evolution of contemporary drama and theatre as one of the fundamental models of the performative turn of the last decades. His late style as a dramatist and a director has influenced contemporary performative theatre in artistic, socio-cultural, and even commercial terms (formats, bills, venues and unconventional settings such as installations, exhibitions, and urban spaces). Nevertheless, his most challenging pièces, the shorter plays, appear to be still waiting for a 'staging tradition' which could make the most of their constitutive brevity. In fact, productions of the so-called "dramaticules" have multiplied on the world scene, although often presented in antologies, collections, or multiple billings. Yet, there have already been some interesting and promising productions, and this paper aims at showing the centrality and pregnancy of brevity on the artistic and performative contemporary scene approaching Beckett's poetics of subtraction in the wider perspective of the interplay between the theatre and other arts. Both focusing on the spectator's experience and the 'commercial challenge', contemporary arts and Beckett's late theatre have come closer and closer. A brief assessment of the fortune of Beckett's shorter plays on the Italian stage confirms the fecundity of this intersectional path on which the artistic and performative scene seems to be going further along.

Talking about his friend Samuel Beckett, E.M. Cioran once said:

> The Buddhists say, of one who tends toward illumination, that he must be as relentless as 'a mouse gnawing a coffin.' Every true writer puts forth such an effort. He is a destroyer who adds to existence, who enriches it while undermining it. (qtd in Graver and Federman 1979: 375)

If coffins make one easily think of Beckett,[1] they can also relate to theatre, which has been often given up for dead during the twentieth century,

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[1] As Keir Elam has pointed out, "[t]he language of Beckett's dramaticules is all a cipher for the R.I.P. word" (1994: 159; see also Morrison 1982).

because of its intrinsic fragility and the overwhelming assault by media as well as all the technological changes of the world. Theatre is dead. Long live the theatre.

With his theatrical work serving as an ongoing provocation to the theory and practice of theatre, Beckett has certainly contributed to the death at least of the kind of theatre Peter Brook called "deadly" (1968), but he has also extended our understanding of what theatre is and what it can do, especially in a "convergent" (Jenkins 2008), "performative" (Fischer-Likte 2008), "postdramatic" (Lehmann 2006) world. Actually, Beckett has "enriched" the life of theatre "while undermining it".

This paper wishes to explore how Beckett's shorter plays, none of which takes up more than eight pages in print or more than thirty minutes in performance, have particularly contributed to the enrichment of the variety of theatrical forms on the contemporary scene, while also developing new perspectives on the theatre, including venues and bills, on the consumption of different cultural forms, and on the intersection between different artistic forms.

"The creative act is first and foremost an act of destruction" (Picasso)

In the second half of the twentieth century, visual and plastic arts moved towards performance and audio-visual forms; conceptual art, performance art, and installation art all flourished in the same years when Beckett devoted himself to theatrical practice and to the writing and staging of shorter plays. These developments called upon the need to rethink long-held assumptions about what art is (and concepts such as authenticity or 'authorial intention' were questioned) and to re-examine routine practices and treatment procedures[2]: when museums acquire, present and wish to preserve installation artworks, for example, they are confronted with new challenges (see Van Saaze 2013), not to mention the difficulty in defining what the 'artwork' is in performance art and articulating debates around the advisability of preserving a 'representation'[3] of it.

Among the changes that brought theatre and the arts closer to one another, two of the most intriguing and significant aspects are: spectators'

[2] See Bishop 2005; Corris (ed.) 2004; Costanzo 2007; Zuliani (ed.) 2006. On the theme of mutating and adapting media as a starting point for a twofold inquiry into the contemporary performing arts see Vanderbeeken (*et al.* ed.) 2012.

[3] "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations" (Phelan 1993: 146).

participation (defined as the "essence of installation art", Reiss 1999: xiii), the core of the performance, and the challenge to the commercial mechanisms of the art market and related institutions issued by these ephemeral and theatrical artworks. As Phelan wrote, "[p]erformance resists the balanced circulations of finance. It saves nothing; it only spends" (1993: 148).

It is no surprise then that Beckett's theatre – one of the most influential models of recent theatrical developments, leading in the last few decades towards the concept of "performative theatre"[4] now spread worldwide – emphasized the centrality of participation and 'commercial challenge'.

In Beckett's own works (on the page and on the stage) and in his legacy, theatre and other art forms have achieved a very profound level of dialogue and interchange. This development has usually been investigated in terms of creative processes with suggestions, allusions, strategies, and the sharing of compositional patterns. Such investigations examine above all the inspiration Beckett drew from a field he loved so much and, on the other side, his seminal influence on it:[5] the Irish performance artist Amanda Coogan has described Beckett's works as "essential pivots for performance practitioners globally" (qtd in Tubridy 2014: 43), and since the Sixties many artworks have been clearly and often explicitly inspired by Beckett's *oeuvre* (ibid.), no less than dramatic and theatrical works. What is more, these interrelations may suggest a reconsideration of the space-time situation in which the artist, the artwork, and the spectator interact; the traditional ideas about theatrical and artistic venues as very definite and separated places may be therefore usefully questioned.

The museological debate has long revolved around the relationship between objects and viewers, and the ongoing crisis which museums are assumedly experiencing (Casey 2005: 79) has mostly been dealt with through a shift in their role from "legislating meaning through . . . objects" to "interpreting that meaning" (ibid.). In a much quoted article of 1971, the famous museologist Duncan Cameron described the change in museums, which he considered "in desperate need of psychotherapy" (Cameron 1971: 11), as a metaphorical shift from authoritative "temple" to contextualized "forum" containing multiple voices and perspectives and the importance of the museum's interpretative mission (and educative aim) has increased since then, "emphasizing the emotional rather than the intellectual tenor of the place" (Casey 2005: 84).

[4] Following Annamaria Cascetta, I use this apparently tautological expression "to define the specific trend of postmodernity" (2014: 6) and its characteristics. See also at least Auslander 1997; Carlson 2004; Bial 2010.

[5] To mention some particularly well-known studies, see McMillan 1975; Ben-Zvi (ed.) 2003; Oppenheim 1999, 2000; Phelan 2004; see also Brater 1974; Rabinovitz 1985; Taban 2011. On Beckett's use of images borrowed from philosophy and aesthetics see Uhlmann 2006.

"Emotional rather than intellectual" is also the experience Beckett's late theatre offers to its audience. As Laughlin wrote: "Beckett's plays move their spectators beyond exegesis into a theatrical experience of a very different sort" (Laughlin 1989: 20), getting closer to that language addressed first of all to the senses as already invoked by Artaud (1958).[6]

These parallels, analogies, and strict intersections between Beckett and the arts could perhaps suggest some new ideas for the staging of his late plays, which go further along this intersectional path. Indeed, *apropos* of *Footfalls*, which he considered as "words … only built up around this picture" (i.e. the image of the woman pacing relentlessly up and down) (Asmus 1977: 254), Billie Whitelaw commented:

> … well, perhaps he should be in an art gallery or something. Perhaps I should be pacing up and down in the Tate Gallery, I don't know, because the way the thing looks and the way he paints with light is just as important as what comes out of my mouth. (qtd in Kalb 1989: 235)

In fact, nowadays we can easily find live performances which involve actors and bodies in museums. There is no need to mention the long tradition of body art or more recently the world famous example of Marina Abramovic at the MoMa (*The Artist is Present*, 2010; Biesenbach ed. 2010). There are also – as already noted – many performances inspired by Beckett's works; on the other side, actors in a theatrical context can be hidden within a structure such as a real sculpture, as it occurred in the Pan Pan theatre company's production of Beckett's radioplay *Embers* (winner of Herald Angel Award at the Edinburgh International Festival 2013), which placed an enormous wooden skull centre stage, wedged into mounds of grey pebbles. Similarly, in a recent production of *Not I* with Lisa Dwan at the Royal Court Theatre in London (2013),[7] the performance was followed by the screening of an interview with Whitelaw focused on her experience of performing in *Not I* and a panel discussion with Lisa Dwan and other special guests; all this sounds more like a didactic project of 'edutainment' usually hosted in museums rather than a traditional theatre-night.

And what can one say about the applauded *Rough for Theatre I* and *Act without Words II* directed by Sarah Jane Scaife at the 2013 Dublin Fringe Festival, in a car park?[8] Since installations and exhibitions have started to inhabit urban

[6] On the relationship between Beckett's theatre and Artaud and other twentieth-century notable theatrical masters, as well as on the quality of Beckett's work in training actors, see Peja 2010.

[7] Lisa Dwan first performed in *Not I* at the Battersea Arts Centre in 2005. In 2014 she returned to the Royal Court and then to London's West End with *Not I*, alongside *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* directed by Walter Asmus.

[8] This 2013 production of *Samuel Beckett's Rough For Theatre I and Act Without Words II*

spaces, such a displacement of modern art is not uncommon, yet it remains a rather unusual space for what is, after all, an example of 'text-based' theatre.

Certainly, a briefer play may fit better in a location such as a car park, considering all the noises and distractions, and the audience's general discomfort, and it is therefore not a coincidence that among his plays Beckett's shorter ones are the most often produced in these unconventional ways.

Therefore, even if there are also many examples of 'heterodoxical' stagings of Beckett's 'longer plays', (as, for instance, the award-winning Italian production of *Endgame* by Teatrino Giullare in 2004, staged on a chessboard using chess pieces and two players),[9] it is in his late style that Beckett's theatre "is on the verge of becoming something else" (Brater 1987: 3) and one comes "to grips with the need for a new kind of critical vocabulary" (ibid.) in order to face these late "textlets" that Elam considers "surely the most intense and disquieting body of texts conceived for the twentieth-century stage" (Elam 1994: 146). In fact, Beckett himself was utterly conscious that he had written plays that were "on the very edge of what was possible in the theatre" (Knowlson 1996: 602)[10].

As has been pointed out, Beckett's later plays "exist somewhere between installation and poetry, their strict aesthetic bringing the meditative rhythms of visual art into performance" (qtd in Tubridy 2014: 49). That is why they also

> provide especially fertile ground for the study of the audience response. In their very sparseness and challenges to dramatic conventions, these plays help to 'lay bare' the specific nature of the dramatic work and its implications for their reception. (Laughlin 1989: 20)

Installation for Beckett in the City was preceded by Scaife's *mise en scène* of *Act Without Words II* which "was first produced to critical acclaim in 2009 as part of Dublin's 'Absolut Fringe Festival'. It was re-presented at the 2010 'Ulster Bank Dublin Theatre Festival', and subsequently travelled to two major London festivals in 2011 with support from Culture Ireland: 'Greenwich & Docklands' (where it played in St Alfege's Park) and 'Imagine Watford' (where it played in the stage-door laneway of Watford Palace Theatre). In June 2012 it played in Theatre Alley, New York, as part of the River to River Festival" (Tubridy 2012). The company's website (http://www.company-sj.com, last access 20 November 2014) offers plenty of detailed information and some very enjoyable photos and videos.

[9] This production received the "Premio speciale Ubu 2006", the National Italian Award of Critics 2006, and the Special Jury Recognition and the "Brave the new world" Award for the direction at the 47th MESS International Theatre Festival at Sarajevo in 2007. See Teatrino Giullare 2006.

[10] On Beckett's late theatre see Brater 1987; Davis and Butler (eds) 1989; McMullan 1993; Porter Abbott 1995.

"Brevity is the soul of wit" (Hamlet)

At the head of a series of notes he prepared for Donald McWhinnie's 1976 Royal Court production of *That Time*, Beckett wrote his 'theatrical manifesto', the most succinct and explicit statement of his late aesthetics: "To the objection that visual component too small, out of all proportion with aural, answer: make it smaller, on the principle that less is more" (qtd in Gontarski 1999: xxv).

This statement, in all its paradoxical as well as literal truth, can be usefully applied also to the aspect of the length of his works. Beckett seems to have progressively realized that the shorter his plays were, the more they displayed their power. As Rosemary Pountney had it with regard to *Come and Go*: "The more concise, the more highly stylised Beckett's 'dramaticule' becomes, the more telling it is, until the final point is wordless" (1989: 16-17).

In the sixteenth of his *Provincial Letters*, Blaise Pascal wrote that he had made that letter longer because he did not have the time to make it shorter ("Je n'ai fait celle-ci plus longue que parce que je n'ai pas eu le loisir de la faire plus courte", 4 December 1656). Brevity is an aim, not a starting point; it requires great effort and the Latin expression *labor limae*, typical of literary work, appropriately evokes the idea of the harshness of material work, of a handicraft made by shaping and polishing.

Similarly, even in the case of Beckett, shortness is a goal, laboriously achieved, in every instance, in every work, thanks to a wide range of different strategies,[11] but also throughout his whole career as a playwright, which is quite a long one even though he was famously 'wordless' and always on the verge of silence. As one of his famous adages states, "there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express" (Beckett 1983: 139).

Beckett himself proved he was aware of his going along the path of brevity towards silence and, talking to James Knowlson, he linked this fact – quite intriguingly – to an *ab contrario* influence of Joyce:

> I realized that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, in control of one's material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look to his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, subtracting rather than adding (Knowlson and Knowlson 2006: 47).

[11] A paper (*Towards Lessness: Samuel Beckett's Short Forms*) presented by Federico Bellini at the International Conference on "The Short Form" held in Turin from 7 to 9 April 2014 has been devoted to the discussion of two of the principal strategies Beckett uses to become concise (a combinatorial one which goes toward abstraction, using symmetry and ellipsis, and a second one using fragmentation, concentration, and *accumulatio*).

Many studies[12] devoted to his drafts and writing phases, which are sometimes very complicated and prolonged, have elucidated his struggles and the extended process of "discovering" and "uncovering" (Gontarski 1985: 134) that, through writing and rewriting, adding and deleting, correcting and polishing, led to his published works, and more and more to a conquered brevity. After all, his theatrical work on the whole starts with the longest plays (with a first one, *Eleutheria*, amounting to over one hundred pages, even if small-sized, in the first and posthumous publication by Les Éditions de Minuit in 1995). Only gradually did he reduce the length of his works, often further abridging during their staging when he 're-wrote' them as he started doing in the second half of the Sixties at the beginning of the period that S.E. Gontarski terms "Beckett's working through Beckett" (1999: xxiii). Then directing became a crucial part of his creative process and he "corrected" (his own word) the theatrical insufficiencies he found in his earlier plays and started writing with more and more brevity.

However, when Beckett wrote "less is more", he referred to all the elements of theatre and therefore his writing became shorter and shorter, but also stiller and stiller, with a progressive circumscription of motion "within the bound of invariant location" (Garner 1994: 72), greyer and greyer, giving up colours and dulling what manages to come out of the dark,[13] and more and more dismembered, with few, truncated parts of the body visible and more often disembodied figures.

Significantly, in the mid-Fifties, he had claimed that "For some authors writing gets easier the more they write. For me it gets more and more difficult. For me the area of possibilities gets smaller and smaller" (qtd in Admussen 1973: 26). Obviously this also affects the audience. The spectator is not well treated in Beckett's last plays:

> As stage space conceded to invading darkness of offstage, language diminished toward silence, characters devolved into creatures, and plays dwindled to dramaticules, the possibility of audience empathy would fade (almost) to zero. Yet an audience ignored would become an audience involved, implicated and, ultimately, liberated. (Davies 2009: 82)

The relationship is always inversely proportional: less is more. Nonetheless, the brevity of Beckett's last plays is so extreme that it seems in fact

[12] For a concise but thorough illustration of Beckett's manuscript and published works see Cohn 2001. See also Gontarski's seminal 1985 study, Admussen 1973; Mitchell 1976; Pountney 1989.

[13] Stanton Garner justly underlines how in *Come and Go* the already "dull" violet, red and yellow for the "full-length coats, buttoned high" of Ru, Vi, and Flo was further reduced to "different shades of grey" by Beckett himself when he directed the play in 1966 (Garner 1994: 70).

to undermine even the possibility of mere survival of the theatre which, as a business, must follow some rules. The public cannot be asked to pay a ticket for a less-than-twenty-minutes show, which is the length of most of his dramaticules (not taking into account the shortest ones: according to its stage directions, for example, *Breath* should run about thirty-five seconds!).

Not only do the shorter plays often include very few words, but in many cases we know that Beckett wanted them played at a very fast pace, pushing the limits of intelligibility. To Jessica Tandy's complaint that *Not I*'s suggested running time of twenty-three minutes rendered the work unintelligible to the audience, Beckett responded: "I'm not unduly concerned with intelligibility. I hope the piece may work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect" (qtd in Gontarski 2014: 10)[14] and the New York première he directed with Billie Whitelaw as Mouth ran about fifteen minutes.[15]

For another New York première, that of *Play*, directed by Alan Schneider, Beckett's instructions (eventually not followed because of the producers!) were that "*Play* was to be played through twice without interruption and at a very fast pace, each time taking no longer than nine minutes", that is eighteen minutes overall (Schneider 1986: 341).

Does this mean that Beckett was not interested in audiences? Is unintelligibility (or, rather, the risk of it) due to his disregard for spectators? On the contrary, it is exactly because he puts the audience at the centre of his theatre that his plays give them a hard time. Entering less familiar experiences involves a sense of uncertainty and a strong urge to find alternative grounds of stability. In fact, this also happens to the actor who is playing Beckett. Yet both the actor and the spectator are carefully guided in the performance through sparseness and precision of signs. Less is more and, for example, it is the reduction of mobility that characterizes these plays that provides the theatrical image "with focal points of movements and gesture" (Garner 1994: 72).

By cutting details, adding ellipses, and increasing non-specific and ambiguous references,[16] Beckett also undermined what had traditionally been

[14] And in the letter to Alan Schneider dated 16 October 1972, again: "I hear it breathless, urgent, feverish, rhythmic, panting along, without unduly concern with intelligibility. Addressed less to the understanding than to the nerves of the audience which should in a sense *share her bewilderment*" (Harmon 1998: 283).

[15] See also Beckett's comments on the German performance of *Not I* directed by Ernst Wendt, with Hanne Hiob as Mouth (in a letter to Schneider, dated 8 December 1973): "*Not I* in Schiller Werkstatt performed by Brecht's daughter! Well, they say, just 30 minutes. *Du Lieber!*" (Harmon 1998: 312). The *Not I* already mentioned by Lisa Dwan has cut down to nine minutes the play, making it the quickest it has ever been performed. For a famous account of this exhausting actorial experience see Whitelaw 1995: 101-33.

[16] Rosemary Pountney clarifies this process very well with regard to *Come and Go*, and

called 'meaning' or 'content', but at the same time he made the audience confront different possibilities: not exclusively verbally expressed, often demanding, but also extremely rewarding. As Gontarski has claimed, "Beckett's own art may reject much (but not all) of the referential quality of language, but, like music, its mainstay is its own relational structure" (1985: 11). The audience are not detached objective observers, but rather "are positioned as an inherent part of the performance" (McMullan 2010: 13), and in that Beckett stages his spectators "as deliberately as he does his characters, consciously manipulating the experiential orientation of audience to stage" (Garner 1994: 81). Interestingly enough, the spectator is often doubled on the stage, sometimes explicitly, and sometimes also with reference to the inner core of the genesis of the play, as it is said to have been for *Not I*. As reported by Enoch Brater, Beckett told him about a scene he had observed in Morocco in late February 1972: a "solitary figure, completely covered in a djellaba, leaning against a wall" (Knowlson 1996: 589), which is clearly a 'foreshadowing' of the Auditor, not of Mouth.

Being a Beckettian actor is certainly not a piece of cake, but a high degree of concentration and perception is demanded from his spectators too, which could perhaps imply they can do better with shorter performances. Nonetheless these dramas have often been grouped into double or even triple bills. *Footfalls* and *That Time*'s world premières opened in a triple bill with *Play* at the Royal Court Theatre in 1976 during the celebrations for Beckett's seventieth birthday. He had volunteered to direct the first one (starring Billie Whitelaw) himself, while helping McWhinnie with the first production of *That Time* and "casting an eye" (ibid.: 622) over the revival of *Play*. Again, only a few months later, he himself rehearsed the two more recent plays at the Schiller-Theater Werkstatt in Berlin.

Evidently Beckett himself did not oppose the staging of more than one of his plays in one night, but he would not have given his consent for every programme. For example, he expressed to Alan Schneider his doubts about the order ("Surely *Act without Words* before *Happy Days* unless technically quite unfeasible. After seems to me impossible", Harmon 1998: 284) and he drastically resisted some combinations: "Feel it [*That Time*] should be kept apart from *Not I*, i.e. the two never be included in same programme. Mutually damaging" (ibid.: 320). And, as he wrote to Schneider on 1 September 1974, and again, one year later: "*That Time*

concludes: "The ambiguities in the final version of *Come and Go* fill out with surprising richness and depth, a textually bare play. Beckett has achieved this effect by combining an obscure minimal text with precise and explicit stage directions, capable of directing audience attention to possibilities not verbally stated and making the play a *tour de force*" (1989: 19).

should never figure in the same programme with *Not I*" (ibid.: 329).

In fact, one cannot deny that the matching of multiple texts has often been unsatisfactory, if not detrimental. Echoes, cross-references, and shared aspects in different works can prove redundant and end up in an impoverished hotchpotch (see Bertinetti 1994: xlii). But even when carefully measured, redundancy is extrinsic to the striking concentration of Beckett's later texts for theatre, which has perhaps not yet been fully exploited on stage (not even by himself, who opened some doors but could not follow the whole path lying forward).

If in recent years, Beckettian productions have increased in number on the European stages, often thanks to famous directors (Peter Brook's work provides a comprehensive example),[17] the shorter plays still seem to be waiting for the establishment of a 'staging tradition' capable of making the most of their constitutive brevity in a form that differs from anthologies, collections, and multiple billings, with their inevitable redundancies.

However, a few efforts already look promising,[18] as Shannon Jackson's account of the difference between her first encounter with Beckett's *Rockaby* and a recent one can perhaps demonstrate. Jackson has pointed out how the first time she saw the play she was sitting in a theatre and the experience was completely dissatisfying: "…. I found the piece to be in marked violation of my expectations … I remember feeling trapped by the pace and by the unending repetition and wanting to jump out of my seat" (Jackson 2011: 3). Some twenty years later, she saw "another incarnation of *Rockaby*, this time lodged inside an evening of works that were part performance and part 'installation'"; this time being a "moving spectator" rather than a seated one, her involvement with the piece "was completely different" as she found herself "quite at ease with the presentation of the stage image and with the staggered, delayed-timing of her voice-over" (ibid.).

Obviously twenty years had not passed in vain and in the meantime she presumably read (as she admitted) and saw many other things. Time also passes for the average expectations of audiences, who become used to things once considered bewildering; but this example as well as the increasingly widespread use of installations and actuations based on Beckett's work[19] suggest that there are fruitful intersections open for us to in-

[17] In Autumn 2006 Peter Brook directed *Fragments*, bringing together five short pieces: *Rough for Theatre I*, *Act Without Words II*, *Rockaby*, *Come and Go*, and the poem *Neither*. The programme has toured since 2006, and it was again in Paris at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in January 2015.

[18] See, for example, the already mentioned Sarah Jane Scaife's Company SJ project *Beckett in the city*, which is meant to "re-insert his writing within the architecture and social spaces of the city of Dublin" (see www.company-sj.com, last access 20 November 2014).

[19] See Tubridy 2014 and also a very interesting project entitled "Beckett and the Visual Arts", organized as a collaboration of the Naughton Gallery, Drama Studies at Queen's,

vestigate and it is indeed time to explore different routes if we really want to exploit the specificity of Beckett's later work in the theatre.

A Glance at the Italian Stage

The Italian stage was quick in embracing Beckett's theatre. In November 1953 *En attendant Godot,* directed by Roger Blin at the Théâtre de Babylone at the beginning of the same year, was staged at Piccolo Teatro in Milan, and the following year the first Italian production of *Godot* occurred and *Aspettando Godot* was mounted at the Teatro di Via Vittoria in Rome on 22 November 1954. The play was directed by Luciano Mondolfo, with Marcello Moretti (Estragon), Claudio Ermelli (Vladimir), Antonio Pierfederici (Lucky), Vittorio Caprioli (Pozzo), and Maurizio Landi (a boy).[20]

The Italian stage was prompt in welcoming the shorter plays, too: *Not I* opened at Teatro Flaiano in Rome on 17 March 1973, just a few months after the London première and in the same year Faber and Faber published the play, while France had to wait until 1975! *Non io* was played by Laura Betti; the director was Franco Enriquez and the evening programme (whose general title was *Beckett* 73) also included *Breath*, the projection of *Film*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Act without Words I* with the 'definitive Italian Krapp', Glauco Mauri (see Cascetta 2000: 290-2).

During the Spoleto Festival of Summer 1977, Daniele Formica and Luisa Rossi played *Trio per Samuel Beckett*, directed by Romolo Valli, a bill that included *Eh Joe, Footfalls*, and *That Time*, just one year after the world debut of the first two.

In July 1982 the Asti Festival's production *Una voce dal pianeta Beckett* [*A Voice from Planet Beckett*] staged *Ohio Impromptu, A Piece of Monologue* (both in a well-timed Italian première), and *That Time*, all directed by Giancarlo Romani Adami, starring Virginio Gazzolo and Paolo Cosenza.

The outsize *Buon compleanno Samuel Beckett* [*Happy Birthday Samuel Beckett*] at "La Versiliana" in July 1986, directed by Giancarlo Sepe, included more than thirty Beckett's works (taking in prose, poetry, and television pieces) among which *Rockaby* and *Catastrophe* that appeared in Italy for the first time, albeit with a delay of several years from their first productions.

What is worth noting is that, apart from its timeliness, the Italian stage has also helped to enlighten the deep connection between Beckett's work

the Queen's Film Theatre and Reading University and launched in 2009. The project includes exhibitions, films, and seminars (see www.brianfrieltheatre.co.uk/Conferences/BeckettandtheVisualArts, last access 20 November 2014).

[20] For the whole history of Beckett's staging in Italy until the year 2000, see the appendix ("La fortuna scenica") to Cascetta 2000: 264-327. On the first Italian Godot see ibid.: 267-8.

and the arts; it is no coincidence that many of Beckett's plays have been performed by exponents of the experimental theatre who started the careers in the arts, or have above all been concerned with the encounter of various arts and often with the use of technologies on the stage[21]. I think, for example, of Carlo Quartucci's lifelong interest in Beckett, Pier'Alli's rigorous and refined as well as internationally applauded *Winnie dello sguardo* (from *Happy Days*) in 1978 and 1984,[22] Federico Tiezzi's Beckettian mises en scène, Giancarlo Cauteruccio's whole career, or even, more recently, the Motus Company, with their homage to Beckett which reveals an 'original inspiration'.

Director, scenographer, and dramatist Carlo Quartucci's theatrical events have always been strikingly visual. His first *Godot* dates back to 1959 and since then has continually worked on Beckett, staging *Act Without Words* (1962), *Endgame* (1963), *Waiting for Godot* in 1964,[23] and even some shorter plays, although it has to be said that his productions have often proved excessive at all levels from costumes to acting, to duration (Cascetta 2000: 280). The running time of *Primo amore* (1989), for example, was more than three hours.[24] His work on Beckett focused on an experimental 'scenic writing', with special attention to the anti-naturalistic and geometric precision of the set design and to the actors' exact movements. Being one of the first of the 'avant-garde' theatre of the Sixties to stage Beckett, his influence must not be underestimated.

Federico Tiezzi founded the theatre company "Il Carrozzone" (later "Magazzini Criminali", then simply "I Magazzini" and in more recent years

[21] On contemporary Italian stage and its connection to the arts and technologies see, among others, Quadri 1977; Ponte di Pino 1988; Balzola and Prono 1994; Valentini 2007; Monteverdi 2011.

[22] *Winnie, dello sguardo*, Firenze, Rondò di Bacco, 16 July 1978, Compagnia Ouroboros, directed by Pier'Alli, with Gabriella Bartolomei, Franco Cadenzi, Gianfranco Morandi, Pier'Alli; a second edition opened at Milano, CRT Teatro dell'Arte on 11 April 1984 again with Gabriella Bartolomei, and Luca Di Napoli, Riccardo Bini, Ferruccio Bigi/Pier'Alli. An analysis of this performance is to be found in Cascetta and Peja 2003: 88-90.

[23] *Aspettando Godot*, Roma, Teatro Brancaccio, 20 September 1959, Compagnia Universitaria Latino-Metronio; directed by Carlo Quartucci, with Carlo Quartucci, René Monti, Maurizio Navarra, Ernesto De Vito, Gina Greco, Celeste Benedetti, Corinna Pasqualotta; *Atto senza parole I*, in *Me e te*, Roma, Teatro Goldoni, 13 October 1962, Compagnia Teatro della Ripresa, directed and performed by Carlo Quartucci; *Finale di partita*, Roma, Teatro Ateneo, 4 February 1963, Compagnia Teatro della Ripresa, directed by Carlo Quartucci, with Rino Sudano, Leo De Berardinis, Anna D'Offizi, Cosimo Cinieri; *Aspettando Godot*, Genova, Teatro Duse, 31 March 1964, Compagnia Teatro Studio dello Stabile di Genova, directed by Carlo Quartucci, with Rino Sudano, Leo De Berardinis, Maria Grazia Grassini, Claudio Remondi, Mario Rodriguez.

[24] *Primo amore* (Roma, Teatro Ateneo, 9 January 1989, Compagnia La Zattera di Babele, directed by Carlo Quartucci, with Carla Tatò, Sandro Lombardi, Franco Citti, Rada Rassimov, Jan Schade, Fabien and Dan Demuynck, Adrienne Larue, with the recorded voice of Laura Betti) staged *Footfalls*, *Ohio Impromptu*, *A Piece of Monologue*, *Not I*, *Rackaby*, *That Time*, *Breath*, *Catastrophe*.

"Compagnia Lombardi-Tiezzi") with performers Marion D'Amburgo and Sandro Lombardi, while studying art history at the University of Florence. They produced provocative pictorial performances challenging the boundaries of theatre practice and started presenting their highly formal conceptual theatre events in contemporary art galleries during the Seventies. In the mid-Eighties Tiezzi turned towards a sort of 'poetic theatre' and in 1987 staged *Come è* (from Beckett's novel *How it is* translated from French and adapted by Franco Quadri) which won the "Premio Ubu" for the best theatre direction of the year, while later on he staged Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1989) and *Endgame* (1992).[25]

Magazzini's *Come è* is a successfully accomplished example of the great fascination Beckett's narrative works have exercised on most Italian theatre practitioners. It is important to note that even before staging Beckett's theatre, "Beckett fitted the cultural outlook of Tiezzi's company" (Restivo 2003: 99) and in fact we find Winnie's burning umbrella from *Happy Days* in one of Tiezzi's first productions: *La donna stanca incontra il sole* [*The weary woman meets the sun*] (1972).

What we can especially appreciate in Tiezzi's *Endgame* is the intersection between poetry, music, and the visual arts. Indeed, he speaks of theatre as a "conglomerate" that must appear as an indivisible unit,

> the literary text 'dying', as he says, the moment it becomes theatre and being reborn in the actor, this theatrical unity thus achieved, fusing words, music, action, images, colours, and dance, must express its emotions like a face, be dynamic like Gordon Craig's screens, in a space as ideal and 'pure' as that conceive by fifteenth century painters and architects. (Ibid.: 100)

Giancarlo Cauteruccio, who studied architecture, is among the most innovative directors, scenographers, and actors in the Italian theatrical panorama since the 1980s. In 1982, he founded *Krypton* and started experimental research on theatre and technology using videos, laser lights, electronic and digital tools in his *mises en scène* as part of a creative process which is also deeply aware of dramaturgical aspects, finding in Beckett's works a constant point of reference throughout the years. From *Forse. Uno studio su Samuel Beckett* (1989), which assembled a few dramas,[26] to *Trittico*

[25] *Come è*, Modena, Teatro Storchi, 10 January 1987, Compagnia I Magazzini, directed by Federico Tiezzi, with Marion D'Amburgo, Sandro Lombardi, Federico Tiezzi, Rolando Mugnai; *Aspettando Godot*, Palermo, Teatro Biondo, 14 February 1989, Compagnia Teatro Biondo Stabile di Palermo, directed by Federico Tiezzi, with Virginio Gazzolo, Franco Mescolini, Gianluigi Pizzetti, Gustavo Frigerio, Gigi Lo Cascio; *Finale di partita*, Brescia, Teatro Santa Chiara, 14 April 1992, Compagnia CTB-I Magazzini, directed by Federico Tiezzi, with Virginio Gazzolo, Gianfranco Varetto, Emanuela Villagrossi, Paolo Ricchi. About Tiezzi see, among the others, Quadri (ed.) 1987; Mango 1994; Valentini 1988.

[26] *All that Fall*, *Happy Days*, *How It is*. Firenze, Teatro di Rifredi, 23 February 1989,

beckettiano (2006), his work includes another four Beckettian productions: two different *Krapp's Last Tape* (in 1993 and 2003), one *Happy Days* (1995) and a very peculiar mise en scène of *Endgame* in Calabrian dialect: *U iuocu sta' finisciennu* (1997).[27]

Again with *Krypton* we can see how, for most Italian artists, staging Beckett means focusing on a fusion of languages and arts, with a frequent preponderance of the visual impact.

An avowedly Beckettian inspiration also stood at the basis of the creation of Motus, a group founded in Rimini in 1991 (and christened Motus in 1992) by Enrico Casagrande and Daniela Nicolò, whose internationally known work concentrates on the interchanges between languages and technologies, in a 'post-modern' imaginary journey from comics to photography, from painting to fashion.

In 2006, presenting *A place. [that again]*,[28] subtitled "una performance di Motus dedicata a Samuel Beckett" [a Motus performance dedicated to Samuel Beckett], they wrote:

> After ten years, Motus is back at work on Beckett: it's back in 1994-95 when the show *L'occhio belva* joined the members of the company allowing them to start living-transforming non-theatrical places into real artistic "invasions".

Following two previous 1992 Beckettian projects (*Strada principale e strade secondarie* [*Highway and secondary roads*], inspired by Paul Klee and Samuel Beckett, and *Ripartire da lì*, [*Starting again from there*] inspired by *Texts*

starring Daniela Cerri, Graziano Dei, Roberto Visconti and directed by Giancarlo Cauteruccio.

[27] *L'ultimo nastro di Krapp*, Scandicci, Teatro Studio, 14 January 1993, Compagnia Krypton, directed by Giancarlo Cauteruccio, with Massimo Verdastro (the old Krapp) and Fulvio Cauteruccio (the young Krapp); *Giorni felici*, Scandicci Teatro Studio, 7 December 1995, directed by Giancarlo Cauteruccio, with Marion D'Amburgo and Giancarlo Cauteruccio; *U juocu sta finisciennu. Endgane*, Palermo, Cortile della Biblioteca Comunale, 14 August 1997, translated by John Trumper, directed by Giancarlo Cauteruccio, with Giancarlo Cauteruccio, Fulvio Castiglia, Alessandro Russo, Ricchezza Falcone; *L'ultimo nastro di Krapp*, Prato, Teatro Fabbricone, 18 November 2003, directed and performed by Giancarlo Cauteruccio; *Trittico beckettiano. Act without Words I* (with Fulvio Cauteruccio), *Not I* (with Monica Benvenuti), *Krapp's Last Tape* (with Giancarlo Cauteruccio) directed by Giancarlo Cauteruccio, Scandicci (FI), Teatro Studio January 2006. These data are mainly drawn from Cascetta 2000 and Krypton's website, www.compagniakrypton.it (last access 30 November 2014). On Cauteruccio see Cauteruccio 2010; Gaglianò 2014.

[28] *A place. [that again] Performance dedicated to Samuel Beckett*, Scandicci, "1906 Beckettcentoanni 2006" Teatro Studio, 6 March 2006, devised and directed by Enrico Casagrande and Daniela Nicolò; shootings Simona Diacci and Daniela Nicolò; motion graphic and video editing p-bart.com; on screen Silvia Calderoni and Gaetano Liberti, voice off Emanuela Villagrossi and Dany Greggio. See Motus's informative website: www.motusonline.com (last access 30 November 2014). In general, about Motus see at least Chinzari and Ruffini 2000; Molinari and Ventrucci 2000; Motus 2006.

for Nothing by Samuel Beckett[29]), in 1994 *L'occhio belva* [*The Beast Eye*][30]was inspired by a definition Beckett used to indicate the video camera, and the show itself focused on an obsession for the glance; although this production did not include the performance of any particular text, it kept *Quad* and *The Lost Ones* as its main references. It "goes beyond Beckett's works as the synthesis of his works and thought":

> L'*Occhio Belva* was a big proof of love towards Beckett's visual lyrics, towards his "white" period, made of "speechless acts"; before starting rehearsing with the unusual and unique show, we shot a short video in super 8 format about *All Strange Away*, as a study concerning the relation between the eye of the camera and the body/the skin of the actor . . . every further theatre action by Motus bore this sign . . . (http://www.motusonline.com/en/spettacoli/a_place, last access 30 November 2014)

In the long run, our rapid 'tracking shot' of the most interesting Beckettian productions in Italian avant-garde theatre (often keen on visual aspects and technological interchanges) seems to validate the idea that these aspects of Beckett's theatre are fecund and are still worthy to be explored. In fact, even though on its first appearance Beckett's later theatre may have seemed to some critics at risk of "being confined to the printed pages", due to its challenging shortness and novelty of language (Bertinetti 1994: xlii), its extensive performative qualities have now been recognized, the road lying open to a re-composition of the segmentation of art in the search of a unity, a "form that accommodates the mess", that is – as Beckett taught us – "the task of the artist now" (qtd in Graver and Federman 1979: 243).

[29] *Strada principale e strade secondarie* (*Highway and secondary roads*), inspired by Paul Klee and Samuel Beckett. Forlì, "Festival Sogni Onomatopeici", Palestra di Piazzale della Libertà, 31 March 1992; directed by Enrico Casagrande, music Fernando Del Verme, Domenico Filizzola, Coco, with Emiliano Ceccarini, Daniela Nicolò, Francesco Riccioli. *Ripartire da lì* (*Starting again from there*) inspired by *Texts for Nothing* by Samuel Beckett. Ravenna, rassegna "In centro c'è spettacolo", 16 September 1992, directed by Enrico Casagrande, Daniela Nicolò, music by Fernando Del Verme, with Emiliano Ceccarini, Daniela Nicolò, Francesco Riccioli, Alan Crescente.

[30] *L'occhio belva (The Beast Eye)* inspired by Samuel Beckett's latest literary production, Verona, Stazione Frigorifera Specializzata Interzona, Ex Magazzini Generali, 2 December 1994, directed by Enrico Casagrande; focus Daniela Nicolò; sound Claudio Bandello, Marco Montanari; Super 8 Motus/Sistemi Rudimentali, David Zamagni; with Giancarlo Bianchini, Enrico Casagrande, Nicola Fronzoni, Daniela Nicolò, Sabrina and Simona Palmieri, Monica Pratelli, David Zamagni. In 1999 within the project "Prototipo" organized by Fanny & Alexander, Masque Teatro, Motus, Teatrino Clandestino and Interzona in collaboration with "Biennale di Venezia - settore Teatro", they presented *L'occhio belva remake* (Verona, Stazione Frigorifera Specializzata Interzona - Ex Magazzini Generali, 7 October 1999).

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Harold Pinter's Early Revue Sketches

Abstract

Considering Pinter's early revue sketches as integral elements of his early writing project, this article puts them in partial dialogue with the longer dramatic works from his pen in the same period. The value and impact of his sketches is placed in the context of the playwright's emerging career as a writer, and the contribution to his reputation they effected offers a suitable counterpoint to the mainstream view of his work as difficult or obscure. His choice of comedic theme and form in the sketches cannot simply be explained as his employing short-form to experiment with material he might expand or develop in his longer dramatic works, but the brevity of expression is clearly structured and exploited to offer a focussed delivery toward a revelation or punch-line, to such a degree that the journey to the punch-line often has greater dramatic importance than that final release. The use of phatic speech, audience confusion or mis-direction, allows Pinter to foreground character and index character motivation to forge humour from unexpected verbal developments. Vignettes that consider social power relationships are clearly important in these sketches and, while there is little that is overtly political, class structures and the relationship between power (including gendered power) and morality are explored across the portfolio of early sketches.

Harold Pinter was the master of short-form drama. Of the eighteen stage plays he wrote, only eight were full length (*The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, *The Hothouse*, *The Homecoming*, *Old Times*, *No Man's Land*, *Betrayal* and *Moonlight*). The rest are one-act plays that mostly will last for less than an hour in performance, certainly less than ninety minutes (*The Dumb Waiter*, *Landscape*, *Silence*, *Monologue*, *A Kind of Alaska*, *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language*, *Party Time*, *Ashes to Ashes* and *Celebration*). Those that were written for radio or television clock in around the hour mark or less too (*A Slight Ache*, *A Night Out*, *Night School*, *The Dwarfs*, *The Collection*, *The Lover*, *Tea Party*, *The Basement* and *Family Voices*). If we add the substantial list of the sketches he published throughout his career then it becomes clear that the majority of Pinter's output involved dramatic expression concentrated

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into a condensed period of time.[1] It is to this latter collection of sketches, and the early revue sketches specifically, that I will be drawn in this essay. In doing so, I want to consider how they pack their dramatic punch, and what genetic traits they share with their more well-known kin.

In part, the writer's investment in short-form drama might be explained by Pinter's working methods, and in part by that intense period in the late 1950s and early 1960s in which he was writing for radio and television, and therefore to a given, fixed time-frame. These two factors pull against one another. In 1962, he argued that his characters should be allowed "to carry their own can, by giving them a legitimate elbowroom" (Pinter 1991a: xii). "Each time I write it is like opening the door to some unknown house", he later explained, "I don't know who is in the house. I don't know who is going to come through the door. I don't know what is going to happen" (qtd in Batty 2001: 123). Throughout his career, he repeatedly and consistently clarified his working method in these ways, as being subject to the demands and vicissitudes of inspiration, dependent upon characters making themselves known to him and determining their own stories. Clearly, there is a structuring process taking place in the writer's studio, applied to the free-form arrangements that arrive at the tip of the writer's pen from such a mode of working as the material revolves around a kernel of thought, argument, or problem to solve. It is not a methodology that might usually make for long-form drama, which might require a more consciously and systematically controlled, organised and sustained creative process. To some degree, this method might be problematised by the structural demands of writing for the media of television and radio, which imposed a strict discipline upon the writer. This clearly represents a challenge to a declared method of working which espoused absolute flexibility, not restraint of any sort. Nonetheless, the need to expand a dramatic narrative to fit but not exceed a specific timeframe for radio of televisions is clear enough as an explanation of the disciplined nature of Pinter's early short-form writing. The demands of writing sketches for revue shows magnifies that imposition of form over content, as the need to move from establishing a dramatic issue, to developing it, to resolving it, is contracted into just a few minutes. In this regard, Pinter's portfolio of sketches from his early career might clearly have had some influence on the evolving methodology of the young writer in terms of the impact of achieving a narrative or thematic result in a condensed format.

The early revue sketches mostly predate Pinter's writing for radio and television, and represent, then, a stringent application of format. With

[1] Admittedly, this calculation takes no account of Pinter's extensive writing for the cinema.

these, we have a rich collection of brief dramas that we might consider from a number of angles. Most pertinently within this study, is the interest they hold as examples of Pinter's ability to express, entertain or amuse in very condensed packages, and his ability to wield language in a way that draws attention to its purpose and its construction. These sketches, then, might in turn be considered as part of a process of a developing writer, and we can consider how the sketches inform the full-length dramas he wrote for the stage. Rather than viewing them as footnotes to his dramatic works, though, we should be encouraged to think of them as integral elements of his writing project, finding their way after all into his collected dramatic writings on an equal footing with their more well-known, lengthier counterparts. There is very little waste in Pinter's writing career, and a survey of the materials that he gave to the British Library manuscripts archive indicates that very little was left unpublished in his bottom drawer. The published sketches are not, as it were, the cream of an otherwise unpublished collection, they represent everything he wrote in that format.

Looking at the context of Pinter's early revue sketches, we can note that Pinter's career as a dramatist was far from established. His first play, *The Room*, had been written in 1957 to be performed by a student group led by Pinter's old Hackney friend Henry Woolf. His second script, *The Birthday Party*, written later in 1957, was his first to receive a professional production, in 1958. However, this was to remain on stage for only a week, with audiences quickly waning in the shadow of some pretty damning reviews. *The Dumb Waiter* was written at the same time, but was not to receive a British premiere until 1960, when *The Room* also was first put to professional production. He wrote *Something in Common* for radio early in 1958, but it was rejected by the BBC. He adapted and extended it to become *A Slight Ache* which he presented again to the BBC in September 1958, who accepted it for later broadcast. In the winter of that year, he began to write *The Hothouse* for radio, but it was not well received by the BBC commissioning department, and he himself then shelved the work once it was completed, believing it to be too explicit in its political satire (it was first only published and performed as a stage play much later, in 1980). It was at this point in late 1958 and early 1959 – with one failed professional production and two radio plays submitted to the BBC - that Pinter wrote his first review sketches. Disley Jones, who had worked with Pinter on the failed production of *The Birthday Party* at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, approached the author to contribute to a revue show he was planning at the theatre for summer 1959. A further commission arrived for the Apollo Theatre, and Pinter contributed material to these two revue shows in short succession; *One to Another* at the Lyric that opened on 15 July and *Pieces of Eight* at the Apollo on 23 September. At the time, then, these represented the most certain sources of income from writing

that presented themselves, complemented by the scheduling of the radio broadcast of *A Slight Ache* on 19 July 1959, a few days after the opening of the *One to Another* revue. To ease matters, in September 1958, Pinter had received some financial support from Roger L. Stevens, an American producer and philanthropist, indicating that in discerning circles the measure of his talent was beginning to be appreciated. The award made it possible for Pinter, newly-married and with a baby son, to dedicate time to his writing ambitions beyond the certainty of the modest income from the sketches and radio play. In early 1959 he wrote *The Caretaker*, and its success a year later would seal his fame and recognition. With the affirmative public and critical response to that career-defining play still waiting in the wings, Pinter at this stage had a very small public portfolio, some critical respect, and a lot to prove.

Pinter's contribution to the two 1959 revue shows was a small handful of sketches: "The Black and White", "Trouble in the Works", "Last to Go", "Request Stop", "Special Offer" and "Getting Acquainted" (the manuscript to which is now lost). To these we might add for consideration other sketches penned at that time: "That's Your Trouble", "That's All", "Interview", "Umbrellas" and "Applicant", the latter being a scene recovered from the then shelved *The Hothouse* script. Some of the others were dramatic re-writes of short prose pieces that Pinter had written in the early fifties ("The Black and the White", for example, was originally a prose piece written in 1954-55). The text of "Umbrellas" was re-discovered, over fifty years after it had disappeared and the sketch had been part of a revue entitled *You, Me and the Gatepost* at the Nottingham Playhouse on 27 June 1960.

The *One to Another* revue also featured sketches by N. F. Simpson, Bamber Gasgoine and John Mortimer and starred Patricia Bredin, Ray Barrett, Sheila Hancock, Barbara Evans, Tony Tanner, Roddy Maude Roxby, Joe Melia, Beryl Reid and Patrick Wymark. It ran for seventy-four performances. Peter Cook contributed the majority of sketches to *Pieces of Eight* at the Apollo, and the actors for that production included Kenneth Williams and Fenella Fielding, supported by Peter Reeves, Josephine Blake and Myra de Groot. It ran for over 400 performances and its popular success contributed to the nascent reputations of both Pinter and Cook, though only the latter sought to capitalise upon it as a vehicle for developing a career in comedy. This sort of work, though, and this cohort of actors, very much served to position Pinter alongside Cook as a new sort of comedy writer, part of a new generation that re-wrote the rules of revue wit in ways that adumbrated the challenging social satire of 1960s television shows such as *That was the Week that Was* (1962-63). Beryl Reid and Sheila Hancock were young comic actresses for stage, screen and radio with emerging reputations. Kenneth Williams was perhaps the biggest name in the casts of

the two revues, whose work on radio in *Hancock's Half Hour* (1954-59) had made him something of a household name, which he was about to consolidate with numerous appearances in the *Carry On* franchise of films (1958-92). The context in which Pinter began to develop a reputation, then, was more as part of an alternative new wave of comic material than in the world of the angry young men and women that was dominating the young, new theatre scene at the time.

Pinter's brand of comedy, as represented by these early sketches, was far from as overt as that constructed by Peter Cook or John Mortimer for the same revues. His humour very often sat in the foregrounding of specific verbal characteristics that his characters manifested, and what they revealed of their characters' social or emotional positions. By way of example, one of the characteristics of Pinter's writing that is evident in the sketches is the use of phatic speech, which, as Michael Billington puts it, involves "using language not so much to communicate as to maintain the tenuous thread of human contact" (2007: 108). "Last to Go" is the prime example of this, and has been the subject of a notable article by David Lodge that examines the phatic speech, though he draws some conclusions about metaphorical structures that might not hold up to the scrutiny of live performance experience (Lodge 2001). The sketch centres around a dialogue between a coffee stall barman and his customer, a newspaper seller, who engages him in conversation. The sketch involves the newspaper seller making small-talk and the barman politely confirming each packet of trivial information in turn by way of repetition, or sustaining the conversation by asking obvious closed questions:

MAN	… All I had left tonight was the 'Evening News'. *Pause*
BAR.	Then that went, did it?
MAN	Yes. Pause. Like a shot. *Pause.*
BAR.	You didn't have any left, eh?
MAN	No. Not after I sold that one.

(Pinter 1991b: 234)

The humour in the scene might be generated from two angles, and would depend upon delivery to be created and sustained. Firstly, there might be a tension – with slow delivery and working of the pauses throughout the sketch – that would operate by making an audience anticipate whether or not the two men could sustain their empty dialogue. This humour relies to a certain degree on a slight superiority of audience to character; we are amused by the lack of articulacy, perhaps, and by the ability to sustain vacant dialogue without communication. Secondly, humour might arise from the expectation that some form of genuine communication is going to take place as a result of this exchange; that in some way the phatic expressions are being sustained in order to create a context within which a

meaningful message might be shared. Humour builds up in the tension of anticipation of that, and is released as laughter in the failure of its appearance once titillatingly forwarded. Towards the end of the sketch, this sense that the two men may have something productive or meaningful to say arises when they begin a chain of exchanges about a George, seemingly a mutual acquaintance. The narrative, so to speak, begins to develop when we hear why the man was passing the coffee stall earlier that day, a piece of information with which he opened the dialogue: he was intent on finding George. This collapses in a deliberately flaccid revelation that George was not to be found. With an exchange about whether or not George had arthritis, we suspect they are not talking about the same man. The sketch then folds back on itself with repetition of details of which paper was sold last, before the final (potentially poignant) line: "I think he must have left the area" (Pinter 1991b: 236).

In its context within the *Pieces of Eight* revue, "Last to Go" stands out as quite subtle, signalling its comedy a lot less than the sketches that surrounded it. Peter Cook's "Not an Asp" is a useful point of comparison. In both sketches, a possibly lonely individual seeks to make contact with another, but fails to do so. In Cook's sketch, the oddball individual has a box in which he claims he has a viper, and pursues a near monologue of what is and is not in the box and inflicts this bizarre tirade on his unwitting neighbour on the park bench. Well suited to Kenneth William's precise and emphatic delivery, the comedy is found predominantly in the strange behaviour of this character. What is distinct in Pinter's work, and less easy to 'perform' in terms of straight comedy, is that he wields the space between people, the breach in communication, as an experience that is both pathetic and comic. As audience, we wait for him to fill the gaps that he creates, only for them to collapse.

We see this too in "The Black and White", the title of which refers to the name of a chain of milk bars that once were found all around London. Milk bars were alternative to pubs, where one would buy a milk-based drink from a counter. Simple meals were available too, most commonly soup. One of the first Black and White bars, so named after their choice of décor, stood at 68 Fleet Street. As a teenager and young man, Pinter would frequent this establishment with his friends on late nights out in London. Its location was convenient for them as Fleet Street would be where they would alight from buses from West London via Marble Arch and catch buses home to Hackney. The conversation between two old women around buses in the sketch, then, is likely to have stemmed from Pinter's own experience and detailed knowledge of the timetables and trajectories of the various London night buses, and indeed accurately reflects the bus routes of the early 1950s from and around Fleet Street.

As with "Last to Go", the sketch sustains itself through phatic dia-

logue, and in this case the impulse even displaces or over-rides attempts at real conversation, suggesting a rigidly embedded conversational routine between old friends:

SEC. You see that one come up and speak to me at the counter? …
FIRST You got the bread then?

(Pinter 1991b: 228)

As with the elusive George in "Last to Go", this sketch has in its background the potential of human contact beyond the speakers. While we might detect an impulse toward and need for such contact in 'Last to Go', the introverted routine that we detect between these ladies extends itself to a suspicion of others. We learn that the second woman was approached by a stranger who asked her the time, and that he received verbal abuse and a threat of the police being called for his innocent request. There is sad observational humour in these exchanges, where two ladies so clearly enjoying the benefit of one another's company set themselves through their behaviour in opposition to the potential of social interaction. The stage location of the all-night café suggests an existence beyond the regular social world of work and domestic rhythms, and the talk towards the end of the sketch of how the two of them are heading off soon in different directions, one to "the Garden" (probably Covent Garden) and the other to Waterloo Bridge, foregrounds their separate lives. The expression of a desire to stay put ("I wouldn't mind staying") nonetheless seems to indicate a need to sustain the conversation and the company (Pinter 1991b: 230). There is a subtle friction between the two in these closing exchanges, in terms of the contrasting use of "up" or "down" to indicate a location away from the bar:

SEC. I'm going. I'm going up to the Garden.
FIRST I'm not going down there. Pause. I'm going up to Waterloo Bridge.

(Pinter 1991b: 230)

Though we might not read this as deliberate contradiction, it does indicate a separation, a movement in different directions which, on the back of an expression of the desire to stay put, suggests something of the loneliness of these characters and their existence outside of social norms or social exchanges.

"That's All" approaches this theme differently, with two women (Mrs A and Mrs B) discussing their shopping habits in relation to those of another, who we learn has moved away but returns on Thursdays to use the butcher's shop she is used to, pointing to the entrenched routines that dictate the lives of these characters. Mrs A asserts that the third woman

used to come round to her house for a cup of tea on Wednesdays, but comes less often now. Mrs B seems to suggest that the other women does not come around at all, but Mrs A insists that is not the case. As with "Last to Go" and "The Black and White". The comedy is gentle, mostly derived from the mundane detail, repetition and casual responses of Mrs B (who mostly just says "Yes", "No" or "I know"), but the brief sketch is another study of the reassuring grip that routine and habit has on human acquaintance, and the sadness of the risk that beneath habit there is no connection between people.

Phatic speech had of course been mobilised by Pinter in the plays he wrote before these sketches, notably in the comparable dialogues between Rose and Meg and their husbands in the opening scenes of *The Room* and *The Birthday Party* as a means to express the character of those domestic environments, before their dramas were generated by intrusion from beyond the walls of the home. In *The Dumb Waiter*, it served to indicate that the two protagonists are waiting, biding their time until instructions arrive to necessitate more meaningful exchanges. What these sketches perform, though, is an intuited need for company and connection between their characters that goes further than the suggestion of contented simplicity or inadequate communication between partners in those early plays. This adumbrates the ambition of *The Caretaker* and the television plays of the early 1960s to examine not only the means by which that company is solicited – the offer to take care of one another – but the human failures and weaknesses that betray those impulses of coming together.

We might also consider dialogue such as that presented in "That's All" and "The Black and White" as 'schizogenic' in the terms presented by Luc Gilleman, who considers seemingly bizarre speech patterns in Pinter's work as effective as a consequence of "its appearance of simplicity and its actual relational complexity, structurally present in the form of contradiction and disqualification" (Gilleman 2008: 81). The comedy and the tensions such dialogue produce are sources in the appetite we carry for making sense of what appears nonsensical. "Trouble in the Works" provides an early example of Pinter experimenting with a schizogenic exchange to hilarious ends, but with a potentially sinister undertone that he exploits elsewhere. In stark contrast with "Last to Go", "That's All" and "The Black and White", 'Trouble in the Works' operates in a more well-trodden comedy sketch format of a bizarre verbal exchange that moves towards a punch-line. Another dialogue, this time the sketch is positioned from the off in terms of a simple power relationship, between a factory owner, Fibbs, and a foreman or even perhaps a trade union representative, Wills. Industrial relations seem harmonious; the staff has excellent facilities and the nature of the dialogue suggests a positive working relationship between the two men. Wills is nonetheless present in his boss's office to

inform Fibbs of some worker discontent, and the comedy is generated by the building tension towards learning what possible detail the work force are so unhappy about, and audience are in the same position of ignorance as the boss in this regard. Along the way, there is deliberate base humour served in the innuendo-riven names of the various tools and fixtures that the men are complaining about making: "brass pet cock", "hemi unable spherical rod end", "high speed taper shank spiral flute reamers", "nippled connector" and "nippled adaptor" to list but a few (Pinter 1991b: 226-7). The fun is in both the innuendo and the hilarity that is released from vocabulary of a highly specific technical sort being tripped off the tongue in quick succession. Part of the humour here also, of course, is the fact of watching two men having a conversation that quite obviously makes straightforward sense to them, and in which they get increasingly emotionally invested, when its constituent parts are a series of repeated semi-nonsensical industrial jargon. In this way, Pinter's innovation is that the journey to the punchline is more important than the punchline itself, which simply offers a packet of satisfaction in signalling the curtain is to fall.

Wills finally reveals what it is the workers want to make instead of all those machine parts. Interestingly, and as if to substantiate the notion that the punch-line is not the key to the comedy here, there have been three versions of the punch-line over the life of the text in print. One anecdote has it that Pinter's original punchline (the men want to make "trouble") was censored for being too political in its original context (and by that we might read it might have been taken as dismissive of or ridiculing workers' rights and demands). It was replaced by "brandy balls", which remained as the given text when published by Methuen (it reverted to "trouble" in later publication by Faber). "Brandy balls", of course, maintains the frisson of innuendo of "nippled connector" and "nippled adaptor", but perhaps in a diminished, unsatisfying way. Another alternative punch-line was "love", which was used in a cartoon version of the sketch made and broadcast in Canada in 1968 under the title of *Pinter People*. The idea of making "love" was, of course, very much in synch with the late 1960s alternative society zeitgeist, whilst satisfactorily playing on the variable function of the verb 'to make'.

The potential of specialised jargon as the basis of humour was first explored by Pinter in a short prose piece "Latest Reports from the Stock Exchange" (1953) in which the opaque paraphernalia of newspaper stock exchange reports formed a structural basis for a series of comments about crises in the political arena. In dramatic form, the wielding of specialised jargon was exploited as part of a process of rendering people vulnerable and is first wielded with some effect in the interrogation of Stanley by Goldberg and McCann in *The Birthday Party*, though a far more exquisitely

written example is the bamboozling verbal assault that Mick makes on Davies in *The Caretaker* when pretending to have understood the vagrant has some expertise in interior decoration as a means of exposing the old man's conniving behaviour. Though "Trouble in the Works" has none of the nuance of Mick's assault, it is premised in the same experience of the ownership of knowledge that mastering of jargon manifests, and this makes it an early example in Pinter of how power is wielded through abstract language. This is more fully capitalised upon in *The Caretaker* and beyond. Elin Diamond draws a connection between use of vocabulary such as "hemi unibal spherical rod end" with Mick's use of "penchant" in *The Caretaker* and Ben's use of "ballcock" in *The Dumb Waiter*, to argue just this point: that "such words function as a primitive force, silencing or intimidating the listener" (Diamond 1985: 211). Whereas our laughter in those plays is directed at the vulnerable character in each exchange, the joke in "Trouble in the Works", however, is clearly on the audience, whose established position of ignorance is cause for their own hilarity.

'Umbrellas' offers something of a brief examination of power in a comic vignette, though its ambitions are quite monochrome. Less than a couple of minutes in length, "Umbrellas" is a dialogue between two men sunbathing in deck chairs on the terrace of a hotel. In just shorts and sunglasses, they carry no signifiers of wealth or status in the form of clothing, though the location and the characteristics of their exchange (they refer to one another as "old boy") might suggest they are both men of means, of what in the 1950s might have been considered upper class. The comic premise of the play is two semi-naked men in the hot sun extolling the virtue of umbrellas for the entirety of the brief dialogue. The punch-line ("You find them handy, eh? […] When it's raining particularly") is a small dose of humour, and operates on two levels (Pinter 2011: 518). Firstly, it foregrounds the current uselessness of the umbrella that is to hand, and, by doing so, it deflates and foregrounds the preceding dialogue as being more precisely about currency, ownership, the emblems of acquisition that the umbrella has temporarily replaced in this self-congratulatory exchange. The dialogue here, then, is not just filling time or the gap between men, it is affirming a world-view through a bizarre symbol for the purpose, one that at the time in the late 1950s might ordinarily have been used metaphorically to describe the value of the recently established welfare state structure to protect all equally.

Umbrellas' is reminiscent of "That's Your Trouble", in which two men, also called A and B, (and one of whom also carries an umbrella) discuss another man (offstage) who is carrying a sandwich board. The entire sketch, barely a couple of minutes in length, involves discussing what ailment the man might be afflicted with by carrying the board for too long. They dispute whether he'll get a headache, based on differing views of

where in the body the strain of carrying the board will take its toll. Again, the social commentary is subtle, enveloped within a seemingly meaningless exchange in which two men claim ownership of greater knowledge about the human body. These two men of leisure (one lying on the grass in the park with a book in his hands the other making cricket strokes with his umbrella) objectify a working man, employed in the least remunerative and most exploitative activity, as a walking advertising board. The vague punch-line ("You don't know what your trouble is, my friend. That's your trouble.") reflects back on the speaker who has just anatomised the off-stage person (Pinter 1991c: 222). The sketch seems to activate that sense of judgement on the distance between people sustained by class and the kind of leisure/labour separation explicit in the deck chaired attitude of the men in "Umbrellas", augmented here in 'That's Your Trouble' by the petty claim to superior knowledge that the two gentlemen briefly feud over.

Pinter had employed a petty argument over who knows best as a means of distraction from greater truths in *The Dumb Waiter*, notably in the scene in which Ben and Gus argue over the appropriate nature of the colloquialism "light the kettle" as against the accuracy of "light the gas" (Pinter 1991a: 126). As with 'That's Your Trouble', the comedy generated by the squabble between the men in their claims to superior knowledge foregrounds their blind spot, their seemingly oblivious attitude to significance of the structures that contain them as workers, neatly captured in a process that sums up British stoicism, routine and the will to procrastination: making a cup of tea. Embedded as a note in *The Dumb Waiter*, the fact that a spat over knowledge becomes the very premise and engine of the sketch 'That's Your Trouble' makes the labour/leisure and class structures that remain unchallenged all the more noticeable, and we might therefore consider it the most overtly political of these early sketches, in its attachment if a flippant attitude to the ills of exploitative labour, and implication of its audience in that attitude through the attractive humour it generates.

"Interview" offers no overt sense of social commentary in the way that "That's Your Trouble", "Umbrellas" or even "Trouble in the Works" hint at, though the outburst of a punch-line that it delivers is both absurd (in the sense that it is simply bizarre) and explicitly political. Mr Jakes in being interviewed by an unnamed gentleman, who enquires about the health of the pornographic book market. With a few hilarious comment about how Christmas represents something of a downturn in trade ("you don't get all that many people sending pornographic books for Xmas presents") (Pinter 1991c: 229), the interview takes an odd turn when Jakes responds defensively to being asked what sort of people frequent his shop. There follows a seemingly paranoid rant about the "security police" keeping dossiers, which develops into the revelation that Jakes too keeps dossiers on

his clientele with the ambition eventually to expose them. "They're all the same, every single one of them. COMMUNISTS" comes the punch-line, causing no doubt an immediate confusion, and concomitant hilarity, in any audience (Pinter 1991c: 230). The implication is that, in order to pursue a moral crusade, the bookseller must engage in selling unseemly wares that will attract those he wishes to purge from society.

The fervour with which Jakes presents his paranoid view and means of identifying undermines any real political charge the sketch offers, however overtly political it positions itself, and this would seem to serve simply to puncture posturing that has no substantial basis. Without real target, and offering humour through its bizarre revelation, the sketch is weak and more akin to work in progress than a finished work, but its spark and charge has a root in the same structure that Goldberg and McCann present in *The Birthday Party*, and which causes the dilemma that Ben and Gus face in *The Dumb Waiter*, which is the machinations of ideological structures to impose conformity, obedience and punish transgression. These take form much more explicitly in Pinter's later drama where the impulse by the powerful elite toward "keeping the world clean for democracy" results in the fragmentation of family and state control of the individual (Pinter, 2011: 277) and Basil Chiasson speculates neatly that Pinter from early on in his writing career offers a "response to … the ways of speaking which correlate to the rationality instrumental to the neoliberal project" (2014: 251).

While the interview format is used in "Interview" as a straightforward platform for the release of this paranoid divisiveness, it serves a far more intrusive and violent function in "Applicant", the sketch extracted from the originally abandoned radio play *The Hothouse*. Lamb, a young man who is clearly eager to please is interviewed by Miss Piffs, whom Pinter describes as "the essence of efficiency" (Pinter 1991c: 225). The sketch opens with pleasantries exchange between the two, and we assume quickly that Lamb is being interviewed for a scientific post (he confirms he is a physicist). Piffs informs Lamb that he will first undergo a psychological test to determine his suitability, and connects electrodes to his hands and fits earphones over his ears. Lamb is evidently alarmed by this, but maintains a polite tolerance for the unexpected procedure. Once the equipment is in place, Lamb is encouraged to relax before Piffs presses a button which causes Lamb to convulse and fall from his chair. Piffs then begins a long trade of questions, without pausing for answers. Starting with plain enquiries about his emotional health, she swiftly moves onto innuendo ("Do you often do things you regret in the morning?") and implies ambiguity as to Lamb's sexual persuasion ("Are you often puzzled by women? … Men") before asking outright about his libido and whether he is a virgin (Pinter 1991c: 226-7). Pressing another button, she turns on a

pulsating red light and synchronously asks rhythmic questions about how aspects of femininity might alarm Lamb ("Do women frighten you? … Their clothes? Their shoes? Their voices? Their laughter?") (Pinter 1991c: 228). Toward the end of this passage, the words are replaced by drum beats, the strike of a cymbal, a trombone chord and a bass note, punctuated each time with just the word "their", as though to attribute these abstract musical sounds to women too. This is a remarkable appropriation of the tendency to use such noises as indicators of casual sexual titillation in screen and radio comedy of the time,[2] employing them instead as indicators of female sexual agency and power rather than of willingly accessible sexuality. The scene is a more potent take on the notion expressed in 'Interview' that the morally correct and strong can weed out and subject those assumed to be morally inferior and weak.

We also see a challenge to gender orthodoxy in "Special Offer", a short monologue in which a female employee of the BBC tells a tale of having been approached with an offer of "men for sale", clearly a form of sexual exploitation in which the men are presented as "tried and tested" commodities at "very reasonable rates" with a money-back guarantee (Pinter 1991b: 237). The inversion of exploitation quite simply renders not only the reality of prostitution overt, but the broader objectification of women as pleasing objects within a male-dominated gender discourse is foregrounded. This reversal of the contemporary representation of women in comedy in "Special Offer" and "Applicant", albeit crude, is an initial example of Pinter's later more sophisticated examination of the complex relationships negotiated between men and women in domestic and working relationships. This became something of a major characteristic with his work for television in the early 1960s – with plays such as *A Night Out*, *Night School* and *The Lover* – and came to fruition on the stage with *Tea Party* and *The Homecoming*. In all of these, the threat of female sexuality, of women retaining ownership of their sexuality despite the manoeuvres of the men to define them and contain them in the domestic sphere, is a key creative occupation for Pinter, resolved finally in the character of Ruth in *The Homecoming*, who most overtly takes on the masculine discourses of gender control and sexual privilege, and, mastering them herself, turns them on the men.

"Request Stop" plays with gender stereotypes differently, and activates a more common comedy trope; that of the lonely, asocial old woman who talks excessively. Standing in a queue at a bus stop, the Woman speaks down to a small man in a raincoat next to her, the attire being the signifier of the

[2] Perhaps the most memorable contemporaneous example of this is the sound effect that accompanied the sudden loss of the bra by Barbara Windsor's character during a morning exercise scene in *Carry on Camping* (1969), part of a film franchise that was tirelessly replete with such base humour sound effects.

'dirty old man' in stock mid-century British comedy.[3] She presents herself as a victim of the man, who is given no lines in response by the author, causing us at first to assume his guilt. "I beg your pardon, what did you say", she says as the sketch begins and continues in that tone of aggrieved upset, claiming that all she had done is ask the man if she could get a bus to Shepherd's Bush from that stop, accusing him of making insinuations (Pinter 199lb: 231). As she attempts to get another lady involved as a witness, the second lady makes an exit, before the others in the queue thrust their arms out to catch the bus that has now arrived. Following their mime of departure, another man comes to join her, now alone at the bus stop. Acting in a coy manner, the woman delivers the sketch's punch-line, and asks him if he knows whether she can catch a bus to Marble Arch from that stop. The humour, of course, is ignited here by the realisation that, now asking after a completely different destination, she has been up to mischief, and had managed perhaps to fool the audience into believing that she had been harassed by the first man on the scene. She simultaneously rises in our estimation as the agent of comic unrule, and falls as a clear public nuisance, about to falsely accuse another man as a means of self gratification.

Pinter's early revue sketches, though they might have come into being as a response to a career-sustaining offer of paid work at a time of uncertainty, were demonstrably integrated into his developing project as a writer, both in terms of the mastery of formal structures, and in terms of the engagement with themes that had been and would be explored in his work for stage, radio and screen. As comedy vehicles, they did not always operate in the commonplace ways of providing humour through, for example, unresolved friction between characters, the undermining of social status for the satisfaction of an observing low-status audience, or the puncturing of hubristic pride. Instead, Pinter took the opportunity to examine the opportunities of a condensed short-form drama, and exploited the usual engagements with audience that they might usually secure. Insight into character emotional need through what is not spoken, the implied critique of social structures by presenting humour from characters' being oblivious to those very structures, and the unsettling of gender discourses, are all key components of his early work that are explored in and through the sketches. Later in his career, we might perceive that new trajectories were often set in motion first through experimentation with sketch drama. 'Night', presented in revue in 1969, participates in a lengthy exploration of the ambiguity of past experience having some sway on present arrangements and relationships that dominated much of

[3] The raincoat was notably employed as a signifier in this way repeatedly in *The Benny Hill Show* on TV (1955-91).

the next decade of Pinter's output. In 1983, the sketch 'Precisely' initiated a period of more overtly political writing that concluded with the sketches 'God's District' (1997) and 'Press Conference' (2002). Considered from this perspective, Pinter's sketches offer keen insight into his working methods, his thematic concerns and the trajectory of his creative currents at any point in the chronology of his extensive output.

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"...worth using twice"? Making a Short Story Long. Tom Stoppard's Two Early One-Acters

Abstract

The article focuses on Tom Stoppard's TV drama *Another Moon Called Earth* (1967) and the radio play *Artist Descending a Staircase* (1972). Moving from the analysis of their peculiarities in relation with the medium they were written for, the essay considers their function in the writing of two stage dramas: *Jumpers* (1972) and *Travesties* (1974). In both cases, the borrowings from other works, namely Shakespeare's and Oscar Wilde's, have been an essential element of the transformation of short pieces into longer ones. Yet, somehow against expectations, the second pair of dramas (*Artist Descending a Staircase* and *Travesties*) is characterized by a lessening in dramatic force and complexity in the passage from the short to full-length play. This brings forth the hypothesis that Stoppard, in his production for TV and radio, felt less constrained by the commercial rules regulating the production of West End plays. This is further reinforced by looking at other two short radio plays (*M is for Moon Among Other Things*, 1964 and *If You're Glad I'll Be Frank*, 1966) which reveal how Stoppard possessed an ability of dealing with human sentiments that was not detectable in the longer plays of the period.

"I wanted to be in the theatre ... It is simply the way I felt, and there were many like me in those early Osborne, Wesker and Pinter years, when bliss was to be performed but to be staged was very heaven" (Stoppard 1998: vii). In the preface to the volume collecting his TV plays, Tom Stoppard defined his own hierarchical order among spectacular forms when he was a young playwright. Nonetheless, he had to wait until 1967 to see his *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* staged by professionals; in the meantime, the young writer had to make do with other ways to support himself and his growing family, that is, by writing for radio and television.

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Stoppard's work for the small screen has been going on to the present day – it is worth remembering that his five-part TV adaptation of Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy *Parade's End* (1924-28) was aired on BBC in 2012. Nevertheless, he gave up writing original pieces for television quite early, since his last televised play is *Squaring the Circle*, broadcasted in 1984. On the contrary, his interest in the radio as an appropriate medium for drama has lasted for all of his lifetime, as demonstrated by *On Dover Beach* (2007), a 15-minute radio play based on Matthew Arnold's nearly homonymous poem, and *Dark Side* (2012), a 55-minute radio play aimed at celebrating the fortieth anniversary of Pink Floyd's album *The Dark Side of the Moon*. Therefore, Stoppard's interest in short pieces is not to be considered as entirely depending on a contingent situation of need, as implied above. In fact, his quickness of wit was probably most suitable for dramas that were to find their resolution in a short time span, but that is not all. Besides, with the benefit of hindsight, we know that his short works were often to be developed into longer plays. It is hard to say if this transformation of short pieces into full-length ones was somehow planned: probably not, but what Stoppard declared in the mid-seventies about his habit of re-using texts and ideas – "If it's worth using once, it's worth using twice", he once said (Hayman 1982: 2) – cannot be ignored. It seems to suggest that this process was consciously and willingly replicated, envisaging what was going to be a very fruitful creative streak spanning the whole of his career.

The relationship between the short piece (be it a radio or a TV drama or a theatrical one-acter) and the full-length play can assume different forms. For instance, although adapted for the stage with a few additions and a new title (*Indian Ink* [1995]), the radio play *In the Native State* (1991) maintained both the original characters and plot, while *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet King Lear*[1] was more radically transformed and eventually became *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*'s third act. Occasionally, the short play provided the full-length one with nothing more than a general frame or setting: for instance, the radio drama *The Dog It Was That Died* (1983) and the play *Hapgood* (1988) have not much in common in terms of plot and characters, except for their setting (the world of espionage during the Cold War) and especially their dealing with the psychic estrangement affecting double agents. This suggests that the radio drama somehow constituted a first step in the composition of the later piece. Derek Marlowe, a playwright Stoppard was friend with in the early years of his career, thus describes his composing

[1] *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet King Lear* was probably written by Stoppard in Berlin in the summer of 1964; this early draft was never published, see also note 6 below.

method: "For Tom, writing a play is like sitting for an examination. He spends ages on research, does all the necessary cramming, reads all the relevant books and then gestates the result. Once he's passed the exam ... he forgets all about it and moves on to the next subject" (Tynan 1979: 90). The logical deduction is that such a work of research was wasted on just one short play, or at least it must have looked so to Stoppard himself.[2]

In the following pages I will select two different cases of Stoppard's transformative practice: one TV and one radio drama, both turned into full-fledged plays for the stage at a later date. I will discuss this peculiar process of expansion with a focus upon the dramaturgical features of both the short and the long plays with the aim of identifying the specifics of the former from a comparative perspective.

A Trip to the Moon

I will start with *Another Moon Called Earth*, a 30-minute TV play broadcasted by BBC in June 1967. This date bears some importance, since the real event constantly referred to (man's first landing on the moon) is still two years away. There are four characters: a married couple, Bone and Penelope, a visitor, Albert, and Crouch, the porter. The action (in fifteen takes) is entirely located in three rooms of the flat: Penelope's room, Bone's study and the hall, while in the street below a celebratory parade for the astronaut's homecoming is being held. The background is Bone's and Penelope's marital crisis, thus summarized by Bone himself:

> We have on the one hand, that is to say in bed, an attractive married lady whose relations with her husband are, at their highest, polite, and have been for some time. We have, on the other hand, daily visits by a not unhandsome stranger who rings the doorbell, is admitted by Pinkerton and shown into the ladies bedroom, whence he emerges an hour or so later and lets himself out. Now, let's see: does anything suggest itself? Wife in bed, daily visits by stranger. What inference may one draw? (Stoppard 1998: 52)

Of course the drama does not boil down to the relationship between an unfaithful wife and a cuckolded husband. A short explanation is needed:

[2] As regards this work of research, the case of *Neutral Ground* deserves a treatment of its own for being based on Sophocles's *Philoctetes*, and yet containing elements from another *Philoctetes*, namely Euripides's that we possess only in fragments. The genealogy of *Neutral Ground* will be the subject of a separate study I am currently working on.

Penelope claims to be unable to get off her bed since man's landing on the moon and attributes her incapacity to her sense of bewilderment deriving from that event:

> God, is it only me? I tell you, he has stood outside and seen us all, all in one go, little. And suddenly everything we live by – our rules – our good, our evil – our ideas of love, duty –all the things we've counted on as being absolute truths – because we filled all existence – they're all suddenly exposed as nothing more than local customs – nothing more – because he has seen the edges where we stop, and we never stopped anywhere before ... I'm telling you: when that thought drips through to the bottom, people won't just carry on. The things they've taken on trust, they've never had edges before. (Ibid.: 57)

This speech is not devoid of sense, yet it bears the signs of an uneasy state of mind: up to this point (that is, halfway through the play) the spectator is still in doubt whether Penelope is just a spoilt woman (there is a reference to her being an heiress) or she is mentally breaking down: however, her carefree demeanour contributes to maintaining an atmosphere of light comedy. This far, the play is based on the witty banter between husband and wife, who has interrupted him in his research work as historian. It is soon clear that, even if she behaves quite foolishly, she is far from being unintelligent. Their exchanges mostly revolve around Albert, a doctor whose visits started well before Penelope's supposed illness, giving some foundations to Bone's suspects. The crisis breaks out when Bone finds out that Penelope has fired her life-long nanny, Pinkerton, because she beat her at every kind of game ("Every damn thing. Cards, nought and crosses, charades ...", ibid.: 54). As we will understand later, the conversation regarding Pinkerton is a whole series of double-entendres ("I got rid of her ... Gave her the push ... sudden impulse"; "You can't just throw your old nanny into the street", ibid.: 53-4). When Albert arrives, bringing an expensive-looking bunch of flowers, Bone retires to his study and the story seems to go towards a predictable ending. The turning point coincides with an informal enquiry carried out by the porter, Crouch, about an incident occurred in a street nearby. This is how he sums it up to Bone: "The incident. There's been a bit of an incident ... Woman, middle aged to elderly ... fell in the street. Dead" (ibid.: 61). Of course, the woman is the ex-nanny, Pinkerton, but Crouch's words are misunderstood: Bone gathers that she died of a heart attack, and here once more Stoppard revels in underlining the ambiguities of verbal expression (a theme that will become central in another TV movie, *Professional Foul*, 1977) in order to ambush his audience.

Bone informs his wife (who is clearly uninterested) of Pinkerton's death due to a natural cause, but, when he goes back to Crouch, he gets a more complete narration: "From the window. We were all watching the parade and suddenly behind us – thump ..." (Stoppard 1998: 63). Now, both Bone and the audience understand what really happened, that is, that Pinkerton was pushed out of the window. Yet Penelope persists in her insouciant manner and Albert, signing a certificate of accidental death due to natural causes, solves any prospective trouble. In the final scene Bone is left alone with his wife, a probable murderer, who has miraculously regained the use of her legs and waves happily to the parade from her window. Their final conversation, which takes up the motif of the loss of moral certainties deriving from the first moon landing, is worth citing in full as a proof of the uneasy atmosphere the spectator is left with. It has to be noted that Stoppard here introduces the typically Beckettian contrast between words and gestures through an ironic show of Albert's unreliable diagnostic skills: in leaving the apartment, he had predicted that Penelope would never regain the use of her legs, which is soon proved false, since she is finally shown standing at the window:

BONE.	She was your nanny.
PENELOPE.	Poor Pinkers. You think I'm a bad loser – but no one is safe now.
BONE.	You can't hush it up, you know. And what about me? There's the law – accessory after the fact. You can't flout the laws – and nor can Albert.
PENELOPE.	(*Fondly*) Huh – him and his ripe pears...[3]
BONE.	And don't think I don't know what's going on!
PENELOPE.	Nobody knows, except me and him; so far. Albert almost knows. You'll never know. There he goes... [*she smiles. Waves her hand slightly at the lunanaut below*] Hello... [*the parade fades into the distance*].

(ibid.: 66-7)

Penelope's disturbed state of mind is apparent in her refusal to take Pinkerton's murder seriously, while also teasing her husband who, on his part, is reduced to a complete state of helplessness. It is hard to imagine somebody as good as Stoppard at turning a sophisticated comedy into a thriller in only half an hour, with an open ending made even more disquieting by the idea of unpunished crime and vaguely apocalyptic undertones ("... but no one is safe now"). If we consider the general

[3] A reference to Albert's description of Penelope's breasts.

setting of *Another Moon Called Earth*, it is clearly theatrical (three adjoining spaces). Unfortunately, no video recording is available on the international commercial networks nor on the web, so that any consideration on this play in performance is based on conjectures: we can presume that close-ups on the two main characters could express what in the text is left in the shadows, like Penelope's mental health.[4] There is an element of suspense in Bone's going back and forth between his wife and Crouch, yet the quick solution of the mystery surrounding Pinkerton's death does not allow for a real tension, while Bone's resigned stance prevents any curiosity on the part of the audience as regards the (probable) adultery, which is hinted at but never shown. Stoppard seems more interested in the moral implications of the story and, even if the idea of the moon landing causing a complete overturning of previous ethic principles and existential certainties seems a bit far-fetched (and it did prove so in two years' time) the author's unease in an epoch of changing moral standards is genuine, and it clearly shows in other works of the same period. In the year before the broadcasting of *Another Moon Called Earth*, that is, in 1966, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* was staged at the Edinburgh festival and Stoppard's only novel, *Lord Malquist and Mr Moon*, was published. In the former the two characters moving inside the plot of *Hamlet* seem to have no control or responsibility for their actions, and yet Guildenstern's often quoted cue, "There must have been a moment, at the beginning, when we could have said – no. But somehow we missed it" (Stoppard 1968: 125), implies that their role as spies was not plainly written in their destiny and they had anyway a possibility of choice. As for *Lord Malquist and Mr Moon*, its links with *Another Moon Called Earth* are apparent in the characterization of one of the two protagonists, Mr Moon, a historian sexually snubbed by his adulterous wife; but, as regards moral questions, the other eponymous hero, Lord Malquist, is a clear example of the difficulty of living in times of rapidly changing moral standards: his vision of contemporary life is expressed by, and reflected in, his (somehow Wildean) statement: "Since we cannot hope for order, let us withdraw with style from the chaos" (Stoppard 1980: 21). I agree with Kenneth Tynan when he affirms that "[t]hough Stoppard would doubtlessly deny it, these pronouncements of Malquist's have a ring of authority that suggests the author speaking" (Tynan 1979: 55).

[4] Conversely, the stage directions of *Jumpers* clearly state from the first scene how Dotty should be characterized in performance: "*From her tone now it should be apparent that Dotty, who may have appeared pleasantly drunk, is actually breaking down mentally*" (Stoppard 1972: 20).

Verbal Gymnastics

Morals are at the centre of Stoppard's next stage play, *Jumpers* (1972), whose affinity with *Another Moon Called Earth* is soon evident. In *Jumpers* we have four main characters: a professor of moral philosophy, eloquently called George Moore, who is busy dictating to his secretary the text of a conference paper; his wife, Dotty, a former singer who retired from the stage (and from marital duties, as George remarks: "Unfortunately she retired from consummation about the same time as she retired from artistry", Stoppard 1972: 58) because of a mental breakdown consequent to the moon-landing, which by that time had really happened; a doctor-philosopher-acrobat coming every day to examine and assist Dotty, Archie, and a porter, Crouch. The play's unfolding is triggered by a murder: during a celebratory party at the Moores' for the electoral victory of a fictitious Radical Liberal Party, one of the guests, McFee, a professor of Logic who was forming a human pyramid with other amateurish gymnasts, is killed for unknown reasons by a shot coming from a dark corner of the room. There arrives a police inspector, but the situation is resolved partly by a certificate of suicidal death issued by Archie, and partly by Archie and Dottie falsely accusing the inspector of attempting to rape Dotty. As happened in *Another Moon Called Earth*, a parade is going on in the streets, this time celebrating the Radical-Liberal victory, but differently from the TV play the murderer's identity and motives remain undisclosed (even if many clues point to Archie). Apart from the plot, whole textual excerpts passed from the TV to the stage play, and they are really too numerous to be mentioned here. It is possible to surmise that a widespread feeling of déjà-vu characterized the first audience's reaction at inspector Bones' cue "Sawing ladies in half –that kind of things?" (ibid.: 44), born out of the confusion between the meaning of the words "Logician" and "Magician", that came straight from *Another Moon Called Earth* (Stoppard 1998: 58); or the poetic description of a medical examination passing almost verbatim from Albert to Archie: "You think that when I'm examining Penelope I see her eyes as cornflowers, her lips as rubies, her skin so soft and warm as milk ... You think that my mind turns to ripe pears as soon as I press those firm pink..."(ibid.: 60).[5] Perhaps Stoppard counted on the fact that not too many spectators would remember the TV play or maybe he consciously resorted to repetition as a device aimed at entertaining and engaging

[5] Apart from being slightly enlarged, Archie's speech has, of course, "Dorothy" instead of "Penelope" and "her skin as soft and warm as velvet" (Stoppard 1972: 70) instead of "her skin so soft and warm as milk".

the audience. As Kenneth Tynan put it, "... self-cannibalism is not alien to Stoppard" (Tynan 1979: 89), and so, even at that early stage of the playwright's career, a certain amount of self-quotation was not deemed reproachful. In conclusion, Stoppard added, as it were, flesh and muscles to the bare skeleton of *Another Moon Called Earth*, turning a light dark comedy into a thoughtful, albeit often very funny, drama on moral views and choices. The character of professor Moore is centre-stage for almost the whole play. In preparing his paper for a philosophical conference he tackles a series of moral questions: his soliloquy is always resumed after every interruption by the other characters, so that a coherent discourse on ethics unfolds throughout the play. Yet, what gives *Jumpers* a different quality from the TV drama are the Shakespearean borrowings. The transplant of textual matter had already been one key element of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*'s success.[6] Stoppard's borrowing of whole passages from Shakespeare, sometimes verbatim,[7] sometimes by narrativizing the action of the original or dramatizing one of of its narratives,[8] were an obvious part of the drama's concept. These passages were meant to give the spectators the thrill of recognizing the quotations from a classical author: a kind of intellectual flattery Stoppard consciously carried out in order to please his audience. To acknowledge Shakespeare's presence was clearly part of the pleasure of watching *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, since in that play we were entirely plunged into *Hamlet*'s plot; in *Jumpers* the intertextuality is more subtle and casts an interesting light on Stoppard's creative process, including his way of transforming short plays into full-length ones.

[6] This proceeding had also a decisive role in the development of the short play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet King Lear* into *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. For the lack of a published edition of the former, we have to rely on the reconstruction by John Fleming, who examined a draft of this play in Stoppard's personal archive kept at the University of Texas's Harry J. Ramsom Umanities Research Center. According to him, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern meet King Lear* roughly corresponds to the third act of the longer play, while the two first acts, which contained the largest Shakespearean inserts, were written later.

[7] As in the King's and Queen's speeches to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in *Hamlet* 2.2.1-25.

[8] As in Ophelia's report of Hamlet's strange behaviour to her father (*Hamlet* 2.1.74-81) that passes in descriptive terms into the stage directions of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*: "*Ophelia runs on in some alarm, holding up her skirts – followed by Hamlet. Ophelia has been sewing and she holds her garment. They are both mute. Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced, no hat upon his head, his stockings fouled, ungartered and down-gyved to his ankle*", Stoppard 1968: 34-5); or in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's comic narrative of Hamlet's first encounter with them (*Hamlet* 2.2.217-376 and Stoppard 1968: 56-8)

It may be argued that *Jumpers* is *Another Moon Called Earth* plus Logical Positivism plus Shakespeare (and particularly *Macbeth*). Of course this statement needs to be explained. This is how Tynan recounted the genesis of Jumpers: "Early in 1970, he [Stoppard] told me, over lunch, that he had been reading the logical positivists with fascinated revulsion. He was unable to accept their view that because value judgements could not be empirically verified they were meaningless" (Tynan 1979: 90). There was a bit of expediency on Stoppard's part in focusing on a school of thought that, as Neil Sammells puts it, " ... was as dead as a dodo before he [Stoppard] started writing the play" (Sammells 2001: 113). Clearly, Stoppard's preoccupation was not with philosophical matters but with practical ones: what he was worried about were the consequences of a vision of life that excluded the idea of absolute good.[9] This concern surfaced also in *Another Moon Called Earth* but it was resolved in a quite cursory way and, even if a murder was involved, Penelope's generally foolish behaviour prevented any serious approach. In *Jumpers* the most significant change is exactly in the figure of the female protagonist: instead of the child-wife Penelope there is Dotty, a character who takes on a Lady Macbeth-like status, even in her nervous frailty, and here is where Shakespeare comes to the fore. I will not discuss all Shakespearean borrowings in Jumpers[10] but I will focus on the one taken from *Macbeth*, marking the differences with the corresponding situation in *Another Moon Called Earth*. In the opening of the TV play, Penelope tries to call her husband's attention by crying for help and then literally crying wolf ("Wolves! Look out!! Rape! Rape! Rape!"), causing Bone's ironic comment: "Not the most logical of misfortunes" (Stoppard 1998: 49). In this exchange all the elements of light entertainment can be detected (a silly wife, an ironical husband, a hint at sex), and even if, as one may expect from Stoppard, this is not going to be the whole story, the audience is oriented towards an expectation of fun. In *Jumpers*, Dotty, after crying for help in a similar fashion, turns to *Macbeth* for her cues: "... Oh, horror, horror, horror! Confusion now hath made its masterpiece ... most sacriligious (*sic*) murder– [*different voice*] Woe, alas! What, in our house?" (Stoppard 1972: 24). It is worth recalling that the spectators have already witnessed the murder of McFee, whose first name is Duncan:

[9] There is also a political angle in this moral preoccupation, since, in the words of Tynan, *Jumpers* "… is an attack on pragmatic materialism as this is practiced by a political party called the Radical Liberals, who embody Stoppard's satiric vision of socialism in action" (Tynan 1979: 93) but it is beyond the scope of this essay.

[10] The other three are from *Hamlet*, *Richard II* and *Richard III*.

consequently, the echoes from *Macbeth* (2.3.62-5, 85-6), with Dotty borrowing Macduff's and Lady Macbeth's cues after the King's murder has been discovered, acquire more sinister overtones, since everyone in the audience knows (or should know, as Stoppard probably expected) that Lady Macbeth's words are just a screen intended to hide the premeditated murder of King Duncan. From that moment on the gap between Dottie and Penelope widens. Although the latter is a confessed murderer, she is never endowed by Stoppard with a tragic status since, murder apart, the general tone of *Another Moon Called Earth* is comic. On the contrary, Dottie is increasingly characterized as mentally unbalanced but also as cynical and exploitative: this makes her a more perverse character than Penelope and even if her role in McFee's murder remains undisclosed, she is not exempted from suspicion. Dotty's transformation into a veritably dark lady is accomplished both in the scene of the feigned rape, aimed at getting rid of inspector Bones, and in the subsequent lunch with Archie, when the woman gloats quite ungraciously on the success of the enterprise. This scene must have been really disturbing in performance, because Stoppard completely changed it for the 1984 staging of *Jumpers* (with Felicity Kendall impersonating Dottie instead of Diana Rigg). In the later production the most disquieting features were toned down and there was a perceptible shift towards comedy, probably because the moral (and political) issues that were behind *Jumpers* were no longer as pressing as in the early seventies. Where *Jumpers* completely drifts away from *Another Moon Called Earth* is in the *Coda* "*in bizarre dream form*" (Stoppard 1972: 83) in which Archie definitely shows his most sinister side ordering the elimination of a political enemy with a slightly modified quote from Shakespeare's *Richard III* 3.4.1983-5: "My Lord Archbishop, when I was last in Lambeth I saw good strawberries in your garden – I do beseech you send for some" (Stoppard 1972: 87). In an interview with Ronald Hayman, Stoppard famously remarked that "Prufrock and Beckett are the twin syringes of my diet, my arterial system" (Hayman 1982: 8). We could add that Shakespeare too is an extremely important 'tool' in his literary artistry (or craftsmanship). In brief, the TV play here examined testifies to the dramatic autonomy of the genre of the short play, as well as to its flexibility in providing material for longer dramas. In this case, the derivative play turns out to be more complex thematically and more ambitious in scope by absorbing a Shakespearean frame and a philosophical background.

Portrait of Three Artists as Young Men

My next example is a 45-minute radio play that was instead to stand behind a somehow less complex and tragic stage play: *Artist Descending a Staircase*, broadcasted by BBC in November 1972. Its time structure is well described by Stoppard himself in his directions:

> There are eleven scenes. The play begins in the here-and-now; the next five scenes are each a flashback from the previous scene; the seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh scenes are, respectively, continuation of the fifth, fourth, third, second and first. So the play is set temporally in six parts, in the sequence ABCDEFEDCBA.
> A= here and now
> B= a couple of hours ago
> C= last week
> D= 1922
> E= 1920
> F= 1914
>
> (Stoppard 1990: 111)

Despite its seeming convolutedness, the plot can be easily followed: it revolves around three elder avant-garde artists, Martello, Beauchamp and Donner, and one girl, Sophie. According to Elissa Guralnick, the three artists are transparent disguises of Marcel Duchamp, whose *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* is hinted at in the title:

> Martello is transparently Marcel. Beauchamp (that is, Beecham, as the British would say) needs only a French pronunciation to approximate Duchamp. And Donner, in French, not only sounds like the significant word in the title of Duchamp's last great work, Etant donnés, but also, being an infinitive, recalls A l'infinitif, the collection of previously unpublished notes that Duchamp issued in facsimile in 1967. Small surprise, then, that each of the artists, to different degrees, can be seen to embody Duchamp. (Guralnick 1996: 41)

Modern art is evidently the main theme traversing the whole drama, and yet it has a tragic core concerning the three artists' relationship with Sophie, a girl who will commit suicide. Following Stoppard's steps, the plot unfolds (backwards) like this:

> A: Martello and Beauchamp find the dead body of Donner down the staircase of a flat shared by the three of them. A tape recorder, left switched

on by Beauchamp (a supposed attempt at avant-garde art he has practiced for all of his life) reports a possible aggression by someone the victim knew well. At the end, the hearer (but not the characters) understands that Donner fell and died by accident, trying to catch a fly.

B: Beauchamp and Donner discuss art but then come to talk about Sophie, and Donner, who was desperately in love with her, shows all his bitterness towards Beauchamp, whom he blames for her suicide.

C: Also Martello's and Donner's exchange moves from art to Sophie. Martello reveals that Sophie probably loved him, even if she had become Beauchamp's lover by mistake (between their first and second encounter she had become completely blind and had mistaken one from the other).

D: Sophie, realizing that Beauchamp is about to leave her, refuses Donner's suggestion that they could live together and commits suicide by throwing herself from a window.

E: Sophie visits the three artists in their flat and tries to remember whom she had fallen in love at first sight with before becoming completely blind. Her choice, based on her memory of a painting she saw during her first encounter with the three of them, falls on Beauchamp.

F: The three young friends go for a walking tour in France and witness the very early stages of World War I.

This short summary does not do justice to the brilliance of a play that mixes comedy and tragedy with a clear emphasis on the latter. In her soliloquy preceding her suicide, Sophie fully achieves the status of tragic heroine and, in my view, is probably the best-rounded among Stoppard's female characters, thanks also to the dramatic density of the short play. Previously, Sophie had raised the characters' and the audience's admiration for her capacity of facing her blindness head on, and in the previous scene she had impressed the three young artists with her ability in finding her bearings in their room. But, in knowing that Beauchamp is about to leave her, she is suddenly overcome by her disability. For an understanding of the following excerpt, it is important to make clear that Mouse is Donner's schoolboy nickname, and therefore it is him Sophie is addressing, without knowing if he is still there or not. The audience will soon be informed that he was already downstairs without Sophie's noticing his exit, and in fact his nickname came exactly from his capacity of entering or leaving rooms without being heard:

I feel blind again. I feel more blind then I did the first day, when I came to tea ... what are you thinking of, Mouse? ... We can't live here like brother and sister. I know you won't make demands of me, so how can I make

> demands of you? Am I to weave you endless tablemats and antimacassars in return for life? ... And I cannot live with you knowing that you want me – do you see that? ... Mouse? Are you here? Say something. Now, don't do that, Mouse, it's not fair ... Are you going to watch me? – standing quietly in the room – sitting on the bed – on the edge of the tub ... Oh no, there is no way now – I won't – I won't – I won't – no, I won't ... ! [*Glass panes and wood smash violently. Silence. In the silence, hoof beats in the street, then her body hitting, a horse neighing*].
>
> (Stoppard 1990: 151-2)

It is worth pointing out that Sophie's death does not coincide with the climax of the play, since it is already hinted at and taken for granted in the first scene. The real tragic catastrophe comes when Martello discloses to Donner his idea that the girl was in love with him and not with Beauchamp. For clarity's sake, it should be recalled that Sophie had met the three men at an art exhibition before losing her sight, and she had instantly fallen in love with the one who was standing next to a picture, representing a snowy landscape:

> DONN. But it was Beauchamp – she remembered his painting, the snow scene ... It was the only snow scene.
>
> MART Yes, it was, but – I promise you, Donner, it was a long time afterwards when it occurred to me, when she was already living with Beauchamp ... Well, your painting of the white fence ... Thick white posts, top to bottom, across the whole canvas ... one might be wrong, but her sight was not good even then.
>
> (Ibid.: 153)

In Guralnick's words, "[t]he source of Sophie's unhappiness in love was her possibly having confused, in her gathering blindness, the foreground and the background of a painting. What Sophie believed to be a snow scene ... might have easily been a white fence" (1996: 47). With a typically Stoppardian paradox, in this radio-play sight is contemporarily central and dispensed with. *Artist descending a staircase* is quintessentially fit for radio broadcasting in that it fully exploits the possibilities of the medium, be it in putting a fifty-year gap between scenes C and D without even changing the clothes or the make-up of the actors, or in the representation of Sophie's suicide by means of sound effects. The epitome of this phonic illusion is Beauchamp's horse: in the scene that occupies the centre of the drama, that is, the temporally remotest one, hoof beats are heard and Beauchamp constantly refers to the horse he is mounting, and even

the other two acknowledge its presence. But when other sounds effects (lorries, galloping cavalry, explosions) occupy the whole phonic space suggesting that something really terrible is approaching (the outbreak of World War I), the joke somehow wears thin for the three friends, and Donner cries out: "For God's sake, Beauchamp, will you get rid of that coconut" (Stoppard 1990: 146). In this respect, Guralnick remarked that

> [a]nyone familiar with radio sound effects is certain to remember how hoof beats are produced: namely, by clapping together the halves of a hollowed-out coconut shell. And with this simple recollection, Beauchamp's horse dematerializes. We instantly infer that he was never there at all. Although, how can that be? For in seeing him, did we not actually create him, so that, by radio magic, he was there when he was not? (1996: 52).

And yet, to the hearer they all sound the same, the (fake) horse and the (fake/real) gun shots. Is radio really magic, or does it just perform some cheap aural tricks to the other senses? In *Artist Descending a Staircase*, while celebrating the suggestive power of sounds that allows him to concentrate a veritable tragedy in a 45-minute play, Stoppard seems to warn the audience against trusting the sense of hearing. Indeed Sophie's admittedly faltering sense of sight played some part in her unfortunate choice of a partner and this unreliability of the senses may refer us back to *After Magritte*, in which an initial tableau, bizarre but explicable, tricked a policeman into thinking that something shady was going on. An irregular droning noise is interpreted as Donner dozing but in the last scene we gather (yet can we be sure about that?) that the noise was the buzzing of a fly, and Donner fell from the stairs trying to catch it. Nonetheless, tragic as may be the deaths of Sophie and Donner, the real climax of the play is the latter's discovery that probably he was the one Sophie loved. The tragic outcome of *Artist Descending a Staircase* results from the encounter of real (that his, Sophie's, in her passage from extreme short-sightedness to total darkness) and metaphoric blindness (Donner's incapacity to go beyond the literariness of the definition of "snow scene" and thus recognize himself as the one loved by Sophie), while a sense of unavoidability is enhanced by the flash-back structure. Apart from depicting Sophie's and Donner's tragic destiny, Stoppard had another goal in writing *Artist Descending a Staircase*, that is, to expose the shaky foundations of contemporary art. Sophie has a traditional conception of art and, given Stoppard's conservatism in cultural matters,[11]

[11] "I'm a conservative with a small 'c'. I'm a conservative in politics, literature, education and theatre" (qtd in Bull 2001: 151).

we can presume that her positions do not differ much from the author's. In scene E, when she visits the three young artists, she clearly expresses her views: "I think every artist willy-nilly is celebrating the impulse to paint in general, the imagination to paint something in particular, and the ability to make the painting in question" (Stoppard 1990: 139). This offers a stark contrast with Beauchamp's view, whose aim in recording various kind of games (namely, table tennis and chess) is to create mental images, free from the constraints of visual art: " ... I'm trying to liberate the visual image from the limitations of visual art. The idea is to create images – pictures – which are purely mental. I think I'm the first artist to work in this field" (ibid.: 136-7). Fifty years later, Donner will demolish with gusto Beauchamp's illusion of creating something meaningful: "Those tape recordings of yours are the mechanical expression of a small intellectual idea, the kind of notion that might occur to a man in his bath and be forgotten in the business of drying between his toes"(ibid.: 120). Apart from illustrating the obvious opposition between avant-garde and traditional ideas on art, the contrast between Beauchamp's enthusiasm and Donner's cynicism exemplifies another key feature of this radio drama. As Anthony Jenkins put it, "the three carefree young men will grow up to be ridiculous old fools" (Jenkins 1987: 106) and the portrait of this loss of both innocence and intellectual brilliance connected to ageing is one of the play's main source of pathos.

However, *Artist Descending a Staircase* is also very funny: the conversations in which the three friends try to reconstruct some episodes of their lives as young men are among Stoppard's funniest bits and in their being inconsequential they point, once again, at Beckett's Didi and Gogo as models, as in the following example:

BEAUCHAMP.	... The first duty of the artist is to capture the radio station.
DONNER.	It was Lewis who said that.
BEAUCHAMP.	Lewis who?
DONNER.	Wyndham Lewis.
BEAUCHAMP.	It was Edith Sitwell, as a matter of fact.
DONNER.	Rubbish.
BEAUCHAMP.	She came out with it while we were dancing.
DONNER.	You never danced with Edith Sitwell.
BEAUCHAMP.	Oh yes I did.
DONNER.	You're thinking of that American woman who sang negro spirituals at Nancy Cunard's coming-out ball.
BEAUCHAMP.	It was Queen's Mary wedding, as a matter of fact.

DONNER. You're mad.
BEAUCHAMP. I don't mean wedding, I mean launching.
DONNER. I can understand your confusion but it was Nancy Cunard's coming out.
BEAUCHAMP. Down at the docks?
DONNER. British boats are not launched to the sound of minstrels favourites.
BEAUCHAMP. I don't mean launching, I mean maiden voyage.
DONNER. I refuse to discuss it ...

(Stoppard 1990: 121)

And yet the play is also very moving in its dealing with lost love and lost lives, partly acted and partly confusedly recounted through the staggering memories of old men. As Anthony Jenkins also remarks, "[b]ehind the glittering cleverness, Stoppard's depiction of sorrow and misunderstanding injects the play with an emotion that is all the more moving because of his constrained handling of a potentially saccharine plot" (Jenkins 1987: 111). In its delving into human pain *Artist Descending a Staircase* represents a unique achievement in Stoppard's production before the 1990s, unequalled even by *The Real Thing* (1982), a story of betrayed love that does not reach a tragic dimension since adultery is dealt with in a very upper-middle class civilized way or, as one character, Debbie, puts it: "What a crisis. Infidelity among the architect class. Again" (Stoppard 1999: 218). As regards the common view that Stoppard's early plays lacked emotional depth, Kenneth Tynan, in his *Show People* (1979), reported a conversation he had with the playwright:

> Not long ago, I asked Stoppard what he thought of Marlowe's charge that his plays failed to convey genuine emotion. He reflected for a while and then replied, "That criticism is always presented to me as if it were a membrane that I must somehow break through in order to grow up. Well, I don't see any special virtue in making my private emotions the quarry for the statue I'm carving. I can do that kind of writing, but it tends to go off, like fruit. I don't like it very much even when it works ... There's a direct line of descent from the naturalistic theatre which leads you straight down to the dregs of bad theatre, bad thinking and bad feeling ... Let me put the best possible light on my inhibitions and say that I'm waiting until I can do it well". (Tynan 1979: 64)

Stoppard apparently (and unnecessarily) connects the expression of deep emotions in his plays with the baring of his own soul. In its

requiring a sustained, albeit time-limited tension, the short form seems to have liberated, in this and other cases, something in Stoppard, a way of handling human feelings he was not familiar with. I will quote in the last paragraph two more examples of short plays from the Sixties in which human feelings and relationships were subjected to an in-depth scrutiny; oppositely, one was to wait until *Arcadia* (1993) in order to find a similar unlashing of passions in a full-length play, with the cruel destiny of Thomasina, a seventeen-year-old girl whose untimely death by fire, after receiving her first kiss, moved the audiences in a very un-Stoppardian way.

The Importance of Being in 1917 Zurich

Quite predictably, after *Artist Descending a Staircase* Stoppard went back to a lighter tone and wrote *Travesties* (1974). The two plays have much in common. Without quoting the source, Anthony Jenkins claims that Stoppard himself recognized their kinship: "[T]hematically it [*Artist Descending a Staircase*] offers what Stoppard himself called a 'dry run' for ideas that will appear more expansively in *Travesties*" (1987: 105). The debate on early twentieth-century avant-gardes, and, more specifically, the role of the artist in society is a theme the two plays have in common. This is particularly evident in a few lines pronounced by Beauchamp: "What is an artist? For every thousand people there's nine hundred doing the work, ninety doing well, nine doing good, and one lucky dog painting or writing about the other nine hundred and ninety-nine" (Stoppard 1990: 144) and reprised, if slightly modified, by *Travesties*'s protagonist, Henry Carr. This character is based upon a real person of the same name, an employee of the British consulate in Zurich during the Great War, infamous for a judicial quarrel with James Joyce, who, on his part, later exacted retribution against him by giving his surname to a despicable character of *Ulysses*, Private Carr. Besides Carr's documented relationship with Joyce, his fictional acquaintance with two other famous inhabitants of 1917 Zurich, Lenin and Tristan Tzara, is the unifying idea of the drama. Tzara and Lenin were also present in secondary episodes of *Artist Descending a Staircase* (the former being comically confused at some point by Beauchamp with Tarzan),while some other artists, such as Hans Harp and Picabia, are also mentioned in both plays. The comic device of re-telling the past through the uncertain memories of an elderly person, which had worked so effectively in *Artist Descending a Staircase*, is replicated here by Carr who recalls his past life mixing and confusing it with the characters and plot of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The choice of the Wildean play is not casual: real-life Carr's

only claim to fame (his court case with Joyce) had been originated by a quarrel on the expenses he had sustained in order to interpret the character of Algernon in a staging of *The Importance of Being Earnest* directed by Joyce himself. That episode, transposed in the fictional reality of the play, seems to have haunted Carr for the rest of his life. It could even be argued that *Travesties* originated from the merging of *Artist Descending a Staircase* with *The Importance of Being Earnest*, from which the framework of the play and the female characters' names, if not their personalities, are derived: suffice it to say that Henry Carr and the Dadaist Tristan Tzara take on the role and are given the (modified) cues of Algernon Moncrieff and John Worthing; that the female characters of Cecily and Gwendolen, besides being wooed by Carr and Tzara respectively, work as enthusiastic personal assistants of Lenin and James Joyce, and that the latter is paired with Lady Bracknell/Aunt Augusta and at some point even speaks one of her lines: "Rise, sir, from that semi-recumbent posture" (Wilde 1972: 60; Stoppard 1975: 55). In a characteristically self-deprecating fashion, Stoppard defined *Travesties* as "a pig's breakfast" (Hayman 1982: 12), in order to underline the play's richness verging on confusion. This kind of operation did not prove entirely convincing, though. As Kenneth Tynan, otherwise an enthusiastic admirer of Stoppard, put it: "Stoppard imposes the plot of Wilde's play, itself thoroughly baroque, upon his own burlesque vision of life in war-time Zurich, which is like crossbreeding the bizarre with the bogus" (Tynan 1979: 109). Travesties is an intellectual extravaganza (a certain familiarity with *The Importance of Being Earnest* is mandatory in order to appreciate and enjoy its humour) and a fireworks display of wit, yet at the same time it betrays a kind of hollowness, especially in comparison with the radio play, in which Stoppard's verbal ingenuity is not an end in itself but it is functional to the tragic development of the drama.

To Make a Short Story Long

In both *Jumpers* and *Travesties* the full-length play is the result of the insertion of textual matter (massive in one case, quantitatively limited but extremely meaningful in the other) of a classic author into the fabric of a short play. This creative modality has been employed by Stoppard in two other cases: the unpublished *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet King Lear*, liberally transformed into the third act of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, while *Hamlet* gave substance to the first two acts; and *Dogg's Our Pet*, a fifteen-minute play written in 1971 for Ed Berman's Almost Free

Theatre. *Dogg's Our Pet* constituted the embryo of *Dogg's Hamlet – Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979), a double-bill play that included both Shakespearean tragedies in abridged versions. Stoppard's goal in this play was to call the attention on the situation of political dissidents in Eastern Europe: the focus was particularly on Pavel Kohout, a Czech playwright and director who, forced out of work for his political beliefs, founded a Living-Room Theatre and performed *Macbeth* in any household that would accept the risk of hosting it. Anyway, the peculiarity of the four dramas sequence (*Another Moon Called Earth*, 1967, *Jumpers*, 1972, *Artist Descending a Staircase*, 1972, *Travesties*, 1974) is that they stand in a sort of chiasmic relation: while in the first couple we find a predictable increase in complexity (i.e. the longer play develops and deepens the themes of the shorter one), in the second one, the longer play somehow trivializes the motifs of the short one, using them as pretexts for the author's flamboyant fantasy and verbal dexterity. This may come as a surprise but, apart from the obvious consideration that, in drama, short is never synonymous with easy or second-rate, in Stoppard quite the opposite is true. In his early production there are two other specimens of short radio plays in which human feelings are the object of an in-depth investigation that Stoppard seemed not interested in transplanting into his longer plays. One is *M is for Moon Among Other Things* (1964), a fifteen-minute radio play in which the lack of communication and feelings between a middle-aged married couple is highlighted by the emotional response of the husband to the news of Marilyn Monroe's suicide; the other is the thirty-minute long *If You're Glad I'll be Frank* (1966), in which a surreal plot (the search of a husband for his wife, trapped somewhere as the voice of the Speaking Clock of the telephone) gives way to a tender exchange between the two spouses. It is hard to find a satisfactory explanation for Stoppard's tendency to investigate the human soul in short plays and to emphasize comicality in the longer ones. One may be led to conjecture that, after the success of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, he realized that the paying customers of the West End theatres expected from him a sophisticated laugh, and gave them exactly that, while with the at-home audiences of TV and radio he felt freer not to conform to the cliché depicting him as a wizard of verbal expression. Given that his ultimate goal was just to "entertain a roomful of people" (Hudson, Itzin, and Trussler 1994: 57) it is quite pointless to look for explanations that the author himself would be unable, or better, unwilling to give. The following quotation is taken from a 1974 interview with the editors of *Theatre Quarterly* and refers to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, but can be applied to all of Stoppard's

dramas, showing how hard it is to distinguish in his work the spontaneous from the planned:

> [O]ne is the victim and beneficiary of one's subconscious all the time and, obviously, one is making choices all the time ... It's difficult for me to endorse or discourage particular theories – I mean, I receive lots of letters from students, and people who are doing the play, asking me questions about it, which seem to expect a yes-or-no-answer. It is a mistake to assume that such questions have that kind of answer. I personally think that anybody's set of ideas which grows out of the play has its own validity. (Hudson, Itzin, and Trussler 1994: 58)

Stoppard reiterated this explanation in his interview with Ronald Hayman, also emphasizing an element of chance in his creative process: "My experience is that a lot of one's work is the result of lucky accidents ... What's wrong with bad art is that the artist knows exactly what he's doing" (Hayman 1982: 2). A logical conclusion is that a strictly delimited (and non-negotiable with a theatre management) space of time, spanning between the 15 and the 45 minutes of the radio and TV play under scrutiny helped Stoppard to keep his creative forces concentrated, without leaving free reins to his somehow straying verbal exuberance.[12] The staging of both *Jumpers* and *Travesties* bears witness to Stoppard's difficulty in keeping his longer plays into manageable dimensions testifying his flair for long forms. As regards the former, Kenneth Tynan takes credit for having reduced, seemingly without Stoppard's consent, its size in rehearsals: "'Ten days before the premiere, however, the play was still running close to four hours ... The next afternoon ... I nipped into the rehearsal room ... and dictated to the cast a series of cuts and transpositions that reduced the text to what I consider manageable length" (Tynan 1979: 97).[13] The case of *Travesties* is even more peculiar: the second act of the play starts with Cecily's long lecture on Marxist theories. The 1984 printed edition has this extraordinary direction: "*the performance of the whole of this lecture is not a requirement but an option*" (Stoppard 1984: 66). The fact that Stoppard looked at a long speech as dispensable shows that he was aware that his

[12] As the *New York Times* critic Walter Kerr remarked,"[i]ntellectually restless as an hummingbird, and just as incapable of lighting anywhere, the playwrights has a gift for making the randomness of his flight funny" (qtd in Jenkins 1987: x).

[13] Kenneth Tynan was literary manager of the National Theatre between 1963 and 1974 (see http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/discover-more/welcome-to-the-national-theatre/the-history-of-the-national-theatre/kenneth-tynan, last access 15 November 2015.)

tendency to verbal overflowing sometimes stretched an audience's patience to breaking point. One has only to compare this hypertrophy with the economy of expression achieved in the short plays previously quoted to notice how much Stoppard profited from imposed time limits. *Another Moon Called Earth* is a perfect entertaining device that holds the ground for all of his running time with no dull moment, as opposed to *Jumpers* whose monologues seem sometimes to exceed the audience's attention span; and, as discussed above, *Artist Descending a Staircase* comprises a balanced mixture of tragedy and comedy unrivalled in Stoppard's early production. Given these qualities, it is quite surprising that these short plays are largely forgotten, especially in comparison with the plays derived from them, which have been even recently staged.

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Alexandre Koutchevsky*

Repetition as Zoom Effect. A Mechanism of Short Writing Played at the Level of Words[1]

Abstract

The proliferation of short theatrical forms in France has never stopped growing, especially since the 1980s. This strong presence of short texts in French theatrical panorama is not simply due to the amelioration of writing, production, and circulation conditions, but is a symptom of a profound evolution of contemporary dramatic writings. For many of these authors, brevity offers a range of exhilarating tools which allow for the invention of new dramaturgical forms. If one admits that brevity is in the first place a question of style rather than of format, what is especially at stake for the authors of short forms is to achieve a maximum degree of signification with a minimum amount of words. It is therefore necessary to aim at economizing the means while, at the same time, attaining the highest efficacy (at the level of sense, of dramatic, poetic, narrative power, etc.). The zoom process, which aims at a slow-motion unfolding of sense to our consciousness, inscribes itself into a dimension of maximum profitability and parsimony. Accordingly, this article analyses the repetition of the word "fissures" ["cracks"] employed as zoom effect in Roland Fichet's short piece *Fissures* (1998).

Un seul mot peut vous mettre sur la voie,
un deuxième vous trouble, le troisième vous met en panique.
À partir du quatrième, c'est la confusion absolue.
(Ionesco)

[One single word can start you off,
a second one troubles you, a third one gets you into a panic.
From the fourth one onwards, it's utter confusion.]

In France, short drama has been sailing before the wind for some thirty

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[1] This article is a revised version of a few passages taken from my PhD thesis in theatre studies, entitled *À l'échelle des mots, l'écriture théâtrale brève en France* 1980-2007 [*At the Level of Words: Short Theatre Writing in France, 1980-2007*]. That analysis moved from the reading of more than three hundred texts written by over one hundred authors. These texts are available in print and have been represented at least once by professional companies.

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years on both the page and the stage. The significant presence of short texts in the French theatrical panorama is not simply due to a generalized amelioration of writing, production, and circulation conditions, but is also the symptom of a profound evolution of contemporary dramatic writing. Since the 1980s, the multiplication of short forms has never stopped growing and this trend does not seem to be fading in any way. Therefore it is not a question of a passing fashion, of a flair of French theatre for short forms, but of a durable and profound drive.

Who are the authors of short dramatic pieces? A generation may be identified, namely the one we ascribe to the 'return of the authors' who started to be known from the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. They are Philippe Minyana, Noëlle Renaude, Didier-Georges Gabily, Roland Fichet, Christian Rullier, Catherine Anne, Michel Azama, and Enzo Cormann, among the others), although this group may include also younger authors such as Xavier Durringer, Sophie Lannefranque, and Fabrice Melquiot, to name just a few.

This article will investigate the stylistic result of repetition as zoom effect by focusing on the verbal texture of the script of a short piece by Roland Fichet which appears to be particularly suitable for exploring this specific mechanism. A larger and varied corpus of texts might have been selected with this aim, but I chose to concentrate on the detailed analysis of only one text in order to let the linguistic effects at the level of words emerge as more comprehensible and more perceptible.

In this article the word 'short' will be used for the form and 'brief' for the style. If we admit that briefness is above all a question of style rather than of size, the main challenge that the authors of short forms face is how to mean a lot by using very few words. They need to spare their means and, at the same time, to attain the highest degree of efficaciousness (at the level of meaning, of dramatic, poetic, and narrative power, etc.). Two main procedures, each in its own right, are bound to reach a maximum of effectiveness and economy: zoom and acceleration. These two effects – which constitute the authentic skeleton of short texts – are embedded into writing strategies based on the management of speed in both delivering information and making images, words, sentences, etc. appear. If this management of speed is apparent with regard to the acceleration of the fabula (see the peripeteia and other dramatic turns), what happens at the level of sentences is that the procedure that allows us to zoom out a word or an expression, suddenly focusing our attention on a specific area of the text, slows down our comprehension of its meaning. That is why the zoom belongs to a writing strategy based on speed modulations. However,

leaving aside a discussion of the effects of acceleration,[2] in this article I will rather concentrate on the zoom effect.

The zoom effect consists in making a word or an expression progressively appear throughout the text, somehow arresting its becoming, as it is proper of that state to "duck the present" ("esquiver le présent", Deleuze 1969: 9). By looking at the scripts of these short plays, one realizes how the author 'slows down' the readers or even causes a short pause in the process of reception, or a stasis of sense, as it were. This type of effect relies especially on a maximized investment of the processes of connotation and evocation; the zoom is characteristic of a poetic use of language, and indeed authors have to introduce a rupture or a cleavage in the flux of the text in order to deploy a whole range of meanings. Creating the conditions in which the words may develop their entire signifying potential can set off the zoom effect.

The zoom process is characteristic of a poetic use of language on which we should briefly dwell before going into a more detailed analysis. Indeed, when approaching short dramatic texts, we are immediately faced with what Peter Handke would style as "la possibilité du poème" ["the poem's possibility"]:

> Tout s'est un peu brouillé, confie Handke à Gamper, les frontières entre le drame, le poème, le récit: dans mes derniers travaux, les frontières ne sont plus aussi nettement dessinées, je me crois capable, ou j'exige de moi-même, d'unir dans ce que j'écris la trame du poème ou la possibilité du poème, l'élan lyrique et aussi l'élément dramatique. (qtd in Sarrazac 1999: 200-1)
>
> [Everything gets a little muddy, Handke confied to Gamper, the boundaries among drama, poem, and narration; in my latest works, the boundaries are not clearly outlined anymore, I believe I am able, or I expect from myself, to unify in my writings the poem's plot or the poem's possibility, the lyrical momentum and also the dramatic element.]

This "poem's possibility" influences the short form. Whatever epoch we are dealing with, looking at short texts at the level of words inevitably brings forth the poetic question. However, we need to point out in the first place that the short forms we are discussing here belong to the

[2] The effects of acceleration include all those processes that – as Benito Pèlegrin would dub them – we may call "figures du silence" (1984: 66-7) ["figures of silence"]. All figures related to implied meanings are part of these processes of acceleration that rely on an exasperation of the functioning of the 'outside-text'. These effects result into an acceleration of the action.

general context of the French contemporary dramatic writings in which the poetic use of language is extremely widespread, to the point that we could ask ourselves, with Geneviève Jolly and Alexandra Moreira Da Silva, whether we should be talking of "poème dramatique" ["poetic drama"] in order to define these texts that intimately mix dramatic and poetic aspects:

> Il faut … préciser que le poème dramatique ne se confond ni avec le théâtre versifié, ni avec le "poème dramatique" de Corneille, ni avec la "poésie dramatique" qu'analyse Diderot … S'il ne constitue pas un genre propre, le poème dramatique renvoie à des formes spécifiques rompant avec le drame absolu ainsi qu'avec une conception illusionniste du théâtre … On peut le considérer comme l'une des manifestations de la crise du drame: se voulant contestataire, et s'écrivant contre un certain théâtre, il est en recherche d'une autre théâtralité. (Jolly and Moreira Da Silva 2001: 90)
>
> [We should … specify that the dramatic poem neither overlaps with verse drama, nor with Corneille's 'poème dramatique', nor with the 'poésie dramatique' analysed by Diderot … If it does not constitute a genre on its own, the dramatic poem refers to specific forms that move away from absolute drama as well as from an illusionistic conception of theatre … We could consider it as one of the manifestations of the crisis of drama: wishing to be dissenting, and being written against a certain theatre, it is after another theatricality.]

We could therefore interpret this "possibility of the poem" as the sign of the research for another theatricality. Yet, when applied to short forms, this expression, "possibilité du poème", alludes at at least a couple of different realities: to the (poetic) format and to the (poetic) style.. Thus, browsing through collections such as Roland Fichet's *Micropièces. Fenêtres et fantômes*[3] [*Microdramas. Windows and Ghosts*] or Xavier Durringer's *Histoires d'hommes*[4] [*Stories about Men*], what strikes us are the blocks of words gathered in heaps, often laid out as free verse on the page without a specified locutor. At a first glance, what we see makes us think of a collection of poems. At a second glance, reading these texts – especially the shortest ones – arouses the feeling that we are dealing with poetry resurfaces. What characterizes these dramas in a poetic sense then is a certain writing style in which we observe a great number of features traditionally

[3] See, for instance, *Loterie*, *Sac*, and *Yeux* [*Lottery*, *Bag*, and *Eyes*], four microdramas occupying the same page (see Fichet 2006: 26).

[4] See, for instance, fragment 12 (Durringer 2003: 30), or 15 (ibid.: 34), or 17 (ibid.: 37), or even 18, 19, and 20 (ibid.: 38-9).

related to poetic language: the effectiveness of the words' musicality, the multiplication of connexions, connotations, images, only to name a few among the most noteworthy aspects. Philippe Minyana has remarked then that brevity has pushed him towards a practice belonging to poetic writing:

> La brièveté oblige à une sélection serrée pour faire comme un répertoire de paroles emblématiques, comme des sentences, des titres, c'est presque un poème. Beckett l'a fait bien avant nous: sélectionner une phrase qui ressort plus de l'art du poème que de l'art dramatique. C'est, je pense, le même plaisir qu'aura le poète à remplir sa page puis à passer à un autre poème, même s'il a des thèmes récurrents. C'est une façon de conduire autrement l'imagerie théâtrale. (Koutchevsky 2006b)
>
> [Brevity requires a strict selection in order to obtain a sort of repertoire of emblematic words, such as maxims, titles, it is almost a poem. Beckett did that well before us: selecting a sentence that is related to poetic rather than dramatic art. It is, I think, the same pleasure a poet would have in filling his page and carry on to the next poem, even though he works on recurrent themes. It is a different way of conducting theatrical imagery.]

Minyana's point of view can be valuably completed by Matéi Visniec's who further underlines the mutual permeability of these two kinds of short forms: poems and short dramas:

> Avant de passer à l'écriture dramatique j'ai écrit des milliers de poèmes … Je voulais accéder à l'essentiel, au mystère des mots. C'est ainsi que j'ai appris à apprivoiser la forme courte. Car mes poèmes devenaient des petites histoires, des scénarios … Ce sont dans ces 'embryons' que j'ai puisé plus tard mon théâtre. Je me suis rendu compte que mes poèmes étaient des courtes pièces de théâtre en puissance, et cela me fascinait de les développer. (Visniec 2000: 14)
>
> [Before moving on to dramatic writing I wrote thousands of poems … I wanted to achieve the essential, the mystery of words. Thus I learned how to domesticate the short form. My poems became little histories, scripts … It is from these 'embryos' that later on I drew my theatre. I realized that my poems where potential short dramas, and this fascinated me into developing them.]

For reasons of both format and writing style, short dramas and poems do have a lot in common and that is why we will rely here on tools which are normally employed in the analysis of poetry in order to investigate the zoom effect.

Choosing Words and Placing Them into a Contextual Dependency

In photography, cinema, and television, zoom indicates a "variable focus lens made of a fixed and a movable part whose shifting modifies the focal length" (*OED*, 'zoom', 2a). The word 'zoom' comes from English and is defined as a "shot in which the range is rapidly shortened to close-up without loss of focus" (ibid.). This second definition gives a rather precise idea of the processes we can observe in the texts we will investigate here. Zooming a word or an expression may be translated in terms of shortening the range of vision, of focusing on a specific object or of employing the necessary speed to perform such an operation. The cinematographic zoom aims at putting a certain portion of what is visible under the eyes of the spectator. Similarly textual zoom aims at isolating one word or one expression among the others in order to emphasize it, as it can amplify its connotations and expand its semantic field. Therefore, making the reader linger on one word is functional to the comprehension of the whole range of meanings of that same word. Clément Rosset has summarized the result of such an operation:

> Cet art de faire parler un mot plusieurs fois à la fois, dans plusieurs sens différents au sein d'une même phrase, confère à celle-ci une sorte de richesse musicale, et d'épaisseur harmonique, en même temps qu'il rend possible un supplément de sens intellectuel. (1995: 56-7)
>
> [This art of making one word speak many times at a time and with many different senses within one same sentence, endows it [the sentence] with a sort of musical richness and harmonious thickness and, at the same time, it enhances its intellectual meaning.]

Playwright Philippe Minyana has noted how "la brièveté l'oblige à une sélection serrée" ["brevity obliges him to carry out a strict selection"] – alluding to a selection of words – since, as quoted above, he has to produce something "comme un répertoire de paroles emblématiques, comme des sentences, des titres" (Koutchevsky 2006b) ["like a repertoire of emblematic words, such as sentences or titles"]. Many points in this quotation deserve to be highlighted and developed as they help throw light on both zooming and decelerating as the tools of brief style. To start with, the question of verbal selection is crucial; as Rosset points out, "le choix des mots est affaire sérieuse. Il signale toujours une certaine forme d'adoption – ou de refus – des choses, d'intelligence ou de mésintelligence de la réalité" (1995: back cover blurb) ["The choice of words is a serious

matter. It always gestures towards a certain form of adoption – or of refusal – of things, of understanding or misunderstanding of reality"].

We may say that the importance given to the choice of words is a prerogative of all authors who are truly committed to literature. Yet, it is rather obvious that the choice of 'good words', of the most 'appropriate' ones, keeping in mind the objective one wishes to achieve, becomes crucial in short forms. The shorter the text, that is, the lower the number of words that composes it, the higher the importance of each word; indeed the receiver will have to make the maximum use of what the author supplies. Minyana confirms that this effort is necessary and consubstantial to the writing of short forms:

> C'est vers la densité que je me dirige dans mes formes brèves. Tu es obligé d'avoir une acuité supplémentaire, de cadrer davantage ton récit. C'est excitant et vertigineux de savoir qu'à une réplique près le fragment peut être en péril. (Koutchevsky 2006b)
>
> [In short forms, I head for density. You must have some supplementary acuity and frame your account. It is exciting and dizzying to knowing that if one cue is missing the fragment may be in danger.]

If there is something dangerous in this exciting dizziness it is perhaps because short forms, when pushed to their extreme consequences, refer the author (and the attentive receiver, who is responsive to this brevity) to "la peur de crouler avec tous les mots" (Cioran 1980: 15) ["the fear of collapsing with all the words"]. As Emil Cioran has remarked: "Ne cultivent l'aphorisme que ceux qui ont connu la peur au milieu des mots, cette peur de crouler avec tous les mots". (ibid.) [Only those who have known fear among words, this fear of collapsing with all the words, cultivate aphorisms.]

Therefore the chosen words become "emblematic", as Minyana has it. They tend to assume the signifying form of a "sentence" or of a "title", that is, the meaning that they convey shines, asserts, and establishes itself as a belief, and carries all its weight within the sentence. The authors of short forms create the conditions for an optimal setup of the meaning of the words they wish to foreground. Since their texts are composed of a small number of words, many of them will pursue this operation. One should recall how Michel Collot defined the objective of the majority of these procedures: it is a matter of "faire culminer la dépendance contextuelle du mot":

> L'un des traits principaux de l'organisation poétique du sens paraît être

> … de faire culminer la dépendance contextuelle du mot. Les relations qui déterminent la signification du mot débordent en poésie le cadre logique et syntaxique de la phrase, et s'établissent au sein d'unités prosodiques et/ou typographiques comme le vers, la strophe, ou le poème, et jouent aussi bien sur les signifiants que les signifiés. Il en résulte à la fois une spatialisation et une multiplication des rapports intervenant dans la réévaluation sémantique de chaque mot. L'espace ici fait sens; les mots signifient par position. (Collot 1989: 225)
>
> [One of the main features of the poetic organization of meaning seems to be … climaxing the contextual dependency of words. The relationships that determine the meaning of a word overflow, in poetry, the logical and syntactical frame of the sentence and establish themselves within prosodic and/or typographic unities such as verses, stanzas, or the poem itself, and play on both the signifier and the signified. This brings forth both a spatialization and a multiplication of the relations occurring within the semantic re-evaluation of each word. Thus space makes sense; words signify through their position.]

In addition to a rigorous choice of words, an operation one should particularly rely on in short forms is this maximization of the contextual dependency of words. If Collot applied it to poetry, short dramas also profit from being thus investigated. As happens in poetry, in short theatrical pieces "les relations qui déterminent la signification du mot … s'établissent au sein d'unités prosodiques et/ou typographiques … et jouent aussi bien sur les signifiants que sur les signifiés." (ibid.) ["The relationships that determine the meaning of a word … establish themselves within prosodic and/or typographic unities … and play on both the signifier and signified."]

This way of writing, riveted to words, recalls what Michel Vinaver – who greatly influenced Philippe Minyana – once remarked:

> Si l'on se passionne pour l'écriture, à un moment, n'est-ce pas, elle crée un plaisir. Eh bien, pour moi, ce plaisir gît uniquement dans la micro-description, pas du tout dans la construction d'un plan d'intrigue ou d'un plan symbolique, d'un plan rationnel entre plusieurs niveaux d'écriture. Le plaisir est au ras du langage. Cela se relie au fait que l'écriture est une démarche de connaissance à tâtons, non de révélation. L'écriture n'est pas un acte de dévoilement; elle est un acte de fouille. (Vinaver 1998: 287)
>
> [If one develops a passion for writing, at a certain point it brings pleasure, doesn't it? Oh well, in my opinion, this pleasure lies exclusively in the micro-description and not in the least in the construction of a plot or of

> a symbolical or rational outline among several levels of writing. Pleasure lies at the level of language. This is connected with the fact that writing is like groping one's way to knowledge, and not getting it through revelation. Writing is not a matter of unveiling, it is a matter of rummaging.]

Expressions such as writing and finding one's pleasure "*au ras du langage*", "*à tâtons*", "handling" (language, in particular) regularly emerge in the authors' discourse too. They refer to writing techniques that do not belong exclusively to short forms – Vinaver refers to drama in general – and yet, when employed in short forms, they assume a crucial importance because of the limitations they are forced to. Thus framed, the effects gain not only visibility but also efficaciousness.

The Repeated Word as "radiating nucleus": Roland Fichet's *Fissures*

Among the many 'word highlighting' effects, one in particular consists in repeating a term or an expression over and over again throughout a text, like a refrain. As Hans-Thies Lehmann has foregrounded, the receiver can be affected by this process since

> [a]s duration, a crystallization of time occurs in repetition, a more or less subtle compression and negation of the course of time itself … On closer inspection, however, even in theatre there is no such thing as repetition. The very position in time of the repeated is different from that the original. We always see something different in what we have seen before. Therefore, repetition is also capable of producing a new attention punctuated by the memory of the preceding events, *an attending to the little differences*. (2006: 156-7)

Conceived as allowing "*an attending to the little differences*", repetition invites to micro-reading. Indeed it is the easiest way to focalize the reader's attention on a particular syntagm, while producing a rhythmic dynamics capable of influencing one's reading. In order to better understand the effects of repetition, it is necessary to limit its examination to the most significant procedures. Thus, textual investigation built upon one word or one expression is a fit starting point for the analysis of the word as the "noyau irradiant" ["radiating nucleus"] within short forms. I have borrowed the expression "noyau irradiant" from a study Suzanne Bernard dedicated to prose poems. She employed it to qualify the modern authors'

tendency to isolate words within a poem and extract them from a sentence:

> … on reliera à ce désir d'abolir le temps toute la tendance poétique moderne à donner au mot une importance primordiale — au nom surtout, qui n'est autre chose que le signe et l'évocation de l'objet considéré dans son essence intemporelle. Inséré dans le déroulement d'une phrase, le nom perd en partie cette valeur pour n'être plus qu'un élément d'un ensemble qui prend sa forme progressivement, à travers le cheminement des propositions; mais qu'on l'isole et, retrouvant son autonomie, son éclat propre, il devient un noyau irradiant; il émet librement toutes les suggestions sensorielles ou idéelles que le progrès de la phrase continue rejetait dans l'ombre. (Bernard 1994: 457)
>
> [… we will relate desire to get rid of time to the modern poetic tendency to endow words with a primeval importance – and nouns, in particular, which are nothing but the sign and the evocation of the object in its timeless essence. Included in the development of a sentence, the noun partially loses this value and becomes a mere element in a composition which progressively takes form through the sequence of prepositions; but let us isolate it and, while it recovers its autonomy and proper brightness, it becomes a radiating nucleus; it freely releases all the sensory or ideal suggestions that the continuous progress of the sentence threw back in the shade.]

The short writing form always tries to produce meaning through the smallest linguistic unities and one of its essential tendencies is that of creating both the conditions that would make a word emerge and the possibilities for the optimal deployment of the universe it contains. The dream of short forms (or better their authors' dream) has perhaps been revealed by Francis Ponge:

> Chaque mot a beaucoup d'habitudes et de puissances; il faudrait chaque fois les ménager, les employer toutes. Ce serait le comble de la "propriété dans les termes" … Il faudrait dans la phrase les mots composés à de telles places que la phrase ait un sens pour chacun des sens de chacun de ses termes. (qtd in Collot 1991: 181)
>
> [Each word possesses many habits and potentials; it is matter of managing and employing them all, time after time. This would be the height of "the propriety of terms" … One would need words to be placed in such positions so that the sentence made sense in every sense of each of its terms.]

It is a fruitful utopia in which all the words of a sentence would exploit the totality of their signifying potential, and yet it is a utopia on which

literary shortness rests. French playwright Roland Fichet would not deny it. Indeed, he is dedicated to this kind of procedure which consists in repeating a word or an expression over and over in order to make it 'cough up' its meaning in the same way we make someone 'cough up' ['rendre gorge'] what he or she has taken. Each word contains a world, a plurality of senses and landscapes, and therefore one of the author's tasks is to extract what it conceals and to illuminate its meaning. In four of his fourteen *Petites comédies rurales* [*Little Rural Comedies*] (1998),[5] Fichet constantly repeats the same word slightly varying the immediate context in which it appears. Among his *Petites comédies*, *Fissures* [*Cracks*][6] is by far the most intriguing piece from the point of view of repetition, which becomes an authentic questioning of words.[7]

Fissures is nine pages long. It is a short traditional drama in that it includes dialogues, actions, a progressing plot, and a *dénouement*. The play is composed of three sequences (or scenes) of equal length (three pages each), indicated only by numbers. As the title of the collection reveals, the action takes place in the countryside; *Fissures* is set in a resort in Bretagne, near the legendary forest of Brocéliande. The first two sequences are set at the city hall (the place is indicated by a stage direction), the second starting after an interval of one year. The last one is set on the lakeshore three hours after the events dramatized in the second sequence. The characters are Milig Le Floch (the city hall secretary), Pierre Pidou, and Aline Kieffer (the environment councillor). As typically happens in short forms, in order to spare time to the full the first sequence starts *in medias res*:

[*Dans la mairie.*]
MILIG LE FLOCH. Répète ce que tu dis.
PIERRE PIDOU. Des fissures dans les arbres.
ALINE KIEFFER. Quoi des fissures dans les arbres?
Quel idiot!
Des fissures dans les arbres c'est pas d'aujourd'hui.
(Fichet 1998: 31)

[*At the city hall.* // MILIG LE FLOCH. Repeat what you're saying. // PIERRE

[5] *Plus personne* [*No one, no more*] (Fichet 1998: 27-30); *Fissures* [*Cracks*] (ibid.: 31-9); *Mon combat* [*My battle*] (ibid.: 41-3); *Antipodes* (ibid.: 45-9).

[6] *Fissures* was premiered at La Passerelle, Scène Nationale de Saint-Brieuc Theatre on 17 January 1997 and directed by Roland Fichet; since then it has been staged for over one hundred times.

[7] The violence suggested by the term 'questioning' is not casual here since the author constantly strives to make the words speak.

PIDOU. Cracks in the trees. // ALINE KIEFFER. What cracks in the trees? / What an idiot! / Cracks in the trees is no news.]

Later on, we find out that Pierre Pidou "met l'œil" ["peers"] into these cracks and "y voit des choses graves" (ibid.: 31) ["sees some serious things in them"], while his behaviour first amuses, then troubles and later annoys Aline Kieffer. What Pierre Pidou sees in the cracks are "des femmes nues blessées au ventre" ["naked women with wounded bellies"] who walk into the Pond of Comper "en aboyant" (ibid.: 32) ["barking"]. Hearing this, Aline Kieffer lectures Pierre Pidou warning him that this would "affoler les estivants" ["throw the holiday-makers into a panic"] and "sans les estivants nous sommes sur la paille" (ibid.: 33) ["without the holiday-maker we're penniless"]; then, in order to hush him she promises he will win a bicycle at the August fair. Yet, a year later, in the second scene, Pierre Pidou still has not won his bicycle and comes back to the city hall announcing that he now sees "fissures dans les animaux" ["cracks in the animals"] and, once again, this gets on the councillor's nerves. The year before, because of the rumours about the cracks, she had all the trees cut down in order to calm down the holiday-makers. Since there is no question of killing all the animals, she decides to follow Pierre Pidou and let him show her these famous cracks. The last scene is a dialogue between Milig Le Floch and Pierre Pidou, while Aline Kieffer lies unconscious on the lakeshore in front of them:

PIERRE PIDOU. M'a poussé
l'ai poussée
m'a claqué
l'ai mise à poil et hop dans le lac!

(Ibid.: 37)

[PIERRE PIDOU. She pushed me / I pushed her / She slapped me / I stripped her and there, I threw her in the lake!]

We then learn that Pierre Pidou wanted to "attendre la chienne du lac" ["wait for the bitch of the lake"] but Aline refused, at which he slapped her and thenceforth he "a tout fouillé / tout fouillé les creux / tout zieuté – meme la fourche! –" (ibid.: 38) ["searched everything / searched all the cavities / peeped everywhere – even into the fork! –"], but saw nothing in her: "y'a rien dedans / elle est vide" (ibid.) ["there's nothing inside / she's empty"]. The play closes with Pierre Pidou's questioning Milig Le Floch about his bicycle:

MILIG LE FLOCH. Demain.
PIERRE PIDOU. Elle aboie.
MILIG LE FLOCH. T'as de la malice quoique t'en dis
t'as de la malice, Pierre Pidou.
[ALINE KIEFFER jappe légèrement.]

(Ibid.: 39)

[MILIG LE FLOCH. Tomorrow. // PIERRE PIDOU. She barks. // MILIG LE FLOCH. You've got malice, no matter what you say, / you've got malice, Pierre Pidou. // (ALINE KIEFFER yelps slightly.)]

As should be evident by now, the "radiating nucleus" here is the word "fissures" ["cracks"]. It appears thirteen times in the first scene, nine times in the second, and once in the last scene, which makes a total of twenty-three occurrences in nine pages. Not only does this omnipresence testify to Pierre Pidou's obsession with it, but also to its being contagious to the other characters, especially to Aline Kieffer. The word runs across the drama text, and even though it appears only once in the last scene, it is still there, weighing heavily in the background, actually bringing the plot to its conclusion. Indeed, Pierre Pidou eventually managed to look through Aline Kieffer's cracks. How does the word "fissures" move from its first appearance, in the second line of the text, to its virtual graphic disappearance in the last scene? In what sense can we say that it is a "radiating nucleus"?

A "nucleus" is something hard, something difficult to break. The atomic nucleus is the region at the centre of the atom, consisting in protons and neutrons, and the mass of the atom is concentrated almost entirely in it. Comparing a word to the nucleus is making of it the smallest possible significant linguistic unity. We can break a word, cut it up in sounds, still it would "radiates", which means it would produce radiations, radiate, diffuse… but what? Sense and imagery that contaminate and radiate (here in its transitive meaning) the rest of the text. That word – its meaning, the connotations it suggests – powerfully diffuses in the text as a whole, and in this case, the radiations of a word such as "cracks" can be hardly resisted. It belongs to a family of powerful words, whose signifying and connotative perspectives are varied by the author simply modifying their field of application. Michel Collot thus specified the definition of the word "connotation":

[Le] sémantisme occasionnel produit par le contexte poétique est de l'ordre de la connotation. Celle-ci peut en effet être définie précisément comme un "trait fluctuant" de signification qui vient au mot de son association

> avec d'autres. Cette association connotative peut être … paradigmatique, mais aussi syntagmatique. … Du fait de toutes ces relations paradigmatiques ou syntagmatiques, le mot ne cesse de s'absenter de lui-même pour rendre présent un sens qui ne lui appartient pas en propre, mais résulte des rapports complexes de différence et de ressemblance qu'il entretient avec les autres. (1989: 226-7)
>
> [The] occasional semantism produced by the poetic context belongs to the category of connotation. This may indeed be specifically defined as a 'fluctuating feature' of signification which a word derives from its association with other words. This connotative association can be … paradigmatic, but also syntagmatic … Due to these same paradigmatic or syntagmatic relations, the word does not stop being itself to convey some other meaning that does not properly belong to it, but results from the complex relationships of difference and similarity that it maintains with the other words.]

In order to vary the meaning of the word, Fichet establishes three associations between the cracks and the objects they affect: cracks in the trees, cracks in the animals, cracks in human beings (in a woman, in this case). The text revolves around this three-stroke range of cracks, and in parallel with this tripartition, the word itself works in turn as a dramatic, poetic, and comic engine. Among these three power fields of expression, the comic is to be intended as a consequence of the other two. Michel Vinaver's assertion with regard to his own dramas may be adapted to the conception and usage of the comic by other authors, especially Roland Fichet, Philippe Minyana, and Noëlle Renaude:

> La dimension comique de la pièce, mais aussi sa dimension tragique, et la façon dont l'une s'articule à l'autre, résident dans le rythme, plus que dans telle situation, telle action, telle réplique. Les émotions dont la pièce est porteuse surgissent de correspondances entre tel et tel élément, plutôt que de tel élément particulier. Les émotions surgissent de l'"entre-deux", donc du rythme. C'est par le rythme que la banalité se transcende. C'est par un travail sur le rythme que tout danger de trivialité se dissout. (Vinaver 1998: 20)
>
> [The comic dimension of a play, but also its tragic dimension, and the way in which they relate to each other rest on the rhythm rather than on a specific situation, action or line. The emotions the play conveys arise from the correspondences among the various elements, rather than from a particular one. Emotions arise from the 'in-between', therefore from the rhythm. It is through rhythm that banality is transcended. It is by working on the rhythm that all danger of triviality gets dissolved.]

In *Fissures*, the comic also has a lightening function. Although the dramatized events are rather grim (Aline Kieffer is eventually stripped, beaten, and thrown into the water), the comic shade allows to avoid the pathos. As Fichet has it, "dans la brièveté je sentais mieux quelque chose du côté de la comédie. Les *Petites comédies rurales* sont des petites tragédies, mais dans l'écriture la comédie est en jeu énormément" (Koutchevsky 2006a) ["In shortness I felt it more appropriate to have something on the comic side. The *Little Rural Comedies* are little tragedies, but in writing them comedy plays a huge role."]

One of the main features of Roland Fichet's writing relies exactly on this argumentation which we may summarize with the formula: think tragic, write comic. The expression "some cracks [in the trees, in the animals]" stands between comedy and poetry: it is not downright funny and it troubles you before it makes you laugh. It is the engine of the play, in that it multiplies its connotations by varying its fields of applications. The term "cracks" refers to a breach, an opening, a cleft. However, a crack may also signify that the end is near, it is a disturbing omen of destruction. Throughout the text, the author makes this word function (and work as fiction) both in a proper and figurative sense, therefore calling into cause the evidence – or at least a significant echo – of the fact that the announcer of the cracks, Pierre Pidou, is himself cracked, as Aline Kieffer points out to him twice, at the beginning of scenes one and two:

> Aline Kieffer. Fais pas le zèbre, Pierre Pidou,
> il n'y a pas de fissures dans les arbres,
> dans ta tête oui mais pas dans les arbres
> …
> tous les êtres vivants sont fissurés, Pierre Pidou,
> même toi.
> Surtout toi.
>
> (Fichet 1998: 32-4)

> [Aline Kieffer. Don't play the fool, Pierre Pidou, / there are no cracks in the trees, / in your head maybe, but not in the trees. / . . . / all living beings are cracked, Pierre Pidou, / you too. / Especially you.]

Pierre Pidou is what we would call the village idiot, the simpleton, the half-wit, as his name also suggests.[8] Yet, he is apparently not as stupid as

[8] The sound quality of 'pierre pidou' endows this name with a slightly ridiculous aspect which is specially conveyed by the close repetition of the 'p'. "Pidou" makes one

he looks. In a series of lectures on Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze analysed the figure of the "idiot" who – he said – embodies:

> La puissance de la raison naturelle réduite à soi. Tellement réduite à soi qu'elle est malade. Et pourtant elle a gardé des éclairs. Le prince, l'idiot il ne sait rien. Mais c'est l'homme des présupposés implicites. Il comprend tout. (Deleuze 1980)
>
> [The power of natural reason reduced to itself. So much reduced to itself that it is sick. And yet, it maintains some sparks. The prince, the idiot knows nothing. But he is the man of implicit presuppositions. He understands everything.]

The idiot knows nothing yet understands everything. Thus, at a dramatic level, we may analyse the plot from a twofold perspective with regard to the motivations and actions of this character. At a first reading, he seems to achieve his goals by "messing around"[9] with the councillor, and making her promise he will get a bicycle, which triggers Milig Le Floch's comment, repeated three times in the last scene: "T'as de la malice, quoique t'en dis, t'as de la malice, Pierre Pidou" (Fichet 1998: 37, 39) ["You've got malice, no matter what you say, you've got malice, Pierre Pidou"]. We may therefore suppose that Pierre Pidou has successfully carried out a strategy in order to obtain what he wanted. Talking about cracks in the trees and in the animals, he messes around with Aline Kieffer and earns a bicycle. This is a first possible reading, based on the conflict between the two protagonists (in this perspective, Milig Le Floch is a helper), of whom one succeeds by playing the fool. Yet, there is a second level of interpretation that disturbs and undermines the first one as it rests on the very nature of Pierre Pidou's announcements. Apparently simple and naive, his declarations about the cracks are fundamentally poetic, and therefore they unsettle and destabilize the action. Rather than a village idiot's, Pierre Pidou's words are reminiscent of the Pythia's: they sound like an oracle's, mysterious and perfectly clear at the same time, as is his first line: "Des fissures dans les arbres" (ibid.: 31) ["Cracks in the trees"]. The power of this sentence derives from the absence of the verb,

think of a contracted form of 'petit doux' ('p'tit doux', 'little sweet one'), which reminds of a nickname and connotes the character as ridiculous and yet good-natured. It is also homophonous of 'pis doux', literally 'sweet tit', that is, cow pee which adds a country connotation to its double meaning.

[9] "Did you mess around with her?", Milig Le Floch asks him on the lakeshore (Fichet 1998: 37).

from the conciseness of its formulation, and from its being at the same time visual, affirmative, and final. As Philippe Minyana had it, brevity pushes towards the "sentence". Besides, the beginning *in medias res* within which this sentence emerges, definitely reinforces its fascinating capacity:

> Milig Le Floch. Répète ce que tu dis.
> Pierre Pidou. Des fissures dans les arbres
>
> (Ibid.)

> [Milig Le Floch. Repeat what you are saying. / Pierre Pidou. Cracks in the trees.]

The sentence has already been pronounced; it has already had its effect. Just like the Pythia,[10] exclusively alert to her interior vision, Pierre Pidou seems to ignore his interlocutors. No matter how much Milig Le Floch and Aline Kieffer interrogate him, mock him or show their surprise, Pierre Pidou (deliberately maybe) gives out a little bit at a time and no one can modify the course of his revelation. Every time he speaks, a little detail comes out to complete his account at a hallucinatory pace: "Des fissures dans les arbres" ["Cracks in the trees"], "Des fissures dans les arbres / j'y mets l'œil" ["Cracks in the trees / I peer into them"], and "Des fissures dans les arbres / j'y mets l'œil / je vois des choses graves" (ibid.) ["Cracks in the trees / I peer into them / I see some serious things"]. This technique of progressively adding details that gradually enhance the vision is a fine illustration of the word "fissures" as radiating nucleus. Clearly enough, the word "fissures" behaves here as the booster of the sentences, it is their living source and meaning-maker. As Julien Graq had it:

> … le sens, on l'oublie trop, est à la fois signification et direction irréversible: le sens est un vecteur; la machinerie du langage, dès qu'elle est en mouvement, crée immédiatement dans l'esprit un courant induit qui tout de suite s'affranchit de son inducteur. Ce courant est déjà projet: l'esprit est "lancé" (tout écrivain de bonne foi, je pense, avouera ce mouvement qui est la dynamique même de l'écriture) la force vive ainsi éveillée se heurte au langage, l'utilise, biaise, compose avec lui, mais ne lui appartient plus toute. (1980: 157)

> [... the sense, as we too often forget, is at the same time meaning and irreversible direction: sense is a vector; the machinery of language, once start-

[10] Differently from the Pythia, it is Pierre Pidou who moves around to announce his tidings. This encourages our first interpretation that has Pierre Pidou following a preordained strategy throughout.

> ed, immediately creates in the mind a flow of induced current that soon breaks away from its inductor. This current is already a project: the mind is "off" (every writer acting in good faith, I think, would avow this movement, which is the very dynamics of writing); thus awakened, the living force knocks into language, uses it, hems and haws, composes with it, but does not belong to it completely.]

The word "fissures" electrifies the group of words that follows but also imparts a 'direction', frames the sentence, and circulates a "living force" within Pierre Pidou's words. Both the dramatic and the poetic levels are boosted by the "cracks". Every time Pierre Pidou supplements his vision with a new detail, he mounts both a poetic and a dramatic step. The imagery keeps growing while the account of the visions pushes Milig Le Floch and Aline Kieffer to the limit, until the last scene which constitutes an actual *dénouement*.

The cracks allow one to see, both concretely and figuratively. It is through them that Pierre Pidou manages to see, and the verb 'to see' here is endowed with a sense of 'supernatural vision'. Besides, this supernatural dimension is augmented in the second scene, as we move from the cracks in the trees to the cracks in the animals. The expression "cracks in the trees" may still sound acceptable to common sense and immediate perception, thanks to its being obvious rather than irrational. Everybody knows there are cracks in the trees, although few people actually say it, and even fewer pronounce it as an oracle. It is this variance that makes it weird. Yet, the fact that there are cracks in the animals heightens the originality of this point of view, which is now focused on the animals – perceived as 'more alive' than plants – and, in spite of its unusualness, it is absolutely unquestionable. In fact, it is a matter of point of view and designation. Through what do we look at the animals? From which perspective? And what kind of formulation do we rely on to describe our observations? Preferably, we define those areas in the body that allow an exchange between inside and outside as orifices, and we would probably speak of cracks when referring to claws, nails, or skin. Announcing this (partially acceptable) reality by means of a formula as concise, categorical, and generalizing as "cracks in the animals" is undoubtedly surprising. This perspective, this zoom – to resume the term we pointed out above –, this cornerstone of reality causes a slight destabilization of sense, a faltering of perception. It is exactly the fact that Pierre Pidou 'voices' this obviousness that makes his words enter the realm of folly – as minor ravings prompted by his status of village idiot – but also the one of poetry.

The poetic outlook may reveal obviousness but above all it formulates it with all the power of self-evidence, and consequently makes us feel all its oddity. In this regard, we may refer to Clément Rosset's commentary on reality, referring to Parmenides:

> Il faut dire et penser que ce qui est est, car ce qui existe existe, et ce qui n'existe pas n'existe pas: je t'invite à méditer cela … à y regarder de plus près, ces sentences se révèlent bientôt à la fois paradoxales et terrifiantes: … Paradoxales en ceci que, loin de flatter l'habituelle "raison", elle se heurtent à un sens commun, ou à une sensibilité commune, qui, chez les hommes, sont beaucoup plus volontiers disposés à admettre que ce qui existe n'existe pas tout à fait et que ce qui n'existe pas possède quelque vague crédit à l'existence, si minime et désespéré soit-il … (Rosset 1991: 9-10)
>
> [We must say and think that what is is, because what exists exists, and what does not exist does not exist: I invite you to meditate on this. … on a closer look, these sentences soon sound both paradoxical and terrifying; … Paradoxical in that they, rather than flattering regular 'reason', clash with common sense or common sensibility which, in human beings, are much more inclined to admit that what exists does not exist and that what does not exist does show some signs of credibility, be they small and despairing…]

If, in the first scene, Aline Kieffer and Milig Le Floch totally deny the possibility of cracks in the trees, a year afterwards they adopt a different strategy to get rid of Pierre Pidou by admitting that there are in fact some cracks in the animals and that he is "le messager d'aucune nouvelle extraordinaire, tous les êtres vivants sont fissurés" (Fichet 1998: 34) ["the messenger of no extraordinary news, all living beings are cracked"]. Yet this strategy aimed at doing away with Pierre Pidou by agreeing with him does not work. They need to go further, and Aline Kieffer decides to verify the existence of the cracks in the animals: "Je suis comme Saint Thomas faut que touche du doigt" (ibid.: 36) ["I am like St Thomas, need to touch for myself"].

In the last scene, as we noted above, the word "fissures" appears only once:

> Pierre Pidou. Hi hi une fille lisse come une assiette je croyais
> mais non
> des fissures dans son corps.
> Elle exagère elle saigne.
>
> (Ibid.: 39)

[PIERRE PIDOU. Ha ha a girl as smooth as porcelain, I thought / but no / cracks in her body. / She exaggerates, she bleeds.]

Yet, this word keeps on illuminating the whole scene. First of all, the lexical field of 'cracks' is still present: "Pierre Pidou t'es fêlé"; "j'y mets l'œil dans le creux"; "Elle est blessée au ventre", etc. ["Pierre Pidou you're creviced"; "I peer into the cavities"; "she's wounded in the belly"]. Yet it is its absence that makes this expression still act resonantly, as it were. We have read it so many times that it cannot easily exit our imagination. This effect is reinforced by the fact that the play is very short: the repetition of the same word within a short text is certainly very evident. Although they are graphically absent from the stage, the cracks persist and seal the play's *dénouement* by strictly associating the poetic mode with the dramatic one. We learn that Pierre Pidou wanted to "wait for the lake's bitch" ("attendre la chienne du lac") but Aline Kieffer did not, so he "slapped" her, "stripped" her and "threw her in the lake" ("giflée", "mise à poil", "et hop dans le lac!"). However, we also discover another motive. This is Pierre Pidou speaking:

Aline Kieffer – mademoiselle Kieffer – a coupé les arbres.
Aline Kieffer – mademoiselle Kieffer – voulait abattre les animaux se plaint de quoi?

(Ibid.: 38)

[Aline Kieffer – Miss Kieffer – cut down the trees. / Aline Kieffer – Miss Kieffer – wanted to put down the animals complains about what?]

The brutality of the action is not the most relevant detail here. What leads the plot to its symbolic but also, we could say, imaginary and poetical conclusion is the fact that Pierre Pidou keeps explaining all along to Milig Le Floch that he looked 'inside' Aline Kieffer and saw nothing. Here are the different occurrences of this sad remark:

…
j'ai rien vu.
je l'ai regardée j'ai rien vu.
…
Toute fermée toute fermée
même les oreilles… Trop fermée, beaucoup trop.
…
J'y mets l'œil
dans le creux.
…

J'ai regardé tout
tout fouillé
tout fouillé les creux
tout zieuté – même la fourche! –
rien vu
y'a rien dedans
elle est vide.
…
Y'a rien dedans …
t'es vide te plains de ça.

(Ibid.: 37-9)

[… / I saw nothing. / I looked at her, I saw nothing. / … / All closed, all closed / even her ears… Too closed, too much. / … / I peered / into the cavity. / … / I looked at everything / searched everything / searched all the cavities / peeped everywhere – even into the fork! – / saw nothing / there's nothing inside / she's empty. / … / there's nothing inside . . . you're empty, complain about that.]

Once we have gone from fantasy to reality, we stand on the other side of the cracks and what looked as nothing but a vision of one who is a bit funny in the head ("I see naked women wounded in the belly who enter the water barking", scenes 1 and 2) becomes indeed a premonition. And we go back to the Pythia. Aline Kieffer is wounded in the belly, she bleeds, "jappe" ["yelps"], and "aboye" ["barks"]. Pierre Pidou has swung into action; he was no longer happy to talk anymore, and put his claims into practice. What he saw through the cracks in the trees and in animals was but the anticipation of the last scene, and while he was no actor of those visions he was their producer. Once he acts, he is restored to his role of acting subject and leads the action to its end. It was a matter of seeing through Aline Kieffer then. Undoubtedly this is a case of what psychoanalysis calls scopophilia in which the eye is not perceived only as a source of vision but also as a source of libido. I will not pursue here a psychoanalytical line of investigation, yet this perspective is interesting as it may envisage how Roland Fichet foregrounds the existence of a relation between being unconscious and the short form. What he argued with reference to a short text entitled *Sur les dos des morts* [*On the Back of the Dead*] can be adapted to *Fissures* as well:

Sur le dos des morts c'est une image qui précipite du sens. Un impact spécifique différent de celui d'un texte long. La forme brève introduit du subliminal, de l'implicite. Pour moi la forme brève est un dispositif d'ouverture à l'inconscient. (Koutchevsky 2006a)

> [*Sur les dos des morts* [*On the Back of the Dead*] is an image that precipitates out of sense. It produces a different impact from that of a longer text. Short forms introduce subliminal and implicit elements. In my opinion, the short form is instrumental in opening up the unconscious.]

"Une image qui précipite du sens"[11] is the exact definition of a process that, in *Fissures*, mixes the poetic and the dramatic. Baldine Saint-Girons may help us understand this notion of 'sense precipitate' by inscribing it in the field of the unconscious and relying on the concept of condensation (in its psychoanalytical meaning):

> Formation caractéristique de l'inconscient, la condensation … est la simple expression de la tendance à l'épargne qui domine tous les processus psychiques … la condensation est certes le résultat d'une omission ou plutôt d'une ellipse ou d'une élision, pour emprunter le langage de la grammaire et celui de la poésie. Mais elle est en même temps le fruit d'une surdétermination qui aboutit à la création de termes-carrefours, d'images génériques et de compromis: 'Le processus de condensation', écrit Freud, 'est particulièrement sensible quand il atteint les mots et les noms'. Traitées comme des choses, les expressions verbales deviennent aussi opaques que celles-ci. (Saint-Girons 1999)

> [as a typical formation of the unconscious, condensation … is the sheer expression of a tendency to economy that dominates all psychological processes … condensation is certainly the result of an omission or rather, borrowing the language of poetry and grammar, of an ellipsis or of an elision. Yet, at the same time, it is an overdetermination which leads to the creation of crossroad words, of generic and compromised images: 'The process of condensation', Freud writes, 'is especially perceptible when it affects words and names'. When treated like things, verbal expressions become as opaque as them.]

In the last scene, the missing word, caused by an elision or an (in)voluntary omission of the author, is "fissures" which quite clearly responds to the above mentioned definition of "termes-carrefours". The psychoanalytical concept of condensation is rather useful in order to qualify both the graphic absence and the simultaneous activism of the word "fissures". Besides, while the word has disappeared from the page as a written formula, its absence 'translates' its presence into cavities; indeed, the term "cracks" does not allude to an object *per se*, but to a 'rift'

[11] The expression "précipite du sens" ["precipitates out of sense"] is used with reference to chemistry and is to be intended as alluding to a process of crystallization.

in that object, that is, what allows us to see through or in it. Removing the signifier "fissures", while keeping on exploiting its poetic resources and dramatic consequences, somehow is equal to make it function as a hidden metaphor at the level of the last scene. The strength of the word "fissures" in this short drama is in fact its continuing signification even in its absence. In his *La poésie moderne et la structure d'horizon*, Michel Collot illustrates a fundamental mechanism of textual signification:

> La valeur signifiante d'une unité linguistique manifestée se définit par rapport à une série d'autres unités non manifestées qui auraient pu être employées à sa place au même point de l'énoncé et qui ont été exclues, mais restent d'une certaine manière présentes à l'arrière-plan … lorsque je prononce 'bas', par exemple, le sens de mon énoncé repose sur l'existence non-manifestée de 'haut'. Toute chose n'est vue qu'en relation à un horizon de choses invisibles … 'Le signe ne veut dire quelque chose qu'en tant qu'il se profile sur les autres signes' comme un objet ne se donne à voir qu'en dissimulant les autres objets du champ. (1989: 221)
>
> [The signifying value of a manifest linguistic unit is defined in connection with a series of hidden units that could have been used in its place within the enunciated but have been excluded, although they are somehow still present in the background … if I pronounce the word low, for example, the meaning of the enunciated rests on the hidden existence of the word high. Everything is seen in connection with a horizon of invisible things … 'The sign means something only in its projection onto the other signs' as an object that shows itself by concealing the other objects included in the field.]

The process described by Michel Collot is exactly what happens here with these 'graphically absent' and metaphorical cracks; yet, this is a negative image (in a photographic sense), an inversion, an engraving. As Collot would have it, the "unité linguistique" (here "fissures") is not "manifestée", it is "non manifestée" even though it is "présente à l'arrière-plan" as if all the other linguistic units which compose the scene never stopped referring to it or rather never stopped exposing the structure of the crack both poetically and dramatically. The word "fissures" keep on working at a metaphorical level, transposed to the horizon, "appresenté" (ibid.) ["appresented"]:

> À la différence de la préoccupation quotidienne, qui nous oblige à concentrer notre attention sur tel objet à l'exclusion des autres, la contemplation esthétique est fondamentalement compréhensive: elle tend à restituer la

> chose dans son environnement proche et lointain, dans cet horizon extérieur qui est comme son territoire. (ibid.: 20)
>
> [Unlike everyday worries, which make us focus our attention on a certain object by excluding the others, the aesthetic contemplation is fundamentally comprehensive. It tends to restore things to their proximate and faraway context, to this external horizon that somehow forms its territory.]

We could say that the "territoire" of the word "fissures" gets illustrated in two phases. First, in a 'presence mode' through its association with the trees and animals, then in an 'absence mode' through this principle of metaphorical functioning.

As a conclusion, we can pair Baldine Saint-Girons's comment – "traitées comme des choses, les expressions verbales deviennent aussi opaques que celles-ci" ["treated like things, verbal expressions become as opaque as them"] – with Viktor Chlovski's definition of art as a process:

> Et voilà que pour rendre la sensation de la vie, pour sentir les objets, pour éprouver que la pierre est de pierre, il existe ce que l'on appelle l'art. Le but de l'art, c'est de donner une sensation de l'objet comme vision et non pas comme reconnaissance: le procédé de l'art est le procédé de singularisation des objets et le procédé qui consiste à obscurcir la forme, à augmenter la difficulté et la durée de la perception. (2001: 82)
>
> [And to convey you the sensation of life, to feel the objects, to prove that a stone is a stone, there exists what we call art. The aim of art is to give a sensation of the object as vision and not as recognition: the art process is a process of identification of objects, a process that consists in obscuring the form, augmenting the difficulty and duration of the perception.]

"Obscurcir la forme", "augmenter la difficulté et la durée de la perception", giving "une sensation de l'objet comme vision et non pas comme reconnaissance": many other similar definitions could be used to qualify the processes carried out by Roland Fichet in order to fully exploit the word "fissures". I should notice that the 'radiating word' process works particularly well with respect to a nine-page text such as *Fissures*. Its very short format produces an internal dynamics and a horizon[12] of expectations which do not last enough to deteriorate. In fact, it is not certain that in a longer piece, half an hour long for instance, the absence of the word

[12] I refer here to its etymological sense, from the Greek 'horizein', i.e. 'to define, to mark the boundary'.

"fissures" – as happens in the last scene of Fichet's piece – would have possessed the force of a presence. All in all, duration would probably damage this kind of process.

English translation by Lisanna Calvi

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Ten Years of Short Theatre. Rome and Its 'Short' Festival

Abstract

This article focuses on the analysis of a ten-year old festival of performing arts called *Short Theatre* which has been organized in Rome since 2006. Initially hosted at the India Theatre and later on at *La Pelanda*, *Short Theatre* represents one of the most topical and up-to-date Italian occasions to explore and celebrate contemporary international experimental theatre. Moving from the investigation of the festival's own constituting idea, its main characteristics and locations, the meaning of its title, *Short Theatre*, is investigated in relation to the types of performances staged during the many editions of the festival. In the last part of this essay, two shows performed at *Short Theatre* in 2013 are analysed in detail as significant examples of short theatre: *Pentesilea* [*Penthesilea*], produced by Lenz Rifrazioni, and *La semplicità ingannata* [*Simplicity Deceived*] starring Marta Cuscunà. These two shows have not been chosen for being substantially 'better' than others, but because they efficaciously, clearly, and even emblematically exemplify the Festival's characteristics as illustrated in this analysis.

1.

There is a famous quarter in Rome called Testaccio, known to have developed close to a mound of many thousands of *cocci* (*testae* in Latin), fragments of amphorae that used to contain grains, oil or other liquid fit for human consumption. Amidst its busy roads, not so distant from the river Tiber, there stands a huge fascinating construction built by Gioacchino Ersoch between 1888 and 1891 as a slaughterhouse, which was in use from the late nineteenth century until 1975.[1] Nowadays, after an important restoration, it is an example of industrial archaeology that houses several institutions: a branch of the University of Roma 3 (Department

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[1] See http://www.museomacro.org/macro_testaccio/macro_testaccio (last access 21 July 2015).

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of Architecture), one of the two locations of the *MACRO – Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Roma* [Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome] and other various Associations specifically intended to encourage and disseminate interest in and appreciation for culture and contemporary art.

Within the cultural reality of Rome, the *MACRO* manages to have an international physiognomy, though maintaining its civic identity and reinforcing the participation and relationship with the community in all its artistic, cultural, and intellectual fields. Among the various projects handled by the *MACRO* today there is also the management of *La Pelanda*, a centre of cultural productions, educational activities and workshops, originally conceived by the association *Zoneattive*.[2] The site where the centre operates covers an area of 5,000 square metres in the ex-slaughterhouse and includes the same structures once used both for the *pelanda dei suini* [skinning of pigs] and as water tanks. Following restoration, the main part of the structure now consists of a large nave with a truncated cone smokestack, some metallic equipment and many large windows to enhance the volume and perspective of the place. The nave is surrounded by five areas. In addition, space was created for two theatre halls, a rehearsal room, a recording studio, a control and directing room, a two-storey apartment, a kitchen area, some dressing rooms and toilets. The entire architectural complex was imagined as a modular system, fully accessible to the public and meant to become an innovative performing space, flexible enough to stage different kinds of events.

Since 2010 *La Pelanda* (together with the India Theatre) has been one of the most spectacular and intriguing venues and it is where *Short Theatre* has mainly been held so far. *Short Theatre* is a recurring festival, now in its tenth edition, usually organized in Rome during the first weeks of September (at least from the third edition onwards).[3] This event was conceived by AREA06 (a multidisciplinary corporate association of artists and operators whose aim is to produce cultural activities based on the interrelation of

[2] See http://www.museomacro.org/macro_testaccio/la_pelanda_centro_di_produzione_culturale (last access 21 July 2015).

[3] The first two editions of *Short Theatre* took place during the last decade of June in 2006 and 2007, whereas the third edition was held at the beginning of September 2008 (see Di Giammarco 9 June 2006; De Sanctis 9 June 2006; Di Giammarco 9 June 2007; Di Giammarco 18 June 2007; De Sanctis 9 June 2007; Di Giammarco 3 September 2008; Di Giammarco 12 September 2008; [Editorial Staff] 5 September 2008). From September 2010, the newly opened space of *La Pelanda* became one of the official sites of the festival (see R.C. 3 September 2010 and [Editorial Staff] 8 September 2010). The tenth edition took place from 3 to 13 September 2015 (for further information see http://www.shorttheatre.org/, last access 25 September 2015).

artistic languages)[4] and *Accademia degli Artefatti* (a Roman theatre company active since the early 1990s).[5] After organizing and financing it for the first two years,[6] from the third edition on the institution *Teatro di Roma* [*Theatre of Rome*][7] has been a fundamental partner for this exhibition, together with *MACRO-Testaccio* (from the fifth edition on) and other associations. Since its inception, Fabrizio Arcuri has been the Art Director of this fascinating project,[8] financially supported by the Regione Lazio, the District and the City of Rome, and, in turn, many other different institutions over the years.

Since in the last decades many scholars – like, for instance, Paolo Ruffini and Silvia Mei – have already offered an exhaustive and broad analysis of short forms in the Italian contemporary theatrical panorama, my analysis will not include a general overview of the Italian spectacular context[9] – to which both Rome *Short Theatre* Festival and other similar initiatives promoted by Fabrizio Arcuri (see, for instance, Turin *Anteprima* festival)[10] belong. I will indeed specifically investigate the only festival that, starting from its very title, programmatically claims to provide its audience with a selection of short dramas and spectacles.

From its very beginning in June 2006, *Short Theatre* has been something more than usual festivals or exhibition of contemporary theatre. It is a sort of non-stop ensemble of theatre and dance performances (sometimes at their debut, sometimes already staged somewhere else), conferences, workshops, deejay sets, vee-jay sets, concerts, art installations and public conversations, increasing and developing their mutual interactions over the years.[11] As can be read in the programmes of the different editions,

[4] AREA06 was founded in 2001. In the course of fifteen years, the association has conceived and arranged at its best a very specific, innovative and nationally recognised way to organize and produce cultural events (see http://www.jobsoul.it/SoulWeb/schedaAzienda.action?idAzienda=C1D417BC-334F-424C-93DE-3B345BF1A313&modale=true, last access 25 July 2015).

[5] See http://www.artefatti.org/ita/index.html (last access 25 July 2015).

[6] At the end of April 2008, the city of Rome had a new Mayor and due to the widespread economic crisis many cultural project received less funding than expected. Consequently the programme of *Short Theatre* was reduced from twelve to eight days of performances (Del Fra 5 September 2008). The following year the reduction was even worse: only three days of performances focused mainly on local groups of theatrical avant-garde (Di Giammarco 13 September 2009).

[7] See http://www.teatrodiroma.net/ (last access 25 July 2015).

[8] For further information on his activities, see http://www.artefatti.org/ita/biografia/2/componenti-compagnia.html (last access 25 July 2015).

[9] See on this at least Ruffini 2005; Mei 2012.

[10] See Arcuri 2011; Arcuri and Godino 2011.

[11] See Di Giammarco 9 June 2006; Di Giammarco 31 August 2011; Bandettini 2

every year, in a special place and at a specific moment in time, artists of different practices, spectators and operators coming from various parts of the world get together not only to see the many new shows, or to perform them, but also to compare and discuss their ideas on Art, Contemporary Theatre and Performance. It is a very particular meeting place, a sort of 'Arts *agora*'.

Although in recent editions *La Pelanda* has seemed to better fit the multifunctional needs of the various exhibitions of the festival, the initial choice of organising *Short Theatre* at the India Theatre was undoubtedly the winning one. The India Theatre is located in the group of buildings of the former Mira Lanza soap factory (a large industrial site on the banks of the river Tiber not far from the ex-slaughterhouse). It has three theatre halls of different sizes, but also several modular spaces, in which it is easy to set even the most complex contemporary performing actions.[12] Mario Martone, the Art Director of *Teatro di Roma* from 1999 to 2000, who strongly supported the acquisition and requalification of the structures where today this theatre is placed,[13] once said of Arcuri's choice:

> Arcuri aveva realizzato diverse edizioni di un festival chiamato Short Theatre al Teatro India di Roma, la mia creatura amatissima realizzata con furia e passione quando ero stato per due anni direttore dello stabile capitolino: e con Short Theatre avevo visto utilizzati gli spazi dell'India al meglio, vivificati da un rapporto dialettico e stimolante tra pubblico e artisti. (Martone 2011: 9)
>
> [Arcuri had been in charge of several editions of a festival called Short Theatre at the India Theatre in Rome, my beloved creature realized with fire and passion in the two years when I was the director of Teatro Stabile of Rome: with Short Theatre I had seen the spaces of the India Theatre used at their best, enlivened by a stimulating relationship between the public and the artists.]

During *Short Theatre* Festivals a special focus is also laid on many various contemporary artistic languages thanks to several collaborations and intersections established, year after year, with other international festi-

September 2012; Di Giammarco 6 September 2012; Bandettini 9 September 2012; Di Giammarco 3 September 2013; Di Giammarco 31 August 2014; Cordelli 31 August 2014 and also http://www.shorttheatre.org/archive/2014/index.html#/presentazione (last access 25 July 2015).

[12] See Groppi 2 July 2007 and also http://www.teatrodiroma.net/adon.pl?act=doc&doc=3118 (last access 30 July 2015).

[13] See http://www.teatrodiroma.net/adon.pl?act=doc&doc=1331 (last access 30 July 2015).

vals, embassies and cultural institutions. Among the projects realized in collaboration with these organisations, the following are worth remembering: *IYME - International Young Makers Exchange*, a European project conceived by a network of theatre and dance festivals from all over Europe especially sustaining young artists; *Iberscene*, a permanent window on Iberian contemporary creativity in Spain and Southern America promoted by Instituto Cervantes of Rome and Institut Ramon Llull of Barcelona; *FranceDanse*, a biennial festival of contemporary dance supported by the Embassy of France and the Institut Français of Italy; *Fabulamundi, playwriting Europe*, a project on contemporary dramaturgy supported by the European Community, aiming at creating cooperation and exchange of ideas among actors, directors and authors coming from different countries, and to produce *mises en espace* of translated plays.[14]

Moreover, since 2012 the exhibition which usually opens on the last day of the festival has been dedicated to the final presentation of the work created by the *École de Maîtres*, an international and itinerant course of theatrical specialisation. The masters involved in these courses in the past three years were Rafael Spregelburd (2012), Costanza Macras (2013) and Ricci/Forte (2014).[15] In 2015, for the twenty-fourth edition of the *École de Maîtres*, the master involved was Ivica Buljan, and one possible final outcome was again staged within *Short Theatre*, at the India Theatre on 13 September 2015.[16]

Each edition of *Short Theatre* was distinguished by a subtitle, which helped people to orient themselves through the marathon of events. In 2010, for instance, after partially recovering from the drastic drop in funding and the reduction in days suffered the previous year, Arcuri chose this subtitle for his festival: *Effetto farfalla. Battiamo le ali non le mani* [*Butterfly Effect. Let's clap our wings not our hands*]. Evoking a very famous example taken from the theory of chaos and metaphorically ascribing it to the Italian theatrical system, he suggested that, if you are determined, you can produce long-term variations even with small changes (or little money!). Indeed, only through the patient efforts of its organizers the

[14] Every edition of *Short Theatre* presents a detailed programme (also available on line) which includes a special section called *progetti* [projects] dedicated to these collaborations.

[15] See the programmes of the last three editions: http://www.shorttheatre.org/past-editions/ (last access 25 July 2015). For more details on the performances, see Trigo 22 September 2012; [Editorial Staff] 18 September 2013; Bandettini 31 August 2014; Di Giammarco 22 September 2013; [Editorial Staff] 25 September 2014.

[16] See http://www.cssudine.it/progetti_scheda.php/ID=38/menu=1/anno=2015 (last access 7 October 2015).

festival could survive the great recession endured the two previous years.[17]

Another effective subtitle was *West End*, chosen for the 2012 edition. On the one hand, the West End is a very famous quarter which hosts a large number of theatres in London and is undoubtedly a symbol of a certain Western idea of theatre. On the other hand, after 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York in 2001, it may also signify the End of the values upheld by the West which has become a recurrent topic since then. Therefore, alluding to this double meaning, the Art Director of *Short Theatre* gathered for his festival quite a number of performances, in which the representation of reality was a matter of close investigation, in relation to languages, characters and spectators, as well as from a geographical point of view.[18] The following concise list shows the different subtitles of all the editions, together with locations and dates:

SHORT THEATRE EDITIONS:

2006 1 *Radicali trasformazioni in atto* [*Radical changes underway*] / India Theatre, 20 June-1 July.

2007 2 *Fuori formato* [*Outsize*] / India Theatre, 19 June-1 July.

2008 3 *Ai confini della realtà* [*The Twilight Zone*] / India Theatre, 7-13 September.

2009 4 *Senza tetto né legge* [*Homeless and Lawless*] / India Theatre, 14-16 September.

2010 5 *Effetto farfalla. Battiamo le ali non le mani* [*Butterfly Effect. Let's clap our wings not our hands*] / India Theatre, 3-5; *La Pelanda*, 8-11 September.

2011 6 *Politiche della visione. Se non vedi non credi* [*Policies of Vision. If you don't see it you don't believe it*] / *La Pelanda*, 5-7; India Theatre, 8-18 September.

2012 7 *West End* [*West End*] / India Theatre, 5-8; *La Pelanda*, 11-15 and Argentina Theatre, 22 September.

2013 8 *Democrazia della felicità* [*Democracy of Happiness*] / *La Pelanda*, 5-8, 11-14 and 18 September.

2014 9 *La rivoluzione delle parole* [*The Revolution of Words*] / *La Pelanda*, 4-13; Argentina Theatre, 13-14 and India Theatre, 25 September.

2015 10 *Nostalgia di futuro* [*Nostalgia for the Future*] / *La Pelanda*, 3-12; Vallicelliana Library and India Theatre, 13 September.

[17] See Scarpellini 14 September 2008; Di Giammarco 27 August 2010; De Santis 31 August 2010; and [Editorial Staff] 3 September 2010.

[18] See Bandettini 2 September 2012; Di Giammarco 4 September 2012; and Distefano 5 September 2012.

The main aim of this essay, though, is not to look closely at each performance staged over the ten seasons of the festival (quite a long and in some way captious task), but to try to inquire into the multifarious meanings of the adjective 'short' contained in its title and to relate it, when possible, to the *pièces* shown. In fact, if at first sight the spirit of this recurrent programme of events could be considered similar to other contemporary Italian festivals, after further consideration it becomes clear that the principles underlying this enterprise are strictly connected with that type of definition. Therefore, first, I will discuss some implications connected with the choice of the festival's own title. Secondly, I will consider the meanings which best suit the performances there proposed. Finally, I will briefly analyse two examples among the many possible ones that, from our point of view, identify this perfect match.

2.

If we consider that *Short Theatre* was born as a ten-day non-stop exhibition of different kinds of performing events, lasting from six pm until past midnight, the adjective 'short' does not seem to be related with its length as a whole, but with something a bit more specific. Still, if we compare the duration of this festival with a regular theatrical season, which usually starts more or less at the end of September and goes on until the middle of June of the following year, we can affirm that *Short Theatre* is certainly shorter.

Although there is no official declaration in this regard, it is an almost obvious assumption to connect the title of this festival with the definition of 'short film' (i.e. any movie which is not long enough to be considered a feature film). The boundary between short and feature films is flexible: sometimes it is drawn at a running time of forty minutes, sometimes thirty, or even at a lesser span. Similarly, in the first two editions of *Short Theatre* both Arcuri and Giorgio Albertazzi (the Art Director of *Teatro di Roma* at that time) underlined that each performance was not meant to last more than one hour.[19] Afterwards, as we will see, many of them were definitely shorter (or only in very few cases just a little longer). Thus, a piece of 'short theatre' may be not only a theatrical performance actually conceived from a script shorter than a regular drama composed of three or more acts, but also any kind of non-verbal show, provided it does

[19] See [Editorial Staff] 9 June 2006 and Di Giammarco 20 June 2006.

not last too long.[20] Therefore a one-act play (like Pirandello's, Beckett's and those of many twentieth-century authors)[21] could be as perfect for *Short Theatre* as an original script or a reduction of a longer text (like a Shakespearean play or a novel),[22] but also, with some obvious distinctions, as choreography,[23] or as every other form of non-verbal performance. And the festival programmes have kept confirming this through the years. On 8 September 2010, for instance, Rodolfo Di Giammarco wrote:

> La sempre intraprendente manifestazione di tendenze, progetti e percorsi di nuovo culto 'Short Theatre' si trasferisce da stasera alla Pelanda, al Macro Testaccio, e annuncia oggi ben 11 appuntamenti. Per i seguaci di Ricci/Forte c'è il loro *Pinter's Anatomy* che scannerizza le violenze e le insinuazioni del grande autore inglese (35', dalle 18 alle 2 in loop), ma di 'teatrale' c'è pure *L'uomo dal fiore in bocca* di Pirandello con Sandro Lombardi e Roberto Latini (55', alle 21:15), e *Commedia* di e con Giorgio Barberio Corsetti (1h, alle 22:45). Di coreografico c'è *Nel disastro* di Aldes / Roberto Castello (1h 30', alle 19:30), e *Il gioco del gregge...* di Fabrizio Favale Le Supplici (20', alle 22:15). (Di Giammarco 8 September 2010)
>
> [Starting today, 'Short Theatre', the ever resourceful show of trends, projects and paths of new worship, will move to La Pelanda at Macro Testaccio, and eleven events have been announced for tonight. For the followers of Ricci/Forte there is their *Pinter's Anatomy*, which scans the violence and insinuations of the great English author (35 min., from 6 pm to 2 am, continuously). But on the theatrical side there is also Pirandello's *L'uomo dal fiore in bocca* (*The man with a flower in his mouth*), starring Sandro Lombardi and Roberto Latini (55 min., at 9.15 pm), and *Commedia* (*Comedy*) by and with Giorgio Barberio Corsetti (60 min., at 10.45 pm). On the choreographic side, there is Aldes/Roberto Castello's *Nel disastro* (*In the disaster*) (90 min., at 7.30 pm), and Fabrizio Favale Le Supplici's *Il gioco del gregge...* (*The game of the flock...*) (20 min., at 10.15 pm).]

As already pointed out, apart from the choreographic piece *Nel disa-*

[20] For a first approach to this subject, see De Marinis 2004 and Mango 2003.

[21] See Cordelli 22 June 2007; [Editorial Staff] 19 June 2007; Di Giammarco 6 September 2011; Cordelli 27 September 2011.

[22] For instance, in 2011 Manuela Cherubini realized a forty-minute version of *La stupidità* [*Stupidity*], a text by Rafael Spregelburd lasting more than three hours (see Di Giammarco 13 September 2011), while in 2014 Roberto Latini staged an adaptation of the first act of Pirandello's *I giganti della montagna* [*The giants of the mountain*] (see Bandettini 14 September 2014; Cordelli 20 September 2014).

[23] See [Editorial Staff] 20 June 2006; Di Giammarco 9 June 2007; Battisti 9 September 2012; Torriero 5 September 2013; [Editorial Staff] 7 September 2013; [Editorial Staff] 4 September 2014.

stro, that evening each performance lasted less than one hour. Among the many interesting issues, though, what immediately captures the attention is also that some shows are repeated several times during the same night.

Even if it does not seem a fixed rule, the concept of 'short in time' sometimes appears to go together with the need to create more intimacy with the public and the need for a smaller place in which to perform. In these circumstances, 'repetition' becomes indeed an essential part of the exhibition itself, because only a few persons at a time can see it.[24] The above-mentioned Ricci/Forte's performance, for instance, was repeated six times in a row each day for four days.[25] However, if you repeat seamlessly the same thing several times in the same evening, can your exhibition be called short? Is it really possible to consider a piece repeated six times in a row as something finished in itself? It is true that one spectator is meant to see only a fragment of it in one evening, but ultimately it is a short piece of something that, as a whole, actually lasts a few hours. This kind of mechanism provides also an unexpected insight into the deep meaning of the structure of *Short Theatre*, to which I shall return later.

Another aspect that could be considered similar in both 'short films' and 'short theatres' is related to means, languages, and contents. Short films are usually centred on original subjects and, because of their lower production costs, they can more easily address alternative and unconventional topics or use new narrative techniques. On the one hand, short films may be the first stage of a greater future movie (as happens, for instance, to some authors, who write a short story to develop a subject for a forthcoming novel). On the other hand, there are professional actors and film crews who choose to create short films as an alternative form of expression, something very different from longer and more commercial films.

As far as the Italian experimental theatre is concerned, after a first season of avant-garde theatre in the 1970s and 80s (related to the work of internationally acknowledged great masters such as Julian Beck and Judith Malina, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba and, later on, Peter Brook),[26] since the late 1990s, with the success of new media, there has been a growing and pervasive tendency to use on stage a synthesis of various communication tools and artistic means of expression (such as multimedia

[24] See, for instance, the performance of Fanny&Alexander staged in the 8 edition of *Short Theatre*: Cordelli 16 September 2013. On the activities of the group see http://fannyalexander.e-production.org/ (last access 14 August 2015).

[25] See Sassi 8 September 2010 and Bandettini 11 September 2010.

[26] For further readings on their work, see at least De Marinis 1987 and 2013; Perrelli 2007 and 2015.

projections, visual art, etc.) together with gesture, dialogue and movement. From that period on, a relatively short performance without pauses has seemed the best way to mingle and highlight those different techniques.

Considering that many performances usually presented at *Short Theatre* were of this kind,[27] we can say that a piece of 'short theatre' is basically a concentrated and concluded experimental representation. It is worth noting, though, that sometimes it may even be an excerpt from a longer and more traditional play,[28] or the initial stage of a major extensive project (exactly as happens between a short film and the production of a movie). For example, in 2007 Teatro delle Albe company staged Werner Schwab's *Sterminio* [*Extermination*] as the second part of a diptych dedicated to Evil,[29] while in 2012 at *Short Theatre* the group MOTUS presented *Who*, a nocturnal choral act, the third part of triptych called *W. 3 atti pubblici* [*W. 3 public acts*]. This cycle of three shows (*Where*, *When* and *Who*) was conceived within a broader and more complex political project called *2011>2068 Animale Politico* [*2011>2068 Political Animal*].[30]

Unlike a film, though, a theatrical piece can partially change its form after some performances and be transformed into something else. Then, a piece of 'short theatre' can be conceived as work in progress, although questions on the opportunity of this practice have sometimes been raised by critics.[31] At the India Theatre at the end of June 2006, for instance, the representation of Thomas Bernhard's *Prima della pensione* [*Before retirement*], staged by the group Teatro Aperto (today Teatro i) and directed by Renzo Martinelli, was somewhat different if compared to the exhibition seen the previous May in Milan. From Franco Cordelli's point of view, it was as if in June they were quoting the play seen in May, telling the story of a disappeared performance, a performance that could not be staged any more.[32]

In 2010, instead, Beckett's *Senza parole* [*Act without words*], directed by Andrea Adriatico, was initially played by the porn star Carlo Masi and an actress (Rossella Dessu). In the new version presented on 4 and 5 September of the same year at *Short Theatre*, however, Masi worked with

[27] See Costantini 11 June 2006 and Novelli 13 June 2007.

[28] See Di Giammarco 25 June 2006.

[29] See Di Giammarco 9 June 2007; Di Giammarco 25 June 2007; Bernocco 29 June 2007. For further information on the activities of Teatro delle Albe see http://www.teatrodellealbe.com (last access 12 August 2015).

[30] See Cordelli 20 September 2012; for further information on this cultural Association see http://www.motusonline.com/ (last access 7 August 2015).

[31] See Cordelli 11 September 2010 and Cordelli 7 September 2014.

[32] See Cordelli 2 September 2006; on the activities of the group see http://teatroi.org/it/ (last access 12 August 2015).

an actor (Marco Matarazzo). In this re-run of the play the traditional couple became a gay couple, a solution which helped investigate the manifold aspects of desire and the need for the other.[33]

Another type of exhibition seen at *Short Theatre* is also a recital composed of several small fragments written by the same author, like Martin Crimp or Ivan Vyrpaev.[34]

However, one of the most interesting shows made of scattered parts conceived for the festival is certainly the "parasitic performance", a performance within another performance. In 2011, for instance, every show endorsed the MK-*Grand tour* project: an outside performer (Michele di Stefano) intruded in every show and built creative chaos within it.[35]

> Grand Tour is a parasitic performance and a touristic enquiry into the circumscribed world of contemporary performing arts festivals. Its model is the Grand Tour, the traditional travel of Europe undertaken from the second half of XVII century by mainly upper-class European young men of means … The project starts from the determination of a festival suitable to be transformed into the itinerary of the Tour. Every single performance, theatrical piece or choreography in the programme will be analysed for its spatial character and dynamics. The author/director/choreographer of every piece will be asked to host the passage, the crossing, the stay or even the camping of an external traveller during the time of the performance. The duration of this interference will be negotiated previously.
>
> The performer, who is always the same person, will cross or visit the different performances hosted by the festival as different stages of his journey; he will not produce relevant or controversial acts, being a mere presence coming from elsewhere to have a look into the wherever. He will come [*sic*] back to his elsewhere without hesitation, eager to reach a new stage. He is not a 'signature' nor an actor nor a witness. He is a collision in time, a coincidence that will transform the formal tension of a performance into an ordinary everywhere, just for a moment. (MKGT)

Moreover, the raids invented in 2010, 2012 and 2013 by Tony Clifton

[33] See [Editorial Staff] 4 September 2010b and Sassi 4 September 2010. On Andrea Adriatico's theatrical research on Beckett see Casi 2010 and also the Teatri di Vita's website (http://www.teatridivita.it, last access 12 August 2015).

[34] See Di Giammarco 29 June 2006; Di Giammarco 30 June 2007; De Sanctis 30 June 2007.

[35] See Di Giammarco 8 September 2011 and Bandettini 17 September 2011. MK was at *Short Theatre* also in 2013 with *Impressions d'Afrique* (see Di Giammarco 11 September 2013 and Bandettini 15 September 2013). On MK activities see http://www.mkonline.it/ (last access 12 August 2015).

Circus, a sort of experiments of comical extremism, can be counted in this kind of classification.[36] In particular, the *Missione Roosevelt* [*Roosevelt Mission*] project is worth mentioning. *Missione Roosevelt* was conceived as a wheelchair race aiming "at crossing an urban space, making a journey and leaving a trace, a coloured mark on the ground", (TCCMR), during which the actors invited the public "to enjoy the forbidden pleasure of using a taboo object", that is, the wheelchair which was intended as "a metaphor for disadvantage by which conquering the city" (ibid.).

The types of performances examined so far prove that the criterion of brevity underlying the idea of 'short theatre' inevitably brings together the concepts of the instantaneous, synthetic and fragmented, but also those of intimacy, dynamic space and, from a certain point of view, repetition. An entire festival called *Short Theatre*, though, must also adopt a special *ad hoc* criterion to arrange the sequence of this kind of shows. The solution pursued by Arcuri seems to consist in creating a patchwork of different fragments bound together not only by a very full daily programme, but also by one's own curiosity and taste. Since the personal experience of the audience is another very important dimension that enriches the complex mechanism of the programme, some events are free, while others can be accessed on payment of a single or daily ticket. Therefore, diversified and customized participation in the events can be chosen every day, also thanks to their repetition or dissemination.[37] The basic idea is to let the public experiment a bit of everything, instead of exploring only a single show. In fact, alongside and amidst the various performances there might be meetings with art, and entertainment experts;[38] readings, conferences, and book launches;[39] art exhibitions; vee-jay and deejay sets, and concerts, etc.[40]

After all, the most intriguing aspect of *Short Theatre* is the continuous negotiation of sense between the compact surface of every single

[36] See [Editorial Staff] 5 September 2010; Distefano 5 September 2012; Battisti 5 September 2012; [Editorial Staff] 12 September 2012; De Sanctis 14 September 2012; Di Giammarco 11 September 2013; De Sanctis 17 September 2013. On Tony Clifton Circus raids and activities see http://www.tonycliftoncircus.com/ (last access 12 August 2015).

[37] See Di Giammarco 9 September 2010; Bandettini 11 September 2010; Battisti 5 September 2012; Cordelli 15 September 2012.

[38] See Di Giammarco 30 June 2006; [Editorial Staff] 18 June 2007; [Editorial Staff] 11 September 2012.

[39] See [Editorial Staff] 18 June 2007; [Editorial Staff] 11 September 2010; Di Giammarco 5 September 2011; [Editorial Staff] 6 September 2012; [Editorial Staff] 11 September 2013.

[40] See [Editorial Staff] 18 June 2007; [Editorial Staff] 4 September 2010a; Bandettini 11 September 2010; Battisti 28 September 2012.

self-contained creation and the general meaning of the whole experience, a process that supplies new information throughout its development. In a sense, in order to appreciate an evening at *Short Theatre* in full, we need much more time than what we would usually dedicate to a performance.

3.

In 2013, *Short Theatre* was entirely held at *La Pelanda*. It was a special edition, with an emblematic subtitle *Democrazia della felicità* [*Democracy of Happiness*], which Arcuri started off with a reflection on the state of the culture in Italy in that period.[41] Among the thirty-nine shows offered that year it is worth focusing on two different performances, which I think perfectly respond to some of the criteria of shortness underlying the conception of the festival: *Pentesilea* [*Penthesilea*], produced by Lenz Rifrazioni, with Sandra Soncini, and *La semplicità ingannata* [*Simplicity deceived*] with Marta Cuscunà.[42] In particular, the choice of these two spectacles does not respond to aesthetic criteria (these performances are not 'better' than others from a merely aesthetic point of view), but it serves a clear identification of two possible constructive modalities of a 'short' spectacle which follow different and even decidedly antithetical routes.

The Lenz Rifrazioni group is led by Maria Federica Maestri and Francesco Pititto and has long been one of the undisputed protagonists of Italian contemporary experimental theatre. They normally use an extreme and always conceptual language, often compared with the rugged physicality of marginality and diversity.[43] The Heinrich von Kleist's bewildering expressionistic drama *Penthesilea* (1808) was translated and reshaped as a monologue of about forty minutes by Pititto. In the performance actress Sandra Soncini, directed by Maestri, pronounced her soliloquy in front of the camera of a Macbook, which captured her foreground image, multiplied it and magnified it on a background screen. Her monologue is "un racconto che si fa delirio, ossessione, auto-dialogo di chi disperatamente cerca nel bagliore dello schermo tracce di vita, aiuto, ascolto" (Porcheddu 14 March 2013) ["a

[41] See Di Giammarco 1 September 2013; Di Giammarco 3 September 2013; [Editorial Staff] 5 September 2013; Bandettini 8 September 2013; [Editorial Staff] 8 September 2013; Petroni 9 September 2013; [Editorial Staff] 13 September 2013; Cordelli 17 September 2013; De Sanctis 17 September 2013.

[42] See [Editorial Staff] 6 September 2013.

[43] See Porcheddu 14 March 2013. On the activities of the group see http://lenzrifrazioni.it/?lang=it (last access 14 August 2015).

story that becomes delirium, obsession, the self-dialogue of those who desperately seek traces of life, help, consideration in the glow of the screen"].

At *La Pelanda* only a small group of people, sitting on a narrow structure of benches, was allowed in to watch Soncini's performance. Penthesilea/Soncini was alone in front of her laptop with a glass of water. She was an unarmed Queen, torturing herself by chatting online. Against a background of words, music and sounds created by Andrea Azzali_ Monophon, she produced and projected a series of images of herself one after the other in which her face and parts of her body were distorted and discomposed.[44] If in Kleist's drama the Amazon Queen is trapped by conflicting and destructive emotions, in this performance the pictures made with 'photo booth' are the arrows used in the fight between the woman's two different selves: the physical body, which the people see and hear talking behind the computer, and the virtual body, framed and deformed in the projected images.

The revisited Myth of Penthesilea – here she kills and devours her beloved and then commits suicide – was chosen by Lenz Rifrazioni also as an unusual way to investigate the never-ending conflicting relationship between flesh and words in the body of the actor:

> L'attore espone il corpo, la parola è lì dentro, rinchiusa muta e ci guarda dal corpo, dagli occhi ci spia e ci avverte che potrebbe non uscire mai. Quando e come lo decide lei. Il corpo dell'attore la contiene soltanto e dentro rimbalza, scalcia, si nasconde, gli provoca sofferenze terribili, lo mastica tutto, ora in fretta ora lenta, la lotta è iniziata e l'attore lo sa. Sa che una volta fuori scomparirà nel suo vuoto, che sarà l'unica e l'ultima, che lo abbandonerà lì, solo, involucro innocuo come un pupazzo … Quando tutto il corpo è sprofondato all'altro mondo, quello vero del teatro, allora è uscita bella e pulita, sacra e pura, sfrontata e giusta. Il corpo dell'attore ha aperto la porta, ha varcato la soglia, le ha permesso l'ingresso, si è reso trasparente per lei, le si è offerto. (LRPNT)
>
> [The actor exhibits his body. The word is inside him, locked up and silent; it looks at us from inside his body, it spies from his eyes and warns us that it might never come out. [The word itself] will decide when and how. The actor's body just contains it, and inside of him it bounces, kicks, hides itself, causes terrible sufferance, it chews him up, sometimes fast, sometimes slow. The struggle has begun, and the actor is aware of it. He knows

[44] Changing the perception of body was the topic of many other performances at *Short Theatre* (see, for instance, [Editorial Staff] 5 September 2010).

> that once the word is out, he will disappear in his own emptiness; it will be final and unique, it will abandon him, alone, a shell as harmless as a puppet … When the body has sunk in another world, the real world of theatre, the word can come out beautiful and clean, sacred and pure, shameless and right. The actor's body has opened the door, crossed the threshold, allowed it to enter, become diaphanous to it, and offered itself to it.]

Thus, thanks to the particularly intriguing use of the 'photo booth', in the staging of *Penthesilea* it is possible to detect the literalization of some of the basic ideas of *Short Theatre*: synthesis, fragmentation, and repetition. On the one hand, in each single image framed on the screen by the actress there is a small concentrated sign of the more general theme of the drama (the discomposed body, the struggle between real and virtual selves, etc.). On the other hand, the general meaning of the whole experience (flesh *vs* spirit, body *vs* word) is created during the process of obsessive projection of those images in succession.

Unlike Lenz Rifrazioni, Marta Cuscunà apparently adopted a more traditional approach to create her performance, mixing narrative theatre and puppetry, and thanks to the experiments developed by the sound designer Hubert Westkemper, on 6 September 2013 for her *pièce* she could also use the Wave Field Synthesis (WFS), an amplification system in which spectators can perceive space, depth, and volume in relation to the movement of the actors on stage and of their own position in the stalls.

La semplicità ingannata was conceived and directed by the interpreter herself. The subtitle defined it a "Satire for an actress and female puppets about the luxury of being women" (MCSN). The text was freely inspired by several critics' works – like Giovanna Paolin's *Lo spazio del silenzio* [*The Space of Silence*] – and by the writings of Arcangela Tarabotti, a seventeenth-century Venetian nun who, as many young girls at that time, entered a convent against her will because of economic reasons.[45] Being the second phase of a project on female Resistance in Italy,[46] *La semplicità ingannata* mainly tells the story of the monastery of the *Ordo Sanctae Clarae*

[45] On Marta Cuscunà and her work see http://martacuscuna.blogspot.it/ (last access 16 August 2015); Cuscunà 19 December 2012 and Paolin 1996. Arcangela Tarabotti (1604-52) is considered one of the most important women writers of her time. For further details see at least Tarabotti 2007. It is worth mentioning that on 29 October 2012 Cuscunà received the twenty-seventh Eleonora Duse prize for the best emerging Italian actress during the theatrical season 2011-12 (see Cuscunà 17 December 2012).

[46] First stage of this project was the performance *È bello vivere liberi!* [*It is beautiful to live free!*], focused on female Resistance in Italy during the Second World War and, in particular, on the biography of the partisan Ondina Pateani (see Cuscunà 23 December 2012).

nuns in Udine. In mid-sixteenth century these Poor Clares carried out a truly unique form of resistance: "they transformed their convent into a place of antiestablishment activity, freedom of thoughts, desecration of religious dogmas and male culture. They fought with a cultural fervor unconceivable for the female universe at that time" (Cuscunà 21 December 2012).

After more than a year of successful representations (the show had its debut at Bassano del Grappa, near Vicenza, on 31 August 2012), Cuscunà arrived at *Short Theatre* with a performance lasting one hour and fifteen minutes as a result of a careful construction of three smaller fragments: a prologue and two parts called *Libro I* and *Libro II* [*Book I* and *Book II*].[47] This particular structure quite clearly reveals that *La semplicità ingannata* is a blend of originally separate parts. At first, in the prologue, the actress explains in a satirical way that in the sixteenth century the problem of giving a dowry to noble daughters was solved either by marrying them to a man of minor claims, or by sending them to a convent. Afterwards, in *Libro I*, Cuscunà tells of the childhood and youth as a girl until she becomes a cloistered nun. At the end, in *Libro II*, Cuscunà relates how six nuns succeeded in putting up an organized form of rebellion in the monastery of Udine, reading books and adhering to innovative ideas.

Apart from its length, civic contents, and dramaturgical conception, I think that what makes *La semplicità ingannata* a wonderful example of 'short theatre' is the skilful ability of the interpreter, who disassembles the usual codes of narrative theatre in order to offer, sometimes with great wit and sarcasm, a gallery of accents and characters. Her acting makes use of an extraordinary stratification of theatrical genres, and also recovers the tradition of puppetry and contaminating it with the contemporary taste for visual theatre.[48] In particular, following the latest trends in puppetry,[49] in *Libro II* she manipulates six puppet-nuns and the head of a puppet-Cardinal in plain sight, creating a joyful and kaleidoscopic symphony of voices. With her natural talent she mingles puppetry and *Commedia dell'Arte* techniques with narrative and more traditional theatre. The result is a fabulous performing mixture, which offers 'in short' a shot of the most conven-

[47] See http://www.shorttheatre.org/archive/compagnie_2013/Marta_Cuscuna.html (last access 20 August 2015); and at least Santini 24 November 2012; Cova 10 September 2013. For an analytical press review of the show see MCSN.

[48] On this argument see, in particular, Norese 23 November 2012 and Santini 24 November 2012. On new trends in drama see also De Marinis 2000 and 2013.

[49] See Vilardo 4 April 2014; Canziani 2013; and Plassard 2014.

tional and traditional theatrical techniques, revivifying them from their roots.

All in all, leaving aside both the theatrical techniques there employed (word, image, video, etc.) and the contents of the single spectacles (be they political, social, literary, cultural or other), the feature that lets *Short Theatre* emerge in the Italian contemporary panorama is the fact that within different and multi-functional spaces and during a decade this festival has managed to create a structure/container/model in which the idea of brevity convincingly works as a multifariously articulated foundation and emblem of the whole event.

Abbreviations

LRPNT "Intro", in http://lenzrifrazioni.it/creazioni/archivio-creazioni/pentesilea/ (last access 14 August 2015).

MCSN http://www.semplicitaingannata.blogspot.it/ (last access 21 August 2015).

MKGT http://www.mkonline.it/Grand_Tour_eng.html (last access 6 August 2015).

TCCMR http://www.tonycliftoncircus.com/index.php?cmd=spettacoli&show= mr (last access 6 August 2015).

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