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Short Forms

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Contents

NICOLA PASQUALICCHIO	
<i>Introduction</i>	3
JAVIER CUESTA GUADAÑO	
<i>Forms of Short Modernist-Symbolist Theatre in Spain</i>	27
DIDIER PLASSARD	
<i>Edward Gordon Craig and the “smallest drama in the world”</i>	51
ELISA MARTINI	
<i>Just Two Cues: Achille Campanile’s Upside-Down Tragedy</i>	65
LAURA PEJA	
<i>Shorter and Shorter: Samuel Beckett’s Challenge to the Theatre</i>	81
MARK TAYLOR-BATTY	
<i>Harold Pinter’s Early Revue Sketches</i>	101
CARLO VARESCHI	
“... worth using twice”?	
<i>Making a Short Story Long. Tom Stoppard’s Two Early One-Acters</i>	117
ALEXANDRE KOUTCHEVSKY	
<i>Repetition as Zoom Effect. A Mechanism of Short Writing Played at the Level of Words</i>	139
SIMONA BRUNETTI	
<i>Ten Years of Short Theatre. Rome and Its ‘Short’ Festival</i>	165

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.

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 dimensionnelle, 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 synonymy 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 nineteenth 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 choose 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 deconstruction 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, Settemelli, and Corra in 1915, required theatre to be

SINETTICO 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, Settemelli 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 *Skènè* 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 Chénétier-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 restraint 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, *dramas 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 consequentality”]. 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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