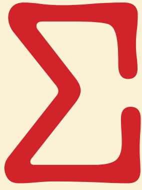

10:2 2024

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Giovanna Di Martino*

Introduction. (Mis)Remembering Greece and Rome in Early Modern Performance

The present special issue is part of a double bill on the topic of *Memory and Performance. Early Modern Festivals and Classical Reception*, of which this is the second and conclusive instalment. It engages with how performances within the context of festivals, whether a one-time courtly or noble celebration (such as a wedding) or a commemorative ceremony (such as a funeral), or part of an established festive event, preserved and transmitted collective memories. It does so by exploring the materiality, outlook and politics of the repositories of said memories around such events, i.e. the newly formed "memory texts" (*lato sensu*), to use the terms of archivistics theory (Ketelaar 2005, 45), that, whether explicitly or implicitly, reactivated, as well as elaborated upon, Graeco-Roman material through performance. If, on the one hand, such performances were themselves drawing on the "memory texts" of the Graeco-Roman repertoire, whether that be myths, whole plays, or epics, they also contributed to the creation of new "bodily texts" that were then codified into words (ibid.; Bortoletti 2008). Such repositories, in addition to documenting through memory performances that did indeed occur, became themselves *memorabilia*, i.e. containers for the forging of new memories.

In many ways, all contributions in this issue have identified translation / translating as a primary mode of '(mis)remembering' ancient material in this period and a basis for the development of new memories. Its intrinsic connections with performance in the various contexts presented in this issue, together with the relative freedom with which early modern scholars, playwrights, and creative artists dealt with the ancient source texts, call for an understanding of translation that, in addition to the interlingual and intercultural dimensions, also includes various sign systems ("intersemiotic"), including verbal to non-verbal signs and vice versa (Jakobson 1959, 127).

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In this sense, translation and memory are necessarily complementary: the former could not exist without activating memories, distant and present, while the latter could not be created without the medium of the former, i.e. without somehow being 'understood' and transposed into the signs of the codifier who is sharing it with their own (new) community.[1]

Indeed, translation is central to the first of the contributions collected in this issue by Nicola Bonazzi, who identifies the birth of Italian theatre with a form of translation. His case studies are part of a wider "*volgarizzamento* (i.e. put into the vernacular) project" (28) promoted at the Este court in Italy's Ferrara by the Duke Ercole I during his reign (1471-1505). Translating here featured as a necessary dramaturgical 'training' that eventually led to Ludovico Ariosto's famous *Cassaria* (1525). If a reworked version of Plautus' *Menaechmi* into the vernacular signalled the beginnings of Ercole I's extraordinary intuition of the importance of translation in the (re)founding of theatre; the two Plautine comedies at the heart of Bonazzi's analysis marked its very ends, performed in occasion of Alfonso D'Este and Lucrezia Borgia's wedding celebrations in 1502 (*Cassina*, Girolamo Berardi), and the carnival of 1503 (*Mustellaria*, Girolamo Berardi), when the applications and functions of translation within this particular endeavour had been amply codified and fully mastered.

The translation strategies at play in the Este court's project are recognisable in many other engagements with the Graeco-Roman material that are analysed in this issue. If *amplificatio* is the key-term that has been employed by scholars to define the adaptation techniques used in these early modern (Plautine and Terentian) plays to meet the tastes of their contemporaries; the (rather Terentian) author/character Anello Paulilli featuring in the prologue to his 1566 tragedy *Fire of Troy*, and analysed in Anne Morvan's contribution, openly situates the ancient source (*Aeneid* 2) as inextricably weaved in together with his own "caprices" and "lies" (43). Indeed, the play is as much a retelling of the ancient tale with additions and changes as a translation into Aristotelian 'rules' of playwriting (excitingly codified through the newly 'rediscovered' *Poetics* and extensively discussed in the numerous poetics treatises published at the time; see Refini 2020 and Di Martino 2023). But the tragedy is also deeply rooted in the performance practices of Naples' noble courts and their literary culture (as evidenced by the use of musical interludes rather than Choruses, monumentally spectacular sceneries, and grand costumes), and performed as episode three of a trilogy that included the *Judgment of Paris* and *Helen's Abduction*. In addition to operating on the ancient-early modern memory exchange, Paulilli also

[1] On the intersection(s) between Memory Studies and Translation Studies, see, amongst others, Brodzki 2007, Brownlie 2016, Radston and Wilson 2020, and Jünke 2021.

leaned on audience members' memories of episodes one and two, and the communal experience which must have resulted from this vision two weeks prior to the presentation of *Fire of Troy*. The performance framework within which this play was produced is clearly delineated and 'remembered' by the trilogy's printer, Giovanni Maria Scotto, in his lengthy preface.

The tension between translation and new play are at the centre of Francesco Dall'Olio's analysis of John Pickering's *Horestes*, which, as he demonstrates throughout his piece, may have been performed at the presence of Queen Elizabeth at Whitehall in 1567-68 (if we are to identify the *Revels' Accounts* mysterious "Orestes and a Tragedie of the kinge of Scottes" with his *Horestes*). Read within this context, the play subsumes immediate political affordances; indeed, it becomes a commentary on most recent events (1567), i.e. Queen Mary Stuart of Scotland's demise following her (alleged) murder of her second husband Henry Stuart Lord Darnley, supposedly with the help of her future husband James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell. It also serves as a form of diplomatic advice to the Queen (in perfect continuity with many other Tudor plays) that regal status should never suggest that personal gain can take precedence over the protection of the law. The ancient tale maps onto the modern through the Medieval versions available to Pickering at the time. If Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* provided our first version of what would become a well-known revenge plot about a queen who murders her own husband while 'in bed' with another man,[2] that story had travelled far and wide through the Middle Ages via Benoît de Sainte-Maure's twelfth-century *Roman de Troie*, Guido dalla Colonna's thirteenth-century *Historia destructionis Troiae*, and into Raoul Lefèvre's *Recueil des Histoires de Troie* (1464), whose English translation by William Caxton was the first book printed in English (1473-1474) and which, together with John Lydgate's *Troy Book* (reprinted 1555), represented Pickering's sources for his own modern tale. Translation here goes hand in hand with dramaturgy: not only did Pickering root these stories into his contemporary world, he also transposed them onto a different medium, that itself was in dialogue with and counted on the audience's memories of these multi-layered, ancient-modern stories.

Much like Paulilli's translation of the *Aeneid* episode into Aristotelian rules, Giovanna Casali speaks of another 'Aristotelian' translation, this time in an opera (*Ercole in Cielo*, 1696) by Frigimelica Roberti, the most "radical" of the reformers in the seventeenth-century restructuring of melodrama (78). If the five-act division together with the three unities (time, place and action) and the presence of a Chorus make Roberti and his *Tragedia* amongst the

[2] For more information on how Aeschylus infused significantly more agency into Clytemnestra compared to previous versions of the myth, see Raeburn and Thomas 2011, xviii.

most "orthodox" products of "Aristotelianism" in libretto-writing at the time (81), Frigimelica in no way eschews the inherently hybrid and combinative relationship with ancient sources found in all the other plays analysed so far. Casali talks about his adaptive techniques as an *ars combinatoria* whereby, while claiming complete adherence to the classical model (Sophocles' *Trachiniae*), he contaminates the story with multiple other sources (with *amplificatio*), ancient and contemporary, including Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*, as well as Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris*.

Both Christopher Jotischky and Raf Van Rooy touch upon the use of language as a form of translation: one that while openly functioning as a political move also specifically relies on audiences' memories around the stratified meanings of that language and the communities that it enables to create, select and nurture.

Jotischky's three case studies across the Ionian islands well exemplify the interplay between language, translation and audiences. A performance of an Italian translation of Aeschylus' *Persians* in Zakynthos celebrating Venetian victory against the Ottoman Empire in the battle of Lepanto (1571) is testament to the political function that language inevitably took on in this colonial context (interestingly, the only piece of evidence that this performance ever took place comes from a scholarly essay by Spyridon De Viazis in 1895, well after the collapse of Venetian rule in 1797). The linguistic hybridity of the Ionian islands is further proved by Jotischky's second and third case studies, a fragment from Kefalonia (1732) containing a vernacular translation of a Roman play, Seneca's *Troades*, and a play that contains a translation of Terence's *Hecyra*, written by Antonios Matesis in Zakynthos during the 1820s. Here again we find the usual combinative-amplificative translation strategies that have emerged in the other plays discussed in this issue: though the stories are borrowed from the Romans, Seneca's play has been 'composed anew' and translated into the rules of Cretan theatre, while Terence's play has been 'contaminated' with other source texts. In both cases, the language employed is vernacular Greek, which functions as a powerful medium for writing these stories into local theatrical repertoires.

If these last two case studies describe a shift from top to bottom, i.e. from a selective Latin-speaking audience and readership to a local vernacular one, Raf Van Rooy's contribution illustrates the opposite effort in the use of ancient Greek in Antwerp during the 1640s. This "new humanist form of Ancient Greek" (Van Rooy 2023, 4), that some scholars have recently named New Ancient Greek, served as a marker of elevated culture and capital during this period of great scholarly interest in Greek composition in the Low Countries (1550s-1650s). It is in this context that Van Rooy analyses two compositions in New Ancient Greek, probably performed for two solemn occasions, a funeral and a wedding in the Plantin-Moretus family, one of the

most important representatives of that cultural capital at the time. Indeed, they owned the *Officina Palatina*, whose printing centres in Antwerp and Leiden were at the very centre of this composition frenzy. The Greek dirge for Balthasar I's death (Platin's grandson and business owner) is paired with a Latin prose subscription, playing on the functions of each language: whereas the former is meant to remind the audience that it is a funerary service, the latter is meant to emphasise the exceptionality of the dead, who, rather than being prayed for in Latin as customary on these occasions, is prayed for in the "language of the New Testament" (123). The other poem, instead, features in a multi-lingual collection alongside other compositions and translations by learned men in and from Greek, Latin and Hebrew, as well as a variety of vernacular languages, printed under the title *Acroamata nuptialia* by the press itself, and probably recited during the three-day feast celebrating the marriage of Balthasar II (heir to the family business) with Anna Goos on 23 July 1645. In both cases, by means of its intimate, exclusive status as a language, whose codes and meanings must have highly resonated with the audiences it was inevitably selected for, New Ancient Greek is employed to mark the solemnity of the two events.

Translation and memories, old and new, are the core of the last two contributions. In many ways, these spring from the pedagogical desire to integrate research and teaching practices into a comprehensive exploration of this rich tapestry of interconnected and multilayered 'memory texts', which (originally designed for performance) require performance as one possible method of analysis. Integral to the two-stage conference on *Memory and Classical Reception in Early Modern Festivals* that this double special issue largely draws from was the inclusion of a workshop on early modern translations of Aristophanes' *Plutus*, led by Marco Martinelli, and including school and university students from London and Parma, with which the last two contributions collected here are in dialogue. If Bortoletti and Refini (133-65) illustrate early modern performance pedagogies and how they call for a contemporary practice-based approach such as that developed by Martinelli over decades of experience working with young adults (his 'non-school' methodology); Di Martino presents findings from her dramaturgical research of the translations used for the workshop, as well as how the translators' contexts, linguistic choices and political choices operated in the creation of the final script presented in a demonstration-performance at the end of this work (167-213).

More specifically, Bortoletti and Refini explore the interconnection between early modern learning and educational hubs and the theatre, where the need for a dramaturgical rewriting of the source texts to suit contemporary audiences well combined with a pedagogical imperative to understand as well as extract 'skills' from these texts. Indeed, education sat at the heart of

the dialogue surrounding early modern performance, with scholars like the Venetian Tito Livio Frulovisi championing theatrical practices as essential tools for moral and civic training. As illustrated in discussions of Frulovisi's school dramas, theatre was intertwined with rhetorical education, providing students with the skills necessary to engage meaningfully in public life. The incorporation of comedic and dramatic elements in educational settings served to enrich students' oratory skills while fostering a sense of community among participants. Lastly, Bortoletti and Refini provide a brief overview of Martinelli's own combination of pedagogy and theatre practice, stressing the importance of feeding off one another to ensure that both are alive.

Following on from Bortoletti and Refini, Di Martino digs deeper into the means and methods of the workshop with Martinelli. After providing an overview of early modern translations and performances of *Plutus*, Di Martino analyses the 'memory texts' that were reactivated in the context of the workshop: Eufrosino Bonini's *Comedia di Iustitia* (1513), Thomas Randolph's *Πλουτοφθαλμία Πλουτογαμία. A Pleasant Comedy Entituled Hey for Honesty, Down with Knavery* (1651); and H.H.B's *The World's Idol, Plutus a Comedy* (1659). Also included in the article is an appendix which offers Marco Martinelli's perspective on the workshop: how he envisioned the scenes and constructed the Chorus, as well as an appendix containing the final script.

Indeed, all of the 'memory texts' discussed in this issue have as their basis the interplay between translation and performance. These emerge as not merely a stage for new dramatisation, but as a significant site for the ongoing negotiation of cultural heritage and identity, inscribed within, while also heavily relying on, contemporary audiences' memories, of both the past and the present.

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Nicola Bonazzi*

Adding and Subtracting: Plautine *Volgarizzamenti* at the Este Court and the Case of Girolamo Berardo

Abstract

Beginning with an overview of the intense translation activity of Plautine texts at the court of Ercole d'Este and the famous lettera from Battista Guarino to Ercole himself conveying advice for a good vernacular translation: "adiungere et minuire et ridurre in forma de lo usitato parlare quelle antiche cose" ("Adding and subtracting and reducing those ancient words to the language in current use today"), this intervention will attempt to exemplify such a practice through the two translations (*Mustellaria* and *Cassina*) attributed by sixteenth-century printings to the obscure Girolamo Berardo from Ferrara, connecting them to the then declining period of the great theatrical festivals in Ferrara.

Keywords: Ferrara; Plautus; *volgarizzamenti*; Girolamo Berardo

The events related to the investigation and historicisation of a crucial period for the birth of Italian theatre, which unfolded under the aegis of the House of Este in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, have experienced a peculiar fate. Misunderstood or poorly understood for over half a century after the study by Alessandro D'Ancona in the late nineteenth century (1891) due to the scarcity of texts and the precariousness of documentary sources, these events were later explored with inexhaustible generosity, mainly in the last two decades of the past century, by theatre historians. They framed the contemporary descriptions of festive and scenographic apparatuses within broad historical perspectives that are useful for redefining the evolutionary path of theatrical spaces (the study by Cruciani-Falletti-Ruffini in 1994 was fundamental in this regard). A similar process, albeit performed less extensively, has been attempted, naturally in the scope of their own discipline, by historians of literature, who have placed texts and literary events within the vast archipelago of the courts in the Po valley region – we are referring in particular to the significant work of Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti (1983 and 2006), reintroduced in very recent years by Matteo Bosisio (2019). Nor should the endeavours of some excellent

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Latinists – Ferruccio Bertini first (1997) and later Giovanni Guastella (2013 and 2018) – be forgotten as they worked to verify the vitality of Plautine theatre during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

After so many precise and well-articulated analyses, it might seem that little space remains for further verifications or panoramic descriptions. And yet, in the scholarship of the period there still thrives a narrative that somewhat schematically dates the beginning of Italian Renaissance theatre from the first performance of Ludovico Ariosto's *Cassaria,* as if it were the product of a random and miraculous birth instead of the fruit of an author who made use, using his well-known ability, of the great explosion of interest in and writing, translating, and staging theatrical texts that preceded him, a movement of which he himself was certainly a part. The persistence of this narrative perhaps warrants a reconsideration of the extraordinary theatrical vitality of the Este court, even if only by trying to reconfigure backgrounds and close-ups according to the needs of a necessarily abbreviated discourse, yet one that is capable, where possible, of detecting its main features with renewed energy.

To return to the origins of theatre at the Ferrarese court, or more generally to the origins of Italian comedy, essentially means revisiting the history of Plautine *volgarizzamenti* (i.e., "translations into the Italian vernacular")[1] at that court; this history was forced to face the very severe judgment of Ireneo Sanesi at the beginning of the last century, who disapproved of the length of the texts and their lack of comedic vigour, caused by the transposition of dialogues from the original Latin of trochaic septenaries or iambic senarii into the incongruous measure of the vernacular tercet, which always exceeded the speed of Plautus' lines.

This, coupled with the anonymity of most of the translations, has discouraged scholarly interest in the texts. While it is difficult (although exceptions must be made) not to agree with Sanesi's judgment, we must refer to these texts and their contemporary reception in an attempt to understand how they formed the foundation of a newly, and fully secular, comic theatre emancipated from moralistic restrictions, that is to say the implementation, in the theatrical domain, of the most genuine humanistic program. The grand festive episode of the wedding of Alfonso d'Este and Lucrezia Borgia is the culmination of this program, the most visible moment of a lively commitment to theatre and its use as a tool of political and social promotion, which was animated by a continuous dialogue between members of the Este family and the surrounding intellectual environment, of which the epistolary exchanges among the members of the Este family

[1] On the meanings and applications of the term for Italian Renaissance theatre, see Di Martino 2023, 151-8.

members and between them and the intellectuals working on the pieces is privileged evidence.

This wedding was a culminating, nearly conclusive, moment if, following the proposal of Clelia Falletti (1994, 144), we agree that this great surge of innovation lasted just over two decades, from the end of the 1470s until around 1503, thus spanning almost completely the years of Ercole I's reign (he was Duke from 1471 until his death in 1505). After this period, so to speak, the die was cast, and Ferrarese (even more, Po-region) drama was able to walk on its own two legs with complete autonomy, reaching new levels of comic and structural excellence with Ariosto's production.

Falletti identifies the inaugural event of this fervent period with the performance of the *volgarizzamento* of *Menaechmi*, which took place in January 1486 in the courtyard of the ducal palace, whereas the concluding moment would be the four Plautine and Terentian performances during the carnival of 1503 (*Aulularia*, *Mostellaria*, *Eunuch*, and again *Menaechmi*: on the chronology, Coppo 1968). Thereafter, the history of Este comedy would be characterised less by the use of translations and more by original texts; over time, *volgarizzamento* would be perceived as something obsolete, rudimentary examples of a cumbersome and convoluted dramaturgy.

Some letters from Bernardino Prosperi to Isabella d'Este provide insight into how much the theatrical landscape in Ferrara had changed in just a few years. These letters, quite well-known, include one from March 8, 1508, in which Prosperi reports on a series of performances for that year's carnival. The plays were all original works, including one by Antonio dal Organo, one by Tebaldeo, one by an unspecified "Grecho" ("Greek") and, most notably, Ariosto's *Cassaria.* Prosperi describes the *Cassaria* as having "tanta elegantia e . . . tanto piacere quanto alcun'altra che mai ne vedesse fare, e da ogni canto fu multo commendata" ("such elegance and. . . allure as any that I have seen put on, and from every side it was highly praised"; qtd in Davico Bonino 1977, 414-15). The positive judgment on Ariosto's 'modern' productions was repeated during the first performance of *Suppositi* on February 8, 1509; Prosperi praises it as a "comedia in vero per moderna tuta deletevole e piena de moralità e parole e gesti de renderne assai cum triplice falacie o sia sottopositione" ("a comedy truly all delightfully modern and full of morality, words, and gestures, rendering it very enjoyable with three levels of deceit, or rather subterfuge"; ibid.).

However, the most interesting testimony concerning how, as the century progressed, new texts had supplanted classical ones in the audience's taste comes from a letter by Giovanni Manetti to Niccolò Machiavelli. Manetti reports on a Venetian performance of *Mandragola*, noting that, despite the presence of the renowned comedian Cherea, the *Menaechmi* was considered "something dead" as compared to Machiavelli's work:

> un'altra compagnia di gentilhomeni che ad concorrentia della vostra in quella sera medesima etiam con spesa grande ferno recitar li *Menecmi* di Plauto vulgari, la qual per comedia antica è bella e fu recitata da asai boni recitanti, niente di meno fu tenuta una cosa morta rispetto alla vostra.
>
> [another company of gentlemen, in competition with yours on the same evening and at great expense, had the *Menaechmi* by Plautus performed in the vernacular, which, as an ancient comedy, is beautiful and was acted by good actors, yet it was considered a dead matter compared to yours. (Machiavelli 1961, 452)]

However, being unable, because of its singularity, to avoid recalling a notable letter from a humanist author Battista Guarino to Ercole d'Este in February 1479, we can perhaps rearrange the chronology by taking that date as the starting point for a sometimes tumultuous struggle over ancient texts, which was aimed at converting them into contemporary language. This effort was carried out according to the needs of the Este family that evidently relied on those *volgarizzamenti* to produce self-promoting theatrical events that were suitable for the times, and to simultaneously ensure that its members would experience the pleasure of performances that were both lively and yet scrupulously faithful to the original. We are not dealing with a lord who is content to display an apparatus of spectacle on the occasion of important events, but with a personality who consciously intervenes in the translational operation in order to recover, for the sake of the community, texts that possess the authority typical of the classics; as mentioned, a fully humanistic operation.

In the letter (qtd in Davico Bonino 1977, 405-6), Guarino responds to Ercole, who presumably accused him of deviating "da la sententia di Plauto" ("from the word of Plautus") by inserting "molte cose che non erano in Plauto" ("many things that were not in Plautus"). But Guarino replies, "non credo essere per niente lontanato dal sentimento di Plauto né anchora da li vocabuli" ("I do not believe that I am at all far from Plautus's sentiment nor even from his words"), an expression whose relevance, focused on the sentiment of the original, contributes to forming a sort of phenomenology of translation that is still valid today. Guarino continues: "se ho posto moschio et zibetti, el gli è però in lo testo venditori de odori da ongerse per sapere da buon" ("if I have referred to musk and civet, it is because the text mentions sellers of scents to be applied so that we can smell good"); the goal is not to betray the original text but to try to render it in more accessible words that are immediately locatable in the horizon of present-day meanings: "parvemi molto melgiore translatione nominare li diti odori et ridure la cosa ad la moderna, che volendo esprimere de parolla in parolla fare una translatione obscura et puocho saporita" ("It seemed a much better translation to me to name the mentioned scents and transform the thing in a modern manner,

rather than, by expressing the text word for word, creating an obscure and less flavourful translation").

This matter is not merely technical; rather, it involves the relationship between the Renaissance scholar and the ancient one. The discussion between the courtly scholar and his lord involves an extremely important *tête-à-tête* that in some way determines the immediate future of Italian theatre. It results from the exceptional tension between an almost philological desire, on the one hand, not to deviate from the letter of the original, and the necessity, on the other, of making that letter alive and present, especially within the comedic code, which must rely on the immediacy of the theatrical dialogue.

The conclusion of Guarino's letter, in which he states his pledge of obedience, seems to anticipate the victory of the imperative to strict fidelity demanded by Ercole: "tuttavia non mi partirò dal dire di Plauto siccome anche per lo passato credo haver fatto et cossì trovarà la V. Ex. Se farà expojnere li vucabuli da chi intende" ("nevertheless, I will not depart from Plautus's words as I believe I have done in the past, and so Your Excellency will have the words explained by someone who understands").

In a slightly later letter accompanying the translation of *Curculio*, Guarino reiterated his effort to "andare dietro ad le parole dil testo" ("follow the words of the text"), well aware that this risked compromising the enjoyability of a possible theatrical performance, to the point of feeling the need to attribute the responsibility for this reduced enjoyability to Plautus: "se ad la V.Ex. parerà che la non sia così piacevole come lei desiderarebbe, sarà da imputare ad lo auctore e non ad mi" ("if Your Excellency finds that it is not as pleasant as you would like, it will have to be attributed to the author and not to me"; Luzio-Renier, 1888, 178). And again, further down in the letter, Guarino reiterates the difficulty in sticking strictly to the text: "Io mi forcio andare dietro ad le parolle dil testo, benché in certi luogi mi pare melgio pilgiare lo tenore ed formargli un buono soprano" ("I force myself to follow the words of the text, although in certain places, it seems better to me to keep the tenore and give it a good soprano"). It has been argued that this peculiar expression may be suggestive of the fact that Renaissance acting shared some characteristics with singing, implying that Guarino's phrase goes beyond metaphor and is effectively an expressive description (Guastella 2013, 41).

The "de parolla in parolla" ("word for word") option (to use Guarino's term) was, however, disregarded in the practical work of the scriptorium: Guarino's vernacular version of *Aulularia* has not reached us, but all of the Plautine versions that appear to come from the Ferrarese environment (if one wants to remain cautious about the provenience, we can speak of "early" Plautine versions: Guastella 2018, 37-8) follow the mode of intervention proposed by Guarino in the letters to Ercole, as highlighted by Guastella:

"bisogna alcune fiate adiungere et minuire et ridure in forma de lo usitato parlare quelle cose antiche" ("sometimes it is necessary to add, subtract, and adapt those ancient things to the usual way of speaking"). In modern terms (to be thoroughly Guarinian): to add, subtract, and transpose into the commonly used language. This is indeed what we see happening in the translations from those years, whether handwritten or printed, that have been passed on to us.

All *volgarizzamenti* present acts of mediation that attempt to cut what is deemed unnecessary (scenes, fragments of scenes, or even characters within a scene) and to replace with entirely new parts what appears obscure or excessively summarised in the original; and even more, to use, as Guarino himself claims to do, modern terms for Latin words lacking a vernacular equivalent – all in an attempt to convey a broader understanding to the modern spectator.

However, the meter that had meanwhile been imposed for theatrical *volgarizzamenti*, and for original works as well, was the tercet, which contradicts Guarino's claimed need for congeniality because the structure of the tercet forces the original dialogue into improper measures. This often results in rapid exchanges of lines, crafted with extreme economy of words from the original and diluted into an excessive number of lines within the typical rhythm of chained rhyme. Only the translation of *Penolo* is in prose, while that of *Stico* has an unprecedented and almost unique metrical structure (following the pattern of the frottola, with stanzas of six lines). Moreover, *Stico* testifies, according to its modern editor, to "the attempt to free itself from a strict dependence on the Latin model, placing itself now halfway towards innovation" since "the few scenes that are properly translated are shifted and rearranged with extreme ease" (Rosetto 1996, 56).

Not surprisingly, Isabella d'Este, who in her correspondence reveals herself to be a well-informed reader and theatregoer, when writing in 1498 to Francesco Castello (an official of the Este court) asking to receive scripts for reading, she explicitly states that she prefers prose *volgarizzamenti* because, although Plautus" comedies "sono rapresentate e stampite in rima . . . a noi più delecta la prosa da legere" ("are performed and printed in rhyme . . . we find prose more delightful to read"; Falletti 1994, 134).

Isabella makes a clear mention of the activity of reading. However, the fact that texts were mainly used for theatrical practice, which at the time was already well-established in the Este capital thanks to the Duke's efforts (after all, Isabella herself alludes to the practice of performance), is attested to by a letter from Ercole to Francesco Gonzaga in which the Duke apologises to his counterpart from Mantova for having to send him prose translations, rather than the verse, of some requested comedies because these had been lost after being performed (D'Ancona 1891, 2.368-9; Stefani 1979, 71):

> Quando Nui facessimo recitare dicte Comedie, il fu dato la parte sua a cadauno di quelli, che li avevano a intervenire, acciocch"imparassero li versi a mente, et depoi che furono recitate, Nui non avessimo cura di farle ridurre altramente insieme, né tenerne copia alcuna, et il volergele ridurre al presente serìa quasi impossibile per ritrovarsi di quelle persone, ch'intervennero in dicte Comedie, in Franza, parte a Napoli et alcuni a Modena et a Reggio, che sono uno Zaccagnino et m. Scarlattino.
>
> [When we had said Comedies performed, each person who was to participate was given his part so that he could learn the verses by heart, and after they were performed, we did not take care to have them put together in any other way, nor keep any copy of them. Wanting to have them redone now would be almost impossible to accomplish due to the difficulty of finding those people who participated in those Comedies; some are in France, some in Naples, and some in Modena and Reggio, including one Zaccagnino and Mr Scarlattino.]

The use of "Nui" ("we") tells us about the lofty will guiding from the top down an entire ecosystem of texts and performances, which were ultimately a crucial node in the history of theatre, not only in Italy. The explanation of the loss of these texts reveals a fully modern system of understanding theatrical practice: these texts are actual scripts, ephemeral material that only exists for the purpose of enabling the performance, and committed to memory by the actors, each entrusted with his own part, and then dispersed as the actors themselves disperse.

And so we have this emphasis, within the vast panorama of contemporary letters and documents attesting to the flourishing theatrical culture at the Este court, not only on dramaturgy but also and especially on the technical and scenographic aspects of the various productions, precisely because the text is performance.

The diaries and chronicles of Ferrarese officials delve into descriptions of the stage space and sets (that of the *Menaechmi* is well known, featuring a life-size section of a ship on stage: Falletti 1994, 35; Guastella 2013, 36; Uberti 1995, 44-5). Ugo Caleffini, Niccolò Cagnolo and Bernardino Zambotti go into detail about the interludes between the acts of various performances, which must have had an enormous visual impact. Courtiers who served as privileged intermediaries between the Este court and Isabella d'Este, such as Giovanni Pencaro, and later, Bernardino Prosperi, also describe these aspects in their letters to the marchesa. In one letter, Pencaro laments the loss of previous missives that contained very detailed descriptions of performances, particularly one dedicated to *Asinaria* (Luzio and Renier 1988, 180): "Di questa lettera più che dell"altre mi duole che persa sia, perché io la scripsi dopo le sei hore di nocte cum grandissimo somno d"ochij" ("I regret the loss of this letter more than the others because I wrote it six hours after sunset,

when my eyes were very tired"). This clearly indicates that Isabella was eager to know the details of the performances and that her correspondents tried to provide reports that were as detailed as possible (hence the need to write them down promptly).

From all of these descriptions, we learn that performances lasted approximately four hours, that they took place in the evening or in the afternoon after lunch, and that the audience was quite numerous; according to a letter from Isabella d'Este to her husband Francesco Gonzaga on 29 January 1502, the grandstand that would accommodate the audience at the Ducal Palace during the Plautine performances for the marriage of her brother Alfonso to Lucrezia, could hold up to 5,000 people (qtd in Davico Bonino 1977, 412).

The audience's participation is not just (or rather, not simply) a gathering of spectators to view a theatrical performance but is an act of participation in a foundational moment of city life, in which the community comes together; in celebrating the ruling dynasty, it celebrates itself through a social ritual directed from above but not for this reason any less cohesive and unifying.

Hence, it is evident that the marriage of Alfonso and Lucrezia represents the pinnacle of this theatricalised sociality. Less expected is the fact that, just over a year later, comedies are again being performed at the Ducal Palace for another festive event (the carnival of 1503), which, however, marks the end of that extraordinary period of Plautine translations and performances carried out under the auspices of Ercole; in short, both the apotheosis and the conclusion occurred within little more than twelve months. Curiously, this period concludes with the text that had inaugurated it, namely *Menaechmi*.

Perhaps it is not coincidental that the official Zambotti does not dwell too much on the performances (or at least not as extensively as he had for other similar festive events). However, apart from the essential vivacity of the report, it is interesting to note a difference in its content as compared to, for example, the theatrical reports of almost twenty years earlier, when Ercole had recently come to power and initiated a rich season of works derived from Plautus. Apart from a quick judgment on *Menaechmi*, the only comedy mentioned by name, Zambotti focuses not so much on the content of the texts or their success, but rather on the arrangement of the hall and the apparatus accompanying the performances.

On 19 February, a Sunday (presumably during the carnival season), a comedy was performed in the Great Hall of the Ducal Palace in the presence of Ercole and "Lucrecia Borgia soa nora" ("Lucrezia Borgia, his daughter-in-law"). Behind them, Zambotti notes, was a grandstand with multiple tiers set up where "zintildone e matrone belissime" ("gentlewomen and most beautiful matrons") as well as "zintilhomini e cittadini" ("gentlemen and citizens") sat. The stage, set up on the opposite side, represents a city

with painted and wooden houses, that the actors could enter and from which they could emerge. The comedy is interspersed with "canti e melodie e moresche" ("songs, melodies, and Moorish dances"). On 21 February, a Tuesday, another comedy is performed in the Great Hall "con grandissimi piaceri e jochi" ("with greatest pleasure and games"); it is likely that these generic "jochi" ("games") refer, because of the attention given them by Zambotti, more to the festive quality of the interludes than to the lexical equivocations capable of eliciting laughter, as Ariosto will mention in the prologue to the *Cassaria*. Then, on 23 February, another comedy is presented "con intromissione sempre a li acti de diverse feste e moresche e canti e soni" ("with an intermission including various festivities, Moorish dances and songs and sounds"). Finally, on Monday 27, "una comedia de due gemelli" ("a comedy of two twins") is performed, naturally the *Menaechmi*, the only one, as mentioned earlier, for which Zambotti provides the title; in this case, the chronicler goes so far as to say that it was "molto bella e piacevole" ("very beautiful and pleasant"), noting the presence of "moresche e cantari" ("Moorish dances and songs") as well (1937, 346).

It is noteworthy that on 25 January 1486 (eighteen years earlier), Zambotti provided a much more detailed account of the so-called foundational performance of the Ferrarese Plautine tradition: once again, coincidentally, *Menaechmi*, which both opens and closes that extraordinary season, with a judgment from the chronicler that was overall similar, since in the report from 1486 the comedy was also described as "beletissima e piacevole" ("most beautiful and pleasant"; 171).

On that occasion, the performance took place outdoors, in the courtyard of the Ducal Palace, just like eighteen years later, with scenes made of wood representing the city of the action, and a grandstand hosting the audience – Zambotti mentions, though the number appears excessively high, about "dexemila" ("ten thousand") people. However, the chronicle, before enthusiastically recounting the display of fireworks that followed the performance, takes the time to provide details about the plot and the characters of the comedy, giving attention to the text's content, and not just the festive spectacle, which we will not find in the 1503 chronicle (172):

> . . . dove vene [i.e.: nella scena di legno] dui de una similitudine vestiti, ma uno ne vene in una galea con vela de longinque parte, e dispotono asay qual de loro hera il vero Menechino, intervenendoge il marito e molgie, balie, meretrice e schiave con molte deceptione.
>
> [. . . where two similarly dressed individuals come onto the stage, but one of them arrives in a galley with a sail from a distant part, and they debate much which of them was the true Menaechinus, with the husband and wife intervening, nurses, a courtesan, and slaves with many deceptions.]

Skipping over other chronicles reporting various festive events of that distant year – including the enthusiastic Caleffini: "Il duca de Ferrara in questo tempo se ne andava in mascara ogno zorno per Ferrara et davasi piacere" ("The Duke of Ferrara during this time used to walk masked around Ferrara every day and enjoyed himself"; Coppo 1968, 44) – a diachronic reading of Zambotti's account of such similar events cannot fail to recognise a much more concise approach to describing the theatrical events of 1503 as compared to those of 1486, together with a sort of disinterest in the titles and contents of the comedies. In other words, even if we do not want to claim that theatre had become a common feature of city life, it certainly no longer evoked the interest it did in its early days, an interest which is, for the chronicler, focused only on interludes and spectacular apparatus, not on the texts.

On the other hand, Isabella d'Este, who, as mentioned, was the most discerning of Ferrarese spectators and the most enthusiastic advocate of the practice of theatrical *volgarizzamento*, had already expressed some disappointment with the Plautine performances taking place during the marriage of Alfonso and Lucrezia Borgia, surely the most significant festive event of Ercole's duchy, which occurred just a year earlier, amid "sbadacchi" ("glares") and "querelle" ("quarrels") from the audience and other less flattering responses (D'Ancona 1891, 2.385).

It was palpable that new needs were emerging as Ercole's death became imminent in 1505; in 1508, three years later, Ariosto's *Cassaria* achieved great success, marking a foundational moment for modern theatre. Although festive and theatrical performances continued under Alfonso, the focus shifted away from Plautus in favour of original works, primarily pastoral and mythological in nature (Falletti 1994, 179), until eventually, as an epitaph of the Latin author's fortune, Giovanni Manetti wrote the letter referred to above and addressed Niccolò Machiavelli's friend.

This represents a sensibility that is refining and moving towards livelier outcomes or, in other words, less essentially frozen in literary postures, forgetting the necessary dynamism of the stage. How that sensitivity begins to resonate with those of us who in our laziness are annoyed by those ancient translations into tercets, can well be seen by opening the *Cassina* and *Mustellaria*, translated by "Girolamo Berardi (or Berardo) Ferrarese" (the printed tradition reports two possible textual variants of the name). This experiment can show points of interest in relation to everything said so far: the performances of the two comedies are situated in the golden age of Plautine theatre at the Ferrara court and in a phase when the debate over the quality of texts was no longer so vibrant (*Cassina* was performed in 1502 and *Mustellaria* in 1503, so during the last two major festive moments of Ercole's duchy); they are among the very few *volgarizzamenti* of which

we have the name of the translator-renovator; and lastly, despite their late origin, they offer some valuable insight into the practice of "addition" and "diminution" characteristic of Ferrarese restructuring: it is a practice that we can see at work in these two texts by the same translator (a significant aspect in a landscape of almost completely anonymous texts available).

The figure of Girolamo Berardo remains rather obscure as very little information and very few documents can be attributed to him. Therefore, the concise profile dedicated to him by Giancarlo Mazzacurati in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (1966) can still prove useful, although there is no mention of a letter, cited by D'Ancona, that was sent by Berardo to Duke Ercole in 1503 about the primacy of sacred representations in Ferrara as compared to those in Florence (D'Ancona 1891, 1.301; Bonazzi 2019, 227). It is mentioned that Berardi sends Ercole a volume of sacred Florentine plays "non perché quella impari da' Fiorentini de ordinare et fare Representatione, ma più presto a ciò che Quella veda quanta differentia è da le cose di V.S. a le loro, li quali tra le cose devote mischiano buffonarie, come in quelle vederà Vostra Excellentia" ("not so that he may learn from the Florentines how to arrange and perform plays, but rather so that Your Excellency can see how different their things are from yours, as they mix buffooneries among devout matters, as Your Excellency will see in them"). Gianmaria Mazzucchelli (1760, 914) and Apostolo Zeno (1753, 402n2) also mention Berardo. According to Luigina Stefani (1979, 74n16), it is "more reliable that Berardo's translations should be placed in the same years when the translation activity by Guarino, Cosmico, and Collenuccio in Ferrara, and by Ceresara and students of the Studio in Mantua, took place extensively and systematically, at the turn of the century, commissioned by Ercole and not by Alfonso, who succeeded his father in 1505".

Berardo signs the letter as prior of Nonantola; it is impossible to know if this Berardo is the same as the translator of the two Plautine comedies, even if the idiosyncrasy of the mixture of "buffonarie" ("buffooneries") and "cose devote" ("devout things") would lean towards excluding the possibility (the two Plautine translations, especially *Cassina*, abound with obscene *doubles entendres*). However, without worrying too much about an unprovable fact, it is advisable to accept the common authorship of the two translations of Plautus, as presented by Zoppino, the Venetian printer by whom they were published in 1530 (their late publication is likely due to the unclear state of conservation of manuscripts, scripts serving the performances and various actors).

Between the two *volgarizzamenti*, that of *Cassina* appears to be deserving of more attention because of the very free way in which the original is handled and its extensive use of *amplificatio*, which greatly expands the perimeter of the action and dialogue among characters, even allowing the

introduction of two characters only mentioned in the original: the young Theuthuirimco and Cassina herself.

A quick synopsis of Plautus's comedy may serve as a summary orientation for the argument here advanced: Lysidamus is infatuated with the slave Casina and, so that he can have her, he intends to give her in marriage to his steward Olympio; this plan however has not taken into account the equally energetic designs of his wife Cleustrata, who instead aspires to marry Casina to the household servant Chalinus so that her adolescent son Euthynicus (the Theuthuirimco of Berardo's version) can enjoy her. From here, quarrels and misunderstandings will arise until the inevitable happy ending. Plautus's dramaturgical cleverness lies in focusing the action on the two couples in dispute, Lysidamus-Olympio and Cleustrata-Chalinus, without the intervention of the young son or even Casina, who are frequently mentioned but never present on stage, which contributes to truly making Casina the protagonist.

Beyond the introduction of two new, important interlocutors, to which we will return, the massive use of *amplificatio* by Berardo can already be noticed in the initial part of his translation, which adds several new scenes to the original with the evident intent of giving greater depth and prominence, in terms of comic rilvalry, to the conflict between the two elderly spouses (Stalino and Cleostrata in Berardo's version). Thus, we have a first scene in which Stalino declares to the steward Olimpione (the Olympio of the original) his intention of giving him Cassina, to which Olimpione responds with lascivious enthusiasm; a second scene in which Stalino reveals the same plan to his wife, receiving in return a refusal motivated by the identical and opposite intention of giving Cassina to the servant Calino so that their son can enjoy her (with Olimpione as an interested spectator in the juicy dialogue); this is followed by a scene between Stalino and his son, in which the father dissuades him from carrying out his intentions towards Cassina. Only at this point does the translation overlap with the original, with a dialogue between Olimpione and Calino, in which each is engaged in claiming the slave for himself.

This overlap actually occupies a few scenes, as Berardo's version then takes off in other directions, subsequently reconnecting with the hypotext and so on, in a sort of "accordion" operation that would be difficult and also somewhat sterile to analyse. Berardo's coarse grain of comedy in the added parts, generally playing on male desires, is noteworthy (1530, C3*r*):

Stalino Io te scio dir che essa è di gran beltade
E non credo che passi quindeci anni
Et è vergine, et è tutta bontade
Olimpione Essa è dunque da alzarli adesso i panni . . .

[Stalino I hear you say that she is of great beauty / And I do not believe she is over fifteen years old / And she is a virgin, and she is all goodness / Olimpione Then it is time to raise her skirts now . . .]

On lexical *doubles entendres* of a clearly obscene nature:

Stalino Ecco che in lei non hai l'animo messo
Indarno, che io farò che tu l'havrai
E quel che brami te sarà concesso.
Ma così come sempre tu me dai
Il primo fico, persica o mellone
Che nasca, e il primo d"ogni frutto ch'hai,
così anchora mi par che sia ragione
che pria che metti in Cassina la mano
lasci gustar a me il primo boccone.
Olimpione Non sciai l'ufficio tu de l'hortolano
Che è di piantare? A me tocca il piantare
La fava, e a te poi tocca il primo grano.
(C3*r*-*v*)

[Stalino Here you have not wasted your desire on her / In vain, for I will make sure you have her / And what you desire will be granted. / But just as you always give me / The first fig, peach, or melon / That grows, and the first of every fruit you have, / so it also seems to me that it is reasonable / that before you lay your hand on Cassina, / let me taste the first bite. // Olimpione Don't you know the gardener's job / which is to plant? It's my job to plant the bean, and then it's your job to harvest the first grain.]

In short, the "minuire" ("diminishing") that Guarino spoke of in his famous letter to Ercole does not seem to be among the preferred options for Berardo of Ferrara. Furthermore, even when he tries to translate "de parolla in parolla" ("word for word", to quote Guarino again), the structure of the tercet does not allow for short turns of dialogue, since the nature of the stanza only allows closure on the third verse. Thus, very fast exchanges of conversation expand until they dilute the comic substance of the dialogue (Bonazzi 2019, 226).

This somewhat serious and didactic approach to performance exhibited by the author of the *volgarizzamento* of *Cassina* certainly clashed with the too-rapid conclusion of the original text, in which the resolution of the plot is delegated to a final line of the lead, where the noble origin of the slave is declared, and, therefore, the possibility that she can directly marry the young Euthynicus.

In Berardo's version, all of this emerges in dialogue, with the intervention of Cassina herself, who, lamenting by herself, declares herself ready to accept the decision of the mistress to give her in marriage to the house servant. But

from her recollection of her obscure origins comes the discovery that she is the daughter of the neighbouring couple Mirrina and Alcesino, which leads to her subsequent happy marriage to Theuthuirimco.

Beyond Berardo's translation style, it is perhaps possible to hypothesise, with the presence of the two young characters (ultimately happy lovers) as interlocutors, that the occasion for which the translation was intended, i.e., the wedding between Alfonso and Lucrezia, played a role in it. Or even better: the occasion may lead us to think that the Zoppino edition we can access today is precisely the one performed in 1502. The important ceremony at the Este court may have consciously spurred Berardo to introduce the two young figures (Cassina and Theuthuirimco and their wedding party), to the point of making it plausible for the spectators to associate in their minds the royal spouses with the two characters on stage, as could be confirmed by the characters' lines near the end of the play:

> Theuthuirimco Cassina adunque per la man io piglio
> Come mia moglie e rendo gratia a Dio
> Che te ha tratta de affanno e de periglio.
> Cassina Madre mia cara, andiam dal padre mio.
> Vien messere, vien madonna, andiamo tutti
> Che vedo che dal ciel son amata io.
> (C54*v*)

> [Theuthuirimco So I take Cassina by the hand / As my wife, and I thank God / That he has rescued you from anguish and danger. // Cassina My dear mother, let us go to my father. / Come sir, come madam, let us all go / For I see that I am loved by heaven.]

This can be confirmed by a comparison with another text attributed by the sixteenth-century editor to Berardo, namely *Mustellaria* (also printed by Zoppino in 1530 as part of an evidently planned project of recovery of humanistic theatre; Zoppino published several theatrical *volgarizzamenti* in that year). Here, despite the story involving the usual conflict between the generation of fathers and that of sons, with the young Philolache engaged in redeeming the courtesan Philocomasia (in the original, Philolaches and Philematium, respectively), made possible by money left to him by his father Teropide (Theopropides, in the original), the romantic plot does not reach its conclusion on stage. It remains, as in Plautus, confined to the background, while what prevails in the conclusion is the forgiveness granted by the old man to his son, his servant Tranione, and his friend Callidamante (Tranio and Callidamantes, in the original), his fellow reveller.

The treatment of the original appears in this second case to be more rigorous as compared to *Cassina*, with a small but nonnegligible novelty:

the two characters of the servants Sphaerio and Pinacium are eliminated. Sphaerio has the sole task (fulfilled by means of a single line) of informing Tranio of the arrival of old Theopropides; Pinacium, instead, is Phaniscus' interlocutor (Phaniscus is the other servant of Callidamates) in a dialogue about the master"s alcoholic excesses.

For the first, the scene is deleted, while for the second the function of Pinacium is taken on by Phaniscus (Damnisco in the vernacular). In short, if *Cassina* is entirely developed, perhaps for reasons external to the text, by using the practice of "adiungere" ("adding"), here instead, although to a lesser extent, that of "minuire" ("diminishing") prevails.

In both cases, the translator demonstrates a certain knowing awareness of the needs of the stage, given that these two texts can be attributed to the same authorial hand: that of the almost otherwise unknown Girolamo Berardo. This is a crucial point that naturally poses several questions. Martina Mazzoleni, for instance, has demonstrated that Zoppino's edition of *Mustellaria* incorporates printing variants that can be dated to sometime after 1503; this may suggest that Zoppino's printing is an update of the manuscript used for the 1503 performance (Mazzoleni 2016, 236). At the same time, the request for printing privileges submitted to the Venetian Senate by the actor Cherea in 1508 with respect to a few comedies, including *Mostellaria* and *Casina* (the privilege was never used: D'Ancona 1891, 2.111; Guastella 2018, 40), might reveal that the texts sent for printing by Zoppino are the Ferrarese scripts that reached Venice through the actor of the city Lucca, who was at the time involved in performances at the Este court of Ercole I.[2]

Whether the texts performed in 1502 and 1503 are the complete or partial vernacular versions of *Cassina* and *Mustellaria* attributed to Girolamo Berardo, it must be noted that they are heirs to a long-standing tradition, of which they seem to incorporate both merits and flaws, of the practice of an informal translation capable of becoming a revision (opening up to the innovative demands of the first decade of the sixteenth century); and of the insistent use of tercets, not coincidentally perceived as cumbersome and unsuitable, as noted by the exceptional spectator Isabella d'Este.

At the same time, with one (*Cassina*) performed for the marriage of Alfonso and Lucrezia and the other (*Mustellaria*) concluding the great Plautine festivals in Ferrara, the two *volgarizzamenti* attributed to Berardo also seem to fulfil a metaphorical function, exactly in the translational modality of which they are model examples. The *Cassina*, with its additional elements (not by chance leaning towards the theme of love), closely traces the lavish nuptial celebrations of 1502. *Mustellaria*, more faithful to the original,

[2] Cherea is said to have derived his name from a character in the *Eunuchus*, performed in Ferrara during the carnivals of 1499 or 1503 (Guastella 2018, 39n9).

seems like a return to the primary reasons motivating Ercole's Plautine *volgarizzamento* project, right at the time when, almost as a premonition of its end, that project was to fade away due to the duke's imminent death.

In summary, the two *volgarizzamenti* attributed to Girolamo Berardo have the capacity to communicate, both on a concrete and symbolic level, the cultural context of the last two grand theatrical festivals at the court of Ercole d'Este, which, just as it was reaching its peak in magnificence and splendour, had begun an inevitable decline.

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A Capricious Tragedy: Anello Paulilli's Plastic Memory in the Performance of *The Fire of Troy* (*L'Incendio di Troia,* 1566)

Abstract

Naples, July 1566. Some weeks after two tragicomedies, *Paris' Judgement* and *Helena's Abduction*, Anello Paulilli presents a singular tragedy: *The Fire of Troy* (*L'Incendio di Troia*). The performance takes place before a noble court during a celebration, and it appears that this specific context transforms the play extensively, orientating it mainly towards the audience's entertainment. Thus, Paulilli deliberately chooses to draw inspiration from Virgil's *Aeneid* rather than dramatic sources. Bringing epic material to life on stage allows him great flexibility to deal with ancient sources and theatrical practices. In the Prologue, he claims his own freedom, or *capriccio*, as author. Indeed, on the thematic level, Paulilli accommodates patterns which are unusual (if not, foreign) in tragedy, especially with Coroebus and Cassandra's love story. On the formal level, he borrows from eclectic traditions, epic and lyric, both ancient and modern. The Italian poets (Ariosto and Petrarch) take over the Latin ones. The reappropriations of heterogeneous sources, their fusion with modern references, and their impact on the audience will be examined in order to question the justifications for labelling as a 'tragedy' a play which refuses to follow the usual models of the genre. Epic, gallant, musical, unjust, entertaining… All these adjectives count as many oxymorons for this tragedy, which accumulates distancing effects in order to shed a light on its own fictionality and dramatic illusion.

We will investigate how performative memory (awareness of the performance context) and literary memory (borrowings from the tradition) challenge the tragic nature of the play. In fact, the playwright's selective memory, through the reappropriation and fusion of heterogeneous sources, questions the generic classification of a tragedy which appears to be an author's caprice.

Keywords: tragedy; Neapolitan theatre; Anello Paulilli; Troy

1. Introduction: Presentation of the Text and Its Performance

Naples, 1566. An amateur writer named Anello Paulilli stages an atypical tragedy entitled *The Fire of Troy* (*L'Incendio di Troia*), depicting the last day of the mythical city. In this well-known story, the playwright feels free to alter some details, claiming his creative liberty in the Preface: "Following my own

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caprice, I want [Paris] to be alive the last day of Troy" ("io a mio *capriccio*, voglio che [Paride] sia viuo nell'ultimo giorno di Troia").[1] Indeed, he selects this character as protagonist of a trilogy that results in a surprising tragedy composed of 3,079 Italian lines, divided into five acts as follows:

1. The Greek Sinon spies on the Trojan camp while the Trojans celebrate the (apparent) departure of the Greeks;
2. The three wisest of the Trojans (Aeneas, Laocoon, and Panthous) suspect the gift of the wooden horse;
3. Laocoon's death goes unnoticed by the Trojans, who glorify their past deeds on the battlefield;
4. The Trojans celebrate Coroebus' and Cassandra's wedding while the Greeks infiltrate the city;
5. The characters subsequently engage in the battle occurring backstage, leading to the fall of the city.

The ancient tale, largely based on Virgil's epic poem (*Aeneid*, 2), is transposed onto the stage on the occasion of a feast day.[2] Therefore, the author follows a dual imperative: the conciliation of the tragic form with the desire to please the audience. At this time, Naples belongs to a kingdom ruled by viceroys nominated by the King of Spain, Philip II, and, despite the various difficulties which the overcrowded city faces, the court still promotes a spirit of revelry and magnificence.[3] The performance context then invites a reflection upon the influence, potentially determinative, it may have had on the composition of the text.

As such, the concept of 'memory' becomes a useful tool for understanding the reception of ancient literature and the new creative process at work in Paulilli's tragedy. In a reciprocal relationship, not only does the recollection of the past infiltrate the present creation, but the present context as well may orientate us towards a specific use of the past. Consequently, memory can be conceived as a dual principle: passive (encompassing the reception and conservation of a tradition) and active (involving recollection, restatement and reappropriation of such a tradition). Fluidity, selectivity, partiality: these qualities suggest that memory allows for understanding the relationship with the past as free borrowings rather than sterile imitation.

This article aims to investigate the meetings between two types of memory

[1] All the translations are mine. The Italian text transcribes the 1566 edition; the orthography is slightly modernised, but the emphasis follows the original.

[2] On the theatrical representations in the noble courts and the courts themselves as theatrical spaces, see Ferroni 1987, 178.

[3] For a historical and critical synthesis, see Pieri 2013. About the organisation of the Neapolitan society at the turn of the century, see Folin 2011, 397-401.

operating in the composition and performance of *The Fire of Troy*. On the one hand, literary memory includes any references to sources, whether ancient or modern. On the other, the awareness of the performance context, which we can term 'performance memory', leads Paulilli to organise the literary memory from the perspective of a unique event, making it more effective for the audience. The reappropriation of heterogeneous sources, their fusion with modern references, and their impact on the audience will be explored in order to shed a light on the labelling of the play as a 'tragedy' despite its deviation from conventional models of the genre. Memory engages Paulilli in a subjective relationship with the literary legacy, to the extent that the actual tragic nature of the play is questioned.

2. Collective Memory: the Constitution of a Common Experience

The context of Paulilli's play gives rise to tension in the adaptation of past memory to the audience's present expectations. The revival of ancient elements comes second to the creation of a participative event in which the audience is largely involved.

2.1 Performance as Memory, Book as Record

All the clues available for reconstructing the performance lie within the single volume printed by Giovanni Maria Scotto[4] in Naples, 1566.[5] It features a trilogy composed of two tragicomedies, *Il giuditio di Paride* (*Paris' Judgement*) and *Il ratto di Helena* (*Helen's Abduction*) as well as one tragedy, *L'Incendio di Troia (The Fire of Troy).* The book also includes a general Preface "To the Readers" and Dedications, which, along with the Prologues at the beginning of each play, provide information about the author and the context of the plays. Regarding Paulilli, we know that he worked in the Neapolitan law court and composed these plays for his own amusement.[6] This recognisable *excusatio propter infirmitatem* seems to be confirmed by the fact that no other play is attributed to him. The second play (and possibly all three) was staged in the palace of Vicenzo Carrafa d'Arriano, a member of an influential family in the city to whom Paulilli dedicates the second play (Folin 2011, 398). This already speaks volumes about the audience – the elite of Neapolitan society, cultivated

[4] Manzi identifies Scotto's workshop with "a golden age of Neapolitan edition and culture" (1973, 166).

[5] The plays have not been edited since, so we will refer only to the text and page numbers of this printing. The pages are not numbered for the Prologue and the preliminary texts.

[6] See Paulilli, *Paris' Judgment*, <end of the Prologue>.

but not erudite. We can outline the chronology of the trilogy as follows:

a) 1565, August: Writing of the plays;[7]
b) 1566 (?): Staging of *Paris' Judgment;*
c) 1566, Spring (April?): Staging of *Helen's Abduction;*[8]
d) 1566, May the 1st: *Dedication of Paris' Judgment* and *Helen's Abduction;*
e) 1566, May or June: Staging of *The Fire of Troy;*[9]
f) 1566, July the 4th: *Dedication of The Fire of Troy;*
g) 1566, December: Publishing.[10]

The performances appear to have occurred only once, and their transience amplifies the importance of these events. Since the book was published after these occurrences, it is reasonable to assume that we are reading a text closely resembling the original recitations. As such, the printed text is nothing but the remaining trace, the memory of a festive and ephemeral event worthy of remembrance.

2.2 *Continuum* between the Stage and the Audience

The prevalence of performance proves favourable for a close contact between the playwright and his audience. Their connection is staged in the Prologue, which, following Terence's model, features a character external to the plot, somehow acting as the author's mouthpiece. On the edge between the characters and the audience, he fosters the elaboration of a common space between the stage and the room, which explains the frequent addresses to the spectators and the use of the first person plural. Author, Prologue, actors, and audience together form a community that not only shares the same city, but also a social proximity that enables them to take part in the same event. The homogeneity between the artists and the audience is affirmed at the end of the Prologue:

> Ringratiarete parimente quei vostri Giovani Napoletani, che così amorevolmente la rappresentaranno, li quali, non per desio d'interesse, ma solo per loro diletto, et per agratarvi.

[7] This information is given in the Prologues of *Paris' Judgment* and of *The Fire of Troy.*
[8] The whole Prologue praises the mildness of spring, which would better fit the context if it were actually performed in this season.
[9] This datation is based on the Dedications and Prologues: those of the first two plays state that the last one is still in preparation, and the last Dedication, recalling the last performance, offers the *terminus ante quem.*
[10] The date figures on the front page. The publication is already announced in the Prologue of *The Fire of Troy.*

> [Be thankful as well to your young Neapolitans who are going to perform it so lovingly – not for idleness, but only for their own leisure and in order to please you.]

The proximity expressed by the possessive "vostri" and the establishment of a playful courtship between the actors and the audience imply the equality of their status which should not exist with professional actors. The emphasis on leisure distinguishes them from professionals: they do not perform to earn a living (which contributes to the professionals' bad reputation), but purely for general entertainment.

The sense of community is further expressed through the mobilisation of a standard culture. In order to be functional, the references to literary memory have to align with the audience's common knowledge. In the *Fire of Troy*, this alignment is facilitated by the fact that the audience has already seen two plays featuring the same characters, as the Prologue of *Helen's Abduction* recalls:

> Così parimente, s'adoprò nella prima Favola del *Giuditio di Paride*, da la quale questa *Rapita d'Helena*, ch'è la seconda, depende . . . già s'apparecchia à la terza, dove co'l vostro usato favore, sì vedrà quasi palesemente, l'*Incendio di Troia.*

> [The author did the same in the first tale of *Paris' Judgment*, on which this *Abduction of Helen*, the second tale, depends . . . He is already preparing the third tale, *The Fire of Troy*, which you will see with your usual indulgence.]

He therefore engages in an act of immediate memory: integrating the present performance into a cycle activates the sense of familiarity but also the participation in a common experience.

The Prologues create the conditions for an adequate reception of the play. The production of a spectacle made by and for the elite transforms the performance into a mundane event in which the members of the aristocracy, greatly involved, display themselves (Kindermann 1984, 126). All these elements abolish the distance between the author and the audience, in a spatial *continuum.*

2.3 The Self-Definition of a Genre: Paulilli's Minimalist Conception of Tragedy

Beyond the scholarly world, this tragedy infiltrates high society; conversely, the courtly destination of the text conditions Paulilli's conception of tragedy. Far from the systematic approach of the treatises,[11] he elaborates his authorial

[11] On the debates around Aristotle's *Poetics*, see Petrocchi 1972, 279-87.

identity through proclamations of independence based on three arguments. First, the unreliability of ancient sources: poets and historians are nothing but liars.[12] Second, the instability of poetic rules and the variety of their applications: scholars never end the debates, deeming it impossible to list the ingredients of a good tragedy, and these rules are even contradicted by the evidence in the ancient texts. Third and foremost, the supremacy of the author's wishes. Therefore, to justify the nomination of 'tragedy', he provides a minimalistic definition for this genre:

> Così parimente non cura punto . . . che l'habbia dato il Titolo di Tragedia, come che in quella si ricerchi stile, & più alto, & più ornato.
>
> [Thus, it does not matter that [the author] gave to it the title of *tragedy*, in the sense that, in this genre, one searches for a more elevated and adorned style. (Emphasis mine)]

Limiting the definition to the stylistic level allows considerable freedom in both content and desired effects. However, a discrepancy persists between the carelessness shown by Paulilli and the knowledge he displays. Indeed, he is well aware of the importance of erudition in maintaining one's credibility. To mention learned controversial debates is the best way to deflect accusations of ignorance. Moreover, for the majority of the play he conforms to the tragic customs which are already in use in Italy: he divides the action into five acts, separated by musical interludes, and does not exceed what could be termed the unities of time and action.

In the shaping of his own *persona*, Paulilli presents himself with a certain *sprezzatura*. He clearly sides with the audience while ridiculing the scholars. Not that he is oblivious to the rules and customs governing the composition of tragedies, but he follows these conventions as long as they do not interfere with his primary scope. The consideration of the audience conditions Paulilli's theatrical conceptions and the use of literary memory.

3. Literary Memory (Ancient and Modern) and the Hybridising of a Festive Tragedy

Despite labelling *The Fire of Troy* as a tragedy, Paulilli does not adhere to a dramatic model. Instead, he draws inspiration from an epic poem, the second book of the *Aeneid*. Unlike the Greek and Latin tragedies on the same subject, such as Euripides' or Seneca's *Trojan Women*, he shifts the focus not to the

[12] Paulilli, "To the Readers": "Poeti, la cui Natura è, d'osseruare le bugie, si come si vede in Verg. In Homero" ("Poets, whose nature is to tell lies, as we can see in Virgil and in Homer").

day following the fall of the city but to the preceding day and to the pivotal moment of the final battle. This relative independency from other established plays enables him to seamlessly adapt the plot to the performance setting, blurring the boundaries of the usual features of tragedy.

3.1 Musical Tragedy: a Bridge between Fiction and Reality

First of all, Paulilli enhances the musical component of his tragedy to align the festivity of Troy with those of the court in Naples. The music, however, is not heavily reliant on choruses. The (traditional) chorus composed of Trojan women exists but, instead of consistently concluding the acts, they appear twice in the middle of them, first to celebrate the wedding (4) and second to lament the fall of the city (5), and once at the beginning of an act: "During the musical interlude, the wall collapses and the horse is drawn inside by the Trojan ladies, singing" ("Mentre ch'è l'intermedio de la Musica, si rumpe il Muro, & si tira il cavallo da le Fanciulle Troiane, cantando"; 4.38*v*). This is the only indication of a proper interlude, but Paulilli implies a musical pause between each act when he states "instead of [the Choruses], we have nowadays pieces of Music and other interludes" ("in vece de i quali [i Chori], hoggi son le Musiche con gl'altri intermedii"; 5*v*).[13] With this historical argument, he acknowledges the evolution of tragic forms and deliberately establishes himself in his time. Aligning with the audience's preference for interludes, he follows the Neapolitan tradition of the Cinquecento.[14] It is noteworthy that the conclusive scenes of the acts consist of lyrical replicas: Coroebus' prayer (1), the shepherds' duets (2), and presumably Coroebus' aria (3). These verses serve as a transition between the act and the musical interlude. Additionally, Paulilli incorporates numerous lyrics into the scenes, indicating four times in the stage directions the insertion of rhythmically autonomous pieces: Coroebus' love vows (1), Laocoon's propitiatory prayers (2), the nuptial song (3), and the Greeks' oath (4). Instead of resorting to choral lyrics, Paulilli offers a variety of songs and singers.

Driven by audience expectations, the music provides the clearest example of "performance memory" while also being organically integrated into the scenes. Coroebus and Cassandra's wedding between Acts 3 and 4 facilitates the convergence of the cheerful music of the plot with that of the interlude. At this juncture, musicality reaches its peak, superimposing fictive and real

[13] About the correspondence between the ancient choruses and the modern interludes, see Lodovico Dolce's *Trojan Women* (1567, 132).

[14] Benedetto Croce recalls other performances in Naples of the same decade, and in particular *Alessandro* by Piccolomini, staged in a palace with "splendid interludes" (1966, 25).

celebrations, as well as preparing for the contrasting sonorous confusion in the final act where the recited hendecasyllable is abandoned in favour of shorter, and more vivid verses, and gradual screams and cries emphasised in the stage directions.[15] Paulilli uses music, a component of the fictive plot as well as an element of the real spectacle, to build a coexistence between the fictive space of the stage and the actual space of the theatre.

3.2 Gallant Tragedy: from Tragedy to *Pastorale*

In addition to its entertaining and architectural role, the music supports one of the main thematic threads of the play and even of the trilogy. Love is indeed brought forward through two couples: Helen and Paris, the two main characters of the trilogy, and the new couple of the play, Coroebus and Cassandra. Paulilli follows the narrative recounted by Virgil (Virg. *Aen.* 2.341-6, 403-8) but expands it so that each act progresses toward their bridal night. The wedding serves as the joyful pinnacle of the play which, for the most part, is a festive tragedy.

At the heart of the dialogues, their story allows an ample space for pieces of love poetry in the Petrarchan style, especially when Coroebus reveals to Paris his love for Cassandra (1) or engages in a dialogue with his beloved (3). Motifs from the *Canzoniere* resonate throughout the play, such as the significance of the eyes in the *innamoramento* ("Nostr'occhi, sono due fenestre al core", "Our eyes are two windows to the heart"; 10*r*) or the paradoxes of love, such as the antithesis between life and death ("Vivo morendo", "I live while dying"; 11*v*) or between fire and frost ("d'Amore arso, & gelato", "By Love I burn and freeze"; 9*r*). Paulilli also incorporates more specific metaphors. For instance, when Coroebus says that "like a Salamander, [he] live[s] in the flames" ("io qual Salamandra / vivo a le fiamme"; 11*r*), he echoes Petrarch's verses: "Di mia morte mi pasco, e vivo in fiamme: / stranio cibo, e mirabil salamandra" ("I feed on my own death and I live in the flames: / strange food and marvellous salamander"; *Canzoniere*, 207.40-1). These allusions to Petrarchan poetry awaken in the audience the memory of a more recent tradition, one that directly influenced contemporary productions.

This emphasis on love motifs reshapes the characters, particularly

[15] The act begins with a single voice: "Policrate Troiano solo gridando per la Città" ("The Trojan Polycrates, alone, is shouting through the city"; 46*r*). The rumour is then spreading: "Si parte così gridando, et si senton varii soniti di strumenti militari, pianti, et sospiri per la Città" ("They leave, shouting, and we hear various sounds of military instruments, cries and sighs in the city"; 46*v*). The end of the play reaches an acoustic peak: "si senteno più che mai pianti, & rumori" ("we hear more than ever cries and noises"; 54*v*).

Cassandra, who, unlike her traditional portrayal in tragedy, is presented as Coroebus' lover rather than Apollo's prophetess. Paulilli selectively withholds mythological details to serve his own plot, keeping the circumstances around Cassandra's prophecies and her story with Apollo in the shadows. Thus, two opposing forces coincide in this character: her traditional identity as a prophetess of doom devoted to a god (3.33-4); and her new identity as a lover (3.37-8). From the ancient characters, Paulilli keeps the relationship and reduces them to a small set of qualities to integrate them into his tragedy. Indeed, the audience's taste for love poetry is attested in Naples through the performances of gallant farces (Petrocchi 1972, 311-36) and pastoral poetry in vogue in Southern Italy (Tateo 1980, 39). These themes are clearly expressed in the first two plays of the trilogy but still influence the third one in spite of the generic requalification. The thematic continuity driven by the logic of trilogy, centred around Paris' love story, leads Paulilli to dedicate a large portion of this tragedy to motifs unusual in Cinquecento tragedy, thus redefining the borders of the genre. In a way, performance memory operates at the level of the memory of past representations that occurred a few months before.

3.3 Epic Tragedy: Sumptuous Spectacle

Besides the pastoral influence, Paulilli favours the epic models that resonate throughout the great extent of the spectacle he offers. Right at the beginning of the Prologue, he places his work in the footsteps of Ariosto: "Benche con l'otio ch'egli havesse, potrebbe (e forse potrà) imitare quel savio, che cominciò a cantare. Di Donne, e Cavallier, l'Arme & gli Amori" ("Even though with leisure he has, [the author] may, and maybe will, imitate this wise man who began to sing *Of Ladies and Knights, the Weapons and Loves*; emphasis mine).

The first verse of *Orlando Furioso* introduces the tragedy as a sketch for an epic poem. It is no coincidence that Paulilli draws inspiration from the second book of the *Aeneid* whose most emblematic episodes are transposed on stage from Laocoon's death (Virg. *Aen.* 7.40-56, 199-227; Paulilli, 3.30*v*-31*r*) to Venus' apparition to Aeneas (Virg. *Aen.* 2.588-621; Paulilli, 5.53*r*-54*r*). An entire scene is dedicated to recalling the deeds of battle (3.31*v*-35*r*), offering a *compendium* of the Trojan war.

The epic spread influences the aesthetic of the play, distinguished by a scenic profusion typical of epic narratives. Most notably, the number of characters is so considerable that Paulilli feels compelled to explain it in the Preface: "Nella Tragedia dell'*Incendio*, eccederò alle Regole, in sopravanzar il numero delle persone, con tutto che questo sia anco indiciso trà i giudici della Poesia" ("In the tragedy of the *Fire*, I will exceed the rules with an

excessive number of characters, even though this is still debated by poetry specialists"). In fact, in addition to the twenty-three characters listed before the play, we should include the Furies who escort Juno, the chorus of Trojan women, and the numerous extras. Unlike the precepts of Horace, Paulilli even features in some scenes more than three speaking characters.

The scenery, as far as can be discerned through the stage directions, lives up to the expectations surrounding such a monumental event. Far more than a painted background, Paulilli develops a plethora of scenic effects, proving that he exploits all available technical possibilities. The set features the door of Priam's palace (the destination of most exits) and the walls of Troy (on which Laocoon climbs in act 3). Above all, the wooden horse, a "great marvel" ("alta merauiglia"; 2.16), is not a mere decorative element, but rather a genuine theatrical machine, typical of the ingenuity displayed in the spectacles of this century (Leclerc 1965, 582). This threatening presence in front of the walls is drawn into the city, which implies that "the wall collapses" ("si rumpe il muro"; 4.38*v*): in other words, the destruction of Troy begins. Even more spectacularly, the mechanism should be big enough to serve as a hiding-place for Menelaus, Agamennon, Odysseus, Pyrrhus, and other anonymous Greek soldiers until they "descend with ropes and scales" ("scendeno per le funi, et per le scale"; 4.43*v*).

Similarly, the final fire, from which the play derives its title, is not merely reduced to an account in the characters' dialogues. The stage directions in the final act allow to trace its progression, starting from the end of Act 4 where "we begin to see smoke in the Trojan houses and the fire begins" ("si comincia a veder il foco per le case Troiane, & comincia l'Incendio"; 45*v*), then "the fire is growing" ("l'Incendio accresce"; 52*v*) until the final destruction where "the doors of the castle fall and the fire is to be seen inside" ("cadeno le porte del Castello, et dentro vi si vede il foco"; 54*v*). The technicity required by the staging illustrates the taste and mastery of the city in machines and pyrotechnics (Iannella 1993, 171; Steadman 2021, 95).

These sensational techniques bring the epic material to life on stage. They create the impression of a play where the spectacular may be, if not an end in itself, at least an essential component of the theatrical experience, both visually and acoustically. They justify the adjective "cumbersome" ("macchinoso") used by Petrocchi (1972, 317) to describe the play, but they also reveal the budget of the event and part of the societal involvement in it. The prominence of the audience conditions the eclectic assembly that permeates this oxymoronic tragedy. This, however, raises a question: what effect does the playwright seek to evoke in the audience? Is the spectacularity still in harmony with the feelings (pity, horror, stupefaction...) typically assigned to tragedy?

4. Memory Against Actuality: Distancing and the Tragic Effect

The accumulation of numerous elements in the play, both unusual and external, if not entirely foreign, to tragedy, risks compromising its very nature, but it may also defuse the tragic effect to make the play match the festive atmosphere. In many respects, Paulilli displays different levels of distancing from the plot represented on stage, prompting the audience to consider it an entertaining tale.

4.1 Distancing from the Characters: the Mirror of the Enemies

Referring to the actors as "your young Neapolitans" (see above) underlines the playfulness of the performance, where the members of the elite disguise themselves and, in fact, the few allusions to the costumes in the text suggest the contrary of sobriety, as illustrated by Laocoon's clothing (2) or Athena (Pallade)'s recognisable *aegis* and spear (2). In the other two plays, the Trojan costume is distinguished by its opulence. For instance, when thinking of Helen in Troy, Paris pictures her "crowned to the fullest with gold and oriental gems" ("coronata / D'oro, & di gemme orientali a pieno"; *Helen's Abduction*, 21*r*). Paulilli suggests the Trojans resemble oriental princes, hinting at rich clothing in the last play featuring mostly Trojan characters.

Yet, this depiction of the characters tends to position them within the enemy camp. Naples belonged at the time to the realm of Spain, a Catholic monarchy continually involved in a struggle against Turkish ships for maritime control over the Mediterranean Sea.[16] The orientalisation of Troy facilitates the identification of this city as an adversary to Naples. The audience does not have to feel concerned, at least not in a mimetic way, by what is performed, and politics is largely absent in the trilogy.

4.2 Distancing from the Gods: the Possibility of Divine Injustice

The distancing is also supported by the presence of pagan gods in a way that further enhances the gap between modern values and an artificial Antiquity. Their cruelty is a *leitmotiv* in the play, especially in the opening scenes of the acts, when Juno (1), Athena (2), and then Achilles (3) acknowledge the

[16] Allusions to this context are to be found in the Dedication to "don Perafan di Ribera" (surely to be identified with don Pedro Arafan de Ribera, the current vice-king from 1559 to 1571), in particular with the phrase "l'ira del Gran Tiranno d'Oriente" ("the wrath of the Great Tyrant in Orient"; 3*r*).

violence of the Trojan fate, as well as its legitimacy. In doing so, Paulilli questions divine justice.

Certainly, in order to prove that the cruelty of the gods is somehow fair, the playwright presents the fall of the city as the punishment for Trojan faults. Indeed, a lot of characters recall Paris' impiety (staged in the preceding plays), but also that of their ancestors: Athena (2.14*r*), as well as the Trojan Laocoon (2.20*r*), allude to Laomedon's broken promise. Similarly, Paulilli makes sure he announces the punishment of the human characters responsible for the miseries displayed on stage through Cassandra's anticipation of Agamemnon's and Helen's death.[17] While the playwright does not explain their demise, he assures that the bad will face retribution, thus perpetuating a logic of revenge.

Nevertheless, this does not solve the problem of disproportion between the faults of a few Trojans and the destruction of the whole city.[18] The collective fate of Troy raises the same question as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, when Abraham questions God: "Will you destroy the just with the unjust?" ("numquid perdes iustum cum impio"; *Genesis* 18:23), but there are two points of difference between this and the biblical episode.

Firstly, the biblical narrative implies that the city could have been saved if a single man had been proven just, suggesting that all the inhabitants deserved their fate, unlike the unjust deaths of Troy. It is true that the Trojans seem responsible for not listening to the wisest characters, in particular Laocoon and Cassandra, but Paulilli deliberately chooses to put these two at the forefront. The deaths of Laocoon with his sons, as well as Coroebus' slaughter and Cassandra's enslavement, two pure and innocent lovers, serve as examples of blatant injustice since even the righteous among the Trojans endure a harsh fate.

Secondly, the destruction of Sodom is decreed by the biblical God, unique and omnipotent, whereas that of Troy is decided by Juno and Athena seeking revenge because they have been injured by Paris' judgement, not as a response to an affront against justice. Even the divine characters appear selfish, biased, and overly sensitive, defending their personal interests above

[17] Helen's death is an interesting case study. Paulilli mentions that she will be "hung from a tree", which seems to refer to the Helen *dendrophoros*. However, her death is not at all notorious (in the *De mulieribus claris*, 36, Boccaccio confesses that he ignores it), it is almost never related nor depicted. It is mentioned in Pausanias (3.19.9), an author rarely found in scholarly programs, therefore it is difficult to assume that the audience already knew the story (unlike that of Agamemnon) and it is surprising enough that Paulilli did.

[18] On Troy as the paradigm for the destruction of the cities and the symbolics of fire, Hills 2007, 190-1. The choice of this specific episode may reflect the fears of a city shaken by earthquakes and plagues.

all else.[19] The absence of Christianisation of the pagan gods is a hint to their lack of authority, which leaves the audience in a loophole. The event may be excessive and not fully justified, but poses a minor problem since it is caused by foreign gods acting in a fictive world.

4.3 Fake Tragedy: Fiction Against Identification

In addition to the characters, the distancing effect extends to the plot itself. Right from the beginning of the performance, the Prologue reduces the whole story to its fictional essence, pretending that the playwright created it by "stealing from poets and historians, Latin and Greek, their caprices and their lies in order to represent them with his own" ("rubando, & da Poeti, & da Historici Latini, et Greci, i loro capricci, et le bugie di quelli, [per] ridurre in apparenza insiememente con le sue"). The unreliability of the ancient sources betrays their frivolity.

Furthermore, the Prologue leverages reality against fiction before leaving the stage. To mitigate the horrors that the Furies are supposed to provoke Paulilli contrasts them and Juno with the ladies he addresses in the audience:

> Ne prenderete spavento di sua apparenza, perché non potrà mai ella con le sue faci Infernali, recarne tanto, che non sia maggiore il diletto, che date voi bellissime Donne, con le vostre Angeliche figure.
>
> [Neither will you be afraid of her appearance because she will not be able, with her infernal torches, to arouse more fear than the pleasure you give, most beautiful Ladies, with your angelic faces.]

By no means does fiction take over reality. Paulilli echoes here the prologue of Cinthio's *Orbecche* (1548) in which the author's mouthpiece already balance the negative feelings caused by the display of horrors with the fictionality and the remoteness of the events. The performance context and the audience counteract the horrific vision presented on stage. Relegated to the fictional realm, fear should not overcome the spectators, and the festivity of the event is not spoiled by a message of doom. The author contains the emotions in the spectators by distracting them with theatrical stunts. In fact, spectacularity seems to redeem violence in order to preserve entertainment. In a sense, beyond the fake walls of Troy, the final fire destroys an ephemeral

[19] On the contrary, Lodovico Dolce resolves in the *Trojan Women* the impossibility of imputing injustice to divine will since God (with a capital G) does not tolerate cruelty: "ANDROMACA Voglia Dio, come giusto: a cui dispiace / La crudeltà via più, ch'altro peccato" ("ANDROMACHE For God's will, is just: he is displeased / with cruelty more than with any other sin"; 5.120).

setting that reveals the actual building of Vicenzo Carrafa d'Ariano: thus, the destruction of the fictional space marks the end of the dramatic illusion.

5. Conclusion

In this conclusive play of the trilogy, Paulilli's text is exemplary for the potential concepts of 'memory' towards the understanding of literature in the Cinquecento, in the balance between a return to ancient stories and genres, and the experimentation of new forms. The tragedy provides an overall framework that encompasses a mosaic of heterogeneous inspirations. Within this context, the story of the fall of Troy undergoes transformations: represented on stage, it becomes contaminated with Italian poetry and Neapolitan theatre according to contemporary tastes. The combination of various traditions generates new poetical forms, defying repetitive rigidity. In a pastiche of literary memories, ancient but mostly modern, Paulilli transforms the very volatility of memory into a creative matrix for his own tragedy.

However, the fictitious nature of the play, designed for the audience's entertainment, gains the upper hand over its tragic effect, diffused by playful leisure. The theological debates should not be taken too seriously, overshadowed as they are by the entertaining nature of the event. The various distancing effects mitigate the audience's emotional attachment to the characters' fates in order to preserve the success of the performance. The playwright's selective memory (that is, the reappropriation of heterogeneous sources), challenges the generic classification of a tragedy that appears to be, above all, the author's *capriccio*.

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Francesco Dall'Olio*

Horestes "and a Tragedie of the kinge of Scottes": Theatre and Politics at Elizabeth's Court[1]

Abstract

In their edition of the *British Drama Catalogue,* Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson rejected the possibility that John Pikeryng's interlude *Horestes* (1567) is to be identified with a play mentioned in a note of the *Revels' Accounts* as being performed before the Queen at Whitehall in 1567-1568. With this article, I intend to take up the matter and argue instead that this identification is at least probable. When accepted, the identification provides us with a scenario that fits perfectly inside well-known cultural patterns of the time, such as the writing of a play by a young and ambitious politician wanting to make himself known and, more relevantly, the use of theatrical performances in front of the Queen as occasions to offer advice to the sovereign on political and religious matters. This is a relevant topic for *Horestes*, given the often-stated nature of the play as a defence of the rebellion of the Scottish nobility against Mary Stuart (also taking place in 1567) and her subsequent deposition: a position that could have had serious consequences for its author, but that could instead be freely stated when expressed throughout the performance of a play.

Keywords: *Horestes*; John Pikeryng; Mary Stuart; theatre and politics

1. Introduction

Among the notes in the *Revels' Accounts* relating to the expenses for plays staged at Whitehall Palace before the Queen between 14 July 1567 and 8 March 1568, there is one that has aroused some curiosity among scholars of the early Elizabethan theatre. The note records the expenses incurred for the performance of seven plays, the full list of which is provided:

> The first namede as playne as Canne be, The second the paynfull pilgrimage, The thirde Iacke and Iyll, The forthe six fooles, The five callede witte and will,

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> The sixthe callde proligallitie, The seventhe of Orestes and a Tragedie of the kinge of Scottes. (Feuillerat 1963, 119)

Some scholars have speculated that the last play on the list is to be recognised in John Pikeryng's interlude *Horestes*, whose first and only printed edition was published in 1567. However, the editors of the *British Drama Catalogue* Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson tend to reject this identification, for various reasons, including the lack of any allusion to a court performance in the text printed in 1567.

With this article, I intend to argue that, although there is no tangible evidence that *Horestes* is the play performed in front of Elizabeth, nevertheless such an event would fall within a cultural pattern typical of early Renaissance English theatre: the performance of plays in front of the sovereign as a particular form of advice on specific political and/or religious topics. All that we know of the interlude, its author and the historical and cultural context of its writing and performance bears profound similarities to the cases known to us in which this tradition has been observed. My demonstration will proceed in four parts. In Part 1, I will set out what we know of the play, its subject matter and its author. In Part 2, I shall present and discuss Wiggins and Richardson's reasons for rejecting the identification of *Horestes* with the play mentioned in the *Revels' Accounts*; more specifically, I will explain why I do believe that they are not strong justifications to reject the identification. Part 3 shall see a necessarily brief exposition of the early modern England tradition to use theatrical performances of play as a means of political discussion at the Tudor court, and especially as a way to give the sovereign advice on relevant issues. Such exposition will set out the background for Part 4 of the article, where I will show how the well-known relationship between *Horestes* and the events surrounding Mary Stuart's deposition help fit the hypothetical performance of the interlude into this established cultural pattern.

2. John Pikeryng's *Horestes*

Within the complicated history of the relations between English Renaissance theatre and ancient Greek literature (especially the theatre),[2] the myth of

[2] Since the 1990s, a new wave of studies has re-proposed the question of the influence of Greek literature on Elizabethan theatre on a new foundation: see the introduction to the special issue of *Classical Reception Journal* on this subject (Demetriou and Pollard 2017) for a more accurate exposition; cf. also Giovanna Di Martino and Cécile Dudouyt's introduction to their edited volume on early modern translations of Greek drama (Di Martino and Dudouyt 2023).

Orestes represents a very special case. It is the only Greek myth consistently present on the early modern English stage, from its earliest stages in the 1560s[3] to its latest in the 1650s. During this time period, no less than four plays are dedicated to the myth of Orestes (cf. Miola 2017), starting with John Pikeryng’s interlude. Almost fifty years later, it would be followed by Thomas Heywood’s *The Second Part of the Iron Age* (1612-1615, printed in 1632) and Thomas Goffe’s *The Tragedy of Orestes* (1613-1618, printed in 1633). Lastly, in 1649, came Christopher Wise’s translation of Sophocles’ *Electra*. In addition, we also know about one or two lost plays, *Agamemnon* and *Orestes’ Furies*, written by Thomas Dekker and Henry Chettle and performed by the Admiral’s Men in 1599.[4] This is not only a very conspicuous presence, but also the only significant exception to the apparent disinterest of early modern English theatre to the subjects of ancient tragedy.

Among these works, Pikeryng’s interlude stands out for some very particular characteristics. While the other plays present the myth more or less as presented in ancient theatre, *Horestes* stages the myth as recounted in the medieval literary tradition of the romances. Its original source was Dictys Cretensis’ *Ephemeris Belli Troiani*, a prose text dating back to the 3rd century AD, and the differences of this version with those of the classical theatre are conspicuous. First of all, all traces of the tragic perspective of the *genos* curse disappear: Aegisthus is not related to the Atreides and Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon only for his adultery with Cassandra. The trial at the Areopagus takes place in front of other Greek kings and is the result of the accusations of Menelaus, who wants to take over the kingdom of Mycenae.[5] In Medieval romances, this scene is rewritten so that it happens before a council of knights, and it even includes an offer by the duke of Athens to fight on Orestes’ behalf in ritual combat. Whereas the matricide,

[3] Maybe even earlier, if Lucy Jackson is correct in recognizing an influence of Euripides’ *Orestes* and Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* on the way Nicholas Grimald’s *Archipropheta* (printed 1548) staged the characters of Herod and Herodias as haunted by the ‘ghosts’ of their crimes (as Orestes is haunted by the Furies in Euripides’ tragedy): cf. Jackson 2023, 215-7, 221-2. She also theorizes that the character of the Syrian *ancilla* in the same play, who announces and mourns the death of John the Baptist, could be based on both the Phrygian slave in Orestes and Clytemnestra in Aeschylus’ Agamemnon: cf. Jackson 2023, 217-21.

[4] These plays are mentioned in Philip Henslowe’s diary and the debate remains open as to whether they are one play in two parts or two separate tragedies: see the entries dedicated to the two respective titles in the *Lost Plays Database* (LPD 2024). Louise Schleiner suggested that these two plays may have exerted an influence on some aspect of *Hamlet*: see Schleiner 1990.

[5] This detail may be inspired by Euripides’ *Orestes*, where Menelaus is depicted as a double-crossing opportunist, ready to betray his nephew when it clearly appears the people of Argos do not approve his actions and are about to condemn him.

as in the ancient myth, is expressly ordered by the oracle as a necessary means of regaining the kingdom, in Middle Age romances this means the deletion of the Furies' persecution and the possible madness of Orestes, as well as of the subterfuges and deceptions present both in Aeschylus and in the two plays written about Electra (Orestes' sister, which is also deleted) by Sophocles and Euripides, respectively. In those texts, Orestes arrives to the palace without being recognised, and pretends to be a messenger carrying the news of his own death, thus gaining access to the presence of his mother and Aegisthus. In Dictys and the Middle Age romances, Orestes is at the head of a military expedition supported by Idomeneus, king of Crete and by the Phocian king Strophius (and, in ancient myth, father of Pylades, Orestes' trusty friend – another character completely absent).[6] It is also specified in all versions that Orestes cuts off Clytemnestra's breasts before killing her. This version of Orestes' myth is present in the main Medieval texts about the Trojan War, such as Benoît de Saint-More's *Roman de Troye* (twelfth century), Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae* (fourteenth century) and Raoul Lefèvre's *Recuyell of the Historie of Troye*. These works would later become the sources for the two texts identified as the sources for *Horestes*: William Caxton's English translation of Lefèvre (reprinted 1553) and John Lydgate's *Troy Book* (reprinted 1555).[7]

Pykering's interlude re-proposes this story with some important variations. He eliminates Orestes cutting off Clytemnestra's breasts, replacing it with a more dignified off-stage death for the character, and for reasons of narrative economy, deletes the character of Strophius, leaving Idomeneus (Idumeus in the text) as the only ruler supporting Orestes. The trial at the Areopagus is retained (we have even Nestor offering himself to fight in defence of Horestes' honour), but Menelaus does not display the selfish motives described in the sources: his denunciation of Orestes is now motivated by a genuine demand for justice. Above all, several allegorical and/or comic characters are introduced (characteristic of the theatrical genre of the interlude) and made the protagonists of several scenes. Of particular importance are the figures of the Vice and Councell, whose actions are fundamental both to the unfolding of the plot and to the ultimate message of the play. In Scene 2, the Vice persuades Orestes to overcome his doubts and pursue revenge against his mother, pretending to be a messenger of the gods: "I was in heaven when al the gods did gre [sic] / That you of

[6] Unlike Electra's, Pylades' absence in these texts is a surprising one, especially since both in the Middle Age and the Renaissance, Orestes and Pylades were a classical *exemplum* of friendship.

[7] The identifications were proposed by Brie 1912 and Merritt 1972, respectively.

Agamemnons death, for south, revengid should be" (199-200).[8] Then the Vice assists Orestes throughout the central scene of the interlude, the siege of Mycenae (Scene 7), at times even becoming almost a negative double of the hero.[9] Also, Orestes gives to the Vice the charge of killing Clytemnestra, and he leads her offstage to her destiny. The action of the play as designated by Pikeryng thus depicts the Vice as the true driving force of the plot, according to a narrative scheme also found in other interludes of the time, such as Nicholas Udall's *Respublica* (1553) and R.B.'s *Apius and Virginia* (1567 ca, printed in 1575: cf. Grantley 2003, 21). In all these texts, the dramatic action is the result of the negative actions of the Vice, who either persuades the antagonist to indulge his illicit desires or tricks the protagonist into making a mistake. However, in *Horestes*, unlike what usually happens in these texts, the initial deception of the Vice is never revealed: up until the ending of the interlude, Orestes will remain convinced that he has acted following the will of the gods ("by the godes I was comaund there to", he says while on trial at the Areopagus, 973), but no god will ever appear to explicitly say it is so.

However, this does not make Orestes' action a damnable one. As Robert Knapp pointed out, in Renaissance moral thought vengeance could be seen as both in a positive and in a negative light: "Vengeance is a virtue when it punishes wrongs done to God and one's neighbor; vicious when it is cruel or brutal, usurps the magistrate's authority, or is remiss when it should be severe" (Knapp 1973, 210). And in fact, Orestes receives an explicit approval of his action by the other important allegorical character in the play, Councell, who sees Orestes' revenge and Clytemnestra's death as an act of justice, aimed at punishing a grave crime: "Her faute is great, and punnyshment it is worthy to have, / For by that meane the good, in south, from daungers may be saufe" (526-7). By killing his mother, Orestes will re-establish order, thus again providing his citizens with a true paradigm of justice, as is the duty of the sovereign:

> For, lo, the universaull scoul of all the world we knowe
> Is once the pallace of a kinge, where vyces chefe do flow
> And, as waters from on head and fountayne oft do spring,
> So vyce and virtue oft do flo from pallace of a kinge;

[8] I quote from Axton 1982.

[9] Particularly relevant is the proximity between the words with which Orestes, in encouraging his troops, states that he wants to be the first to go up on the walls ("The walles be hye, yet I intend uppon them first to go / And, as I hope, you sodierrs will your captayne eke be hynde", 682-3) and the way in which Vice, shortly afterwards, exhorts him to keep his word: "Nowe to thy men lyke manley hart I pray the for to showe, / And, as thou seiste, be first the man that shall the citie wyn" (719-20).

Whereby the people, seeing that the kinge adycte to be,
To prosecute the lyke they all do labour, as we se.
(526-33)

The arguments presented here by Councell will be repeated by Orestes twice, first in front of his mother when she begs him not to kill her ("cities are well governed in dede, / Where punishment for wicked ones by lawe is so decreed", 811-12), and then in the trial at the Areopagus. The action of *Horestes* contrasts Councell's perspective on the matricide with the action of the Vice, whose 'official' status as the representative of evil in the world of the play is here replaced with a more 'neutral' role as the incarnation of the human impulse to revenge, that can lead to committing heinous crimes as well as punishing evil-doers.[10] This contrast forms the true substance of the interlude, making the play a discussion in dramatic form on the permissibility of Orestes' matricide.

This is not surprising when one considers the personality of the author of *Horestes*. For some seventy years now, it has become customary to identify the 'John Pikeryng' named on the frontispiece of the 1567 *quarto* edition with a renowned Elizabethan politician and diplomat, Sir John Puckering (see Phillips 1955, 233-5, 239-44).[11] Born in 1544, in 1567 he had just completed his education as a lawyer at Lincoln's Inn, the first step towards a brilliant political career. After holding many minor administrative posts, he would be elected twice speaker of the House of Commons between 1584 and 1587, where he was able to intervene decisively on some important points of Elizabeth's anti-Catholic policy, which led to his appointment as *Queen's serjeant*. His subsequent tireless activity in the service of the crown (especially in suppressing conspiracies in favour of Mary Stuart) earned him in 1592, in addition to the knighthood, the title of Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, which he held until his death (1596). If we accept Phillips' identification, *Horestes* (the only literary work known to us to be connected with Puckering) is to be seen as part of the young politician's debut in the political environment of the time. In this, Puckering would have been following in the footsteps of Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, authors of one of the first Elizabethan tragedies, *Gorboduc*, first performed in 1561 at the Inns of Court, and later enjoying – especially Sackville – brilliant political careers. The similarity

[10] Horestes is not the only character in the play seeking vengeance: so do all the low-class characters of play in their scenes, as well as Menelaus in the trial, when he tries to have Orestes condemned for the matricide. However, as Knapp noted, unlike Horestes', their actions "lead to no justice, lacking both adequate cause and authority" (Knapp 1973, 209).

[11] The following information on Puckering comes partly from Phillips 1955 and partly from the entry on Puckering in the *Oxford DNB* by N.G. Jones (*ODNB* 2024).

is further supported by the fact that both *Gorboduc* and *Horestes* are plays containing obvious political subtexts; as such, they would constitute a means whereby their authors could first make themselves known as possible advisors to the sovereign.

Some of the evidence seems to suggest that *Horestes* enjoyed some success. The epilogue of the printed text reports that the interlude was performed before the Lord Mayor of London:

> For all the nobylytie and spiritualtie let us pray,
> For judges, and head officers, what ever they be,
> According to oure boundaunt dewties; espetially, I saye,
> For my Lord Mayre, lyfetennaunt of this noble cytie.
> (1199-202)

It is also worth noting the surprising closeness in time between the performance of the interlude and its printing: very rare for the time, when years might pass between the performance of a text and its first printed edition, if such an edition emerged at all.[12] All of this suggests that *Horestes* enjoyed a fair amount of popular success.

Moving towards the conclusion of this first part, what we know about *Horestes* paints a picture that is not only coherent, but also fits into the cultural conventions of the period: a young law student, intent on pursuing a political career, writes a play in the style of a popular genre of the time (the interlude) to make himself known, following the example of others before him. To do so, he chooses a subject already known from previous literary tradition in a form familiar to an audience that was still unaware of (or had only just become acquainted with) the classical version of the myth. He rewrites it according to the literary conventions of the referenced theatrical genre, while at the same time exploiting those same conventions to transform it into a commentary in dramatic form on one of the most pressing political problems of the moment. This last element makes *Horestes* a perfect candidate for taking part in the well-established political practice of using the performance of plays in front of the sovereign to advise him/her on grave political matters. However, as I said, the discussion of this eventuality by Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson ended with the two scholars pronouncing against the hypothesis that *Horestes* was ever staged at Court. In the following section, I am going to review Wiggins and Richardson’s reasons for saying so and discuss their validity, in order to ascertain if a representation of *Horestes* at court is truly an eventuality to be discarded.

[12] This is true for both the aforementioned *Apius* and *Respublica*; the last one even remained in manuscript form until the 20th century: see Grantley 2003, 289.

3. *Horestes* at Court?

Puckering's *Horestes* is present in the second volume of Wiggins and Richardson's catalogue, at no. 451. It is not registered under his usual title; it is instead simply renamed *Vice*: a choice based on the original title of the *quarto* edition, whose title presents the play as "A New Enterlude of Vice Conteyninge, the Historye of Horestes".[13] This choice is made by the editors of the catalogue to distinguish this play from the *Horestes* named in the *Revels' Accounts*, listed by them at no. 465 of the same catalogue, and which they consider a different play. Their rationale for distinguishing the two plays is presented as thus:

> Proposed identification of this play with the *Orestes* performed at court in 1567-8 . . . is problematic. The absence from the text of the 'house' provided for Orestes at court is not a major issue, since it was presumably a stage house, a booth or sign associating a particular route of entry with Orestes. However, the text's strong emphasis on the likely presence of cutpurses in the audience, and the assumption of a daytime performance, do not seem compatible with presentation at court. The date of Q is also awkward: either the play was already in print before the court performance or the date on the title page refers to the old-style year ending on 24 March 1568; but if Q was printed that March, the printer strikingly neglected an opportunity to make the volume more attractive by referring to a recent court performance on the title page. (Wiggins and Richardson 2012)

They come back to the question at no. 466, when speaking about the "tragedie of the King of Scottes" mentioned in the *Revels' Account* (see above), they do maintain that the identification of these three plays "entails imposing a very tendentious topical interpretation" (ibid.).

In my opinion, most of the reasons Wiggins and Richardson bring about to reject the identification are not as stringent as they affirm, such as, for example, the so-called "strong emphasis on the likely presence of cutpurses in the audience". Upon reading of the play, one finds only two instances of his supposed instances, both times during a soliloquy of the Vice. In the first one, the Vice is about to go off scene to join Horestes in his expedition, and he promises to the audience that, while he is away, "My cosen Cutpurse wyll, I truste, / Your purse well tast" (674-5). The second one occurs in the last soliloquy of the character in the play: as he goes off stage for the last time, he warns his cousin to "be ruled by me, / Or elles you may chaunce to end on a tre" (1120-1). Two recurrences of this theme hardly qualify, in

[13] Only in this instance, I quote the text from the semi-diplomatic edition included in the ClaRE archive (Pikeryng 2024; https://clare.dlls.univr.it/gestionale/edition/view-gems?id=284).

my view, as evidence of a "strong emphasis", even more so because they do not refer to a generic presence of cutpurses among the audience. What we have in both instances is the Vice speaking (or pretending to speak) to one specific character, one he affirms to know very well, the so-called Cousin Cutpurse. This character is part of an established comic routine from the Vice, which we can trace also in other 1560s theatrical texts of the time, where it is featured in a much more prominent way than it is in *Horestes.* A good example in that regard is Thomas Preston's tragedy *Cambises*, staged for the first time in 1560-1561, but first printed in a *quarto* edition in 1569 (two years after *Horestes*). In spite of his official definition as a 'tragedy', the work still presents many stylistic and dramatic features typical of the interludes,[14] including the presence of a Vice named Ambidexter. Like the Vice in *Horestes*, Ambidexter calls upon his 'cousin' during the soliloquies.[15] Unlike in Puckering's text, though, in *Cambises* the Vice's references to his 'cousin' are not restricted to one or two lines, instead they are each time developed in lengthier iterations:

> In deed as ye say I have been absent a long space.
> But is not my cosin Cutpurse, with you in the mene time?
> To it, to it Cosin and doo your office fine.
> (6.602-4)

> But how now Cosin Cutpursse with whome play you?
> Take heed for his hand is groping even now.
> Cosin take heed, if ye doo secretly grope:
> If ye be taken Cosin, ye must looke through a rope.
> (6.702-5)

> He is as honest a man as ever spurd Cow:
> My Cosin cutpurse I meane, I beseech ye judge you.
> Beleeve me Cosin if to be the Kings gest, ye could be taken:
> I trust that offer would not be forsaken.
> But Cosin because to that office ye are not like to come:
> Frequent your exersises, a horne on your thumb.
> A quick eye, a sharp knife, at hand a receiver:
> But then take heed Cosin ye be a clenly convayour.
> Content your self Cosin, for this banquit you are unfit:
> When such as I at the same am not worthy to sit.
> (10.1000-9)

[14] So much so that the *Stationers' Register* refers to *Cambises* as "an enterlude" (*SRO* 1122).

[15] I refer to and quote the text from Robert Carl Johnson's edition of *Cambises* (Preston 1975), which is divided in scenes and whose verses are numbered in a continuous series that does not restart with every scene.

If the mention of Cousin Cutpurse is to be taken as an indication that such criminals are present in the audience, then I would say that the emphasis on this data in *Cambises* is way stronger than in *Horestes*. And yet, this had never stopped scholars such as David Bevington (1968, 158) and Eugene D. Hill (1992, 405) to find it likely that the play could have been staged at court even with no evidence this actually happened, just for the political undertones that *Cambises* has always been recognized to have (cf. Armstrong 1955; Hill 1992; Dall'Olio 2019).[16]

It is true, though, that the mention of Cousin Cutpurse seems to point out to the staging of *Horestes* in a popular, low-class context. However, I could think of another reason for this, one that also deals with the other reason Wiggins and Richardson give against the staging of *Horestes* at court: "the assumption of a daytime performance". It is a well-known fact that, at the moment of writing or editing a theatrical script, an author and/or an editor tries to give the reader an idea of what the text would be like when played. And we do have evidence that, by the second half of the 1560s and the beginning of the 1570s, did exist in England a readership interested in theatrical texts that acted as "a vicarious experience of the [theatrical] event through ownership of a copy of the playbook" (Walker 1998, 30). This means that the "assumption of a daytime performance", as well as the mentions of Cousin Cutpurse in the soliloquies of the Vice, could have less to do with the circumstances of the staging of the play and more with the intention of the printer to recreate for his readership the context and the feeling of a performance in front of a popular audience. After all, we saw in Part 1 that we do have some evidence from the printed text that the work enjoyed some popular success in London: it is therefore likely that, at the moment of printing, the text was meant to summon up such a context of performance in the reader's mind. While on that subject, it is worth mentioning that the only textual evidence of a daytime performance in *Horestes* is the "good morrowe" (2) the Vice bids the audience with at the beginning of the play. Nothing would have prevented an actor from changing the line in the event of an

[16] The case is even more intriguing if we consider that *Cambises* and *Horestes* share, in addition to being often recognized as two politically charged plays, other similarities. Like *Horestes*, *Cambises* too is the work of a young member of the intellectual elite of the time: Thomas Preston, born in 1537, had just received his M.A. in Classics at Cambridge, King's College, by the time the tragedy was first staged (1561). He would go on to have an illustrious academic career (he would be Master of Trinity Hall (1584) and vice-chancellor of the University (1589-1590), in some ways comparable to the successful political career of Puckering. And as Puckering would eventually be admitted in the Privy Council, so Preston would also become a favourite of Queen Elizabeth, who considered him to be *scholarem suum*. I take the information about Preston from his biographical note in the *ODNB* by Alexandra Shepard.

evening performance; in a similar way, nothing would have prevented actors from toning down the jokes of the Vice and the references to his 'cousin' should the royal audience find it too offensive. So far, then, the evidence brought about by Wiggins and Richardson against the staging of *Horestes* at court is circumstantial at best.

More consideration should instead be given to the third argument they give against the identification: the lack of any allusion to a court performance in the printed text. I do agree with the editors when they say that, if the text has been printed after such a staging, then the printer's choice not to mention that would indeed be strange: why would he ever renounce to something that would be a significant source of interest for *Horestes*? However, I also find the alternative scenario Wiggins and Richardson themselves suggest for such an absence, that "the play was already in print before the court performance", to be quite likely. First of all, we should remember that we do not have a specific chronology of events. On the one hand, the frontispiece of *Horestes* only says that the play was printed in 1567, without saying anything more about the circumstances of the first staging. On the other hand, the note in the *Revels* only gives us a period of time for the staging of the seven plays, without specifying when exactly each of those performances took place. It is then far from impossible that the immediate, although ephemeral, success of *Horestes* (as evidenced by the unusual closeness between the first staging of the play and its print) lead to a quick printing of the play as a way for the printer to cash in on it, and that only later *Horestes* had been staged at court. The real question here is why, if that is the case, the text has not been reprinted immediately following the performance. My suggestion is that the answer can be found in the view involving the facts of Scotland that the play was expressing, one that was unwelcome to the Queen but also quite spread amongst her political advisors. This opinion (of which I shall talk in more detail in Part 4 of the essay) made *Horestes* a controversial text to be printed again, even after a performance in front of the Queen.

To conclude, none of the objections raised by Wiggins and Richardson against the identification between Puckering's interlude and the seven plays mentioned in the *Revels' Account* can be taken as conclusive evidence. When put under scrutiny, such objections emerge as based on a unilateral reading of some elements in the text, for which another explanation can be given that is equally as possible, such as Cousin Cutpurse being a standard comic routine for the Vice character or the assumption of a daytime performance being an editorial choice rather than a true indication of the context of the performances. The lack of an allusion to a court performance can be seen as stronger evidence, but given the absence of a precise chronology for when those events took place, on its own it is not enough to exclude that the performance did occur after the printing of the text. This leaves us

with a seemingly impossible choice. If another play was indeed staged about Orestes, as Wiggins and Richardson suggest, then we deal with another lost play from early modern English theatre, which admittedly is not an unlikely possibility.[17] Then again, it cannot go unnoticed that the court performance of a play such as *Horestes* – an interlude whose subject is classical in origin, whose author has been identified in a young aspiring politician, whose style is reminiscent of that of contemporary popular theatre, and whose content has often been seen as a comment upon a relevant political situation of the time – could enrich what we know about an important tradition of early modern English theatre, that of using the performance of the play to give the sovereign advice, sometimes even expressing opinions that would have been otherwise impossible to utter out loud. I will now turn to a discussion of this tradition.

4. Theatre and Politics at the Tudor Court

We may start with Shakespeare, more or less. In Scene 9 of *Sir Thomas More* (the collective play written by Shakespeare and other playwrights between the late 1590s and the early 1600s),[18] the titular character hosts a banquet at his house in Chelsea; as part of the feast, More employs a company of actors to perform an interlude entitled *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom.* The interlude is then performed on stage by the actors during the banquet, and More himself ends up acting in it to supply for the temporary absence of an actor. He plays an allegorical character, Good Counsel, and performs the part so well that he wins the respect of the actors: "Would not my lord make a rare player? O, he would uphold a company beyond all ho . . . Did ye mark how extemp'rically he fell to the matter, and spake Luggins's part almost as it is in the very book set down?" (9.301-6). This last remark can be seen as a reminder to a similitude More himself loved to use in his writings, that between the performance of an actor on stage and that of the politician in real life, waiting for the right time to deliver his advice to an audience and adapting his speech to the situation at hand. The most prominent example of this use comes from *Utopia,* where More exhorts Raphael Hythloday to learn to 'play the part' of the advisor (see on this passage Lupić 2019, 10-30):

[17] Speaking about this lost play, Wiggins and Richardson suggest it was performed by the Children of Windsor and the Children of the Royal Chapel, although they do not give any evidence for this: see Wiggins and Richardson, no. 465.

[18] There is no definite date for the composition and staging of *Sir Thomas More.* John Jowett argues for the original text to have been written around 1600: see Jowett in Shakespeare 2011, 424-33. I quote the text from this edition.

> Est alia philosophia civilior quae suam novit scaenam, eique sese accomodans, in ea fabula quae in minibus est suas partes concinne et cum decoro tutatur. Hac utendum est tibi. Alioquin dum agitur quaepiam Plauti comoedia, nugantibus inter se vernulis, si tu in proscaenium prodeas habitu philosophico et recenseas ex *Octavia* locum in quo Seneca disputat cum Nerone, nonne praestiterit egisse mutam personam quam aliena recitando talem fecisse tragicomoediam? . . . Quaecumque fabula in manu est, eam age quam potes optime, neque ideo totam perturbes quod tibi in mentem venit alterius quae sit lepidior.
>
> [There is another philosophy, better suited for the role of a citizen, that takes its cue, adapts itself to the drama in hand and acts its part neatly and appropriately. This is the philosophy for you to use. Otherwise, when a comedy of Plautus is being played, and the household slaves are cracking trivial jokes together, you come onstage in the garb of a philosopher and repeat Seneca's speech to Nero from the *Octavia*. Wouldn't it be better to take a silent role than to say something inappropriate and thus turn the play into a tragicomedy? . . . So go through with the drama in hand as best you can, and don't spoil it all just because you happen to think of a play by someone else that might be more elegant. (More 2007, 94-7)]

More's ability as an actor in scene 9 thus serves as yet another proof of his qualities as a good politician, able to adapt himself to every circumstance and in doing so always give the right advice for the situation. From that point of view, More comes to be the perfect incarnation of the ideal politician/courtier as the political thought of Renaissance Europe envisioned him in texts like Baldassarre Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (printed 1532, and translated in English by Thomas Hoby in 1561): a man capable of "guadagnarsi . . . talmente la benivolenzia e l'animo di quel principe a cui serve . . . e conoscendo la mente di quello inclinata a far cosa non conveniente . . . con gentil modo valersi della grazia acquistata . . . per rimoverlo da ogni intenzion viciosa" ("earning to such an extent the good will and the mind of that prince he serves that, if he ever sees that prince inclined to something unproper, with gentleness he'd use the grace he acquired to remove him from any vicious intent"; 4.5, 358-9; my translation).[19]

This overlap between acting and politics was not only a literary convention used to describe how a politician ought to act: sometimes it took on a very practical meaning. Scholarship of the last three decades often observed how, in the history of early modern British theatre, either playwrights or their patrons used the performance of a play as an occasion to comment

[19] It should be noted that, in the most famous scene of the drama (the one usually attributed to Shakespeare), More did just that, by quelling with a speech the revolt of the London citizens and persuading them not to act against the laws.

on important issues of politics and religion. This is particularly relevant for the genre of the interludes, whose performance in house of nobilities and at court made them particularly suitable to be used as a form of teaching the audience and giving advice on important matters. Greg Walker defined very well the cultural foundations on which such a process was based (see Walker 1998, 63-6). The master of the house, as he presided over the feast, played the role of the good ruler, exerting his power and magnificence in the right way – which meant, according to the political culture of the time, also listening to and accepting advice from his 'subjects', without imposing any restrictions upon their liberty of speech. In return, the playwright or the patron who set up the performance is called to provide such advice as a way of performing his duty as a wise advisor and helper of the master, speaking to him freely and without fear of antagonising him. Theatrical representation thus became a terrain for political exchange and confrontation, even more so because the stature of the performance as a playful event and of the feast itself as a moment of relative relaxation of social norms allowed the author an even greater freedom of speech. At the Tudor court, this often translated into an opportunity for the intellectuals to advise the sovereign directly on major internal and external political issues.

This is the case of two famous interludes by John Heywood, *The Play of the Weather* (1533) and *The Four PP* (1534). The author was the best-known playwright at the court of Henry VIII, but he also carried a reputation of secretly being a Catholic. In *The Play*, Heywood stages the story (partially taken from a dialogue by Lucian) of Jupiter attempting to arrange the weather of the world in a way that meets the needs of all mortals. However, everything he does ends up disappointing some representatives of different types of men, who come to complain about it and ask for a change. A similar plot also recurs in *The Four PP*, where four different characters representing four different trades (a Palmer, a Pardoner, a 'Pothecary', a Pedlar) discuss matters of religion in a vain attempt to find a compromise and proceed together in a pilgrimage. In these plays, Heywood expresses a clear condemnation of the religious strife plaguing the country during those turbulent years, while at the same time inviting Henry to a policy of tolerance and acceptance, in order to guarantee genuine peace in his kingdom (see Walker 1998, 89-100; 2005, 100-19).

It was however around the half of the century that this use of the theatre as a means of political communication reached its peak. Many interludes printed and/or performed in between the 1540s and the 1560s do indeed present a very transparent political allegory, sometimes to the point of being almost too explicit in their advocation for a particular cause. This is the case with David Lyndsay's *A Satire of the Three Estates,* first printed in 1602, but staged at the court of Scotland for the first time in 1540 (cf.

Grantley 2003, 312-3). It is a true religious satire, which sees his protagonist Rex Humanitas being coaxed by a group of Vices to give in to his carnal desires, taking advantage of the fact that Lady Sensuality (i.e. the Catholic Church) approves of his behaviour. After the positive character Divine Correction (who presents himself as sent by God "to punische tyrants for their transgressioun, / And to caus leill men live upon their awin", 1603-6; I quote the text from Lyndsay 1998) persuades the King to reform, the second part of the play sees the sovereign presiding over a full-fledged session of Parliament, where the 'three estates' of the kingdom (nobility, church and people) are gathered to redress the wrongs made by the Vices. A position of prominence is given to John the Commonweal, representant of the people, to which Lydnsay entrusts a speech that attacks the Scottish Catholic Church and his orders: "I mein nocht laborand spirituallie, / Nor for thair living corporallie: / Lyand in dennis lyke idill doggis, / I them compair to weil fed hoggis". The interlude, often acknowledged as an important text in the history of both English theatre and the evolution of British political theory (cf. Majumder 2019, 50-70), ends up with the Parliament putting down a detailed project to reform the Church in no less than fifteen points. For that reason also, the *Satire* is perhaps the most explicit example of how the space of the theatrical performance could be transformed into a moment of political discussion.

While no interlude in England would ever be thus politically charged, nonetheless many examples can be found of interludes being used to comment about political issues. In 1553, the plot of the aforementioned *Respublica*, staged in front of Mary Tudor, is based on the same narrative mechanism as the *Satire*: the main character, Respublica, is tricked by a group of Vices into giving in to its desires, only to be brought back to the right path by a series of positive allegorical characters. Prominent among these is Nemesis, an allegorical representation of Mary himself, come to redress the evils of the country and punish the wicked. Seven years later, in 1560, another play already mentioned in this essay, Thomas Preston's *Cambises*, expressed in more or less explicit tones an open condemnation of the behaviour of previous English sovereigns towards the Reformation (see Hill 1992, 426-7). The depiction of the Persian king Cambises (a well-known figure of tyrant in Renaissance literature: see Hill 1992, 419-22; Dall'Olio 2020) as a prince that "in his youth was trained up, by trace of vertues lore: / Yet (béeing king) did clene forget, his perfect race before" (Prol. 19-20) was a reminder to Henry VIII as was depicted and criticised in some Protestant circles: the king who, after ruling for years like an ideal king, then revealed his true face when he used the Reform for his own ends, with no intention to actually reform the Church. By the end of the play, the cruelty of Cambises towards his victims is explicitly compared to that of Edmund Bonner ("was a kin

to Bishop Bonner"; 11.1142), Bishop of London under Mary and renowned persecutor of Protestants: a comparison that makes even clearer the political undertones of Preston's tragedy.

It is therefore highly significant that one of Elizabeth's first acts of government is an edict, dating back to 1559, concerning "Unlicensed Interludes and Plays", in which it is declared illegal to address "either matters of religion or the governance of the estate" (Hughes and Larkin 1969, 115) in plays not approved from the Crown. The purpose of the edict is clearly to put an end to the freedom that was guaranteed by the theatrical event, preventing it from becoming a means for the dissemination of dissident opinions that could jeopardise the legitimacy of Elizabeth's title and worsen the already tense atmosphere of conflict within the country created by Mary's persecutions of Protestants. However, at least during the first decade of her reign, the edict proved ineffective, as evidenced by the great success of *Cambises*, which would turn it into a classic of Elizabethan tragedy. Such a success was a demonstration of how strongly rooted was the conception of theatre as an important medium for political discussion, despite any intervention against it. Another prominent example of how deeply rooted this tradition was would be, two years later, the performance at court, during the Christmas festivities of 1561-1562, of Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville's *Gorboduc*, under the patronage of Robert Dudley Earl of Leicester. It was an event with a deep political subtext (see Walker 1998, 197-210): it was intended to persuade Elizabeth to marry Leicester instead of giving her hand to a foreign husband. If she did, then Elizabeth would have proved to be a good sovereign who listened to the advice of her faithful subjects.

In the light of what we have seen in this section, I think it is now clear that, should we accept the identification of Puckering's interlude with the play mentioned in the *Revels' Accounts*, the resulting scenario would fit perfectly within the customs of early Elizabethan theatre. *Horestes*, in this picture, would be yet another case of an interlude whose performance before the sovereign could be a way of advising the sovereign on important political issues, as many authors and plays had done before him. In Puckering's case, this case is particularly relevant since, as research over the last fifty years has widely acknowledged, *Horestes* in fact represents a commentary in dramatic form on the events that transpired in Scotland in the same year as the interlude was printed.

5. *Horestes,* Mary, and Elizabeth

On 10 February 1567, Henry Stuart Lord Darnley, second husband of Queen Mary Stuart of Scotland, was murdered in mysterious circumstances. What

followed was a rather slow investigation, which fuelled the suspicion among the Scottish nobility that Mary herself had organised the act to get rid of her unwelcome consort. This only aggravated the already existing tensions, in regard to both politics and religion. Mary had only a few years before come to live in Scotland after a life spent at the French court, and despite her choice of pursuing a policy of religious appeasement and tolerance, her undeniable Catholic faith was hardly well received by the mostly Protestant noblemen, who for twenty years had ruled the country in more or less complete autonomy. Darnley's murder and Mary's subsequent marriage (15 May 1567) to James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, and prime suspect in the murder, proved to be the last straw. A month later, on 15 June, an army of rebellious nobles defeated the royal army at the Battle of Carberry Hill and captured the Queen. They imprisoned her in Edinburgh and forced her to abdicate in favour of her and Darnley's son James, who was not even a year old.

That *Horestes* was somehow connected to these events was first suggested by James E. Phillips (1955), in the same article that proposed the identification of the author with Sir John Puckering. Subsequently, other scholars have taken up and deepened Phillips' hypothesis, showing how the dramatic structure and imagery of the interlude bear stylistic similarities to polemical writings against Mary of the time (see Robertson 1990; George 2004). The comparison between Mary and Clytemnestra (two unfaithful wives who kill their husbands to marry their lovers) had already recurred in some anti-Marian ballads written to lament Darnley's death, and it became so popular that four years later, in 1571, George Buchanan would use it again in a letter to the English diplomat Daniel Rogers to describe how dangerous the deposed sovereign was (see Phillips 1955, 233). Moreover, Lincoln's Inn, where Puckering studied, was a notorious den of opponents of the Queen of Scots, to such an extent that it earned an official reprimand from none other than William Cecil.[20] Nor is it to be forgotten that the most notable actions of Puckering's political career are linked to Mary's fate. In the 1580s, Puckering was at the forefront of actions against plots in favour of Mary, starting with that of William Babington, and it was his tireless activity in this field that earned him a knighthood. Both Puckering's biography and the socio-political context of 1567 thus seem to provide a strong indication not only of him being the author of *Horestes*, but also of the nature of the play as a commentary on what happened in Scotland.

Speaking of which, it must be noticed that the way Puckering treats the issue of matricide within his interlude bears very strong similarities to the way the issue of the subjects' right to revolt against a bad king is treated in the dialogue *De Iure Regni Apud Scotos.* Printed in 1579 after a long circulation

[20] We are left with the letter in which Mary thanks Cecil for his intervention: see *SPO* 1566-1568, 148-9.

in manuscript form, it was actually written in the immediate aftermath of the events of 1567 as a way to justify the actions of the nobility. The author, George Buchanan, was one of the most renowned and celebrated writers of the time, as both a translator from Greek and a poet and tragedian in his own right; he was also one of the most eminent representatives of Protestantism in his homeland. In the dialogue, Buchanan states that kingship is an institution created by the people to enforce the law and that the king's power cannot be dissolved from its function of acting as a defender of the law. He then asks his interlocutor (the English politician Thomas Maitland) who should check that the sovereign is respecting his office. Maitland has no doubt: "ipsum regem" ("the king himself", Buchanan 2004, 31).[21] Buchanan does not agree: leaving the king as the sole authority over himself means granting a man, by nature subject to corruption, absolute power, and that would mean putting the state at great risk. On the contrary, it must be the people who control him, since they are the true source of royal power: "non rex legi sed lex regi coercendo quaesita est. Et a lege id ipsum habet quod rex est, nam absque ea tyrannus esset . . . Lex igitur rege potentior est ac velut rectrix et moderatrix et cupiditatum et actionum eius" ("It is not the king who is established to limit the law, but the law to limit the king. And it is the law that defines what a king is, while he who departs from it is a tyrant . . . The law is therefore more powerful than the king, and acts as a check and moderator of his actions and desires"). It follows that if the king fails in his duty, the people have every right to rebel and even kill him as an enemy to the state.

It was not the first time such an idea had been proposed. The right of the people to depose and kill an evil ruler had already been raised in some important political texts of the Middle Ages, and in the second half of the 16th century had been taken up and expanded in some important texts written by Protestant intellectuals in exile during Mary Tudor's reign, such as John Ponet (*A Short Treatise of Politick Power*, 1556) and Christopher Goodman (*How Superior Powers ought to be obeyed of their subjectees,* 1558; for a more in-depth discussion I refer to Dall'Olio 2017, 476-81; 2022, 229-31). There are, however, significant differences (see Mason and Smith in Buchanan 2004; Majumder 2019, 89). In those texts, the right of the people to disobey and rebel against the king was argued on religious grounds: the ruler is to be punished insofar as his behaviour makes him a sinner who fails in his God-given task. In *De Iure*, this religious perspective is absent: Buchanan states that the reason why the people can punish the sovereign is that the latter has received his power from the people. This too was not a novel idea: it had already appeared within some political treatises of those years, most notably

[21] All quotations from the *De Iure* text come from Buchanan 2004. The translation is mine.

Sir Thomas Smith's *De Republica Anglorum* (written in 1561-1562, printed posthumously in 1583). This text opens with a definition of the state as "a society or common doing of a multitude of free men collected together and united by common accord" (Smith 1583, 49) and of the sovereign as "who by succession or election commeth with the good will of the people to that gouernement, and doth administer the common wealth by the lawes of the same and by equitie, and doth seeke the profit of the people as much as his owne" (6). In a sense, then, Buchanan's dialogue was merely applying a widespread idea of Renaissance political theory to the concrete situation in Scotland, taking it to its more extreme but also more logical conclusions: Mary had been a bad sovereign, and since she received her power as Queen from the people, they had exercised their power over her by taking it away and entrusting it to a worthier ruler.

The same logic can be found in *Horestes* and specifically in the way Puckering stages the discussion and eventual justification of Orestes' matricide. As we saw in Part 1, two allegorical characters, the Vice and the Councell, are deeply connected to this issue. The former, as the official representation of evil within the world of the interlude, convinces Orestes to go to war against his mother, deluding him into believing that his action is approved by the gods; he then accompanies him in battle and is charged by Orestes with the task of killing his mother. This proximity between the hero and Vice, from a dramatic point of view, underlines how Orestes' action is, in itself, of evil origin and nature. Other elements of the play reinforce this negative view of the matricide. In scene 4, Puckering stages a heated confrontation between Orestes and another allegorical character, Nature. She reproaches the young man for his behaviour, accuses him of "tyraney" (i.e. of following his own desire against any right, as a tyrant does) and invites him to remember the unfortunate fate of those who dared kill their parents, such as Oedipus[22] and Nero. Also recurring in the imagery of the interlude is a metaphor – that of fire as a symbol of desire – used by the author to highlight how Orestes' revenge is part of a cycle of death and destruction with potentially damaging results for the state: the young man claims to be burning with desire to carry out his revenge ("my hart doth boil in dede, with firey piercing heate", 216); the adulterers Aegisthus and Clytemnestra affirm that the love that pervades them is like a fire (554-69); the Vice triumphantly affirms, while appropriating Revenge's name, that "when

[22] This mention of Oedipus is arguably one of the first instances in British literature when the character is somehow presented as a tyrant. This was not the way Renaissance literature usually viewed Oedipus. In fact, four years before Puckering's interlude, in Alexander Neville's English translation of Seneca's *Oedipus* the character was portrayed as an essentially good ruler: cf. Woodbridge 2010, 134-5; Dall'Olio 2018.

myne eayre is set on fyare / I rap them, I snap them – that is my desyare" (670-1); finally, another allegorical character (Fame) tells the audience that "in lyke sort Revenge hath set [Menelaus] on fyare" (905) when he has heard of Orestes' crime. There is thus no doubt that Orestes' matricide is seen as a crime in the interlude, at least when it is considered a crime against the natural, biological bonds between mother and son.

At the same time, however, matricide is approved by Councell as punishment for Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon, which must be punished for the good of the commonwealth. This becomes even more important because Councell is a character with a double symbolic value. On the one hand, it can be interpreted as an allegory of an abstract concept (that of reasonableness, to which every concrete action may be referred); on the other hand, it also represents a reference, if not to an actual governing body, at least to a group of people who constitute the expression of the general will of the kingdom and the law that represents it. It is no coincidence, as Karen Robertson (1990, 31-2) noted, that the character speaks in abstract, bureaucratic terms where the family ties between Clytemnestra and Orestes are purposely blurred, in order to better highlight the principle that "the prince as the executor of public law . . . cannot be called a tyrant even when he sheds his mother's blood" (Robertson 1990, 31). Orestes himself affirms this principle in order to rebut Nature's accusations: "If that the law doth condemn her as worthy death to have, / Oh Nature, woulst thou will that I her life should seme to sayve?" (434-5). At the end of the interlude, it is this opinion that will prevail: the judges of the Areopagus will deem that Orestes has performed an act of justice in killing his mother, and Menelaus will renounce revenge and give his daughter in marriage to Orestes.[23]

The interlude thus ends with the victory of the principle that the true source of the sovereign's power is the will of the people, which is even able to absolve him of terrible crimes if they end up being for the benefit of the commonwealth.[24] Therefore, if a king is a good king, he has to consult the

[23] It is, as Miola (2017, 160) points out, an ambiguous ending. As I mentioned before, the Vice's deception is never revealed (the character is entirely absent from the scene at the Areopagus), and Orestes does not show repentance for his action, thus not allowing for any moral 'redemption' on his part as would be suited to the conventions of the interludes. Moreover, Idumeus persuades Menelaus to renounce justice for reasons of pure political expediency: it is not justice in the absolute sense that prevails at the end of the interlude, but reasons of state, or, as Idumeus defines it, the "pollicye" (481), a term that is deeply ambiguous (see Latham 1984, 97-8).

[24] Once again, this is an idea that could already be found not only in the aforementioned texts of resistance in the 1550s but even in a literary work such as *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1559), a collection of examples from English history gathered by a group of authors led by William Baldwin with the intent of providing young magistrates with moral examples about how to administer justice. In that work, it was

people before taking any actions, as Idumeus advises Orestes to do as he leaves for war: "Over rashe in doinge ought doth often damage bringe; / Therfore take councell first, before thou dost anye thinge" (482-3). In the final scene of the interlude, Orestes demonstrates that he has learned his lesson well when, upon ascending to the throne, he asks his subjects if they would accept him as their sovereign, and only after their positive response does he officially become king. As long as Orestes acts as their representative and in agreement with them, nothing he does can be considered a crime. This line of thought is perfectly analogous to that expressed by Buchanan in *De Iure*, where it served to justify the right of the Scottish nobles to depose Mary in the name of the welfare of the kingdom of Scotland. According to Buchanan, since it is the authority of the people that gives kings their powers, the war against those kings that "non patriae sed sibi gerunt imperium neque publicae utiliatis sed suae voluptatis rationem habent" ("do not rule for the good of the country but for themselves, taking decisions not for the public welfare but for their own pleasure", Buchanan 2004, 54), is a right war: the people have the right to depose those that come short of their task, and give the authority to another one that would wield it better.

From this point of view, it should be noted that Puckering makes a particular modification to his sources that adds further significance to Clytemnestra's death. In the interlude, unlike what happened in the sources, where Orestes mutilated his mother by cutting off her breasts before throwing her body to the dogs, Clytemnestra is led off-stage by the Vice to be killed. As pointed out by Bigliazzi (2018), in Elizabethan theatre sovereigns are never killed on stage unless they are first deposed (like Richard II) or are usurpers (like Richard III). This rule is respected in *Horestes*, even more so by the contrast of Clytemnestra's death with that of Aegisthus, who is simply hanged on stage. That Clytemnestra is instead killed off-stage represents a subterranean recognition of the legitimacy of her position as Queen, which adds another level to Orestes' rebellion: he is no longer just a son rebelling against his mother, but also a subject rebelling against his sovereign. Puckering's interlude thus emerges as a perfect dramatic counterpart to Buchanan's dialogue: both texts justify and approve the deposition and killing of a ruler who, however much he/she may hold legitimate power, misused it by proving unworthy of their task. This element, when added to the other clues in our possession (the chronological proximity between the printing of the interlude and the rebellion; the traditional juxtaposition of Mary and Clytemnestra; Puckering's attendance at Lincoln's Inn; Puckering's subsequent political

explicitly stated that, although rebellion against constituted authority was a crime and a sin, sometimes God allowed it to punish the people in authority for their sins: see Lucas 2007.

career), makes the conclusion almost inevitable that *Horestes* represents not only a commentary in dramatic form on what happened, but also a defence of what the nobility did.

This would be perfectly in line with the traditional political stature of the interludes, which, as we saw in section 3 above, were texts habitually used to express and argue matters of a political nature as a way to advise the sovereign how to act. In Puckering's case, however, this point takes on a second-level significance, since in this case the author was expressing ideas that, had they been expressed otherwise, would have earned him some unwanted attention from the royal censorship. While Elizabeth accepted the action of the Scottish nobles, she never approved of it; in the subsequent years, she would have long hesitated before condemning Mary to death, well aware that, in doing so, she risked setting a dangerous precedent.[25] In addition, in the years immediately following the occurrences in Scotland, the English religious political and cultural establishment, under the Queen's leadership, would take precautions to prevent 'dangerous' ideas such as those expressed in *De Iure* (whose reading was forbidden by an Act of Parliament in 1584) from spreading. In 1571, the Anglican Church published a text, the *Homilie Against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion,* where it is clearly stated that the people had no right to rebel against the sovereign instituted by God, not even if he proved unworthy of his role: "a rebel is worse then the worst prince, and rebellion worse then the worst government of the worst prince" (*Homilie* 1571, B1*v*). The people are thus invited to consider the accession to the throne of a tyrannical ruler as a punishment imposed by God for their sins and to trust in the justice of the Lord, who "wyll either dysplace hym, or of an evyll prince, make hym a good prince" (B2*v*). For the next fifty years, this would become the official position of the Tudor and Stuart kings, and the censors would be very strict in checking that it was never questioned. However, at the time of the printing of the *Horestes,* theatre was still a place where it was possible to express even dangerous ideas when not explicitly against the will of the sovereign. Robert Dudley had done it in 1561 when, by patronising the performance of *Gorboduc* at court in 1562, he tried to use it to persuade Elizabeth to marry him, thus tackling a subject that Elizabeth would not allow anyone to talk about.

If we were to accept the identification of the *Horestes* with the "play of Orestes and the Scottes" (a juxtaposition that, in the light of what we have seen, is very significant) recorded in the *Revels*, the event would basically fall within the same cultural pattern as *Gorboduc*: the performance of the play by a young author seeking affirmation at court becomes also a way

[25] George speculated that "[Puckering]'s . . . reluctance to stage the death of a female monarch seems . . . to anticipate Elizabeth I's own unease' at the prospect of having Mary beheaded" (George 2004, 75).

to offer advice to the sovereign on a difficult and potentially dangerous matter without suffering any consequences. From that point of view, Robert Knapp's criticism for the political interpretation of the play (an exception amongst scholarship on *Horestes*) seems to somehow miss the point. Of course, Knapp is right when he points out that, when compared to the more complex discussion about Mary's deposition going on in official letters and treatises at the time, Puckering's treatment of such political issue is very superficial: "he glosses over the difficult questions that so occupied Elizabeth and her councillors; he lets his characters assume the warrant of heaven and the right of Horestes in a thoroughly unrealistic way" (Knapp 1973, 215-16). However, Puckering was not writing a political treatise on the subject, nor was he yet an important political figure, able to discuss such matters in an environment where they deserved more serious considerations. He was a young politician for which the staging of an interlude of his at court was the first step to make himself known. Moreover, his interlude was to be performed during a festivity, i.e. an environment where the play was supposed first of all to entertain. It is then not a surprise that he simplified as much as he could the political issue at stake, so that they would more easily adapt to the plot of his play while at the same time ensuring that the message was clear. It is also not a surprise that, in spite of this performance, the text was not reprinted again: it was unlikely that Elizabeth would ever allow again the staging of a play that seemed to affirm that the people had the right to depose a sovereign.

6. Conclusion

As I mentioned at the beginning of the article, we have no documentary evidence to support the hypothesis that *Horestes* is the play mentioned in the *Revels' Accounts* as having been performed at Whitehall in 1567-1568. However, I believe to have demonstrated that not only the arguments brought by Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson to reject the identification are not as strong as they seem, but also that, if one accepts such an identification, the resulting scenario fits perfectly within the cultural patterns of the early Elizabethan age concerning politics and theatre. On the one hand, the staging of the interlude in 1567 would represent the debut of a young jurist, John Puckering, with political ambitions, who, through the reworking for the stage of a subject known from previous literary tradition, addresses relevant political issues of his time. In doing so, he demonstrates not so much his skills as a dramatist, but rather, those necessary for the career of a Renaissance politician, especially the ability to express his views by exploiting one of the official channels of political communication of the time. On the other,

as I showed in Part 3, the performance of plays during festive occasions often represented an occasion for members of the political elite (either the authors themselves, or their patrons) to offer their advice to the sovereign on important topics. This would even allow them sometimes to freely express on stage opinions that might otherwise have met with opposition, as would be the case with *Horestes*, given its oft-recognised connection with the events surrounding the deposition of Mary Stuart as described in Part 4 of the article. More specifically, the nature of the play as a defence in dramatic form of the right of the Scottish noblemen to rebel against a Queen unworthy of her role (an argument in many ways analogous to that of George Buchanan's dialogue *De Iure Regni Apud Scotos*) made it the exponent of a view not officially approved by the crown and yet having deep connections to English Renaissance political thought of the time. It is therefore far from inconceivable that some members of the Elizabethan court sympathetic to the cause of the Scottish nobles patronised the performance of *Horestes* before Elizabeth as a form of advice to the Queen. In the absence of any valid alternative (we have no record of any other plays concerning the Orestes myth written or performed in this period), in my opinion this is a scenario that points decisively in favour of identifying *Horestes* with the play mentioned in the *Revels' Accounts*, thus making it another highly remarkable example of the links between theatre, politics and feast in Elizabethan England.

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Aristotle's Presence in Opera Between Theory and Practice. A Case Study: Girolamo Frigimelica Roberti's *Ercole in cielo*

Abstract

Since the origins of the opera genre, reflection on Greek tragedy and music as they were described in ancient treatises, and above all in those of Aristotle, has been crucial. Reflecting on *Poetics*, in particular, led to several essential considerations for creating the genre in the sixteenth century and influenced the poetics of seventeenth-century *dramma per musica*. This new theatrical genre, with its specific characteristics, was consolidated during the seventeenth century, nonetheless, towards the end of the century, in the context of the so-called opera reform, some neo-classical librettists stood out, of whom Count Girolamo Frigimelica Roberti was considered the most radical. Frigimelica Roberti, whose ideas were considered "distorted" by his contemporaries, distinguished himself as a staunch supporter of Aristotelian demands and accompanied his reflections on Poetics with an attempt to apply its principles. In my contribution, I intend to focus on the libretto *Ercole in cielo* (1696), highlighting how the librettist's attempt to adhere to a strenuous observance of Aristotelian principles nevertheless went hand in hand with the need for different choices on a practical level.

Keywords: Aristotle's *Poetics*; Girolamo Frigimelica Roberti; opera; opera reform; seventeenth-century librettos; Hercules; classical reception

1. Aristotle's *Poetics* and the Opera Genre

The influence that Aristotle's *Poetics* had on western theatre offers a vast and fruitful field of study, and within that, the study of its specific influence on opera is just as wide-ranging. There is no shortage, in fact, of contributions from musicology that explore in depth how the reception of the *Poetics* – and the commentaries on it – played a fundamental role in artistic thought at the birth of the opera genre, right from the first musical experiments born within the cultural temperament of the late Italian Renaissance. The first modern staging of a Greek tragedy took place in 1585 at the Olympic Theatre in Vicenza, where a group of scholars set out to revive ancient Greek tragedy by staging the choruses from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, set

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to music by Andrea Gabrieli.[1] Orsatto Giustiniani, who was in charge of the Italian translation, defined the chosen play in his preface as "la più eccellente tragedia del mondo, stimata da ogn'uno bellissima sopra tutte l'altre; et della quale Aristotile istesso in quella parte, ou'egli ragiona della Tragedia, si valse per esempio nel formar la sua *Poetica*" ("The most excellent tragedy in the world, esteemed by everyone to be beautiful above all others; and which Aristotle himself, in that part where he discusses Tragedy, used as an example in formulating his *Poetics*"; translation mine).[2] The fact that *Oedipus Rex* was defined in the *Poetics* as the perfect tragedy certainly legitimised its choice, as well as its symbolic value. However, the Sophoclean drama must also have been chosen by the Academicians of the Olympic for another reason, namely its choruses. In a 2015 article, Donatella Restani analyses several documents related to the choruses of the *Oedipus* of Vicenza – the staging designs made by Angelo Ingegneri and Sperone Speroni, various comments, reviews by Ingegneri himself and other spectators – situating them in the context of the ideas on the chorus circulating at the time, derived from the contemporary reception of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the Olympic Academy. The Academicians, in fact, were familiar with Alessandro Pazzi's Latin translation of 1536 and Bernardo Segni's vernacular version of 1549; furthermore, some of them were undoubtedly also familiar with the commentaries by Robortello (1548), Vettori (1560) and Castelvetro (1570). Restani's article offers, in general, "an interesting case study in order to investigate how Italian sixteenth-century transmission, translation, and interpretation of ancient Greek and Latin treatises on poetry, rhetoric, and music shaped new musical theorisations and experiments" (78), since the very reflection born among Renaissance intellectuals was certainly at the basis – or at least constituted the prelude – of the subsequent birth of the new musical genre we now call opera. Moreover, it allows us to see specifically the Academicians' thoughts on the function and purpose of the chorus as it was described in the *Poetics* – or rather, as they had, often erroneously, interpreted Aristotle's description.

The experiment of the Academicians of the Olympic Theatre was an isolated one, as it explicitly aimed at recovering Greek tragedy. It was, in fact, Greek music that constituted the major subject of study and consideration for the intellectuals who pondered this new type of theatre, as can be seen in works such as *L'antica musica ridotta alla moderna pratica* by Nicola Vicentino (1555) and the *Dialogo della musica antica e moderna* by Vincenzo Galilei

[1] Among the many studies on the subject, some fundamental ones are: Gallo 1973, Palisca 1985, Flashar 1991 (in particular 25-32), Mazzoni 2013.

[2] The entire quotation can be found in Gallo 1973, xxxi. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are mine.

(1581-1582).[3] However, the attempt to recreate the ancient harmony between word and music was also imbued with a certain misunderstanding of what ancient drama was: in fact, theorists – and the reference is of course to the exponents of the Florentine Camerata – "studied and imitated ancient Greek music theory and practice, mistakenly thinking that ancient poetic drama had been sung in its entirety" (Ketterer and Solomon 2017, n.p.). On the other hand, it is well known how much cultural prominence was given to the study – and consequent dissemination – of the *Poetics* and the commentaries on it by members of the Florentine Camerata and the Accademia degli Alterati, whose facilitators were authors such as Piero Vettori and Girolamo Mei. The paradoxical discovery of lost music laid the foundations for devising a new kind, so much so that Jacopo Peri's Euridice speaks of a "new way of singing" ("un nuovo modo di cantare").[4] In the wake of the sixteenth-century critics and literati, in the following century there followed members of the Accademia degli Incogniti,[5] who, considering chapter 1 of the *Poetics*,[6] questioned the various possible functions that music had in ancient drama – that is, whether tragedy was entirely sung, whether only the choruses were sung or neither – and this debate was amply highlighted by Claude Palisca in his fundamental *Humanism in Italian Renaissance Musical Thought*.[7] That Aristotle, again, had formed the basis of the Incogniti's reflections should come as no surprise. In fact, the Academy's philosophy derived from the teachings of the peripatetic Cesare Cremonini, professor of philosophy at the University of Padua, where many of the Academy's members had studied. Reflection on the *Poetics,* therefore, led to a series of crucial considerations for the definition of the genre in seventeenth-century

[3] On Galilei, see especially Palisca 2003 and, on the whole operation of reviving – or rather, attempting to emulate – ancient music from ancient treatises on philosophy (Plato and Aristotle among all) and music theory (Aristoxenus), see Maniates and Palisca 1996, and Palisca 2006. In particular, Peri and Caccini attempted to recreate the *hêdumenos logos* of Greek tragedy as described by Aristotle in the *Poetics*, based on Aristoxenus' distinction between musical intervals and spoken language, and the recitative style developed from these principles. See also Solomon 2011.

[4] See Restani 2001, 39ff.; see the entire essay for her analysis of the legacy of ancient dramaturgy in sixteenth-century musical culture. On the Alterati, see also Palisca 1968.

[5] On the Accademia degli Incogniti, see Rosand 1991, 37-40.

[6] *Po.* 1447b24–8: "there are also some arts which use all the stated media – rhythm, melody, metre – as do dithyramb and nomes, tragedy and comedy. They differ in that some employ them all together, others use them in certain parts" (εἰσὶ δέ τινες αἳ πᾶσι χρῶνται τοῖς εἰρημένοις, λέγω δὲ οἷον ῥυθμῷ καὶ μέλει καὶ μέτρῳ, ὥσπερ ἥ τε τῶν διθυραμβικῶν ποίησις καὶ ἡ νόμων ἥ τε τραγῳδία καὶ ἡ κωμῳδία· διαφέρουσι δὲ ὅτι αἱ μὲν ἅμα πᾶσιν αἱ δὲ κατὰ μέρος). For the English translation of the *Poetics,* see Halliwell 1995.

[7] Palisca 1985; see, in particular, Chapter 14: "Theory of Dramatic Music".

Venice.[8] However, the conclusion reached was always the same, namely that "regardless of ancient practice, the requirements of modern taste alone were sufficient to justify *dramma per musica*" (Rosand 1991, 40). It is not surprising, then, that the ancient Aristotelian rules that were the basis of the debates that had animated the theorists, such as the famous Aristotelian unities of time, place and action, the division into acts, the mixture of genres, and the use of choruses, were abandoned. However, the question of unities continued to be a matter for debate in the seventeenth century, in which "the crux of the problem . . . was the disagreement as to whether Aristotle had addressed the unities at all in his *Poetics*" (46).[9] Again, the debate was resolved in favour of freedom to (not) respect the Aristotelian unities, so much so that the librettists emphasised making excuses to the reader for their absence. An absence that, on the other hand, had its motivation, since the theory also came into conflict with one of the main requirements of the new operatic genre: variety. The issue of division into acts, as Ellen Rosand (1991, 52) points out, "seems to have been much simpler proposition for the librettists than adherence to the unities". The choice facing the librettists was simple: the plot could be divided into three or five acts. The five acts were clearly reminiscent of ancient tragedy, generally articulated in five episodes, while the choice of three acts drew on both *commedia dell'arte* and Spanish drama, which had a great influence on seventeenth-century librettists. Many librettists initially followed the five-act division, but from 1640 the second option was favoured, becoming conventional for the genre of *dramma per musica*, and "the issue did not rise again until the end of the century, when a few of the most radical neo-classicising librettists, especially Frigimelica Roberti, but also Zeno, used five-act division as an emblem of their orthodoxy" (53). Frigimelica Roberti,[10] in particular, is considered the most radical of librettists in the context of the so-called opera reform that animated the late seventeenth century.[11] Between 1694 and 1708, he composed

[8] Starting in 1637 – the date chosen by convention for the performance of Benedetto Ferrari and Francesco Manelli's *Andromeda* at the Theatre of San Cassiano – a new era of opera theatre began in Venice: an impresario-type theatre. This structural change implied that the type of performance offered and the dynamics relating to its production also changed. See especially Bianconi and Walker 1984; Bianconi 1986; Fabbri 1990.

[9] Rosand 1991, 46. See the chapter "*Drama for* Music: The Question of Genre". Specifically, the question of unities can be found on pages 45-51, the question of division into acts on pages 52-3, and the chorus on pages 54-5. On Aristotle's interpretation and attempts to legitimise the new genre by referring to him, see also Weiss 1987, 1-30.

[10] For the biography and librettist activity of Frigimelica Roberti see, among others, Leich 1972; Freeman 1981; Saunders 1985; Balata and Finocchi Ghersi 1998.

[11] For an overview of the opera reform see, among others, Di Benedetto 1986.

a series of librettos for the Teatro S. Giovanni Grisostomo, aiming to outline what the new rules for theatre should be. Frigimelica Roberti's starting point was Aristotle, who maintained his stronghold in the Paduan environment where the count was born and trained (Balata and Finocchi Ghersi 1998). In this article, I intend to use a specific case study, namely the libretto *Ercole in cielo* (1696), to highlight Frigimelica Roberti's method, which represents a peculiar case of Aristotelianism at the end of the seventeenth century – and, in general, in known libretto production.[12]

2. The Aristotelianism of Girolamo Frigimelica Roberti

To understand Frigimelica Roberti's method, it is necessary to focus briefly on the theatre for which he composed all eleven of his librettos,[13] since "his extreme solutions, while they contributed to the climate of reform at the time they were written, were fitted to the Theatre S. Giovanni Grisostomo's special circumstances" (Saunders 1985, 79). Frigimelica Roberti was related to Giovanni Carlo Grimani, who founded the aforementioned theatre with his brother Vincenzo. In addition, Giovanni Carlo had founded the Accademia degli Animosi in Venice, which was incorporated into the Accademia dell'Arcadia in 1698. The relationship between the literary theories of the Arcadia and the reform of opera has been extensively investigated by scholars;[14] what I would like to emphasise here is that S. Giovanni Grisostomo became the venue for the so-called "reform librettos"[15] shortly after 1690. Until the first half of the eighteenth century, when it was closed, serious operas with librettos by well-known reformers such as Apostolo Zeno, Domenico David, Francesco Silvani and Girolamo Frigimelica Roberti were staged. Specifically, in addition to the eleven operas by Frigimelica already mentioned, David wrote only two operas for the S. Giovanni Grisostomo (1692 and 1696); Silvani wrote eight operas between 1708 and 1714, followed by four operas between 1740 and 1748; Zeno wrote three between 1698 and 1703, and thirteen between 1717 and 1743. However, if one considers the

[12] Indeed, as Giuntini (2019, 440n11) writes, "Frigimelica's is an unprecedented undertaking in terms of the breadth of theoretical reflection and the systematic (ingenious) application of Aristotelian principles".

[13] Except for a libretto, *Il Ciclope*, staged in Padua in 1695.

[14] On the Accademia degli Animosi and the relationship with the Roman Accademia dell'Arcadia, see Saunders 1985, in particular, chapter 2. On the positions of the members of the Accademia dell'Arcadia regarding the reform of opera, see Di Benedetto 1988.

[15] Rosand 1991, 397. For an overview of the Theatre of S. Giovanni Grisostomo in the context of opera reform, see chapter 13 of this volume, with reference to the bibliography, and Saunders 1985.

operas premiered in all the theatres up to 1716, there are five by David, fifteen by Frigimelica, sixty-five by Zeno and sixty-three by Silvani, and, expanding the perspective even further, an estimate of the individual authors over the entire operatic production amounts to 701 librettos for Zeno (1696-1830), thirty for Frigimelica (1694-1737), and sixteen for David (1691-1717). The only librettists who fully participated in the late seventeenth-century theatre tradition – not only in Venice – were Silvani and Zeno; David is marginal: his librettos were hardly known. When viewed in context with the entire operatic season of the end of the century, Frigimelica was relatively obscure: the data[16] indicates that he had a privileged and continuous relationship with the Theatre S. Giovanni Grisostomo, which is not the case with any other librettist. Frigimelica's production context was thus limited to the Grimani brothers' Theatre, which allowed him to theorise – and implement – his dramaturgical solutions.

In fact, there were a variety of positions of the literati who questioned the manner in which opera librettos should be written at the turn of the century, and these were not uniform nor unequivocal (see Di Benedetto 1986). Frigimelica appeared to follow meticulously Aristotelian *Poetics* in reinterpreting the opera libretto; however, the literati who were questioning these issues in those same years considered the count's ideas extravagant and difficult to apply.

Indeed, from the writings in which Zeno expresses his views on Frigimelica, it is clear that the librettist did not consider his ideas merely extremist, but downright preposterous; in a letter to Antonio Muratori dated 26 May 1708, one reads:

> Mi è stato detto, che anche il Frigimelica in Padova voglia dar fuori qualche cosa contro di voi: non l'ho nondimeno per nuova sicura; ma quando fosse, avremo campo di ridere, essendo egli pieno d'idee stravolte, e così poco ragionevoli, come i suoi drammi.
>
> [I have been told that Frigimelica in Padua also wants to come out with something against you: I do not have it for certain, but when it is, we will have cause to laugh, as he is full of distorted ideas, and as unreasonable as his dramas.]

The members of the Accademia degli Animosi themselves made fun of him, as denoted by the sixth satire written by Bartolomeo Dotti (1757, 103), where Frigimelica is mocked precisely for his relationship with Aristotle:

[16] The proposed data were obtained by searching the Corago project database ("Corago: Repertoire and archive of librettos of Italian opera from 1600 to 1900", https://site.unibo.it/corago-dbc/en; Accessed 5 December 2024).

Non v'è forse chi più posi
Sovra l'arte Aristotelica?
Su i costumi maestosi,
Esce in campo il Frigimelica.
Via levate la berretta,
E inchinate la sua musa,
Ringraziando ch'ei la metta
Con cent'altre alla rinfusa.

[Is there anyone who I would rank higher than / Aristotelian art? / With majestic costumes on, / Frigimelica comes out on the field. / Take off your hat, / And bow to his muse, / Being thankful that he puts it on / With a hundred others in bulk.]

The reputation Frigimelica had in Venice among his contemporaries, due to his Aristotelianism, was therefore not the best, but let us see what ideas the librettist pursued. The common denominator of all Frigimelica's librettos was the desire to follow slavishly the dramaturgical possibilities listed in Aristotle's *Poetics.* Whether Frigimelica had actually understood the meaning of Aristotle's words[17] is not the point here; what is important is to try to follow the thought processes and consequent dramaturgical choices made by Frigimelica based on the *Poetics.* The count's ideas are well explained in the prefaces of his librettos and in the *Discorso poetico sopra lo scioglimento della tragicomedia per musica* entitled *l'Alessandro in Susa.*[18] Furthermore, Frigimelica had written a manual of poetics in which he referred to Aristotle's *Poetics.* This early eighteenth-century poetics manual, preserved in the British Library in three manuscript copies (Add. MSS. 10731, 10732 and 10733), is nothing more than an account of a series of lessons given by the Paduan count to Girolamo Giustiniani, a member of a well-known Venetian family.[19]

For an exhaustive analysis of the manual, see the entire article by Francesco Giuntini, where the author highlights how the discovery of this document, read together with Frigimelica's other writings, offers a

[17] As Leich wonders in his analysis (1972, 146).

[18] The commentary on his last libretto, *Alessandro in Susa* (1708), was so extensive that it was published as a standalone volume. See Saunders 1985, 87.

[19] The manual has not yet been published, and I was unable to consult it. Francesco Giuntini, however, published an article on this subject in 2019; therefore, only some parts of the manual quoted in Giuntini's article, which are useful to the arguments presented here, are reported in this contribution. They will be cited with the abbreviation (i.e. AP = *Arte Poetica*) and folio number indicated by Giuntini, together with the article page reference. Regarding manuscript copies, Giuntini chose the last one as the reference copy, given the probable authorship of the second part (438).

broader overview of the librettist's peculiar classicist method. Specifically, I would like to emphasise here how the count wished – in intent – to adhere strenuously to Aristotelian norms, and how, through an analysis of certain passages from the manual and libretto under study, one can gain a better understanding of how Frigimelica's method was implemented in the encounter between theory and practice. To set the stage for the case study, I will briefly mention some aspects that generally characterise the Paduan count's dramaturgical choices. Firstly, as mentioned in the introduction, all of Frigimelica Roberti's librettos are characterised by their division into five acts. Of the operas staged in Venice from 1680 to 1720, less than ten per cent were in five acts, and more than a third of those were works by Count Frigimelica Roberti. Moreover, each act is separated by a chorus – with which the last act always ends – precisely to emulate Greek drama, organised according to a subdivision into episodes and stasimons.[20] We can observe the "Aristotelianism" of Frigimelica Roberti even in his use of the chorus, since this had been abandoned in Venetian practice. Furthermore, Frigimelica emphasises in the preface of each of his librettos that he wants to follow the three Aristotelian unities, and he specifies, case by case, how this will be achieved; as Freeman (1981, 114) points out, "the most obvious effect of this interest on the librettos themselves lies in the limits placed on the number of set changes", namely, the tendency to have only one set per act, and occasionally a few scene changes within the same act. Thus, the librettist, arguing and justifying his poetic choices, tries to stick to these dramaturgical elements listed by Aristotle, namely the division into acts, the unities of time, place, and action, and the use of choruses.[21]

These are, more or less, the general characteristics that distinguish Frigimelica's work. Other aspects are relevant to a more detailed analysis, such as, for instance, the distribution of arias among characters. It is important to consider these elements in order to gain a broader understanding of how Frigimelica's libretto production might be interpreted. I now intend to specifically analyse another particular aspect of Frigimelica Roberti's classicising method, namely the choice of subject and the way in which it is elaborated within the libretto, highlighting how the theoretical desire to adhere stringently to the norms described by Aristotle in the *Poetics* was at odds with compositional practice (or rather, impracticality, as we shall see).

[20] See the list compiled by Freeman 1981, 275n179. On the division into five acts, in general, see also Freeman 1981, 90, and on Frigimelica's use of it in particular, 114.

[21] It is worth noting that such issues were also central to the classical period of French theatre. Thus, it is not surprising that Frigimelica admired seventeenth-century French playwrights such as Corneille and Racine. See Leich 1972, 146.

3. *Ercole in cielo*

Frigimelica Roberti's *Ercole in cielo* is defined by the author as "Tragedia", a term that was at the time completely out of use to define *dramma per musica*. The traditional term is not generally used for any of the librettos, but always *tragedia*, *tragicomedia*, and so on. Of course, the very naming of "tragedy" highlights the focus on the distinction between genres as Aristotle conceived it.[22] Not only that: the librettist provides a "brief Explanation" ("breve Allegazione") to the libretto from which we can infer his intention to differentiate dramas according to a meticulous typology by referring to Aristotle's doctrine, and this characterises the entire play (Giuntini 2019, 440). The inclusion of this paratext by Frigimelica indicates a singular attitude on the part of the count. In fact, Frigimelica devotes considerable attention to writing the libretto, which is accompanied by a detailed and articulate apparatus and notes, which distinguishes him from other librettists. The libretto under study includes a preface, an address to the reader ("L'autore A Chi Legge"), and an *Argomento* ("Argument"), all of which are well-described and punctual. In order for the reader to understand Frigimelica's intentions when preparing these texts, he added precise information to the libretto. I quote part of the address "To the Reader" from the libretto *Ercole in cielo*:

> Presento la seconda mia Tragedia, con questa breve allegazione, in cui vi dica cosa ella sia. Non perché voi nol sappiate in vederla, ma perché in vederla voi possiate giudicare se lo sa chi l'ha fatta. Quattro modi di Tragedie, come altre volte ho accennato, insegna Aristotele. Due nella quali non segue l'orribilità, e sono i due ampissimi fonti delle tragedie di fine lieto. Due nelle quali segue, e sono le due sorgenti delle tragedie d'esito infelice. Fra questi un modo si è quando l'orribilità è commessa conoscendo, e volendo, tal è la *Rosimonda*. L'altro quando è commessa per ignoranza. Ed ecco il caso nostro, in cui l'orribilità di uccider Ercole vien eseguita per ignoranza non di persona, ma di strumento. Credendo Deianira di dare al marito un magistero amoroso per farsi amare, gli dà una veste avvelenata e contra sua voglia l'uccide. Ognun vede le spezie di questa tragedia, e comprende che ella è atta a destare più compassione che terrore, al contrario della *Rosimonda*, che portava più terrore che compassione tal'è la natura degli errori nati per ignoranza, perché hanno per lor natura tutto il compassionevole, e nulla dello scellerato. (Frigimelica 1696, 8-9)[23]

[22] The question of genre had, however, already been a matter of debate for seventeenth-century theorists, who questioned the primary Aristotelian distinction between tragedy, comedy and epic. See Rosand 1991, 46. Moreover, it is worth noting that the term "Tragedia" was usually employed for librettos divided into five acts.

[23] In the transcription of Frigimelica's texts, the use of punctuation, capital letters,

> [I present my second Tragedy with this brief explanation, in which I tell you what it is. Not because you would not know when you see it, but so that you may judge when you see it whether the person who made it knows. Aristotle teaches four modes of tragedy, as I have mentioned elsewhere. Two in which horribleness does not follow, and these are the two very ample sources of tragedies with happy endings. Two in which it does follow, and these are the two sources of the tragedies with unhappy endings. Of these, one is when the horribleness is committed knowingly and willingly, such as in *Rosimonda.* The other is when it is committed through ignorance. And here is our case, in which the horribleness of killing Hercules is committed through ignorance not of person but of instrument. Deianira, believing she is giving her husband an amorous enchantment to make him love her, gives him a poisoned robe and kills him against her own will. Everyone sees the characteristics of this tragedy and understands that it is apt to arouse more compassion than terror, unlike Rosimonda, who brought more terror than compassion. Such is the nature of errors born out of ignorance, for they have by their nature everything pitiful, and nothing of the dastardly.]

It may be noted how the address "To the Reader", which was conventionally placed before the *Argomento* of the *libretto*, may be read as a declaration of the author's poetics. It suffices to dwell on the first part, concerning the distinction between the various types of tragedy, in which Frigimelica clearly refers to Aristotle's *Poetics*, in particular chapter 14, where Aristotle deals with "the question of what sorts of incidents strike us as terrible or pitiable" (*Po.* 1453b14-15; ποῖα οὖν δεινὰ ἢ ποῖα οἰκτρὰ φαίνεται τῶν συμπιπτόντων, λάβωμεν), presenting the possibilities for the tragic character (*Po.* 1453b27-1454a5):

> ἔστι μὲν γὰρ οὕτω γίνεσθαι τὴν πρᾶξιν, ὥσπερ οἱ παλαιοὶ ἐποίουν εἰδότας καὶ γιγνώσκοντας, καθάπερ καὶ Εὐριπίδης ἐποίησεν ἀποκτείνουσαν τοὺς παῖδας τὴν Μήδειαν· ἔστιν δὲ πρᾶξαι μέν, ἀγνοοῦντας δὲ πρᾶξαι τὸ δεινόν, εἶθ' ὕστερον ἀναγνωρίσαι τὴν φιλίαν, ὥσπερ ὁ Σοφοκλέους Οἰδίπους· τοῦτο μὲν οὖν ἔξω τοῦ δράματος, ἐν δ' αὐτῇ τῇ τραγῳδίᾳ οἷον ὁ Ἀλκμέων ὁ Ἀστυδάμαντος ἢ ὁ Τηλέγονος ὁ ἐν τῷ τραυματίᾳ Ὀδυσσεῖ. ἔτι δὲ τρίτον παρὰ ταῦτα τὸ μέλλοντα ποιεῖν τι τῶν ἀνηκέστων δι' ἄγνοιαν ἀναγνωρίσαι πρὶν ποιῆσαι. καὶ παρὰ ταῦτα οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλως. ἢ γὰρ πρᾶξαι ἀνάγκη ἢ μὴ καὶ εἰδότας ἢ μὴ εἰδότας. τούτων δὲ τὸ μὲν γινώσκοντα μελλῆσαι καὶ μὴ πρᾶξαι χείριστον· τό τε γὰρ μιαρὸν ἔχει, καὶ οὐ τραγικόν· ἀπαθὲς γάρ. διόπερ οὐδεὶς ποιεῖ ὁμοίως, εἰ μὴ ὀλιγάκις, οἷον ἐν Ἀντιγόνῃ τὸν Κρέοντα ὁ Αἵμων. τὸ δὲ πρᾶξαι δεύτερον. βέλτιον δὲ τὸ ἀγνοοῦντα μὲν πρᾶξαι, πράξαντα δὲ ἀναγνωρίσαι· τό τε γὰρ μιαρὸν οὐ πρόσεστιν καὶ ἡ

some spelling elements – such as the letter *h* –, apostrophe and accents have been modernised.

> ἀναγνώρισις ἐκπληκτικόν. κράτιστον δὲ τὸ τελευταῖον, λέγω δὲ οἷον ἐν τῷ Κρεσφόντῃ ἡ Μερόπη μέλλει τὸν υἱὸν ἀποκτείνειν, ἀποκτείνει δὲ οὔ, ἀλλ' ἀνεγνώρισε.
>
> [First, the action can occur as in the early poets who made the agents act in knowledge and cognisance (as Euripides too made Medea kill her children). Alternatively, the agents can commit the terrible deed, but do so in ignorance, then subsequently recognise the relationship, as with Sophocles' Oedipus: here, of course, the deed is outside the play, but cases within the tragedy are, for instance, Alcmaeon in Astydamas, or Telegonus in *Odysseus Wounded.* This leaves a third possibility, when the person is on the point of unwittingly committing something irremediable, but recognises it before doing so. These are the only patterns; either the action is or is not executed, and by agents who either know or do not know its nature. Of these, the worst is for someone to be about to act knowingly, and yet not do so: this is both repugnant and untragic (since it lacks suffering). That is why no one makes such plots, or only rarely, for instance with Haemon and Creon in *Antigone*. Next worst is execution of the deed. Better is the act done in ignorance, and followed by recognition: there is nothing repugnant here, and the recognition is thrilling. But best is the last option: I mean, for example, in Cresphontes Merope is about to kill her son, but recognises him in time. (Halliwell 1995)]

This question is also taken up within the manual, in Chapter 2, 21, where the four ways the drama can be arranged are presented, depending on whether the evil happens or does not happen and whether it is done knowingly or through ignorance. Frigimelica specifies that, in the first way, the person who acts does an evil thing knowingly and willingly; in the second, the person who knowingly wants to do an evil, then does not do it; in the third, the one who does an evil does it out of ignorance and, when they realise they have done it, can no longer remedy it; in the fourth, the person who is about to do evil does not know the people involved, but then, thanks to a recognition, refrains from doing it (Giuntini 2019, 442). Thus, in the libretto under consideration, based on the mythical story of Hercules and Deianira, we have the third 'mode', which leads to compassion.

Of the issues mentioned in the address "To the Reader" that clearly refer to Aristotle's *Poetics*, this is not the only one to be elaborated in a more systematic form within the manual: in fact, another aspect can be explored, namely that of the reworking of the ancient tragedians, which Frigimelica claims is based on Aristotelian principles (Giuntini 2019, 445). If, in fact, we return to the address "To the Reader", it may be useful to dwell on what is specified regarding the plot, that is, the construction of the plot from the tragic reference text; in fact, Frigimelica writes:

> Tra il numero immenso delle favole ricevute ho poi eletta questa trattata da Sofocle nella tragedia intitolata le Trachinie, perché serviva alla mia intenzione, e per altre ragioni, che vi dirò forse una volta, se quest'ultima fatica d'Ercole non sarà anche l'ultima mia. Basta che quest'uso di trattare un argomento trattato da altri poeti, e approvato da Aristotele, e dall'uso de buoni antichi e moderni . . . Dietro a tanti Esempi verrà per via battuta il mio Ercole a farsi vedere con abito italiano, deposto il greco di Sofocle ed il latino di Seneca. Nell'intreccio, com'è l'uso della buon Arte, ho tenuto savi gli universali ricevuti, e cangiate le cagioni, e le cose particolari, come le ho credute più acconce per formare un drama in cui s'unisca il vago ed il forte, a fine d'introdurre un'altra sorte di piacere accomodato alla seconda parte del Carnevale, senza offendere il decoro del Teatro, di chi ascolta, e di chi ha composto. (Frigimelica 1696, 9-11)
>
> [From among the immense number of fables received, I chose this one treated by Sophocles in the tragedy entitled the *Trachiniae*, because it served my intention, and for other reasons, which I will perhaps tell you one day, if this last labour of Hercules is not also my last. It is enough that this practice of treating an argument treated by other Poets, and is approved by Aristotle, and by the practice of good ancients, and moderns . . . After so many examples will come my Hercules to be seen in Italian dress, having deposed the Greek of Sophocles, and the Latin of Seneca. In the plot, as is the custom of good *Art*, I have kept safe the universals that have been received, and I have changed the motifs and particular things, as I believed them to be more suitable to form a drama in which the beautiful and the strong are united, in order to introduce a different kind of pleasure suitable for the second part of the Carnival, without offending the decorum of the theatre, of the listener and of the composer.]

From this statement, it is clear that even the 'orthodox' Frigimelica is aware that he must model his libretto for the context in which he proposes it, where the key word is variety. However, herein lies the exceptionality of the Paduan librettist's method; the changes made to the drama are always justified based on the *Poetics.* In fact, Frigimelica, in the libretto, claims to have based his work on a fable written by an ancient poet – Sophocles' *Trachiniae* – and retained its "universal" aspects. The use of this very term naturally refers back to the *Poetics*, where a distinction is made between poets, who deal with the universal, and historians, who instead deal with the particular: "consequently, poetry is more philosophical and more elevated than history, since poetry relates more to the universal, while history relates particulars" (*Po.* 1451b5-8; διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποίησις ἱστορίας ἐστίν· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ποίησις μᾶλλον τὰ καθόλου, ἡ δ'ἵστορ καθ'ἕκαστον λέγει).

Frigimelica reiterates this distinction within his manual, where, in chapter 21, he emphasises how poets

> per render poi più credibili siffatti successi e simili ravvolgimenti di fortuna mirabili, ed in persone illustri, pigliano nomi noti di persone chiare nelle storie e fingono cose possibili a loro accadute. Gli spettatori poi credono possibile o verisimile ciò che credono o sanno che sia avvenuto; vi prestano fede perché non sarebbe avvenuto se non fosse possibile. E non è poi probabile che casi gravi e meravigliosi di persone illustri non siano registrate da qualche storia. . . . Lo stesso s'intende quando si prende invece della storia a rappresentare le antiche favole già ricevute (AP, c.21*v*; qtd in Giuntini 2019, 445).
>
> [To make more credible such miraculous successes and similar reversals of fortune, and in illustrious persons, they take well-known names of famous people in history and make up possible things that happened to them. The spectators then believe possible or likely that which they believe or know to have happened; they believe it because it would not have happened if it were not possible. And it is not probable that grave and wonderful things happening to illustrious people are not recorded in some history . . . The same is meant when history is taken instead to represent ancient fables already received.]

It is thus emphasised in this passage that the poet must represent what could happen according to a criterion of verisimilitude. Frigimelica, therefore, dwells on the fact that in the imitation of human actions, the poet must first aim at the universal and then choose the characters and weave the plot with particular elements as they wish (Giuntini 2019, 446). This thought is also expounded in the same chapter of the manual:

> Il poeta vorrà tessere una favola tragica con fare in modo che l'orribilità sia la morte d'un figliuolo innocente datagli dal suo medesimo padre, non per effetto di odio e di scelleraggine, ma per errore di crederlo colpevole contro di lui di gravissima offesa. Ecco in breve l'universale che si prefigge ad imitare il poeta. Ora convien riempire questa favola d'accidenti che cagionino il ravvolgimento, e che lo impediscano, altrimenti seguirebbe subito il ravvolgimento e la favola non avrebbe la giusta grandezza con altri notabili mancamenti. Come farà il poeta? Ha prima da scegliere i nomi, e quelli gli daranno gli episodi. Se vuol rendere particolare questa sua imitazione col caso di Teseo, dovrà prendere gli episodi dagli avvenimenti succeduti, o possibili a succedere a Teseo (AP, c.25*v*; qtd in Giuntini 2019, 446).
>
> [The poet wants to weave a tragic tale so that the horribleness is the death of an innocent son, inflicted by his own father, not as a result of hatred or

> villainy, but as a result of the error of believing him guilty of a very serious offence against him. Here, in short, is the universal that the poet sets out to imitate. Now it is necessary to fill this fable with incidents that motivate the upheaval, and that prevent it, otherwise the upheaval would immediately follow and the fable would not have the right grandeur with other notable failings. How will the poet do it? He first has to choose the names, and those will give him the episodes. If he wants to make his imitation particular to Theseus' case, he will have to take the episodes from the events that happened, or that may possibly happen to Theseus.]

This passage is particularly interesting because it sheds light on the (convoluted) uniqueness of Frigimelica's method, which, while taking as its model the "received fables" of the ancient tragedians, freely covers their essential narrative core by justifying itself through the Aristotelian categories of "universal" and "particular". However, Frigimelica's method, presented under the guise of an 'orthodox' Aristotelianism, is nothing more than the libretto-writing mechanism that characterises all opera production in seventeenth-century Venice. Indeed, librettists draw material to elaborate their plots in particular from classical sources, but they do so in a completely arbitrary manner, using, rather than Greek tragedies, others derived from Latin literature, vernacular versions, the great mythographic collection, as well as theatrical texts and other opera librettos. The librettist, who thus operates according to a criterion that can be defined as *ars combinatoria*, makes use of a classical subject from which he starts, and then recreates it in a new plot invented to meet the taste of the time and genre conventions; in fact, the expressions "*si finge che*" and "*fingesi*" ("it is pretended that") are common, to emphasise the purely inventive act. It is clear, therefore, that if in studying seventeenth-century librettos one must try to trace which sources were actually used by the librettist, one must at the same time bear in mind that these sources were a mere tool aimed at producing new plots at a rapid rate, as is often evident from the same notes to the reader that are dedicated to the subject of the libretto, where the librettist complains about the haste with which he had to compose.[24] Frigimelica, in fact, is bound to the Venetian theatrical production context like all the other librettists of his time (although, as we have said, the theatre he wrote for differed from the others towards the end of the century) and this is the reason[25] why he adds elements to Sophocles' plot that are extraneous to it, such as the role of the

[24] On the mechanisms of ancient source reworking in seventeenth-century librettos, see examples in Badolato 2009; Restani 2009; Casali 2022. On the (failed) relationship between Greek tragedy and librettos, see also Napolitano 2010.

[25] In addition, of course, to the genre conventions that had become established for the plot structure.

centaur Nessus,[26] the love affair between Hyllus and Iole, and Deianira's jealousy. In this and other contemporary libretti based on the same *fabula*, the addition to the love plot, which is a requirement for the operatic genre, is in fact derived from the Latin versions. The mythical segment that has at its centre the story of Deianira and Hercules is in fact taken up and exploited above all by Ovid, in no less than two compositions: both in the *Heroides*, in which Epistle 9 focuses on Deianira, and in *Metamorphoses* 9. *Heroides* 9, in particular, sees the consecration of Hercules as an elegiac lover, bent on *servitium amoris* for Iole, who is no longer represented as the distraught Sophoclean prisoner. The needs to develop the theme of love naturally implies significant dramaturgical changes to the Greek tragedy: first of all, Deianira is represented as jealous, beginning to outline the traits that will characterise her in all – or almost all – subsequent performances; furthermore, she fears that her role as wife may be undermined, from a social and legal point of view, offering a thematic precedent that will have great resonance in the theatre of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In fact, in almost all the plays that will be based on the love theme and, in general, on Ovid as a source, there arises the concrete possibility of Hercules repudiating Deianira in order to marry Iole. Moreover, the elegiac representation of Hercules makes Ovid dwell on other aspects of the myth that were only mentioned in the *Trachiniae*, first and foremost the period of slavery that Hercules spends with Omphale: in *Heroides* 9 it is mentioned by Deianira as a precursor to her husband's actual *servitium amoris*, but it acquires a specific literary status that will prove fruitful.[27] In fact, in the same *Argomento*, after presenting in great detail the plot of the *Trachiniae*, to which he explicitly refers, Frigimelica adds:

> Alcuni altri fatti d'Ercole, che hanno servito per intrecciare la favola sono notissimi. Egli nell'ultimo di sua vita partì per una impresa con dubbio di non aver più da tornare, lasciò scritto il suo testamento, ed il comando d'essere atteso fino a tal giorno, e non più, avendo avuto per oracolo in Dodona, che in quei tempi cadeva l'ultima sua fatica. Egli fu mandato da Euristeo per compiacere Giunone, in vari rischi, fra quali all'Inferno per trarre il gran Cerbero. Egli pure si piegò alla bassezza tanto famosa di filare con Iole, vestita lei della pelle del leone, e cedutale la fatale sua clava. Di tutte queste, se n'è lavorata una favola sola col nodo, episodio e soluzione, che si vede chiaramente nel decorso della tragedia, con quell'unità d'azione e di tempo che insegna l'Arte, e con l'unità di luogo, che concede il magnifico

[26] In Greek tragedy, the episode of Nessus is only told by Deianira to the Chorus at 557-77, when she reveals her plan to win back Hercules' love.

[27] For an analysis of the sources and librettos centred on the myth of Hercules and Deianira, see Casali 2021.

> abuso di mutare per contentar l'occhio, e l'opinione della spesa, tante volte il teatro. (1696, 15-16)
>
> [Some other facts about Hercules, which have served to weave the fable, are very well known: in the last part of his life he set out on a quest, doubting whether he would be able to return. He left his will written down, and the command that he must be awaited until such a day, and no longer, since he had received an oracle at Dodona that his final labour fell at that time. To placate Juno, he was sent by Eurystheus into various dangers, among them to Hell to capture the great Cerberus. He seems to have stooped to the famous baseness of spinning with Iole, having clothed her in the lion skin, and handed over to her his fatal club. Out of all these, one single fable has been worked, with the binding of event and resolution which can be clearly seen in the course of Tragedy, with that unity of action and of time that the *Art* teaches; and with the unity of place, which validates the extraordinary and frequent makeover of the theatre to please the eye, and the opinion of the expense.]

Also depicted in this libretto, as in many others of the period centred on the story of Hercules and Deianira,[28] is the episode of Hercules' spinning in the service of Iole, which occurs in 4.3 and is taken from the chapter centred on Iole in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris.* Degiovanni (2019), in fact, sheds light on how Boccaccio made an extremely fortunate misinterpretation of the Ovidian text, which, in *Heroides* 9, described Iole instead of Omphale. Thus, in the chapter dedicated to Iole, Boccaccio actually describes Hercules' *servitium amoris* for Omphale, where the famous scenes of the spinning and the exchange of clothes are depicted: having put on the skin of the Nemean lion, the woman hands Hercules the distaff and spindle, with which he begins to weave wool instead of her. This scene, in which Iole thus becomes the protagonist, would be reprised in most plays of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[29]

Without dwelling further here on the sources used by the librettist, what must be emphasised once again is how Frigimelica's work presents rather singular peculiarities precisely because of the author's attempt to

[28] Such as, for example, *Ercole amante* by Francesco Buti with music by Francesco Cavalli; for other cases, see Degiovanni 2019.

[29] Degiovanni (2019, 314) compares how this episode is presented in Francesco Buti's libretto *Ercole Amante* and in the one examined here. In Buti's libretto, Hercules voluntarily offers his services to Iole in order to flatter her, whereas, in the libretto *Ercole in Cielo*, Iole imposes the task of spinning on Hercules. In fact, as Iole confides to Hyllus in 4.6, she wants Hercules, angered by this humiliation, to stop desiring her. This episode is a shining example of the influence of Boccaccio's text in seventeenth-century librettos; indeed, in the chapter on Iole in *De mulieribus claris*, in fact, it is described how she wants to humiliate Hercules so as to take revenge in a devious way.

reconcile a strenuous observance of Aristotelian rules with the need to adapt to the demands of the *dramma per musica*. This necessity thus leads to a confirmation of the mechanisms of reception and re-elaboration of the ancient sources in the libretto context of the time, where the poet, as we have said, makes use of various sources, 'mixed' together, most often without declaring their authorship; however, if this is the practice, in this case the operation is justified, in theory, by the desire to follow Aristotle. This also explains another aspect. As in other librettos whose plot centres on the story of Deianira and Hercules dramatised in the *Trachiniae*, Frigimelica Roberti includes the love subplot between Iole and Hyllus, which in turn naturally complicates the main relationship between Iole and Deianira, who end up being allies. However, unlike other librettos, Frigimelica also stages Deianira's suicide anyway, in fact taking up, in 4.7, the intimate moment of greeting at the nuptial thalamus finely described by Sophocles (Soph. *Tr.* 896-946). Deianira's death could have been avoided, from a dramaturgical point of view; one can see the reason for its inclusion in the author's need to remain faithful to the chosen 'type' of tragedy, that is centred on an unconscious action that is carried out. Deianira's failure to commit suicide would have betrayed the type described by Aristotle (and described by Frigimelica in the preface to the libretto) and is therefore kept in the plot: Deianira has killed her husband out of ignorance of the instrument and, realising too late the evil she has done, takes her own life. However, in order to comply with genre conventions, Frigimelica cannot but vary the ending: the hero's apotheosis is necessary because the *dramma per musica* required a happy ending.[30]

Having to follow the happy ending and thus betraying the ending of the Greek tragedy of reference, the librettist convinces himself (and wants to convince others) that he has remained faithful to Aristotelian categories. Indeed, even in his manual (2.19), Frigimelica resorts to the authority of Aristotle to emphasise the superiority of the happy ending:

> Aristotile ha detto che tragicissima è la favola passante dalla felicità alla miseria, né contradice punto il dire che quando non segue l'orribilità per sopravveniente riconoscenza sia modo ottimo, perché anche in questo modo vi è il passaggio dalla felicità alla miseria; e v'è di più, che né l'operante né

[30] It is for this reason that Sophocles' drama, despite its original tragic nature, is admitted into seventeenth- and eighteenth-century librettos, because the apotheosis allows for the realisation of the happy ending (see Casali 2022, 264-5). The resolution of the apotheosis, which every theatrical revival owes – directly or indirectly – to Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus*, allows for the complete abandonment of the all-too-human tragic nature that characterises Greek drama. Becoming a god, Hercules is indeed able to restore order and provide the happy ending that every opera of these centuries demands.

> il paziente è mai scellerato; e di più ancora, che la miseria tutto ad un tratto svanisce e termina la tragedia, che vuol dire in tempo che la tragedia ha fatto già il suo effetto movendo il terrore e la compassione, e poi nell'atto che lo spettatore è già per uscir del teatro parte contento col sapere che l'orribilità non è seguita né seguirà (AP, c.38*r*; qtd in Giuntini 2019, 443).
>
> [Aristotle has said that most tragic is the fable that passes from happiness to misery, nor does he contradict himself in saying that when horribleness does not follow, due to a sudden recognition, it is the best way, because even in this way there is the passage from happiness to misery; and what is more, that neither he who acts nor he who suffers is ever wicked; and still more, that the misery all of a sudden vanishes and the tragedy ends, which means in time that the tragedy has already had its effect by arousing terror and compassion, and then at the moment when the spectator is already about to leave the theatre, he leaves happy knowing that the horribleness has not followed nor will follow.]

The tragedy, with the death of Deianira following the sending of the robe, had fulfilled its 'orthodox' task by inspiring compassion. Instead, the decision to abandon the Sophoclean tragic ending proved necessary to make the spectators leave the theatre happy.

4. Conclusion

According to scholars, Frigimelica Roberti is "one of the most important and austere neoclassical librettists" (Rosand 1991, 398n23), "the extremist" (Saunders 1985, 79); Zeno and the librettists of his time thought of him as an extremist too, as they considered his ideas as distorted as his dramas. Frigimelica's method of setting the dramaturgy of his librettos on the basis of Aristotle's *Poetics* was undoubtedly unique. The librettist, indeed, identified the canon to be followed in reforming opera librettos in the Aristotelian *Poetics* and, based on this theory, he attempted to be consistent in his dramaturgical practice as much as the conventions of the opera genre allowed. We have seen from the perspective of how the subject was developed that Frigimelica could not deny the convention of the love plot, as well as that of the happy ending. Whenever adherence to Aristotelian norms failed in practice, the librettist returned to theory in order to justify his actions on the basis of the *Poetics*. However, beyond the efforts made to reform the librettos, Frigimelica Roberti's plays had very few spectators, since his librettos were not successful, outside of performances in Venice, and they remained in obscurity (Freeman 1981, 114). The extravagant method of the Paduan count, who justified his poetics through the *Poetics*, in fact led him to disrupt the traditional system of *dramma per musica* to such

an extent – including the exaggerated use of choruses, the disproportionate number of characters,[31] and the absence of metrical conventions – that his texts were rendered unworkable for the theatre.[32]

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[31] In *Ercole in cielo*, for example, the action is represented by five main roles, three male (Hercules, Hyllus, Nessus) and two female (Deianira, Iole), to which are added two more male roles (Lico, Philotetes) and four secondary female roles (Hergirida, Climene, Driope, Coronide), as confidantes. For the final apotheosis, three gods (Jupiter, Juno and Hebe) are added and there are seven choruses. The scheme echoes *Il Pastore d'Anfriso* (1695), where, however, there were only two female confidantes; see Leich 1972, 59.

[32] Frigimelica's lack of success is precisely due to this, namely to the fact that his works were not suitable for the theatre from a dramaturgical point of view. Thus, I disagree with Saunders (1985, 78-9), who argues that it was "the academy's propaganda apparatus" that was responsible for Zeno's greater success rather than authors such as Frigimelica, who had assimilated "neoclassical literary precepts into opera" much more than him in reforming the genre.

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Roman Theatre in Greek, Greek Theatre in Italian: Dramatic Performance as a Vehicle of Latin-Greek Contact in the Early Modern Ionian Islands[1]

Abstract

Theatre in the early modern Ionian Islands was predicated on the mixing of elite Italian-speakers and non-elite Greek-speakers during carnival festival performances and other annual celebrations. The position of the islands as a Venetian territory meant that they developed a theatrical infrastructure in the style of Western Europe during the eighteenth century. Roman antiquity carried a greater cultural capital for local elites than elsewhere in Greece because of Latin's prime position as a classical language in Western European education. Furthermore, the importance of Roman comedy and tragedy to playwrights such as Molière, Diderot, Goldoni, and Shakespeare influenced Ionian theatrical tastes. Although classical Greek drama may have been performed, this was often in Italian translation for the benefit of the local Venetian authorities, while Greek-language adaptations of Roman plays are also documented. A consideration of three such productions from Zakynthos (1571, 1820s) and Kefalonia (1732) demonstrates educated local translators' investment in the Roman legacy as a mark of European cultural identity, and their concurrent desire that Latin drama be accessible to Greek-speaking audiences. It also shows that Greek-speaking Ionian audiences did not automatically view the dramatic legacy of Ancient Greece as their rightful or sole theatrical inheritance, contrary to how theatrical life would develop in the nineteenth-century Kingdom of Greece.

Keywords: classical reception; modern Greek theatre; translation; Ionian Islands; Venetian Empire

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1. Introduction

The Ionian Islands (Επτάνησα) off the west and south coasts of Greece have a theatrical history distinct from the rest of the post-Byzantine Greek-speaking world as a result of their lengthy colonial rule by the Venetian Republic during the late-medieval and early modern periods. The greater cultural connectivity (relative to the rest of Greece) of the Ionian Islands with Western Europe meant that the theatrical achievements of post-Renaissance Italy, France, Spain, Britain, and Germany had a stronger presence within this region, and therefore acted to shape local dramatists' and audiences' tastes (as attested in Matesis 2011, 1). Major European playwrights, such as Molière (1622-1673), Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793), and Pierre-Augustin Beaumarchais (1732-1799), achieved earlier recognition in the Ionian Islands than in the rest of Greece because of the close links between the islands' theatrical culture and that of Venice, and consequently the rest of the Italian peninsula (Puchner 1999, 222; Pefanis 2003, 15-17). The Ionian Islands were also exposed much earlier than the rest of Greece to newly developed theatrical forms such as Italian opera; indeed, the earliest recorded operatic performance in Greece took place on Corfu in 1733 (Mavromoustakos 1995, 157; Kardamis 2004, 2n2). These Western European influences were joined by local playwrights to the dramatic inheritance of sixteenth-century Crete and, more distantly, of the Byzantine Empire, in their works (Puchner 1999, 223), which were often staged in festival contexts such as the pre-Lenten carnival, since, of the seven islands, only Corfu and Zakynthos had permanent theatres before 1800 (Fessas-Emmanouil 1989, 55, 78; Pefanis 2003, 39-40).

Classical reception in early modern Ionian theatre is a response to the linguistic and educational effects of this unique Greek-Italian cultural hybridity. The islands were effectively bilingual during the early modern period, with Greek spoken by almost everyone as a native language, but Venetian-influenced Italian used publicly by most elite and middle-class individuals (Mackridge 2009, 39). Educationally, elite Ionian culture was closely aligned with upper-class Venice, especially since so many aristocratic Ionian males went on to matriculate at the nearby University of Padua. Because of this situation, while a classical education in the rest of the Greek-speaking world centred around the religiously dictated need to read the Bible, the Church Fathers, and classical Greek and Neoplatonist philosophy in the original, Ionian males were exposed to a somewhat different set of educational assumptions, including, uniquely in the Greek world, the centrality of Latin as a classical language of equal importance to Ancient Greek (Beaton 1999, 29). Therefore, early modern Ionian dramatists, when reaching for classical precedents for their plays, were likely to draw inspiration from Roman comic and tragic traditions as well as from the

Ancient Greek theatrical inheritance, without placing any special emphasis on the latter because of a perceived cultural kinship between ancient and modern Greek-speakers.

As Konstantina Zanou has shown, the mixture of overlapping cultural influences at play in the region during the early modern period led to the development of what she terms a 'transnational' Ionian identity which was neither fully Greek nor fully Venetian/Italian in the sense that either term would come to signify by the nineteenth century (2018, 6; see 13-15 for a brief overview of the early modern history of the Ionian Islands). Building on her important work, I argue in this article that the early modern Ionian dramatic tradition, and especially those elements of it which engage with classical reception, was the product of this same Greek-Italian cultural hybridity. The educated latinity of Ionian islanders, combined with their ready identification with the intellectual traditions of Latin-influenced Western Europe, meant that they felt no special need to ground their dramatic productions in the legacy of Ancient Greece to the exclusion of other elements. Similarly, they perceived no intellectual difficulty in incorporating Roman theatre into their dramatic repertoire, despite the strident claims which began to emerge from elsewhere in the Greek-speaking world during the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that drama was somehow proprietary Greek material, since the European dramatic tradition had developed in Ancient Greece.

To demonstrate how easily ancient Greek dramatic traditions were shorn of perceived Hellenic specificity and their Roman equivalents were domesticated within the region between the late sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries, I focus here on three case studies of actual productions or texts drawn from two islands: a reported performance in Italian translation of Aeschylus's *Persae* on Zakynthos in 1571; a fragment of a translation into vernacular Greek of Seneca's *Troades* from Kefalonia (1732); and the translation of Terence's *Hecyra* into vernacular Greek completed on Zakynthos in the 1820s by Antonios Matesis (1794-1875). These examples are then followed by a consideration of how the burgeoning movement for Greek independence began to change perceptions within the Greek-speaking world of the Greekness of the dramatic tradition during the early decades of the nineteenth century, undermining centuries-old Ionian traditions of theatrical interconnectivity with Western Europe.

2. Aeschylus's *Persae* (Zakynthos, 1571)

Although the tragic theatre of classical Athens does appear to have occupied a foothold in the local dramatic repertoire, this did not necessarily carry the assumption that early modern Ionians, as speakers of Greek, enjoyed

an automatic association with or monopoly over this performance legacy. A festival production of Aeschylus's *Persae* on Zakynthos celebrating the Venetian victory over the Ottomans at the Battle of Lepanto (7 October 1571) is described in an essay written in 1895 by Spyridon De Viazis (1849-1927), in which he notes that the play was put on in Italian translation, with a cast of young nobles (qtd in Evangelatos 1970, 15-16). This event also happens to be one of the earliest documented theatrical performances in the Ionian Islands.

The historical truth of the performance is difficult to confirm, because De Viazis's rather generic claim to have found the relevant evidence in an old court archive has proved impossible for subsequent researchers to corroborate in the wake of the earthquake which struck Zakynthos on 12 August 1953, destroying many of its historic structures and archival holdings (Pylarinos 2003, 251; Zanou 2018, 29). No contemporary Italian translation of Aeschylus's play is known to exist (Puchner 1999, 226); nevertheless, one translation, the 'mediocre' prose version of Sanravius, printed in Basel in 1555, did exist in Latin by 1571, and it is conceivable that this could have been used as the basis of an Italian performing version (Mund-Dopchie 1984, 88). The Italian version of the play performed need not have been based on a published translation at all: it could, like Antonios Matesis's translation of Terence's *Hecyra* 250 years later, have been written down in a notebook without ever achieving publication. The play could also have been translated as a school exercise: Ionian students such as Matesis are documented translating Latin texts into Italian in the early nineteenth century (see Pylarinos 2002 for an example), and similar activities putting classical texts into Italian could have been carried out in earlier centuries.

Of primary interest here is less the historical reality of the performance than De Viazis's belief that such a production could have taken place, and under such linguistic circumstances, according to his understanding of the sixteenth-century cultural life of his native island. De Viazis was born half a century after the collapse of Venetian control over the Ionian Islands in 1797, but he was three years old before the official language of the British protectorate of the Ionian Islands changed from Italian to Greek in 1852 (Gekas 2017, 24; Mackridge 2014, 68). The honorific nature of the *Persae* performance would suggest the presence of Venetian officials; an Italian-language translation could have been selected to accommodate Venetian colonial administrators, or to demonstrate to such authorities the thoroughly Venetian identity of the island. In fact, a classical Greek drama such as the *Persae* would almost certainly have been chosen for performance because of the imagined similarities between the Ottoman defeat at Lepanto and the Persian defeat at Salamis depicted in the play. Furthermore, although the supposed date of the *Persae* production, 1571, would situate it only a few

years before the heyday of the theatre of the so-called Cretan Renaissance and the vernacular dramas of Georgios Hortatsis (fl.1576-96), the concurrent popularity of vernacular performances in other parts of the Greek-speaking world does not necessarily mean that classical tragedy would automatically have been performed in a vernacular Greek translation. Hortatsis's plays are not based directly on classical originals, and there is no evidence that a thriving tradition of translating classical Greek drama into vernacular Greek existed at all during the period.

Whether or not this performance took place as a matter of historical record, therefore, the linguistic contortion of performing a tragedy by Aeschylus in Italian translation on a Greek island is a plausible result of the cultural interconnectivity between the Ionian Islands and the Italian-speaking world during the period. Audiences who spoke Greek as their native language, as the majority of sixteenth-century Zakynthians did, need not have regarded classical Greek tragedy, a form which has no direct parallel in surviving Greek-language theatre of the period, as proprietary material with which they, as Greek-speakers, enjoyed a privileged relationship. The performance of *Persae* in 1571 thus represents both the early modern Ionian theatre's embrace of vernacular translations of ancient drama and the bilingual theatrical life which was a hallmark of the islands' dramatic traditions under Venetian rule. The performance's uncertain historical veracity means that our ability to assess important factors such as the extent to which Aeschylus's tragedy had been domesticated into contemporary Venetian theatrical practice, or the linguistic accessibility of the Italian translation itself, is severely curtailed. Nevertheless, the readiness with which nineteenth-century local historians accepted that the performance had indeed taken place demonstrates that, in the early modern Ionian Islands, Ancient Greek drama does not appear to have been integrated into a vernacular Greek theatrical paradigm, and was therefore just as much the intellectual property of the Venetian authorities as of their Greek subjects. As we shall see below, the Roman dramatic tradition seems to have benefited from a wider Ionian audience than might otherwise be expected due to this lack of a sense of national ownership of particular ancient theatrical legacies.

3. Seneca's *Troades* (Kefalonia, 1732)

A highly mysterious fragment from Kefalonia, dated to 1732 and apparently the opening of a vernacular Greek translation of Seneca's *Troades* (*Trojan Women*), is preserved in the first volume of an anthology of texts from that island compiled by Ilias Tsitselis (1904, 19; see Evangelatos 1970, 95-7, for the surviving fragments and brief discussion). As Spyros Evangelatos,

the only modern scholar to treat the fragment in full, explains, Tsitselis's failure to elaborate on his own sources means that we cannot trace the verses' provenance further back than the latter's anthology (1970, 96), but their language and style are in accordance with that of early modern Ionian theatre in Greek. This anonymous translation can tentatively be linked to the Kefalonian dramatist Petros Katsaïtis (c.1660/1665-c.1737/1742), whose classically inspired tragicomedies *Iphigenia* (Ιφιγένεια, 1720) and *Thyestes* (Θυέστης, 1721), were both composed on the island and held an important place in the Ionian Greek-language theatrical repertoire during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. There is, however, very little firm evidence to support Katsaïtis as the author of the fragment other than a similar geographical provenance and stylistic overlap.

Whoever was responsible for this translation of Seneca, its very existence reveals that the Roman dramatic tradition held a place in the rich mixture of influences operating within the Ionian theatrical world during the early modern period. The eight lines of surviving text reverse the direction of linguistic and cultural travel of the performance of *Persae* in 1571. While the sixteenth-century performance supposedly featured a classical Greek tragedy put into the language of the islands' Venetian rulers, the present translation apparently brought Seneca's Latin-language original into the linguistic register and metre that had developed under the theatre of the Cretan Renaissance and was the most frequent vehicle for Greek-language Ionian drama during the early modern period, although the loss of the translation itself does not allow us to argue this with absolute certainty.

The eight verses of the fragment are not part of Seneca's play, but form an introduction to the translation. I quote them here in Greek to emphasize their vernacular nature:

> Η τραγωδία Τ ρ ω ά δ ε ς είναι ωνομασμένη
> του σοφωτάτου Σένεκα λατινοσυνθεμένη
> και εσυντέθη νεωστί εις την πεζή τη φράσι
> σε στίχους από λόγου μου, πούχα την μεταφράσει
> εις το νησί του Κέφαλου, στου Πάλιου τα μέρη.
> Το όνομά μου 'πιθυμώ, τινάς να μην το ξέρη,
> Στα χίλια εφτακόσια τριάντα δύο έτη,
> εκ της επανθρωπήσεως Χριστού του ευεργέτη.
> (Evangelatos 1970, 95-6)[21]

> [The tragedy is named *Trojan Women*, composed in Latin by the most learned Seneca, and it has been composed anew in our common speech in verses of my own; I translated it on the island of Kefalonia, in the region of Palio. I

[2] All translations are mine.

> desire that no one know my name. In the year one thousand seven hundred and thirty two after the incarnation of Christ our benefactor.]

Two points should be made here. First, the verses of the translation were in the decapentasyllabic metre typically employed in Cretan theatre, not the *senarii* used by Seneca for the dialogue of the original. No precedent for the Latin metre, or for the iambic trimeter of Greek tragic dialogue, exists in Modern Greek poetry, which is constructed around stress rather than syllabic length, and so a direct imitation of either Seneca's metrical practices or those of Attic tragedy would presumably have sounded out of place to the translation's intended audience. A further similarity with the poetry of the Cretan Renaissance is the (classically inflected) use of a *sphragis* in which the author claims ownership of the work, although the best-known Cretan example of this device, a passage at the end of the epic poem *Erotokritos* (Ο Ερωτόκριτος) by Vitsenzos Kornaros (1553-1613/14), is not anonymous: indeed, Kornaros explicitly states that he "do[es] not want to hide" his identity ("δε θέ' να κουρφευτώ", 4.1533; text from Kornaros 2016), the precise opposite of our translator here.

Second, we must ask why the translator would have deemed such an introduction to be necessary at all. Seneca's original contains no such section, but an explanatory prologue is commonplace in both tragic and comic spoken theatre and Italian opera of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and early modern translators of ancient dramatic texts often included such sections in imitation of ancient comic practice, suggesting that the translator was familiar with the theatrical traditions of the early modern Italian peninsula. The surviving verses assume that not just the translation, but also the playwright (Seneca) and his language (Latin) are unfamiliar to the intended audience, which in turn implies that this was composed of non-elite spectators who had not been exposed to Seneca and his tragedies as part of their education, while the vernacular Greek nature of the translation would have ensured the play's accessibility to the widest possible cross-section of contemporary Kefalonian society.

Despite the loss of the translation itself, we have, in addition to the eight introductory verses quoted above, a prose hypothesis for the play, written in a much more archaizing register:

> Μετὰ τοῦ Ἰλίου πόρθησιν οἱ Ἕλληνες ἐκληρώσαντο τὰς αἰχμαλωτίδας τῶν γυναικῶν: τοῖς γὰρ ἐν ἀξιώμασιν ἔδωκαν, Ἀγαμέμνονι Κασσάνδραν, Ἀνδρομάχην Νεοπτολέμῳ, Πολυξένην δ' Ἀχιλλεῖ: ταύτην μὲν οὖν ἐπὶ τοῦ τάφου ἔσφαξαν, Ἀστυάνακτα δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν τειχῶν ἔρριψαν. Ἑκάβη δὲ τῆς μὲν Ἑλένης κατηγορήσασα, τοὺς ἀναιρεθέντας δὲ κατοδυρομένη τε καὶ

> θρηνήσασα, πρὸς τὰς τοῦ Ὀδυσσέως ἤχθη σκηνάς, τούτῳ λατρεύειν δοθεῖσα. (Evangelatos 1970, 95-6)[3]
>
> [After the sack of Troy, the Greeks assigned the female captives [to masters]. They were allotted according to rank, Cassandra to Agamemnon, Andromache to Neoptolemus, Polyxena to Achilles. This last they slaughtered over the tomb [of Patroclus], while they threw Astyanax from the city walls. Hecuba, making accusations against Helen and lamenting and mourning the slain men, was dragged off to the tents of Odysseus, since she had been given to him to serve.]

The content of this summary of events leading up to the play's action appears unremarkable to a classically trained reader, but only because it echoes the language and style of the prose hypotheses frequently attached to classical Greek tragedies in the manuscript tradition. What it demonstrates, however, is that the translator (assuming that the hypothesis and the introductory verses are the work of the same person) reserved different registers of the Greek language for different purposes: vernacular Greek for the translation itself, and an archaizing discourse more customary in Greek prose of the time in other contexts. Indeed, this hypothesis shows that the translator was aware of the conventions surrounding the presentation of a classical Greek tragedy, and of the appropriate linguistic register for such a summary; Seneca's Roman tragedy is therefore packaged here for a contemporary Greek audience in the same trappings as a tragedy from fifth-century BCE Athens.

Why would an eighteenth-century Greek translator be interested in a Senecan tragedy when a Euripidean tragedy with the same title already existed in Ancient Greek? As we have already seen, classical Athenian tragedy does appear to have occupied a toehold in the region's theatrical repertoire under Venetian rule, but, as I argued above, this need not indicate that Ionian speakers of Greek imagined themselves to enjoy a privileged relationship with the form. Although Euripides was popular in early modern Europe, Seneca's influence on Renaissance and later dramatic traditions, including in Italy, was also strong (Citti 2015; Mayer 2015; see Capirossi 2020 on the reception of Seneca in the early modern Italian cultural zone). Seneca's *Troades* is not simply a Latin retelling of Euripides's tragedy of the same name, but combines the subject matter of Euripides's play with that of his *Hecuba*, adding a healthy dose of Stoic philosophy for good measure; translating Seneca, rather than Euripides, would have yielded a very different

[3] Archaizing features include the use of the dative case (ἀξιώμασιν, Ἀγαμέμνονι, Νεοπτολέμῳ, Αχιλλεῖ, τούτῳ); inflected aorist participles, both active and passive (κατηγορήσασα, ἀναιρεθέντας, θρηνήσασα, δοθεῖσα); the verbal infinitive (λατρεύειν); and the (not especially idiomatic) use of conjunctive particles (γάρ, μέν, δέ, οὖν). None of these features is found in spoken Modern Greek.

dramatic product. The translator has therefore engaged in a complex process informed, on the one hand, by Seneca's importance as a literary figure in the contemporary Western European dramatic tradition, and, on the other, by the desire to make Seneca's *Troades* appear as comprehensible as possible to an eighteenth-century Kefalonian audience. Seneca's text was presumably selected for translation because it was deemed to be a significant part of the dramatic repertoire which should be available to Greek-speakers. But the translator has then tried to contextualize Seneca's tragedy within two distinct Greek dramatic legacies: the Cretan Renaissance theatre, which appears to have dictated the metre of the translation itself; and, with the hypothesis, the manuscript traditions of classical tragedy. The result is a hybrid product which could only have emerged from the early modern Ionian world.

We cannot know if this translation was ever performed in public; if it was, it would provide compelling evidence for a popular reception of classical drama within the eighteenth-century Ionian Islands. Its very existence, however, does demonstrate that at least some educated individuals in the region were interested in widening the bounds within which appreciation of classical drama customarily operated. A vernacular Greek translation of Seneca's Latin play required of its audience neither a classical education nor a knowledge of Italian, rendering the piece suitable for performance in a public context such as a religious or civic festival, where the spectators might plausibly have been drawn from all ranks of society. Behind this enigmatic fragment therefore lies one of the earliest recorded attempts from the post-Byzantine Greek-speaking world to promote popular access to masterpieces of classical literature, both Ancient Greek and Roman, which is a direct result of the cultural hybridity of early modern Ionian theatre.

4. Terence's *Hecyra* (Zakynthos, 1820s)

Our final case study brings us back to Zakynthos, and to the dawn of Greece's modern era of national independence. Antonios Matesis is best known today for his comedy *The Pot of Basil* (Ο βασιλικός), first performed in 1832, but before completing this work he had, at some point in the 1820s, prepared a vernacular Greek translation of Terence's *Hecyra*. This translation apparently never received a public performance, and was published in full only in 2009 (Pylarinos 2009), but it represents a vital landmark in the Ionian reception of classical drama because of its chronological coincidence with the struggle for Greek independence and its demonstrable legacy as an inspiration for Matesis's own *Pot of Basil* (see Jotischky 2023 for an assessment of the relationship between the two plays).

Roman comedy largely drew its plot material from the (now mostly lost) New Comedy of fourth-century BCE Athens, and was therefore not generally highly regarded in the Greece of Matesis's lifetime (Jotischky 2024, 75). Adamantios Koraïs (1748-1833), probably the most significant Greek classical scholar of the early nineteenth century, complained that Plautus and Terence had done little other than 'imitate and translate the Greek comic writers' (να μιμώνται και να μεταφράζωσι τους Έλληνας κωμικούς; 1988, 159n3), while Stefanos Koumanoudis (1818-1899), Professor of Latin Philology at the University of Athens between 1846 and 1886, acknowledged the importance of Roman comedy, but only as a vehicle for preserving otherwise lost Greek-language works (1849, 245). Nevertheless, the plays of Terence in particular were held in high regard in much of the rest of Europe during the early modern period, and were frequently used as school texts (Delcourt 1934, 8-10; Kes 1988, 19; Barsby 2013, 447). *Hecyra* had attracted the interest of major dramatic figures such as Denis Diderot (1713-1784), serving as a crucial inspiration for his *Le Fils naturel* (1757), and it is likely that Matesis selected the play for translation as a result of its importance in the theatrical traditions of Western Europe, which, as we have seen, were a central driving force behind elite Ionian dramatic productions during the period (Jotischky 2023, 326).

Like his friend Dionysios Solomos (1798-1857), Matesis had begun his literary career writing poetry in Italian, before switching decisively to Greek during the 1820s, almost certainly motivated by a desire to play a part in the ongoing process of the formation of a Modern Greek literary canon during the decade in which the creation of an independent Greek state was becoming a realistic prospect. As his other writings from the period, such as his "Treatise on Language" (Πραγματεία περί γλώσσης, 1824), an essay arguing against the use of archaizing registers in Modern Greek, demonstrate, Matesis's Ionian geographic context was wedded to an outlook which incorporated the wider Greek-speaking world in discussions of literature and language. The accessibility of Matesis's translation of *Hecyra*, which is in vernacular prose (albeit with many Zakynthian dialectal features) and features clear indicators, such as stage directions (missing from the Latin original), that Matesis intended the work for performance, speaks to the public nature of his ambitions for the Greek reception of Roman drama, as does his later use of plot material from *Hecyra* in a comedy of his own.

Terence's Roman comedy is domesticated effectively for a Greek-speaking audience. Vernacular Greek filler expressions such as τέλος πάντων ("anyway"), intended to convey the tone of a particular remark, are inserted liberally into Terence's dialogue. Certain passages are altered to incorporate Greek ideas familiar to Matesis's contemporaries, such as Haros, the personification of death derived from the ancient Charon, the ferryman who brings souls to the underworld (*Hec.*422; Pylarinos 2009, 517), or to substitute

concepts such as the Roman name for the underworld, Orcus, with the more Greek-sounding Hades (*Hec.*852; Pylarinos 2009, 527). Terence is packaged for Matesis's Greek-speaking contemporaries not as a Latin playwright who draws inspiration from fourth-century BCE Greek New Comic plots (Apollodorus of Carystus's now lost *Penthera*, in the case of the current play; see Lefèvre 1999; Brown 2013, 20), but as a timeless writer whose comedy is totally effective in a vernacular register of the Greek language; in other words, his antiquity and use of Greek models are downplayed in favour of his part in Matesis's vision of a Modern Greek theatre which comfortably incorporates all manner of dramatic influences, including Roman.

Matesis's interest in translating Terence into vernacular Greek emerges from a dual impulse: to shape theatrical culture in the emerging Greek nation by bringing it in line with the tradition represented by the inheritance of Roman comedy which had been so influential in previous centuries to playwrights already canonical in the Ionian Islands, such as Molière, Goldoni, and Diderot; and to ensure that Greek-speaking audiences' access to classical drama was not dependent on their level of education, a goal apparently shared with the anonymous Seneca translator a century before. To these broader ambitions might be added a more local imperative: the increased need for Greek-language theatrical productions on Zakynthos following a petition in 1806 from the islands' citizens to its government for more performances in Greek (rather than Italian) (Fessas-Emmanouil 1989, 78). Matesis's Terence translation therefore represents not the beginning of a movement to classicize theatre in nineteenth-century Greece as a whole so much as the end of a long-standing Ionian tradition of absorbing non-Greek influences into the local vernacular dramatic repertoire, and a response to local concerns about the dominance of Italian-language theatre on an island where Italian was understood only by those at the top of the social ladder.

5. Conclusion: the Invention of Theatrical Greekness

The running theme throughout each of the cases we have examined here has been a lack of assumed ownership of the theatrical traditions of Ancient Greece by early modern Ionians, which went hand in hand with an openness to non-Greek – including Roman – dramatic influences. I have explained this largely through the islands' position as a bridge between Greece and Western Europe, occasioned by their history, unique in Greece, as long-term colonies of a Western European, not a Middle Eastern, power during the early modern period. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, however, an important shift of attitudes took place in the wider Greek world which would alter this Ionian theatrical distinctiveness.

The idea of Ancient Greece as the cultural progenitor of modern Europe was firmly established by the middle of the eighteenth century in Western European intellectual centres, but the involvement of contemporary Greeks in this process was initially minimal (Gourgouris 2021, 72, 134). As nationalist ideas became more firmly embedded in the Greek cultural sphere through the thought of revolutionary intellectuals such as the aforementioned Koraïs or Rigas Velestinlis (1757-1798), the perceived glories of Greek antiquity were increasingly adopted by such figures as a powerful signifier of the emerging Modern Greek nation and as a means to exploit Western interest in Ancient Greece in the service of the liberation of Modern Greece (Herzfeld 1986, 20). This Greek assumption of the classical legacy was expressed in literature through an increased rhetoric of Modern Greek ownership over forms originally developed in Greek antiquity. As we have seen, this situation was the opposite of that which pertained in the early modern Ionian theatrical world, which was comfortable domesticating non-Greek dramatic traditions without asserting Greek ownership over them.

Perhaps the most telling indication of a shift of attitudes in the wider Greek world towards the Hellenic nature of drama comes through the words of Matesis's contemporary Mitio Sakellariou (*née* Megdani; 1789-after 1863), whose translation of two plays of Carlo Goldoni was published in Vienna in 1818 (see most recently Papalexopoulou 2021, 6-7; also, Puchner 2001). Sakellariou's translation is accompanied by a preface directed to her "kind female readers" (τας ευμενείς αναγινωσκούσας) which is particularly revealing in its approach to the originality of Greek theatre. In arguing for the social good provided by drama, Sakellariou states that the theatre is the "noblest diffusion" (η ευγενεστέρα διάχυσις) emanating from every European nation (1818, η΄), thus appealing to the international nature of the art form; she has no doubt, however, that drama is in origin a Greek phenomenon that "our wise ancestors first introduced" (πρώτοι οι σοφοί πρόγονοί μας εισήγαγον; η΄-θ΄), with the rest of Europe simply following suit.

The claim to Greek dramatic exceptionalism espoused by Sakellariou is indicative of the paradox within which intellectual supporters of Greek nationalism found themselves during the period. Despite the Western philhellenic conviction that Greece was the origin of European civilization, contemporary writers in Greek were mostly reliant on Western European formal models within their own works, resulting in a large number of translations into Greek during the period: Sakellariou's version of Goldoni represents just two of the sixty-five known Greek translations of plays recorded between 1791 and 1821 (Constantinidis 1987, 16). Faced with the numerical superiority and more advanced stage of development of such literary genres outside of Greece than within it, nationalist-minded Greek intellectuals resorted to the argument that, even if they were forced to

draw their immediate inspiration from some other literary tradition, all of European letters was ultimately a copy of those of Greek antiquity, and contemporary Greece could thus lay claim to all written modes of expression to be found within modern Europe.

Throughout this study, we have seen that, in the Ionian Islands, whose geopolitical trajectory was distinct from the rest of the Greek-speaking world during this period, as it would continue to be until 1864, the necessity of borrowing ideas from Western Europe to construct a Modern Greek literary and theatrical reality carried no such anxieties. Instead, the local interplay between Greek and non-Greek theatrical traditions points to an environment whose literary figures acknowledged how strongly intertwined their theatrical culture was with that of Western Europe, without feeling the need to assert their own tradition's chronological supremacy. The apparent linguistic illogicalities of Greek-speaking audiences translating Ancient Greek drama into Italian represented by the *Persae* production of 1571 are in fact easily explained by the need to accommodate an Italian-speaking audience of Venetian administrators, the lack of a strong sense of identification with the Ancient Greek past in the region during the period in question, and by the apparent absence of a local tradition of performing Greek tragedy in a vernacular translation which would have been comprehensible to Greek-speaking spectators. Concurrently, the Greek versions of Seneca and Terence we have discussed do not represent an attempt to reappropriate Greek plot lines originally appropriated for the Roman theatre so much as a desire on the part of Ionian intellectuals to create accessible Greek-language versions of theatrical masterpieces written in a language most of their fellow Ionians could not understand. With the culmination of Greek nation-building efforts in the nineteenth century, the resulting focus on the Ancient Greek dramatic legacy, evident in the writings of figures like Mitio Sakellariou, began to undermine the Ionian sense that theatrical appropriation from Western European traditions was a natural, or even desirable, process for Modern Greeks. The true role of a Greek-speaking intellectual began to be cast as emphasizing the importance of the Ancient Greek past as the root of the Modern Greek nation; the early modern Ionian theatrical inheritance, which embodied a Hellenism constructed of many constituent parts, of which Ancient Greece was just one, enjoyed little currency within such a literary environment.

Although this attitude would go on to prove highly significant in subsequent assessments of the Ionian theatrical legacy (see, for example, the comments of Giorgos Theotokas (1905-1966) that Matesis's *Pot of Basil* is a work of "purely Italian", καθαρά ιταλικό inspiration (1985, 387), it must be noted that such assessments reflect the priorities of the post-independence Greek world as a whole, and not the ideas of those early modern Ionians

we have discussed here. Instead, the relative porosity between Greek and Latin dramatic traditions in the early modern Ionian Islands demonstrates that Greek-language high culture of the time was enriched by an openness to non-Greek influences which would later be distinctly lacking from the performative rush to embody Ancient Greece so characteristic of the nineteenth-century Greek state. Shorn of the automatic assumption of Ancient Greek superiority frequent in the literature of the period, the theatre of the early modern Ionian Islands illuminates a new direction for exploration of the reception of ancient Greek drama in Greece, thus rendering it a unique chapter in both the history of classical reception and Modern Greek theatrical life.

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Raf Van Rooy*

A Funeral and a Marriage at the Moretuses (1640s): Ceremonial Greek in the Early Modern Low Countries[1]

Abstract

As a side product of the Greek revival in the Renaissance, the Ancient Greek language became a language of performance next to Latin. The early modern staging of Ancient Greek is, however, grossly understudied. In my paper, I zoom in on a case study: how Greek was possibly performed at the Plantin-Moretus publishing house, and which functions it served at ceremonies. I argue that the performance of Greek created distinctions between the people participating in the ceremony: especially those with Greek, and those without. The former group covered not only scholars but also the patrons commissioning-and hence literally owning-the Greek, whereas the latter group typically contained the unsuspecting onlookers, who can be assumed to have been dumbfounded by the unusual linguistic medium. I will discuss two Greek poems, one mourning the death of Balthasar Moretus I (1641), the other celebrating the marriage of Balthasar Moretus II and Anna Goos (1645). I also edit the former poem by Martin Binnart, which has thus far remained in manuscript.

Keywords: New Ancient Greek; occasional poetry; Plantin-Moretus; early modern Low Countries

1. Introduction

In academic ceremonies today one often hears the odd Latin word or phrase, sometimes even a poem or a piece in prose, to accompany the ritual. In Oxford degree ceremonies, for instance, the procedure is still partly conducted in the old academic language (*Degree Ceremonies*). Such ceremonial uses of Latin would have been absurd in the early age of the university and, more broadly, in early modern high culture, since Latin served as the *lingua*

1 I thank the anonymous reviewer for valuable comments on an earlier draft of this article. I am also indebted to Maxime Maleux and Kristof Selleslach for sending me source materials and for clarifying certain points of detail. The article has also benefitted from discussion with students in the frame of the FWO Senior Research Project "From Hellas to Haarlem" (G040624N).

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franca of so many aspects in life, especially education, scholarship, religion, administration, and diplomacy (e.g. Leonhardt 2013, Chapter 3). The quasi omnipresence of the language in what Leonhardt (2013, 122) dubs "Europe's Latin Millennium" made it not exceptional enough to fulfil any saliant ceremonial roles. A language like Ancient Greek, on the other hand, was more apt for such purposes, as I argue in this paper by looking at a double case study from 1640s Antwerp. Through the Greek language, a group of people could demarcate themselves from others, as this tongue constituted a kind of socio-cultural shibboleth on different levels and served to display the group's wealth, both material and cultural. In this paper, I build on ideas regarding the performative dimensions of New Ancient Greek expressed in Van Rooy (2023, 120-31). Performance is understood here in a double sense. Through its being recited (performed), Greek helps shape social relationships (it performs a social role).

My paper aims to analyse how the Greek shibboleth worked in two poems produced for a funeral and a marriage in the Plantin-Moretus family of publishers in the 1640s. This study therefore joins in the recent upsurge of interest in Greek composition and its cultural contexts in Europe during the Renaissance and after, to which I refer as New Ancient Greek literature in parallel to Neo-Latin literature.[1] Contrary to most earlier studies, this article explicitly thematises the performative dimensions Greek composition could have, for instance when recited to enliven and solemnise events like funerals and marriages, where far from everybody would have been able to understand the text. This fact implies that not only the literal meaning of the text mattered but particularly its context of performance and the impression that a recited text, though unintelligible, left on its audience. Han Lamers (2023) provides an interesting analysis of this phenomenon drawing on the concept of "affordances" in his study of a young schoolboy's epic poem he recently rediscovered in manuscript at The Hague. Stressing the performative dimension, I opt for Catherine Bell's (2009) concept of "ritualisation" in this article. Greek composition and recitation can be understood, I argue, as a ritualised action creating and perpetuating social distinctions between groups of people who attend such an action, e.g. a funerary service or a marriage ceremony (for research into ritual, see the overview in Stephenson 2022).

To understand the socio-cultural and historical context, I first introduce the Plantin-Moretus family and their dealings with Greek very briefly (Section 2), before moving to the analysis of the two texts, possibly performed during

[1] See especially Pontani and Weise 2022, as well as e.g. Päll and Volt 2018; Kajava and Korhonen 2020; Korhonen 2022; Lamers and Van Rooy 2022b; Lamers 2023; Van Rooy 2023, with a definition of "New Ancient Greek" at 17.

funerary and marital ceremonies (Section 3), and venturing some thoughts on ceremonial Greek with the Moretuses in the conclusion (Section 4). The Appendix contains an edition and translation of the previously unedited funerary poem from 1641.

2. The Plantin-Moretus Family and Greek

The Plantin-Moretus printing dynasty was founded by the French-born Christophe Plantin (1520-1589), who started out as a bookbinder but made fame as a publisher of elegant and high-quality publications in both the classical and the vernacular languages, eventually obtaining the status of royal printer in service of the Catholic King of Spain Philip II (see e.g. Voet 1969-1972). One of the most famous products of the *Officina Plantiniana* was the Antwerp Polyglot Bible (1568-1573), giving the text of the Old Testament in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin, and that of the New Testament in Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Hebrew. Plantin moreover issued many Latin and Greek classics, following in the footsteps of earlier humanist printers in the Low Countries. These printers were themselves inspired by Aldo Manuzio's (ca. 1449/52-1515) publishing house of especially Greek classics in Venice around the turn of the sixteenth century, where active Greek speaking and writing was both intensely practiced and persistently promoted.[2]

Dirk Martens (c.1450-1534) was the first to publish work in the two classical languages in Antwerp and the university city of Leuven. After Martens' retirement in 1528, printers in the two languages were active in major cities like Ghent and Bruges but especially Antwerp and Leuven. Overall, the history of Greek printing in the Low Countries would benefit from a closer study, which holds *a fortiori* for the situation in Antwerp before Plantin.[3] It is clear in any case that several publishers had Greek fonts in Antwerp, printing Greek classics and occasionally also New Ancient Greek poems, usually as liminary materials in editions of Greek and Latin texts (see e.g. Van Kerchove 1974). There is hardly any denying, however, that with the *Officina Plantiniana*, after Plantin's death taken over by his son-in-law Jan Moretus I (1543-1610), the pace of Greek publishing and composition increased dramatically, partly in parallel with the short-lived *Officina Goltziana* in Bruges during the 1560s and 1570s (Lamers and Van Rooy 2022a). In fact, the great age of Greek composition in the Low Countries coincides with the humanist acme of the Plantin-Moretus press

[2] See e.g. the playful "law" of the *Neakademia* in Manutius (2016, 288-93).

[3] See e.g. Delsaerdt 2020 and the references there. Early Greek printers in Antwerp who deserve closer attention include Johannes Grapheus and Michael Hillen of Hoogstraten.

from the 1550s until around 1650 (Lamers and Van Rooy 2022b). The family surrounded itself with the most prominent classical scholars of the period and area, in their offices in Antwerp and Leiden, including luminaries like Justus Lipsius (1547-1606). The Plantin-Moretuses exploited the cultural capital of these scholars by having them compose poetry adorning their publications and classical text editions, usually in Latin and in more exclusive cases also in Greek. The typical goal was to praise the author or subject of their books, but from time to time also to honour members of the family's printing imperium.

In this contribution I highlight two Greek poems in dactylic hexameters that served to solemnise two milestone events in the Moretus family rather than to adorn their publications: the death of Plantin's grand-son Balthasar Moretus I (1574-1641) on 8 July 1641, and the marriage of Balthasar I's nephew and godson Balthasar Moretus II (1615-1674) with Anna Goos (1627-1691) on 23 July 1645. The dirge for Moretus' death was composed by Martin(us) Binnart (Binnaert and Binhart; ca. 1590-ca. 1653), who had worked as proofreader for the Moretuses from 24 March 1612 until 1637.[4] In this period, Balthasar I loaned Binnart a substantial sum of money enabling his employee to buy a house (Van Impe 2016, 291). Binnart started his own bookshop sometime after 1634, in the context of which he collaborated with the Moretuses (Voet 1967-1972, II, 492), and ran a printing shop from 1637 onwards. His printing press mainly published newspapers, next to a handful of booklets. At the Lutheran university of Jena, where Justus Lipsius also had taught, Binnart enjoyed a decent education (Van Impe 2016, 288-90) and probably learned both Latin and Greek. His learning is apparent from a Latin translation he made of a Spanish work at the request of the Antwerp Jesuit Andreas Schottus (Van Impe 2016, 294) as well as from a Dutch-Latin school dictionary he produced. This dictionary first appeared while he was corrector at the *Officina Plantiniana* and enjoyed some success. Binnart proudly boasted of his position at the *Officina* on the title page of the work.[5]

Presumably as a former employee and current business partner in selling books, Binnart honoured Balthasar Moretus I with a Greek poem.[6] Binnart may also have been the author of the marriage poem for Balthasar Moretus II and Anna Goos, as its language shows some infelicities not unlike those in the slightly earlier dirge and they have some shared parallels, as the two poems contain echoes of Homer, the Greek Anthology, Nonnus, and

[4] See especially Claes 1972a-b; Van Impe 2016.

[5] In the 1635 edition of his *Dictionarium Teutonico-Latinum*, the first of which a full copy seems to survive, the author is identified on the titlepage as "Martini Binhart in Officinâ Plantinianâ Correctoris" (Claes 1972b, 258). The dictionary was never published by Binnart's own press (Van Impe 2016, 295).

[6] See the edition in the Appendix and especially the Latin subscription of the poem.

Gregory of Nazianzen.[7] At the same time, the epithalamium is richer in textual references and shows greater skill in verse composition than the dirge, which seems to have been written with a grammar and a dictionary at hand.[8] As a lexicographer, Binnart of course knew such tools well. The option remains open, therefore, that the two texts have different authors, or perhaps that Binnart honed his skills as a Greek poet in the years between 1641 and 1645.

Balthasar I was certainly not the first member of the dynasty to be honored with a Greek poem. Christophe Plantin himself, too, was lamented in Greek poems currently kept in manuscript at Leiden University Library in the files of Lipsius and Vulcanius.[9] Yet, with Balthasar I, there is the possibility that the Greek dirge was part of a remembrance strategy his 25-year-old nephew and heir Balthasar II had planned, perhaps in dialogue with his dying uncle. Balthasar II commissioned two paintings, one depicting his late uncle in his deathbed (see Figure 1), the other showing him alive in typical portrait style. Both were produced by Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert (1613-1654), who received 96 florins for the job.[10] Balthasar I had always opposed the idea of having himself portrayed, "even by his good friend Rubens," as he suffered from an "inferiority complex derived from his physical infirmity" (Voet 1969-1972, 1.318).

At the same time, Balthasar I's family saw to it that his last days and hours were spent comfortably, and that he was honored with a proper funerary service, for which an ode was commissioned for 12 florins (Voet 1969-1972, 1.211). It is not inconceivable that the funerary ode is to be identified with the Greek dirge (θρῆνος) for Balthasar Moretus I by former staff member Martin Binnart, today preserved in the Plantin-Moretus archives and, like the paintings, probably also commissioned by his nephew Balthasar II. Indeed, the latter noted in his journal with personal expenses that he had paid 12 florins on 19 July 1645 "for the poems external persons composed on

[7] See Lamers and Van Rooy (2022c, 261-4) for the Greek text of the marriage poem, an English prose translation, and further context, and the Appendix here for the sources of the dirge.

[8] The hyper-epic-Ionic diction in forms like ἠϊδίων and φθοῦνος seems to corroborate this argument. In addition, rare words may have been drawn from a dictionary rather than from an actual reading of ancient texts. I owe this suggestion to the anonymous reviewer.

[9] E.g. Leiden, University Library, LIP 3 (24), unnumbered item at the back (after folio 75); VUL 103, 12*r*. The authorship is unclear at the moment, and the poems require further study. Lipsius can probably be excluded as author, but Vulcanius is an obvious candidate for many of the compositions.

[10] Voet (1969-1972, I, 318). The painting is currently on display at Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus, MPM V IV 004.

my late uncle's death".[11] Writing commissioned poems may well have been one of Binnart's various sources of extra income (see Van Impe 2016, 298-9).

Fig. 1: *Balthasar Moretus I on His Deathbed* (Museum Plantin-Moretus)

Greek also made a dramatic appearance when 29-year-old Balthasar II married the 18-year-old Anna Goos on 23 July 1645, nota bene the birthday of his late uncle Balthasar I. The marriage with its symbolic date was solemnised by a multilingual poetical publication titled *Acroamata nuptialia*, "Wedding Recitals," offered to Balthasar and his wife by a group of unnamed "learned men" (*viri docti*) but certainly coordinated by the Jesuit Jacob de Cater (1593-1657).[12] In this publication, Greek features prominently at the heart of the publication (8-11) as one of the learned house languages next to Hebrew and Latin, followed by pieces in Spanish, Italian, French, Dutch, and again Latin. Dirk Sacré (1998-1899, 158) discovered that the Latin and Dutch poems were by de Cater, whereas the suggestion that Martin Binnart may have been the author of the Greek poem and its Latin translation goes back to Lamers and Van Rooy (2022c, 261-4). The short poems in the vernacular

[11] See Antwerp, *Museum Plantin-Moretus*, Arch. 169, 2: "Item betaelt voor de dichten door vreemde persoonen op Oom salighers doot gemaeckt".

[12] For context and book-historical details (with reproduction), see de Schepper (1996), For details on the main editor of the volume and Balthasar II's references to the *viri docti*, see Sacré (1998-1999); for the *viri docti*, see 156-7 in particular. De Schepper (1996, 381) translates *acroamata* among other things as "showpieces", whereas Sacré (1998-1999, 155) renders the term of Greek extraction as "concert". My account in this paragraph and the next draws on their excellent contributions.

languages are currently still unattributed, whereas the Hebrew is an excerpt from Psalm 127 (or 128 in the current numbering), accompanied by a poetical paraphrasis of the entire psalm in Latin. The Greek poem in the *Acroamata* is original in that it is not a rehashing of an ancient text or motive, as is often the case with early modern epithalamia (Greene 2015).

The marriage was considered of crucial importance for the future of the *Officina Plantiniana*, as Balthasar Moretus II was the sole heir of the business, succeeding his childless uncle Balthasar I. Hence, it was celebrated exuberantly, with a publication for the occasion reflecting the original humanist interests of the press, which were, however, slowly waning in favour of liturgical publications. Marcus de Schepper calls the epithalamia in the *Acroamata nuptialia* ". . . een uiterst zeldzaam [en vroeg] voorbeeld van een gelegenheidsbundeltje uit de 'boekenwereld'" (1996, 378; "an extremely rare [and early] example of an occasional collection from the 'world of books'"). Dirk Sacré asserts that "[t]ijdens het huwelijksfeest [zo mogen we misschien veronderstellen] zijn die poëtische stukken effectief voorgelezen in aanwezigheid van de schare uitgelezen gasten" (1998-1999, 155; "during the wedding [we may perhaps assume] those poetic pieces were actually read out loud in the presence of the select club of guests"). The wedding took place in the house of Balthasar II's father-in-law Jacobus Goos, hosting ninety guests, who feasted for three consecutive days.[13] In other words: there was plenty of time for reciting poems, even if the personified presses would have to speak in absence of their physical embodiments. The rhythmic movements of the presses that the *Acroamata* may evoke according to Sacré (1998-1999, 155) must therefore have remained a poetical fiction.

In sum, Greek was strategically used to solemnise two key moments in the life of the Moretuses in the 1640s. The dirge for Balthasar I was most likely commissioned by his nephew Balthasar II, whereas the *Acroamata* were offered to Balthasar II and his spouse by learned associates. In the case of the wedding, Greek featured prominently among the other major languages of the Plantin-Moretus family business. In both cases, the use of Greek served to display cultural capital and the humanist tradition of the famous press, as I argue detail in the next section.

[13] Antwerp, *Museum Plantin-Moretus*, Arch. 213, 13*v*, cited in Sacré 1998-1999, 156, who also notes that there was an informal festive meal, with some forty guests (mostly friends), at the Plantin-Moretuses in early August, lasting for two days.

3. Ceremonial Greek: a Funeral and a Marriage in 1640s Antwerp

Looking at the poems' materiality, one immediately notices that the two Greek texts have been carefully executed. The manuscript dirge for Balthasar Moretus I has been elegantly written on the middle of a very large sheet of paper, carrying a title in meticulously crafted capital letters, somewhat atypically provided with accents and spirituses. Not only could the sheet be easily held for solemn recital, but perhaps it was also put on display for some time during or after the funeral (see Figure 2). The *Acroamata* publication, on the other hand, was produced in quarto by the Plantin-Moretus presses, including a carefully printed emblem of Plantin's symbol, The Golden Compasses (de Schepper 1996, 381n8). The format and the high-quality execution would have allowed convenient recital in this case, too. Although there is no hard proof that recitals actually took place, the occasional character of the poems and the close connection to two events that typically go accompanied by various rituals are sufficient to at least put forward the hypothesis that they were indeed recited. In what follows, I analyse how such a ceremonial use of Greek may be interpreted as a ritual performance in Bell's (2009) sense, arguing that the medium of Greek helped shape social relationships, especially around the figure of Balthasar II.

The ceremonial use of Greek gains further significance once one looks at the meaning of the texts, which would have been inaccessible for most bystanders. That is a first relevant conclusion to draw: the Moretuses and their environs, especially Martin Binnart in this case, used Greek to mark the exceptionally wide range of their business, the European-wide fame of which is made explicit in the opening lines of the dirge for Balthasar I (1-13). This ceremonial Greek produced different effects among the people attending the funeral. Those with Greek felt an association with the major publisher of European fame because they shared the same cultural background of humanism, immediately appreciating that Binnart had Hellenised Plantin's well-known motto *Labore et constantia* ("Through labour and perseverance") on line 25 as Καρτερίας τε Πόνου τε, albeit in reverse order. Those without Greek will have felt and expressed amazement at a Greek recital, either because they only had Latin as a learned language or they were used to hearing Latin even though they did not understand it. Greek, in other words, realised two things for the Moretuses on these occasions: making ties with the select few Greek experts closer, and gathering the admiration of the many without Greek, including friends and business associates. In the case of the *Acroamata*, the admiration would have been increased by the multilingualism of the publication in general, especially the additional presence of a portion of Biblical Hebrew next to that of the various vernacular languages.

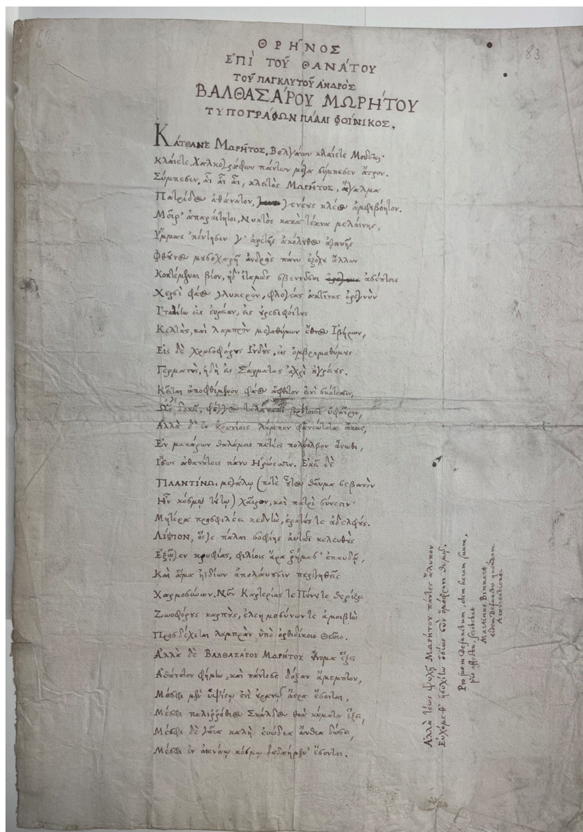
ΘΡΗΝΟΣ
ΕΠΙ ΤΟΥ ΘΑΝΑΤΟΥ
ΤΟΥ ΠΑΓΚΛΥΤΟΥ ΑΝΔΡΟΣ
ΒΑΛΘΑΣΑΡΟΥ ΜΩΡΗΤΟΥ
ΤΥΠΟΓΡΑΦΩΝ ΠΑΛΑΙ ΦΟΙΝΙΚΟΣ,

Fig. 2: Dirge for Balthasar Moretus I (Museum Plantin-Moretus)[14]

The effect must have been all the greater as, by the early 1640s, knowledge of Greek had become something of a rarity in the Southern Low Countries (according to the first impressions of Lamers and Van Rooy 2022b-c). The numerous linguistic infelicities in Binnart's poetry further corroborate this impression (see Appendix; Lamers and Van Rooy 2022c, 264). The rarity and exclusive nature of Greek perhaps also encouraged its use as a language of intimate ideas and emotions, not unapt for a funeral and a marriage. This intimate use of Greek corresponds to a broader trend in early modern uses of Greek (see Van Rooy 2023, 116-20). The dirge, for instance, contains an endearing passage on Balthasar I's arrival in heaven (14-27) and particularly on the persons he meets and greets there:

[14] For the details on the source, see the Appendix.

. . . Ἐκεῖ δὲ
Πλαντίνῳ μεγάλῳ (ποτὲ οὗτος θαῦμα σεβαστὸν
ἦν κόσμῳ τούτῳ) χαῖρον, καὶ πατρὶ σύνεστιν·
μητέρα προσφιλέει κεδνήν, ἐρατούς τε ἀδελφούς.
Λίψιον, ὅς γε πάλαι σοφίης αὐτῶϊ κελευθοὺς
ἐξῷγεν κρυφίας, φιλίοις ἄρα ῥήμασ᾽ ἐπαυδᾷ,
καὶ ἅμα ἠϊδίων ἀπολαύουσιν περιγηθεῖς
χαρμοσύνων . . .
(19-25)

[And there / he greeted the great Plantin (who once was the venerable marvel / in this world), and joins his father; / he approaches his dear mother for a kiss and his beloved siblings. / He addresses Lipsius, who long ago disclosed to him the / hidden paths to wisdom, no doubt with friendly words, / and together they are ecstatically enjoying eternal / delights.]

In Greek, we meet the inner circles of Balthasar I: Plantin, his grandfather and founder of the printing dynasty; his father Jan Moretus I and mother Martina Plantin (1550-1616), and his ten siblings (see Voet 1969-1972, 1, 200), to end with the great humanist Justus Lipsius, his childhood tutor. The encounters increase in intensity following the rhetorical strategy of amplification: from greeting through kissing to a conversation with wise Lipsius that leads them to “eternal delights”.

Binnart consoled the living members of the Moretus family with the idea that Balthasar I was now reunited with his loved ones – in Greek, although most members of the family would not have understood this language. At the same time, their family’s business literally owned Greek in the form of fonts and employed correctors competent in that language, including Binnart himself. Balthasar II may have been the most notable exception, as his well-educated uncle Balthasar I had encouraged him to take up humanist studies at the local Jesuit college and in Tournai, which certainly included Latin and French (Voet 1969-1972, 1.217). It is not inconceivable that his programme also had room for at least some Greek. Hence, Binnart possibly tailored his text to the tastes and worldview of Balthasar II in particular. This hypothesis gains even more credit when one considers that Balthasar II to some extent “had an urge to play the *grand seigneur* and ape the nobility” (Voet 1969-1972, 1.217, who at the same time nuances this picture). The fondness of ceremonial Greek may have been part of this seigneurial persona, as nobility and royalty were more often celebrated in Greek than publishers. This observation adds another, very personal layer to the picture of ceremonial Greek, next to the two other distinctions alluded to before: Greek distinguishes not only (1) those having it from those without it and (2) the Moretuses with their great cultural capital from outsiders, but also

(3) the personal tastes of one particular Moretus from the rest. One may surmise that the new manager Balthasar II wanted to profile himself as a cultivated leader promoting the humanist publishing share of the company, taking the commemoration of his uncle Balthasar I as a showcase. Binnart's dirge in any case pictured Balthasar Moretus as a new and unforgettable culmination in the almost century-long history of the humanist printing dynasty (see lines 28-33). As this passage mentions in general the fame of the name "Balthasar Moretus", one may be tempted to argue that Binnart was alluding to both the deceased uncle and the young nephew attending the funerary ceremony. Such indirect praise was in any case not an uncommon strategy in classical and early modern literature, especially at courts (e.g. Gattavari 2020, 112; Harrison 2024, 82).

One final performative aspect of the dirge can be found in the bilingual subscription of the text, written vertically on the sheet of paper and consisting of two Greek hexameters and a prose Latin subscription. The Greek lines urge everyone to pray for Balthasar I's soul, thus evoking a ceremonial context of a funerary service, where the usual praying would have occurred in Latin. This brief vertical addition perhaps serves to suggest that Balthasar I's exceptional soul deserves prayers in the original language of the New Testament.

From his late teens, Balthasar II was initiated into the family business by his uncle and godfather, Balthasar I, who saw his nephew as the *unica spes Typographiae Plantinianae*, "the sole hope of the Plantin press" (Voet 1969-1972, 1, 216). Balthasar II, in other words, felt pressure to work hard in the business as well as to produce offspring to ensure the future of the publishing house. The Greek wedding recital of 1645 describes how he was so eagerly doing the former that he almost forgot about the latter. Fortunately Eros had found him with his arrows to secure the direly needed offspring, one of the central themes in the *Acroamata*. Whereas the dirge for Balthasar I's demise was mostly past-oriented due to the nature of the occasion, this Greek epithalamium looked forward, painting Balthasar II's future as a combination of hard work at the office and numerous children at home:

> Νῦν ἔγνως τὸν Ἔρωτα βαρὺν σφόδρ' ὅστις ἑαυτοῦ
> κήδεσί σου δυνατὸς μελέτας ἐστ' ἐκπολεμίζειν.
> Ἀλλὰ δέχου νόμιμον τὸν Ἔρωτα, ποθῶν τὸ καθῆκον,
> ὄφρα ἔπειτα πονήσῃς ἔμπαλιν, ὅττεό σε χρή.
> Ἐκ δὲ γάμων παλίνορσον γὰρ μάλα πολλὰ δοκοῦσιν
> ἔργα σοφῶν. Γλυκερός σε μὲν αἱρεῖ μηρὸς Ἔρωτος,
> βέλτιον ἀλλὰ μέρος ταῖς Μούσαις σεῖο φύλαττε.

[Now you have come to know exceedingly powerful Eros, / who is capable of making your concerns conflict with his own priorities. / But accept

legitimate Love, while longing for your duty, / so that you will work hard again on whatever befits you. / And very many works of wise men indeed expect you to return / from your marriage affairs. The sweet thigh of Eros seizes you, / but preserve your better half for the Muses. (Text and translation from Lamers and Van Rooy 2022c, 262-3)]

The context of the publication is, of course, congratulatory, but the content of this Greek piece does not strike one as unambiguous, especially since there is only one unnamed reference to the bride Anna Goos at the end of the poem. The Greek text reads in the first place as a warning for Balthasar II not to start neglecting the business after marriage, since wise Greek men require his constant attention on the presses. The piece does end, not atypically for an epithalamium, with a wish for many children, who are expected to continue the work ethic of their father – that is at least implied in the phrase πατρώζοντα τέκνα (25-6):

Οὕτω πατρώζοντά τε σοι τέξει παράκοιτις
τέκνα, Ὀλυμπιάδων Μουσάων ἔκγονα Φοίβου.
Τοῦτο δέ μοι χαρίεν, μητρός τε καὶ Ἑλλάδος εὐχὴ
ἑπτὰ Σοφῶν, σοι τοῦτο ἐπεύχει Παλλὰς Ἀθηνᾶ.

[Thus your wife will give birth for you to children who take after / their father, grandchildren of Phoebus' Olympian Muses. / And this pleases me, this is the wish of Greece, mother of / the seven Sages; this is what Pallas Athena wishes for you. (Text and translation from Lamers and Van Rooy 2022c, 262-3)]

In general, the multilingual collection, summarised by the Dutch poem of de Cater, serves as a kind of mirror for princes but then for a publisher. The various presses and their languages not only congratulate and praise the young manager and groom but in the first place remind him of his duties in the grand scheme of things: successfully running the family business and ensuring the future of the Plantin-Moretus dynasty. The various pieces encourage Balthasar II to work hard, behave well, and produce offspring, with the Greek doing so most outspokenly. If the groom could not have gathered this hardly subtle message from the Greek text, he surely could have from the Latin verse translation that accompanied the poem on the facing pages. The learned Greek poem, then, would not only have solemnised the wedding of Balthasar II and Anna as part of a larger multilingual poetic collection, but served to perpetuate social relations as they were, in dialogue with the other pieces. Balthasar II should continue his good work in the tradition of his predecessors and produce worthy successors, a role he played with verve, as he and his wife had no less than twelve children together, including his successor Balthasar III (Voet 1969-1972, 1.227).

4. Conclusion

There is no hard evidence that the two remarkable New Ancient Greek poems that I have briefly analysed in this paper were actually performed. Yet, there are unmistakable clues in the materiality and context of the sources that both texts served to solemnise two key events in the Moretus household of the early 1640s, either commissioned by the family – in particular the new manager Balthasar Moretus II – or offered to them by learned associates. The texts likely show a desire on behalf of Balthasar II to continue the humanist publishing line of his predecessors, including in particular his late uncle Balthasar I, himself educated by Lipsius and an eager supporter of his nephew's humanist training. The language par excellence symbolising that humanist capital was Greek, and hence an apt medium to mark important life events within the family and at the same time consolidating their leading role in that market by showing who owns the Greek. I have tried to make the case that this use of Greek centred on Balthasar II, the new leader of the imperium as of 1641 who wanted to self-present him as such, emphatically claiming the Greek for his family and all those associated with it – both as a learned and as an intimate medium – and generating amazement and respect among those outside the family. At the same time, the active use of Greek at the Moretuses in the 1640s was much more limited than had been the case at Aldo Manuzio's publishing house in Venice more than a century earlier, where speaking and writing Greek were literally daily business.

Various questions still remain unresolved, also with regard to the Greek poet Martin Binnart: where did he learn his Greek? Why was he the go-to candidate for the Moretuses? May there be other specimens of ceremonial Greek in Antwerp from this period, the tail end of a strong tradition of Greek versification in the Southern Low Countries? They can reasonably be expected to be limited to the early period of Balthasar II's management, since this Moretus increasingly moved towards liturgical publications as his directorship progressed and "the Antwerp humanists . . . completely faded away" (Voet 1969-1972, 1.218).

Appendix

The Funerary Poem (Shortly After 8 July 1641), Text and Translation

I have resolved ligatures and adapted accentuation and spiritus marking to modern philological standards, though retaining mistakes and adding explanatory notes where I deemed it appropriate. I have regularised capitalisation, also removing (small) capitals in the title and in personal names throughout the text as it is not easy to render (small) capitals with spirituses and accents in Unicode in a way that is aesthetically as pleasing as in the original manuscript.

The text seems to be a clean copy of an earlier draft, as a copying mistake confirms: on line 8, the final word of line 9 was accidentally inserted (ὀρεγνυν, without the accent) and immediately struck out to be followed by the word intended for line 8: ἀσέπτοις. There are various ink drops and blots and one other correction on line 4 (γενει into γενέους), but the manuscript is otherwise very clean and may lead one to suspect that it was used for some form of display. On the other hand, there are also clear signs of folding, suggesting that the document was at least for some time not preserved on display but locked away in a folder or the like.

Text

a: Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus, Arch. 1150a. misc., item 83,
paper and ink dimensions: 397/402x296mm
(The length on the left-hand side is a little shorter than on the right-hand side, making the large sheet of paper a slightly imperfect rectangle)

[*horizontally*]

Θρῆνος ἐπὶ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ παγκλυτοῦ ἀνδρὸς
Βαλθασάρου Μωρήτου τυπογράφων πάλαι φοίνικος.

Κάτθανε Μωρῆτος, Βελγάων κλαίετε Μοῦσαι·
κλαίετε, χαλκογράφων πάντων μέγα σύμπεσεν ἄστρον.
Σύμπεσεν, αἶ αἶ αἶ, κλειτὸς Μωρῆτος, ἄγαλμα
πατρίδος ἀθάνατον, γενέους κλέος ἀμφιβόητον.
Μοῖρ’ ἀπαραίτητοι, Νυκτὸς κακὰ τέκνα μελαίνης, 5
ὔμμας ’κέντησεν γ’ ἀρετῆς ἀκόλουθος ἀγαυῆς
φθοῦνος μουσοχαρῆ ἀνδρὸς πάνυ ἐξόχου ἄλλων
κοπτέμεναι βίον, ἠδ’ ἰταμῶς σβεννῦσαι ἀσέπτοις
χερσὶ φάος γλυκερόν, φλογέας ἀκτῖνας ὀρεγνὺν

Ἰταλίην εἰς εὐρείαν, εἰς οὐρεσιφοίτους 10
Κελτάς, καὶ λαμπρὸν μεγαθύμων ἔθνος Ἰβήρων,
εἰς δὲ χρυσοφόρους Ἰνδούς, εἰς ὀμβριμοθύμους
Γερμανούς, ἠδὴ εἰς Σάρματας ἀχρὶ ἀγρείους.
Κεῖται ἀποφθίμενον φάος ἄφθιτον εἰνὶ σκότεσσιν,
ὥς γε δοκεῖ, φέγγος ταλάνεσσι βρότοισι ὑφαῖρον, 15
ἀλλὰ δ' ἐν οὐρανίοις λάμπον φανεώτατα οἴκοις,
ἐν μακάρων θαλάμοις πατέει πολύολβον ἄνωθι,
ἴσως ἀθανάτοις πάνυ Ἡρώεσσιν. Ἐκεῖ δὲ
Πλαντίνῳ μεγάλῳ (ποτὲ οὗτος θαῦμα σεβαστὸν
ἦν κόσμῳ τούτῳ) χαῖρον, καὶ πατρὶ σύνεστιν· 20
μητέρα προσφιλέει κεδνήν, ἐρατούς τε ἀδελφούς.
Λίψιον, ὅς γε πάλαι σοφίης αὐτῶϊ κελευθοὺς
ἐξῷγεν κρυφίας, φιλίοις ἄρα ῥήμασ' ἐπαυδᾷ,
καὶ ἅμα ἠϊδίων ἀπολαύουσιν περιγηθεῖς
χαρμοσύνων. Νῦν Καρτερίας τε Πόνου τε θερίζει 25
ζωοφόρους καρπούς, ἐλεημοσύνων τε ἀμοιβὴν
προσδέχεται λαμπρὰν ὑπὸ ὀρθιδίκοιο Θεοῖο.
Ἀλλὰ δὲ Βαλθασάρου Μωρήτου οὔνομα ἕξει
ἀθάνατον φήμην, καὶ πάντοσε δόξαν ἄμεμπτον,
μέσφι μὲν ὑψίστῳ ἐνὶ οὐρανῷ ἄστρα ἔσονται, 30
μέσφι παλιρρόθιος Σκάλδος θοὰ κύματα ἕξει,
μέσφι δὲ γαῖα καλὴ εὐώδεα ἄνθεα δώσει,
μέσφι ἐν αἰενάῳ κόσμῳ δεδαήμεν' ἔσονται.

[*vertically*]

Ἀλλὰ τέως ψυχῇ Μωρήτου πάντες ἄλυπον V1
εὐχόμεθ' ἡσυχίην ὁσίως σὺν ὁμόφρονι θυμῷ.

Pro suo in defunctum, olim herum suum, pio affectu, scribebat
Martinus Binnart, eidem defuncto quondam
a correctione.

Not. crit.: titulus the original has capitals of varying size || **1** Κάτθανε Μωρῆτος] the original has small capitals || **3** αἶ αἶ αἶ] more common is αἲ αἲ αἴ or αἰαῖ | Μωρῆτος] the original has small capitals || **4** γενέους] *corr. ex* γενει || **7** φθοῦνος] unattested, hyper-Ionicised variant of φθόνος | μουσοχαρῆ] one would expect μουσοχαροῦς, from μουσοχαρής, -ές, attested only once in *AG* 9.411.2 || **8** σβεννῦσαι] faulty aorist infinitive of σβέννυμι | ἀσέπτοις] *corr. ex* ὀρεγνυν || **13** ἀχρὶ] *sic pro* ἄχρι || **15** γε] *add. supra lineam* | ταλάνεσσι] seemingly corrected out of τάλανεσσι | ὑφαῖρον

] unattested form of ὑφαιρέω, probably the active present participle was intended, i.e. ὑφαιροῦν or ὑφαιρέον, which would have been metrically possible || **16** φανεώτατα] *sic pro* φανερώτατα? || **19** Πλαντίνῳ] the original has small capitals || **22** Λίψιον] the original has small capitals | κελευθοὺς] *sic pro* κελεύθους || **23** ἄρα] the inferential particle is used rather oddly here || **24** ἠϊδίων] *sic pro* ἀϊδίων (hyper-Ionic form) || **25** χαρμοσύνων] *sic pro* χαρμοσυνῶν || **26** ἐλεημοσύνων] *sic pro* ἐλεημοσυνῶν || **27** ὀρθιδίκοιο] *sic pro* ὀρθοδίκοιο || **28** Βαλθασάρου Μωρήτου] the original has small capitals || **33** δεδαήμεν'] *sic pro* δεδαημέν' || **V1** Μωρήτου] the original has small capitals

Sim.:[15] **3–4** Eur. *Hel.* 206 (ἄγαλμα πατρίδος) || **4** (pseudo-?)Apollinaris, *Metaphrasis psalmorum* 2.7.14, 2.31.28, 2.66.8 & 2.66.12 (κλέος ἀμφιβόητον) || **5** Orph. *H.* 59.1 (Μοῖραι ἀπειρέσιοι, Νυκτὸς φίλα τέκνα μελαίνης) || **7** *AG* 9.411.2 (μουσοχαρεῖ = *hapax legomenon*) || **9** see e.g. Hom. *Od.* 16.23 & 17.41 (γλυκερὸν φάος) || **10** Ἰταλίην εἰς εὐρείαν] *AG* 16.5.2 (καὶ Τίτος εὐρείας ἄγαγ' ἀπ' Ἰταλίας) | οὐρεσιφοίτους] saepe in Nonn. *D.* et bis in *AG* || **12** saepe in Orph. *H.* et ter in *Oracula Sibyllina* (ὀβριμόθυμος in Hes. *Th.* 140, *h.Hom.* 8.2) || **14** φάος ἄφθιτον] ter in *AG* || **17** cf. *AG* 16.21.5-6 || **21** μητέρα… κεδνὴν] cf. e.g. Hom. *Od.* 10.8, Hes. *Th.* 169 || **22–23** κελευθοὺς… κρυφίας] *AG* 16.269.1 (Οὗτος ἀκεστορίης κρυφίας ὤιξε κελεύθους), de Hippocrate || **25** Καρτερίας τε Πόνου τε] cf. dictum Plantinianum *Labore et constantia* || **27** Gregorius Nazianzenus, *Carmina de se ipso*, p. 1244, l. 8 (Θεοῦ… ὀρθοδίκοιο) || **29** Orph. *H.* 15.11 (δόξαν ἄμεμπτον) || **31** Opp. *C.* 2.387 (…θοὰ κύματα τέμνων) || **33** cf. Nonn. *D.* 9.220–221 (ἀενάου δὲ / ἡ ταμίη κόσμοιο), 13.40 (Πύρριχος ἀενάοιο διέδραμεν ἕδρανα κόσμου)

Prose Translation

Dirge for the death of the man famous among all:
Balthasar Moretus, once the phoenix of printers

Moretus has passed away, weep Muses of the Belgians: / weep, the great star of all publishers has fallen. / The famous Moretus – oh oh oh – has fallen, immortal / ornament of our fatherland, far-famed glory of our stock.

[15] References are to the editions used by the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, as of 30 January 2024. Frequency indications are also based on searches conducted that day. As the reviewer rightly points out, not all parallels necessarily indicate direct inspiration from these passages, as the poet may have worked with a dictionary at hand. Yet, the parallels remain instructive as indications of the register and genre associations of certain words and phrases.

/ [5] Inexorable Fate Goddesses, evil children of the black Night, / envy that pursues brilliant virtue has encouraged you / to take the life of a man delighting in the Muses far more / than the others, and to eagerly extinguish with your unholy / hands a sweet light, which directs its fire-bright rays / [10] towards extensive Italy, towards the mountain-roaming / Celts,[16] and the illustrious nation of great-hearted Iberians,[17] / and towards the gold-wearing Indians, towards the strong-spirited / Germans, and towards the utterly boorish Sarmatians.[18] / Perished lies the imperishable light in the darkness, / [15] seemingly removing light from the wretched mortals, / but shining very brightly in its celestial dwellings. / Very fortunate it treads in the chambers of the blessed above, / in a manner very similar to immortal Heroes. And there / he greeted the great Plantin (who once was the venerable marvel / [20] in this world), and joins his father; / he approaches his dear mother for a kiss and his beloved siblings. / He addresses Lipsius, who long ago disclosed to him the / hidden paths to wisdom, no doubt with friendly words, / and together they are ecstatically enjoying eternal / [25] delights. Now he is harvesting the life-giving fruits / of Perseverance as well as Labour, and he is receiving a bright / compensation for his alms from the justice-upholding God. / Yet the name Balthasar Moretus will have / an immortal fame, and in all directions a blameless reputation, / [30] as long as there will be stars at the top of the sky, / as long as the ebbing Scheldt will have swift waves, / as long as the beautiful earth will produce sweet-smelling flowers, / as long as there will be learned men in the everlasting world.

[*vertical*]

But for now we all pray that Moretus' soul may have / a painless peace — in piety, with our spirits united.

As an expression of his pious sentiment towards the deceased, formerly his master, Martin Binnart wrote this, once corrector for the late man.

[16] The French are meant.
[17] The Spanish and Portuguese.
[18] The Slavs.

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Francesca Bortoletti - Eugenio Refini*

Dionysus and the Youth Between Academia and the *Polis*. Rethinking the Intersections of Scholarship, Performance-based Research, and Pedagogy

Abstract

This essay examines how Italian Renaissance Humanism adopted drama as a pedagogical tool to prepare young people for the challenges of adult life. By reviewing four key centers – Rome, Florence, Venice, and Padua – it argues that a central feature of the humanist approach to theatre was the concept of 'choral' involvement from all participants. In its Dionysian spirit, the dramatic chorality revived by humanist school dramas, especially within universities and learned academies, fostered forms of engagement that integrated ethics, aesthetics, and educational entertainment. The essay concludes with a contemporary example demonstrating how the classical tradition, revitalised through the humanist revival of ancient drama, continues to provide effective models at the intersection of scholarship, performance, and pedagogy: namely, Marco Martinelli's "non-school".

Keywords: Humanist theatre; pedagogy; chorus; academies; universities

We have taught youth
both to perform and to sing,
to ignite their passion.
(Sulpizio da Veroli, 1486; translation ours)

1. Prologue

The discovery in the early fifteenth century of twelve previously unknown comedies by Plautus and the commentary by Aelius Donatus on the works of Terence stimulated an ever-growing interest in the theatre of the ancient world. This revival spurred a circulation of commentaries, editions, and

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translations of Latin and Greek authors.[1] The initial advocates for staging classical works were primarily humanists, often operating within educational and academic settings. Humanist schools served as the foundation for the assimilation of classical culture and dramaturgy, sharing this role with various other environments, locations, and individuals that collectively formed the community-based backdrop of theatrical life. Through this framework, a diverse and dynamic conception of theatre and its civic function emerged within the space of the city.

The interconnection between academic instruction, pedagogical aims, and the social, civic, and civil functions of youth and intellectuals constituted a necessary condition for the integration of classical dramaturgy into the writings and performative practices across diverse cultural contexts of the fifteenth century. This integration occurred with varying intentions and circumstances, establishing a complex interplay among schools, universities, humanist and student circles, and spheres of elite (or even 'subversive') entertainment, diplomatic and political exercises, as well as festive and civic life within the city. There existed a discontinuity of experiences among different centers across the Italian peninsula, as well as within individual centers themselves. This diversity of circumstances sought, through different approaches, to bring about the realisation of texts and performative contexts that shared common archaeological references but varied significantly in methods and outcomes.

In Rome, for instance, the performance of Latin and Greek comedies was closely associated with the educational practices of the Academy of Pomponio Leto, which prioritised the material aspects of theatrical performance and their growing prominence within civic ceremonial life. However, this was not a uniquely Roman phenomenon, even though, as Fabrizio Cruciani points out, "Rome was certainly the focal point, and the Academy of the Pomponians its culturally privileged site" (1983, 184). There was a prior precedent in Florence, where the application of ancient pedagogical traditions guided both the teaching of schoolmasters, who with their students brought Latin and Greek dramaturgy to the 'stage', and that of Angelo Poliziano, who in his university lectures emphasised the institutional and educational value of the recitations of Plautus and Terence. A few decades earlier in Venice, the revival of ancient drama materialised in the pedagogical program of Tito Livio Frulovisi's School, integrating itself

[1] In 1429, Poggio Bracciolini reported that Niccolò Cusano had brought to Rome a manuscript containing 16 plays by Plautus, of which only four were previously known. News of this new manuscript spurred an intense effort to transcribe and study Plautus's text, identifiable as the *Itala recensio*, a recension whose origins, authorship, and date of assembly remain difficult to pinpoint (see Sabbadini 1986, 45-59; Questa 1984, 151-4; Tontini 2002, 57-88).

into the composite educational landscape of Venice and the ongoing private initiatives in teaching. These experiences, together with the philosophical and scientific activities of the School of Rialto and the academic chairs of San Marco, ensured a prolific plurality of educational centers that brought theatre to young people from various social backgrounds within the Venetian Republic.[2] Similarly, at the universities of Bologna, Pavia, and Padua, young students engaged during their studies in the composition (and occasionally the performance) of original dramatic works modeled after the ancients. Some of these works achieved a high level of erudition, while others took on a parodic form, serving as polemical critiques of contemporary society.

These seemingly marginal histories, presented by elite groups guided by the vision and efforts of a few, nonetheless inhabited places, activated them, and through this, offered acute and varied demonstrations of how the canonical precept of imitating ancient Greco-Roman theatre could be interpreted and revitalised. These efforts exposed young students to new pedagogical and performative practices, novel textual outcomes, and fresh perspectives on theatre and its role within society.

In the form of a brief historical and geographical narrative presented in four sections, this essay outlines the main features of these experiences, which throughout the fifteenth century and across the entire Italian Peninsula animated the pedagogical thought and practices of schools, academies, and universities. In the conclusion, we will turn to other explorations of the ancient Dionysian spirit, festivities, games, and the "bringing to life" of classical drama within the practices of theatre director Marco Martinelli's "non-scuola" (literary, "non-school"), and its encounter with our own ideas of pedagogical practice and the study of antiquity, both within and beyond academia today.

[2] The environment surrounding the promotion of ancient-style performances in the courts of Ferrara and Milan, however, differed significantly. In Ferrara, the antiquarian taste of the Este court, particularly Duke Ercole, fostered a notable series of performances of Plautine comedies, translated into the vernacular and in verse, presented during carnivals and major dynastic celebrations of the family. This began in 1486 with a vernacular production of Plautus's *Menaechmi* (see Zorzi 1977, 5-59; Cruciani, Falletti, Ruffini 1994, 131-217). In contrast, no records document performances of classical comedies in Milan's schools, academic circles, or court; however, a flourishing incunabular production of Plautus's and Terence's works aimed at educational circulation or scholarly audiences is well documented, especially among intellectuals and literati associated with the court of Ludovico il Moro, as argued by Claudio Passera (2014, 225-90).

2. Ancient Theatre, Academy, and *Polis* in the Rome of the *Pomponiani*

> The Italian Renaissance theatre was the work of a group of individuals – relatively few in number and often interconnected. The revival of ancient theatre, which lies at its origins, is part of an ambitious project set within a real society: the dream of a distinguished, harmonious way of life envisioned by a group of influential and active men. The reclamation of ancient theatre in Rome was led by a *sodalitas*, the Roman Academy. After the pioneering efforts of Pomponio Leto (and Giovanni Sulpizio da Veroli), the Academy's development can be traced through the study of Tommaso Fedra Inghirami, Pomponio's successor in the rhetoric chair at the esteemed University of Rome. (Cruciani 1983, 38-9)

In papal Rome, from Pius II to Paul III, the fluctuating fortunes of a *sodalitas literaria* – the Roman Academy of Pomponio Leto and later Sulpizio da Veroli – emerged as a crucial thread for understanding the values, experiments, and initiatives through which the 'invention' of theatre based on ancient models took shape in the city. This occurred within the ccademy, schools, and universities, and extended through these institutions into both private and public festivities.

Throughout the fifteenth century, the philological approach that permeated various fields and centers of humanistic knowledge, alongside the rhetorical praise of the *litterae humanae* and the quest to grasp the essence of antiquity, intersected with a new ethical and civic pedagogical practice aimed at young students and future citizens.[3] In the Rome of Pomponio and Sulpizio, this pedagogical impetus drew upon the reading of classical dramas, their translations, and rewritings, creating privileged contexts for performing – "as a living thing" – ancient comedy and tragedy. Through this "acting and singing", it fostered reflection on the role of theatre in modern society. It cultivated a vision of theatre that, following the ancient model, aimed to educate youth – both by entertaining and admonishing them – through "the performance of poetry, stories, jokes, and theatrical dramas", bringing a new theatrical vision from the halls of the Academy to the festive spaces of the *polis*.

The endeavor to revive classical theatre, situated between pedagogy and rhetoric, found expression in Rome as a culturally powerful project within the gatherings and rituals of Pomponio's disciples, the so-called *pomponiani*, initially considered heretical enough to prompt the temporary closure of

[3] For a broader discussion on humanistic pedagogy, particularly in poetry, rhetoric, and theatre, the literature is extensive. Key references include Billanovich 1978, 365-80; Branca 1983; Garin 1958, 1994, 1996; and Dionisotti 2003. On Latin humanistic comedy, see Stäuble 1968; Pittaluga 2002, 101-214; Ruggio 2011, 3-72.

the school.[4] In later phases, however, this endeavor paved the way for the affirmation of the *Pomponiani*'s theatrical practices in closer relation to the city and its official cultural and political arenas, adapting to its norms and traditions while simultaneously asserting the needs and vision of the new humanistic culture. This connection between pedagogy and the revival of ancient theatre in Rome is corroborated by the accounts of fifteenth-century chroniclers and literati. Marcantonio Sabellico, a professor at the School of San Marco in Venice, recalls Pomponio Leto (who had spent a brief period in Venice between 1467-1468) and the celebrations he organised for the anniversary of Rome's founding, where "[t]he young, eager for eloquence, gave their first demonstrations of talent with panegyrics and encomiastic speeches" (1499; see Cruciani 1983, 47-59). And where: "The old antechambers were used as theatres, in which works by Plautus, Terence, and some more recent plays were performed, which he [Pomponio] taught to the young nobles and supervised their performances" (ibid.).

Here, pedagogy and theatre are intertwined, encompassing rhetorical discourse, expression, and action. They progress through the study of antiquity and the revival of its rituals and dramas, enacted by the student-orator-actors of the school within the Academy's halls or even in the bishops' chambers repurposed as theatres, thanks to Pomponio's teachings and direction. The spoken word, understood as a pure means of communication, brings the search for the ancient rhetorical model down to the humbler ground of human relationships and real life, finding its rhetorical training ground in the rediscovery and performance of classical dramas.

To stage classical dramas in Rome and within the humanist circles of the *pomponiani* was, therefore, to embody antiquity in a collective manner and to propose it as a model for contemporary times. The aim was to educate young people, as the ancients did, in the arts of acting, speaking, and singing, thereby shaping society as a whole for political and civic engagement. The recitation in Greek and Latin did not remain confined to the school or separate cultural settings; in Rome, it became a moment of shared collective participation in public ceremonies and festivals, both within and beyond the city.[5]

[4] The Roman Academy was founded by Pomponio Leto in 1465 but was closed by Pope Paul II in 1468 on charges of heresy, with several members imprisoned; it was reopened in 1471 under Pope Sixtus IV. Documentation is fragmented for the Academy's early phase before 1486. For studies on Pomponio Leto and the Roman Academy, see De Rossi 1882; Zabughin 1901-12; Dietrich 1957; Cruciani 1980, 356-77; Medioli Masotti 1982, 189-204; 1984, 451-59; 1987, 135-66; Moscadi 1994-95; Bianca 2008, 25-56; 2011, 47-59.

[5] In this later phase, the Academy was no longer seen as "dangerous" and gradually gained approval from authorities (Bianco 2008, 45-7). Academicians' participation in civic festivities further illustrates this shift. For instance, in 1492, the *Palilie* ceremony

The pedagogical program of the *pomponiani* finds its meaning within the interplay between entertainment and celebration, as evidenced by figures such as Tommaso Inghirami, known as Phedrus/Phedra for his portrayal of Phaedra in Seneca's *Hippolytus* in 1486, marking his first acting endeavor. This performance took place first in the square in front of Cardinal Riario's palace "near Campo de' Fiori", and then at Castel Sant'Angelo, in the presence of the citizenry and under the direction of Sulpizio da Veroli, who also authored the *Argomentum* and *Prologus*. In these two compositions that introduce the Senecan tragedy, Sulpizio emphasises that the performance is a novel event, insisting on the educational value of acting, and arguing that the spectators (the "people of Quirites") would emerge from it as better individuals.[6]

After succeeding Pomponio as a rhetoric instructor at the University of Rome in 1497, Inghirami also performed outside the papal borders, such as in Naples, where he and his students ("Fedria comico cum la sua schola") were invited to perform "comedie et egloghe ale noze della Regina iovane e il duca di Calabria" in 1501. Through these activities and practices of the *pomponiani*, the connection between pedagogy and the revival of ancient theatre, as well as between these elements and the *polis*, grew increasingly strong, reaching its epicenter in Rome on the Capitoline Hill (see Cruciani 1969). There, in 1513, during the festivities for the conferral of Roman citizenship to the nephews of the new Pope Leo X, Giuliano and Lorenzo de' Medici, Fedra/Inghirami staged and performed Plautus's *Poenulus* and oversaw the entire iconological program of the decorative apparatus of a temporary theatre built for the occasion. This theatre appears to respond to a request made by Sulpizio da Veroli as early as 1486, in the dedication to Cardinal Raffaele Riario preceding the *editio princeps* of Vitruvius's *De Architectura*, which expressed the hope of seeing a public building erected in Rome suitable for the performances of their students and at the service of Roman citizens:

> Tu [Raffaele Riario] enim primus Tragoediae quam nos iuventutem excitandi gratia et agere et cantare primi hoc aevo docuimus (nam eius actionem iam multis saeculis Roma non viderat) in medio foro pulpitum ad quinque pedum altitudinem erectum pulcherrime exornasti. Eandemque postaquam

organised by the *Pomponiani* coincided with the celebration of the fall of Granada and Holy Week. From 1501 onward, they were included in papal court ceremonies and later extended to broader civic festivities. The *Pomponiani* were also involved in celebrating the 1493 wedding of Lucrezia Borgia and Giovanni Sforza, bringing ancient comedy to the Vatican with a performance of Plautus's *Menaechmi*, which was reprised in 1502 for Lucrezia's marriage to Alfonso d'Este.

[6] Cruciani 1980. For more on Tommaso Fedra Inghirami, see Romano 1985, 239-50; Rowland 1996, 275-82.

in Hadriani mole divo Innocentio spectante est acta, rursus intra tuos penates tanquam in media circi cavea toto consessu umbraculis tecto, admisso populo et pluribus tui ordinis spectatoribus honorifice excepisti. Tu etiam primus picturatae scoenae faciem quom Pomponiani comoediam agerent, nostro saeculo ostendisti. Quare a te quoque theatrum novum tota urbs magnis votis expectat.

[For you [Raffaele Riario] were the first to magnificently adorn a stage erected in the middle of the square, five feet high, for the tragedy that we were the first to teach to the youth of this age, to act and to sing in order to stir them up (for Rome had not seen such a performance for many centuries). After it was performed at Hadrian's Mausoleum in the presence of the divine Innocent, and then again within your household, as if in the middle of the circus's seating, with the entire audience covered by canopies, admitting the people and many spectators of your rank, you welcomed it with honor. You were also the first to show our century the appearance of a painted scene when the *pomponiani* performed a comedy. Therefore, the entire city awaits from you, with great hope, a new theatre.][7]

A theatre is necessary ("theatro est opus"). Such a request, and its partial fulfillment – albeit in temporary form – during the ceremonies of 1513, not only affirmed the connection between pedagogy and theatre but also the link between the academy, the ancient city, and the modern city through the promotion of performances and the active participation of the Roman *sodalitas* in the political, economic, cultural, and festive fabric of the city. Here, ideas, practices, and customs that constituted the pedagogical process of modern youth and the populace coalesce, asserting a model of living and being that is embodied by the theatre: "Nam quae voluptas potest cum hac spectandi delectatione conferri? Quae per oculos et aures blande in animos influens eos titillat, movet, docet et afficit?" (Sulpizio 1496; "Indeed, what pleasure can compare with this delight of watching a spectacle that, insinuating itself gently through the eyes and ears, charms, moves, instructs, and affects the soul?").

This phenomenon was not exclusively Roman, as noted from the outset, although elsewhere the pedagogical experience did not always find, as it did in Rome, a convergence with the economic, political, and festive elite of the *polis*. Nevertheless, other pedagogical initiatives across the Italian Peninsula also laid the groundwork, in each case distinctive and unique, where a dramaturgical form in dialogue with the ancient texts and their performance repertoire found the opportunity to materialise in shared and communal performative settings. Through these, the educational value of performing classical texts for young adults in modern society was asserted, along with the instructive

[7] Here and below, transcriptions from Cruciani 1983, 222-5.

and critical functions that such practice, from its classical origins, had held in the community, according to a conception of comedy as *magistra vitae*. Let us continue this brief narrative by turning our gaze momentarily to Florence.

2. School Drama in Medicean Florence

> The most original and consequential experience for the future development of Florentine theatre, and perhaps the one most closely tied to Lorenzo [de' Medici]'s personal interest, was the rediscovery of classical dramaturgy. This is a story not yet fully deciphered but one of considerable significance, both because it spans more than a decade (from 1476 to 1488, if we consider only the well-documented dates, which roughly correspond to a period of reduced public performances and ceremonies) and because it represents a central juncture in the history of Renaissance theatre, with Florence being the first city in Italy to revive Latin and Greek dramaturgy on stage. Nevertheless, the few events known to have taken place during these years failed to establish themselves within the city's theatrical traditions or, for that matter, to gain any form of public recognition. (Ventrone 1993, 22-3)

A letter from Pietro Cennini to Alemanno Rinuccini recalls that during the Carnival festivities of 1476 in Florence, Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, a renowned tutor of young Florentine nobles and a friend of Angelo Poliziano and Marsilio Ficino, had his students – including, in all likelihood, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and Vespucci's nephew Amerigo – perform Terence's *Andria* in Latin three times, at three different locations: at the school, at Lorenzo's house, and finally, at the Palazzo della Signoria before the Magistrates. From the classroom, the classical comedy was brought to traditional civic power centers in Florentine society as an exercise in oratory and gestural skills for young nobles, and as an example of pedagogical practice inspired by the ancient tradition. This model, formalised in the writings of Cicero and Quintilian, included not only customary training practices such as dance, military and equestrian exercises, but also theatrical performance – often alongside skilled actors – to refine the rhetorical abilities of school-aged boys.[8] In more spontaneous, yet repeated, humanistic gatherings, this approach embraced the recitation of ancient dramas and poetic improvisation with the lyre, drawing on classical imagery and the civic role of poetry and theatre.[9]

[8] The letter from Cennini to Rinuccini is preserved at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (BNCF) in manuscript 2.9.14, 175*r*-176*r*, and was published in Marchesi 1899, XXI-II. See section 6, specifically entry 6.2 concerning this letter by Lorenza Biagini in Ventrone 1992a, 221-30 (223-4); Ventrone 1993, 22-38. Pintor suggested that the recitation may have been intended to conclude a course by Vespucci on Terence.

[9] See Bortoletti 2012 and 2020. This is a vision and experimentation that, primarily

In that same year, a few months later, Pietro Domizi, a canon of the Florentine cathedral and tutor at the Schola Cantorum Eugeniana,[10] requested that Lorenzo the Magnificent host a performance of *Licinia*, a Latin comedy he had written and had his clerical students from the School of Santa Maria del Fiore perform.[11] A few years later, in 1479, Domizi wrote again to Lorenzo, inviting him to attend a performance of another Latin comedy composed by him. Domizi had intentionally composed his own texts, modeled on the classics but written in Latin and inspired by morally edifying themes, considering Vespucci's choice to stage a classical comedy unsuitable for the education of young clerics.

The proposals of Vespucci and Domizi were not isolated in Florence. For instance, Luca de' Bernardi from San Gimignano, a grammar teacher at the Florentine Studio between 1485 and 1498, routinely had his students perform comedies he composed in the classical style, alternating vernacular octaves with Latin Sapphic rhyme, and even, on at least one occasion, a comedy by Plautus.[12] Additionally, it is known that Greek performances took place in Florence, as suggested by the discovery of a parchment containing the role of Charon from Aristophanes' *Plutus*, showing signs of wear that suggest performative use, as Paola Ventrone notes, drawing on Marzi's 19th-century study.[13] The students of Janus Lascaris, a master at the Florentine Studio, also performed in Greek, as indicated by Poliziano's comments on the 1493 production of Sophocles' *Electra* at Bartolomeo Scala's house,

through the use of the vernacular in literary settings and seeking a new classical quality for the mother tongue, opens toward an expressive eclecticism. This would eventually lead, with *La fabula di Orfeo* by Angelo Poliziano, to the writing and performance of the first secular drama in the vernacular, culminating – significantly – in a joyous Dionysian bacchanal.

[10] The school was founded by Pope Eugene IV (see Trexler 1980).

[11] In Florence, however, the relationship between an evolving pedagogical model and theatre finds fertile expression not only within scholastic or academic domains but also within the devotional associative context of confraternal organisations, known as the "compagnie dei Fanciulli" (children's companies), to which Feo Belcari and Antonio Peruzzi's ventures in the vernacular religious drama genre, the *sacra rappresentazione*, are connected.

[12] See Ventrone 1993, 25. De' Bernardi's teaching position in grammar in Florence is documented in the State Archives of Florence, in the records *Deliberazioni circa lo Studio fiorentino e pisano* from 1484 to 1492, 114*v*, 120*r*, 121*r*, 131*r*, 133*v*, 141*v*, and in the records for the years 1492-1503, 10*r*, 112*r*.

[13] See also Ventrone 1993, 28-9. The Aristophanic fragment, housed in the State Archives of Florence (Diplomatico, Badia Fiorentina, no. 7, Casella 2588, 14 . . . [sic]), was described by Garbero Zorzi, in Fabbri, Garbero-Zorzi, Petrioli Tofani, Zorzi 1975, entry 4.1, 72. The scholar suggests that this may be what is referred to in theatrical terms as a "scanned part", meaning a disassembled portion of the script distributed among the actors.

where Alessandra and Giuliano Scala played the roles of Electra and Orestes, respectively.[14] The performance was a great success, and Alessandra's acting, in particular, was praised by both Poliziano and her teacher Lascaris.

In 1488, Paolo Comparini, a close associate and secretary of Poliziano and a tutor at the Schola Cantorum of San Lorenzo, staged a performance of Plautus's *Menaechmi*. For this production, Poliziano wrote the prologue, in which he defended the inclusion of classical drama performances in school curricula against criticisms, affirming the centrality of staging ancient comedies in the educational development of young people, as expressed in the accompanying letter to Comparini.[15] Drawing on Quintilian's precepts and echoing the opening of Plautine prologues, Poliziano addresses the audience directly, urging them to remain silent and, if some verses prove displeasing, to "quae si minus placebunt, auribus expuite / aut devorate quasi pilulas et pharmacus" (13-14; "spit them out from their ears or swallow them whole like pills and remedies"). He then shifts to polemics, adopting the style of Terentian prologues, to criticise the authors of contemporary comedies, contrasting the stylistic, rhetorical, and moral educational value of ancient drama with the works of modern innovators (18; "molitores novitii"), whose prose comedies, he contends, are comedies in name only.[16]

The prologue continues with a praise of Plautine comedy, which segues into a fierce anti-clerical invective against those who distort and condemn the practice of performing ancient comedies, a practice supported by Lorenzo the Magnificent. Whether these invectives were aimed specifically at Domizi's attempts in playwriting and staging is uncertain. As Paola Ventrone notes, all these efforts to revive the classical model within the context of Florentine schools – whether by Vespucci or Domizi – belonged to the same cultural milieu centered around Lorenzo and reflected a charged atmosphere of controversy and conflict, integrating political disputes between Medicean and anti-Medicean factions into their

[14] Poliziano refers to the performance both in one of the Greek epigrams that the Florentine poet dedicated to Alessandra after 1493 and in a letter addressed to the humanist Cassandra Fedele.

[15] Poliziano's prologue to Plautus's *Menaechmi*, transmitted in two versions following Poliziano's death – one contained in the Laurenzian manuscript pl. XC sup. 39 and the other printed in the Aldine edition of 1498, found in the *Epistolario* (i 5) and among the *Epigrammi latini* (Ii 3-4) – was published by Del Lungo (based on the Aldine edition, without regard to the Laurenzian manuscript) and more recently by Giovanna Bombieri (who, while following the Aldine edition due to its inclusion of a cover letter to Paolo Contarini, also compared it with the manuscript version). See Del Lungo 1867, 281-84, and Bombieri 1985, 498-506 (text, 492-3).

[16] Here, we will follow the manuscript version, highlighted as a variant in relation to the Aldine edition in the text published by Bombieri 1985, 492-3.

dramatic writings and performances. These debates manifested through the use of classical material even within university and private course settings (Ventrone 1993, 31).

The themes found in Poliziano's prologue, especially in the passages of invective, align closely with the arguments he expressed a few years earlier during his lecture course on *Andria* at the Studio, probably between 1485 and 1486 – notes from which have survived in his own handwriting.[17] In the midst of these polemics against ancient theatre, the master adeptly explains in his lectures the usefulness of ancient *fabulae* both as exempla for a balanced and just life, and as a practice for mastering language, the art of speech, voice, gesture, and persuasive communication, skills that Florentine politics and society demanded from its young citizens. In this context, the Florentine heralds, who served as entertainers and diplomats, representing the Signoria at official ceremonies both in the city and abroad, played a central role in the city's political life (Ventrone 2016, 7-24; Bortoletti 2020, 63-77).

Reconstructing the historical and sacred origins of classical drama and emphasising its function as a source of exemplary teaching, Poliziano invokes the authority of ancient writers to counter any ideological opposition to the theatrical exercises of Lorenzo's circle. Here, the ancient tradition, its theatre, and its revival in the education of Florentine adolescents and future citizens are employed in a discourse aimed at defending Lorenzo's cultural policy against criticisms from ecclesiastical authorities and anti-Medicean factions, as Poliziano systematically argues in the preface to the first *Centuria* of the *Miscellanea*, published in the autumn of 1489 (Martelli 2009, 93-158; Ventrone 1993, 36).

This dynamic interplay between the school, the academy, the university, and politics surrounding classical theatre as an educational and pedagogical practice for Florentine youth did not, as elsewhere, lead to its establishment as a dominant cultural form during the age of Lorenzo and his successors, as Poliziano had hoped. However, it left a legacy that, as Ventrone observes, would reveal its significance in the years to come.[18]

[17] Lattanzi Rosselli 1973, where the notes from Poliziano's lectures are edited.

[18] Ventrone 1993, 37; Ead. 1992b, 150-96. Evidence of this legacy, particularly the influence of Poliziano's lessons and the related theatrical experiences of the young Florentines of that era, can also be found in the theatrical writings of subsequent playwrights such as Niccolò Machiavelli, Jacopo Nardi, and his student Eufrosino Bonini. Furthermore, looking beyond the Medici boundaries, it is worth noting that – as Franco Ruffini pointed out concerning the Florentine *Andria* of 1476, from which we began this discussion – the text of the Terentian comedy, presented in a school context in Florence, was revived fifteen years after the performances of the Vespucci during the carnival of 1491 in Ferrara, in celebration of the marriage between Alfonso d'Este and Anna Sforza. See Cruciani, Falletti, Ruffini 1994, 207-8.

It was no coincidence, then, that when the Medici returned to Florence in 1512 after 18 years of exile, Eufrosino Bonini – Poliziano's student, a grammar teacher in Greek at the Florentine Studio, and an editor of Aristophanes – was commissioned by the Medici to write a vernacular comedy inspired by the first three parts of Aristophanes' *Plutus* (1-801): *Comedia di Iustitia* (A Comedy of Justice), performed during the Carnival festivities of 1513 to celebrate the Medici as guarantors of renewed peace, justice, and liberty in Florence. In Bonini's writing, Asclepius is no longer a god but represented by a council of enlightened doctors (whereby the Italian for doctors, *medici*, has obvious resonances with the Medici family), with whom the chorus of laborers, who open the play by depicting the anguish of poverty in the face of injustice and power, engages (Di Martino in this issue).[19] The chorus appears here as a dramaturgical and historical link between the ancient and the present, serving as both the actor and the audience of the piece, embodying the people – the "fedeli" which "Iustitia ha exauditi". Through this figure, Bonini revives the political and civic lesson of ancient theatre, which fundamentally aimed at the moral healing of its primary audience, the citizens, and thus society.

Behind Bonini's reworking of Aristophanes lies not only an encomiastic and overtly political intent connected to the first Medicean restoration but also the re-emergence of an idea of theatre as *exemplum* and as a pedagogical and persuasive tool that does not exclude entertainment. Further discussion on Bonini's comedy will follow shortly (see Di Martino in this issue). However, it is crucial here to emphasise that, although the pedagogical-humanistic experiences of ancient theatre within Florentine schools and the Studio did not manage to secure a stable place in the city's theatrical traditions or gain public recognition, their legacy remains vibrant, finding new forms, visions, and projects of revival – both in the near and distant future. This legacy also intertwines with other heritages that, during those uncertain and prolific years of the late fifteenth century, extended their roots. Let us now turn our attention to the northeast, to the lagoon, to the domains of the Serenissima, where ancient theatre found a renewed presence.

[19] Bonini's *Iustitia* was discovered in a Florentine manuscript: ms. Magl. Strozz., 7, 1211; it was subsequently described by Pintor and then published alongside two other contemporary vernacular comedies, *Amicitia* and *I Due felici rivali* by Jacopo Nardi, which also have classical roots, in Stefani 1986, 109-50. Bonini also edited the first Giuntina edition of Aristophanes' *Plutus* in 1515, which was republished in 1525 along with *Pax*. For information on the humanistic reception of Aristophanes, particularly concerning *Plutus*, see Cisterna 2012; Muttini 2019, 1-40; 2020, 67-91, Bastin-Hammou 2023. Regarding the relationship between Aristophanes and the early performances of comedies and farces in the Florentine context, refer also to De Mara 1980, 378-408.

3. Frulovisi's School Drama in Venice

> In 1430s Venice, school theatre did not emerge within centers of power. Scholastic comedy – a unique form of performance and likely the earliest association between classical dramaturgy and rhetorical-acting practice – remained distant from other public or elite circles and functions. It did not lead to a straightforward transmission or multiplication of similar forms; instead, it fostered a gradual infusion of an appreciation for learned recitation into the education and private conduct of individuals and communities within the ruling class. (Guarino 1988, 45)

In the Venice of the 1430s, within the private school of the parish of San Basso, the Ferrara-born teacher and rector Tito Livio Frulovisi educated his students in rhetoric and oratory through the performance of comedies he composed in Latin prose. Having studied in Venice under the humanist Guarino Veronese,[20] Frulovisi presented the recitation of comedies as a refined cultural activity, intended as an alternative to other forms of elite entertainment. He firmly believed in the pedagogical role of theatrical performance as a mnemonic exercise and rhetorical practice, useful for the political, ethical, and civic education of young Venetian aristocrats, the future leaders of the Republic.

Seven of Frulovisi's comedies are preserved in a manuscript held by St. John's College, Cambridge: *Corallaria*, *Claudi duo*, *Emporia*, *Symmachus*, *Oratoria*, *Eugenius*, and *Peregrinatio*, each accompanied by an *argumentum*, a *prologus*, and some autograph marginal notes. These annotations reflect the master's awareness of the significance of his work, in terms of both its relation to the classical model from which it draws inspiration and its address to contemporary society, where he staged new plays with his students.[21] The

[20] Guarino Veronese taught in Venice from 1414 to 1419. The first phase of the educational path designed by Guarino Veronese was dedicated to learning the basic rules of Latin grammar; the second phase introduced students to the reading of various literary genres; finally, the third phase focused on rhetoric through the study of the philosophical works of Cicero and Plato. See Garin 1957, 143-6; Sabbadini 1896, 19-22; Frulovisi 2010, xiii-xiv.

[21] Cambridge Codex, Library of St. John's College, C. 10, from the 15th century: the only manuscript that has transmitted the theatrical corpus of Frulovisi. The comedies of Frulovisi were published by Previté-Orton (who considers the notes and corrections to be autographs): *Titi Livii de Frulovisii Opera hactenus inedita*, edited by W. Previté-Orton, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1932. The editor prefaced the editions with a lengthy introduction (ix-xxxvii), which, along with the previous essay (Previté-Orton 1932) and the one by Ferrari (1921, 17-28), contributed to a preliminary biographical and historical-literary reconstruction of Frulovisi and his works. In addition to these preliminary studies on the works of Frulovisi and the relationship between comedy and education in Venice, see also: Sabbadini 1934, 55-81; Stäuble 1968,

first five comedies in the manuscript were certainly performed between 1432 and 1435, as indicated by the content of the stage directions and prologues, which follow the model of Terentian manuscripts.[22] This is evident even in the opening of *Corallaria*:

> Corollaria T. Liviii Frulovisii incipit. Titulus. Acta Venetiis ludis Romanis Francisco Foscari duce, Leonardo Mocenigo, Iacobo Trivisano, Bertucio Quirino, Fantino Michaele, Antonio Contareno et Petro Lauredano procuratoribus, indictione undecima. Egit Hyeronimus de Ponte. Modos facere Leonardus Piçolus et Iohannes Gratius Iuditibiis. Tota est peracta Latina. (1-6)

> [The *Corallaria* of Tito Livio Frulovisi begins. Title. Performed in Venice during the Roman Games under Doge Francesco Foscari and the magistrates Leonardo Mocenigo, Iacopo Trivisan, Bertuccio Quirino, Fantino Michele, Antonio Contareno, and Pietro Loredan, in the eleventh indiction. Staged by Girolamo da Ponte. Music composed by Leonardo Pizzolo and Giovanni Grazio with playful flutes. The entire performance was in Latin.][23]

As in his other comedies, Frulovisi indicates the governing authorities at the time of the performance (the doge and procurators), as well as the musicians and the director, in this case, the student Girolamo da Ponte, who also served as the *recitator*, as revealed in the prologue.[24] Belonging to prominent Venetian aristocratic families, such as the Da Ponte and the

23-51; 1968, 51-65; Guarino 1987, 135-66; Arbizzoni 1998; Rundle 2004, 193-202. Recently, new critical editions, translations, and commentaries of some of Frulovisi's comedies have been published within the series *Teatro umanistico*, aimed at recovering a corpus of works that are often unpublished or published in sixteenth-century editions: *Oratoria*, edited by Cristina Cocco in 2010; *Claudi Duo*, edited by Incardona (2011); *Peregrinatio*, *Emporia*, and *Symmachus*, edited by Fossati (2012, 2014, and 2017); *Corollaria*, edited by Bisanti (2021).

[22] In particular, *Corollaria*, *I Claudi duo*, and *L'Emporia* were written and performed between the autumn of 1432 and the summer of 1433, while *Symmachus* was composed in 1433-1434, and finally *Oratoria* in 1434-1435, as indicated by the procurators' records. For a discussion of the stage directions and their importance in Humanistic theatre, see Pittaluga 2002 and the introductions and commentaries in the aforementioned editions of Frulovisi's works.

[23] This text is transcribed from the edition and translation by Bisanti 2021, 6-7.

[24] For the other comedies, the staging and performance of the prologue were entrusted to the students of the School of San Basso: Simone Fioravanti for *I Claudi duo*; Antonio da Ponte, brother of Girolamo, for *L'Emporia*; and again Girolamo da Ponte for *Oratoria*. The production of *Symmachus*, however, was assigned to a colleague of Frulovisi, Paolo di Andrea, who served as rector scholarum for the Venetian parish of San Giovanni Bragora, located by the Riva degli Schiavoni. See *Corollaria*, edited by Bisanti 2021, xliv and n110.

Fioravanti, the students articulated, through the prologues, the vision of their master Frulovisi, presenting to the audience gathered for the Roman Games the rationale behind their theatrical endeavor. This practice emerged from the intersection of writing, education, and theatre – both ancient and contemporary.

In the prologue of *Corallaria*, Girolamo Da Ponte, a young student, takes the stage, declaring the reason for his appearance: his master's intention for him to serve as a defender, rather than a mere prologue, to advocate for the significance of staging 'new' comedies and to counter the criticisms of school performances, which some deemed unsuitable and merely recreational for young students:

> Ne cui vestrum mirum sit qui sim et cur venerim, paucis dabo et simul eloquar nomen meum. Praeceptor huc me misit meus. Oratorem voluit esse, non prologum. Nomen Hieronymus [Da Ponte] est mihi. Nunc attendite quid velim. Si quiquam unquam meruit de vobis et vestris liberis, date operam nobis statariam, atque attendite equo animo. Neque vos moveat oratio malevolum, qui ita dictitant: non licere novas dare fabulas: satis esse graece scriptitatas et conversas latine. Sint fuerintque graecae et latinae multe. Qua gratia ab studio et industria hominem student reicere? Retrahere volunt in ocium. Credunt mutata hominorum ingenia, quanquam omnino perierint virtutis precia. Quod fecere Greci, facerent et Latini, si sibi honoris palmam praesto scirent. Avaricia, ambicio, invidia, crudelitats iniquum bonorum pervertunt ingenia. Scitis ab urbe fere condita in hodiernum moris semper fuisse et esse in nostra patria his feriis disciplulis praeceptores aliquid ludorum dare. Qui certant hastis: qui saltationibus: qui Baccho magis sacrificant. (2021, 15-31)

> [So that none of you may wonder who I am and why I have come, I shall say it briefly and, at the same time, reveal my name. My master sent me here. He wished me to be his advocate, not the prologue. My name is Girolamo [Da Ponte]. Now listen attentively to what I wish to convey. If ever he deserved anything from you and your children, allow us to perform a 'stational' comedy and listen with an open mind. Do not be swayed by the words of the malevolent, who claim: 'It is not permissible to stage new comedies; those written in Greek and translated into Latin suffice'. Let there be many Greek and Latin comedies, past and present. But why do they seek to discourage man from study and industriousness? They want to drag him into idleness. They think that men's talents have changed, even though the rewards of virtue have entirely perished. What the Greeks accomplished, the Latins would also achieve, if they recognized the honor they could attain. Greed, ambition, envy, cruelty, and injustice corrupt the qualities of the good. You know that since the founding of the city, and to this day, it has always been customary in our homeland for teachers to offer their

> students some form of entertainment during festivals. Some compete with spears, others dance, and still others prefer to offer sacrifices to Bacchus.][25]

Following the model of Terence's comedies,[26] and in particular citing *Heautontimorumenos* ("Oratorem esse voluit me, non prologum"; Ter. *Heaut.*, 11), the young Da Ponte thus becomes the spokesperson for his master and playwright, inviting the audience to act as impartial judges, to recognise the value of composing new comedies modeled on the ancients and to bring ancient texts back to life, thereby stimulating the intellect, creativity, and industriousness of contemporary society. The comedies are presented by the young orator as a gift from the master to his students, offering them – reviving ancient festival traditions – alternatives to martial games, dancing, or Bacchic festivities.

Frulovisi's defense of the legitimacy of staging new comedies in the style of the ancients is closely tied to the concerns of the present, reflecting his aim to engage contemporary audiences. This is evident in the many references to daily customs, historical events, and moral issues of the time. Moreover, he sought to reform scholastic customs by offering a new kind of theatrical practice – honest, learned, and enjoyable. Otherwise, as highlighted in the subsequent lines of the same Prologue, ancient texts would be mere "decrepitude". Here, the voice of the young disciple is juxtaposed with that of the teacher, who addresses his students, their parents, and the public:

> Honestior est nobis visus hic ludus scenicus. In hoc est nostrum studium placere adulescentulis nostri discipulis vobisque et populo. Neque ex hoc studio aliam palmam expetimus, nisi quod vobis iocunda sit voluntas nostra. Scio malivolos detrahere et argumento et stilo. Id illi sibi hoc responsum habeant. Alias sibi excogitent, et in publicum adducant. Facta eos laudent, non maledicta oratio . . . Nova delectant, nova placent, vetera senium inducunt. Nunc virtutem et aequanimitatem expeto vestram vosque queso et obstetor: equo animo attendite dum huiusce fabulae argumentum eloquor. (2021, 31-43)

> [This theatrical performance seemed more suitable to us. In it, we place our desire to please our young students, you, and the public. We ask for no reward from this effort other than for our intent to be pleasing to you. I know that the spiteful criticize both the subject and the style. Let them take this response. Let them think up others themselves and present them publicly. May deeds, not scornful speech, bring them praise. New things delight; new things please; old things lead to decrepitude. Now, I seek your attention and

[25] See also Bisanti 2021, 6-9.

[26] The speaker of the prologue often presents himself as a defender-orator in the guise of the prologue: "Orator ad vos venio ornatu prologi" ("Vengo a voi come difensore in veste di prologo"; Ter. *Hecyra*, 9).

goodwill; I implore and beseech you: listen willingly as I unfold the plot of this comedy.][27]

The aim of Frulovisi, as teacher, director, and playwright, is not simply to revive antiquity for its own sake but rather to present something 'new' through that tradition – something that would please, educate, and entertain. For Frulovisi, the purpose of this new writing does not lie in achieving a stylistic excellence equal to that of the ancients, as other individual humanist efforts of the time sought to do.[28] Instead, he seeks to integrate classical heritage within a didactic-rhetorical curriculum, as part of a pedagogical vision in which the study and engagement with classical texts, as a thematic and linguistic repertoire, and the practice of acting, could instruct his students and reach the citizens, even if this is limited here to a small, elite audience.

The diversity of literary and theatrical sources employed by Frulovisi in composing his comedies – from Aristophanes (Plutus) to Lucian (Timon), Plautus, Terence, and the novella tradition – reveals that these classical precedents operate at a granular level rather than shaping the overall form of the text and dramaturgy. His primary aim was to create scenarios for performance and exercises in recitation for adolescents. Frulovisi provides some information about how these performances were conducted through his prologues and notes. Performed entirely in Latin ("Tota est peracta Latina"; *Corallaria*, 6), his comedies initially featured the participation of *histriones* and mimes, as in the case of the *Corallaria*. However, in later performances, the stage appears to have been increasingly left to the students of the school, with the number of characters expanding: from sixteen in the *Corallaria* (including minor figures like the "bats" or policemen who appear briefly in Scene 8, along with three characters mentioned but without lines) to twenty in *Claudi Duo* and *Emporia*, and up to twenty-four in *Symmachus*. As noted by Armando Bisanti in the introduction to the new critical edition and translation of *Corallaria*, "ci troviamo di fronte, in tutti i casi, a

[27] Several elements may be found here that Antonio Stäuble had already identified as characteristic of Frulovisi's comedies, namely: the comedic influences of Greek and, in particular, Latin sources, including Terence and Plautus, along with medieval narrative elements, and references to contemporary life, whether everyday or historical (Stäuble 1968, 51-65).

[28] As often noted, Frulovisi was the most prolific Italian author of Latin humanistic comedies. The majority of other contemporary authors engaged in comic-dramatic production as a marginal experience, focusing instead more diligently on other genres, which were perhaps considered more 'elevated': from Vergerio's *Paulus*, Rinuccio Aretino's *Penia*, Sicco Polenton's *Catinia*, and Antonio Barzizza's *Cauteraria* to Alberti's *Pilodoxus fabula*, Leonardo della Serrata's *Poliscena*, and the goliardic farce *Repetitio magistri Zanini coqui*, and especially Ugolino Pisani's *Philogenia*. See Perosa 1965; Pandolfi and Artese 1965; Stäuble 1968; Padoan 1982; Guarino 1987.

componimenti particolarmente 'affollati', benché . . . questo 'affollamento' risulti più apparente che reale, dal momento che non sono mai chiamati ad agire e a parlare più di tre personaggi alla volta" (Bisanti 2021, xlviii; "in all cases, we are dealing with particularly 'crowded' compositions, although . . this 'crowdedness' is more apparent than real, since no more than three characters ever appear on stage simultaneously").

This crowdedness invites reflection, for although, as Bisanti observes, no more than three characters appear together on stage at any given time, in adherence to classical theatrical conventions, the multiplication of figures and subsidiary characters suggests a writing process that, as we might describe it today, emerges directly from the stage and Frulovisi's work with his students. It develops in relation to the group of students at the School of San Basso, where he taught. This scenario raises the possibility that behind this "crowdedness" lies an idea of a chorus, understood as a pedagogical practice and collective experience that bridges the worlds of theatre and life.

The prologues also reveal that other teachers of the time engaged in the writing of comedies and viewed theatre and acting as a healthy pedagogical practice, forming a key component of their instruction. Notably, in the prologue to his third comedy, *Emporia*, Frulovisi mocks his rivals' initiatives, asserting his own superiority as a playwright and educator. This episode provides valuable evidence of a lively and polemical debate within the Venetian scholastic community regarding the educational and didactic use of theatre, particularly that of Latin and Greek drama. It also reflects the broader revival of classical drama in Venice, which went beyond autonomous literary productions or the philological rigor of Venetian editions, influencing the other aspect of the city's classical revival, seen for instance in the masters of the School of San Marco, especially Giorgio Merula.[29] On one hand, ancient drama, particularly comedy, became part of the exegetical circuit of Venetian humanism, which regarded philology as a preliminary science to all knowledge and practice. On the other hand, and in parallel, these plays served as examples of living language, gaining new form, voice, and action in school performances, becoming central to the rituals of schools and academies.

Nevertheless, Frulovisi's comedies, like the Venetian humanistic comedy tradition in general, did not gain prominence in the public sphere as they did in places such as Rome, where festive and celebratory intentions converged between the cultural and socio-political elites. Instead, these comedies

[29] Giorgio Merula served as a professor in the second chair of the School of San Marco from 1468 to 1484 and actively collaborated with the printers Vindelino da Spira and Giovanni Colonna. In 1471, *Terenzio*, edited with Raffaele Zovenzoni, and Donato's commentary were published separately. In 1472, an emended edition of *Plautus* was printed.

remained within the private circles of the Venetian oligarchy. Despite this, they contributed to the patrimonial memory of patrician families, aiding the absorption of texts into scholarly tradition, circulating themes and motifs through manuscripts, and of course, influencing educational practices.[30]

In other contexts, the failure to establish school theatre at the centers of power led, in some cases, to its emergence as a form of anti-literary protest against the dominant cultural and political power, as seen in the student circles around the University of Padua. Yet even in these seemingly marginal locations, practices of the dramatic arts emerged, in which the ancient model of classical theatre found new modes of expression and adaptation, reaching different levels of artistic and civic knowledge and action. Let us now briefly outline some of these features before finally arriving at 'our' own modern engagement with these practices.

4. The Studium of Padua

> Among the students in Padua, satirical associations had formed, such as the 'Macaronic Sect' and the 'Cosmic Academy', remembered primarily for their focus on extracurricular pursuits: love affairs, feasts, pranks, and revelry of all kinds. Among the entertainments sponsored by these groups, performances increasingly took center stage, modeled after the popular street farces enjoyed by the general public and not disdained by the upper classes. Alongside *mariazi* (festive skits), there appeared proto-goliardic farces, pastoral eclogues, and rustic comedies, as well as more complex works. Though these works lacked the full structure of a theatrical play and were undivided into acts or scenes, they represent the early forms of a sophisticated drama, foreshadowing the emergence of formal theatre. (Zorzi 1967, xlii)

On the mainland across the lagoon, in the halls of the University of Padua, a dense network of students, professors, and poets – among whom could also be found "altri scapigliati, giullari, *clerici vagantes*, cantimpanca, talenti estrosi quanto irregolari" (ibid.; other *scapigliati*, jesters, *clerici vagantes*, *cantimpanca*, talents as whimsical as they are irregular) – began laying the foundations of what Pandolfi has termed the "spurie origini del nostro teatro drammatico" (spurious origins of our dramatic theatre; see Pandolfi

[30] See Guarino 1987, 143-4. As noted by the scholar, the circulation of Plautine and Terentian manuscripts is also documented in the catalogs of the Marciana Library; more generally, the circulation of classical theatre, further fueled by exchanges among patricians, philologists, and editors, also leaves its mark in private libraries. Notably, there is the Estense manuscript of Aristophanes signed by Marco Musuro and Alvise and Francesco Barbaro.

and Artese 1965, ix). Padua emerged as a unique crucible of diverse literary experiences and cultural currents. Still deeply infused with a rural ethos, the city was also receptive to the grafting of a university culture rooted in Aristotelian-Averroist traditions, which had made the integration of the renewed humanistic pedagogical system into the academic curriculum difficult.[31] Nevertheless, new methods of commentary, texts, and authors gradually found their way into the classrooms of the ancient University of Padua, which could not remain unaffected by the teachings of scholars such as Ermolao Barbaro, Pietro Pomponazzi, or Giorgio Merula himself.[32]

By the late fifteenth century, the struggle between the new and the old, between the emerging trends of Humanism and the persistence of university culture tied to the tradition of Scholasticism, was still ongoing. The role of *auctoritates* remained strong, and numerous constraints continued to govern the university system, which at the beginning of the new century was still deeply embedded in the civic fabric. The *universitas scholarium*, of medieval origin and initially connected to ecclesiastical power, continued to uphold its corporate spirit during this period. Its distinct presence at the city's ceremonial events reflected a well-defined representative role in the framework and rhythms of civic rituals. University life was not merely marked by the ringing of the bell that signaled the beginning and end of classes, nor was the classroom context the only cultural reality with which the student population came into contact. The university itself, the Cathedral, the Episcopal Palace, the Palace of the Captain, convents, confraternities, churches, main streets, as well as shops, taverns, and squares: these were varied spaces where the presence of students was registered during formal festive occasions or in the form of spontaneous gatherings, often taking on a provocative character that challenged the established order. This atmosphere frequently translated into parodic distortions and licentious, erudite humor.[33]

[31] Founded in 1222, the Studio quickly gained wide acclaim, becoming the official seat of the University of the Republic of Venice in 1405 (when Padua transitioned from Carrarese to Venetian rule) and a cultural center of considerable prestige.

[32] As Garin states, the University was characterised by readings and commentaries of various authors, and these readings were conducted by professors who, while enjoying a degree of freedom in their pedagogical choices, introduced new issues, authors, texts, and translations into the classrooms of the Studio. These innovations were acquired and cultivated in other locations more attuned to the advancements of humanistic culture. See Garin 1994, 7-11. Also refer to Billanovich 1977, 19-110; 1978, 365-80.

[33] The feasts of Saint Luke, coinciding with the start of the academic year on October 18, and of Saint Catherine, the patron saint of the law faculty, as well as the procession of Corpus Christi, were celebratory moments in both academic and civic life. These events often provided opportunities for the student community to engage in inappropriate behavior and licentiousness. Similarly, graduation ceremonies and the election of the Rector, held in the cathedral or in the Palazzo del Capitanio, were

Such was the case, for instance, at the University of Pavia, as documented by Matteo Vegio's fifteenth-century invective against the customs of certain "empi cerimoniali studenteschi" (impious student ceremonies) that turned the *vesperiae* – the final disputations of the graduating student held in the presence of peers and professors in the university's halls and in the Cathedral – into an "allegro baccanale" (merry bacchanal). This kind of conduct is also attested in one of Ugolino Pisani's works, the *Repetitio egregii Zanini coqui*, a parody of an academic ceremony in the form of a comedy written in the so-called *Latinus grossus*, performed in Pavia during the Carnival of 1435 and two years later in Ferrara before Leonello d'Este and Guarino, who sharply criticised the work for its lack of fidelity to the humanistic comic model in both form and linguistic purity.[34]

Similar experiences likely characterised student life and the bohemian culture in Padua as well, though we have limited information about these events. However, some dramatic compositions in Latin from this period attest to the influence of classical dramatic models and the new humanistic comedy: Sicco Polenton's *Catinia* (1419) and its anonymous vernacular version (published in Trent in 1492); *Armiranda*, composed by the Bergamasque student Giovanni Michele Alberto Carrara (c.1457-1460); the anonymous *Commedia elettorale* (1462); and the *Comedia* by the Sicilian student Caio Caloria Ponzio (1490) (Padoan 1982; Bortoletti 2002-2003, 151-65).

It is uncertain whether these comedies were actually performed or what occasion might have prompted their composition and potential staging. However, by undertaking a comparative study of various sources – such as decrees, legal rulings, and other official documents in conjunction with contemporary literary texts – some intriguing information can be gleaned about student customs beyond the confines of the university.[35] Students attended music, singing, and dance classes at private schools, such as that

accompanied by an imposing ceremonial that actively involved the entire student body. Divided into various nations, the students often resolved internal rivalries through animated debates and, at times, through duels, complete with witnesses and an audience. From such situations arose, as noted by Pandolfi, the first comedic texts of our theatre and the initial true performances. See Pandolfi and Artese 1965.

[34] This production also includes the *De falso hypocrita* (1437) by Mercurio Ranzio, the *Janus sacerdos* (1427), and the *Philogenia* by Ugolino Pisani, composed a few years later, as well as the *Cauteraria* by Antonio Barzizza (1420-1425). For further reference, see Pandolfi and Artese 1965; Perosa 1965, 23-5; Stäuble 1968; Viti 1982; Chiabbò-Doglio 1998.

[35] Among the manuscripts consulted at the Historical Archive of the University of Padua are mss 609 and 610, titled by Giomo, *Processi contro studenti*; ms 587 (which contains information on performances to be conducted prior to the doctorate, notes on ceremonies and promoters); and ms 655, which pertains to sacred and profane festivals, distribution of gifts, etc. (1437-1757).

of the lute master Antonio Rota, or participated in private readings and lectures at professors' homes, which became meeting places not unlike the circles of humanist scholars who, as previously noted, were actively engaged in practices of recitation, literary disputations, or other forms of entertainment.[36]

Within these kinds of informal student circles and associations, one can trace the tastes, interests, and literary and artistic inclinations of a diverse cohort. This is corroborated by reports from Bernardino Scardeone on the performances by the noble Paduan Matteo da Rio, who staged *pavanerie* and theatrical *fabulae* for the enjoyment of his circle of friends—performances so delightful that "nothing sweeter for cheering the spirit, no matter how sorrowful, could ever be read or heard by our people" (Scardeone 1569, 290). Similarly, a literary recollection from one of Niccolò Cosmico's opponents – Cosmico being a Paduan-born grammar teacher later associated with the Pomponian Academy in Rome – mentions a certain "accademia a gente strana, nominata Cosmicana" (academy of strange people, named the Cosmicana). Vittorio Rossi interpreted this as the *macaronea secta*, a group taking poetic shape and gaining life in Tifi Odasi's *Macaronea*, and later consecrated in Teofilo Folengo's macaronic works, beginning with that choral poem of anarchy and tumult, *Baldus*.[37]

The connection between such literary production and the university environment has now been well recognised and documented. Although the details of the elusive student performers are unclear, the remaining texts clearly reflect the intellectual playfulness characteristic of the university and student culture, as well as an experimental approach to language and its expressive possibilities. This experimentation involved incorporating dialectal material into conventional poetic and dramatic formulas inspired by classical models, demonstrating in Padua, too, the intersections between humanistic research and university scholarship, as well as their connection to literary and poetical uses of the local dialects. These practices undermined

[36] While examining the records of a trial involving the lutenist Antonio Rota, who was determined to seek compensation for the physical and material damages inflicted upon him during a duel, a joyful, chivalric, and erudite group emerges, primarily composed of students from Rota's school of dance, music, and singing, who hastened without hesitation to testify in favor of their teacher. See Martellozzo Forin 1969, 425-43; Bortoletti 2002-2003, 161.

[37] Rossi highlights the connections, not only literary, between the two poets – Cosmico and Odasi – and their affiliation with the same academic environment in Padua. This connection is further corroborated by the hypotheses of identity put forth by Rossi and Fabris, which suggest that the protagonists of the macaronic poems are based on real individuals associated with the Studio. See Rossi 1882; 1888, 1-49; Fabris 1933, 3-16; Paccagnella 1979, 62-8; 1980, 80.

the new values, education, and discursive practices of the literati and scholars attuned to the new rules of classical rhetoric and the emergent vernacular dramaturgies.

The aristocratic and elitist nature (with a distinctly archeological flair) that characterises the humanistic experience in Rome and other centers across the peninsula takes on an innovative tension in the Veneto region. Here, there is a revival of the rich linguistic and literary material associated with the tradition of the dialect, integrating into the high-end literary discourse the irreverent tensions and transgressive enthusiasms of the goliard community and the heterogeneous world of "eccentric talents" referenced by Zorzi. Throughout the fifteenth century, Padua lacked recognised cultural centers that could serve as alternatives to the university. The environment of the court, which under the Carrara dynasty had offered a favorable space for the convergence of diverse cultural experiences and reinterpretations, had long since disappeared. Meanwhile, the setting cultivated by Alvise Cornaro – where intellectuals, artists, writers, and playwrights would later gather to create a new if smaller scale court in Padua, and even develop the concept of a theatrical space in the Cornaro loggia with a kind of *scaenae frons* – was still far from being realised.[38]

We must, in fact, move forward in time to find references in Padua to the practice of drama – comic theatre in particular – related to official festive occasions and relevant spaces, revealing a pedagogical and didactic role for theatre. This emerges no earlier than 1532, when, by concession of the Rector of the university, comedy was allowed during the Carnival celebrations as a replacement for the traditional equestrian joust. The performance was a play by Angelo Beolco, known as Ruzante, likely *La Piovana*, staged by the author himself "ad ricreationem scolarium" (for the recreation of the students) (Sambin 1983).

However, throughout the fifteenth century, the presence of texts linked to a poetic and dramatic production that engaged, albeit subversively (or in a "Dionysian anarchic" manner), with the classical tradition, is connected to the communicative and educational power of the spoken word – whether classical, dialectal, or modern – and to a practice of performance conceived as a means of expressing alternative forms of knowledge and action. This practice originated within the university setting and intersected with the legacy of the ancient Dionysian bacchanalia, giving rise to a new theatrical

[38] We must also wait until the end of the century to witness the realisation, in nearby Vicenza, of the vision and hope – expressed nearly a century earlier by Sulpizio – of a theatre building designed according to Vitruvian principles: namely, the construction of the Teatro Olimpico (1485), the result of the collaborative exegetical efforts of Ermolao Barbaro, Andrea Palladio, and primarily academic patrons. See Mazzoni 1998.

language and novel creative solutions. These solutions, which emerged from seemingly marginal contexts, in turn generated new trends, wherein theatre – much like the ancient chorus – was experienced as a collective act (both poetic and dramaturgical), primarily involving the diverse youth of the student body, repeatedly traversing and impacting the entire *polis.*

5. Epilogue: Martinelli's "non-scuola": "igniting the chorus"

> Theatre as tradition, or rather as a séance: from Aristophanes to Jarry, from Ruzzante to Brecht. We are nourished by all those dead, indispensable bread and wine, and all those dead, like vampires, feed on our blood to stay alive among the living, marking their presence in the unbroken chain of centuries. Not a place for staging (*messa in scena*), but a place for bringing to life (*messa in vita*). (Martinelli 2021, 10)

At the end of our narrative, and in its epilogue, it is worth making room for new reflections and practices that intertwine research and pedagogy, exploring ways to connect our contemporary world with the classical stage, the "dead" with the "living". These reflections and practices are part of a journey marked by intersections, readings, and exchanges within and beyond academia, aiming to integrate theatre practice into teaching—not merely as a space for knowledge transmission, but as a site of research and inquiry itself. It is a place where students are not merely recipients but active agents in reactivating and valuing a legacy – textual, oral, visual, or performative – rooted in the classical model.

This approach has been enriched over the years by the extensive and collective experience of the "non-scuola", developed by theatre director Marco Martinelli and the Teatro delle Albe in Ravenna. Through the engagement of school and college students with classical texts, this initiative seeks to rekindle the Dionysian principles of festivity, ritual, and, most importantly, play – transforming an undifferentiated group into a CHORUS.

Starting in 1991, Marco Martinelli has cultivated this practice and methodology by conducting theatre workshops in collaboration with Italian schools and internationally. The "non-scuola" approach enables young people to become cultural creators through the immersive experience of performance and engagement with the classical tradition. The "non-scuola" method evolved from Martinelli's lifelong dedication to the craft and art of theatre, a journey he began alongside his artistic and life partner, Ermanna Montanari, with the founding of their theatre company, Teatro delle Albe/ Ravenna Teatro, in 1983. Central to their work is the conviction that theatre serves, above all, as a space for connection – personal, artistic, and social.

Since the inception of the "non-scuola" theatrical method, Martinelli has

looked at classical texts with fresh eyes, working together with adolescents. Over the years, alongside his companions in life and art, he has developed a new practice that has led him to work with the most difficult texts in the most difficult situations: in Scampia, a northern suburb of Naples, a place marked by Camorra feuds, drug dealing, and more, where the "non-scuola" has brought together students from Scampia and from the affluent Naples neighborhood of Piazza del Gesù (Martinelli 2009, 2016); in Mazara del Vallo, a multicultural city in Sicily just 200 km from the Tunisian coast; in the Sardinian hinterland, in Seneghe; or in Calabrian towns under administrative control for mafia infiltration, working with the adolescents of Lamezia Terme and Roma youth. He continued amidst the rubble of earthquake-stricken towns in Emilia, in the archaeological sites of Pompei (Saturnino 2024), or by playing with the multilingualism of university and high school students from various European and non-European countries (see below).

His work has also crossed national borders, reaching Senegalese neighborhoods in Belgium, Puerto Rican communities in the Bronx of New York, Chicago, Kibera in Africa, Rio de Janeiro, or the farthest outskirts in the North-East of London. With this new perspective, Martinelli has brought the classics closer to hundreds, even thousands, of young people, discovering them:

> enthusiastic, capable of dedicating time and passion to theatrical work, attentive and focused, volcanoes of untapped energy . . . capable of moving from wild blows to tender caresses, from chaos and shouting to an almost religious silence, hungry for affection and tenderness, longing for that temperature felt on stage, that state in which stutterers sing without faltering and the shy become lions, that upside-down life, never to end. (Martinelli 2016, 8-9)

Martinelli calls all these young souls "asini" (donkeys) – creatures that seem so distant from those ancient texts, which have poetically captured and preserved for centuries stories of injustice, war, peace, and that powerful tangle of drives, upheavals, anxieties, infatuations, challenges, visions, and dreams that animate creation. And yet, the classics and today's adolescents are so close in their shared anticipation for this tangle of indistinct elements to be *messi in vita* (brought to life). Indeed, they can engage in dialogue, recognise one another, and, as Martinelli would say, "rub together" like two wooden sticks until, from that friction, a spark is born – a fire. The fire of Dionysus. It resides in ancient texts and lives within young people, yesterday as today, and still ignites today as a veritable game:

> Play, even today, is the 'loving massacre' of Tradition – not 'staging' ancient

> texts, but 'bringing them to life': resurrecting Aristophanes, not merely reciting him. The technique of performance begins with tearing apart, tilling the ground.[39]

The essence of this endeavour lies in focusing and unleashing the creative energy of young people, creating a "short circuit" as they read canonical texts, then "incorporate" and manipulate them, making them resonate through a creative process born at the moment of the first encounter between the coryphaeus, Martinelli, and that initially undifferentiated group of young people, who, in that shared moment of working together, embody "the world" – indeed, "the universe". That gathering of people – of "masks" – each with their own world, individual and unrepeatable, rich with infinite nuances, boiling desires, conflicting emotions, a collective of bodies echoing distances, a tangle of voices inherited from the past and ready to engage in dialogue in the present (Treu 2022).

A dialogue that begins with silence and listening, with a commitment that is mutual and voluntary, sealed from the very first moment, in that "farsi luogo" (becoming a place), in that becoming a CIRCLE: "the form which we have shaped over millennia and which still shapes us" (Martinelli 2023).

At the centre of this circle lies its pivot – mobile, alert, in motion and listening. At the very centre of this pivot is its coryphaeus – Martinelli – the messenger of Dionysus, with his techniques, the tools of a knowledge in continuous evolution, made of poetry, song, and movement. He begins to play, and with his tools, he activates energy aimed at rediscovering that mysterious, almost alchemical, balance between word and sound, narrative and music, through which, via the joyful sacredness of play that generates fire, the weaving of a polyphonic narrative and a performative presence made of gesture, voice, and thought takes shape.

Aristophanes's comedies have thus become a key text for Martinelli, a means of 'playing' with students in the workshops. This is not an archaeological or literary recovery of the ancient text to try to restore what has been lost. That kind of approach would only create innocuous and useless historical reconstructions. It would foster 'decay', as Frulovisi warned centuries ago, emphasising the role of youth as a conduit between generations, connecting with the public and thus with the community and the *polis*. Dionysus, Martinelli reminds us, is not a subject for philologists. Dionysus evokes and generates energy, grace, and connection – between actors, the "technicians of

[39] Martinelli *et al.* 2004, 12. The phrase also appears under the entry "Historia Universalis" in *Noboalfabeto. 21 lettere per la non-scuola*, a collection of twenty-one dogmas corresponding to the 21 letters of the Italian alphabet, written by Martinelli and Montanari in 2001a and 2001b. This work was conceived to preserve the spirit in which the "non-scuola" experience was born.

Dionysus", as the Greeks called them, and the spectators:

> [Dionysus] is the god who presides over the origins of Western theatre; he is not merely the "precursor" of the most archaic rites but the transformed figure, the Aristophanic clown, the Holy Dionysus as he came to be called in the villages of Christianized Greece: we still call him this, knowing he has a thousand names, elusive. What has always fascinated us about Dionysus is his anarchic quality, his turbulent, wild, 'foreign' irruption into the norms and peaceful life of society. Children and animals, adolescents and the marginalized embody him naturally. Every performance is an adventure, a process of making and unmaking, under his banner. He appears in the world by many names: in Brazil, they call him *axè*; in Bali, *tasku* (literally, 'the place that receives light'); in Japan, *iki iki*, 'the radiant one'; in Senegal, he takes form in the field of forces created by the griot-narrator or in the dance circle called *sabàr*, where all are simultaneously spectators and actors, anyone can enter the center of the circle because the circle itself is the stage, the place of celebration, the space for bodies in ecstasy. (Martinelli 2023, 23; translation ours)

Dionysus is a key term in the language of Martinelli's work, in the "non-scuola", and in the Teatro delle Albe, alongside the concept of *messa in vita* ("bringing to life"), which describes "an eruption of human beings, citizens, in creative tension with the language of art" (2021, 35). This is the fiery connection between young adults and the classics, starting from the "circle" and bringing life to the stage, creating turmoil in the individual actor and the spectator. The spectator ceases to be a mere observer and becomes a knowledgeable participant, capable of recognising part of themselves in this act of bringing to life. The audience, the citizens, thus join the action of the chorus in and for the polis, encouraged to "devour", as Poliziano urged his audience, "whole, like pills or medicines", these verses renewed through the bodies, voices, and actions of young adults.

It is from the circle and its transformation into a space that "our action" has taken shape, energy, thought, and alchemical "fire", transfiguring what is undifferentiated – each time different in the various stages of "our" projects – into a CHORUS. A chorus led by the choragus Martinelli, with the collaboration of dramaturg Giovanna Di Martino, and which, as is only natural, opened itself to the city, with an invitation for shared participation in the work of *messa in vita*: a way of making theatre between art and life that is both choral and collective.

In 2022-2023, our journey began with Aristophanes's *Plutus* and scenes from sixteenth-century adaptations: *Commedia di Iustitia* by Bonini (1513), discussed earlier in this essay; *Hey for Honesty, Down with Knavery* by Thomas Randolph with additions by a certain F.J. (1651), another highly politicised reworking of *Plutus*; and finally, *The World's Idol, Plutus: A*

Comedy by H.H.B. (possibly H.H. Burnell, 1659), which accompanies his Aristophanes with a discourse that openly denounces some of the political and religious issues of its time (Di Martino in this issue). The final script was a mosaic of many fragments, created across two workshops, in Parma (October 10-14, 2022) and London (February 20-24, 2023), with participation of 10 university students (5 from UCL and 5 from UNPR), alongside secondary students from each host city, supported by the W.I.D.E. (Widening International Didactics and Education) program. The project continued in Parma in fall 2023 with Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, once again under the guidance of Marco Martinelli and Giovanna Di Martino. This *Lysistrata* "in cinque lingue" (in five languages")[40] transformed a group of 40 students from 7 universities across 5 countries into a CHORUS: students came from France (Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance [CESR]-Université de Tours, Paris Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris Nanterre, Paris 13 Nord), the Netherlands (University of Groningen), the Czech Republic (University of Olomouc), the United Kingdom (University College London), and Italy (University of Parma). Realised as part of the Erasmus BIP (Blended Intensive Program), this project took the form of an International Fall School. It brought together Italian and foreign scholars from diverse disciplines, as well as archivists and theatre artists, who led interdisciplinary seminars and workshops on reviving classical works in the performing arts.

The first chapter of this ongoing project concluded with Aristophanes's *Peace* in the fall of 2024 in London, at Chickenshed Theatre, an inclusive space in North London known for working with people with disabilities and special needs, open to all who wish to join in its theatre, art, music, and dance projects. A group of 12 university students (10 from the University of Parma in WIDE 2024 mobility, and 2 from the University of Bristol) collaborated with about 30 young people from the Chickenshed Theatre, guided once again by Martinelli as choragus, along with dramaturg Di Martino and UBU-awarded actress Ermanna Montanari, Martinelli's artistic and life partner. *Aristophanes at Chickenshed* marked a natural extension of this productive partnership between the University of Parma, UCL, and the Teatro delle Albe/Ravenna Teatro. This three-year project offered an immersive journey through Aristophanes' theatre, dramaturgy, performance practices, and the reimagining of ancient drama as a living text that renews itself each time through fragments of humanity – each from different backgrounds, cultures, languages, and daily lives—who, guided by our choragus, come together in the circle, enacting their transformative act to turn the undifferentiated into a CHORUS.

[40] This was the title of 'our' Lysistrata according an article appeared on the *Gazzetta di Parma* (15 October 2023).

Through these workshops in Parma and London, a diverse international network emerged, strongly rooted in each local context, engaging other institutions, theatres, archives, and secondary schools. Our format – international and local at once, intersecting disciplines and bridging theoretical and practical work – arose from the need to create tangible conditions for sharing methods and theories to study and reinvent the classics, rewriting or bringing them to life within society, across time, and today.

In bringing the classics to life, the meaning and function of pedagogical practices are once again placed at the centre, leading the youth to actively engage in dialogue with an author who lived thousands of years ago, and thus with history. Through this interaction, they manage to act in the present, reactivating ancient stories with the thoughts and urgencies of contemporary life, in a powerful mechanism of reinterpretation through a kind of agency that is deep rooted in ancient drama itself. Just as the adolescent Aristophanes did in his early works and, as an adult, in his later endeavours, today's adolescents and college students shout, dance, sing, and take a stand on the injustices and values of society, faithfully renewing the tradition, in an act that is at once translation and betrayal.

It is in this process of *messa in vita* that Martinelli's theatre finds its civic and political dimension (whereby 'political' is understood in the classical and humanistic sense of 'relevant to the *polis*'). This dimension is the same that defines "our action" in research and pedagogy. This action, which we intend to continue under the guidance of choragus Martinelli, envisions new collaborations, synergies, and shared projects with our students, as we look toward new texts, encounters, and fragments of humanity with which to ignite a new CHORUS. This is an action within and beyond the academy and university classrooms – a political and civic act, even more than a pedagogical one, grounded in the dynamic exchange between research and teaching, and entailing an intentional betrayal of the tradition to revive its essence. In doing so, we renew its original force, engaging in dialogue with the *polis*.

> Now you stand bare and unarmed at the center of the circle, the guide;
> it is up to you to light the fire. You are the spark.
> So that the undifferentiated may be transformed into Chorus.
> (Martinelli 2021; translation ours)

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Practice Research, Performance Pedagogy, and Early Modern Aristophanes: Building (on) the Script(s)[1]

Abstract

The present article provides an overview of the dramaturgical research underlying a two-stage workshop directed by Marco Martinelli (Albe and Ravenna Teatro) on a selection of early modern translations of Aristophanes' *Plutus*, which took place in Parma (10-13 October 2022) and London (20-23 February 2023) and which combined practice research with performance pedagogy. I will first introduce the aims, methodologies and research clusters in which this workshop is rooted; I will then chart the reception of *Plutus* in the early modern period and analyse how the linguistic, cultural, and political aspects of each translation chosen for the workshop informed the writing of our final script. The translations selected for the workshop and explored in this article are: Eufrosino Bonini's *Comedia di Iustitia* (1513), Thomas Randolph's *Πλουτοφθαλμία Πλουτογαμία. A Pleasant Comedy Entituled Hey for Honesty, Down with Knavery* (1651); and H.H.B's *The World's Idol, Plutus a Comedy* (1659). Also included in the article is an appendix which offers the director's perspective on the workshop: how he envisioned the scenes and constructed the chorus, as well as an appendix containing the final script.

Keywords: dramaturgy; theatre translation; practice research; performance pedagogy; Aristophanes' reception; early modern translation; classical reception

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1. Introduction: Practice Research, Performance Pedagogy and Dramaturgy

This article provides an overview of the dramaturgical research underlying a two-stage workshop entitled *Performing Early Modern Aristophanes*, which took place in Parma (10-13 October, 2022) and London (20-23 February, 2023) within the framework of the conference *Memory and Performance: Classical Reception in Early Modern Festivals* (Bortoletti, Di Martino, Refini 2024). It entailed working on three translations of Aristophanes' *Plutus*, spanning the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Italy, England and (most likely) Ireland (see further below), and involved participants from numerous state-funded schools in Parma and London, as well as from University College London and the University of Parma.

The workshop was also inscribed within a larger research project on *Translating Ancient Drama* and based at the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (Oxford): integral to this project is a collaborative practice-based methodology that uses performance for the analysis of early modern and contemporary translations, as well as the production of new translations (APGRD 2024).[2] It is based on the understanding that any translation of a dramatic text has an inherent dramaturgy, specifically the creative (re)arrangement of the dramatic meanings and structures found in the source text(s).[3] Indeed, in addition to the linguistic and cultural negotiations normally characteristic of any translation process, theatre translation also invariably entails a nuanced mediation between the

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[2] In Theatre Studies, previous work on theatre translation with a practice-based mode of enquiry includes Margherita Laera's project *Translating Theatre* (2016-19), in which Laera and her team explored 'foreignisation' and 'otherness' as translation strategies for the modern stage in order to address the marginalisation of playwrights writing non-English plays in the post-Brexit British theatre (Laera 2016-2019). In Classics, while the theorization of the performance of Greek tragedy has recently benefitted from successful collaborations between Theatre and Classics scholars (Hall and Harrop 2010; Dunbar and Harrop 2018), little has been done on the translation of Greek tragedy that combines academic research with performance practice (Wiles 2007; Harrop and Wiles 2008; Rodosthenous 2017; Macintosh and Di Martino 2021; Di Martino and Baudou 2023).

[3] For recent scholarship on the interplay between translation and dramaturgy, see, amongst others, Versényi 2014; Trencsényi and Cochrane 2014; Trencsényi 2015, 51-66; Barnette 2018; Brodie 2020, 584; Di Martino and Baudou 2023.

theatrical conventions of the source material and those of the new context.[4] Translation must then consider elements related to both the source's and target's performance culture, which can either be explicitly addressed or subtly influence the final product.

In line with recent developments in translation and adaptation studies, conceiving translation in this way usefully shifts the focus from a hierarchical relationship between the source and the target texts towards intertextual analyses that recognise the role of audiences, readerships and bodies in the meaning-making process (Barnette 2018, 9-18). It also blurs the lines between translation and adaptation as they both involve creating target texts that reinterpret and reassemble existing dramatic meanings and structures.[5] As such, works that are 'faithful' to the source should be treated in the same manner as those that are more 'free' with respect to the source so long as some form of translation and reassembling of the meanings and dramatic structure of the source takes place; this rationale accounts for the inclusion here of target texts which, as will be seen, share varying degrees of relationship with the source. This expanded understanding of translation is especially needed when analysing early modern engagements with ancient dramatic texts, where translation practices were as varied and heterogeneous as the theories behind them (Di Martino and Dudouyt 2023, 6), and where the source often served as a springboard for new literary works aimed at establishing a (proto)national canon (ibid.).

Employing performance practice as research thus presented itself as the preferred method for the exploration of the dramaturgical elements embedded within the chosen translations for the 2022-2023 workshops. But the use of performance as research was also combined with performance pedagogy, a theoretical and practical tool that has been central to theatre studies (and Shakespearean studies in particular) since the first decades of the twentieth century and which has seen an increase in interest since the performative turn in the 1960s (Gilbert 1973 1984, 601; Riggio 1991, 1; Haughey 2012, 60). Recently, it has gained momentum within the discipline of Classics as well, particularly in the teaching of Greek drama (Mitchell-Boyask 2023; Meineck 2023; Plastow and Bullen 2024). The participation of students from secondary schools and universities, rather than professional actors, must be viewed within this framework: the intention was to have

[4] Discussions about how to incorporate this third linguistic code in translation have multiplied since the 70s of the last century; for a recollection of the main developments in the field of theatre translation theory and practice, see, amongst others, Bigliazzi, Kofler and Ambrosi 2013, and Brodie 2020, 84.

[5] On the interdependence of, and/or (im)possibility of distinguishing between, translation and adaptation in the theatrical process, see Link 1980; Bassnett 1985; Windle 2011; Krebs 2014; Laera 2014, and Di Martino and Dudouyt 2023.

students be active participants in the reinterpretation and preservation of early modern textual and non-textual material that was the focus of the conference, i.e. in the "knowledge-production" that constitutes the core of practice research and performance pedagogy (Nelson 2013, 3-4).

The combination of both methodologies was further enhanced and supported by the choice of Marco Martinelli as the director. The workshop was deeply ingrained within Martinelli's own methodology, known as the 'non-school', which eloquently points at a non-prescriptive way of engaging with texts that may well be the object of study in the classroom, but which need to be deconstructed and eviscerated on the stage in order to *come to life* ("messa in vita": Martinelli in Appendix 3). His approach to creating (and understanding) theatre is through the Chorus, i.e. the idea as well as physical translation of an 'I' that becomes a 'we'. His way of working with young adults is through exercises that will increasingly build this 'we', i.e. the Chorus, that is made entirely of amateurs. His methodology perfectly suited the choice of playwright, Aristophanes (one of Martinelli's preferred texts in his non-school projects), and specifically the play *Plutus*, which has come to us largely devoid of its choral songs,[6] yet whose Chorus remains notably present in several early modern reimaginings (see further below). There is no doubt that Martinelli's engagement with the ancient Greek Chorus as a practice is a part of modern theatre's long fascination with and integration of Greek *choreia* into their own performance practices, from both an aesthetic (the co-presence of 'song' and 'dance') and pedagogical viewpoint (i.e. its intrinsic link with 'education', to put it with Plato).[7] Indeed, there has been a growth in contemporary engagements with the Chorus, particularly in British productions of Greek drama post-pandemic (Baudou and Di Martino 2025; Weston 2024, 84).[8]

[6] Sommerstein 2001, 23 lists six places where there may be evidence for the presence of a choral song which failed to materialise in the copies that circulated in antiquity; as has recently been argued, the absence of choral songs from the play, however, is not due to a change in performance practices in 4th century BCE that would make choral songs increasingly unrelated to the plot or to their debated authorship (Sommerstein 2001, 23; Csapo 2010, 14).

[7] See *Leg.* 654a-b: ᾗ δὴ κινεῖν τε ἡμᾶς καὶ χορηγεῖν ἡμῶν τούτους, ᾠδαῖς τε καὶ ὀρχήσεσιν ἀλλήλοις συνείροντας, χορούς τε ὠνομακέναι παρὰ τὸ τῆς χαρᾶς ἔμφυτον ὄνομα . . . οὐκοῦν ὁ μὲν ἀπαίδευτος ἀχόρευτος ἡμῖν ἔσται ("by which [pleasure] [the gods] make us move and lead our choruses, connecting us with one another by means of songs and dances, naming the chorus from the name of joy [which is] intrinsic [to the chorus] . . . should it be assumed, then, that someone with no training in the chorus is uneducated whereas someone who has enough practice in a chorus is educated?"). On Plato's definition of *choreia*, see Peponi 2013, 22.

[8] On modern engagements with the ancient Greek Chorus in the theatrical realm, see, amongst others, Bierl 2004, 157-83; Billings, Budelmann, and Macintosh 2013; Laera

As Martinelli himself explains in his notes (Appendix 3), work on the text(s) came second to brainstorming with the students about the challenges posed by the play (i.e. 'What is wealth?'; 'What is poverty?'; 'How do they relate to us?', etc.) and what possible (aesthetic) 'translations' these questions may have into our own world (for example, choosing contemporary or traditional songs that well exemplify the feelings of the Chorus when they interact with Plutus; see Martinelli in Appendix 3). This allowed us to find a link between us and the text that functioned as the overall framework for both the practice research side of the project (i.e. analysing the dramaturgical meanings and structures of these early modern translations through embodiment and re-enactment via our own bodies and readings) and its use of performance pedagogy (i.e. inviting students to participate in said analysis through their own specific 'situatedness').

In both Parma and London, I acted as an ongoing translator between Martinelli's vision as a director and the translations themselves, as well as between the participants (half Italian, half English) and Martinelli.[9] I would suggest which translation was most appropriate for the scene we would be grappling with, i.e. which lines most clearly conveyed the message, or provoked instant laughter, or which dramaturgical choices worked best (see point 3, the dialogue between Poverty and Chorus as an example): these suggestions were then discussed with Martinelli and the participants themselves, who would react to and implement them with their own inputs, ideas and improvisations.

After each day's workshop, I transcribed, in order, on a running Google document that Martinelli and I shared, the choices we had made, both in terms of performance and word choice. The following day, we would build on that and add to it by the end of that day. Indeed, the final text was a mosaic of different 'fragments'. While the translations themselves provided the overall structure (see point 2) and the words of Aristophanes' play (see point 3), some lines were the result of improvisation by the students when they were asked to come up with modern equivalents to convey the same meanings of the play and its translations or to respond to their challenges (see Martinelli in Appendix 3); finally, some 'fragments' came from Martinelli's own 'creative palette', such as the insertion of the opening dialogue from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* or the presence of an ottava from Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* (see point 2 and Martinelli in Appendix 3).

In this contribution, I present the research that I conducted prior to the workshop concerning the translations used (which had been shared

2013, especially 62-4; Baudou 2020; Baudou and Di Martino 2025.

[9] For more on the role of the dramaturg as 'translator' and mediator between texts, contexts, playwrights and audiences, see Romanska 2017, 10-13.

and discussed with Martinelli before the workshop) and how it informed the writing process of our final script. First, I will discuss the translations and performances of *Plutus* in the early modern period, and then I will explore how these translations, i.e. their linguistic, political, cultural, as well as dramaturgical choices, contributed to the construction of our mosaic. Appendix 3 includes Martinelli's account of the workshop from the perspective of a director: how he envisioned the play's scenes and built the Chorus. Our final script is included in Appendix 4.

2. Early Modern *Plutus*(es)

The choice of working on Aristophanes' *Plutus* responded to multiple needs. If Aristophanes was one of the main authors already in the creative repertoire of our director, the reception history of this play perfectly suited the context of the conference of which this two-stage workshop was a part. Indeed, *Plutus* was amongst the most translated and performed ancient Greek dramatic texts in the early modern period. It had a place of prominence in the textual transmission of the Aristophanic corpus as part of the Byzantine triad (*Plutus, Clouds*, and *Frogs*) and counted ca. 170 copies between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries (see full list in Muttini 2023a: 25-34). Aristophanes in general was widely used as a teaching tool to learn Greek (Bastin-Hammou 2017, 44), but his *Plutus* was also appreciated because of its philosophical and moralising subject: the contest between Penia (Poverty), Chremylus and Blepsidemus, two poor old friends seeking a better life, and the Chorus was particularly compelling (Miola 2014, 493-5; Morosi 2022, 202; see further below).

In Appendix 1, which (tentatively) reports all translations of the play being made between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, one can identify some of the most prominent literary figures of the period, including, amongst others, the scholars Leonardo Bruni and Pietro da Montagnana in Italy; the so-called prince of poets, Pierre de Ronsard, and the poet and member of the Pléiad Jean Antoine de Baïf, in France; as well as the humanist and translator Pedro Simón Abril, in Spain.[10] If one compares extant data on the number of translations and performances of *Plutus* produced and mounted, respectively, in sixteenth-century Europe alone with those of Euripides' *Hecuba*, arguably the most successful Greek tragedy at the time (Pollard 2012, 1064; Appendices 2-4 in Pollard 2017), *Plutus* falls short under the vernacular translations category (four[11] *vs* nine), but triumphs

[10] I was not able to find this translation though it is cited in Giannopoulou 2007, 312.

[11] Only two of these four were printed (see Appendix 1).

in the Latin department (twelve[12] *vs* seven), and, more importantly, in the number of productions mounted (eight *vs* five), admittedly amongst the best indicators of dissemination and appreciation of a dramatic text, particularly in the performative culture of this period (Bortoletti and Refini 2024, 10).

Performances of *Plutus* were either in Latin translation or in ancient Greek,[13] which, together with the high number of Latin translations produced between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries (twenty in total, published and unpublished), may be symptomatic of the pedagogical role that *Plutus* must have played in many of the learning hubs where it was produced. A further testament to its pedagogical appeal is the selection, inclusion, and wide circulation of a part of the prologue (1-44) in a grammar 'classic' of the first decades of the sixteenth century, i.e. Nicolas Clénard's *Institutiones ac meditationes in graecam linguam* (the lines featured in Petrus Antesignanus's *Praxis seu usus praeceptorum grammatices*, which was added to Clénard's *Insitutiones* in 1554 and reprinted with it many times after that), a textbook that extends its overarching influence well beyond this single century (and France) (Bastin-Hammou 2020, 84-6).[14] The prologue seems to be a preferred locus for many translators, too, including Leonardo Bruni, Pietro da Montagnana, Eufrosino Bonini (on whom, see further below) and Pierre de Ronsard (Bastin-Hammou 2020, 86). It may also have been performed by students as a form of performance pedagogy that was becoming increasingly common in colleges and universities across Europe, a practice that was also being ratified in university and college statutes and that served multiple purposes, including learning Latin and Greek (Norland 2009, 44; Jackson and Crawforth 2019, 345; Bortoletti and Refini in this issue).[15]

Along with the prologue, the already-mentioned debate between Penia, Chremylus, Blepsidemus and the Chorus, i.e. the *agon* (487-618), attracted the interest of many scholars (Miola 2014, 492-3); it functioned as a creative springboard for Rinuccio da Castiglione's adaptation, composed around 1415 and titled *Fabula Penia*, and heavily featured in Bonini's own version of *Plutus* (see below). These two scenes in the comedy, the prologue and the agon, were the passages that we too chose for our workshop: our guide in this sense was Bonini's adaptation, which, as will be seen, provided the dramaturgical structure for our final script.

[12] I have counted only the printed editions of these translations (see Appendix 1).

[13] The only exception may be Hans Sachs's adaptation of *Plutus* in five acts which he mounted in Nuremberg in 1531 (Giannopoulou 2007, 312) (Appendix 2).

[14] See also Giovanni Tortelli in his *De Ortographia* under the heading "prologue" where he cites the prologue of *Plutus* as an example (Radif 2014, 400-1).

[15] See for example the Jesuits' *Ratio Studiorum* (1599) at paragraphs 375-94 in Pavur 2005, 160 and 234-5. See also Grendler 2019, 17.

2. Building a Dramaturgy: Bonini's *Comedia di Iustitia*

A Professor of Greek Grammar in the Studio Fiorentino since 1502 (Stefani 1986, 14), Bonini (probably) presented his adaptation of Aristophanes' *Plutus* under the title *Comedia di Iustitia* ("Comedy of Justice") at the Florence Carnival in 1513, a carnival which, according to Nicholas Scott Baker, was quite unusually crafted to celebrate and reinforce the hierarchies that this festive occasion symbolically subverted (Baker 2011, 492).[16] Indeed, Bonini's *Comedia* had been commissioned by the Duke of Urbino, Lorenzo di Piero, the Duke of Nemours, Giuliano di Lorenzo, and Giovanni de' Medici (a.k.a. Pope Leo X from 1513 to 1521), to contribute to celebrating the Medici's successful homecoming. (The Medici family had been banned from Florence in 1494 and eventually made a return in 1512).

If the "Dialogo" ("Dialogue") preceding the adaptation clearly situates it in 1513 and largely writes it into Giovanni de' Medici's programme of "cultural *renovatio*" (Stefani 1986, 9),[17] the text itself exudes allegorical meaning that identifies the return of 'Justice' with that of the Medici. Indeed, Politimo (read: Plutus, the God of Wealth, in the source script) is healed by a council of enlightened physicians ("medici"; read: Asclepius, in the source script) who variously converse in the vernacular and Latin to find a cure for Politimo's blindness. When Pirro (read: Carion, in the source script) recounts the story of Politimo's healing to his master Atimo's wife, Licoride (read: Wife, in the source script), reference to the Medici (this time with a capital "m" in the adaptation itself) is made explicit:

> . . . politimo [sic] nostro, subito
> che e' medici e noi già libero e guarito
> scorse e cognobbe, come ricordevole
> del benefitio del loro ricevuto, comandò che
> e' Medici fussino copiosissimamente remune-
> rati . . .
> e' viti al tutto sono oggi sbanditi

[16] The text of this adaptation was published for the first time in 1986 by Luigina Stefani; quotations herein included refer to the manuscript Magl. 7.1211, our only source for this text.

[17] "Gli è già passato un anno / che nel monte Elicona / non rimase persona / il fonte è traboccato / ognuno è diventato oggi poeta / prima si stava cheta / tutta questa brigata, / anz'era ammutolata, / or ce n'è una schiera / tale che mattina e sera / si reciton comedie, / dialogi, tragedie, farse e feste" (A year has passed already / Since not one soul remained / Upon the mount Helicon / The spring has overflowed / Everyone has now become a poet / Before, this brigade / kept quiet, / or rather, it was kept quiet, / now such a cohort gathers / morning and evening / performing comedies, / dialogues, tragedies, farces and celebrations; Bonini 1513 2*r*-*v*).

Iustitia ha exauditi
e' suo fedeli e vuol remunerarci.
(Bonini 1513, 30*v*)

[. . . Our [P]olitimo, as soon as he / saw and recognised, now healed and free, / the physicians and us, mindful of / the gift received from them, ordered that / the Medici be remunera- / ted . . . / and vices are now banned altogether / Justice has satisfied / her subjects and wants to remunerate us.][18]

Beyond the evident celebratory tones that traverse Bonini's adaptation, the text is a remarkable piece of theatre, linguistically and dramaturgically, one that rather uniquely (for Aristophanes and for the period) may further contribute to uncovering Aristophanic influences on the development of, and links with, early modern theatre, its languages and rules (Radif 2014, 398; Beta 2023).

Bonini reimagines the prologue, the agon and the healing scene (roughly adapting *Pl.* 1-801), employing the same 'rules' that governed adaptations of Greek tragedy and Roman comedy in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, that is, by applying the (Aristotelian) principle of imitation as a mechanism for creating a new literary work (Arbizzoni 2013; Di Martino 2023, 138-43; Bonazzi in this issue). The source text is mapped onto new tracks that follow the rules of coeval imitations of Roman comedy: Bonini's play is divided into five acts (thus using the 'Roman' structure [Hor. *Ars* 189-90] as opposed to the Greek division into episodes: Di Martino 2023, 147) and, as has been observed (Stefani 1986, 8), it also employs (with a few exceptions) ottava rima (a stanza of eight eleven-syllable lines with the rhyme scheme *abababcc*). Not only was this the meter into which most rewritings and/or translations of Plautine or Terentian comedy had been written since the last decades of the fifteenth century, in Ferrara especially (Guastella 2018, 41); this was also the meter that, as Guido Abrizzoni has argued, "the vernacular tradition had consecrated to the comic style" (1994, 278).

But, unlike all other adaptations of Roman comedy from this period, Bonini's play (precisely because his model is not Roman at all) has a Chorus. Bonini maintains its dramaturgical function throughout the comedy and moulds it so that the Chorus may reflect the reality of farmers labouring in the Florentine *contado* ("countryside"): the somewhat contrarian character of the Chorus in the source text is replaced with a group of god-fearing, simple and uneducated peasants ("zappatori"), who retain some of the

[18] Henceforth, all translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

most prominent functions of the Greek Chorus, i.e. singing[19] and speaking directly to the audience (i.e. the "parabasis").[20]

Retracing the dramaturgy of the source text, Bonini inserts an alternative song in place of that sung by Carion and the Chorus, who enact the stories of Cyclops and Odysseus and of Odysseus and Circe in a parody of Philoxenes' *Cyclops* (290-321; the only instance of the Chorus singing in *Plutus* that has survived). The presence of a song is kept in the dramaturgical structure of the play but ingrained in the time of the translation and replete with contemporary references. Having heard the happy news from Pirro/Carion about Politimo/Plutus being in the hands of their very master Atimo/ Chremylus, the Chorus joyfully burst into:

> CORO Poiché di lavorar proprio non si ragiona,
> i' vo' che noi cantiano una canzona.
> Sa' ne tu ghuna a mente su Fortuna?
> (125)

> [CHORUS Since work is out of the question / I want us to sing a song. / Do you know one about Fortune?]

> ΚΟΡΥΦΑΙΟΣ ὡς ἥδομαι. καὶ τέρπομαι καὶ βούλομαι χορεῦσα.
> ὑφ ἡδονῆς, εἴπερ λέγεις ὄντως σὺ ταῦτ ἀληθῆ.
> (Manuzio 1498, 47)

> [CHORUS LEADER How pleased I am! And delighted and I want to dance. / Out of joy, if what you are saying is really true.]

Loosely based on the Greek (which functions more as a cue for literary re-creation), the Chorus initiate with Pirro a discussion on the possible songs that they could sing together to express their gratitude for the good news they have just heard. In what looks like a perfect exemplum of a feature that has been argued to be characteristic of the ancient Greek Chorus due to its "festival context", i.e. its "self-referentiality" (their talking about what they

[19] The song is planted precisely at the same point where the source text has the parodos.

[20] At the very end of the play, the Chorus explicitly break the fourth wall within a subtle game that blurs the boundaries between the "iusti" of the play and the "iusti" ("just") in the audience: they (Atimo & Politimo but also the Medici who have healed the god) who have given "il core e l'alma" ("their heart and soul") and "tien suo patria in calma" ("held their country in peace") should be the focus of the audience's attention as representatives of the "vivo fonte" ("living source") of Justice itself. The story purposefully becomes an ambivalent "speccio" ("mirror") that merges the onstage with the offstage, reality with fiction. *Plaudite et valete* ("clap and be well") is their final sendoff.

are doing) (Bierl 2009: 31), this early modern Chorus brainstorm different incipits of well-known sacred music pieces belonging to the popular tradition, including, for example, "J'am pris amours" by Antoine Busnois ("J'am pris?"; Bonini 1513, 12*r*), or the "Magnificat" ("Una magnifica?"; ibid.); but Pirro does not seem to be acquainted with any of these and suggests "il Beati" (the "Beatitude": the text is from Matthew 5:3 in the *Vulgata*; 12*v*-13*r*), which the Chorus deem as one of the most widely known sacred songs of their time; they then set out to sing it in unison.

In our final script, we retained the above-quoted passage, upon which we grafted another piece of music, an ottava from Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* (1.16.1-8; Appendix 4), which, in both Parma and London, the director had used in the rehearsal room to build the Chorus (as he is accustomed to: Martinelli 2023, 8-9). Indeed, our warmup would mainly consist of us mirroring the director using the ottava to prepare our voices and bodies, experimenting with a range of rhythms and accompanying words with movements, from small to big and vice versa (Martinelli 2023: 8). This ottava also perfectly fit into our dramaturgy of the scene as found in Bonini's own version of it: not only was it (serendipitously) about "Fortuna"; just like Bonini's "Beati", the song belongs to the popular tradition, and more specifically to the "Maggio Epico" or "Drammatico" ("Epic May" or "Dramatic May"), an "ancient practice" of popular theatre rooted in the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines, where people would (and still do) dress up in costumes and gather to perform verse narrative from the chivalric romance tradition, including Boiardo's *Orlando* (Benatti 2024).

Beyond the use of direct quotations which was fairly limited, and for practical reasons,[21] Bonini's text was fundamental in more than one way for the construction of our own final script; not only did it provide us with a clear dramaturgical structure that moved seamlessly from the prologue to the first song (i.e. *parodos*), and from the agon to the healing scene (which, for want of time, we could only hint at in our own script); it was also deeply in tune with the ways in which the director wanted us to 'feel' the text, as a creative space for rewriting ourselves into it.

3. Building (on) the Script(s): Randolph-F.J.'s *Hey for Honesty* and H.H.B.'s *The World's Idol*

The bulk of the text of our final script came from two seventeenth-century English translations of the play, which, rather curiously, were published only

[21] Half of the participants were not Italian natives and would have had difficulty memorising even small chunks of this text.

eight years apart but came after a dry spell in publications of Aristophanes in England: Thomas Randolph's *Πλουτοφθαλμία Πλουτογαμία. A Pleasant Comedy Entituled Hey for Honesty, Down with Knavery* (composed around the 1620s but published posthumously, and after a whole makeover, by a certain F.J. in 1651: Morosi 2022, 202); and *The World's Idol, Plutus a Comedy*, translated by H.H.B.[22] Indeed, as Miola has noted (2014, 480), apart from an edition of the Greek text of *Knights* in 1593, Aristophanes did not receive much attention on English soil in this period: as far as we know, *Plutus* was performed in ancient Greek in Cambridge in 1536 and 1588 (Appendix 2), but had to wait a full century to appear in print in the English language (Appendix 1).

Both translations are published within the period known as the Puritan *interregnum*, that is, from the deposition and execution of Charles I to the restoration of monarchy with Charles II in 1660: from 1642, London theatres were closed and (supposed) immoral entertainment banned. Aristophanic endeavours could only appear under the banner of strictly scholarly activities, as is the case of H.H.B.'s translation, or be clandestine altogether, as is the case of Randolph-F.J.'s script (or at least of its afterlife on and off the stage until the reopening of theatres).

In the fictional dialogue added to Randolph-F.J.'s play as part of "The Introduction", the Translator explicitly advises Aristophanes to mind his language in contemporary London: the "schools of Latin and Greek have a long vacation", he warns the ancient playwright, and anything other than strictly English has been outlawed (Randolph-F.J. 1875, 380);[23] Cleon's ghost also makes an appearance: his bragging about past and present glories is meant to mirror and caricature John Pym, the Parliamentary leader between 1640 and 1643. Secret readings and private performances of plays did indeed occur; there exists a record of Randolph-F.J.'s play being performed only a year after its publication at Wadham college in Oxford by a group of exiled Royalists, possibly belonging to the Royal Society of London.[24] But the play

[22] On the possible identities of H.H.B., see Wyles 2007, 94-95, where she argues that a most probable candidate may be the Catholic playwright Henry Burnell, a pivotal figure in the Kilkenny Catholic confederacy, which was established soon after the Irish rebellion in 1641.

[23] "The Introduction" is absent from the 1651 edition but included in the 1875 collection of Randolph's works by William Carew Hazlitt: "But fie upon thee for an ass! Dost thou come to speak Hebrew-Greek at London? Why, three-quarters of the city are Roundheads, man, that of all the languages of Babylon think it a heresy to understand any but their native English. The schools of Latin and Greek have a long vacation: if thou wilt please um, thou must needs speak English; and I'll give thee t'other pottle for thy pains, too".

[24] In the addenda to James Elmes's *Memoirs of the life and works of Sir Christopher Wren* (1823, xii), the architect notes that in an "old quarto play", which he later reveals

had (probably) been performed even before its publication (in its pre-F.J. form) either in Cambridge, at Trinity College, while Randolph was there (1624-1629),[25] or in London, probably at the Salisbury Court Playhouse, whose opening production may have been Randolph's *The Muse's Looking Glass*, another blunt ridiculing of the Puritans' ignorance about, and stance against, plays and theatre (Bentley 1948, 778).

Hey for Honesty is imbued with political satire, particularly after F.J.'s additions, who inserts open references to the various factions at play during the English Civil War (1642-1651) and the Puritan *interregnum* (1652-1660), both of which occurred after Randolph's death. The Chorus are politically aligned with the Levellers (a political movement active during the Civil War and advocating for popular sovereignty and equal rights for all). In the agon with Poverty, they are surprised that she does not seem to know that "we are all Levellers, there's no Nobility now" (Randolph-F.J. 1651, 17). Poverty gathers a band of Royalists to fight against Chremylus, Carion, and the Chorus, and their decision to restore Plutus' sight. The Pope himself (Pope Innocent X) makes an appearance at the end of the comedy in a humorous scene, desperate because "indulgencies are grown cheap and at no price" (1651, 44). Hermes is a god who fought alongside the king against the Roundheads (the Parliamentarians); whereas Plutus is the son of "Pinch-back True-penny" (1651, 3), a usurer from a part of London, Islington, and Mrs. Silverside, an Alderman, that is, a member of the administrative body of the Corporation of London. Plutus is essentially a wealthy heir raised in the rich mines of Wales, unaware of, and (literally) blind to, his own powers.

The World's Idol falls under the other category: it is a publication that seems to be a scholarly endeavour in all aspects. Its true intentions, however, unfold in the "Short Discourse" that follows the comedy. The many remarkable points of this discourse have been amply analysed by Rosie Wyles in her "Aristophanes in 1659" (2007, 97-103); here, I will outline those that find a *translation* in H.H.B.'s understanding of Aristophanes' text and into our final script. Amongst Aristophanes' "ancient fables", the author suggests, *Plutus* provides a most clear example of the "*World* as it stood with *Plutus*

to be a copy of Randolph's *Hey for Honesty*, there appears a gloss dated 1801 and penned by the editor of Shakespeare's works, Isaac Reed, that reads: "This is the play in which Sir Christopher Wren, our great architect, performed the character of Neanias before the Elector Palatine, Dr. Seth Ward, and many others, probably in 1652". For more on this, see Toback 1971, 87-8.

[25] This would make it an interesting example of a play being written and produced at one university (Cambridge) and performed at another (Oxford), reinforcing recent academic emphasis on performance cross-overs and communication across learning hubs, particularly within the same country (see Jackson and Crawforth 2019, amongst others).

his *eyes open*, and as it now stands with his *eyes out*" (H.H.B. 1659, 34, *italics* in the original): Plutus is an Adam-like figure, emblematising "*Innocency*" while his "*blindness*" resembles "our *fault*" (1659, 33; *italics* in the original). If "Tyranny and blood-shedding over other creatures and persecution and slavery" represent the beginning of human fall, their very reality brought about the "unhappy thing" that we call "propriety" (i.e. "property") (36): far from keeping poverty at bay, the idea of property further corroborates human nature's inherent dissatisfaction with "equal parts in any division" and encourages people's "desire to encroach" (ibid.). Together with "tillage" (the "unnatural and forced use of the earth": 38), property symbolises our growing distance from the simplicity and innocence of Plutus' original (Adamic) nature into a predominantly predatory and colonial gaze onto each other, usually justified on the basis of a claimed cultural superiority and civilising mission or under the false pretence of religion.

This rather *humanised* interpretation of Plutus (in contrast to recent scholarship arguing for a "numinous understanding of Wealth"; Barrenechea 2018, 19) in conjunction with the insistence on *humanly* terrible acts (such as imperialist and military feats, as well as obsessions with self-aggrandizement, whether on land or through religion) implied that the answer lay in the human, i.e. in humanity accepting responsibility for the past and future. During the workshop (in both Parma and London), we had discussions about the translations and the translators' stances regarding wealth, poverty and human actions, and H.H.B.'s approach stood out as the most compelling and resonant. Their emphasis on personal responsibility on a human level also partly informed the insertion of a scene in the play whereby the Chorus moved towards the audience and told them individually what they would do if they had money, that is, what they would do in order to alter their own as well as other people's circumstances (Appendix 4).

But the crude description of the human actions underlying the repeated concepts of tillage and property in the "Short Discourse" were also rather timely topics that mapped onto some of the most important events occurring in this period of unrest and may have been familiar to H.H.B., if they are indeed to be identified with the Irish playwright Henry Burnell (see fn. 21). The very reason for the Irish rebellion in 1641 was land-related: it was a response to the ongoing confiscation and occupation of Irish Catholic-owned land by English and Scottish settlers; the rebellion culminated in the Act for the Settlement of Ireland in 1652, which prohibited the practice of Catholicism in Ireland and gave most of the land owned by Catholics to English and Scottish settlers. But the colonial gaze criticised by H.H.B. went well beyond the encroaching desire of the English crown over Irish land and included the alarmingly ruthless "conquest of the *Moors* [and their expulsion] and *Indians*" (1659, 44) by the Habsburg empire which, as has been argued,

served as a model for England's own expansionist feats (Wyles 2007, 103). Though such military actions were brought to pass in the name of religion, their true reason lay in fact in mere "self-interest" and "want" (H.H.B. 1659, 45). The discourse unveils a deeply disillusioned vision of modern society as a place of brutal force and prevarication. The only way in which one can hope for a better world is if humanity as a whole returns to its natural state, away from artifice, ambition and competition and back into the innocence and simplicity of life; in other words, if humanity (just like Plutus) regains its sight. The *World's* biggest *Idol* (in stark opposition to Francis Bacon's coeval conceiving and categorising of the "Idols of the Mind") may be that of thinking that we can (*colonially*) grasp reality at all.[26]

The two standpoints in the translations emerge quite clearly from the first few lines of the prologue which I report here with the Greek text of Aemilius Portus' 1607 edition. This collection was a turning point in the reception history of Aristophanes' editions, not least because it was the first to contain all eleven comedies with a Latin translation for each play (Bastin-Hammou 2024, 395).[27] It indeed may be a book that Randolph-F.J. and H.H.B. might have had access to and modelled their translation on:[28]

> Carion O Bonny Jove, and the rest of the boon gods that dwel in the Tipling-house of Olympus! There be mettals & hard things in the world, but nothing so hard as to be bound Prentise in Bedlam, and have a Fool to ones Master: my very Livery is faced with his Worships foolery. Our condition is miserable; for if our Masters but dine at the Ordinary of mischief, the poore Serving-man is sure to be fed with the scraps of misfortune: We must share of our Masters misery, we are but Tenants, they will not let us be Freeholders to the petty Lordships of our own corpusculous Fortune; damnable Fortune! how fatally hast thou sold the tenure of us, to him that will pay us our wages! (Randolph-F.J. 1651, 1)

[26] As Wyles argues (2007, 95-6), the title may also hint at the iconoclastic war thrivin in Northern Europe in the Reformed Church (and in England especially: in 1643, troops of soldiers and citizens were stirred up by an order of parliament to remove all monuments of idolatry and superstition from religious places).

[27] Aemiulius Portus (son of the famous Cretan scholar Franciscus Portus, who famously commented Aeschylus' plays, amongst other things, in sixteenth-century Italy) put the edition together while he was professor of Greek in Geneva. The collection combines in one volume all eleven comedies with their most recent Latin translation as well as ancient and modern scholia (some published for the first time, as is the case, for example, of Florent Chrestien's Latin commentary of *Lysistrata* and *Wasps* or Edouard Biset de Charlais's Greek commentaries to all eleven comedies). For more on this edition, see Bastin-Hammou 2020.

[28] There is some evidence that may concur to H.H.B. (at least) using Frischlin's translation as model (in addition to both Randolph's and H.H.B.'s adoption of Frischlin's division into acts and scenes). See further below on H.H.B.

CARION O Jupiter! what a hard age is this to be a Servant in,
Especially to a foolish Master; if a servant shall
Give never so good Counsel, his word will not
Be taken, his Master thinks himself wiser, and so
His Family is bound to suffer with him; for 'tis the mischief
We are not Masters of our own bodies,
But they that buy us.
(H.H.B. 1659, 1)

ΚΑΡΙΩΝ Ὡς ἀργαλέον πρᾶγμ' ἐστίν, ὦ Ζεῦ καὶ Θεοί,
Δοῦλον γενέσθαι παραφρονοῦντος δεσπότου.
ἢν γὰρ τὰ βέλτισθ' ὁ θεράπων λέξας τύχῃ,
δόξῃ δὲ μὴ δρᾷν ταῦτα τῷ κεκτημένῳ·
μετέχειν ἀνάγκη τὸν θεράποντα τῶν κακῶν.
τοῦ σώματος γὰρ οὐκ ἐᾷ τὸν κύριον
κρατεῖν ὁ δαίμων, ἀλλὰ τὸν ἐωνημένον
(Portus 1607, 1-2)

[CARION What a hard thing it is, oh Zeus and the gods, / To be the slave of a master who's insane. / For if the servant happens to suggest the best course of action, / But [his] owner decides not to do that, / It is adamant for the servant to share in the evils. / For the deity won't allow him to be master / Of his own body, but it is of him who bought it.]

Randolph-F.J.'s translation is very evidently a witty amplification of the Greek: it carefully recontextualises each one of Carion's references to the ancient world into his own contemporary world. The gods dwell in a pub ("Tipling-house") at Olympus; the master-slave relationship is first understood through the lens of an "apprentice in Bedlam" and then through the vocabulary of house-renting and -buying ("Tenants", "Freeholders", "Lordships", "tenure"). Bedlam was the colloquial name for the Bethlem Royal Hospital in London, famous for its inhumane treatment of the mentally ill: in addition to indicating a rather degrading situation, being "bound" there as an intern would also suggest that the master was being highly irrational, even mad (παραφρονοῦντος). Here, Fortune (ὁ δαίμων) appears to be the primary cause of the miserable condition of the "Serving-man".

H.H.B.'s sense of the text is rather different: one can clearly detect the feelings of powerlessness and disillusion that fuel his vision of society in the "Short Discourse" too: the punchy wit of Randolph-F.J.'s (and the source's) script is altogether absent. Carion opens with a generally bleak comment on the present times ("what a hard age" rather than a more circumstantial "what hard thing" [Ὡς . . . πρᾶγμ']), which does not attribute any responsibility to "fortune" or any other source of divine power (ὁ δαίμων). Furthermore,

the single destiny of one servant (τὸν θεράποντα) becomes that of a whole community ("his Family"). While it is possible that "Family" may be an incorrect translation of *famulum* ("slave") from Nicodemus Frischlin's Latin (which faces the Greek text in Portus' edition, 1607, 1),[29] it also further substantiates H.H.B.'s pessimistic view of people as predatory and prevaricating; after all, responsibility for the "mischief" lies not in fortune's mishaps but in "they that bought us", i.e. other humans.

Both translations blended well together in our own script: from Randolph-F.J.'s script we derived some of the most effective punchlines; from H.H.B. we took the directness of expression and simplicity of the language. An example of this intermingling comes a few lines further down from Carion's words, when Chremylus explains the reasons behind going to the oracle of Apollo. Here, I report the passage in its blended form as it appeared in our final script and in the two translations:

CHREMYLUS 1 You know, I've lived religiously, with both Gods and Men. Yet I have always lived poor and miserable.
CHORUS, TOGETHER Poor and miserable, like us.
CHREMYLUS 2 and yet – they that rob the very churches, the rhetoricians, delinquents . . .
Chorus react vehemently and angrily.
CHREMYLUS 1 Those demure cheaters, with some corrupted law-gowns...
CHREMYLUS 2 With Roundheaded citizens and cuckholds, these, I say, grew rich the while.
CHORUS, TOGETHER Grew rich the while.
(Appendix 4)

CHREMYLUS Well, thus it is: in the days of my folly, I was a just, precise, and honest man . . .
Well, being honest, I was by natural consequence very poor.
. . .
But others, such as your demure cheaters . . .
With some corrupted Law-gowns . . .
With Round-headed citizens and cuckolds.
These, I say, grew rich the while.
(Randolph-F.J. 1651, 2)

CHREMYLUS . . . I have lived religiously with both Gods and Men, and yet alwayes have lived poor and miserable.
. . .

[29] *Ibi necesse famulum fieri malorum participem cum hero suo* (There, it is necessary for the servant to share in the evils with his master).

> And yet – they that rob the very churches, the rhetoricians, sychophants, every rascal grows rich.
>
> (H.H.B. 1659, 1-2)

> Κρ. ἐγὼ θεοσεβὴς καὶ δίκαιος ὢν ἀνὴρ
> κακῶς ἔπραττον καὶ πένης ἦν·
> . . .
> ἕτεροι δ ἐπλούτουν ἱερόσυλοι ῥήτορες
> Καὶ συκοφάνται καὶ πονηροί.
>
> (Portus 1607, 5)

> [CHREMYLUS Though I am a god-fearing and just man / I fared badly and was poor; / Yet others, temple-robbers, rhetoricians, / Sycophants and rascals, they have become rich.]

H.H.B.'s translation offered the first two lines. "Religiously" is made to incorporate both the "god-fearing" (θεοσεβὴς) and humanly "just" (δίκαιος) qualities of Chremylus in the Greek; the two spheres (religious and human) hinted at in the source text are translated with "Gods and Men". That "religiously" along with a reference to H.H.B.'s contemporary world in the translation of ἱερόσυλοι ("temple-robber") with the explicit mention of "churches" worked particularly well for us: in addition to connoting the play as clearly set in the early modern era (where [the Christian] religion – or living according to it – was by and large the moral compass by which one should measure the degree of integrity and honesty of a person), it also described our own setting as we were performing under a shiny antique chandelier in a neo-classical church in central London.

From Randolph-F.J. we integrated the amplified and timely rendering of the other three categories of wealthy rascals mentioned by Chremylus (ῥήτορες: "rhetoricians"; συκοφάνται: "informers"; and πονηροί: "rogues"). If "demure cheaters" and "corrupted law-gowns" referred to the perceived hypocrisy connected with the legal and civic institutions of his time, "round-headed citizens" indicated the political faction in the Civil War from F.J.'s time. "Cuckolds" instead alluded to the complexities of marital fidelity and male honour in seventeenth-century society. H.H.B's "Poor and miserable" and Randolph-F.J.'s final punch, "grew rich the while", were the key direct phrases that we had our Chorus (present on the stage from the beginning; Martinelli in this issue) repeat loudly.

But in addition to plucking out specific lines from the translations to adapt to our script, we also retained a number of dramaturgical choices that H.H.B. made in terms of the relationship between Carion and the Chorus, as well as the relationship between the Chorus and Chremylus. In *The World's Idol*, there emerges a sense of real friendship and communality shared between

the Chorus and Carion that transpires from the very beginnings of their interactions and which may be influenced by the translation and commentary with which Portus had equipped the 1607 edition. The translation featuring in Portus' collection was the most recent version of the play produced by the already-mentioned Frischlin and published in Frankfurt in 1586 for the first time (but already reprinted at that point); the commentary, on the other hand, was by an otherwise little-known literary figure in sixteenth-century France, Charles Girard, professor of Greek at the Université de Bourges from 1543:

> Carion You, all friends and neighbours, poor and laborious, that have lived with us upon Onions and hard fare, now make hast and make use of the present occasion whilest it is offered.
>
> (H.H.B. 1659, 8)

> Carion O Qui multas cum hero cepas edistis unà amici
> Viri, et populares, et laborum studiosi, venite,
> Ite, properate, currite: neque enim ullus est morandi
> Locus; sed ipsa se offert occasio rei gerenda:
> Quam ut arripiatis protinus, vi tota anniti oportet.
>
> (Frischlin in Portus 1607, 27)

> [Carion O you who have shared many feasts in company with my master, friends and companions, and eager for work, come, go, hurry, run: for there is no time to waste; the opportunity for action presents itself before you: which in order for you to seize immediately, you must exert all your strength.]

> φίλοι: recte hoc, quandoquidem ἰσότης ut aiunt, φιλότητα ἀπεργάζεται: i.e. aequalitas amicitiae est author. Aequales aut a Carione notantur, qui ut Chremylus, exiliter et iuste vivere maluerunt, quam opipare et iniuste.(Charles Girard, qtd in Portus 1607, 27)

> [friends: rightly so, for equality, as they say, fosters friendship: i.e. equality is the foundation of friendship. Equals are indeed explained by Carion as those who like Chremylus preferred to live simply and justly rather than sumptuously and unjustly.]

> Καριων ὦ πολλὰ δὴ τῷ δεσπότῃ ταυτὸν θύμον φαγόντες
> ἄνδρες φίλοι, καὶ δημόται καὶ τοῦ πονεῖν ἐρασταί·
> ἴτ', ἐγκονεῖτε, σπεύδεθ', ὡς ὁ καιρὸς οὐχὶ μέλλειν,
> ἀλλ' ἔστ' ἐπ' αὐτῆς τῆς ἀκμῆς, ᾗ δεῖ παρόντας ἀμύνειν.
>
> (Portus 1607, 27)

> [Carion Oh friends, who have eaten thyme together with my master many a time, and neighbours and lovers of hard work; come, move, hurry up, for the opportunity does not wait, rather it is at its very peak, which you must be present for to help.]

In addition to showing its debts to the Latin translation (*cepas*: "onions"; *occasio*: "occasion"; *ipsa se offert*: "while it is being offered"), H.H.B.'s translation offers further insights into their utopian idea of a "best" possible world. The address succinctly summarises the more elaborate phrasing of line 254 of the Greek in two subsequent and effective pairs of adjectives. H.H.B. emphasises the "poor" (an addition) condition and "hard fare" (another addition) already attached to both Chremylus and Carion; the adjectives also interestingly omit ἐρασταί, i.e. they are "laborious" but not necessarily "lovers" of hard work. The Chorus' condition of poverty emerges again in their response to Carion: "we are men toyled with labour and oppressed With Age", they utter, highlighting their persistent need to "labour" in their old age (H.H.B. 1659, 8).[30] They are also introduced as "friends" and "neighbours" of Carion and Chremylus both (as opposed to being his master's only, τῷ δεσπότῃ), and on a par with them. Girard's commentary further substantiates this sense of communality: "equality fosters friendship", he comments, quoting an old saying (ἰσότης φιλότητα ἀπεργάζετα),[31] and explains that the Chorus and Chremylus are friends *because* they are "equals" (*aequales*), in that they both chose a just (*iuste*) and simple (*exiliter*) way of life. This sense of equity resurfaces in the agon scene, which we constructed in our own script, employing (for the most part) H.H.B.'s translation. Rather powerfully, instead of Chremylus, the translator has the Chorus sustain the debate with Poverty, a choice we too retained in our dramaturgy of this scene.[32]

Following the Latin translation, H.H.B. has all the characters exit the stage and enter again to start the agon. As soon as they come on stage, the Chorus introduce what they are about to do as a rigorous test of the reasons of their party against Poverty's:

[*Ex. om.*]
Enter Chorus, Cramulus, Blapsidamus, Poverty.
Chorus Let us now fall to the matter in hand, and decide the controversy by true reason, laying all jests and scurrility aside.
(H.H.B. 1659, 14)

[30] The Latin translation may again function as a model for the English here: *viris labore / fessis, et natu grandioribus* (men tired from the hard work and from age; Frischlin in Portus 1607, 27); see Greek, ἀσθενεῖς γέροντας ἄνδρας (weak old men; ibid.).

[31] Interestingly, that same old saying is used by Plato to argue the opposite about the relationship between slaves and masters (*Lg.* 757a).

[32] It does not seem that such choice was informed by the Latin translation and its abbreviation of "Chorus" into "CH.", since this did not affect the English translation in every other place where this ambiguity is present. In his introduction to the scene, Biset too makes it clear that the Chorus is an observer of "Poverty" and "the old men fighting with opposing arguments" (τῆς Πενίας, δὲ τῶν γερόντων ἀντιλογίαις ἐριζόντων; Portus 1607, 51).

Chorus Igitur nunc seria proferte, et veris rationibus illi
Obstistite, quo vincatis: neque quicquam admiscete iocosum.

[Chorus Therefore, now produce serious arguments, and oppose her with true reasonings in order to win: and do not add any joke.]

Χο. Ἀλλ' ἤδη χρῆν τι λέγειν ὑμᾶς σοφὸν, ᾧ νικήσετε τηνδὶ,
ἐν τοῖσι λόγοις ἀντιλέγοντες· μαλακὸν δ' ἐνδώσετε μηδέν.
(Portus 1607, 51)

[Chorus But you must say something clever now, in order to defeat her, counter-arguing with words; and don't allow any softness.]

The Chorus' tone differs slightly from that found in the Greek and retraces the Latin: rather than advising Chremylus "not to allow any softness" (μαλακὸν δ' ἐνδώσετε μηδέν), they take it into their own hands to settle the matter in all seriousness (*seria*; *neque quicquam admiscete iocosum*) and with the use of reason (*veris rationibus*).

Indeed, this may be partly a reflection of the seventeenth-century culture of rhetoric and nurturing rhetorical skills in the school curriculum (particularly in England), and was certainly informed by Girard's comment (in addition to the Latin translation), which explains that "to clarify whether Penia is in the right, the Chorus advises the men to leave behind foolishness and try to refute Penia with reasoned arguments" (*ne an Penia rectius sentiat, Chorus viris suadet ut nugis relictis conentur rationibus Peniam refuter*; Portus 1607, 51). But the seriousness with which H.H.B. colours the agon also comes from H.H.B.'s conviction that this *is* a matter of life and death, and that the situation described by both the Chorus and Poverty can easily map onto their own, as announced in the "Short Discourse".

Some of the core ideas contained in the latter resurface prominently in a number of linguistic choices made throughout the translation of the debate. Right after their introductory words on the rigor and seriousness of the debate they are about to stage, for example, the Chorus open their argument by returning to that concept of "equity" already hinted at before. Rather than simply "prosperity" or "success" as the Greek would suggest (τοὺς χρηστοὺς; *Pl.* 490), "equity" is presented as an ideal that "honest men ought to be happiest". For, they continue, it is plain "insanity" that the world they live in currently awards the "wicked", while the "honest men are ready to starve" and thus live in (and with) (P)poverty (1659, 14). If "equity" could also be read as a direct translation of the Latin *aequum*, that "ready to starve" is a variation that can only be found in H.H.B. The phrase stands in place of the Greek πεινῶσιν (πεινάω: "I hung after, starve"; *Pl.* 504) which Frischlin renders as *fame pressi* ("oppressed by hunger"; Portus

1607, 53). Here, H.H.B. connotes the "starving" not as a consequence of being poor but as a *choice* of life, the same choice that makes Chremylus and the Chorus equal in status and on which their friendship rests, as we have seen; a choice that qualifies them as honest men.

Even more eloquent is Poverty's response, which also featured in our final script:

> Poverty . . . if that you desire Should come to pass, what good would it be to you? For if Plutus should see again, he would distribute equally to all men. (H.H.B. 1659, 14-15)
>
> Πε. εἰ τοῦτο γένοιθ', ὃ ποθεῖθ' ὑμεῖς, οὔ φημ' ἂν λυσιτελεῖν σφῷν.
> Εἰ γὰρ ὁ Πλοῦτος βλέψειε πάλιν, διανείμειέ τ' ἶσον ἑαυτόν.
>
> [Poverty If this which you desire were to happen, I would not say that it benefitted you. / For if Plutus were to see again, he would distribute himself on an equal basis.]

Plutus would distribute "equally" (Frischlin translates with *ex aequo distribuat* (["[he] may distribute equally"]; Portus 1607, 53), H.H.B.'s Poverty confirms, if he were to see clearly – which we retained as such in our own final script. And if it was not plain enough that we should be reading this "equally" along the same lines of the "equity" that regulates that "innocency" and "simplicity" of life wished on humanity in the "Short Discourse", H.H.B. adds a gloss on the left margin of this passages, and annotates:

> Διανείμειέ ισον [sic], of διανέμω (I distribute), relating to the first life of Mankind in common, poverty maintains the life of propriety against it. (1659, 15)

That "first life of Mankind" was marked with "truth and simplicity" (where H.H.B. 1659, 42), where "want" did not determine all of our actions nor inscribe all relationships within a clear hierarchy of power; it was a state where "propriety" did not have a place and where the Plutus-Adam-like-figure had a full and clear *vision.*

Indeed, H.H.B.'s translation of the agon left a profound mark on our script. The replacement of Chremylus with the Chorus was a choice that inevitably strengthened the dramaturgical voice and power of this character on the stage. But the translator's insistence on concepts like "equity" and his longing for a simpler world, free of prevarication, slavery, and the identification of oneself with material goods, also struck a profoundly familiar note for us as we, too, worked on this play in a rather bleak moment in the history of the UK (though the social and economic challenges that followed the pandemic, in fact overshadowed far beyond the UK itself). The workshop had been

moved from university grounds to a local church in central London because a few weeks before the UCU (University and College Union) had announced unprecedented strike action across all UK universities to demand a pay raise in order to cope with rising living costs and eliminate the widespread culture of insecure employment. The strike was only one in a series across the country and among several professions, including NHS staff and employees of the rail and bus systems (ONS 2023), that had persevered for over a year on UK soil, following perceived and real economic difficulties in the post-Brexit and post-pandemic era.

Thus, when Poverty delivered her final line: "all good comes from [her]" (H.H.B. 1659, 17; *Pl.* 593-4), the Chorus' immediate reaction to seize and remove her from the stage well translated our own desires (via H.H.B.'s emphatic condemnation of "property" and "tillage") to abolish *in*equality once and for all. Together with Aristophanes', Bonini's and Randolph-F.J.'s, H.H.B.'s dramaturgy had been integrated into our own understanding and re-imagination of the play, inevitably imbued with our 'situatedness' and cultural backgrounds, and resulting into a full new script.

Appendix 1
Translations of *Plutus* (1415-1695)

ca.1415: Rinuccio da Castiglione, *Fabula Penia*
ca.1439: Leonardo Bruni, Latin translation of lines 1-239
ca. 1440-1444: Pietro da Montagnana, Latin translation of lines 1-287 and 403-61
ca. 1458: Alessandro da Otranto, Latin translation with comments
ca. 1480s: Lodovico da Poppi, Latin translation
1501: Franciscus Passius, Latin translation (printed)
ca. 1501-1513: Willibald Pirckheimer, Latin translation
1512: Beatus Bild, Latin translation
1513: Eufrosino Bonini, *Comedia di Iustitia,* vernacular Italian translation
1522: Anonymous (Leipzig), Latin translation
1531: Thomas Geschaff (i.e. Venatorius), Latin translation (printed)
1533: Adrianus Chilius, Latin translation (printed)
1538 Andreas Divus, Latin translation (printed)
1545: Fratelli Rositini, vernacular Italian translation (printed)
1547: Miguel Cabedio de Vasconcellos, Latin translation (printed)
1549: Charles Girard, Latin translation with commentary (printed)
1549: Pierre de Ronsard, vernacular French translation of lines 1-239
1556: Coriolano Martirano, Latin translation (printed)
1556: Lambertus Hortensius, Latin translation (printed)
ca. 1560: Jean-Antoine de Baif, vernacular French translation (lost)
ca. 1567: Lorenzo Giacomini, Latin translation
1577: Pedro Simón Abril, vernacular Spanish translation (printed and lost)
1586: Nicodemus Frischlin, Latin translation (printed)
1594: Anonymous (Naples), Latin translation (printed)
1596: Anonymous (Leiden), Latin translation (printed)
1651: Thomas Randolph-F.J., vernacular English translation (printed)
1659: H.H.B., vernacular English translation (printed)
1684: Anne le Fèvre, vernacular French translation (printed)
1695: John Leng, Latin translation (printed)

Sources: Giannopoulou 2007, 312-16; Appendices 2 and 3 in Pollard 2017; Bastin-Hammou 2019, 2020, 2023; Beta 2023; Muttini 2023a and 2023b; APGRD; Translatoscope

Appendix 2
Performances of *Plutus (1513-1588)*

1513, Florence: *Comedia di Iustitia* by Eufrosino Bonini at the Florence Carnival
1517, 1521, Zwickau: in both Latin and ancient Greek, performed by students and directed by George Agricola
1531, Zurich: in ancient Greek; the choral odes were put to music by Ulrich Zwingli
1531, Nuremberg: adapted in five acts in German and directed by Hans Sachs
1531, Nuremberg: in Thomas Geschaff's Latin translation
1536, Cambridge, St John's College: in ancient Greek, student actors
1549, Paris Collège de Coqueret (?): in ancient Greek, student actors
1588, Cambridge: in ancient Greek, student actors

Sources: Giannopoulou 2007, 312-16; Appendix 3 in Pollard 2017; APGRD

Appendix 3
Building the Chorus: Notes from the Director
Marco Martinelli*

As a director, I have always enjoyed working on the comedies of Aristophanes, whom I consider a 'totem ancestor'. Reading his plays, I feel part of his 'family' of playwrights. His ability to weave together important themes (like war, political corruption, etc.) with satire and the most outrageous comedy, without forgetting the fantastical and dreamlike aspects of existence, seems still very potent to me, if only it can be reawakened by the right means. Think of his *Birds*, for example, a work in which Aristophanes evokes our most intimate desires, the dream of having wings, the utopia of escaping from the cages of everyday life, but also provides a pitiless x-ray of our craving for power.

Aristophanes' stories, however, cannot be merely 'staged'; one must immerse such scripts into life, rewrite them, 'seed them' as it were onto the terrain of today. This *mise en vie* (to adopt a variant on the French term *mise en scène*) is the secret of an authentic theatre, that is: a theatre that is alive (Martinelli 2024). I understand this *mise en vie* as the possibility of restoring theatre's (Nietzschean) 'Dionysian' potential. Dionysus, a name "we have borrowed from [the Greeks]" (Nietzsche 1872, 23), is the god without whom theatre does not exist (or at least my conception of it): the god of the Chorus, of "I am we", of movement and ecstasy, enraptured dance and contemplation; the god who destroys prejudice and barriers between class and sex, who forces us to meet one another in an embrace (Martinelli 2023, 1). Dionysus is the god who dies and resurrects: Dionysus the unexpected, the unpredictable, the god of both tragedy and comedy, of the death we are doomed to and the laughter in the face of that doom.

* Marco Martinelli is a playwright and director, and with Ermanna Montanari co-founder of Teatro delle Albe. He has received numerous awards, including seven Premio Ubu as a director, playwright, and educator; the Hystrio Prize; the Golden Laurel at the Mess Festival; and the Prize for Career Achievement at the Festival Journées Théâtrales de Carthage in Tunis. His plays have been published and staged in Italy, France, Belgium, Germany, Romania, Slovakia, Chile, Brazil, and the United States. His play *Farsi Luogo* was published in France (Alternatives théâtrales), Romania (ed. Brumar), and Germany (Alexander Verlag Berlin). His book *Aristofane a Scampia. Come far amare i classici agli adolescenti con la non-scuola*, was published by Ponte alle Grazie in 2016, and by Actes Sud in French in 2020 under the title *Aristophane dans les banlieues*. It won the 2021 Critics Union Award for "Best Book on Theater." Martinelli has also directed several films, including *Aung San Suu Kyi's Life Under Arrest* (2017), *The Sky over Kibera* (2019), *Er* (2020), and *Fedeli d'Amore* (2021). Together with Ermanna Montanari, he is the artistic director of the Teatro Olimpico's 77th and 78th "Ciclo di Spettacoli Classici".

Dionysus loves music, the tambourines that make our heart leap, the flutes that jolt our brain electrically. Dionysus is the stranger. Dionysus is the cat who leaps onto the table and scatters the papers of all that is already-thought, already-planned.

Let me try to explain better what I mean by *mise en vie*: as a director, I must never limit myself to assigning roles, distributing speeches. I have to reinvent the ancient dramaturgy so that the Chorus of people I work with (at any point of their lives, and whatever their language) can reimagine it with me and improvise lines, gestures, and situations drawn from their everyday experience in a new stage space. The roles remain, obviously, as do the tasks of the director, set designer, costume designer, etc., but within a circle in which each face is everyone's face. Every face moves us, even in its stillness and silence; each speaks through its lines of age, its wounds, the tilt of its head, and the light flickering in its eyes. And my task is to observe each of those faces with the same attention with which I translate the words of the ancient text. I am a medium, nothing more.

What a wonder humanity is that portion of humanity I find before me, surrounding me! My duty is to extract 'theatrical' poetry from that 'vital' poetry, out of that bottomless well! How can all this be obtained? There are no recipes. The task is never to follow fast fashion. One must never give up, no matter how rough the road. One must look into each person's face, learn every face's name, even if there are two hundred of them. It is a matter of audaciously, judiciously, weaving the turbulence of the present into the ancient text.

Without digging deep, without grasping in the dark, without immersing oneself in those profound caverns (a director is nothing but a speleologist!); without working on the basis of this awareness, one runs the risk, as often happens, of collapsing into a useless, dusty, harmful 'museum'. The ancients demand of us to be respectful of them in spirit, not in the letter. Better, they do not merely 'demand of us': they invoke respect, cry out for it from the past in which they are entombed. Every single page must be tested: do those dramatic situations still speak to us? That handful of women who challenge men's corruption and incapacity to govern; do they still speak to us? Certainly they do. "So much gnaws at my heart!": so begins *The Acharnians*, Aristophanes' first comedy (the earliest extant), written when still a teenager (*Acharn.* 1). And how it resonates within each of us, that cry that speaks from 'our' heart, that verse which could have come from Charles Baudelaire or Walt Whitman. Because the world is still upside down, as iniquitous and violent and corrupt as it was millennia ago, and it must be set right again. Starting from those still-urgent questions, we begin to create, to unleash the imagination, to put bodies and voices into play; bodies and voices which, in a world of computers and AI, continue to be miraculous 'technologies', the

most powerful and least utilized of all. Everyone together at work, creatives and participants alike, in the joy of creation.

Using these principles and this method, I worked in Parma and London at the invitation of Francesca Bortoletti and Giovanna Di Martino. In agreement with them, Aristophanes' *Plutus* was chosen as the triggering text for a group of about thirty young and very young people. The Parma group was not exactly the same as the London group; some components were the same but most were not (see Appendix 4); in Parma, obviously, they were mostly Italian, in London mostly English. In both cities the principal languages used were Italian and English, but not exclusively.

One of the principles of the *mise en vie* is to utilize all the linguistic richness of the participants, starting from their mother tongues: thus in both Parma and London, our *Plutus* echoes with expressions in Polish, Portuguese, and so on (see Appendix 3). The play with languages was conceived so as to get through to the spectators, predominantly Italian in Parma and English in London. Indeed, as many before me, I posit the audience at the very centre of the theatrical event; that is, thinking of theatre as a dialogue with the other: performance requires the "co-presence" of both the "doers" and "onlookers", to employ Fisher-Lichte's terminology (2010, 29).

In agreement with dramaturg Giovanna Di Martino, we employed a selection of Renaissance-era English translations she offered up that functioned as springboard for creating anew: slowly, they were weaved in together with the participants' own input and additions as well as mine. The powerful and explosive provocation posited by *Plutus* was directed at all participants as we explored possible answers together, as a Chorus. As a sort of introduction to *Plutus* itself, its themes and main ideas, I inserted the very first lines from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*:

> Poet Good day, sir.
> Painter I am glad you're well.
> Poet I have not seen you long. How goes the world?
> Painter It wears, sir, as it grows.
> (1.1.1-5)

It seemed to me that this exchange between the Poet and the Painter perfectly introduced the issues posed by Aristophanes in the *Plutus*: "how goes the world", inquires the poet. In other words: "How is the economy faring?"; "What is the state of society?"; and "How are the macrostructures that confine, condition, and poison our lives progressing?". The question implies that the life of every single individual is in fact inseparable from that of our own collective existence; indeed, it reflects a complex and layered web of interconnected relationships.

An honest farmer opens the play with the sad realization that, though always honest in his manners, he has "always lived poor and miserable": what should he teach his own son, then, he asks Carion, his servant; should he "change his manners" and "learn to be as cunning a knave as he can"? (Appendix 4). When, after visiting the oracle, the farmer discovers that the cause of the unfair distribution of wealth in the world derives from the fact that the god of gold is blind, he sets as his objective to heal the god, Plutus, and thus to redistribute wealth "equally" (on the importance of this word in one of the early modern translations chosen for this workshop, see Di Martino above). This is the utopian idea of the last work of Aristophanes that has come down to us.

I began the workshop in Parma with music. I asked the participants to suggest to the group songs that had to do with money. Lots of titles came up, of which I chose three that seemed particularly suited to our purpose: *Money* by ABBA, *Il Gatto e la volpe* ("The Fox and the Cat") by Edoardo Bennato, and *Non me lo posso permettere* ("I can't afford it") by Caparezza. *Money* was our opening song, in both Parma and London: it started off slowly and gently but gradually turned into an angry choral cry that set the tone for the whole demonstration-performance (Fig. 1). *Il Gatto e la Volpe*, a piece that closely retraces the story of the fox and the cat in Collodi's *Pinocchio*, introduced us into the play proper. The Chorus had just gathered together after running frantically in all directions and shouting furiously about all their debts and unpaid bills, and they were now closing in on Plutus, who was on his knees, centrestage. *Il Gatto e la Volpe* was intended to give body and voice to Chremylus' complaint right after, with a hint of irony: the song is openly satirical, and this was helpful to enhance the 'comic' tone of the scene.

In London, we brainstormed again to find a possible substitute that would be immediately understood by our audience and yet function on multiple levels, just as Bennato's piece: we ended up deciding for a children's song, *Oranges and Lemons*. This is a traditional nursery rhyme that is usually accompanied by a game where the players run through a human arch in pairs (facing each other) but with a twist: at the final line, "Here comes a chopper to chop off your head", those forming the arch drop their arms and attempt to catch those running through. The choice of song mapped onto Bennato's piece quite well: it maintained its playful tones while also ending on a quite brutal note ("chop off your head") that could again function as cue for Chremylus' discontent and anger (Fig. 2).

Non me lo posso permettere is another highly ironic song: Caparezza auctions a range of everyday items (such as a loaf of bread) that have become unaffordable for simple honest workers. The piece functioned as the Chorus' response to Plutus' voicing his fear that Zeus would find out Chremylus' healing plan and "turn [him] into a pretty pickle" (Appendix 4). The Chorus'

words had (again) a double entendre: if they gave voice to Plutus' fright by explicitly positing that this was a luxury he could not afford ("non me lo posso permettere"); they also rather cunningly implied that *they* (rather than him) could not afford him not affording it. Again, the London audience posed the challenge of finding an equivalent for this song, which eventually was replaced with another children's song, *Ring O' Roses*. In this widely popular nursery rhyme, children form a circle around one person in the middle and stoop at the final line, "we all fall down", lest they become the "rosie" in the middle. But in popular culture, the song is associated with the Great Plague that swept England in 1665, with the implication that those who "fell" at the end of the song had in fact died (from the disease) and were therefore no longer part of the circle (Figs 3, 4). In our rendition of it, the Chorus started off playfully as a children's circle around Plutus, only to darken the tones of the song as they repeated it four times before stooping at the final line. Caparezza's piece was tainted with darker nuances, but it maintained its playfulness at the same time. Weaving those songs into a series of stage actions that roughly followed the plotline of Plutus' prologue, we constructed an entire 'Chorus line'.

The characters Chremylus and Carion were performed not by individual actors but by two groups, two Choruses speaking directly to the spectators. The only two figures performed by solo actors were Plutus and Poverty, the two pillars of the two main scenes that we constructed in both workshops: the prologue and the agon scene.

From the beginning, Plutus was the symbolic centre of all the actions and desires of the Chorus surrounding him. He represents an ambiguous centre and becomes the object of contradictory actions on the part of the Chorus. As long as his identity remains unknown and he is thought to be a ragged derelict, he is mistreated and harassed. When he is discovered to be a god, however, the Chorus prays to him and venerates him. Plutus is at the centre of a circle that is the archaic locus of ancient sacrifice: at first the scapegoat, the victim to be devoured, he suddenly becomes divine. This primeval ambiguity remains typical of contemporary life: one need only think of human sacrifice as it takes place in the media today, an athlete or politician idolized and then cast in the mud. This dynamic of adore-and-attack functions powerfully on stage, grafting into the Chorus a terrifying capriciousness that erupts naturally, so to speak, in moments when we succeed in translating Aristophanes' score into our own choral language.

Parma and London functioned well as two sequential phases of the same work of art: in Parma we enacted the revelation of Plutus and the unfolding action of Chremylus and Carion, who convince the god to be cured. In London, we took this first part and added the explosion onto the stage of Poverty. In both cities we dedicated particular attention to the choice of where to

perform the spectacle: not a theatre but a place with a somewhat ancient aura - an old monastery (in Parma) and a neo-classical church (in London) - evocative of the political-religious situation conceived by Aristophanes, whose radical theatre brings the high into conflict with the low, economics with the holy, the plain with the mysterious, obscene vulgarity with lyrical transport. Everything that concerns us as humanity.

Appendix 4
Final Script

Director: Marco Martinelli
Dramaturg: Giovanna Di Martino
Workshop Organisers: Francesca Bortoletti, Giovanna Di Martino

Participants in Parma (10-13 October 2022): Pietro Bertoni, Chiara Botti, Anna Calzolari, Eleonora Capitano, Zoë Carvalho Morris, Laura Cupellaro, Lucia Davoli, Camilla Di Felice, Margherita Galeotti, Lucia Giusiano, Joshua Hobson, Benedetto Loris Pizzo, Luna Malavaso, Santiago Medioli, Carlo Mirra, Marta Mitello, Aurora Monachesi, Sara Odierno, Victoria Rasbridge Anna Rizzo, Giulio Robuschi, Lucy Ruddiman, Marta Szatkowaska, Shreeyukata Thapa, Maria Tonna, Luca Zerbi.

Participants in London (20-23 February 2023): Rosanna Beacock, Franklin Barron, Zoë Carvalho Morris, Janina Corbet, Laura Cupellaro, Giovanna Di Martino, Flora Grime, Indie Halstead, Josh Hobson, Emily Kerr, Sophie Kerr, Benedetto Loris Pizzo, Luna Malvaso, Aurora Monachesi, Zoë Perry Smith, Anna Rizzo, Lucy Ruddiman, Marta Szatkowska, Agnes Wilhelmsen.

Secondary Schools Involved: Liceo Aristico Toschi, Liceo Classico Romagnosi, St Olave's, the Jewish Community Secondary School, Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School, and La Sainte Union, Camden

Universities Involved: University of Parma, University College London

Places of the Demonstration Performance: 13 October 2022: Abbazia di Valserena (CSAC - University of Parma Communication Archive); 23 February 2023: St George's Church Bloomsbury, Bloomsbury Way, London WC1A 2SA

Supported by: Widening International Didactics and Education Programme (w.i.d.e; 2022, Parma), the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama, the Leventis Foundation, the Classical Association, the Institute of Classical Studies, the Gilbert Trust Fund, and the Institute of Advanced Studies (UCL)

Project Identification Number 22797/001 approved by UCL's Ethics Research Committee; Project Title: Theatre Practice and Ancient Greek Drama in Translation. PI: Giovanna Di Martino; Co-Investigators: Francesca Bortoletti (Parma) and Marco Martinelli (Teatro delle Albe).

The CHORUS *slowly remove their hands from their eyes and begin running frantically around the stage, shouting. Meanwhile,* PLUTUS *detaches from the group and slowly walks away, attempting to escape the* CHORUS. *The* CHORUS *halt and three* CHORUS MEMBERS, *one after the other, detach from the group and make an announcement which is repeated by the whole* CHORUS *three times.*

CHORUS MEMBER *(three times in crescendo)* De grão em grão a galinha enche o papo.[33]

CHORUS MEMBER *(three times in crescendo)* On se lasse de tout, sauf de l'argent.[34]

CHORUS MEMBER (three times in crescendo): Pieniądz rządzi światem![35]

At this point, PLUTUS *walks centre stage, assuming a kneeling position.*

PLUTUS *repeats the following three times, gradually decreasing from a normal voice to a whisper*: Money, money, money. The common whore of humankind.[36]

The CHORUS *regroup and slowly walk towards centre stage, where* PLUTUS *is kneeling, his face covered with his hands. One* CHORUS MEMBER *begins singing the refrain of "Oranges and Lemons", and after a few lines, the rest of the* CHORUS *join in. They repeat the refrain three times, gradually increasing their volume from a whisper to a loud shout.*

Text of the Song

Oranges and lemons
Say the bells of St. Clement's
You owe me five farthings
Say the bells of St. Martin's
When will you pay me?
Say the bells of Old Bailey
When I grow rich
Say the bells of Shoreditch
And when will that be?
Say the bells of Stepney
I do not know
Say the great bells of Bow
Here comes a candle

33 English translation: "Grain by grain, the hen fills its stomach".
34 English translation: "One gets tired of everything, except money".
35 English translation: "Money rules the world".
36 Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, 4.347.

To light you to bed
And here comes a chopper
To chop off your head.

Individual CHORUS MEMBERS *detach from the main group and move to the right, forming* CHORUS 1, *i.e. a Chorus of Chremyluses. Meanwhile,* CHORUS 2 *regroup on the left.*

CHORUS 1, CHORUS MEMBER You know, I've lived religiously, with both Gods and Men. Yet I have always lived poor and miserable.
CHORUS 2 (*together*) Poor and miserable, like us.
CHORUS 1, CHORUS MEMBER and yet – they that rob the very churches, the rhetoricians, delinquents . . .
CHORUS 2 (*react vehemently and angrily*).
CHORUS 1, CHORUS MEMBER Those demure cheaters, with some corrupted law-gowns…
CHORUS 1, CHORUS MEMBER With Roundheaded citizens and cuckholds, these, I say, grew rich the while.
CHORUS 2 (*together*) Grew rich the while.
CHORUS 1, CHORUS MEMBER*:* Allora sono andata a consultare l'oracolo - sì, l'oracolo.
CHORUS 1, CHORUS MEMBER*:* I went to consult the Oracle about my son, to see whether it were not best for him to change his manners, shake off his honour, learn to be as cunning a knave as he can!
CHORUS 2 (*together, angrily*) Cunning, Knavery, Deceit!
CHORUS 1, CHORUS MEMBER*:* L'oracolo mi ha detto di seguire la prima persona che incontravo fuori dal tempio.
CHORUS 1, CHORUS MEMBER*:* He bid me, whomsoever I first met, him I should follow.
CHORUS 2, CHORUS MEMBER Hey, hey - you. What did you say? Who did you meet?
CHORUS 2 (*in agreement*) Yeah, yeah - who did you meet?
CHORUS MEMBER This poor, blind man.

CHORUS 1 AND 2 *move closer to* PLUTUS*, surrounding him, and merge into one Chorus again.*

CHORUS MEMBER Tell us, who are you?
CHORUS (*together*) Who are you?
PLUTUS Fuck off.
CHORUS MEMBER No, no, no, glie l'abbiamo chiesto male… Hey, you, more gently, please.

CHORUS MEMBER Please, please, please, sweetheart - would you tell us who you are?
PLUTUS Vaffanculo.
CHORUS MEMBER, *looking confused*: What…?
CHORUS MEMBER It means fuck off.

The CHORUS *react angrily.*
Two CHORUS MEMBERS *approach* PLUTUS *at different intervals, appearing to lunge at him. The rest of the* CHORUS *quickly intervenes, holding them back to prevent them from getting any closer.*

PLUTUS OK, OK, OK. I'll tell you… My name is Plutus, the God of wealth.
CHORUS MEMBER Questo sarebbe il dio della ricchezza? È il dio dell'oro?
CHORUS MEMBER Plutus…? With that miserable face? And dirty clothes?
PLUTUS I am.

The CHORUS *react with a variety of emotions, shouting in a mix of enthusiasm, anger, and confusion, creating a chaotic atmosphere around* PLUTUS, *and finally burst into:* But he's blind!

CHORUS MEMBER How come you are so miserable, so nasty?
The CHORUS *repeat the question in agreement, their voices echoing together to emphasise their shared support and solidarity.*
PLUTUS Jupiter, envying the good of miserable mortals, robbed me of my sight, that I might not know knaves from the honest, but to them might go.

The CHORUS *react in different ways at the news.*

CHORUS MEMBER AHH! Hai capito?
CHORUS MEMBER Ho capito.
CHORUS MEMBER Avete capito?
CHORUS MEMBER Hanno capito.
CHORUS MEMBER Cioè Zeus, invidioso di noi uomini…
CHORUS MEMBER E donne.
CHORUS MEMBER Ha reso lui… cieco!
CHORUS MEMBER But, if you had your eyesight back, would you flee from the wicked?

The CHORUS *echo the question.*

PLUTUS I, I protest I would.

Chorus Members *nod in approval, expressing their agreement with enthusiastic gestures.*

Chorus Member And would you only go to honest and ingenious sorts?
Plutus Only to them, for I have not seen but one of them this many a day.

Chorus Members *nod in approval.*

Plutus Shhhhhh, If Jupiter did but know of this project, he would powder me into a pretty pickle.
Chorus Member What…? Can it be worse than this?
Plutus no, no, no, please…! I fear him enormously.
Chorus Member Is it possible? You're the greatest of all cowards!

Chorus members *form a circle around* Plutus, *beginning to sing "Ring o' Roses". They start by whispering the words, gradually increasing their volume until they are singing loudly together. The* Chorus *conclude their song, raising their hands like claws, poised as if ready to pounce on* Plutus.

Text of the Song
Ring-a-ring o' roses,
A pocket full of posies.
A-tishoo! A-tishoo!
We all fall down!

Each Chorus Member *moves toward an audience member, engaging in conversation and sharing what they would do if they had a little money.*
Meanwhile Plutus walks backwards and tries to get away.
A Chorus Member, *shouting at the rest of the Chorus*: Guys, guys: he's getting away!
The Chorus *run to* Plutus *and bring him back centre stage to reassure him.*

Chorus Member It has been decided. You'll see as well as a lynx. Apollo assured me of this.
Chorus Member We'll take you to the temple of Asclepius, the god of medicine - he will cure your blindness.

As the Chorus *begin to walk toward the back of the room, singing the opening lines of an ottava from Boiardo, "Tutte le cose sotto della luna / L'alta*

ricchezza e i regni della terra",[37] *a* CHILD *bursts onto the stage, running excitedly. Demanding everyone's attention, the* CHILD *pauses to deliver a heartfelt speech:*

CHILD Stop! Stop!

The CHORUS *turn to the child.*

CHILD I have a message from the Gods. What are you thinking? You must trust me. I have lived for a thousand upon thousands of years on the peak – the very peak – of Mount Olympus. I know humans and gods very well. Answer me if you're able: do you guys really want to bring justice back to this earth? You are crazy, crazy, crazy, I say! Out of your minds! You make me laugh. Jupiter will send down lightning and turn you all to dust!

The CHORUS *look at each other and nod in agreement.*
A CHORUS MEMBER, *addressing the audience:* But he's only a child!
The CHORUS, *agreeing vehemently, lift the child and carry him off stage.*
The CHORUS *then reconvene at the centre of the room, surrounding* PLUTUS *once again.*

CHORUS MEMBER Now, after this little incident - we'll bring you to the temple of Asclepius.

The CHORUS *walk toward the back of the room, singing "Tutte le cose sotto della luna / L'alta ricchezza e i regni della terra". Suddenly, they hear a woman shouting from the front of the room, interrupting their song.*

POVERTY (*standing on a chair*) Wait
CHORUS (*together*) Not again. Who are you?
POVERTY I am Poverty.
The CHORUS *react with a variety of emotions, shouting in a mix of anger and confusion:* What?? Oh that's great.
POVERTY You know me well enough, sure?
The CHORUS (*together*) Yes, we do!
POVERTY I have frequented many of your houses a good many years, and waited diligently upon you.
The CHORUS *react:* Is she mocking us?

[37] The full text of this ottava is included at the end of the script accompanied by an English translation.

Poverty I will demonstrate that I am the cause of all good to you – and that you are out of the way if you would make the just man rich. Sit down.

The Chorus *begin to improvise various reactions, some expressing confusion, others laughter, while a few look concerned. They all sit down.*

Poverty If this revolting god, Plutus, should see again, he would distribute equally to all men.

Chorus That is indeed the point!

Poverty And then – I pray you – who would care to study Arts or Trades? What arts or sciences would remain?

The Chorus *look at one another, muttering in confusion as they process what Poverty is saying.*

Poverty Who would do the dirty little jobs?

The Chorus *point at the audience and shout*: They would!

Poverty No, no, for they would have gold too.

The Chorus *improvise a mix of reactions: some nod, some shake their heads, some just look confused.*

Poverty You would have to mend your shoes yourself, and plow, and sow and reap or else you must not eat!

Chorus Members *share a serious look with one another.*

Poverty From me you enjoy all this and all else you have need of, I am the imperious Mistress of all Artists.

Chorus Members *display a mix of incredulity and conviction in their expressions, some appearing sceptical while others seem to agree with* Poverty*'s words.*

Poverty With me men are active, and slender-bodied, without me they become… blah

Some Chorus Members *laugh, some nod.*

Poverty Observe the politicians.

Chorus Members *look at the audience.*

Poverty When they are poor, how equally and justly they carry themselves between the people and the citizens; when they are rich and wealthy, they become so corrupted and nasty.

Chorus Members *nod in agreement.*

Poverty All good comes of poverty.

Chorus Members *look at one another, silent and scared.*

Chorus Member (*standing up*): Look, you don't convince me, if you do

convince me.
Gå til helvete.[38]
CHORUS (*together*) gå til helveter.

CHORUS MEMBERS *seize* POVERTY, *forcefully pushing her down towards the ground, symbolically sending her back to the hell from which she emerged.*
The CHORUS *return to* PLUTUS, *surrounding him once again with an air of determination.*

CHORUS MEMBER They say, third time's a charm? Now, maybe - maybe - we can finally bring Plutus to heal at the temple of Asclepius.
CHORUS MEMBERS *joyfully approve their words and start clapping.*
CHORUS MEMBER Poiché di lavorar, qui, proprio non si ragiona, e poiché qui noi abbiamo catturato la fortuna… i vò che noi cantiamo una canzona… Ne sai tu una sulla fortuna?

As the Chorus begins to walk offstage, they start singing an ottava from Boiardo's Orlando Innamorato, *their voices echoing as they fade into the distance.*

Tutte le cose sotto della luna
L'alta ricchezza e i regni della terra
Son sottoposti a voglia di Fortuna
Lei la porta apre d'improvviso e serra!
E quando più par bianca divien bruna
ma più se mostra a caso della guerra
instabile, voltante e roinosa
e più fallace ch'alcuna altra cosa.[39]

[38] English translation: "Go to hell".
[39] Boiardo, *Orlando Innamorato,* 1.16.1-8. English translation: "All things beneath the moon / Great wealth and the kingdoms of the earth / Are subject to Fortune's whims / She suddenly opens the door and slams it shut! / When she seems brightest, she darkens; / and in war she reveals herself as ever fickle, / unstable, mutable and ruinous / the most treacherous of all things."

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Photograph by Alessandro Bartolomucci.

Figs 3, 4: The Chorus sing the final line from *Ring O' Roses*, "They all fall down". Photographs by Alessandro Bartolomucci.

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David Lucking*

Famous Last Words: the Rhetoric of Death and Dying in Shakespeare

Abstract

This essay examines a number of speeches in Shakespeare's plays that are occasioned by the death of a character within them or by the imminent prospect of such a death. These include statements made by the dying persons themselves, eulogies delivered after their deaths, and various other forms of commentary elicited by their demise. Particular attention is paid to speeches pronounced by individuals seeking at the moment of death to shape how posterity will view them, and to those that constitute more or less deliberate appropriations of the deceased's memory by parties pursuing personal or ideological agendas of their own. The varied and sometimes clashing intentions motivating such speeches are frequently reflected in the differing ways in which the individual is viewed in retrospect, contributing thereby to the multiplication of perspectives which is a hallmark of Shakespearean drama.

Keywords: Shakespeare; eulogy; epitaph; self-fashioning; appropriation

Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs.
(*Richard II* 3.2.141)

1.

The purpose of the following essay is to examine a number of speeches in Shakespeare's plays that are occasioned by the death of a character within them or by the imminent prospect of such a death. This broad category includes statements made by the dying individuals themselves, eulogies delivered after their deaths, and various forms of elegy, epitaph, valediction, and even adverse or otherwise judgmental commentary that are prompted by their demise. Such utterances often constitute moments of personal evaluation or validation, when the significance of a life is summed up by the dying person for their own benefit or that of their auditors. In some instances, they might provide the occasion for the affirmation of collective values, whether they be those of the community to which the deceased has belonged, or of one whose tenets they have transgressed and which must

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come to terms with what they represent. But it might also happen that they serve more covert objectives, as those delivering them seek either to appropriate the memory of the deceased for personal or ideological motives of their own or, in the case of the dying person, to preempt such efforts at appropriation by determining for themselves the image they wish to transmit to posterity.

Precisely because the purposes of such speeches diverge so fundamentally, it is only to be expected that significant discrepancies will arise between what characters say about themselves at the moment of death and what is subsequently said about them, as well as between the accounts of those characters' lives that are formulated by different commentators. While dying persons in Shakespeare often endeavour to define themselves *in extremis*, find a comprehensive meaning in an existence which is coming to an end, or simply justify or vindicate themselves and their conduct in their final moments,[1] eulogies and other kinds of postmortem commentary often respond to quite different exigencies.[2] In *Julius Caesar*, Antony famously commences his funeral oration over Caesar's body by observing that "The evil that men do lives after them; / The good is oft interrèd with their bones" (3.2.76-7),[3] but despite the attitude of resigned indifference he assumes with respect to such processes of posthumous refashioning he himself proceeds to shape the image of his late mentor in the manner most conducive to his own political ends. As this instance illustrates, while a eulogy might in some cases reflect a sincere effort to memorialise or pay tribute to the deceased, it just as often constitutes an attempt to enlist the memory of the departed into a narrative that is not their own.

[1] Shakespeare's interest in the significance of dying speeches reflects that of his age. For a discussion of the importance attached in Early Modern England to the statements made by individuals at the final moment before death, see Wunderli and Broce 1989. For explorations of that subset of this category of speeches consisting in the last words pronounced by condemned persons, see Sharpe 1985 and Dolan 1994.

[2] For studies of the functions served by epitaphs in Early Modern England, see Sherlock 2008 and Newstok 2009. Claire Bryony Williams examines how epitaphs were circulated in manuscript form in Williams 2014. For a discussion of the epitaph on Shakespeare's own tomb, see Lucking 2016. H. Austin Whitver's investigation into the ways in which the use of tombs "to construct fictive narratives to perpetuate a myth or to act as loci of moral instruction" is reflected in Shakespeare's drama is also highly relevant to the issues I am considering here (Whitver 2023, this quotation 13).

[3] All references to Shakespeare's works throughout this essay are to the single volume Oxford Shakespeare Complete Works (2006).

2.

In view of the nature of the speeches to be considered in the following discussion, a logical point of departure might be the one play by Shakespeare that begins with an actual funeral, this being the first part of *Henry VI*. The exequies being celebrated as the drama opens are for King Henry V, and involve a series of speeches glorifying the late monarch in the hyperbolic terms the occasion seems to warrant. The Duke of Gloucester's speech is a particularly fulsome exercise in celebrative eulogy:

> England ne'er had a king until his time.
> Virtue he had, deserving to command.
> His brandished sword did blind men with his beams.
> His arms spread wider than a dragon's wings.
> His sparking eyes, replete with wrathful fire,
> More dazzled and drove back his enemies
> Than midday sun, fierce bent against their faces.
> What should I say? His deeds exceed all speech.
> He ne'er lift up his hand but conquered.
> (1.1.8-16)

In this panegyric the memory of the deceased sovereign has been wholly subsumed beneath a radically idealised, and extravagantly magnified, version of what he has been in life, at the expense of anything resembling a human dimension. Since for those of his caste what Gloucester calls "virtue" consists almost exclusively in prowess on the battlefield, there is no talk in his speech about the late king's qualities as a human being, about his ability to administer a nation or ameliorate the life of his people, about his grieving family or, for that matter, about his grieving country. It is precisely for the reason that all facets of Henry's character other than those of the soldier have been effectively erased from recollection that he can be perceived in retrospect as being endowed with almost superhuman stature, justifying the myth of a warrior king "too famous to live long" (6) which is being assiduously woven by those who survive him.

During his own lifetime the monarch commemorated so effusively has gone to significant lengths to resist such manufactured fame, insisting that it is the practical exploits performed on the battlefield rather than the ephemeral reputations built on them which are truly worthy of admiration. Such an opinion is expressed for example at that point in *Henry V* when he declares that "Either our history shall with full mouth / Speak freely of our acts, or else our grave . . . shall have a tongueless mouth, / Not worshipped with a waxen epitaph" (1.2.230-3). Notwithstanding the indifference he professes for the malleable epitaphs that testify to what are, in the final

analysis, no more than provisional and perhaps even negotiable reputations, however, Henry himself is not above a little strategic myth-making when it serves his turn. This appears for instance in the aftermath of the trial at arms in which he defeats in single combat the man who has rebelled against his father's rule in the first part of *Henry IV.* While the words with which he initially confronts Hotspur on the battlefield are full of bristling hostility, no sooner has he vanquished his adversary than he delivers himself of a speech apostrophising his fallen foe in more subdued accents as "brave Percy" and "great heart" (5.4.86). The operations of the process by which the memory of the dead man is judiciously purged of those elements that do not conform to the prince's own chivalric code of honour are perfectly manifest in this speech, and they work in a manner, significantly enough, which is the reverse of that invoked by Antony in *Julius Caesar*:

> Adieu, and take thy praise with thee to heaven.
> Thy ignominy sleep with thee in the grave,
> But not remembered in thy epitaph.
> (98-100)

Harry is here voicing the hope that it will be the positive attributes of Hotspur – by which he means his courage and high-minded nobility – that will be recollected in the future, while whatever defects might have resided in his character will be consigned to the oblivion of a tomb. By extension, or so at least it might be surmised in view of his own somewhat mottled history, he is also expressing the hope that the same mechanisms of selective remembering will one day be applied to himself. What is implicit in his concern for Hotspur's posthumous reputation is a community of values which transcends the rivalry and even the mutual antagonism of those participating in that community. Harry has hunted Percy to the death, but the very intensity of that pursuit makes the two men kindred spirits and not merely enemies. This sense of kinship is reflected in the marked contrast in tone between the valedictory lines that Harry dedicates to Hotspur and the considerably less elevated eulogy he pronounces a few moments later over what appears to be the inanimate body of his former boon companion Falstaff:

> What, old acquaintance! Could not all this flesh
> Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell.
> I could have better spared a better man.
> O, I should have a heavy miss of thee,
> If I were much in love with vanity.
> Death hath not struck so fat a deer today,
> Though many dearer in this bloody fray.
> (101-7)

There is a certain amount of grudging affection in this speech, but none of the respect that has been accorded Hotspur, and the laboured punning on the words *deer* and *dear* might be regarded as being in doubtful taste under the circumstances.[4] Nor is the speech very relevant coming when it does, since for the moment at least Falstaff is still very much alive, and is in his own way as exuberantly vigorous as ever. Unabashedly craven as he is, and holding in utter contempt the chivalric code that is so detrimental to the prospects of survival for those professing it, he is merely feigning to be dead in order to avoid a fight. But if in his brief eulogy Harry has alluded to his former companion in the tones of disparagement proper to his own princely station, it is in more essentially human terms that Falstaff is recalled when he actually does expire in *Henry V.* The account of his final moments is given by the hostess of a tavern of which Falstaff was an assiduous frequenter, who naturally enough sees him from another standpoint than that of the heroic code which the newly crowned Henry has come full-heartedly to embrace:

> Nay, sure he's not in hell. He's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. A made a finer end, and went away an it had been any christom child. A parted ev'n just between twelve and one, ev'n at the turning o'th' tide – for after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his finger's end, I knew there was but one way. For his nose was as sharp as a pen, and a babbled of green fields. "How now, Sir John?" quoth I. "What, man! Be o' good cheer." So a cried out, "God, God, God", three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him a should not think of God; I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. So a bade me lay more clothes on his feet. I put my hand into the bed and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone. Then I felt to his knees, and so up'ard and up'ard, and all was as cold as any stone. (2.3.9-26)

Notwithstanding his seeming to embody all the vices that flesh is heir to, and as such having been repudiated by the fledgling king who is forging a new and socially more responsible identity for himself, Falstaff is here recalled in tones of the utmost tenderness simply as a lovable old man. That even the corpulent figure of Falstaff can be viewed in such radically disparate lights by those acquainted with him is a revealing example of the perspectivism which, as various critics have remarked, is a hallmark of Shakespeare's drama,[5] and

[4] Although, oddly enough, Antony will indulge in similar wordplay over the body of Caesar in *Julius Caesar* 3.1.205-11.

[5] Barbara Freedman refers to Shakespeare's "perspectival plays" (1991, 24), Harold Bloom applies to the playwright the epithet of "endlessly perspectivizing Shakespeare" (1999, 175), and Mustapha Fahmi speaks more generally of "perspectivism" as being "one of the most fundamental laws of the Shakespeare universe" (2010, 130). Though the terminology used is sometimes different, numerous other commentators have

which can be seen operating in the playwright's treatment of other characters under discussion here as well.

Hamlet, one of Shakespeare's most death-haunted plays, affords a number of instances of postmortem commentary which, like Harry's eulogies, reveal more about the speaker than the deceased. As early as the second scene, for example, we have Hamlet's comparison of his late father to his uncle Claudius as "So excellent a king, that was to this / Hyperion to a satyr" (1.2.139-40), assimilating the men being spoken of to mythological archetypes in order to emphasise the contrast between them and so, once again, effectively effacing the human dimension of each. Later in the play Hamlet, after having committed the blunder of murdering Polonius in an excess of homicidal zeal, adds insult to injury by gratuitously indulging in a number of contemptuous comments at the expense of his victim, deriding him as a "wretched, rash, intruding fool" (3.4.30), and later as "most still, most secret, and most grave, / Who was in life a foolish prating knave" (188-9) – judgements which may not be shared by all members of the audience. The prince's most famous speech on the subject of a dead person is of course that he pronounces as he holds in his hands the skull of the dead jester Yorick:

> Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio – a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now, how abhorred my imagination is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning? Quite chop-fallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come. Make her laugh at that. (5.1.180-90)

The skull of a man once renowned for his ready wit and infectious gaiety is thus converted into an emblem not only of human mortality but also of the futility of a life that leads ineluctably to the grave, an incongruous fate for a man who evidently took considerable pleasure in existence and was capable of making others do the same. It is left for the spectator of the play to decide whether this transformation of his skull into a symbol of existential meaninglessness in the morbid ruminations of the Danish prince is the last and only word concerning the significance of Yorick's life, or for that matter that of any other individual.

Other speeches inspired by the memory of a deceased person are to be found in *Hamlet* as well. Perhaps the most celebrated of these is Gertrude's lyrical description of Ophelia's death which, interrupting an earnest discussion between Claudius and Laertes about how they can most expeditiously

written in a similar vein.

dispatch Hamlet, interjects itself as a brief but poignant counterpoint to the brutal discourses of violence and revenge that are gathering momentum at the court of Denmark:

> There is a willow grows aslant a brook
> That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
> Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
> Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
> That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
> But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.
> There on the pendant boughs her crownet weeds
> Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
> When down the weedy trophies and herself
> Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
> And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up;
> Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,
> As one incapable of her own distress,
> Or like a creature native and endued
> Unto that element. But long it could not be
> Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
> Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
> To muddy death.
> (4.7.138-55)

The circumstances of Ophelia's death are thus evoked in a manner that would capture the imagination of poets and artists long after Shakespeare, to the extent indeed that the iconography inspired by this event rivals that associated with Hamlet himself. Even Ophelia's brother Laertes, who is by no means immune to the climate of violence prevailing in Elsinore, echoes the tenor of Gertrude's description when he bids the assembled mourners to "Lay her i'th' earth, / And from her fair and unpolluted flesh / May violets spring" (5.1.233-5). Much different in tone is Hamlet's own response when he witnesses the funeral and realises that Ophelia is dead:

> I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
> Could not, with all their quantity of love,
> Make up my sum.
> (266-8)

Hamlet's comment is clearly more focussed upon himself and the intensity of his own sentiments than upon the girl for whose death he is at least indirectly responsible. Instead of mourning the passing of Ophelia or even inquiring about the manner of her death he immediately turns his attention to Laertes, insisting that his own love exceeds that of which a brother is

capable, and provoking a pointless and unseemly quarrel over the grave before storming off in petulant fury. The suspicion is that even as a memory Ophelia scarcely exists for the prince except insofar as she can serve as a pretext for an altercation which, for whatever mysterious reason, he seems inordinately eager to precipitate. Certain it is that after this episode Hamlet has nothing whatsoever to say about the girl he professes to have loved, a disturbing silence that continues to reverberate until the end of the play.

Silence , indeed, is quite literally the last word in Hamlet's own life as well. He does not have time to make any final pronouncements after Laertes's poison begins to take effect, and his dying comment that "the rest is silence" is an appropriate concluding utterance for a man who insists at one point that the "heart of my mystery" can never be penetrated (5.2.310, 353-4). He delegates the task to Horatio to "Report me and my cause aright" (291) and to "tell my story" (301), but we cannot know what Horatio will choose to say in the event. He bids farewell to Hamlet with the words "Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince, / And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest" (312-13), but when it comes to rendering an account of the events in which his friend has become caught up he can produce nothing more illuminating than the following:

> And let me speak to th' yet unknowing world
> How these things came about. So shall you hear
> Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause;
> And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
> Fall'n on th'inventors' heads. All this can I
> Truly deliver.
> (333-40)

This is hardly fulfilling the mandate Hamlet has assigned him to tell his story. Significantly enough, it is not Hamlet's friend Horatio, but Fortinbras, the son of his father's enemy who will succeed him to the Danish throne, who pronounces the only thing resembling a genuine eulogy, and it is a very strange one:

> Let four captains
> Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,
> For he was likely, had he been put on,
> To have proved most royally; and for his passage,
> The soldier's music and the rites of war
> Speak loudly for him.
> (349-54)

In view of what we have come to learn of Hamlet's tortured personality, this must be considered an almost textbook instance of posthumous refashioning. As Harold Goddard points out, "the sarcasm of fate could go no further. Hamlet, who aspired to nobler things, is treated at death as if he were the mere image of his father: a warrior" (1960, 381). What Fortinbras would seem to be intent on doing as he prepares to ascend the throne is, as Arthur Kinney surmises might be the case, "to appropriate Hamlet to help claim authority in Denmark" (Kinney 2002, 94), representing the deceased prince as having been a worthy predecessor to himself by retrospectively reconstructing his character in the light of the martial code he himself lives by. The dark figure of the brooding scholar, those traits which have made him what Jonathan Bate describes as "an icon of consciousness" for generations of readers (1997, 278), are forgotten in the formal splendours of the military exequies that are virtually thrust upon him after his death, and since he has failed to make any dying statement on his own behalf it can only be the rites of war that will speak for him.

3.

Julius Caesar contains a number of eulogies, including what amount to being anticipatory self-eulogies. Caesar himself, though oblivious to the fate that is about to overtake him, produces a resounding testimonial to his own greatness in the final speech he pronounces before the conspirators strike him down. In keeping with his accustomed manner, it is an exercise in rather blatant self-fabrication, the speaker's intention being to project the idealised image he has of himself and reify it in rhetoric. "I could be well moved if I were as you" (3.1.56), he superciliously chides the conspirators who, seeking a pretext for the assassination they have planned, are urging him to rescind one of his own decrees, and he continues to drive home the point in terms calculated to antagonise all who hear him:

> But I am constant as the Northern Star,
> Of whose true fixed and resting quality
> There is no fellow in the firmament.
> The skies are painted with unnumbered sparks;
> They are all fire, and every one doth shine;
> But there's but one in all doth hold his place.
> So in the world: 'tis furnished well with men,
> And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive;
> Yet in the number I do know but one
> That unassailable holds on his rank,
> Unshaked of motion; and that I am he
> (58-68)

This is stirring stuff from the rhetorical point of view, and may serve to confirm Caesar in his own exalted opinion of himself, but it has little to do with reality. The irony of this speech is that only a short time before we have witnessed Caesar vacillating wildly about whether to follow through with his plan of presenting himself before the Senate (2.2.1-107), while Cassius has been snidely sedulous in recalling a number of incidents which cast a dubious light on Caesar's steadfastness earlier in the play (1.2.102-30). Caesar might be any number of remarkable things, but constant as the Northern Star he is not.

It falls to Antony to deliver the real eulogy, and it is perhaps not of a kind that Caesar would have wished for. Upon first catching sight of the mutilated remains of his friend he apostrophises him with the words "Thou are the ruins of the noblest man / That ever livèd in the tide of times" (3.1.259-60), which – given that he is not playing to an audience when he pronounces it – we can assume is an essentially unaffected tribute on his part. But other strategies of memorialisation are at work in the masterfully contrived funeral oration that follows, the delivery of which constitutes a pivotal moment not only in this play but, according to Shakespeare's reading of events at least, in the history of Rome itself. This follows on the heels of Brutus's terse and deliberately dispassionate address:

> As Caesar loved me, I weep for him. As he was fortunate, I rejoice at it. As he was valiant, I honour him. But, as he was ambitious, I slew him. There is tears for his love, joy for his fortune, honour for his valour, and death for his ambition. (3.2.24-9)

In contrast with this ostentatiously austere speech Antony's extended declamation is a *tour de force* of emotively charged rhetoric, intended less to render sincere homage to the assassinated man than to inflame the populace against those who have murdered him. Instead of rehearsing Caesar's qualities as a soldier and statesman, Antony portrays him with vivid pathos as a compassionate benefactor to his people – "When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept" (92) – caught in the snare of cruel and envious conspirators:

> You all do know this mantle. I remember
> The first time ever Caesar put it on.
> 'Twas on a summer's evening in his tent,
> That day he overcame the Nervii.
> Look, in this place ran Cassius' dagger through.
> See what a rent the envious Casca made.
> Through this the well-belovèd Brutus stabbed;
> And as he plucked his cursèd steel away,
> Mark how the blood of Caesar followed it,

As rushing out of doors to be resolved
If Brutus so unkindly knocked or no –
For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel.
Judge, O you gods, how dearly Caesar loved him!
This was the most unkindest cut of all.
For when the noble Caesar saw him stab,
Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,
Quite vanquished him. Then burst his mighty heart,
And in his mantle muffling up his face,
Even at the base of Pompey's statue,
Which all the while ran blood, great Caesar fell.
(168-87)

The conception of Caesar that emerges from this oration corresponds neither to the dead man's idea of himself nor to the conspirators' view of him, the indeterminacy of character resulting from such discrepancies accentuating the problem of epistemological relativism which, as various commentators have recognised, constitutes a central concern in this play.[6] The fact that Antony's speech "destroys the single, stable significance presumed by Brutus", as David Willbern puts it (2005, 223), demonstrates the degree to which the identity of any individual is less a property intrinsic to the self than a transient figment of the rhetorical imagination.[7]

This applies to the other characters who appear in *Julius Caesar* as well. Like the man he has assassinated, Brutus himself utters what is tantamount to being a self-eulogy as he makes preparations for his own death, one that is under the circumstances somewhat ingenuous in its attempt to snatch moral victory from the jaws of military defeat:

Countrymen,
My heart doth joy that yet in all my life

[6] In his fine analysis of the issue of interpretive subjectivity as it is explored in the play, Jeffrey Yu argues that Shakespeare "illustrates the manner in which reality is construed by the perceiver and dramatises a Caesar of signifiers, instead of grappling with an evasive signified" (2007, 104). For an earlier, but still highly relevant, treatment of Julius Caesar as "a dramatization of the impact of point of view upon one's perception of truth", see Fortin 1968, this quotation 342.

[7] Of the speeches delivered by Brutus and Antony respectively Gayle Greene remarks that "each oration creates its own Caesar, or its own illusion of Caesar. Both cannot be true, yet nothing we have seen of Caesar enables us to know which to accept" (1980, 88). In much the same vein, Millicent Bell argues that the two speeches "illustrate how a public figure is without essentiality", raising the question of whether Caesar might not be, "like all famous men, the product of the publicist's rhetoric, or the historian's or biographer's art of portraiture, as well as of his own crafting of an expedient self" (2002, 249).

> I found no man but he was true to me.
> I shall have glory by this losing day,
> More than Octavius and Mark Antony
> By this vile conquest shall attain unto.
> (5.5.33-8)

But this is no more than Brutus's own wistful and self-consolatory view of himself, an adumbration of the somewhat romanticised image he would like to see perpetuated after his death. For his own part Antony, though harbouring few doubts as to how the glory of the day's battle should be allocated, and little inclined to concede the least portion of that glory to his fallen foe, is nonetheless motivated to pronounce what appears to be an extremely generous eulogy to Brutus's memory at the end of the play:

> This was the noblest Roman of them all.
> All the conspirators save only he
> Did that they did in envy of great Caesar.
> He only in a general honest thought
> And common good to all made one of them.
> His life was gentle, and the elements
> So mixed in him that nature might stand up
> And say to all the world "This was a man".
> (67-74)

In this case as well, however, the speech is ultimately self-serving, because it models the image of the dead man along the lines of ideals which, at least for the present, Antony has a vested interest in promoting. Antony can afford to be magnanimous, because Brutus is by now no longer a menace, and his memory can be safely assimilated to the Roman orthodoxy he himself subscribes to. Brutus's motives, so pointedly difficult of access in the play itself, are radically simplified, reduced even to commonplace, as in the final analysis his personality is as well. The culminating assertion that "This was a man", resonant though it is, sounds less like a tribute to a once-living human being than something resembling a secular apotheosis.

In *Antony and Cleopatra* it is Antony's turn to die, after delivering a final speech exalting his personal history and vindicating his integrity as a Roman notwithstanding his having allied himself with an enemy of Rome and waged war against his country:

> The miserable change now at my end
> Lament nor sorrow at, but please your thoughts
> In feeding them with those my former fortunes,
> Wherein I lived the greatest prince o'th' world,
> The noblest; and do now not basely die,

> Not cowardly put off my helmet to
> My countryman; a Roman by a Roman
> Valiantly vanquished.
> (4.16.53-60)

When he boasts to Cleopatra that he is "a Roman by a Roman / Valiantly vanquished" he is apparently referring to the fact that the wound to which he is succumbing has been inflicted by himself, that he is dying in accordance with what Cleopatra will later call the "high Roman fashion" (89). What he is therefore doing is seeking to reclaim the Roman identity he has earlier abdicated in words that might be read – like Brutus's final declaration of moral victory in *Julius Caesar* – as a kind of anticipatory eulogy to the image of himself he wishes to see propagated after his death. But this is no more than special pleading on his part, because the fact is that in military terms at least it is another Roman who has vanquished Antony. This is Octavius, and it is he who, once having satisfied himself that Antony is safely dead and therefore no longer a threat, delivers a eulogy of his own, one extolling his fallen foe in extravagantly heroic terms but at the same time situating him firmly within the epic he is forging of his own life. He begins by remarking that

> The breaking of so great a thing should make
> A greater crack. The rivèd world
> Should have shook lions into civil streets,
> And citizens to their dens. The death of Antony
> Is not a single doom; in that name lay
> A moiety of the world.
> (5.1.14-19)

And he then goes on to lament the passing of the rival he has been pursuing with such predatory fervour in a manner that recalls Harry's challenge to Hotspur when he encounters him on the battlefield:

> O Antony,
> I have followed thee to this. But we do lance
> Diseases in our bodies. I must perforce
> Have shown to thee such a declining day,
> Or look on thine. We could not stall together
> In the whole world. But yet let me lament,
> With tears as sovereign as the blood of hearts,
> That thou, my brother, my competitor
> In top of all design, my mate in empire,
> Friend and companion in the front of war,
> The arm of mine own body, and the heart
> Where mine his thoughts did kindle – that our stars

Unreconciliable, should divide
Our equalness to this.[8]
(35-48)

There is of course an unmistakeable element of self-aggrandising in this, as Octavius represents Antony as being a kindred spirit as well as his only worthy adversary. To defeat so redoubtable an enemy, who is also in some sense a wayward alter ego to himself, redounds to his own credit both as a warrior and as a future emperor learning to curb the unruly impulses in his own nature. When Cleopatra comes to commemorate Antony, however, it is in wholly different terms, as she focuses her attention on aspects of her lover's character that Octavius has censured as inimical to the Roman spirit:

His legs bestrid the ocean; his reared arm
Crested the world. His voice was propertied
As all the tunèd spheres, and that to friends;
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
There was no winter in't; an autumn 'twas,
That grew the more by reaping. His delights
Were dolphin-like; they showed his back above
The element they lived in. In his livery
Walked crowns and crownets. Realms and islands were
As plates dropped from his pocket.
(5.2.81-91)

Not only does she celebrate the character of Antony in all its multiple facets, but Cleopatra seeks to shape the contours of her own postmortem reputation as well, meticulously orchestrating her suicide so as to thwart Caesar's plan to exhibit her in Rome as a trophy and so subordinate the story of her love for Antony to his self-congratulatory narrative of conquest. She bids her attendants to "Show me . . . like a queen" by decking her out in her "best attires", and envisages herself as being bound "again for Cydnus / To meet Mark Antony" (223-5), before exposing herself to the serpents that will kill her. She is sufficiently successful in this scheme of self-appropriation as to wring an admiring acknowledgment even from Octavius himself that "she looks like sleep, / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace" (340-2). But such words reflect no more than a momentary yielding on Octavius's part, for while in the concluding speech of the play he does pay reluctant homage to the story of the lovers, he does so in such a way as

[8] See Harry's words in the first part of *Henry IV*: ". . . think not, Percy, / To share with me in glory any more. / Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere, / Nor can one England brook a double reign / Of Harry Percy and the Prince of Wales" (5.4.62-6).

to make that story an adjunct to his own:

> She shall be buried by her Antony.
> No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
> A pair so famous. High events as these
> Strike those that make them, and their story is
> No less in pity than his glory which
> Brought them to be lamented.
> (552-7)

It is of course an irony of which Octavius cannot be aware as he pronounces these lines that it is himself who plays a subservient part in the story that Shakespeare has woven into the drama of Antony and Cleopatra, and that although it may be he who has the last word in the play it is not in the least the final one.

4.

Obeying the same impulse as that evinced by other Shakespearean characters to construct as positive an image of himself as possible in the final moments of his life, Othello too, belatedly recognising the folly he has fallen into under Iago's malignant influence, delivers himself of a final grandiloquent speech before killing himself. The clear intention of this speech is to present an alternative version of himself to that he knows has been formed in the minds of his auditors, employing much the same strategy of "narrative self-fashioning" that, as Stephen Greenblatt observes (1984, 234), he has used to craft his own identity earlier in the play.[9] To all intents and purposes what he is doing in his final words is dictating a eulogy to his own memory, one that he explicitly demands be committed to writing:

> I pray you, in your letters,
> When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
> Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
> Of one that loved not wisely but too well,
> Of one not easily jealous but, being wrought,
> Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
> Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
> Albeit unusèd to the melting mood,

[9] For the importance of the theme of narrative in this play, see also Bates 1994, Hardy 1997, esp. 58-63, Tsomondo 1999, Macaulay 2005, and Lucking 2020, esp. 68-73.

Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum. Set you down this
(5.2.349-60)

While T.S. Eliot is certainly right in asserting that there is an element of aesthetic self-consciousness in this speech which brings its sincerity into doubt (1964, 111), it should be clear at this point that this is a tendency common to many of the pronouncements made by Shakespeare's characters at the moment of death. What Othello's final request amounts to is a last effort to salvage his future reputation by transforming himself from a credulous victim of Iago's machinations and murderer of an innocent woman to an essentially noble individual who, having cast away the pearl he loved not wisely but too well, is now wracked by grief and remorse. What is curious is that notwithstanding the gravity and egregious foolishness of the crime he has committed there are those present at the scene who seem prepared to some extent to acquiesce in his self-evaluation. Cassio rather inconsequentially explains his suicide by saying that he was "great of heart" (371), while Lodovico shifts the onus of blame by telling Iago that "the tragic loading of this bed . . . is thy work" (373-4), thereby kindling at least a suspicion that the process of rehabilitating Othello's memory might already be underway. No more elaborate eulogy is forthcoming in the play, but the information that Lodovico will shortly return to Venice and "to the state / This heavy act with heavy heart relate" (380-1), suggests that the final verdict on the Moor's character is yet to be delivered, though the terms in which it will be formulated remain unknown.

One of the most memorable speeches inspired by the death of a personage in Shakespeare is without question that pronounced by Macbeth when he is apprised of his wife's death. What is particularly worthy of note about this dark soliloquy, however, at least from the perspective of the present discussion, is that it constitutes not so much a eulogy as such than a denial of the possibility of eulogy:

She should have died hereafter.
There would have been time for such a word.
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle.
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing.
(5.5.16-27)

Macbeth finds himself quite literally at a loss for words precisely at the moment that he has greatest need of them, as he realises not only that he is unable to formulate any kind of meaningful tribute to the memory of his wife, but that the stories in which all lives consist are ultimately barren of significance. Emptied of redeeming narrative possibilities, time itself – the dimension in which all of Macbeth's grandiose ambitions were to be fulfilled – has been reduced to being no more than a tedious concatenation of syllables terminating in silence. Notwithstanding his failure to find a word commensurate with the solemnity of the occasion, however, Macbeth is grimly resolute in his determination not to let others have the last word. As Carmine Di Biase observes, he is propelled into a final contest with Macduff "not by the threat of death but by that of being renamed by his enemy" (2001, 34), the man who is his nemesis confronting him with the intolerable prospect of being stigmatised with the epithet "tyrant" if he allows himself to be captured alive (5.10.27). He is however unsuccessful in this final attempt to escape being defined by others, and the retrospective description of him by the newly acclaimed king of Scotland as a "butcher" allied to a "fiend-like queen" (5.11.35) – words which seem scarcely adequate to define the complex characters we have come to know in the course of the play – illustrates in the most definitive way possible the manner in which the memory of the dead is inexorably subject to the imperatives of the living.

Yet, as we have seen, things can take a different turn, and there are occasions in which even enemies can be recruited into the prevailing value system once they are dead. If Macbeth is goaded into attempting a final trial at arms with Macduff because he refuses to be branded with an epithet he deems derogatory, in *Coriolanus* Martius finds himself in an analogous situation when Aufidius affronts him by addressing him slightingly as "thou boy of tears" (5.6.103). Martius's angry response is to invoke the battle in which he earned the honorary appellation by which he continues to be known in Rome and which gives the play itself its title:

"Boy"! False hound,
If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there
That, like an eagle in a dove-cote, I
Fluttered your Volscians in Corioles.
Alone I did it. "Boy"!
(113-17)

These words represent Martius's last bid to reaffirm the identity he has painstakingly constructed through his military exploits, since Aufidius and his henchmen take this taunt as a provocation to fall upon their old enemy and kill him. Surprisingly, however, and under the circumstances ironically as well, Coriolanus will in fact be remembered in very much the terms in which he has conceived himself. One of the Volscian lords commands that his body be honoured "As the most noble corpse that ever herald / Did follow to his urn" (144-5). And even Aufidius seems to undergo a sudden change of heart:

> My rage is gone,
> And I am struck with sorrow. Take him up.
> Help three o'th' chiefest soldiers; I'll be one.
> Beat thou the drum, that it speak mournfully.
> Trail your steel pikes. Though in this city he
> Hath widowed and unchilded many a one,
> Which to this hour bewail the injury,
> Yet he shall have a noble memory.
> (147-54)

Coriolanus can be mourned even by those who have held him in the greatest detestation because, once again, what is ultimately being celebrated by those obeying its canons is not the memory of any particular person but the martial ethos itself, which transcends the individual to encompass both friend and foe. This is not the case with Macbeth, however much desperate courage he has displayed in the final hours of his life. He has put himself beyond the pale of all communal values, even those founded on the mystique of soldierly valour, and the phrase "dead butcher" is the only epitaph by which he will be remembered.

One final instance of self-fashioning at the point of death remains to be mentioned here, though there are doubtless others that have no less valid a claim to consideration. In *Henry VIII*, the apt alternative title of which is *All Is True*, the former queen Katherine, cast off by Henry and foreseeing as her end approaches that the mechanisms of historical revaluation will not be favourable to her memory, announces that she is entrusting her posthumous reputation to the sole person she believes will treat it with the deference it deserves:

> After my death I wish no other herald,
> No other speaker of my living actions
> To keep mine honour from corruption
> But such an honest chronicler as Griffith.
> (4.2.69-72)

Not content with appointing her own chronicler, Katherine, like Cleopatra before her, goes still further in her effort to mould the image of herself that will be transmitted to posterity, imparting detailed instructions as to the manner in which her body should be exhibited to the public view after her death:

> When I am dead, good wench,
> Let me be used with honour. Strew me over
> With maiden flowers, that all the world may know
> I was a chaste wife to my grave. Embalm me,
> Then lay me forth. Although unqueened, yet like
> A queen and daughter to a king inter me.
> (168-73)

What she is effectively doing at this point is envisioning herself as her own effigy, displayed as an emblem of queenly virtue for all the world to admire. As Nathalie Oziol argues, Katherine "does not just choose the sort of posthumous discourse she would like people to hear; she also builds a real monument for herself in words" (2019, 23). This is an edifice that she hopes will be proof against the shifting sands of history, and that to a certain extent Shakespeare's empathic portrayal contributes to shoring up as well.

5.

"After your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live", Hamlet facetiously remarks in connection with the influence that actors can exert on public opinion (2.2.528-9). As Mark Antony intimates at the beginning of his funeral oration, however, ill reports have an unfortunate habit of outliving those they concern, and not uncommonly become inscribed in bad epitaphs as well. That one's memory might be immutably fixed in what Belarius in *Cymbeline* describes as a "sland'rous epitaph", notwithstanding whatever "fair act" may have been performed in life (3.3.52-3), is a dread evinced by numerous characters in Shakespeare. It is a fear that can only be exorcised, or at least mitigated, by the hope that the custodian of one's posthumous reputation will prove to be a sympathetic one. It is presumably with an eye to his own future reputation that Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*, believing that he is about to die by Shylock's hand, urges Bassanio to refrain from taking any further action to defend him on the grounds that that "You cannot better be employed, Bassanio, / Than to live still and write mine epitaph" (4.1.116-17). This is the aspiration overtly expressed by characters as diverse as Hamlet and Othello and Katherine, as well as implicitly conveyed by other characters who have been discussed in the foregoing pages. It is only by finding what

Katherine describes as an "honest chronicler", one willing to treat their memories with no bias other than the respect and comprehension they feel is their due, that is it possible for these personages to safeguard the dignity of their reputations in the eyes of those that come after them, and indeed to ensure that their reputations survive at all.

Yet identifying such a chronicler, one who does not have personal axes to grind or partisan interests to promote, is not a straightforward process, as the instance of Shakespeare's own assumption of a role very similar to this perhaps illustrates. In those of his sonnets dealing with that particular kind of immortality to be attained through the mediation of art, it is to himself in his capacity as poet that Shakespeare attributes the function of perpetuating the memory of the young man he is nominally addressing. A particularly noteworthy case in point is a sonnet that opens, sombrely enough, with an allusion to an epitaph that is yet to be written:

> Or I shall live your epitaph to make,
> Or you survive when I in earth am rotten.
> From hence your memory death cannot take,
> Although in me each part will be forgotten.
> Your name from hence immortal life shall have,
> Though I, once gone, to all the world must die.
> The earth can yield me but a common grave
> When you entombèd in men's eyes shall lie.
> Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
> Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read,
> And tongues to be your being shall rehearse
> When all the breathers of this world are dead.
> You still shall live – such virtue hath my pen –
> Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.
> (Sonnet 81)

Whether or not he lives long enough to write the young man's epitaph, the poet is saying, it will be his verse that supplies the monument in which the memory of his friend will be preserved for future generations, conferring upon him the closest thing that human existence affords to eternal life. From the perspective of the person who is the object of such solicitude this might seem gratifying enough, but in view of what occurs in those works by Shakespeare in which the posthumous memory of a character is enlisted into the service of exigencies other than their own it is perhaps to be wondered whether this poem too might not come with a sting in its tail. Shakespeare may have been perfectly sincere in his desire to erect a monument in words to the person he is addressing. But he must also have been aware even while penning this sonnet that the principal beneficiary

of his imaginative labours was not at all the individual ostensibly being referred to, that it is not so much the immortality of the young man he was ensuring through such confident affirmations of the eternising power of art as his own.

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Raffaella Viccei*

Tragic Actress and Human Voice. Maria Callas in *Ifigenia in Tauride* Directed by Luchino Visconti

Abstract

This article examines Maria Callas's role as Iphigenia in Christoph W. Gluck's opera *Iphigénie en Tauride* (*Iphigenia in Tauris*), which was performed at the Teatro alla Scala in 1957 as *Ifigenia in Tauride*. This eighteenth-century opera serves as a significant testament to Maria's prowess as a singer and "grande attrice", as noted by Visconti, who directed the production. The artistic collaboration between Callas and Visconti commenced with Gaspare Spontini's *La vestale* (*The Vestal Virgin*) in 1954 at the same venue and reached remarkable heights with *La traviata* (*The Fallen Woman*) in 1955-1956. Maria Callas's portrayal of Iphigenia thus marks the culmination of an extraordinary journey, prompting a reflection on several critical aspects of her legacy: her unique identity as a singer-actress and "menschliche Stimme", a phrase coined by Ingeborg Bachmann, who was profoundly moved by Callas's interpretation of Violetta; the professional, artistic, and personal relationship with Luchino Visconti, which contributed to one of the most memorable seasons in twentieth-century opera, acting, and directing, along with the theatrical insights that emerged from this collaboration; and Callas's own connection to her Greek origin and to Greek tragic myths. In exploring the life and impact of Maria Callas, it is essential to acknowledge the diverse dimensions of her legacy. The concluding section of this article discusses a poetic tribute to Callas and her collaboration with Visconti: *Hommage à Maria Callas* (*Homage to Maria Callas*) by Ingeborg Bachmann, along with Mario Martone's installation and film showcased in the exhibition *Fantasmagoria Callas* at the Teatro alla Scala in 2023-2024.

Keywords: Maria Callas; Luchino Visconti; *Iphigénie en Tauride* by Christoph W. Gluck; opera singer-actor; Ingeborg Bachmann

1. Callas: "grande attrice" and "menschliche Stimme"

On May 28, 1955, at Teatro alla Scala, Maria Callas delivered an unforgettable performance of *La traviata* (*The Fallen Woman*) under the direction of Luchino Visconti.[1] Visconti recognised the opera's potential to become

[1] Callas and Visconti's collaboration began at La Scala in 1954 with *La vestale* (*The Vestal Virgin*) by Gaspare Spontini (December 7, conductor Antonino Votto) and ended in 1957 with *Ifigenia in Tauride* (*Iphigenia in Tauris*) by Christoph Willibald

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a 'classic' and expressed this belief on both public and private occasions. In a letter dated August 13, 1956, addressed to Maria Callas's husband, Giovanni Battista Meneghini, he remarked that "*Traviata* will endure . . . and will endure because that 'certain revision' has now become an artistic fact, achieved through the art of a *grande attrice* (great actress) like Maria" (Meneghini 1981, 193, emphasis added).[2] Visconti not only regarded the 1955 production of *La traviata* as indisputable in its significance but also praised Callas's exceptional acting artistry. The opera was revived in January of the subsequent year, during which Ingeborg Bachmann attended the dress rehearsal (see Boella 2022, 51-62), remaining indifferent until

> a movement, a voice, a being, all at once, brought about this jolt within me, which can be suddenly triggered by a physical collision or a vehement understanding, a mental accomplishment. A creature was on this stage, a human. I suddenly knew: this is her, the lost one, the new Violetta . . . She was ten or more times great, in every gesture, in every step, in every movement, she was what . . . makes one think of Duse: *ecco un artista.* (Bachmann 2005, 408-11)[3]

In the article titled "Indimenticabile Callas/Unforgettable Callas", featured in the Catalogue of the exhibition *Fantasmagoria Callas* (Museo Teatrale alla Scala, 2023-24), Laura Boella reflects on the remarks made by the Austrian poet and writer in the following manner:

> On the stage, Bachmann saw Callas who was the incarnation of the artist and the creature, a body and a voice. What had appeared on the stage was not simply an extraordinary theatrical and vocal phenomenon, but the fragility of a human being who gave voice to the most profound emotions, resonated joys and pains that came from afar, from fables, but also from close by, from the desire for joy and beauty, for a rebirth that characterized the Fifties in a world that had just emerged from war and totalitarianism. On the stage of La Scala a *human voice* had resonated . . . (Boella 2023, 92)[4]

Gluck (June 1, conductor Nino Sanzogno); between 1954 and 1957 Callas performed also other operas: *La sonnambula* (*The Sleep-Walker*) by Vincenzo Bellini (March 3, 1955, conductor Leonard Bernstein), *La traviata* (*The Fallen Woman*) by Giuseppe Verdi (May 28, 1955, conductor Carlo Maria Giulini), and *Anna Bolena* (*Anne Boleyn*) by Gaetano Donizetti (April 14, 1957, conductor Gianandrea Gavazzeni). For more on this unforgettable period and the individual operas, see: Gastel Chiarelli 1981; Crespi Morbio 2019, 53-9; Bentoglio 2022, 256-63; Bentoglio 2023, 73-87; Mazzocchi forthcoming; Viccei forthcoming. Additionally, see Mazzocchi 2023.

[2] All English translations of the German, Italian, French quotations, unless otherwise stated, are mine.

[3] See Dusini 2009, 31-44.

[4] See also Boella 2022, especially 51-66. On the exhibition, see Stocchi 2023-2024.

We know what Bachmann means by 'menschliche Stimme' from an essay she wrote a few years after her striking encounter with Callas, titled "Musik und Dichtung" (1959):

> . . . this voice of a captive creature, which is not entirely capable of saying what it suffers, not entirely capable of singing what there is to measure in highs and lows. There is only this organ, without ultimate precision, without ultimate trustworthiness, with its small volume, the threshold above and below – far from being a device, a reliable instrument, a successful apparatus. But there is something unrestrained about youth in it, or the chafing of age, warmth and cold, sweetness and hardness, every virtue of the living . . . who would not suddenly realise – when it sounds again, when it sounds for him – what this is: *Eine menschliche Stimme* (a human voice). (Bachmann 1978, 62; emphasis added)

This article examines Maria Callas's role as the protagonist in Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* (*Iphigenia in Tauris*), which was performed at the Teatro alla Scala on June 1, 1957 as *Ifigenia in Tauride*. This eighteenth-century opera serves as a final testament to Callas's identity as a singer-"grande attrice" (Visconti) and a "menschliche Stimme" (Bachmann), under the direction of Luchino Visconti. The artistic partnership between Callas and Visconti at La Scala, which commenced with Gaspare Spontini's *La vestale* (*The Vestal Virgin*) in 1954 (see Viccei forthcoming) and reached a climax with *La traviata* (*The Fallen Woman*) in 1955-1956, ends with *Ifigenia*. Prior to engaging with the main topic, it is essential to offer some introductory observations on the 'singer-actress' pair. It is a well-established notion that an opera singer also embodies the role of an actor; however, this has frequently been neglected in numerous studies of the 'divina' on stage, leading to a simplification of Callas's artistry reduced to merely a lyrical voice. [5] In recent years, the exploration of Callas's acting praxis has emerged as a distinct area of study.[6] Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge another fact: Maria Callas performed in the opera theatre, that is to say, a kind of theatre requiring a specific musical use of the voice-body. Nicola Pasqualicchio has made a significant contribution to the accurate understanding of this topic in an article whose title aptly asks whether the singer is an actor:

> The fundamental theatrical challenge for the opera singer lies not merely in the ability to move, but rather in the necessity of embracing the role of an actor and developing an understanding of this responsibility. In essence, the

[5] Regarding the vocal polymorphism of Callas, see Beghelli forthcoming.

[6] See in particular Guccini 2019, 1-47, and 2020, 1-75; Bentoglio 2023. On the debated and thorny issue of opera singers-actors, see Ostwald 2005 (new edition forthcoming); Hicks 2011; Brunetti and Pasqualicchio 2015; and Viccei forthcoming.

> primary issue is not centred on the skills of mimicry and gesture, but rather on an awareness of dramaturgy. It is from this awareness that the singer can derive the comprehensive value of their vocal and gestural performance. Similar to prose actors, opera singers utilise both voice and body, as the voice and body they bring to the stage are those of the characters they embody. From the outset, both elements are inextricably linked to the role that the character plays within the drama. (2015, 23)

Ifigenia in Tauride holds significant relevance to the current discussion, particularly due to its association with the notable reforms introduced by Gluck and Ranieri de' Calzabigi which brought about "dramatic consequences of the reformed melodrama" (ibid.). The opera performer, previously referred to merely as a 'singer', also takes on the role of an 'actor' within a "musical theatre that seeks to restore the dramaturgical significance of the sung word" (ibid.). Another aspect to consider is Visconti's impact on Callas as an actress. This influence has been highlighted by some critics and scholars, while others have minimised its importance. In my view, the directorial contributions of one of the most prominent figures in twentieth-century opera direction were crucial to Callas's development as a singer-actress, particularly as this collaboration unfolded within a broader and more profound professional, artistic,[7] and personal partnership. While the inspiration provided by Visconti was undeniably significant, Callas's own journey was also deeply influenced by other directors both prior to and during her work with Visconti[8] and by other artistic experiences.

In 1951, Callas had the opportunity to engage with members of the Roman cultural circle known as Anfiparnaso, where discussions also centred around musical theatre and the art of acting. The Teatro alla Scala played a pivotal role for Maria Callas, serving as a centre for exploration and an endless reservoir of inspiration, where she experienced the most significant years of her professional career (1950-1961). Additionally, her time at the Museo Teatrale alla Scala was of great importance, as it allowed her to appreciate the painted and sculpted representations of artists such as Eleonora Duse and Giuditta Pasta, analysing their postures, gestures and expressions.[9] Finally, Callas possessed an undeniable talent for performing on stage with

[7] Visconti played a significant role in shaping Maria's artistic interests. In this regard, see Agosti 2022, 276.

[8] The scenic and musical magisterium exercised by Elvira de Hidalgo, Renato Mordo, Tullio Serafin, Margherita Wallmann, Herbert von Karajan, and Tatiana Pavlova was fundamental for Callas. For contributions from these and other directors, see Guccini 2019, 26-32, and 2020, 15-17; Bentoglio 2022, 256-63, and 2023, 10-4, 17-71, 89-93, and forthcoming.

[9] See Crespi Morbio 2007, 11-28; Guccini 2019, 21-6; and the documentary videos made available by the Media Library of the Museo Teatrale alla Scala.

both intelligence and awareness, creating a distinctive and memorable style. Visconti remarked that "Her gestures thrilled you", and expressed a blend of admiration and disbelief by asking where she learned them and concluding that they were simply her own: "Today, some famous singers try to imitate what Maria did, but they only make fools of themselves. Maria looked a certain way with her long neck, body, arms, and fingers. She can never be copied" (qtd in Ardoin and Fitzgerald 1974, 90).

In response to Visconti's question, an issue that has been echoed by numerous critics and audiences, Callas herself provided an inadvertent yet comprehensive answer in writings that serve as a theoretical overview of her identity as a singer-actress and, more broadly, the role of opera singer-actors (see Viccei forthcoming). Specifically, Callas observed:

> Even though my acting springs from the music, instinct does play a part. It must be the Greek in me that speaks, as I have done nothing outside the operatic stage. I was quite surprised when once I watched the Greek actor-producer Minotis rehearse the Greek chorus in Cherubini's *Medea* that I was appearing in. Suddenly I realized they were performing the same movements I did as Alceste a few years before. I had never seen Greek tragedy performed. When I was in Greece it was mostly during the war and I was studying singing. I did not have much time or money for anything else and yet my movements as the Greek Alceste were similar to those of the Greek chorus in *Medea*. It must be instinct. (Galatopoulos 1998, 430-1)

Callas's considerations are essential for an understanding of her work as opera actress, also regarding *Iphigenia in Tauris*. However, the insights provided by Visconti concerning the singer-actor dynamic and Callas as one are also significant. In "La Callas e la recitazione nel melodramma" (Callas and the recitation of melodrama),[10] Visconti addresses the "reform of the method of identification" and lyrical performance. He notes that this approach is "different; . . . it is an emphatic acting style, in which certain elements must be emphasised. It is directed using a method distinct from that employed in prose". He subsequently highlights Callas, stressing her extraordinary qualities:

> Certainly, there are cases such as that of Maria Callas, for example. Given that Maria Callas possesses a remarkable acting temperament in addition to her exceptional singing ability, that she possesses a profound tragic temperament, in that case, a depth of work is required, akin to that of a dramatic actor . . . It is well understood that melodrama necessitates a certain expansion of emotions, gestures, and attitudes, among other elements. With Callas, achieving this is remarkably effortless, as she is naturally inclined towards it; however, she does so with extraordinary control, finesse, and taste

[10] In D'Amico de Carvalho and Renzi 1979, 24. See Quazzolo 2020, 13-36.

> . . . This stands in stark contrast to many other singers, for whom performing an opera is often limited to a few clichéd gestures that they repeat throughout the performance. (Qtd in D'Amico de Carvalho and Renzi 1979, 24)

In conclusion, Callas and Visconti shared a profound elective affinity that positioned them ideally to express their talents. Their collaboration revealed a remarkable alignment in their artistic philosophies and a shared theatrical vision, particularly emphasising the importance of listening to the music in both directing and acting.[11] They engaged in specific preparatory practices, maintained a keen dramaturgical awareness of character, and approached character development through a physical transformation that effectively communicated psychological and emotional depth.[12]

However, it is essential to acknowledge the distinctions between Callas and Visconti, largely stemming from their differing roles in the performance and their varied educational backgrounds. In the context of *Ifigenia in Tauride*, it is noteworthy to highlight Visconti's practice of reading the libretto while also considering the original literary or theatrical texts whenever feasible (Gastel Chiarelli 1997, 28). This comparative analysis allowed him to explore the nuances between the texts, fostering a rich and eclectic imaginative framework[13] from which he could draw, while consciously avoiding superficial overlaps or hybridisations.

2. Greek Reflections in the Visconti-Callas *Ifigenia in Tauride* (Gluck – Guillard)

Ifigenia in Tauride, composed by Gluck with a libretto by Nicolas-François Guillard, draws inspiration from Euripides's tragedy and provides an opportunity to explore the distinctive qualities of Callas's performance within the context we have seen. It also invites reflection on the shared sensibilities of Callas and Visconti regarding a tragic realm that harks back to ancient Greece. This classical tragic landscape was profoundly significant

[11] For both, table rehearsals and participation in piano rehearsals were fundamental: see D'Amico de Carvalho and Renzi 1979, 87-9; Celletti et al. 1978, 19, 21-2; Crespi Morbio 2019, 16-17.

[12] Callas, speaking about her interpretation of *Lucia di Lammermoor* (conductor and director Herbert von Karajan, 1954), reveals a Stanislavskian approach. The Stanislavski method, which Callas further explored with Tatiana Pavlova, was not unfamiliar to Visconti: see Bentoglio 2023, 51, 54-7; Meldolesi 2008, 259-69; Mazzocchi 2008, 271-3. See also Stanislavski and Rumyantsev 1975.

[13] For a discussion of this imaginary, linked to Visconti's artistic vision and education, see De Grassi 2020, 127-77.

to Maria Callas, who felt a deep connection to her Greek heritage – she used to say "the Greek in me that speaks". Luchino Visconti acknowledged this connection, stating in a 1969 French television programme, the same year Callas portrayed Medea in Pier Paolo Pasolini's film, that "Maria Callas est grecque" (Maria Callas is Greek). [14] He further remarked that "[s]he possesses the essence of tragedy within her, along with the ability to convey it. I would greatly appreciate witnessing Maria Callas perform at Epidaurus in a tragedy by Euripides or Sophocles". [15] When Maria Callas took on the role of Iphigenia in June 1957, she was already familiar with the female characters of Greek tragic mythology. Earlier, she had portrayed Euridice in *L'anima del filosofo ossia Orfeo ed Euridice* (*The Soul of the Philosopher, or Orpheus and Euridice*) by Franz Joseph Haydn in 1951, under the direction of Guido Salvini, who was also a director of Greek tragedies. In 1953, she played Medea in Luigi Cherubini's homonymous opera, directed by André Barsacq (at XIV Maggio Musicale Fiorentino), and Margherita Wallmann at Teatro alla Scala. The following year, she assumed the lead role in Gluck's *Alcestis*, once again directed by Wallmann at La Scala (see Crespi Morbio 2007b, 16-7, 97-9; Bentoglio 2023, 33-5, 62-8).

In an interview with Visconti the day prior to the premiere of *Ifigenia in Tauride*,[16] he was asked whether his inspiration stemmed from the Greek world of Euripides or the modern world of Gluck. Visconti replied: "The staging was designed as if it were an eighteenth-century court performance. Within this framework, the elements of Greek tragedy serve merely as a pretext, as they have already been somewhat overlooked in Gluck's work" (1957a).[17] This artistic choice was well-received by Rossana Rossanda, who noted in her review in *Il Contemporaneo* (June 29, 1957): "It now seems positive to us, first and foremost, that he [Visconti] rejected the misunderstanding of treating the libretto as one would the Euripidean prototype: that he, in essence, criticised Gluck's classicist ideal" (D'Amico de Carvalho and Renzi 1979, II: 126, 128). When it comes to the 'Greekness' of *Iphigenia*, Visconti and Callas held markedly different perspectives. For Visconti, Gluck's *Iphigenia* was intended to evoke those *tableaux vivants* inspired by Tiepolo's frescoes

[14] See Franco Serpa, Franco Ruffini, Stefania Parigi, in Aversano and Pellegrini 2023, 255-89; Fusillo 2022. See also Katsantonis 2023.

[15] Pasolini 1969: "Maria Callas discusses her intention to participate in Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Medea* as an actress and expresses her desire to engage in cinema. Luchino Visconti praises Maria Callas for her acting abilities but believes that she should not have opted to make her debut film with Pasolini, who does not typically work with prominent actors".

[16] The opera is presented in a shortened form: two parts instead of four acts; unique scene; abridged text. See Visconti 1957a and Gastel Chiarelli 1997, 31.

[17] See also Gastel Chiarelli 1997, 30-1.

at Villa Valmarana, which Visconti had interpreted during his youth in the House of Savoy, as well as Veronese's paintings.[18]

In relation to the project envisioned by Visconti, Callas expressed incomprehension, doubts, and reservations, all stemming from one and the same origin. She believed that since Iphigenia was a figure from Greek mythology, her story was inherently tied to the Greek world. As a Greek herself, Callas felt that the portrayal of Iphigenia on stage required a 'Greek' Maria Callas,[19] embodying a tragic persona that encapsulated the *ethos* and *pathos* of Greek tragedy, complete with Grecian-style attire. It is challenging to disregard the possibility that Maria's perspective was shaped by her previous performances as Euridice, and particularly as Medea and Alcestis, during the 1950s, along with her collaboration with Salvini, who, as previously noted, directed Greek tragedies, some of which were presented in renowned venues such as the ancient theatre of Siracusa and the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza.

3. Maria Callas-Iphigenia

During the premiere of *Ifigenia in Tauride*,[20] Callas entered on stage finally fully embracing the director's guidance (D'Amico de Carvalho and Renzi 1979, 1.87). She portrayed Iphigenia as the central figure in the *tableaux vivants* designed by Visconti in the spirit of the eighteenth-century *tragédie lyrique* (Gastel Chiarelli 1997, 29-31).[21]

> Maria executed precisely what I requested of her. When the curtain rose, a tempest erupted, compelling her to dash across the stage in a frenzy. She was adorned in a magnificent gown, richly pleated with sumptuous silk brocade, complemented by an enormous train, over which she wore a striking crimson cloak. Her hair was adorned with large pearls, and her neck was graced with pearl necklaces that embraced her décolletage. At

[18] See Agosti 2022, 367-8; Bentoglio 2023, 85; Crespi Morbio 2007a, 26.

[19] Visconti in Ardoin and Fitzgerald 1974, 162: "As a matter of fact, we really didn't agree about Ifigenia . . . she didn't understand my idea at all. 'Why are you doing it like this?' she asked. 'It's a Greek story and I'm a Greek woman, so I want to look Greek onstage!' I said, 'My dear, the Greece you are talking about is too far off. This opera must look like a Tiepolo fresco come to life'. But still she fussed, wanting to look Greek".

[20] There are no video recordings of the *Ifigenia in Tauride*, but only photos. See Visconti 1957b, 1957c, 1957d, 1957e, 1957f, 1957g, 1957h.

[21] Visconti-Benois's production sparked lively discussions among the public and critics, which can be summarised by the unfavorable views of Massimo Mila and the favourable ones of Rossana Rossanda (see D'Amico de Carvalho and Renzi 1979, 2.124-34, for these and other reviews).

> one moment, she ascended a tall ladder, only to swiftly descend the steep steps, her cloak billowing wildly in the wind. Each evening, she hit the high note on the eighth step, so perfectly synchronized were the music and her movements. She resembled a circus horse, trained to perform any theatrical act she was taught. Regardless of Maria's thoughts on our Iphigenia, I believe *it was the most exquisite production we created together.* Subsequently, I staged numerous works without her in Spoleto, London, Rome, and Vienna. However, what I accomplished with Maria always stood apart, uniquely crafted solely for her. (Crespi Morbio 2007a, 26; emphasis added)[22]

The opera opened with a storm – made possible through the use of a wind machine, sound effects, and projections – that raged over a fixed scene, characterised by the imposing colonnade of the Temple of Artemis in Tauris. Maria had to match the storm with her body and a fast, tempestuous way of walking while singing "*O Dei! Propiziate il destino… La calma rinascea, ma, in fondo al mio cor*" (1957), in dialogue with the chorus of Priestesses.

On a stage that was a magnificent example of allusive art to the eighteenth-century scenographies and architectures of Bibiena and the paintings of Tiepolo, amidst lights that interacted with this scenic space and with the bodies of the performers, creating games of surprising theatricality,[23] Maria re-born from the music rising from the orchestra (conductor Nino Sanzogno) and became Iphigenia. In recalling, on another occasion (Celletti et al. 1978), the famous beginning of Gluck's opera, Visconti made other important observations about art of acting by Callas:

> She entered the stage, ascended a towering staircase that seemed almost suspended in mid-air, and then rushed down during the famous storm, making her entrance and launching into her performance. I had merely instructed her: ascend, remain in the wind, descend, and arrive at the precise moment to start singing at the front of the stage. That was all. I had not provided her with specific timings, yet Maria possesses an innate sense of timing; everything comes to her instinctively. Nevertheless, we are all aware of her myopia… I stood backstage, filled with anxiety, for witnessing her run under such conditions, adorned in a twenty-meter-long cloak and facing a fan, ascending and descending with perfect timing, and having enough breath to deliver a powerful performance upon arrival… Such feats can only be entrusted to an artist in whom one has complete confidence,

[22] It is noteworthy that Visconti's metaphor of the horse for the actor is quite frequent (for example, D'Amico de Carvalho and Renzi 1979, 1.87-9). See Agosti 2022, 82-9, 216-27.

[23] As is well known, Visconti had a formidable care for the spaces and atmospheres in which the characters acted and reacted.

> for one understands her sense of timing, her musical instinct, and her instinctual embodiment of the role of dramatic and tragic actress. (Qtd in Celletti et al. 1978, 20-1; emphasis added)

The rapid and dizzying movements of Maria-Iphigenia were interspersed with brief moments where her body was still, and her voice was enveloped in silence: this contrast can only be partially reconstructed based on a few photographs (see Visconti 1957i). These pictures, however, allow us to grasp the dramaturgical awareness with which Callas brought to life the beginning of the tragic conflict within Iphigenia's soul. Maria seemed "to want to explore and foresee in her character and in her encounter with the forces of nature her own destiny". As if "driven by the anxiety of a dream, guided by the powers of the heavens", Maria-Iphigenia then animated the contrasting motion of ascending and descending the majestic staircase in the manner remembered by Visconti. "The storm returns to the sea, rejected by her song and her magical presence; the sky and the stage clear up, but now all the shadow has gathered in her rich and assured voice and in the dream that unsettles Iphigenia" (Gastel Chiarelli 1997, 29-30): the horrific dream of blood and vengeance, in which her murdered father Agamemnon, the assassin Clytemnestra and Orestes appear; the dream that Maria-Iphigenia recalls to the Priestesses with a sense of nostalgia for the distant home, terror and melancholy.

In the captivating opening of *Ifigenia in Tauride*, Maria-Iphigenia's body was intricately linked to the eighteenth-century silk brocade costume along with a striking bright red cloak, crafted by Nicola Benois, who also designed the scenes. The attire of Iphigenia, along with her cloak, resonated with the tumultuous nature of the storm and the disquiet of the dream's memories, acting in concert with Callas. This principle extended to the other costumes, whose transformations paralleled the character's metamorphosis. The costume, which "symbolises the sacrificial victim, is embellished with gold arabesques in the initial scenes and later transitions to white, featuring a broad, radiating collar reminiscent of Cleopatra as depicted by Tiepolo in the Venetian Palazzo Labia", as noted by Cristina Gastel Chiarelli. In the second act, the costume is entirely gold, representing the royalty of Iphigenia, who has now become a priestess of the goddess Artemis in the foreign land of Tauris (Gastel Chiarelli 1997, 30).

King Thoas assigned Iphigenia the dreadful duty of sacrificing foreigners who had arrived in Tauris, a measure taken to avert the prophecy that foretold the king's demise at the hands of a stranger. Scythian warriors enter, declaring the capture of two strangers who, having weathered the storm, have just reached the shore: they are Greeks, specifically Orestes and Pylades. It is noteworthy that Iphigenia does not immediately recognise her

brother Orestes and his companion, a detail consistent with both Euripides's narrative and Guillard's libretto. The revelation must be awaited until nearly the conclusion of the opera. In the recognition scene with Orestes (Dino Dondi), which starkly contrasts the emotional tone of the opera's opening, Maria Callas again exemplified her exceptional talent as a singer-actress and showcased the qualities of the human voice. Through the utterance of the word "fratello" (brother), her embrace, and the glances exchanged with her brother (see Visconti 1957j; D'Amico de Carvalho and Renzi 1979, 2.130-1), she masterfully conveyed a complex array of emotions: the love of a sister, the joy of reunion, the sorrow of prolonged separation and the dread of the impending death of the 'stranger' Orestes.

Visconti regarded *Iphigenia in Tauris* as the most exquisite opera among the five he collaborated on with Maria Callas. Even in the face of the most unfavourable critiques, which primarily focused on the direction and set design, Maria Callas as Iphigenia triumphed. Notably, Massimo Mila's review stands out. He pondered what ultimately remained of this lacklustre Iphigenia: "There remained the voice of Callas, who sings so well and acts with such tragic nobility" (qtd in D'Amico de Carvalho and Renzi 1979, 2.126). However, he further remarked: "but we remember . . . her humanity in *La Traviata*, and we know that this excellent artist could be something more than a diva" (ibid.).

4. A Tragic Actress and the "umano mitologico"

The tragic disposition of Maria Callas was widely acknowledged. She proposed that her natural attitude for tragic performance stemmed from her Greek heritage, a notion that Visconti affirmed in his portrayal of her. Particularly in her interpretation of female tragic figures such as Iphigenia, all variously linked to ancient Greece, Callas embarked on a vibrant quest for echoes of classical antiquity to resonate on stage. This pursuit, which was never naively antiquarian, drew its strength and significance from Maria's remarkable capacity to observe and absorb insights from figures such as Visconti, subsequently reinterpreting them with exceptional creativity based on her artistic experiences and knowledge. Consequently, it is not surprising that this "complete theatrical phenomenon: musical and dramatic" (D'Amico de Carvalho and Renzi 1979, 2.358) could be described as "a thousand and one Callas" (Aversano and Pellegrini 2023) and could be likened to a range of such diverse artists as Giuditta Pasta, Maria Malibran, Ettore Petrolini, and Eleonora Duse.

> Callas belongs to that rare breed of actors, even in the realm of prose theatre, who manage to become physically different according to the character they

> embody . . . Such was Petrolini, for example; and so was Callas. I remember how much this impression struck me the first time I had the opportunity to see her again, in quick succession, in three different operas. It was in the 1954-1955 season at La Scala, the one in which Visconti did his first opera directions, all three with her. Giulia in *La Vestale*, Amina in *La Sonnambula*, and Violetta were three completely different people, in every sense, from the moment they appeared on stage.[24]

Maria Callas possessed the remarkable ability to comprehend and to feel which gestures, postures, movements, and voices were envisioned by artists of the past, such as Gluck, for their heroines, drawing upon ancient influences. She adeptly rendered these gestures, postures, movements, and voices memorable across various times and contexts, for Maria possessed the gift of crossing the arts. As a Greek woman who had journeyed across the globe, she embodied the legacy of Greece, a formidable source of tragic myths that could be revived endlessly in diverse settings. Furthermore, as a pioneer of a new artistic expression, redefining what it meant to be a singer, actress, myth, and diva. Maria Callas successfully personified "the rare, the extravagant, the exceptional".[25] Consequently, her strength is also rooted in the vast legacy she has left behind. Another exceptional director in cinema, theatre, and opera, Mario Martone has crafted a poetic evocation of Callas. A particularly moving portion of the Fantasmagoria Callas exhibition is the installation and film directed by Martone, titled *Hommage à Maria Callas* by Ingeborg Bachmann, which showcases Sonia Bergamasco in the role of Bachmann.[26] In a captivating interview conducted by Martone regarding this work, he engaged in a discussion with Mattia Palma about the exceptional qualities of Maria Callas in both her singing and acting:

> [Maria] was a great actress. It is no coincidence that Pier Paolo Pasolini also wanted her for the film on Medea. He was attracted to her from the perspective of a *umano mitologico*, if it can be called that. After all, where does myth originate if not from the human? All Greek mythology has its roots in the observation and expression of the human. In this sense, Maria Callas is a timeless force. (Qtd in Martone and Palma 2024, 59; emphasis added)

[24] Also referenced is another great musicologist, music and theatre critic, Fedele D'Amico, in Celletti et al. 1978, 18-19.

[25] Visconti in an interview from 1958, in D'Amico de Carvalho and Renzi 1979, 2.8.

[26] Martone 2023, 63-9; Martone and Palma 2024, 58-61. See also Boella 2023, 87-93.

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David Schalkwyk*

Bakhtin *vs* Shakespeare?

Abstract

This essay returns to Bakhtin's place in Shakespeare criticism in the light of his relative neglect by Shakespeareans over in the twenty-first century. It asks whether Bakhtin is correct to dismiss the theatre as insufficiently 'dialogical' and offers a critical account of his remarks on Shakespeare in the "Bakhtin on Shakespeare", published in 2014. It argues that Bakhtin's remarks on Shakespeare show his lack of a proper, historical, knowledge of the nature of Shakespeare's theatre and stagecraft, which was much closer to the carnivalesque nature of the marketplace than he understands, and that his denigration of the theatre as such stems from the "theatre with footlights" of his experience in Russia and the Soviet Union. Rather than dismiss Bakhtin, however, the essay argues that a combination of his work on carnival and his broader philosophy of language may be used productively in a new critical reading of Shakespeare. It closes with a brief example from *King John* to illustrate this argument.

Keywords: Bakhtin; Shakespeare; Weimann; Rabelais; carnival; heteroglossia; dialogism

Mikhail Bakhtin's star has waned considerably, at least in the Anglosphere, since his relatively brief appearance in the bright firmament of theory in the late-twentieth century. An even greater eclipse has occurred in relation to Bakhtin and Shakespeare. If the 1980s and 1990s saw a general interest in the Bakhtin School (including V.N. Voloshinov and P.N. Medvedev) that encompassed both linguistic philosophy and the sociology of the carnival, most American and British critics of the time focussed chiefly on the latter: on Shakespeare's relation to the topsy-turvy world of carnival inversion and bodily excess. There was much less interest in what the broader linguistic philosophy of the "Bakhtin School" could contribute to the understanding of Shakespeare.

Interest in Shakespeare's relation to folk festival and carnival has been part of critical literature since at least C.L. Barber's pioneering *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959) and especially Robert Weimann's subsequent *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition of the Theatre* (1976). But the discovery of Bakhtin in the West gave this relationship a new, more political twist. In

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Shakespeare studies, Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* (1968) was the almost exclusive point of focus, informing both specific readings of the plays, exemplified by Ronald Knowles' edited collection, *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin* (1998) and more general studies combining literature, social history and politics, like Peter Stallybrass and Alon White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986) and Michael D. Bristol's *Carnival and Theatre: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (1985).

Bakhtin's role in this exploration of the political aspects of the carnivalesque is uncontested. Stallybrass and White declare: "Undoubtedly it was the translation of Mikhail Bakhtin's monumental study of Rabelais and the carnivalesque which initially catalysed the interest of Western scholars . . . around the notion of carnival, marking it out as a site of special interest for the analysis of literature and symbolic practices", and that under Bakhtin's influence "[t]here is now [1986] a large and increasing body of writing that sees carnival not simply as a ritual feature of European culture but as a *mode of understanding*, a positivity, a cultural analytic" (Stallybrass and White 1986, 6). The "other" Bakhtin – of speech genres, heteroglossia, and chronotopes – received much less attention from Shakespeareans.[1] The only monograph devoted to Bakhtin and Voloshinov's linguistic philosophy is James Siemon's comprehensive study of *Richard II*: *Word Against Word* (2002).

General interest in the Bakhtin School continues in the twenty-first century, but in more attenuated ways: in Graham Pechey's *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Word in the World* (2007), Caryl Emerson's *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (2018), Kenneth Hirschkop's *The Cambridge Introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin* (2021) and Dick McCaw's recent *Bakhtin and Theatre: Dialogues with Stanislavski, Meyerhold and Grotowski* (2021). The impetus for this recent resurgence of interest beyond Shakespeare studies has been the publication of extensive new material from the Bakhtin *Nachlass*, which casts new light on Bakhtin's engagement with his Russian contexts and releases material not previously available:

> In 1996, the Russian Academy of Sciences began to publish the Bakhtin *Collected Works*, a properly scholarly edition of everything by Bakhtin that had already been published – the two books, the essays, the notes – and much that was new, including the contents of many of Bakhtin's notebooks. The end result was a sea change in Bakhtin scholarship. (Hirschkop 2021, 7)[2]

But this scholarly collection has also complicated Bakhtin scholarship, rendering it much more complex, difficult, and in some ways intractable, than before. This may account for both the renewed interest in Bakhtin in

[1] See Bakhtin 1982, 1984a, 198b, 1987; Voloshinov 1986.

[2] See also Bakhtin 1996-2012.

general accounts of his work and influence, and a waning interest in his relation to Shakespeare. Few Shakespeare scholars have the patience to wade through the six new volumes of the collected works, and even fewer (including this author) have the Russian that would enable them to read them. Moreover, the topic seems to have induced a certain weariness, as the sociological politics of the carnival has faded with the displacement of theory (and its attendant politics) by the seemingly infinite resources and institutionally rewarded scholarship of archival research. Essays continue to be published on Shakespeare and Bakhtin, mostly in (Eastern) Europe, and with few exceptions they continue to focus on detectable elements of carnival in his plays – chiefly in the comedies, but also in *Hamlet.* There hasn't been a monograph on Shakespeare and Bakhtin since Siemon's *Word Against Word*, published over twenty years ago, in 2002.

1. Bakhtin on Theatre

Is there anything new to say about Shakespeare and Bakhtin? The answer has two aspects. One concerns Bakhtin's notorious denigration of drama in favour of the novel – especially the Dostoevskian novel, which exemplifies Bakhtin's key concept, heteroglossia. In the Dostoevsky book (1984) Bakhtin does acknowledge Shakespeare (along with Cervantes) as a precursor of the kind of mixing of voices that he espouses as the very condition of linguistic interaction, but the concession is somewhat grudging, especially when Shakespeare is compared to Rabelais and Dostoevsky. Bakhtin insists that "carnival knows no footlights" and the sterile "statement and reaction" of drama, in his dogmatic view, cannot come close to the rich, interlinguistic dialogism of the novel. No true polyphony is possible in the theatre:

> To speak of a fully formed and deliberate polyphonic quality in Shakespeare's dramas is in our opinion simply impossible, and for the following reasons: First drama is by its very nature alien to genuine polyphony. Drama may be multi levelled but it cannot contain multiple worlds. It permits only one and not several systems of measurement.
>
> Secondly, if one can speak at all of a plurality of fully valid voices in Shakespeare then it would only apply to the entire body of his work and not to individual plays. In essence each play contains only one fully valid voice, the voice of the hero . . .
>
> Thirdly the voices in Shakespeare are not points of view on the world to the degree they are in Dostoevsky. Shakespearean characters are not ideologists in the full sense of the word. (Bakhtin 1984b, 33)

Bakhtin offers a specific and a general criticism here: of Shakespeare in particular, and of drama in general. Being a species of the genus "drama",

Shakespeare is constrained by the limitations of the genus, no matter how much his work may strive to transcend it.

The chief reason that drama cannot rise to polyphony lies in its generic structure: its DNA, as it were. In theatrical dialogue a single voice responds to another with relatively univocal intonations, without the mixing of voices and intonations that for Bakhtin is the true characteristic of heteroglossia or polyphony. In the novel, the regulatory "character" of the narrator (absent from the theatre) is able not only to control the story, comment on characters, pry into and reveal their motives and souls, but – crucially – to mix his or her voice with theirs, or others not present, in the form of free indirect discourse. This is explained most clearly in Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*:

> We're dealing here with words reacting on words. However, this phenomenon is distinctly and fundamentally different from dialogue. In dialogue, the lines of the individual participants are grammatically disconnected; they are not integrated into one unified context. Indeed, how could they be? There are no syntactic forms with which to build a unity of dialogue. If, on the other hand a dialogue is presented as embedded in an authorial context, then we have a case of direct discourse, one of the variants of the phenomenon with which we are dealing in this inquiry . . .
>
> The words and expressions, incorporated into indirect discourse with their own specificity detectable are being made strange and made strange precisely in the direction that suits the author's needs: they are particularised, their coloration is heightened, but at the same time they are made to accommodate shadings of the author's attitude – his irony, humour, and so on. (1986, 131)

Two questions: first, is it impossible for a character in a play to offer the kind of polyphony that Voloshinov and Bakhtin find exemplified in the narrator of the novel? I will argue that in Shakespeare it is not only possible but common. The second, weightier, question concerns Bakhtin's knowledge and experience of theatre, especially the early modern theatre that was Shakespeare's formative context and his development. When Bakhtin declares that "carnival knows no footlights", is he thinking only of the naturalistic, proscenium-arch, bourgeois theatre-house of the nineteenth century of his experience? Shakespeare's theatre knew no footlights. It was, at least in the large public arenas, a daylight theatre, in which common theatregoers crowded around a thrust stage in close contact with the actors, and who could, if the play displeased them, boo it off the stage altogether. Better paying classes could also display themselves on the stage in a multiple engagement in the "selfe-resembled show" of the clown (Hall 1597, qtd in Weimann 1978, 191). The house lights did not dim on passive spectators, the footlights did not illuminate actors removed from an audience untouched

by direct address and appeal, and there was no autocratic director to beat recalcitrant players into a predetermined mode of playing, as Stanislavsky notoriously did.[3]

2. Bakhtin on Carnival

In the Rabelais book, Bakhtin often invokes the medieval theatre of the marketplace, but he surprisingly seems to ignore completely (or be unaware of) the dynamic, fluid, popular stages of Shakespeare's Renaissance, which also "knew no footlights". It would help briefly to recapitulate Bakhtin's conception of carnival. It is, above all, political, focused on the dynamics of power between authoritarian imposition of control and censorship and the dispersed, dissident, forces of popular culture. These are respectively centripetal and centrifugal forces – one drawing everything towards its monolithic centre; the other celebrating a dynamic, folk-based movement intent on a literal and symbolic inversion of the imposed hierarchical dichotomies of centralising, controlling and ruling powers. These movements or structures are always in tension, if not in conflict. Their respective *domains* differ, but carnival and fair offer a dialogical space in which hierarchical relations are inverted and parodied: Bakhtin shows "how Rabelais brings the high languages of classical learning, medicine, theology and the Court into a relativizing dialogue with the low languages of the fair and the marketplace" (Stallybrass and White 1986, 60).

Carnival is the zone of what Bakhtin calls the "marketplace" where, in effect, anything can happen. But this concept of the marketplace is untouched in Bakhtin by the proto-capitalist impetus of such 'actual' areas.[4] Unpoliced by the centrifugal forces, it is a 'utopian' space in which every subversive voice can have its say, in which hierarchies can be inverted through the power of free invective, travesty and parody, and in which externally imposed decorum can be flaunted in the elevation of the "lower bodily strata". It is a festival of *laughter*:

> Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naiveté and illusion, from the single meaning the single level, from sentimentality. Laughter does not fill permit seriousness to atrophy

[3] "I was saved by the despotism of stage direction that I had learned from the methods of Kronek with the Meiningen Players. I demanded that the actors obey me, and I forced them to do so" (Stanislavski 2016, 247).

[4] For an extensive discussion of the relationship between fairs and the commercial circulation of trade and commodities, see Stallybrass and White 1986.

> and to be torn away from the one being, forever incomplete. It restores the ambivalent wholeness. Such as the function of laughter in the historical development of culture and literature. (Bakhtin 1984a, 123)

This laughter is also fearless – it faces, ridicules and overcomes the imposition of terror by "the official" – it allows people to enter a "second time", of "community, freedom, equality, and abundance" (9). It is also universal, the "laughter of all the people . . . universal in its scope . . . directed at all and everyone . . . it asserts and denies, buries and revives" (11-12). And its literary embodiment is to be found in "grotesque realism", exemplified by Rabelais:

> . . . the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the transfer to the sphere and body in their indissoluble unity . . . Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it is not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one . . . it is always conceiving. (19-21)

The space of the carnival thus subjects the place of official culture to ridicule, degradation and inversion, and crucially, opens up its enclosed, individualised, atomic body to a world of the ceaseless becoming of decay and rebirth.

Like his conception of language, Bakhtin's notion of carnival is both historically specific and timeless, located in particular spaces and beyond geography, realistically hard-headed and sentimentally nostalgic. He locates it historically in a movement from Classical Dionysian festival to medieval "marketplace" release, and then to more restrictive post-Renaissance appropriations in its re-emergence, after Rabelais, in the heteroglossia of Dostoevskian novels. Bakhtin's celebration of carnival laughter and invective attacks the realm of the *serious*: "To make an image serious means to remove its ambivalence and ambiguousness, its unresolvedness, its readiness to change its meaning, to turn itself inside out, it's mystifying carnival essence . . . to declare something stable and unchangeable" (2014, 526). Carnival knows no footlights because, in its essential lack of seriousness in Bakhtin's sense, in its unresolvedness and changeability, it cannot be split into performers and spectators. Everyone in carnival is a participant. This emphasis on egalitarian, universal participation, perhaps above anything else, is what separates the carnival from the theatre.

3. Bakhtin on Shakespeare

In 2014, one of the many texts in Bakhtin's *Nachlass* was published in an English translation in *PMLA*: his notes on Shakespeare (Bakhtin 2014). Although a version of the notes (written while Bakhtin was revising his book on Rabelais in the mid-1940s) was published in Russian in 1992 and 1996, this

is the first English version to have been made available. It therefore appeared long after the initial interest in Shakespeare and Bakhtin had waned, if not disappeared entirely. The notes are remarkable, especially considering their Rabelaisian context. First, unlike most Shakespearean work on Bakhtin, they show little interest in Shakespeare's relation to carnival; second, they focus almost entirely on the tragedies – *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, rather than the comedies and histories, where most Shakespeareans have found Bakhtinian and Rabelaisian echoes. There is only one reference to Shakespeare's material theatre, namely to the metaphorized levels of the heavens, the earthly stage, and the hell below. Bakhtin's discussion of Shakespeare is almost entirely textual, but with a symbolic sense of a cosmic rather than naturalistic theatrical space. It traces, with great acuity, the ways in which Shakespeare's figures work, through the language of his characters, to invoke issues that are central to his own sense of the contradictions and energies of the *carnivalesque*, but which do not directly deal with carnival motifs in Shakespeare.

In Bakhtin's account, Shakespeare appears on the cusp of the transition from the free medieval celebration of carnivalesque inversion exemplified by Rabelais literary representation and the Renaissance constriction and appropriation of popular festivity through, above all, its individualisation of the body:

> The Renaissance saw the body in quite a different light than the Middle Ages, in a different aspect of its life, and a different relation to the exterior nonbodily world. As conceived by these canons, the body was first of all a strictly completed, finished product. Furthermore, it was isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies. All signs of its unfinished character, of its growth and proliferation were eliminated; it's protuberances and off-shoots were removed, it's convexities (signs of new sprouts and bud smoothed out, its apertures closed). The ever unfinished nature of the body was hidden, kept secret: conception, pregnancy, childbirth, death throes, were almost never shown . . . Corporal acts were shown only when the borderlines dividing the body from the outside world were sharply defined. (Bakhtin 1984a, 29)

This is crucial. For precisely what the modern world celebrates about Shakespeare – his "invention of the human", in the form of wholly formed, individualised characters, expressing a modern "interiority" especially in the figures of Hamlet, Richard II and the poet of the sonnets – is what Bakhtin finds problematic in his work:

> The topographic coordinates of action, word, and gesture have faded and rubbed off, they wound up on the dense (impenetrable) ordinary life and abstractly historical plane that the limits and poles of the world could no longer glow through. The remaining topographic elements . . . become a

> relative and conventional unfelt form. Action, word, and gesture acquire an ordinary, pragmatic and story-line-related meaning, one that is abstractly historical (rationalistic), but the main and decisive meaning becomes the expressive one: they become the expression of the *individual* soul, its inner depths . . . now the gesture is read intensively, i.e., only in relation to one point – the speaker himself, as a more or less deep expression of his individual soul; but this point itself – the soul speaking by means of the gesture – cannot be localised in the *whole* of the world for there are no (axial) coordinates to localise it. The only direction of the gesture is to the speaker himself, but the place of the speaker himself in the *ultimate* whole of the world is not *immediately, visibly* determined by the gesture. If this ultimate whole is assumed at all, it is mediated through a complex process of thought. (Bakhtin 2014, 534)

It is worth quoting Bakhtin at length because it brings out both the outlines of his thought in general and his disappointment with Shakespeare in particular. What he favours about the dramatist is not character but image and gesture – ways in which Shakespeare's language in general taps into broader, deeper, indeed more *cosmic* dimensions than the Romantically inflected figuration of the interiority of individual character.

Bakhtin's displays an intense aversion to individuality or individual subjectivity. His idealising discussion of early folk existence extolls its essentially communal nature. He excoriates the negation of folk culture by the focus – from the seventeenth century onwards, and especially in Romanticism – on the representation and exposure of isolated consciousness, "within the limits of the individual and sealed-off progression of a single life" (1981, 200).

This is in line with his pointed lack of interest in the generally celebrated capacity of Shakespeare to body forth individual interiority.

> We should emphasise the fact that in Rabelais life has no absolutely no *individual* aspect. A human being is completely external. The known limits to a man's possible exteriority are achieved. For indeed, there is not a single instance in the entire expanse of Rabelais' huge novel where we are shown what a character is thinking, what he is experiencing, his internal dialogue. In this sense there is in Rabelais' novel no world of interiority. All that a man is finds expression in actions and in dialogue. There is nothing that cannot adequately be made public (outwardly expressed). On the contrary, all that a man is acquires its full significance only in the external expression: only externally does it become associated with authentic life experience and authentic, real time. (1984a, 168)

Bakhtin's aversion to individual interiority is also apparent in his notes on individual Shakespeare plays. He focusses entirely on the central tragedies: *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, but in none is he chiefly interested in

character, which in the plays' very titles invite focus on their protagonists. Nor is he particularly interested in a Materialist historicism. He employs a range of metaphorical antimonies to unveil the characteristics that seem to him to underlie what is noteworthy in Shakespeare: praise vs invective; basic tones vs overtones; architectural vs ornamental; cosmic vs individual. In his discussion of *Macbeth*, he claims that the any reading of the play as a representation of feudal conceptions of the state or of the criminal ambitions of a single human being would be attending merely to its "overtones". The "basic tones" of the play (its architectural structure rather than superficial ornamentation) are more "cosmic" than concerned with Macbeth himself:

> Macbeth is no criminal . . . all Macbeth's deeds are determined by the iron logic of any crowning and any power (hostile to replacement). Its constitutive movement is violence, oppression, lie, trembling, and fear of the underling and the adverse, the reciprocal fear of the ruler before the underling. This is the superjudicial crime of all power . . . Here we already have the iron logic of a crime that is *not contingent* . . . Thus, the tragedy (and crime) of all power (that is, even the most legitimate power) is revealed in the image of the usurper (the criminal ruler). (1984a, 527-8)

Bakhtin sees in *King Lear* "the ambivalent folk wisdom of saturnalia and of carnival" (529), whose images and gestures touch what is "cosmic, liminal and topographic" (528). Furthermore, he claims that "it is deeply naïve" to reduce the collapse of "the whole system of official good, truth, love friendship" in *Hamlet* to "the psychology of a man who is indecisive, eaten by reflection, or overly scrupulous" (529). Shakespeare's images always present "both poles" of a cosmic world – "hell and heaven, angels and demons, earth and sky, life and death, top and bottom . . . they are cosmic; all the elements of the world; the entire universe, are implicated in their play" (530). A major part of this implication lies in the symbolic topography of the Shakespearean theatre, where the represented places (palace, room or street) carry a double, cosmically inflected, meaning: "the action and gesture taking place in the room are at the same time taking place in a topographically understood universe, the hero keeps moving all the time between heaven and hell, between life and death, next to the grave" (532). This topographical richness is echoed in the speeches of the characters, which combine both cosmic elements of the theatrical space with "lowering" images of bodily topography that embody the carnivalesque "logic of oaths, curses, profanities, incantations, blessings" (532).

Shakespeare, then, is "a playwright of the first (but not the fore-most) deep level". He could take any plot, from any time and involving any people. He could "remake any kind of literary work, if only it was at least faintly connected to the main topographic stock of folk images" (528). First, but not fore-most. For Bakhtin, the carnivalesque in Shakespeare's plays lies in the

images and gestures of Shakespeare's "architectural" structures, including the multiple resonances of the language and its dramatic spaces.

These resonances resound 'vertically': they are contained within the text in references, upwards and downwards, to the symbolic levels of the actual building: he acknowledges both the material and symbolic levels of Shakespeare's theatre, inherited from medieval stages – of the heavens above, earth at the level of the stage, and hell and the grave below – and explicates metaphorical and literal references to those levels in the text. But he pays no attention to the horizontal relations between the actors on the stage and the surrounding audience watching and to some extent participating in that action. He ignores completely the degree to which – inherited from medieval folk theatre – there is in Shakespeare's theatre a horizontal crossing of the space between actor on the stage and audience in close proximity to the acting space, with its vertical dimensions. Robert Weimann describes this crossing of the horizontal division between spectator and actor especially acutely, in terms of the flexible representational and expressive spaces of *locus* and *platea.* The former is the space of formal representation (of nobles, royalty, and so forth), the latter the area, closer to the audience surrounding the thrust platform, where clowns, comedians, servants could not only engage directly with the audience but also solicit their support in satirical and critical comments (Bakhtin's "inventive") against those occupying the *locus.* This horizontal engagement "results from, and consummates, a theatrical process from the actor (and the citizen) to the role and the spectator and back again to the actor and the citizens in the audience, all participating in a common cultural and social activity" (1967, 223). Weimann demonstrates that "the audience's world is made part of the play and the play is brought into the world of the audience" (83):

> What is involved . . . is not the *confrontation* of the world and time of the play with that of the audience, or any serious *opposition* between representational and non-representable standards of acting, but the most intense *interplay* of both . . . In short, both *platea* and *locus* are related to the specific locations and types of action and acting, but each is meaningless without the functioning assumptions of the other. (87)

This is another form of dialogical interaction that cannot be reduced to mere "statement and response".

4. What Was the Theatre that Bakhtin Knew?

Weimann's perspective contradicts Bakhtin's sense that Shakespeare's text could not cross the footlights. Bakhtin's insistence that carnival "knows no

footlights", while assuming a footlight-like division of audience from actor in Shakespeare's theatre, prompts the question: what kind of theatre did Bakhtin know, and what did he think of it? Dick McCaw speculates that "one might wonder whether this rather quaint nineteenth-century image of theatre was how he actually conceived of the stage" (2015, 76).[5] Furthermore, what did he know of the performance conditions of Shakespeare's theatre, apart from his sense of its architectural and symbolic division of heaven above, earth on the plane of the stage, and hell below? There are very few answers to these questions (published in English at least), apart from McCaw's recent book. McCaw states that "Bakhtin maintained an academic interest in the theatre throughout his career" (2015, 65), but also that Bakhtin never specifies what he means by "drama" or "theatre", and that "his interest extends only in so far as it illuminates, positively or negatively, the nature and function of verbal creation or the novel" (66). We have seen that Bakhtin regarded the dialogue of theatre as essentially monological compared with the heteroglossia of the novel. But Graham Pechey offers a telling corrective to this prejudice by pointing out that Bakhtin's distinctions hold only if drama is "reduced to the text": "Drama is perhaps not so much monological in essence as 'monologised' by being read as 'literature' rather than as theatre" (2001, 61).

This insight is to a large extent what we have been tracing in Bakhtin's notes on Shakespeare and his theatre – the vertical integration of text and acting space, but no attention to the essence of early modern theatre: not footlights themselves (a nineteenth-century innovation that imposed a physical barrier between player and audience), but the very *absence* of a barrier between audience and actors, allowing for a two-way interaction between them – what Weimann describes as "the most intense *interplay* of both" (1967, 87). This reveals Bakhtin's own monologisation of the multiple energies of the theatre. The dynamic, liminal space in which actor and audience could comingle, in which the very carnivalesque energies of a socially multidimensional audience could engage with the multivalent space

[5] The Duvakin interviews of 1973 include an interview (March 1973) which deals with Bakhtin's experience of the theatre (Bakhtin 2019). But, disappointingly, little is said about the structure of history of dramatic art beyond anecdotal accounts of Bakhtin's thoughts and experience of the theatre in his periods of exile and his visits to St. Petersburg and Moscow. They focus on the qualities of specific actors (e.g. Sandro Moisiu) and playwrights like Meyerhold, Ibsen, and Gogol, with some interesting comments of Freud as "a discoverer, and a great discoverer" (186), but little on the nature of theatre as such. In this interview Bakhtin makes some positive remarks about specific performances, but in the course of Bakhtin's earlier, mid-1940s notes on the "architecture" of Shakespeare's plays, he dismissively contrasts Shakespeare's load-bearing structures with the mere "ornament" of modern theatre.

and energy of the stage, is reduced to the theatre of early twentieth century Russia and the Soviet Union with which Bakhtin was directly acquainted, and to the theatre of Ibsen, of which he writes:

> In the new drama, such as Ibsen's plays, the whole matter is in the ornament . . . glued to the carcass of a prop made of cardboard, devoid of any architectural complexity . . . Its emptiness and lack of accents then have to be cluttered with naturalistic decorations, props, accessories. (2014, 528)

Apart from the carboard ornaments of naturalistic plays, Bakhtin nonetheless holds that without an overarching consciousness outside the plot – the narrator able to mix languages in genuine heteroglossia – theatre cannot offer a genuine mixing of languages, intonations and accents:

> In drama there is no all-encompassing language that addresses itself dialogically to separate languages, there is no second all-encompassing plotless (nondramatic) dialogue outside that of the (nondramatic) plot . . . inside this area a dialogue is playing out between the author and his characters – not a dramatic dialogue broken up into statement and response. (1987, 266; 320)

On the face of it, this is a curious restriction. First, as the author of *Speech Genres* should have known, language is not merely a matter of "statement and response" but a huge variety of activities and performatives ("language games" for Ludwig Wittgenstein; "speech acts" for J.L. Austin) that cannot be reduced to "statements". Dramatic dialogue is comprised precisely of the multitude of speech acts and genres that Bakhtin himself discusses in "The Problem of Speech Genres" (1986).

Second, the author of *Discourse in the Novel* makes a point of insisting on the intrinsically heteroglossic nature of *all* utterances: everyone who speaks acts in an arena always already filled with other voices, intonations and evaluations that resonate with their own dialogism. That is the nature of language as utterance, as Bakhtin insists even in the Rabelais book:

> Languages are philosophies – not abstract but concrete, social philosophies, penetrated by a system of values inseparable from living practises and class struggle. This is why every object, every concept, every point of view, as well as every intonation found their place at this intersection of linguistic philosophies and was drawn into an intense ideological struggle. (1984a, 471)

If this is true, then there is no reason whatsoever why the discourses of a variety of characters in drama should not themselves be heteroglossic and not merely "dialogical" in the reduced Bakhtinian sense of drama: containing and responding to intonations and evaluations not only of other characters on the stage but also those in the society as a whole, beyond the fictions of

the theatre. True, there is no overarching narrative voice able to mix these accents in a comprehensive way, but such hegemonic control runs against the very idea of incompleteness, growth and proliferation Bakhtin celebrates as the essence of the carnivalesque.

My point is that drama (certainly Shakespearean drama) is not confined to a merely vertical set of relations within the confines of the stage: "statement and response" between characters trapped in that space. Shakespeare's theatre also acts horizontally, encompassing a whole world of heteroglossia in its utterances, and also in its very eschewal of "footlights" – in the permeable interaction between player and audience and the folk traditions that that mingling encompasses. Weimann once again offers a crucial corrective to Bakhtin's myopia:

> In Shakespeare's youth the popular actor, especially the comedian with his extemporal wit, performed not so much *for* an audience as *with* a community of spectators who provided him with inspiration, and acted, as it were, as a chorus . . . the spectator who challenged the actor has the weight of the audience behind him. (1967, 213)

He argues that this community persisted in various forms well into the development of Shakespeare's mature theatre: "in the way the fictive spectators and the actual audience merged and became a vital link between play and real life" (213) – in the flexibility of the stage, derived from earlier forms of folk theatre and festival, and especially in its flexible and interaction between *locus* and *platea.*

Following Weimann, Chris Fitter argues that the "public theatre offered a reconstituted festive community: and one intrinsically anti-authoritarian, indeed often, like carnival, exuberantly oppositional in its political emotions". Furthermore, this festive community can be discerned not through the text alone, but through attention to Shakespeare's stagecraft: "there can be no accurate assessment of the politics of Shakespearean drama without recapture of the experience designed for players in original performances: and experience in which deixis could unleash tactical surprises central to political fashioning" (Fitter 2022, 16, 31). Fitter's emphasis on Shakespeare's stagecraft is crucial: it highlights the limitations of a largely textual approach to Shakespeare's play, with little concern or knowledge of their dynamic social and political interactions with audiences.

In the opening to the first chapter of *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Stallybrass and White ask: "How does one 'think' a marketplace?"

> At once a bounded enclosure and a site of open commerce, it is both the imagined centre of an urban community and its structural interconnection with the network of goods, commodities, markets, sites of commerce and

> places of production which sustain it. A marketplace is the epitome of local identity and the unsettling of that identity by the trade and traffic of goods from elsewhere. (1986, 27)

With a few relatively minor adjustments, this might be an account of the early modern theatre: bounded and yet open, a centre of commercial exchange and creative production, and a site where "goods from elsewhere" (the imagined worlds of the plays) both affirm and unsettle local identities. The representational and spatial flexibility of the early modern English stage, informed by the theatre companies' essentially *collaborative* nature, embodied the social structures and complexities of the society and the performance traditions out of which their theatre emerged:

> As long as the Elizabethan clown continued to carry on a secularized, postcultic element of self-embodiment (what Joseph Hall called his "self-resembled show") the ago-old contradiction between ritual and *mimesis*, which lived on in the contradiction between actor and his role, survived – a survival facilitated by the Elizabethan social context. Thus, a more ancient duality was involved: the tension between imitation and expression, between representation and self-realization, rooted in miming culture since the beginning of the division of labor. This traditional form of dramatic two-dimensionality took on an added strength and realized new possibilities in the Elizabethan period, especially at a time when the national and cultural "mingle-mangle" was about to reach its climax. (Weimann 1967, 246-7)

Weimann's sense of the dynamics of the theatre and its situatedness in particular historical contexts is infinitely more informed, more historical, more able to encompass a plethora of voices and social evaluations (the "mingle-mangle") than Bakhtin's ignorant parody.

I am perhaps being too hard on Bakhtin here. My aim is not to discard him, but to clear a space within his criticism of theatre, and even his qualified appreciation of Shakespeare, in order to apply his most powerful theoretical work in the philosophy of language, on the carnival, and in his later thoughts on "speech genres" and "chronotopes", for a comprehensive application of *all* aspects of his work to Shakespeare and his theatre. His work on Rabelais, heteroglossia and speech genres work together. Carnival is a space for the dynamic dialogism of social accents, intonations and evaluations. But so is the flexible community of Shakespeare's theatre, where the languages of *locus* and *platea* mix and clash in performative speech acts or language-games that far exceed in diversity and effect mere "statement and response".

5. Bakhtin on Language

Let us return to the key aspects of the "Bakhtin School's" philosophy of language that we might use to illuminate Shakespeare's admired linguistic capacities. The first is the sense that language should be approached as "utterance" – words in use – rather than as an abstract and abstracted system, such as proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure and his structuralist followers. This is close to Wittgenstein's insistence that the meaning of a word is its use in the language, and such use always occurs through "language games" embedded in the plethora of human "forms of life" (Wittgenstein 1973). Approaching language as utterance (rather than the abstraction of mere sentences) focusses on the concrete contexts of such uses, their situatedness in human interaction, and the intonations and evaluations they carry into new contexts of use. This means that every utterance is directed towards another utterance – both responding to previous utterance and anticipating a response in return: "when the listener perceives and understands the meaning . . . of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude towards it . . . Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in some form or another. The listener becomes the speaker" (Bakhtin 1987, 68). In this most basic sense of the term, all language use is dialogical. Moreover, every utterance and its response arises out of a context that imbues it with what Bakhtin calls "intonation": "a single concrete utterance is always given in a value-and-meaning cultural context, whether it be scientific, artistic political, etc., or in the context of a situation from everyday personal life. Each separate utterance is alive and has meaning only within these contexts. There are no neutral utterances nor can there be" (Bakhtin 1990, 292). Such contextually determined dialogism will undergo further complications, but let's retain its simplest sense. If we apply this basic sense of dialogism to the theatre and the novel, respectively, a number of issues emerge.

In both genres the represented speech between characters conforms to the interactive, anticipatory and responsive nature of dialogism as such – although on the stage different actors can, through body language, intonation and pauses, find different forms of expression for such interactive relationships, or even highlight the implicit forms of dialogical response. Characters in a novel are tied completely to the reins of the narrator. Furthermore, in the theatre – especially the early modern theatre – there is a triple interaction. The audience anticipates and responds to the dialogical interaction of the characters on stage, but also to each other, in modes that are scarcely controllable and largely unpredictable. There is thus a three-way, multi-logical interaction occurring with every theatrical performance – an interaction that, moreover, changes with every performance. The audiences of Shakespeare's theatre were notoriously unruly, freely and openly

responding to the play and each other in a thousand different unrepeatable utterances, including the power to terminate a play if it disliked them. Compared to the single reader of the novel, the early modern theatre, in its multiple interactivity, its dynamism, its unpredictability and expressivity, is much closer to the actual dynamics of carnival, even as represented in a novel written by Rabelais.

There is one area in which the novel offers a degree of heteroglossia that occurs to a much lesser extent in the theatre: the free indirect discourse of the narrator. For Voloshinov and Bakhtin the novel's mixing of discourses and accents is central to their celebration of novelistic dialogism. Free indirect discourse is the stage, as it were, on which different intonations, those of the reporting and those of the reported speech, can engage in creative friction. The intonation of one can interfere with the other without being entirely obliterated, both being perceived simultaneously in the whole utterance:

> Indirect discourse hears a message differently; it actively receives and brings to bear in transmission different factors, different aspects of the message than do other patterns . . .The words and expressions, incorporated into indirect discourse with their own specificity . . . are particularised, their coloration is heightened, and at the same time they're made to accommodate shadings of the author's attitude – his irony, humour, and so on. (Voloshinov 1986, 129; 131)

There are numerous instances in the theatre (especially Shakespeare's theatre) where characters act as narrators, using quasi-indirect discourse to overlay or inform the reported utterance with their own intonation, exactly as Voloshinov describes the process in the novel.[6] This general point is in effect

[6] See Hirschkop 2023 on the presence of heteroglossia (which he ties to indexicality) in all discourse, although it's more concentrated in the novel: "Time to return to the earlier question: does this only happen in novels? Everyday life is full of ideologies and beliefs that can be mobilized in the pragmatic grasping of an utterance, and we typically encounter utterances in narrative situations with a distinctive physiognomy. But although in everyday contexts we may be aware of indexical features, they're usually something mixed in with the denotational or immediate performative work done by the utterance. Novels, by contrast, focus on indexicality in a more rigorous and thorough fashion, because the point of novels is 'the artistic representation of a language', which means the interrogation of a style's social and historical significance. Unlike scientific, moral, and other practical forms of discourse, in which reference is to objects, people and situations in the world, in novels the object of representation is language itself: they don't claim to represent the world (they are 'fictions'), but our representations of the world, given in language. Indexical relations may be suggested or created anywhere, even in the evanescent discourse of everyday life but they are established on a more lasting basis by the rigour and intensity of public, institutionalised metapragmatic discourse, which Bakhtin called 'novelistic discourse" (8). Hirschkop doesn't discuss drama, but there is no reason to suppose that drama isn't

made in “Discourse in the Novel”, in the section on “The Speaking Person in the Novel”, in Bakhtin’s general argument that, in effect, *all* discourse (beyond the novel) involves both the internalization of ideological systems expressed in particular forms of language (what he calls “authoritative discourse” (345) as “internally persuasive discourse”, together with the re-representation of the words (and thus ideological systems and evaluation) of others:

> In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else’s. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organises masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses. (Bakhtin 1981, 345-6)

The re-presentation of others’ words in our own – in mockery, reconsideration, refutation, irony, and so on, in which their intonations are overlaid with our own – is thus an absolutely central aspect of everyday speech. This is not, however, a form of dialogism, since such representation has, for Bakhtin, a pragmatic and not an artistic purpose: it is concerned primarily with the *transmission* of meaning between two people. The rhetorical representation of another’s language has a similar practical purpose: the exposure of contradiction, for example, in order to refute another’s argument. (We may point out here the highly traditional, narrow view of language as a mere means of communication [in everyday] discourse, in contrast to Wittgenstein and Austin’s demonstration of it manifold performative functions, but I will leave that for a later discussion of the place of speech genres in Bakhtin’s later work). For the moment we might restrict ourselves to the observation that if *all* discourse involves the representation and overlay of the discourses of others with a speaker’s intonation, then this will clearly be evident in discourses used between characters in the theatre. But Bakhtin has an answer: “Double-voicedness in the novel, as distinct from double-voicedness in rhetorical or other forms, always tends towards double-*languagedness* as its own outside limit. Therefore novelistic double-voicedness cannot be unfolded into logical contradictions or into purely dramatic contrasts” (1981, 356). The hybridization of double-languedness in the novel offers an image of language(s) as forms of social articulation and belief, in order to expose their multiplicity and ideological relativity. But is it not possible that speeches

concerned with either indexicality or “the artistic representation of a language”.

of characters in a play may, in addition to performing a pragmatic function within the world of play, act in exactly this "novelistic" way, detectable not only by other characters, but also by the audience? It is not only possible, but highly likely.

Voloshinov (but not Bakhtin in "Discourse in the Novel") excludes the mixing of intonation for spoken discourse, confining it entirely to the *written* word:

> [I]n that area where quasi direct discourse has become a massively used device – the area of modern prose fiction – transmission by voice of evaluative interference would be impossible. Furthermore the very kind of development quasi-direct discourse has undergone is bound up with the transposition of the larger prose genres into a silent register, i.e. for silent reading. Only this 'silencing' of prose could have made available the multileveldness and voice-defying complexity of intonational structures that are so characteristic for modern literature. (1986, 156)

Here we have the most trenchant reason for excluding the theatre from the "voice-defying complexity of intonational structures" of the modern novel. Like Harry Berger Jr, who holds that in performance the variety of intonations available through the silent reading of a play are reduced to the single choice of a particular actor, Volshinov claims a qualitative change in the intonational complexity through the historical development of the novel and its narrational dynamics compared to the monological voicing to which the theatre (and other genres) are restricted (Berger 1983). The lonely reader encountering an equally isolated author/narrator can therefore silently release and entertain a much greater degree of heteroglossic intonation than a theatrical cast interacting with two thousand actively responsive audience members.

This is a philosophical point rather than an empirical one. It is therefore not affected by my questions about the kind of theatre Bakhtin is considering when he dismisses theatre as an essentially monological genre. We may, nonetheless, ask whether the point is valid. The narrator may overlay the voices of characters with his or her own inflections, intonations and evaluations, but are these themselves open to multiple further, virtual tones in the mind of the reader? And does the narrative overlay not, in its very essence, close down such possibilities for the reported speech? Is the "voice-defying complexity" of modern genres meant for reading not actually a voice-denying narrowing of possibilities through the controlling voice of the narrator, in turn directed by the pen of the author?

However we answer these questions, it does seem that this may be a situation in which what is lost on the swings is gained on the roundabouts. The multiple dimensions of interactive dialogue both on the stage and between the stage and auditorium – flexible, unpredictable, and beyond authorial or narrative control

– is more likely to release a polyphonic and polysemic contrast and mixture of voices than the single author directing his or her written discourse at a single reader. The former is much closer to the cacophonic hurly-burly dynamics of carnival. It is only in the post-Renaissance theatre – with its footlights, its darkened auditorium, its polite bourgeois protocols and dividing proscenium stage of the "dead" theatre, so reviled by playwrights from Berthold Brecht to Jerzy Grotowsky, Anton Artaud and Peter Brook – that the stage becomes a place of mere "statement and response".

Bakhtin offers something of an answer to the acknowledged fact, indicated above, that "the text is always imprisoned in dead material of some sort" (Bakhtin 1981, 253), in his concept of the chronotope:

> But inscriptions and books in any form already lie on the boundary line between culture and nature. And the completely real-life time-space with the work resonates, where we find the inscription and the book, we find as well a real person – one who originates spoken speech as well as the inscription and the book – the real people who are hearing and reading the text… Therefore . . . the real, unitary and as yet incomplete historical world set off by a sharp and categorical boundary from the represented world of the text . . . creates the text, for all its aspects – the reality reflected in the text, the authors creating the text, and the performance of the text (if they exist) and finally the listeners or readers who could recreate and in so doing renew the text – participate equally in the creation of the represented world in the text. Out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotypes of the world represented in the work in the text. (Ibid.)

Bakhtin's chronotope is not merely the fusion of time and space represented in the text, but also that combination in the world from which the text is forged and the worlds towards which the text moves through history. The chronotope renders nugatory the intense battle between historicists and presentists that occupied so much critical debate in the late twentieth century. The form and meaning of the text is shaped out of the dialogical interaction of its represented world, the world in and from which it was represented by the author, and the worlds on each occasion of its re-representation. Bakhtin acknowledges the "performance of the text" and the "listener" as equal participants in the "creation of the represented world in the text". We may thus figure the chronotopes of a theatrical performance as a five-fold structure: 1) the textual world(s) from which the world of the text is shaped (in the *Henry IV* plays, for example), 2) the historical world of late medieval England in which they are set, 3) the early modern world of the text's production and as Shakespeare reflects and refracts it in his play, 4) the complex combination of time and space in each performance of

the play (touring the provinces, the Theatre, the Globe, the Blackfriars or at Court) in Shakespeare's time, and 5) the worlds of performance, reading and adaptations of the text subsequent to, say, 1616.

To save space, we might concentrate on just a few of the chronotopes that Bakhtin discerns in the development of the novel in his essay, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" (1981). For early modern theatre, the most significant is his discussion of the ways in which the figures of the clown and the fool in medieval folk festival and tales move into the novel:

> The masks of the clown and the fool come to the aid of the novelist. These masks are not invented: they are rooted deep in the folk. They are linked with the folk through the fool's time-honored privilege not to participate in life, and by the time-honored bluntness of the fool's language; they are linked as well with the chronotope of the public square and with the trappings of the theater . . . At last a form was found to portray the mode of existence of a man who is in life but not of it, life's perpetual spy and reflector; at last specific forms had been found to reflect private life and make it public . . . Opposed to ponderous and gloomy deception we have the rogue's cheerful deceit; opposed to greedy falsehood and hypocrisy we have the fool's unselfish simplicity and his healthy failure to understand; opposed to everything that is conventional and false, we have the clown, a synthetic form for the (parodied) exposure of others. (1981, 161-2)

It is curious that while Bakhtin briefly acknowledges Falstaff in his extensive praise of Rabelais' "tight matrix of death and laughter, with food, with drink, with sexual indecencies" (1981, 198), he denigrates the "masks" of clown and fool to mere "trappings of the theatre". He ignores the essential roles of the "rogue's cheerful deceit" (*The Winter's Tale*), the "fool's unselfish simplicity" (*Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Macbeth*) and the exposing "clown" (*Twelfth Night*, *King Lear*, *Timon of Athens*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *As You Like It*) in Shakespeare's theatre. These figures do not "come to the aid of" the dramatist as they do the novelist (161). They are an integral part his theatre via its deep roots in the tradition of folk festival, and that continuing relationship extends to the chronotope of theatrical reception, among author, player and (differentiated) audience into an indeterminate future.

6. An Example: Shakespeare's *King John*

I don't have space to demonstrate my project to recover Bakhtin for Shakespeare and his theatre, but I can offer a brief example, from Shakespeare's *King John* – not a play that has been considered especially carnivalesque, even by Shakespeareans who have discerned elements of Bakhtinian carnival in the *Henry* plays, some of the comedies, and *Hamlet* (see Knowles

1998). Here is a fairly long passage, from the opening scene, in which the character referred to as "Bastard" of "Richard Faulconbridge" reflects on his transformation, by King John, from the older, but putative bastard son of Robert Faulconbridge, to the newly knighted bastard son of King Richard the Lionheart. He has now lost, as a result of the king's action, his inheritance of land and income to the younger brother. As a knight now he outranks the younger Robert Faulconbridge: "A foot of honor better than I was, / But many a many foot of land the worse" (1.1.188-9).

The speech hovers between a droll reflection on the implications of his new social status – of what he is now free to do and say in the world, and a direct address from a *platea* position to the surrounding audience:

> Well, now can I make any Joan a lady.
> "Good den, Sir Richard!" "God-a-mercy, fellow!"
> An if his name be George, I'll call him "Peter,"
> For new-made honor doth forget men's names;
> 'Tis too respective and too sociable
> For your conversion. Now your traveler,
> He and his toothpick at my Worship's mess,
> And when my knightly stomach is sufficed,
> Why then I suck my teeth and catechize
> My pickèd man of countries: "My dear sir,"
> Thus leaning on mine elbow I begin,
> "I shall beseech you" – that is Question now,
> And then comes Answer like an absey-book:
> "O, sir," says Answer, "at your best command,
> At your employment, at your service, sir."
> "No, sir," says Question, "I, sweet sir, at yours."
> And so, ere Answer knows what Question would,
> Saving in dialogue of compliment
> And talking of the Alps and Apennines,
> The Pyrenean and the river Po,
> It draws toward supper in conclusion so.
> But this is worshipful society
> And fits the mounting spirit like myself;
> For he is but a bastard to the time
> That doth not smack of observation,
> And so am I whether I smack or no;
> And not alone in habit and device,
> Exterior form, outward accouterment,
> But from the inward motion to deliver
> Sweet, sweet, sweet poison for the age's tooth,
> Which though I will not practice to deceive,
> Yet to avoid deceit I mean to learn,

For it shall strew the footsteps of my rising.
(*King John*, 1.1.188-222)[7]

On the surface, the speech expresses the newly dubbed knight's reflection on his transformed behaviour as a member of the aristocracy – his capacity to turn any commoner ("Joan") into a lady through marriage; the new respect he will receive from those below him; his social capacity to pay no attention to the names of commoners; the new language of compliment and worldly wise travels in "worshipful society"; and his Machiavellian capacity, as a "mounting spirit", to use "outward acouterment" to achieve his political and social "rising". As such it acts as a self-revealing soliloquy of personal ambition, like Richard III or Edmund in *King Lear*.

But the speech, and especially its direct engagement with the proximate spectators, contains multiple layers of the "self-resembling show" that Weimann discerns in the stagecraft of the Shakespearean clown. The Bastard is satirising the behaviour, status and language of the nobility, its assumed social superiority, affected insouciance, and empty "habit and device", prompting the common spectators to engage *with* him in carnivalesque laughter *at* the upper classes sitting above them in the galleries. There are multiple layers here: for the actor playing the Bastard is himself a commoner, not a knight, engaging directly with fellow commoners in the pit, splitting and combining the representational *locus* of the upper stage and the margins of the *platea*; his language is similarly subject to a splitting, between real aristocratic discourse and mocking irony in a complex show of heteroglossia. The mocking tenor of the speech aligns the actor with the audience, but also places the character/actor against both the *platea* figure of King John (for example) on the stage and the real high-born spectators who could afford the gallery.

The invocation of speech patterns in his comic presentation of "Question" and "Answer" offers samples of common "speech genres" (discussed by the later Bakhtin) but also reflects on such speech genres as examples of J.L. Austin's performative speech acts: linguistic performances that, given the appropriate social and political authorising context, can change the world and human relations. The Bastard's performative transformation into a knight by King John is one such example; his sardonic reflection on his capacity to "make any Joan a lady" another. And his satirical reference to the "absey-book" suggests the arbitrary, politically haphazard nature of the power of Bakhtin's speech genres or Austin's speech acts.

This brief analysis of a single monologue by Shakespeare brings together the two traditionally separated aspects of Bakhtin's work: on the sociology of the carnival and the philosophy of language. I hope to have shown that

[7] References to *King John* are from Shakespeare 2018.

in the Bastard Shakespeare presents a figure who embodies the folk and theatrical traditions of the clown, working horizontally from the *platea* across the division between actor and audience to parody the discourse and behaviour of the upper classes. That connection with the audience works on two levels – in sympathy with the "groundlings" in close proximity to him, but also laughing with them at the more distant upper classes in the galleries. His parody works in two horizontal directions: towards the gallery, but also towards the upper-class figures embodied on the *locus* of the stage. The parody is made possible not only by his physical swagger but also by his narrator-like incorporation of the habitual language of privileged classes into his own discourse, overlaid with his own "attitude – his irony, humour" and satirical laughter (Voloshinov 1986, 131). The Bastard's language is thus both carnivalesque and an instance of heteroglossia. The two work together through the flexibility of Shakespeare's stage and its nature as an extension of the festive spirit of the marketplace.

I hope that this brief exposition of the dynamics of the Bastard's performance has demonstrated that there is a space in Bakhtin's work for the heteroglossic and performative richness of Shakespeare's stage, and that attention to its fusion of text and stagecraft shows that in some ways the interactive, communal, and multidimensional resonances of his theatre may exceed the linguistic and social power of the text on the page, confined to the enclosed consciousness of a single reader.

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Gherardo Ugolini*

Excellent Suicides. *Ajax* and *Phaedra* at the Greek Theatre of Syracuse

Abstract

For the 59th season of classical drama put on by the Syracuse National Institute of Ancient Theatre two fifth-century Attic tragedies were staged: Sophocles' *Ajax* directed by Luca Micheletti and *Hippolytos Stephanophoros* (*Hippolytus the Wreath Bearer*) directed by Paul Curran, to which was given the title of *Phaedra*. Ajax and Phaedra are two heroes of ancient myth with similar destinies. As they have (for very different reasons, however) both lost their honour, they decide to take their own lives in order to avoid public shame. In both cases the staging gives rise to singular consequences. Micheletti's interpretation of *Ajax* is a strikingly emotive one, played entirely on the character's physicality. On the other hand Curran's *Phaedra* gives precedence to the psychological dimension, not only by bringing out a personal tragedy in which she is overcome, in spite of herself, by passionate love and suicide from shame, but also the drama of Hippolytus with his inflexible moralistic and sexophobic dogma, not to mention that of Theseus who is too quick to draw conclusions and to reach irrevocable conclusions so causing his punishment, the death of his son.

Keywords: Sophocles; Euripides; *Ajax*; *Hippolytus*; National Institute of Ancient Drama; Luca Micheletti; Paul Curran

Dating from the forties of the fifth century BCE, Sophocles' *Ajax* is the source of quite a few staging problems. One example of this is met with immediately in the prologue: how can the tent of the hero of Salamis be opened so that Odysseus may see what is happening inside? Is there a change of scene, from the Achaean camp to the beach, when Ajax kills himself? These and other staging problems have been topics of discussion for ages and Luca Micheletti, the director of the latest production of the tragedy put on at the Syracuse Greek Theatre for the 59th season of classical drama of the National Institute of Ancient Theatre certainly had to face such problems. It is so generally recognised that the staging of *Ajax* is extremely problematic that in recent history the play was only put on in Syracuse three times: in 1939 directed by Franco Liberati, in a translation by Ettore Bignone, with Gino Cervi, Paolo Stoppa, Aroldo Tieri, in 1988 directed by Antonio Calenda, with Massimo Popolizio) and in 2010 directed

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by Daniele Salvo, translated by Guido Paduano, with Maurizio Donadoni and Elisabetta Pozzi).

Luca Micheletti is well-known as an actor, opera singer (baritone) and theatre director. In 2011 he won the Ubu Award for best supporting actor in Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (*Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui*) performed at the Teatro di Roma. This year's *Ajax* represents his debut at the Syracuse Greek Theatre and is also his first experience as a director of Greek tragedy.[1] As he explained in an interview for the newspaper *La Repubblica* his interpretation targets a reading of the tragedy of *Ajax* as a drama "that reveals itself little by little, almost like a thriller, in which the protagonist, as he passes through the state of madness that the goddess Athena has forced on him, makes a journey towards a new kind of awareness. "When Ajax comes to himself again he has not gone round in a circle, he does not get back to where he started. The director's question must be 'Where does Ajax come ashore when he recovers from his madness?' And the answer is 'In a land where heroes of his kind have no longer any kind of legitimacy' and in fact he is obliged to kill himself and to bring down his civilisation. The mad Ajax lives in his own world: when he returns he can only inhabit a new imaginary one – the hereafter", the director explained (Di Caro 2024).

The first interesting innovation here is the fact that Micheletti does not simply manage the staging. He also takes the part of the protagonist, a choice which – to the best of my knowledge – has no precedent in any other production by the Syracuse Greek Theatre, but which was a practice seen often in classical Athens, at least at the beginning of the greatest period of Attic tragedy. The other unusual decision is the choice of a colleague, Daniele Salvo, for the part of Odysseus. Salvo was the director of the *Ajax* of 2010

[1] *Ajax* by Sophocles, director Luca Micheletti, Italian translation Walter Lapini, scenic project Nicolas Bovey, costumes Danile Gelsi (in collaboration with Elisa Balbo), lighting Nicolas Bovey, music Giovanni Sollima, chorus master Davide Cavalli, assistant director Francesco Martucci, choreography Franrzio Angelini, Assistant stage designer Eleonora De Leo, Costume designer assistant Andrea Grisanti, Stage director Giovanni Ragusa, Assistant stage director Dario Castro, Dramaturg Francesco Morosi, cast: Luca Micheletti (Ajax), Roberto Latini (Athena and Messenger), Daniele Salvo (Odysseus), Diana Manea (Tecmessa), Tommaso Cardarelli (Teucer), Michele Nani (Menelaus), Edoardo Siravo (Agamemnon), Lidia Carew (Ate e Thanatos), Giorgio Bongiovanni, Lorenzo Grilli, Mino Manni, Francesco Martucci (coryphaei); Giovanni Accardi, Gaetano Aiello, Ottavio Cannizzaro, Pasquale Conticelli, Giovanni Dragano, Raffaele Ficiur, Gianni Giuga, Paolo Leonardi, Marcello Mancini, Marcello Zinzani (Chorus); Francesco Angelico, Christian Barraco, Cecilia Costanzo (violoncellos); Giovanni Caruso (percussion) e Giuseppina Vergine (harp). Sophocles' Ajax directed by Luca Micheletti and produced by INDA saw its first performance at the Greek Theatre of Syracuse on the 10th May 2024, with repeat performances until the 7th June 2024.

and is often present at Syracuse; in 2023 he directed Aristophanes' *Peace*. In Micheletti's staging the character of Odysseus takes on a fundamental significance in that he represents a more modern idea of heroism, unarmed and based on intelligence, shrewdness and pragmatism which is in all ways the contrary to that of Ajax. Even after the prologue Micheletti's Odysseus stays on stage, silent, for the whole time, right up until Ajax's suicide. Unseen by the others, he moves about the stage with a questioning air and observes Ajax's monologues and his catastrophic end with apparent acquiescence. None of this is in Sophocles' original play but is an excellent invention. It could be said that Micheletti and Salvo, two theatrical directors, are interpreting two characters each of whom are directors of their own worlds, Ajax of the archaic civilisation, often called in Eric Dodds' expression "the society of shame" (1951, 28-63) and Odysseus of the more modern civilisation, that of "guilt", a world in which the *logos*, the word, becomes the winning resource.

Other important aspects of the metatheatrical dimension are to be discerned at the centre of this staging. For example, in the scenography: even before the play begins the spectator can see a huge white tent stained all over with blood. This is Ajax's tent in the Achaean camp, bloodstained from the slaughter of livestock by the hand of the protagonist (Fig.1).

Fig. 1: Ajax's tent and the Chorus. Photo Centaro (AFI Siracusa)

At the beginning no animal carcasses are visible, except that of a calf with a sword stuck in its back. But during the course of the play the bloodstained tent becomes a sort of vast curtain that swells with the gusts of wind and thus little by little rises and reveals to everyone the horror it was hiding (the carcasses and entrails of cattle and sheep). It is the curtain of Ajax's conscience, the veil of his interior world. And it is also an effective way of lending scenic reality to the certainty of the incident that the Sophoclean text imagines will gradually build up as the puzzle of the various points of view (those of Odysseus, of the sailors and of Tecmessa) is put together.

Above the tent vultures are circling. They cannot be seen but their terrifying cries can be heard. From within the tent can be heard the movements of Ajax as he beats the captured animals. Athena, androgynous goddess *par excellence*, is interpreted by a male actor, Roberto Latini. She does not correspond to any traditional iconography; no helmet, shield nor spear. She is wearing poor clothes and her head is wrapped in a baggy hood until she bares it and displays to the stunned Odysseus the spectacle of the lunacy of his rival. The only thing visible of Ajax, still possessed by madness, is his head appearing from the tent face upwards.

The sailors from Salamis, who make up the Chorus, also emerge from under the bloodstained tent, as if camouflaged among the dead animals. They too are covered in animal skins. Micheletti commissioned the composer Giuseppe Sollima to prepare new original music for the stasima performed on stage by an ensemble of musicians (a trio of cellos, percussion, harp, clarinet, flute and trombone). The pieces sung by the Chorus with the scores by Sollima are definitely the most successful and convincing aspect of the production. The choreographic movements of Ajax's sailors are illuminated by a streak of light that accentuates the contrast with the otherwise shadowed stage. The themes and rhythms of the melodies underline the emotions that are linked to the story itself, alternating horror and compassion for human fragility, but also joy as the faithful sailors are convinced that their commander has given up the intention to kill himself. From this point of view Micheletti has succeeded in his aim to recreate the unity between music and poetry that is at the origin of ancient Greek tragedy.

While Ajax is talking to the sailors, to his wife Tecmessa (Diana Manea) and to the little Eurisace (interpreted by Arianna Micheletti Balbo, the director's actual eighteen-month-old daughter), a spectral figure is dancing silently and sinuously around him, clothed in a red tunic and a metal helmet. This perturbing figure is Thanatos (interpreted by the Black actor Lidia Carew) and represents the imminence of death. This case too is an interesting example of the director's inventiveness and originality, although it is not an easy one for the spectator to decipher.

After pronouncing the celebrated *Trugrede* ("Deception Speech", lines 646-92), Ajax disappears, sucked through a trapdoor. At this point the climactic suicide scene is prepared for: the bloodstained tent is hauled down completely (it is a tent but it could also suggest the idea of a sail) and suddenly in the area of the upper stage a gigantic human skeleton appears with a skull and bones. Seen from a distance it looks more like the skeleton of a dinosaur than that of a man.[2] Ajax, with Thanatos beside him, kissing and embracing him, utters his final *rhesis*, while thunderclaps rend the theatre and the monstrous black Erinyes of vengeance, invoked to fall upon his enemies (the Atreides and Odysseus) by Ajax himself, actually appear on the stage. The suicide as contemplated by Sophocles does not follow his script, that is Ajax does not fall sideways upon the sword that he has fixed in the ground, but it is Thanatos who follows him as he disappears behind the skeleton.[3]

It is common knowledge that *Ajax* falls into two clearly distinguishable parts and that it is the hero's death that constitutes the dividing line. The element that bestows unity to the tragedy as a whole and that various scholars have classified under the apposite label "diptych structure" (see Waldock 1951, 50-67 and Webster 1936, 102-3) is Ajax's body which looms over everything from its position centre-stage for the whole of the second part of the play. It is around the hero's corpse that the dispute between Teucer and the Atreides for the burial takes place. It should be said, then, that in the case of the Syracuse staging, while the first part, with Micheletti as star-performer in the role of Ajax and in addition Sollima's music, was in our opinion a complete success, the second part did not seem nearly as convincing. The dispute over Ajax's body is the crucial moment in the action of Sophocles' play. It is the most innovative and most prolific in references to the current historical and political issues (the prohibition of burial for example directly recalls *Antigone*, performed a very few years after *Ajax*). Sophocles makes the Atreides speak the language of Athenian democracy, while Teucer defends the logic of divine law that imposed the burial of family members even if they had been accused of treachery (see Ugolini 1995).

In Micheletti's version, this bitter confrontation, full of tensions and insinuations, almost disappears, its protagonists reduced to mere caricatures.

[2] In a lyric composition written between 1994 and 1995, entitled *Ajax zum Beispiel* (*Ajax, for instance*), the German poet and playwright Heiner Müller employs the image of a dinosaur in order to emphasise the archaic nature of Ajax when compared with modern times, an archaicity that is a counterpart to that of the author when contrasted to the new Germany of the era following reunification - all consumerism and profit. Perhaps Micheletti and the scenographer Nicolas Bovey had this literary reference in mind.

[3] The theme of Ajax's suicide and of its realisation on stage is amply debated. See the contributions in the miscellaneous volume edited by Most and Ozbelk 2015.

Teucer (Tommaso Cardarelli) acts in a way that seems artificial and hysterical and he never takes on the semblance of a hero. Menelaus (Michele Nani) alternates between the authoritarian and the ridiculous – a figure whose awkwardness seems caused by the fact that he is under Agamemnon's thumb as he mechanically repeats his older brother's words as if they were slogans. Agamemnon himself (Edoardo Siravo) is a *miles gloriosus* an arrogant braggart, but fundamentally grotesque rather than inspiring fear (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Agamemnon (Edoardo Siravo) and Menelaus (Michele Nani).
Photo Centaro (AFI Siracusa)

In the end it is the flexible and pragmatic logic of Odysseus that has the best of it. He comes on stage bearing the shining gilded arms of Achilles that had been assigned to him after the death of the great Pelides and that had triggered Ajax's overwhelming wrath. This last is a well-thought-out masterstroke that causes the audience to applaud. After the exit of the two Atreides the celebration of the funeral rites could have been expected as Teucer's last speeches suggested or at least a sign that something similar would happen, but the director preferred to avoid this issue.

It only remains to say that besides its debt to Sollima's music the success of this *Ajax* owes a great deal to Walter Lapini's excellent translation with its balance between precise lexical choices and understanding of what is helpful both for ease of acting and for public comprehension. But it is above all Micheletti's physicality both as director and as interpreter of the hero of

Salamis that guarantees the quality of the performance. "At the centre of the discourse stands the *body* of the hero", writes Micheletti,

> and its exploration, dehumanisation, destruction and reinvention are prefigured by the butchering of the cattle, the dismembering of the animals mistaken for his enemies by Ajax when he is raving mad and he will end up by identifying with his very victims when he butchers himself with Hector's sword. His body is the metaphorical place around which the tragic fact spends itself. First there is his suicide, symbolising the definitive farewell to the epoch of archaic heroism. Then the diatribe about his burial . . . Ajax's huge body, by now become the ancient vestige of a world without lifeblood, a skeleton of time past, not made an object of veneration but desecrated by the lack of ritual, exists as a zone for dialectic conflict, a place for debate, the scenography for the theatre of a new regime, an enormous touchstone to confront and from which to distance oneself. (2024, 15-16)

The second tragedy of the 2024 season at the Syracuse festival was *Hippolytos Stephanophoros* (*Hippolytus the Wreath Bearer*), directed by Paul Curran and presented with the title of *Phaedra*.[4] This is not a new choice for the National Institute of Ancient Drama (the same thing happened in 2010). The more than legitimate justification for this decision is that ancient sources were already using the title *Phaedra* for Euripides' play, just as a lost tragedy by Sophocles had the same title as did a successive one

[4] *Phaedra (Hippolytus Stephanophoros*) by Euripides, Director Paul Curran, Italian translation Nicola Crocetti, Dramaturg Francesco Morosi, scenic project Gary McCann, costumes Gary McCann, Opening chorus music: Matthew Barnes, Music from the performance: Ernani Maletta, Lights Nicolas Bovey, Video design: Leandro Summo, assistant director Michele Dell'Utri, Chorus director: Francesca Della Monica, Chorus leader: Elena Polic Greco. Cast: Ilaria Genatiempo (Aphrodite), Riccardo Livermore (Hippolytus), Sergio Mancinelli (Servant), Gaia Aprea (Nurse), Alessandra Salamida (Phaedra), Alessandro Albertin (Theseus), Marcello Gravina (Messenger), Giovanna Di Rauso (Artemis), Simonetta Cartia, Giada Lorusso, Elena Polic Greco, Maria Grazia Solano (corypheas), Valentina Corrao, Aurora Miriam Scala, Maddalena Serratore, Giulia Valentin, Alba Sofia Vella (Trezene women's chorus), Caterina Alinari, Allegra Azzurro, Andrea Bassoli, Claudia Bellia, Carla Bongiovanni, Clara Borghesi, Davide Carella, Carlotta Ceci, Federica Clementi, Alessandra Cosentino, Sara De Lauretis, Ludovica Garofani, Enrica Graziano, Gemma Lapi, Zoe Laudani, Salvatore Mancuso, Carlo Marrubini Bouland, Arianna Martinelli, Riccardo Massone, Linda Morando, Giuseppe Oricchio, Davide Pandalone, Carloandrea Pecori Donizetti, Alice Pennino, Francesco Ruggiero, Daniele Sardelli, Flavio Tomasello, Elisa Zucchetti (chorus). Euripides' *Phaedra* directed by Paul Curran and produced by INDA, saw its first performance at the Greek Theatre of Syracuse on the 11 May 2024, with repeat performances until 28 June 2024. There were further performances at the Teatro Grande of Pompeii (11, 12, and 13 July 2024) and at the Roman Theatre in Verona (11 and 12 September 2024).

by Seneca.[5] The previous staging at Syracuse in 2010 directed by Carmelo Rifici was based on the translation by Edoardo Sanguineti and included in its cast Maurizio Donadoni as Theseus, Massimo Nicolini as Hippolytus and Elisabetta Pozzi as Phaedra.[6] This year, for the 59th season of INDA the play was directed by the Scottish lyric opera specialist Paul Curran, former artistic director of the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet and creative consultant of the Central City Opera of Denver in Colorado. The fluent and accurate translation is by the distinguished philologist and translator Nicola Crocetti, also recognised as promotor of the journal *Poesia* and of the eponymous publisher (Crocetti editore), well-known for its interest in modern and contemporary Greek literary texts. The director was joined in tandem as dramaturg by Francesco Morosi, a young scholar of ancient theatre and translator of dramatic texts and by Gary McCann as scenographer and costume designer.

The result of this has been a compelling and impressive performance, which underscores with music and scenographical expedients not only Phaedra's personal drama, overwhelmed by as she is by erotic passion and shameful suicide, but also that of Hippolytus, inflexible in his moralistic and sexophobic dogma, cursed and rejected from his father's house, and ultimately that of Theseus himself, too hasty in reaching conclusions and in making irrevocable decisions and thus punished for this by his son's death.

The vast scenic space of the Syracuse Greek Theatre displays in the background a construction of metal scaffolding with wooden ladders and walkways. An authentic-looking building site complete with tube frames: this must be the royal palace of Troezen. the place where Euripides sets his tragedy, stately residence which seems either a bit dilapidated, still under construction or perhaps already in decline. At the centre looms the outline of a human figure, a huge white female head, six metres high, enveloped in a wrapping. There could be an invitation here to read this as an allusion to *Hippolytus Veiled*, which Euripides presented at the Great Dionysia a few years before the *Hippolytus the Wreath Bearer* but it was soundly defeated for its indecorous contents. When the veil is dropped the faces of Aphrodite and Phaedra are alternately projected upon the head. Later on in the play it will be discovered that this cumbersome head, hanging over the actors and the spectators for the whole course of the action and upon which will be projected images of fire and water to represent figuratively

[5] Not to mention the fact that all the modern rewrites and adaptations from Racine to D'Annunzio and even to Sarah Kane resort to the name Phaedra in their titles.

[6] This year's representation is the fifth staging at the Greek Theatre at Syracuse of *Hippolytos Stephanophoros* after those of 1936, 1956, 1970 and 2010.

the emotions of the moment, is the head of Artemis, the goddess of the hunt to whom the young Hippolytus and his followers are devoted.

After all, the tragedy is played out along the opposition of two divinities in competition with one another. And this confrontation, between Artemis and Aphrodite, this struggle for power will involve the destinies of the human beings who are at the mercy of their caprice. Aphrodite (interpreted by Ilaria Genatiempo) opens the play by arriving on the scene by way of the steps, instead of speaking from a raised podium (*theologeion*) as was habitual in an ancient theatre. The goddess of love is decked out in a gown with a glittering golden bodice and an ivory coloured skirt with a long train. She has a gold crown on her head and is wearing stiletto heels. Clearly the sensuality and elegance of the costume and of the actor who is wearing it help to emphasise the power of this vengeful goddess who right from her opening lines describes to the audience the prequel and the ending of the story. This is a provocative, shameless Aphrodite. Her composed and well-timed interpretation is commendable. This is exactly how an offended deity would plan her revenge: with ruthless disdain ("I give precedence to those who revere my power. I throw down those who think themselves too high for me," she threatens at the beginning of her speech in the Prologue).[7]

The up-and coming young actor Riccardo Livermore, seen last summer at Syracuse playing the role of Pedagogue in Federico Tiezzi's *Medea*, gives life and lightness to a high-spirited, bold and flamboyant Hippolytus. He comes on stage dressed in white trousers and a silver shirt shining with sequins and open to show off his hairy chest. This masculinity, emphasised by his costume, aims at being completely asexual, dedicated solely to the ritual and cult of the goddess Artemis, to the practices of the hunt and the contests of horse-racing. His retinue is made up of frenzied young men wearing wreaths of ivy on their heads and brandishing branches of the same plant who give themselves over to wild, unrestrained dancing. Rather in the style of hippies of the 'Sixties of the last century, or devotees of *Hara Krishna*, or perhaps initiates of Bacchic rituals, they writhe and flail about as they listen to impetuous, chaotic melodies (composed for the occasion by Matthew Barnes). The paradigms of reference to modern times are more than permissible as they usefully make the text topically relevant. In the context of what is happening onstage the fact that a member of the chorus clicks a smartphone to put on the music is simply by the way. The only thing that could be said is that perhaps these particular kinds of allusions are a little inappropriate when referred to someone like Hippolytus who, in the name of Artemis, preaches the values of chastity and moralism.

[7] Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 5-6, in Hilary J. Deighton's 2019 translation. All English quotations from the play refer to this translation.

Alessandra Salamida plays a subdued and tormented Phaedra, psychologically destroyed by shame for a love that she herself knows is socially and morally unacceptable, and by the fear of its discovery. The idea behind this is to make of her a modern woman, suffering from depression and devoured by guilt towards her husband and children. Any attempt to suffocate her passion in silence and in secrecy is completely useless. Phaedra does not know that it is Aphrodite who has struck her down, that Eros is an overwhelmingly invincible force. When erotic passion manifests itself for her it reveals itself as traumatic, as something that causes her unbearable pain. Love becomes a self-destructive journey that will of course lead her to suicide. Beside her the Nurse (Fig. 3) tries to console her, clutching her hands, pulling her into her arms, supplicating her, calling her "child", "my baby" (an excellent solution for the Greek vocative παῖ).

Gaia Aprea is very good as the elderly nurse, devoted and malicious, whose voice is at one moment aggressive and at the next dripping with honey, and who, in the end, manages to wrest her mistress' secret from her. And when Hippolytus, scandalised when he is told of Phaedra's immoral passion for him, bursts out with his famous monologue against women ("Oh Zeus, why did you set down women, a deceitful evil to mankind, in the light of the sun?", 617-18), the inevitable applause breaks out, at first hesitant and then more and

Fig. 3: Phaedra (Alessandra Salamida) and the Nurse (Gaia Aprea).
Photo Ballarino (AFI Siracusa)

more decided. The Syracuse public is sufficiently *à la page* to understand that these misogynistic lines do not constitute the play's message but the venting of Hippolytus' devastation.

The action takes off with Theseus' entrance on stage. He is wearing a blue tunic that confers regal authority upon him. Alessandro Albertin, already greatly admired for his interpretation of the title role in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* performed in Syracuse in 2023, reveals himself to be the star performer of the second part of the tragedy. His interpretation gives maximum definition to the chain of disasters that have befallen him: his wife Phaedra's suicide, the curse hurled against his son, Hippolytus, unjustly accused of having abused his stepmother, and finally the death of this son, whose innocence he recognises too late. The end of *Hippolytus the Wreath Bearer* is a tragedy within the tragedy, an aspect of the play that Paul Curran has realised perfectly. That Theseus' retinue is made up of men dressed in yellow uniforms, reflectors and helmets with head torches, as if they were civil protection agents or firemen, made some among the audience turn up their noses but in point of fact the anachronism does no harm. The most pathetic moment of the production is the display of Phaedra's body, carried on a stretcher from the Emergency Room: as the music and singing of funeral laments arise Theseus' desperate "Nooooo!" freezes the blood (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Theseus (Alessandro Abertin) in front of the body of the dead Phaedra. Photo Ballarino (AFI Siracusa)

The dying Hippolytus, wounded in an accident with his chariot, is also brought on stage on a stretcher. Theseus overcomes his harshness and is able to say fare well to his son with rediscovered affection. The father-son relationship takes on Freudian characteristics without having to alter a single word of Euripides' dialogue but using the character's gestures and style of delivery. There is absolutely no communication between the two of them: it is a love/hate relationship. The last sequence of the action shows the old king of Attica holding in his arms the body of his son, victim of his father's curse. The underlying model of Michelangelo's Pietà, however much it has been overused, seems, in this context, to be the only one possible and charges the finale with emotion. But there is still space for the apparition of Artemis (Giovanna Di Rauso), in a long classic peplum, with a helmet, collar and bracelets all in dark red. The goddess comes out of the huge totemic head that has been on stage the for the whole play and that suddenly opens. It is her task to explain, in a steady voice, the truth of all that has happened, that is, Aphrodite's punishment of Hippolytus, and the punishment of Theseus for having made a serious mistake: that of condemning his son, who had been wrongly accused by Phaedra of sexually abusing her, basing his condemnation simply on emotion without making sure of the truth of what had happened.

In a key passage of the play, when Phaedra, between embarrassment and reticence, finally reveals her feelings for Hippolytus to her Nurse, she asks the old woman "What is it when people say they love?" (347) as she seeks help to try to define the turmoil she feels in her heart. The director, Paul Curran, starts right from this question and makes it the crucial point of the tragedy. His answer can be read in the programme and has throws light on the design of the action:

> In *Hippolytus*, love is not the radiant, clear, limpid sentiment, deliberately purified of every physical element, that a sexophobic culture has imposed on us through the ages. In Euripides' tragedy, Eros is carnal desire, obsession, ruin. Aphrodite, the goddess who sets off the action and whose triumph is celebrated at the end, is the life-force from which every earthly thing is born. It is not transgression but the very foundation of the cosmos of human society. And Eros is its terrible, omnipotent agent. (2024, 13)

From this premise, Curran's staging becomes a perturbing investigation into the uncontrollable ambiguities and consequences of erotic love, between desire and negation, freedom and constraint. The two contradictory erotic impulses, passion and repression, are embodied in the two warring goddesses, Aphrodite and Artemis.

Among the most successful features of the production should be mentioned the intriguing play with the colours of the costumes carried out

by Gary McCann, the scenographer and costume designer. The colour palette alternates the grey of the background (the crumbling palace), the gleaming white and gold of Aphrodite, as a symbol of her anxiety for implacable and voluptuous revenge, the yellow of Phaedra's tunic, the colour of passionate frenzy accompanied by a sense of shame and remorse, the black gown of the Nurse, elderly confidante who instead of acting as protection ends up by determining deathly ruin, the dark blue of Theseus, sign of regal authority and also of preannounced catastrophe, the red of Artemis, to signal the triumph of the goddess who *ex machina* explains to the mourning Theseus her reasons and the sins he has committed.

Translated by Susan Payne

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Peter Eckersall*

Monica Cristini, *La MaMa Experimental Theatre – A Lasting Bridge Between Cultures*[1]

Abstract

This review essay discusses the monograph *La MaMa Experimental Theatre – A Lasting Bridge Between Cultures* (Routledge 2024) written by Monica Cristini. This book gives an account of the early days of La MaMa Theatre in New York and the dialogue with avant-garde theatres in Europe that was forged in an era spanning 1961-1975. La MaMa founder Ellen Stewart is discussed as a pioneering figure not only in her founding of this off-off Broadway theatre in the East Village New York, but also as a keen supporter of artistic exchange between experimental theatre makers in New York and western and eastern Europe. Stewart termed this exchange "cross-pollination". Cristini's book is an exhaustive history of the fruits of this, seen principally in the rise of a visceral and intimate avant-garde performance style that transformed the contemporary theatre landscape. Cristini's work explores the constellation of artists coming from the United States and Europe – some well-known, some who have remained in the theatrical underground – who were important in the development of the multifaceted experiential theatre of the 1960s and 1970s.

Keywords: La MaMa Theatre; avant-garde theatre; Ellen Stewart, Tom O'Horgan, Andrei Serban, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, Peter Brook

1. La MaMa Experimental Theatre and the Rise and Fall of the Intercultural Avant-Garde

The La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club (La MaMa) was founded in 1961 by Ellen Stewart (1919-2011) and was at the center of the 1960s off-off Broadway theatre scene in New York. La MaMa began with staging small café-style performances consisting of freshly written one-act plays that were performed by non-trained actors in tiny spaces converted from shopfronts. Audiences and actors were so closely situated that one could barely tell who was doing what. That was precisely the point, and the theatre gradually became the gathering place for a new generation of a new kind of theatre artist. These artists did not so much eschew the mainstream theatre as they barely acknowledged its existence. The East Village was a long way from

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Broadway in those days and the off-off scene certainly didn't respect the modern canon of American plays by Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and others. Many participants and audiences (often one and the same) came from backgrounds where they had little or no theatre experience or training and the café theatre that evolved was more connected to street poetry, monologues, and a DYI aesthetic that turned a generally impoverished means of production into a house style. Although not particularly political in its outlook (and Stewart funded the theatre from her work as a fashion designer), La MaMa grew in stature and became a place for radical theatrical experimentation.

As Monica Cristini shows in her book, *La MaMa Experimental Theatre – A Lasting Bridge Between Cultures* (Routledge 2024), this was a model for theatre as a laboratory forged from a series of interventions and exchanges between artists in New York and parts of western and eastern Europe. As Cristini argues, in the period spanning the mid-late 1960s, through to the mid-1970s, La MaMa became *the place* for the wider dissemination of the nascent ideas and theatre craft of Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba and Peter Brook and the International Centre for Theatre Research (ICTR). Brook's theatre was based at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris but was working on the ground in Africa and the Mideast and touring everywhere. Likewise, in the 1970s, Grotowski and Barba travelled from Europe to the US at the invitation of La MaMa and Cristini's book charts an emergent transnationalism that was not only an aspect of experiential performance but in some ways came to define it.

Unlike other notable 1960s theatres in the United States, such as the Living Theatre or the National Black Theatre (NBT), the cultural political background of La MaMa's founding was not so much the civil rights movement or new left, anti-Vietnam war protests, although these movements did have some connections with many people working at the theatre (that are discussed briefly in the last chapter of Cristini's text). By contrast, Cristini's study highlights La MaMa's role as a nodal point in a growing transnational theatre movement. Adding a new perspective to other studies on the history of La MaMa and the New York downtown scene, Cristini, who is an Italian theatre historian working at the University of Verona, explores in close historical detail the theatre's leading role in intercultural bridgebuilding. Thus, she draws out Stewart's notion of theatre as a space for "cross-pollination" and dialogue, that in many ways remains La MaMa's legacy until today. Ironically, (although not surprising to people already steeped in the European postwar avant-gardes), the evolving "dialogue" that is explored in the book is not in respect of drama, but of performance. The theatre that evolved aimed to question the logocentric structures of modern drama and wanted to shift theatre away from an emphasis on dramatic dialogue. Seeking to look beyond Aristotelian dramaturgy, it looked to the unconscious and experiments in embodied presence as alternatives to established aesthetic models and

forms of theatrical communication. It was decentered, impressionistic, and intentionally opaque. Also ironic is how Cristini's book charts an era when theatre looked to encounters with other cultural practices as a way of searching for a universal or transversal means of communication. Spoken language was not the primary syntactical form of dialogue; in its place were invented gesticulations of the voice and the body of the actor.

La MaMa Experimental Theatre begins with a discussion of the rise of theatre in the East Village, that in the 1960s was a neighbourhood of immigrants, many of whom came to the US after experiencing poverty and political turmoil in their homelands. The East Village had cheaper rents than Greenwich Village and other more salubrious areas of Manhattan, and, to this day, La MaMa still owns and occupies several buildings in East 4th Street and Great Jones Street and regularly has two theatres showing work from a variety of local and international artists and groups. Cristini explores the transience of the early days of this movement, when performances took place in churches, cafes, apartments, and lofts, and when artists came and went with "the blink of an eye" (2024, 7). She mentions the wider activities of the postwar scene in New York, an inspiring time for all the avant-garde arts ranging from the Beats, John Cage and Black Mountain College to Warhol, The Velvet Underground, and the Judson Church. To revisit this history is to revisit a remarkable era of interdisciplinary arts practices, although often strikingly insular, and perhaps now over-extended in the histories of the New York scene. In a time when NYC is more complicated and when the downtown avant-garde (as much as remains) plays its productions at high art venues such as the Park Avenue Armoy, what new can be said about this earlier time and the productions that happened then?

Cristini considers this question in her opening chapter, and she convincingly argues that the importance of La MaMa was not only as a site of the American avant-garde, but as a center for its entree into the wider world. As she writes, it is the "network of relationships . . . that would prove to be fundamental in developing the Avant-garde itself, in Europe as in in the United States, where artists from different cultural backgrounds . . . discovered a common identity" (55). Cristini shows how the early sense of transience and the performances of one-off plays shifted towards an idea of theatre as a workshop-based laboratory for a new kind of transcultural future. With Stewart at the helm, and her fundraising skills and her goal to unconditionally support the work of artists, La MaMa became both an organization of permanent theatres and rehearsal studios (first in New York, and then later, in Italy), and a transnational network of actors and experimentalists who worked to make theatre something more like ritual practice. Of course, this was not the only version of La MaMa's history, but Cristini sees this as the gap in our understanding of the1960s theatre and she credits Stewart with the

recognition of the need for bridgebuilding and the fortitude to make this happen. As a scholar from Italy, who undertook her research in NYC on a MariBet fellowship, she has fresh eyes on the archive and is not nostalgic for the 'good old days' of New York.

The most important discoveries in *La MaMa Experimental Theatre* lie in the details about who, where, and when these transatlantic exchanges took place. In tracing the interest in Grotowski, for example, we see how this was not only a movement directed to new forms of theatre training focused on corporality. It was also aligned with a grab-bag of non-western theatre practices directed towards rethinking theatre in terms of ritual.

The work of La MaMa directors Tom O'Horgan, and Andrei Serban who pioneered forms of ritual theatre is discussed at length in several chapters. In chapter 3, Cristini documents the tours to Europe by the La MaMa Repertory Troupe that was led by O'Horgan. They performed at the Spoleto Festival and the Edinburgh Fringe among other places. While on tour, the processes of cross-fertilization continued to evolve; tours fostered the exchange of information and new actors sometimes joined the company along the way. Cristini describes O'Horgan's theatre as "a total physical theatre that involved the audience with a rhythm marked by sound from the movements of the actors . . . [and] included animal cries, noises, and shouts" (74). She discusses the infusion of these influences, while also noting that O'Horgan was feeling his way and the company found their own approaches to artistic choices; actors wore rag-tag everyday clothes, and their performances enhanced the sensuality of their bodies (ibid.). There is also a discussion about the proliferation of styles at La MaMa during this period such as connections with the Open Theatre, and with Richard Schechner who held a Grotowski seminar at New York University in 1967 (87). Cristini makes the point that from 1968 to 1973, the key texts of this movement were published (115), principally, Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre*, (1968), Brook's *The Empty Space* (1973) and Schechner's *Environmental Theatre* (1973). Indeed, each of these texts offer viewpoints on the centrality of the actor, of forging new relationships with audiences, and on theatre as a place almost of mystical communion. Such theatre aimed to reset what Brook called the "deadly theatre" – to reawaken the human spirit, and to resist the rationality of modern drama.

The work of Serban and the influence of Brook is discussed in chapter 5. Serban worked with Brook on the latter's famed production of *Orghast* in 1971. Made from improvisations and using experimental sounds composed by the poet Ted Hughes, the piece was notable for its experiential and expressively physicalized dramaturgy. Serban brought these techniques to La MaMa in the 1970s, working with Stanley Rosenberg, Elizabeth Swados and others. His leadership of the Great Jones company at La MaMa is described

as bringing theatre closer to the "realization of Artaud's actor shamans" (132). Cristini's point is that during this period La MaMa was the center for the development of the poor theatre-Brookian theatre in the United States and from there, its influence spread into theatre training programs, theatre workshops, and into the work of other companies. We don't hear much about these artists in connection to how La MaMa is remembered today and yet Cristini shows how the work of O'Horgan, Serban and their collaborators was, for a decade or more, at the core of the artistic vision and repertoire of the company as a whole.

Another important aspect of the book explores how the artists developed friendships with Stewart, and, like so many other artistic and cultural organizations in the city, personal relations and personal taste informed La MaMa's development. There is a Latourian sense of network in these personal connections that meant that things could be done quickly and with a fresh artistic vision. The avant-garde thrives on such a burning sense of vibrancy in the moment. On the other hand, these are not transparent organizational models for sustaining artistic institutions; they are precariously dependent on one's connections to people with access to private money and on the personal taste and continued vibrancy of one's leadership. The downside of this is seen in how the experimental theatre in New York is now full of fossils and there is very little attention given to supporting the next generations. There are exceptions to this such as the work that the Wooster Group did to assist and develop a new generation of artists in the 1990s and 2000. But these are exceptions to the rule and experimental venues such as La MaMa have become more niche and parochial, less innovative.

A focus on the idea of work, of labor, in the attention given to theatre as place for workshopping and training is compellingly developed in Cristini's book. On the one hand, La MaMa becomes the crucible for the theatre as laboratory; of process-as-outcome, and viscerally physicalized theatre forms. It is one of the beginnings of "impulse" acting techniques and improvisations that explore Jungian notions of the archetype and utilize the unconsciousness and breath as a basis for acting. It is also the beginning of the era of intercultural theatre. Barba moves forward to develop his theatre anthropology – a kind of universal register of equivalence and not something that sits well with the multi-media and self-indexical aspects of contemporary performance today. Grotowski, who was perhaps the true innovator of this transcultural group, eventually ended-up in Italy. Cut off from eastern European audiences who were skilled in reading the avant-garde and could appreciate the liturgical-corporeal essence of his work, he ended his career leading self-awareness workshops in para-theatre settings that became synonymous with the personal growth movement and new-age capitalism. After the 1970s, ritual performance easily becomes

commodified in a world of healing circles, full moon dances, ayahuasca rituals, and fake shamans. Certainly, this is not La MaMa's fault, but the lack of a dramaturgical awareness, the resistance to criticism, or maybe the self-centeredness of how these forms became more about one's "personal journey" and self-identity is disappointing.

Cristini shows how the influential strand of the America theatrical avant-garde connected to Barba and Grotowski was fostered through La MaMa. But it is also interesting to see how disconnected the theatre itself was from the next generation of experimental artists. There is no postmodern La MaMa, no indeterminacy, and no new aesthetic forms after the 1970s. And while one of La MaMa's intercultural pathways leads in part to Turner-Schechner Performance Studies, that too is curtailed in the way that La MaMa resists change and doesn't develop an effective dramaturgical consciousness.

Finally, while Cristini's text is an exemplary history of La MaMa, closely detailed and rigorous, it also tells a history that is somewhat haunted by the Cold War. Grotowski came from Soviet Poland, yet his work never fit the model of Marxist critique. Barba did in fact establish the Odin Theatre as a live-in community along with the International School of Theatre Anthropology, in Holstebro, in a remote town in northern Denmark, but he was never critical of western society and his theatre anthropology was naïvely essentialist. American organs of State, in the 1960s, while often conservative at home, supported international cultural exchange as part of a wider expression of soft power.

This is not to detract from the importance of the movement that this book traces, merely to give another perspective on its context. In the radical sixties, the theatre often rejected postwar Marxist politics and artists in the United States, perhaps, less consciously than in Europe or Asia, struggled to make a new theatre that was in dialogue with the political ideas and variants of praxis after 1968. Other theatres, (in the legacy of the Berliner Ensemble or the cultural revolutionary opera in China, for example), showed strong political inclinations. And the influence of "new dramaturgy" was seen in the emergent postmodern theatre in the 1970 and 1980s and beyond. Yes, La MaMa was at the center of the development of a new kind of theatre that was expressively connected to the body of the actor. It searched for a theatrical imagination drawn from the idea of architypes and Jungian unconscious impulses. It developed training practices and workshop techniques that were "pre-expressive" in their application of sound and voice. There was a new form of politics being forged here, but not an ideological one. This movement fed the idea of performance as transforming the senses and later as intercultural theatre and performance anthropology. What it could not do was effectively respond to new forms of political power or the critique of interculturalism.

And where have these avant-garde theatre practices gone? Grotowski

was almost a compulsory inclusion on the curriculum of the drama training programs of the 1970s, but there is little interest in his work now. The impulse behind this interest, was, of course, Artaud. And while many examples of works continue to struggle with Artuad's extraordinary provocations, it is no longer with reference to Grotowski or Barba. Instead, we see Artaud's shadow in the work of Sarah Kane, Jan Fabre, Romero Castellucci, Back to Back theatre, and so on – all theatre's that have deeper dramaturgical awareness, work on the senses, and grapple with the contemporary world. Meanwhile, Peter Brook's works that were drawn from his trips to Africa and India all but disappeared in a storm of Bharucharian postcolonial backlash. Brook's last work before he died, called *Why* (2019), was an exquisite ode to Vsevolod Meyerhold.

In closing, *La MaMa Experimental Theatre* charts the development of training as a basis for creativity. There is both a sense of working the body and psyche and of finding new ways of placing bodies in spaces on the La MaMa stages that was transforming. Perhaps another "bridge" then, developed in the book, is the linking of the older version of La MaMa with the future of theatre. The book shows the way that the kinds of theatre that La MaMa pioneered and supported were influential in contemporary practice. But then their influence waned. The fact is that the venue itself now seems anachronistic and struggles to maintain upkeep and interesting programming. The spiritual age of La MaMa is well over.

Cristini's book is excellent for the way that it shows how all this came to be and how it ended. There is value in exploring the past, as well exploding some of its myths. Not for a long time has La MaMa been at the center of theatre and those spaces and that beautiful main theatre on East 4th street are much underused and this is a great shame. Every time I see a show there, I leave wondering what it could be. And maybe this is also true for the wider theatre scene in the United States. With a few heroic exceptions, it is rarely experimental, not structurally or dramaturgically political, and no longer avant-garde. Cristini's book reminds us of a time when – for a moment at least, and in particular historical circumstances – that was not the case.

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The Fire Within: *Cenere* by Stefano Fortin, and Giorgina Pi (Biennale Teatro 2024)[1]

Abstract

Stefano Fortin's *Cenere*, directed by Giorgina Pi and staged at the 2024 Biennale Teatro, narrates an inconsolable solitude and an author who questions the meaning of his own words. The word *cenere* (ash), which gives the text its title, has an evocative and metaphorical value, for which we need to reference the documentary cinema of Werner Herzog. The article also highlights the thematic connections with Florian Zeller's *The Son*, a play portraying the distress of a generation that accuses their fathers of stealing their future and hope.

Keywords: Stefano Fortin; Giorgina Pi; Biennale Teatro 2024; volcano; Werner Herzog

1.

In 1977, Werner Herzog directed a documentary about La Soufrière volcano in Guadeloupe, which was expected to erupt imminently. Defying the danger, Herzog and his crew filmed what was happening in the town below the volcano, from which residents had been hastily evacuated to avoid a disaster similar to the one that, at the beginning of the century, had destroyed a nearby city. The footage shows the streets of a deserted and dead town, even though life inside the houses seems reluctant to give up and still emanates from functioning objects: fridges and air conditioners left running, phones ringing, faucets leaking. Abandoned pets wander the streets, slowly starving to death. Wild animals, like boars and deer, lazily take over the human environment. The images document the agony for and the anticipation of catastrophe, narrated by a voice devoid of emotion – stark, epic. The documentary's emotional atmosphere emanates from the looming shadow of the volcano, hidden and revealed by the erratic movement of immense clouds of ash. Vapours rising

[1] *Cenere*, directed by Giorgina Pi. Script: Stefano Fortin. A Bluemotion project starring: Valentino Mannias, Sylvia De Fanti, Giampiero Judica, Francesco La Mantia, Alessandro Riceci, Giulia Weber, Valerio Vigliar, and Cristiano De Fabritiis. Music: Valerio Vigliar. Sound project: Collettivo Angelo Mai. Lights: Andrea Gallo. Production: La Biennale di Venezia and Bluemotion in collaboration with Angelo Mai. A special thanks to the Press Office of the Biennale for providing the unpublished script.

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from the ground and the shifting, glowing earth around the crater create an unstable, ever-changing landscape. Then, a rain of ash begins to fall – a thick, dense, fine ash that envelops trees, meadows, flowers, and cut wood, seeps through windows, weighs down birds' wings, and settles on objects, turning them into fossils, as if they belonged to an ancient time. Miraculously, the eruption did not occur, but the allure of volcanoes, a metaphor for inescapable death and the immense power of nature compared to human frailty, permeates Herzog's later works, from *Into the Inferno* (2016) to *The Fire Within: A Requiem for Katia and Maurice Krafft* (2022; see Dottorini 2023). The footage in this latter documentary was all shot over decades by the couple of volcanologists who died beneath Mount Unzen in Japan while filming its eruption. The narrator's voice-over commentary becomes especially sparse here. It's not a biographical recollection of the two protagonists – far from it. Through the Kraffts' documentaries, Herzog demonstrates the power of images and their ability to express, much more than words, that 'fire' which consumes those who love the pursuit of knowledge and wish to leave a trace, even at the cost of their own lives. *The Fire Within* thus becomes a journey into the imagination of the two volcanologists, unfolding as a process of waiting. The film narrates the moment of suspension before the catastrophe, with full awareness of the danger. Yet, the catastrophe arrives unexpectedly and suddenly: when the mountain explodes, the torrents of pyroclastic material are so vast and fast that escape is impossible. This was the fate of the Kraffts during their final expedition. The extraordinary footage, revisited by Herzog, is all metaphorical: even scenes from the couple's youth signify the anticipation of an inevitable end.

The dark clouds covering the sun, the ash rain enveloping everything, the steam rising from the ground, the glowing red lava flows from the crater – these are symbols and metaphors of a waiting that concerns us all: the wait for death. The images convey the ambivalent emotions of this waiting, as well as the awe inspired by the images themselves. In this way, the power of cinema is celebrated, and the wonder generated by film is staged. Inseparable from the images, the music also generates wonder. This raises the question: is it possible for words to have the same emotional power? Do the things we describe with words contain the same emotional plurality as images?

2.

The play I am concerned with here helps us answer this question. Its title, *Cenere*, is thematically linked to Herzog's films about volcanoes. The word *cenere* (ash) signifies both a material and a metaphor derived from the quality of the material itself. To say *ash* means to speak of death, dissolution,

the decomposition of solid bodies, and pulverisation. Ashes, par excellence, have always been those of the dead, from ancient Greek tragedy onward. The word *cenere* thus evokes the emotional atmosphere of awaiting the end, but also – like the clouds unleashed by a volcano – an obstruction to vision and a shroud capable of paralysing life, of stopping time. One immediately thinks of the ash that buried and simultaneously immortalised the cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii. Ash is also a fertiliser, as seen in the garden of lush, purple roses nourished by the ashes from the Auschwitz chimneys in Jonathan Glazer's film *The Zone of Interest* (2023).

Ash also has the power to freeze a moment in time, even the most intense expression of emotions, like the embrace of terrified lovers caught in a devastating fire, who died clinging to each other, as depicted in Christian Petzold's latest film *Red Sky* (*Roter Himmel*, 2023). From the ashes, the Phoenix is reborn in myth, and life itself emerges from ash, in a well-known biblical metaphor. Ash is what remains of a burning fire, and even before cooling down, it too can burn. The title of Stefano Fortin's play, a text awarded at the 2023 Biennale Teatro for the under-35 category and staged as a national premiere at the 2024 Biennale Teatro under the direction of Giorgina Pi, is both metaphorical and highly evocative. The ash thus becomes a metaphor for the curtain behind which the action unfolds and from behind which the narrator himself speaks – a metaphor reminiscent of a famous line by Johann Wolfgang Goethe in his compact treatise *On Epic and Dramatic Poetry* (1787), written in collaboration with Friedrich Schiller. Goethe writes that it would be better if the rhapsodist, like a "superior being", "read behind a curtain" in order to achieve pure objectivity (1988, 251).[1]

3.

Cenere unfolds as a prologue followed by three separate scenes. The prologue consists of stage directions that describe the gradual and unceasing fall of ash upon the stage.[2] This ash will continue to fall steadily throughout the play, symbolising an unstoppable process of accumulation, like the passage of time or the inescapable layering of memories and losses.

[1] "Der Rhapsode sollte also in höheres Wesen in seinem Gedicht nicht selbst erscheinen, er läse hinter einem Vorhange am allerbesten, so daß man von aller Persönlichkeit abstrahierte und nur die Stimme der Musen im allgemeinen zu hören glaubte".

[2] "The prologue consists of stage directions describing the slow and continuous fall of ash onto the stage. Initially untouched and primordial, it will continue to fall uninterrupted for the entire duration of the play, as part of an irreversible process of accumulation" (*Niger et Albus* 2024, 137).

It is an ever-present force, both haunting and unavoidable, marking the space and filling it with a physical representation of the irreversible.

The three scenes then present distinct moments of human interaction and confrontation with loss. In the first scene, *No*, a son is called to breakfast by his parents – a seemingly simple, everyday gesture that evokes the intimacy and fragile normalcy of family bonds. The boy's rejection signifies a total rejection of the world represented by his parents, which, however, is a consequence of feeling excluded from their lives. The family reveals itself not as an ordered cosmos of affections but rather as a nucleus ready to explode, held together more by hate than by love. The parents are no longer able to find the words to communicate with their son, whom they had hoped would remain a child forever. The son, on the other hand, has not had the time to learn his parents' language or to take possession of their memories.

The situation hinted at in this text recalls some of what we consider the most intense works in contemporary theatre: Florian Zeller's trilogy *The Father – The Mother – The Son*.[3] Especially this last play, from which a film was made in 2022 directed by Zeller himself, has notable thematic connections with Fortin's text. *The Son*, in fact, tells of an adolescent's inability to communicate his maladjustment to his parents and of the parents' inability to understand the depth of their son's distress and suffering. In Fortin's text, the boy does not pursue any path of treatment. In Zeller's *The Son*, however, there is an attempt at treatment, which is interrupted by the parents, despite the doctors' warnings about the danger of the apparent calm in a mentally ill person who has attempted suicide. But the parents assume that their love will be enough to save him, unable to accept that their love is one of the causes of their son's existential pain, and thus, in a certain sense, they condemn him to die by suicide using a symbolic object – the father's gun. This object is therefore not emotionally neutral, just as in Greek tragedy it is not indifferent that Ajax kills himself by falling on the sword gifted to him by his enemy Hector.

The second scene, *Here*, shifts to the tragic encounter where a police officer must deliver the devastating news of a son's death to his parents, confronting them with an absence that is absolute and shattering. The third scene, *Everything*, is a monologue by a victim who reflects on their identity and recounts what has happened to them, laying bare the personal depths of trauma and existence altered by loss.

[3] Brought to the stage very effectively, from 2022 to the present, under the direction of Piero Maccarinelli, with Galatea Ranzi and Cesare Bocci as the lead actors. It's worth noting that the first play of the trilogy, *The Father*, was later adapted into a film directed by Zeller himself, with Anthony Hopkins winning the Oscar for Best Actor in 2020.

Beyond these characters, the author's voice also manifests as an active presence on stage, a voice that observes, comments, and occasionally intervenes through the "author's notes". These notes, which vary from one production to another, create a dialogue between the staged events and the world outside, grounding the play's themes in the broader, ever-shifting reality around us. Thus, the structure of the text seems almost to represent a middle ground between a series and a documentary, oscillating between fiction and testimony.

4.

The sequence of scenes creates a strong narrative tension: the audience "feels" that something is about to happen, and this something could be external, like a sudden and disastrous eruption, or internal, affecting both the characters and the author. The ash that continues to fall relentlessly is the tangible sign of a catastrophe, experienced with detachment and resignation. In the end, the boy takes his own life, but this is perhaps the only tragic outcome that can be sensed from the very beginning. Yet, something unexpected remains, something literally unspoken, which saturates the atmosphere and against which there can be no rebellion. This bleak atmosphere is amplified by the character of the author, who is also the character of the victim. Throughout, this figure appears to burn his own words in a futile, painful ritual, suggesting a struggle to express, purge, or perhaps destroy memories and emotions too heavy to bear. The ash falling upon this ritual can be likened to distant, almost inaudible sounds that gradually intensify. Another meaning of the "ash" emerges: it is that of the work repudiated and burned by its own author, like the Virgil of Hermann Broch. Indeed, a novel that Fortin might have drawn inspiration from, especially for the text's structure in "scenes" or "panels", is *The Death of Virgil.* The poet or writer assumes the role of demiurge, yet a demiurge without any power except through words, which, however, cannot alter reality nor direct it in any way other than that chosen by human beings.

5.

If the author metaphorically sets fire to their own work, feeling it inadequate and incapable of grappling with pain, what remains instead is the final letter of a young man who took his own life, Michele, published in 2017 in a newspaper at the request of his parents:

> . . . I tried to be a good person, made many mistakes, tried many things, sought to give myself meaning and purpose using my own resources, tried to make an art of my suffering. But the questions never end, and I'm tired of hearing them. And I'm tired of asking them, tired of meeting everyone's expectations without ever seeing mine fulfilled, tired of putting on a brave face, of pretending interest, of deluding myself, of being mocked, of being cast aside. From this reality, you can expect nothing. . . . This is absolutely not the world I was supposed to inherit, and no one can force me to continue being part of it . . .

These words are eerily similar to those spoken by Nicolas, the character of the son, in Florian Zeller's previously mentioned play: "It's just... It's just that I'm not made for living. I can't manage it. And yet I try, every day, with all my strength, but I just can't. I'm constantly suffering. And I'm tired. I'm tired of suffering" (Zeller 2019, 195).

In the letter, Michele articulates the relentless disillusionment and sense of betrayal that permeates his generation, a sentiment that resonates deeply within *Cenere*, where ash and fire metaphorically express the same internal struggle. The ash represents not only destruction but also the residue of unfulfilled dreams and expectations, of a life that felt robbed of joy and stability. It is as if Michele's words, imbued with both resignation and accusation, are embodied in the ceaseless fall of ash on the stage – an ever-present reminder of loss, of a world that has betrayed its promise, and of a generation left to reckon with what remains.

This cycle of introspection and self-destruction made visible through the recurring motifs of fire and ash, becomes not just an image of despair but a meditation on the weight of memory, the persistence of trauma, and the fragments of ourselves that remain in the aftermath of loss. The relentless fall of ash represents the layers of unshakable memories that cling to the present, forming a dense sediment of past and present struggles. In this space, the author and protagonist appear trapped in a liminal realm between destruction and the impossible task of coming to terms with their inner turmoil. It is a portrayal of existential endurance, one in which the act of writing, remembering, and speaking becomes an act of survival amid the ashes of a fragmented self. The only thing one might perhaps reproach Stefano Fortin for is dwelling too much on the "author's notes", meaning the reflections of the author's voice and the connections between the narrative and the present moment of the staging. This kind of "self-confession" sometimes distracts the audience and ultimately makes the metaphorical and universal impact of what is staged – including the curtain of ash – less powerful.

To sum up, three main themes resonate in the three 'scenes' that structure the play. The first is silence, born from incommunicability, which tightens an anguished knot around a family unable to name their pains, whether

physical or psychological. The second is the anticipation of something terrible and sorrowful, something sensed but, until the last moment, hoped to be avoidable. The third is time, which is only a feeling. Conventionally, we believe that the young have time, but then something happens that can overturn this assumption, and time ends or is made to end, because the future equates to hope, and those who have lost hope – or never had it – lose any sense of what could be.

Time is like a volcano, showing signs that it may soon split the mountain, its eruption awaited with the knowledge that if one gets too close to witness the force and spectacle of molten lava, there won't be time to escape. Time is like ash that makes the sky impassable, marking distances and rendering them unbridgeable.

6.

Let us return to the thematic connection between Fortin's *Cenere* and Werner Herzog's films, which I mentioned earlier. In its own way, *Cenere* also documents an eruption from afar: the 2010 eruption of an Icelandic volcano that grounded air traffic across half of Europe – not due to its magma, but to the vast amount of ash it produced, which spread indiscriminately over much of the continent, as well remembered by those who experienced it. That natural, uncontrollable, distant, and seemingly random wind becomes decisive in the lives of the play's characters. That eruption metaphorically "pulverises" the bond between the son and his parents, and between the son and a life he refuses. The ash from the volcano spreads over everything, appearing to suffocate every breath of life. Thus, the entire text is permeated by a sense of "inconsolable solitude" (*Niger and Albus* 2024, 135).

In the play, ash represents the obstacle to expressing emotions, the barrier between bodies, and the distance imposed. But it is also what fertilises, within the closed core of what we call the 'heart', another explosion – almost like a *mise en abîme* of the volcano's eruption within the body of a single individual. We mean the explosion of anger and unhappiness. The character of the author is simultaneously the victim and "sets fire to his own words. The ashes that fall on this desperate ritual are like distant sounds: gradually, as in the slow pan of a camera, they turn into the deafening live noise and feedback of a rehearsal room, and a close-up on the protagonist's face" (137).

On one side, there is the invisible, erupting volcano, which we must imagine; on the other, on stage, are the devastating inner eruptions of the characters, which we also have to imagine – in the hinted words, the silences, and the interrupted gestures. It seems that the narrator/author is also observing from afar, recounting the characters, himself, and other

events from history – the grand European history of the past forty years – events that settle like ash on memory, fossilizing recollection.

Words, therefore, are born from words, in a movement of tension and release with respect to the audience. They disintegrate and recompose themselves like the Lucretian atoms evoked in the motto affixed to the script, questioning their own existence. They are both raw and documentary, yet simultaneously become metaphors for what is happening on stage: for theatre, representation, vision, listening, and the projection of emotions. This is a *theatre of words*, where the text transforms into imagery through skilful direction and sound design, as well as the abilities of the entire cast – especially the outstanding Valentino Mannias, who skilfully splits himself to give voice to both the author and the youngest character, embodying many of our own anxieties along with them.

It is to be hoped that, after Venice, this artistic project will circulate through Italian theatres, carrying with it a message steeped in an ethics of memory and respect for suffering – light yet potentially as lethal as the ash from a volcanic eruption.

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