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Shakespeare in Italy

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musical) had to undergo considerable cuts; the focus was put on the grotesque scenes, which were sung in English in order to preserve their full grotesqueness. (The cast of the *Fairy Queen*, of course, differed widely from that of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.) The scenes in the Steintheater and on the Water Terrace, with the combined effects of music, ballet, and comic byplay, were highlights of the Festival, which terminated in a grand finale followed by fireworks.

The "Festival at Hellbrunn 1978" succeeded in amalgamating art and nature, theatre and landscape. The overall effect would perhaps have been stronger if the number of components had been smaller. It is likely that this imaginative experiment will be repeated during one of the next Hellbrunn Festivals.

ITALY

Shakespeare in Italy

JOHN FRANCIS LANE

Theatre in Italy today tends to favor the director and the designer, often at the expense of the author or the actor. In a theatrical culture that is still imbued with the Renaissance spirit, and with plays performed in playhouses that often outbid the performance itself as an attraction (Palladio's Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza is one example), it is not surprising that even in modern times classic authors should be the victims, inspiring visual rather than verbal magic. Performances of Shakespeare's plays are no exception, even if he is unquestionably the most performed author on Italian stages, with Pirandello and Brecht close behind and Molière and Goldoni the runners-up.

Great liberties are often taken with the translation of Shakespeare into Italian, usually to satisfy the whims of the director. Sometimes this promotes clarity for a modern audience, but it brings chills down the spines of scholars. When Franco Zeffirelli staged his Italian version of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Roman Theater in Verona, for example, eyebrows were raised at the raciness of the language, particularly that spoken by the Nurse, which seemed much more "obscene" in a modern Italian idiom. But Zeffirelli's translator, Gerardo Guerrieri (who had also translated Miller, Williams, Albee, and Inge), upset the traditionalists—and not only them!—even

more with the same director's *Hamlet*, where in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy "that is the question" became a laconic "so what?"

Italian is a musical language, and the poetry of Shakespeare's verse is sometimes too readily left to the sound of the language itself. Rarely is an attempt made to find a substitute for rhyming couplets, so that in lines like "The play's the thing/. . . conscience of the king," in order to get a rise rather than a fall on the exit, the Italian actor is encouraged to resort to operatic vocal tricks. Only in recent times has the word *teatro*, theatre, stopped being synonymous with *opera* for Italian theatregoers. Indeed, in considering the role that Shakespeare has played in the chronicles of the modern Italian stage, it should be remembered that the most familiar Shakespearean characters on Italian stages are Falstaff and Otello [*sic*], who were borrowed by Verdi and his librettists (along with Macbeth, though this opera is more rarely seen) for two of the greatest and most popular operas of modern times.

Maybe Italians feel they have a right to "borrow" from Shakespeare, seeing that the Bard himself had pilfered a good deal from Italian sources. From a creative point of view, the Italian theatrical avant-garde rarely offers important contributions in its performances "from" or "after" Shakespeare. One rare exception is a brilliant and talented actor-director, Carmelo Bene, now in his late thirties, who over the past two decades has tackled many Shakespearean heroes "in his own fashion." Even though the texts have been mutilated, Bene has always declared his deep respect for Shakespeare, behaving rather as if he had received a personal mandate from the poet to "rearrange" the plays. The role he has affronted most frequently has been Hamlet, which he has presented in several stage versions and in two film versions, one in color (*One Hamlet Less*), which was admired at several international film festivals, and one in black and white, for television. In each version he presented Hamlet as a traveling player who was engaged for most of the performance in packing his bags at Elsinore to go to Paris on tour. Bene has also done mangled versions of *Romeo and Juliet* (in which he played Mercutio and kept him alive to the end as a sort of alter ego to Romeo) and *Richard III* (in which he donned a hunchback at the end of the first part as if he were about to sing the title role in *Rigoletto*). During the present season he finally got around to *Othello*, for which he was obviously most suited in histrionic terms.

Othello, or rather *Otello*, is a natural for Italian stages. In addition to one recent production in which the Moor was totally naked (the director was a young actor named Gabriele Lavia, the

Othello was Massimo Foschi), there was a celebrated 1974 avant-garde version performed at the Biennale in Venice in a deconsecrated church, in which the director Memé Perlini (one of the better-known experimental directors of the new generation) cast a 76-year-old non-professional as Desdemona. About the only connection with Shakespeare's tragedy was the fact that Othello was black.

Fortunately not all Italian directors of Shakespeare are aiming at travesty. The most celebrated Shakespearean productions of the immediate post-war years were by Luchino Visconti. His *Troilus and Cressida* in 1949—for which a fantastical Troy was dreamed up by the designer, a young Florentine named Franco Zeffirelli—was given only six performances in the Boboli Gardens in Florence because no impresario could have afforded to pay a cast which read like a Who's Who of the Italian Theatre at the time. A year later, in Rome, the same director staged an *As You Like It*, rebaptized *Rosalinda*, with sets and costumes designed by Salvador Dali. The most popular Shakespeare of the 1950s was a *Hamlet* with Vittorio Gassman in the title role. During the 1960s it was Zeffirelli who won fame with *Romeo and Juliet*, reproducing for his own countrymen the mood of his successful Old Vic production. His *Romeo* in Italy was Giancarlo Giannini, who has since become a popular film actor on international screens.

But Visconti is dead, and Zeffirelli now divides his time between cinema and opera. The two directors who can most be relied on to treat the Bard with respect now are Giorgio Strehler at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan and Maurizio Scaparro with the Teatro Popolare di Roma—though Luigi Squarzina, formerly director of the Genoa City Theatre and now director of Rome's City Theatre, the Teatro di Roma, has been responsible for some impressive professional Shakespearean stagings, even if his most recent, a *Measure for Measure* in Rome, was not among his best.

Mention should be made of two "curiosities" which will certainly be of interest to Shakespearean scholars. Franco Enriquez, well known internationally for his opera productions, has revived several times his successful production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, first staged in 1962. Apart from the good Anglo-Italian Renaissance fun of the "Taming" itself, Enriquez's production is notable for having provided a conclusion to the Induction which Shakespeare or his publishers forgot to wrap up. Enriquez has unearthed *The Taming of "A" Shrew*. What interested Enriquez was the epilogue, in which we are shown what happens to Sly after the performance he has been privileged to watch, treated as a gentleman by his mocking

"hosts." The play over, he is dressed in rags again and thrown back onto the streets. The traveling players leave the house where they have been performing and ignore the bewildered Sly, who by now has quite sobered up. This touch of melancholy is accentuated by the appearance of the players. The exuberant widow who had married Hortensio in "*The Shrew*" is seen as a bent-up, tired old actress hanging onto the arm of a fellow player. As they trundle off, the light fades on a disconsolately lonely Christopher Sly. Touches of this kind, giving one a naturalistic glimpse of life in Renaissance Italy, do much to console one for the less tasteful interpolations or misrepresentations in Italian Shakespearean productions.

The other "curiosity" is a production of *Hamlet* in which the title role was played by an actress. This *Amleto*—or *Amleta*, as one local critic immediately dubbed it—was first staged in July 1978 at Verona's open-air Roman Theatre, the Teatro

HAMLET [AMLETO]. Presented at the Teatro Romano in Verona by La Fabbrica dell'Attore company on 26 July as part of the annual open-air Shakespeare Festival of Verona; subsequently presented at the Teatro Antico, Taormina, Sicily on 12 August; now adapted for indoor presentation and seen in Prato, Turin, Rome, and other Italian cities throughout 1978-79. Translation, Adaption, Sets, Costume Design, and Direction, Giancarlo Nanni; Music, Giovanni Fiori. Running time 3 hours.

PRINCIPAL CAST: *Claudius*, Edoardo Florio; *Gertrude*, Maria Rita Ruffini; *Hamlet*, Manuela Kustermann; *Ophelia*, Giovanna Fregonese; *Polonius*, Franco Bisazza.

Romano, where each summer there is a Shakespeare Festival. (The city of Verona likes to consider itself the Italian Stratford-upon-Avon, and as you enter the city gates you see the inscription in English and Italian, "There is no world without Verona walls.") I saw this production a few weeks later in the ruins of a much larger ancient theatre, the Greek-Roman *Teatro Antico* at Taormina in Sicily. The production was by a young Italian who has recently come out of the cellars of experimental theatre and is now accepted in the more traditional playhouses. His name is Giancarlo Nanni, and the actress who usually appears in his productions, Manuela Kustermann, has been called the "Duse of the Avant-Garde." In tackling the role of Hamlet, the actress is obviously inviting comparison with Sarah Bernhardt, who was the most famous female Hamlet of modern times (apart from Danish actress Asta Nielson, who played the part in a rather hilarious silent film in which Horatio's discovery of the breasts of the dying "Prince" prompted him to exclaim "Now I know why I always loved you so much").

In Nanni's staging one searched in vain for

some interpretation that would justify the casting of an actress for the part. There was no particular emphasis on the Hamlet-Horatio relationship, even though the final fade-out was on Horatio carrying the dead Hamlet down a long stairway (a feat that is not too difficult for the actor when his Hamlet is a flyweight actress). The Nanni-Kustermann Hamlet was played as a rather infantile, defenseless youth without any particular sexual connotation. In the end, one could only assume that Miss Kustermann was playing the part because she is a star and the part is a very good one.



Manuela Kustermann (Hamlet)

Though there were some rather startling textual manipulations (we got an advance on "To be or not to be" at the very opening of the play, while a hunchback dwarf later identified as Osric was menacingly around most of the time reminding us that something was rotten in the state of Denmark), the three-hour performance was surprisingly traditional in its eventual unfolding, almost monotonously so, given the premise. But in recompense there were some vivid visual effects—such as the ghost's metaphysical apparition in a blaze of red and green flashing lights with lots of billowing white smoke. All in all, it seemed that this *Hamlet* was taking too literally the line "Frailty, thy name is woman!" which was spoken into an enormous mirror on stage throughout the performance. Miss Kustermann and her director had seemed more at home the previous season with the lusty Latin melodramatics of *Cymbeline*.

Of recent Italian Hamlets, the most impressive

has been that of a young actor named Pino Micol, who is the leading player of the *Teatro Popolare di Roma* company which he co-directs with Maurizio Scaparro, who in addition to *Hamlet* has also staged *Richard II* and, during the 1978–79 season, *Julius Caesar*, in which Micol played Antony. Micol's Hamlet had been angled at a young audience and indeed was a success of almost "pop" proportions, rather as John Neville's Hamlet was some years ago at the Old Vic in London. Though hardened Shakespeareans could perhaps find weaknesses in performance and production, Scaparro and his actor deserved credit for making the play's central themes of uncertainty and unrest seem topical to youngsters growing up in the troubled political and social realities of Europe today. Particularly impressive was the way in which Micol delivered "To be or not to be" (which an Italian audience is inclined to giggle at when they hear the only line from the play familiar to them). Micol came right downstage, sat on the edge of it with his legs dangling within a few feet of the spectators in the front row, and looking straight into their eyes, seemed to be asking them what he should do.

With *Julius Caesar*, the same approach was attempted. This play is understandably the one that is closest to an Italian audience's experience, not

JULIUS CAESAR [GIULIO CESARE]. Presented at the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza by the Teatro Popolare di Roma company as part of the Classical Performances Festival from 7 September; subsequently readapted for proscenium stage performance at the Teatro Quirino and on tour during 1978–79. Director, Maurizio Scaparro; Translation, Angelo Dall'agiacoma; Set Design, Roberto Francia; Costumes, Vittorio Rossi; Music, Giancarlo Chiaromello. Running time 2 hours, 40 minutes.

PRINCIPAL CAST: *Brutus*, Luigi Diberti; *Calpurnia*, Laura de Marchi; *Casca*, Piero Nuti; *Cassius*, Fernando Pannullo; *Julius Caesar*, Renzo Giovampietro; *Marcus Antonius*, Pino Micol; *Portia*, Leda Negroni.

only because the characters are "local" heroes, so to speak, but also because in perhaps no other country is it so pertinent to be reminded how "this lofty scene" has indeed been reenacted over the ages. There was no need to play it in modern dress or find a gimmicky link to the latest totalitarian regime. The words were allowed by Scaparro to speak for themselves. The liberty he took with the text was to remove all the trappings and above all the plebs. This was certainly an audacious cut, but highly effective insofar as it succeeded in eliminating the role of the "people" portrayed by Shakespeare as "worse than senseless things" (indeed, Marullus' speech in the opening scene was cut), a portrayal that would not be appreciated by a leftist-minded young European audience of today. The absence of the "people" as a stage "character" was less acceptable when Antony had to de-

liver his funeral oration. Micol performed it like a set piece, an opera aria, as if the audience were stupid enough not to understand that Antony is being sarcastic when he refers to the conspirators as honorable men. Still, it must be added that the general lines of the interpretation succeeded in making us feel how men in power were conniving at the expense of the country they were supposed to govern. In an Italy which during 1978 had lived through the trauma of the political assassination of one of its leaders—with so much unexplained about this and other political crimes of recent years—it was not surprising that Shakespeare's "lofty scene" should seem so topical.

A play somewhat more surprisingly adaptable to its Italian setting is *The Tempest*, which in

THE TEMPEST [LA TEMPESTA]. Presented at the Teatro Lirico in Milan by the Piccolo Teatro della Città di Milano beginning 28 June, reopening 30 October. Director, Giorgio Strehler; Translation, Agostino Lombardo; Sets and Costumes, Luciano Damiani; Music, Fiorenzo Carpi. Running time 3 hours, 40 minutes.

PRINCIPAL CAST: *Alonso*, Claudio Gora; *Antonio*, Osvaldo Ruggeri; *Ariel*, Giulia Lazzarini; *Caliban*, Massimo Foschi; *Ferdinand*, Massimo Bonetti; *Gonzalo*, Mario Carraro; *Miranda*, Fabiana Udenio; *Prospero*, Tino Carraro; *Sebastian*, Luciano Virgilio; *Stephano*, Mimmo Craig; *Trinculo*, Paolo Falace.

Giorgio Strehler's production at the Milan *Piccolo Teatro* seemed totally authentic. These were credible Dukes of Milan and Kings of Naples. Even more significant, the clowns were straight out of the *commedia dell'arte*, not the refined eighteenth-century version familiar from productions like Strehler's own well-traveled *Servant of Two Masters*, but the knockabout Italian comics of the sixteenth-century, the kind which Shakespeare probably saw himself and which were the equivalent of the Elizabethan clowns he created for his audiences. Turning the language of Trinculo and Stephano into Neapolitan dialect in Agostino Lombardo's translation was an inspired idea, truly the kind of "faithful" operation that ought to be tried more often.

Giorgio Strehler is Italy's leading director. For thirty years he has been at the helm of the Piccolo Teatro, which he founded with Paolo Grassi in 1947. In three decades at the Piccolo Strehler has staged twelve different Shakespeare plays. *The Tempest* is the only play he has returned to a second time. The first production was in the Boboli Gardens of Palazzo Pitti in Florence during the Maggio Festival of 1948. The second was in June 1978 at the large Teatro Lirico in Milan, where Strehler was obliged to open the production after deciding that the smaller (literally named) Piccolo Teatro itself could not hold the vast mechanism that he and his designer, Luciano

Damiani, had conceived for this *Tempesta*. After those first performances in June, the play reopened in October 1978 at the Lirico with a few cast changes and was due to run the whole winter in Milan. Like all of Strehler's major productions at the Piccolo, this *Tempesta* will then play in Rome and other Italian cities during the 1980s and almost certainly tour abroad, beginning with Paris, where Strehler is now as well known as in Italy itself.

Luigi Cinnaghi



Tino Carraro (Prospero)

Like the *Lear* which Strehler staged earlier in the 1970s, also designed by Damiani, this *Tempesta* is a highly individual director's reading of Shakespeare, faithful to the spirit of the original play, but, like the work of a Peter Brook or a Peter Stein, a personal enough interpretation to convince the reviewer that it is Strehler's *Tempest* as well as Shakespeare's. In his *Lear*, Strehler cast a young actress, Ottavia Piccolo, as both the Fool and Cordelia. The two characters never need to appear on stage together, so perhaps the same actor played the two parts in Shakespeare's company. It worked wonderfully, not only because the actress was good but because the identification between the two people who love Lear and whose affection he never loses seemed such a logical theatrical unity.

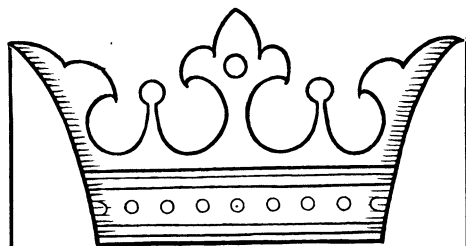
In the *Tempest*, another talented actress, Giulia Lazzarini, is cast as Ariel and the "he/she" asexual identity offers a similar foil to the affections of Prospero the magician, the lonely exile, while Miranda, his "real-life" daughter, remains his link with his past. The technical artifice of Ariel's

presentation is brilliant. He/she flies on a visible wire which is a symbol of Ariel's captivity. When Prospero finally sets Ariel free, he unhooks the wire from his/her back and the wire snaps into the flies above the proscenium like an unleashed elastic. The sound is as magical as that of the broken chord in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (another of Strehler's recent productions). These *theatrical* effects of alienation, reminding the spectator that he is in a theatre and poised between a borderline of fiction and reality, are at the heart of modern Italian theatre, perhaps taking a hint in metaphysical and structural terms from Pirandello's plays.

When Prospero breaks his staff, the whole proscenium arch and orchestra pit snap in two. In a few seconds scenery and stage seem to have been hit by an earthquake. When the actor who has been removing his make-up and is down in the orchestra stalls asks for our indulgence, to make Prospero the magician-man of theatre return to his stage, we applaud eagerly; then just as quickly as the stage had been "earthquaked," everything returns to normal. The actors take their bows; the fifteen young people in the orchestra pit who have been working the sea storms in reams of blue silk

pop up their heads to receive their merited share of the applause. We are back in the theatre again, and it is a triumph of theatrical magic.

This kind of directorial "showing off" can sometimes become a substitute for serious acting. In Strehler's case the performances are strong enough to "compete" with the production, or in any event to fit appropriately into their place in the canvas. Strehler and Damiani like to use open space, cyclorama backdrops, rostrums with opening flaps. They like contrast, in black and white. Accordingly, they use lighting often, perhaps almost too much, creating silhouette effects. The result is beautiful images, as in the awe-inspiring opening storm sequence or in Caliban's ebony-black figure against a blue sky. But sometimes the actors are too much in the shade, and we would like to see more of the expressions on their faces, as with the splendidly spoken Prospero of Tino Carraro (who was also Strehler's Lear). There is abundant light, however, when Prospero magically uncovers Miranda and Ferdinand playing chess, or when Ariel is dancing arabesques in mid-air. And for all its visual magic, this production also gives prominence to the word. Shakespeare is vindicated for some of the travesties he has been subjected to on Italian stages in recent times.



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DENMARK

Shakespeare in Denmark

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The year 1978 saw two Shakespeare productions in Denmark: *1 and 2 Henry IV* in Aarhus, Jutland, and *The Taming of the Shrew* in Copenhagen. Both were adaptations. The two-part *Henry IV* was necessarily much shortened, and the *Shrew* was Charles Marowitz's grangerized-version—Shakespeare's text interleaved with a parallel present-day theme. Both plays had been remodeled in accordance with the demand for contemporary relevance.

Ved Sorte Hest is a newish experimental theatre, run on a shoestring and housed in what was once probably the stable of a 200-year-old inn. The seating capacity is about one hundred, less than that of Stratford's Other Place, with nine