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***A Travelling Tale:
Shakespeare on the Italian Stage***

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DECLARATION

I, Maria Coduri, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the transposition from page to stage of some of Shakespeare's plays in Italy. In particular it concentrates on different approaches to Shakespeare's texts and different ways to transform them into theatrical action.

The first chapter has an introductory function, and lays the groundwork for subsequent discussion. It illustrates the encounter between the work of the English playwright and the Italian people through an overall view of the reception of Shakespeare in Italy from the first mention of his name in 1667 to Francesco De Sanctis's critical writings in the mid-nineteenth century.

The following chapters discuss how Shakespeare's plays have been adapted for the stage by some prominent Italian actors and directors. The focus is on three periods of the history of Italian theatre. The Great Actors of the mid-nineteenth century offered stagings of Shakespeare's plays that focused on the main character, thus depriving them of anything that did not enhance the role of the lead actor. The generation of the directors, that flourished in Italy in the mid-twentieth century, advocated a philological reading of the playtexts, after they had been so severely altered by the generation of the actors. Finally, all through the 1960s and 1970s, the experimentalists of the 'Nuovo Teatro' ('New Theatre') returned to what can be defined 'the actor's theatre', and their approach veered towards very personal productions considered by many irreverent to and disrespectful of the playtexts.

Combining general theoretical discussion with the close reading of some adaptations, the thesis offers an analysis of different movements in Italian productions of Shakespeare, and an argument about different versions of Shakespearian 'authenticity' in Italy.

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Table of Italian Titles and English Translations

<i>Amleto</i>	<i>Hamlet</i>
<i>Amleto di Carmelo Bene (da Shakespeare a Laforgue)</i>	<i>Hamlet by Carmelo Bene (from Shakespeare to Laforgue)</i>
<i>Il gioco dei potenti</i>	<i>1, 2, 3 Henry VI</i>
<i>Il racconto d'inverno</i>	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>
<i>King lacreme Lear napoletane</i>	<i>King tears Lear Neapolitan</i>
<i>King Lear: studi e variazioni</i>	<i>King Lear: Studies and Variations</i>
<i>La faticosa messinscena dell' Amleto di William Shakespeare</i>	<i>The Challenging Staging of William Shakespeare's Hamlet</i>
<i>La Tempesta</i>	<i>The Tempest</i>
<i>Mercante di Venezia</i>	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>
<i>Otello</i>	<i>Othello</i>
<i>Re Lear</i>	<i>King Lear</i>
<i>Re Lear da un'idea di gran teatro di William Shakespeare</i>	<i>King Lear from an Idea of Great Theatre by William Shakespeare</i>
<i>Riccardo III</i>	<i>Richard III</i>
<i>Romeo e Giulietta</i>	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
<i>Sogno di una notte di mezza estate</i>	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
<i>Totò principe di Danimarca</i>	<i>Totò Prince of Denmark</i>

Table of English Titles and Italian Translations

<i>The Challenging Staging of William Shakespeare's Hamlet</i>	<i>La faticosa messinscena dell' Amleto di William Shakespeare</i>
<i>Hamlet</i>	<i>Amleto</i>
<i>Hamlet by Carmelo Bene (from Shakespeare to Laforgue)</i>	<i>Amleto di Carmelo Bene (da Shakespeare a Laforgue)</i>
<i>King Lear</i>	<i>Re Lear</i>
<i>King Lear from an Idea of Great Theatre by William Shakespeare</i>	<i>Re Lear da un'idea di gran teatro di William Shakespeare</i>
<i>King Lear: Studies and Variations</i>	<i>King Lear: studi e variazioni</i>
<i>King tears Lear Neapolitan</i>	<i>King lacreme Lear napulitane</i>
<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	<i>Mercante di Venezia</i>
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	<i>Sogno di una notte di mezza estate</i>
<i>1, 2, 3 Henry VI</i>	<i>Il gioco dei potenti</i>
<i>Othello</i>	<i>Otello</i>
<i>Richard III</i>	<i>Riccardo III</i>
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	<i>Romeo e Giulietta</i>
<i>The Tempest</i>	<i>La Tempesta</i>
<i>Totò Prince of Denmark</i>	<i>Totò principe di Danimarca</i>
<i>The Winter's Tale</i>	<i>Il racconto d'inverno</i>

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Introduction

My travelling tale began studying and subsequently teaching English to secondary school students in my native country Italy. A developing passion for theatre transformed an immersion in the English language dramatists into a deeper curiosity for another culture, another country, and another way of being. Travelling to England and researching Shakespeare and the links between his body of work and subsequent stagings in Italy began to elicit and pose questions in me about the ‘trade’ in ideas between different cultures, and about what bridges and what separates the culture and history of my native homeland and the world beyond.

This is a travelling tale for many different reasons. On a personal level, it is my journey from Italy to Britain, from being a teacher to being a student, from using Italian as my everyday language to relating to other people mostly in English, from my native well known culture to a different one. On the level of my research into the work of Shakespeare, it is the journey of his plays from Britain to Italy, from page to stage, from English to Italian, from the culture in which they were conceived to the Italian culture. There is a kind of symmetry in all this and, in both cases, there is a process of adaptation that has taken place, but also an opportunity to open up to something new, and to gain something from the dynamic, reciprocal encounter between two cultures and two languages.

In the programme of the Globe to Globe festival that ran in London from 21st April to 9th June 2012, Dennis Kennedy mentions Salman Rushdie’s words, ‘It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation. I cling obstinately to the notion that something can be gained’.¹ How can we object to this idea when we think of what the festival was: 37 Shakespeare’s plays in 37 languages, including British Sign Language. Tom Bird, the festival director, travelled to every corner of the world to choose the companies that would perform in London, and he realized that the British are not the most fervent worshippers of Shakespeare. In the

¹ *Globe to Globe Festival Programme* (London: Shakespeare’s Globe, 2012), p. 2.

programme he reports that some Armenians, for example, give their children the name of Shakespeare, Shakespeare Malikyan, Shakespeare Kardashian.² Companies from the most diverse cultures came to London to perform in Shakespeare's theatre. It is a kind of return journey, in which British Shakespeare was first transformed into foreign Shakespeare and then, in the new adapted form, was brought back to his homeland. We usually assume that this transformation is possible because of Shakespeare's plays' *universality*, but Kennedy prefers to talk about *flexibility*:

His plays are open documents that can be made to fit many styles and many meanings, from the cinematic realism of Al Pacino to the overtly stagey song and dance of Beijing Opera. This process has been going on since Shakespeare death, and quite likely while he was still alive. In fact from 1660 to about 1850 and beyond, hardly a play of Shakespeare's was seen on stage in London unless it had been significantly altered in language, plot or character.³

This is exactly what my thesis is about. It is about flexibility and, consequently, about transformation and adaptation. And certainly it is about a gain and not about a loss.

A Travelling Tale: Shakespeare on the Italian Stage considers the transposition from page to stage of some of Shakespeare's plays in Italy. In particular it concentrates on different approaches to Shakespeare's texts and different ways to transform them into physicality on the stage. The work stretches over a very long period of time. It starts in 1667 when the name of Shakespeare was mentioned in Italy for the first time, and ends in the 1990s, with productions of Shakespeare's plays by two Italian actor-directors, Leo de Berardinis and Carmelo Bene. For obvious reasons I have chosen some 'blocks' within this very long period, on the basis of my focus of interest. The discussion addresses many different topics, but there are two main

² Ibid., p. 10.

³ Ibid., p. 3.

strands, which I investigate. On the one hand I study some of Shakespeare's plays and their transformation into theatrical action through the development of Italian theatre in terms of acting and of directing; on the other I explore different kinds of staging playtexts in Italy through the work of Shakespeare. Related to the first area there are issues concerning the shift from Shakespeare's texts, which only consist of words, into stage productions which, besides words, involve other means of communication like the gestures and movements of the actors, and the choice of the stage set, of the props, of the lights, of the music. Working on foreign Shakespeare, there is another shift to consider, that is the shift from the language of the playtexts, English, into the language of the stage production, Italian. Another issue worth exploring is what we can call the 'appropriation' process, that is, how the Italians have appropriated the English playwright and adapted his plays to their culture. Related to the second line of research are issues concerning theatre practices in Italy. When talking about the staging of a play, three figures must be taken into account: the author, the actor, and the director. In the course of time, the strength of one of the three has meant the weakness of the others, in a game of power, which, with varying levels of success, has seen one of the three stand out to the detriment of the remaining two. I investigate this issue in relation to the Italian stage and, through the close reading of some stagings of Shakespeare's plays, I study how the Italian theatre has developed, and whether it has privileged what we can define as 'the author's theatre', 'the actor's theatre', or 'the director's theatre'. They are three completely different kinds of theatre, the first of which considers the author's text as 'sacred' and, therefore, immutable. In theory, at least, one staging only is possible, that is the staging that the author would have had in mind (if he had one). The second sees the actor as the dominant figure on the stage, the star that fills the space with his or her sole presence, and who adapts the text to his or her own taste. The third replaces the supremacy of the actor with that of the director, a supervisor, who substitutes the oneness of the actor with the oneness of the staging, who is in charge of every single aspect of it, and who blends all the elements that contribute to the transformation of a

text into theatricality in a harmonious way. The three kinds of theatre have all intersected with Shakespeare's tradition, and have given birth to very different Shakespeares on the stage.

The thesis is composed of four chapters. The first chapter has an introductory function, and lays the groundwork for subsequent discussion. It illustrates the encounter between the work of the English playwright and the Italian people through an overall view of the reception of Shakespeare in Italy from 1667 to Francesco De Sanctis's critical writings of his plays in the mid-nineteenth century. Today Shakespeare in Italy is considered as important as Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, so much so, that in secondary school, the great majority of students study his plays, and/or his sonnets (probably more than British students do!). Universities and other academic institutions host national and international Shakespeare conferences, and Shakespeare events. Theatre productions of Shakespeare's plays are staged every year in every corner of Italy, Shakespeare's festivals are organized in the country, and British companies come with their English productions. Italian theatres also host foreign productions such as those by the Lithuanian Eimuntas Nekrosius and the German Thomas Ostermeier. Among the various reproductions of the London Globe theatre, one is in Rome. All of this is taken for granted today. But it has not always been so. The acceptance of Shakespeare in Italy involved a long gestation period, and strong resistance to the novelty that his plays represented within the context of the Italian theatre of the end of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century (before the name of Shakespeare was completely unknown in the peninsula). Chapter 1 tells this story, and gives an account of the work done by men of different skills and working in different fields to make Shakespeare's plays known, understood and loved in Italy.

The following chapters discuss how Shakespeare's plays have been adapted for the stage by some prominent Italian actors and directors. The focus is on three periods of the history of Italian theatre. Chapter 2 looks at the work done by the Great Actors of the mid-nineteenth century, who took up Shakespeare and performed his plays not only in Italy but also in Britain and in America. Their acting style differed significantly from the Anglo-

Saxon, so much so that Marvin Carlson speaks of an ‘Italian style’, which juxtaposed a passionate kind of acting in comparison with the restraint of British actors. The chapter also introduces the idea of the actor’s theatre, a theatre in which the lead actor was in charge of all the aspects of the production. The actors of the mid-nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century appropriated Shakespeare’s plays, and offered stagings that focused on the main character, thus depriving them of all the elements that did not enhance their role. Besides being actors, therefore, they also acquired dramaturgical functions. The chapter also considers the work done with Shakespeare’s plays in Britain in the same period, and reveals how even British actors appropriated the playwright’s texts and altered his plays to suit their taste and the taste of the age.

The generation of the directors, that flourished in Italy in the mid-twentieth century, is the subject of chapter 3. The director’s theatre is the theatre in which the *mise-en-scène* is seen as a product that must be treated in its entirety, as opposed to the actor’s theatre in which only the figure of the lead actor was exalted. The focus of the chapter is on the productions of Shakespeare’s plays by Giorgio Strehler, probably the most influential Italian director up to date. In 1947 in Milan, Strehler set up the first civic theatre funded with public money. On the one hand he wanted to improve the conditions of Italian theatre which, for the most part, still consisted of touring companies that offered a predominantly commercial repertoire of low-budget productions. On the other he wanted to restore the original texts after they had been so severely altered by the generation of the actors. The chapter discusses the shift from the actor’s theatre to the director’s theatre, which, at least in its first expressions, advocated a philological reading of the playtexts, and considered the director as the custodian of the text. The chapter also considers the paradox implicit in the idea of authenticity if compared with the hybridity, fluidity, and instability of Shakespeare’s texts. My interview with Giulia Lazzarini, who played the part of Ariel in Strehler’s 1978 production of *La Tempesta* certainly makes my discussion more interesting.

Chapter 4 investigates the work of the experimentalists of the 'Nuovo Teatro' ('New Theatre') who, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, advocated a return to the actor's theatre, while their approach to Shakespeare veered towards very personal productions considered by many irreverent to and disrespectful of the playtexts. The first part of the chapter concentrates on the birth and development of new self-financed theatre groups who produced their stagings in spaces like cellars or basements, where they could experiment with a different kind of theatre. The chapter then compares these productions with those of the director's theatre. The director was no longer seen as the faithful interpreter of Shakespeare's texts, and men like de Berardinis and Bene claimed the autonomy of the staging from the playwriting. The chapter also explores the almost counter-intuitive idea that the representatives of the New Theatre, despite distancing themselves from what may have been the original texts, shared more with Shakespeare's theatre than the protagonists of the director's theatre. Even this chapter is enriched by an interview. Elena Bucci, an actress who was present in most of de Berardinis's Shakespearian productions, gave me an invaluable contribution to understand the theatre of the Italian experimentalists.

My thesis aims at investigating three different kinds of theatre and the ways in which each one of them intersected with Shakespeare's tradition. It takes into account three moments of breaking with the past, and of evolution in the history of Italian theatre, but it also illustrates how theatrical culture is cyclical, and how new theatre practices may recall older ones, and transform them in personal ways. The thesis is also a story of love for Shakespeare that different protagonists of the Italian stage have expressed in different ways at different times.

Literature Review

Literature in English on the topic of Italian adaptations of Shakespeare's plays is not rich, and it is fragmentary. There are single essays on a few Italian theatre directors, and one book that discusses Shakespearian adaptations by the mid-nineteenth-century actors. Even as to the reception of Shakespeare in Italy, contributions are scant and are not recent. Literature on the topic in Italian is richer but, as the following discussion of the critics' approaches and conclusions will indicate, it leaves areas unexplored that have created space for my project. Moreover there is no scholarly study, either in English or in Italian, that provides a detailed comparative analysis of stagings of Shakespeare's plays in the three kinds of theatre I have cited in the introduction

The present review of critical literature will survey two groups of studies: those which consider the reception of Shakespeare in Italy and Italian adaptations of Shakespeare's plays; and those which offer an overview of global Shakespeare. My analysis will be more detailed as to the first group that is closely linked to my thesis, while I will only briefly review, or just cite, work in the second adjoining field.

Lacy Collison-Morley, *Shakespeare in Italy* has been a fundamental instrument for me to acquire the background I needed to work more consciously on the recent past and on the present.⁴ The book traces the history of Shakespeare in Italy from the first mentions of his name to the age of stage performances by the mid-nineteenth-century actors. It gives a detailed account of criticism of Shakespeare before and after Voltaire; it contextualizes the debate on Shakespeare within the wider debate on Romanticism; it evaluates translations of Shakespeare's plays up to those by Carlo Rusconi and Giulio Carcano started in 1832, and it discusses the influence of Shakespeare on Alessandro Manzoni. Shakespeare in the

⁴ Lacy Collison-Morley, *Shakespeare in Italy* (Stratford-upon-Avon: Shakespeare Head Press, 1916).

nineteenth-century theatre is addressed in the last chapter and is not examined in detail.

Agostino Lombardo's essay 'Shakespeare and Italian Criticism' has proved a detailed guide to understand the contribution given by Italian writers and critics to the knowledge and understanding of the poet's texts as to their content and, more recently, to the language and form.⁵ Like Collison-Morley, Lombardo starts his study from the first mentions of Shakespeare in Italy. Then he concentrates on Manzoni's, De Sanctis's, and Croce's criticism of the English playwright, and concludes with more recent criticism, although he does not provide a thorough insight into this.

Focusing on the reception of Shakespeare in Italy in the eighteenth century, is Gaby Petrone Fresco's *Shakespeare's Reception in 18th Century Italy: The Case of Hamlet*.⁶ The scholar emphasizes the role played by the few Italians who had a first-hand knowledge of the work of Shakespeare. She chooses *Hamlet* as an exemplary case to explore issues concerning the introduction of Shakespeare in Italy, such as the debt that the country owes to France as the first translations were made from French versions of the plays, or the need to adapt the English playwright's texts to the Italian culture.

As for literature in Italian, in *Le traduzioni di Shakespeare in Italia nel Settecento*, Anna Maria Crinò examines the first translations of Shakespeare's plays in Italian, but also devotes her attention to the first criticism of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century.⁷ As Petrone Fresco would also do, she emphasizes the Italian indebtedness to France not only

⁵ Agostino Lombardo, 'Shakespeare and Italian Criticism', in *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History*, ed. Peter Demetz, Thomas Greene, and Lowry Nelson Jr (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), 531-580. Lombardo (1927-2005) was a linguist, translator, critic, and professor of English literature. He is considered as one of the 'founding fathers' of English and American studies in Italy and one of the Italian most influential Shakespeare scholars. He translated many of Shakespeare's plays, among which *The Tempest* for Giorgio Strehler's production of 1978. I will write extensively about the collaboration between the two men in chapter 3.

⁶ Gaby Petrone Fresco, *Shakespeare's Reception in 18th Century Italy: The Case of Hamlet* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1993).

⁷ Anna Maria Crinò, *Le traduzioni di Shakespeare in Italia nel Settecento* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1950).

for translations, but also as Italian criticism of Shakespeare was deeply influenced by Voltaire's love-hate relationship for the playwright.

The books I have mentioned so far, have proved useful sources for chapter 1 of my thesis, which, as I have already pointed out, introduces the topic I discuss in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 continues the analysis of the reception of Shakespeare's in Italy concentrating on the contribution given by the mid-nineteenth-century actors to spread knowledge of the English playwright among the people. In this chapter I also begin my discussion of how Shakespeare's plays have been taken to the stage within the context of different kinds of theatre. There is only one book in English that considers the Italian stage adaptations in the nineteenth century: Marvin Carlson's *The Italian Shakespearians: Performances by Ristori, Salvini, and Rossi in England and America*.⁸ The scholar focuses on Shakespearian interpretations of the three most famous Italian actors of the century. He explores their acting style comparing it with the British or American, and gives an account of their Shakespearian performances in Italian in Britain and in America. While also referring to the actors who preceded Ristori, Rossi, and Salvini, Carlson does not consider the actors who followed them, and who embodied the shift from the actor's theatre to the director's theatre in Italy.⁹

While I am not aware of any English books that investigate the Shakespearian performances of the generation of the *mattatori* such as Giovanni Emanuel, Ermete Novelli, and Ermete Zacconi, literature in English on the life and art of Eleonora Duse is rich enough.¹⁰ Among the books I have used there are Giovanni Pontiero's *Eleonora Duse: In Life and Art* and Bernardt, Terry, *Duse: The Actress in her Time* by John Stokes,

⁸ Marvin Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians: Performances by Ristori, Salvini, and Rossi in England and America* (Washington: Folger Books; 1985).

⁹ The book contains a portfolio of drawings and photographs of the actors in character.

¹⁰ There is no English equivalent for the Italian *mattatore*. In general *mattatore* is the term used to identify the second generation of nineteenth-century actors, those born in the middle of the century. In chapter 2 I will explain what distinguished the theatre of the Great Actors from the theatre of the *mattatori*.

Michael R. Booth, and Susan Bassnett.¹¹ The first is a biography that covers Duse's entire life, from her upbringing to international success, emphasizing her role as a pioneer in theatre. In the second Bassnett concentrates on Duse the actress, discussing her collaborations with Arrigo Boito, with Gabriele D'Annunzio, her passion for Henrik Ibsen, and her interest in the development of theatre in Europe.

Among literature in Italian there are various books that consider the transposition from text to stage by nineteenth-century actors. Among those I have used there is *Il teatro del personaggio: Shakespeare sulla scena italiana dell'800* edited by Laura Caretti that, as the title suggests, hints at the character as the focus of such adaptations.¹² The book, which is a collection of essays, also considers other aspects linked to the staging of the playtexts, such as translations, and Verdi's adaptation of *Macbeth*, just to mention two.

Leonardo Bragaglia's *Shakespeare in Italia: personaggi ed interpreti: vita scenica del teatro di Guglielmo Shakespeare in Italia (1792-1973)* is a survey of stage adaptations.¹³ Being an actor and a director, besides writing essays, Bragaglia devotes all his attention to the theatre productions, and to the actors, while poetical or critical evaluations of the playtexts are completely missing.

In *Teatro e spettacolo nel Secondo Ottocento* Roberto Alonge provides a thorough insight into the actor's theatre, examining the performances of both the Great Actors and the *mattatori*, and compares the Italian situation with what was happening in Europe in the nineteenth century, when the figure of the director had already established itself.¹⁴ The author also illustrates the development of a European dramaturgy, and gives an overview of the Italian dramaturgy in the same period.

¹¹ Giovanni Pontiero, *Eleonora Duse: In Life and Art* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1986). John Stokes, Michael R. Booth, and Susan Bassnett, *Bernardt, Terry, Duse: The Actress in her Time* by (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹² *Il teatro del personaggio: Shakespeare sulla scena italiana dell'800* ed. Laura Caretti (Roma: Bulzoni, 1979).

¹³ Leonardo Bragaglia, *Shakespeare in Italia: personaggi ed interpreti: vita scenica del teatro di Guglielmo Shakespeare in Italia (1792-1973)* (Roma: Trevi Editore, 1973).

¹⁴ Roberto Alonge, *Teatro e spettacolo nel Secondo Ottocento* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1988).

Differently from the sources I have mentioned, chapter 2 of my thesis offers a complete overview of the performances of all the actors that occupied the Italian theatrical scene between the mid-nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, before their supremacy was replaced by the supremacy of the director. I consider the forerunners of the Great Actors, those who, for the first time and with very little success, tried to offer Shakespeare's plays on the Italian stage. Then I move on to the Great Actors, with whom Shakespeare gained enormous popularity in Italy. Finally I investigate the performances of the later generation, the *mattatori*, and reflect upon the changes that this group of actor-interpreters brought about both as to Shakespearian performances, and to theatre in general. I also discuss the idea of the encounter between the actors and Shakespeare as a meeting place, which allows the first to use the work of the second as a source for the creation of new artworks. I finally refer to the appropriation of the actor-directors of the 1960s, who adopted a similar approach to Shakespeare's plays and advocated a return to the theatre of the actor. In so doing I introduce the idea of cyclicity within theatrical culture.

In chapter 3 I illustrate the shift from the actor's theatre to the director's theatre. Firstly I discuss theoretical issues concerning the latter. I offer general ideas about directing, and I bring to light the aspects that characterized directing in Italy in the first half of the twentieth century. As to this topic, I have used secondary literature in Italian.

A book that provides a thorough insight into the issues mentioned above is Silvio d'Amico's *Tramonto del grande attore*, published in 1929.¹⁵ Here, at a time when theatre was still the theatre of the actor in Italy, d'Amico examines this situation, focusing on the period between 1920 and 1929, when the debate over the necessity to introduce the figure of the theatre director started in Italy. D'Amico clearly states that the staging should be at the service of the text. Therefore he advocates the presence of a supervisor who would replace the predominance of the actor on the Italian stage. He analyses the theatre of the *mattatori*, and gives an account of the

¹⁵ Silvio d'Amico, *Tramonto del grande attore* (Firenze: La casa Usher, 1985).

activity of influential figures for the renewal of European theatre, like Jacques Copeau and Erwin Piscator.

Various books illustrate the birth of directing in Europe and/or in Italy. Among them we can cite: Mirella Schino's *La nascita della regia teatrale*; Umberto Artioli's *Il teatro di regia: genesi ed evoluzione (1870-1950)*; and Roberto Alonge's *Il teatro dei registi: scopritori di enigmi e poeti della scena*.¹⁶ The most important book on the birth of directing in Italy is still Claudio Meldolesi's *Fondamenti del teatro italiano: la generazione dei registi*.¹⁷ The book is divided in two: some of the chapters are theoretical. In these Meldolesi examines issues related to directing, and outlines three lines of directing in Italy focusing on what he calls 'critical directing'. In the other chapters he considers the work of those directors who were born in the 1920s and started to experiment with directing in the 1940s and 1950s. The figures he concentrates on are Giorgio Strehler, Vito Pandolfi, and Luigi Squarzina, whom he regards as a compact generation, those who introduced directing in Italy. The other books were all published in the span of three years. While Schino's book starts its investigation from the experiences of the last decades of the nineteenth century, both Artioli and Alonge draw the attention to previous stagings in France, Germany and England that anticipated the modes of the director's theatre. All the books investigate the work done by those who are considered as the founding fathers of European directing, namely the Duke of Meiningen, André Antoine, Constantin Stanislavski, Vsevolod E. Mejerchol'd, and Antonin Artaud. Alonge also devotes the last chapters of his book to contemporary directors like Giorgio Strehler, Luca Ronconi, Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba. While all these books were fundamental for me to extend my knowledge of theatre directing, none of them refers specifically to Shakespeare, as my research does.

¹⁶ Mirella Schino, *La nascita della regia teatrale* (Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2003); Umberto Artioli, *Il teatro di regia: genesi ed evoluzione (1870-1950)* (Roma: Carocci, 2004); Roberto Alonge, *Il teatro dei registi: scopritori di enigmi e poeti della scena* (Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2006).

¹⁷ Claudio Meldolesi, *Fondamenti del teatro italiano: la generazione dei registi* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1984).

An interesting discussion on the role of the author, the actor, and the director in theatre is offered by the essay ‘Actors, authors and directors’, by Joseph Farrell.¹⁸ Within his discussion, Farrell also gives account of the view of Luigi Pirandello who saw both the actors and the directors as artisans at the service of the author. The final part of the essay focuses on experimental theatre groups that towards the end of the 1960s opposed the official theatre and the role of the director.

In order to shape my ideas as to which actors, directors, and companies I wished to include in my research, an invaluable instrument was Anna Anzi’s *Shakespeare nei teatri milanesi del Novecento*.¹⁹ The book is composed of two volumes: the first published in 1980, covers the years 1904-1978, the second published in 2001, stretches between 1978 and 2000. It offers a survey of Shakespearian productions in Milan. For each production it gives all the information needed (theatre, date, name of the company, of the director, and of the actors), followed by a description of the production and a survey of critical reviews.

After the theoretical introduction illustrated above, chapter 3 of my thesis moves on to analyse stagings of Shakespeare’s plays by Strehler.

The only monography in English on Strehler’s work is David Hirst’s *Giorgio Strehler*.²⁰ After two introductory chapters in which Hirst tells the story of the foundation of the Piccolo Teatro and of Strehler’s ideas about theatre in general, the author dedicates the following three chapters to examine Strehler’s theatre adaptations of the texts by his favourite playwrights: Luca Goldoni, William Shakespeare and Bertolt Brecht. The analysis of Shakespeare’s *Re Lear* and of *La Tempesta* is quite thorough, although the scholar makes no reference to the text and does not provide any insights into the issue of translation.

Besides this book, there are only articles on Strehler’s adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays (or on Strehler in general). Gian Giacomo Colli’s

¹⁸ Joseph Farrell, ‘Actors, authors and directors’, in *A History of Italian Theatre*, ed. Farrell and Paolo Puppa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 269-277.

¹⁹ Anna Anzi, *Shakespeare nei teatri milanesi del Novecento* (Bari: Adriatica, 1980-2001).

²⁰ David Hirst, *Giorgio Strehler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

‘Shakespeare in a Fountain: The First Italian Production of *The Tempest* directed by Giorgio Strehler’²¹ gives a detailed description of Strehler’s production of *La Tempesta* in 1948. The successive production of 1978 is discussed by Pia Kleber in ‘Theatrical Continuities in Giorgio Strehler’s *The Tempest*’.²² Very interesting to understand the different readings of the play by Jan Kott and by Strehler is Kott’s article ‘Prospero or the Director: Giorgio Strehler’s *The Tempest*’.²³ Here Kott argues that the problem of that production was the excessive identification of the Italian director with Prospero. Instead, within the context of my discussion of stagings of Shakespeare’s plays in the director’s theatre, I suggest that this identification is the proof that any transposition from page to stage is inevitably influenced by the director’s reading of the play. Consequently, what the audience saw in 1978 was not Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, but Strehler’s interpretation of it.

A discussion of the visual aspect of Strehler’s productions, with an emphasis on *Re Lear* and *La Tempesta* is provided by the section that Kennedy dedicates to Strehler in his *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance*.²⁴ The scholar offers an overview of some of the director’s adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, and then concentrates on the productions of *Re Lear* of 1972 and of *La Tempesta* of 1978. The second production, in particular, was highly visual, and Kennedy describes in detail the unrealities created by Prospero, which were nonetheless very clear stage effects. I found Kennedy’s analysis particularly interesting as its focus is on the devices that can be used for stage

²¹ Gian Giacomo Colli, ‘Shakespeare in a Fountain: The First Italian Production of *The Tempest* directed by Giorgio Strehler’, *Theatre Research International*, 29.2 (2004), 174-185.

²² Pia Kleber, ‘Theatrical Continuities in Giorgio Strehler’s *The Tempest*’, in *Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance*, ed. Dennis Kennedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²³ Jan Kott, ‘Prospero or the Director: Giorgio Strehler’s *The Tempest*’, *Theater*, 10.2 (1979), 117-122.

²⁴ Dennis Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance*, 2nd edn (1993; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). The section on Strehler’s *Re Lear* is at pp. 216-219; the section on *La Tempesta* is at pp. 304-310.

representation, and that can replace what cannot be rendered through translation.

Literature in Italian on Strehler is quite rich, and includes many writings of Strehler himself. In *Inscenare Shakespeare* Strehler offers general thoughts about the staging of Shakespeare's plays.²⁵ The book also includes the production notes for *Coriolanus* premièred on 9 November 1957; for *Re Lear* premièred on 6 November 1972, and for *La Tempesta* premièred on 28 June 1978. It is a very useful instrument to follow Strehler's reading and interpretation of the texts, and his ideas as to the transposition of the written words to the stage, including some thoughts on the issue of translation.

In *Strehler e Shakespeare* the already-mentioned Lombardo offers a survey of Strehler's adaptations of Shakespeare's plays.²⁶ Lombardo worked side by side with Strehler various times. The book (which was firstly conceived as an essay) does not provide a thorough insight into the work of Strehler, but is a useful instrument to introduce the reader to the director's stagings of Shakespeare's plays. It touches on various elements of Strehler's theatre, like the metatheatrical quality of some of his stagings, the issue of translation, and the serious study that Strehler did for each of his stagings. The book quotes extensively from Strehler himself.

A very useful instrument for the analysis of Strehler's *Re Lear* is Giorgio Strehler's *Il Re Lear di Shakespeare*, which provides the script of the stage adaptation, a portfolio of photos, the diary of rehearsals of some of the actors involved in the production, and Lombardo's essay 'Irrappresentabile o illegibile' ('Unperformable or unreadable'), which addresses the issue of whether Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a text to be read or to be represented on the stage.²⁷

²⁵ Giorgio Strehler, *Inscenare Shakespeare* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1992).

²⁶ Lombardo, *Strehler e Shakespeare* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1992). For more about Lombardo see footnote 5 at p. 19.

²⁷ Strehler, *Il Re Lear di Shakespeare* (Verona: Bertani, 1973); Lombardo, 'Irrappresentabile o illegibile', in Strehler, *Il Re Lear di Shakespeare*, 259-267.

La Tempesta tradotta e messa in scena, 1977-78: un carteggio ritrovato fra Strehler e Lombardo e due traduzioni inedite realizzate da Lombardo per il Piccolo Teatro di Milano edited by Rosy Colombo was another invaluable instrument for me.²⁸ The book contains the letters that Strehler exchanged with Lombardo, the translator of the play. The translation was a joint work between the scholar and the artist, and the letters are real essays by Strehler on the issue of translation for the stage. Following this part, the book provides the English text that was used by Lombardo and the two translations that were made, one for the reading and one for the staging.

What is missing in these books is a discussion of the characteristics of the staging of a Shakespeare play in the director's theatre. My investigation of Strehler's theatre goes hand in hand with a reflection upon what distinguishes a production as the result of the work of a director, and one as the result of the work of an actor. Another issue I investigate in this chapter, which is not identified in any of the sources I have mentioned is the meaning of 'original text' when we speak about Shakespeare's plays. I contrast the idea of the restoration of Shakespeare's original texts that characterized directing in Italy in the mid-twentieth century with the instability and fluidity of Shakespeare's texts.

My discussion continues in chapter 4 with Shakespearian adaptations of Shakespeare's plays by avant-garde groups that started their experimentations at the end of the 1950s. In particular I concentrate on the work of de Berardinis and Bene. Before looking into their work, I give an overall view of what is now known as the Nuovo Teatro (New Theatre), one of the definitions – along with experimental theatre, or avant-garde theatre – that is used to define the theatrical experiences of groups of young theatre practitioners who, from the 1960s experimented with new forms of theatre

²⁸ William Shakespeare, Agostino Lombardo and Giorgio Strehler, *La Tempesta tradotta e messa in scena, 1977-78: un carteggio ritrovato fra Strehler e Lombardo e due traduzioni inedite realizzate da Lombardo per il Piccolo Teatro di Milano* ed. Rosy Colombo (Roma: Donzelli, 2007). The book is accompanied by a DVD of the television broadcast of the original mtheatre production, directed by Claudio Battistoni.

opposing mainstream theatre. Two books have been useful sources for my discussion: Marco De Marinis's *Il Nuovo Teatro 1947-1970*, and the more recent *La nascita del Nuovo Teatro in Italia: 1959-1967* by Daniela Visone.²⁹ While the first offers an international perspective with an overall view of experimental theatre in and outside Italy, Visone's book thoroughly illustrates the birth (which she traces in 1959) and development of the Nuovo Teatro in Italy, and then it gives an account of the *Convegno di Ivrea* (*Ivrea Conference*) of 1967. Visone makes extensive reference to De Marinis's *Il Nuovo Teatro*. While De Marinis's book does not contain any pictures, Visone's contains a portfolio of photographs of some stagings by various directors.

Fundamental for the understanding of the experimental groups of the 1960s and 1970s is Franco Quadri's *L'avanguardia teatrale in Italia: Materiali (1960-1976)*, which is probably still the most complete survey of experimental theatre from 1960 to 1976.³⁰ Quadri was a keen observer of the work of the avant-garde groups that opposed mainstream theatre. In the long introduction he discusses experimental theatre in general, and the influence that foreign experiences like the American Living Theatre may have had on it. Then he examines the work done by the protagonists of that theatrical season, like Bene and de Berardinis, and by smaller groups all over Italy. The book also includes a very detailed bibliography of the 'avanguardie storiche' (the avant-garde movements of the first decades of the twentieth century), of foreign theatre groups and movements, of the Italian neo-avant-garde of the 1960s, and of single Italian groups.

Other books that consider the theatrical experimentation of the 1960s and its developments in the 1970s and 1980s are Giuseppe Bartolucci's, *La scrittura scenica* and *Testi critici 1964-1987*, collections of his writings for

²⁹ Marco De Marinis, *Il Nuovo Teatro 1947-1970* (Milano: Gruppo Editoriale Fabbri, Bompiani, Sonzogno, Etas, 1987); Daniela Visone, *La nascita del Nuovo Teatro in Italia: 1959-1967* (Corazzano [Pisa]: Titivillus, 2010).

³⁰ Franco Quadri, *L'avanguardia teatrale in Italia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1977).

various papers and magazines.³¹ They also contain writings by other critics like Edoardo Fadini, Corrado Augias, and Franco Quadri, that is the group of dissident critics who played a fundamental role for the diffusion and appreciation of the theatre of the experimental groups. Just a few of the writings are dedicated to Shakespearian adaptations.

Italian and foreign theatre in the second half of the twentieth century is also investigated by Paolo Puppa in *Teatro e spettacolo nel secondo Novecento*; by Roberto Tessari in *Teatro e avanguardie storiche*; and by Cesare Molinari in *Teatro e antiteatro dal dopoguerra a oggi*.³² Molinari dedicates a section of the book to adaptations of Shakespeare's plays concentrating on *Hamlet* and on the encounter between Bene and Shakespeare. Apart from this section, none of the books is specifically on Shakespeare.

When we come to the Shakespearian productions by de Berardinis, literature is almost nonexistent. There is nothing in English except an article by De Marinis that was originally written in Italian and subsequently translated into English, entitled 'From Shakespeare to Shakespeare'.³³ The article was the result of a long interview that De Marinis was given by de Berardinis, focusing on his adaptations of Shakespeare's plays.

Even literature in Italian on de Berardinis is scant. The only book that gives a detailed account of his life and of his theatre is Gianni Manzella's *La bellezza amara: arte e vita di Leo de Berardinis*.³⁴ The book is an essay written in a narrative form. For this reason it is very pleasant to read, and through Manzella's poetical style, it leads the reader into the poetry of de Berardinis's theatre. The work of this protagonist of the Italian

³¹ Giuseppe Bartolucci, *La scrittura scenica* (Roma: Lerici, 1968); *Testi critici 1964-1987*, ed. Valentina Valentini and Giancarlo Mancini (Roma: Bulzoni, 2007).

³² Paolo Puppa, *Teatro e spettacolo nel secondo Novecento* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1990); Roberto Tessari, *Teatro e avanguardie storiche* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2005); Cesare Molinari, *Teatro e antiteatro dal dopoguerra a oggi* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2007).

³³ De Marinis, 'From Shakespeare to Shakespeare: The Theatre Transcended', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 7.25 (1991), 49-63.

³⁴ Gianni Manzella, *La bellezza amara: arte e vita di Leo de Berardinis* (Firenze: La casa Usher, 2010).

theatre of research, is illustrated in the wider context of the revolution of Italian theatre that took place in the 1960s.

La terza vita di Leo: gli ultimi vent'anni del teatro di Leo de Berardinis a Bologna edited by Claudio Meldolesi is mainly composed of recollections by people who knew and/or worked with de Berardinis.³⁵

Because of the scarcity of sources, I have also relied on the words of actress Elena Bucci, who worked with de Berardinis for ten years and has now her own company. In May 2012 she granted me a long interview, the focus of which was the work that de Berardinis did with Shakespeare's plays, but it widened to cover the actor-director's idea of theatre and of the staging of the classics. The chapter on de Berardinis of my thesis is the only existing discussion of his theatre in English. It does not consider all his stagings of Shakespeare's plays, but most of them, and stretches from the first youth experiments with Perla Peragallo to his mature works of the 1990s. Moreover, I contrast his theatre with the director's theatre, and I suggest that, with his emphasis on the actor, de Berardinis resumes the typically Italian tradition of the *commedia dell'arte* on the one hand, and the Shakespearian tradition on the other. I also highlight the elements of his theatre that, despite very free interpretations of Shakespeare's plays, are paradoxically very Shakespearian.

Literature in English on Bene is also practically nonexistent. In fact there are no books on him. The most comprehensive source is Joseph Farrell's essay 'Revolutionizing Tradition'.³⁶ The essay offers a thorough insight into the theatre of Bene, and discusses the way in which Bene approached the classics. The scholar suggests that Bene's theatre is 'a meditation on theatre', as the main aim of theatre, copying reality, is completely banished.³⁷

³⁵ *La terza vita di Leo: gli ultimi vent'anni del teatro di Leo de Berardinis a Bologna*, ed. Claudio Meldolesi (Corazzano [Pisa]: Titivillus, 2010).

³⁶ Joseph Farrell, 'Revolutionizing Tradition', in *Theatre, Opera, and Performance in Italy from the Fifteenth Century to the Present: Essays in Honour of Richard Andrews* ed. Brian Richardson, Simon Gilson and Catherine Keen (Egham: The Society for Italian Studies, 2004).

³⁷ Farrell; 'Revolutionizing Tradition', p. 294.

Literature in Italian is quite rich. The most complete study of Bene's theatre is probably Piergiorgio Giacché's *Carmelo Bene: antropologia di una macchina attoriale*.³⁸ The book takes into account the influence that Bene's south Italian origins had on his future career, and it explores all the aspects (the idea of the impossibility to represent a text on the stage; the continuous variation that is at the basis of his stagings; and the importance of sounds and music, just to mention a few) that characterize Bene's theatre from the beginnings to its more mature forms.

On the relationship between Bene and Shakespeare we can mention Gianfranco Bartalotta's *Carmelo Bene e Shakespeare*.³⁹ The book provides a close reading of some of Bene's Shakespearian adaptations, from his various *Amleti* to *Romeo e Giulietta*, *Riccardo III*, *Otello*, and *Macbeth*. Bartalotta frequently quotes from the scripts of the productions, and evaluates the development of Bene's theatre from the first stagings to his more mature works.

Armando Petrini's *Amleto da Shakespeare a Laforgue per Carmelo Bene* analyses the five stage adaptations of Bene's *Amleto* between 1962 and 1975.⁴⁰ There is no reference to *Hommelette for Hamlet* (1987) and *Hamlet Suite* (1994), as the author considers the first five productions as a compact body that develop a common idea, while – he claims – the last two offer a less rich and less problematic scenic language. I do not completely agree with Petrini because the 1987 and the 1994 productions introduce some elements that were not present in the previous ones, although they do not seem to contain that innovative drive that characterized the first productions.

Differently from Petrini's book, Enrico Baiardo and Roberto Trovato's *Un classico del rifacimento: l'Amleto di Carmelo Bene* is a survey of the cinema versions of Bene's *Amleto*. The book is a useful guide

³⁸ Piergiorgio Giacché, *Carmelo Bene: antropologia di una macchina attoriale*, 2nd edn (1997; Milano: Bompiani, 2007).

³⁹ Gianfranco Bartalotta, *Carmelo Bene e Shakespeare* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2000).

⁴⁰ Armando Petrini, *Amleto da Shakespeare a Laforgue per Carmelo Bene* (Sesto Fiorentino [Firenze]: edizioni ETS, 2005).

to watch the videos of these productions, and offers ample excerpts from the scripts.⁴¹

My discussion of Bene's adaptations of Shakespeare's plays draws from all these sources, out of which I have conceived my own reading of Bene's theatre and of his approach to Shakespeare. My interest lies in contrasting Bene's rewriting of the classics, and of Shakespeare in particular, with Strehler's concern with fidelity to the text, and in highlighting the elements that make his theatre a very Shakespearian theatre.

There are three more volumes in Italian on Shakespearian adaptations in Italy, that I have used and have been very helpful. These are *Amleto in Italia nel Novecento* by Gianfranco Bartalotta; *Macbeth in Italia* by Isabella Aradas; and Visone's *L'ombra di Lear*.⁴² The merit of the three books is that they make a comparative study of productions of *Hamlet*, of *Macbeth*, and of *King Lear* in Italy. The first gives account of the most important productions of *Hamlet* in the twentieth century. Therefore, differently from my research, it does not consider the stagings by the nineteenth-century Great Actors. On the other hand, Aradas's book predominantly focuses on the nineteenth century, while less attention is devoted to the twentieth. Both scholars consider stagings by a high number of actors and directors, whereas my research gives a more thorough insight into the work of those I have chosen, which I consider as case studies to explore the questions I have posed in the introduction, and to make a comparison between the actor's theatre, the director's theatre, and the New Theatre. Visone's book is the most comprehensive. The scholar analyses adaptations of *King Lear* from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth, and focuses both on the drive and on the resistance that characterized the shift from the actor's theatre to the director's theatre. Unlike the books I have just mentioned, some sections of my thesis offer a comparative study with Shakespearian productions in Britain, along with

⁴¹ Enrico Baiardo and Roberto Trovato, *Un classico del rifacimento: l'Amleto di Carmelo Bene* (Genova: Erga, 1996).

⁴² Bartalotta, *Amleto in Italia nel Novecento* (Bari: Adriatica, 1986); Isabella Aradas, *Macbeth in Italia* (Bari: Adriatica, 1989); Visone, *L'ombra di Lear* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2004).

references to the theatre at the time of Shakespeare. Finally, my work also examines in detail some important events in the evolution of Italian theatre, such as the foundation of the Piccolo Teatro and its significance, and the birth and development of the New Theatre. While these sections are not directly linked to my discussion of Shakespearian stagings, they lay the groundwork to understand the productions better, and explore some fundamental occurrences within the development of theatre in Italy, that may not be known to English-speaking readers

My research can certainly be seen in the context of what is known as ‘global Shakespeares’. Among the scholars who have investigated the field, Kennedy is one of the most authoritative. His *Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance*, which I referred to before, is a collection of essays that discuss Shakespeare performance outside the English-speaking theatre in the second half of the twentieth century. The aim of these essays is to trace the differences existing between stagings of Shakespeare’s plays in Britain and those in other European countries. In the introduction Kennedy draws the attention to various issues concerning foreign-language productions, and suggests that, if something gets lost in the transference from English to another language, ‘foreign performances may have a more direct access to the power of the plays.’⁴³ He also notices that while for many Anglophone Shakespearians translating Shakespeare’s English into modern English is anathema, the translation into foreign modern languages is common practice.

Kennedy continues his exploration into global Shakespeare in the already-mentioned *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance*. Here the scholar looks at the relationship between scenography and foreign Shakespeare, in order to explore how the visual transmits meaning on the stage. Kennedy investigates this aspect by exploring home and foreign adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays. He

⁴³ Kennedy, *Foreign Shakespeare*, p. 5.

examines the work of Theodore Komisarjevsky, Brecht, Josef Svoboda, and Strehler, just to mention a few.

World-wide Shakespeares: Local Appropriations in Film and Performance edited by Sonia Massai differs from previous collections of ‘global Shakespeares’, which do not usually include non-European adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, as it focuses on appropriations from a wide range of geographical locations, such as Mexico and China.⁴⁴ Borrowing Pierre Bourdieu’s idea that ‘the producer of a work of art is not the artist but the field of production as a universe of belief which produces the value of the work of art as a *fetish*’, Massai points out that it is necessary to consider Shakespeare as the sum of the responses that his plays elicit.⁴⁵ In other words, the response of Italian critics, and Italian audiences to Shakespeare’s work – the subject of my research – contributes to shape it.

The series *International Shakespeare* edited by Patricia Kennan and Mariangela Tempera offers a numbers of essays by various scholars who address diverse issues like the transposition of Shakespeare’s plays from page to stage; Shakespeare on the international stage; Shakespeare in translation; the reception of Shakespeare by foreign cultures; and Shakespeare in opera and in cinema, just to mention a few. The series is composed of two volumes, *International Shakespeare: The Tragedies*, and *International Shakespeare: The Comedies*.⁴⁶ *International Shakespeare: The Histories* has not been published yet. The series was preceded by the volume *Shakespeare from Text to Stage*, in which the first set of essays is primarily text-based, while the second explores stage and performance.

Through the close reading of the theatre adaptations I have chosen, I explore most of these issues in my research, but I am also interested in asking the same questions about avant-garde stagings, and to assess whether

⁴⁴ *World-wide Shakespeares: Local Appropriations in Film and Performance* ed. Sonia Massai (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁴⁵ Quoted in *World-wide Shakespeares*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ *International Shakespeare: The Tragedies*, ed. Patricia Kennan and Mariangela Tempera (Bologna: CLUEB, 1996); *International Shakespeare: The Comedies*, ed. Kennan and Tempera (Bologna: CLUEB, 2004); *Shakespeare from Text to Stage*, ed. Kennan and Tempera (Bologna: CLUEB 1992).

they preserve a Shakespearian spirit despite being very free interpretations of the playtexts. Certainly, the above-mentioned collections have proved useful theoretical and methodological models, and have helped me shape my ideas about how to develop my own methodology.

From this survey of primary and secondary sources it should be clear that literature in English on the topic of theatre adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in Italy is scant. Therefore, my work makes a contribution to the field of 'global Shakespeares'. Furthermore, although there are various sources that explore the development of Italian theatre in terms of acting and directing, there are none (and certainly not in English) that base such exploration on the work done by actors and directors with Shakespeare's plays. As well as this, there is no scholarly work, either in English or in Italian that compares and contrasts Italian theatre adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in the theatre of the nineteenth-century actors, of the twentieth-century directors, and of the actor-directors of the Nuovo Teatro. My exploration is twofold, and this contributes to the originality of my work. Finally, the use of the interviews I have been granted makes my discussion more interesting.

1. The Reception of Shakespeare in Italy (1667-mid-19th century)

The acceptance of Shakespeare in Italy involved a long gestation period, and strong resistance to the novelty that his plays represented within the context of Italian theatre that, as far as the first half of the nineteenth century, was still permeated by classical rules. The irregularity of Shakespeare's texts, and the freedom in style and content that characterized them, seemed to be anxiety provoking in the Italian intellectual circles, and the challenge to the 'sacredness' of the rules, was seen as undermining of the status quo of theatre and of society.

In this first chapter I am going to tell the story of how Shakespeare's plays arrived in Italy, focusing on the hard work of a number of people operating in different fields and having different skills, who had to struggle to spread knowledge of Shakespeare in the country, and to make his plays accepted and loved. Such people were scholars, writers, translators, composers, and actors, who travelled, learned English to understand the original texts or worked on French translations, broke rules, and defied generally accepted ideas about theatre and culture in general. The debate over Romantic issues was fought in the name of Shakespeare, and it was only around mid-nineteenth century, that Shakespeare's status in the cultural imagination was fully established, and the Italian theatre audience, finally recognized the greatness of the English playwright.

1.1 From the First Mention of Shakespeare to Francesco De Sanctis

While all through the sixteenth century a considerable number of Italian people travelled to England for commercial reasons, in the

seventeenth century this number decreased significantly. The execution of Charles I shocked the Italians, and added to the already existing distrust of the English on account of their religion. Only with the Restoration did some interest in the northern island revive which, however, did not include the literary field. As for William Shakespeare, public awareness of the English playwright developed in Italy much later than in other European countries and at the beginning of the eighteenth century he was still almost completely unknown in the peninsula.

The first mention of his name is to be found in a list attributed to the Florentine linguist, essayist and diplomat Lorenzo Magalotti who, according to Piero Rebora,¹ was in England in 1667. The list reads as follows: ‘Chacius, Spenns, Drayton, Shakespier, Johnson, Bemont comico, Flesher comico (...)’.² We have nothing more than that name even though, according to Anna Maria Crinò, the first Italian translation of Hamlet’s monologue ‘To be or not to be’, may be attributed to Magalotti.³ In his *Teatro Britanico*, published in London in 1683, the Milanese Gregorio Leti makes a comment on English theatre without mentioning the name of Shakespeare or his works: ‘splendid and magnificent theatres deserve to be seen by foreigners ... for all that concerns the scenes of the comedies, the skill of the actors, the inventions and designs and everything else; they are in advance of the other theatres of Europe’.⁴ And a firm proof of the ignorance of the Italians about Shakespeare is the fact that the Venetian writer Apostolo Zeno wrote his melodrama *Ambleto* (1705) going back to the original source, Saxo Gramaticus,⁵ whereas there is no trace of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in his work.

¹ ‘Fortuna e comprensione di Shakespeare in Italia’, in Piero Rebora, *Interpretazioni Anglo-Italiane* (Bari: Adriatica, 1961), 43-62 (p.49) and ‘Magalotti e gli Inglesi’ in the same book, 163-189 (p. 167).

² Rebora, ‘Magalotti e gli Inglesi’, p. 173.

³ Anna Maria Crinò, ‘An Unknown “Verso sciolto” Translation of Hamlet’s Soliloquy “To Be or not To Be” in the Archivio Magalotti’, *Shakespeare Today: Directions and Methods of Research*, ed. Keir Elam (Firenze: La casa Usher, 1984), 215-220. The essay contains the transcript of the English original and the Italian translation that A. M. Crino’ found in the *filza* 174 of the Archivio Magalotti.

⁴ Quoted in Collison-Morley, *Shakespeare in Italy*, pp. 2-3.

⁵ For a good analysis of this see Collison-Morley, *Shakespeare in Italy*.

The first Italian who expressed an opinion on Shakespeare was the physicist, mathematician, philosopher and historian Antonio Schinella Conti (1677-1749). It was contained in ‘Risposta del Signor Abate Antonio Conti al Signore Jacopo Martelli’ prefacing Conti’s tragedy *Il Cesare* and appeared in 1726. Here Conti wrote:

Sasper [sic] e’ il Cornelio degl’Inglesi, ma molto piu’ irregolare del Cornelio, sebbene al pari di lui pregno di grandi idee, e di nobili sentimenti.⁶

Sasper[sic] is the Corneille of the English, but much more irregular than Corneille though, like him, full of great ideas and of noble sentiments. (All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated).

Conti, who spent three years in England where he arrived in 1715, was still imbued with classical theories and French taste as he had been to Paris. Referring to *Julius Caesar*, he pointed out that Shakespeare did not observe the Aristotelian rules, though he admitted that this allowed much more emotional freedom, which would please the public much better:

Ristringendomi qui a parlare del suo Cesare, il Sasper lo fa morire al terzo atto; il rimanente della Tragedia è occupato dall’aringa di Marc-antonio al Popolo, indi dalle guerre e dalla morte di Cassio e di Bruto. Può maggiormente violarsi l’unità del tempo, dell’azione, e del luogo? Ma gl’Inglesi dispreszarono fino al Catone le regole d’Aristotile per la ragione, che la Tragedia è fatta per piacere, e che ottima ella è allora che piace.⁷

Talking about his Caesar, Shakespeare has him die in the third act; the remaining part of the tragedy is occupied by Marc-Antony’s harangue to the people and by Cassio’s and Brutus’s deaths. Could he have

⁶ *Il Cesare tragedia del Sig. Abate Antonio Conti nobile veneto con alcune cose concernenti l’opera medesima* (Faenza: Archi, 1726), p. 54.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

violated the unities of place, of action and of time more? But the English have despised the Aristotelian rules since Cato, because tragedy is written to be liked and it is excellent when people like it.

But he did not follow this example when he wrote his *Il Cesare*, though he may have been influenced by Shakespeare's work. Critics disagree on whether Conti had substantial and direct knowledge of Shakespeare's plays: Collison-Morley, for example, concluded in 1916 that Conti only knew Shakespeare through conversations with friends and justifies his opinion by hinting at the wrong spelling of Shakespeare (Sasper) and at the fact that, referring to *Othello*, Conti mentioned an English tragedy but not its author.⁸ In her book *Le traduzioni di Shakespeare in Italia nel Settecento*, Anna Maria Crinò finds it unlikely that Conti never read anything by this author who was so much talked about at the time of his stay in the country, and believes that Conti had most probably Shakespeare in mind when highlighting the qualities of English tragedies. It is also true that Conti did not mention Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* when he illustrated the reasons that moved him to write his tragedy *Il Cesare*, but admitted that he would not have embarked on the writing if he had not been in England.⁹

Paolo Rolli (1687-1756) – poet, librettist and scholar – arrived in England in the same year as Conti. Rolli spoke English well since he was in London from 1715 to 1744. He was a strenuous defender of Shakespeare and his most important contribution to the development of the playwright's reception in Italy was his translation of Hamlet's monologue 'To be or not to be'.¹⁰ The accuracy of his translation reveals Rolli's good understanding of the original text as the sample I am giving below shows:

To be, or not to be – that is the	Essere o no, la gran Questione è
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⁸ Collison-Morley, *Shakespeare in Italy*, p. 8.

⁹ Crinò, *Le traduzioni di Shakespeare in Italia nel Settecento*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁰ This was thought to be the first translation into Italian of a passage from a play by Shakespeare until Crinò drew attention to the previous one by Magalotti.

question; Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune Or to take arms against a sea of troubles And by opposing end them; to die: to sleep – No more, and by a sleep to say we end The heartache and the thousand natural shocks That flesh is heir to. ¹¹	questa: Qual nella mente è forte più? Soffrire Colpi e Saette d'oltraggiosa Sorte; O prender l'Armi contra un mar d'Affanni, E dar loro, in opporsi, a un tratto il fine? Morir! Dormire: Altro non è. Nel Sonno, Dicon, che fine avrà il Cordoglio, e mille, Retaggio della carne, altre sciagure. ¹²
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In the Preface to his translation of *Paradise Lost* by Milton published in Verona in 1730, he speaks quite extensively about Shakespeare:

Il primo fra gl'Inglesi che felicemente usasse il verso sciolto fu Guglielmo Shakespear [*sic*], nato nel 1564 e morto nel 1616. Gentiluomo che nel Regno della Regina Elisabetta elevò il Teatro Inglese ad insuperabile sublimità con le sue Tragedie (...). Questo prodigioso ingegno (...) scrisse alcune Tragedie che io chiamerei Istoriche, poiché rappresentano tratti istorici de i Re e Patrizj illustri della sua nazione; ed in queste i fatti ed i caratteri de' Personaggi

11 Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, Second Quarto, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, Arden Shakespeare, 3rd series (London: Methuen, 2006), 3.1.55-62.

12 Crinò, Le traduzioni di Shakespeare in Italia *nel Settecento*, p. 38.

interlocutori sono così viva [sic] e poeticamente e con adattissimo stile espressi; che nulla più.¹³

The first among the English who beautifully used the blank verse was Guglielmo Shakespear, who was born in 1564 and died in 1616. A gentleman who, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, elevated English drama to unequalled sublimity with his tragedies (...). This wondrous genius (...) wrote certain tragedies which I would call historical, since they represent historical happenings concerning the illustrious kings and nobles of his nation: and in these the events and the characters that participate are so vivid and so poetically expressed with most fitting style as not to be bettered.¹⁴

Rolli was also the first who mentioned Shakespeare together with Dante:

Secondo che di lui dico quel che asserisco del Dante; cioè ch'eglino due soli mi fanno altamente meravigliare d'aver i primi tanto sublimemente poetato nella loro lingua.¹⁵

I can say of him what I can say of Dante: that they are the only ones who make me marvel at how sublimely they have written poetry.

It is necessary, at this point, to mention the name of Francois-Marie Arouet (1694-1778), better known as Voltaire, whose engagement with the work of Shakespeare was extremely useful to the knowledge of the English playwright in France and outside France. Voltaire's relationship with Shakespeare was a long one, starting with his first thoughts contained in *Essai sur la poésie épique* (1728), followed by the preface to his tragedy *Brutus* (1730), his *Lettres philosophiques* (1734), the article *Art Dramatique* contained in *Le Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1764) and *Les Lettres a*

¹³ 'Vita di Giovanni Milton' preface to *Il Paradiso Perduto: poema inglese di Giovanni Milton tradotto dal Sig. Paolo Rolli con le annotazioni di G. Addison* (Parigi: Bartolomeo Occhi, 1758), V-LXIV (pp. LI-LII).

¹⁴ From Agostino Lombardo, 'Shakespeare and Italian Criticism', p. 532.

¹⁵ Ibid.

l'Academie written after the publication in France of the first two volumes of Le Tourneur's translation of Shakespeare's plays. At that time, Voltaire was the commanding critical voice in much of Europe and this was especially true of Italy. We will see how some of the opinions expressed on Shakespeare in Italy are just a reflection of Voltaire's statements. His attitude was mixed: on the one hand Voltaire admired the genius of the English playwright, on the other he could not accept Shakespeare's disdain of all the rules of classical literature. In particular what Voltaire and, as a consequence, the great majority of Italian critics condemned, was the mishmash of tragic and comic elements, bringing together noble people – even Kings or Queens – and humble people, the use of a variety of language types, from highly poetical to coarse and vulgar, the use of poetry and prose in the same play, the presence of the fantastic, of the supernatural, and the non-observance of the Aristotelian rules. While in his first writings Voltaire expressed some positive remarks on the English playwright, later on – as the general admiration for Shakespeare grew – these remarks became real accusations.

A few quotations will clarify Voltaire's attitude. He expresses his disapproval very forcefully in *Essai sur la poésie épique*, which he wrote in English. The original title was: *An Essay upon the Civil Wars of France, extracted from curious Manuscripts and also upon the Epick Poetry of the European Nations, from Homer down to Milton, by Mr. de Voltaire*. It was issued by a London book-seller in 1727, and translated into French in two distinct pieces of work. Here he states:

These plays are monsters of tragedy. There are some which cover a period of several years; the hero is baptized in the first act and dies of old age in the fifth. In them you see witches, peasants, drunkards, clowns; gravediggers as they work sing drinking songs and play with

skulls. In brief, imagine whatever you can that is most monstrous and absurd and you will find it in Shakespeare.¹⁶

In the Preface to his tragedy *Brutus*, Voltaire speaks of the English theatre and explains why this theatre was not suitable to French taste:

Il a manqué jusqu' à présent à presque tous les Auteurs Tragiques de votre Nation, cette pureté, cette conduite régulière, ces bienséances de l'action & du stile, cette élégance, & toutes ces finesses de l'Art, qui ont établi la réputation du Théâtre François depuis le Grand Corneille.¹⁷

What has been missing among all your nation's tragic writers is the purity, the ordinary discretion, the sense of propriety in action and style, the elegance, and all the artful finesse which have established the reputation of the French theatre since the time of the great Corneille; but the most irregular of your plays have one great merit: their sense of action.¹⁸

Again he refers to Shakespeare in particular in the XVIIIth letter contained in his *Philosophical Letters or Letters upon the English Nation* which were published in London in 1733, shortly before the first French edition appeared.

Il avait un génie plein de force et de fécondité, de naturel et de sublime, sans la moindre étincelle de bon goût, et sans la moindre connaissance des règles. Je vais vous dire une chose hasardée, mais vraie: c'est que le mérite de cet auteur a perdu le théâtre anglais; il y a de si belles scènes, des morceaux si grands et si terrible répandus dans

¹⁶ Voltaire, 'A Shakespeare Journal', in *Shakespeare in France*, ed. Joseph H McMahon, *Yale French Studies*, 33, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 5-13 (p. 6).

¹⁷ *Le Brutus de Monsieur de Voltaire, avec un discours sur la tragedie*, 2nd edn (Amsterdam: E. J. Ledet & Compagnie, et Jaques Desbordes, 1731), p. 8.

¹⁸ Quoted in 'A Shakespeare Journal', p. 7.

ses farces monstrueuses qu'on appelle tragédies, que ces pièces ont toujours été jouées avec un grand succès.¹⁹

His genius was strong and fertile, full of nature and the sublime, without the slightest spark of good taste, and without the least understanding of the rules. I will tell you something daring but true: the great accomplishments of this author doomed English theatre; he gave us such beautiful scenes, such great and terrible moments sprinkled through his monstrous farces, which some call tragedies, that these plays have always been performed to great applause.²⁰

Similar ideas can be found in the works mentioned at the beginning (and of which Anna Maria Crinò gives a good analysis in her *Le traduzioni di Shakespeare in Italia nel Settecento*).²¹ Voltaire's mixed attitude became little by little contempt but on the whole because of his fame, he contributed significantly to arousing interest in Shakespeare.

Collison-Morley's *Shakespeare in Italy*, Lombardo's essay *Shakespeare and Italian Criticism*, and Crino's just mentioned work, give a detailed account of the influence of Voltaire's ideas on Italian Shakespearian criticism.²² In his letter to Abbé Franchini dated October 1735, the cultivated man and friend of Voltaire, Francesco Algarotti, mentioned the 'faults innumerable and thoughts inimitable' of Shakespeare's plays and 'the barbarity of the English stage'.²³ In his *Della Storia e della Ragione d'Ogni Poesia* (1743), Francesco Saverio Quadrio simply repeated Voltaire's words. He admitted that the English playwright 'possessed a fertile and vigorous genius' but 'he had not as M. de Voltaire says, the slightest acquaintance with the rules, nor are his poems anywhere

¹⁹ Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques* (1733), ed. Frédéric Deloffre (Paris: Gallimards, 1986), p. 124.

²⁰ Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters Or, Letters Regarding the English Nation* (1733), ed. John Leigh and trans. Prudence L. Steiner (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2007), p. 69.

²¹ Crino, *Le traduzioni di Shakespeare in Italia nel Settecento*, pp. 17-22.

²² Collison-Morley, *Shakespeare in Italy*, Ch. 2; Lombardo, 'Shakespeare and Italian Criticism'; Crinò, *Le traduzioni di Shakespeare in Italia nel Settecento*, pp. 57-63.

²³ Collison-Morley, *Shakespeare in Italy*, pp. 18-19.

illuminated by the light of good taste. Hence, instead of benefiting the English stage and correcting its defects, he brought it to utter ruin'.²⁴ And, like Voltaire, he considered Shakespeare's plays 'monstrous farces'. In *Discorso sopra le vicende della letteratura* (1761), Carlo Denina affirmed that no one gave more honour to or damaged English theatre more than Shakespeare. He possessed a sublime genius, a great fire, prolific imagination, and all the natural qualities which make a poet great, but he was completely in the dark as to theatre rules.²⁵ Jesuit Saverio Bettinelli (1718-1808) defined Shakespeare 'bestial, though sometimes sublime'²⁶ and Melchiorre Cesarotti (1730-1808) – though he had translated *Ossian*, thus showing a liking for pre-romantic themes to which Shakespeare would be assimilated – believed that *Julius Caesar* had 'no merit'.²⁷ Giambattista Roberti thought that you must do more than 'handle corpses like Shakespeare'²⁸ and Pietro Napoli-Signorelli, in his *Storia Critica de' Teatri Antichi e Moderni* (1777), once more blamed Shakespeare for the non-observance of the rules. Shakespeare: 'had no better knowledge of the rules of probability than the Chinese. Like them he compressed the events of thirty years into a performance of a few hours'.²⁹

Scholar Giuseppe Baretta, among the few who appreciated Shakespeare in Italy towards the middle of the eighteenth century, attacked the opinions of Voltaire in his *A Dissertation upon the Italian Poetry* written in English in 1753, in *A Dissertation upon the Italian Tongue* (1757) and above all in *Discours sur Shakespeare et sur Monsieur Voltaire* (1778) – which he wrote in French in order to be sure to be understood by the French – and placed Shakespeare among the great figures of world literature. Baretta knew England well as he stayed there in two successive periods, from 1751 to 1760 and again from 1766 to his death in 1789. He had a good

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

²⁵ Quotation given in Italian in Crinò, *Le traduzioni di Shakespeare in Italia nel Settecento*, p. 59 and paraphrased by me in English.

²⁶ Collison-Morley, *Shakespeare in Italy*, p. 22.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

command of English and blamed Voltaire for his imperfect knowledge of the language, although Voltaire had spent over two years in England. In his *Discours*, Baretti states:

Oui, Messieurs les François! Pour connaître Shakespeare il faut que vous veniez à Londres. En y arrivant, il faut que vous vous mettiez à étudier l'anglois (...) Il faut que vous examiniez ce peuple, non pas en François, mais en Hommes.³⁰

Yes, dear French! To know Shakespeare you have to come to London! And when you are here, you have to take up studying English (...) and examine this population not in French but as men.

And in an unpublished letter kept at Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C., which according to the catalogue was addressed to Samuel Johnson, he openly criticizes Voltaire:

Voltaire knows a peu pres just as much of English, as your tender Misses do of French, which I took the liberty to term no knowledge at all in a man that pretends to play the critick. (...) Believe me, Sir, that, if Voltaire had ever been able to write such English language and such English style during five or six years (...), he would have felt Shakespeare at least as much as I do, Poet as he is.³¹

Baretti knew Samuel Johnson well and deeply admired him. It was Dr Johnson who probably introduced him to the work of Shakespeare when he arrived in England for the first time. Dr Johnson had written a long Preface to *The Plays of William Shakespeare* (1765) in which he upheld Shakespeare's work against those who discredited it – though also

³⁰ Gaby Petrone Fresco, *Shakespeare's Reception in 18th Century Italy*, p. 97; also in Rosa Trillo Clough 'Giuseppe Baretti, Figura di Critico Nuovo', *Italica*, 30.4 (Dec., 1953), 209-222 (p. 216).

³¹ Gustavo Costa, 'Lettere inedite di Giuseppe Baretti', *Italica*, 48.3 (Autumn, 1971), 353-366 (p. 355).

highlighting a few defects. Reading Baretto's *Discours*, Dr Johnson's influence on the Italian critic is evident. Dr Johnson wrote:

His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated and the whole system of life is continued in motion. In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species.³²

And Baretto:

Une des plus grandes perfections de Shakespeare est celle de mettre devant nos yeux des caractères qui sont très souvent des prototypes. Les principaux personnages dans ses Pièces ne représentent point des individus mais des espèces.³³

One of the greatest achievements of Shakespeare is that of showing us characters who are very often prototypes. The main characters in his plays are not at all individuals, but a species.

Reading the works by the two writers in their entirety, the influence of the first on the second becomes even clearer. Many of the issues that Baretto engaged with hint at Dr Johnson's Preface. Baretto played a primary role in spreading a knowledge of English literature in Italy and he was a central figure in Shakespeare criticism for his life-long commitment to the study, defence and diffusion of the playwright's work. Nevertheless, his influence was not immediate: Italy seemed not to be ready to receive Shakespeare's plays as it was still permeated by classical models and taste.

This is confirmed by the lack of translations: the first attempts at translating complete works by Shakespeare were only made towards the mid-eighteenth century. And not always were the translations directly from

³² Samuel Johnson, 'Preface to Shakespeare' (1778), facs., introd. P. J. Smallwood. (Bristol: Classical Press, 1985), pp. 4-5.

³³ Quoted in Petrone Fresco, *Shakespeare's Reception in 18th Century Italy*, p.103.

English into Italian: in 1769 Francesco Gritti translated *Hamlet* from an adaptation by Jean-Francois Ducis (1733-1816), of Pierre-Antoine de la Place's (1707-1793) translation from English into French which appeared in France in 1746!³⁴ We can easily imagine how inaccurate this first translation was if we consider that La Place's translations were fragmentary; they were rather paraphrases, very free variations on Shakespeare's themes. And this *Hamlet* was the first staging of a play by Shakespeare in Italy (1774). Before Gritti, in 1756, Canon Domenico Valentini had translated *Julius Caesar* without knowing English; he had English friends conversant with Italian, who explained the whole play to him. Despite the difficulties that Valentini must have faced, his translation was quite accurate.³⁵ Differently from what happened in France, Valentini made the attempt to be as faithful as possible to the original text in his work.

Between 1769 and 1777 Alessandro Verri translated *Hamlet* in prose but, for personal reasons, never published it. After Domenico Valentini's translation of *Julius Caesar*, this would have been the first translation of a complete play from English into Italian.³⁶ Alessandro Verri praised Shakespeare as follows:

Questo autore mostra la vera strada della natura, e dopo d'averlo letto si trovano artificiosi gli eroi del teatro francese ... Egli è vero pittore della natura, gli altri sono manierati, questo dipinge sempre col nudo avanti gli occhi ... Tutto è libero, è originale, è strano in Shakespeare.³⁷

This author shows the true path of Nature, and after reading him, one finds the heroes of the French theatre artificial ... He is the true

³⁴ Jean-Francois Ducis was a French dramatist and adapter of Shakespeare's plays. Pierre-Antoine de la Place was the first translator of Shakespeare in France apart from the few attempts by Voltaire's. The first volume of his *Theatre Anglois* was published in 1745.

³⁵ As Crino' affirms (p. 43), Valentini had the merit of justifying Shakespeare for not observing the Aristotelian rules in a century when classicism was still dominant.

³⁶ For a complete analysis of translations of Shakespeare's plays in the XVIII century see Crinò, *Le traduzioni di Shakespeare in Italia nel Settecento*. See also Petrone Fresco.

³⁷ Quoted in Lombardo, 'Shakespeare e la critica italiana', *Sipario*, June 1964, 2-13 (p. 5)

painter of Nature; the others are mannered, he paints with the naked model before his eyes ... Everything in Shakespeare is free, original, and strange.³⁸

The ideas highlighted by Baretti, Alessandro Verri, and a few others in Italy were already dominant in the German cultural area, where the Romantic movement was spreading with its praise of Shakespeare: in his work the Romantics found themes, characters, feelings – liberty of form, unrest, melancholy – quite close to their new sensitivity. In particular August Wilhelm Schlegel expressed his admiration for Shakespeare in his *Über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* (1808-11) and translated some of the plays. Schlegel distinguished between ‘classical’ dramatic literature including the Greeks and their imitators, the French and the Italians, and ‘romantic’ dramatic literature, which included the Spanish and the English. According to him, while the Greeks, the Spanish and the English were original, the French and the Italians were not and, for this reason, he considered their work much less valuable.³⁹ Schlegel and other German intellectuals like Hamann and Herder were fostering a different idea of beauty, and their attitude to Shakespeare and to literature in general seems to be more subjective than that of most Italians at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth. They suggested that there can be works that are as beautiful as the ancient ones though they follow different criteria that depend on the characteristics and conditions – political, social, even climatic – of the country in which they are created. The notion of relativism of taste, and the idea that critics should not judge a work of art in abstract terms and according to general criteria, constituted a bad blow to the principle of imitation.

This tendency found ampler scope in Italy in the course of the nineteenth century. Ugo Foscolo was the first who, at the beginning of the century, applied the historicist criterion to the evaluation of literature:

³⁸ Quoted in Lombardo ‘Shakespeare and Italian Criticism’, p. 542.

³⁹ August Wilhelm Schlegel, ‘Erste Vorlesung’, in *Über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur* (Heidelberg: Moor und Zimmer, 1809), 3-43.

Gli egregi lavori del genio dell'uomo non saranno mai probabilmente stimati da chi guarda il genio diviso dall'uomo e l'uomo dalle fortune della vita e de' tempi ... a intendere le parole degli scrittori più di mille commentatori giova la conoscenza delle loro anime.⁴⁰

The remarkable works of man's genius will never be valued by those who look at the genius as separated from man and man from the fortunes of life and times ... to understand the writers' words it is the knowledge of their soul that counts more than the work of a thousand commentators.

A work of art is the creation of an individual endowed with the gift of 'genius', influenced in his creation by his life conditions and the fortunes of his times. What Foscolo implies here is that an artwork is not only that which results from the imitation of the classics. Ugo Foscolo knew Shakespeare and admired him. We find passages in his *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* where the influence of the new Romantic movement – Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* – and of Shakespeare is evident. In letter LVI, for example, there is a clear reference to one of Hamlet's monologues:

Uomo debole! Perché te ne stai qui, timido, irresoluto come un fanciullo che inoltri il mal fermo piede nel bujo della notte? – Incomprensibile eternità! Non sei tu no tanto spaventosa ed orrenda! Ma chi senza di te potrebbe soffrir una esistenza così penosa, viver fra cotanti scellerati, spirar l'aure de' vizi, trascinarsi dietro le miserie, le persecuzioni, gli affanni?⁴¹

Weak man! Why are you here, shy, irresolute, like a boy taking faltering steps in the dark night? Incomprehensible eternity! No, you

⁴⁰ Quoted in Mario Puppo, *Manuale critico-bibliografico per lo studio della letteratura italiana*, 13th edn (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1980), p. 46.

⁴¹ Quoted in Mario Corona, *La fortuna di Shakespeare a Milano (1800-1825)* (Bari: Adriatica Editore, 1970), p. 20.

are not that frightening and horrendous! But who, without you, would live such miserable life among villains and bear the vices, the miseries, the persecutions, the troubles?

In the letter of 13 May 1798 Jacopo mentions Shakespeare together with Homer and Dante as heralds of the new Romantic sensibility:

Omero, Dante e Shakespeare, tre maestri di tutti gl'ingegni sovrumani, hanno investito la mia immaginazione ed infiammato il mio cuore: ho bagnato di caldissime lagrime i loro versi; e ho adorato le loro ombre divine come se le vedessi assise su le volte eccelse che sovrastano l'universo a dominare l'eternità.⁴²

Homer, Dante and Shakespeare, three masters of all the superhuman minds, have taken possession of my heart and inflamed it: I have moistened their verses with burning tears; and I have adored their divine shades as if I saw them seated on the high peaks that tower above the universe to dominate humankind.

In the last part of the book, when Jacopo Ortis has made up his mind to commit suicide, Foscolo's knowledge of *Macbeth* becomes clear.⁴³ More than once do Jacopo's words remind us of Macbeth's vision of the dagger, for example. It is in fact with a dagger that Jacopo kills himself:

Ahi Lorenzo! Ecco quel demonio mio persecutore; (...) e perché mi caccia fra le mani un pugnale ?⁴⁴

Alas Lorenzo! There is that demon who persecutes me; (...) and why does he place a dagger in my hands?

⁴² Ugo Foscolo, *Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (1801), ed. Carlo Muscetta, 8th edn (Torino: Einaudi, 1973), p. 65.

⁴³ See Aradas, *Macbeth in Italia*.

⁴⁴ Foscolo, *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*, p. 129.

Foscolo speaks widely about Shakespeare in his article *Della nuova scuola drammatica in Italia* (1826) where he outlines some of the features of Shakespeare's plays. Of his historical plays he stressed that he made them interesting:

per l'esattezza con che sapeva delineare i personaggi reali di principi passati, per la varietà d'incidenti e di caratteri che v'introduceva, per la sua cognizione della umana natura, e soprattutto per il fuoco luminoso e continuo che la sua immaginazione ed il suo cuore ispiravano nei suoi versi (...). Ma nell' *Otello* e nell'*Amleto* e nel *Macbeth* (...), i caratteri sono sua invenzione e quindi più originali insieme e più veri, perché vi contribuiva tutta l'umana natura (...).⁴⁵

through the exactness with which he drew the real characters of past princes, through the variety of incident and character, through his knowledge of human nature, and above all the luminous and constant fire that his heart and imagination inspired in his verses (...) But in *Othello*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* (...), the characters are more his own invention and therefore more original and also more true because to their creation contributed the whole of human nature (...).⁴⁶

Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873), the spokesman and supreme authority of Milanese and Italian Romanticism, despite being unfamiliar with English and reading Shakespeare in French, was the one through whom the reception of Shakespeare in Italy entered a new, positive phase. Manzoni's contribution to the debate on Shakespeare is part of the wider debate on Romanticism that took place in Italy at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In her article 'De l'esprit des traductions' translated in Italian with the title 'Sulla maniera e sulla utilità delle traduzioni', which appeared in January 1816 in the periodical *La Biblioteca Italiana*, Mme de Stael invited the Italians not to be prejudiced against foreign authors and to

⁴⁵ Quoted in Lombardo, 'Shakespeare e la critica italiana', p. 6.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Lombardo, 'Shakespeare and Italian Criticism', p. 546

broaden their culture – thus hinting at Italian provincialism – and valued the work of translators as necessary to spread culture which, in her opinion, is a shared wealth that should be enjoyed by anyone without distinction of country:

Sarebbe auspicabile, mi sembra, che gli italiani si occupassero di tradurre con cura le nuove poesie degli inglesi e dei tedeschi.⁴⁷

It would be desirable that the Italians carefully translated the new poems of the English and of the Germans.

Among the English, the first modern author whom she mentioned was Shakespeare. In *De la littérature* published in 1800 she maintained that:

Lorsqu'on se pénètre uniquement des modèles de l'art dramatique dans l'antiquité; lorsqu'on imite l'imitation, on a moins d'originalité; on n'a pas ce genie immediate, si je puis m'exprimer ainsi, qui characterise particulièrement Shakespeare. Depuis les Grecs jusqu'à lui, nous voyons toutes les literatures deriver les unes des autres, en partant de la meme source. Shakespeare commence une literature nouvelle.⁴⁸

When one is only imbued with the dramatic models of classical antiquity, when one imitates imitation, one is less original, one has not got that genius that springs from nature, that immediate genius, if I can put it like that, that characterizes Shakespeare in particular. From the Greeks up to him, we see all the literatures derive from the same source, Shakespeare begins a new literature.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Maddalena Pennacchia, 'Mme de Stael, Shakespeare e l'Italia', in *Memoria di Shakespeare*, ed. Lombardo (Roma: Bulzoni 2000), 173-184 (p. 179). See this essay for a good analysis of Mme de Stael's criticism on Shakespeare and her influence on the Italian Romantic debate known as 'la querelle romantica'.

⁴⁸ Madame de Stael, *De la Littérature* (1800), ed. Gérard Gengembre and Jean Goldzink (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), p. 217.

Her article, together with A. W. Schlegel's *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* published in 1809 and translated in Italian by Giovanni Gherardini (Milano, 1817) with the title *Corso di letteratura drammatica*, were the sources of heated discussions within Milanese intellectual circles. Giovanni Berchet's *Lettera Semiseria di Grisostomo*, regarded as the manifesto of Italian Romanticism, appeared in 1816; between 1818 and 1819, Silvio Pellico published his articles on drama in the *Conciliatore*; in 1819 the 'Dialogo sulle unità drammatiche' by Ermes Visconti appeared in the same journal. Manzoni's *Il Conte di Carmagnola* with the author's Preface in which he illustrates his ideas about a new kind of drama, was published in 1820 and his *Lettre a M. Chauvet*, where he carries the topic started in the Preface much further, in 1823 (though he had written it in 1820) together with Claude Fauriel's translation of his tragedies *Il Conte di Carmagnola* and *Adelchi*. Lombardo affirms that 'all the writings that contribute to the debate on Romanticism deal, directly or indirectly, with Shakespeare'.⁴⁹ Shakespeare was seen as the symbol of liberty for his non-observance of classical rules and for the passion with which his plays were imbued. More than in other European countries, in Italy Romanticism had a political connotation. After the fall of Napoleon and the restoration of reactionary governments, the Romantics were looked at with suspicion and the ideals fostered by Mme de Stael, for example, were deemed subversive. Defence of classical models, therefore, did not only mean sticking to a certain artistic pattern, but also fighting against dangerous revolutionary ideas. And to the rejection of new Romantic artistic models corresponded the rejection of Shakespeare, while the praise of the English playwright went together with the praise of Romanticism.

Manzoni kept aloof from this political dimension; nevertheless he strenuously defended the work of Shakespeare. He stated that literature has 'the useful as its goal, the true as its subject, and the interesting as its

⁴⁹ Lombardo, 'Shakespeare and Italian Criticism', p. 549.

means'.⁵⁰ His central point was the opposition of the 'real' to the 'ideal', and he believed that it is in reality, in truth that the author should search the material for his art, which is aimed to 'the betterment and the salvation of the reader's soul'.⁵¹ The moral improvement of the reader, according to Manzoni, is the principal objective of any art and he believed that the observance of the rules limits the possibilities of art, prevents the artist from expressing the truth and, as a consequence, from contributing to the moral education of the reader. He found all that he fostered in the work of Shakespeare, which, in his opinion, was highly moral.⁵² These thoughts are clearly expressed by Manzoni in the Preface to his tragedy *Il Conte di Carmagnola* where he does not mention the name of Shakespeare, but clearly hints at him while debating on Romantic drama, in his *Lettre à M. Chauvet*, which he wrote in French in response to Victor Chauvet's review of his *Il Conte di Carmagnola*, and in his *Materiali Estetici* published by Bonghi in 1887.

In the Preface he explains why the issue of the observance of the rules is based on a false supposition:

L'unità di luogo, e la così detta unità di tempo, non sono regole fondate nella ragione dell'arte né connaturali all'indole del poema drammatico; ma sono venute da una autorità non bene intesa, e da principi arbitrari (...). Quando poi vennero quelli che, non badando all'autorità, domandarono la ragione di queste regole, i fautori di esse non seppero trovarne che una ed è: che, assistendo lo spettatore realmente alla rappresentazione d'un'azione, diventa per lui inverisimile che le diverse parti di questa avvengano in diversi luoghi, e che essa duri per lungo tempo, mentre lui sa di non essersi mosso di luogo, e d'aver impiegate solo poche ore ad osservarla. Questa ragione è evidentemente fondata su un falso supposto, cioè che lo spettatore

⁵⁰ G. A. Borghese, 'Literary Criticism in Italy during the Romantic Period', *Italica*, 23.2 (Jun., 1946), 65-72 (p. 66).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See Natalino Sapegno's Preface to *La lettre à M. Chauvet*, ed. N. Sapegno (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1947).

sia lì come parte dell'azione; quando è, per così dire, una mente estrinseca che la contempla (...). Quando si considera che lo spettatore è fuori dall'azione, l'argomento in favore delle unità svanisce.⁵³

The unity of place and the so-called unity of time have not been deduced from art's principles, nor are they connatural with dramatic poetry. They come to us from an ill-conceived authority and from arbitrary principles (...). Subsequently, when some, in utter disregard for authority, demanded the reasons for such rules, their advocates could not find but one; that is, because the spectator watches in his flesh and bones the performance of an action, it becomes nonverisimilar that that action might develop in different places and last for a long time, while the spectator knows that he did not leave his place and that only a few hours have elapsed since he began watching the action. But this reason clearly rests on a false premise; that is, that the spectator is there as part of the action, whereas he is, so to speak, a mind contemplating from the outside (...). If one considers the spectator outside the action, the argument in favour of the unities vanishes into thin air.⁵⁴

And referring to English and German tragedies in which the rules are not followed and whose beauty the supporters of the rules cannot deny, he continues:

I sostenitori stessi delle regole (...) non negano le bellezze ottenute a scapito delle regole; ma affermano che bisogna rinunciare a quelle bellezze, giacché per ottenerle bisogna cadere nell'inverosimile.⁵⁵

The very supporters of the rules (...) do not deny the beauties obtained through the violation of the rules, but they assert that one must

⁵³ Alessandro Manzoni, *Opere*, ed. Lanfranco Caretti (Milano: Mursia, 1965), p. 40.

⁵⁴ Manzoni, *The Count of Carmagnola and Adelchis*, transl. Federica Brunori Deigan (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 104.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 43.

renounce those beauties because, in order to obtain them, one must fall into inverisimilitude.⁵⁶

On the contrary, Manzoni believed that the author falls into inverisimilitude when he follows the rules arbitrarily. In his book *Shakespeare in Italy*, Collison-Morley discusses extensively the influence of Shakespeare on Manzoni. He points out that Manzoni did not follow Shakespeare in the structure of his own plays, but was certainly indebted to him for the creation of some of his characters. He also states that, 'the numerous soliloquies are obviously modelled on Shakespeare'.⁵⁷ In her 'Il prologo storico di Manzoni',⁵⁸ Patrizia Beronesi compares *Il Conte di Carmagnola* with Shakespeare's historical plays and shows that the first draft of Manzoni's play was far more similar in structure to that of Shakespeare's plays than the final one. From this she concludes that, despite his assertions in practice Manzoni still followed classical patterns. But this does not diminish the strength of Manzoni's defence of Shakespeare; it clarifies that the acceptance of Shakespeare's modes was a long process that went through various phases; in the case of Manzoni, the Italian writer was convinced of the merits of the English playwright, but was not ready to follow completely in his steps.

In the *Lettre a Monsieur Chauvet sur l'unité de temps et de lieu dans la tragédie*, Manzoni expands on the idea that the observance of the rules limits the beauty of a dramatic text. He refers to Ermes Visconti's 'Dialogo sulle unità drammatiche' published in 1819 in the journal *Il Conciliatore* in which Visconti (1784-1841) imagines somebody who offers a new version of *Macbeth* following the rules.⁵⁹ This means that the playwright would choose to show only the final part of Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's

⁵⁶ Manzoni, *The Count of Carmagnola and Adelchis*, p.107.

⁵⁷ Collison-Morley, *Shakespeare in Italy*, pp. 113-117.

⁵⁸ Patrizia Beronesi, 'Il prologo storico di Manzoni', in *Il teatro del personaggio: Shakespeare sulla scena italiana dell'800*, 20-63.

⁵⁹ After the publication of this article and of the previous one, 'Idee elementari sulla poesia romantica' published in *Il Conciliatore* in 1818, Ermes Visconti became one of the most influential theorists of the Italian Romantic Movement.

journey from ambition and the consequent deeds to remorse, fear of the future, hallucinations. To this interlocutor, Visconti would reply:

Vous aurez, à la vérité, choisi le plus beau moment, c'est-à-dire le dernier période des remords; mais une grande partie des beautés du sujet aura disparu, parce que la beauté poétique de ce dernier période dépend beaucoup de ce qu'il arrive après les autres; elle dépend de la loi de continuité dans les sentimens de l'âme.⁶⁰

To be honest, you will have chosen the best moment, that is to say the final time of remorse; but much of the beauty of the subject will have disappeared because the poetical beauty of this last moment greatly depends on what happens before; it depends on the law of continuity in the feelings of our soul.

To show that the observance of the rules makes the action less believable, he compares Shakespeare's *Othello* to Voltaire's *Zaira*:

Dans l'une et dans l'autre pièce, c'est un home qui tue la femme qu'il aime, la croyant infidèle. Shakespeare a pris tout le temps dont il avait besoin; (...) On voit, dans *Othello*, le soupçon conçu, combattu, chassé, revenant sur de nouveaux indices, excité et dirigé, chaque fois qu'il se manifeste, par l'art abominable d'un ami perfide; on voit ce soupçon arriver jusqu'à la certitude par des degrés aussi vraisemblables que terribles. Le tâche de Voltaire était bien plus difficile. (...) Le poète ne pouvant, dans un si court intervalle, rassembler les faux indices qui nourrissent lentement les soupçons de la jalousie, ne pouvant conduire par degrés l'âme d'Orosmane à ce point de passion (...) a été obligé de faire naître l'erreur de son héros

⁶⁰ Manzoni, Lettre à M. C*** sur l'unité de temps et de lieu dans la tragédie (1823), ed. Umberto Colombo (Azzate (VA): Edizioni Otto/Novecento, 1988), p. 90.

d'un fait dont l'interprétation fût suffisante pour produire la certitude de la trahison.⁶¹

In both plays, there is a man who kills the woman he loves in the belief she is unfaithful. Shakespeare took all the time he needed; (...) In *Othello* we can see the suspicion conceived, fought against, dismissed, springing up again through new clues, aroused and managed, each time, by the abominable skill of a treacherous friend; we see this suspicion turn into certainty by degrees, as credible as terrible. Voltaire's task was much harder. (...) Since the poet, within such a short interval, could not gather the clues that slowly feed jealousy, and could not lead the soul of Orosmane to such point of passion by degrees (...) he was obliged to mislead his hero through a fact, the interpretation of which, was enough to produce the certainty of betrayal.

In the *Materiali Estetici* Manzoni declares that those who think that drama can only be immoral, say so just because they have not read English drama. And in his opinion, among the playwrights, Shakespeare is the most moral because he goes deep into the human soul and showing the human heart helps the audience or the reader to find the principles of virtue:

Dimostrare che il Bossuet il Nicole e il Rousseau come s'apposero nel dire immorali le opera teatrali Francesi, così errarono nel credere che il Teatro sia essenzialmente immorale. Questo loro errore viene in parte dal non aver conosciuto il Teatro Inglese (...). Toccare questo punto che la perfezione morale è la perfezione dell'arte, e che perciò Shakespear [*sic*] sovrasta agli altri perché è più morale. Più si va in fondo del cuore, più si trovano i principj [*sic*] eterni della virtù.⁶²

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 70-72.

⁶² Manzoni, 'Materiali Estetici', in *Tutte le opere di Alessandro Manzoni*, ed. Alberto Chiari e Fausto Ghisalberti, 7 vols (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1991), I, p. 14.

It can be demonstrated that Bossuet, Nicole and Rousseau, just as they were mistaken in considering the works of the French theatre immoral, were mistaken also in believing that the theatre is essentially immoral. This error comes partly from ignorance of the English theatre (...). Touch on this point, that moral perfection is the perfection of art, and that therefore Shakespeare surpasses the others because he is more moral. The deeper one goes into the heart, the more one finds the eternal principles of virtue.⁶³

Even in his masterpiece *I Promessi Sposi* Manzoni mentions Shakespeare: in chapter VII he states:

Tra il primo pensiero d'un impresa terribile, e l'esecuzione di essa (ha detto un barbaro che non era privo d'ingegno) l'intervallo è un sogno, pieno di fantasmi e di paure.⁶⁴

As has been remarked by a barbarian not devoid of genius: / Between the acting of a dreadful thing / And the first motion, all the interim is / Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream.⁶⁵

The statement is taken from *Julius Caesar*,⁶⁶ and the comment in brackets (in the Italian version) is ironic and is mentioned against Voltaire who had defined Shakespeare as 'a barbarian not devoid of genius'.

We can conclude this part affirming that, if Voltaire influenced eighteenth-century Italian criticism of Shakespeare, Manzoni was the central and most influential figure of nineteenth-century criticism of the English playwright and the one through whom the appreciation of Shakespeare in Italy took a significant step forward. Although his plays still show typical

⁶³ Lombardo, 'Shakespeare and Italian Criticism', p. 557.

⁶⁴ Manzoni, *I Promessi Sposi* (1827), ed. Lanfranco Caretti (Milano: Mursia, 1984), p. 87.

⁶⁵ Manzoni, *The Betrothed* – 'I Promessi Sposi': A Tale of XVII century Milan, trans. Archibald Cloquhoun (London: Dent, 1956), p. 92.

⁶⁶ Between the acting of a dreadful thing/And the first motion, all the interim is/Like a phantasma or a hideous dream'. William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, 2.1.63-65, ed. David Daniell, Arden Shakespeare, 3rd series (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 1998).

elements of classical drama, it is thanks to his contribution in the field of criticism that Shakespeare became a central figure of study. As a proof of this, we see that it is in this period that the work of translation began in earnest. Two names deserve to be mentioned: Carlo Rusconi and Giulio Carcano, who started to translate Shakespeare in 1839 and, little by little, managed to translate his complete oeuvre, the first in prose, the second in verse, a task that took them many years.

Criticism on Shakespeare took a big step forward with the work of Francesco De Sanctis (1817-1883), the most influential critic of the nineteenth century in Italy. His appreciation of Shakespeare was based on the assumption that a work of art should not be judged from the outside comparing it with supposed objective rules (classical rules), but from the inside tracing and revealing the laws that are peculiar to that work only. He saw the work of art as an individual organism, the content of which is contained in its appropriate form which, therefore, does not exist *a priori*. The task of the critic is to go through the same process that led the author to the creation of his work and establish whether he was able to blend content and form harmoniously.

De Sanctis speaks widely about Shakespeare in his *Teoria e storia della letteratura*, and then continuously refers to him in the *Saggi Critici* and in *Storia della letteratura italiana*. In the first-mentioned text, which is a record of the lessons he offered in Naples between 1839 and 1848, De Sanctis makes a long introduction to Shakespeare's work and, after that, he analyses a few of the plays by the English playwright where we find some insights that constituted a novelty in the history of Italian Shakespearian criticism even though he read Shakespeare only in translations and, therefore, he could not contribute to the understanding and appreciation of the language. According to De Sanctis the great poet is able to blend the 'real' with the 'ideal'. He agreed with Manzoni on the fact that Shakespeare used the 'real' to create his stories and characters but he went further: he distinguished between those poets and philosophers who, very patiently, record and classify phenomena, and those who are not able to live in the real world and withdraw themselves into the realm of ideas:

A me pare che sia dei poeti come dei filosofi, alcuni dei quali hanno diligente pazienza nel registrare e classificare i fenomeni, ed altri si levano ad altissime astrazioni, lasciando il mondo esterno e la realtà; ma solo pochissimi sono quelli che sanno essere del pari altamente speculativi e pratici e positivi. (...) Massimo poeta è colui che riunisce le due forze: come Shakespeare, come Dante.⁶⁷

I tend to believe that some poets, as well as some philosophers, can patiently record and classify phenomena, while others elevate themselves to very high abstractions, leaving the external world and reality behind; but very few can be highly speculative and practical and positive at the same time (...) The master poet is who combines the two forces: like Shakespeare, like Dante.

Therefore life, which to many seems to be contradictory, to De Sanctis is absolutely harmonious because behind the real we can always find the soul, the ideal:

Considerare lo Shakespeare solo per le particolarità del reale che egli presenta, e dimenticare l'anima ch'egli fa vibrare sotto di esse, vale non intenderlo.⁶⁸

Praising Shakespeare only for the peculiarities of the real that he presents and forgetting the soul which vibrates underneath, means misunderstanding him.

He widens the idea of the representation of reality in his analysis of *The Tempest*. Here he contradicts those – Schlegel in particular – who did not see the real in this play. But he points out that we should distinguish between 'reality' and 'truth': the story told in *The Tempest* is not real, but it represents the truth:

⁶⁷ Francesco De Sanctis, *Teoria e storia della letteratura: lezioni tenute a Napoli dal 1839 al 1848*, ed. Benedetto Croce (Bari: Laterza, 1926), pp. 205-206.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 205.

Nessuna realtà storica ci porge l'idea di uomini piccini meno di un pollice, o di un viaggio nella luna; eppure leggiamo con diletto creazioni come queste in Swift e in Ariosto. Reali o immaginate, pur che siano rappresentate con verità e noi sentiamo la verità che in esse si asconde, non cerchiamo altro in arte.⁶⁹

No historical reality offers the idea of tiny men, less than an inch tall, or of a journey to the moon; still, we read with pleasure creations like these in Swift and in Ariosto; real or imagined what matters is that they are represented with truth and we feel the truth that hides behind; this is all that we expect in art.

The essay on *Romeo and Juliet* is the most complete and meticulous. In it De Sanctis introduces an important idea which had only been suggested before outside Italy, by Mme de Stael for example: the idea of the modern hero shown in Shakespeare's plays as opposed to the ancient hero:

Si è detto da taluni che questa tragedia dipende dal caso; (...) Ma il caso è caso pel volgo; pei poeti è il misterioso legame delle umane azioni, che segue a un primo passo errato e pericoloso. Pensate come son fatti Giulietta e Romeo, alla loro passione, alla loro inesperienza, alle loro illusioni; come potete meravigliarvi che il corso degli umani avvenimenti li travolga e li schiacci?⁷⁰

Some have suggested that this tragedy depends on fate; (...) But fate is for the common people; for the poets it is the mysterious thread of human actions that follows a first wrong and dangerous step. Think of what Juliet and Romeo are like, of their passion, their inexperience, their illusions; how can you wonder that the course of human events overwhelms them?

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 212.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 216.

As Lombardo highlights, this passage is important because it indicates ‘how De Sanctis saw clearly the complete “modern” nature of Shakespeare’s art, and how he could recognize it even in a play where it was not easy to avoid the danger of attributing the catastrophe to an external force’.⁷¹ The essay is long, interesting, and beautiful: in the first part, De Sanctis focuses on Romeo and Juliet’s youthful love, he summarises the plot of the play, and mentions some beautiful, poetic lines. In the second, he praises Shakespeare for writing plays that show reality in its entirety. All agreed by that time that bringing together tragic and comic, for example, was necessary to Shakespeare to depict life as it really is, but De Sanctis took this point even further affirming that from the encounter of the two worlds poetry originates. The way he explains it is striking:

E quanta poesia nasce dall’incontro dei due mondi! Voi siete angosciati e travagliati, e un amico, ignaro, viene a discorrere con voi, lieto e barzellettando. Voi avete la morte nel cuore, e per la via incontrate gente che se ne va serena, allegra, ridente. In questo contrasto, si sente più forte la poesia del dolore.⁷²

And how much poetry originates from the encounter of these two worlds! You are distressed and tormented and a friend, unaware, comes to talk with you, happily and jokingly. You have death in your heart and on the street you meet serene, happy, smiling people. The poetry of pain is felt more strongly in this contrast.

The presence of secondary characters contributes to give a full view of reality, according to De Sanctis. They are never superficial, they have their individuality, a reason for being there that, to a great or small extent, serves the purpose of the play. De Sanctis opposes the unity of character to the unity of time and place, the former being – in his opinion – much more important than the latter. He also makes it clear that unity of character

⁷¹ Lombardo, *Shakespeare and Italian Criticism*, p. 564.

⁷² Ibid., p. 222.

means showing a complex, multi-faceted character: even a hero has got the weaknesses of a man.

As to the historical dramas, De Sanctis asks how history can be represented poetically, a question that is part of a wider one: how reality can be represented poetically. It is not necessary to spend hours in a library to give an account of history, what is important is to be able to interpret times and peoples, to guess the character of times and peoples, which is what Shakespeare did. We see here that the discussion on single characters has widened to a population.

De Sanctis never abandoned reflection upon Shakespeare. His name is mentioned in essays concerning other authors and he often judged these in the light of Shakespeare's work. Little by little the study of Shakespeare's plays was becoming more detailed. De Sanctis contributed significantly to the development of Italian Shakespearian criticism suggesting the idea of a Shakespeare who showed the 'ideal' in the 'real' and focusing on the 'modern' nature of his characters and of his plays. After him, no real innovation was to be seen until 1920 when Benedetto Croce published his essay *Ariosto, Shakespeare and Corneille*. But despite this, Shakespeare was making his way into the Italian peninsula through other channels.

1.2 Verdi's Macbeth: a Milestone in the Diffusion and Appreciation of Shakespeare's Plays in Italy

Operas based on Shakespeare's plays began to appear in various European countries at the end of the eighteenth century.⁷³ As far as Italy is concerned, Shakespeare reached the Italian theatre by way of the opera house. According to Winton Dean the best operas were composed by Italians:

⁷³ For a clear analysis of Shakespeare operas in a European context see Winton Dean, 'Shakespeare in the Opera House', in *Shakespeare Then Till Now*, ed. Allardyce Nicoll, *Shakespeare Survey* 18 (1965), 75-93.

German opera composers have tended to make Shakespeare sententious or sentimental, the French have often made him just sentimental, the English have made him dull, while the Italians have turned him into roaring melodrama. (...) The Italian method, when refined, has produced the most satisfactory results.⁷⁴

As would happen in prose theatre, in opera too the plays were adapted to the spirit and taste of the age and, most of all, to the type of opera which was fashionable at the time of the composition. Therefore, the resemblance of the opera in terms of plot and characterization was minimal and, till the mid-nineteenth century, there seemed to be very little respect for the original creation. Operas did not usually originate from the text by Shakespeare, but from adaptations like those of the already-mentioned Ducis. Until the end of the nineteenth century, there was also little concern for the music: what mattered was just the spectacle. In the course of the nineteenth century the art of opera began to develop, but the understanding of Shakespeare was still far to come.

Shakespeare operas began to appear all over Europe in the last thirty years of the eighteenth century, the first of which were *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Tempest*. Then, as a consequence of the re-evaluation of Shakespeare during the Romantic Age, a high number of operas were composed. Among these we can mention Rossini's *Otello* which dates back to 1816 and was the first opera founded on a play by Shakespeare that was regarded as a masterpiece. Nevertheless, the libretto still very much differed from the original text with the exception of the last act where the murder scene was preserved. This was something new at a time when tragic endings were usually converted into happy endings. What is striking is that – according to Winton Dean – in this act Rossini reached a much higher level from a musical point of view:

74 Dean, 'Shakespeare in the Opera House', p.76.

Something of Shakespeare's dramatic truth seems to have penetrated to Rossini. Here, perhaps for the first time, we can detect the influence of Shakespeare on a great composer.⁷⁵

On the whole, however, Rossini's main concern was not fidelity to the text. In this respect, the first opera writer who composed works that were meant to be really Shakespearian was Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901). Verdi profoundly admired Shakespeare and tried to gain a deep understanding of his texts and, through his music, to preserve the spirit, plot and characterization. This is how he replied to the accusation of not knowing Shakespeare made of him by the French press after he presented a renewed version of his *Macbeth* in Paris in 1865:⁷⁶

Può darsi che io non abbia reso bene il *Macbet* [*sic*], ma che io non conosco, che non capisco e che non sento Shacpeare [*sic*], no, per Dio, no. È un poeta di mia predilezione, che ho avuto fra le mani dalla mia prima gioventù, e che leggo e rileggo continuamente.⁷⁷

I may not have rendered *Macbeth* well, but that I do not know, do not understand and feel Shakespeare, no, by heavens, no! He is one of my very special poets, and I have had him in my hand from my earliest youth and I read and re-read him continually.

In 1846 Verdi was commissioned by impresario Alessandro Lanari to compose a new opera to present in the Lent season of 1847 in the theatre in Via della Pergola in Florence. Lanari asked him to find something in the 'genere fantastico'.⁷⁸ There were three plays that he considered: *Die Ahnfrau* by the German dramatist Franz Grillparzer, *Die Räuber* by Schiller, and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The choice depended on the singers that would

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 80.

⁷⁶ The first version was premièred on March 14, 1847 in Florence.

⁷⁷ *Carteggi Verdiani*, ed. Alessandro Luzio, 4 vols (Roma: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1947), IV, p. 159.

⁷⁸ Giorgio Melchiori, 'Macbeth: Shakespeare to Verdi', in *Macbeth – Giuseppe Verdi*, Opera Guide Series, ed. John Nicholas (publ. in association with English National Opera, 1990), 7-12 (p. 9).

be available. For *Macbeth*, which he read in Rusconi's prose translation and on which the choice fell, he had already in mind the singer for the role of Macbeth: the baritone Felice Varesi, though Lanari had another baritone – Gaetano Ferri – under contract. For Lady Macbeth, he thought of Sofia Loewe but, since she was not available, the part was assigned to Marianna Barbieri-Nini. Up to that moment Verdi had written operas in the Rossini tradition, that is operas that would primarily show the singers' voices, while scarcely considering the dramatic effect. In his article 'The Young Verdi and Shakespeare', David Kimbell maintains that what Verdi now wished to do was:

not to transform a dramatic and literary masterpiece into a typical Italian opera, but to transform Italian opera into a medium flexible and eloquent enough to be a vehicle for such characters and such passions as those in a literary masterpiece like *Macbeth*.⁷⁹

Therefore the singers should have certain characteristics, and their voices should be appropriate to a particular dramatic action or to a particular emotion; each voice should be intense, multi-timbric, while Verdi was much less concerned with its beauty. In August 1846, while he was still reflecting upon the play he would choose, he wrote to Alessandro Lanari about the baritone Varesi:

Varesi è il solo artista attuale in Italia che possa fare la parte che medito, e per il suo genere di canto e per il suo sentire, ed anche per la stessa sua figura (...) senza nulla togliere al merito di Ferri che ha più bella figura, più bella voce, e se vuoi anche migliore cantante, non mi potrebbe certamente fare in quella parte l'effetto che mi farebbe Varesi.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ David R. B. Kimbell, 'The Young Verdi and Shakespeare', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 101, (1974-1975), 59-73(p. 64).

⁸⁰ *I Copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi*, ed. Gaetano Cesari e Alessandro Luzio (Milano: Fronti, 1913), pp. 25-26.

(Lettera XXIX al Sig. Alessandro Lanari – Milano, 19 agosto 1846)

Varesi is the only contemporary artist in Italy who can play the role I have in mind for his singing mode, his temperament and also for his figure. (...) Ferri has a better figure, more beautiful voice and he is also a better singer but, in that role, he would not have the same impact as Varesi.

As for Lady Macbeth, when the part was given to Eugenia Tadolini for a production in Naples, he wrote to the Neapolitan librettist Cammarano:

Ma nell'interesse dell'esecuzione, penso sia necessario osservare che essa possiede qualità troppo grandi per questa parte. Può sembrare una assurdità. La Tadolini ha bella voce e bella presenza ed io vorrei una Lady brutta e cattiva. La Tadolini canta in modo perfetto, ed io vorrei che Lady Macbeth non cantasse affatto. La Tadolini ha una voce meravigliosa, limpida e potente; e la voce di Lady Macbeth dev'essere quella di un demonio!⁸¹

(Lettera LXVII – Parigi, 23 Novembre 1848)

But, in the interest of the performance, I think it necessary to observe that she has too great qualitties for this part. It may seem absurd. Tadolini has a beautiful voice and a beautiful figure and I would like an ugly and wicked Lady. Tadolini sings perfectly and I would like Lady Macbeth not to sing at all. Tadolini has a wonderful voice, clear and powerful; and Lady Macbeth's voice must be that of a demon!

To Marianna-Barbieri Nini he wrote:

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

As for the letter, it's impossible to cut it out, because it is fundamental to the drama (...); the sleepwalking scene, is for dramatic effect, one of the most sublime theatrical creations.⁸²

This is what Marianna Barbieri-Nini said about the rehearsals directed by Verdi:

La scena del sonnambulismo assorbì tre mesi di studio. E per tre mesi, mattina e sera, cercai di imitare quelli che parlano dormendo, che articolano parole, come mi diceva il Maestro senza quasi muovere le labbra, lasciando immobile le altre parti del corpo, compresi gli occhi!⁸³

The sleepwalking scene took me three months of study. And for three months, morning and evening, I tried to imitate those who speak while sleeping, who articulate words, as the Maestro told me hardly moving his lips, keeping the other parts of the body motionless and eyes fixed!

To Varesi, Verdi wrote:

I shall never cease recommending you to study closely the dramatic situation and the words: the music comes of itself. In short I would rather you served the poet better than the composer.⁸⁴

From these statements we understand that Verdi wanted his singers to acquire a dramatic technique, and that this was at least as important as the beauty and perfection of the singing. It is not surprising that Verdi took active part not only in the choice of the singers, but also in the wording of

⁸² Frank Walker, 'Verdi's Ideas on the Production of his Shakespeare operas', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 76th Sess., (1949-1950), 11-21 (p. 15). The Italian version of Verdi's letters to Barbieri-Nini is published in the Italian periodical *Musica*, (November 23rd, 1913).

⁸³ Leonardo Bragaglia, *Verdi e i suoi interpreti (1839-1978)* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1979), p. 330.

⁸⁴ Walker, 'Verdi's Ideas on the Production of his Shakespeare operas', p. 15. The Italian version of Verdi's letters to Varesi is published in the Italian periodical *Nuova Antologia*, (December 16th, 1932).

the libretto. As I pointed out before he had to rely on Rusconi's translation for his *Macbeth*, but nonetheless he made clear requests to librettist Francesco Maria Piave. Therefore, the dialogue between the two was intense. On the whole Verdi was not satisfied with Piave's libretto (in fact he asked Andrea Maffei for help for the last two acts). He often reproached him, and he insisted that he should use few words: 'Always bear in mind to use few words, few words, few, few but significant'. (September 22, 1846). Melchiori suggests that Verdi's request for 'few but significant words' was an attempt to be faithful to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, his shortest tragedy.⁸⁵ 'The power of imagery, the recurrent figures of antithesis and the play of metaphors (...) add a visionary dimension to the words' in the play. Verdi's aim was that of replacing words with such 'visionary dimension' recreated through music.⁸⁶

A fundamental role is played by the chorus. The three witches are replaced by a group, as well as Banquo's murderers. And a significant interpolation is the chorus of the Scottish refugees at the beginning of act 4, which clearly hints at the Italian history of the period, and had a strong impact on the audience.⁸⁷ The presence of the chorus augmented the element of spectacle in the opera, and placed it within the context of the nineteenth-century staging of the play. Although there was still no tradition of staging Shakespeare in Italy and the first *Macbeth* appeared in 1949, Verdi was certainly aware of the spectacular treatment that characterized the theatre of his time. Therefore, his singing and dancing witches were part of a well-established staging tradition, in which 'supernaturalism became spectacle'.⁸⁸ Another important characteristic of his *Macbeth* was the use of contrasts. Daniela Goldin speaks of the *contrast*i, or the 'oppositions so characteristic of Verdian dramaturgy. Macbeth versus Banquo, Macbeth versus Lady Macbeth; but also Banquo in Act One versus Banquo in Act

⁸⁵ In the next chapters I will explore the idea of 'authenticity' extensively.

⁸⁶ Melchiori, '*Macbeth*: Shakespeare to Verdi', p. 9.

⁸⁷ In 1847 Italy was still a divided country and, in the north, it was under the Austrian rule. Organized revolts to eliminate Austrian control took place in 1848.

⁸⁸ Michael R. Booth, '*Macbeth* and the Nineteenth-Century Theatre', in *Macbeth – Giuseppe Verdi*, Opera Guide Series, p. 37.

Two, Lady Macbeth in Act One versus Lady Macbeth in Act Four'.⁸⁹ The composer was less interested in the characters' psychology than in making them a kind of opposing situations, which he used in order to create striking and violent musical contrasts. As I will illustrate in the next chapter this feature would influence the first performances of Shakespeare's plays in the country. The actors of the mid-nineteenth century used contrasts extensively, creating opposing emotions and situations, and it is very likely that they knew about the same use in Verdi's *Macbeth*. Theatre, in fact, was in competition with opera, which was more popular and better financed at that time. So, the actors had to find ways to be as appealing to the audience as opera was.

Verdi's *Macbeth* was performed on March 14, 1847 in Florence. A revised version was presented in Paris on 21 April 1865 which is the one on which all the successive stagings of the opera were based. As to the aim of this chapter – explaining how Shakespeare's plays were introduced and received in Italy – the first version is relevant because, after the first performances of 1847, the play – in this opera version – literally invaded the country. After *Macbeth* Verdi also composed *Otello* (premiered in Milan in 1887) and *Falstaff* (premiered in Milan in 1893). In both cases Arrigo Boito was the librettist. These two compositions are regarded by experts as much more mature works than *Macbeth*; but in this thesis I do not analyse Verdi's operas from the musical point of view. What interested me was to clarify the importance of Verdi for the diffusion and understanding of Shakespeare in Italy, and to point out how his opera version paved the way for new transformations and adaptations made by the first actors who played Shakespearian characters on the Italian stage.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Melchiori, '*Macbeth: Shakespeare to Verdi*', p. 10.

In order to spread the knowledge and appreciation of Shakespeare's plays in Italy, a long period of induction and acquaintance with the foreign genius was needed. Men like Baretto, Manzoni, Verdi, and the others, whose work I have investigated in this chapter, created the conditions to make the English playwright available to the Italian people, and their reactions to his work, whether in scholarship, criticism, translation or opera, ushered in a slow process of reception of his plays in the country.

There is one field that is missing in this first chapter's survey, the field of theatre practice. After the scholars, the critics, the writers and the composer, it was the presence in Italy of three great actors, who took up the English playwright and performed his plays all over the country, that marked a significant phase in that long process of acceptance that started with the first mention of his name in 1667. The performances of Ernesto Rossi, Tommaso Salvini, and Adelaide Ristori in Italy, but also in Europe, and in Northern and Southern America, will constitute the bulk of chapter 2 of my journey. As I have written in the introduction, in chapter 2 I will also start my discussion of different ways to stage Shakespeare's plays, and I will elucidate what is meant by 'actor's theatre', and how the protagonists of the actor's theatre approached Shakespeare's texts, and gave them theatrical form.

2. Shakespeare in the Actor's Theatre (mid-19th century-1925)

Three elements made a fundamental contribution to the knowledge and diffusion of Shakespeare's plays in Italy in the mid-nineteenth century. Two have already been mentioned: Manzoni's defence of the playwright and Verdi's operas. The third was the presence in Italy of three great actors who took up Shakespeare and performed his plays not only in their country but also in Europe, and in Northern and Southern America. They were: Adelaide Ristori (1822-1906), Ernesto Rossi (1827-1896) and Tommaso Salvini (1829-1916).

Today they are known as 'la triade' ('the triad') and they are remembered as the 'Great Actors' with capital letters. Yet they are not the only ones who became very popular in the 1800s. In fact, the century was characterized by the presence of a number of extraordinary actors in various European countries, a number that rises if we focus on the period that extends from mid-nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. Among the best known, besides Rossi, Salvini and Ristori, there were: Gustavo Modena, Mademoiselle Rachel, Antonio Petito, Sarah Bernhardt, Henry Irving, Ellen Terry, Ermete Zacconi, Giovanni Grasso, Angelo Musco, and Eleonora Duse. Out of thirteen, nine are Italian! In her book *Racconti del Grande Attore: tra la Rachel e la Duse*, Mirella Schino affirms that Italy 'in un certo senso è stata la patria del Grande Attore' ('was in a certain sense the homeland of the Great Actor').¹

It is on the actors that I will focus my attention in this chapter, and on their performances of Shakespeare's plays. In the first part of the chapter I will discuss the revolution in acting that was brought about by Gustavo Modena, that later resulted in the memorable performances of the triad, and

¹ Mirella Schino, *Racconti del Grande Attore: tra la Rachel e la Duse* (Città di Castello [Pg]: Edimond, 2004), p. 7.

that, although indirectly, also influenced the art of Duse at the turn of the century. In the following chapters it will be clear that Modena's teachings were fundamental to the further evolution of acting in Italy in the twentieth century, in a story that, despite the emergence of extremely talented directors in the middle of the century, does not seem to abandon the preference for a direct relationship between the actor and the audience. In the second part of the chapter I will look at Rossi's, Salvini's, and Ristori's interpretations of Shakespeare's characters, and I will discuss how Shakespeare's plays were staged in what is now known as the actor's theatre. Finally I will move to other Shakespearian performances by the following generation of actors, the so-called *mattatori*, Ermete Novelli and Zacconi and, most important of all, Duse.² Her work will allow me to illustrate how, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the first signs of a new revolution, the shift from the actor's to the 'director's theatre', made their appearance. In this chapter I also want to compare the stagings of Shakespeare's plays by the Italian actors with those by British actor-managers, like Charles Macready and Henry Irving, in the same period, and compare Italian acting of Shakespeare, labelled by Marvin Carlson as 'The Italian Style',³ with English acting.

2.1 A Forerunner and the Great Actors

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the first attempts to create resident theatre companies to replace touring companies were made

² For *mattatori* see footnote 10 at page 20. Further on in the section I will explain what distinguished the theatre of the Great Actors from the theatre of the *mattatori*.

³ Marvin Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians: Performances by Ristori, Salvini, and Rossi in England and America*, p. 175.

in Italy. Touring companies had taken their productions all around Europe from the mid-sixteenth century but, in the course of the eighteenth, they gradually disappeared in most of Europe. Therefore, the Italian delay was an exception. It was only in 1806 during the Napoleonic domination, that, following the example of the French Comédie Française,⁴ the Compagnia Reale Italiana (Italian Royal Company) was founded and remained in existence until 1827. Meanwhile, in 1821, the Compagnia Reale Sarda (Sardinian Royal Company) was set up on the order of Vittorio Emanuele I, King of Sardinia. It worked for 34 years and was dismissed in 1855 when Parliament abolished the subsidy considering it superfluous expenses.⁵ Other attempts followed, but none lasted long. Some councils (local authorities) gave grants, but the little money they disposed of was usually assigned to opera which, in Italy, was much more prestigious than non-musical theatre. The consequence of this situation was that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, companies were still forced to tour around the country with some inevitable negative consequences: the same scenery was used for different plays, as it was impossible to bring along three-dimensional props, in place of which painted cloths were used. Lights were fixed. Every actor had his or her costumes that did not necessarily match with the other actors'. There was no time for rehearsal, so actors had to play stock-roles, a long-standing tradition of the Italian theatre. The repertory was rather commercial as tickets were the only form of income and the public – often composed of poorly literate or illiterate people – wanted popular pieces. Adding to the audience's unrefined taste, there was also the mistrust of authors towards actors and vice versa. Authors were not willing to write for theatre as, according to Meldolesi and Taviani, literature 'non era più disposta a compromettersi con il sudore, con il disordine, con le manomissioni del teatro' ('was no longer disposed to compromise itself

4 The Comédie Française, set up in 1680, was the first European theatre with a fixed location, which received state subsidies.

5 These attempts failed because the two companies had not been set up for a genuine belief in their cultural function, but with the sole aim to show an understanding – which turned out to be only apparent – of the profound social changes aroused by the French Revolution.

with the sweat, with the disorder, with the manipulations of theatre').⁶ As for the actors, they accused authors of giving them plays that were not appealing for the public and that, probably more truly, did not allow them to increase their popularity. It is difficult to establish who was right and who was wrong. Perhaps there was some truth on both sides. What is interesting is Meldolesi and Taviani's idea that the authors' neglect of theatre had some positive consequences, as the actors had to do their best and find new ways to offer appealing productions despite the poor repertoire. But I will develop this point in my discussion of the work of the triad on Shakespeare's plays.

It is in this context that Modena brought about his revolution of theatre. Modena was born in 1803 in Venice. He was the son of two actors but, following his father's wishes, he studied Law at university. Yet, because of his love of theatre, he abandoned that career and joined the theatre company of Salvatore Fabbrichesi. He made his debut in Venice in 1824, where he was immediately noticed for the natural quality and spontaneity of his acting, which sharply contrasted with the conventionalism and declamatory style typical of eighteenth-century acting. After being in exile from 1832 to 1839 because of his republican ideals and his participation in the revolutionary movements of those years, he returned to Italy and set up a company of young actors, whom he wanted to shape according to his ideas. Clearly his journeys around Europe had widened his mind, and allowed him to compare Italian theatre with foreign theatre. The 'compagnia dei giovani' ('company of the young') was run by Modena from 1843 to 1845. He left the company after only two years because he was a strong opponent of the institutionalization of theatre, but his mark was to last long. According to Meldolesi and Taviani, Modena did not want to create an alternative theatre, but to exploit the potential of Italian theatre.⁷ In order to do this, much had to change, primarily acting, which needed to be improved. Modena did not want to shape his pupils, but help them find the

⁶ Claudio Medolesi and Ferdinando Taviani, *Teatro e spettacolo nel primo Ottocento* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1991), p. 223.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

right way to develop their natural talent. Central for him was work on the character, with whom the actor should identify himself through long hours of study of the character's behaviour and psyche. Distancing himself from the declamatory style of eighteenth-century acting on the one hand, and from the habit of playing stock characters on the other, Modena asked his pupils to create real characters, in whose existence the audience would believe. Although the revolution in acting was the most important aspect of his model of theatre, he also paid great attention to the use of lights, to the setting, and to costumes that were chosen according to the play that he wanted to stage. In moving the attention from the individual to the ensemble, he can be regarded as a forerunner of the director, a figure that, in Italy, would only be accepted from the first decades of the twentieth century. Again we can speak of an Italian delay if we have a look at other European countries, where there had already been avant-garde mises-en-scène before the last decades of the nineteenth century. Namely, at the above-mentioned Parisian Comédie-Française, choices were made already at the beginning of the century that paved the way for the modern idea of a director's theatre. The repertoire was chosen by the main *sociétaires*, seven or eight members of the company (the figure of the actor-manager did not exist). Rehearsals lasted at least three weeks and, if the play to be staged was by a contemporary author, they were conducted by him personally. It is not mistaken to affirm that, in most cases, the first directors were the playwrights, a practice that reached back to Shakespeare's own time. Of course the author's main concern was that the actors respected his text, so the final product to be offered to the audience would unfold during rehearsals and, as a consequence, the printed text differed markedly from the first version.⁸ As for Germany, in the nineteenth century, there were already many resident companies in various theatres: in Weimar, Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832) directed the Court Theatre from 1791 to

⁸ Elena Randi, 'Allestimenti d'avanguardia francesi ante 1870', in *Il teatro di regia: genesi ed evoluzione (1870-1950)*, ed. Umberto Artioli, 22-26.

1817.⁹ In his theatre everything depended on him: the repertoire, the choice of actors and their acting which he required to be ‘choral’. Even with Goethe we find a writer who became a director, an ‘Ur-regisseur’, who wished to unify harmonically the various parts of the *mise-en-scène*.¹⁰

This harmony, besides the improvement of acting, was what Modena tried to achieve in his school and with his stagings. He was also concerned with choices regarding the repertoire. On the one hand he tried to promote a new national dramaturgy, on the other, he opened himself to the inclusion of European plays, especially those coming from the most developed countries, in the belief that in those plays he could find the right situations and the right characters for his idea of a democratic and popular theatre.

Shakespeare’s plays were among Modena’s choices. Unfortunately, his first attempt was unsuccessful. The play he chose was *Otello*, which he presented at Teatro Re in Milan in 1842. The play was not at all understood by the audience who, being accustomed to comedy or to tragedy but not to any contamination of the two, whistled just after the opening scene – when Roderigo started to shout for Brabantio and Brabantio appeared half asleep and with disordered clothes –, as they considered it comic.¹¹ The performance was interrupted – according to Modena at the end of act 1, scene 1, according to more recent studies not long before the end – and Modena was so discouraged that he did not make any further attempts. Certainly, offering a play by Shakespeare in a country where the English playwright was practically unknown to the public, and where theatre was still very much influenced by classical rules, was a very daring enterprise.

A few years later another actor decided to try again, Alemanno Morelli. Morelli knew Modena well, and shared his interest in Shakespeare. Despite Modena’s failure he presented *Amleto* and *Macbeth* in Milan and in other cities in the early 1850s. His success was moderate, but this was a sign

⁹ Mara Fazio, *Regie teatrali: dalle origini a Brecht* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2006), pp. 8-11; Elena Randi, ‘Il caso della Germania e dell’Inghilterra’, in *Il teatro di regia*, 26-30.

¹⁰ Also dealing with the *mise-en-scène* before the advent of the directors’ theatre: Alonge, *Il Teatro dei registi: scopritori di enigma e poeti della scena*, pp. 16-36.

¹¹ Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians*, p. 18.

that, little by little, the Italian audience was starting to accept the English playwright.¹² But it was only with the triad that Shakespeare's plays finally made their way into the hearts of the Italians and, although the appreciation of the English playwright varied at times, from this moment on they would never leave the Italian stage.

Rossi and Salvini were among Modena's pupils. Rossi was the first actor who was immensely successful with a play by Shakespeare. He examined the plays in detail and in the original as he could speak English, and also wrote essays about Shakespeare. His command of the English language allowed him to judge translations; he was satisfied with Rusconi's translation of *Hamlet* but not of *Othello*. Therefore he asked Carcano for a new verse translation, and he went even further: he made his own translation of *Julius Caesar*. He travelled to Paris and to England, saw English performances and, in 1856, he finally presented his *Otello* in Milan's Teatro Re, the venue of Modena's fiasco. He gained so much success that this *Otello* was followed by *Amleto* presented two weeks later in the same theatre and, after two years, by *Macbeth* played in Venice, and *Re Lear* played in Turin. Carlson reports Rossi's memoirs, in which the actor noted that, by the time he played Othello, the audience were more accustomed to Shakespeare's style, and were ready to accept it, although they could not understand everything.¹³ Rossi was also Coriolanus, Shylock, Romeo, Macbeth, Julius Caesar and Richard III. In 1856 Salvini too played the role of Othello.

Salvini was an outstanding actor who met huge success.¹⁴ Although Othello was considered his greatest part, he was also Hamlet, King Lear and Macbeth. The third 'member' of the triad was Ristori, who had not been Modena's pupil, but was indirectly influenced by him. Ristori's only Shakespearian role was Lady Macbeth, but one role was enough for her to

¹² Collison-Morley, *Shakespeare in Italy*, p. 154; Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians*, p. 19.

¹³ Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians*, p. 21.

¹⁴ Collison-Morley, *Shakespeare in Italy* p. 158.

be acclaimed in Italy and outside the peninsula.¹⁵ Taking a closer look at how these first actors performed Shakespeare's characters we will clearly trace the strong influence of Modena's ideas on acting. Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938), the Russian-Soviet actor-director-teacher, creator of the most influential 'system' of acting in the Western world and founder, in 1897, of the Moscow Art Theatre, for example, was impressed by Salvini's long preparation before each performance to find the right emotion for the character he was going to play.

Certainly, their style differed from the Anglo-American though these actors had seen English or American companies perform Shakespeare. Rossi and Ristori were in Paris in 1856 where they saw Wallack's troupe and, (as I said before), Rossi spent some time in London where he made friends with Charles Kean and studied his versions of *Hamlet* and *Othello*.¹⁶ One of the features that Carlson underlines of the Italian Style was the spontaneity and individuality of the acting. In the following section I will deal with the English and American tours of these Italian actors, but I will quote here a long article published on 7 August 1881 in the *New York Tribune* which gives an extensive account of Rossi's acting style and of Modena's influence on him, Salvini and Ristori. Referring to Rossi the critic wrote:

Under the teachings of Modena, who never shackled his pupils with tradition, and never exacted even the copying of himself, he had been trained to be natural in his own way, and this was a development in the spontaneous direction of his mind. All the pupils of Modena, who have been heard of at all, have exemplified the master's wisdom in

¹⁵ For an analysis of Ristori as Lady Macbeth see: Laura Caretti, 'La regia di Lady Macbeth', in *Il teatro del personaggio*, ed. Laura Caretti, 147-180; also 'Shakespeare and Shakespeare', in Alonge, *Teatro e spettacolo nel secondo Ottocento*, 39-51.

¹⁶ The Wallacks were one of the three great theatrical families of America, the others being the Booths and the Jeffersons. James W. Wallack Sr. was born in London in 1794 and died in New York in 1864. His acting company was continued by his son Lester. In 1856 the troupe were presenting several Shakespearian plays in Paris at the Salle Ventadour.

one notable way – they have kept their distinct individuality and advanced in pathways of their own.¹⁷

As Marvin Carlson explains, this spontaneity did not seem to belong either to the British acting style of that period or to the American, which was deeply influenced by the former. Carlson hints at the ‘sameness in the movements of most Shakespearian actors in England and in America’¹⁸ and at their declamation of the text that ‘too had a certain predictability, even though it was less regular than that of the French stage’.¹⁹ In other words, while the English and American actors followed a kind of fixed structure, the Italians were more flexible and expressed themselves in a more emotional style.

The article in the *New York Tribune* continues:

His [Rossi] salient peculiarity as an actor is the passionate reality of his personations – a reality which comprehends the rare and delicate emotions of the soul not less than the manifestations of physical excitement. Thus, he is as intense and vital in conveying the spirit of one of Hamlet’s dream-burdened soliloquies as in depicting the fury of Romeo’s assault on the slayer of Mercutio (...) Those who have seen him act testify that his intuition, not only as to this character [Hamlet], but as to every part that he plays, is extraordinarily subtle [*sic*], and that his capacity for embodiment is wonderful.²⁰

And this is how Modena had expressed his philosophy of the creation of a character and of the character’s consistency:

¹⁷ *New York Tribune*, 7 August 1881.
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1881-08-07/ed-1/seg-5/>, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, (can be accessed at the British Library – London) [accessed 14 November 2012]. The article gives a detailed account of Rossi’s career, of the important role he played in the introduction of Shakespeare’s plays in Italy, of his opinion of existing translation, and of his acting style.

¹⁸ Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians*, p. 181.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *New York Tribune*, 7 August 1881.

Non conosco che una legge: - il mio personaggio -: Quando è contegnoso, quando è altiero, devo esserlo anch'io; quando è umile, ed io umile; quando vaneggia, ed io matto; se l'ira lo vince ed io servo dell'ira, della passione, meno che uomo (...). Chi ha inchiodata e ribadita nelle teste italiane codesta falsa massima del tipo unico di recitazione tragica (...).²¹

I know one law only: - my character - : when he is dignified, when he is lofty, I must be too; when he is humble I must be humble; when he raves, I must be mad; if he is overwhelmed by anger, I must be the servant of the anger, of passion, less than a man (...). Who has filled Italian minds with the false rule of a single type of tragic acting (...)?

Modena taught his pupils to get rid of their personality and to enter fully into each character's soul. Referring to Duse, Ristori – who had retired by that time – sharply criticized her, affirming that Duse was not able to identify herself with the character; she blamed her for performing a limited range of characters who were all very similar to one another instead of trying to step out of her own personality to give life to the character:

Io avevo tutti i colori della mia tavolozza, avevo anche una potenza di fibra, è vero, ma avrei sciupato gli uni e l'altra senza l'ostinata volontà di uscire dalla mia natura per entrare in quella del tipo che volevo rappresentare. Invece mi pare che certe attrici non facciano altro che ridurre alla propria natura tutti i tipi.²²

I had all the colours of the palette; I also had a powerful fibre, that is true, but I would have wasted the former and the latter without my obstinate will to come out of my nature and enter that of the character I wanted to represent. I have the feeling, instead, that some actresses just reduce all the characters to their own nature.

²¹ Alonge, *Teatro e spettacolo nel secondo Ottocento*, p. 24.

²² Ibid., p. 27.

‘Creating the character’ was also Stanislavski’s principal objective in his work with the actor. It is with a long preparation, with repeated rehearsals, with the minute study of the character’s feelings and of the character’s biography (which means creating the character’s entire life, his or her ideas, thoughts, visions, his or her present, past and future) that an actor becomes a character. From the last three quotations we can understand that Italian acting, besides being regarded as spontaneous and individual, also seemed to be more realistic than the style of the English and American actors.²³ Today we would probably not define the interpretations of the Italian actors as realistic, but they were so in their time, and their realism was to be seen in opposition ‘to the more general traditions which might be called “idealized” or “poetic” in style’ that better applied to the French or the English tradition.²⁴ French actors still followed classical models; their style was still very declamatory, whereas the Italians added such passion and violence sometimes that their performances could be even disturbing to some. So, if the French classical model influenced significantly Italian criticism on Shakespeare in the eighteenth century, as I illustrated in the previous chapter, the same model did not shape Italian acting in the following century. In his book Carlson makes a comparison between Ristori and the French actress Rachel who:

was the embodiment of French classicism – passionate, but passionate in a manner rigidly controlled by a long tradition of movement and declamation, in works of highly structured proportion and balance.²⁵

In the same chapter Marvin Carlson clearly explains how the Italian actors showed realism using contrasts, both with the voice – which they could use in any way they wished so they would alternate shouts with whispers – and with movements: they would shift from little gestures to ample ones to create contrasting emotions. Gestures and movements were

²³ For an analysis of Stanislavski’s work with the actors see Konstantin S. Stanislavskij, *Il lavoro dell'attore* ed. Gerardo Guerrieri (Roma-Bari: Editori Laterza, 1982), p. XX.

²⁴ Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians*, p. 180.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 180-181.

an important feature of their acting; they would always portray the actions with some impressive physical representations, and that was very different from the English style.²⁶ Contrasts also characterised the structure of the play – impassioned scenes alternated with quiet ones – and it was also common to build up a scene with long preparation. Examples are Ristori's sleepwalking scene or Salvini's rage against Iago which was the result of a long crescendo. Both characteristics, the use of contrasts and the crescendo, recall the style of opera singers, which certainly influenced the performances of the actors.²⁷

How did this typically Italian style compare with what we can call – borrowing Carlson's definition – 'the English acting style'? In the chapter 'Macready, Irving and Self-Control' in *Shakespeare and the Victorians*, Adrian Poole draws a parallel between the kind of acting of the best-known English actors of the nineteenth century – Charles Macready (1793-1873) and, later on, Henry Irving (1838-1905)²⁸ – and Victorian manners.²⁹ From his analysis we can understand why 'the Italian way' was seen as alien in the English-speaking world. He points out that Macready acted for forty years but, of these, only the last third were under the reign of Victoria. Yet his style could be defined as Victorian in terms of restraint, intellectuality, and scholarliness.³⁰ The same restraint and intellectuality or, as he calls it, 'a strong sense of "inwardness"' were the features of Irving's acting.³¹ In other words, he and his predecessors tried to apply the Victorian strict code of behaviour to life on the stage. Passions could be expressed, but inwardly. The result was a kind of fight between on the one hand the urge of the instincts, emotions and passions to burst, and on the other the need to keep them under control and to express them with little gestures, facial expressions, or the simple movement of the eyes. Therefore, the physicality

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 181-182.

²⁷ See the section dedicated to Verdi in chapter 1.

²⁸ By 1819 Macready was firmly established at Covent Garden and at Drury Lane in London. Irving became manager of the Lyceum in 1878 and 'ruled' for twenty years. In 1899 management was taken over by Lyceum Ltd.

²⁹ Adrian Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians* (London: Thomson Learning, 2004).

³⁰ Ibid., p. 32.

³¹ Ibid., p. 35.

of actors like Salvini with his powerful voice, comparable to the voice of an opera singer, was everything that Macready and Irving were not. To English self-control the Italians opposed a 'more violent and emotional style'.³²

The love of Rossi, Salvini and Ristori for the English playwright is undeniable, yet they rearranged his plays to a great extent. Schino compares the Great Actors' relationship with Shakespeare's characters with the relationship that Shakespeare may have had with Giraldo Cinthio, the author that had told Othello's story before him. Shakespeare almost always worked from sources, but treated them with great flexibility and even inaccuracy – which we may regard as irreverent or creative. In both cases Schino defines this relationship as 'un luogo di incontro' ('a meeting place'),³³ a definition which I will discuss further on in the chapter. Let us have a look at facts now. In the hands of the Great Actors Shakespeare's plays were totally purged of the historic-political dimension, of any obscenity or ambiguous words and phrases that would not have been accepted by nineteenth-century morality, and of digressions and minor characters. The action revolved around the star, which meant changes and cuts: the scenes that did not enhance the protagonist's characterization were reduced or deleted, secondary actors were there mainly to support the star, and stage setting was scarce. When Ristori accepted the role of Lady Macbeth, the play really became *Lady Macbeth*: Macbeth was reduced to a minor character, totally subjugated to his wife, and the actor chosen to play the role was usually weak in order to mark the contrast with Ristori's bravura. Ristori even asked the translator Giulio Carcano to change the title into *Lady Macbeth*, which he refused to do. Just to have an idea of these actors' interventions in the texts, we can have a look at what remained of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* after Ristori's cuts. In act 1 she cut scenes 1, 2, and 4; what remained was Macbeth and Banquo's encounter with the witches which was immediately followed by scene 3 where Lady Macbeth reads the letter sent by her husband. This was the first apparition of Ristori on the stage. The actress

³² Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians*, p. 181.

³³ Schino, *Racconti del Grande Attore*, p. 10.

started to build her character showing from the beginning strong emotions and accompanying the words with ample and very precise gestures. Act 2 remained intact with the exception of the Porter's sequence in scene 3, and scene 4 was more faithful to the original than any contemporary English version. The Porter's scene was presumably not considered necessary, as it did not imply the presence of Ristori on stage. Emphasis lay on the dialogue between Macbeth and his wife after the murder of Duncan in scene 2, and on Lady Macbeth's reaction to the news of Duncan's murder. Although Lady is not given many lines in the text, all the attention had to be drawn to Ristori's facial expression, gestures, and movements. In act 3 only scene 2 and scene 4 were preserved, the two scenes in which Lady Macbeth is on stage. Scene 2 is the second 'duet' between Lady Macbeth and her husband, after Macbeth has given orders to the murderers to kill Banquo. It is in this scene that Ristori started to show a changed attitude and signs of weakness that would lead to the sleepwalking scene. Act 4 and act 5 were combined. Ristori's act 4 started with the exchange between Malcolm and Macduff (act 4, scene 3 in Shakespeare) followed by the sleepwalking scene which, in the original, is in act 5, scene 1. Scenes 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 from act 5 were reduced to the minimum, as the sleepwalking sequence was the climax of the production and of Ristori's performance. In effect, Ristori's exit marked the end of the play although there were still a few brief scenes. The practice of rearranging acts and scenes in order to allow the star to be the last one to leave the stage or to have the last word was very common and, as we will see further on in this section, it was typical of English actors too.³⁴ Ristori's sleepwalking scene, for which the rest of the play became a sort of preparation, and which was sometimes presented as an afterpiece, became immensely popular, and people would applaud every time she performed it.³⁵

³⁴ To make another example, Rossi's *Hamlet* ended with the line 'The rest is silence', and the character of Fortinbras did not appear at all in this version.

³⁵ For a detailed description of Ristori's performance as Lady Macbeth see Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians*, pp. 36-46, and Laura Caretti, 'La regia di Lady Macbeth', in *Il teatro del personaggio*, ed. Laura Caretti, 147-180.



Figure 1: Adelaide Ristori as Lady Macbeth

Salvini's and Rossi's work on the texts was very similar. Salvini cut scene 1, in which Othello does not appear, from act 1 of his *Otello*, because, as Carlson tells us, the 'production (...) was designed to focus on the star, who should be brought on stage as soon as possible and kept there through most of the evening'.³⁶ Moreover, choices were also made so that the audience's attention would focus on the star even when another actor was speaking lines. Carlson tells us that Salvini's reactions were 'as complex and specific as the gestures and expressions which he used to support his own lines'.³⁷ All this is shown in the photographic documents at our disposal: we see the actor/actress in costume, while there are no props (only a painted cloth is visible) or other actors to be seen.³⁸

³⁶ Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians*, p. 61.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³⁸ Carlson's *The Italian Shakespearians* contains a portfolio of drawings and photographs of the actors in character.



Figure 2: Ernesto Rossi as Hamlet



Figure 3: Tommaso Salvini as Hamlet



Figure 4: Ernesto Rossi as Macbeth



Figure 5: Tommaso Salvini as Macbeth

I think it is also important to notice that all the reviews, along with Carlson's book, revolve around the interpretation of the actors, while there is very little reference to the set, or to anything that is linked to an idea of a general plan, of what became the basis of directing. Only later, toward the mid-twentieth century, did Shakespeare's plays start to be studied in their entirety in Italy. These productions, instead of being informed by textual scholarship, had much in common with opera with which – as I pointed out above and in the previous chapter – they were in competition. In both cases

the original text was seen as a frame: there was not much difference between the stripped-down version that a libretto presented of the text and the texts created by the mid-nineteenth-century actors. The focus was in both cases on memorable moments that were built little by little in order to impress the audience. In opera this aim was achieved through the music and the singers' virtuosity, in non-musical theatre through the voice, the gestures, the movements, which all aimed to enhance a particular emotion and to create the effect.

However, it must not be forgotten that, in some cases, the Italians preserved scenes or lines that the English deleted. In Salvini's *Otello*, for example, Iago's more openly sexual lines were kept, while they were commonly cut in English productions of the time. This may seem strange to many laymen who would probably think that the English did not rearrange their Shakespeare and would regard the Italian manipulations as outrageous. They would be extremely surprised if they knew the true story. Among the books that trace the history of appropriations and adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in Britain, there are Michael Dobson's *The Making of the National Poet* and Poole's already mentioned *Shakespeare and the Victorians*.³⁹ From the first book we learn that, since the re-opening of theatres in 1660, 'a series of alternative Shakespeares'⁴⁰ appeared, and that they had enduring life and fame. Sir William Davenant's *The Tempest; or the Enchanted Island*, co-written with John Dryden in 1667, Nahum Tate's *The History of King Lear* (1681), and Colley Cibber's *The Tragical History of King Richard III* (1699) are among the best-known. Plays were rewritten for various reasons: during the constitutional crises of the 1670s and 1680s, adaptations varied according to what was required from theatre, with some meant to politicize the stage, and others aimed to depoliticize it. More often than not, affirms Dobson, Shakespeare's plays were rewritten to avoid the political issues at stake in that period and, consequently, the stress was on

³⁹ Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

‘the private realm of the passions’.⁴¹ From the Glorious Revolution to the 1730s, Shakespeare’s plays were polished and corrected so that they would suit the requirements of the Enlightenment. Therefore, they were deprived of the gross, earthy, and fleshly elements that appealed to some sections of the audience, but could not be accepted by the Augustan literary élite.⁴² The habit of correcting Shakespeare’s plays went on for a long period and, although throughout the nineteenth century there were attempts to restore the original texts, in 1876 the Irish actor Barry Sullivan was still playing Cibber’s *Richard III* at Drury Lane,⁴³ and Irving’s *King Lear* of 1892 still bore the influence of Tate’s version.⁴⁴ It must also be pointed out that what Carlson defines as ‘the grand manner’ of Italian performance – that is the custom of giving very little regard to the overall play and focusing all the attention on the leading actor – did not differ much from the English or American style.⁴⁵ Irving, for example, did not feel in the wrong when he cut an estimated 46 per cent of *King Lear* for his staging or, like the Italians, made changes that allowed him to have the last word before the exit of the actors.⁴⁶

Even in terms of stage set the Victorian actors did not try to reproduce what the stage would have been in Shakespeare’s times. On the contrary, until the beginning of the twentieth century Shakespeare on stage meant spectacle, and Poole speaks of ‘a series of monumental Shakespearian productions that went on up to the outbreak of war’ (First World War).⁴⁷ Poole also registers Henry James’s comment on Irving’s *Romeo and Juliet* which, according to him, the actor-manager had

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴² Ibid., p. 101.

⁴³ Thomas Barry Sullivan (1824-1891) started his career playing minor Shakespearian parts to Charles Kean’s lead. By 1844 he was playing leading roles. He worked in Great Britain, the U.S.A., and Australia.

⁴⁴ Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians*, p. 19.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 175.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 20

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 23

transformed ‘from a splendid and delicate poem into a gorgeous and over-weighted spectacle’.⁴⁸

In the light of all this, we understand that the approach of the Italians to Shakespeare’s texts was not substantially different from that of the English; and we may also feel more inclined to ‘justify’ the Italians’ re-writings if we consider that they were working on translations that were still far from faithful.

This discussion acquires even greater force if we consider what happened in Shakespeare’s times, and if we try to answer the question: ‘What is Shakespeare’? I am referring to all the changes that the plays went through from composition to the first representation on the stage to the printed text. I am hinting at the different versions of the same play that we possess today, the quarto and the folio texts, which create many problems to editors and to translators; and also at the collaborations between playwrights at the time of Shakespeare, that sometimes make it difficult to tell which lines in a play belong to Shakespeare and which do not. I will return to these issues in chapter 3, where I will deal with the birth of directing in Italy in the first decades of the twentieth century. The reason for locating discussion of textual issues in this chapter lies in the fact that directing in Italy was primarily born with the aim to offer a philological reading of the playtexts and, through the staging, to restore the originals after the manipulations of the age of the actors.

What is remarkable is that the Italian actors took Shakespeare even to England and to America, performing in Italian and meeting huge success. It must be said that they toured mainly for economic reasons since, as we saw, in Italy there was very little financial support from the state to the theatre. Travelling, however, was not only a habit of Italian actors. Poole notices that English and American actors also toured extensively. Besides visiting various towns outside London, where they earned much more than they would have performing in the capital only, the former often travelled to America.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 26

Touring across (...) Britain and Ireland and North America meant that they became agents and icons of identity, (...) all the more powerfully when identity was stamped with the mythic force of Hamlet or Lear, or Juliet or Lady Macbeth. (...) Shakespeare carried 'authority'.⁴⁹

Macready made two trips to the United States, the first in 1826 and the second in the 1840s; Irving crossed the Atlantic eight times. At the same time, the Americans came to continental Europe and to England: Ira Aldridge left America because of the persistent discrimination which black actors endured in the United States, and he never returned. Edwin Booth arrived in London in 1861 and then again in the 1880s.⁵⁰ All of them found substantial reward across the Atlantic. As for the Italians, Ristori made seven English and four American tours between 1856 and 1885; Salvini made a tour of South America in 1871 and an extensive American tour in 1873-74; Rossi performed a little in London and made a tour of the United States in 1881-82.

Their English and American tours are quite remarkable for many reasons. The first one who made an American tour was Ristori. It is for this tour that the sort of press publicity that we know today began. Ristori was introduced in America by an entrepreneur called Jacob Grau who risked the huge sum of \$ 50,000 for her tour. The arrival of the star was preceded by daily articles in various papers dealing not only with details of her tour but also with information – not always true – about her private life. She was accommodated in luxury hotels, and she was constantly busy with interviews, dinner parties, and social occasions. Ristori gadgets were launched, copies of the *Macbeth* libretto were distributed.⁵¹ As a consequence, Ristori's success was a certainty before the star began her performances. More or less the same happened with Salvini and Rossi,

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians*, p. 29.

though – for reasons that I will explain a little further – the last was not as successful as the first two.⁵²

For these American productions the three actors did not always present a whole play: sometimes they just acted the best-known excerpts from different plays in one evening. They acted mainly in Italian, and translations were often quite flat, sometimes even a bit ridiculous for English/American-speaking audiences who, despite this, loved their performances because of their powerful stage presence and their Italian way of acting. Thanks to their propensity for gesture the audiences were able to understand what was going on especially if they more or less knew the plot of the play. Moreover, little by little the actors started to introduce some English and there were productions that were conducted in the two languages. The Italian actor would speak in Italian while the other actors, who were often American or English, would reply in English!

Tommaso Salvini seems to have been the best Othello. It is very interesting to read Henry James's opinion in *The Scenic Art*:

His powerful, active, manly frame, his noble, serious, vividly expressive face, his splendid smile, his Italian eye, his superb, voluminous voice, his carriage, his tone, his ease, the assurance he instantly gives that he holds the whole part in his hands and can make of it exactly what he chooses (...). He is a magnificent creature and you are already on his side.⁵³

And in the London *Spectator* of 17 April 1875 he writes:

His voice is surprisingly beautiful; flexible beyond belief; full of musical inflexions, of change, of passion, of tenderness, and tears (...). His articulation is so distinct that every word is heard with ease in the

⁵² For a complete analysis of their tours see Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians*.

⁵³ Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians*, p. 61. James's *The Scenic Art* was published in New York in 1857.

most distant parts of the theatre, and not the least effort attends his most passionate outbursts.⁵⁴

Rossi was less successful in America. This is probably due to the fact that, when he arrived in 1881, the American audience was perhaps a bit tired of these Italian Shakespearian performances since they had seen a number by then, but it cannot be denied that on the whole the audiences loved the Italian performers. It was not always the same for critics. Along with good reviews like the one published in the *New York Tribune* on 7 August 1881, there were also some negative ones. The main criticism that was made of the Italians was the fact that their style did not conform to the English way of acting Shakespeare's characters. In particular, it was believed that Italian actors, known for their passion typical of Mediterranean people, were not fit for interpreting northern types like Hamlet, an intellectually complicated character. That is the reason why they praised Salvini's interpretation of Othello, a southerner who, in their opinion, was not that different from the Italian interpreters. James shared this opinion. Referring to Salvini's Othello he stated:

A study of pure feeling – of passion, with as little as possible of that intellectual iridescence which (...) less visible, or at any rate less essential, in the Moor of Venice than in the other great parts, puts the character much more within Salvini's grasp than the study of Hamlet, of Lear, of Macbeth.⁵⁵

Similar is James's comment on Rossi's Othello:

Rossi is both very bad and very fine; bad when anything like taste and discretion is required, but 'all there', and much more than there, in violent passion.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 177.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 181.

Such comments are prejudiced and sound even racist but, as I hope it is clear from my analysis, there were undeniable differences between the way Shakespeare was presented by the Italians and the typical Anglo-American way. Yet, even within America or England, there were different actors with different styles. In America, for example, the extrovert Edwin Forrest was contrasted to the introverted Booth.⁵⁷ And in England the most popular predecessor of Macready and Irving, Edmund Kean (1787-1833), was an explosive, passionate, and physical actor.

Before moving on to talk about the generation of the *mattatori*, I wish to draw some conclusions on the figure of the Great Actor and on the work that the Great Actors did with Shakespeare's plays, and complete my discussion of this first section. I want to return to Schino's definition of the relationship of the Great Actors with Shakespeare's plays as 'un luogo di incontro' ('a meeting place'). Quite rightly, I think, she compared this relationship with the relationship that Shakespeare may have had with the original sources of his plays. In the same way as Shakespeare created his own art drawing from already existing material – and doing it so freely and flexibly, without a concern for accuracy or authenticity – the Great Actors created theirs drawing from Shakespeare's plays.⁵⁸ She also mentions Meldolesi, according to whom the work that the Italians did on Shakespeare was a process of recreation that 'a tutti gli effetti assumeva caratteristiche drammaturgiche'⁵⁹ ('to all effects acquired dramaturgical characteristics'). And she argues that we should look at the work of the Great Actors 'con una mente sgombra dai paradigmi dell'interpretazione, il che non è quasi mai possibile'⁶⁰ ('with a mind cleared of the paradigms of interpretation, which is hardly ever possible'). I think that by 'interpretation' Schino means mimesis of the text. The question whether the staging of a play by Shakespeare should imply authenticity, is an old one and keeps recurring. I believe that good theatre (or bad theatre) exists independently of whether

⁵⁷ Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians*, p. 36.

⁵⁸ Schino, *Racconti del Grande Attore*, p. 10.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

what is offered is a philological reading of the text, or whether the text is seen as fundamentally unfixed and free for remoulding and reshaping. In the course of time, there have been various and varied approaches to Shakespeare's playtexts, as I hope that my thesis will make clear. But, as I will illustrate, there have also been returns to older patterns. The important period of the director's theatre, which in Italy flourished around the 1940s, marked the advent of the figure of the theatre director, who saw himself as the custodian of the text. Men like Strehler affirmed that the director is at the service of the text and restoring Shakespeare's original texts was their objective after the adulterations of the generations of the actors. But against what is now called the director's theatre, the experimentalists of the 1960s, like de Berardinis and Bene, reaffirmed the supremacy of the actor and felt entitled to make the most extreme alterations of Shakespeare's plays because, for them, theatre is the creation of a new artwork. Therefore, once again, the actor acquired dramaturgical functions. Certainly the context was different. While the experimentalists of the 1960s had all the material they needed for a philological approach to Shakespeare's texts (had they been interested in such an approach), along with a number of translations, the Great Actors of the mid-nineteenth century still had little at their disposal. Therefore, it must be recognized that they played an active and fundamental role in the spreading of the knowledge and understanding of Shakespeare's plays in Italy. We are certainly indebted to them as much as we are to a writer like Manzoni, a composer like Verdi, or a scholar like De Sanctis. I would like to widen this idea, as their achievements crossed boundaries, by which I mean that they also contributed to the general knowledge of the English playwright. I pointed out before that Salvini kept Iago's more sexual lines in his *Otello*, lines that were normally cut in the English productions of the Victorian age. This means that English audiences would have a more complete understanding of the character than by watching a 'home-grown' production. In addition, although the emotional and passionate Italian style of acting certainly differed from the English, it probably helped the understanding of some aspects of the situations represented, or of the characters interpreted.

2.2 The Generation of the *Mattatori*⁶¹

In his book *Fondamenti del teatro italiano* the writer and critic Claudio Mellolesi distinguishes five generations of actors performing between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.⁶² First came the forerunners of the Great Actors, born between 1796 and 1803, among whom was Gustavo Modena. Next came the Great Actors, Rossi, Salvini, Ristori, born between 1822 and 1829. They were followed by a third group, called *mattatori*, like Giovanni Emanuel, Ermete Novelli, Ermete Zacconi and, greatest of all, Eleonora Duse, born between 1848 and 1858. To this generation followed the generation of Ruggero Ruggeri and Emma Gramatica born between 1871 and 1875. The last generation was that of Maria Melato, Ettore Petrolini and Memo Benassi, born between 1885 and 1891. The first glimpses of a renewal of theatre that would lead to the birth of the director's theatre in Italy can be traced in the generation of Emanuel, Zacconi, Novelli and, most of all, Duse.

At the turn of the century Shakespeare was worshipped in many European countries (there was a real Shakespeare mania in Germany for example), but Shakespearian performances in Italy in this period were not so acclaimed as they had been a few decades earlier at the time of Rossi, Ristori and Salvini. What the Italian public had loved of Shakespeare in the performances of the mid-1800s were the great tragic roles played by Rossi, Salvini and Ristori; they had loved the actors more than the characters and, without any doubts, more than the plays. Until the beginning of the First World War, that is after a century of Italian Shakespearian productions, the

⁶¹ As I pointed out in footnote 10 at p. 20, it is impossible to give an English equivalent for the term *mattatore*. It was Alessandro D'Amico who, for the first time, distinguished between the Great Actors, and actors who were great but were not the Great Actors. The acting of the *mattatori* was made of vocal modulations, of characterizing details, of perfect diction, of small effects, as opposed to the emphasis put by the Great Actors on impressive movements and gestures.

⁶² Claudio Mellolesi, *Fondamenti del teatro italiano. La generazione dei registi* (Firenze: Sansoni Editore Nuova, 1984), p.12.

public still preferred bourgeois dramas and French *pochades*.⁶³ More than to the great tragedies of the English playwright or to the Greek tragedies, they felt attracted to contemporary stories unfolding within the boundaries of a household, stories of unhappy marriages, of adultery, of betrayed women. Of course such themes were also present in Shakespeare's plays, but the distinction I want to draw rests upon contemporaneity and the 'high style' of Shakespeare's tragedies. The Italian playwrights, on their side, wished to contribute to the debate on important contemporary questions, like the so-called *questione femminile* (the issue of women), divorce, the division of society into classes, and the comparison between the aristocracy and the middle class, questions which attracted the sympathy of the authors and public. Examples of Italian dramaturgy are *La morte civile* by Paolo Giacometti – composed in 1861 – in which a man, sentenced to life imprisonment, commits suicide after escaping from prison to let his wife marry another man since divorce did not exist; or Achille Torelli's *I mariti* – written in 1867 – where the good husband is identified with the good middle-class man. Among the writers of the last decades of the nineteenth century we can also mention Giuseppe Giacosa and Marco Praga and, of course, Giovanni Verga, the most prominent writer of Italian *Verismo*, with his *Cavalleria rusticana* (1883), *La lupa* (1896), *In portineria* (1885), and *Dal tuo al mio* (1903).

Despite not being very popular in Italy, there were some performances of Shakespeare's plays at the turn of the century. Among the actors of the second generation, there is a name worth mentioning: Giovanni Emanuel (1847-1902). Emanuel was an actor but he probably played a more important role as an acting teacher. Though his command of English was rather limited, he tried to read Shakespeare in the original for two main reasons: firstly because he was not at all satisfied with the existing translations by Rusconi and Carcano (the only ones that were still used at

⁶³ The word *pochade* is derived from the nineteenth-century French verb *pocher* meaning to sketch, and it is usually related to painting. In the field of theatre a *pochade* was a light comedy, a sketch.

the end of the century); secondly because he was against the tradition of the Great Actors and their habit of cutting the text. He believed that these performances failed to offer a knowledge of the text in its entirety, and mutilated the character who cannot be shown in his complexity and in all his nuances if deprived of the context and of the relations to other, even minor, characters. And he was well aware that the inadequacies of translations greatly contributed to the misunderstanding of the text. Emanuel, therefore, should be remembered because he paved the way for the philological approach to Shakespeare which would be the trademark of the work of the first great Italian directors in the 1940s and 1950s. On the other hand, however, he was also a representative of the new tendencies of *Naturalism* and *Verism*. The result, as far as Shakespeare is concerned, was not brilliant. Adapting Shakespeare's language to the current cult of truth and of everyday situations meant flattening the language and losing the poetry. This was probably the main problem with Shakespeare's plays at that time. The theatre of *Verismo* was a theatre made of vocal modulations, of characterizing details, of perfect diction, of small effects all aimed at the faithful representation of reality, elements that did not always match with the great tragic heroes of Shakespeare's plays. At the end of 1899 Ristori (who was seventy years old) wrote in a letter to Salvini who had asked her about the new art:

Io, *modestamente* sono d'avviso che l'attuale forma di interpretazione è *falsa e acrobatica*! E che noi dobbiamo essere orgogliosi di essere stati quello che fummo, *seguaci della verità e della manifestazione della grand'arte*.⁶⁴

I *humbly* think that the current acting style is *false and acrobatic*! And that we must be proud of having been what we were, *pursuers of the truth and of the representation of the great art*.

⁶⁴ Alonge, *Teatro e spettacolo nel Secondo Ottocento*, p.222. Emphases original.

What can be understood from these words is that the actors of the previous generation could not trace any art in the work of their successors.

What Ristori said (rightly or wrongly) can be perfectly applied to two other actors belonging to the generation of the *mattatori*: Ermete Novelli (1851-1919) and Ermete Zacconi (1857-1948). Zacconi was and is generally considered a master of the new naturalistic acting style but not a good Shakespearian performer. He was Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, Shylock, and Coriolanus but none of these interpretations was particularly praised. Silvio D'Amico (critic and founder, in 1934, of the first Italian school for actors and directors, Regia Scuola d'Arte Drammatica [Royal School of Dramatic Art]) was particularly harsh:

Il suo 'Macbeth' era tanto incolore, prolisso e monotono, da render possibile questo tour de force: annoiare il pubblico con l'opera più densa, fervida e fascinatrice che sia mai apparsa su le scene.⁶⁵

His 'Macbeth' was so dull, long and monotonous that he made this tour de force possible: boring the public with the most intense, ardent and bewitching play that has ever been staged.

Ermete Novelli also performed in some of Shakespeare's plays. His masterpiece was his interpretation of Shylock who, at that time, was the best loved Shakespearian character of this generation of actors since he is not heroic, but is imbued with prosaic worldliness which makes of him a more modern character. The title was: *Shylock* and, in brackets, after *Mercante di Venezia di Guglielmo Shakespeare (The Merchant of Venice from William Shakespeare)*. That is enough to understand what kind of play he offered. He altered it significantly, he isolated the character but, on the other hand, he made a very accurate study of Shylock. This is the opinion expressed by Silvio D'Amico:

⁶⁵ Silvio D'Amico, *Tramonto del grande attore*, p. 72.

Non resta, dunque, a considerare altro che l'ebreo. Diciamo subito che Ermete Novelli, quanto mostra di avere rinunciato ad intendere il poema, altrettanto è entrato nello spirito del carattere shakespeariano.⁶⁶

It only remains, then, to consider none other than the Jew. Let us say at once that Ermete Novelli has entered the spirit of the Shakespearian character in the same measure in which he has given up trying to understand the poem.

D'Amico admitted that Novelli had understood Shylock's character fully, his degradation, his stubbornness, his meanness, his despair. Makeup, gestures, movements, voice, all were perfect according to the critic. Novelli was able to create true characters, vibrating with life; he used the texts – or pre-texts – to create portraits of old men, good or wicked, generous or mean, fat or slim, rich or poor.⁶⁷ Once again the focus was on the character and only the character!



Figure 6: Ermete Novelli as Shylock

The case of Duse (1858-1924) perfectly represented the bridge between the Italian theatre of the nineteenth century and the new ideas that

⁶⁶ Silvio D'Amico, *Maschere-Note sull'interpretazione scenica* (Roma: Mondadori, 1921), p. 63.

⁶⁷ By 'pre-text' I mean the use of a playtext almost as an excuse to create a completely different play on the stage. In other words, a source which the actor (or the director) manipulates freely to create his or her own artwork.

were spreading in Europe in the last decades of that century. As a matter of fact, the years between 1870 and 1880 marked the advent of the first recognized experiences of the director's theatre. The first protagonists of this theatrical revolution were the Duke of Meiningen in Germany and Antoine in France. Not much later followed Stanislavski in Russia (who founded the Moscow Art Theatre in 1897); Gordon Craig (with his theory of the *Über-Marionette* to replace the actor) in England; and Adolphe Appia (who explained his ideas about theatre in three books: *La messa in scena del dramma wagneriano*, 1895; *La musica e la messa in scena*, 1899; *L'opera d'arte vivente*, 1921) in Switzerland.⁶⁸ As for England there had been other figures who anticipated the modes of the director's theatre. William Poel, for example, who founded the Elizabethan Stage Society in 1895, tried to stage plays that used a unified acting ensemble in opposition to the theatre of the star actor, and to restore textual and historical authenticity. Or Harley Granville-Barker (1877-1946) who, under the influence of Poel, did away with the star system of acting and concentrated on excellence in the entire ensemble too.

Duse was an extraordinary actress who introduced a very personal way of acting. She was not, like Ristori, inclined to ample movements and effective big gestures; she did not raise her voice as the actors of the previous generation did. Her acting was made of silences, whispers, and small gestures aimed at entering the soul of the character. Duse came from a family of touring actors who struggled for their living; she started to act as a young child. She played Juliet in Verona in May 1875 when she was only fourteen, and before the age of twenty she had also been Cordelia, Ophelia and Desdemona. Apart from these roles in some of Shakespeare's plays (as usual in versions that did not share much with the original text), her repertory included mainly the French who were very popular in Italy, like the younger Dumas and Sardou, thanks to whom she became the most loved actress of her time. But she had something else in mind; she was 'sick of a

⁶⁸ I will expand on the founding fathers of directing in the next chapter.

Theatre *without Art*'.⁶⁹ Despite meeting huge success with the French plays and plays by the Italian Capuana and Verga, she became intolerant of the mediocre standards prevalent on the Italian stage. She had become acquainted with the work of Antoine and with his innovative stage design and lighting. It was the meeting with Arrigo Boito (1842-1918) in 1887 and their love relationship that marked a big change in her career. Boito was a learned man and a lover of the arts; he had already composed the libretto for Verdi's *Otello* when he met Duse in 1887. Boito became Duse's lover but, more importantly probably, he became her mentor and guide. He encouraged her to abandon that French, commercial repertoire, he encouraged her to read, and he convinced her to devote her talent to the true art: the work of Shakespeare. Acting Shakespeare meant breaking the bond with the commercial French theatre and taking up a mission. The result of this encounter was *Antonio e Cleopatra*, translated and adapted by Boito (from the French translation made by Victor Hugo's son) for Duse and premièred in Milan, at the Teatro Manzoni, on 22 November 1888. The letters written by Boito before and after the show help us understand what the aim was and what the result.

(20 November 1888)

Non m'inganno, l'opera è grande e tu sei degna dell'opera e il risultato sarà degno dell'alto ardimento. Io so Shakespeare e so il Teatro e so Lenor [Duse]. (...) Fidati! (...) Questo t'appartiene per diritto di Dio! Dunque, va! Entra nella tragedia gloriosa, e tu gloriosa n'escirai. (...) Domani t'aspetta una missione grande, una santa missione d'arte. Se non la vinci domani, tu, si aspetteranno dei secoli prima che la vinca un'altra.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Quoted in Susan Bassnett, 'Eleonora Duse' in Stole, Booth, and Bassnett *Bernhardt, Terry, Duse*, p. 124. Emphasis original.

⁷⁰ Eleonora Duse – Arrigo Boito, *Lettere d'amore*, ed. Raul Radice (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1979), p. 289.

The play is a classic, you are equal to its greatness, and the result will be worthy of your enormous courage. I know my Shakespeare, I know the Theatre and I know my Lenor [Duse]. (...) Trust me! (...) This belongs to you by divine right. So, go! Enter the glorious tragedy and you will be glorious. (...) Tomorrow a great mission awaits you, a holy mission of art. If you do not win it tomorrow, it will be centuries before another one wins it.

But let us read the letter Boito wrote after the performance:

(23 November 1888)

Brava.

Avevo tanta paura. Grazie. – Si comincia a respirare. Quel lavoro così breve, così spoglio di tutte le informi ma possenti esuberanze del testo mi pareva all'ultimo momento una cosa indegna, una calunnia verso Shakespeare, un tradimento fatto a Lenor. (...) E la colpa è davvero mia se il successo non seppe raggiungere il suo altissimo culmine all'ultimo atto. – La causa di ciò sta nella inetta brevità della riduzione. (...) Ci siamo preoccupati di una cosa sola ed è questa: estrarre dal possente poema tutta la divina essenza dell'amore e del dolore e abbiamo chiuso gli occhi sul resto. (...) Se ti ho data una cattiva riduzione perdonami. – L'ubriacatura che dura da due anni ne ha anche una parte di colpa. Bisognerà essere freddi per misurare con giustezza il pensiero e le speranze (...).⁷¹

Brava.

I was so afraid. My heartfelt thanks. – Now I can breathe again. The play seemed to be so brief, once stripped of all the formless yet powerful exuberance in the text. At the last minute, I suddenly found it unworthy, a calumny against Shakespeare, a betrayal of my Lenor.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 290-291.

(...) I am truly to blame if the work failed to reach a grand climax in the final act. This was caused by my inept reduction of the text. (...) We concentrated on only one aspect in our efforts – to extract from that powerful poem all the divine essence of love and sorrow, and we closed our eyes to the rest. It was a mistake. (...) If I have given you a bad translation, forgive me. (...) This inebriation which has gripped us for the last two years is also partly to blame. One needs to be detached in order to measure one's thoughts and hopes with any precision (...).⁷²

And in a letter written in January of the following year after the play had been staged a few times:

4.2.89

Ed ora, a te, coraggio! Questa volta la battaglia di Shakespeare dev'essere vinta. E' NECESSARIO. (...) E' una missione d'arte, ed è una necessaria missione per te. Finché non farai quella grand'Arte là sarai sempre sezionata viva ed avrai sempre un'esistenza dolorosa e assurda. Tu vivi nella perenne esposizione di te. E questa del mostrar se stessa (e null'altro che se stessa) è una dannazione, una fatica senza scopo. Ed è ciò che ti fa soffrire o che ti umilia. – Io soffro anche. Quando in te mostrerai Shakespeare e propagherai l'opera SUA, quella sarà gloria immacolata!⁷³

And now, over to you! Come on! This time the battle for Shakespeare must be won. It is NECESSARY. (...) It is a mission of art and it is a necessary mission for you. As long as you don't make that great Art, you will always be dissected alive and your existence will always be painful and absurd. You live in the perennial exhibition of yourself. And exhibiting yourself (and nothing but yourself) is a damnation, an

⁷² Quoted in Pontiero, *Eleonora Duse: In Life and Art*, p. 77.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 304.

aimless fatigue. And it is what makes you suffer or humiliates you. – I suffer too. When you show Shakespeare in you and spread HIS work, that will be immaculate glory!

Much can be understood from these three letters. Despite the good intentions, it is clear from Boito's words that, once again, what was offered to the public was a stripped down version of the original text in which the focus was on the Egyptian queen and on her love relationship with Antony. Boito was in earnest when he decided to translate Shakespeare for the greatest contemporary Italian actress because he believed that she deserved to confront herself with great art and because he felt the need to give new dignity to the Italian stage, but he was not ready for a more philological reading of the text. Furthermore, as he affirms, his passion for Duse did not allow him to be clear-headed enough and the result was that, while translating, he had the actress in mind more than the playwright and his work. At the same time, it can be easily inferred from the third letter that, despite Duse's wish to change theatre, to bring forth a revolution, she had not lost the typical vices of the Italian Great Actors.

The Italian reviews were generally bad. Not only was Boito attacked for his reduction, but also Duse, as it was maintained that she did not have the 'physique du role'. She was blamed for her inability to play great tragedy, for the fact that she was lacking in sensuality, that she was too ordinary and everyday in her performance to play the role of the great queen. According to the reviews, moreover, she had not been able to show Cleopatra's ambiguity, her doubleness, just leaving a woman in love who, at the end, commits suicide because of the death of her lover rather than not to submit to the power of Octavius Caesar.



Figure 7: Eleonora Duse as Cleopatra

The play was not at all appreciated in her Italian tour but it did better abroad. It was taken to Egypt, Russia, and London.⁷⁴

In order to have a clearer idea of Duse's role as a bridge between the actor's theatre and the director's theatre, I wish to dedicate this section to her collaboration with Gabriele D'Annunzio.⁷⁵ Despite the scarce success of her Shakespearian interpretation, her desire to create a theatre of art remained and found its second possibility in the encounter with D'Annunzio in 1897. The love she felt for the man was strong and passionate but it ended after a few years because of his infidelities in life as well as in art. At the time of their meeting Duse was trying hard to get rid of the *cliché* of the Great Actor to devote her talent to the poet and to the poet's creation: the text. She had travelled around Europe and had come into contact with the new European trends; she wished to create a theatre of the author, in which the actors should serve the author and the text. D'Annunzio demanded exactly that. He can be considered the first Italian director, a playwright-director. Like Wagner, he dreamt about the global work of art where poetical word, music and dance should be reconciled. He imagined a

⁷⁴ For a detailed analysis of the Italian reviews and for Boito's reduction see: Laura Vazzoler, 'Eleonora Duse e Arrigo Boito: lo spettacolo sull' "Antonio e Cleopatra" di Shakespeare', *Biblioteca Teatrale - Rivista trimestrale di studi e ricerche sullo spettacolo*, 6/7 (Roma: Bulzoni, 1973), 65-119.

⁷⁵ Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938) wrote novels, poetry, and drama. He was also a journalist and was a soldier during World War I. He was associated with the Decadent movement in his literary works, which interplayed closely with French Symbolism and British Aestheticism.

poetical theatre that retrieved the sacred dimension of the performance and that broke the bond with the bourgeois drama. He despised what he considered the bad habits of the Great Actors; he looked for amateur actors to be shaped by him and, in this regard, he resembled the ‘fathers’ of the modern European directing (and of Modena before him). His plays were full of stage directions, thus leaving very little margin of freedom to the actor who was just one of the instruments to vehicle the poet’s words. In *La città morta* (spring 1901) Duse was required to act away from the front stage, giving her back to the public, distanced from the audience. D’Annunzio was a strong opponent of *Verismo*; that was not art to him; his plays should not be the mere, naturalistic representation of everyday life. Therefore he opposed his ‘teatro di poesia’ (‘poetical theatre’ – ‘literary theatre’, a trend that was to be continued by the first great Italian directors) to the bourgeois theatre of the time. But problems between him and Duse arose soon: on the one hand, D’Annunzio lacked the necessary experience as a director; the cost of his productions for example were too high; on the other, despite her efforts and goodwill and despite her profession of faith in the supreme value of Art and her determination to serve the poet, Duse had been brought up in the tradition of the Great Actor. Therefore, D’Annunzio’s attitude (together with his infidelities) became unbearable. Duse resumed all her typical bad habits like skipping rehearsals. When their relationship ended in 1904, Duse went back to the French plays but also took up Ibsen and came into contact with some of the European innovators like Craig. After a first wave of enthusiasm on either side (after meeting him in Berlin in 1906, Duse invited him to design the sets for Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm*), they clashed violently at the beginning of 1907 when *Rosmersholm* was touring the French Riviera. The reason for this was the fact that Craig’s sets had to be modified, as the theatres were not big enough for his original plan. When he saw the set in Nice, he rushed to Duse’s hotel and said to her ‘Come quick, urgent, they are ruining my scenery’. Duse’s reply was ‘Sir, what they are doing to your scenery now ... they’ve been doing to my art all my life’!⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Pontiero, *Eleonora Duse*, p. 231.

Times seemed not to be ready for a director's theatre in Italy.

Duse died in 1924. As I said, she has been identified as the watershed between the old and the new, between the demands of the Great Actor on one side, and the need for a new generation of actors more inclined to serve the text on the other, between stagings that used the text just as a pre-text to show the mastery of the lead actor/actress and new trends aimed at giving it new value and at showing it in its entirety. In his essay *L'attore italiano tra Otto e Novecento*, Sandro D'Amico states that the actors of the following generation looked at Duse and learned a lot from her.⁷⁷ That would be the generation of the actor-interpreters, interpreters of the text, the first of whom was Ruggero Ruggeri.⁷⁸ Those were also the years in which the echoes of the new European trends had reached Italy, and the debate over the necessity to introduce in the theatre a new figure, whose task should be that of tracing the theatrical essence in the text and transforming it into theatrical action, was now inevitable. But actually, nothing new had happened yet. As we noticed earlier on in the chapter and as Silvio D'Amico observes in the first chapter of his book *Tramonto del grande attore*⁷⁹, at the end of the nineteenth century, among the names of the great European actors, most were Italian; among those of the *metteurs-en-scene* in the first decades of the twentieth, not even one was Italian. D'Amico concludes this interesting chapter, affirming with strength that it was no longer possible to improvise in Italy; it was necessary to set up a serious acting and directing school (which he did in 1934), to train a new generation

⁷⁷ Sandro D'Amico, 'L'attore italiano tra Otto e Novecento', in *Petrolini: la maschera e la storia* ed. Franca Angelini (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1984), 25-38 (p. 36).

⁷⁸ It would be too long to expand on the actor-interpreters here and not necessary to understand the evolution from acting to directing I am talking about.

⁷⁹ Silvio D'Amico, *Tramonto del grande attore*, p. 28.

of actors, and to produce the new figure: the *metteur-en-scene* (the word *regista* [director] still did not exist in Italy); and it was also fundamental to travel, to study abroad, not to copy but to develop new personal ideas. It is a concept that recalls what Mme de Stael had stated to justify the need for the Italians of translating the works of foreign authors.

It is in the light of these new thoughts and trends that Shakespeare's plays were put on stage in Italy in the first decades of the twentieth century, but it is worthwhile to notice that the first directors who worked with Shakespeare in Italy were not Italian: Max Reinhardt, Jacques Coupeau, and Peter Scharoff. But, after these productions, a number of Italian directors would offer many more, some of which rank among the best productions of Shakespeare's plays on a European level. The generation of the directors will be the subject of the third chapter of my journey.

3. Shakespeare in the Director's Theatre (1947-1978)

Among the directors who revolutionized Italian theatre from the mid-twentieth century, Giorgio Strehler was the most influential. It is on his work, and in particular on his productions of Shakespeare's plays, that I will focus my attention in this chapter. Having illustrated what we mean by the actor's theatre and how Shakespeare's texts were rearranged by the Great Actors, it is now important to reflect upon what directing is, and on when and how directing was born in Europe. After this section which will be mostly theoretical, I will tell the story of the foundation of Strehler's theatre, the Piccolo Teatro della Città di Milano, and of its significance as the first civic public theatre set up in Italy. Then, I will focus on Strehler as a director, and on his first productions of Shakespeare's plays. The bulk of the chapter is constituted by his productions of *Re Lear* and of *La Tempesta*, two case studies which I will use to investigate how Shakespeare's texts were put on stage according to the new requirements of the director's theatre.

I have chosen 1947 and 1978 as the date-boundaries of this chapter, as in 1947 the Piccolo Teatro was founded in Milan and in 1978 Strehler directed his production of *La Tempesta*.

3.1 From the Actor's Theatre to the Director's Theatre

Alonge considers the director's theatre as the theatre in which the *mise-en-scène* is seen as a product that must be treated in its entirety, as opposed to the actor's theatre in which only the figure of the lead actor was exalted. The director's theatre absorbs the actor, who becomes one of the

elements of the ‘finished product’.¹ According to Schino, the Great Actor united various personalities – and aspects of theatre, I would say – in his sole presence, as if multiple viewpoints were united in a single person. In the director’s theatre the entire scenic space comes to life as ‘un unico animale in movimento’ (‘a unique animal in motion’).² The Great Actor was one, and his oneness was enough to satisfy the eyes of the audience and to fill the space; the directors replaced the oneness of the actors with the oneness of the scenic space which, through the props, the lights, the sounds, the music, and the actors’ presence, became ‘un corpo unico’ (‘a single body’).³

Most scholars trace the birth of the director’s theatre from the last decades of the nineteenth century, but Alonge points out that forms of directing were already present in the eighteenth century. He then draws attention to the Paris of the first decades of the nineteenth century, full of theatres and of specialized magazines. Paris was the centre of the world. If a production was successful there it was taken to the provinces. But it could not be changed, it could only be an exact replica of what had been staged in Paris. For this purpose the so-called *livrets scéniques* were published, which were like instruction booklets used in the provinces to duplicate the show that had been staged in Paris. The *livrets* contained every single aspect of the staging: the list of characters and of the corresponding actors, the costumes, the sets, the props, entrances and exits of the actors, how they should move, and where they should go.⁴ This was not really what we mean today by directing. In fact, the function of the *livrets* was that of reproducing exactly the same show day after day in Paris and in the provinces, in the belief that to one text could correspond only one staging. The real innovation was introduced at the end of the nineteenth century, when directing became an artistic process as well as being an organizational one. Directing as an artistic activity considers the text as one, but the stagings as

¹ Alonge, *Il teatro dei registi: scopritori di enigmi e poeti della scena*, p. IX.

² Schino, *La nascita della regia teatrale*, p. 36.

³ Ibid., p. 38.

⁴ Alonge, *Il teatro dei registi*, p. 5.

multiple, as many different interpretations are possible.⁵ But in the first half of the nineteenth century this idea of directing was still to come. Alonge suggests that the first directors were the authors. Many examples of this double role are to be found in the history of theatre. If we go back to five hundred years before Christ, we find Aeschylus and Sophocles who were authors and directors. And if we think of Shakespeare – or any sixteenth-century playwright – we can consider them as the directors of their own plays. Most likely Shakespeare participated in rehearsals, and he frequently wrote stage directions into the script that were clear cues for his actors and for actors today.⁶ And Alonge draws attention to the productions of the Comédie Française of plays by contemporary authors. If that were the case, the author would do the casting, would read the text to the actors and explain it to them, and would follow – and practically decide on – every aspect of the staging.⁷ In Germany, as I have already pointed out in the previous chapter, an author, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, can be considered one of the first directors.

Theories about directing as we know it today, and experiments with new kinds of stagings, date back to the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth when, in various countries of Europe, different ideas were conceived, books were written, and plays were put on stage. I have already mentioned the protagonists of this theatrical revolution in the previous chapter: the German Duke of Meiningen (1826-1914) who founded the Meininger Company, which started its activity in Saxony in 1870; the French Antoine (1858-1943) who set up his Théâtre Libre in Paris in 1887 and which became the seat of Naturalistic Theatre; and not much later the Russian Stanislavski (1863-1938) and, after him, Mejerchol'd (1874-1940) who carried through the reform of Russian theatre; the English Poel (1852-1934) and Granville Barker (1877-1956); Craig (1872-1966) who, from London, preached the creative and central function of the director

⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶ See Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Stage 1574-1642*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 210.

⁷ Alonge goes into detail describing the staging of *Chatterton* by Vigny at pp. 21-30.

to whom the actor was supposed to be submitted; and the Swiss Appia (1862-1928) who experimented with his conception of scenic space. To these we can add the French Copeau (1879-1949) and Jouvet (1887-1951), and the Austrian Reinhardt (1873-1943). Quite rightly, Schino entitles a paragraph of chapter 1 of her book 'Tanti inizi' ('Many beginnings').⁸ It would be impossible in this context to go into the details of their work, but I can refer to the already mentioned books by Alonge and Schino, along with others, like Umberto Artioli's *Il teatro di regia* and Roberto Tessari's *Teatro e avanguardie storiche: traiettorie dell'eresia*.⁹ Thanks to their creativity, these directors conceived innovative ideas about theatre, looked at each other's works, read what the others had written and, some of them, met to discuss and exchange views. Schino gives us a very useful list of what the first directors achieved, which I will merely summarize. Probably the most important achievement was that of transforming the staging into 'un'opera d'arte unitaria' ('a unified artwork') which, consequently, needed a figure charged with the responsibility for harmonising its various aspects. Fundamental was also the suppression of the predominance of the actor on the stage, in a kind of theatre where acting was just one of the elements of the staging.¹⁰ As a consequence, the actor no longer spoke his lines at the front of the stage, looking at the audience, opening his arms as if to draw the audience to him, but was positioned in other parts of the stage, or asked to act with his back to the audience, as D'Annunzio had required Duse to do. Depriving the human being of his centrality meant focusing the attention on other aspects like the stage setting. Therefore, the painted cloths used throughout the nineteenth century were replaced by architectural props, like Craig's screens – tall rectangular panels – for his *Hamlet* staged at Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theatre in 1912.

⁸ Schino, *La nascita della regia teatrale*, p. 3.

⁹ Artioli, *Il teatro di regia: genesi ed evoluzione* (1870-1950); Roberto Tessari, *Teatro e avanguardie storiche: traiettorie dell'eresia* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2005).

¹⁰ Schino, *La nascita della regia teatrale*, pp. XIX-XX.



Figure 8: Gordon Craig's screens for *Hamlet*

From being just the container of the action, the set acquired a role, and contributed to the action itself by making the actors' movements easier, for example, or hindering them. The first act of *Hamlet* started with the screens in movement, and the action only began when the movement was stopped. The tall screens represented the battlements of the castle, the perfect place to be inhabited by ghosts and apparitions, but they also acquired a symbolic role, representing vast and inexorable forces of fate, much bigger than the characters. In fact, in comparison to the huge panels, actors seemed very small, and moved among them as if along a narrow lane or a dark corridor. Their movements and gestures were non-naturalistic and reduced to the minimum, while the scenery became part of the meaning of the play and the interpretation of the text, rather than just a local setting.¹¹

Things developed much more slowly in Italy, where old habits still existed in the first half of the twentieth century: little rehearsal time (one or two weeks), actors still used to having a prompter, no reading of the whole text before rehearsal, very simple stage design, the same costumes for different productions.¹² Directors Luchino Visconti (1906-1976), Orazio Costa (1911-1999), Luigi Squarzina (1922-2010), and Strehler (1921-1997), above all, started to experiment with directing in the 1940s. By that time artists like Reinhardt, Copeau and Jouvet had already gone a long way in

¹¹ A detailed description of this *Hamlet* can be found in Schino, *La nascita della regia teatrale*, pp. 7-11.

¹² It is remarkable that theatre practices in the Italy of the first half of the twentieth century were similar to those in use in sixteenth-century England.

theatre development. The debate over the necessity to reform theatre and to introduce the figure of the director developed around 1920. The protagonists of the debate were: theatre critic and journalist Silvio D'Amico (1887-1955) who fought the battle against the predominance of the star actor in the pages of his book *Tramonto del grande attore* published in 1929; dramatist, novelist and short story writer Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936) who, in the period 1925-1928, founded the Teatro d'Arte in Rome; and Anton Giulio Bragaglia (1890-1960), a versatile and intellectual artist who founded his Teatro degli Indipendenti in 1922. The name *regista* (director) was only introduced in 1932 by the philologist Bruno Migliorini (1896-1975) and, at the *Convegno Volta* (*Volta Conference*) of 1934, the discussion still revolved around the necessity of setting up a director's theatre.¹³ Directing in Italy was conceived primarily as an instrument to reaffirm the central role of the author in opposition to the supremacy of the actor. The figure of the director, therefore, was seen as someone who should guarantee that the playtexts were not modified during the staging, and that the author's will was respected.

D'Amico and Pirandello were the most strenuous advocates of this idea. They never shared the ideas of directing as it was conceived in other European countries, and were not willing to acknowledge the role of the director as a creator of the play. During the 1934 *Convegno Volta* the former made a plea, affirming the necessity of training a new generation of actors and directors, to which the Fascist regime responded by setting up the Accademia Nazionale d'Arte Drammatica (National Academy of Dramatic Art) in 1934. Meanwhile with Bragaglia we can speak of the *teatro teatrale* (theatrical theatre) or *pure theatre*, that replaced the supremacy of the author (and of the actor) with a figure who would exalt the spectacular aspects of theatre. He took inspiration from the European experimentations and from

¹³ The Convegni Volta were organized by the Accademia dei Lincei (Academy of the Lynx-Eyed), founded in 1603 by Federico Cesi. It was the first academy of sciences to persist in Italy. It was revived in the 1870s to become the national academy of Italy, encompassing both literature and science among its concerns. Eight Convegni Volta were organized between 1931 and 1938, and they covered various fields.

the past and, following Antoine's ideas, employed amateur actors to be shaped according to the director's ideas.¹⁴ Between 1946 and 1947 the debate was carried on in the pages of the magazine *Sipario* (*Curtain*), from which three directorial trends were outlined: the *regia di orchestrazione stilistica* (directing of stylistic orchestration), the *regia a spettacolo unico* (directing of unified spectacle), and the *regia critica* (critical directing). Directing of stylistic orchestration was the kind of directing that developed just after the war. Those who followed this trend were the custodians of the text who wanted to show the essence of the text and were not willing to consider the staging as an autonomous form of art.¹⁵ The followers of the second trend had very precise ideas about the staging that remained the same for different texts. They were mainly interested in expressing themselves, and therefore they extended the director's role granting him also dramaturgical functions. To the 'sacredness' of the text, they opposed the 'sacredness' of the staging.¹⁶ Critical directing was a kind of middle way between the first two. Therefore, the directors whose directing can be defined as critical aimed at stagings that would preserve the integrity of the text which, however, needed to be re-narrated by the director through his creativity. Strehler can be defined as a critical director.

3.2 The Foundation of the Piccolo Teatro della Citta' di Milano

The following article appeared in *Corriere della Sera*, the most influential Italian newspaper, on 26 January 1947:

La Giunta municipale, in una delle sue ultime riunioni, ha approvato la trasformazione dell'ex-cinema Broletto in teatro, che sarà

¹⁴ Artioli, *Il teatro di regia*, pp. 175-179.

¹⁵ Meldolesi, *Fondamenti del teatro italiano*, p. 150.

¹⁶ Ibid.

municipalizzato, ossia gestito direttamente dal Comune, e prenderà il nome di 'Piccolo teatro della Città di Milano'. Secondo le dichiarazioni fatte dall'assessore Jori, il nuovo teatro si aprirà probabilmente verso la metà di aprile (...) con una stagione di prosa, alla quale potranno anche essere intercalate manifestazioni concertistiche di particolare rilievo. Una commissione, composta di uomini di teatro e di lettere, sta già studiando il repertorio che si adatti al palcoscenico e alla sala e la formazione della Compagnia che verrà appositamente costituita.¹⁷

In one of its most recent meetings, the city council has approved the transformation of the former cinema Broletto into a theatre, which will be municipalized, that is run directly by the municipality, and will be called 'Piccolo teatro della Città di Milano'. According to councillor Jori, the new theatre will probably open around mid-April (...) with a theatrical season, which will alternate with concerts of particular relevance. A committee, comprising men of the theatre and men of letters, is already working on a suitable repertoire for the stage and for the auditorium, and on the shaping of a Company that will be set up for that purpose.

The Piccolo Teatro della Città di Milano, the first civic public theatre in Italy, opened on 14 May 1947 with the première of *L'albergo dei poveri* (*The Lower Depths*) by Maxim Gorky and was followed by other municipal, publically funded theatres in various parts of the country.

Forty years later Strehler, one of the two founders (the other one being Paolo Grassi), recounted the story of the Piccolo Teatro in these words:

The first ten years at the Piccolo Teatro were ten years of theatrical madness. In ten years we chose, rehearsed and mounted nearly eighty plays. We put them on in our small theatre in Milan, in the open air, in

¹⁷ Magda Poli, *Milano in Piccolo: il Piccolo Teatro nelle pagine del Corriere della Sera* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2007), p. 16.

squares, churches, celebrated theatre throughout Italy and all over Europe ... it was hard work but exhilarating. Our theatre was from the start a poor theatre and it has remained a poor theatre. Initially we had a first-rate group of actors and technicians who decided to stay together. But eventually one of them – or a group – would leave and others would take their place. The history of the Piccolo is that of four or five companies which have constantly alternated, changed, amalgamated; plus those few individuals who have stayed with the theatre for twenty or thirty years. The Piccolo started with a group of friends and has developed into a communal theatre in which the personal relationships are all-important, most of all the strong and enduring friendship between myself and Paolo.¹⁸

Today the Piccolo Teatro di Milano has three auditoria: Teatro Grassi founded in 1947, Teatro Studio, the experimental auditorium opened in 1987, and the new site called Teatro Strehler, inaugurated in 1998 after Strehler's death. Sergio Escobar is currently the manager of the theatre, and Luca Ronconi is the artistic director.

Writing about the Piccolo Teatro in this work is relevant for at least three reasons: firstly because the theatre was the first civic theatre in Italy subsidized by the State; secondly because Giorgio Strehler was the first influential theatre director in the country; thirdly because his contribution to the understanding of Shakespeare's plays in Italy is fundamental.

The foundation of the theatre is a fascinating story, and its importance can only be fully understood in the context of the social, political and cultural situation of Milan at the end of World War Two. The city, which had been a base for Partisan Resistance in the North during the war, became the centre of a cultural re-birth which went along with the reconstruction of the town. The fight against Fascism resulted in the desire to re-build Milan economically and culturally through a political process of democratization of the institutions, with the reforming task of the intellectuals and artists

¹⁸ Hirst, *Giorgio Strehler*, p. 1.

integrated into this process. Writers, philosophers, critics, painters who during the war, together with workers and the wider populace, had fought against fascism, gathered in the town, and all contributed to animate a flourishing cultural scene. In his book *Teoria e realtà del Piccolo Teatro di Milano*, Giorgio Guazzotti writes that the spirit of the democratic fight against Fascism, undertaken by citizens belonging to all social classes, was very much alive after the war, and permeated the electoral institutions of the public administration.¹⁹ In a town that had to start anew, the role of culture was recognized as fundamental in building a democratic society, but also fundamental was considered the democratization of culture and the spreading of education.

In this context Strehler and Grassi realized what their role should be, and how to effect it; also that the foundation of a new theatre should serve the same process of democratization of society. ‘Il teatro è un pubblico servizio’,²⁰ (‘theatre is a public service’) wrote Grassi in the paper *Avanti* on 25 April 1946, spreading the idea of theatre that the two men had in mind; the definition of the Oxford English Dictionary for the word ‘service’ reads: ‘a system supplying a public need such as transport, communications, or utilities such as electricity and water’.²¹ Theatre was as important for Grassi, and it was its social function that interested him. His aim was that of reaching wide sections of the population in order to educate them through theatre and, in this, Guazzotti finds the reason why Grassi and Strehler did not choose an extreme position, or propose an experimental repertoire.

Strehler and Grassi started their collaboration in 1946 when they founded the *Diogene* group for theatre lovers, who would meet up every Sunday to read Italian and foreign texts by authors and playwrights who had been banished by the Fascist regime. Thanks to this group, many people heard of Chekhov, Strindberg, Wedekind, Majakovski, Büchner, Toller,

¹⁹ Giorgio Guazzotti, *Teoria e Realtà del Piccolo Teatro di Milano* (Torino: Einaudi, 1965), p. 25.

²⁰ Ibid., p.29.

²¹ ‘service’. Oxford Dictionaries. April 2010. Oxford University Press.

<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/service> [accessed 19 November 2012].

Brecht and Kaiser for the first time.²² In this cultural climate the two friends conceived the idea of a civic public theatre with a permanent company of actors. In the first half of the twentieth century there were still touring companies in Italy, or private theatres which, due to economic reasons, were forced to choose a rather commercial repertoire which would best suit the audience's taste, or theatres financed by the Fascist regime (that is publicly funded), which exercised a strict control over the plays to be staged. The intentions of Strehler and Grassi for their theatre were clearly stated in an open letter:

Rifiutiamo gli esperimenti della letteratura pura. Rifiutiamo le decorazioni della pura scenografia. Rifiutiamo l'avallo gratuito della moda. Rifiutiamo ogni concessione alla sensualità della folla. Rifiutiamo le frasi fatte, i luoghi comuni, il conformismo del costume politico e sociale.²³

We refuse the experiments of pure literature. We refuse the decoration of pure stage design. We refuse the easy endorsement of fashion. We refuse any concession to the sensuality of the crowd. We refuse clichés, commonplaces and the conformism of political and social usage.

They wanted to offer a vast repertoire of Italian and foreign authors, contemporary and classical plays in order to develop new tastes and form a new audience. They wanted 'un teatro d'arte per tutti (...), un teatro dove la comunità liberamente riunita ascolta una parola da accettare o da respingere' ('a theatre of art for everybody (...), a theatre where a community freely gathered listens to words to be accepted or rejected').²⁴ It is clear that the two men wanted to bring about a revolution in Italian theatre: no more

²² Brecht's ideas of theatre as having a social and political purpose and his theory of the *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect) will influence Strehler significantly, as I will discuss in depth later on in the chapter.

²³ Poli, *Milano in Piccolo*, pp. 22-23.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

bourgeois theatre, no more theatre conceived as a form of entertainment only, no concession to trends and fashion, no theatre as sheer spectacle, but as an instrument to educate people, to create community, and to stimulate diverse opinions. They thought that theatre is the place where an audience gathers freely, is stimulated and encouraged to think and to accept or reject ideas. Today, in a country like Italy, where major cuts are being made to culture and to education, where schools seem to be regarded almost as a burden to the coffers of the state, where money is taken away from public institutions to be given to private ones, where theatres are forced to reduce the number of new productions because the state's financial support steadily decreases, it is moving to read what the then mayor of Milan, Antonio Greppi, who enthusiastically supported the project of these two young men, said about the foundation of the first civic public theatre in Italy. He felt that the new theatre should illuminate consciences, improve customs, give new life and safeguard the universal values of culture and art. It should be a theatre for the people without being demagogically popular, a theatre of wide remit, a theatre of any time and any place.

Così Milano sarà una volta di più alla testa del movimento di ricostruzione nazionale, che è, prima di tutto, né potrebbe non essere, un movimento di coscienze e di valori spirituali.²⁵

So Milan will be once more at the head of the movement of national reconstruction which is, first of all, and it could not be otherwise, a movement of conscience and spiritual values.

Greppi was also well aware that such a plan would not be fulfilled without the financial backing of public institutions.

Before introducing the two men at the heart of this theatrical revolution, it is interesting to compare what happened in Milan at the end of the war with the situation of theatre in Britain during the war, when, for the first time, the government introduced state subsidies to arts through the

²⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

financial support of CEMA (Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts), established in January 1940.²⁶ CEMA's function in the Second World War can be compared to that of ENSA (Entertainments National Services Association) in the First. Both organizations provided entertainment for the troops at war but, at the same time, their objective differed drastically: whereas ENSA provided light entertainment aiming at uplifting the troops' morale, CEMA wanted to offer high art, which would make people think, and create 'permanent, educated audiences all over the country'.²⁷ Moreover, CEMA did not intend to stop its function at the end of the war, but to continue it, and to foster permanent State financial support to the arts and the foundation of municipal theatres all over Britain. Its most important undertaking during the war was the opening of the first state theatre in British history, the Theatre Royal, Bristol. The reasons that led the members of CEMA to encourage public financial backing to culture in Britain, and Strehler and Grassi to set up the Piccolo Teatro in Italy, were similar: in both cases, there was the need to spread education through art and to offer high art not only to a few privileged groups, but to a wide audience composed of all social classes. But in Britain there was another element which played a fundamental role in the decision to grant money to theatres and theatre companies: as Heinrich puts it, during the Second World War, 'Britain seemed to be fighting for its cultural heritage',²⁸ and drama was seen as the symbol or manifestation of this heritage. It is clear that, more than any other author, Shakespeare – 'the national poet' – was the emblem of Britain's national heritage. Supporting theatre and staging Shakespeare's plays (together with other classics), therefore, became a political issue, a

²⁶ A detailed account of the state intervention in the arts in Britain during the Second World War can be found in Anselm Heinrich, *Theatre in Britain during the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁷ Quoted in Heinrich, *Theatre in Britain during the Second World War*, p. 63. Strehler and Grassi's wish for a 'theatre of art for everybody' is very much in line with the objectives of the members of CEMA.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

contribution to the fight against Nazi Germany.²⁹ Many stars performed Shakespearian characters at the Old Vic which, during the war, played the role of a National Theatre. CEMA met the expenses and also secured the presence of Laurence Olivier and Ralph Richardson as artistic directors of the theatre, making it possible to call them back from the front. The effects of the role played by CEMA during the war were lasting: in 1949 Parliament decided to spend £1 million to build a National Theatre.³⁰ At the end of his article, Heinrich – quoting Olivier – speaks of a ‘rebirth of the theatre’³¹ in Britain during the war, which was ‘closely linked to the war and to a change in official and public attitude towards the function of theatre in society’.³² As for the foundation of the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, it can be said that it was closely linked to the situation of post-war, post-fascist Milan and to a change in the attitude towards the function of theatre from being pure entertainment to becoming an instrument to educate people. Although I am not aware of direct links between the founders of the Piccolo Teatro in Italy and the protagonists of the theatre developments in Britain, in both countries theatre acquired a social function and came to be regarded as a social service, and in both cases it mirrored the political situation of the two countries, of Britain during the war and of Italy just after it.

Going back to the ‘Italian stage’, I wish to spend a few words on the background of the protagonists of this theatrical revolution. Strehler and Grassi were very different, but complementary. Strehler was the artist, Grassi was the manager. Grassi had also been a director, but he soon

²⁹ In this context it is worth mentioning Laurence Olivier’s 1944 film adaptation of *Henry V* that was intended as a morale booster for Britain and, for this reason, it was partly funded by the government.

³⁰ After the war the south bank of the Thames was chosen as the site for the proposed national theatre, and in 1951 building started. Then in 1962 a National Theatre company was finally established, with Sir Laurence Olivier as director. The Old Vic company provided the nucleus of actors, and the National Theatre took temporary residence at the Old Vic theatre, opening on October 22, 1963, with a production of *Hamlet*. A mixed repertoire of classic and modern productions directed by distinguished English and foreign directors rapidly brought the National Theatre to prominence in world drama. In February 1976 the National Theatre gave its final performance at the Old Vic theatre and later that year moved to its new home along the Thames. From 2003 the company has been directed by Sir Nicholas Hytner.

³¹ Heinrich, *Theatre in Britain during the Second World War*, p. 67.

³² Ibid.

realized that that was not the right path for him. So, he invented a new figure: l'operatore culturale (the cultural operator). Both were fervent socialists.

Strehler was born in Barcola – a village near Trieste – on 14 August 1921. His father died when he was only two years old, his mother was a highly regarded violinist. When he was a child they moved to Milan where, after primary school, he studied at Liceo Parini (a renowned State grammar school), and then read Law at university. However, he had loved theatre since he was an adolescent and attended Milan's Accademia dei Filodrammatici (Drama Academy). He started his career in theatre as an actor but, already at the age of twenty-two, it was directing that attracted him. Before the war he and Grassi had already become friends. During the war he was a refugee in Switzerland where – under the name of Georges Firmy (his French grandmother's surname) – he directed three plays between 1942 and 1945: *Assassinio nella cattedrale* (*Murder in the Cathedral*) by T. S. Eliot, *Caligola* (*Caligula*) by Albert Camus and *Piccola Città* (*Our Town*) by Thornton Wilder. He returned to Italy after the war where he started to work as a director and theatre critic. However his dream – which he shared with Grassi – was that of renewing Italian theatre and of setting up the first civic public theatre in Milan. They fulfilled their dream in 1947.

Grassi was born on 30 October 1919 in Puglia. As an adolescent he was already keen on theatre. Like Strehler he attended Milan's Liceo Parini and, at the age of eighteen, he was already co-editor of the cultural pages of the Milanese newspaper *Il Sole*. In 1937 he also started to work as a theatre director. He continued his career as a critic and was also an essayist and 'operatore teatrale' ('theatre impresario'). In 1940 he set up a theatre company; one year later he founded the avant-garde group *Palcoscenico* (Stage), to which actors like Strehler and Franco Parenti belonged. With this group he put on stage plays by contemporary playwrights like Pirandello, O'Neill and Chekhov aiming at a radical change in playwriting. During the war he was called up; he was a member of the Partisan Resistance. From the Liberation to March 1947 he was in charge of the theatre criticism section of

the paper *Avanti*. It was in this period that he developed the idea of creating a publically funded civic theatre.

How Strehler and Grassi chose the theatre is a remarkable story. One day they visited the former cinema Broletto which, during the war, had been used as a prison by a fascist regiment. What later became the dressing rooms of the theatre had been cells where the Fascists imprisoned and tortured Partisans. At the end of the war the space was taken over by the Allied Forces. The story goes that on that first visit Grassi asked Strehler: ‘Giorgio, te la senti di fare con me un teatro stabile qui dentro?’³³ (‘Well, Giorgio, do you think we can turn this place into a home for a resident theatre company?’)³⁴. Strehler remained there alone for a few hours, and finally decided to embark on this adventure.

Not everybody shared the idea that a new theatre was necessary at a time when Milan had much more serious problems. In an article which appeared in the newspaper *Corriere d’Informazione* of 11-12 April 1947, a journalist illustrated the situation clearly: the cost of living and unemployment kept increasing, public services were getting more and more expensive, there were still many homeless, salaries were too low.³⁵ But this did not stop Strehler and Grassi, who – as I wrote before – would argue that culture and the cultural education of people were as important as other public services. To achieve their aims the two men wanted to create a new kind of theatre independent of any political pressure. Their theatre should no longer suit the tastes of that section of the audience who saw it just as a form of entertainment and a place to see and be seen and, at the same time, they did not want a theatre for the initiated. In the open letter which they wrote to present their theatre to the Milanese citizens they stated:

(...) recluteremo i nostri spettatori, per quanto più è possibile, tra i lavoratori e tra i giovani, nelle officine, negli uffici, nelle scuole,

³³ Strehler, *Io, Strehler: una vita per il teatro. Conversazioni con Ugo Ronfani* (Milano: Rusconi, 1986), p. 40.

³⁴ Hirst, *Giorgio Strehler*, p. 6.

³⁵ Paraphrased from Poli, *Milano in Piccolo*, p. 21. The name of the journalist is not mentioned.

offrendo semplici e convenienti forme d'abbonamento per meglio saldare i rapporti tra teatro e spettatori, offrendo comunque spettacoli di alto livello artistico a prezzi quanto più è possibile ridotti. Non dunque teatro sperimentale e nemmeno teatro d'eccezione, chiuso in una cerchia di iniziati. Ma, invece, teatro d'arte, per tutti.³⁶

(...) we will recruit our audience, as much as possible, among workers and young people, in workshops, offices, schools. We will offer simple and cheap forms of subscription in order to bring together theatre and audience, offering shows of high artistic level as cheaply as possible. No experimental theatre and no exceptional theatre for a group of the initiated. But, instead, a theatre of art for everybody.

To comply with the idea of shaping an audience and of reaching large strata of the population, the repertoire of the first seasons was rather eclectic. It may seem odd that the first play was not Italian, but the choice of *L'albergo dei poveri* (*The Lower Depths*) certainly had a political connotation in line with Strehler and Grassi's socialist ideas and with their wish to educate through theatre. Beside Gorky's play, three other plays were staged, all directed by Strehler. But, the following year, Strehler gave opportunities to other directors like Orazio Costa, Guido Salvini, Mario Landi, Gerardo Guerrieri, a choice made to comply with the idea of organizing the theatre democratically rather than as a hierarchy. However, at the end of the first season, Grassi and Strehler realized that there was no real collaboration among these directors, which prevented the establishment of an organic repertoire. As a consequence, from the second season, the choice of the dramaturgical line was entrusted to Strehler who, effectively, assumed the role of artistic director of the theatre. It would be too long and only marginally related to the aims of my work to explore in detail the choices made by Strehler for the definition of the repertoire of the Piccolo

³⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

Teatro,³⁷ but it is interesting to identify the lines that were at the bottom of these choices. Hirst points out that Strehler had some strong ideas concerning the choice of the programme which were ‘distinguished by his need to discover poetry in the theatrical medium, his keen social sense and the consciousness that the company was helping to mould and influence a new Italian society’.³⁸ And, according to Guazzotti, the investigation of man in history and man in society was Strehler’s main interest, which he explored working both on contemporary and classical authors.³⁹ As to the classics, it was their contemporaneity, their impact on the present that interested him. Therefore, it is in this light that we should read his productions of Shakespeare’s plays. Shakespeare, in particular with his history dramas, also complied with Strehler’s desire to investigate the individual in history, and with his wish to deal with *teatro di poesia* (poetical theatre). Goldoni, who frequently recurred in the Piccolo’s productions, gave Strehler the chance of observing the individual in society: in particular in the *Trilogia della villeggiatura* (*Holiday Trilogy*) he could picture the crisis of Italian society in the eighteenth century. The investigation of theatre itself was certainly another of Strehler’s main interests, which led him to direct Goldoni’s *Arlecchino servitore di due padroni* (*Servant of Two Masters*), with his characters from *commedia dell’arte*, and to choose plays by Shakespeare known for their metatheatrical quality, most of all, *The Tempest*. Strehler’s interest in metatheatricality might seem at odds with his concern with social issues and with the idea of theatre as an instrument to interpret society and man in relation to it. But I do not think it is. Strehler was a tireless director who considered theatre as his life mission, as ‘moral responsibility’ towards the community.⁴⁰ So, it is within this frame that I think we should consider his investigation of theatre: not only was he interested in using theatre to fulfil what he believed was his role

³⁷ See Guazzotti, *Teoria e realtà del Piccolo Teatro di Milano* and also Hirst, *Giorgio Strehler*.

³⁸ Hirst, *Giorgio Strehler*, p. 11.

³⁹ Guazzotti, *Teoria e realtà del Piccolo Teatro di Milano*, p. 85.

⁴⁰ Strehler, *Io, Strehler*, p. 63.

in society. He also wanted to understand and explore the means that he used to achieve his goal.

3.3 Strehler, the Director

In this section of the chapter I wish to reflect upon Strehler as a theatre director with a focus on his idea of the director as an interpreter of the text. I will also look at the work of the European directors who influenced Strehler and helped him develop his own directing method.

After the generation of the Great Actors and of the *mattatori*, Strehler claimed the pre-eminence of the written text, which should be the focus of the director's staging. He spoke of 'critical directing' and 'creative directing': critical, as it implied researching and analysing the text; creative, as it meant listening to the sensations which it conveyed.⁴¹ In his approach to the text, the director should combine rationality and sensitivity, acting as a supervisor, an intellectual capable of thinking on the one hand, and of creating art on the other, who, through his stagings, would infuse the audience with the same capabilities and would arouse critical thinking and feeling at the same time.⁴² The idea of the, so to speak, born actor who is simply born with a natural talent, and therefore knows instinctively how to perform a role, was superseded by the idea that the actor needs to be directed by a figure who is at the service of the text. Strehler's productions were acclaimed for their aesthetic value, but they were also a source of illumination of the text, and can be considered as pieces of theatrical criticism combined with theatrical inspiration.

A closer look at his method of work, from the choice of the text to the mise-en-scène, helps understand all this. First of all he studied the text (in the original language and in the available translations) and the author, trying to understand them in relationship to their time and then comparing

⁴¹ Strehler, *Inscenare Shakespeare*, p. 8.

⁴² Ibid., p. 24.

them with his time. He read critical works, and met with the stage designer, the costumed, and the musical director for a preliminary plan of the staging. Only after these months of study did he gather the actors, to whom he explained all his findings, his interpretation of the text, his insights into the story and the characters, and his ideas about all the components that contribute to the realization of a staging. At the same time he read aloud the whole play for the actors, taking the various roles, showing the characters' personality, their tone of voice, sometimes their gestures or movements and listening to the actors' comments.

Giulia Lazzarini, the actress who played the role of Ariel in the 1978 production of *La Tempesta* (along with many other roles in productions by Strehler), explains Strehler's readings with the actors very clearly in the interview which she granted to me on 25 May 2011. For reasons of clarity and fluency I will not quote my questions.

Strehler faceva le letture. Prima studiava lui, poi faceva la lettura e tu già capivi cosa lui voleva che fosse; ti metteva dentro quel mondo. Leggeva lui prima tutto ad alta voce. (...) Mentre leggeva spiegava il rapporto che doveva esserci tra i personaggi. Leggeva e spiegava e tu capivi (...) il tuo rapporto con gli altri, il tuo rapporto con il testo, il significato che il testo doveva avere e quindi era meraviglioso e (...) non è che tu diventavi un clone, non eri un imitatore di un tono ma eri ... la motivazione di quel tono era così chiara che tu facevi tua la motivazione di quel modo, di quella battuta detta in quel modo. (...) Se io e lei [riferito a me] ora leggiamo un testo, decidiamo di fare una cosa, se la leggiamo già facendo io un ruolo e lei l'altro, lei pensa al suo ruolo, io penso al mio; non li mettiamo insieme. (...) Lui leggeva già dando appunto queste motivazioni, (...) creava i rapporti, le relazioni, cosa difficilissima a teatro adesso, trovare i giusti rapporti perché trovi magari un attore bravo, l'altro bravo però (...) non si ascoltano, non legano; l'importante non è dir bene una battuta, è capire quello che si dice in funzione dell'altro. (...) E poi, aveva il desiderio pazzesco, più che in altri testi, di metterlo in scena, di

vederlo [si riferisce a *La Tempesta*], quindi siamo andati abbastanza presto in palcoscenico. (...) La lettura durava giorni. (...) Siamo andati in scena perché lui voleva vedere subito le sue luci (...) perché senza la luce giusta (...) difficile che tu riesca a creare, a concentrarti (...) e lui doveva vedere, appunto, o una luce di tempesta, o una luce ...⁴³

Strehler did the readings. First he studied, then he did the reading and you already understood what he wanted it to be; he led you into that world. It was he who read it all aloud before. While he was reading, he explained the relationship that should exist among the characters. He read and explained and you understood (...) your relationship with the others, your relationship with the text, the meaning that the text should have, and so it was wonderful and you did not become a clone, you were not the imitator of a tone, but you were ... the motivation of that tone was so clear that you made the motivation of that way yours, of that line spoken in that way. (...) If you [referred to me] and I now read a text, we decide to do something, if we read it with you taking a role and I another, you focus on your role, I focus on mine; we don't put them together. (...) He read giving these motivations, (...) he created relations, which is very difficult in theatre now, finding the right relationships, because you find a good actor, another good one (...) but they don't listen to each other, they don't connect; it is not important to speak a line well, it is important what you say in function of the other. (...) And then, more than for other texts, he had the wish to put it on stage, to see it [she refers to *La Tempesta*], so we went quite early on stage. (...) The reading lasted days. (...) We went on stage because he wanted to see the lights immediately (...) because,

⁴³ At this point Ms Lazzarini moved on to talking about the character of Ariel. I will quote this section of the interview in my analysis of Strehler's staging of *La Tempesta*.

without the right light, (...) it is difficult to create, to concentrate (...) and he wanted to see, the light of the tempest or a light

The reading with the actors was another moment of investigation for the director, as his pre-conceived ideas started to take shape thanks to their presence. After this phase, a long period of rehearsals started (usually about two months), during which nothing was fixed, much still changed, the music, the stage set, the costumes because even rehearsals were a phase of exploration and of interpretation for Strehler. We understand that the director was the dominant figure and that if on the one hand the months of research and thinking were the proof of a very serious commitment to his role, on the other they also placed Strehler as a director in an extremely authoritative position.

As I pointed out before, in the first seasons Strehler's choice of plays was rather heterogeneous and his 'readings' of the texts less meticulous than a few years later. He was still experimenting and exploring, trying to work out the best repertoire for the audience he wanted to form. In later years, instead, the number of plays was reduced substantially, to which corresponded a more detailed analysis of the texts, longer rehearsal periods (seventy days for his *Galileo* in 1963 as opposed to just two or three weeks for the first productions), and productions which lasted months. More than once Strehler resumed texts and reworked them, thus reviving previously staged shows, as he was aware of the ephemeral, ever-changing quality of theatre in comparison to other forms of art and, secondly, to find new meanings and to re-interpret the texts for another generation of actors and public. Every re-staging, therefore, was a further reflection on a previous theme, which confirmed his wish to be seen as an interpreter and intermediary between the text and the audience. Strehler staged plays by a high number of playwrights – Sophocles, Ibsen, Molière, Eliot, Büchner (not to mention the staging of operas by Strauss, Verdi, Donizetti, Malipiero, Massente), but his favourites were the already mentioned

Goldoni and Shakespeare, along with Brecht.⁴⁴ *Arlecchino, servitore di due padroni* by Goldoni, which closed the first season of Piccolo Teatro, has been performed every single year since then and even after Strehler's death in 1997. The actor playing the title role changed in 1963 when Marcello Moretti was replaced by Ferruccio Soleri. At the age of 82, Soleri is still playing the role of Arlecchino.⁴⁵

In his book *Io, Strehler: una vita per il teatro. Conversazioni con Ugo Ronfani*, Strehler defined his generation as 'la generazione senza maestri'⁴⁶ ('a generation without teachers'), meaning that they knew very little of the development of European trends of directing. But, when he started to work, he began to look outside Italy in order to develop his own way of directing. Three men contributed significantly to shape his concept of the role of a director: Coupeau, Jouvett and Brecht. In his conversations with Ronfani, Strehler explains what these three men taught him: like Coupeau, Strehler thought that theatre, even comic theatre, should always strive for order, honesty and truth, and considered the work of a director as a life-committing mission. He stated:

Credo che a Copeau io devo, intanto la visione austera, morale, quasi giansenista del teatro. Il teatro come 'responsabilità morale' nei confronti della collettività. Un sentimento dolorosamente religioso della teatralità.⁴⁷

First of all I think I owe to Coupeau an austere, moral, almost Jansenist vision of theatre. Theatre as 'moral responsibility' towards the community. A painfully religious feeling of theatre.

He admired the French director for his wish to fight against the dominance of the star actors and for his battle to find an acting method at

⁴⁴ The quotation given at the beginning of the section 'Strehler's First Productions of Shakespeare Plays' explains what Shakespeare represented for Strehler and why he staged more plays by Shakespeare than by any other playwright.

⁴⁵ Soleri was born in 1929.

⁴⁶ *Io, Strehler*, p. 105.

⁴⁷ *Io, Strehler*, p. 63.

the service of the text. From him he also learnt what he defines as l'unità del teatro' (the 'unity of theatre'), unity of play text and staging, unity of authors, actors, stage designers, musicians and technicians.⁴⁸ Jouvot too taught Strehler to consider theatre as a service offered to the collective, and the actor and the director as instruments of poetry. From him he also learnt that working in theatre is a daily job not an 'arte divina' ('divine art')⁴⁹ and that directing is not only a philological, cultural or technical undertaking but also an 'abbandono intuitivo'⁵⁰ ('intuitive acceptance') of its poetic values.

Brecht's lesson was probably the most important for Strehler and is in line with that of Coupeau and Jouvot. The two men met during rehearsals of Strehler's staging of *L'opera da tre soldi* (*The Threepenny Opera*) premièred on 10 February 1956 just a few months before the German playwright and director died. The idea of what Strehler calls 'teatro umano'⁵¹ ('theatre of humanity') was further developed through Brecht's influence. Brecht taught him a conception of theatre that helped men to be better, and 'la dignità di lavorare nella società e per la società, dentro la storia e i problemi del mio tempo'⁵² ('the dignity of working inside society and for society, inside history and the problems of my time'). Brecht also had an influence on Strehler's development of a new acting method, one of the tasks of Strehler and Grassi when they established the Piccolo Teatro. According to Strehler, Italian actors have a more highly developed intuitive sense,⁵³ and are therefore more capable of improvising than other European actors like the French, but they certainly lacked a method at the end of the Second World War. Some drama schools had already been set up, like Luigi Rasi's Regia Scuola (Royal School), which opened in Florence in 1882, Edoardo Boutet's school, or the already-mentioned Accademia Nazionale d'Arte Drammatica (National Academy of Dramatic Art) founded by Silvio

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 64

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 63.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 66.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ I suppose this is due to the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte* in Italy that had trained actors to improvise. Something of that acting method has probably remained in the approach to acting of Italian actors.

D'Amico in 1934. Yet a common pedagogy was still missing in Italy when, in other European countries like Germany, a debate on the issue of drama schools was already going on towards the mid-nineteenth century. The method that Strehler developed was mainly based on Stanislavski's and Brecht's ideas: identifying with the character on the one hand; distancing from the character – the so-called *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect) – on the other. It should always be a middle way between getting into and out of the character; in Strehler's words: 'a game of internal versus external reactions, of participation and distancing, of absence and presence'⁵⁴ with a double effect on the audience: empathising with the character and the story but also being aware that theatre is not reality. According to Brecht only through detachment of the actors and, as a consequence, of the audience, can theatre stimulate critical judgement. Strehler agreed, and staged *L'Opera da tre soldi* (*The Threepenny Opera*) according to Brecht's ideas and, at the same time, he was continuously searching for beauty and poetic perfection.

3.4 Strehler's First Productions of Shakespeare's Plays

Strehler staged more plays by Shakespeare than by any other playwright.⁵⁵ Most writings on Strehler's Shakespeare start with the following words by the Italian director:

Credo veramente che Shakespeare, appena appena lo si avvicini con una media disponibilità di cuore, richieda a noi un assoluto impegno,

⁵⁴ Hirst, *Giorgio Strehler*, p. 32.

⁵⁵ *La Tempesta* (1948); *Riccardo II* (1949); *La bisbetica domata* (1950); *Riccardo III* (1951); *Re Enrico IV* (1951); *La dodicesima notte* (1951); *Macbeth* (1952); *Giulio Cesare* (1953); *Coriolano* (1957); *Il gioco dei potenti* (an adaptation of 1,2,3 *Henry VI* – 1965); *Re Lear* (1972); Some of the plays were revived more than once. Most important of all was the second version of *La Tempesta* directed in 1978 which, together with *Re Lear*, ranks among the finest of his productions of a Shakespeare play. In 1948 the Piccolo Teatro produced *Romeo e Giulietta* directed by Renato Simoni with Strehler as assistant. Strehler also directed two operas by Verdi at Milan La Scala: *Macbeth* (1975); *Falstaff* (1980).

una ricerca di verità molto fonda, di rapporti molto densi, domandi una meditazione totale sul mondo e sulle cose, estremamente ricca e sempre coinvolgente. E che in questo senso Shakespeare diventi anche una specie di spartiacque tra chi sul teatro gioca e chi al teatro crede invece come a una forma insostituibile di Verità e Poesia.⁵⁶

I firmly believe that Shakespeare, if you approach him with an average disposition of the heart, demands total commitment, a very profound search for the truth, for very dense relations; he demands an all-encompassing, extremely rich and always involving meditation on the world and on things. And that in this way Shakespeare also becomes a sort of watershed between those who play with theatre and those who believe in theatre as an irreplaceable form of Truth and Poetry.

As I wrote before, in the first seasons Strehler varied a lot and experimented with several playwrights and texts in order to test the audience's response and, at the same time, to mould a new and more numerous audience. This applies to his stagings of Shakespeare too, as is clear from the list given in footnote 54. Several comments can be made about the first Shakespearian productions. In his book *Looking at Shakespeare*, Dennis Kennedy argues that Strehler's 'initial productions reflected the uncertain direction of Italian theatre immediately after the war'.⁵⁷ As I will make clear with a more detailed analysis of the 1948 production of *La Tempesta*, Strehler was still searching for the right way of dealing with Shakespeare's plays; he was exploring different theatrical conventions, while a deeper understanding of the text and a more precise characterization were probably still to come. Hirst, for example, mentions the 'sbandieratori' ('flag-wavers'), a large vocal chorus, who the director

⁵⁶ Giorgio Strehler, *Shakespeare, Goldoni, Brecht*, ed. Giovanni Soresi, 2nd edn (Milano: Edizioni Piccolo Teatro di Milano-Teatro d'Europa, 2006), p. 20.

⁵⁷ Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance*, p. 216.

introduced in his *Henry IV*,⁵⁸ a choice made in order to move away from the long-standing tradition of the actor's theatre, where very little relevance was given to ensemble scenes. The same wish informed his choice of plays, like the history plays or *La Tempesta*, for example, as he favoured pieces showing off the ensemble nature of the company. A third, important element was that Strehler wanted to widen the rather limited range of Shakespeare's plays offered in Italy. This is remarkable if one considers that, even today, it is rare to see a *Coriolanus*, a *Richard II*, or a *Richard III*, for example. Choosing these plays may seem to contradict Strehler's preference for ensemble scenes, as they all allow a star actor to dominate, but the director found ways to diminish the weight of the protagonist on the stage and to give prominence to Shakespeare's words. For example, already from his first productions, his use of lighting was rather unconventional: more than once, and even in much later stagings like in the 1978 *La Tempesta*, he was accused of a preference for underlighting. But again that was an intentional measure to diminish the relevance given to the performance of the lead actor or actress at a time when the audience still applauded at the end of the most popular monologues (as they were used to applaud at the end of the most popular arias in opera).

The 1948 production of *La Tempesta* was certainly remarkable, and deserves to be mentioned. Although Strehler, in later years, expressed his dislike for open-air stagings, he set this play in the wonderful Boboli gardens in Florence, for the Eleventh Maggio Musicale Fiorentino.⁵⁹ This production was spectacular: the multi-layered stage was built on a fountain at the centre of a lake known as the Vasca dei cigni (the Swans Pool). The layers had a highly symbolic significance, the lower levels representing darkness, ugliness, base actions and characters, the higher standing for light, beauty, redemption, goodness. Prospero's cave was at the top of this structure. The acting space was separated from the audience by a semicircle of water and, just in front of the stage, magnificent jets of water formed a

⁵⁸ Hirst, *Giorgio Strehler*, p. 64.

⁵⁹ The annual opera festival founded in 1933 by conductor Vittorio Gui.

kind of curtain which added to the separation. But Strehler did not think about frogs in the pool! During rehearsals a chorus of frogs was heard; so, in order to avoid the inconvenience, the pool was electrified. The above description makes clear that it was more on the setting that Strehler focused his attention, rather than on the acting and on the exploration of the text. Probably there was an influence from the spectacular open-air productions by Reinhardt (in 1933 he directed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Boboli Gardens), but the set of Strehler's *La Tempesta* was even more lavish and spectacular.⁶⁰ Also the music – arrangements of Scarlatti by Fiorenzo Carpi – played a fundamental role in Strehler's production. This is how Strehler remembered that production when he was working on the successive *La Tempesta* thirty years later:

In quell'equivoco [come definiva le produzioni *en plein air*] nacque la *Tempesta* sempre con poche prove, poca riflessione, molto timore spazzato via dalla necessità di 'far andare in scena lo spettacolo' costi quel che costi. (...) Magia esteriore, incanti e lazzi dei buffoni, non profondità e meditazione, non la disperazione inquieta che mi pare oggi di aver ritrovato, non quegli interrogativi supremi che mi pare siano chiusi nella *Tempesta*. Non esisteva, ricordo, Caliban ... poco Ariel ... Prospero ... aveva poche dimensioni. Ma i due buffoni legati coraggiosamente al rondò della Commedia dell'Arte, uno napoletano e l'altro veneto, uno un Pulcinellaccio, e l'altro uno Zanni primitivo, resistono ancora come fatto critico al vaglio del tempo anche se con diversi accenti.⁶¹

In that compromise [how he defined the *en plein air* productions], *The Tempest* came to life always with few rehearsals, little reflection,

⁶⁰ For Reinhardt's productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* see Gary Jay Williams, *Our Moonlight Revels; A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Theatre*, pp. 164-186. For his production in Florence, Reinhardt 'used an Italian cast on the terraced levels of the Boboli Gardens, with the Pitti Palace in the background. He used the Austrian baroque costumes, torchlight processions, spotlights, and Mendelssohn' (p. 175).

⁶¹ Strehler, *Shakespeare, Goldoni Brecht*, p. 23.

much fear shed by the need to put the show on stage at any cost. (...) Exterior magic, enchantment, the jests of the fools, no depth or meditation, not the restless desperation that I seem to have found today, none of those supreme questions that I think are contained in the *Tempesta*. There was, I remember, no Caliban... little Ariel ... Prospero ... there was very little dimension.⁶² But the two fools courageously linked to the rondo of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, one Neapolitan and the other one Venetian, one a Pulcinellaccio [derogatory for Pulcinella], the other a primitive Zanni [zany], and still resist the scrutiny of time, even if with different accents.

From the first productions, the reflection upon theatre in its various forms was fundamental. The emphasis accorded to the roles of Trinculo and Stephano, depicted as two typical characters of the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, was a way to think about and to revive this remarkable theatrical genre. Even the choice of the play – where the whole story is orchestrated by Prospero, the magician but also the director of the show, – was determined by the same wish. Such a spectacular production did not seem to match the ideals of the founders of the Piccolo Teatro, as it probably granted more to the visual appreciation than to the understanding of all the complexities of the text, as Strehler himself affirms in the above quotation. However, it is to be seen within his process to revolutionize Italian theatre on the one hand, and to direct plays by Shakespeare that had not been staged before. And, as Gian Giacomo Colli argues in his article ‘Shakesperare in a Fountain’, such a play that:

demanded a collective interpretation (...) could only be enabled by a new kind of theatre and organizational structure. (...) No more a private, but a public theatre, under the guide of a capable administrator, attending to the repertory and the development of the audience, and with a director free to make his dramaturgical choices.

⁶² It should be noted that Strehler did not mean that the character of Caliban did not exist, but that he was only superficially characterized.

(...) The staging of Shakespeare in Italy was fundamentally changed and the collective of energies that was the Piccolo Teatro was able to stage a spectacular *Tempesta* in only twenty days.⁶³

After this production, Strehler continued to work extensively on Shakespeare in the 1940s and in the 1950s. In his book *Strehler e Shakespeare*, Lombardo notices that Strehler's main motivation in those years was political and, therefore, he tended to adapt the plays he chose to the current Italian and international political situation.⁶⁴ Lombardo refers, in particular, to the tension created by the Cold War and, in that context, to the defeat of the Communist Party (PCI) by the Christian Democracy Party in the general elections of 1948.⁶⁵ In the theatre season 1949-1950 Strehler directed *Riccardo III* and, in 1952, *Macbeth*, two gloomy plays, whose negativity and lack of hope Strehler underlined in his production.⁶⁶ According to Lombardo, it was with the staging of *Coriolanus* in 1957, that Strehler found the perfect correspondence between the motives of the author and the motives of the interpreter.⁶⁷ This staging was followed, in 1963, by *Il gioco dei potenti (Power Games)* a production that included *1, 2, 3 Henry VI* and that Strehler remembers with the following words: 'Fu certamente lo sforzo più grande che io abbia mai fatto come regista. Fu una specie di delirio nato non so ancora da dove o da come o da quale necessità'.⁶⁸ ('It was certainly the biggest effort I ever made as a director. It was a kind of delirium, and I still do not know where it originated from, or how, or from what necessity'). Strehler's dialogue with Shakespeare continued, though he reduced the number of productions, and it was with his successive

⁶³ Colli, 'Shakespeare in a Fountain: The First Italian Production of *The Tempest* Directed by Giorgio Strehler in 1948, pp. 182-183.

⁶⁴ See Lombardo, *Strehler e Shakespeare*.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

⁶⁶ See Lombardo, *Strehler e Shakespeare*; Strehler, *Inscenare Shakespeare*; Hirst, *Giorgio Strehler*.

⁶⁷ Lombardo *Strehler e Shakespeare*, p. 32. Colli, 'Shakespeare in a Fountain: The First Italian Production of *The Tempest* Directed by Giorgio Strehler in 1948, pp. 182-183.

⁶⁷ See Lombardo, *Strehler e Shakespeare*.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Strehler, *Inscenare Shakespeare*, p. 31.

directorial enterprises, the staging of *Re Lear* (1972) and of *La Tempesta* (1978), that this dialogue reached its highest moment.⁶⁹

3.5 *Re Lear*

I would like to start my analysis of Strehler's *Re Lear* quoting his own words:

Il Lear mi appare sempre più – tra le altre cose – un dramma generazionale, chiarissimo, in questo senso almeno, in mezzo a un turbine di profondità forse insondabili. Da una parte pochi ‘sopravvissuti’ come animali preistorici, gravi e tragici nella loro storicità (...). Dall'altra una muta di ‘ragazzi’ (...), quasi immagine di una impietosa gioventù di oggi, capelli, visi, modi, anche crudeltà e incertezza.⁷⁰

More and more Lear appears to me – among other things – as a generational drama, very clear in this respect at least, amidst a whirl of probably immeasurable depths. On the one hand, few ‘survivors’, like prehistoric animals, heavy and tragic in their historicity (...). On the other, a pack of ‘youngsters (...), almost the image of today’s merciless youth, hair, faces, manners, even cruelty and uncertainty.

From this quotation it can be inferred that Strehler considered *King Lear* a very complex tragedy. Yet, as a result of long meditation and in-depth study, he saw the generation gap as one of its fundamental themes. He saw a shift from an old world, inhabited by Lear, Gloucester and Kent, to a new one, belonging to a power-hungry generation of youths only concerned

⁶⁹ By this time Peter Brook had directed his revolutionary productions of *King Lear* (1962) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970). I am not aware whether Strehler knew the second, but he knew Brook's *King Lear*. In the next section I will discuss this.

⁷⁰ Giorgio Strehler, *Per un teatro umano: pensieri scritti, parlati e attuati*, ed. Sinah Kessler (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1974), p. 180.

with their own interests, devoid of any moral scruples, subject to their needs, their wishes and their lust. It is a world where there is no space for the old, who are first subjugated and then doomed to disappear.

Strehler's *Lear* was premièred at Piccolo Teatro on the 4th November 1972. It was the first play that he directed after his return to the Piccolo Teatro, which he had left in 1968. The reasons why he left the theatre that he had founded twenty-one years before seem to be various and not totally clear. Renato Palazzi, journalist, essayist, and director of the Scuola d'Arte Drammatica 'Paolo Grassi' (Paolo Grassi School of Dramatic Art) from 1986 to 1995, mentions the interference of political parties in the management of the theatre which had become unsustainable, the complexity of running the theatre due to the exponential increase of its prestige and artistic influence that made its structure more rigid and less manageable, the refusal of the local and national authorities to find a new, more suitable seat for the Piccolo Teatro, and the student protest which addressed Strehler himself.⁷¹ Strehler, the man who had created the first civic public theatre in Italy, was seen as a reactionary, a right-wing man, one who had monopolized theatre, the 'barone della scena' ('baron of the stage').⁷² This may not have been the principal reason for his resignation, but the quotation above clearly hints at the lack of understanding between his generation and the younger one. Actually, the protest did not only come from the students: in 1967 the *Convegno di Ivrea* took place in Ivrea, in which men of theatre – among whom were Bene and Ronconi – gathered to discuss the various ideas and currents of Italian theatre and, for the first time, spoke of avant-garde theatre, and aimed to revolutionize the traditional concepts of theatrical text, directing, role of the actor, theatre location, and the public. I will talk about the *Convegno di Ivrea* in the next chapter, but I am interested here in showing how these events may have influenced Strehler's reading of

⁷¹ Renato Palazzi, 'Le dimissioni di Strehler dal Piccolo nel 1968 e la contestazione della regia e della politica degli stabili pubblici', in *Giorgio Strehler: Atti del convegno di studi su Giorgio Strehler e il teatro pubblico* (21 gennaio 2008, Roma, Sala Capitolare, Chiostro del Convento di Santa Maria sopra Minerva), ed. Elio Testoni (Soveria Mannelli - Catanzaro, 2009), pp. 112-113.

⁷² Strehler, *Io Strehler*, p. 232.

King Lear. Central to the discussion was opposition to traditional theatre and the authority of the director, which they wanted to be replaced by a group working together without hierarchies. This was deeply connected with the ideological-political climate of those years of protest, but also with experiences coming from abroad, most of all, that of the Living Theatre. In the mid-1960s this group, which had been founded in 1947, toured Europe. Its members were organized as a collective, living and working together toward the creation of a new form of nonfictional acting based on the actor's political and physical commitment to using the theatre as a medium for furthering social change. They came to Italy for the first time in 1961, and their performances had a strong impact on Italian experimental theatre practitioners.⁷³ Opposing the traditional theatre also meant opposing the 'teatri stabili' (publically funded theatres with a resident company).⁷⁴ The contrasts between these new currents and Strehler's theatre were strong and on both sides there were words of sharp criticism. Despite the issue of the generation gap, which seems to be dominant in the interpretation offered by Strehler, the critics were unanimous in affirming that he was the first Italian director who objectively represented the playtext of *King Lear* on the stage, taking into consideration all the aspects present in Shakespeare's tragedy:

Finalmente si è ascoltato *Re Lear*, tragedia delle tragedie (...), l'opera più vasta e complessa fra le tante create dalla mente di Shakespeare, e della quale, proprio a motivo della sua vastità e delle molteplicità dei suoi temi, in tempi recenti e non soltanto in Italia sono state fornite edizioni parziali, massimamente limitate ai problemi del potere.⁷⁵

⁷³ For a history of the Living Theatre see Massimo Dini, *Teatro d'avanguardia americano* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1978), pp. 29-63; see also Franco Perrelli, *I maestri della ricerca teatrale: Il Living, Grotowski, Barba e Brook* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2007).

⁷⁴ Francesco Bono, 'Dossier Ivrea 1967 "Mettere in causa il teatro in quanto tale": alcune note su Ivrea 1967', in *ateatro: webzine di cultura teatrale*, 108.12, ed. Oliviero Ponte di Pino <<http://www.trax.it/olivieropdp/ateatro108.htm#108and12>> [accessed 26 November 2012].

⁷⁵ Raul Radice, 'Carraro splendido Re Lear', *Corriere della Sera*, 7 November 1972.

Finally we have heard *King Lear*, tragedy of all the tragedies (...), the widest and most complex among those created by Shakespeare's mind, and of which, because of its vastness and the multiplicity of its themes, in recent times and not only in Italy, partial versions have been made, mostly focused on the problems of power.

Strehler's *King Lear*, therefore, was not a partial version although, analyzing the text we can notice that the two translators, Angelo Dallagiacomma and Luigi Lunari, with the constant collaboration of Strehler, made some cuts mainly concerning the very descriptive passages. Translating the text took a long time; Dallagiacomma and Lunari provided four different translations and, during rehearsal, Strehler kept revising the final one, checking it again and again, along with the original text and other existing translations.

Before carrying on, there is an issue that deserves to be looked into. When talking about Strehler and about directing in Italy, the stress is always on the original text, and on the importance of authenticity. This makes sense, and it is understandable in the light of the adulterations made by the previous generation of actors. Yet, if we go back to the time when the texts were created, we will see that they were altered at so many different stages, and by so many different hands, that the phrase 'original text' loses consistency. Tiffany Stern gives a complete and fascinating account of the instability and fluidity of Shakespeare's texts in her *Making Shakespeare*. The first reviser of the texts was Shakespeare himself, who might change his mind as to characters and plot after writing the first draft. Alterations, or even revisions over full plays, were also made – after a play had already been performed – because London was a relatively small town that did not provide an audience for a long run of the same play; therefore it had to be changed if it was to remain current.⁷⁶ Crucial are textual differences in different versions of a play. Quarto and folio editions denote the size of the

⁷⁶ Tiffany Stern, *Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 45.

sheet on which the text was printed.⁷⁷ In the first case the sheet was folded twice, in the second only once. Q editions were relatively cheap, ephemeral, small-format, single-play editions (like modern single-play paperbacks) that came out at various times during Shakespeare's career and afterwards. The First Folio of 1623 was a large-scale, expensive, monumental, prestigious 'collected works' – a very different kind of publication (like a modern hardback 'collected works'). Some plays appear only in Q, or only in F; most appear in both, and for some (like *King Lear*, as I will elucidate) there are significant differences between Q and F texts. A 'good' Q text (there are also 'bad' Q texts) is a text that is considered authoritative. But this does not necessarily mean that it comes from Shakespeare's hand. It may originate in a rough draft by Shakespeare; in a scribe's neat copy of a Shakespearian draft; or in the playhouse 'book', which was used for prompting. A 'bad' Q text, instead, is a text that is so confused that it cannot be considered authoritative. It usually derived from a memorial reconstruction of whoever supplied the manuscript to the printer, at a time when the author had no legal right over his plays. As for F, all the texts it contains are 'good',⁷⁸ but again the sources were varied. Yet, since they were gathered together by Shakespeare's colleagues Heminges and Condell, they were more likely than Q texts to have at least some kind of direct connection to the papers of Shakespeare's companies rather than being, for example, reconstructed from memory. To make the whole issue even more confusing, anyone could have a text printed. Usually textual ownership rested with the playing company, but it was provided to whoever paid the stationers' guild a sum of money.

The journey of the text from the first draft to the printhouse was long and hazardous. The first draft (the foul paper) was usually very confusing, and it often missed important information, like which character was supposed to speak which lines. For these reasons, the foul paper was written out in a fair copy by the author, or by a scribe. In the second case the first changes from the author's original were made. This version became the

⁷⁷ From now on I will refer to Q for quarto and F for folio.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 46-48.

playhouse ‘book’. The book was then passed on to a prompter, who would add his own amendments, and remove from the text the bits that were considered inappropriate because of moral or political reasons. After this stage, the text was sent to the Master of Revels for final censoring and corrections. The text was not ‘safe’ even when it was in the hands of the printer. The author’s handwriting may not have been clear, so the printer would have to decipher what the word was, and if he could not, he simply substituted it. Or he might mistake letters that were next to each other on the trays or ‘cases’ that contained the pieces of type.⁷⁹

In the light of all this, the task of the modern editor is hard, and, in the presence of different versions of the same play, he or she has to make choices. Conflated texts – that is a text that derives from the combination of two (like Q and F when considered ‘good’) – were customary until the 1980s, and are still to be found today, but Stern points out that this way of proceeding: ‘produces a superimposition of all available texts one upon the other and is thus as far away as possible from what Shakespeare wrote at any one time’.⁸⁰

As for *King Lear*, the play was published in a Q version in 1608 and then again in the first Folio of 1623, and the two versions differ significantly. Yet it was not until the 1980s that awareness of these differences became a main issue in scholarship. In his book *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition*, René Weis refers to the *Oxford Complete Shakespeare* edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor as:

the first major edition of the works to treat Q and F as two different texts, and therefore [belonging] to the new ‘disintegrationist’ school of *King Lear* scholarship, an influential group of textual scholars, critics and editors who have argued since the late 1970s that there is no ideal single *King Lear* text; rather there are two different texts, one based on the Quarto of 1608 (the ‘Pied Bull’ Q) and another, ‘revised’

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 145 and 150.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 158.

Shakespearian version which was published in the first Folio of 1623'.⁸¹

Therefore, it must be clear that every time I refer to Shakespeare's 'original' texts, I am using an imprecise phrase.

Consequently, even Strehler's claim to be at the service of the author and to be the faithful interpreter of his words, is to be understood with a new awareness thanks to the studies of scholars like Wells and Taylor. Bearing in mind all this, what did Strehler mean by the 'original' text of *King Lear*? According to the witness of one of the actors, Ernesto M. Rossi, Strehler chose the F version. In his diary of rehearsals, he wrote: '(...) è stata seguita l'edizione "in folio" considerata dagli studiosi più seri l'originale shakespeariano') ([Strehler and the translators] followed the "in folio" version regarded by the most influential scholars as the Shakespearian original'). Such an assumption was probably valid in the Italy of 1972, but it is no longer today. Stern points out that the two *Lear* constitute two completely different versions of the play, both probably authorial, and that neither is necessarily worse or better than the other.⁸² In any case, it is unlikely that Strehler only used F, as I found lines in the text used for his production that are only in Q. At the time when they were working, both Strehler and Rossi may have been unclear on the relations between Q and F, and getting hold of a non-conflated text would have been difficult, so Strehler may have worked with a conflated text believing it to be F, or it was Rossi who made an incorrect statement. The other possibility is that Strehler knew both versions, and he made choices, that give his 'mark' to the production. Yet, in the book which contains the translation of the play, Lunari imagines Strehler being asked: 'Come intendi fare il *Re Lear*'? ('How do you want to do *King Lear*'?) According to the translator, Strehler's answer would have been: 'Come lo ha scritto Shakespeare' ('As

⁸¹ René Weis, *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition*, 2nd edn (Harlow: Longman, 2010), p. 1.

⁸² Stern, *Making Shakespeare*, p. 59.

Shakespeare wrote it').⁸³ In the light of the discussion above, we understand that such a statement acquires a paradoxical quality. The wish to represent the original texts on the stage contrasted with their fluidity and instability. Therefore, we should regard Strehler's concept of 'what Shakespeare wrote' as a construction, a fiction even, rather than a fixed and verifiable entity. To some extent it was a rhetorical ploy to distinguish his practice and philosophy from those of previous stagings, which had little to share with either Q or F versions. Most of the stagings that had been seen in Italy before had focused on the figure of the king, while the other characters were only secondary and had never been considered in their individuality and personal story.⁸⁴ The clearest example is offered by Gloucester, whose tragic life was usually regarded as a double of Lear's, and whose physical blindness symbolically represented Lear's emotional blindness. Of course Strehler saw this link between the two old men's lives, but he gave Gloucester and his story new dignity. This was achieved through the new Italian version of the text (whichever it was), that reintroduced scenes that had been deleted before and through Strehler's requirements of his actors. In particular, it was noted that Tino Carraro did not obscure the other actors with his interpretation, and refrained from playing the role of the star actor.⁸⁵

In his essay 'Irrappresentabile o illeggibile' ('Unperformable or unreadable') Lombardo affirms that Strehler's production did not concentrate on the characters, however big they may be, or on one topic in particular – the filial ingratitude or the theme of madness; his was a difficult journey into a play that, more than once, had been defined as

⁸³ Strehler, *Il Re Lear di Shakespeare* (Verona: Bertani, 1973).

⁸⁴ All the Great Actors, from Rossi and Salvini to Emanuel, Novelli, Zacconi had had Lear in their repertoire, but all of them had reduced the play to the figure of the king, offering different views of his behaviour and of his madness. The first attempt of directing the play was made by Franco Enriquez in Milan in 1955. The play received good reviews, but Enriquez's work resulted to be rather weak, as he did not manage to offer a comprehensive direction to the staging.

⁸⁵ He did the same in Strehler's following Shakespearian production *La Tempesta* of 1978 in which he was Prospero. Strehler asked him to speak some of his most beautiful lines in the dark, or turning the back to the audience, in order to allow them to focus on the poetry and not on the actor.

‘irrapresentabile’.⁸⁶ According to Lombardo, Strehler’s production was actually the proof that *King Lear* can be represented in all its complexity; he went even further stating that this is a play that cannot be read but only represented on stage, thus challenging the opinion of those who affirmed the opposite – Charles Lamb in 1811, or A. C. Bradley in 1904, just to mention two. But Lamb’s judgement was based on the stagings that he had attended, all based on Nahum Tate’s version of the play, *History of King Lear*, published in 1681. In his version Tate added a love story between Edgar and Cordelia, omitted the character of the Fool – as the presence of a comic character was not tolerated in a tragedy – and changed the tragic ending for a happy one, in which the good were rewarded and the bad were punished. Only in 1838 did the English actor William Charles Macready (1793-1873) restore the original play to a great extent. The problem for Lamb was also that he was seeing the play in a period when rather over-the-top stagings of features like the storm were fashionable. It was probably the discrepancy between what he read and what he saw on the stage that led him to claim that Lear’s inner suffering can only be conveyed through the words, not through the actions of the actors on stage.⁸⁷ Similarly, Bradley, who regarded Lear’s tragedy as a universal one and as a journey from the outer world of power and wealth to the liberation of the soul through pain and suffering, believed that these inner feelings, and the universal dimension of Lear’s journey of redemption and final state of ecstasy, can only be made manifest through Shakespeare’s poetic language, not through stage representation.⁸⁸ The debate on whether *Lear* is a play that can be better understood by reading it or by seeing it performed on the stage went on, and was still very heated when Strehler worked on the play. Supposedly Lombardo did not literally mean that *Lear* is ‘illeggibile’, but he believed

⁸⁶ Lombardo, ‘Irrapresentabile o illeggibile?’, in Strehler, *Il Re Lear di Shakespeare*, 259-267 (p. 260).

⁸⁷ Paraphrased from Charles Lamb, ‘On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their fitness for Stage Representation’(1811), in *Shakespeare criticism. A selection 1623-1640* ed. D. Nichol Smith (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 215-240. The section on *King Lear* is at pp. 232-233.

⁸⁸ Paraphrased from Andrew C. Bradley, *Shakespearian Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*, 3rd edn (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 211-212.

that the stage representation, far from hindering its understanding, helps reveal its truth. And he refers to Strehler's own words in an interview that the director released to Roberto De Monticelli: 'Tutte le cose del testo che ho capito, le ho capite giorno per giorno, sulla scena'.⁸⁹ ('All the things of the text which I have understood, I understood day by day, on the stage).

Yet, before starting rehearsal (which lasted two months), Strehler studied the text thoroughly, collaborated with the translators,⁹⁰ and read critical works, among which there was Kott's *Shakespeare our Contemporary*, which influenced his staging to a good extent. He was most likely indebted to Kott for the choice of the stage setting which was bare, essential, poor, a reminder of Beckett's minimalism (a sign of the lack of values, of hope, of communication), and pessimism which Kott traced in the Shakespearian tragedy comparing it with *Fin de Partie* (*Endgame*) by the Irish writer.⁹¹

The publication of Kott's book exerted a strong influence on many stagings of the play in the second half of the twentieth century. In his analysis of *King Lear*, the Polish critic distinguished between ancient tragedy and modern tragedy, in which history has replaced 'fate, gods and nature',⁹² and is seen as an absurd mechanism that has no direction and where men are doomed to lose balance and to fall, thus provoking the audience's laughter. The tragic nature of life is conveyed through the grotesque, as it happens in Beckett's plays. And it is likely, according to Kott, that Beckett traced this element in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Lombardo did not share Kott's critical reading of *King Lear*, and affirmed that Strehler's interpretation was much more objective than Kott's. I agree with his assumption as Kott's essay leaves very little space for any different reading of the text, but traces of his identification of the tragic with the grotesque are visible in many aspects of Strehler's staging, for example in

⁸⁹ Lombardo 'Irrappresentabile o illeggibile', in Strehler, *Il Re Lear di Shakespeare*, p. 260.

⁹⁰ I will look at the issue of translation more closely in my analysis of Strehler's 1978 production of *La Tempesta*.

⁹¹ Jan Kott, 'King Lear or Endgame', in Kott, *Shakespeare our Contemporary* transl. Boleslaw Taborski (1965), 2nd edn (London: Methuen & co Ltd, 1967), 100-133.

⁹² Ibid., p. 109.

the director's choice of setting the scene in a sort of circus and of arraying Lear as a ringmaster and the Fool as a Pierrot, a clown. In more than one scene, the characters have a clownish attitude and look like the ignorant victims of a mechanism that they cannot control, thus recalling Beckett and matching Kott's ideas.

The total lack of hope that Kott saw in *King Lear* could be clearly detected in Peter Brook's production of the play (1962), which Strehler knew.⁹³ Brook interpreted the play in nihilistic terms, the reasons for which Foakes traces in the main events of the twentieth century, namely the Second World War, the use of the atomic bomb, and the cruelty of the concentration camps.⁹⁴ The English director saw the same sadism, the same despair and bleakness in Shakespeare's tragedy; therefore, in his opinion, the play could be much more clearly understood by twentieth-century audiences than by the nineteenth-century public. However, Kott's and Brook's view did not convince Strehler, in whose production there is not only desolation and anguish, but also faith in a better future and in man. If we compare the stagings of the two great European directors, this becomes evident. In his view of a bleak world that denies any possibility of consolation, Brook chose to close act 3, scene 7 following the F version: after Gloucester's blinding, the last lines are attributed to Cornwall who, well aware he is going to die, leaves the stage with Regan. Strehler, instead, chose the Q version, which ends with a dialogue between two servants showing pity for old Gloucester (3.7.96-104).⁹⁵ For the same reason, the English director eliminated Edmund's final act of redemption in act 5, scene 3, which is in both Q (236-239) and F (217-221) when he tries to save Cordelia's and Lear's lives, while Strehler restored it. The Italian director also emphasized Edgar's good-heartedness and made of him a more

93 Clear references to the fact that some elements of Strehler's production (the acting and the costumes chosen for Lear and Gloucester in the scene of the tempest) recall Brook's are to be found in Kennedy's *Looking at Shakespeare*, pp. 218 and 219.

94 Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes, Arden Shakespeare, 3rd series (London: Thomson, 1997), p. 83.

95 Weis, *King Lear*. I have chosen Weis's book, as it provides both the Q and the F texts. All subsequent references are from this.

articulate character who, in previous productions, had not been given much significance. Following the F version of 1623, he gave Edgar the last lines and changed them to make his faith in the future and trust in man clear.⁹⁶
The original:

EDGAR The weight of this sad time we must obey,
 Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
 The oldest hath borne most; we that are young
 Shall never see so much, nor live so long. (5.3.299-302)

became

Noi invece obbediamo e pieghiamo la schiena
Sotto il peso di questa ora triste.
E diciamo quel che davvero pensiamo,
senza riguardi o pietà.
Molto i vecchi hanno sofferto.
Noi che siamo giovani
Non permetteremo
Che si vedano più simili sventure,
né pretenderemo di essere eterni.⁹⁷

Instead we obey and bend our back
Under the weight of this sad hour.
And we say what we really think,
without regard or pity.
The oldest have suffered greatly.
We who are young
Will not allow
Similar misfortunes to be seen again,
Nor will we claim to be eternal.

⁹⁶ These lines are spoken by Albany in the Quarto of 1608.

⁹⁷ Strehler, *Il Re Lear di Shakespeare*, p. 211.

In Strehler's production, Edgar is seen as the new man who does not escape his responsibilities and accepts the consequences of the wrong actions committed by the older generation. Strehler thought that only out of goodness and forgiveness can there be hope for the future, and he sees Edgar and Cordelia as good and forgiving. There are two moments of extreme tenderness in the production, in which Strehler's trust in the goodness of man is very clearly shown: the first is sequence R (the play is divided in sequences from A to Z), where Edgar – disguised as poor Tom – deceives his father who wants to die and invents a landscape for him, inducing him to believe that he is falling off the cliffs of Dover; the second is sequence U, in which Cordelia strokes her father while he is asleep. The scenes, present in the playtext, are emphasised by Strehler. The second I have mentioned is reminiscent of Michelangelo's first 'Pietà':⁹⁸ Cordelia is sitting looking at the audience with an unconscious Lear lying in front of her. Roles seem to have swapped: she is like a caring mother who is there for her suffering son, like the Madonna with the body of Christ on her lap; the idea of goodness, tenderness, purity and calm after the storm – in naturalistic and metaphysical terms – is enhanced by Strehler's choice of dressing both characters in white. Cordelia is not the wife of the King of France here (differently from Brook's production, where she is seen as a powerful Queen), and Lear is not a king; they are just a daughter and her father, or the symbols of an old, pure order, subjugated by a new, uncaring one.

⁹⁸ Many critics have observed that the final tableau of the play, with the dead Cordelia in Lear's lap, is an inverted Pietà.



Figure 9: Ottavia Piccolo as Cordelia and Tino Carraro as Lear

The children are not all good-hearted. Regan, Goneril and Edmund are evil, and Strehler made this very clear stressing the distance existing between the older and the younger generation. The contrast between a good order and a bad one, which Strehler identified as the play's main theme in the quotation given at the beginning of this section, is represented through many different directing devices, like the use of lighting, the music, the noises, the costumes, the tone of voice, the movements. The two old men, Lear and Gloucester, wear loose clothes of a light colour, for example, while the young wear very tight black leather trousers and black jackets. Regan and Goneril have high-heeled shoes and excessive make up. Edmund speaks fast, Regan and Goneril's tone of voice is harsh and very masculine. The scene in which Gloucester has his eyes gouged out is stunning in its cruelty. The old man, whose arms are bound to ropes, is lowered into a trap door so that the blinding is not visible to the audience, but what is happening is absolutely evident. When he is pulled up, the audience sees his wounds in place of his eyes and hears his scream when he realizes that Edgar did not betray him. He did not scream while he was suffering physical pain, but he does when he understands his huge mistake. And during the blinding Regan sits near the hole of the trap door in a state of sexual excitement increased by Cornwall who puts his hand on her genitals while committing his act of

cruelty against Gloucester.⁹⁹ Another scene, which ranks among the best of the production and perfectly shows the injustice committed by the evil characters against the good one – Cordelia – , was that in which Lear carries his youngest daughter's body in his arms at the end of the play. On the bare stage where only corpses are lying and only the silence of death can be heard, Cordelia's head suddenly appears from behind the black curtain at the back of the stage, accompanied by a sudden, loud and shrill noise, just a corpse in her father's arms.



Figure 10: Ottavia Piccolo as Cordelia and Tino Carraro as Lear

The old man walks towards the proscenium, lays Cordelia's body on the floor, touches her, lifts her arm as if it were that of a puppet, looks at her, and dies with her. In his notes Strehler wrote:

Alla fine quando Lear porta dentro Cordelia, Cordelia è nelle sue braccia: l'idea di un fantoccio rotto, un fantoccino pallido, esangue, dal viso bianco bianco. Lear la porta proprio come un fantoccino, quasi facendole trascinare le punte dei piedi per terra, tenendola abbracciata, al petto, con fatica, perché pesa, nonostante tutto. I

⁹⁹ The scene of Gloucester's blinding was deemed so shocking that it could only be witnessed for the first time by early-twentieth-century English audiences. With the mid-twentieth-century interpretations of the play and, in particular, with the publication of Kott's *Shakespeare our Contemporary*, directors made choices aimed at intensifying the cruelty and sadism of the scene.

piedini sfiorano il fango e qualche volta strisciano lasciando una riga lunga.¹⁰⁰

At the end when Lear brings in Cordelia, Cordelia is in his arms: the idea of a broken puppet, a little puppet, pale, wan, white-faced. Lear carries her just like a little puppet, hugging her to his breast, with effort, because despite all, she has weight. The little feet slightly scrape the mud, and sometimes shuffle leaving a long line.

Lear's last lines in Strehler's version are 'Guardatela bene, guardate, / le sue labbra! / guardatela, guardate, là ...',¹⁰¹ which is an almost literal translation of Lear's last lines in F: 'Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips, / Look there, look there' (5.3.284-285). These lines are missing in Q, and this gives us another clue as to which version or versions Strehler followed.

The characterization of the Fool – interpreted by an actress, Ottavia Piccolo, who also played the part of Cordelia – was recognized as Strehler's best achievement in this production. Lombardo affirms:

Il suo Matto è veramente una cosa nuova, e ciò nel senso che di lui vengono alla luce quelle qualità che la critica migliore aveva individuato e che raramente tuttavia (e mai in Italia) avevano assunto un così concreto rilievo scenico.¹⁰²

His Fool is really a new thing, because Strehler brought to light all the qualities that the best critics had discerned and that had rarely (and never in Italy) acquired such concrete scenic relevance.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Strehler, *Il Re Lear di Shakespeare*, p. 40.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 209.

¹⁰² Lombardo, 'Irrappresentabile o illeggibile' in Strehler, *Il Re Lear di Shakespeare*, p. 263.

¹⁰³ As I wrote at p. 150, in England the character of the Fool was eliminated from the play in 1681 at the time of Nahum Tate's adaptation *History of King Lear*. David Garrick's *King Lear*, premièred on 11 March 1742 at Drury Lane theatre, very much conformed with Tate's version and did not include the presence of the Fool, as well as Edmund Kean's

In his idea of choosing an actress to interpret the double role of Cordelia and the Fool, Strehler was certainly influenced by Bradley's *Shakespearian Tragedy*. Bradley affirmed that, at the time of Shakespeare, the same boy presumably played the two roles.¹⁰⁴ Strehler was not convinced of this assumption¹⁰⁵:

Bisognerebbe controllare tale affermazione [l'affermazione di Bradley]: su quali basi è nata, dai registi? (non credo); dalla tradizione? (non mi pare); da quale notizia allora?¹⁰⁶

We should check this statement [Bradley's]: where does it come from? From the directors?, (I do not think so); from tradition? (It does not seem to me); from which source then?

Yet he started his reflection from there. If the assumption was true, he thought, why not have a woman be both Cordelia and the Fool? Casting the same actress to play the two roles was justified by the fact that the Fool appears when Cordelia disappears, only to appear again when the Fool has left for good. Therefore, the Fool can be seen as an extension, a continuation of Cordelia's goodness and truth-speaking, and that is why his presence was necessary after the banishment of the youngest daughter. But – Strehler asked himself – what role would the Fool have if he remained on stage after Lear's change? Probably none, as the Fool's task was that of opposing Lear, of challenging him and forcing him to see the truth. His task was fulfilled after the tempest, he had no longer a reason to be near the old King. Strehler did not wish the audience to recognize the two characters in terms of voice or physical appearance, but wanted them to be aware of the mysterious link between the two. Ottavia Piccolo was acclaimed for her interpretation of the

version of 1823. It was only William Charles Macready, in his 1838 production, who re-introduced the figure of the Fool.

¹⁰⁴ In Strehler, *Inscenare Shakespeare*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁵ Foakes argues that the role of Cordelia was played by a boy, while the Fool was probably interpreted by Robert Armin (1568-1616), who replaced Will Kemp in 1600. In Shakespeare, *King Lear*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁶ Strehler, *Inscenare Shakespeare*, p. 91.

Fool. Dressed as a Pierrot with a white face, she was able to give life to a multi-faceted Fool, strict and tender, fragile and strong, cheeky and frightened at the same time. What could not be rendered through the translation in Italian, was resolved by Piccolo through her gestures, movements and facial expressions.

Tino Carraro's interpretation of the king was in general a huge success. Poet and theatrical critic Roberto Rebora commented:

Tino Carraro ha portato magistralmente il grande personaggio dalla cecità alla veggenza e alla disperazione incontenibile seguendo una linea di recitazione diretta ed essenziale che propone un Lear del tutto salvo dalle convenzioni interpretative.¹⁰⁷

Tino Carraro brilliantly led the great character from blindness to awareness and to unrestrained despair, along a straightforward and essential line, offering a Lear totally devoid of acting conventions.

Strehler probably chose to dress Lear as a ringmaster in a circus to underline the absurdity of his behaviour at the beginning of the play and his lack of wisdom and future loss of dignity. At the beginning of the play, Carraro presents his Lear as an authoritarian ruler who requires immediate attention and obedience and who shouts his orders in an imperious tone. His magnetic eyes stare at the interlocutor and reveal a self-confident man who does not doubt the correctness and appropriateness of his behaviour. Little by little, his facial expression changes and starts to show incredulity at what is happening around him. It takes time before he fully realizes his huge mistake and, during the tempest, the transformation of Carraro is complete. The scene is well described by Strehler in his notes. While the bad characters are protected in a sort of cage, the noise of thunder and the howling of the wind announces the approach of the tempest. Then all goes

¹⁰⁷ Roberto Rebora, 'Strehler presenta Re Lear', in *Corriere del Ticino*, 25.11.1972.

quiet, a curtain is rolled down to hide the stage, then it is lifted up again and Lear reappears on the scene, a changed man who no longer speaks in his harsh voice, but uses low tones which make his suffering clear. The physical tempest is over but not the tempest inside his soul that Strehler represented using a very strong, white light as opposed to the darkness of the tempest, and shrill noises which only the old king can hear and which are to him like repeated pricks of a needle in his head. Despite not being seen in the tempest as in all previous productions of the tragedy, the scene was highly effective and enhanced the idea of the parallel between the natural tempest and the turmoil, the storm that was taking place in Lear's soul.

After the tempest, Lear and Gloucester reappear dressed in rags, costumes that remind very much of those chosen by Brook, to the extent that, looking at photos of the two productions, it is difficult to distinguish Strehler's Lear and Gloucester from Brook's.



Figure 11: Renato De Carmine as Gloucester and Tino Carraro as Lear in Strehler's *Re Lear*



Figure 12: Paul Scofield as Lear, Alan Webb as Gloucester and Brian Murray as Edgar in Brook's *King Lear*

Foakes points out that such robes were meant to look timeless, the story of the two old men being the story of man, of many other 'lost souls groping about in a void'.¹⁰⁸ This is another scene in which Kott's influence is visible in both Brook's and Strehler's stagings. The two old men are like a Vladimir and an Estragon, the caricature of what they were, two clowns that

¹⁰⁸ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, p. 3.

have lost control over their lives.¹⁰⁹ But, as I said before, the difference between the interpretation of Kott and Brook on one side, and of Strehler on the other, is that while for Kott the theme of *King Lear* is the decay and fall of the world, and Brook's vision is apocalyptic with an overall effect that tends towards nihilism, Strehler's *Re Lear* can be seen as a journey of knowledge from symbolic blindness to reality.

From 1681 until the mid-nineteenth century, theatre productions of *King Lear* in Britain focused on Nahum Tate's version of the play and on the story of Lear. In later productions, mostly English and German, though the focus was still on the character of Lear, more comprehensive readings of the text followed, with the restoration of the tragic ending, the re-introduction of the figure of the Fool, and more complex characterization of figures like Gloucester, Edgar, and Edmund. The play is certainly complex and the presence of the sub-plot renders its staging more difficult; but Strehler and other twentieth-century European directors, have shown that *King Lear* can be represented in its entirety.

3.6 *La Tempesta*

As I wrote in the first section of this chapter, one of Strehler's greatest achievements was that of widening the range of Shakespeare's plays that had been seen on stage up to that moment in Italy. As for *The Tempest*, only a puppet show based on the play had been staged in 1921 by Vittorio Podrecca although, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, many translations had been made. In her essay 'Due Tempeste di Giorgio Strehler', Anna Anzi explains that the Italian Great Actors and *mattatori* refused to play the role of Prospero because of the influence of nineteenth-century critics who judged the story impossible to stage for its improbability and for the presence of too many fantastic elements.¹¹⁰ Strehler was the first

¹⁰⁹ It is very likely that Beckett was influenced by the pairing of Lear and Gloucester.

¹¹⁰ Anna Anzi, 'Due Tempeste di Giorgio Strehler' in *Memoria di Shakespeare*, 6 (Roma: Bulzoni, 2008), pp. 221-222.

who brought *The Tempest* to Italy in 1948. After that spectacular version at the Boboli Gardens in Florence he went back to the play and revived it in a completely new version, which was staged at Milan's Teatro Lirico in June 1978, broadcast by Italian state television (RAI) in December 1981, and brought back to the stage (with a few changes) in 1983-84. This second staging ranks among the best European productions of a play by Shakespeare, so much so that, according to Dennis Kennedy, it: 'may have been the most important Shakespearian production since Brook's *Dream*'.¹¹¹

This version is of particular relevance to my work as the exchange of letters between Strehler and the translator Lombardo, now available in the already-mentioned book *La Tempesta tradotta e messa in scena, 1977-78: un carteggio ritrovato fra Strehler e Lombardo e due traduzioni inedite realizzate da Lombardo per il Piccolo Teatro di Milano*, is an invaluable source, which offers essential insights into the issue of translation, and allows us to follow, step by step, the work of Strehler as an 'interpreter' of Shakespeare's text.¹¹² Moreover, the comparison with the first version shows how the ideas that Strehler already had in his early years of directing, in terms of his engagement with the work of Shakespeare, and in terms of his role as a director, were fully realized in this production.

Once again, I wish to start the analysis of this production with Strehler's words. The first quotation comes from a letter that he wrote to Lombardo (who translated the play for this staging) in August 1977. The second is contained in Hirst's book on Strehler:

Dove sono, io, per ora? Quasi nel vuoto. Con un tale cumulo di interrogativi, di perplessità (...), davanti ad un testo che mi appare sempre più insondabile (...) Con questi terrori, con questo tremore di meraviglia quasi, davanti a un capolavoro assoluto, devo pensare ad uno 'spettacolo' il più possibile *giusto*, il più possibile chiaro e

¹¹¹ Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance*, p. 304.

¹¹² This is confirmed by the collaboration that Strehler and Lombardo also had with Jan Kott and which I will address further on in the chapter.

‘comprensibile’, almeno in una parte della sua ‘realtà’. *Tutta* la sua realtà oltrepassa invece non solo le mie forze, i miei mezzi, ma proprio (vorrei non dirlo!) ‘il teatro’.¹¹³

Where am I now? Almost in the void. With such a bundle of questions, of doubts (...) facing a text which seems to me more and more unfathomable (...). With these terrors, with this tremor of wonder almost, in front of an absolute masterpiece, I must think about a ‘show’ which is as *right* as possible, as clear and ‘understandable’ as possible, at least in a part of its ‘reality’. *All* of its reality, on the other hand, overpowers not only my strength, my means, but even (I’d rather not say it!) the ‘theatre’ itself.

But above all else it [*The Tempest*] is a huge metaphor of theatre. Alongside the profound questions concerning life itself, history and the problem of understanding that Shakespeare poses, there are also questions about the destiny of theatre itself. That is, questions about how and why we create theatre – we, people working in theatre – and about what theatre should or could be.¹¹⁴

The words of the first quotation are uttered by a director who, after directing over two hundred plays, still saw himself as the interpreter of the text, the intermediary between the text and the audience, but who, this time, doubted his capacity to fulfil his task. In the second quotation Strehler outlines what for him is the main theme of the play: he saw *The Tempest* as a ‘metaphor of theatre’, which gives him the opportunity to reflect upon theatre, and upon what can or cannot be achieved through this means of expression.

Even in this case the preparation of this staging was long and included various steps, the first of which was the textual work and work on

¹¹³ Letter written to Lombardo in August 1977, in Shakespeare, Lombardo e Strehler, *La Tempesta: tradotta e messa in scena*, pp. 5-6. Author’s italics.

¹¹⁴ Hirst, *Giorgio Strehler*, p. 89.

the translation, alongside the reading of critical works, in particular of Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. Then followed the reading aloud with the actors and, before starting rehearsal, a ten-day study seminar to which Strehler invited Lombardo, Dallagiacoma, Lunari and Kott.¹¹⁵

In his book *Strehler and Shakespeare*, Lombardo affirms:

Ancora più importante della quantità [si riferisce alle messe in scena di opera shakespeariane da parte di Strehler] è, invero, la qualità: il livello sempre altissimo e sempre innovativo di queste regie, di questi suoi 'saggi', come Strehler le definisce, quasi a indicare il lavoro intellettuale che le sottende;¹¹⁶

Even more important than quantity [referring to Strehler's stagings of Shakespeare's plays] is, truly, their quality: the constantly highest level and innovative quality of these directed works, of these 'essays', as Strehler defines them, as if he wanted to point to the intellectual work that is at their root.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* can be interpreted in various ways: it has been seen as the playwright's artistic testament, as a metaphor of theatre, as a journey of knowledge, as a colonialist or anti-colonialist play, as a reflection on James I's style of kingship; Prospero has been regarded as Shakespeare towards the end of his life, maybe tired of his artistic endeavours, as the director of a play, as a duke who made the mistake of handing over his dukedom to devote himself to his books and to his magical art (in a similar way to Lear who renounces his kingdom in favour of his daughters), as the colonizer who exploits Ariel and Caliban (though in very different ways). All these elements are taken into consideration in Strehler's staging, but the metatheatrical quality and the identification of Prospero with a theatre director – with Strehler himself – certainly stand out. In fact

¹¹⁵ The transcription of part of the conversations among the five men can be found in: Stefano Bajma Griga, *La Tempesta di Strehler per Giorgio Strehler* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2003), pp. 91-111.

¹¹⁶ Lombardo, *Strehler e Shakespeare*, p. 8.

the production can be seen as a celebration of theatre in different forms: through the emphasis put on Prospero as the director of the show; through some extraordinary *coups de théâtre*; through the presentation of some theatre genres like the Italian *commedia dell'arte*; and through a choice of words that, more than in the English version, refer to the world of theatre.¹¹⁷ It is theatre meant to astonish the public with extraordinary illusionistic effects, but also presented in its unreality in a very Brechtian way: it represents life but, at the same time, it makes clear that it is not life. If the island is theatre, Prospero is the director. In order to stage his play, the director needs a set (the island), the actors and the public. Ariel (played by actress Giulia Lazzarini) – the airy spirit, the white-faced clown, the servant – is the actor, the one that gives life to the director's vision.¹¹⁸

The production opens with the first stunning effect: the representation of the tempest. Preceded by 'a tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning', as Shakespeare's text demanded, the scene opens with what appeared to be a ship in the midst of the storm on which, little by little, the various characters start to appear and to shout their lines. The natural elements acquire more and more power, the waves seem to rise and fall, until the mast breaks leading to the end of the scene. The sea withdraws and the sound and fury of this first scene is replaced by the appearance of a male figure, whose gestures and movements make him resemble an orchestra conductor. The elements have calmed down, a stretch of sand appears, and the man is joined by a girl, who rushes to the centre of the stage after witnessing the tempest and the sinking of the ship. Little by little, we learn that all has been organized and orchestrated by the man, by Prospero – the magician – who starts to tell his story, of his past and of his arrival on the island. The girl is Miranda, his daughter, who – like the audience – now gets to know about her identity and the circumstances of the previous twelve years. When, as if hypnotized by Prospero, she falls asleep, the second

¹¹⁷ I will provide a few examples when discussing the translation that was made for this production.

¹¹⁸ This Ariel is certainly reminiscent of the Pierrot like Fool in *Re Lear*.

stunning effect is created. Prospero calls Ariel who, suddenly, makes her appearance from the flies and hovers in the air by means of a thick, visible wire which holds her, highly symbolic – according to Kott and Hirst – of the relationship of director and actor: one of trust and need to be guided on the one hand, of resentment and longing for freedom of expression on the other.¹¹⁹

Figure 13: Giulia Lazzarini as Ariel and Tino Carraro as Prospero

Many critics, from Lombardo to Hirst, from Kennedy to Pia Kleber, (and Strehler himself) refer to Brecht's influence on the Italian director.¹²⁰ Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* is reached by Strehler especially in the television version of the staging, where all the theatrical tricks are clearly visible. The tempest, which lasts five minutes, does not hide the fact that it

¹¹⁹ Kott, 'Prospero or the Director: Giorgio Strehler's *The Tempest*', *Theater*, 10, 2 (1979), 117-122 (p. 119); Hirst, *Giorgio Strehler*, p. 84.

In my interview with Lazzarini, the actress praises Strehler who, contrary to most directors, guided the actor without imposing his view. This may seem surprising thinking that Strehler was an actor before being a director so he surely had his own acting method. Or, just the opposite can be affirmed: being an actor himself, he knew that the best results can be achieved when the actor finds his own way of expression. However, analyzing his method of work, it can also be inferred that Strehler was quite authoritative, as I will illustrate further on in this section.

¹²⁰ Lombardo, *Strehler e Shakespeare*; Hirst, *Giorgio Strehler*; Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare*; Pia Kleber, 'Theatrical continuities in Giorgio Strehler's *The Tempest*', in *Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance*.

is theatrical illusion created by man. The cloth representing the sea is agitated by seventeen youngsters whom the public can see in the video preparing it before the beginning of the performance.¹²¹ In the interview that Giulia Lazzarini granted me on 21 May 2011, she remembered those youngsters and their role in the play:

le rive [erano] fatte da diciassette ragazzi che erano sotto (...); quando si alzavano per i ringraziamenti, era un'apoteosi proprio perché erano, erano bravissimi, vestiti tutti d'argento, sembravano tanti spermatozoi [ride], uscivan tutti così da sotto questo mare meraviglioso.

The banks [were] made by seventeen youngsters who were underneath (...); when they stood up for the applause, it was an apotheosis because they were, they were excellent, dressed in silver, they looked like many sperms [she laughs], they all came up from this wonderful sea.

The thunder is made with percussion instruments which are also shown in the video. Prospero and Miranda open a trap door on the floor in scene two in which they place the cloak which is no longer needed.

The presence of Stephano and Trinculo, here presented as a Brighella and a Pulcinella, the former speaking with a dialect from Northern Italy, the second with a heavy Neapolitan accent, gives Strehler another opportunity to reflect upon theatre, namely the Italian *commedia dell'arte*. Like Brighella, Stephano is quite shrewd, dishonest and malicious, while Trinculo is more ingenuous, more clownish; he speaks in a more gross way, and relies more on gestures and movements than Stephano. Even their appearance and manner, the way they are dressed and their movements, echo the two characters from the *commedia dell'arte*. There is no evidence

¹²¹ In his 'Prospero or the Director', Kott argued that Strehler did not in fact make the illusion of the theatre clear; that was his original idea which, instead, only remained in the television version.

of a direct influence of the *commedia degli zanni*¹²² on Shakespeare, but very strong similarities between scenes from the Italian arte scenarios and scenes from *The Tempest* justify, at least, the assumption that Shakespeare shared some common sources with the *commedia* and that by 1611, as Richard Andrews suggests: ‘both *The Tempest* and the scenarios [were] fishing in an existing pool of plot theatergrams which dramatists and practitioners could pick up by a variety of means’.¹²³ In his talk given at the Verona Conference ‘*The Tempest* at 400’ in December 2011, Andrews drew parallels between various scenes from *The Tempest* and arte scenarios, and between the former and scripted Italian plays from the 1580s based on the ‘magical pastoral’ format. To the end of discussing the characters of Trinculo and Stephano and their role in the play, I will only refer to one of the arte scenarios referred to by Andrews, namely Flaminio Scala’s collection of arte ‘scenarios’.¹²⁴ In *The Fourteenth Day*, or *The Fourteenth Item*, as Andrews referred to it, there is a short exchange between Fabritio and Arlecchino that would be echoed in act 3 scene 2 of *The Tempest*. In the Italian scenario,

Fabrizio, ridendo, racconta le miserie de gli amanti, dicendo in uno male d’Amore; in quello Arlecchino vestito da furfante li dà una mentita, e fugge. Fabrizio di nuovo torna a dir mal d’Amore. Arlecchino fa il medesimo, e fugge. Fabrizio caccia mano alla spada, e li corre dietro, e qui finisce l’atto primo.¹²⁵

Fabritio laughingly speaks of the misery of lovers; next Arlecchino enters, dressed as a rogue. He calls Fabritio a liar and runs off.

¹²² In their essay ‘Commedia dell’arte’, Kenneth and Laura Richards explain that the term ‘commedia dell’arte’ derives from eighteenth-century usage. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Italian improvised theatre was known as ‘commedia italiana’, or ‘degli zanni’, or ‘a soggetto’, or ‘mercenaria’. In *A History of Italian Theatre*, ed. Joseph Farrell and Paolo Puppa, p. 102.

¹²³ Richard Andrews ‘*The Tempest* and Italian improvised theatre’, unpublished conference paper, ‘*The Tempest* at 400’, Verona University, 15-17 Dec 2011.

¹²⁴ A scenario was an outline of entrances, exits, and action describing the plot of a play that was pinned to the back of the scenery. It is also known as *canovaccio*.

¹²⁵ Flaminio Scala ‘Il teatro delle favole rappresentative’, in *La Commedia dell’Arte*, ed. Cesare Molinari (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1999), p. 122.

Fabritio continues with his comments on love's miseries. Arlecchino reappears and again calls him a liar and runs. Fabritio draws his sword and chases him, and the first act ends.¹²⁶

In act 3 scene 2 of *The Tempest*, Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban are conspiring against Prospero. Ariel, invisible to them, but visible to the audience interjects the words 'Thou liest'! into the conversation of the conspirators. Scala's collection is from 1611, the same year as the first performance of *The Tempest*. What does this tell us? Scala's collection does not include material that was invented at the moment when the collection was put together, but was put there because it had already been used by professional companies. Therefore, Andrews argues that the repeated and elastic (in that it could be repeated as many times as the actors wanted) 'Thou liest' gag already existed by 1611. 'It existed in a stock of theatre material which transcended linguistic boundaries – an orally transmitted patrimony, available for any clown or any dramatist to use'.¹²⁷ The question is how this patrimony would have been available to Shakespeare. Kenneth and Laura Richards speak of the great reputations that some Italian troupes performing *commedia dell'arte* had acquired by the end of the sixteenth century not only in Italy but also abroad. Touring in various European countries had started in the 1570s and, although troupes did not often reach England, there are traces of their journeys to the island.¹²⁸ Also, they toured extensively in France where some English theatre practitioners may have been and picked up their material. It is very likely, therefore, that Shakespeare had access to this material.

The clearest example of the director's wish to stress the metatheatrical quality of the play is represented by the final scene. When Prospero renounces his magic and breaks his wand, the whole set collapses, revealing how theatrical illusion is created. It is only after the audience's

¹²⁶ Scenarios of the *Commedia dell'arte*: Flaminio Scala's *Il Teatro delle favole rappresentative* transl. Henry F. Salerno (New York: New York University Press, 1967). See also Andrews, 'The Tempest and Italian improvised theatre'.

¹²⁷ Andrews, 'Tempest and Italian improvised theatre'.

¹²⁸ Kenneth and Laura Richards, 'Commedia dell'arte', pp. 115 and 117.

applause that it reassembles, thus implying the need for the public to decree the success of the play, and to allow theatre to live, and to perform its role of educating and entertaining.

Kleber affirms that the set was conceived by Luciano Damiani (one of Strehler's most faithful collaborators) to show theatre as theatre, according to Brecht's lesson, in so far as the island was not presented in naturalistic terms.¹²⁹ Brecht's idea of the *Verfremdungseffekt* can also be traced in the acting: when Prospero tells Miranda the story of their past life, he becomes the typical Brechtian actor, who distances himself from the story that he himself has experienced and narrates it in the third person. In the interview, Lazzarini explains how the actors reached the *Verfremdungseffekt*:

Lui [Strehler] voleva che il personaggio vedesse sè stesso fare il personaggio (...) il teatro epico rappresenta una cosa, però la deve vivere, (...) la vive e la rappresenta; anche *Il giardino dei ciliegi* era così. C'è sempre questo gioco del teatro ... che tu sei sempre al di fuori, vedi il personaggio che 'disse'; (...) Virginia entrava e vedendo il padre che guardava ... "Dove vai Virginia?" 'disse', diceva il padre e Virginia rispondeva "Vado a messa con la signora Sarti, babbo" 'disse Virginia'. Erano personaggi rappresentati quindi acquistano quel tanto di volume in più, di suspense (...) non è recitazione naturalistica ecco e permette lo straniamento. (...) Ora si recita Shakespeare come se fosse ... quello che noi diciamo semplice, moderno, buttato via. No, non è buttato via, è moderno, semplice, ma è sostenuto da un modo di recitare che, ecco, nella nostra *Tempesta* si sente. Molti oggi recitano così, semplice, moderno, buttato via, però poi gli spettacoli non hanno quell'importanza che deve avere uno spettacolo.

He [Strehler] wanted the character to see himself play that character (...) epic theatre represents a thing (...), but it lives it, it lives and

¹²⁹ Kleber, 'Theatrical Continuities in Giorgio Strehler's *The Tempest*', p. 144.

represents it; even *Il giardino dei ciliegi* [*The Cherry Orchard*] is like that. There is always this game of the theatre ... you are outside, you observe the character who 'said'; (...) Virginia entered and seeing her father watch her ... "Where are you going, dad?" 'said Virginia'. They were represented characters so they have volume, suspension (...) it is not naturalistic acting and allows estrangement. (...) Now you play Shakespeare as if he was ... what we call 'simple, modern and thrown away'. No, it is not thrown away, it is modern, simple, but it is sustained by an acting style, that you can feel in our *Tempesta*. Many act like this today, simple, modern, thrown away, but plays do not have the importance that a play should have.

Also in the choice of words, Strehler emphasized the theatrical element. Let us see for example, how Lombardo and Strehler translated a few lines from 3.3, in which Prospero talks to Ariel:

PROSPERO: Bravely the figure of this Harpy hast thou
Perform'd, my Ariel; a grace it had, devouring:
Of my instruction hast thou nothing bated
In what thou hadst to say: so, with good life
And observation strange, my meaner ministers
Their several kinds have done. (3.3.83-88)¹³⁰

PROSPERO: Recitata bene, mio Ariel,
La tua parte di Arpia.
Hai divorato con grazia.
Nelle tue battute non hai dimenticato
Nessuna delle mie indicazioni.
E bene anche gli altri,

¹³⁰ Shakespeare, Lombardo, Strehler, *La Tempesta*, pp. 262-263. In the book Colombo states that Lombardo used the English text from the Shakespeare New Arden edited by Frank Kermode. The text is reproduced in the book edited by Colombo. Therefore, all the quotations I have chosen (in English and in Italian) are from this. I indicate the lines of the English at the end of the quotation.

I miei più umili ministri,
Che hanno recitato anche loro
Con grande naturalezza e raro impegno.¹³¹

At line 86, the words ‘in what thou hadst to say’, become ‘nelle tue battute’ which, if we translate back into English, would be ‘in your lines’; also, the English ‘my meaner ministers / their several kinds have done’ at 87-88, becomes ‘i miei più umili ministri, / che hanno recitato’, where ‘recitare’ is ‘to perform’ in English.

However important the metatheatrical quality of *The Tempest* was to Strehler, he did not overlook other aspects of the play and, differently from the first production, he also analysed the characters and their relationships thoroughly. Carraro-Prospero shows a variety of attitudes: he is a loving father but he can also be quite authoritative, he is a strong man and a powerful magician who can direct the natural elements but, at the same time, he is an ageing man who wishes for peace for the remaining years of his life; he is also the colonizer who, through the tone of voice and body postures and movements, exerts his authority over Caliban and Ariel.



Figure 14: Michele Placido as Caliban and Tino Carraro as Prospero

Strehler’s Caliban perfectly represents the colonized, the victim. The actor, Michele Placido, is painted coal black and, in his movements, he is very grounded, as if to show his instinctive part, his earthiness compared to

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 263.

Lazzarini-Ariel, a light, white-faced Pierrot who hovers on the stage. The choice of a slender woman – disguised as a being without a precise sex – is very appropriate and matches the image we get of Ariel from Prospero's words, 'a spirit too delicate/To act her [Sycorax's] earthy and abhorred commands' (1.2.272-273) where the adjective 'delicate' stands for 'fine', 'exquisite' or 'delightful', 'charming' as opposed to 'earthy' which, as I have already pointed out, perfectly applies to Strehler's Caliban. And later on in the text, Prospero calls Ariel 'bird': 'This was well done, my bird' (4.1.184), a line which may suggest Ariel's ability to fly, Prospero's affection for a pet and, once again, the idea of Ariel as a diminutive being. Lazzarini gives a clear idea of who or what Ariel was for Strehler:

dovevo essere questa cosa che volava e lui [Strehler] aveva in mente una pallina, sai, una pallina da cui escono due mani e due piedini; era molto difficile fare la pallina che vola. (...) Strehler voleva l'aria, voleva l'aria messa dentro nel pino che lui libera, la poesia, l'inconsistenza, la trasparenza.

I had to be this thing that flew and he [Strehler] had a little ball in mind, you know, a little ball from which two little hands and two little feet emerged; it was very difficult to be a little ball that flies. (...) Strehler wanted air, he wanted air captured in a pine, and he frees it: poetry, inconsistency, transparency.

At the end of the show, Ariel is released; in Strehler's production he/she does not go back to the elements, but exits running along the aisle in the stalls. Kott noticed that: 'He is not departing to the cold freedom far away from the world of mortals',¹³² but Strehler's choice is in line with his reading of the text: Ariel goes back to the world, he leaves the theatre as this being is just an actress playing a role.

¹³² Kott, 'Prospero or the Director', p. 122.

3.7 The Translation of The Tempest by Agostino Lombardo and Giorgio Strehler

There would be more to say about Strehler's *La Tempesta*, of which much has been written in Italian but also in English; however, for the purpose of this chapter, in which I want to illustrate how the great Italian director worked, I will only address one other issue, the translation made by Lombardo with the active collaboration of Strehler. New translations of Shakespeare's plays started to appear in Italy in the 1940s due to a renewed interest in the work of the English playwright, after his fortune had declined with the advent of Verism and the flourishing of a bourgeois theatre. The new translations were needed as the shift to the director's theatre, in its first manifestations, claimed the pre-eminence of the text; therefore, the material that directors worked with was not suitable for exploring the text in depth, as these translations had been made for the end-of-nineteenth-century and beginning-of-twentieth-century productions, with their focus on the great characters of Shakespeare's plays. In the letter that Strehler wrote to Lombardo in August 1977, he submitted to the scholar important thoughts on how to make a translation for the stage. He also made suggestions on how to proceed with their work, which he saw as a necessary ongoing collaboration to provide the appropriate scenic translation. He suggested that he and Lombardo worked side by side, with the translator submitting parts of the translated text to the director, which the latter would read and amend where necessary, and then return to the translator for a final revision:

*Noi dovremmo prepararlo insieme questo 'spettacolo-traduzione-spettacolo', almeno nei limiti del possibile.*¹³³

¹³³ Shakespeare, Lombardo and Strehler, *La Tempesta*, p. 7. Strehler's emphasis.

We should prepare this ‘performance-translation-performance’ together, at least within the limits of the possible.

This is, in fact, what they did. As Anzi states in the afterword to the book *La Tempesta: tradotta e messa in scena*, Strehler’s letters are really essays on how to translate for theatre.¹³⁴ The book provides two translations, the one made by Lombardo for the reading, and the other intended for the staging, which was the result of Strehler’s emendations. Sometimes, the DVD of the television broadcast offers some further changes.

The issue of translation raises a number of questions. What are the requisites of a good translation and, more specifically, of a good translation for the stage? It is impossible for me to investigate the matter in detail. The field of Translation Studies is recent (it started in the 1960s), but there are now a number of books and articles that should be analysed carefully. Translation Studies started as a branch of Linguistics. It was only in the 1980s that it began to move away from the simple comparison between two different languages, and expanded its scope to explore the cultures involved in the production and reception of texts and translated texts. And only recently has Translation Studies started ‘to engage and deal with the textual and metatheatrical problems of drama translation together’.¹³⁵ This means that before, problems concerning *performability*, *speakability*, and *playability* were not taken into account. According to such views the translator should not engage with issues concerning the staging of a playtext and problems that may arise with a translation that does not take such issues into account. The idea of seeing a playtext as a literary text, created solely for the page, has been suggested – among others – by Susan Bassnett, according to whom:

Whilst the principal problems facing a director and performers involve the transposing of the verbal into the physical, the principal problems

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 367.

¹³⁵ Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes, ‘Between Words and Silences: Translating for the Stage and the Enlargement of Paradigms’, *Scientia Traductionis*, 7 (2010), 120-133 (p. 121).

facing the translator involve close engagement with the text on page and the need to find solutions for a series of problems that are primarily linguistic ones (...). I would argue that these considerations should take precedence over an abstract, highly individualistic notion of performability, and that the satisfactory solution of such textual difficulties will result in the creation of a target language text that can then be submitted to the pre-performance readings of those who will undertake a performance.¹³⁶

Most recent studies see the translated text as a re-creation, and a work of art in its own right, that should suit the taste of the audience for whom the text will be performed. According to David Johnston translating a play can be compared with writing one because it should work, provoke, and engage the audience as much as any good play.¹³⁷ As I have pointed out, the matter is quite complex, but what interests me here is to investigate a few aspects of how to translate Shakespeare and of the work that Strehler did with Lombardo.

The question we have to ask is: what are the problems connected with rendering a Shakespeare play in a language other than English? A lot is lost in a translated text: the blank verse cannot be kept in Italian, the innumerable puns can only be partially translated, the metaphors are not easily rendered in a translation. Yet Shakespeare has been translated everywhere in the world and knowledge of his works occurs more often via translations than not. The debate on the extent to which Shakespeare can be appreciated in a translation was particularly heated around the 1990s, and was part of the debate on whether Shakespeare's early modern English should be translated into modern English.¹³⁸ Among the voices that defended the value of translations was that of Michael Billington, the theatre

¹³⁶ Susan Bassnett 'Translating for the Theatre: the Case Against Performability', (www.erudit.org) <<http://id.erudit.org/037084ar>> [accessed 3 September 2012].

¹³⁷ In Balduino Fernandes 'Between Words and Silences', p. 125.

¹³⁸ See the introduction to *Shakespeare and the Language of Translation*, ed. Tom Hoenselaars (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004), 17-21.

critic of *The Guardian*, who argued that translations can reveal unsuspected aspects of the text:

aspects of a play we [as an English audience] would overlook shine out more clearly when transmitted through the prism of another language, culture, and history ... I am not trying to suggest that Shakespeare is better in translation. I am simply suggesting that the plays acquire a different resonance and richness – a new patina of meaning – when seen through foreign eyes.¹³⁹

And, as I have already pointed out in the introduction, the same has been expressed by Salman Rushdie:

It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately to the notion that something can also be gained.¹⁴⁰

I think that Billington and Rushdie have a point here. As it is impossible to render all of Shakespeare's language into another, the play, in a translation, may reveal some new facets. It is all the more true when it comes to stage productions in a language other than English. This happens because what cannot be conveyed through words, can be rendered through other instruments on the stage, like settings, music, costumes, lights, the actors' tone of voice, facial expression, gestures and movements, through which a foreign director may offer new insights into the play. For example, if I compare Strehler's *La Tempesta* with the recent production directed by Sir Trevor Nunn (with Ralph Fiennes playing the role of Prospero), which ran at the Royal Haymarket London from 27th August to 29th October 2011, I think that Strehler's Prospero was a more varied and multi-faceted character than Nunn's, despite Fiennes's undoubted acting skills. For me, this proves that the words are only a part – although the most important – of a theatre production and that translating for the stage is not the same as

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁴⁰ *Globe to Globe Festival Programme*, p. 2. The quotation is contained in Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*.

translating for reading. A translation for theatre inevitably implies a scenic translation, by which I mean the non-verbal elements that a director disposes.

Besides the articles I have already referred to which deal with translation of playtexts in general, among the tools I have used to shape my ideas on translation of a Shakespeare play there is a book (*Shakespeare and the Language of Translation*), a DVD (*Playing Shakespeare*),¹⁴¹ and an article ('Learning Shakespeare's Secret Language: The Limits of "Performance Studies"').¹⁴² The book is a collection of essays focusing on various issues related to translating Shakespeare's plays and on adapting them for the stage; in the DVD Associate Director and co-founder of the Royal Shakespeare Company, John Barton, reflects upon the hints that Shakespeare gives to the actors, stage directions that are contained in the words; in the article, John Russell Brown encourages actors and watchers of Shakespeare's plays to recognize the secret language of Shakespeare, again those cues to the actors that are hidden in the text. A common element to all of these sources is the idea that Shakespeare's words, prosody, metaphors, rhythms, and images, all suggest how a line should be spoken, which intention it should convey, and which gesture and which movement it should inspire. If this is true, and I believe it is, the answer to the question: 'Can Shakespeare's plays be translated?' should be in the negative. How can the words, the prosody, the metaphors, the rhythms, the images be kept in a foreign language? In *Shakespeare and the Language of Translation*, theatre translator Jean-Michel Déprats gives his answer in the essay 'Translating Shakespeare's Stagecraft': here he explains how, when translating Shakespeare's plays for performance, one does not just translate for the theatre; one translates theatre, translating words into new words, but also into movement, light and sound. In particular, he draws attention to the

¹⁴¹ *Shakespeare and the Language of Translation*, ed. Tom Hoenselaars (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004); *Playing Shakespeare*, DVD, directed by John Carlaw (Acorn Media, UK: 2010).

¹⁴² John Russell Brown, 'Learning Shakespeare's Secret Language: the Limits of "Performance Studies"', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 24.3 (Aug., 2008), 211-221.

fact that, when translating theatre, one should translate for the muscles, nerves and lungs of the actors. The theatre phrasing is directly linked to the breathing, and the breathing requires pauses and suspensions:

Shakespeare's plays are theatre first and foremost in the sense that they must be spoken, that their breathing, scansion and rhythm give them life. Above all, then, translating Shakespeare for the theatre means listening to the spoken voice. A voice, a way of speaking, or a rhythm will make the translator favour one word, one kind of melody or phrase over any other. The rhythmic pulse, whether it be slow or rapid, flowing or jerky, is what constitutes the tune and inner poetics of each translation. Without the melody, a translation is but a sequence of lifeless words; though they may be accurate, they will have no inner justification and will not work on stage.¹⁴³

Similar thoughts were submitted to Lombardo by Strehler in the letter which he wrote to him in August 1977 and which I mentioned at the beginning of this section. Strehler strongly felt the importance of participating in the translation as the two men had different needs. Lombardo was the philologist who dedicated all his life to studying, understanding, writing on and translating Shakespeare; therefore he wished to provide a translation which would be as faithful to the original text as possible in terms of words and phrases on the one hand, and of sentence length and alternation of verse and prose on the other. Strehler did not differ in terms of providing a detailed and correct understanding of the text through his staging but, of course, was mostly concerned with words and lines that would be 'dicibili' ('speakable'), that could be spoken. However, they agreed that in theatrical speech there should be:

sempre implicito il tono con cui l'attore dovrà pronunciarla, il gesto che dovrà compiere, l'atteggiamento che dovrà assumere, le maschere

¹⁴³ Jean-Michel Déprats, 'Translating Shakespeare's Stagecraft' in Hoenselaars, *Shakespeare and the Language of Translation*, pp. 133-147 (p. 137).

che dovrà indossare, la libertà stessa d'improvvisare che potrà prendersi.¹⁴⁴

always implicit the tone with which the actor should pronounce it, the gesture that he has to make, the attitude he has to assume, the masks he has to wear, the freedom he has to improvise.

A word, therefore, is not just a word, it contains much more than a meaning; it is more than its semantic value, it contains the right tone of voice, the actor's gestures and movements. And, closely related to the quotation above from Déprats, Strehler believed that the most important element was rhythm. But which was the correct rhythm? Lombardo strove to use a rhythm that corresponded to Shakespeare's, but that was not necessarily the appropriate rhythm for Italian actors. Strehler attempted to use the hendecasyllable (typical of Italian poetry), and ended up with hendecasyllables that become *settenarii* (seven-syllable lines), *novenarii* (nine-syllable lines), quick verses alternating with slow ones according to a 'music' which is also:

una musicalità *mia personale*, alla quale non posso sottrarmi e che è legata ad un certo modo di 'interpretare' le scene e le situazioni. Sperando sempre che questo abbia *veramente* a che fare con una possibile realtà del testo di SH [Shakespeare].¹⁴⁵

my own musicality, which I cannot avoid and which is linked to a certain way of 'interpreting' scenes and situations. Always trusting this has *really* got something to do with a possible reality of the text of SH [Shakespeare].

Strehler argued that you either translate line by line, as in English (but this is not always possible), or you search for the right music and rhythm to render the playtext dramatically in the Italian language. His choice fell on

¹⁴⁴ Shakespeare, Lombardo and Strehler, *La Tempesta: tradotta e messa in scena*, p. 372.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 8. Strehler's emphases.

the second possibility which is arguably the only viable one, when it comes to transferring the text into theatrical action, and it seems to me to be all the more appropriate to Shakespeare's texts, which were created for the stage.

When Strehler wrote to Lombardo, he had read Lombardo's translation of act 1. In order to explain to Lombardo what he needed for the staging he used the first three lines of scene 2 in the version that the translator had sent him, amended with his own suggestions. The scene begins with Miranda who, after witnessing the tempest, rushes to her father to ask him to calm the sea:

If by your Art, my dearest father, you have
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.
The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch. (1.2.1-3)

The following is Lombardo's translation of the three lines:

Se con la vostra Arte, mio carissimo padre, avete
Precipitato le acque selvagge in questo tumulto, ora
Acquietatele. Il cielo sembra voler versare fetida pece.¹⁴⁶

Lombardo's translation is faithful to the original in terms of vocabulary and of verse length, a perfect translation for the reading but not always for the speaking. This is how Strehler amended the text according to his needs:

Se con la vostra Arte, / mio carissimo padre (7+7)
Avete gettato / le onde (acque) selvagge / in questo tumulto (6+6+6)
Ora calmatele. / Sembra che il cielo (6+5=11)¹⁴⁷

We can notice that in Strehler's suggestion, the verb 'have' which is in line 1 in the original and was kept there by Lombardo – 'avete' – was moved to line 2 by Strehler for speaking reasons: Strehler argued that

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

Miranda enters the stage when Prospero is there already and, most likely, she runs as she has just witnessed the tempest and the sinking of the ship. This means that she probably speaks excitedly, but this excitement is not rendered in Italian with the ‘avete’ at the end of the line. In his essay Déprats affirms that:

Preserving the oral and sonorous impact of the text requires a translation which is more concerned with movement and rhythm than with intellectual understanding.¹⁴⁸

And also:

A translation which does not lend itself to acting is a misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of Shakespeare’s works.¹⁴⁹

By moving the verb ‘avete’ to line 2, Strehler was preserving ‘the oral and sonorous impact of the text’ and, through the position of that word in the verse, was conveying meaning. Moreover, Lombardo’s translation of the word ‘allay’ with ‘acquietatele’ did not convince the director who preferred ‘calmatele’ in order to avoid two consecutive ‘a’s (‘ora acquietatele’) that do not allow fluent speech. The final version which was actually heard on the stage after the two men reached an agreement was:

Se con la vostra Arte, mio carissimo padre,
Avete gettato le acque selvagge / In questo fragore,
Ora calmatele. Sembra che il cielo / Voglia rovesciare fetida pece¹⁵⁰

A change of word appears in this version: the word ‘tumulto’ becomes ‘fragore’ because the translation for ‘roar’ in line two (sounded and onomatopoeic in English) is not rendered by the word ‘tumulto’ (mute

¹⁴⁸ ‘Translating Shakespeare’s Stagecraft’, p. 138.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 144.

¹⁵⁰ Shakespeare, Lombardo and Strehler, *La Tempesta: tradotta e messa in scena*, p. 145.

and non-onomatopoeic) in Italian; Strehler's suggestion was a word like 'ruggito, fragore, urlo' where the 'r' sound has in Italian the same effect that 'roar' has in English. Moreover, Strehler wished to create a very sonorous, noisy, roaring, frightening tempest with shouts and cries. Miranda's words, therefore, referred to something that had just happened in front of the audience's eyes. This example serves to clarify that a theatre translation is also – should we say primarily? – the interpretation of a work in a musical sense, but I would add that the choices made for the acting, for the spoken word, contribute to the interpretation of the play in an hermeneutic sense. If Strehler managed to reach this objective, it means that he did, in the Italian version, what Shakespeare had done in his own language: he conveyed the meaning through the sound. The two examples (the choice of the word 'fragore' and moving the verb 'avete' from line 1 to line 2) also prove the 'gestural' quality of the spoken word, by which I mean the 'Gestus' in Brechtian terms: a word, a phrase, a verse, the verse length, produce an attitude and create meaning in the same way as the combination of gesture, facial expression and body language do.

The translator and director's task became even more difficult when it comes to Ariel's songs. As Strehler himself stated, these songs could only be paraphrased, and what could not be rendered with a literal version in Italian was provided with a musical equivalent. Lombardo's translation of 'Full fadom five thy father lies'¹⁵¹ was rather faithful as to the choice of words and to the verse length.

Full fadom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
Buth doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell. (1.2.400-405)

¹⁵¹ Usually we find 'fathom', but in the text edited by Colombo 'fadom' is given.

A cinque tese sott'acqua tuo padre giace.
 Le sue ossa sono già corallo,
 Quelli che erano i suoi occhi sono perle.
 Tutto ciò che di lui deve perire
 Subisce un mutamento marino
 In qualcosa di ricco e strano.
 Ninfe del mare ad ogni ora
 Suonano per lui la campana a morto.¹⁵²

Clearly he could not maintain the rhyme of the original text (A-B-A-B-C-C-D) and provide the appropriate rhythm in Italian. According to Strehler, this could be rendered through much shorter lines. So, the version for the staging was:

A cinque tese sott'acqua / Tuo padre giace.
 Già corallo / Son le sue ossa
 Ed i suoi occhi / Perle.
 Tutto ciò che di lui / Deve perire
 Subisce una metamorfosi marina
 In qualche cosa / Di ricco e di strano.
 Ad ogni ora / Le ninfe del mare
 Una campana / fanno rintoccare.¹⁵³

In his essay, Déprats argues that 'translating for the theatre does not mean making the text easier to act and speak by breaking it into sections, smoothing out its roughness or pruning its metaphors', and that 'we must come back to a certain degree of literalness, going against one of the most current notions which claims that being literal is the reverse of being exact' as 'in Shakespearian translation, being literal is a better way of preserving

¹⁵² Shakespeare, Lombardo and Strehler, *La Tempesta: tradotta e messa in scena*, p. 145.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 177. Further little changes were made for the television broadcast directed in 1981 by Claudio Battistoni. Lines seem to be short in that version too, while the order of some words was changed.

the form, which is a source of theatrical energy'.¹⁵⁴ I do not think that anyone would object to these ideas, but it is self-evident that a literal translation is not always viable, as two different linguistic systems will never match. Translation is work in progress, it depends on a number of factors, and a perfect, immutable translation will never be provided. Every time a translator takes up a translation, he makes choices and decides to what extent literalness is possible and advisable. However, in theatre translation, more important than being literal, for me, is trying to be faithful to the spirit of the play, of the scene, of the word.

I would like to finish this excursus on the subject of translation by writing a few words on a production of *Midsummer Night's Dream* by the Elfo company, a well-known company based in Milan. Their *Sogno di una notte di mezza estate* has become a cult on the Milanese stage; the first version dates back to the 1980s, after which three more followed. There are differences among the four versions, but the scene of the mechanicals has always remained the same. The director, Elio De Capitani, made a rather extreme choice: he deleted parts of the original text and added some lines and puns of his own. For some people this is anathema, but I do not agree because, in my opinion, De Capitani kept the 'theatrical energy' of this scene which, in Shakespeare's time, would have aroused laughter in the audience. De Capitani's rendering may be somewhat exaggerated, but certainly it makes people laugh and, as in the original, it is very much focused on the misunderstanding of words among the characters, in particular between Quince and Bottom. I think that, on the stage, this conveys the physical reality of the original text better than a more literal translation. Once again I want to stress that the subject of translation is a complex one. I have investigated it partially in this section, focusing on the work done by Strehler and Lombardo and trying to offer a few personal thoughts.

¹⁵⁴ Déprats, 'Translating Shakespeare's Stagecraft', pp. 144-145.

When considering the staging of a play, a question comes to mind: is the staging a means by which the playtext becomes theatrical action, or is it an autonomous creation which, among other elements, needs the text to come to life? In the second case we would speak of ‘scenic writing’, thus implying that the staging acquires dramaturgical characteristics and the director, the creator of the staging, becomes the ‘author’ of the new artwork.¹⁵⁵ There is no single answer to the question. Different directors make different choices. Good theatre can be a production that, as far as possible, follows the cues contained in the playtext, or one that uses it as a source of inspiration to create something new. Yet, even in the case of a director like Strehler, whose main wish was that of restoring Shakespeare’s original texts, his interpretation was inevitably filtered through the lens of his sensitivity, of his personality, and of the historical time in which he lived. Therefore, the audience of *La Tempesta* directed by Strehler did not see Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, but Strehler’s interpretation of the playtext. Bene – to whom I will dedicate a section of chapter 4 of my thesis – said: ‘Io sono Shakespeare’ (‘I am Shakespeare’)¹⁵⁶. Bene was a narcissist and a self-centred man but, by this phrase, he meant that what a director can offer when he stages Shakespeare’s plays is Shakespeare as he interprets him and his work, that is by replacing Shakespeare’s sensitivity, knowledge and historical background with his own. Paradoxically – we could say – by becoming him.

Directing in Italy was born primarily as a reaction to the substantial alterations of the texts made by the Great Actors. Truthfulness to the text was the first directors’ main aim. Therefore, in theory at least, they deprived

¹⁵⁵ I will write extensively about ‘scenic writing’ in the next chapter.

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Enrico Baiardo and Roberto Trovato, *Un classico del rifacimento: l’Amleto di Carmelo Bene*, p. 21.

themselves of artistic qualities. This is how Strehler expressed these thoughts:

Nel teatro esiste un solo artista: l'autore del testo drammatico. Esiste una sola vocazione: quella del poeta. Esiste una sola realtà drammatica: il testo. Tutto il resto – il complesso spettacolare, questo complesso non sostituibile, fondamentale perché il teatro si crei ed il testo non resti letteratura – è un problema di 'mestiere', non più di arte.¹⁵⁷

In theatre there is only one artist: the author of the dramatic text. There is only one vocation: that of the poet. There is only one dramatic reality: the text. All the rest – the spectacle, the staging that is irreplaceable, and fundamental to the creation of theatre and to prevent the text from remaining literature – is a 'job', not itself an art.

Strehler as the servant of the poet, he seems to say. But he also affirmed that:

L'interpretazione di un'opera di teatro è – per me – un'operazione fondamentalmente critica (e per 'critica' sarebbe ora (...) di finire di considerarla solo (...) lo studio pedante di un testo e non accettare invece il termine di critica come implicante anche una larga misura di intuizioni, di slancio emotivo, di amorevole rapporto del cuore (...).)¹⁵⁸

The interpretation of a work of theatre is – for me – a fundamentally critical operation (and by 'critical', the time has come (...) to stop considering it only (...) the pedantic study of the text, and not accepting the definition of criticism as also implying the notion of intuition, of emotional impulse, of the loving relationship of the heart (...).)

¹⁵⁷ Strehler, *Per un teatro umano*, p. 162.

¹⁵⁸ Strehler, *Shakespeare, Goldoni, Brecht*, p. 16.

In the second quote Strehler gives a clear definition of critical directing which, according to Alonge: ‘legge e interpretata con sensibilità e intelligenza (e fervore politico di sinistra) i testi della drammaturgia tradizionale’ (‘reads and interprets the texts of traditional dramaturgy with sensitivity and intelligence [and with left-wing fervour]’).¹⁵⁹ Strehler was certainly well aware of the director’s responsibility, as it is through the director’s work that an audience not familiar with the play gets knowledge of a text or of a playwright; however, he also knew well that directing is not the simple transference of a text from the page to the stage, nor the simple philological interpretation of the words; it implies the director’s creativity. Creativity, ‘intuition’, ‘emotional impulse’, ‘loving relationship of the heart’ – along with the thorough study of the text – are the individual qualities that lead each director to offer his own interpretation of Shakespeare’s words and that led Shakespeare himself to rearrange already-existing materials in his own personal way.

Everything I have written so far is as valid today as it was in the years preceding and following the Second World War when directing was born in Italy. Not much has changed in terms of directing either in Italy or in other countries. Certainly there have been variations; there have been experimentations, there has been a return to the actor’s theatre in Italy in the mid-1960s of which I will write extensively in chapter 4, but directing as it was intended by Strehler and by the other first directors has not really changed since. Therefore, it is not easy for us to understand how innovative those ideas were when men like Strehler, Squarzina, or Visconti directed their first plays. The work that Strehler did in order to explore Shakespeare’s plays from a textual and critical point of view, working side by side with translators and critics, allowed him to stage productions that encompassed all the elements of the text in an organic and harmonious unity. The Great Actors filled the stage with their mere presence, with their words and with their gestures and, therefore, offered memorable interpretations of some of Shakespeare’s characters to the detriment of the

¹⁵⁹ Alonge, *Il teatro dei registi*, p. 119.

play as a whole. Strehler offered stagings of Shakespeare's plays that considered the play in its entirety, building a coherent system of images corresponding to his interpretation of the text. His work on *The Tempest* still ranks among the best productions of a Shakespeare play in Italy and beyond. In a review by Michael Billington of Trevor Nunn's already-mentioned production of *The Tempest* at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in London (from 27th August to 29th October 2011), the critic still refers to Strehler's – along with Brook's and Jonathan Miller's – affirming that Nunn's work did not offer any startling revelations as those had already done.¹⁶⁰

I wish to conclude with Lombardo's words:

(...) illuminando come nessun altro prima di lui aveva fatto molti aspetti dell'arte shakespeariana, il suo [riferito a Strehler] lavoro si configura come un momento decisivo, punto d'arrivo e insieme di partenza, dell'intera esperienza italiana. Senza Strehler, invero, il rapporto italiano con Shakespeare sarebbe stato assai più povero, e non soltanto sul palcoscenico.¹⁶¹

(...) giving light as no one had done before him to Shakespeare's art, [Strehler's] work constitutes the decisive moment, arrival and also starting point, of the entire Italian experience. Without Strehler, indeed, the Italian relationship with Shakespeare would have been much poorer, and not only on the stage.

After the writer (Manzoni), the composer (Verdi), the actors (Rossi, Salvini, and Ristori), it is now a director who gives a fundamental contribution to reveal new aspects of Shakespeare's art and to make them known to a wide public. As I pointed out in the introduction, the story I am telling is a story of love for the English playwright, a story that – in the course of time – has taken different and varied ways to write itself. Certainly, the work that the protagonists of what is now called the Nuovo

¹⁶⁰ Michael Billington, 'The Tempest' - Review, *The Guardian*, 7 September 2011.

¹⁶¹ Lombardo, *Strehler e Shakespeare*, p. 11.

Teatro (New Theatre) did with Shakespeare's texts, constitutes another significant piece of this story, and will be the content of the fourth chapter of my journey.

4. Shakespeare in the New Theatre (1959-1998)

The staging of Shakespeare's plays according to the intentions and modes of the director's theatre was strictly connected to the birth and the development of the civic public theatres in Italy. Very different mises-en-scène, that can be included in what came to be known as the New Theatre, and whose beginnings date back to the end of the 1950s, developed in alternative spaces – especially in the so-called Roman *cantine* (cellars) – completely separate from the circuit of the official theatre. The Roman *cantine* were underground venues, spaces like garages, basements, old warehouses, where young artists researched new forms of theatre and experimented with them. They were self-financed groups, whose main interest was to have a place where they could carry out a theatrical project that departed from the rules and conventions of mainstream theatre.

In the first section of this chapter I will focus on the birth and development of these new groups, and will give a general overview of their ideas and of their first stagings. I will also show how to a new kind of theatre corresponded a new idea of criticism, and how this second theatrical revolution (after the revolution of the directors) was supported by a group of dissident critics. I will finish the first section of the chapter illustrating the steps that led to the organization of the *Convegno di Ivrea*, where theatre practitioners, critics, and various artists met to discuss their objectives and achievements. In the second and third section of the chapter I will deal with stagings of Shakespeare's plays by two of the protagonists of the *Convegno di Ivrea*: de Berardinis and Bene. Distancing themselves from the idea of the director and the actor as faithful interpreters of Shakespeare's texts, they claimed the autonomy of the staging from playwriting and, though in very different forms, fostered a return to the actor's theatre.

4.1 The New Theatre

In 1970 director Mario Ricci presented his *Re Lear da un'idea di gran teatro di William Shakespeare* at the festival for experimental companies organized within the Venice Biennale Festival.¹ The production was very well received, and can be considered as the point of arrival of a long process of transformation of theatre that had begun at the end of the 1950s and that, besides Ricci, had involved many other young theatre practitioners.² The first unusual thing about this production was the fact that, when rehearsal started, the title was the only thing that was known to the actors. There was no script for them, and there were no production notes, as the show had to be created on the stage. Ricci's theatre was a kind of laboratory, where all the members of the company shared in the various phases of the staging. Isabella Imperiali hints at the all-encompassing role of the actors who were expected to create their theatre and be carpenters, tailors, and makeup artists. And she reports Ricci's own words:

nella fase di costruzione e realizzazione dell'oggetto si arriva a capirlo, a conoscerlo nella sua dinamica e quindi a sapere quello che quell'oggetto può fare e come lo si può muovere.³

While building and creating an object you get to understand it, to know it in its dynamics, and to know what that object can do and how you can move it.

Of Shakespeare's plot only the nucleus remained, what for Ricci were the fundamental moments – the division of the reign, the battle, and death – whose atmosphere he wanted to re-create. He did not see *King Lear* as a

¹ Ricci (born in 1932) was a painter and a sculptor before engaging himself with theatre. He returned to Italy in 1962 after living in Paris and in Stockholm, where he worked with Michael Meschke's *Marionetteater*.

² A detailed analysis of the production can be found in Sonia Bellavia, *L'ombra di Lear: il 'Re Lear' di Shakespeare e il Teatro Italiano (1858-1885)*, pp. 242-259. I have relied on her analysis for my discussion.

³ Isabella Imperiali, 'Shakespeare e l'avanguardia in Italia', in *Studi Inglesi* (Baria: Adriatica, 1975), 425-463 (p. 451).

text, but as a 'poetical intuition',⁴ which he wanted to transform into images on the stage, reducing it to the minimum. The actors moved on the stage like puppets, and the lines from Shakespeare's text (or what remained of them, as the production was only one hour and fifteen minutes long) were delivered through a tape-recorder. Ricci also made use of cinema, but he did not use a screen. The actors, wearing white robes, placed themselves in a line, so as to create a kind of cinema screen, on which images of the rehearsals of the play were projected. The metatheatrical quality was also achieved through the use of a toy theatre, that was brought onto the stage by Lear, where a part of the tragedy took place. The destruction of the theatre marked the beginning of Lear's madness. At this point the noise of the tempest started. The roar of the sea and the blowing of the wind were rhythmically accompanied by Lear, hitting a hammer on an anvil. At the same time images of girls, imitating the gestures and facial expression of lunatics, were shown on the 'screen'. In the last scene the characters played a game called *schiaacciaquindici* (press fifteen). On eight of the fifteen squares that were assembled at the back of the stage, parts of Lear's body were drawn. The king tried in vain to re-create his image, but when he had nearly finished his drawing, this was erased by the other characters, an act symbolizing Lear's death. Ricci's aim was not that of telling the story of *King Lear* (although he said that the audience were able to understand it), but to show signs on the stage, which it was the audience's task to interpret. The text was no longer the 'protagonist', but became just one of the elements of the production. Similarly, the actors lost their dominant role and were reduced to being some kind of puppets. The production was one of the best achievements of the so-called New Theatre, a kind of theatre which was born primarily in opposition to the director's theatre.

In *La nascita del Nuovo Teatro in Italia* Daniela Visone traces the birth of the New Theatre in the year 1959, when three plays were put on stage in Rome: Beckett's *Aspettando Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*) directed by Carlo Quartucci; Camus's *Caligola* (*Caligula*) by Alberto Ruggiero, in

⁴ Ibid., p. 252.

which Bene made his debut as an actor; and Ruzante's *La Moscheta* by Claudio Remondi.⁵ Quartucci, Remondi and – most of all – Bene would soon become some of the protagonists of the Italian theatrical renewal of the 1960s.⁶ Although these three figures were very different in their training and in their ideas about the staging of a play, they certainly shared in the desire to oppose institutional theatre (by which I mean publicly funded theatres and their artistic choices), and to explore new ways of dealing with a playtext – when they used one! Visone remarks that phenomena of a theatrical revolution also took place outside Italy in the same year: in Poland Jerzy Grotowski set up his *Teatr 13 Rzedov* renamed *Teatr Laboratorium* in 1965; Tadeus Kantor published the theoretical manifesto *The Informal Theatre*; the Living Theatre opened the Fourteenth Street Theatre in New York, where, in June, they premièred *The Connection*; Ronnie Davis founded the San Francisco Mime Troupe; and painter Allan Kaprov presented the first *happening* at the Reuben Gallery of New York.⁷ As for the Italian stage, in the introduction to Visone's book, Lorenzo Mango points out two other significant years: 1965, when the *intenzione drammatica* (dramatic intention) of the first experimental attempts became clear; and 1967, the year of the *Convegno di Ivrea*, when a number of artists – mainly theatre people but not exclusively – and critics met with the aim to gather the various theatrical experiences that, on an individual basis, had been developed in the previous years, and tried to shape them into a proper movement.⁸

⁵ Visone, *La Nascita del Nuovo Teatro in Italia: 1959-1967*, p. 19. It is interesting to notice that the first two plays were recent: *Waiting for Godot* was written in French between 1948 and 1949 and premièred in Paris on 5 January 1953, while the English-language première was on 3 August 1955. *Caligula* was begun in 1938 and was first performed in 1945. *La Moscheta*, instead, was written in 1529.

⁶ Quartucci (born in 1938) is Sicilian; he moved to Rome where he attended university and he staged his *Aspettando Godot* with some fellow students. Remondi (born in 1927) was not linked to the academic world. He was self-taught; he saw all the important plays staged in Rome and read about theatre. Bene (1937-2002) was an actor, director and screenwriter. He is now considered one of the most versatile artists of the world theatre history. The third section of this chapter is dedicated to him and to his engagement with Shakespeare's plays.

⁷ Visone, *La nascita del Nuovo Teatro in Italia*, p. 25.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

But what was the New Theatre, and what were the causes that led to attempt a complete renewal of theatre in Italy? After the theatrical revolution led by the first Italian directors – Strehler in particular – at the end of World War Two, which meant the shift of the Italian theatre from the actor's to the director's theatre, gradually the innovative impulse slowed down until it came to a standstill. Great productions could still be seen, but research and experimentation in terms of playwriting and of staging were almost completely neglected. This was due to various factors: a lack of generational turnover at the head of the Italian public theatres, with the artistic directors well anchored in their positions; the policy of state subsidies given according to the extent to which theatres complied with the ideologies of the government, which made it safer not to risk staging texts that were too challenging for the establishment; and a slump in the sale of tickets, mainly due to competition coming from television, that made economic and organizational problems a priority, thus neglecting the artistic requests of directors, authors, and actors.⁹ Therefore, the renewal, or the attempt at a renewal, developed far from the official theatre circuit. The protagonists were a group of very young artists who did not identify themselves with the reality, the policy, or the artistic choices of the public theatres, and completely relied on their scarce financial possibilities to stage their plays. They were not born as a movement. They experimented in different ways and often they did not know one another. It would be too long and not relevant to the purpose of my research to analyse their work in detail, but I will try to highlight some trends of their investigation within a wider context of international experimentation, in order to have the necessary tools to analyse the most important Shakespearean productions of the Italian New Theatre.

The starting point of their research was certainly opposition to the director's theatre. As I have extensively illustrated in the previous chapter, directing, as it had been intended by the first Italian directors after World War Two, was the instrument to give dignity to the playtexts after they had

⁹ De Marinis, *Il Nuovo Teatro: 1947-1970*, p. 152.

been severely cut and altered by the Great Actors. Therefore, directing was aimed to interpret the texts in their entirety, and to give them scenic form on the stage. Strehler considered himself at the service of the text, and a commitment to authenticity was his main aim, as he believed that the word was predominant over all the other elements that make a staging. That is the first assumption that was questioned by the young artists. In place of a very precise hierarchy at the top of which was the word, the New Theatre fostered a horizontal structure in which word – in terms of written text –, acting, scenic space, objects and props, music, costumes, and lights have the same relevance, and should all be part of what critic Giuseppe Bartolucci, years later, defined as ‘scenic writing’, which also became the title of a book.¹⁰ Analysing the two words it can be understood that they were in opposition to the idea of playwriting, the writing of a text, transformed into theatrical action at a later time. Scenic writing, instead, does not make any distinction between text and staging; indeed, it does not necessarily imply the presence of a text. As Visone puts it:

Si tratta di un termine vitale per leggere i nuovi spettacoli, costituiti da un’organizzazione di segni ‘materiali’ indipendente dalla presenza di un testo.¹¹

It is a vital term to read the new performances, constituted by an organization of ‘material’ signs, independent of the presence of a text.

Thus, the performance as a narration was no longer needed. It was not the development of a story that counted, but the presence of the material signs on the stage. Far from being the tools to interpret a text and to transmit it to the audience, the signs acquired their meaning from their own existence

¹⁰ Giuseppe Bartolucci (1923-1996) was an essayist and theatre critic. His role in the development of the New Theatre was fundamental; he was an acute observer who, differently from the great majority of Italian critics in that period, supported the enterprises of the young artists and contributed significantly to spread their ideas; he was also one of the promoters of the Ivrea conference. The book I mentioned is: Bartolucci, *La scrittura scenica*.

¹¹ Visone, *La nascita del Nuovo Teatro in Italia*, p. 43.

and in the relationships that they established with one another. In other words, they should be considered in their semiological quality, as signifiers and not as signified. The absence of a narrative logic, even if in the presence of a text, makes the understanding of the performance more ambiguous; but it was not ambiguity that the exponents of the New Theatre were looking for. They wanted their productions to encourage different reactions in the audience and to be open to different interpretations. A few years later Umberto Eco used the phrase ‘opera aperta’ (‘open work’) in his book *Opera aperta*, in which he maintains that:

(...) un’opera d’arte, forma compiuta e *chiusa* nella sua perfezione di organismo perfettamente calibrato, è altresì *aperta*, possibilità di essere interpretata in mille modi diversi senza che la sua irriproducibile singolarità ne risulti alterata.¹²

(...) an artwork, complete and *sealed* in its perfection as a perfectly balanced organism, is also *open*, as it can be interpreted in a thousand different ways without its irreproducible individuality being altered.

Undoubtedly it is as open structures that Quartucci, Bene, Ricci and Leo de Berardinis saw their shows.¹³ In the case of Quartucci and Ricci, at least, the two directors wanted to encourage the audience to be active and to reflect upon the signs that they saw on the stage. It seems just the opposite of the aim of directors like Strehler. Far from acting as facilitators between the text and the audience, these young men stepped out of a priest-like role for the director who explains, and preferred to show, in order to give the audience the possibility of freely interpreting the performances. They did not tell a story, but they showed signs. This tendency was particularly evident in the work of Ricci, in whose first very visual stagings he did not even include the presence of the actor. In doing so he showed strong links to the Futurist

¹² Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta* (Milano: Bompiani, 1962), p. 34. Author’s emphases.

¹³ De Berardinis (1939-2008) was an actor and director. He became one of the most important representatives of the Italian experimental theatre. He worked extensively with Shakespeare’s plays, some of which I will deal with in the second section of this chapter.

theatre and to the scenic revolution of Enrico Prampolini who, starting from Craig's idea of the *Über-marionette*, went even further excluding not only the actor, but also the puppet.¹⁴ Considering theatre as a work of art, 'which neither pretended to be, nor aimed to be an imitation of life',¹⁵ Craig saw the actor as an obstacle, which he wanted to substitute with the *Über-marionette*, 'a figure that surpasses the puppet in beauty and expressivity – not an imitation of man but the symbol of man, and its role is to convey eternal, spiritual values'.¹⁶ Instead Ricci's first productions were a display of objects and a study of the relations existing among them. Only with his *Varietà* (*Variety*), staged in 1965, did he introduce the figure of the actor. Yet the actor became an object, devoid of any psychological characterization, and whose movements and gestures were very stylized and geometrical.

Fundamental for the protagonists of the theatrical renewal was also the elimination of the separation between stage and audience. In opposition to the idea of a division of the theatre in two, the New Theatre sought a much closer contact between actors and spectators, an element that was present from the beginning. Quartucci, Remondi, and Ricci worked on various possibilities to eliminate the invisible wall that separates the stage from the audience, with the objective of a direct participation of the latter in the development of the performance. Such practices also characterized the performances staged by the Living Theatre. Yet, as De Marinis rightly points out, we cannot speak of an influence of the American group on the beginnings of Italian experimental theatre, as the Living Theatre's first stagings date back to 1959, and they came to Italy for the first time in

¹⁴ Enrico Prampolini (1894-1956) was an Italian painter, sculptor and scenographer, who, with his antinaturalistic stage settings, played an important role within the theatrical revolution advocated by the Futurists. Edward Gordon Craig (1862-1966) was an English modernist theatre practitioner, who worked as an actor, director and scenic designer, and wrote a number of essays on theatre.

¹⁵ Irène Eynat (1980) 'Gordon Craig, the *Über-marionette*, and the Dresden Theatre', *Theatre Research International*, 5.3 (1980) 171-193 (pp. 177-178).

¹⁶ Ibid.

1961.¹⁷ However, from 1961, the Italian experimental theatre acquired a more European and extra-European dimension. The arrival of the Living Theatre was not a success with the public, but surely did not go unnoticed by the critics, and also represented a vehicle to introduce Artaud's ideas on the Theatre of Cruelty in Italy. Moreover, from 1962 circulation of essays on the European theatre began.¹⁸

The idea of involving the audience in the development of the performance takes us back to Shakespeare's time. The elimination of the *fourth wall* comes precisely from that tradition. Elizabethan theatre practices were certainly known to the Italian experimentalists, as will be clear from some statements by de Berardinis and Bene which I will discuss in the next two sections of the chapter. Today the arrangement of the so-called *teatro all'italiana* and of most theatres in Italy and outside Italy makes the experience of watching a play quite passive, contrary to what the members of the New Theatre wished and to the experience of theatre-going in Shakespeare's times, when actors and audience shared the same space.¹⁹ This allowed a close relationship between performers and spectators with the former often involving the latter in the performance itself. In *A Short History of English Renaissance Drama* Hackett quotes from *The Tempest* where 'Prospero turns a masque within the play into a metaphor for the evanescence of human existence, and then looks outward with self-conscious irony to the Globe playhouse as a microcosm of the whole world in its mutability and mortality':²⁰

Like the baseless fabric of this vision –

The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,

¹⁷ On 13 and 14 June 1961, they presented *The Connection* by Jack Gelber and *Many Loves* by William Carlos Williams at Rome Teatro Club. De Marinis, *Il Nuovo Teatro*, p. 161.

¹⁸ Visone mentions, for example, Ferruccio Marotti's essay on Gordon Craig, 'Gordon Craig', in Visone, *La nascita del Nuovo Teatro in Italia*, p. 35.

¹⁹ The *teatro all'italiana* is constructed in the shape of a horseshoe or rounded auditorium in several tiers facing the stage, from which it is divided by an arch – the proscenium – which supports the curtain.

²⁰ Helen Hackett, *A Short History of English Renaissance Drama* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), p. 98.

The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind (4.1.151-156).²¹

Prospero addresses the audience directly and, in doing so, makes the audience not just witnesses of the events unravelling in front of them, but also sharers in the events to make a life experience. Similar approaches were advocated by the experimentalists of the 1960s. In their case, the involvement of the audience in the performance also had a political underpinning. It was a clear challenge to the director's theatre, in which the audience were passive recipients of the 'truth' provided by the director. On the other hand, it cannot be overlooked that the experimental research of the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s with its antinaturalistic staging did not make understanding easy. As a matter of fact, in most cases, the productions were followed by a number of experts, who knew well what they were going to see. The *cantine* were clubs that required the visitors to be members, thus becoming cultural circles mainly attended by intellectuals. It was in the second half of the 1960s that Italian theatre really became socially and politically oriented. In particular, we can mention the work of Dario Fo (born 1926) who, in 1968, founded a theatrical movement of the revolutionary left called *La Comunità* (*The Community*). This movement supported students and activists in many cities and its performances were 'actual political manifestations, including speeches, debates and passing the hat for incarcerated comrades'.²² Also the work of Quartucci became much more socially and politically oriented, and community theatres were created in many parts of the Italian peninsula.

The experimentations of the young artists did not go unnoticed by some critics, Giuseppe Bartolucci and Franco Quadri in particular, who

²¹ Ibid.

²² Mario Prosperi, 'Contemporary Italian Theatre', *The Drama Review: TDR*, 22, 1, *Italian Theatre Issue* (Mar.1978), 17-32 (p. 28).

realized that something new was happening in the panorama of Italian theatre.²³ Although they knew that much of the work was still immature, they believed that such tendencies contained the seeds of a renewal of Italian theatre; therefore, they became strenuous supporters of the new trends, and worked to give them a theoretical dimension. For example, after the meeting among poets, fiction writers, playwrights, and critics belonging to the *Gruppo 63* that took place in Palermo from the third to the eighth October 1963, Bartolucci pointed out the difference existing between this group and their theatrical experimentation, based on verbal subversion, and the theatrical experiments carried out by men like Quartucci and Ricci. The theatre of the *Gruppo 63* was characterised by the pre-eminence of the word (disintegrated and demoted), while the interest of the latter lay primarily not in the subversion of words, but in the creation of a completely new scenic language that would be specifically theatrical.²⁴ Comparing Giorgio Manganelli's *Iperipotesi* (*Hyperhypotheses*) with any of Ricci's works, for example, will help understand what Bartolucci means. Manganelli's *Iperipotesi* was one of the 11 one-act plays that were presented in Palermo.²⁵ There is only one character, a lecturer who addresses the public. There is no scenery. In fact the curtain is not even raised. The play is just a monologue given by the lecturer, which starts:

Signori e signore, l'importante è proporre delle ipotesi. Nessuna attività è più nobile di questa, più degna dell'uomo. In primo luogo, in qualsivoglia condizione, senza pausa elaborare ipotesi; in secondo luogo, confortarle di documenti, indizi, argomenti, fenomeni,

²³ Franco Quadri (1936-2011) was Italy's most influential theatre critic. He was also a publisher, translator, and essayist. As we will see, he played a fundamental role in the promotion of the New Theatre in Italy.

²⁴ Visone, *La nascita del Nuovo Teatro in Italia*, p. 40.

²⁵ The list of the plays can be found in *Gruppo 63: l'Antologia*, ed. Nanni Balestrini and Alfredo Giuliani (Torino: Testo & Immagine: 2002), 260-262 (p. 260). Giorgio Manganelli (1922-1990) was a journalist, writer, translator, and literary critic. He translated Edgar Allan Poe's complete stories and authors like T. S. Eliot, Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson, George Gordon Byron, and others. He was one of the best-known *neoavanguardisti*, and a member of *Gruppo 63*, although he thought of himself as an outsider.

epifenomei (...). Ipotizzare è sano, relaxing (...) è un'attività euforica ed euforizzante, da week-end, come fondare religioni, concepire generali, merendare con consanguinei (...).²⁶

Ladies and Gentlemen, the important thing is to suggest hypotheses. No other activity is nobler, worthier of man than this. Firstly, in whatever condition, with no pause, [it is important] to formulate hypotheses; secondly, [it is important] to support them with documents, clues, arguments, phenomena, epiphenomena (...). Speculating is healthy, relaxing (...) it is an inspiring and inspired activity, a weekend activity, like founding religions, conceiving generals, having a snack with blood relations (...).

The monologue is long (three pages in the anthology) and is only interrupted by various noises, like the sound of other voices, gunshots, the noise of rain, whistles, and so on. On the other hand Ricci's first stagings did not include any human presence or any form of spoken word. *Movimento 1 e 2* (*Movement 1 and 2*) was a performance (we could also define it as a sketch) that lasted thirty minutes, whose 'protagonists' were six little papier-mâché men's heads, that recalled De Chirico's mannequins. The little heads were aligned at the back of the stage. Another little head, a woman's, was placed in front of the others. The heads were held by an invisible black thread that lifted them in order to make them turn. Visone gives a detailed description of this production, but I do not think I need to go into details in order to highlight the difference between these two 'experiments'.²⁷ If in the first case the protagonists of the sketch were still words interpolated with sounds, in the second Ricci does without words at all, as his only interest was that of offering to the public a series of images to decode. Yet, even within the context of the New Theatre, Bartolucci highlighted the presence of two different directorial trends: a more moderate one to which Quartucci belonged, where the starting point of the

²⁶ Giorgio Manganelli, 'Iperipotesi', in *Gruppo 63: l'Antologia*, pp. 260-262 (p. 260).

²⁷ Visone, *La nascita del Nuovo Teatro in Italia*, pp. 48-49.

experimentation was still the text, and a more radical one – of which Ricci, Bene and de Berardinis, though with very different modes, became the major representatives – that replaced the binomial playwriting and staging, with a unique writing, the scenic writing.²⁸

The discussion about the New Theatre was conducted on the pages of the theatre magazine *Sipario* (*Curtain*), of which Quadri became editor in 1962.²⁹ The magazine followed the development of the New Theatre closely, and also became a vehicle to spread ideas coming from abroad into Italy. In particular, between 1964 and 1965, it published a number of articles on Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and on various theatrical phenomena that showed signs of his influence, like the work of Peter Brook, Jean Genet, Jerzy Grotowski, the Living Theatre – as I said before – , and the Happening. The ideas that Artaud had expressed in his *Le Théâtre et son Double* (*The Theatre and Its Double*), published in 1938, but which he had not put into practice, were applied, decades later, both in Europe and in America, and were also traceable in the work of the Italian experimentalists.³⁰ In 1966 the first conference on the work of Artaud took place at the Parma XIV Festival Universitario (University Festival). Among the scholars and theatre men invited to the conference was Jacques Derrida, who, for the first time, tried to codify the Theatre of Cruelty. His speech can be summarized as follows. Firstly, the Theatre of Cruelty is inclusive of all forms of art, and of everything which constitutes or is characteristic of art in general; therefore, music, dance, visual, sonic images, volume, depth, are all present on the stage. Secondly, the theatre of Cruelty does not give pre-eminence to the word over the other components of the staging. Thirdly, in the Theatre of Cruelty the audience, far from just witnessing the theatrical event, joins in the artistic creation.³¹ The link between Artaud and what I have been saying so far about the Italian New Theatre is clear.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

²⁹ Also Bartolucci became a constant presence on the pages of the magazine with his articles and his various surveys on the state of the Italian theatre.

³⁰ Artaud's *Il teatro e il suo doppio* was published in Italy by Einaudi in 1968.

³¹ In Visone, *La nascita del Nuovo Teatro in Italia*, p. 62.

Besides hosting the discussion about the New Theatre, *Sipario* also hosted the discussion about a New Criticism. Men like Bartolucci and Quadri, but also Corrado Augias, Ettore Capriolo and Edoardo Fadini,³² believed that critics should acquire the necessary technical tools to be able to understand the new theatrical trends, and make them clear to the audience. In the issues of March, April and June 1967 the magazine published a survey, conducted by Bartolucci, entitled ‘Situazione della critica’ (‘The Situation of Criticism’),³³ where foreign and Italian critics were interviewed and expressed their ideas on the current situation of theatre criticism and on the skills that a critic of the New Theatre should have. Reading the various interviews a big difference between the role of critics in England and in Italy stands out. As Martin Esslin points out, theatre criticism in England in the 1960s was the natural continuation of what it had been since the beginning of the twentieth century.³⁴ Critics like Max Beerbohm or Bernard Shaw and, later on, Kenneth Tynan and Harold Hobson, were unwilling to remain neutral, and wanted to fight in favour of certain playwrights in order to bring them to the attention of the public. It was Tynan, Esslin affirms, who made authors like John Osborne, Harold Wesker, and John Arden known to the public, or who defended Brecht, Genêt and Beckett when people still mistrusted them. In France, Bernard Dort distinguished between the play as a text on the one hand, and in terms of its staging on the other.³⁵ The theatre critic, he says in the interview, cannot refer to the first; his role is that of expressing his judgement on the

³² Corrado Augias (born in 1935) is a very well known journalist, writer, critic and TV host; Ettore Capriolo (born in 1926) is an expert in English literature and translator (he was stabbed in 1991 by an Iranian for translating Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*); Edoardo Fadini was for many years theatre critic for the Italian paper *L’Unità*, and founder, in 1975, of *Cabaret Voltaire* in Turin, a theatrical space that was open until 1994 (it then changed its name into *Orsa: Organizzazione per la Ricerca in Scienze e Arti*) and hosted various Italian and foreign avant-garde artists and groups, like Bene and the American Living Theatre.

³³ ‘Situazione della critica’ (1): interviste e testimonianze di critici drammatici stranieri’ ed. Giuseppe Bartolucci, *Sipario*, 251 (March 1967), 2-8; ‘Situazione della critica (2): inchiesta tra i critici italiani, *Sipario*, 252 (April 1967), 1-12; ‘Situazione della critica (3): interviste Alberto Arbasino, *Sipario*, 254 (June 1967), 3-4.

³⁴ ‘Situazione della critica (1)’, p. 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

second. Given this preliminary statement, the critic must be well acquainted with all the elements that contribute to the transformation of a written text into physicality on the stage. In other words, the critic must have the necessary skills to judge not only the text and the acting, but also the directing, the stage setting, the music, and so on. However, from his words we infer that in France the great majority of critics still did what he calls ‘critica impressionistica’ (‘impressionistic criticism’), which is easier and relies on the impression that a critic gets from watching a performance, rather than on the technical knowledge of the scenic writing.³⁶

In the second and third part of the survey, a number of Italian critics were interviewed. Among them, Alberto Arbasino maintained that very few Italian critics were ready to open up to the most recent theatrical forms in the 1960s. According to him, the problem lay in the fact that criticism should not be considered a permanent job: Shaw, Beerbohm, Tynan, and Robert Brustein, he says, had never seen this as a life-long career, whereas most critics in Italy did.³⁷ Therefore, it was easier not to risk trying to impose new texts, or new directors, and to maintain the status quo instead.

Forse l’inconveniente italiano è nel ‘sistema’. Cioè nel considerare la ‘posizione’ di critico come un cadreghino fisso e non come una situazione di passaggio.³⁸

Maybe the Italian obstacle lies in the ‘system’. That is in considering the ‘position’ of the critic as a permanent job, and not as a temporary situation.

The same problems that afflicted the great public theatres seemed to afflict criticism, but the main complaint that critics like Bartolucci and

³⁶ Ibid., p. 5. The survey ‘Situazione della critica (1)’ also contains interviews to American and German critics, which would be too long to analyze here.

³⁷ We should also remark that in several of these cases they were also creatively involved in theatre as playwrights, and Tynan was literary manager of the National Theatre.

³⁸ ‘Situazione della critica (3)’, p. 4.

Capriolo made was the lack of preparation of most critics.³⁹ They give account of the fact that in the past 20 years, theatre had developed thanks to the dedication of directors, certainly not of critics, and apparently the situation was not very dissimilar in the 1960s. The contribution of a critic cannot be limited to registering what occurs on the stage, but should also include collaborating actively to change and modernize it. In order to accomplish this task, critics should be well aware of the development of theatres in foreign countries, follow the new tendencies in their own, and acquire the necessary tools to understand them and make them accessible to the audience. It was not possible to review a performance according to the rules of the past, that is focusing on the text and on the acting, but with the capacity to:

Muoversi nello spettacolo con un atteggiamento mentale aperto e con una conoscenza precisa, sia degli orientamenti che delle tecniche teatrali in atto (...). Il pubblico (...) disposto a capire lo spettacolo, si attende questo dalla critica.⁴⁰

Move through the performance with an open mind and with a precise knowledge of the current directions and of the theatrical techniques (...). The audience (...) willing to understand the show, expects this from criticism.

Indeed, the productions of the Living Theatre, or of directors like Quartucci, could not be codified according to the parameters of the director's theatre as intended by Strehler for example.

In 1965, within the XXIV Festival Internazionale della Prosa (XXIV International Prose Festival) of Venice, the Living Theatre presented their production of *Frankenstein* and Quartucci a play entitled: *Zip, Lap Lip Vap Mam Crep Scap Plip Trip Scrap & la Grande Mam*, written by Giuliano

³⁹ Bartolucci in 'Situazione della critica (2)', pp. 1-3; Capriolo in *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁰ Bartolucci in 'Situazione della critica (2)', p. 2.

Scabia (born 1935).⁴¹ In both cases, the idea of the show as the staging of a text was questioned; the importance of *Zip* lies in the fact that it can be considered the most complete example of scenic writing, where the text, the scenic space, the objects, the sounds, and the actors were fused together and none of them dominated. The creative process was also new: Scabia wrote a text beforehand, but then actively collaborated with the director and with the actors, modifying the text during rehearsals according to the director's requests and to the inputs coming from the actors who were encouraged to use improvisation. In this way, the text developed alongside the staging, thus creating the scenic writing. The staging of *Zip* was also a clear example of the theatre company seen as a community, where all the members share in and are involved in the various phases of work.

As I wrote before, the idea of theatre as a community, where all the phases – from the writing of a play to its staging – are shared activities, goes back in time and characterized Shakespeare's theatre. The activity of theatre companies, then, was extremely frantic, as Gurr explains. Players performed a different play every day and worked six days a week. New plays were produced at frequent intervals. In 1594-95 the Admiral's Men at the Rose offered a repertory of 38 plays, of which 21 were new ones. Some plays were performed only once, and only a few were put on stage again in the following season.⁴² Probably, such a high output of plays was possible because of the collaborative quality of theatre making. Writing was a collaborative activity. We tend to think of a play as Shakespeare's, or Marlowe's, or Jonson's, but we should be aware of the fact that it was not common practice for playwrights to work alone. For example, Hackett draws our attention to *Macbeth*, and reports Gary Taylor's opinion, according to whom Middleton contributed extensively to the text, making cuts and additions to it. 11 per cent of the text in the First Folio, Taylor

⁴¹ Before working with Quartucci, Scabia (born in 1935) wrote the libretto *La fabbrica illuminata* (*The Illuminated Factory*) for Luigi Nono. He became one of the protagonists of the New Theatre.

⁴² Gurr, *The Shakespearian Stage*, p. 103.

believes, is by Middleton.⁴³ Even the staging was a collaborative activity. Roles were conceived to fit the performing styles of the actors, but they might be altered during rehearsal, in a process in which, similarly to the staging of *Zip*, actors were encouraged to improvise and to offer their own input. Changes on the stage could also be made by the playwright himself, in a kind of theatre in which the author would also play the role of the ‘director’. This is how Susan Bassnett illustrates the kind of work of actors at the time of Shakespeare:

The fragmentary written text, such as it was, functioned as a blueprint on which performers could build from their own experience. The notion of the fixed playtext, with its detailed stage directions, with each player’s speech patterns carefully calculated by the playwright did not at that time exist.⁴⁴

I have not found sources indicating that Scabia and Quartucci were knowingly looking back to Elizabethan practices but, as I pointed out before, there are various references to the theatre at the time of Shakespeare by de Berardinis and Bene. It is very unlikely, therefore, that reviving practices similar to those of the early modern playhouses was simply a coincidence. At the same time, as we will see in the next two sections of this chapter, these resemblances between original sixteenth-century practices and New Theatre practices gave origin to very free interpretations of the playtexts, in a process that was in itself very Shakespearian. In their opposition to mainstream theatre of the mid-twentieth century, the protagonists of the New Theatre were also returning to Italian practices of the past that were lost in the director’s theatre. As a matter of fact, Bassnett’s quotation could be easily applied to the *commedia dell’arte* too, another theatre tradition which certainly inspired these young theatre practitioners.

⁴³ Hackett, *A Short History of English Renaissance Drama*, p. 68.

⁴⁴ Bassnett ‘Translating for the Theatre’, p. 103.

Despite all this, the experiment carried out with *Zip* was rather unusual for its time. The consequence was that Scabia and Quartucci ran into various problems during rehearsals: the actors, for example, were not accustomed to acting without a complete text, and the collaboration among the various members of the group would have needed a long time to develop, whereas the company only had twenty-three days to rehearse. Besides the difficulties that accompanied the staging, most critics did not welcome the production. Probably they did not understand it or, as De Marinis puts it, many misoneists used it as a scapegoat to attack the new avant-garde theatre.⁴⁵ However, the play certainly marked an important moment for the development of the New Theatre in Italy.

What fascinates me is the collaboration between an author and a director. Writing theatre is not the same as writing a novel: it requires acoustic and auditory perception, an ear for dialogue and for music, and an awareness of the transformative effects of light and shade, processes that remain creations of the imagination in prose. Prose writers accompany the reader on a narrative journey, whereas writing for the theatre is about confrontation, face-to-face ‘live company’, an interaction rather than intra-action. Given these assumptions, I believe that a collaboration between authors and directors can be very helpful. Shakespeare was an actor besides being a playwright. And he wrote for a specific theatre, for a company he knew and, as I said, designed his roles to fit the particular gifts and aptitudes of particular actors (e.g. Kempe, Armin, Burbage).⁴⁶ But in the 1960s the collaboration between Scabia and Quartucci was an exception.

A heated debate on the relationship between authors and theatre went on for months in 1965. Once again, it took place on the pages of *Sipario*. A survey, entitled ‘Gli scrittori e il teatro’, was published in the May, July and

⁴⁵ De Marinis, *Il Nuovo Teatro*, p.167. For a detailed analysis of the play see pp. 162-167; and Visone, *La nascita del Nuovo Teatro in Italia*, pp. 77-92.

⁴⁶ Such a practice, like the custom of type-casting parts was necessary as the players performed a different role every day. (Gurr, *The Shakespearian Stage*, p. 104).

August issues of 1965,⁴⁷ which was followed by other articles written for various Italian papers and magazines. The survey stemmed from an Italian anomaly: while in most European countries there existed a direct relationship between the most advanced literary experiences and theatre, in Italy there was a clear separation between intellectuals and the 'stage'. A number of well-known and highly regarded writers were interviewed and, with some exceptions, their attitude towards Italian theatre in general and the theatre of the 1960s in particular, seemed to be rather arrogant. Most of them declared that they took no interest in theatre in terms of playwriting – making an exception for Eduardo De Filippo – and of staging, and that they rarely, or never, attended theatres. Arbasino, for example, the same Arbasino who would affirm, one year later, that the critic should be well acquainted with all the new theatrical trends, stated:

La sola idea che un eventuale copione debba venire esaminato, e possa subire le osservazioni, d'uno dei nostri attori, o d'uno dei nostri registi, bastano a riempir l'animo di un raccapriccio così profondo da indurre a decisioni disperate: non uscir mai dalla narrativa e dalla saggistica.⁴⁸

Just the thought that a script must be examined by one of our actors, or by one of our directors, and may be subject to their objections, is sufficient to fill our soul with such deep horror that it leads to desperate decisions: I will never abandon fiction and essay-writing.

And Alberto Moravia added the following opinion about theatre audiences: 'Il pubblico del teatro mi sembra stupido e volgare'.⁴⁹ ('Theatre audiences seem to me to be stupid and vulgar'). I agree with Carlo Bo's words: 'Credo che fra gli intellettuali italiani e il teatro esista un rapporto

⁴⁷ 'Gli scrittori e il teatro: inchiesta', ed. Marisa Rusconi, *Sipario*, 229 (May 1965), 2-14; 'Gli scrittori e il teatro: rispondono i teatranti', *Sipario*, 231 (July 1965), 2-10; Roberto Rebora, 'Gli scrittori e il teatro: Contributo alla confusione', *Sipario*, 232 (August 1965), 2-4.

⁴⁸ 'Gli scrittori e il teatro: inchiesta', p. 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

doppio di presunzione e di complesso di inferiorità'.⁵⁰ ('I think that between Italian intellectuals and theatre, exists a mixed relationship of conceit and inferiority complex'). The consequence of all these prejudices is that very few of the authors interviewed wrote or write for the theatre. It must also be accounted for that some of them did not feel they possessed those skills that I mentioned above.⁵¹ However, it is quite clear that, on the side of the writers, there was an attitude of general resistance to theatre and the tendency to consider it a lesser form of art, and very often not a cultural form at all.⁵² It is not easy to find reasons for this, but something is worth pointing out, I believe. In Britain there is a tradition of drama and the creative arts in education that is lacking in Italy. At the time of the New Theatre, many British schools and universities were active in amateur extracurricular drama, and this has since developed into the organised teaching of drama as an academic subject, whereas Italy has never had such provision. One reason why drama has tended to be an activity (either extracurricular or curricular) in British schools is simply because of the central place of Shakespeare in culture and in the education system. Studying Shakespeare in the classroom, as all British pupils have done for a hundred years or so, leads to a desire to perform the plays on stage. The Italian education system, on the contrary, is more academically oriented, and I think that this accounts for the situation I have been describing.

The same attitude of resistance shown by the writers who accepted to express their opinions in the survey conducted by *Sipario* seemed to affect directors working for the official theatre. From the same survey and from another survey 'Inchiesta sui teatri stabili' ('Survey on the civic public theatres'), published in the May 1966 issue of *Sipario* and conducted by Bartolucci, it can be inferred that directors usually mistrusted the work of new playwrights, and preferred to stick to well-known ones, or to the

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵¹ See p. 208.

⁵² Not much seems to have changed in Italy: we can see on our stages plays by Steven Berkoff, Alan Bennett, Tom Stoppard, Edward Bond, Mark Ravenhill, and Sarah Kane, but not many plays by Italian playwrights are available.

classics.⁵³ Such an attitude of closure does not do any good either to the writers or to theatre practitioners, I believe. My position is well expressed by Luciano Codignola's words:

(...) per fare del teatro non basta né un testo né una compagnia ma ci vuole qualcosa di più, cioè l'incontro, la fiducia reciproca, la disponibilità, la collaborazione.⁵⁴

(...) in order to do theatre, neither a text, nor a company suffices, but something more is needed, that is, the encounter, the mutual trust, the willingness, the collaboration.

Therefore, he carries on, on the one hand writers must understand that writing theatre requires great commitment; on the other, theatre people cannot ignore literary culture.

The rediscovery of the classics also informed the theatre of the new experimentalists. But it was the theatre of the Elizabethans, and of Shakespeare in particular, that fascinated them for reasons that Imperiali discusses in the already-mentioned essay 'Shakespeare e l'avanguardia in Italia', to which also Visone refers in her discussion of Ricci's *Re Lear da un'idea di gran teatro di William Shakespeare*.⁵⁵ First of all the protagonists of the New Theatre recognized an age of dissatisfaction, of insecurity, of uncertainty, and of anxiety in the Elizabethan Age that characterized their own age and experience too. Such social instability gave origin, at the end of the sixteenth century, to an 'unstable' kind of theatre, 'un teatro in movimento' ('a theatre in movement'), characterized by a very free structure.⁵⁶ It is this free structure that allowed the theatre practitioners of the 1960s to be as free, and to modify Shakespeare's plays, making extreme choices, and creating new artworks without destroying the sources.

⁵³ 'Inchiesta sui teatri stabili', *Sipario*, 241 (May 1966), 70-82.

⁵⁴ 'Gliscrittori e il teatro: rispondono i teatranti', p. 5.

⁵⁵ Imperiali, 'Shakespeare e l'avanguardia', pp. 425-427. Visone *L'ombra di Lear*, pp. 245-246.

⁵⁶ The idea of 'a theatre in movement' is by Capriolo and is quoted in Imperiali 'Shakespeare e l'avanguardia', p. 426.

Secondly, the young experimentalists were attracted by the simple stage sets of the Elizabethan theatre, which fitted well with their choice of a frugal theatre in opposition to the opulence of the productions of mainstream theatre. Simple sets meant that words acquired a strong evocative quality in Shakespeare's theatre, with the audience expected to use their imagination to 'see' places, and create images. The young practitioners of the 1960s filled this gap by transforming words into images. As there is a lot in Shakespeare's plays that is only hinted at, they felt entitled to use their own imagination, and to provide the images that are missing in the texts. Far from feeling in the wrong they believed that in so doing they were contributing to the understanding of aspects of Shakespeare's plays that are not immediately visible through words. Imperiali concludes this theoretical discussion affirming that these young men saw Shakespeare's works as a resource available to everybody everywhere in the world.⁵⁷

I will expand on these ideas in my analysis of the theatre of de Berardinis and Bene. The close reading of their stagings will give a practical confirmation to the above-mentioned thoughts, and will show how such approach to Shakespeare's texts was very similar to Shakespeare's approach to the sources he used for his own creations.

4.1.1 A Manifesto for the New Theatre

One year after publication of the survey 'Gli scrittori e il teatro', in November 1966, a manifesto for the New Theatre was published in the 247th issue of *Sipario*. The manifesto became the first step in a fascinating journey undertaken to gather different voices and experiences, and to give shape to a proper movement. In its final part, the signatories called for a conference, aimed at bringing together theatre practitioners and theatre critics who shared the views expressed in the manifesto. In preparation for the conference, Bartolucci, Quadri, Fadini and Capriolo wrote a document

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 427.

entitled ‘Elementi di discussione del convegno per un nuovo teatro’ (‘Elements of Discussion of the Conference for a New Theatre’), a very detailed programme of the various issues for discussion at the conference. The *Convegno di Ivrea*, the final step of the journey, was held at Ivrea from 9 to 12 June 1967. It is a story of failures also, but its outcome was the beginning of an important season for Italian experimental theatre. The manifesto was written by Bartolucci, Quadri, Fadini, Capriolo, and Augias with the collaboration of Scabia and Roberto Lerici (1931-1992).⁵⁸ It is not by chance that the five critics chose two writers: they believed that Italian dramaturgy should be renovated and that there was a strong need of new texts. Moreover, they believed in a close collaboration between authors and theatre directors, with the authors attending theatres and sharing ideas with the people that would stage their text. After writing the manifesto, they invited various people to sign it. They were thinking about a large movement that would bring together theatre people, critics, musicians, painters, and film-makers, as they firmly believed that all these arts should contribute to the staging of a playtext. Some theatre practitioners, for example, experimented with different media and explored the meeting of theatre and cinema or television. Quartucci used film projections at the back of the stage to illustrate the action, and also de Berardinis made extensive use of recorded videos in his productions.⁵⁹ What united all the artists contacted to sign the manifesto was the common intent to explore alternative forms of art to the mainstream.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Lerici was an author, but also a publisher and a critic. In 1964, he wrote the text *La storia di Sawney Bean*, directed and interpreted by Carmelo Bene. In 1966 he started his collaboration with Quartucci for whom he wrote the play *Libere Stanze* (*Free Rooms*).

⁵⁹ I will discuss the role of projections in de Berardinis’s theatre in the section of the chapter dedicated to him.

⁶⁰ There were Bene (1937-2002), Quartucci (born 1938), and directors Antonio Calenda (born 1939), Luca Ronconi (born 1933), and Aldo Trionfo (1921-1989). There was Emanuele Luzzati (1921-2007), stage designer and illustrator. There were cinema directors Marco Bellocchio (born 1939) and Liliana Cavani (born 1937). Bellocchio’s film, *Pugni in tasca* of 1965 and Cavani’s *Francesco d’Assisi* of 1966 were quite challenging for the establishment, the first being very critical of the idea of the family, the second presenting St Francis as a protester and supporter of armed brotherhood. Other signatories were singer and composer Cathy Barberian (1935-1983), and Sylvano Bussotti (born 1931). The complete list of signatories can be found in Visone, *Il Nuovo Teatro*.

Below I include excerpts of the manifesto; then I will summarize the content of the ‘Elements of Discussion of the Conference for a New Theatre’, and will give an account of the events that occurred during the conference.⁶¹ Although this will take my discussion away from Shakespeare, it is necessary to understand the general thinking about what kind of innovations were needed in theatre in the Italy of the 1960s. Moreover, in the next two sections, it will become clear that New Theatre practices and Shakespearian practices had many resemblances, and that the New Theatre practitioners had particular affinity with Shakespeare’s plays, which were especially fruitful material for their productions.

In the first part of the Manifesto, the signatories clarify their opposition to the great and powerful civic public theatres which, according to them, too often offered a commercial repertory to satisfy the audience and sell more tickets, while they only marginally devoted their attention to research and experimental theatre and to the theatrical offerings coming from foreign countries:

In una situazione di progressiva involuzione, estesa a molti settori chiave della vita nazionale, in questi anni si è assistito all’inaridimento della vita teatrale, resa ancora più grave e subdola dall’attuale stato di apparente floridezza. Apparenza pericolosa in quanto nasconde l’invecchiamento e il mancato adeguamento delle strutture; la crescente ingerenza della burocrazia politica e amministrativa nei teatri pubblici; il monopolio dei gruppi di potere; la sordità di fronte al più significativo repertorio internazionale; la complice disattenzione nella quale sono state spente le iniziative sperimentali (...).⁶²

In a situation of increasing regression, extending to many key sectors of national life, in recent years we have witnessed the stifling of theatre, made even more serious and deceptive by its current

⁶¹ The manifesto can be found in Quadri, *L’avanguardia teatrale in Italia*, pp. 135-137.

⁶² Ibid., p.135. All subsequent references to this text will be in round brackets.

apparently flourishing state. It is a dangerous appearance, as it hides the ageing and the obsolescence of theatre buildings; the increasing interference of political and administrative bureaucracy in the public theatres; the monopoly of groups with power; the deafness to the more significant international repertory; the complicit neglect of experimental initiatives.

Alongside the stagnation of theatre, they denounce the stagnation of criticism, as the mainstream critics too often favoured the official theatre, thus renouncing their role of researchers, a role that they should share with directors, musicians, stage designers, technicians, and costumists:

La critica drammatica istituzionale dal suo canto, invece di svolgere una funzione di provocazione e di stimolo su questa situazione generale, ha contribuito al mantenimento dello stato di fatto (...) con una rinuncia di fatto al suo compito primo di ricerca e di interpretazione. (135-136)

As for mainstream theatre criticism, instead of provoking and stimulating in this general situation, it has contributed to the maintenance of the status quo (...), thus renouncing its main task of research and interpretation.

The official theatre, according to the signatories of the manifesto, did not only neglect any ideas coming from foreign theatrical experiences; it also isolated itself from any other artistic form aiming to innovation and experimentation:

Con poche (...) eccezioni il nostro teatro (...), si è così venuto a trovare in una posizione di completo isolamento, sistematicamente impermeabile cioè ad ogni innovazione culturale, alle ricerche e agli esiti della scrittura poetica e del romanzo, alla sperimentazione cinematografica, ai discorsi aperti dalla nuova musica e dalle molteplici esperienze pittoriche e plastiche. (136)

With few (...) exceptions our theatre (...), has found itself in a position of complete isolation, systematically neglecting any cultural innovation, like research and results in the field of poetry and fiction writing, film-experimentation, innovations brought about by the new music and by the numerous pictorial and plastic experiences.

Then they claim their distance from the official theatre:

La nostra attività di scrittori, critici, registi, scenografi, musicisti, attori, tecnici di teatro, anche se di diverse ideologie, (...), ci fa sentire estranei ai modi, alle mentalità e alle esperienze del teatro cosiddetto ufficiale. (136)

We feel that our activity as writers, critics, directors, stage designers, musicians, actors, theatre technicians, despite our different ideologies, (...), does not belong to the ways, to the mindset and to the experiences of the so-called official theatre.

They then clarify that criticism needs to acquire the skills and tools necessary to understand the new performances; also, they express their wish to create and use new techniques, to use actors who were not trained in drama schools, and to stage plays in spaces other than theatres, like schools or cultural centres, for example.

Oggi s'impone la necessità di adeguare gli strumenti critici agli elementi tecnico-formali dello spettacolo, di affrontare l'impegno drammaturgico senza alcuna soggezione agli schemi prestabiliti, con un recupero di tecniche e una proposta di altre tecniche, con l'uso di attori fuori della linea accademica (...), con la scelta di ambientazioni che ricreino lo spazio scenico. (136)

Today it is necessary to adapt criticism to the technical and formal elements of performance, to face the dramaturgical task without any pre-conceived notions, thus rediscovering lost techniques as well as

suggesting alternative techniques, employing actors who do not belong to the academy (...) choosing settings that recreate the stage.

They did not want a theatre for an elite, for the chosen few (the same words had been pronounced twenty years before by Strehler and Grassi!), and, at the same time, they wanted to take advantage of the opportunities (mainly financial) offered by the public organizations.

Non vogliamo dar vita a un teatro clandestino per pochi iniziati, né rimanere esclusi dalle possibilità offerte dalle organizzazioni di pubblico alle quali riteniamo di avere diritto. (137)

We do not want to create a clandestine theatre for the chosen few, neither do we want to be excluded from the possibilities offered by public organizations to which we believe we are entitled.

The final part of the manifesto is a call for a conference addressed to all those interested, and who, despite their different modes, shared the same views on theatre.

It is interesting to notice how the attitude of the signatories towards the official theatre was ambivalent. If on the one hand they wanted to distance themselves from that circuit, on the other they did not want to be excluded from the opportunities that the state theatres could offer them. The same ambivalence seemed to characterize the attitude of the official theatre towards the new groups: on the one hand some public theatres offered forms of collaboration to 'experimental companies', on the other they relegated their productions to the margins of their annual repertory. I am thinking, for example, of the collaboration between Genoa's civic public theatre – directed by Luigi Squarzina and Ivo Chiesa – and Quartucci's group in the theatrical season 1963-1964.⁶³ The original plan was that of creating a

⁶³ Luigi Squarzina (1922-2010) was a playwright and director. He was one of the protagonists of the Italian theatre of the twentieth century. Jointly with Ivo Chiesa he directed Genoa's civic public theatre from 1962 to 1976 and Rome Teatro Argentina from 1976 to 1983. Ivo Chiesa (1921-2003) was a theatre impresario, journalist and playwright.

research group within the organization of Genoa's theatre in order to renovate and, hopefully, overcome the crisis that was afflicting the civic public theatres. At the same time, Quartucci's group would be allowed to experiment with the backing of a big theatre and all the security that this could grant. But the group was very disappointed when they realized that they were given very limited chances to work: their staging of *Aspettando Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*), for example, was presented only at the end of the season and for only nineteen evenings.

4.1.2 The 'Elementi di discussione del convegno per un nuovo teatro' ('Elements of Discussion of the Conference for a New Theatre')

After the manifesto, the promoters of the Ivrea Conference wrote a draft plan of discussion called the 'Elementi di discussione del convegno per un nuovo teatro' ('Elements of Discussion of the Conference for a New Theatre') published in the first issue of the theatre magazine *Teatro* founded in 1967 by Bartolucci, Capriolo and Fadini.⁶⁴ This issue also contained some articles on the experiences of the most influential representatives of the New Theatre outside Italy: Artaud, the Living Theatre, Grotowski, and Brook. According to the promoters' plan, each of the three days of the conference should focus on one topic and each topic was clearly and thoroughly outlined in the 'Elements of discussion of the Conference for a New Theatre'.⁶⁵

The first section of the 'Elements of Discussion' is entitled 'Teatro di laboratorio e teatro collettivo' ('Theatre as a Laboratory and Collective

He directed Genoa's theatre from 1955 to 2000. In 1946, together with Gian Maria Guglielmino, he founded the magazine *Sipario*, which he directed until 1951.

⁶⁴ *Teatro*, 1 (summer 1967).

⁶⁵ The complete text of the 'Elementi di discussione del convegno per un nuovo teatro' can be found in Quadri, *L'avanguardia teatrale in Italia*, pp. 138-148.

Theatre').⁶⁶ Theatre as a laboratory is taken to mean that none of the targets reached by the representatives of the New Theatre should be taken for granted, but should rather be questioned, verified and, if necessary, modified. Thus, theatre is seen as an 'open structure', where research and experimentation become key words and should be applied to all the fields of theatre work, like playwriting, methodology, stage setting, scenic materials, acting, and the relationship between stage and audience. Collective theatre refers to the encounter between theatre and society. The society of the mid-1960s was seen as a complex, problematic and articulate society, whose characteristics should be reflected in the New Theatre. Fundamental for the creation of theatre projects that are 'popular' (meaning close to the life and problems of the people) is teamwork, collective work that becomes pre-eminent in all the phases of a staging. Therefore, the individual writing of an author is revised and completed during the staging by all the company members. Collective work also means the direct participation of the public and, as a consequence, a *teatro senza pareti* (theatre without walls), where any division between stage and audience is eliminated. As a consequence, the scenic writing should also take place outside traditional theatres, for instance in schools or cultural centres.

The second section of the discussion paper, entitled 'Acquisizione e sperimentazione dei nuovi materiali scenici' ('Acquisition of and Experimentation with New Scenic Materials')⁶⁷ argues that in the New Theatre all the elements that contribute to the realization of the scenic writing form a unity in which there is no hierarchy. Such elements are: gesture, props, playwriting, sound, and scenic space. Fundamental is the fact that the elements are not used as means to create a narration, but are to be understood just for what they are.

In spoken language sound is no longer considered of secondary importance, and phonetics becomes the predominant linguistic element of the spoken word. It is the sound of the word that counts, not its meaning, a

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 138-141.

⁶⁷ See Quadri, *L'avanguardia teatrale in Italia*, pp. 141-145.

concept that will become very clear in my analysis of Bene's work: the actor-director dissected the word, deprived it of its significance and completely distorted diction.

The scenic space acquires a formal significance; it is no longer the container of the dramatic action (or, at least, not only), but becomes one of the elements constituting the scenic writing, namely the temporal and space forms of the dramatic action. It is also the formal relationship that the dramatic action establishes between the stage and the audience, and between the actor and the audience. *Zip* can help us to understand this point. In an interview that Scabia and Quartucci gave to *Sipario* in 1965, they stated that the whole theatre was transformed into a stage in order to dissolve the single perspective (the spectator's ego) and to multiply the focus of the performance. The spectator did not watch a performance from the stalls but was sitting in the performing area, and the action took place all around him.⁶⁸ However, they appreciate that this was not a completely new experience as it had already been theorized by Artaud and put into practice by Mejerchol'd. They also refer to the painting of Jackson Pollock, who abolished the top and the bottom, the right and the left of his paintings, walked around the canvas, worked from the four sides and was literally in the painting.

The third section of the discussion paper is entitled 'Acquisizione di un pubblico nuovo attraverso nuove strutture organizzative' ('Acquisition of a New Audience by Means of New Organizational Structures').⁶⁹ In this part of the programme, the promoters of the conference illustrate how the Italian society of the 1960s differed from what it was at the end of World War Two and what changes occurred in the theatre world in the same period. Some of the issues they address are: the differentiation and specialization of the various levels of culture; the cultural and economic gap between industrialized areas and socially depressed areas; a young audience much more educated than in the past; the newly acquired possibility of

⁶⁸ Prosperi, 'Contemporary Italian Theatre', p. 24.

⁶⁹ Quadri, *L'avanguardia teatrale in Italia*, pp. 145-148.

reception and distribution of theatre by non-specialized cultural organizations like cultural circles, schools and so on; the pre-eminence of experimental trends; and the birth of numerous autonomous theatre groups with strong connections in various sectors of society. Therefore, they promote a big change in the policy of the great publicly funded theatres and in the idea of theatre as a 'public service', in favour of a theatre that is really present in the social body. The scenic space can no longer be just the traditional theatre, but it must also extend to other structures like schools or cultural centres, that is those places where it is still possible to focus on the process of staging a show rather than on the final product, to experiment, and to train a new generation of theatre practitioners and of audience. Opposing the civic public theatres that no longer devote their attention to research – mainly for economic reasons – and do not distinguish among different audiences, Bartolucci, Quadri, Fadini and Capriolo foster a new theatre that takes into consideration the social composition of its audiences, their modes of expression, their real problems. To reach the objectives outlined in this programme, it is necessary to allow the development of various and varied theatre groups, whose main task is to do research and to experiment with new models of theatre, on a new kind of playwriting, on new scenic spaces, on new forms of acting, in short, on the scenic writing.

4.1.3 The *Convegno di Ivrea*

The *Convegno di Ivrea* took place from the ninth to the twelfth June 1967 at Palazzo Canavese, a village near Ivrea, and at Turin Cultural Union.⁷⁰ As I wrote in the previous paragraph, in the organizers' view, each

⁷⁰ A detailed account of the events occurred during the conference can be found in Visone, *La nascita del Nuovo Teatro in Italia*, pp. 227-255 and in Francesco Bono, 'Convegno per un Nuovo Teatro, Ivrea 1967: rivoluzioni dimenticate e utopie realizzate', (Master's thesis, Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione di Milano, 2004). The Unione culturale Franco Antonicelli (Turin Cultural Union) was founded in June 1945 by a group of antifascist intellectuals. Here they wanted to study Italian history and culture, focusing their

day of the conference should be dedicated to one of the topics mentioned in the 'Elementi di discussione'. Moreover, they also suggested a very precise programme according to which there should be a discussion of the topic in the morning, what they called the 'conferenze-spettacolo' ('seminar-performances') in the afternoon, and 'proposte di spettacolo' ('performance proposals') in the evening. Unfortunately, the programme that the organizers had conceived for the conference was scarcely realized. None of the theatre groups – with the exception of de Berardinis and Perla Peragallo and the Teatro d'Ottobre – presented their shows; the presentation of Eugenio Barba's work with the actors failed completely as the Italians were not used to that kind of training and to the exercises that Barba proposed, aimed to gain total control of the body, sounds and gestures; and there was very little discussion on the 'language' of the new theatre, on the methods, on the materials, on all those elements that should constitute the new scenic writing.

It is true that Grotowski's ideas – whose method very much inspired Barba – were circulating in Italy, but the very strict training to which Barba's actors were subject (hours and hours of mainly physical, but also vocal training that the actors of the company did all year round regardless of whether they were rehearsing for a performance or not) was not understood in Italy. The main aim of the protagonists of the New Theatre in Italy was to replace the predominance of the text with a staging that would make the text just one of the elements, whereas the training of the actors was not their priority or, at least, that kind of training. In fact, if Ricci was much more interested in visual images and objects than in the presence of the actor, with de Berardinis and Bene, we will witness a return to the actor's theatre, that does not justify the contempt they expressed for Barba's work. What I think had a stronger impact on the Italian experimentalists through Grotowski's and Barba's methods, was the idea of theatre as a 'laboratory',

attention on the history of Partisan Resistance and of the labour movement. In the 1960s the most important avant-garde theatre groups and artists performed here. Among them were the Living Theatre, Bene, and John Cage.

meaning a safe space where a company could do research and could experiment without worrying too much about the show. As for the acting, perhaps, it was more with the ideas of the Living Theatre that some of the Italian experimentalists had points in common. I am referring, in particular, to the importance that the American group gave to improvisation on the stage, as a way of rendering the performance more realistic, which was used by some of the Italian experimentalists too. Quartucci worked on improvisation both in *Zip* and in *Cartoteca*, (*The Paper-Archive*) presented in May 1965. In the latter, the actors were not professionals, but students who expressed themselves mainly with improvisation. However, the arrogant attitude that many of the participants showed at the conference is not justifiable in my opinion. This is how Ettore Capriolo recollects the experience:

i maggiori esponenti dell'avanguardia teatrale di allora, e cioè Carmelo Bene, Quartucci e Ricci, non presentarono assolutamente niente, si guardarono bene dal mostrare materiali di lavoro, li presentarono invece coloro che aspettavano un'occasione per farsi vedere (...). Volevamo uno scambio di esperienze di lavoro, pensavamo di poter fare un bel laboratorio dove ciascuno si esprimesse, ma nessuno aveva voglia di scoprirsi.⁷¹

The leading exponents of the theatrical avant-garde, namely Carmelo Bene, Quartucci and Ricci, did not present anything at all, they took good care not to show their work materials, whereas those who were waiting for an opportunity to make themselves known did (...). We wanted an exchange of work experiences, we thought we could organize a workshop in which everybody would express themselves, but none wanted to reveal themselves.

⁷¹ Francesco Bono, 'Dossier Ivrea 1967. Le opinioni di chi partecipò', *ateatro webzine di cultura teatrale*, 108.11, ed. Oliviero Ponte di Pino <<http://www.ateatro.org/mostranew.asp?num=108&ord=11>> [accessed 10 December 2012].

All the speakers mainly dealt with organizational problems: how to set up a strong movement that would oppose the official theatre. It became clear that a common platform in terms of theatre language did not exist. Each artist or group of artists had developed a very individual and personal way of dealing with the text, the acting, the scenic space, and the relations between actors and objects, and between the stage and the audience and, more importantly, was not prepared to share them with the other participants. The categories highlighted by the promoters of the conference in the 'Elements of Discussion' were all present in the work of the various artists, but it seemed that a common platform on how to deal with the scenic materials did not exist. However, at the end of the second day, after a very heated debate between Bene and the Teatro d'Ottobre led by Sandro Bajini, two opposite fronts were naturally created: the first gathered Bene, de Berardinis, Ricci and Quartucci, all interested in theatre as a form of art, in its aesthetic value, in the use of actors and materials for their artistic relevance; the second front grouped the Teatro d' Ottobre and all the other participants who saw theatre primarily as a means of political communication, of propaganda to be realized, according to Bajini 'con una serie di parole d'ordine, di slogan e specie nella maniera più antiartistica possibile'⁷² ('with a series of slogans and, above all, in the most anti-artistic possible way').

The first reactions after the conference were rather negative: most of the participants, including the organizers, considered it a failure, as very little had been discussed in terms of aesthetics, there had been very little sharing, but a lot of arguments. It was only after many years that the value of the conference was finally recognized. Capriolo, interviewed in 1987, stated that a series of problems concerning theatre were made manifest at the conference.⁷³ Quadri saw in the conference the point at which the phenomenon of the New Theatre in Italy was codified, the year when, for the first time, new groups asked themselves the same questions about

⁷² Quoted in Visone, *La nascita del Nuovo Teatro in Italia*, p. 243.

⁷³ Bono, 'Dossier Ivrea'.

organization.⁷⁴ Among those who have written about the conference, De Marinis believes that, despite all the problems, the conference was very important for various reasons: for the presence of high-profile artists or groups like Barba's Odin Teatret, for the confrontations and disputes among the participants, and for the fact that Ivrea made it clear that a real divide now existed between the official theatre and the new avant-garde groups.⁷⁵ I agree with all of these conclusions, but what strikes me most from this episode is the fact that, on that occasion, there seemed to be a real collaboration between critics (who were also fine intellectuals) and theatre practitioners, something unusual even today.

4.1.4 The New Theatre and the Early Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Movements

Before moving on to analyse the work that de Berardinis and Bene did with Shakespeare's plays in the 1960s, I would like to conclude with a few thoughts on the relationship between the New Theatre and the early twentieth-century avant-garde movements. Was the New Theatre genuinely new, or should it be regarded as a continuation of those experimental movements? In both cases there was a desire to break with tradition and to experiment with new forms of expression. Of course, the tradition was not the same. In the case of the early twentieth-century avant-garde theatre, tradition was represented in Italy by the bourgeois theatre and by the theatre of Verism; in the 1960s, tradition was represented by the director's theatre. Although the two were completely different, they shared the idea of a realistic staging, aiming to narrate a story. The elimination of the narrative was the starting point for both the avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde movements. Also there can be found elements of the stagings of the New Theatre that were characteristic of early twentieth-century movements. The

⁷⁴ Franco Quadri, *L'avanguardia teatrale italiana*, p. 9.

⁷⁵ De Marinis, *Il Nuovo Teatro*, p. 172.

protagonists of the New Theatre did not deny this. I mentioned before the interview with Quartucci and Scabia, who affirmed that they wanted to draw on the immense wealth of the avant-garde experiments, techniques, results and failures. And we cannot forget Bene's harsh attack on the theatre group 'Gruppo d'ottobre' at the *Convegno di Ivrea*, when they recited Marinetti's poem *L'assedio di Adrianopoli* (*The Battle of Adrianopoli*) in very ironic tones. It seems that the protagonists of the New Theatre expanded on, and put in practice, some of the ideas that had been conceived by the early twentieth-century movements but had only to a certain extent been given a practical form at that time. If we think of Artaud, for example, he became a protagonist of the theatrical renewal of the 1960s, although he was dead by then and he had conceived his thoughts decades before. An ideal thread between ideas expressed in the first decades of the twentieth century and the experimentation of the New Theatre in Italy and of other groups or individuals outside Italy – I am thinking of Brook, or the Living Theatre for example – certainly existed. The protagonists of the renewal of the 1960s drew on them, and expanded on them. Maybe, as Quartucci and Scabia affirmed in the interview to *Sipario*, the new experimentalists were more interested in building than in destroying: 'Ma a noi oggi interessa un teatro di costruzione, non di distruzione. Una forma teatrale costruita, non la dissoluzione della forma teatrale'.⁷⁶ ('But today we are interested in a theatre that builds, rather than destroys. A constructed theatrical form, not the dissolution of theatrical form'). It will be interesting to see, in the next two sections, whether the theatre of de Berardinis and of Bene, which apparently abandoned any form of narration and of character development, was a theatre of construction or of destruction.

⁷⁶ 'Per un'avanguardia italiana', *Sipario* (Nov. 1965), 11-12, (p. 12).

4.2. *Leo de Berardinis*

Leo de Berardinis worked on Shakespeare's plays throughout his artistic career, providing very personal interpretations, which were always interpolated with material from all kinds of sources. He puzzled critics, who did not understand his experiments at the beginning, and many cried shame, as they saw these stagings as disrespectful of Shakespeare's playtexts. Yet, as I want to demonstrate in this section of the chapter, there are various elements in de Berardinis's stagings, and in the way in which he worked, that are very Shakespearian.⁷⁷ Also, I wish to point out the characteristics of de Berardinis's theatre that made him a representative of the New Theatre, though in a very personal way. Finally, I want to look at his opposition to the director's theatre and to the supremacy of the role of the director, and to show how he resumed the typically Italian tradition of the actor's theatre developing it in a very personal way. For my discussion I will not only rely on books and articles, but also on the words of actress and director Elena Bucci, who worked with de Berardinis for ten years in the 1980s and 1990s, and gave me a long interview on 14 April 2012.⁷⁸ Our conversation made the information I had about de Berardinis's theatre much more interesting and fascinating, and it was as if his theatre came to life again. Moreover, thanks to the fact that she experienced this theatre, which is not at all easy to understand, she brought light to many aspects of it that are not straightforward in books and journals accounts.

⁷⁷ This very hybridity, the weaving together of materials from many diverse sources, is itself very Shakespearian, as I will widely discuss further on in this section.

⁷⁸ After working ten years with Leo de Berardinis, Elena Bucci set up her own company 'Le belle bandiere' with which she performs in various theatres all over Italy.

4.2.1 Working with Shakespeare in the 1960s: La Faticosa Messinscena dell'Amleto di William Shakespeare and Sir And Lady Macbeth

In June 1967 in the 254th issue of the magazine *Sipario*, Rodolfo Wilcock published his review of Leo de Berardinis and Perla Peragallo's *La faticosa messinscena dell'Amleto di William Shakespeare*. He ended his reflection upon this production with the words:

La critica approva i giovani che studiano, pur non diletandosi nel semplice atto di vederli studiare. Riconosce tuttavia che soltanto dallo studio provengono le proposte che interessano la critica.⁷⁹

Critics approve of studious young people, although they take no satisfaction from simply seeing them study. However, they know well that only study produces what really interests them.

Wilcock was among the few critics who did not rail at de Berardinis and Peragallo's first staging of a play by Shakespeare. Yet, as the above quotation suggests, he had not been able to codify that production which, as he wrote, contained 'echi dell'Amleto di Shakespeare' ('echoes of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*'). Leo and Perla, as they are usually referred to in Italy (I will use their family name from now on), met when they were very young. De Berardinis (1939-2008) was twenty-seven; he had worked with Quartucci playing the role of Clov in a 1963 production of *Finale di partita* (*Endgame*), of Vladimir in the 1964 staging of *Aspettando Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*) and, in 1965, he was the character of Lap in *Zip*. Peragallo was a few years younger (1943-2007). She had graduated from Alessandro Fersen's school;⁸⁰ she had a natural dramatic talent and a strong musical background that she had inherited from her family. Their meeting, about

⁷⁹ Rodolfo Wilcock, 'La faticosa messinscena dell'Amleto di William Shakespeare', *Sipario*, 254 (June 1967), p. 43.

⁸⁰ Alessandro Fersen (1911-2001), pseudonym of Aleksander Fajrajzen, set up his acting school 'Studio di arti sceniche' in Rome in 1957.

two years before the above-mentioned production, marked the beginning of a prolific working collaboration and a love relationship that lasted until 1981, when Peragallo left theatre and devoted the following years to teaching.

The first thing that draws our attention is the title, *The Challenging Staging of William Shakespeare's Hamlet*. I will discuss which challenges the two friends met during the staging. But it is now interesting to observe the theatrical self-consciousness of the title which, in my opinion, reveals a desire to focus on the process rather than on the final production. Therefore, it seems to be a declaration of intent, and it creates an intimate relationship with the audience, a kind of dialogue.

La faticosa messinscena dell'Amleto di William Shakespeare was staged on 21 April 1967 at the small underground Teatro alla Ringhiera in Rome. Putting on their *Hamlet* had taken de Berardinis and Peragallo about a year and – as I pointed out above – it had been a very challenging enterprise. They had little money, inadequate space to rehearse (they rehearsed at Peragallo's place or in a warehouse where de Berardinis lived). They lacked experience but they were talented and determined. The result was a staging that was fiercely attacked by the great majority of critics when it was presented at Teatro alla Ringhiera, but later became symbolic of the New Theatre after being staged at the *Convegno di Ivrea*.

In the introduction to his interview with de Berardinis 'From Shakespeare to Shakespeare: The Theatre Transcended', De Marinis points out a few elements that characterised the production: 'an original blending of theatre and cinema', 'provocative manipulations of the text', 'the use of improvisation (in the jazz rather than the theatrical sense)', 'performance that was to focus less on interpretation of roles and more on self-expression'.⁸¹ Certainly, one of the most original elements of this show was the use of three cinema screens where de Berardinis and Peragallo appeared playing their roles. At the same time, they were also acting on the stage and, through the use of microphones, gave voice to and talked with their 'alter

⁸¹ De Marinis, 'From Shakespeare to Shakespeare: The Theatre Transcended', p. 49.

egos' on the screens, and commented upon their actions.⁸² In his book *La bellezza amara*, Gianni Manzella notices that the two artists did not use sound films because that would have been too expensive.⁸³ But de Berardinis and Peragallo were not interested in 'manufacturing' a perfect finished product. In this respect, they shared in the ideas of artists like Pollock or other creators of Action Painting.⁸⁴ It was the process that counted for them, while they refused the idea of the work of art as a product, and its degradation to goods that are manufactured just to be sold.⁸⁵ De Berardinis and Peragallo had a similar view of art. With their stagings they were attacking the official theatre and its well-structured organization that, thanks to good financial backing, offered perfect, finished products to be commercialized on the stages of the various civic public theatres. Their productions, instead, were more like unfinished artworks (this idea reminds me of Michelangelo's 'non finito', unfinished sculptures), or 'open' works, according to Eco's definition.⁸⁶ However 'homemade' these films were, de Berardinis and Peragallo's use of cinematographic media in their stagings would pave the way for a very fashionable trend in the Italian theatre of the 1980s.⁸⁷ The idea of open work was also put in practice through improvisation, a technique that the two artists would use more extensively in their successive productions and that characterised some of de Berardinis's shows after the separation from Peragallo: 'I restricted myself to going on stage and the performance emerged'.⁸⁸ Improvisation also responded to their need to express themselves. Manzella rightly points out that even the use of film was not intended for experiment but for self-expression: 'necessità espressiva' ('necessary expression'), he says.⁸⁹ Everything, in this production, responded to this. Like Hamlet, the isolated young man who tries to find his way, they felt the alienation of the artist in a

⁸² Molinari, *Teatro e antiteatro dal dopoguerra a oggi*, p. 102.

⁸³ Manzella, *La bellezza amara: arte e vita di Leo de Berardinis*, p. 12.

⁸⁴ Scabia and Quartucci referred to the art of Pollock too. See Section 1.2, (p. 220).

⁸⁵ Molinari, *Teatro e antiteatro*, p. 183.

⁸⁶ See this Section 1, (p. 196).

⁸⁷ Molinari, *Teatro e antiteatro*, p. 102.

⁸⁸ De Marinis, 'From Shakespeare to Shakespeare', p. 50.

⁸⁹ Manzella, *La bellezza amara*, p. 13.

hostile world, the world of mainstream theatre, and were looking for ways to give voice to their alienation and to their needs. If the character of Hamlet is the focus of their production, then manipulating the text becomes legitimate, and the madness of Ophelia can be interspersed with a scene from *The Brig* by the Living Theatre. Although Manzella does not explain the choice of this play, we can make some assumptions. *The Brig* is a play written by former U.S. Marine Kenneth H. Brown, which was first performed in New York at the 44th Street Theatre by The Living Theatre on 13 May 1963, and it was staged in Italy in 1965. The play is an anti-authoritarian look at the living conditions in a Marine prison. When it was staged in New York, it led to the closure of the theatre space and to the brief imprisonment of Julian Beck and Judith Malina, the founders of the theatre company. It is a play about physical and psychological violence perpetrated by Marines against other Marines. Therefore, it was intended as a challenge to the establishment, and to the authorities. It is a minimal play, and it is very antitheatrical. During rehearsals Beck and Malina put the actors through sheer hell, U.S. Marine Corps punishment style, with the cast's assent, more or less. Some scenes were improvised, and the actors had to react to unexpected orders by the guards, because Beck and Malina did not want to show the reality of the Brig (the prison), but wanted the reality itself to exist on the stage. Therefore, not only did the play allow the two directors to denounce the physical and psychological brutality of Marine life, but it also allowed them to attack the logic of the traditional staging.

All of these elements certainly attracted de Berardinis and Peragallo, who were also 'screaming' their anger against institutions and authorities on the one hand, and against the complacency of Italian theatre on the other, and who were looking for new forms of theatre. Hamlet, for the two actors, was not a role to play, but a 'stato di coscienza' ('state of consciousness')⁹⁰ to explore through acting, as the objective of theatre is not that of communicating but of knowing. It is during rehearsal and during the

⁹⁰ *La terza vita di Leo: gli ultimi vent'anni del teatro di Leo de Berardinis a Bologna*, p. 252.

performance for the audience, that this process of acquiring knowledge takes place for the actor. Hence the need to improvise: the actor explores the text through acting and reacts to his/her discoveries, in the same way as the actors of *The Brig* did:

Per un teatro che non si proponeva di offrire la traduzione di una cosa ma la cosa stessa. Dove l'attore si trasforma in reagente della realtà vissuta giorno per giorno, per rovesciarla sullo spettatore.⁹¹

For a theatre that did not purport to offer the representation of a thing but the thing itself. Where the actor transforms himself into a reactor to reality lived day by day and gives it back to the audience.

Knowledge, therefore, does not occur before but during the performance, as theatre is not the representation through props, music, lighting, gestures, movements of a text, but rather it is the discovery of the text on the stage. In her essay 'Gli anni sessanta e settanta e la regia della crisi. Gli esempi di Quartucci e Totò, Bene, De Berardinis e Peragallo' ('The Sixties and Seventies, and the directing of the crisis. The examples of Quartucci and Totò, Bene, De Berardinis and Peragallo'), Donatella Orecchia defines the text as a 'partitura d'attore' ('actor's score') that corresponds to Bartolucci's idea of scenic writing.⁹² What does she mean by that? She means the rewriting of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a rewriting that takes place before and during the performance. In his review, Wilcock doubts the presence of a script. He writes about a very heterogeneous performance which, through quotes from other sources, made the audience's task of understanding difficult. I would add that it made the critic's task difficult too. As requested by the promoters of the *Convegno di Ivrea*, the critic needed to acquire new

⁹¹ Manzella, *La bellezza amara*, p. 13.

⁹² The essay is contained in AA.V. *Corpi e visioni: indizi sul teatro contemporaneo*, ed. A. Audino (Roma: Artemide, 2007), but I have consulted the online reduced version: Donatella Orecchia, 'Leo de Berardinis e Perla Peragallo: teatro come jam session', *L'asino vola: scritti molesti sullo spettacolo e la cultura nel tempo dell'emergenza*, 2 (Nov. 2008) <http://www.lasinovola.it/archivio/teatro/0811_2/leoeperla.pdf> [accessed 10 December 2012], 1-8 (p. 5). For more about scenic writing see Chapter 4.1, (pp. 195-196).

instruments to read the productions of the New Theatre. Wilcock was aware that he was in the presence of something good when he saw the *Faticosa messinscena* but, probably, was not able to understand it fully. What is important, I believe, is that he and the other ‘dissident’ critics, whom I mentioned in the previous sections, were willing to learn, to explore, and to change the way in which they were used to watching a theatre production and to reviewing it. It was all work in progress. The new theatre practitioners were finding new ways to make theatre, the critics were following them closely, and the audiences who attended their performances were ready to be astounded, and to witness the development of a new kind of theatre. Trying to judge the staging through its correspondence to the text would inevitably lead to misunderstanding. De Berardinis and Peragallo wished to ‘pensare teatralmente’ (‘think theatrically’), to find the answers ‘in fieri’ (in the course of execution). Manzella defines them as ‘besti[e] teatral[i]’ (‘theatrical beasts’),⁹³ who were not interested in a philological reading of Shakespeare’s text on the stage. Through the text they wanted to explore, to know themselves and the world, and to express themselves. The ‘theatrical beast’ does everything: he is an actor, but also the ‘regista di se stesso’ (‘director of himself’).⁹⁴ He is in charge of everything, of the text, of the sounds, the lights, the costumes, the stage setting, and the films. In the *Faticosa messinscena dell’Amleto di William Shakespeare*, de Berardinis and Peragallo relied on the help and experience of two cineastes for the video, Alberto Grifi and Mario Masini. But when they dropped out the two artists finished the shots and also did the montage. In doing everything for themselves, de Berardinis and Peragallo were sending a clear message to the representatives of the director’s theatre. They were affirming their wish to reconnect to the tradition of the actor’s theatre – with the actor responsible for every single phase of the staging – which, beginning with the improvised performances of the artists of the *commedia dell’arte*, has never died in

⁹³ Manzella, *La bellezza amara*, p. 13.

⁹⁴ Orecchia, ‘Leo de Berardinis e Perla Peragallo’, p. 5.

Italy, and has been resumed in different forms many times through the centuries.

All this interest in self-expression rather than in the representation of a character on the stage was intended to affirm the autonomy of the actor and his creative power, as opposed to his submission to the director's instructions. In my conversation with Bucci, and as I have already illustrated in the previous section of the chapter, she pointed out that in Shakespeare's time: 'il drammaturgo prendeva tantissimo dagli attori, gli attori erano creatori, improvvisatori, creavano al momento' ('the playwright drew a lot from the actors, who were improvisers and created during the performance').⁹⁵ There is a clear resemblance between Shakespearian theatre practices and the work of de Berardinis and Peragallo, which is not a coincidence. The result of their work on *Macbeth* was a staging that, in the words of Bartolucci (who saw the play), was characterised by a total

libertà scenica (...) [che] fa a meno di qualsiasi riscontro illusorio con quel materiale drammaturgico e con quel che esso rappresenta storicamente, proponendone non tanto una soluzione quanto un'apertura.⁹⁶

Scenic freedom (...) [which] does without any illusory correspondence with that dramaturgical material and with what it represents historically, offering an open interpretation rather than a solution.

The same words could be applied to de Berardinis and Peragallo's second Shakespearian enterprise: *Sir and Lady Macbeth* staged in March 1968 at Carmelo Bene's small underground theatre Teatrino del Divino Amore in Rome. Once again, the first thing that draws our attention is the title. What was the thinking behind it? I have not found any explanatory notes, so I can only guess. My idea is that such a title was probably used to indicate a

⁹⁵ See my discussion of *Zip*, Chapter 4.1 (pp. 205-208).

⁹⁶ Giuseppe Bartolucci, *Testi critici 1964-1987*, p. 176.

social elevation that the action of the production then contradicted, as will be clear from my discussion of the play. It may also have indicated to an Italian audience a particular kind of British social propriety – the image of an aristocratic ‘stiff upper lip’ – that was confounded and flouted by the production’s stage action.⁹⁷ But I will come back to this.

From what we can understand from the few accounts we have of that production, de Berardinis and Peragallo used improvisation here less than in the *Faticosa messinscena dell’Amleto di William Shakespeare*. Yet the phrase ‘libertà scenica’ (‘scenic freedom’) certainly applies to this staging too, by which I mean a completely personalized rendering of Shakespeare’s material. Once again de Berardinis and Peragallo were the only actors. Once again they were in charge of all the phases of the staging. Once again the result was not the representation of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, but the representation of themselves through *Macbeth*. Of course, as with their use of *Hamlet*, this relies upon the audience’s already having a good knowledge of Shakespeare’s play. The stage was scattered with electric wires, microphones, lights – there was a sort of tree made up of twenty lamps pinned to a stick – and torches. This time they did not use videos. In the interview Bucci explained that, little by little, de Berardinis moved away from mainly visual stagings (although lights were very important throughout his career), to focus his attention on the actor ‘che può recitare anche alla luce di un semaforo’ (‘who can even act in the light from a traffic signal’). However, it would be wrong to affirm that the acting was not important in this production. Everything revolved around the actions of de Berardinis and Peragallo. The plot from Shakespeare’s play started after the assassination of Duncan, and what was represented on the stage was ‘tutto l’orrore che incombe come follia e angoscia sui due complici, legati da un comune destino di sangue, incapaci ormai di separare la vita dal potere e privi ormai dell’uno e dell’altra’.⁹⁸ (‘all the haunting horrors that, like folly and anguish,

⁹⁷ It must be noted that ‘Sir’ is a title for a knight or for a baronet, not for a Scottish thane like Macbeth, and would not have been used in medieval Scotland – and indeed is not used in the play.

⁹⁸ Manzella, *La bellezza amara*, p. 16.

afflict the two accomplices, related to each other by a shared destiny of blood, unable by now to separate life from power, and deprived even of each other'). But what did de Berardinis and Peragallo do on that stage? Peragallo spent most of the performance sitting on a bidet, or trying to wash Duncan's blood off her hands. She cried, she murmured, she threw up, she shouted.



Figure 15: Perla Peragallo

De Berardinis did more or less the same lying on the old carpet and dragging himself to the bidet to throw up. Even in this case we can only guess at some of the choices made by de Berardinis and Peragallo. As I said before, a contrast was created between what the title suggests and what the audience saw on the stage. The bidet may stand for the throne and, at the same time, it is the place where Peragallo/Lady Macbeth tries to wash her hands. But why did they not choose a washbasin? And why the throwing up and all those shouts? We may read this as a way to denounce where the thirst for power leads. Macbeth and his wife have achieved their goals, but the objects on the stage and their actions hint at the level of abjection and degradation that they have reached. Even in the absence of a narrative, everything here seems to tell a story or, we could say, to reveal a truth. It is as if de Berardinis and Peragallo had found the nucleus of *Macbeth*, and made every single choice in order to represent it on the stage.



Figure 16: Leo de Berardinis and Perla Peragallo in *Sir and Lady Macbeth*

Sounds were predominant in this production: thus the use of microphones and even of a *laringofono* (a throat microphone) to transmit the vibrations of the voice and in an unusual attempt to reproduce the twelve-tone system. Lines were spoken in Italian, in the dialect of Foggia and in English. Words were deformed and were used less for their meaning than for their sonic quality. Music ranged from Verdi's opera to Indian songs and, unsurprisingly, also Schönberg's atonal music. Bartolucci defined all this as 'l'elemento rumore' ('the noise element') which, along with 'l'elemento corpo' ('the body element') and 'l'elemento luce' ('the light element'), form a sort of delirium constituted by sounds, by movement and gestures, and by lights all seen as 'segni' ('signs') that are either used alternately or interact with one another.⁹⁹ The innovative intention is clear, and what is also important, I believe, is Bartolucci's use of the word 'sign' that reminds me of those scenic materials that, according to him and the other promoters of the *Convegno di Ivrea*, should be considered as signifiers more than as signified.

Before moving on to the successive stagings of Shakespeare's plays which date back to the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, I wish to sum up the elements that characterize de Berardinis and Peragallo's first two Shakespearian enterprises and that make them iconic stagings of the Italian New Theatre. The idea of the performance as open work is central, open for

⁹⁹ Bartolucci, *Testi critici*, p. 182.

the creators who express themselves freely on the stage and also use improvisation on the one hand, and for the audience who are expected to interpret what they see subjectively rather than objectively on the other.¹⁰⁰ This, of course, requires imagination and the need to move away from the idea of the staging as the theatrical representation of a written text. Related to this is the manipulation of the text, as the actors want to give voice to their creativity and, through the manipulation, express themselves. They also want to explore the text during the performance, reminiscent of Bartolucci's idea of scenic writing, according to which there is no distinction between the phase of the writing of a text and the phase of its *mise-en-scène*. Fundamental also was the opposition to the oppressive role of the director who, in de Berardinis and Peragallo's opinion, used the actors as puppets. The 'actors-authors', instead, are in charge of the work on the text, and of every step of the staging. Lastly, I need to mention the use of props, lights, sounds, and also of the movements as 'signs', that are to be considered for what they are and not for what they represent.

4.2.2 New Approaches to the Theatre of Shakespeare: the Productions of the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s

In spite of periods of withdrawal, Leo de Berardinis is one of the few author-directors from the new Italian theatre of the 60s and 70s who has remained faithful to the spirit of experiment, and attempted consistently to renew himself and his processes of theatremaking.¹⁰¹

These words by De Marinis are contained in the introduction to the already-mentioned interview that he conducted with de Berardinis in 1985. De Berardinis's career is usually divided into three phases: the first encounters with Peragallo; the collaboration with the company *Nuova Scena*

¹⁰⁰ See Eco's definition of 'open work' at p. 197.

¹⁰¹ De Marinis, 'From Shakespeare to Shakespeare', p. 49.

(*New Stage*) in Bologna from 1983 till the end of the 1980s; and the stagings belonging to the Teatro di Leo, which he founded in Bologna in 1987. In all of these phases, Leo worked on Shakespeare, though with different modalities. In this part of my discussion I will look at his productions of the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s, outlining the elements that characterise his theatre and, in particular, his approach to Shakespeare, in order to explore the ideas that I have outlined at the beginning of this section. As I have not seen any of Leo's stagings of Shakespeare's plays and there is very little that we have on video, I will not go into the level of detail I explored with Strehler's *Re Lear* and *La Tempesta*. Instead, I will proceed to a more general discussion of the majority of the productions.¹⁰²

In 1973, together with Peragallo, de Berardinis staged his first *King Lear*, whose complete title was *King lacreme Lear napulitane*, that is *King Lear* associated with Neapolitan tears.¹⁰³ From the title, an interweaving of *King Lear* and *Lacreme napulitane* by Libero Bovio, it is clear that Shakespeare's text was 'contaminated' with something else, that is with the Neapolitan *sceneggiata*, a popular form of theatre that alternated sung and spoken word in Neapolitan dialect revolving around love, betrayal, honour, domestic grief, and life in the world of petty crime, all shown in pathetic tones.¹⁰⁴ Leo's intention was that of exploring *King Lear*, observing how it would react to the *sceneggiata*: 'my approach to Shakespeare consisted in an attempt at fusion – at making the text react almost chemically with something else in order to see what was there, and to get to know its constituent elements.'¹⁰⁵ It is hard to understand what de Berardinis meant, but what is clear is the process of fusion and, in this particular case, of his wish to blend high culture – Shakespeare – with popular culture – the

¹⁰² The staging of Shakespeare's plays after the first two are: *King lacreme Lear napulitane* (1973); *Amleto I* (1984); *King Lear: studi e variazioni* (1985); *Amleto II* (1985); *La Tempesta* (1986); *Macbeth* (1988); *IV e V atto dell'Otello di William Shakespeare (Act 4 and 5 of Othello by William Shakespeare)* (1992); *Totò, principe di Danimarca* (1993); *King Lear* (workshop) (1996); *King Lear n. 1 (King Lear no. 1)* (1996); *Lear Opera* (1998). The other titles in English are given in the list at p. 7.

¹⁰³ 'Neapolitan tears' is not written in standard Italian, but as a transliteration of Neapolitan.

¹⁰⁴ Libero Bovio (1883-1942) was a Neapolitan lyricist and dialect poet, playwright, and journalist.

¹⁰⁵ De Marinis, 'From Shakespeare to Shakespeare', p. 57.

sceneggiata, a process that is in itself very Shakespearian. Also, he alternated high, poetical language with dialect, another element that was often present in Shakespeare's plays, and high forms of music, like Tchaikovsky, jazz or Schönberg, and popular, like the Neapolitan ballad. As if this was not enough, Shakespeare's words are interspersed with Strindberg's and Melville's.¹⁰⁶ And some of Lear's lines are recited in Neapolitan!¹⁰⁷ Did people understand this unusual Shakespeare? I think that a comment made by Bucci in the interview can provide a satisfactory answer. Drawing another parallel between Shakespeare's theatre and Leo's, she affirmed that:

quello di Shakespeare [era] un mondo molto vivo, molto carnale. In molti strati di pubblico, indipendentemente dal livello culturale, c'era meno annebbiamento intellettuale per quanto riguarda proprio la percezione animale dei riti comunitari come il teatro.

Shakespeare's world was very alive, very carnal. In many layers of audience, independently from the cultural level, there was less intellectual clouding as far as the animal perception of communal rites, like theatre, is concerned.

What I think Bucci means, is that, today – at least in Italy – we tend to watch theatre performances too much through the filter of our brain, our intellect. This is partly due to our school education, which – as I have already explained in the section on the New Theatre – neglects any art practice, be it drama, or playing music, creative writing, or painting.¹⁰⁸ Art in the Italian education system means studying history of art. The Italian school, too often criticized by everybody, offers a good level of cultural preparation but, generally, does not provide the instruments to develop an artistic sensitivity, or artistic skills. Going to the theatre, therefore (I am not

¹⁰⁶ Melville quotes and alludes to *King Lear* extensively in *Moby Dick*.

¹⁰⁷ Manzella, *La bellezza amara*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁸ See my discussion at p. 211.

talking of commercial theatre or entertainment), becomes a mainly cerebral activity, while the perception of the quality of the performance, of its 'magnetism' (Bucci) plays a limited role. Now, I guess that it is this perception of the energy on the stage, of the magnetism, of the impact on our senses and on our emotions, that de Berardinis and Peragallo were trying to transmit with their performances. One could object that Strindberg or Melville, Tchaikovsky, Schönberg or jazz music are not easy, straightforward forms of art, but Shakespeare is not either. So, how did illiterate people understand Shakespeare? They certainly did not understand everything, but they shared in the energy flow on the stage, in the scenes of love or of violence, in the sounds, the noise, the music. And, as we know, the plays were received on different levels according to the cultural level of the spectators. De Berardinis himself spoke of the 'four traditional levels of reading, (...) which manage to cover the entire range of available possibilities and reach all levels of the audience', adding that this was typical of Shakespeare's theatre.¹⁰⁹

The mid-1980s were the years of the Shakespearian trilogy: *Amleto* (I version 1984, II version 1985), *King Lear: studi e variazioni* (1985), and *La Tempesta* (1986). All of these plays are seen by de Berardinis as a journey of the protagonist. Hamlet, for him, is the actor who tries 'to be' rather than 'to act', who does not interpret but is what he is. Lear makes a journey 'in search of himself, towards his reintegration, through madness and beyond illusion or appearances'.¹¹⁰ Prospero, at the end of the play, transcends human limits and acquires a higher consciousness. Shakespeare himself, de Berardinis seems to suggest, is on a journey that transforms him from a playwright into a teacher, a kind of guru, I would say, who transmits his wisdom. The common thread identified by the director in the three plays is the protagonist's search for himself, the need to explore himself and to get

¹⁰⁹ De Marinis, 'From Shakespeare to Shakespeare', p. 56. It is not clear what de Berardinis meant by the 'four levels'. Bucci maintains that he referred to Auerbach's *La lettura di Dante Alighieri*. Whether this is true or not, he certainly referred to the idea of a theatre for everybody that characterised Shakespeare's time, when all social layers would attend the playhouses.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

to know who he really is. Autobiographical elements are evident in the productions. Since his adolescence, de Berardinis had had serious problems with alcohol until he became a real alcoholic and was obliged to go into rehabilitation. The trilogy corresponds to a new phase after the detoxification. Like the three protagonists of the plays, de Berardinis was trying to find his way again, and to reconstruct himself after a period of destruction. In the same way, after destroying theatre with his desecrating stagings, he began a cycle of reconstruction with productions that were not so much characterized by contamination and conflating but focused on Shakespeare. He staged *Amleto* in its entirety, following the Italian text translated by Andrea Dallagiacoma, the result of which was a five-hour performance! Both in Britain and in other countries, we are used to very reduced theatrical versions of the play. Why did de Berardinis stage such a long version? Because he wanted to try! This was theatre for him; it was experimenting, taking risks and observing what happened. His theatre was a very practical art, a form of exploration, and a means to acquire knowledge, ideas that had not changed since the outset with Peragallo. It is difficult to imagine what this *Amleto* was without having seen it. Manzella's words suggest a very dark and nocturnal play, whose darkness is broken by lights coming from above or from the sides, in a kind of 'vigile *rêverie*' ('vigil *rêverie*')¹¹¹ with noises that could be heard from the distance, and characters who appeared like shadows and, like Hamlet and Ophelia, 'compiono lo stesso tragitto su orbite distanti, senza intersezioni, dove uno sguardo diventa il massimo contatto fisico ammesso'¹¹² ('make the same journey on distant orbits, without intersections, where a look becomes the only admissible physical contact'). The representation of roles is secondary, there is very little concern with psychological characterization, 'per lasciare intatta la parola di Shakespeare' ('so that Shakespeare's words remain intact').¹¹³

¹¹¹ Manzella, *La bellezza amara*, p. 125.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

After *Amleto*, de Berardinis encountered *King Lear* again. In contrast with the 1973 staging, the focus this time was on Shakespeare's drama, but de Berardinis made some cuts to Andrea Dallagiacoma's translation, as he saw the play as four big blocks: the love test; Gloucester's blinding; the tempest; and the final scene. The character and the story of Lear were central for de Berardinis, and he saw the subplot and all the other characters as projections of Lear, who makes a journey from an unreal world to the world of reality, in a tortuous search for his true self. The movement from illusion to reality is represented through various choices. At the beginning of the play Lear wears a very long beard – like a kind of mask – which, from the scene of the tempest, will disappear. Far from being an emblem of age, or of power and authority, the mask is clearly false and marks the fiction of theatre. It is just what can be found under the beard that de Berardinis wanted to explore, and he did so by getting rid of it pretty soon.

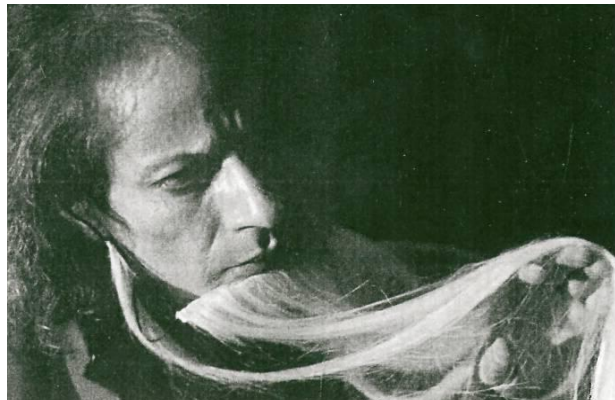


Figure 17: Leo de Berardinis as Lear

The scenic space is divided in two with the stage being the place of illusion and appearances, and the pit, freed from the seats that were replaced with a little balcony at the back of the auditorium, as the heath, the place of reality. But it is not only Lear who makes this journey. Lear is also the actor who does not want to 'wear a mask', but wants to be himself, to express himself on the stage. Wearing a mask is not only a metaphor. De Berardinis and his actors often used masks on the stage, and they did so in this

production.¹¹⁴ In a video that can be found on YouTube, de Berardinis explains the use of the mask: as we know, wearing a mask requires a different kind of acting, as the actor needs to accentuate the body's expressivity to counterbalance always tried to avoid, but what is more interesting is the following:

togliendosi la maschera l'attore capisce che lui è tutto una maschera. A quel punto è diventato veramente un attore. Tutto ciò fluisce con naturalezza poetica (...), e non ti preoccupi più della rappresentazione, in quel momento sei.¹¹⁵

Taking off the mask, the actor understands that he himself is a mask. At that point he has really become an actor. All this flows with poetical naturalness, and you do not worry any more about representation, in that moment you are.

Bucci remembers that she was the first to take off her mask during an improvisation. 'Ti togli la maschera e chi sei? Quante altre te ne puoi togliere per arrivare a un grado zero?' ('You take off the mask and who are you? How many more can you take off to get to a degree zero?'). What de Berardinis's and Bucci's words suggest, I think, is again the wish to be rather than to act; the actor does not represent, he (or she) is. Bucci also affirms that, of course, there were roles, there were characters but, in comparison with the director's theatre, there was much less concern with the idea of 'entering the character' in Stanislavskian terms. Like in all the previous and successive productions, instead, words and their sound were fundamental, in a kind of acting that Bucci defines as 'musical', and that was characteristic of the New Theatre. The actors played big guitars with a

¹¹⁴ The use of the mask certainly bears the influence of various theatrical traditions, such as Greek theatre or Japanese theatre. Strongest of all, however, must have been the influence of the *commedia dell'arte*, I believe, as it is to this very Italian tradition that de Berardinis's theatre is very much indebted.

¹¹⁵ Leo de Berardinis, *King LeoR*, produced by Raffaele Rago, directed and edited by Emilio Battista, Patrizia Stellino, Silvia Storelli (Ecipar – Cineteca di Bologna) (1996). <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCkRa0ZZCb0&feature=relmfu> [accessed 15 April 2012] (part 4 of 5).

bow, and the tempest was evoked by lines in English from the playtext that they spoke on the microphone like the instruments in a piece of chamber music.

In the interview with De Marinis, de Berardinis defines his reading of *King Lear* as ‘teleological’:

It sees an end to things. As absurd and unreal as Lear’s journey can seem to the eyes of the world, for me everything in it follows a precise logic, even if it is not immediately obvious. For me, Cordelia exists, Edgar exists, everyone exists only because Lear saves himself.¹¹⁶

These ideas were prompted by De Marinis’s suggestion that de Berardinis’s *King Lear* differed significantly from Brook’s, and also, from Kott’s pessimistic and absurdist interpretation. On the contrary, de Berardinis affirms that the world appears absurd to those who cannot see, but it was not absurd to Shakespeare. It is up to us, therefore, to see the truth beyond the semblance of absurdity. And he concludes his ideas challenging Brook:

If Shakespeare is read according to the four levels of meaning, on the literal level you can indeed talk of a tragedy of ingratitude: but there are other readings on other levels and Brook will have stopped at one of these ...¹¹⁷

I do not feel like supporting de Berardinis’s criticism of Brook, but I think that his statement is a confirmation of what I wrote in the conclusion of chapter 3. When a director transforms a text into physicality on the stage, he inevitably gives his reading of the play, and this is as valid for a director like Strehler, as for de Berardinis, or Brook. All of them staged *King Lear*, but the three productions are completely different from one another.

¹¹⁶ De Marinis, ‘From Shakespeare to Shakespeare’, p. 62.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

It is noteworthy that, in the discussion with de Berardinis, De Marinis refers to the last lines of the play, attributing them to Edgar, without considering at all the Q version in which they are pronounced by Albany. He is referring to Dallagiacoma's translation, but the fact that there is no mention of the Q text, means that, probably, there was still not much awareness of the issue in Italy in the mid-1980s. Instead, De Marinis points out how Dallagiacoma's translation differs from the original, thus providing a more optimistic interpretation of the last lines: 'We that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long'¹¹⁸ is translated as: 'Noi che siamo giovani / non lasceremo / che si vedano più simili sventure.'¹¹⁹ And this, in English, would be: 'We that are young / Will not allow / Such misfortunes to be seen again'. Although Strehler's and de Berardinis's stagings were completely different, we observe that they agreed on the general meaning of Lear's story, that is the idea of a journey that Lear has to make to find his true self, and both directors saw the tragedy as necessary to set up a better future. The idea of a redemptive journey was very much part of de Berardinis's biography in that period, as I pointed out above, and it is in this light that I understand his reading of *King Lear*. It was no longer the anger and the rebellion of the youth, but the search for something more stable after a life of excess.

After finding his true self, man goes beyond human limits and reaches a higher level of consciousness in the production of *La Tempesta*. Prospero abandons the human condition, as he has completed the journey he (or de Berardinis we could say) embarked on when he was still Hamlet. Hamlet tried to fight against the world of appearances represented by the court, Lear found reality through madness, and Prospero goes beyond. In a metaphorical way we can say that he abandons Caliban and acquires Ariel. In the playtext Caliban is actually abandoned, while Ariel is set free. It is the

¹¹⁸ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 5.3.324-325, ed. R. A. Foakes, Arden Shakespeare, 3rd series (London: Thomson, 1977).

¹¹⁹ In De Marinis, 'Da Shakespeare a Shakespeare: intorno al superamento del teatro mediante del teatro', *Acquario*, 8, 9, 10, (May 1986), 55-71 (p. 71). Strehler chose a very similar translation for these two lines 'Noi che siamo giovani / Non permetteremo / Che si vedano più simili sventure'. See Chapter 3.5, (p. 152).

‘Ariel quality’, I would say, that Prospero acquires. As Ariel is sent back to the elements, de Berardinis’s Prospero embarks on a journey into the higher spheres.

The chaos that characterized de Berardinis’s and Peragallo’s first productions, with objects scattered on the stage, the torches, the wires, the bidet, the recorders, the *objets trouvés*, is replaced in the trilogy by a bare stage, either dark or white, with few props of geometrical shape. Lights are now used to split, enlarge or contract the scenic space. Acting becomes much more self-contained and absorbed, as opposed to the excesses of the first performances with Peragallo. From the excesses of youth, de Berardinis reaches a kind of calm and peace in the stagings of the trilogy, and sees Shakespeare as a companion, a life teacher, a plant which provides him with sap to represent his own and man’s life journey – or life cycle, I would say – on the stage. When I asked Bucci to what extent de Berardinis’s stagings could be considered Shakespearian she gave me the following answer: ‘Era Leo de Berardinis che incontra Shakespeare. Con un gruppo di attori incoraggiati a essere svegli e vigili che incontrano Shakespeare’. (‘It was Leo de Berardinis who meets Shakespeare. With a group of actors encouraged to be alert and vigilant who meet Shakespeare’.) This takes us back to Schino’s definition of the relationship of the nineteenth-century Great Actors with Shakespeare’s plays as ‘a meeting place’.¹²⁰ I find it remarkable that the scholar and the actress used just the same words (meeting, meets), though one was referring to actors who lived over 150 years ago, the other to one who has not been dead for long. We could say that the starting point was the same, but the way in which the Great Actors on the one hand, and de Berardinis on the other, developed their relationship with Shakespeare, differed to a great extent. However, it cannot be overlooked that in both cases the focus was on the actor and on his desire to express himself with very little regard for the overall plan of the play.

De Berardinis’s relationship with Shakespeare continued into the 1990s with a new phase, some new actors, and a return to more extreme

¹²⁰ For more about this see Chapter 2.1, (pp. 85 and 95)

forms of contamination and more ‘open’ stagings. I suppose that was the kind of theatre that de Berardinis really loved and, if the trilogy probably responded to a very personal need to reconstruct his life through the reconstruction of his stagings, by the first decades of the 1990s, he was strong enough to deconstruct again, to mix, to blend, to add rather than to subtract. In *Totò principe di Danimarca*, staged in Asti in October 1990, de Berardinis went back to a composite and heterogeneous theatrical language, as the title once again suggests.¹²¹ Totò and Hamlet: the Italian prince of laughter and the melancholic Danish prince in a wish to blend comic and tragic again, building on Shakespeare’s own habitual blending of the two genres. But that is not all: Totò also becomes Charlot (this is the Italian name for the ‘little tramp’ played by Charlie Chaplin) and quotes Eduardo De Filippo in some of his gestures, and Petrolini.¹²² It is a staging that is constituted by various layers: there is the actor de Berardinis who plays the role of Antonio Esposito (Totò), and Esposito/Totò who wants to play the role of Hamlet. But, from time to time, de Berardinis leaves his role and talks to the audience like an actor of the ‘avanspettacolo’.¹²³ Or is it Esposito who suspends the narration of facts to start a dialogue with the audience? This way of getting out of the character only occurs during the comic parts of the staging, whereas it is missing when scenes from *Hamlet* are performed. There is a double ending: Hamlet dies, but Totò does not. Ophelia dies in a video, but her ‘double’, the florist of Chaplin’s *City Lights*,

¹²¹ Totò (1898-1967) was an Italian comedian, film and theatre actor, writer, singer, and songwriter. He is considered one of the greatest Italian artists of the twentieth century. Classified as an heir of the *commedia dell’arte*, he has been compared to such figures as Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin.

¹²² Sir Charles Spencer ‘Charlie’ Chaplin (1889-1977) was an English comic actor, film director, and composer best known for his work during the silent film era. Eduardo De Filippo (1900-1984) was an Italian actor, playwright, screenwriter, author, and poet. His best known plays are *Filumena Marturano* and *Napoli Milionara*. Among his works, he also translated *The Tempest* in Neapolitan. Ettore Petrolini (1884-1936) was an Italian actor, playwright, writer, and screenwriter. He is considered one of the best representatives of variety theatre.

¹²³ An Italian theatrical genre that developed between the 1930s and the 1950s. Closely related to the variety show, it features a diverse mixture of music, ballet, sketch comedy, and other forms of entertainment.

is still alive.¹²⁴ The production closes with Totò and the florist walking towards the back of the stage, with Totò who has now become Charlot with his typical bowler hat and his characteristic unsteady gait. Fundamental, as usual, is the use of various music genres: from Wagner to Verdi and Mendelssohn. And then American songs alternating with Neapolitan songs from Raffaele Viviani to Pino Daniele.¹²⁵ Even the scenic space is organized to include the two levels: a setting typical of Eduardo De Filippo's comedy, but with an always present skull of Yorick, the only element that evokes Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. All the elements typical of de Berardinis's theatre are present in this staging: a rather chaotic plot that comprises tragedy and comedy; the reference to Hamlet together with the homage to some great actors, Totò first of all, and then Petrolini, Eduardo and Charlot; high culture represented by Hamlet's soliloquies along with the popular culture of Totò, the presence of very heterogeneous music; the combination of acting, singing, dancing, that also characterized Shakespeare's theatre. It was again a kind of theatre that required the audience to use their imagination, to find their way in the cluster of quotes, inserts, theatre and music genres, and acting styles, but it was certainly a kind of theatre that shakes, that has an impact, that does not leave the audience indifferent.

In 1996 and in 1998, de Berardinis staged *King Lear* again. The first, *King Lear n. 1* (*King Lear no. 1*) was premièred at Urbino Teatro Raffaello Sanzio, on 10th December 1996; the second, *Lear Opera*, was staged at Bologna Teatro Laboratorio San Leonardo on 21 April 1998. Both productions blended scenes from Shakespeare's *King Lear* with quotations from other sources. In the first, there was a clear reference to the *commedia dell'arte*, with the actors who wear a mask and act on a small stage at the back of the main stage. On the left hand side of the stage there is a round table and above it a luminous sign, the sign of *Mexico* bar. There are sitting

¹²⁴ *City Lights* is a 1931 silent and romantic film written by, directed by, and starring Charlie Chaplin.

¹²⁵ Raffaele Viviani (1888-1950) was an Italian poet, composer, and theatre actor. He wrote several Neapolitan songs. Pino Daniele (born 1955) is a Neapolitan singer, composer, and musician. His music ranges from pop, to blues, jazz, and Middle Eastern music.

de Berardinis/Lear and Donato Castellaneta/Gloucester who watch what is happening on the small stage and make their comments, and de Berardinis speaks Lear's lines in Neapolitan. The music ranges again from Verdi's melodrama to Mozart's *Requiem*, from Billie Holiday's songs, to Moni Ovadia's, Enzo Jannacci's *El portava i scarp del tennis* (*He was wearing trainers*) in Milanese and Enzo Moscato's *Indifferentemente* (*Indifferently*) in Neapolitan.¹²⁶ Bucci remembers a performance that took place at Firenze Teatro alla Pergola, where a very bourgeois audience walked out at the end of the first part. The positive aspect of it was, according to Bucci, the fact that, from that moment on, a different kind of public started to attend the theatre for the successive performances, a public that would normally have never gone to La Pergola. In *Lear Opera*, *King Lear* is contaminated with *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* on the one hand, and with Neapolitan farce on the other. Following a similar idea of high and low, tragic and comic, and as in *King Lear n. 1* (*King Lear no. 1*), Mozart's *Requiem* and Verdi's *Otello* alternate with Moscato's and Jannacci's songs, along with Moni Ovadia's klezmer music, and *Tema* by I Giganti.¹²⁷



Figure 18: Leo de Berardinis as Lear in *Lear Opera*

¹²⁶ Moni Ovadia (born 1946) is an actor, musician, and theatrical author. He was born in Bulgaria to a Jewish family who moved to Milan in Ovadia's early childhood. His best known theatre production is *Oylem Goylem* (*The world is dumb*), where he also sang klezmer music.

¹²⁷ Enzo Jannacci (born 1935) is a singer, songwriter, actor, and comedian. He is considered as a master of musical art, and cabaret. Enzo Moscato (born 1947) is a chansonnier, actor, playwright, and theatre director. I Giganti was a group that was created in 1959, and reached great success in 1966 with the song *Tema*.

In these productions of the 1990s, among the last that de Berardinis directed before going into a coma during a simple operation in 2001 from which he never recovered, there seems to be a return to the years of his youth with Peragallo. Certainly that is partly true, as these last stagings of Shakespeare's plays were very much open works as the first were. Yet, quite rightly I think, Oliviero Ponte di Pino traces a new element in these productions, a higher form of wisdom. He compares de Berardinis with a shaman, who is invaded by the characters' wisdom and poetry and, through his work on the stage, transmits them to the audience.¹²⁸ Shakespeare, therefore, is a master or a guide, who helps de Berardinis in his journey to wisdom and, through him, helps the audience too. But life is also made of laughter, of materiality, of mistakes, of falls. Thus we have the comic gags, the farce, the parody, and self-parody, in very Shakespearian terms.

When I asked Bucci whether she thinks that de Berardinis used Shakespeare's texts as pre-texts for very personal productions, she was very firm in replying that de Berardinis's respect for the playwright and for his words is undeniable. She added that what made these stagings really Shakespearian was: 'l'intensità della relazione che [de Berardinis] chiedeva a se stesso e a noi quando stavamo dentro quelle parole, quei pensieri, quelle relazioni tra i personaggi' ('the intensity of connection that [de Berardinis] asked of himself and of us when we were inside those words, those thoughts, those relationships between characters'). As I wrote in my discussion of the 1984 production of *Amleto*, Manzella affirmed that de Berardinis kept Shakespeare's words intact. And, in her master's thesis *Leo-*

¹²⁸ Oliviero Ponte di Pino 'La sapienza di Shakespeare (e di Leo de Berardinis): appunti su Lear Opera', *ateatro: webzine di cultura teatrale*, 47.7 <http://www.olivieropdp.it/> [accessed 15 April 2012] .

Lear: 'King Lear' secondo Leo de Berardinis (*Leo-Lear: 'King Lear' according to Leo de Berardinis*), Rosita Oriolo speaks of de Berardinis's 'capacità di restituire al teatro la purezza dei versi shakespeareiani' ('capability to give back to theatre the purity of Shakespeare lines').¹²⁹ De Berardinis's commitment to Shakespeare's plays was life-long and his love for them was clear. He mainly read the texts in translation, but used to meet the translators, spoke with them and compared his ideas with theirs. He also compared the translated texts with the English versions. Yet his approach was very different from Strehler's, and his main concern was not that of 'serving the text' and rendering it on the stage – as much as possible – as it is on the page. 'It was de Berardinis who meets Shakespeare', Bucci said, and who, through the relationship with Shakespeare's plays, developed and refined his own idea of theatre.

People who attended de Berardinis's productions of Shakespeare's plays would have been disappointed if they expected to see 'a textual (or literary) Shakespeare up there on the stage',¹³⁰ but they certainly saw great theatre, a theatre that has an impact, that transforms, and that is not easily forgotten when the performance is over. It is undeniable that it was a kind of theatre that required the audience to know Shakespeare's texts (and not only these), to use their imagination, and to find their way in the cluster of quotes and in the commixture of different artistic languages and artistic genres. It is inevitable, therefore, to use words like 'appropriation' and 'adaptation' for de Berardinis's theatre. Yet, did Shakespeare not appropriate and adapt? I have already discussed the issue of authenticity and of what we need to keep in mind when using phrases like 'Shakespeare's words' or 'Shakespeare's textual original' in the previous chapter. In the afterword of the book *World-wide Shakespeares: Local Appropriations in Film and Performance*, edited by Sonia Massai, Barbara Hodgdon concludes that Shakespeare himself might be defined as 'The Great Appropriator' and 'The Great Adapter'.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Rosita Oriolo, *Leo-Lear: 'King Lear' secondo Leo de Berardinis* (master's thesis, Università degli studi di Bari, 1997-98), p.11.

¹³⁰ *World-wide Shakespeares: Local Appropriations in Film and Performance*, p. 158.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

Shakespeare's plays were the outcome of his meeting with various sources, through which he developed and refined his idea of theatre. So, could we say that de Berardinis's artistic process was closer to Shakespeare's than Strehler's? We are in the presence of two great artists, whose commitment to Shakespeare was life-long, and who never stopped exploring his plays. Yet, they had very different ideas about theatre and, as a consequence, their work on the English playwright was different too. Strehler was the main representative of the director's theatre; de Berardinis felt much closer to the tradition of the actor's theatre. In the Italian director's theatre, the written text was central, and the acting, as well as the staging, were considered as instrumental to the transformation of the written page into theatrical action. De Berardinis, instead, along with other artists who are now regarded as representatives of the New Theatre, did not see the 'truth' of theatre in the text, which, in his productions, became one of the elements of the artistic creation that is theatre. Shakespeare, therefore, was for de Berardinis a teacher and a companion, whose plays he explored in order to understand what theatre is and, at the same time, who he was, in a long journey of search for his true self. A return to the actor's theatre – though in very different forms – as I discussed. It is not by chance that de Berardinis's homage to the great Shakespearian characters, Hamlet in primis, but also Lear, and Prospero, went along with his homage to great actors, like Chaplin, Totò, De Filippo, and Petrolini. These were actors who were real artists, and who developed their own aesthetic idea through their acting.

If de Berardinis's productions were not based on a philological reading of Shakespeare's texts, there were many elements in them and in his theatre that are very Shakespearian. One of these is the idea of a theatre company as a sort of community, of family I would say, where the author (or the director) collaborates with the actors in a mutual exchange of ideas, and of creativity. Fundamental also was the commixture of various artistic forms, like acting, singing, and dancing in a composite and heterogeneous theatrical language, that Bucci defined as very 'alive and carnal'. Commixture also meant bringing together high and popular forms of art; the Shakespearian sublime and the tradition of popular Neapolitan theatre;

poetical language and everyday language, or dialects; comic and tragic elements, just as Shakespeare creatively mixed all of these ingredients. Finally, but not in order of importance, is the idea that a work of art is received on various levels, which makes it possible to reach all the layers of the audience.

At this point I want to highlight something that may sound paradoxical. Strehler's theatre did not share much with Shakespeare's in terms of the work with the company, and the work needed to take the play from page to stage. Yet, through a rather different process, the director wished to give his audience productions that – as far as possible – were faithful to Shakespeare's original texts. Instead, the work of de Berardinis shared more with Shakespearian practices. Yet, despite the similarities, the result were productions that – as I have extensively illustrated – offered very free interpretations of the playtexts. It is as if for Strehler the spirit of Shakespeare was encapsulated in the text, whereas for de Berardinis (and for Bene, as I will illustrate in the next section) it rested on Shakespeare's approach to theatre.

Most of the elements that informed the theatre of de Berardinis were present in Bene's theatre too, but – as we will see in the next section – the two directors/actors also had some very different ideas. In fact, after a collaboration for a *Don Chisciotte* (*Don Quixote*) in 1968, they decided to go their own separate ways, despite their friendship and mutual respect.

4. 3. Carmelo Bene

Carmelo Bene was born in Campi Salentina, near Lecce, in 1937 and died in Rome in 2002. His relationship with Shakespeare was a long one: it spans the period from 1962, when he staged his first version of *Amleto*, to 1996, the year of his last version of *Macbeth* entitled *Macbeth-Horror*

Suite.¹³² Among his Shakespearian productions *Hamlet* was the most recurrent. He staged five different theatre versions, a film, a television play, a radio version, and two more theatre productions, one of which later became a television play, and the other a compact disc.¹³³ Bene also staged *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard III*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*,¹³⁴ but I prefer only to look at his various versions of *Hamlet*, as I believe that this play is the one that, for reasons I will illustrate, best contributes to an explanation of Bene's work with Shakespeare's plays. As I did with Leo de Berardinis, I also wish to explore the elements of Bene's theatre that make him a representative of the New Theatre, and those that mark a very personal style that was new in the panorama of Italian stagecraft, and that, so far, has not produced any heirs. Once more in my discussion, I will address the issue of the director's and the actor's theatre, in order to investigate how this man, who dared to affirm: 'Io sono Shakespeare' ('I am Shakespeare'),¹³⁵ went back to the Italian tradition of the actor's theatre – as he never recognized the figure of the director – just to deny it and to deny theatre in general. This may seem

¹³² *Macbeth Horror Suite* was staged on 30 September 1996 at Rome Teatro Argentina. Its sources were Shakespeare but also Verdi. In the course of his career, Bene's stagings (and performances) became increasingly sonorous. The voice, sounds, and music always played an important role in his productions, but in this and in *Hamlet Suite* they became predominant. That is why he called these versions *suites*. But there was not only the sound of music. Bene and Silvia Pasello (the only two actors) made sounds all through the performance: they shouted, they faked an orgasm, they burped, and they mumbled. If this was not enough, all the sounds were amplified by a powerful electronic machine.

¹³³ The five theatre productions are: *Amleto* (1962); *Amleto* (1964); *Basta, con un 'Vi amo' mi ero quasi promesso, Amleto o le conseguenze della pietà filiale* (Enough: with a 'I love you' I had nearly proposed, *Hamlet or the Consequences of Filial Piety*) da e di W. Shakespeare a Jules Laforgue (from and by W. Shakespeare to Jules Laforgue) (1965); *Amleto o le conseguenze della pietà filiale* da Laforgue (1967); *Amleto di Carmelo Bene [da Shakespeare a Laforgue]* (1975). The film is *Un Amleto di meno* (One Hamlet Less) (1973). The television play is *Amleto di Carmelo Bene [da Shakespeare a Laforgue]*, which was recorded in 1974 but broadcasted in 1978. The radio version was entitled *Amleto da William Shakespeare* (*Hamlet from William Shakespeare*) (1974). The two theatre productions *Hommelette for Hamlet* and *Hamlet Suite* (1987), later became respectively a television play (recorded in 1987 and broadcasted in 1990) and a compact disc (1994). The missing titles in English are given in the table at p. 7.

¹³⁴ *Romeo e Giulietta* (storia di W. Shakespeare) (*Romeo and Juliet* [Story by William Shakespeare]) (1976); *Riccardo III* (1977); *Otello, o la deficienza della donna* (*Othello, or the Woman's Foolishness*) (1979); *Macbeth* (1983).

¹³⁵ Quoted in Baiardo and Trovato, *Un classico del rifacimento: l'Amleto di Carmelo Bene*, p. 21.

paradoxical, but I hope that my discussion will reveal the coherence of such an idea.

4.3.1 A General Overview of Bene's Theatre

In his interesting essay 'Carmelo Bene: Revolutionizing Tradition', Joseph Farrell affirms that: 'Not only content with merely being resistant to interpretation, Bene actively does all he can to fend off interpretation, to ensure obscurity, to guarantee that no sequence of ideas or words can be viewed as carrying rational meaning'.¹³⁶ I believe that this affirmation contains two important thoughts: the first is the fact that it is extremely difficult to interpret Bene's stagings of Shakespeare's plays (and not only of Shakespeare's). The second is the awareness that Bene 'actively' did all he could to defy any possible interpretation of his work. It is in that one word, 'actively' that I see the possibility of understanding – that is of interpreting – the work of this protagonist of the Italian theatre (but also of culture in general) of the twentieth century. Perhaps this last statement may seem as obscure as Bene's work and, probably, contradictory. How are we able to interpret his work given that he actively did everything he could to make his productions meaningless and irrational? At the same time, contradictory is also the term that best describes Bene's stagings: being contradictory in order to give order and coherence. What I am trying to say is that, like Polonius's line 'Though this be madness yet there is method in't',¹³⁷ it is possible to find method in Bene's apparently meaningless, confusing, and paradoxical productions. Also, it is important to say, at the beginning of this discussion, that everything in his stagings – the actors' movements and gestures, their facial expressions, their voice, the choice of words, the stage set, the props, the lights, the costumes, the music, and every other element

¹³⁶ Farrell, 'Revolutionizing Tradition', p. 289.

¹³⁷ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Second Quarto, 2.2.202-203, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, Arden Shakespeare, 3rd series (London: Methuen, 2006). From now on I will refer to this edition.

that contributes to a *mise-en-scène* – aims to defy the idea of a naturalistic theatre, of a theatre as a mirror of reality. When one keeps that in mind, Bene's productions start to make sense, although making sense of them was not what this actor-director-author wanted. I hope that, at the end of this section, I will have been able to give a clear view of what theatre was for Bene, and of how he believed the classics, and Shakespeare most of all, should be rendered on the stage.

Bene joined the *Convegno di Ivrea*, but could find an understanding only with three other participants in the event: de Berardinis, Quartucci and Ricci. He was also the protagonist of an unpleasant occurrence, as he verbally attacked the theatre company 'Gruppo d'Ottobre' ('October Group'), when they made a parody of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the founder of the Italian movement 'Futurism'. Bene strenuously defended Marinetti, as the 'avanguardie storiche', the avant-garde movements of the first decades of the twentieth century, were the only ones that he recognized. He could not find anything new in the movements of the 1960s.

Bene's protest was a protest against the bourgeois consumer society, where everything can be bought, and where even art becomes a product. But his was not a kind of Marxist protest, rather it was the assertion of the independence of art from commercial logic. He believed that experimentation is banished in the consumer society, and homogenization becomes king. He attacked the circuit of the official theatre, the 'teatri stabili' (the publicly funded theatres), where the directors' and managers' main concern was that of selling tickets, with artistic choices made to attract a middle-class audience with little concern about quality. His protest was also a protest against the director's theatre. The ideas expressed by Strehler, according to whom both the director and the actors are at the service of the author and of the text, repelled Bene, as he believed that the role of theatre is not that of being faithful to the written text. Theatre is only and uniquely art, 'artificio' ('artifice'). What happens on the stage should amaze, stupefy, puzzle, overwhelm, as the audience do not go to the theatre to see themselves in a mirror, or to see a copy of reality. They go to see a work of art, even if they are not able to make sense of it. It should already be clear

that a production of *Hamlet* by Bene requires the audience to know the play well and, as Farrell states, they should also ‘have the necessary training in Bene’s works in order to decipher his lines’.¹³⁸ To this I would add that it is also important to be well acquainted with various literary and non-literary sources, as Bene blends Shakespeare’s lines with poems by Italian poets like Guido Gozzano, Freud’s ideas and, most of all, the story *Hamlet ou les suites de la piété filiale* by Jules Laforgue.¹³⁹ His various productions of *Hamlet* contain many differences, and it would be wrong to generalize and consider them a consistent body that summarizes his interpretation of *Hamlet*. Yet the ideas that inform all of them do not change with the passing of years, and every successive production becomes a variation on those same themes and ideas. As a matter of fact, when a director goes back to the same play – Strehler did the same – he does so because he wants to go deeper and to improve.

Now, what are those ideas that inform all the productions of Bene’s *Hamlet*? The first important thing to say – which may seem paradoxical considering the number of Shakespearian adaptations he did – is that Bene did not believe that it is possible to represent Shakespeare’s plays on the stage today, as Shakespeare was also an actor and a *capocomico* (actor-manager), and he wrote his plays for his company and for what theatre was four hundred years ago:

Il *Sogno di una notte di mezza estate*, lo stesso *Romeo e Giulietta*, sono stati teatro, e proprio per questo non lo sono più, non possono più esserlo. Io non metto in scena Shakespeare – l’ho detto tante volte – né una mia interpretazione o una lettura *di* Shakespeare, ma un saggio critico *su* Shakespeare.¹⁴⁰

Midsummer Night’s Dream, or even *Romeo and Juliet*, were theatre and, for this reason, they are no more, they cannot be. I do not stage

¹³⁸ Farrell, *Carmelo Bene*, p. 289.

¹³⁹ I will expand on Gozzano and Laforgue further on in the section.

¹⁴⁰ Bartalotta, *Carmelo Bene e Shakespeare*, pp. 13-14. Emphases original.

Shakespeare – I have said it many times – nor my interpretation or my reading *of* Shakespeare, but a critical essay *on* Shakespeare.

This is an interesting approach to the problem of historical distance: not an effort to reconstruct or a quest for authenticity, but a liberation to do one's own thing in one's own time. What we can also infer from this quotation is that he dispossessed critics of their role, as for him, the artist is the critic. With a few exceptions, Bene's relationship with critics was not a good one, and often there were very sharp words on either side. Certainly it must have been hard to interpret a Bene production, especially at the beginning of his career. His theatre defied any interpretation and did not surrender to any classification. As I wrote in the first section of this chapter, most critics lacked the necessary tools and skills to classify the productions of the new experimentalists, and, for this reason, they sometimes denigrated what they probably were not able to understand.¹⁴¹

Bene also opposed Kott's idea of Shakespeare our contemporary, as Shakespeare, Bene seems to argue, is not our contemporary! So, what did he mean when he said: 'I am Shakespeare'? Certainly he wanted to provoke, but he also wanted to explain something. He meant that, in order to represent Shakespeare, you must be Shakespeare, that is you must take over the role of author and 'create' your own Shakespeare.¹⁴² Echoes of Artaud's thoughts on theatre are strong:

That is, instead of harking back to texts regarded as sacred and definitive, we must first break theatre's subjugation to the text and rediscover the idea of a kind of unique language somewhere in between gesture and thought.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ During a television interview with Arnaldo Bagnasco at *Mixer Cultura* on 15 February 1987, Bene affirmed that the only critics are the artists, and then a real verbal fight began between him and the two critics invited to the programme, Guido Almansi and Renzo Tian. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eG_SInlaW_U [accessed 10 December 2012]

¹⁴² Petrini, *Amleto da Shakespeare a Laforgue per Carmelo Bene*, p. 59.

¹⁴³ Antonin Artaud, 'The Theatre of Cruelty. First Manifesto', in *The Theatre and Its Double*, transl. Victor Corti (London: John Calder, 1977), p. 68.

Disregarding the text, we intend to stage: (...) an adaptation of a Shakespearian work, absolutely consistent with our present state of confused state of mind.¹⁴⁴

Such statements are contained in the 1932 First Manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty, ideas that Artaud did not put in practice, but that have been and still are a source of inspiration for many theatre practitioners, Bene included, as he affirmed in a television interview in 1987:

Io ho ripreso il discorso di Artaud. (...) E' ora il caso di mettere un po' a fuoco cos'è la scrittura di scena (...) già però ventilata in Shakespeare ed in tutto il teatro elisabettiano. Dopo circa quattro secoli di teatro, di testo a monte, ecco finalmente la scrittura di scena (...). La scrittura di scena è tutto quanto non è il testo a monte, è il testo sulla scena.¹⁴⁵

I have retrieved Artaud's idea. (...) It is now necessary to explain what scenic writing is (...) already suggested in Shakespeare's theatre and in all the Elizabethan theatre. After about four centuries of theatre, of theatre based on the text beforehand, here is the scenic writing at last. Scenic writing is all that is not the text beforehand, it is the text on the stage.

The reference to Shakespeare is particularly interesting. It is a clear proof that at least some of the protagonists of the theatrical revolution of the 1960s looked back to Shakespeare.

I believe that when Bene states 'I do not stage Shakespeare (...) nor my interpretation or my reading of Shakespeare' he also implies that – similarly to de Berardinis – he shared a lot with Shakespeare: he identified himself with him, a man who is an author, but also an actor; who considers

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁴⁵ Television interview with Arnaldo Bagnasco at *Mixer Cultura*.

the company like a collective, who does not distinguish between the written word and its rendering on the stage, who draws from various sources to create his own art work, who does everything, from writing the text to whatever is needed to transform it into theatrical action. In the case of Bene rather than talking of an author who is also an actor, I would speak of an actor who is also the author of his stagings, and who is in charge of every single aspect of the production. In an interview of 1978 Bene affirmed that the ‘grande attore moderno’ (‘great modern actor’) must have all the skills of the nineteenth-century actor. And he added:

Ancor meglio poi [...] bisogna che abbia i requisiti di Richard Burbage, di Shakespeare, cioè degli interpreti elisabettiani che erano veramente completi, che pensavano a tutto, alle scene, alle luci, ai costumi, oltre che al testo (...).¹⁴⁶

Even better [...] he [the actor] must have all the skills of Richard Burbage, of Shakespeare, that is of the Elizabethan interpreters who were really all rounded, who thought of everything, not only of the text, but also of the stage sets, the lights, the costumes (...).

Elizabethan amphitheatre playhouses such as the Globe had no artificial lighting, and minimal sets. So, we may think that this is a case of Bene projecting his own experience and his idea of himself back onto the Elizabethan scene. Certainly, the two traditions that he recognized were the Italian nineteenth-century tradition of the Great Actor (despite fighting it at the same time), which, in turn, looked back to the tradition of the *commedia dell’arte*, and the Shakespearian tradition. Bene advocated a return to the actor, and he wished to give him back his power, and the responsibility for the staging and for all the choices made on the stage.

Another important element of Bene’s conception of theatre is that he did not consider it as a mirror of reality. To this he opposed theatre as

¹⁴⁶ In Petrini, *Amleto da Shakespeare a Laforgue*, p. 34.

‘inutilità e gratuità’ (‘uselessness and gratuitousness’),¹⁴⁷ which echoes the idea of art as a form of pleasure carrying no meaning asserted by Oscar Wilde, whom Bene profoundly admired.¹⁴⁸ If theatre is not mimesis, everything must be done in order to avoid it, and theatre becomes the staging of the impossibility of producing a copy of anything beyond the stage. This paradoxical idea was explored again and again, and every single choice he made in his productions was aimed at showing the ‘irrapresentabilità’ (impossibility of being staged) of theatre. This is how Farrell puts it:

All pretence at Realism has been banished from his cosmos. Neither tragedy nor comedy are possible or conceivable in this world, nor is any rapport with history or allegiance to ideology. Of its inner essence, Bene’s work is, rather than plot and drama, a meditation on theatre.¹⁴⁹

If theatre is no longer mimesis and interpretation and if ultimately the same existence of theatre is denied, the actor is no longer an actor, as he cannot become a character and cannot tell a story. He cannot and does not want to play a role! Therefore, theatre becomes the ‘teatro della non-rappresentazione’ (‘theatre of non-mimesis’), and the actor becomes a ‘non-attore’ (‘non-actor’).

Such ideas may find an analogue in non-figurative minimalism in the visual arts and in music. Robert Rauschenberg’s *White Paintings* (1951) denied all possibility of narrative or external reference. John Cage’s 4’33" (1952) consisted of the pianist sitting at the piano without touching the keys for four minutes and thirty-three seconds.¹⁵⁰ Yet I see an important difference between these forms of art and Bene’s theatre. Bene’s theatre has

¹⁴⁷ Giacché, *Carmelo Bene: Antropologia di una macchina attoriale*, p. 143.

¹⁴⁸ The idea of the uselessness of art is clearly explained in Wilde’s Preface to his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

¹⁴⁹ Farrell, *Carmelo Bene*, p. 294.

¹⁵⁰ It can be performed by any instrument or combination of instruments, and it has also been performed by a full orchestra.

been defined by Giacché as the theatre of the ‘absence’, by which he means absence of a narration, absence of communication between actors and between actors and audience, absence of a structure, and destruction of the language.¹⁵¹ This absence would correspond to Rauschenberg’s all-white surfaces, or to Cage’s ‘non-music’. But Bene’s stage was not an empty space (an all-white surface), and his plays were not deprived of music. It was just the opposite: they were filled with music. What I mean by this is that, in order to subtract, Bene added. He added quotes and interpolations from various literary and non-literary sources, dissonant phonic elements, and a huge number of objects on the stage that would hinder the characters’ movements. In this way neither the narrative nor the characters could develop and, therefore, we are in the presence of an absence. But I will return to this, as it is time to start the analysis of the various productions of *Hamlet*.

4.3.2 Variations on *Hamlet*

The first question to be asked is: why *Hamlet*? What drew this man to revisit the play again and again? A very short answer could be: because Hamlet hesitates. Hamlet does not know what to do. He, Bene seems to argue, has been given a burden that is too heavy for him: ‘The time is out of joint; O cursed spite / That ever I was born to set it right!’ (1.5.186-187). He sees in Hamlet a man who would like to withdraw, in the same way as the actor does not want to interpret his role and to tell the story of *Hamlet*. Therefore, it is the metatheatrical quality of the play, the role that Hamlet entrusts to the play within the play, that Bene stresses in his productions, and we could say that his Hamlets (he played the title role in all his productions) embody the actor-author who fights against the text. *Hamlet* becomes a reflection upon theatre in Bene’s hands, a reflection on the impossibility of representing and of giving an umpteenth interpretation of

¹⁵¹ For a detailed analysis of the idea of ‘absence’ see Giacché, *Carmelo Bene*, pp. 109-117.

the play, and Hamlet the protagonist is the character who does not want to do what is required from being Hamlet. In the introduction to *Hamlet Suite*, Bene expresses himself with the following words:

Prima delle sonate per pianola a quattro mani con Jules Laforgue, m'è stato sempre chiaro che per *disamletizzarsi* integralmente, non sarebbe bastata una soltanto, brutale esecuzione.¹⁵²

Before playing piano duets with Laforgue, it was always clear to me that, in order to give up Hamlet's role in full, one brutal performance only would not have been enough.

And he also affirms: 'Per me il teatro, se vuoi la definizione, è impasse' ('If you want a definition, for me theatre is impasse') and *Hamlet* is nothing but 'un saggio sull'impasse' ('an essay on impasse').¹⁵³ This is fundamental, as we will see in a more detailed analysis of some of these productions: impasse seems to be king in Bene's *Hamlets*. Every single choice is made to emphasise this impasse, to the disappointment of the audience who, rather than watching the development of a story, witnessed continuous interruptions, actions that never fully developed, props that were on the stage to block the way, cumbersome costumes that hampered the actors' movements. And they listened to interrupted lines that were often whispered or even stammered, to make the understanding difficult! All of this is what Bene called 'la sospensione del tragico' ('the suspension of the tragic'): no action can develop, as it is denied and obstructed by acts that are in its way.¹⁵⁴

It is not easy to find a path through the intricacies of the several versions of *Hamlet* that Bene staged. What is immediately clear from the titles Bene used is that we are presented with very personal re-writings of Shakespeare's text, which is not the only source of Bene's appropriations.

¹⁵² Carmelo Bene, *Opere: con l'Autografia di un ritratto* (Milano: Bompiani, 1995) p. 1351.

¹⁵³ Quoted in Petrini, *Amleto da Shakespeare a Laforgue*, p. 86.

¹⁵⁴ Bene, *Opere*, p. XIII.

The first two productions still carry the title *Amleto*, but from the third (1965) Laforgue's story makes its appearance, and the name of Laforgue is mentioned next to Shakespeare's, which disappears in the fourth version, and the only source that is recognized in the title is Laforgue. In the fifth the appropriation is complete, as the play becomes *Amleto di Carmelo Bene (da Shakespeare a Laforgue)*. Even the following versions I mentioned at the beginning of this section bear various titles, none of which is simply *Hamlet*. We are in the presence of another appropriator here, but I have already discussed the idea of Shakespeare as the 'Great Appropriator' (Hodgdon) in the section dedicated to de Berardinis.¹⁵⁵ I have also dealt with the issue of what we mean by a play by Shakespeare in my analysis of Strehler's *Re Lear* and of the consequent paradox existing between directors who claim to be servants of the author and of the text, and the fluidity of the process that went from the first performance of a play by Shakespeare to its printing.¹⁵⁶ As for *Hamlet*, the editors' task is even harder than with other plays: of the earliest printed texts, three stand out as being significant: Q1 of 1603, Q2 of 1604-5 and F of 1623. This is not at all irrelevant if we think that Q2 is approximately double the length of Q1, or that F is a little shorter than Q2. Also, despite being so long, Q2 lacks some famous passages of F's dialogue (among which is Hamlet's observation that 'Denmark's a prison' at 2.2.242. The whole passage missing in Q2 is, in F, 2.2.238-267), while F lacks some passages of Q2 (like Hamlet's soliloquy 'How all occasions do inform against me' at 4.4.31-65 in Q2).¹⁵⁷ The two Q versions are different not only in length. Q1 is considered a 'bad quarto' and adds yet more complications to our knowledge of the text – e.g. a very scrambled version of 'To be, or not to be', yet in the position in the play where most modern directors prefer to place this soliloquy. Q2, instead, has high status, as it is thought to be based on a manuscript in Shakespeare's own hand, that is a

¹⁵⁵ See Chapter 4.2.2, (pp. 252-253).

¹⁵⁶ See Chapter 3.5, (pp. 144-148).

¹⁵⁷ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, F 2.2.238-267 can be found in appendix 1, pp.466-467.

‘foul paper’.¹⁵⁸ It is clear that the idea of authenticity loses consistency in the presence of all this.

In all the writings about Bene’s *Hamlets* there is hardly anything to be found about the issue of translation. I believe that Bene must have used translations made from conflated versions of the play in English, as this is what could be found in Italy. It is interesting to notice that Lombardo’s *Amleto* published by Feltrinelli in 1995 was still based on the conflated version of *Hamlet* edited by T.J.B. Spencer for the New Penguin Shakespeare.¹⁵⁹ Certainly Bene was very much concerned with the issue of translation: Petrini, for example, notices that for the character of Polonius, he used nineteenth-century Italian, as he wanted him to express himself in very pompous/bombastic language, which we can read as an interesting example of use of inauthentic language to be authentic to the spirit and effect of the play.¹⁶⁰

When analysing Bene’s *Hamlet*, the first problem is to decide how many, and which versions we should choose. Petrini’s book considers the theatre versions, Baiardo and Trovato’s only refer to non-theatrical ones. It is certainly important to say from the beginning that, though in the presence of a single play, there are many differences among the various versions. Yet, as I have already affirmed, there are elements that never disappear: we could perhaps argue that those elements are developed with increasing depth as if, in the course of the years, Bene started from an idea and worked again and again to bring it to perfection.

I have been thinking carefully about which direction I should take and what choice I should make. I finally came to the conclusion that I would investigate the television production *Amleto di Carmelo Bene (da Shakespeare a Laforgue)* broadcasted on 22nd April 1978 on the second channel of RAI state television, and which recalls closely the 1975 theatre

¹⁵⁸ The best account of the complex textual issues around *Hamlet* is the introduction to the Arden edition by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, which I am using for my discussion of Bene’s *Hamlets*. See, in particular, pp. 8-13, pp.74-86, and pp. 465-486 in the appendices.

¹⁵⁹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. T. J. B. Spencer, (London: Penguin Books, 1980). For more about Lombardo see footnote 5 at p. 19.

¹⁶⁰ Petrini, *Amleto da Shakespeare a Laforgue*, p. 101.

version. One practical reason for my choice is the fact that there are no videos of the previous ones. Watching a video allows me to give a more personal and more detailed interpretation of the production. Furthermore, as I have written, this version recalls closely the 1975 theatre version, differently from other productions like *Un Amleto di meno* (*One Hamlet less*) that was created uniquely for the cinema. This is important because it is theatre stagings that I am discussing in my research. Lastly, but not in order of importance, this version gives me the possibility of offering a precise idea of Bene's theatre as a blend of various sources that interpolate with the main text (Shakespeare's). His first production, for example, was only based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and, although there are already typical elements of Bene's theatre, there is no commixture with other texts. After this version of *Hamlet* I will also refer – though in less detail – to *Hommelette for Hamlet* and to *Hamlet Suite*, which mark a substantial change in comparison to the previous productions.

At this point it is necessary to write a few words about Laforgue. He was a Franco-Uruguayan poet who was born in Montevideo in 1860 and died in Paris in 1887. Among his works there is a collection of philosophical short stories entitled *Les Moralités légendaires*, which was published in 1887 and contains his re-writing of *Hamlet* – 'Hamlet ou les suites de la piété filiale'. The story has very little to share with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In Laforgue's work, Hamlet becomes a poet, who forgets his revenge against Claudius and decides to leave Denmark to travel to Paris with Kate (there is an allusion to Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*), the leading lady of the theatre company arrived in Elsinore. The story keeps the tragic ending, as Hamlet is reached by Laertes, the true avenger, who kills him. In Laforgue's symbolism, Hamlet's death stands for the defeat of the decadent artist and, as Petrini affirms, of the modern artist *tout court*.¹⁶¹ The defeat of the artist is also present in Bene's productions, along with a protest against bourgeois art and against its commodification. As in Laforgue, the death of all the characters, and of Hamlet above all at the end of the play, suggests

¹⁶¹ Petrini, *Amleto da Shakespeare a Laforgue*, p. 70.

the failure of art and the defeat of the artist in the consumer society, an idea that Bene also drew from Shakespeare, as he saw in Shakespeare's play the function of art as critical conscience in society at a time when the triumph of the bourgeoisie was imminent.¹⁶²

Laforge's story is told in the form of a parody, a characteristic that is present in Bene's production as well. What is interesting to notice is that Laforge transforms Shakespeare's play into non-dramatic prose, and Bene then transforms Laforge's non-dramatic prose story into drama again. It was not only the theme of the failure of the artist that must have fascinated Bene, but also the metatheatrical quality of Laforge's work, despite being in non-dramatic prose. Laforge's poet becomes an actor in Bene's play, the actor who is killed at the end because no staging of a text and no interpretation is possible in Bene's theatre of the 'irrapresentabilità'.

My analysis of the first part of this production will be very detailed, while I will give a shorter summary of the second. Bene's production starts with a voice off repeating again and again a few phrases: 'Io sono l'anima di tuo padre' ('I am thy father's spirit' [1.5.9]) is repeated nine times; 'Se mai mi amasti' ('If thou didst ever thy dear father love' [1.5.23]) is repeated seven times; 'Vendica il mio assassinio' ('Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder!' [1.5.25]) is repeated seven times; 'Addio' ('Adieu' [1.5.91]) is repeated nine times; and 'Ricordati di me' ('Remember me' [1.5.91]) is repeated three times. It is almost like a tic, probably used to stress the obligations and imperatives upon Hamlet. The tone of the voice is very plain and monotonous. Immediately after that, Hamlet speaks his first 'soliloquy', which has nothing to do with Shakespeare's soliloquies. In fact it is taken from Laforge. Hamlet says that, at the beginning, he remembered the horrid event, but he has now forgotten his murdered father, his prostituted mother, and his throne, as he has started to enjoy the play. The idea of the theatre within the theatre is developed further in the next scene, where a group of actors are packing and unpacking trunks each one bearing the label 'Paris' (following Laforge). A dialogue between Kate and

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 57.

Hamlet follows, in which the former clearly refers to the role that Hamlet has written for her, thus recognising him as the author of the play. Hamlet promises her that he will read the whole play to her and, after affirming ‘Me ne fotto del mio trono’ (‘I don’t give a fuck about my throne’), he tells her that they will leave and see the world together. The last words are: ‘Parigi, vita mia: a noi due!’ (‘Paris, my life: now it is between you and me’). Once again the source is Laforgue with the exception of the last statement that comes from Balzac’s novel *Le Père Goriot* (*Father Goriot*). Soon after, we see Claudius who gives Hamlet some money, in order to corrupt him and avoid being murdered. The only character who seems to be concerned with Shakespeare’s play is Horatio who, in the dialogue with Hamlet in which he tells the Danish prince about the apparition of his father’s ghost, speaks Shakespeare’s lines with great emphasis and conviction. This is in some ways an appropriate extension of Horatio’s role in Shakespeare’s play, where he always speaks ‘straight’ among all the role-play and game-playing, and seems to personify integrity and sincerity. Bene’s Horatio also looks very angry, which may hint at the fact that, as I have written, he seems to be the only one who cares about the development of the story and about what should be done. Seeing how much indolence and unwillingness there is around probably makes him very upset. But it must be clear that this is my interpretation (if we are allowed to try and interpret Bene’s work). Totally different is Hamlet’s attitude, who changes expression, tone and volume in his voice, contradicting with his body (and facial) language the words he speaks. He is not at all concerned with the role he should be playing. He often speaks with his head on one side, in a slightly contorted position, as if he was living in a world of his own.



Figure 19: Carmelo Bene as Hamlet

The same can be said about Claudius in the next scene, which in Shakespeare's text corresponds to 1.2.1-39 of the Q2 version. Claudius speaks the lines given to him by the author, but looks bored and indolent, as if he was not at all interested in what he is talking about. He only gets very angry when he addresses Hamlet, then goes back to his monotonous acting. Suddenly, Horatio speaks the famous line 'Frailty, thy name is Woman' (1.2.146), after which we see Hamlet ripping off pieces of paper, which he gives to him. This scene is repeated several times in the play, and we later learn that the pieces of paper contain Shakespeare's lines which, in the original text are spoken by Hamlet while, here, they are read by Horatio. Again this might be an extension of an implication in Shakespeare's text that Horatio is Hamlet's mediator with the world, but more importantly, I believe, it hints at Hamlet's abdication of his role. The next scene shows Polonius, an old man with a long beard, who follows Gertrude and, while undressing her, whispers to her the story of Oedipus, which should justify Hamlet's behaviour.

Before carrying on with the plot, there is enough material to highlight some of the recurrent elements of Bene's theatre and work on Shakespeare. The first question we should ask is if there is a plot at all in Bene's *Hamlet*. My belief is that a plot does exist, but it is a new plot made up of excerpts from various sources, Shakespeare and Laforgue in particular, and completely re-arranged by the actor-author Bene. Also, it is not a plot as we are accustomed to. Bene's favourite novel was Joyce's *Ulysses* (a revisiting and modernist refashioning of *The Odyssey* – an analogue for what Bene is doing to *Hamlet*), whose plot is not what we are used to, but a plot exists, as there are characters who are related to one another in passing a day of their life. I would summarize the plot of this *Amleto* as follows: an actor-author (Bene or Hamlet?) and a group of actors do their best to fight against the development of a story, that is, against a plot. What is their goal, do they reach it and, if so, how? The first question can only be answered through a paradox: their goal is that of not reaching a goal. Once again, as I observed in my discussion of de Berardinis, and the New Theatre, it is not the finished product that is important, but the 'non

finito' (the 'unfinished'), the 'opera aperta' (the 'open work'), and more specifically, I would say the 'divenire' (the 'becoming') in the case of Bene. Revisiting the play many times means staying with the process, which consists in a continuous attempt to show the impossibility of representing and interpreting reality and a playtext on the stage. Consequently the actors do not do what is expected from them. Hamlet cannot be bothered with the task he is given, and just wants to be an actor-author and flee Denmark. Horatio, in a way, plays Hamlet's role. Claudius seems as if he has been forced to be there and to be Claudius. Ophelia is dressed (or undressed) like a nurse-nun and is depicted as a nymphomaniac. Instead of taking his revenge, Hamlet is corrupted by Claudius, and it is clear that, if the two are accomplices, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* does not exist anymore. Every other element of the staging is conceived to block the development of Shakespeare's plot and even, I suggest, to contradict the audience's expectations. Let us consider Hamlet's costume, which is probably the only one that corresponds (or should correspond) to the role played by the actor. Bene wears an over-large white collar on a dark velvet costume that may recall Olivier's Hamlet. I am not aware of whether this is an allusion to or a parody of Olivier, but I believe that choosing that costume meant stressing the role that Bene/Hamlet should be playing, and creating a contrast with what the audience would actually see on the stage. Looking back to well established Romantic and Victorian traditions, Olivier's Hamlet was part of the popular culture, and what one would expect Hamlet to look like even in Italy.¹⁶³ So, in the same way as the idea suggested by de Berardinis and Peragallo's choice of the title *Sir and Lady Macbeth* for their production of *Macbeth* would be contradicted by the action, the appearance of Bene in a typical Hamlet costume would be contradicted by the words spoken and the actions performed. Also the tone of the voice does not correspond to what should be the intention of the words. There are outbursts of laughter;

¹⁶³ See figures 2 and 3 in chapter 2. Bene's costume is not that different from the costumes chosen by the nineteenth-century Great Actors.

whispers when the volume should be high, and inappropriate crazed screams. Polonius's words are hardly audible, and he speaks so fast that it is difficult to make sense of what he is saying. But he does so on purpose. The audience are not allowed to see *Hamlet*; they must be shown that theatre can only exist in so far as it provokes sensations, astonishment, puzzlement. In all the studies of Bene's plays, words like 'ecstasy', 'vision', and 'sensation' recur. What these terms share is that they are all the opposite of 'action', and are all resistant to language too. No action is allowed on the stage, which recalls de Berardinis's idea of the actor being a 'stato di coscienza' ('state of consciousness'). In the interview given to De Marinis, he even said that the ultimate communication between actors and audience should happen only and uniquely through energy. The actor should say no word and should make no movement. Yet, he would be able to connect with the audience through his or her mere presence on the stage. De Berardinis did not mean that he had ever reached such a state, but his is a strong assertion of the power of the actor, whose presence is enough to fill the stage, and a clear criticism of the figure and the role of the director. Even the actor Bene was aiming at something like de Berardinis's 'state of consciousness'. In fact, he was fascinated by certain saints (and some he invented) and, even more, by mystics. What is a mystical experience if not the lack of action? Again we can think of Artaud who, in the First Manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty affirmed:

But this tangible, objective theatre language captivates and bewitches our senses by using a truly Oriental concept of expression. It runs through our sensibility. Abandoning our Western ideas of speech, it runs words into incantation. (...) It aims to exalt, to benumb, to bewitch, to arrest our sensibility.¹⁶⁴

What we are not sure about is if connecting with the audience was Bene's aim. On various occasions Bene was quite harsh with the public and

¹⁶⁴ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, pp. 69-70.

he had a sharp tongue that he used to insult them. It is true that the tradition of insulting the audience is as old as the avant-garde itself, and played an important role, for instance in the *Serate Futuriste* (Futurist Evenings).¹⁶⁵ But these Futurist events were a huge success, and audiences flocked to be insulted. In other words we may understand provocative and offensive gestures, or ostensive disregard for the audience, as a complex form or wish-fulfillment and hence communication. In the case of Bene it is not quite clear whether he really despised the public. Without any doubt, he wanted the audience to be deprived of their role of audience, and not to be permitted to relapse into passivity. And it is all part of the same story. To the non-actor corresponded the 'non-audience'.

Inaction and non-representation are also clearly shown by the attitude of the non-actors to one another. There is hardly any dialogue. Everything becomes a monologue and, even when there is an exchange between two characters, there is no eye contact. Each actor looks in front of him or her, or they leer. They seem to be self-enclosed, just concerned with themselves, careful to avoid any direct contact with their partners on the stage because, once again, a dialogue would mean coherence, action, a structure. The stage set becomes very chaotic, as no order is allowed, and even music is carefully chosen for the same purpose.

Music was fundamental for Bene. As a child he became acquainted with theatre through melodrama and, as an adult, he believed that no theatre can be conceived without music. Therefore, music played an increasingly important role in his career and was already very present in this version. Farrell notices that Bene 'added a deliberately disconcerting accompaniment of jaunty, fairground music when sombre, tragic music would be expected'.¹⁶⁶ It should be clear, by now, why he did so. The presence of various kinds of music in one play is another element that he shared with de Berardinis's theatre. On the whole, however, I would say that, while de

¹⁶⁵ Futurist evenings were improvisatory evenings, aimed at provoking the audience and at spreading Futurist ideas. The first was organized in Turin on 8th March 1909. Often the evenings ended with the police intervention and the arrest of the organizers.

¹⁶⁶ Farrell, *Carmelo Bene*, p. 293.

Berardinis was interested in mingling, to see how Shakespeare reacted to it, Bene's mingling always aims at contradiction, therefore, at avoiding coherence. Both artists, however, were interested in music because they were much more concerned with sounds, as sounds do not carry a meaning, and do not tell a story. As for Bene, Farrell defines him as a 'vocal actor', in that 'his voice is given the primacy expected of singers rather than of dramatic actors'.¹⁶⁷

I do not think it is necessary to give a detailed account of the rest of the play. Little changes from what I have highlighted so far. Therefore, I will only point out a few moments that are significant for my discussion. Narrative is completely rejected, and is replaced by a fragmented structure made up of very short scenes which, instead of being steps in a process of development, seem to be arranged in a kind of horizontal structure that does not take us anywhere. To the *aiôn* seen as comprising an infinite past and future, he opposes *chronos*, the extended present in Deleuzian terms. Again we see Hamlet handing over to Horatio small pieces of paper; again we see Polonius whispering to Gertrude; again we see Claudius giving money to Hamlet; again we see Hamlet being very rude to Ophelia to the point that he slaps her on the face. The play within the play is also an exercise in deconstruction of Shakespeare's original, as Claudius, looking bored and annoyed, complains because the actors are not telling the story well, and gives them instructions, usurping what Hamlet does in Shakespeare's version. Once again Claudius is not playing his role. Instead of being the unaware victim of Hamlet's plan to have a confirmation of his guilt, he encourages the actors to do just what will reveal his murder.

There are some very poetical moments in the production, for example when Bene-Hamlet beautifully speaks some lines from a short story in verse by Gozzano *La signorina Felicita*, which are written below:

Ed io non voglio più essere io!
Non più l'esteta gelido, il sofista,

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

ma vivere nel tuo borgo natio,
ma vivere alla piccola conquista
mercanteggiando placido, in oblio
come tuo padre, come il farmacista ...

Ed io non voglio più essere io!¹⁶⁸

And I do not want to be myself anymore!
No longer the icy aesthete, the sophist,
but I want to live in your native small village,
but I want to live trying to conquer small things
trading peacefully, in oblivion
like your father, like the chemist ...

And I do not want to be myself anymore!

There is a clear reference to Hamlet's wish to be somebody else and to give up revenge, and also to the rebellion of the non-actor against interpreting his role. Bene/Hamlet speaks these lines as if he was in a kind of trance, or as if he was dreaming, which, once again takes us back to Artaud:

We do not intend to do away with dialogue, but to give words something of the significance they have in dreams.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Guido Gozzano, *La signorina Felicita e le poesie dei Colloqui* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2001), unit 6, p. 60. Gozzano (1883-1916) was a poet, leader of a poetic school known as *crepuscolarismo*, which favoured a direct, unadorned style to express nostalgic memories. The second and last collection published during his lifetime was *I colloqui* (*The Colloquies*) (1911), which addresses the themes of youth, creative repression, nostalgia, regret and contentment. It includes the poem *La signorina Felicita, ovvero, La Felicità* (*Signorina Felicita or Felicity*). The translation above is mine own, but an alternative English translation can be found in *The Man I Pretend to Be: The Colloquies and Selected Poems of Guido Gozzano*, transl. and ed. Michael Palma (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 66-97.

In the second part of the video there is another beautiful scene, when Kate and the lead actor interpreting the roles of Gertrude and Claudius alternate in a dialogue between a jealous husband and his wife, whom he believes has been unfaithful. It is the translation of *Complainte de l'époux outragé* composed by Laforgue after the popular medieval French song *Qu'allais-tu faire à la fontaine?* which, in turn, is shaped on the model of medieval ballads.

Qu'alliez-vous faire à la Mad'lein,
Corbleu, ma moitié,
Qu'alliez-vous faire à la Mad'leine?
J'allais prier pour qu'un fils nous vienne,
Mon Dieu, mon ami;
J'allais prier pour qu'un fils nous vienne.¹⁷⁰

For the sake of completeness I will also give Bene's translation of Laforgue's lines:

RE: Che andavi tu a fare a la Madeleine,
 per Dio, mia metà,
 che andavi tu a fare a la Madeleine?

REGINA: Andavo a pregare se un figlio ci viene,
 mio Dio, sposo mio;
 andavo a pregare se un figlio ci viene.¹⁷¹

KING: Why were you going to the Madeleine,
 For goodness sake, my better half,
 Why were you going to the Madeleine?

¹⁶⁹ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 72.

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in Baiardo and Trovato, *Un classico del rifacimento*, p. 103.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Baiardo and Trovato, *Un classico del rifacimento*, p. 102.

QUEEN: I was going to pray for a baby,
for goodness sake, my husband;
I was going to pray for a baby.

Interspersion of other sources continues and, in particular, the alternation between Shakespeare and Laforgue. Towards the end of the play, Laertes appears as a kind of revolutionary followed by a crowd of men armed with pitchforks. He duels with Hamlet, kills him and, after Hamlet has pronounced the words: 'Qualis artifex pereo' ('Just as an artist, I die') attributed to Nero and to Hamlet by Laforgue, he kisses him on the mouth and calls him 'compagno' ('comrade'). Petrini gives two possible interpretations of the phrase: Bene may have hinted at the death of the artist, at his defeat; or he may have wanted to stress the fact that he dies as an actor dies on the stage.¹⁷² According to the second interpretation, once again, Bene wants to make it clear that theatre is not reality and that he is an actor (or better, a non-actor). Such a thought may recall Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*. In his essay 'Un manifesto di meno' ('One Manifesto Less'), contained in Bene-Deleuze's *Sovrapposizioni* (*Superpositions*), Gilles Deleuze notices that Brecht was still linked to the 'teatro di rappresentazione' ('theatre of representation'), as he still wished the conflicts and contradictions contained in his plays to be understood by the audience. The difference between theatre before and after Brecht, according to Deleuze, was the shift 'da un polo drammatico della rappresentazione borghese a un polo epico della rappresentazione popolare' ('from a dramatic pole of bourgeois representation to an epic pole of popular representation').¹⁷³ In this respect Bene's theatre differed from Brecht's

¹⁷² Petrini, *Amleto da Shakespeare a Laforgue*, p. 156.

¹⁷³ Bene-Deleuze, *Sovrapposizioni: Riccardo III di Carmelo Bene. Un manifesto di meno di Gilles Deleuze* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1978), p. 87. The essay 'Un manifesto di meno' ('One Manifesto Less') was originally written in French with the title 'Un manifeste de moins'. A commentary in English of the essay, is offered by Mohammad Kowsar, 'Deleuze on Theatre: A Case Study of Carmelo Bene's Richard III', *Theatre Journal*, 38.1, *Dramatic Narration, Theatrical Disruption* (Mar 1986), 19-33.

significantly. Yet Bene searched for alienation too, the alienation of the actor and of the character from the role he or she has to play. In my opinion, Brecht and Bene use the same means to reach a different goal: Brecht did not want the audience to feel empathy with the characters because detachment allowed them to have a clear mind to judge and to reflect upon what they were seeing on the stage. Bene, instead, used a kind of *Verfremdungseffekt* to avoid any possibility of a naturalistic theatre in favour of a totally aesthetic theatre.

Hamlet returned again in 1987 with a theatre production entitled *Hommelette for Hamlet, operetta inqualificabile da J. Laforgue*, which was also recorded for television and, in 1994, with *Hamlet Suite* (spettacolo-concerto da J. Laforgue) (theatre performance-concert from J. Laforgue), which then became a CD.¹⁷⁴ As we see, the name of Shakespeare is no longer mentioned. In both versions, in fact, Laforgue becomes the main source (there are also quotes from the collection of poems *Derniers Vers*),¹⁷⁵ interspersed with lines from Shakespeare. There are some elements that do not change in comparison with the previous versions: Hamlet is still the actor who feels burdened with his role, Kate is still one of the protagonists.



Figure 20: Carmelo Bene as Hamlet in *Hommelette for Hamlet*

¹⁷⁴ It should be noted that ‘inqualificabile’ has a double meaning in Italian. It means ‘not acceptable’ (by bourgeois standards we can infer), but it also suggests something that cannot be qualified, i.e. that resists genre conventions.

¹⁷⁵ This collection was published posthumously in 1890.

Horatio keeps, more or less, the same role he had before. Yet, there are differences: in *Hommelette for Hamlet*, for example, the set is baroque and is composed of a group of marble statues mainly representing angels.



Figure 21: Stefania De Santis as Ludovica Albertoni in *Hommelette for Hamlet*

Hamlet is not killed at the end of the play. The characters are reduced to the prince, Kate, Horatio, and the king. And then there is the blessed Ludovica Albertoni, whose marble statue by Gianlorenzo Bernini can be seen in S. Francesco a Ripa church in Rome. Music and sounds play a far more important role than in the previous productions. The king is a baritone that sings his part, and the whole performance is accompanied by the music of Mendelssohn, Stravinsky, and Tchaikovsky, which will also accompany the scenes of *Hamlet Suite*. The increasingly important role of music is already stressed in the title of this last production, and the fact that it was made into a CD gives evidence that the sound and vocal quality of the production were certainly more prominent than the visual. Giacchè notices that if we consider the story of Bene's *Hamlet*, we can trace a path that goes from action (though continually hindered), to poetry, to singing. The shift from action to inaction is shown clearly in *Hommelette for Hamlet*, where the characters are replaced with statues. Action, therefore, becomes inaction and singing in these last two productions, and the audience are forced to move from representation to sensation. As for the 'plot' of this last version of *Hamlet Suite*, it includes elements that were already present in the very first production (1962), but the principal model is the 1987 version. The movement from action to sensation may recall the journey that de Berardinis

took in the trilogy of the 1990s. In both cases there is a movement towards a more spiritual sphere, which, in the case of Bene, is given its shape through the sonic quality of the last two productions. Language loses its communicative function completely and becomes pure sound. Referring to his idea of theatre, over fifty years before, Artaud had affirmed that ‘it expands the voice’,¹⁷⁶ and in the Second Manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty he stated that words must be ‘construed in an incantatory, truly magical sense, side by side with this logical sense – not only for their meaning, but for their forms, their sensual radiation’.¹⁷⁷ Artaud was undoubtedly a source for Bene,¹⁷⁸ but the Italian actor/director expanded on the French writer’s ideas and, by the time he directed these two versions of *Hamlet*, he had coined the definition of the actor as a ‘macchina attoriale’ (‘actor-machine’), an actor, who has got rid of his human expressive possibilities, and has become a machine, whose voice is amplified in timbre and tone. Bene speaks of ‘l’amplificazione a teatro’ [‘the amplification in the theatre’].¹⁷⁹ It is the phase of the so-called *phoné*, when the actor becomes his voice, and his voice is intended primarily as a sonic mechanism.¹⁸⁰ Referring to other actors, Bene affirms:

Questi incauti, avventati e superficiali dicitori-attori conferenzieri riferiscono il ‘testo’, ignoranti che il ‘*testo*’ è *l’attore*; il *testo* è la voce.¹⁸¹

These unwary, rash and superficial speaker-actors lecturers tell the ‘text’, ignorant of the fact that the ‘*text*’ is *the actor*; the *text* is the voice.

Therefore, there is not a text beforehand that is told by the actor. On the contrary it is the actor who creates the text on the stage, who becomes the

¹⁷⁶ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 70.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁷⁸ Bene, *Opere*, p. XIV,

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. XIII.

¹⁸⁰ Bene, ‘La voce di Narciso’, in *Opere*, p. 1013.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 1015. Author’s emphases.

text, and the text is nothing but his voice, the voice in its sonic quality, not as a means to convey meaning. The dream-like atmosphere of Bene's and of the other characters' performances, their emphasis on signifiers that do not necessarily have an obvious meaning, suggest a fascination with the language of the unconscious. This is enhanced by the presence of the blessed Ludovica Albertoni in *Hommelette for Hamlet*, who speaks her lines lying down as if she was in a state of ecstasy. And if we listen to her words, we realize that their appropriate location is certainly the world of the unconscious, not of the conscious.¹⁸²

At this point I can draw some conclusions concerning Bene's work on *Hamlet*. To my aid comes Deleuze's essay 'Un manifesto di meno' ('One Manifesto Less'). Deleuze follows a precise line which, as I understand, informs the entirety of Bene's theatre. According to Deleuze, Bene's process consists in: depriving the text of all the fixed elements; putting everything in continuous variation; and moving everything to a minor level.¹⁸³ As for the first, Bene deprived *Hamlet* of most of the elements that belong to Shakespeare's text, and that, with the exception of very experimental or very free appropriations, have always been present on the

¹⁸² The title *Hommelette for Hamlet* might be a tribute to or simply a reference to Lacan's theory of the 'hommelette', 'the little scrambled egg'. I have found no direct link between Bene's theatre and Lacan's theories (and it would not do justice to Lacan to explain his theories in relatively little space), but it seems to me that something of Lacan's ideas about the unconscious may have found their way in Bene's theatre. The unconscious for Lacan is structured like a language, and 'is composed less of *signs* – stable meanings – than of *signifiers*'. (Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd edn (1983; Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), p. 146. Author's emphases). The unconscious speaks, but it speaks through an intricate and indefinite web of signifiers, which are linked to one another as if in a chain. When we dream, we visualize an object, an animal, another human being, signifiers that do not necessarily have a direct signified. On the contrary they may hint at something else, and may be simply signifiers within a wider chain of other signifiers.

¹⁸³ Deleuze 'Un manifesto di meno', in Bene Deleuze, *Sovrapposizioni*, p. 86.

stage. All the other elements, those that Bene chose, were revisited again and again, but in a process of incremental variation. This responds to his need never to stop the process, and to avoid ‘manufacturing’ a ‘finished product’. Variation also means minority. Bene preferred minor authors to major authors, as major meant normality to him, the end of process, while minority meant experimenting, exploring. Yet, Deleuze warns, minority can easily become majority, and variation can easily become normality. Therefore, it is necessary to keep varying and also to vary variation.¹⁸⁴ When it comes to major authors, like Shakespeare, the secret is to treat him like a minor author, which means depriving him of those elements for which he is best known all around the world, and treat him like a minor. So, he can keep developing.¹⁸⁵ I find this interpretation fascinating.

When Bene started his career, his work was really revolutionary in the panorama of Italian theatre and, as a consequence, not easy to understand. Today the situation has changed significantly. All the books and articles I have referred to in my discussion allow us to see a clear thread that gives coherence to his Shakespearian productions. But, besides a rational understanding, which is what the researcher needs, I think that it is worthwhile to watch the videos of Bene’s productions without prejudice, plunging into them, and letting them speak to us. There is poetry in them, there is art in its aesthetic quality, and there is music. Bene’s productions needed a spectator who already knew much about the sources, but they also needed a naïve eye and ear ready to be surprised and to enjoy art for its own sake independently from the meaning that it carries. Listening to Bene, whose voice varies in timbre, tone, and modulation, and who, apparently effortlessly, alternates between extremes of pattern of speech changing his *tempo* from *largo* to *prestissimo* is a source of pure joy.

Bene shared in the principles and ideas that gave life to that ‘theatrical season’ called New Theatre, among whose representatives he was particularly attuned to de Berardinis. This meant a new approach to

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

Shakespeare's plays, no longer seen as immutable artworks to be staged again and again in a constant search for fidelity to the text, but as a huge resource from which they could draw in order to undermine the structure of the director's theatre. De Berardinis and Bene returned to the Italian tradition of the actor's theatre but, while the Great Actor used any possible means and all his talent and skills to identify with the character, Bene did the opposite. He used the same talent and the same skills to fight against the temptation to interpret a role, to identify with the character, and to tell a story. It is Hamlet's never-ending rebellion, that quality that – as Florian Mussnug suggests in his *The Eloquence of Ghosts* – makes of Hamlet the quintessential avant-garde artist for some authors of *Gruppo 63*. Mussnug quotes from Manganelli's 'Un amore impossibile' ('An Impossible Love'), a short story contained in the collection *Agli dei ulteriori* (*To the further Gods*) published in 1972.¹⁸⁶ It is an epistolary exchange between Hamlet and the Princess of Clèves, where 'Elsinore is a world threatened by darkness and decay, a universe reduced to a dull stage where dreary players endlessly rehearse lines from *Hamlet*'.¹⁸⁷ Manganelli's Hamlet rebels, and 'he clings to his rebellious aspirations with an obstinacy that could serve as an example for many avant-garde artists',¹⁸⁸ as it is clear from the following words:

Io voglio disubbidire al mio dio, voi supponete che così facendo io ubbidisca al mio dio ulteriore, e che, dunque, codesta mia disubbidienza sia ubbidiente. Ma in tal modo imparo la gioia aspra

¹⁸⁶ It is interesting to notice that Manganelli was a member of *Gruppo 63*, but saw himself as an outsider, and Bene saw himself as an outsider within the New Theatre.

¹⁸⁷ Florian Mussnug, *The Eloquence of Ghosts: Giorgio Manganelli and the Afterlife of the Avant-Garde* (Bern: Lang, 2010), p. 204. *La Princesse de Clèves* is a French novel which was published anonymously in March 1678. Its author is generally held to be Madame de La Fayette. The action takes place between October 1558 and November 1559 at the court of Henry II of France.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

della disubbidienza, e insegno al dio ulteriore che di me non ci si può fidare.¹⁸⁹

I wish to disobey my god, you suppose that in so doing I obey my further god, and so my disobedience is obedient. But in this way I come to learn the bitter joy of disobedience, and teach the further god that one cannot put faith in me.¹⁹⁰

The danger implicit in every insurgence is that of replacing one system with another, in the same way as – Deleuze warns – variation can easily become normality. But Manganelli's Hamlet does not want to surrender. His disobedience is endless and, in Bene's theatre, variation never ends. Yet, even within the continuous variation and despite the differences that exist among Bene's various Shakespearian productions, I see a thread and a strong idea that inform all of them. What at the beginning were very innovative experiments acquired substance in the more mature productions and, I believe, Bene transformed his initial provocations into a well-defined methodology.

As I hope my discussion in this last chapter has revealed, the New Theatre took many different forms in which it expressed itself, which I will briefly summarize before moving to the conclusion of my research work. The New Theatre stretched from Ricci's mainly visual theatre, in which the actor – when he was present on the stage – was regarded as and treated like an object, to de Berardinis's and Bene's theatre, which advocated a return to

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Giorgio Manganelli, *To the Gods Beyond*, translated by John Walker, unpublished, 2010.

the typically Italian tradition of the actor as the unique creator of the play on the stage. But within the differences there were many common elements. Fundamental was the idea of scenic writing, by which we mean the development of a play on the stage, as opposed to the staging of a fixed and immutable text written beforehand. In scenic writing the text loses its predominant role, and becomes one of the elements that make up a staging, and a source from which everyone can draw to create a new artwork. More than the finished artwork it is the process that counts, and theatre is seen as a kind of laboratory where the new theatre practitioners could carry out their experiments. As the play is considered an open structure, many interpretations are possible, both for the creator of the performance, whose main interest is to express himself or herself, and for the audience. There is no concern with authenticity and, following post-structuralist theories, the author's intended meaning is regarded as secondary to the meaning that the reader (here read 'audience') perceives, and every individual spectator creates a new and individual purpose, meaning, and existence for a given text. This means that the audience are no longer seen as passive recipients of the director's reading of the play, but join in the creation and, for this reason, various attempts to eliminate the *fourth wall* are made.

This was the last chapter of my journey in the world of Shakespeare, in the world of Italian theatre, and in the various ways in which the two worlds have intersected in the course of the centuries. I will offer my final thoughts on what I have been researching in the conclusion, in which I will also give a brief overview of how the relationship between Italian actors and directors and Shakespeare has developed in the last few decades.

Conclusion

The first series of questions that I posed in the introduction to my work revolve around the shift from Shakespeare's original texts to their adaptations for the Italian stage. I asked myself what happens to a text written in early modern English when it is translated into a foreign language and then transformed into physicality on a foreign stage. The second series of questions addressed the evolution of Italian theatre in terms of acting and of directing, and how Shakespeare's plays have been staged in the theatre of the actor of the mid-nineteenth century, in the theatre of the director that flourished in the middle of the twentieth century, and in the New Theatre, born at the end of the 1950s. But prior to this I wanted to study when and how Shakespeare's plays were introduced in Italy, and how they were received.

As to the last point I have referred to, there is a general reflection that I want to make, and one that I would not have made at the beginning of my research. What happened to Shakespeare in Italy is not that different from what happened in Britain. I am aware that this statement may sound completely wrong, and indeed it is, if we think of a number of factors that create a huge gap between the story of Shakespearian adaptations in Britain and in Italy, like the different language, the different culture, the different evolution of theatre practices. Yet there are some elements that have affected the 'afterlife' of Shakespeare in Britain and of Shakespeare in Italy that are not so dissimilar.

As I have illustrated in chapter 1, the acceptance of Shakespeare in Italy was anything but a straightforward process. His plays were poorly regarded because they were disrespectful of the rules of classical theatre. Therefore, the Italians had to wait until the first decades of the nineteenth century to see them on the stage. This is not the story of Shakespeare in Britain of course, but from the reopening of theatres in 1660, Shakespeare's texts were altered, as the British people saw in his plays the same faults that

would be traced in Italy some time later. The story of the adulterations of the plays continued in the eighteenth century, to suit the aesthetic and moral taste of the age, and until the first decades of the nineteenth century dramatists still worked with Restoration adaptations, which were no more dissimilar from the original texts than the stagings by the Italian Great Actors of the mid-nineteenth century.

An issue that has informed all the successive chapters of my research is that of authenticity. After the adulterations of the Great Actors, the main concern of the generation of the directors was with restoring the original texts, and the director was seen as the custodian of the text. In opposition to this, the experimentalists of the New Theatre resumed the habit of rewriting the texts, as these were seen as a source of inspiration for the creation of new artworks. Even as to this big topic there is a final thought that I consider particularly important. I have discussed extensively the commitment to authenticity that characterized the approach of directors like Strehler to Shakespeare's plays. Yet in none of my readings of Strehler's work and productions have I found any reference to the instability and fluidity of Shakespeare's texts. When one considers all the changes that a text went through from the first draft to its printing, alongside the habit of collaborative writing in Shakespeare's time, the concept of 'original text' becomes very shaky. On the other hand, through my analysis of the rewritings of artists like de Berardinis and Bene, and of the way in which they worked, I have discovered many elements in their theatre that were very Shakespearian, despite the fact that their productions share very little with any of the playtexts that we can find either in English or in any Italian translation. While Strehler intersected with Shakespeare's tradition through a philological reading of the texts, de Berardinis and Bene expressed their love for the English playwright by approaching his texts in a similar way to how Shakespeare himself had approached the sources he used for his own creations. At the same time, we cannot overlook that while Strehler's productions, besides being highly regarded for their aesthetic value, contributed to spreading knowledge of Shakespeare's plays in Italy thanks

to their philological approach, Ricci's, de Berardinis's and Bene's required the audience to know the plays beforehand.

Many times in my research have I asked myself questions about what gets lost in a translated text and, consequently, in staging a Shakespeare play in a language other than English. It is clear that not everything of Shakespeare's English can be rendered in a translation. Therefore, watching a play in English is a different experience from watching one in Italian or in another language. Yet at least some of what cannot be rendered through the language can be achieved in theatre through the tools that are used to transform a text into theatrical action. I have not explored the issue of translation in detail because this could be the subject of another thesis, but my analysis of stage productions has revealed that the meaning of a word, of a phrase, or of a line, can be conveyed by a gesture, a movement, a facial expression, along with the choice of the music, of the lights, of the costumes, and of the props. However, having said that, and having seen many productions both in English and in Italian, I need to stress that the two experiences are not comparable. But this may not necessarily be a drawback.

Coming to the investigation of the development of Italian theatre in the period I have considered in my research, many reflections can be made and conclusions drawn. In the introduction I asked myself which of the three main figures, the author, the actor, or the director, Italian theatre has privileged. In order to give a complete answer we should consider a much longer period than the 150 years that I have studied. In so doing we would answer that theatre (and not only Italian theatre) has always been the theatre of the actor, and that only very recently has the new figure of the director been introduced. Limiting the scope of research to the period analysed in my research, I can draw the conclusion that Italian theatre has assigned an indisputable centrality to the actor. In fact, directing developed in Italy later than in most of the European countries, as the resistance of actors to the introduction of this new figure was very strong. Furthermore, after just a few decades of stagings by the director's theatre, the generation of the experimentalists of the 1960s advocated a return to the dominance of the

actor, seen as the real protagonist of the stage. The actor resumed not only the functions of the director, but also the functions of the author, as his or her adaptations were real dramaturgical operations. The general mistrust between authors and actors in the 1960s led them to the rediscovery of the classics, and of Shakespeare in particular, although in completely different modalities from the work that directors like Strehler had done.

The shift from the theatre of the directors to the theatre of the experimentalists meant a completely different approach to theatre in general. While the first were mainly interested in staging the best possible production to give to the audience, the second regarded the theatrical space as a safe place where they could express themselves, and try to find new ways to perform and to stage Shakespeare. The result of this process, therefore, was a kind of theatre that acquired therapeutic qualities. It is noteworthy that alongside professional theatre today, innumerable are the laboratories and workshops for amateur actors, who are less interested in the texts than in finding a space where they can express their creativity freely in a society that requires its members to wear a mask. Roles are reversed, and life becomes the theatre where we play a part, while theatre is the place where we can find our true self again. De Berardinis's trilogy is certainly to be seen within this context.

Despite the completely different approach to the playtexts by directors like Strehler and actor-directors like Bene, my analysis of the various productions has led me to the conclusion that every time a director stages a play, he inevitably gives his own reading of the play. As I pointed out in chapter 3, Strehler's productions of Shakespeare's plays were the plays filtered through the director's sensitivity, through his culture, and his taste. Therefore, it would be wrong to grant the role of creator to the author only, or to those theatre practitioners who freely interpret the playtexts. Every director, independently from his or her commitment to authenticity, is a creator. He creates every time he makes a choice for his staging.

One final thought I want to express is the idea of the existence of a cyclic pattern that characterizes the history of theatre. Limiting this reflection to my research, I have witnessed various returns to pre-existing

models. The Great Actors of the nineteenth century resumed the Italian tradition of the *commedia dell'arte* and the Elizabethan tradition, in which the actors acquired dramaturgical qualities, and were the directors of their own plays. The generation of the directors moved away from the practices of the Great Actors, and claimed a neat separation between the work of the author, the work of the director, and the work of the actor, who, in this kind of theatre lost his or her predominant role and became subservient to the director. The experimentalists of the 1950s and 1960s, instead, returned to the theatre of the actor, to the habit of rearranging texts in their very personal way, but they also managed to create a theatre that differed sensibly from the theatre of the Great Actors.

The question I need to ask now is: what came next? How have Shakespeare's plays been put on stage in the last few decades in Italy? I do not think that we can compare the recent past with the three great revolutions – or moments of evolution – that I have been exploring in my research. Furthermore, I have chosen the biggest and most influential figures of these theatrical experiences. What has happened in the period between de Berardinis's and Bene's productions and today is the story of individual enterprises that range from more philological readings of the playtexts to very free interpretations. In general I would say that there is more concern with the text in Britain than there is in Italy. The London or Stratford stages, just to mention two, usually offer productions that more often than not go back to Shakespeare's originals (though in reduced versions sometimes), whereas in Italy there is a tendency to rewrite. Probably the fact that Italian directors work on translated texts plays a part in this.

I would like now to refer to a few of the contemporary actors and directors who have worked and are working with Shakespeare. One-person shows are a long-standing tradition in Italy. Therefore, there are also a few examples of a one-person Shakespeare. For example we can cite the work done with Shakespeare by Roberto Herlitzka (born in Turin in 1937), and by Lella Costa (born in Milan in 1952). Herlitzka's has been performing his *Ex*

Amleto since 1998, and continues to tour around Italy (he also took it to France). Although he has not altered the text (but he has reduced it and changed the order of some scenes), his reading of *Hamlet* is obviously very personal and is mainly an exploration of the theme of loneliness. Herlitzka, in fact, does not give voice to the other characters other than on two brief occasions. The audience is aware of their presence, but only through Hamlet's words, who addresses them and asks them questions, but does not take on their role to give answers. I saw this wonderful performance in December 2012 and was really surprised when I heard the audience applaud after Hamlet had given his instructions to the company of actors. Some habits never die in Italy! Lella Costa offered her reading of *Hamlet* in 2008. Costa was Hamlet, but also Ophelia, Horatio, and the ghost of the dead king. Like Herlitzka, she had to adapt the text to the presence of a single performer on the stage. Alongside Shakespeare's words she used poems by Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath to describe Ophelia's madness, and referred to the Italian writer Italo Calvino. With Herlitzka and Costa we have once again examples of an actor or an actress who fills the stage with his or her sole presence. And how many more could we cite in the panorama of Italian theatre: Vittorio Gassman, Dario Fo, Roberto Benigni, Gigi Proietti, and others.

Completely different are Ronconi's productions. Ronconi (born in Tunisia in 1933) was at the *Convegno di Ivrea*, but he was not one of the protagonists of those days. Since 1999 he has been the artistic director of Piccolo Teatro di Milano. Without doubts his theatre is the director's theatre. He usually works with young actors trained at the drama school that he himself directs, whom he shapes according to his ideas of acting. He is considered the leader of the second generation of Italian directors but has always refused to be labelled; he has created a personal poetics offering very long and complex productions in which the scenery becomes the protagonist. He has been defined as 'regista delle macchine e dell'impossibile' ('director of machines and of the impossible'). In his *Riccardo III*, Vittorio Gassman (one of the most talented Italian actors of the second half of the twentieth century) was imprisoned in a sort of prosthesis

that made his movements very difficult. Ronconi has often chosen to stage narrative texts, cinema scripts or even scientific writings; but among his most recent productions there are two plays by Shakespeare which, I admit, rather baffled me: *Sogno di una notte di mezza estate* staged in two successive theatrical seasons: 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 and *Il mercante di Venezia* in 2009-2010. His *Sogno di una notte di mezza estate* was a *Midsummer Night's Dream* without a dream. The wood did not exist; in its place he used big letters forming the word 'FORESTA' that slid on rails. His reading of *The Merchant of Venice* was quite unusual I believe, as he chose to put the emphasis on the tragic side of the play, ignoring the light aspects. Ronconi also directed Verdi's *Macbeth* in 1980, five years after Strehler did so at Teatro La Scala.

Very well rooted on the Milanese stage is the company of Teatro dell'Elfo now called Elfo Puccini – Teatro d'Arte Contemporanea. The Teatro dell'Elfo was founded in 1973 by Elio De Capitani together with cinema director Gabriele Salvatores. Critic Giovanni Raboni wrote in *Corriere della Sera* on April, 30, 1993:

Esiste, innegabilmente, un marchio, una linea, una griffe Teatridithalia ... situazioni e parole 'forti', appena al di qua o decisamente al di là della pornografia, recitazione senza mezze tinte, anfetaminica ... ricorso sistematico all'amplificazione sonora, con decibel da discoteca, continue citazioni ... dal linguaggio della TV, del cinema, del fumetto'.

There certainly exists a brand, a griffe Teatridithalia (the name given to the company after they took over another theatre in Milan) ... 'strong' words and situations on the borderline of pornography, amphetaminic acting in full tones ... systematic use of sound amplification, constant quotations ... from the language of TV, cinema and comic strips).

The commitment of the company to the classics in general, and to Shakespeare's plays in particular, is a long-standing one, though they also

offer productions of contemporary authors like Mark Ravenhill, Sarah Kane, Steven Berkoff, and Alan Bennett. As for Shakespeare they seem to be interested in the plays in which a generation clash is present like *Romeo e Giulietta*, *Sogno di una notte di mezza estate*, *Il racconto d'inverno*. They usually translate Shakespeare's plays rather than relying on available translations; the versions that they offer are sometimes a bit devoid of philological scruples and may offend admirers of orthodoxy, but their productions are created with *coups de théâtre* and embody many of the magical, transformative possibilities of the theatre. Newspapers reviews are mixed, but their Shakespearian productions are usually cherished by young people.

An interesting experiment with *Hamlet* has been made by Federico Tiezzi (born in Lucignano in Tuscany in 1951). Between 1998 and 2001, he carried out a thorough analysis of *Hamlet* running an extended workshop from which three shows were put on stage, which he regarded as 'notes' on *Hamlet* in preparation for directing his *Amleto* in 2002. His work consisted in exploring the various possible readings of the text, and in showing the multiplicity of the points of view. All these readings, along with different staging styles and four different translations, were present in the 2002 production. He used the 1814 translation of Michele Leoni, Gerardo Guerrieri's and Alessandro Serpieri's translations, and the translation that Mario Luzi made for this production.

Massimiliano Civica is a young director (he was born in Rome in 1974) who directed *Il mercante di Venezia* in 2008 and *Un sogno nella notte dell'estate* in 2010. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is usually translated in Italian as *Sogno di una notte di mezza estate*, but Civica's translation is more correct. Civica, in fact, affirms that he tries to be as faithful as possible to the text, beginning with the title. Despite being a director he believes in the close collaboration between the director, the author (even when the author is dead), and the actor, whom he defines as 'the actor-author'.

Worth mentioning is the work done by Antonio Latella (born in Castellamare di Stabia in 1967) Of his various Shakespearian productions I

will only refer to his most recent one, *Lear* staged in 2010, with Giorgio Albertazzi, one of the last Italian *mattatori*, in the title role.¹ Latella wanted a ‘chamber show’ where the *fourth wall* was eliminated. The set was very simple, just a wooden table, a few chairs and the scripts for the actors. The play started with Albertazzi reading the script, and then being joined by the other actors. From the simple, fictive first reading, the actors moved to an impassioned interpretation, in a game of theatre within theatre, in which Latella tried to find a balance between the two moments of rehearsal. As always in his productions, he used various devices to create a *Verfremdungseffekt*, like non-diegetic sounds and music, placards with parts of the text, and microphones to amplify and distort sounds and noises.

I wish to finish this roundup of Shakespearian productions in Italy with the experiments carried out in prisons. Earlier this year (2012) cinema directors Paolo and Vittorio Taviani presented their film *Cesare deve morire* (*Caesar must die*), which follows convicts of maximum security Rebibbia Prison in the suburbs of Rome in their rehearsals of *Julius Caesar*. The brothers scripted around the play and created a semi-documentary film that follows the internal life of the prisoners alongside their theatrical performances. It is theatre that becomes therapy for the inmates, a way to express their feelings, their anger, and their desperation.

Far from being a point of arrival, my research allows much more exploration into the world of Shakespeare on the Italian stage. Various lines could be investigated. The natural sequel of my project would be a comparison between contemporary English and Italian Shakespeare, which could be enriched by a number of interviews carried out both in Italy and in Britain. I have used interviews only occasionally in my project. All the actors and directors whom I have contacted responded enthusiastically to

¹ Giorgio Albertazzi was born in 1923.

my request, but I have not always had the possibility to see them in the time span of my research.

Another line of research could be that of Shakespeare's plays in *teatro di figura* (puppet theatre), a long-standing tradition in Italy. Susan Young's *Shakespeare Manipulated* examines the links between Shakespeare and the Italian theatre of *marionette*, *burattini*, and *pupi* both during the dramatist's lifetime and in the productions of his work in Italy within the genre of *teatro di figura*.² Massimo Schuster, born in Italy in 1950 and living in France for thirty years, used Shakespeare's works more than once, in productions in which he blended the presence of actors and of puppets on the stage. Gaspare Carlo Gioachino Colla started to perform with his marionettes around 1835, and his heirs still take their marionettes around Italy and abroad. *La Tempesta* and *Macbeth* are among their Shakespearian adaptations.

There are also the re-writings of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* (*Ambleto* of 1972 and *Macbetto* of 1974) by Giovanni Testori where the writer experiments with language, or the re-writing of *La Tempesta* (1983) by Eduardo De Filippo in a seventeenth-century Neapolitan dialect, which could be explored. This would mean investigating written texts more than stage adaptations (although these written works have also been staged), and would focus on the double issue of translation into Italian and into Italian dialects.

Even a project on 'Shakespeare in Prison' would be interesting, I believe. Besides Rebibbia Prison there are other penal institutions where theatre projects are carried out, and Shakespeare is always among the chosen playwrights. This exploration would investigate the field of theatre as therapy, and would explore how a very special group of people reacts to Shakespeare's plays.

² Susan Young, *Shakespeare Manipulated: The Use of the Dramatic Works of Shakespeare in 'teatro di figura' in Italy* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1996).

My journey has now come to an end, but, as I have just illustrated, there is much more to investigate about Shakespeare in Italy, in a story that is made of evolutions and new discoveries on the one hand, and of returns to previous modes and experiences on the other. It is not just a way forward, but also a road that takes us back to old models that can be resumed and given a new, modern shape, in a kind of cyclic pattern that seems to characterise the history of theatrical culture.

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