

Foreword

The book you are holding in your hands, the latest special issue, the fifth already, of RADAC's *Coup de Théâtre* journal, is the written, printed, soft-bound memory of a key moment in the life of our wonderful society dedicated to studying contemporary Anglophone theatre, namely "Crossing Borders", the international conference co-organised with MSH Paris-Nord, Plaine Commune and the universities of Avignon, Grenoble, Paris 13, Lille, Lyon 2 and Sorbonne University, on October 12-13 2018 for RADAC's 40th birthday. During these two very intense days, researchers, translators, theatre-makers, publishers from a dozen European countries worked together on how Anglophone theatre circulates within Europe, raising important questions linked to the reception, translation and adaptation of specific works, but also to the patronage and funding of theatres and theatre professionals. It seemed to us that the voices and ideas of the plenary speakers, the contributors to the panels and the speakers at the round tables would reach more theatre aficionados if they could circulate after the conference. The talks were rewritten and edited in order to offer groundwork to more researchers and professionals and foster new collaborations between individuals and between countries. Let us hope that the book, just like the theme it covers, will cross borders and circulate throughout Europe so as to provide a step towards uniting scholars around the topic of contemporary Anglophone theatre.

What this book cannot really make apparent but what this foreword can report is that all the discussions during the conference happened in the most friendly of atmospheres, and that this atmosphere was entirely due to the hard work and warm hearts of Agathe Torti-Alcayaga (RADAC Treasurer) and Christine Kiehl (RADAC Vice-President), with the help of the RADAC board, three students working under Agathe's supervision (Anita Balendran, Aiswaria Barjesh and Pauline

Bocquillon) and a PhD student (Stéphanie Papa). In the months leading up to the conference, they did everything that was humanly possible to make sure that both the scientific excellence and the convivial atmosphere were sustained during the two days. And they succeeded. The new board members are determined to uphold the values both Agathe and Christine have promoted during their years on the RADAC board in particular friendship and respect across nations, values without which our research becomes meaningless. In that sense, there are no borders between Britain and Europe or between Europe and the United States. Thank you to Agathe, Christine and RADAC for creating a time and place where the Republic of Letters can exist. It is now up to us all to make it thrive.

Claire Hélie

RADAC Vice-President

Introduction

At the end of 2015, the RADAC board decided that it wanted to organize a special conference to celebrate RADAC's 40th birthday in 2018. The conference took place in Paris October 11-12 and this special issue contains a selection of the papers given, the two keynote addresses and a short summary of each of the two round-table discussions featuring actors, directors, translators, editors, publishers, etc.

We chose the topic "Anglophone Theatre in Europe" for a variety of reasons. Firstly, although we are based in France with mainly French members, of late we have begun to have more international contacts and now have members not just from the UK and the US, but also from Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain and beyond. We started to give serious thought to the idea of setting up an international network of scholars working in the field of contemporary Anglophone theatre, not just scholars of course, but also theatre practitioners, translators, etc. those who make it possible for us to see Pinter or Kane, Mamet or Kushner beyond the borders of the UK or US. Although access to English language play-texts poses few problems, access to performances of these works is a different matter. Scholars in Continental Europe will never have the easy access to English language theatre productions that our colleagues across the Channel have. This aspect is rarely acknowledged in publications and we thought that bringing together colleagues from around Europe to discuss Anglophone theatre would be an occasion to exchange ideas and experiences.

The more limited access to English-language productions of contemporary drama does not mean that in Continental Europe we have had to give up the idea of studying performance and production. It is worth noting that the essays contained in this special issue are almost all devoted to specific productions of English language plays. In fact, and this is the second reason for choosing the topic, in some instanc-

es, it is probably easier to see the works of certain British playwrights in France or Germany, for example, than in the UK, a point made by several contributors. By calling on specialists from different European countries this question could be looked at.

Thirdly, the production of Anglophone plays in non-English speaking countries, for the most part involves translation. The third aim of the conference was therefore to consider the role of translation, translators and publishers in the circulation of English language play-texts. We assumed, quite rightly as it turns out, that works written in (and for) one theatrical universe would be changed when placed in a totally different theatrical culture, revealing as much about the works themselves as about the new theatrical contexts in which they were performed. The whole issue of how and why texts are translated into different languages **in order to be performed** is at the centre of several of the essays gathered here.

This volume is divided into two parts, each part beginning with an in-depth analysis provided by each of the two keynote addresses. Peter Boenisch, Professor of Dramaturgy at Aarhus University (Denmark), and Professor of European Theatre at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London (UK), brings his knowledge of both British playwrights and European theatres to his essay “Directing Across Borders: English *Mise en Scène* on the Continental Stage”. If British plays have been staged in Europe since the early sixties with both the “Angry Young Men” and the equally angry “*In-Yer-Face*” generation making their mark, Boenisch stresses that only recently have Continental theatres opened their doors to the work of British directors. Thanks to the work of Artistic Directors such as David Lan at the Young Vic from 2000-2018, productions in Britain have become increasingly influenced by Continental theatre aesthetics. He argues that the arrival of British directors such as Robert Icke and Joe Hill-Gibbons in certain (especially German-language) theatres has paved the way for productions that combine Continental theatre practice with the more British approach to character psychology with the result that: “we are [...] witnessing a potentially very produc-

tive encounter, and maybe the infusion of some new impulses that may eventually work both ways, on both sides of the aesthetic border.” This two-way process has certainly been facilitated by the fact that many of the most influential individuals concerned have backgrounds involving border-crossing of one sort or another. Simon Stone, for example, born in Basel before moving to Australia at the age of 12 “brought a distinct ‘Anglophone’ approach to *mise en scène* on the European stage”. Quite significantly, a number of those mentioned by Boensich have a wide and varied experience of theatre practice. Andreas Beck, who has worked in several different countries and institutions, has also translated, notably Mark Ravenhill. David Lan started his career in theatre in South Africa and was also a playwright and translator. The willingness to take on multiple roles is a feature shared by almost all the contributors to this volume and the playwrights, theatre companies or directors they discuss. It is also the case of the translators involved in helping English-language drama across borders.

In “The Delights and Sorrows of being a Translator and Cultural Mediator”, Maggie Rose insists from the outset of her story of crossing from England to Italy that the term “translator” is inadequate to describe the task and prefers the term “cultural mediator” which she defines as “somebody, who as well as translating plays, assigns herself a number of different tasks in the hope that her translations will make that crucial leap from page to stage.” Throughout her essay it is clear that there is more to theatrical border crossing than mere linguistic competence. Cultural “mediation” allows texts which seem to be “specifically British” to work to great effect elsewhere, as is the case she describes with Alan Bennett.

Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that the movement of English-language drama across Europe has been an easy one. There are three essays in this volume that consider the place of contemporary British playwrights in Italy: Caryl Churchill, Martin Crimp and Sarah Kane. Although Sara Soncini refers to “Churchill’s disgraceful absence from the Italian stage”, Serena Guarracino discusses a very successful version of *Cloud Nine* in “‘Nicks of time’ in the Italian Translation

and Staging of Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine/Settimo cielo*". The play was first performed in the UK in 1979 but has been brought up to date in the 2018 production Guarracino describes to allow for new forms of exploration of gender representation and performance. This production constitutes a kind of "reinvention" of *Cloud Nine*, leading Guarracino to argue that translation "also operates a 'decanonization' by displacing the text and requiring it, as in Churchill's original vision, to ask new questions for a different time and place."

Soncini's essay, "Theatre-making with Sarah Kane: *4.48 Psychosis* on the Italian Stage", is devoted to Sarah Kane, whose work features in a number of essays in this volume. According to Soncini, Sarah Kane's presence on the Italian stage can be thus explained: "the writer's sustained endeavour to break formal boundaries has been noticeably paralleled by the striking readiness shown by her plays to cross *national* boundaries." She considers that *4.48 Psychosis*, in particular, lends itself to radical reworkings.

In "An English Playwright on the Italian Stage: Exporting, Translating and Staging Martin Crimp's Drama" Maria Elena Capitani considers the work of Martin Crimp, (playwright, translator and adaptor of many different texts) and quotes Alek Sierz's remarks on Crimp being more successful in Continental Europe than in the UK because of the radical ambiguity of his texts, which make them difficult to categorize. Capitani suggests that some of them might be considered as "postdramatic". Crimp's work has been performed in Italy notably by the Accademia degli Artefatti, discussed here. Capitani argues that Crimp's plays suited this company's "need for artistic exploration and experimentation to which the company is devoted and stimulate its increasing interest in the study of language and communication." She focuses especially on Accademia degli Artefatti's production of Crimp's "dramatic jigsaw" *Attempts on Her Life*.

The final essay in this section of the volume, "'Qu'on entende la langue officielle': Translation and Self-translation of the French-based Creole of Saint Lucia" concerns another aspect of translating plays: self-translation and how it differs from the more usual kinds

of translation. Giuseppe Sofo takes works by the Caribbean poet and playwright Derek Walcott and analyses how the author himself has translated passages from Creole into English. Sofo notes “the use of variation instead of repetition when the same passage is translated several times in the same context” and offers explanations for this.

Most of the questions raised by translation in these essays came up in the round-table discussion devoted to translation and confirm, to use Capitani’s words, “the fertile intersections between theatre, dramaturgy, translation.”

Translations, adaptations and reworkings facilitate the circulation of English-language plays throughout Continental Europe and the authors of the essays in Part One of this volume all underline the role played by translators, publishers, academics, actors, directors and companies in bringing these works to new audiences. English-language drama has also challenged or changed theatre practice in certain European countries where specific works, authors or types of play have resonated in a particular way.

Changing attitudes to English-language theatre and some of the effects of specific works in different countries and regions are examined in Part Two of this volume “National Stages”. Elisabeth Angel-Perez, Professor of English literature and drama at the University of Paris-Sorbonne, begins with an in-depth study entitled “The ‘Devenir-French’ of the Play: Contemporary British Theatre in France and in French”. She examines how English-language drama finally found its way into some of the major French theatres after a somewhat shaky start with the first productions of Pinter plays. Since the 90s, many British playwrights have had their work performed in France, most notably Pinter, Kane and Crimp. Many others have joined this list, including writers such as Bond and Barker who have fallen out of favour in Britain. Caryl Churchill, however, has been neglected, (a point also raised by Rose and Soncini speaking about Italy). Angel-Perez provides precise data about 21st century productions at several leading French theatres, both in Paris and beyond. She also interviewed a number of directors and asked them to explain their choices.

The main reasons given for choosing British dramatists were: “novelty of the approach, strength of the dramaturgy, capacity to address immediate contemporary issues”.

Angel-Perez also argues that contemporary British drama is able to “import other countries’ concerns and traumas, and particularly historical traumas, onto its own stage”. A play like *Blasted* is an obvious example of this but Angel-Perez gives other examples of the “cosmopolitanism” (as defined by Dan Rebellato) of some contemporary British drama which makes a smooth transition to other national contexts. Finally, she suggests that, far from constituting a handicap, the fact of translating these plays from English into another language creates a kind of “linguistic hermaphroditism” (the term used by Claude Régy), the potential for “a frontierless language, which opens a chasm of possibilities for the actors and readers”. She concludes by demonstrating this by looking at how the use of gendered nouns in a play like Martin Crimp’s *Attempts on Her Life* has the potential to infuse new meanings and new voices into the text.

Although in quite different contexts, both Vicki Ann Cremona and Marta Tirado both credit Anglophone drama with providing impetus to the development of theatre with a specific identity: Maltese and Catalan, respectively. In “Maltese Audiences and Theatre in English: Choice and Controversy” Vicki Ann Cremona describes how English-language theatre was initially a colonial phenomenon, but later had a more positive effect by providing training for actors and directors and then, by providing an outlet for political protest in the seventies and eighties. More recently, contemporary Anglophone plays (*In-Yer-Face* and verbatim) have been staged to oppose censorship. Instead of rejecting the English language as the language of the colonizer, certain Maltese playwrights are choosing to write in English to express controversial ideas.

In “On *Rebentats* (TNC, 2018), the First Catalan Production of Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*: Construction and Audience of Catalan National Theatre”, Marta Tirado shows how a Catalan performance of Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* in 2018 at the Catalan National Theatre fulfilled two

objectives: firstly, “consolidating Catalan theatre as a national entity that is part of the European theatrical tradition” and secondly making it possible “to develop the theatre-reception skills of the ordinary Catalan theatre-goer” by introducing new theatrical forms and languages. She begins by explaining that the TNC was set up, like other national theatres “with the purpose of celebrating their distinct languages and cultures.” However, establishing the specific identity of Catalan theatre does not entail isolation, on the contrary, it involves linking up with other European theatre traditions. A play like *Blasted*, already mentioned by Angel-Perez for its “cosmopolitanism” in the French context, also seems to function in a similar way in the Catalan context, attracting the attention of new companies and directors and introducing audiences to a different aesthetics. Tirado notes an interesting parallel between the hostile reception of some of the Catalan press to *Blasted* in 2018 and that of parts of the British press to the first production of the play in 1995.

In order to investigate the place of Anglophone theatre in Greece, Elizabeth Sakellaridou sent out a questionnaire to directors, critics and translators. She presents a summary of her findings in “Echoes of Contemporary Anglophone Theatre on the Greek Stage”.

Not surprisingly, in the light of what Italian and Spanish academics have noted, her results point to Sarah Kane as the most influential contemporary British dramatist. Caryl Churchill, as in Italy or Spain and Catalonia, is not performed as frequently as her place in British drama might lead us to expect. Sakellaridou’s research focuses on the main reasons Greek theatres choose to put on Anglophone plays. Those contacted by Sakellaridou explain that their choice is not just due to the accessibility of the English language and therefore more readily available translations. They point out that many of the works chosen for production are “plays of social unrest and social inquiry that seem to respond to their own precarious existence as citizens of Greece, Europe and the world.”

Furthermore, as noticed by other authors, such as stage director Christina Chatzivasileiou, Greek theatre practitioners are also drawn

to the more experimental side of British theatre, for example, the work of Forced Entertainment or Tim Crouch, in search of a new theatre aesthetic.

In “Contemporary Anglophone Theatre on Montenegrin Stages from 2000 to 2015”, Vesna Tripković-Samardžić examines recent programming trends in two state and two city theatres in Montenegro. Although, to some extent these theatres tend to produce plays written in English (both British and American) which have already received international recognition, for example Samuel Beckett or Tennessee Williams, other choices seem to be more closely linked to the specific context of 21st century Montenegro: “the consequences of ethnic conflict [...] or the mechanisms of repression in a totalitarian regime”. Four of Pinter’s short plays: *The New World Order* (1991), *One for the Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988) and *Party Time* (1991) were grouped under the same title *Party Time* “because they address the same theme – the legacy of totalitarianism.”

Clare Wallace focuses on “the cultural dynamics of Anglophone drama as it crosses into and circulates within a Czech setting” in “Transpositional Exchanges: Contemporary Anglophone Drama on the Czech National Stage”. Her focus is on 21st century productions at the National Theatre in Prague and she is particularly concerned with the ways that “new meanings may accrue to work through transposition to another social and theatrical context.” Just as Guarracino demonstrates through her discussion of an Italian production of *Cloud Nine*, how a work written in Britain at a particular moment can take on new meanings in a different temporal and geographical context, so Wallace shows how “the national historical specificities of a play like *Rock’n’Roll* inevitably resonated differently within the Czech context in ways that drew attention to Stoppard’s own nostalgia and, paradoxically, the inherent formal stasis of a work about political change”. On the other hand, more experimental works, like *Earthquakes in London* seem to have been better received in Prague since the Czech theatre has a tradition of “scenographic experimentalism”.

The last essay takes us back to the opening of Part Two by looking at how Anglophone theatre is received in France. This time, however, the focus is on theatre from the United States. In “*Angels in America: Performing American Border-Crossing on the French Stage?*” Xavier Lemoine analyses a series of productions in France between 1994 and 2018, showing that *Angels in America* has actually crossed borders both cultural and aesthetic. Challenging the earlier binary vision widespread in France that American drama was either psychological realism or avant-gardism, Lemoine argues that *Angels in America*, by “blurring the distinction between high and low art, realism and avant-garde” has contributed to the creation of a new hybrid theatrical genre.

The Festival d’Avignon 2019 edition, taking place as we are writing this introduction, happens to echo our investigation into the circulation of Anglophone theatre in Europe. With the collaboration of the BNF - Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and the Maison Jean Vilar, The Festival IN’s administration has started to carry out statistical research on the production of international drama since 1947 when the Festival was created under the aegis of actor and stage director Jean Vilar. In a timely coincidence with our *Crossing Borders* investigation, the first chapter of the Festival’s historical survey is devoted to the programming of 20th and 21st Century Anglophone drama; on this occasion, two of our RADAC members and regular Festival attenders, Cyrielle Garson and Christine Kiehl, were invited July 6, 2019 to Avignon’s Maison Jean Vilar for a roundtable on the question.

As a statistical survey of the state of Anglophone theatre in Avignon OFF¹ festival has hardly started, our tentative remarks will be limited to the official IN festival. Besides regular Shakespeare productions, and leaving aside classics like TS Eliot’s *Meurtre dans la Cathédrale* (*Murder in the Cathedral*) in 1957 or Beckett’s *Va et Vient* in 1980, Edward Bond paved the way for English drama with *Early Morning* in 1970, staged by George Wilson, *Maison d’arrêt* (*Olly’s Prison*), staged by Jorge Lavelli in 1993, *Pièces de guerre* (*The War Plays*), staged by Alain Françon in 1994, *Numéro d’équilibre* (*The Balancing Act*), staged

and translated by Jérôme Hankins in 2006, and *Naître (Born)*, staged by Alain Françon the same year.

Few contemporary American playwrights have made their way on to the renowned Avignon stage except for Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, programmed twice, in Brigitte Jaques's French version in 1994 and in Krzysztof Warlikowski's Polish version in 2007. (Both productions are discussed by Xavier Lemoine in this volume.) Dennis Cooper came to read his text *L'Apologize* in 2005 and Naomi Wallace was programmed twice as we shall see.

Besides dramatists, renowned Anglophone artists successfully took the Avignon Festival stage by storm like Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre with *Paradise Now* in 1968, a notorious breakthrough with its ostentatious display of nakedness and sex. 1981 welcomed the British Footsbarn travelling Theatre (now based in Central France) with Steinbeck's *Arthur*. South African protean artist William Kentridge (illustrator, animation film author, sculptor, puppeteer, performer, director) and his Handspring Puppet Company came twice with three productions: *Refuse the Hour Woyzeck on the Highveld* in 1996 and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* in 1997.

Tim Etchell's Forced Entertainment made their debut in Avignon with *The Coming Storm* in 2012 and the same year, Simon Mc Burney's Complicite theatre had the great honour of staging *The Master and Margarita* at the Palais des Papes.

The only productions illustrating British *In-Yer-Face* theatre were both proposed by Thomas Ostermeier in 1999 in his German versions of Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking (Shoppen und Ficken)* and Sarah Kane's *Anéantis (Blasted)* in 2005. It should be noted, however, that contemporary Anglophone playwrights are regularly programmed in Avignon's OFF festival (Howard Barker, Alice Birch, Caryl Churchill, Martin Crimp, David Harrower, Sarah Kane, Daniel Keene, Dennis Kelly, Duncan Mac Millan, Harold Pinter, Naomi Wallace, to name but a few).

After Kane, Naomi Wallace is the second female playwright to have entered Avignon's IN repertoire, in 2011 with *Les heures sèches (Things*

of *Dry Hours* staged by Guillaume Lévêque) and 2019 with *La brèche* (*The MacAlpine Spillway*) staged by French director Tommy Milliot.

Last but not least, 2019 marks Martin Crimp's first and most eagerly awaited appearance in Avignon's IN Festival. Is it because Crimp is one of the most European British dramatists (with Ravenhill and Barker) with his recent plays often premiered in Germany? This was indeed the case with the play chosen by the Festival administration this year: *Le reste vous le connaissez par le cinéma* (*The Rest Will Be Familiar to You from The Cinema*) under Daniel Jeanneteau's stage direction. It was first created by Katie Mitchell in Hamburg as *Alles weitere kennen sie aus dem kino* (2013). It is worth pointing out that the play has never been performed in Britain to this day.

The (incomplete) panorama proposed above enables us to draw some similar conclusions to those evoked in the present volume: contemporary Anglophone drama is programmed outside English-speaking countries either in relation to the socio-political context of the host country, or that country's current taste for artistic innovation or, thirdly, via renowned stage directors presiding over the choice of the playwrights.

In Avignon, the avant-gardist production of Julian Beck's Living Theatre tallied with France's revolutionary context in 1968, and the Handspring Puppet Company's show corresponded to Avignon's interest in aesthetic forms other than text-based drama in the late nineties. Forced Entertainment's extravagance and Complicite theatre's innovative transdisciplinary productions answered a demand for devised theatre and a new playful confrontation with the public. A similar reason may account, more recently, for Avignon's attraction to Katie Mitchell's innovative performances and installations (she may be known as Crimp's most regular stage director, but her creations in Avignon (*Christine* in 2011, *Ten Billion* with scientist Stephen Emmott in 2012, *Die Meiden*, and the video installation *Five Truths*, in 2017) owe more to her experimental, often post-dramatic stage aesthetics than to the adaptation of English play-texts:

Ravenhill was ushered into the famous French Festival via one of Avignon's favourite German stage directors, the bold and uncompromising director of Berlin Schaubühne, Thomas Ostermeier, who conquered the Palais des Papes's epic scale stage and audience with a boisterous *Hamlet* in 2008 and came back with a breath-taking *Richard III* in 2015.

Martin Crimp owes his introduction to Avignon 2019 to a French director already known by the Festival, Daniel Jeanneteau, with *Le reste vous le connaissez par le cinema*. This creation is Jeanneteau's second staging of a Crimp text, after the opera libretto *Into the Little Hill* in 2006.

Let us hope that Avignon's interest in contemporary Anglophone drama initiated this year, may presage future editions with more female voices, after Sarah Kane, Katie Mitchell and Naomi Wallace.

Susan Blattès and Christine Kiehl

¹ OFF is quite the opposite of "Official" as it refers to the alternative venues (like Edinburgh's Fringe Festival) with no fewer than 1500 plays.

Directing Across Borders: English *mise en scène* on the Continental stage

Peter M. BOENISCH

Abstract: While there have been waves of English playwriting leaving their mark on European stages (the “angry young men” of the 1960s, the *In-Yer-Face* writers of the 1990s), the exchange between English and Continental European theatre practice has been much rarer. English theatre only seemed to arrive on the Continent, when directors – such as Peter Brook or Declan Donnellan – turned their back on British stages and left their home country. In recent years, Katie Mitchell has become a pioneer in directing her work both in the UK and in Continental Europe. Yet, nowadays more and more British directors and companies are brought over to work in Europe, such as Robert Icke at Toneelgroep Amsterdam, and Simon McBurney and the collective Dead Centre at Schaubühne Berlin. This essay will investigate how these directors bring a new sense of Anglophone theatre to Europe, which is both influenced by contemporary Continental practices while also influencing European theatre with its distinctly “English” stage language.

From Shakespeare to the “angry young men” of the 1960s, and more recently the “*In-Yer-Face*” generation of the 1990s as well as contemporary playwrights such as Simon Stephens, Lucy Prebble and Duncan Macmillan, there have been several waves of English playwriting leaving their mark on European stages. The exchange between English and Continental European theatre aesthetics, however, has been more selective. Anglophone stage practice only seemed to cross borders to the Continent as directors such as Peter Brook, Declan Donnellan and Simon McBurney (just like, some centuries before, the travelling companies of the 17th century), turned their back on British theatre and left their home country to work or study abroad. Over the past

decade, Katie Mitchell – herself greatly influenced by her training with the Polish Grotowski-adepts Gardzienice in the early 1990s – has become a rare pioneer in producing her work regularly both on UK and on Continental European stages; also, Sheffield-based Forced Entertainment have become regarded across Europe as the pinnacle of the quirky British performance theatre “off”-scene. None of these artists and companies, though, are considered representative of the current mainstream British theatre scene in their native country. Meanwhile, the past decade has seen Continental “directors’ theatre” approaches of artists such as Thomas Ostermeier and Ivo van Hove finding wide resonance amongst UK theatre artists and the public alike, sparking great interest in Continental aesthetic notions such as *mise en scène* and dramaturgy (cf. Syme 2017; Trueman 2017). Gradually, more British directors have followed Mitchell’s success in being commissioned to create work in the context of Continental ensemble structures, most notably Robert Icke at Toneelgroep Amsterdam (*Oedipus*, prem. April 2018), and Simon McBurney and Dublin-based company Dead Centre at Schaubühne Berlin (*Beware of Pity*, prem. December 2015, and *Shakespeare’s Last Play*, prem. December 2018, respectively). This essay will investigate how this work of directors from the UK brings contemporary Anglophone theatre aesthetics to Continental Europe – approaches that are themselves influenced by Continental models (not least that of *Regietheater*), while still adhering to the distinctly realist and psychology-driven “English” stage idiom. We shall concentrate for our discussion on the German theatre context, specifically on works produced by artistic director Andreas Beck (b. 1965), himself a former international associate of the Royal Court, who has been instrumental in commissioning British theatre makers during his tenures at Volkstheater Vienna (2007-14), Theater Basel in Switzerland (2015-19), and, from Autumn 2019, at Residenztheater Munich. He was responsible for bringing Anglophone theatre directors such as Simon Stone, Ramin Grey, Joe Hill-Gibbins and Robert Icke to work, for the first time in their careers, with Continental actor ensembles, on non-English language productions in the context of the state funded public theatre system – hence, enabling them to work

within the theatres that had inspired their work as directors for some years. As with most border crossings, these directors thereby also experienced some form of “coming home” in the foreign environment, precisely as they left their familiar territory behind. We shall thus encounter multiple border-crossings – in the processes of appropriating, adapting, and then passing on (or, passing *back*) – in particular in the work of Icke and Hill-Gibbins, who now take back their own ways of implementing and integrating the impulses they had received from Continental aesthetics, as they begin to work themselves outside an Anglophone context.¹

I am aware that this article will exclusively discuss the work of white, male directors. It thus symptomatically reflects an ongoing, but gradually challenged structural bias within both Anglophone and Continental theatre systems. I should stress, however, that among the British theatre-makers whose work has been inspired, over the past decade or even longer, by Continental theatre work, is an exceptionally high proportion of female directors, some of whom have in fact managed to break through to some hegemonic British theatre institutions, such as the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. Among them are, in particular, Carrie Cracknell, Nathalie Abrahami, Ellen MacDougall, Maria Aberg, and Jude Christian. At the time of writing, none of these female directors, though, had been commissioned to work in a major Continental theatre venue.

Opening doors across aesthetic borders: The influence of the artistic directors David Lan and Andreas Beck

The recent commissions of British theatre directors at prestigious theatre ensembles of the Dutch- and German-language theatre system highlight a frontier between British and Continental European theatre practice – a border policed far more rigorously than that between the undoubtedly rather heterogenic forms of “European” theatre itself, in its German, French, Italian, or Polish manifestations, which, nevertheless, one dares to confidently subsume under the label of “European theatre”. Given the almost everyday presence of Anglophone

playwriting on Continental stages, from Beckett, Bond and Pinter to Kane, Ravenhill and Stephens, let alone Shakespeare, one is tempted to forget that these playwrights also had to cross this aesthetic border. Some of them managed to become well received household names in Continental theatre, while their work remained far more controversially received, if not largely invisible at home in the UK. Sarah Kane, and in the context of performance theatre, Forced Entertainment, but equally Ravenhill and Stephens are notable examples of British playwrights whose wide success abroad, notably in the non-Anglophone, Continental European theatre world, led to their acknowledgement in the UK – a recognition which, at times, only reluctantly corresponded with actual programming and stage presence of their work at home.

Writing at the turn of the century, Lynette Hunter and Peter Lichtenfels identified the incompatibility of the material production processes as the main reason for this border that continues to separate the two theatre cultures and that appears at times rather insurmountable, long before even considering the future effect of Brexit. They stressed that far more than an often anecdotally foregrounded language barrier, the major differences in funding systems (subsidy vs mixed-mode), the company structures (ensemble vs ad-hoc casting), and the varying traditions of performing (repertoire vs *ensuite*) act as major barriers guarding this frontier (Lichtenfels and Hunter 2002, 39–43). It appears significant in this respect that the work of a number of the established border-crossing directors of an earlier generation – such as Mitchell and McBurney, as well as Declan Donellan, whose company Cheek by Jowl is comprised of multiple, English and Russian ensembles, no less than Peter Brook, who escaped the “deadly theatre” system of the UK to set up his base at the Paris Bouffes du Nord – to the present day have remained outsiders to the inner circle of the British theatre business, being regularly programmed alongside “foreign work” at places like the London Barbican and the Manchester, Brighton and Edinburgh International Festivals. Yet, today, an entire group or even generation of emerging directors, some of whom have by now arrived at the country’s major theatres, such as the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, and whose work has been ex-

ported *within* the Anglophone theatre world, to Broadway and Australia, see themselves as at home on both sides of this border.

In contrast to the somewhat “lone adventurers” of the earlier generation who had made individual efforts to cross the borders of these two theatre cultures, a network of crucial facilitators has worked largely behind the scenes to foster and cultivate this emerging generation and their work, contributing to an intensifying dialogue and wider mutual exchange between British and Continental European theatre directing. The singular most important “door-opener” on the British side, who more than once faced adverse reactions from purist gatekeepers of the British theatre tradition, had been David Lan, Artistic Director of London’s Young Vic theatre from 2000 to 2018. Perhaps typically, Lan, who had trained and started his career in theatre in South Africa, by trade was also a playwright and translator. During his tenure, the “Young Directors Network” was established at the Young Vic, with which virtually all of the above named contemporary British theatre directors have been associated. This informal network established a productive platform for exchange between young theatre directors in the UK – a theatre profession that in the UK theatre economy is still largely (and, in terms of employment contracts, officially) considered as technical rather than artistic. The Directors’ Network was open for anyone who was able to demonstrate two public, professional productions. It offered a context for virtual (online) as well as actual meetings and debates, facilitating events and launching working groups, one of them specifically dedicated to Continental European directors’ theatre. Corresponding to his programming of the Young Vic, Lan fostered interaction with artists from abroad. The directors he brought to his theatre, such as Peter Brook himself as well as Katie Mitchell, the late Patrice Chereau and Luc Bondy, Australian Benedict Andrews, South African Yael Farber, and Ivo van Hove from Amsterdam, would engage with this next generation of British directors, giving workshops and masterclasses to network members. In addition, Lan regularly organised visits to foreign theatres and theatre festivals for these young artists, to Germany, Poland, Greece, or to the Avignon theatre festival. Interestingly, a good number of foreign the-

atre directors living in the UK, many of them from Eastern Europe, became members of this network and thus further contributed to the international exchange of ideas and practices, while remaining virtually absent and invisible on British stages.

Numerous Young Vic associate directors emerged through this network of aspiring artists, among them Carrie Cracknell, Natalie Abrahami, Walter Meierjohann, and also Joe Hill-Gibbins. Without public fanfare, Lan thus created a platform that facilitated the internationalisation of British stage aesthetics in the early 21st century. His network promoted a new outward-facing awareness that had previously rarely existed beyond the international programme at the Royal Court theatre, there of course with its main focus on playwriting. Hill-Gibbins himself had started out in the Royal Court's script department before beginning to assist under the Court's former artistic director Ian Rickson. Other British directors who began at roughly the same time planting seeds for an engagement with the new European postdramatic aesthetics, such as in particular Ramin Grey, had also been associated with both the Royal Court and Lan's Young Vic.

The crucial impulses of Lan's initiative in transforming the outlook of an entire generation of British theatre makers (as opposed, for instance, to more conservative directors such as Rufus Norris, current artistic director of the National Theatre, who according to his own admission had never even been to Berlin), facilitated a new flow of inspiration into British theatre which did not see its direct correspondence in Continental theatre. Certainly, for instance, Thomas Ostermeier's Berlin Schaubühne had consistently engaged with Anglophone theatre, in the early years mostly with the new writing of his close friend Sarah Kane, with Mark Ravenhill and others, and since around 2005 also with Anglophone directors such as Benedict Andrews, Katie Mitchell, Simon McBurney, and more recently with New York's Public Theatre and the Anglo-Irish theatre group Dead Centre. The Berlin theatre has thus become a prominent catalyst for stimulating an engagement with contemporary Anglophone stage aesthetics. Elsewhere, German-English director Karin Beier, as artistic director

first in Cologne, later at Schauspielhaus Hamburg, particularly championed the work not only of British playwrights, but also of directors, such as again Katie Mitchell, whom Beier had introduced to the German stage, inviting her to restage her 2006 National Theatre production of *The Waves* at Cologne in 2011.

Meanwhile, the afore-mentioned Andreas Beck facilitated a number of more recent “border-crossings”. Before he took up his first appointment as artistic director, at Volkstheater Vienna in 2007, Beck had originally studied theatre studies and worked, from the 1990s, as a dramaturg as well as a translator, for instance for Mark Ravenhill’s plays in the 1990s. At Vienna, he became one of the masterminds behind the much-noted international coproduction with Lan’s Young Vic and the Norwegian Brageteatret, Ramin Grey’s production of David Greig’s *The Events*, which premiered at the Edinburgh Festival in August 2013. Grey, whom Beck had known from his time at the Royal Court during Ian Rickson’s time as artistic director, had already previously directed at Volkstheater. Moving, from 2015, to Basel, Beck brought Joe Hill-Gibbins and Robert Icke to work in a German theatre context, while also being instrumental in introducing another vital facilitator of the current budding encounters between Anglophone and European theatre aesthetics to German theatre: Australian director Simon Stone, who was actually born in Basel in 1984 before moving to Australia aged 12. From 2015 to 2017, Stone was associate director at Beck’s Basel enterprise, having previously worked as an actor and director in Australian theatre, most notably as staff director at the Sydney Belvoir theatre. His Belvoir production of Ibsen’s *Wild Duck*, created in 2011, was invited to the 2012 Ibsen Festival in Oslo, and also shown at the Holland Festival in Amsterdam the same year. This visit launched Stone’s by now huge career in European, and in particular in German-speaking theatre, where he has since worked, far beyond Basel, at major theatres from Vienna to Munich, Hamburg and Berlin, and received several invitations to the Berlin Theatertreffen, the festival of the season’s most outstanding German-language productions as chosen by a jury of theatre critics. Meanwhile, he was also associated with Lan’s Young Vic, where he directed Garcia Lorca’s

Yerma (2016) in an Olivier-award winning production starring Billie Piper. Amongst Stone's other noted European productions were *Ibsen-huis*, staged with Toneelgroep Amsterdam in coproduction with the Avignon Festival in 2017, and *Hotel Strindberg* in 2018, a coproduction of Beck's Theater Basel with renowned Vienna Burgtheater. Both of these works merged several of the authors' plays into one evening, offering a portrayal of the particular thematic obsessions of these playwrights.

Stone has become known for his trademark directorial rewriting of canonical plays, whose plot and stage worlds he vigorously transposes into the present moment of the twenty-first century, merging the playwrights' motifs and intentions with his generation's contemporary sensibilities and issues. He also brought a distinct "Anglophone" approach to *mise en scène* on the European stage: his character work as well as the specific form of theatrical realism notably departs from the dominant postdramatic and deconstructivist signatures of European *Regietheater*. His dramaturgic approach of merging an entire body of works into one production resembles the multi-layered storytelling of HBO- and Netflix-series that have become popular in recent years.

Navigating theatre-work across the borders: Robert Icke and Joe Hill-Gibbins

Similar comparisons have been attributed to the directing work of Robert Icke, and it may therefore not have been too surprising that Beck invited Icke to direct at Basel, too, where his version of Arthur Miller's *Crucible* premiered in January 2019, some months after he staged a German version of his signature piece, the *Oresteia*, at Stuttgart. The original version, a four-hour non-stop performance, was created at London's Almeida Theatre in 2015, with which Icke has been affiliated since 2013 as Associate Director. It won him the Olivier Award as youngest ever "best director". Icke comes from a working-class background in Northeast England, yet read English at Cambridge, like many influential British theatre directors before him. In 2010, he joined Rupert Goold's Headlong company, with which he

created his first major success, a stage adaptation of George Orwell's *1984* that he devised together with playwright Duncan Macmillan; their textual adaptation of the novel was in fact also staged in Germany, yet only using their script, staged anew by a different director. Icke then succeeded with his staging of Schiller's *Mary Stuart* in 2016, starring Juliet Stevenson and Lia Williams, in which a coin tossed at the beginning of the evening decided who of the two actresses would play Mary, who Elizabeth. In 2017, he directed *Hamlet*, starring Andrew Scott, before creating, as his first non-English production, Sophocles' *Oedipus* for van Hove's Toneelgroep Amsterdam; this production was selected for the Dutch Theatre Festival, the annual selection of the seasons' best productions in the Dutch-speaking countries, their equivalent to the Berlin Theatertreffen.

Not unlike Stone, Icke works from his own textual adaptations, even when directing English-language plays.² For his four-hour *Hamlet*, he compiled a new version based on various Quarto-editions, reintroducing several of their more "apocryphical" scenes not included in the 1623 Shakespeare Folio, most notably around the character of Ophelia. Such a detailed, dramaturgic and in large parts academic study of the playtexts has become characteristic for Icke. He thus develops his key directorial approach by closely studying the text before going into the rehearsal room, deciding on ideas such as the setting of a court hearing that addresses the audience in his *Oresteia*, or the tossing of the coin in *Mary Stuart* to underline the exchangeability of fate. Icke considers himself an author, however not in competition with the playwright, but extending their play visually and atmospherically through his *mise en scène*. At the heart of a play is for him the experimental and experiential dramaturgic arrangement that the playwright has conceived, and which underpins the words and details of the scenes as written down. As Andreas Beck commented in a personal conversation, Icke's entirely un-postdramatic directorial approach of studying a playtext in close detail to create his own "edition", is reminiscent of the (pre-postmodern) German *Regietheater* tradition, paradigmatically exemplified by Peter Stein's Schaubühne of the 1970's. Directors such as Stein himself, Klaus-Michael Grüber, Andrea Breth,

Claus Peymann, and others, would also work from their own translations, adaptations and versions of canonical plays that strongly resonated with contemporary sensibilities. According to Beck, it was this peculiar amalgamation of a Continental approach of directors' theatre and distinct traits of the British theatre idiom that sparked his interest in Icke (and previously, Stone) and made him commission their work at his theatres.³

The specific fusion of characteristic Continental and British approaches that is even more evident in Icke's work than in Stone's, becomes particular evident in his commitment to the primacy of the dramatic text in a way that is characteristic for English stage direction. At the same time, Icke approaches the playtext with a very different attitude that considers the playwright's work not as solidified in the words printed on a page. Instead, he concentrates on interrogating the underlying ideas set in motion through these very words and the play's dramaturgic and scenic composition. Like Continental directors, Icke feels free to intervene in the printed dramatic texts, especially if compared to the prevalent "literalness" of British stage realism. And yet, he remains notably British in unlocking his often radical readings of the playwright's ideas through the lens of character psychology, in contrast to the Stein-*Regie* tradition of the politicised 1970s that attempted a larger scale, fundamental critique of contemporary society. In Icke's approach, socio-political configurations translate themselves through the behaviour of individuals instead of being seen as conditioning them as an outside force as from a materialist and Marxist perspective that underpinned a lot of the Continental work from the 1970s and 1980s. Icke's close attention to character psychology entirely lacks the European "performativity" of a character as a staged construct (rather than a psychologically conceived fiction), even though his overall *mise en scène* never disavows its theatricality. In this respect, Icke's work further discloses his almost obsessive attention for minute stage details and a carefully thought out semiotics of props, stage objects and more generally the scenographic space. He is thus clearly aligned with the "semiotic" compositions of directors such as Mitchell and playwrights such as Pinter, as opposed to the characteristic postmodern playful-

ness of free-wheeling associations and added intertextual material that characterised recent decades of Continental *mise en scène*. A further aspect that links Icke's work to other British directors who have crossed the borders beyond the Anglophone theatre sphere, is his preference to work with a surrogate ensemble company, as he draws consistently on a group of actors (at least in his British work), and employs his preferred designers, composers, and other close associates.

When Joe Hill-Gibbins made his debut at London's National Theatre in 2013, directing Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, the set by Lizzie Clachan – which kept the back and side walls of the venue's Olivier theatre open to the bare firewalls, so one could see for much of the time the off-stage action as well – alongside the video work by Wooster Group and Stefan Pucher-video designer Chris Kondek, showing as projections on screens next to the stage what was going inside a closed-off space on stage that remained otherwise invisible to the audience's eyes, was very reminiscent of signature contemporary European *Regietheater* in the vein of Frank Castorf, Thomas Ostermeier and Ivo van Hove. Over the following years, working as associate artist at Lan's Young Vic, where he staged a cycle of Shakespeare plays, including *Measure for Measure* (2015) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2017), Hill-Gibbins developed his directorial style beyond eclectic appropriations of Continental templates, also eventually arriving at a rather original blend of these tools and strategies with paradigmatic traits of British theatre aesthetics. Critic Andrew Haydon had already identified in his discussion of Hill-Gibbins's *Edward II* some key differences to European work, above all in the way that the British director “uses the play to argue a point, rather than arguing with/against the play itself”, the latter identified as characteristic of Continental directors' theatre (Haydon 2013).

With his Continental debut at Basel in spring 2018, Hill-Gibbins seemed to be pushed even further into a new territory located precisely at the border of Continental and British stage aesthetics. In contrast to Robert Icke's work – essentially, Icke-shows as to be expected, just in another language – Hill-Gibbins' work revealed an almost

textbook instantiation of British character work and stage psychology – mostly, it seemed, since here he was not given another Shakespeare or other canonical classic to direct, but Tracy Letts’s contemporary American play.⁴ *Mary Page Marlowe* carefully expands conventional Anglo-American playwrighting norms by distributing the narrative on eleven scenes that are not presented in chronological order, while also suggesting that the eponymous main character should be played by several actresses, as the play juxtaposes moments from the character’s life aged 40, 19, and so forth. Very typically for the psychological tradition of Anglo-American writing, there was a rich subtext behind the fragmented scenes, while crucial plot-points (such as Mary being jailed for years) were not shown, but only indirectly alluded to. Comparing Hill-Gibbins’s approach to the play’s German premiere at the Berliner Ensemble, directed by David Bösch (2017), showed an unexpected difference. The BE production staged the play with the help of the revolve in separated rooms, thus reinforcing a conventional realism, and an isolated focus on the individual scenes. Hill-Gibbins, meanwhile, continued his collaboration with German scenographer Johannes Schütz, setting his version in an open space, with minimal props, and all performers present on stage throughout. They thus watched and witnessed the past, present and future of Mary Page Marlowe’s life. Even though Hill-Gibbins clearly used with the actors, as he also noted in a personal conversation, an almost textbook-British drama school approach to rehearsal – dividing scenes into units, identifying intentions and objectives, and deciding on “actions” in accordance with the widespread Stanislavsky-based technique invented by Max Stafford-Clark – his *mise en scène* still transcended any surface realism in a way one would have expected more from a German director. The remarkable dynamics that emerged from the contrast of the entirely abstract scenographic frame and the realistic psychological portrayal of the characters (which formally also matched Letts’s play) revealed the implicit potential of the recent directorial border crossings that are at the heart of our discussion. Having been influenced and having followed developments of Continental European theatre closely, Hill-Gibbins may thus contribute to the avantgarde-aesthetics

of contemporary German-language *Regie* precisely by introducing a British textbook-approach that he himself had long abandoned when working in British theatre itself.

Beyond bourgeois institutions: Moving theatre into the globalised, digital media world of the 21st Century

The emergence of a new generation of Anglophone directors such as Ramin Grey, Simon Stone, Robert Icke and Joe Hill-Gibbins on the Continental (and specifically, on the German) stage, may appear accidental. However, we here suggest that as a symptom their concurrent manifestation points towards wider issues affecting the medium and social institution of theatre today – both the subsidised, previously predominantly bourgeois state and city theatres of the Continent, and at least the more discerning and ambitious end of British theatre. Both systems now face the reality of globalisation, which is also a post-bourgeois reality, with changing audiences who bring in very different life patterns, experiences, and not least medial habits and viewing conventions to the theatre, thus also different expectations of the place and role of theatre in their lives, as compared to the traditional middle-class, highly educated theatre patrons for whom the theatre counted as their “cultural capital” famously analysed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Serious theatre makers and artistic directors, such as Lan and Beck, have thus long started to question the role of a city theatre, as they do not understand its institutional role as being a commodity proffering spectacles feeding the entertainment industry, nor as functioning as museum of the formerly dominant bourgeois culture. They instead have embarked on a thorough scrutiny of forms, formats and aesthetics, of which the invitation to foreign theatre-makers to cross borders and thus work in another and different theatre system has been an integral part.

In their considerations about the role and function of theatre for contemporary audiences in a digital, globalised media economy, issues of reality, of representation and the representability of reality, and an engagement with different realities, have become of central impor-

tance; these explorations also extend to revisiting the potential of theatrical realism as a form and medium for such engagement. In fact, these cross-border experiments can be productively linked to the border-crossing success with both UK and Continental audiences of, for instance, Netflix series, video games, and similar new medial dramaturgies. They disclose distinct approaches to narrative, to visual and affective modes of storytelling that reimagine parameters of orality, and appropriate other epic forms no longer predicated on linear and condensed telling or realism, but instead on a multiplicity of plot-lines, and an engagement with complex metaphoric and metonymic relations. This expanded digital poetics of form reflects the disjunctive temporality, the messy experience of presence, and of our present.

As a result, artistic approaches and aesthetic forms that have dominated the stage over the past decades are newly negotiated. The theatre in the German-speaking countries, in particular, had been pre-occupied for a long time with an approach to staging the canonical repertoire driven by deconstructivist questioning and challenging the plays, by confronting, doubting and dismantling them, and not least by staging this very process of confrontation, interrogation and doubt *as* performance. This resulted in the characteristic merger of the dramatic role with the performative persona of the actor, where the actors no longer performed their roles, but rather the performing of the role, or their doubtful refusal or perceived inability to make sense of a play such as, say, *Othello* or *The Merchant of Venice*, from their perspective as self-conscious performance specialists.

At the same time, and equally emphasising the very process of making theatre, the dramatic stage has absorbed the new aesthetics and dramaturgies of viscosity, corporeality and temporality introduced by performance art since the 1960s, and influentially outlined by Hans-Thies Lehmann's notion of "postdramatic theatre". Yet, such predominantly reflexive modes of theatre- and performance making no longer seemed adequate in a time of financial crisis, neo-colonialist exploitation, global migration and a rising new right-wing populism. Old concepts of "realism" and of "mimetic" representation of the reality

beyond theatre seemed to warrant fresh investigations, not so much as a conservative gesture of returning to an old theatre style, but with the impetus to move forward by reinvigorating the critical forces that once drove realist and naturalist theatre-making. This is exemplified, above all, by Simon Stone's work, which opened up a new entry-point to conventions of realism and mimetic acting. His, and likewise the works of the other directors discussed in this contribution have become instrumental in re-appropriating the ability of theatre to still tell stories, to evoke fictional worlds and dramatic conflicts, while of course doing so from a twenty-first century, and hence, also a postdramatic and postmodern perspective, in ways that resonate with present audiences who are as familiar with these postdramatic forms of theatre, as they are with the new narrations and diverse and complex character portrayals explored in the many online TV series. Therefore, none of the directors discussed here goes back beyond a self-conscious, exposed "playing" that does not seek to dissimulate the fact that it is theatre.

This global cultural background applies equally to British and to Continental theatre contexts. For the same reasons as the postdramatic performativity of Continental *Regietheater* had been unable to provide answers to contemporary problems, the very literal British stage realism also had to be put to the test, extended and updated. Britain and the Continent thus meet in these directorial border-crossings in the middle: British theatre seeking a way out of the stalemate of all too literal realism, Continental theatre looking to go beyond its self-reflexive bubble of *l'art pour l'art*-deconstruction whose pretence of radical political gesturing exhausted itself in the performance of empty, "deadly" gestures, to evoke Brook once more. Neither the pure self-reflexivity of Continental theatre nor the obsessive realism of the British stage, neither postmodern deconstruction, nor truthful, mimetic stage realism, were up for this task on their own. They seemed to fail when confronted with the monstrosity of a massacre, as portrayed in David Greig's *Events*, but perhaps even in the telling of the apparently simple story of a woman's life, as in Letts's *Mary Page Marlowe*. They needed their respective other, they needed to turn from a straightfor-

ward and simplistic idea of representation to a dialectic understanding of theatrical *mise en scène*,⁵ which neither disavowed the fabrication of the stage business, nor frowned upon the idea of character and subjectivity, of dramatic conflict and fictional representation. Only such a dialectic, richly textured, and complex approach to *mise en scène*, which returns to and reinvigorates the power of theatrical play, may be able to offer the ability to confront on stage the monstrous depths of globalised modernity in all their ambiguity, force, and complexity. While it is certainly all too premature to float, on the basis of only a handful of productions that have been recently created, the idea of a “wave” of Anglophone directors inspiring European theatre in the second decade of the 21st century, we are at least witnessing a potentially very productive encounter, and maybe the infusion of some new impulses that may eventually work both ways, on both sides of the aesthetic border.

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¹ Icke's *Oedipus* premiered at Toneelgroep Amsterdam in April 2018, a month after Hill-Gibbins had premiered his *mise en scène* of Tracy Letts's 2016 play *Mary Page Marlowe* at Theater Basel, in March. At the time of writing this article, during the 2018/19 theatre season, both of them were lined up to direct more productions in German theatre, in Stuttgart, Wuppertal, again Basel, and Munich.

² This section draws on a personal conversation between Robert Icke and the author which took place at the Almedia Theatre offices in London on 23/7/2018.

³ I am here drawing on a very generous and insightful conversation with Andreas Beck that took place on 27/9/2018.

⁴ I am indebted to Joe Hill-Gibbins for discussing his production with me in a personal conversation that took place via Skype on 22/10/2018, on which I am drawing in this section.

⁵ I maintain the terminological distinction between fake and deceptive "theatricality", and the "theatricality" generated by the dynamics of movement, meaning, and spectatorial affective perception, as introduced by German theatricality studies (*Theatralitätsforschung*) and its pioneers Rudolf Münz and Helmar Schramm (see Boenisch 2015, Ch. 2).

The Delights and Sorrows of being a Translator and a Cultural Mediator

Margaret ROSE

Abstract: Over the last three decades I have worked as a co-translator and a cultural mediator between the UK and Italy, bringing plays by Alan Bennett, Edward Bond, Caryl Churchill, Claire Dowie, David Greig, Kwame Kwei-Armah, Hanif Kureishi, Liz Lochhead, Sabrina Mahfouz, Rani Moorthy, among others, to the Italian stage. Bearing in mind a complex web of Italo-British relations, I will discuss how my strategies of cultural mediation have evolved over the years as a response to significant changes in the two theatre cultures. I will explore why the task of finding a publisher and a producer/director for some British authors has been more difficult than for others, the stage and critical success of certain dramatists in Italy more limited. I will look specifically at the Italian “journeys” of the following writers: Caryl Churchill and my co-translation of *Top Girls* (1986) and *A Mouthful of Birds*, Edward Bond and my co-translation of *The War Plays* for the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin and Alan Bennett and my co-translation of *The History Boys* at Teatro Elfo Pucini from 2011-2013, including two national tours.

I will be addressing the question as to why and how in the early 1980s in Milan I began forging a new role for myself not just as a theatre translator, but as a cultural mediator (Rose 2015).¹ At the time, as a theatre translator, working from English into Italian, I started experimenting with collaborative translations. I was well aware that my knowledge of Italian was insufficient to translate on my own and sought Italian mother-tongue co-translators to work with. In the 1980s collaborative translations were almost totally unheard of, whereas in the last decade it has become a common practice. However, this is a subject I have written about before, and consequently I

will concentrate mainly on my work as a cultural mediator (Marinetti and Rose 2011: 139-154; Rose 2013:147-156²).

By the term “cultural mediator”, I mean somebody, who as well as translating plays, assigns herself a number of different tasks in the hope that her translations will make that crucial leap from page to stage. In my experience I have found that many theatre translators are reluctant to take on the role of cultural mediator because they feel they are stepping into territory they are unfamiliar with and do not have the competency to navigate successfully. Instead the widening of one’s job remit is well worth undertaking, and beneficial both to the translator as well as the theatre practitioners she works with. The five tasks outlined below are of course appropriate to my particular objectives and circumstances as a British mother tongue translator, living and working in Milan. Still they will hopefully be useful for other theatre translators and perhaps even provide guidelines for young people envisioning working in the field of theatre translation.

The Tasks

1. A cultural mediator needs to be well acquainted with the theatre culture of the country of origin of the plays she intends translating as well as possessing a knowledge of the theatre scene, whose language she translates into. She will therefore have a clear sense of which playwrights’ work is most suitable to make that journey from one language and culture to another. She may be asked, or choose, to translate well-known playwrights, once she herself is well-established in her field, but the real challenge, to my mind, will be to turn herself into something of a talent scout, who manages to recognise the potential of an emerging author, before others have got there.

2. Whenever possible a cultural mediator should make contact with the author and directors of the source play, to learn as much as possible about the play and its author. This is particularly true in the case of contemporary theatre, which naturally is not the only option available.

3. A cultural mediator needs to seek a director and a company that might stage the translated play. This means that she has to network with directors, who will be selected according to the play at hand. If the play is written by an emerging playwright, it is probably best to select a young company who might be interested in working with an author of their own generation. On the other hand, a well-established playwright, whose work perhaps has already been performed in the target country, will warrant a more experienced director and company.

4. Once her translation has been taken up by a theatre company and is being used in a production, she will do her best to make sure the playwright sees a performance. She has various options: she can present her play in post-performance meetings, take part in panel discussions and/or run seminars and workshops devoted to the author. Such workshops might possibly be co-led with the author and other members of the creative team.

5. A cultural mediator can also write scholarly articles about the translations and stage histories of the plays, in addition to less specialised articles that she publishes in newspapers and magazines and on social platforms.

In the early 1980s when I embarked on the dual role of translator and cultural mediator, it was not a conscious decision. I was prompted by the adverse circumstances I encountered in the Italian theatre culture: namely a lack of interest in contemporary plays, not just foreign ones but Italian ones too. Furthermore, the plays that were translated and staged, by playwrights like Harold Pinter and Edward Bond, were almost always translated by Italian men, so my identity as a woman and a UK national did not help. Added to that, Italian publishers tended to prefer classical authors, such as Shakespeare, Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde, whose plays were on school syllabuses and so sold well. Consequently, in the 1980s there were very few contemporary British plays published in Italy. This means, had I not adopted this proactive stance, many of my translations would still be awaiting a production.

From England to Milan

When I left England in the late 1970s, contemporary theatre and playwriting were already a part of British theatre culture. Along with the phenomenal success of pop music and British fashion, the work of contemporary playwrights, such as Shelagh Delaney, Anne Jellicoe, John Osborne, Harold Pinter, Arnold Wesker, and a little later Caryl Churchill, David Edgar, Pam Gems, David Hare, were being performed in London as well as in regional theatres, like Manchester's Royal Exchange and the Liverpool Everyman, both situated in the Northwest of England, where I grew up and studied.

Instead in Milan, in the late 1970s and early eighties, the programming of the thirty or so theatres tended to be rather conservative, offering audiences plays by Pirandello, Goldoni, Shakespeare, commercial comedies and farces. There were of course exceptions: Giorgio Strehler, director of Milan's Piccolo Theatre, aimed at creating "un théâtre d'art" for a popular audience. He made stunningly innovative productions of the classical plays just mentioned, and also programmed foreign authors, like Gorky, Camus and Chekhov who had been rarely, or never, staged in Italy. However, this highly talented, pro-European director, even if he had the funding to do so, never set up a new writers' programme and rarely encouraged young Italian playwrights to develop their craft at the Piccolo (Bentoglio 2002). In the period there were some contemporary Italian playwrights, living and working in Milan whom Strehler could have commissioned, such as Dario Fo and Franca Rame. The couple were attracting large popular audiences to their shows, which they wrote, performed and directed. Nor was it only Strehler who shunned the couple; Milan City Council never gave them their own theatre, and Fo and Rame found themselves permanently on the move from one venue to another, except for a brief period at Milan's Palazzina Liberty. These two radical left-wing practitioners were made to pay for their anti-establishment stance. This lack of recognition persists even now they are both dead; their archive has not found a home in Milan, but has been relocated to Verona.

In the early 1980s, then, in Milan's theatreland, a sort of desert as far as contemporary playwriting was concerned, I discovered the Elfo company, a group of young, radical practitioners, who had set up their own company in 1972 (Bentoglio 2013). And fortunately for me, Elio De Capitani and Gabriele Salvatores, two of the founder members, nurtured a passion for contemporary British theatre. In 1983 I saw De Capitani's *Class Enemy* (Williams 1978) by Nigel Williams and was blown away by the energy of the production and particularly by the talent of a young Paolo Rossi in the leading role. In the following decades Rossi was to become a huge name in Italian theatre, cabaret and television. In *Class Enemy* Williams dramatizes the disenchantment of a group of young men towards the establishment, and specifically towards the British education system. In a string of violent clashes, the students revolt against their teachers and wreck the school. De Capitani's directorial choices made the play chime with a generation of young Italians who identified with Williams's characters because, like them, they felt they did not have a voice. The 1968 Revolution in Italy had not lived up to its promises, and in the aftermath many people, young and old, felt thwarted. Hence, I think, the appeal of Williams's play in 1980s Milan.

Trevor Griffiths's *Comedians*. Translation or Adaptation?

In 1985, for the first time after I left Lancaster University, where I had taken part in theatre productions, I found myself directly involved in the creative process of transferring a play from one culture and language to another. The Elfo company was planning a production of Manchester playwright Trevor Griffiths' *Comedians* (Griffiths 1973) and I was asked to work with Ettore Capriolo on the play's translation. While Capriolo was an outstanding and highly respected translator, he was not familiar with some of the culturally specific items and idioms so important in *Comedians*. As Griffiths notes, "In *Comedians* we are not talking about linguistic functions in a superficial or obvious way, but rather about a kind of language which is deeply embedded in the history of the cultural formations of a particular

community which uses that language.”³ Capriolo and I went through the text, discussing this aspect of the play, and my knowledge of the working-class language and culture typical of working-class communities in the postwar era in the Northwest of England fed into the translation. Comedian Phil Murray’s opening lines may serve as an example, illustrating the notable divergences from RP English, regarding both lexicon and syntax:

Christ, what a flap. God knows where that bloody idiot of a brother of mine’s got to. (*he checks his watch against the clock*) Be having a game of bones in the New Inn. He’s probably forgot the stupid mare... I’ve worked meself puce for tonight. I have, I have that. And if that dozy prick... (*Comedians* 1988, 26)

The experience of collaborating on this translation made me realise the importance of both language and culture for theatre translation. While Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere were theorising what became known as the “cultural turn” in theatre translation studies, I was experimenting what it meant at first hand (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990). Using Capriolo’s translation as a starting point, director Gabriele Salvatores, together with Gino Vignali and Michele Mozzati, made an adaptation of *Comedians* (Griffiths 1986), re-locating the play to Milan and seeking Italian counterparts for Griffiths’ comedians. Griffiths’ Manchester Jewish character, Samuels, his Ulsterman, George McBrain and his Welshman, Gethin Pryce, were given new Italian identities. Claudio Bisio magisterially played McBrain, morphing this Northern Irish docker into a Northern Italian warehouse man. This first taste of working collaboratively with an Italian translator encouraged me to take my first steps as a cultural mediator on behalf of Trevor Griffiths, who was unknown in Italy at the time. I published a critical article about my involvement in the translation process of *Comedians* in what was one of Italy’s leading journals, *Alfabeta*, directed by Goffredo Fofi (Rose 1986). Instead with Guerini, a small independent publisher, based in Milan, I brought out an edited edition of Capriolo’s Italian translation. The volume contains a bilingual play-text, interviews with the director and various members of the creative team, as well as essays by critics and academics. The material provides

a record of what proved to be a seminal production in the early career of members of the Elfo Theatre and a significant landmark in contemporary theatre in Italy. The phenomenal success of the Italian production of *Comedians* actually marked the start of a brilliant career path for many of this group of young professionals, some of whom went on to become stellar actors in cinema and cabaret. The cabaret performers among them put Milan's Zelig club on the map as a venue for cabaret and a Milanese brand of standup comedy. Trevor Griffiths visited Milan to attend the play's opening and show his praise and unbridled enthusiasm for the adaptation and the performance of the cast.

Women Playwrights in 1980s Italy

If new playwriting by male writers was generally neglected in 1980s Italy, the situation was even worse for women dramatists. While in Britain the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s was instrumental in the development of women's theatre, in Italy women writers, despite the presence of many feminist groups, struggled much harder to get their work produced. Franca Rame worked collaboratively with Dario Fo on the writing of several of his plays, but her involvement was not always formally recognized. This means that even a staunch feminist, like Rame, opted to take a backseat as a writer. Her motives probably included her well-established and much praised role as an actress – she hailed from a famous theatre family and had trod the boards from a very early age – coupled to a wish to allow her husband to enjoy alone the critical accolades many of his plays received. There were exceptions: in 1977 Rame and Fo co-wrote *Tutto casa, letto e Chiesa* (*All House, Bed and Church* 1977), and in 1983 Rame penned singlehandedly *Lo stupro* (*I don't move, I don't scream, my voice is gone*, also known as *The Rape*), a play about her experience of rape by a group of men, who are thought to have been political adversaries.

In the UK, the situation was very different. The work of Caryl Churchill, Pam Gems, Timberlake Wertenbaker was being performed in theatres like London's Royal Court. Women's work was also nurtured in all female collectives, such as Monstrous Regiment. From

this rich array of talent, I decided to start with a translation of one of Churchill's plays. From early on it struck me that her theatre was in a league of its own, and that her plays were more likely to stand the test of time compared to other contemporary women writers.⁴ And not least, I felt that the political and social issues, emerging in these plays, would be of interest to Italian audiences, and particularly to women. Having received permission from Churchill's Italian agent, Monica Castoldi and I set to work on a co-translation of *Top Girls*. Even if we could not be sure of earning anything from our work, I came to the rather obvious conclusion that until there was a translation available, many directors, who might potentially be interested, could not read the play. Today in 2019 theatre practitioners in Italy tend to know English at least well enough to be able to get the gist of a new play in the original language. This was not certainly the case thirty years ago.

A year later in 1987, I was approached by stage and opera director Marina Bianchi, who had been given the translation of *Top Girls* by Churchill's agent and had decided to stage it. On this occasion I found myself working with an all-female group, not just the cast, but the director, costume and stage designer were women. Our discussions about the play and its significance in the context of women's theatre went well beyond issues concerning the play's translation. I was invited to attend rehearsals and continued to adjust my translation as rehearsals progressed. For example, the characters Lady Nijo and Marlene deploy startlingly different linguistic registers. Nijo, a thirteenth century Japanese concubine, uses beautiful poetic English, laced with archaic expressions, whereas Marlene, the boss at a Temps agency in 1980s London, speaks a kind of English that is fast-paced, slick and to the point. With the cast and director, I discussed these registers, and we thought a lot about the kind of Italian a self-made, working woman originally from a provincial town, might use in a similar workplace to Marlene's in Milan. Some of Marlene's expressions, which the director and cast came up with, fed into the Italian translation. This experience certainly made me realise the huge advantage of working closely with a theatre company, in the process from page to stage (Aaltonen 2000, Marinetti and Rose 2013). *Top Girls*, whose

title remains the same in the Italian version, was performed for a week at the Chiesa di San Carpoforo (a former church) in central Milan as part of a summer festival, “Milano d’estate”. The staging was favourably received by two critics, one of whom was Paolo Paganini. The title of Paganini’s review in the *Notte* newspaper, “A Group of Twenty Amazons Attacks the Citadel” reveals how this critic captured the almost heroic feat of the women involved. We were all struggling young professionals, outsiders from the theatrical mainstream, but bursting with creative energy and determined to introduce a woman’s play into a male dominated theatre culture. However, when the moment came for Gianni Valle, director of the Carcano theatre, who had given his support to the production, to programme *Top Girls* for the following season, he decided against it, without ever explaining why. To date a production of *Top Girls* in a regular theatre season has never happened in Italy. We need to ask ourselves why this is so. Was it because of a lack of funding for contemporary plays? Was it because *Top Girls* has a large cast and neither male nor lead roles? Or does this particular closure simply indicate a widespread reluctance on the part of producers in Italy to invest in women’s work? Was Churchill’s theatre, and not just *Top Girls*, considered just too radical an onslaught on patriarchy, to secure a place in a theatre season? I honestly do not have a definite answer to these questions.

Parallel to the translation and the staging of *Top Girls*, I set to work in my role as social mediator, meeting and interviewing Caryl Churchill in London; the interview came out in the Italian theatre magazine, *Sipario* (Rose 1987). I also found a publisher for *Top Girls* in the Genoese editors, Costa & Nolan (Churchill 1990). My work on Churchill’s plays has continued, with a co-translation of *A Mouthful of Birds* (Churchill 1997) and *Blue Heart* (Churchill 2000). Having written several scholarly articles on Churchill, in 2010 Cristina Cavecchi and I edited the first volume of collected essays devoted to Churchill’s theatre, *Un teatro necessario. Il teatro di Caryl Churchill* (Cavecchi and Rose 2010). In 2009 I also co-organised a public meeting, together with Milan’s cutting edge Teatroi, to celebrate Churchill’s 70th birthday. Together with Federica Fracassi, co-artistic director

of Teatroi, I invited practitioners from the Royal Court to Milan to stage two rehearsed readings, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* and *A Number* directed by Lyndsey Turner, while Renzo Martinelli, co-artistic director of Teatroi, supervised a platform reading of *TG*. This international meeting, supported by Milan City Council, Milan University and British Council, raised awareness of Churchill's work, on the part of critics, theatre practitioners and theatregoers. In 2019, as I write this essay, I am happy to say that Churchill's plays are performed fairly frequently in different parts of Italy. Since 2014 Paola Bono has brought out five volumes of Churchill's plays in Italian, with the publisher Editoria dello Spettacolo. These new publications have aroused considerable interest; among recent productions, Giorgina Pi's stagings of *Cloud Nine* and *Blue Heart*, with her company Blue Motion.

Translating Edward Bond's Theatre

By 2006 I was well enough established to be commissioned to carry out a translation for an important theatre festival. I had admired Edward Bond's plays from his early ones, such as *Saved* and *The Pope's Wedding* in the 1960s and 1970s and early in the new Millennium I had co-translated *Eleven Vests* for a production by director Matia Giorgetti. Even so my prior engagement with Bond's work did not totally prepare me for this new translation. Luca Ronconi, the then artistic director at Milan's Piccolo Teatro, was planning a cycle of plays and talks during the Winter Olympic Games in Turin. The programme, entitled "Domani", was devoted to the theme of war. On the bill was Bond's *The War Plays*, a nine-hour trilogy, dealing with the impact of a nuclear war (Bond 1985), first staged in England by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1985. My co-translator Salvatore Cabras and I were given just three months to complete the translation, which meant working flat out. In this case, many of the tasks outlined at the beginning of the present essay were carried out by other people, in the context of what was a huge production team and promotion campaign. Prior to the beginning of rehearsals Cabras and I were invited to discuss our translation with Ronconi and later

attended rehearsals. We were expecting to be asked about our translation choices, with specific reference to the source text, but this did not happen. It turned out that Ronconi, who did not know English well, was interested to discover whether the Italian translation worked in the dynamic of each scene, rather than discussing precise philological points. We also visited Cambridge to interview Edward Bond for the theatre programme and gave talks about the play and our translation once the festival was under way. While it was tremendously satisfying to see our translation performed by such a talented cast and before an international audience, the production was almost immediately withdrawn, due to the ill health of the leading actor, Maurizio Popolizio. Just the same the production sparked a great deal of interest in Bond's work, and since then *In The Company of Men*, *Lear* and *Summer* have had productions in major theatres and festivals. While we were not involved in the translation of the first two plays, Cabras and I were approached by director Daniele Salvo who commissioned us to translate *Summer*. We had met Salvo, who had worked as one of Ronconi's assistant directors on the Domani programme. As so often happens in Italy, it is thanks to personal acquaintances that a translator finds work. *Summer* was performed at the Naples Festival in July 2012, but unfortunately had no afterlife.

The Astounding Success of Alan Bennett's Theatre in Italy

Probably the introduction of Alan Bennett's work onto the Italian stage has proved my most successful cultural mediatory exercise to date. To make Bennett's work better known in Italy, I started by writing scholarly articles and supervising dissertations on the author. As a fellow Northerner, I felt, and I still feel, a great affinity for Bennett's work which I encountered for the first time with *Beyond the Fringe*, the political cabaret he co-wrote with Jonathan Miller, Peter Cook and Dudley Moore and which premièred at the Edinburgh Fringe in 1966. However, it was in the late 1980s, that I first toyed with the idea of translating Bennett. At the time I recall discussing his work with critics and colleagues, who responded negatively, declaring his plays

“too British” and “too provincial” to find a place on the Italian stage. I paid no heed to their dismissive attitude and by the early 1990s I had made contact with the author, and his London agent encouraged me not to give up on my idea. Consequently, Adele D’Arcangelo and I decided to bring out a selection of his plays and monologues in Italian. Once again a small independent publisher, Gianni Gremese, took a financial risk. It was a labour of love on the part of the six translators involved because none of us received an advance payment, and even more important, we did not have the faintest idea whether our translations would ever make it to the Italian stage and so earn us royalties. *Drammi e monologhi di Alan Bennett* (Bennett 1996), the title of the anthology, contains my introduction, some sketches from *Beyond the Fringe*, the first cycle of the *Talking Heads* monologues and a couple of stage plays. Our gamble paid off when well-known television and theatre actress Anna Marchesini decided to perform two of the *Talking Heads* monologues: *A Bed Among the Lentils* (1998) and *A Chip in the Sugar* (1999) at Vicenza’s Teatro Olimpico. These plays were later broadcast on RAI television and were seen by thousands of people all over Italy. As I have learnt over the years, you often only need one well-established actor or theatre company to use your translation, and after actors and companies come looking for you. Indeed, the reputation of Bennett’s work in Italy went from strength to strength post-Marchesini. Following Marchesini’s success, I decided to take a risk with another Bennett play, *The History Boys*, which in 2004 had enjoyed an excellent run at London’s National Theatre, followed by a Broadway transfer and a film. It struck me that given its investigation into student-teacher relationships, its exploration of the role of literature and history in the British education system, and gay culture in a boys’ grammar school, *The History Boys* would be of deep interest to Italian audiences. So in 2008 Salvatore Cabras and I were given permission to translate the play by Bennett’s agent and we set to work. Cabras also drew up a glossary dealing with the many citations in the play from Auden, Shakespeare, Larkin, etc., in a bid to make the play more accessible to directors and producers. In 2009, Elio De Capitani and Ferdinando Bruni decided to produce *The History Boys* at Milan’s

Teatro Elfo Puccini. It was a bittersweet time for Cabras and me, because we had the satisfaction of seeing the translation produced by one of the most talented companies in Italy, but our translation was never published. A publishing house, Adelphi, had obtained the publication rights and used one of their translators. So while *The History Boys* had a three-year run in Italy in our translation, a different translation circulated throughout Italy, with the title, *Gli studenti di storia* (Bennett 2011). In Italy publication and stage rights are distinct, and in this case Cabras and I had been granted only the second, creating a frustrating state of affairs. Despite such difficulties, I have continued working on Bennett's plays, co-translating *Wind in the Willows* (with Salvatore Cabras) and *Lady in the Van* (with Adele D'Arcangelo) – both of which have still to be staged. Today in Italy Bennett's theatre is much appreciated. *The Talking Heads* monologues are frequently seen in theatre seasons; in 2017 and 2018 at the Elfo Puccini theatre, Luca Toracca performed *A Chip in the Sugar* to great critical acclaim, while in 2014 De Capitani and Bruni added another Bennett to their repertoire by directing *The Habit of Art*.

Introducing Multicultural Plays to the Italian Stage

In 2011 I set up a new three-year project, “Intercultural Dialogues”, based at Milan University and in several Milanese theatres. With Cristina Marinetti from Warwick University and my colleague Cristina Cavecchi, I wished to explore the work of some UK playwrights with hybrid identities, whose work deals with issues of identity and migration. The support of British Council allowed us to invite three authors, for three consecutive years, to spend a week in Milan. Rani Moorthy, Kwame Kwei-Armah and Hanif Kureishi, all gave generously of their time. They presented their work to a group of MA students, specialising in British theatre, and took part in the translation of a few scenes from one of their plays. With a co-translator, I went on to translate the entire plays and secured a rehearsed reading or full-scale production. Still the reception of these works was not without difficulty. When we presented a rehearsed reading of Moorthy's *A Handful*

of *Henna* at a Sri Lankan restaurant in Milan the audience of Sri Lankans and Italians responded well, as did spectators of Kwei-Armah's *Let There be Love* in a small theatre in the suburbs of Milan. Instead audience response to the production of Kureishi's *Borderline* in my co-translation at Milan's Piccolo Teatro was lukewarm. Critics, too, did not review the productions, making me realise that the Italian theatre culture was not ready for these playwrights, all of whom have enjoyed success in the UK.

In conclusion it is worth mentioning that contemporary British playwriting today has an important role in theatre seasons all over present-day Italy. In recent decades new voices, like Mike Bartlett, Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Philip Ridley, Chris Thorpe, Simon Stephens, and more recently Lucie Prebble and Debbie Tucker Green (the author signs her name low case) have joined the older ones. Even if today most of my translations are from Italian into English, I am still working in my role as cultural mediator on a project supported by British Council, involving Milan and Rome Universities, the aim of which is to bring contemporary British playwrights to Italy, to attend the Italian opening of one of their plays. Our plan is to combine this visit with the organisation of a writing workshop led by the author. In spring 2018 we kicked off with Chris Thorpe and his play, *Confirmation*; programming is now underway for 2019.

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¹ In this article, I explore my experience as a translator and a cultural mediator in a much more personal way, while the present essay is more exhaustive of my experience.

² Cristina Marinetti and I discuss theatre translation as teamwork, starting from the specific study of our collaborative Italian translation and our involvement in the rehearsed reading of Rani Moorthy's *A Handful of Henna* in 2012.

³ See the conference Trevor Griffiths gave at Milan University during a symposium devoted to *Comedians*, published as “Narrare, descrivere, criticare” in *Comedians/Comici*, 40

⁴ The style of Churchill’s plays, a blend of realism with dreamlike, surreal elements, suggested they had a timeless quality and might well become classics in the course of time.

“Nicks of time” in the Italian Translation and Staging of Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* / *Settimo cielo*

Serena GUARRACINO

Abstract: This contribution aims at exploring the multiple border crossings enacted by theatre translation as it happens through time and, simultaneously, makes time *happen* in the overlapping of distinct moments: of writing, of translating, and of performing. The Italian staging of Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud Nine*, *Settimo cielo*, produced by the independent theatre company Bluemotion and premiered in Rome at Teatro India in February 2018, enacts the disruption of linear time through its relationship with the play’s already challenging timeline. The passing of time is a central theme in its conception and design: as the director, Giorgina Pi, has stated, her choices were informed by the need to look at *Cloud Nine* from the vantage point of the present, foregrounding this staging as a sort of “third act”, following the first, set in 1879 Africa and the second, in 1979 London, which was also the time of the first performance of the play. This production emphasizes *Cloud Nine*’s apparently outdated rebelliousness, avoiding any cultural reference beyond 1979. Through a detailed analysis of the *mise-en-scene*, I argue that the staging of a translation of a piece, especially when each event is separated from the other by several decades as in this case study, creates what Elizabeth Grosz would call a “nick of time”, allowing the audience to become aware of the passing of time and, in the same movement, of the persistent urgency of the issues confronted by the play itself.

This contribution aims at exploring the multiple border crossings enacted by theatre translation as it happens through time and, simultaneously, makes time *happen* in the overlapping of distinct moments: of writing, of translating, and of performing. The imperfect superimposition of these moments destabilizes the model of linear time

generally embedded in both translation and theatre studies, assuming the derivation of each one of these acts from the other, the translation from the original and the performance from the play-text. On the contrary, here I intend to argue that the staging of a translation of a piece, especially when each event is separated from the other by several decades as in this case study, creates a short circuit or what Elizabeth Grosz would call a “nick of time”, an interruption in the timeline:

[Time] is a kind of evanescence that appears only at those moments when our expectations are (positively or negatively) surprised. We can think it only when we are jarred out of our immersion in its continuity, when something untimely disrupts our expectations. (Grosz: 5)

The Italian staging of Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud Nine*, *Settimo cielo*, produced by the independent theatre company Bluemotion and premiered in Rome at Teatro India in February 2018, enacts this disruption through its relationship with the play’s already challenging time line.¹ The passing of time is a central theme in its conception and design: as the director, Giorgia Pi, has stated, her choices were informed by the need to look at *Cloud Nine* from the vantage point of the present, foregrounding this staging a sort of “third act” of the play, following the first set in 1879 Africa and the second in 1979 London (see Teatro di Roma).² The last part of this article will focus on the ways this production both enacts and disrupts a linear conception of time thanks to its pastiche of visual and musical references; but before addressing the issues raised by Bluemotion’s production, it is necessary to contextualize it in the wider landscape of Churchill’s reception and translations in Italy.

Although this was the first time this play (one of Churchill’s most prominent works) was produced in Italy, *Cloud Nine* was actually one of the first of Churchill’s plays to be translated into Italian. The translation was published in 1990 in a small volume, a pioneering venture featuring this play, translated by Riccardo Duranti, alongside *Top Girls* translated by Margaret Rose, which had been staged two years earlier under Marina Bianchi’s direction (Churchill 1990). Before 1990 Churchill was relatively unknown in Italy, despite having received an

OBIE and an Olivier Award for *Serious Money* that very year. These early translations managed to raise some interest in her work; yet *Settimo cielo* was never staged.

Around 2012, the research and translation project “Non normale, non rassicurante”, has led by Paola Bono, started to foster what is now a more regular and more systematic study of Churchill in Italy. The project is named after an early essay by Churchill, published in a monographic issue of *The Twentieth Century*, which only included contributions from playwrights under 25. Here, at the very beginning of her career, the writer expressed her creative vision for a theatre that is “not ordinary, not safe”:

Playwrights don't give answers, they ask questions. We need to find new questions, which may help us to answer the old ones or make them unimportant, and this means new subjects and new form. (Churchill 1960: 446)

Following this insight, the project's first purpose has been to translate Churchill's complete works into Italian: so far, five volumes have been published and a sixth is currently in production. However, the project also aims to promote and support stagings of Churchill's work in Italy. This had led to a number of workshops and dramatic readings of Churchill's plays alongside full-blown productions: Bluemotion produced, in addition to *Settimo cielo*, *Caffettiera blu* (*Blue Kettle*), *Non non non non non abbastanza ossigeno* (*Not not not not not enough Oxygen*) and *Porci e cani* (*Pigs and Dogs*).³

Why did it take so long for the Italian language and stage to welcome Churchill's work? One of the reasons is discussed by translator and scholar Margaret Rose in the 2012 miscellany *Caryl Churchill: un teatro necessario* (one of the landmarks for Churchill's reception in Italy): the lack of a distinct women's theatre in Italy (Rose: 15).⁴ This is especially true of Churchill's work from the 70s and 80s, which did not find an Italian scene that could make it its own; yet this has also allowed for an intermittent interest in Churchill's works by grassroots and politically engaged theatre companies: hence Marina Spreafico directed *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986) and *Blue Heart* (1997) in the late

1990s for the Teatro Arsenale in Milan; in the 2000s Massimiliano Marau and Valter Malosti directed *Far Away* (2000) and *A Number* (2002) respectively, and Annig Raimondi staged *Seven Jewish Children* (2009) in a double bill with *Far Away*; while Carlo Cecchi both directed and played in *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?* (2006) at the Elfo Puccini in Milan in 2012 (see Caretti: 8-10).

As one can register from this brief overview, for Churchill's new plays only a few years (with the exception of *A Mouthful of Birds*) elapsed between the English premiere and the Italian translation; however, these translations were never published, and older plays were completely ignored. In this sense, *Settimo cielo* differs from all previous Italian productions of Churchill's work, as it marks a significant time lapse between its moment in time, the 1990 Italian translation, and the 1979 original premiere. The production, as my discussion of it in the final part of this contribution shows, confronts this "delay" directly and consequently allows retracing the history of the political movements from the 70s and their legacy. This is especially true for issues related to gendered and racialized identities both on and off stage, which in the meantime have undergone a number of significant critical shifts.

One of the major upheavals in recent critical theory has definitely been Judith Butler's work on gender as performative, originally developed in a tight relationship with theatrical practices. The role of theatre in the elaboration of the performative can be traced to an essay published by Butler in 1988 in *Theatre Journal* and, two years later, in the collection *Performing Feminism*, one of the earliest to elaborate the contribution of feminist criticism to theatrical practices. Here Butler offers a speculation on the contiguities and differences between theatrical performance and the performative as a condition of social and psychological subjectivation, concluding that theatre offers a great opportunity to challenge hegemonic discourses, even if only temporarily and within the policed boundaries of the performing space (see Butler 1990).

Starting from Butler's groundbreaking work, the superimposition of the biological, sexual and social elements that make up the gendered subject has been thoroughly dismantled: *Cloud Nine* anticipates this issue (Bono: 70-71) and marks a crucial moment in the rethinking of the gendered body on stage via its use of cross-casting. According to stage directions Betty, the archetypal "angel of the house" from Victorian Britain, is played by a man, and her son Edward, who is decidedly too "feminine" for Victorian society (he loves playing with dolls), is played by a woman (Churchill 1985: 48). Yet what in 1979 was a groundbreaking practice exposing the violence that traditional gender roles can inflict on bodies, today may be (and has been by some critics) read as an exercise in essentialism. Gender cross-casting, as presented in the play, only works on the basis of a binary definition of the playing body as biologically male or female, a dichotomy that has now been put under scrutiny by that same queer theory that *Cloud Nine* foreshadowed: as Mary Luckhurst has argued: "The relation between biology, gender identity and sexual orientation is no longer assumed to be straightforward. [...]. Sexuality and gender are far more fluid concepts than they were in the 1970s" (Luckhurst: 79).

In much the same way, having a white actor playing a black character comes across as a more problematic practice in the current climate, especially as Churchill's version of 1979 London lacks non-white characters. Churchill specifies that in the first act, set in colonial Africa, Joshua, the African servant, should be played by a white man, in order to expose parallels between oppression based on sexual and racial difference. In the opening scene, Betty declares to the audience: "I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life /Is to be what he looks for in a wife. /I am a man's creation as you can see, /And what men want is what I want to be"; similarly Joshua proclaims: "My skin is black but oh my soul is white./ I hate my tribe. My master is my light./ I only live for him. As you can see,/ What white men want is what I want to be" (Churchill 1985: 251). Yet, while Betty's character returns in the second act, this time played by a woman, and the play shows her somewhat tentative road to emancipation, Joshua's character is granted no such possibility.

Churchill comments on this significant omission in the preface (significantly) to the 1984 American edition of *Cloud Nine*: “there were no black members of the company and this led to the idea of Joshua being so alienated from himself and so much aspiring to be what white men want him to be that he is played by a white” (Churchill 1984: viii). One may note that this state of things has changed in the almost forty years that have intervened between *Cloud Nine*’s premiere and today: at least in Britain and the US, black actors are more present across theatre, television and cinema. Yet the current presence of black performers has not, according to Luckhurst, led to a rethinking of Churchill’s play for the contemporary stage; on the contrary, she laments:

Cloud Nine is long overdue for creative reinvention by directors who want to experiment with racial cross-casting. [...] Depressingly, it still tends to be treated only as a canvas to investigate cross-sex casting and the inherent prejudices of continuing to ignore ethnic agendas, and the failure to produce new meanings cannot be overlooked. (Luckhurst: 81)

What Luckhurst laments here more generally is a process of “canonization” of Churchill’s work (especially from the late 70s and early 80s) with the inevitable downplaying of its more radical and ground-breaking features. By uncritically adhering to the playwright’s original directions, contemporary productions risk staging *Cloud Nine* as an unproblematic homage to a recognized authority of British playwriting instead of marking the interval between that time and ours and all that this entails, from the legal implementations of civil rights for marginalized subjectivities to the unfulfilled promise of more radical forms of freedom.

Translation may prove to be the space for the kind of “reinvention” Luckhurst calls for, as it enacts the text not only for a different language and audience but also quite often for a different time. As Homi Bhabha famously writes in *The Location of Culture*:

The sign of translation continually tells, or “tolls” the different times and spaces between cultural authority and its performative practices. The “time” of translation consists in that *movement* of meaning, the principle

and practice of a communication that [...] puts the original in motion to decanonize it, giving it the movement of fragmentation, a wandering of errance, a kind of permanent exile. (Bhabha: 228)

Conversely, translation also embodies a process of “canonization”, especially if we take into consideration the theories and practices of feminist translation. Amongst the many strategies identified in this field, two are of specific interest here: *recovery*, identified by Françoise Massardier-Kenney as the choice to translate writers who are little-known either in the source or in the target language (Massardier-Kenney 62); and *prefacing*, which is mentioned by Luise von Flotow as one of the ways in which the translator poses (and exposes) her/himself as a subject in a dialogue with the text, instead of disappearing in the movement between the two texts (Flotow 74).

Hence translation, and feminist translation in particular, points to “canonization”, as it recognizes a text as something worth disseminating in another language and culture; yet it also operates a “decanonization” by displacing the text and requiring it, as in Churchill’s original vision, to ask new questions for a different time and place. This shift also helps to put contemporary criticism developed in the Anglophone world into perspective: while, for example, Luckhurst assumes that cross-sex casting is now a non-problematic practice, this is far from true in Italy, where the so-called “teoria gender” (defined by the English loanword, sometimes with explicit reference to Butler’s work) has been the subject of disparaging campaigns from the far right (see Zappino).

However, perhaps thanks to this particularly unwelcoming context, the exploration of gender representations and performances is currently experiencing an unprecedented momentum in Italian theatre. There is no exhaustive review of text and productions tackling gender performance in Italian theatre, yet one can mention at least: *Fa’afafine. Mi chiamo Alex e sono un dinosauro* (*My Name is Alex and I’m a Dinosaur*), written especially for an audience of children and young adults, which tells the story of a child whose sexuality does not conform to the heteronormative matrix; *MDLSX*, produced by Motus and writ-

ten and performed by Silvia Calderoni, about the coming of age of an intersexual character; the project *Don't Panic, BI PAN!* by Primavera Contu; and Liv Serracchiani's *Trilogia sull'identità* (Identity Trilogy). All these examples, together with others, show Italian theatre as a fertile space for performances staging gender identity and performativity, and of an audience equally interested in this kind of productions.

In this context, the first staging of *Settimo cielo* in Italy intersects the wider exploration of gender identity and performativity happening in contemporary, independent Italian theatre, while at the same time witnessing the relevance of Churchill's dramaturgy when interrogated from the "third act" of the present. The chronological distance between Churchill's time and ours is addressed in Giorgina Pi's design through a kaleidoscope of references, which, although integrated through visual and musical pastiche, never crosses the two lines set by the play's time frames: Victorian Africa in the first act, 1979 London in the second. And while this second setting originally represented the present of the audience in the original production, today its punk aesthetics looks deliberately dated in its juxtaposition of leather and lace, corsets and combat boots, and especially in the omnipresent use of the Union Jack and other British iconography from the punk era: thus first-act Edward wears a white t-shirt with an image of Queen Victoria in the style of the Sex Pistols' notorious *God Save the Queen* album cover, which appears in its original form (with Queen Elizabeth) on the t-shirt worn by second-act Edward.

The hierarchy between original and derivative is thus overturned, as we see in Victorian times a reworking of a cultural icon from the 70s whose original (itself a punk rewriting of the Queen as a recognizable visual element) appears later in the "correct" time frame. Similarly, the Nazi-like uniforms worn by Clive and Harry, the *pater familias* and the renegade explorer who represent the two faces of Victorian masculinity, point at a moment in time located in the interval between the two acts, and unexpectedly echo Joshua's quasi-leather costume. Joshua's "leather" version was implemented in the 2019 reprise of the show: in the 2018 production the character, played by Lorenzo Par-

rotto, sported punk gear with a white tank top and bleached hair; the 2019 version, played by Xhulio Petushi, wore a black leather waistcoat and collar. This choice echoes and expands Churchill's own troubling portrayal of the received master-slave hierarchy, with significant changes in stage action especially in the interactions between Joshua and Edward: while Churchill's dramaturgy makes explicit Joshua's dependence on the white man's gaze, Petushi's self-assured and often cocky attitude, enhanced by his looming presence over many of the other elements of the company, exposed the master's own reliance on the slave for his own existence.⁵

However, it is music that emerges as the preeminent way of compressing together different temporalities, as emerges in the three songs featured in the play. In particular, the production's choice for the opening of the play deserves some in-depth analysis, as it is a clear example of the cultural processes activated by translation and the "nicks of time" it engenders. Churchill's play opens with a song on music by explorer Anthony Wilkin (1902), as stated by the copyright note included in the 1979 edition (Churchill 1979). The lyrics celebrate the British Empire and its rule over its overseas territories:

Come gather sons of England, come gather in your pride.
Now meet the world united, now face it side by side;
Ye who the earth's wide corners, from veldt to prairie, roam.
From bush and jungle muster all who call old England home. (Churchill 1985: 251)

The published Italian translation opens with this song as well, choosing an appropriate metre (between twelve and fourteen syllables) in order to respect the four-accent rhythm of the source text (see Churchill 2016: 67). However, for an Italian audience it was necessary to convey the irony and disengagement in Churchill's use of imperial rhetoric without reducing its long-lasting appeal for present-day discourses on British exceptionalism.

In order to do so, the director superimposes the time-frame of the first act with that of the second, thus locating the gaze (and the ear) of the audience already in a different time, beyond the "Africa 1879"

looming in red light over the scene but also beyond the 1979 of the play's own chronological location. In what becomes a compressed time-travelling experience, the audience witnesses a character (who only later will be identified as Ellen from act I, played by Sylvia De Fanti) gain centre stage and sing *a cappella* the first stanza and refrain from *Rule Britannia*, composed by Thomas Augustine Arne with lyrics by James Thomson.⁶ The production thus chose a song whose relationship with the imagery of the British Empire may be recognized by an Italian public; however, its use is not limited to immediate cultural connotation. Actually, the idea to use this song came to the director (as she stated in a private conversation with the writer) as she was watching Derek Jarman's 1978 film *Jubilee*, where Amyl Nitrate, dressed up as Britannia in plumed helm, trident and Union Jack, sings a punk version of the song. And it is this version of the widely known anthem that the production includes when, after Clive's introduction of the other characters, the second stanza from Wilkin's song is substituted by a reprise of Arne's hymn in Jarman's version. The staging hence immediately foregrounds the time lapse between the first and second act, with the quotation from Jarman disruptively intruding in the Victorian celebration of the twin institutions of family and Empire; yet it also, for those who can pick up the reference, locates in a different past the distinctly 1970s sound of electric guitar and punk vocals.

A similar procedure happens with the other two songs from the play: the second song from act I, "A Boy's Best Friend", was originally set to a tune by Joseph D. Skelly (1897); while the eponymous "Cloud Nine", from the second act, was set to original music by Andy Roberts (see Churchill 1979). Both songs are non-diegetic and enact an alienation effect that Churchill borrowed directly from Brecht's epic theatre and especially from his use of songs to interrupt and prevent any form of naturalism and empathic investment on the characters.⁷ Here Giorgina Pi also opted for two well-known tunes, both from 1979: Elton John and Kiki Dee's "Don't Go Breaking My Heart", representing the more light-hearted and pop side of the decade, is used to set

the lyrics from "A Boy's Best Friend", while The Clash's punk anthem "Guns of Brixton" sustains the portrait of lives lived "on cloud nine".

In both cases, the musical choice both emphasizes the message of the original text and sets in motion a complex reverberation with contemporary times. "A Boy's Best Friend" comes at a crucial time during the first act, when young Edward claims his role as man and master by crudely ordering Joshua to get the sewing box for his mother: "You fetch her sewing at once, do you hear me? You move when I speak to you, boy" (Churchill 1985: 278). However, as Betty embraces him to congratulate him on his newly acquired masculinity, Edward rejects her, and it is on this scene of discomfort and pain that the company breaks into a mother-praising song: "And wherever we may turn,/ This lesson we shall learn,/ A boy's best friend is his mother" (279). The cheerful and uplifting mood of Elton John's song contributes to the emotional friction between the ideal harmony of familial love and the actual pain traditional roles are inflicting on the characters on stage; a friction heightened by the subtle irony of using a song by an "out" gay performer who was, in the original song, playing the "man" (albeit admittedly a man afraid of having his heart broken) in a heterosexual love duet to channel Edward's impossibility to "play the man" according to the patriarchal system in which he is being raised.

The tension is further enhanced by stage action. Churchill does not include any indication in the play-text; this production chooses to amplify the emotional disconnection among the characters and between characters and audience by having the cast sing and dance while, centre stage, Edward (performed by Tania Garribba) violently and repeatedly crashes to the ground the doll which has been the subject of many a dialogue between him and his parents on the impropriety of boys playing with dolls. At the end of the song, which is played in its full, four-minute length, the doll is completely destroyed, arms and legs strewn on the floor, wisps of hair torn away. The audience can be drawn into the mood of the song, and experience the moment as funny and light-hearted, contributing effectively to Edward's marginalization and oppression; or they can focus their attention on Gar-

ribba's action, the repeated noise of the doll hitting the ground, and identify with the character's pain and socially unacceptable rage. In either or both cases, the scene comes across powerfully and effectively enhancing and actualizing Churchill's original writing.

A different dynamics between past and present is played out during "Cloud Nine", the song that breaks off narrative continuity in act II. The immediately preceding scene already hovers between realism and magic: in the park where the whole act is set Gerry, adult Edward's renegade lover, meets boy Edward, who repeats the same lines he had addressed to his (rather mature) lover Harry in act I. This ominous sense of previous scripts being replayed even in the more "liberated" context of the 1970s is resisted in the song, which describes new forms of kinships and affections : "The wife's lover's children and my lover's wife,/ Cooking in my kitchen, confusing my life./ And it's upside down when you reach Cloud Nine./ Upside down when you reach Cloud Nine" (312). Here live music replaces the recorded arrangement of Elton John's song from the previous example, with Cathy (Xhulio Petushi) playing guitar, adult Edward (Alessandro Riceci or Michele Baronio⁸) playing the drums, and middle-aged Betty (Sylvia De Fanti) singing and playing the bass guitar. The text, partially adapted from the 2016 printed translation to fit the metrics of the song, still celebrates the many ways in which different people can reach the blissful "cloud nine/settimo cielo"; however, The Clash's echo cannot but evoke the far less blissful guns, an element which runs subterraneously throughout the second act. As the scene opens, young mothers Lin and Victoria (the grown-up version of doll Victoria from act I) discuss whether it is good to let children have toy guns: in particular, Lin is proud of letting her daughter Cathy play with them as her own mother never let her (see Churchill 1985: 291) – a fitting counterpoint to the ban on dolls Edward suffers in act I.

Cathy is indeed obsessed by war games and, when informed that her uncle Bill was killed, she immediately asks: "Can I have his gun?" (304). In this production, Cathy is equipped with a bright pink machine gun, which she drops only to embrace the guitar: the inter-

changeability between the two echoes. The Clash's dark salutation of armed responses to police violence in the rough neighbourhood of Brixton, which a few years after the release of this song (and of *Cloud Nine's* premiere) was to be the theatre of the infamous 1981 Brixton riots, which saw young people from the local African-Caribbean community engage in violent clashes with the Metropolitan Police. The song's reggae-inflected rhythm pays homage to the black community in the area (where composer Paul Simonon had grown up), and the original lyrics include references to Caribbean historical figures such as Vincent "Ivanhoe" Martin, a Jamaican criminal whose life had recently been the subject of the 1972 film *The Harder They Come* (see Popoff: 98).

Hence, the choice of "Guns of Brixton" for the play's title song obliquely addresses the issue of the lack of racial diversity in Churchill's 1979 London; more generally, it foreshadows the collapse of the play's utopian drive towards the idyllic, pansexual and polyamorous "cloud nine" under the pressure of Thatcherian repression. Margaret Thatcher's portrayal by Andy Warhol looms large on the ice cream van appearing on stage shortly after the song: from it both Maud and Clive from the first act emerge, each licking an ice cream, to pressure Betty into the angel-of-the-house mould she has escaped by divorcing her husband and lifting her mother's ban on masturbation. You cannot have the ice cream and eat it too, they seem to say; nonetheless, differently from the popular cake, ice cream melts away as time passes, so one may as well eat it while it is there, as Betty does with the one her mother offers her. Because the promise of happiness and freedom the characters from the play embody at the end of the play is fatally short-lived: as the audience witnesses the birth of the queer family including Edward, Victoria, Lin, the two children (Cathy and Victoria's son Tommy) and maybe even Betty and Gerry, it is also keenly aware that this form of queer kinship has been discarded in favour of homonormativity⁹ and a recrudescence of movements in support of the "natural" (i.e. heteronormative) family worldwide.

Against the contemporary landscape as regards civil rights, the kinship established at the end of *Cloud Nine* seems to arrive not from the past but from the future, from that Chthulucene Donna Haraway has recently envisioned as the era which will see the end of the current Anthropocene and of its outdated production and social models. Giorgia Pi's production enacts this time lapse by emphasizing *Cloud Nine*'s apparently outdated rebelliousness, avoiding any cultural reference beyond 1979: this allows the audience to become aware of the passing of time and, in the same movement, of the persistent urgency of the issues confronted by the characters in the play. In this way, this staging produces a fertile "nick of time", which means at the same time an assessment of past civil rights movements and a projection towards the fights to come: as The Clash sing: "When they kick at your front door/ How you gonna come?".

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¹ Bluemotion's production of *Settimo cielo* was based on Riccardo Duranti's translation discussed later in this contribution. It featured Alessandro Ricci/Michele Baronio (Betty I/Edward II), Marco Cavalcoti (Harry/Martin), Sylvia De Fanti (Ellen/Mrs Saunders/Betty II), Tania Garribba (Edward I/Victoria), Aurora Peres (Maud/Lin), Lorenzo Parrotto/Xhulio Petushi (Joshua/Cathy), and Marco Spiga (Clive/Gerry); costume design by Gianluca Falaschi, music by Collettivo Angelo Mai, lighting by Andrea Gallo. The production saw a first run on February 14-25 2018 at Teatro India in Rome; it has since been reprised in March 19-31, 2019 at Teatro India and toured other Italian cities (among them Milan, Bologna and Ravenna) until May 2019. Differences in casting and staging between the 2018 and 2019 run, when relevant, will be pointed out in the analysis of the production.

² Acts I and II of the play are separated by one hundred years; yet for the characters, a colonial family moving from Africa to London, only twenty-five years have elapsed.

³ For Bluemotion's production of the Italian translation of *Pigs and Dogs* see Guarracino.

⁴ The only attempt at creating a practice for the theatre in Italy can be traced to the Teatro della Maddalena, active in Rome between 1972 and 1987 and founded by activists including writer Dacia Maraini (Silvi).

⁵ In a private conversation, the director shared her insight to work with Petushi on his own Albanian lineage for this character, using the colonial relationship between Italy and Albania and the experience of Albanian immigration to Italy to substantiate the character for an Italian audience. Incidentally, Albanian mass migration to Italy dates back to the 1990s, roughly at the same time as *Cloud Nine*'s translation into Italian.

⁶ The song was originally included in the masque *Alfred* (1740); for its role in the British imperial imagery see Armitage 173-174.

⁷ For Brecht's influence of British theatre and on Churchill in particular see Reinelt.

⁸ Riceci played Betty in act I and Edward in act II in the 2018 run and during the 2019 tour; Baronio replaced Riceci to great acclaim in the 2019 run at Teatro India.

⁹ "Homonormativity" generally refers to the normalization of gay and lesbian rights movements in the 1990s (see Bolen).

Theatre-making with Sarah Kane: *4.48 Psychosis* on the Italian stage

Sara SONCINI

Abstract: This contribution situates itself within a wider research project on the reception and reproduction of Sarah Kane's drama in Italy. If theatre practitioners in the UK may initially have shown some reluctance in bringing Kane's work to the stage, the case was different across the Channel. Though this is seldom acknowledged in the burgeoning critical literature, Italian theatre-makers have been at the forefront in driving the process whereby Kane's oeuvre was quickly taken on by the European experimental scene as an iconic expression of the contemporary *Zeitgeist*. This essay focuses on *4.48 Psychosis*, by far the most widely performed among Kane's plays in Italy (and elsewhere). Since 2001, when it was first presented to Italian audiences, Kane's script has received over thirty professional productions. Perhaps even more than for its unrivalled popularity, however, *4.48 Psychosis* stands out as a unique case because of the readiness with which it has been reworked and reshaped by Italian theatre practitioners, with adaptations, rewrites and even parodies following hard on the heels of the play's first stagings. With their tendency to merge different forms and agents of creativity, the more innovative Italian performances of *4.48 Psychosis* seem specifically designed to challenge the distinction between text-based and devised theatre and, more in general, to invite a perception of theatre-making as an all-inclusive collaborative endeavour.

In an overtly self-referential section of *4.48 Psychosis*, an anonymous voice announces: "after 4.48 I shall not speak again" (Kane: 213). If we trace them to the real person behind the speaking persona, these words ring chillingly true: Sarah Kane killed herself a few days after completing the final draft of her fifth and last play. As an art-

ist's statement, however, this line has been massively disproved by the striking propensity shown by Kane's work to continue speaking. Her plays have been performed regularly all over Europe and beyond, on a truly global stage that stretches from Argentina to Singapore, from Australia to Palestine, from Mexico to Egypt, enabling Kane's distinctive voice as a dramatist to live on in a multitude of verbal languages and stage idioms.

This paper situates itself within a wider research project on the dissemination of Kane's work in Italy, a context of reception that has generally been neglected in scholarly accounts dealing with the international restagings of her plays (Nikcevic; Delgado-Garcia: 105-113; D'Cruz: 64-79). As has been observed (see e.g. Luckhurst), directors in the UK initially showed some reluctance in bringing Kane's work to the stage, possibly as a consequence of the unhelpful scandal raised by her debut play *Blasted*; but this was by no means the case across the Channel, where the writer's sustained endeavour to break formal boundaries has been noticeably paralleled by the striking readiness shown by her plays to cross *national* boundaries. Though their role has yet to be appreciated, Italian theatre-makers have been at the forefront in driving the process whereby Kane's drama was quickly taken on by the European experimental scene as an iconic expression of the contemporary Zeitgeist, prior to its subsequent global spread.

The figures that attest to Kane's early and pervasive presence on the Italian theatre scene are indeed noteworthy. From 1996 – the date of the Italian premiere of *Blasted* – to the time of writing (March 2019), I have estimated over forty productions of Kane's oeuvre, a truly remarkable amount considering that her dramatic output consists of only five plays.¹ The most widely performed by far among her texts is *4.48 Psychosis* with twenty-six productions, several of which have toured nationally and sometimes also internationally, and/or have received multiple revivals over the years. To mention but the most striking example, Elena Arvigo's highly acclaimed one-woman version was first presented to Italian audiences in 2010 and has never been

out of production since, reaching the outstanding record of 190 performances as of February 2019. The total number of stage versions, moreover, would rise considerably if one included the scores of amateur performances, many of which are available on YouTube. It should also be noted that the play's appeal continues unabated to the present day, long after the wave of rock-star celebrity following Kane's sudden and shocking death died down. In addition to revivals, two major new productions of *4.48 Psychosis* made their debut in 2018: Enrico Frattaroli's concert-like rendition, *Sinfonia per voce sola*, premiered in January at Rome's Teatro Palladium, and in September Dimitri Milopulos directed the first ever staging of the play by Teatro della Limonaia,² Sarah Kane's Italian "home" and the venue where her work was first introduced to Italian audiences. Both productions have been revived in 2019, with new dates announced for Frattaroli's *Sinfonia* through to December.

These figures alone would be enough to mark the performance history of *4.48 Psychosis* as quite extraordinary by all accounts, and even more so in a country that has traditionally proved impervious to new writing and non-canonical voices. For a telling comparison one need only turn to the belated and still very limited circulation enjoyed in Italy by the work of Caryl Churchill, in spite of her far more substantial dramatic corpus and her unparalleled influence over the landscape of British new writing (Churchill's disgraceful absence from the Italian stage is an issue that was brought up repeatedly during talks and discussions at RADAC's 2018 international conference, *Crossing Borders: Contemporary Anglophone Theatre in Europe*, where this paper was originally presented).

Even more than for its unrivalled popularity, however, *4.48 Psychosis* stands out as a unique case because of the readiness with which it became the object of radical reworkings, with adaptations, rewrites and even parodies following hard on the heels of the play's Italian premiere. In the UK, the operatic version composed by Philip Venables in 2016 was advertised by the Royal Opera House as the first adaptation ever of Kane's last play. In Italy, a complete rewrite of *4.48 Psy-*

chosis made it to the stage as early as 2001: this was Federica Fracassi's *Sinfonia per corpi soli*, which opened at Milan's Teatro Libero just a couple of weeks after Kane's script had received its Italian premiere as a solo performance featuring Monica Nappo in Pierpaolo Sepe's production for Naples's Nuovo Teatro Nuovo. In 2002, the Ubu Prize for Best Foreign Language Play was awarded (posthumously) to Sarah Kane for *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*. The prestigious accolade was expressly adjudged in connection with four productions staged during the previous season that were felt to have played a key role in the dissemination of Kane's work in Italy. Two of them were "regular" productions of the play: Sepe's first staging of *4.48 Psychosis* and the Italian premiere of *Crave* directed by Barbara Nativi at the Limonaia. Significantly, however, the other prize-winners were Federica Fracassi's *Sinfonia per corpi soli* and Pippo Delbono's *Gente di plastica*, two self-styled "tributes" to Sarah Kane that are equally marked by an extremely free approach to *4.48 Psychosis*. The award can thus be taken to constitute an early acknowledgement, as well as an authoritative critical sanction, of the overlap between "staging" and "adapting" as a distinctive feature of the Italian afterlife of Kane's play.

This tendency to defy classification, to undermine normative distinctions, is operative on more than one level in the creative responses I have investigated. As I illustrate below, Italian reproductions of *4.48 Psychosis* are marked by a considerable variety of staging practices and dramaturgical approaches, and by a parallel desire to extend the theatrical vocabulary of performance by relying on a plurality of languages and media. The processual counterpart to this fluidity of forms is the frequent overlap between the figures of writers, directors and performers, and their respective roles and prerogatives, as they engage with Kane's writing. With their tendency to merge different forms and agents of creativity, the more innovative performances of *4.48 Psychosis* seem specifically designed to challenge the distinction between text-based and devised theatre and, more in general, to invite a perception of theatre-making as an integrated, collaborative endeavour.

Textual mobilities

The untenability of the distinction between “faithful” staging and “free” adaptation in the Italian context becomes apparent once one turns to consider the actual textual practices beyond perceived or stated binaries. To begin with, it is fairly common for productions that present themselves as radical reworkings to introduce extensive verbatim quotations from the play. A prime case in point here is *Gente di plastica*, the multi-award winning show by the internationally-renowned avant-garde artist Pippo Delbono that has already been mentioned as a recipient of the Ubu prize. Delbono’s “adaptation” of *4.48 Psychosis* in fact opens as a new work taking inspiration not from Kane’s play but, as the title indicates, from Frank Zappa’s song, *Plastic People* and its scorching critique of conformity and consumerism. The show is structured as a radio broadcast featuring Delbono as a late-night DJ in the league of Wolfman Jack: from his cabin upstage, he introduces us to Zappa’s world and plays a rather eclectic compilation of music while the rest of the company put on a sequence of wordless sketches evoking as many television or cinema formats – the overall effect is that of a kind of channel-surfing on mute while we listen to his radio programme. About half an hour into the performance, the DJ switches onto the Sarah Kane channel and from this moment onwards we stay tuned to *4.48 Psychosis* almost until the end of the performance. Delbono reads from the play, with the stated intent of telling Sarah Kane’s story through her own words; for the best part of the show, this narrative unfolds as a parallel text to the ongoing visual and musical scores.

Dramaturgically speaking, Delbono’s approach is that of a collagist: Kane’s play is cut and reassembled, further increasing its fragmentary quality, but actual rewrites are very minor. As a result, approximately one third of the original script makes its way into the performance. For all its considerable reliance on Kane’s text, however, *Gente di plastica* does not figure in the list of licensed productions of *4.48 Psychosis* that was kindly provided for me by Danesi Tolnay, Kane’s Italian agent. The more immediate reason for this omission lies in a very

peculiar backstory to the production. Surprisingly enough, Delbono did not initially apply for performance rights; even more surprisingly, however, the agents apparently only took notice when the show reached Rome's Teatro India in February 2003, more than one year into a nation-wide tour that had included major venues in Genoa, Naples and Milan. When the agents finally intervened, giving Delbono warning to stop quoting from the play, the artist offered to clear the use of copyright but his request was rejected on the grounds that the Sarah Kane Estate had instructed its representatives abroad to only license performances which maintained the integrity of the text. Consequently, Delbono suspended the run and went home to rewrite the incriminated passages in order to bypass the veto.³

This episode may have instigated more radical forms of rewriting on the part of the non-canonical, experimental takes on Kane's play which in Italy, at least for the time being, have far outnumbered its "authorized versions": the agents' list only records eleven productions of *4.48 Psychosis* out of the twenty-six that I have been able to identify. *Io sono Sarah Kane*, a mock-autobiographical reworking staged in 2014 by Paolo Scheriani, is designated as "my vocal testament / my unpunctuated pain / my final draft" by its unnamed speaker but as the writer was keen to point out in our email exchange, "not a single word from *4.48 Psychosis*" has been reproduced in the script.⁴ An equally recent example to the contrary, however, is provided by *Ofelia 4 e 48*, a show devised by Stefano Cenci and Elisa Lolli which was originally presented in 2009 but was revived intermittently through to 2017. Advertised as "freely adapted from Sarah Kane's *4:48 Psychosis*", the show features large and fully recognizable portions of Kane's play interpolated into a metatheatrical narrative about a female performer and her sadistic director. Even more crucially, moreover, the "integrity of the text" tends to be likewise forgone also in performances that offer themselves as a "straight" *mise en scène* of *4.48 Psychosis* and that were regularly licensed by Kane's Italian agents. This is the case, for example, of *Psicosi delle 4 e 48*, Valentina Rosati's 2010 production for Teatro Stabile delle Marche. The title seems to promise a "faithful", integral staging of *4.48 Psychosis*, but in fact this is a highly condensed

version of Kane's play, lasting only thirty minutes against the average sixty to eighty of a complete version and involving not only cuts but also the reshuffling of individual lines and whole passages as well as some original interpolations. Rosati's production regularly appears in the official list compiled by Agenzia Danesi Tolnay, but her approach to the play does not significantly differ from Delbono's bootleg version of *Gente di plastica*.

With very rare exceptions, there has been virtually no staging of *4.48 Psychosis* in Italy that has not involved some degree of textual manipulation, whether overt or silent. Contrary to what the "Delbono affair" would seem to demonstrate, this free approach to Kane's script has been to some extent endorsed by the agents themselves. Already hardly applicable when the text in question is a translation, the notion of "integrity" has been further undermined, in the Italian context, by the concomitant existence of two different official versions of the play from the very outset of its performance history. The first Italian translation of *4.48 Psychosis* was authored by Barbara Nativi, the late artistic director of Teatro della Limonaia and the acknowledged champion of Kane's work in Italy. Nativi, who had already translated or retranslated the other four plays in the canon, worked from an unpublished typescript released by the British agents only a few days after the play received its first production at the Royal Court Theatre in June 2000, and she raced against the clock in order to be able to include Kane's last piece in the complete edition of her work which was due out with Einaudi, one of Italy's largest publishing houses, in December of the same year.⁵ For all its authoritativeness, however, Nativi's translation was unexpectedly sidelined in the first Italian performance of *4.48 Psychosis*. Unsatisfied with the available official translation, Monica Nappo commissioned a new version from Gian Maria Cervo which she then used for her solo performance in Pierpaolo Sepe's production. From that moment onwards, both versions remained available for licensing, with Agenzia Danesi Tolnay leaving it to the producers to choose between the one or the other. Although Nativi's translation has been used by the overwhelming majority of subsequent restagings, it is important to note that Pietro Maccarinelli decided to avail

himself of Cervo's alternative version for his 2004 production with Artisti Riuniti, probably the more mainstream among authorized reproductions by virtue of its casting of film and theatre star, Giovanna Mezzogiorno.

This textual instability has by no means subsided over the years: if anything, it has increased through the very recent addition of a third version that was expressly commissioned by Danesi Tolnay from Monica Capuani, a professional translator with considerable experience in the field of contemporary Anglophone drama. The text, co-authored by Capuani and her colleague Cristina Viti, was completed in November 2018 but remains as yet unperformed. Revealingly, moreover, only months before this new translation became available the agents allowed Enrico Frattaroli to omit the official translator's name from the credits for his multimedia show, *Sinfonia per voce sola*, in acknowledgement of the director's substantial (albeit silent) reworking of Nativi's version in the production script.⁶

Performance interventions

In addition to the laissez faire attitude of the Italian agents, this overlap between staging and adapting has been clearly facilitated by the play's formal looseness. On the page, *4.48 Psychosis* consists of twenty-four fragments, each separated by a line of five dashes on the page and offering a wide variety of textures that are not ascribed to particular individuals and are only occasionally woven into a dialogic pattern. There is an inborn malleability to the play that allows the textual work of its stage interpreters to remain largely inconspicuous and that has enabled, and indeed encouraged, theatre-making practices in which different forms of creativity and professional profiles – director, performer, dramaturg, writer – become fully integrated.

A further driving factor must be identified with the unusual mode of circulation enjoyed by the play as a result of its inclusion in the 2000 Einaudi collection. Very atypically for a new play in Italy, *4.48 Psychosis* was made readily available to a very wide readership including, of course, a vast number of theatre practitioners who were grant-

ed quick, unrestricted access to Kane's script. In practical terms, this meant the possibility of bypassing the control exercised by literary agents: not only copyright protection, but also some less beneficial forms of gatekeeping that representatives can sometimes exercise. Even more importantly, however, the publication with such a major and highbrow publisher as Einaudi has deeply affected the perceived status of Kane's writing. Rather than as a play script to be concretized in performance, and somehow subject to prescriptions, or restrictions, concerning how to give it scenic shape, *4.48 Psychosis* has tended to be approached as a repertoire of textual material that needs to be co-created by theatre-makers with each new staging. It is quite symptomatic that in the Italian context Kane's play is often referred to as a "poem" (Frattaroli 2018), a "story", and even a "novel": an eminently performable piece of writing that has not however been designed as a blueprint for a specific performance.

This is quite unlike what has happened in the Anglophone world, where the Sarah Kane Estate has tended to exert a very strict control not only over the integrity of the text, but also over its "correct" stage interpretation. In Britain, the play has almost invariably been staged with three performers, two women and a man, following the authoritative model established by James MacDonald's first production at the Royal Court Theatre (Gobert: 151-152). In the United States, requests for performing rights were systematically denied until 2004, when the Royal Court production was taken there on tour; reportedly, Simon Kane, Sarah's brother and the executor of her estate, wanted to establish MacDonald's anti-biographical version as the definitive production before other directors began to "fiddle" with a play that can all too easily be turned into "the ramblings of an incipient suicide" (McKinley).

While not completely unfounded, this protectiveness is clearly at odds with the almost unbounded room for maneuver that *4.48 Psychosis* offers to its stage interpreters: as is well known, the script has no stipulation of personnel on stage, their gender, how many performers there should be; no setting, action or time frame is given or implied; text is unallocated and at times it becomes unclear not only

how but indeed *whether* it is meant to be spoken at all. With its lack of any indication about the process of *mise en scène*, Kane's writing is clearly animated by the desire to challenge the "text as instructions" model (Radosavljević: 81), namely, the idea that dramatic language can or should dictate the conditions of its staging, and that the task of performance is to reproduce, as fully and accurately as possible, the meanings that are already encoded in the text and are simply waiting to be actualized.

Although this was obviously not their intended aim, the mediating practices that have regulated the transmission of Kane's work in Italy have ultimately contributed to maximizing the creative leeway afforded by her writing and to creating the conditions for installing a more dynamic relationship between text and performance. A signal illustration of this process can be found, again, in *Gente di plastica*. In this "tribute" production, Kane's presence remains exclusively textual, confined to the pages from which Pippo Delbono reads as he shares her story with us. Not only the alleged subject of the performance never materializes on stage; but unlike what usually happens in solo versions of *4.48 Psychosis* – the default mode in Italy – here the performer's gender as well as his stance as an intermediary foreclose identification between the speaker and the words spoken. What we are presented with is not the enactment of a pre-existing script, but a performer's response to it: the notion of theatrical production as a one-way transfer of content from page to stage is blatantly disrupted.

This becomes even more evident when one turns to consider the interplay between Kane's words and the parallel "text" of silent scenes performed by the company (Figures 1 & 2). Just as Delbono's monologue never suggests that the speaker is the originator of the words spoken, so too the parallel performance text cannot be seen as originating from *4.48 Psychosis*: in a meaningful reversal of the customary hierarchies, this unscripted visual score pre-exists the Sarah Kane interlude and continues well after its conclusion; the "original" verbal text is actually framed by the visual poetry devised by the company. It would be reductive, however, to classify Delbono's take on



Figures 1 & 2: *Gente di plastica* (2001) by Pippo Delbono.
Photo: Compagnia Pippo Delbono.

actress who is tasked to perform the multiple and overlapping selves of Winnie, Ophelia, and the unidentified “I” in Sarah Kane’s play under pressure from the despotic prompts and wry directorial advice voiced by Stefano Cenci from his control console offstage right.

In *Gente di plastica*, the notion of theatre-making with Sarah Kane finds an eloquent embodiment in Delbono’s stage persona as a DJ. A true Master of Ceremonies, Delbono presides over the production, orchestrating its flow of text, action and music, blending and mixing its discrete tracks through a principle of counterpoint: an expression in Sarah Kane’s text gains added resonance through its association with an image or action; the mashup of a passage from the closing fragment of *4.48 Psychosis* with *Starless*, the heart-rending swan song by King Crimson, helps us feel the pulse and rhythm of Kane’s distilled poetry in the final journey towards annihilation.

As a dramaturgical process, the principle of musicalization that informs *Gente di plastica* has set an important precedent for subsequent reproductions of *4.48 Psychosis* on the Italian stage. With increasing frequency over the last decade or so, the theatre-makers who have engaged creatively with Kane’s play have relied on music as a means to extend the theatrical vocabulary of performance and its affective possibilities but also, sometimes, to altogether develop an alternative formal construction. This seems poised to become a mainstream method, as recently shown by Philip Venables’s adaptation for the Royal Opera House, a superb response to the in-built polyphony of Kane’s writing. The perception of the creative potential of *4.48 Psychosis* as a piece of musical theatre, however, has been current with Italian theatre-makers for more than one decade, finding its fullest incarnation to date in *Sinfonia per voce sola*, a highly original multimedia performance that was devised by Enrico Frattaroli at around the same time as Venables’s operatic reworking. Adopting a similar approach to the play as a “libretto waiting for a composer” (Ashley), Frattaroli’s “solo symphony” harmonizes Kane’s vocal track, here delivered by a single actress, with live and pre-recorded music, both contemporary and classical, and as-

Kane's work as a one-sided celebration of the disengagement of "theatre" from the authority of "text". With its focus on the artist's response to the play as a reader, *Gente di plastica* draws specific attention to its connection with *4.48 Psychosis* as a piece of writing and places significant emphasis on Kane's words as a source of theatrical meaning. Effecting a highly seminal move, this early reproduction of *4.48 Psychosis* positions the playwright as a partner in theatre-making; her text ceases to be a transcendental object that determines its own representation in performance to become instead a catalyst for a complex dynamic of interactions among the different theatrical vocabularies of the performance. By undermining the traditional opposition between text-based and devised theatre, Delbono's take on Kane's play asks us to recognize that this distinction is no longer fit to account for the manifold ways in which writing gets consumed – and produced – on the contemporary stage.

As I have already pointed out, this approach is by no means confined to Delbono's experimental piece. A number of the productions I have mentioned so far were authored through creative processes that combine writing, directing, devising and performing. *Sinfonia per corpi soli*, the first Italian reworking of *4.48 Psychosis*, was developed by director Renzo Martinelli and the theatre collective Teatro Aperto out of a scripted scenario provided by Federica Fracassi, who also formed part of the cast. On stage, three actresses share Fracassi's original text, an alternative version of Sarah Kane's dramatic testament which they partly enact through recourse to grotesque puppets. When they are not engaged in playing out their scenarios, the performers return to their undersized metallic beds, their breathing amplified by a specially-designed in-mouth microphone; meanwhile, the countless small objects that clutter the stage became eerily animated, creating a fizzling, crackling, mechanic counterpoint to the inner "voices" of human bodies. *Ofelia 4 e 48*, another devised piece that contaminates Kane with Shakespeare and Beckett, began as an acting exercise and eventually evolved into a metatheatrical two-hander in which the creative process is exhibited and scrutinized. (Figure 3) Stuck in an Ikea-like interior that doubles as a stage set, Elisa Lolli plays herself as an

sociates this mixed soundtrack with a very powerful visual score that combines evocative images and projected text (Figures 4 & 5).



Figure 3: *Ofelia 4 e 48* (2009) by Stefano Cenci.
Photo: Stefano Vaja.

Since it made its debut in January 2018, Frattaroli's production has continued to evolve. In September, a new version featuring soprano Patrizia Polia and pianist Diego Procoli performing live on stage premiered at Andria's "Castel dei Mondi" festival. The transition from the initially "all digital" to the mixed "digital/live" mode has resulted in dramaturgical adjustments and a further level of textual mobility involving not only the introduction of new variants to the existing translation but also, more intriguingly, the intensification of the performance's polyphonic quality through the transposition of spoken text into song and the replacement of verbal with visual elements. These changes have been subsequently incorporated in the "all digital" version which is still currently being produced as a more portable alternative to its live iteration.

Sinfonia per voce sola is but the last in a long line of performance interventions produced in response to the challenges as well as the endless possibilities opened up by Sarah Kane's final theatrical masterpiece. Almost twenty years on from the first Italian staging of the



Figures 4 & 5: 4.48 *Psychosis di Sarah Kane in forma di “Sinfonia per voce sola”* (2018) by Enrico Frattaroli. Photo: Enrico Frattaroli.

play, the metamorphic, work-in-progress quality of its latest incarnation seems to suggest that *4.48 Psychosis* has in no way exhausted its potential for stimulating ever new and highly imaginative ways of theatre-making with Sarah Kane.

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¹ An on-line database providing full details of the Italian productions of Sarah Kane's work (Soncini, in preparation) will soon be made available on "Dislocazioni Transnazionali", a digital platform powered by Pisa University Press.

² Prior to producing their own version of *4.48 Psychosis*, the Limonaia had hosted a revival of *4:48 Psykose* by Copenhagen's Betty Nansen Teatret during the 2010 edition of Intercity Festival (2-3 October). The show was directed by Jacob F. Schokking and performed by Trine Dyrholm and Kristian Halken (in video) in Danish with Italian surtitles.

³ An account of events is provided in Delbono (109-10, 113-17) alongside the abridged and modified version of Kane's original text.

⁴ Email to author, 17 October 2017. Initially a female double act, Scheriani's play eventually became a solo show and was taken to the 2014 Edinburgh Festival Fringe where it played, in English, with the title *I am Sarah Kane – An Almost Perfect Life*. Unless otherwise specified, all translations from Italian sources are mine.

⁵ Notably, the cognate collection by Methuen Drama only came out in March 2001.

⁶ In a personal conversation with the author, Enrico Frattaroli explained that he had read the English-language version of the play and was unconvinced by some of Nativi's choices. Following our conversation, he made further changes to the text.

⁷ The latter descriptor appears in the press release issued by Compagnia Pippo Delbono when the run of *Gente di plastica* was suspended.

An English Playwright on the Italian Stage: Exporting, Translating, and Staging Martin Crimp's Drama

Maria Elena CAPITANI

Abstract: Martin Crimp has never been a prophet in his own country. Nevertheless, most of his ambiguous plays have entered the repertoire of several theatres across Europe and overseas. The reasons why this elusive English dramatist is so appealing abroad are to be found in his Continental influences: “Crimpland” is an in-between theatrical space where different traditions such as the absurd, surrealism, and – according to some critics – even post-drama intermingle and converge with a British flavour. As the variety of Italian productions suggests, Crimp’s work has been well received in the Bel Paese. His first encounter with the Italian stage dates back to 1996-97, when “Intercity Festival” in Sesto Fiorentino was devoted to London, the home of British new writing. After an overview of Crimp’s reception in Italy, this article will focus on the experimental and intensive work carried out by Accademia degli Artefatti, a theatrical company based in Rome and founded in the early Nineties by Fabrizio Arcuri. Fascinated by the meaningful ellipses and linguistic ambiguities permeating Crimp’s plays, Artefatti started exploring the ‘unsaid’ in this slippery theatrical territory with the trilogy *Tre Pezzi Facili – Meno Emergenze* (*Fewer Emergencies*), *Avviso alle donne irachene* (*Advice to Iraqi Women*), *Faccia al muro* (*Face to the Wall*) – which received the prestigious Ubu award in 2005. In that year, the company presented *Attempts on Her Life/Attentati alla vita di lei – 17 soggetti per il teatro*, followed by *Besides* (*Misanthropo: Molière / Crimp*) (2006), as part of the wider project “Dress-code: Reality” (2001-2006), which included – among others – plays by Chris O’Connell and Sarah Kane, showing how contemporary British theatre is a breeding ground for aesthetic (and ethical) investigation.

1. Crimp's Reception in Italy

If the Sixties and the Seventies were marked by the so-called “teatro-immagine” (“theatre of images”),¹ which emphasised visuality over words, the last twenty years have witnessed a turnabout on the Italian stage. Since the end of the twentieth century there has been a revival of interest in contemporary playwriting, a return to textuality explored in variously fascinating ways. In this phase of renewed attention to the script, British new writing has become a rich source of texts for Italian theatre-makers. Probably the most important figure in this process of cultural transfer and dissemination of contemporary British plays, Barbara Nativi – the artistic soul of Sesto Fiorentino's Teatro della Limonaia – has brought to Italy the work of Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, by staging plays such as *Blasted* in 1997, *Shopping and Fucking* in 2000 and *Fame-Crave* in 2001 and by translating into Italian the entire output of Kane (*Sarah Kane – Tutto il teatro*), published by Einaudi in 2000. Another Italian institution devoted to contemporary Anglo-American playwriting and which has contributed to this transplant of English-language plays is Milan's Teatro dell'Elfo, where Kane's *Blasted*, Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, and Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* and *Product* have been staged in the past ten years.

Kane and Ravenhill are not the only British dramatists who have been successfully exported to Italy at the turn of the millennium. As its title suggests, my article examines the enthusiastic reception of Martin Crimp in the “Bel Paese”. In his *The Theatre of Martin Crimp* (2006), Aleks Sierz noted that the English playwright has never been a prophet in his own country, where the average theatregoer looking for a good night out is not interested in cryptic and challenging drama:

The key to the puzzle is simple: Crimp's work is difficult. He doesn't write crowd-pleasing social comedies, gritty council-estate dramas or easy plays about ‘me and my mates’. He doesn't do West End hits, soap operas or lyrics for pop musicals. His plays are hard work. Typically, they are experimental in form and unsettling in content. (Sierz 2013: 1-2)

Nevertheless, most of Crimp's ambiguous plays have entered the repertoire of several theatres across Europe and overseas (remarkably, his

dramatic jigsaw *Attempts on Her Life* (1997) has been translated into more than twenty languages, as indicated on the back cover of the play-text published by Faber and Faber in 2007 on the occasion of the National Theatre revival directed by Katie Mitchell. The reasons why this elusive English dramatist is so appealing abroad are to be found in his Continental influences: “Crimpland”² is an in-between theatrical space where different traditions such as the absurd and surrealism intermingle and converge with British taste.³ According to some scholars such as Heiner Zimmermann (2002) and David Barnett (2008), Crimp’s most experimental plays should be considered “postdramatic”, a term first used by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his seminal study *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999), translated into English by Karen Jürs-Munby only in 2006. Even if the German critic never refers to Crimp in his book, in her Introduction to the English edition, the translator and academic Jürs-Munby lists *Attempts on Her Life*, *Face to the Wall* and *Fewer Emergencies* as postdramatic plays, in that they can be described as “‘open’ or ‘writerly’ texts for performance, in the sense that they require the spectators to become active co-writers of the (performance) text” (Jürs-Munby 2006: 6). By contrast, Crimp himself rejects this term (“Please don’t call me post-dramatic. I don’t want to be considered like that. I don’t think I write that sort of thing”, personal interview, 2009) and other scholars have stressed that we should be cautious about applying this label to his work, even if some of Crimp’s plays feature postdramatic elements. For instance, Sierz points out that, in a very British style, the language used by Crimp “remains based on the spoken word and is not artificial literary language drawn from writerly fantasy” (168), entirely in keeping with Martin Middeke’s words: “by far the largest part of Crimp’s language is the everyday speech of dialogue of ‘real people’ that seems fairly grounded in the tradition of British drama” (98).⁴ As it frequently happens, the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle. In his 2009 talk on the British perspective on post-drama at the University of Bologna, Nicholas Ridout observed that Lehmann’s book did not have a considerable impact in the UK, at least until its long-overdue translation. Moreover, we have to bear in mind that the British tend to define themselves as a nation of philistines who are suspicious of any form of

intellectualism, evoked – in this case – by the prefix *post*, which reminds them of terms such as postmodernism and poststructuralism (see Ridout 2010: 44). At the same cycle of conferences held in Bologna, when I asked Lehmann if he considered Crimp a postdramatic writer, he answered that, in his opinion, the most emblematic postdramatic British text was Sarah Kane's *4:48 Psychosis*. He added that one thing does not exclude the other, since “postdramatic theatre can exist even with dramatic texts and, vice versa, you can stage postdramatic texts in a very classical fashion” (Lehmann 2010: 10, author's translation).⁵

As the variety of Italian productions suggests, Crimp's work has been well received over here. His first encounter with the Italian stage dates back to 1996-1997, when “Intercity Festival” in Sesto Fiorentino was devoted to London, the home of British new writing. In 1996, Crimp's *The Treatment* was translated into Italian (*Il trattamento*) and staged under the direction of Roxana Silbert. Even more interestingly, in collaboration with “Intercity Festival”, in 1997 Ubulibri published *Nuovo teatro inglese* (*New English Theatre*), a collection of Nine-ties plays, introduced by Michael Billington, including Kane's *Blasted* (*Dannati*), Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*, Butterworth's *Mojo*, Ridley's *The Pitchfork Disney* (*Il killer Disney*) and Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* (*Attentati alla vita di lei*). In 1999, Crimp's postmodern – or, as some critics believe, postdramatic – masterpiece was directed by Katie Mitchell as *Tracce di Anne* at the Piccolo Theatre in Milan, two years after Giorgio Strehler's death. This production, which constituted his first professional encounter with Mitchell, showed that Crimp had officially attracted the attention of institutional Italian theatre:

I'd been to the Piccolo years before when Giorgio Strehler was heading the Union of Theatres of Europe, which involved workshops with young directors. Then the Piccolo offered these directors the chance to direct a play in the studio, although by this time Strehler had died [in 1997]. I took this opportunity to direct *Attempts on Her Life* because I didn't think I'd ever get the chance to do the play in Britain, where second productions of new plays are very rare. So I met Martin, who was very keen on the idea, although he wasn't involved in rehearsals because he was writing something else at the time. (quoted in Sierz 2013: 197-198)

The Piccolo was not the only theatrical institution interested in Crimp at the start of the new millennium: in 2000, *The Country* was first presented by Franco Però at “Benevento Città Spettacolo” and later staged at Brescia’s Teatro Santa Chiara under the direction of Cesare Lievi (2001). It is interesting to point out that two well-educated and renowned Italian directors such as Lievi and Però approach the most traditional and Pinterian of Crimp’s texts – one which tries “to put a play back together again” (Crimp quoted in Sierz 2013: 56), after having deconstructed dramatic and theatrical rules in *Attempts on Her Life* – while younger and more radical theatre-makers grapple with his most innovative and challenging pieces.

2. Accademia degli Artefatti’s Project on Crimp’s Theatre

After this brief overview of Crimp’s early reception in Italy, this article aims to focus on the experimental work carried out by Accademia degli Artefatti, a theatrical company based in Rome and founded in the early Nineties by Fabrizio Arcuri (b. 1968), who believes in contemporary theatre as a crosspollination of art forms. Holding a degree in Art History from Rome’s Sapienza University, Arcuri started his career as a director with installations in alternative venues such as fringe theatres, art galleries or other non-conventional spaces. Among these installations, we can mention *Kindergarten* (2000), which recreated a baroque garden characterised by a sumptuous scenography, quite complex from an architectural point of view. However, Arcuri realised that his early theatrical vision was too sterile and self-referential, and too close to the avant-garde tradition of “teatro-immagine”, “that of Perlini, Carrozzone, Gaia Scienza and then Raffaello Sanzio, Valdoca and many others” (Arcuri 2010: 64).⁶ Moreover, Arcuri affirms that the Italian government’s increasing cuts in the arts did not allow the realisation of expensive installations anymore and this led Artefatti to a greater minimalism.⁷

Deeply upset by 9/11 and the subsequent invasion of Iraq, in the early Noughties Arcuri increasingly focused his gaze on current political affairs. It may be argued that contemporary global(ised) con-

flicts such as the War on Terror are rooted in the world-wide proliferation and consumption of images celebrating the gruesome spectacle of war. What Jenny Hughes dubs “[t]he performance-like, theatrical nature of war and terrorism” (Hughes 2007: 150) has been noted by various commentators from different backgrounds. Among them, the French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard, whose quote opens Crimp’s *Attempts on Her Life*,⁸ stresses the theatrical nature of the terrorist attack in New York, enacted through the highly “spectacular” collapse of the Twin Towers causing the death of over three thousand civilians: “it is the radicality of the spectacle, the brutality of the spectacle, which alone is original and irreducible. The spectacle of terrorism forces the terrorism of spectacle upon us. [...] This is *our* theatre of cruelty, the only one we have left [...]” (Baudrillard 2012: 23, original emphasis). With their immediate transmission and global consumption, images become a powerful weapon sustaining a sophisticated war machinery:

[T]he terrorists exploited the ‘real time’ of images, their instantaneous world-wide transmission, just as they exploited stock-market speculation, electronic information and air traffic. The role of images is highly ambiguous. For, at the same time as they exalt the event, they also take it hostage. They serve to multiply it to infinity and, at the same time, they are a diversion and a neutralization [...]. The image consumes the event, in the sense that it absorbs it and offers it for consumption. Admittedly, it gives it unprecedented impact, but impact as image-event. (Baudrillard 2012: 21)

Arcuri thought that this proliferation of images and simulacra should lead contemporary artists to reflect upon the idea of the representation of reality, a reality that in our world is falsified and distorted. Thus, the young director decided to investigate contemporaneity through “open texts” – that he defines, more or less consciously, as “postdramatic” – encouraging an artist to formulate his/her own idea of theatre and spectacle:

[A]fter 9/11, we decided to reset everything, to start from scratch: respecting our identity, we wanted to understand how we could come into contact with the society to which our work refers. We started to look for postdramatic texts, open works with a sense of authorship, allowing for

a performative writing parallel to the dramatic one. We deeply respect texts, considering them untouchable classics. However, in these postdramatic texts, relationship is primary, not the word. The internal relationship among actors and the one between actors and spectators are crucial. (“Intervista a Fabrizio Arcuri” 2009. Author’s translation.)⁹

Contemporary dramatists such as Chris O’Connell, Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Tim Crouch, and especially Martin Crimp offered Arcuri and his actors exactly what they were looking for. Indeed, these British writers have written a number of plays which satisfy the need for artistic exploration and experimentation to which the company is devoted and stimulate its increasing interest in the study of language and communication. As Arcuri himself declared:

The exploration of language and the mechanisms of communication inexorably reveals the appeal of certain theatrical writings. The current work of our company should be placed here. It is within a reality which has strongly manifested itself that we can trace the refusal of the homogenisation of the image and the vision.¹⁰ (Arcuri 2006: 139. Author’s translation.)

Artefatti’s project “Dress-code: Reality”, a sort of theatrical workshop, started in 2001 with O’Connell’s *Car*, followed by Kane’s *Phaedra’s Love* (2003). After that, fascinated by the meaningful ellipses and linguistic ambiguities permeating Crimp’s plays, Artefatti started exploring the “unsaid” in this slippery theatrical territory with *Tre Pezzi Facili – Meno Emergenze* (*Fewer Emergencies*), *Avviso alle donne irachene* (*Advice to Iraqi Women*), *Faccia al muro* (*Face to the Wall*) – which received the prestigious Ubu award in 2005. Their project “Crimpland”, entirely devoted to the English writer’s output, also included a successful production of *Attempts on Her Life* / *Attentati alla vita di lei – 17 soggetti per il teatro*, translated into Italian by Margherita D’Amico, and the mini-project *Be-sides* (*Misanthropo: Molière / Crimp*).

It is important to note that a wide-ranging and well-structured project such as “Crimpland” shows the fertile intersections between theatre, dramaturgy, translation, and the publishing industry. Indeed, Artefatti’s work captured the attention of Editoria & Spettacolo, one

of the most important publishing houses in the field, which in 2006 published *Oggetti da interpretare – Il teatro di Martin Crimp nelle messe in scena di Accademia degli Artefatti*. Introduced by the dramaturg Luca Scarlini and by a 2004 interview with Crimp, this book offers the Italian translations of *Attempts on Her Life*, the trilogy *Fewer Emergencies*, and *Advice to Iraqi Women*, followed by various contributions written by some of the actors of the company, the artistic director Arcuri, and theatre critics. Remarkably, Pieraldo Girotto, one of the actors, accurately translated Crimp's short pieces, showing how a practitioner, with his ear for stage dialogue and rhythm (and, in Girotto's case, for foreign languages)¹¹ can do an effective translation. In his words:

As a translator, who is also an actor in the company, I have always been very aware that what we need is a linguistic code able to help the actor reproduce effectively the contemporary British texts we have decided to stage. These texts adopt a direct and colloquial language which requires an adaptation to the expressive features of the Italian language in order to convey the relationship among actors and the feedback of the audience characterising our theatrical approach.¹² (Girotto 2009, email interview. Author's translation.)

The idea of translation as adaptation and collaboration between the textual and the performative dimension of the theatrical experience should be considered an imperative in the practice of translation for the stage. As the theatre scholar, translator, and actor Andrea Peghinelli points out, the translation of a dramatic script goes beyond a mere matter of linguistic transfer:

When translating a play, the translator should always adapt the text he or she is recreating for performance and be aware that a performer will deliver the lines. Clearly enough then, his/her task is not simply to decode a text into a different language creating a linguistic equivalence. Actually, I believe there's no such thing as a literal translation because it will always be the product of someone who re-creates a text for performance to grant an audience access to a specific text. After all, a translation consists in changing a text to suit different needs. (Peghinelli 2012: 22-23)

Before concluding this section on the special relationship between the English playwright and the Italian company, it is worth noting

that Artefatti's last attempt on Crimpland was in 2006, when the company worked on a mini-project based on a comparative analysis of Molière's *Le Misanthrope* and Crimp's rewriting of the French comedy. According to Arcuri, Crimp shares more features with Molière, who wrote *Le Misanthrope* after seeing his *Tartuffe* censored, rather than with Beckett or Ionesco. What he wanted to show through this game of mirrors was the textual operation performed by Crimp and his desire for new strategies to deal with the unsayable of the subtext, something Molière himself was forced to do in the seventeenth century because of censorship.¹³ Once again, this theatrical project exemplifies well Crimp's penchant for elusiveness and Artefatti's interest in the textual holes and blanks as well as in the constantly evolving relationship between actors and spectators, which the Roman company has continued to explore through the texts of Mark Ravenhill – *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat* (*Spara/Trova il tesoro/Ripeti*, 2007-2009), of Dennis Kelly (*Taking Care of Baby*, 2012) and, even more, of Tim Crouch – “Progetto Ab-uso” (2006-2007): *An Oak Tree* and *My Arm; I, Shakespeare: I, Peaseblossom* (2013), *I, Cinna* (2013), *I, Banquo* (2013), *I, Caliban* (2014).



Artefatti's *Attempts on Her Life* (2005)

Photo courtesy of Massimo Borsini, production photographer.

3. Artefatti's *Attempts on Her Life* / *Attentati alla vita di lei* – 17 soggetti per il teatro

Accademia degli Artefatti's exciting production of *Attempts on Her Life*, a contemporary kaleidoscope lasting three and a half hours, was first presented on 8 September 2005 at "Enzimi Festival", on Castel Porziano beach (Ostia). After this debut, the company has continued to stage Crimp's masterpiece over the years.¹⁴

Arcuri's *Attempts* is performed by eleven actors who constantly play with the typically Crimpian space of the "unsaid", and this exciting production is divided into seventeen scenarios, just like the original. The show is rich in hints, echoes, reiterations, and allusions that, initially, mislead the spectators into thinking they will be able to put together the pieces of this jigsaw puzzle. However, these clues prove totally useless, in that Anne's identity is extremely protean and prismatic. Before approaching Crimp, Arcuri and his actors practised a lot on Pinter's texts, starting in a 2003 workshop in Pescara with *Mountain Language* (1988), and thus becoming experts at throwing light on the latent irony and the black humour permeating the subtext. Artefatti's acting modality is undoubtedly effective: actors play characters with no biography and therefore renounce the traditional process of organic creation of the *dramatis personae*. Eschewing psychologism, actors become mere speakers, turning themselves into empty channels crossed by elusive words that they offer to the audience and/or to their stage mates, adopting a direct and frontal kind of recitation. Even if the directorial structure is always the same, each night the show is pervaded by different affective intensities, also related to the feedback of the spectators, with whom actors frequently interact. Passionate about Commedia dell'Arte, Accademia degli Artefatti always leaves a space for some improvisation in the dialogic dynamics, which can be slightly changed on the basis of the performative context (see Arcuri 2006: 139-143; Angius, Croci, Girotto 2006: 161-168).

From a scenographic perspective, the show is characterised by minimalism. At the centre of the stage the spectator can see a white wooden structure, with stairs and a couple of chairs. This empty and seeming-

ly anonymous space becomes the perfect setting for each of Crimp's fragments, turning itself into a middle-class house, a stage for a punk-rock concert or a musical, a contemporary art installation, a gym, and a catwalk. All the scenes are extremely powerful: Artefatti shifts from Crimpian duologues to choreographies. Despite its considerable duration, the show is dynamic and sparkling and the audience is deeply involved in what is going on on stage.

The costume designer Rita Bucchi plays a pivotal role in creating Artefatti's postmodern jigsaw: actors wear wetsuits, wigs, high heels and fake whiskers suggesting cross-dressing and gender trespassing, sailor costumes, dark sunglasses, Hawaiian shirts, and bulky animal masks. In so doing, the fluid and protean identity of Anne, Anya, Annie, Anny, Annushka is mirrored in every image of the show, a mosaic which, frustratingly, can never be properly assembled.

It is also worth stressing that Arcuri makes a strong directorial choice, that is to change the chronological order of the scenarios, indicating each fragment with a number that appears on the stage. Although Crimp offers directors a text which can be easily deconstructed, he has very clear ideas about the architectural structure and the sequence of the scenarios. Arcuri's radical and subversive decision was not fully appreciated by Crimp, as he pointed out when I interviewed him in 2009:

I really enjoyed that show, a couple of years ago. I had the feeling that Fabrizio's production was really amusing, people often laughed. But, at first, when I saw my scenarios put on stage in a different order, I was surprised.

It was very disconcerting. I wasn't completely happy with that decision.

Crimp's words give us a sense of some of the major differences between Italian (or – more generally – Continental) theatre and the British stage. In Italy, France, or Germany the director has a greater freedom of choice and can re-create the script in a very personal – which sometimes means subversive – way,¹⁵ as is well known, whereas contemporary British theatre is text-based and revolves around the figure of the writer.¹⁶ In a 2009 interview I carried out with Sam Walters, the artistic director of the Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond-upon-Thames,

where Crimp's early plays were staged in the Eighties, he stated that he did "believe that the director is there to serve the author, the director is a catalyst between the play and the actors. I didn't have any desire to impose myself". Two markedly different perspectives on the question of authorship.

4. Conclusion

On the whole, it is reasonable to argue that Martin Crimp's work has been favourably received in Italy. Everything started in the mid-Nineties, when *In-Yer-Face* British playwrights were first imported to the "Bel Paese". Even if Crimp is older than Kane, Ravenhill and Ridley, he sold on the *In-Yer-Face* ticket,¹⁷ possibly because the graphic scenes in *The Treatment* (1993) – his first play staged in Italy in 1996 – anticipated the provocative plays of the younger generation.¹⁸

The Roman company Accademia degli Artefatti, directed by Fabrizio Arcuri, over the years has established a close relationship with the English dramatist. Crimp's challenging and unsettling plays have provided Artefatti with the new writing texts the company needed in order to investigate the subtle mechanisms of communication and the crucially active role of the audience in trying to create meaning out of the contemporary chaos. Thanks to Crimp and other present-day British playwrights such as Ravenhill and Crouch, the members of Artefatti have developed and refined a particular acting style that has become their distinctive trait. Moreover, the "anti-conventionality" of Crimp's drama, especially of a play such as *Attempts on Her Life* (Luckhurst 2003: 49), embraces Artefatti's penchant for radical theatre and alternative spaces, which has characterised the company's work from the very beginning. In this light, non-conventional venues have been the most appropriate settings to stage Crimp, at least initially.

Even if Artefatti's ambitious and successful project on Crimp can be considered concluded, at least for now, the English dramatist continues to be staged in Italy. Among others, we might mention the production of *The Country* starring the well-known Italian actress Laura Morante as Corinne under the direction of Roberto Andò, which toured Italy

between 2012 and 2013, and Antonio Syxty's *Cruel + Tender. Tenero e Crudele*, Crimp's contemporary take on Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*, first presented at Milan's Teatro Litta in 2011. This confirms that the plays of the English author have enjoyed notable success in this country. If the most experimental texts (*Attempts on Her Life* and the trilogy) capture the attention of younger directors fascinated by a "restlessly exploratory dramaturgy" (Aragay, Escoda, Monforte 2014: 389) which stimulates them to experiment with new dramatic and theatrical languages by "interpreting the 'blank'" (Obis 2014: 388), the "traditional" Crimp (if someone like that exists), with his *The Country* or with his rewriting of a classical tragedy, has been adopted and adapted by Italian institutional theatre. Because of his "open texts" and his Continental influences, Crimp – as said before – might be considered an unrecognised prophet in his own country, but – thanks to this – his theatrescapes can be exported quite successfully across the Channel, showing how contemporary British theatre is a breeding ground for aesthetic (and ethical) investigation also in Europe.

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¹ The performance-oriented focus of Italian theatre between the Sixties and the Seventies is examined in Cesare Molinari’s *Teatro e antiteatro dal dopoguerra ad oggi* (2007), which devotes an entire chapter to “teatro-immagine”. In keeping with this, in his *Il teatro inglese del Novecento*, Paolo Bertinetti writes: “In the late Sixties and the early Seventies Italian theatre underwent profound changes, with respect to which dramatic literature, not only the English one, did not have much to offer, apart from Bond’s and Pinter’s theatre” (author’s translation). In Italian, the quote reads as follows: “Alla fine degli anni Sessanta e nei primi anni Settanta la scena italiana conobbe trasformazioni profonde, rispetto alle quali la letteratura drammatica, e non solo quella inglese, non aveva molto da offrire. Con due eccezioni: il teatro di Bond e quello di Pinter” (157).

² The term “Crimpland” was coined by Dominic Dromgoole and first used in his *The Full Room: An A-Z of Contemporary Playwriting* (2000): “Crimp has carved out his own theatrical territory, Crimpland, full of hollow folk, all with offstage lives of loneliness and mystery, suddenly trapped together in a mutual obsession” (62).

³ In her Introduction to the 2014 special issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* devoted to Crimp’s theatre, Vicky Angelaki observes that – “as opposed to how it may have felt a few years ago” (309) – the English playwright’s recognition is “on an upward curve” (309). As she adds, “[f]urther to the wide range of Crimp’s activity – he writes, adapts, produces versions of classics, and translates with notable regularity – this was also owing to the interest that Crimp’s work had been steadily receiving from scholars, practitioners and, of course, audiences, in the UK and further afield. At the same time, despite this widening attention, Crimp’s work never featured quite as prominently as that of other contemporary playwrights in, for example, collective volumes that deal with the theatre of a given period. This may be understandable – Crimp’s writing does not fall neatly in a singular period of contemporary theatre, as he has been steadily working professionally since the early 1980s. *Attempts on Her Life* (1997) may still be considered Crimp’s most well known play, but it is far from the only standout text” (309).

⁴ On Crimp and postdramatic theatre, see Escoda Agustí 2013: 110-115.

⁵ “[...] ci può essere un teatro postdrammatico con testi drammatici e [...], viceversa, si possono inscenare testi postdrammatici in una maniera molto classica”.

⁶ “[...] quella di Perlini, del Carrozzone, della Gaia Scienza e poi a seguire della Raffaello Sanzio, della Valdoca e delle altre infinite diverse declinazioni”.

⁷ Personal interview with Fabrizio Arcuri, Rome, 21/5/2009.

⁸ “No one will have directly experienced the actual cause of such happenings, but everyone will have received an image of them” (quoted in Crimp 2005: 198).

⁹ “[D]opo l’11 settembre abbiamo deciso di azzerare tutto, di ricominciare da capo: rispettando la nostra identità, volevamo capire come ritrovare un senso per entrare in contatto con la società cui si riferiscono i nostri lavori. Abbiamo iniziato a cercare testi che fossero ‘post-drama’, opere autoriali ma aperte, che permettessero una scrittura scenica parallela alla scrittura teatrale. Noi rispettiamo in modo ‘sacro’ i testi, li trattiamo come fossero classici intoccabili, però all’interno di questi testi ‘post-drama’ la parola non è prioritaria: ma è la relazione ad esserlo. La relazione interna tra attori e quella tra attori e pubblico sono determinanti”.

¹⁰ “È inesorabilmente il lavoro sul linguaggio e sui meccanismi della comunicazione che rivela l’appel per certe scritture teatrali e in questo va collocato l’at-

tuale corso teatrale della compagnia. È nella realtà, che si è palesata prepotentemente, che si rintraccia il rifiuto all'omologazione dell'immagine e della visione".

¹¹ Perialdo Girotto holds a degree in Foreign Languages from Ca' Foscari, University of Venice. His MA dissertation focused on David Mamet's theatre. Girotto's translations of Crimp's *Whole Blue Sky* (*Un cielo tutto blu*), *Face to the Wall* (*Faccia al muro*), *Fewer Emergencies* (*Meno emergenze*), *Advice to Iraqi Women* and of Ravenhill's *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat* (*Spara/ Trova il tesoro/Ripeti*) have been published by Editoria & Spettacolo.

¹² "Come traduttore che è anche attore della compagnia ho sempre avuto molto chiaro che ciò che serve è un codice linguistico che sia in grado di aiutare l'attore a riprodurre efficacemente i testi della drammaturgia anglosassone che abbiamo scelto di rappresentare. Questi testi adottano un linguaggio diretto e colloquiale, che impone un adattamento ai modelli espressivi propri della lingua italiana al fine di rendere al meglio il lavoro di relazione tra gli attori e di *feedback* con gli spettatori che è caratteristico del nostro approccio sulla scena".

¹³ Personal interview with Fabrizio Arcuri, Rome, 21/5/2009.

¹⁴ I had the pleasure of seeing Artefatti's *Attempts on Her Life* at Teatro India, Rome, in May 2009.

¹⁵ In line with this, in the Introduction to their edited collection *Contemporary European Theatre Directors* (2010), Delgado and Rebellato state that, for the numerous theatre-makers examined in the volume (Castellucci, García, Bieito, Mesguich, Mnouchkine, Castorf, Ostermeier, Borowski, and Mitchell, just to name a few), "the craft of directing is never simply a question of 'interpreting' but rather about shaping, representing, positioning and creating" (18).

¹⁶ This authorial eminence has been evident since 1956, when George Devine – the artistic director of the English Stage Company – stated that the Royal Court was "not to be a producers' theatre or an actors' theatre" but "a writers' theatre" (quoted in Devine 2006: 3).

¹⁷ This is not unusual, especially abroad, as Crimp himself notes: "In that particular book [Sierz's *In-Yer-Face Theatre*] I'm a footnote – I'm an appendix. It was really strange – I mean it's easier for me just to speak anecdotally about it – how odd it was for me to receive books, translations, into Czech, or something, and to find it was three British playwrights, Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill and myself. So we formed this little cluster for a time. But I'm not in their generation" (quoted in Devine 2006: 85).

¹⁸ "Although Crimp comes from the British tradition of new writing, he has never been part of any new wave. He's the odd man out in recent theatre history. Before the in-yer-face 1990s playwrights emerged, Crimp anticipated this contemporary sensibility: the scenes in *The Treatment*, when Jennifer performs oral sex on Andrew and then spits the contents of her mouth into an ashtray, or when

Anne and Clifford tear out Clifford's eyes, anticipate the shocking stage images of Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill. Yet, despite this, Crimp belongs more to what the Royal Court politely calls the 'lost generation': those playwrights, born in the mid-1950s, who started to develop work in the 1980s, and then just vanished from view. He is one of the few survivors" (Sierz 2013: 168).

“Qu’on entende la langue officielle”:
Translation and Self-Translation of the
French-based Creole of Saint Lucia

Giuseppe SOFO

Abstract: This essay will analyse the several stages of translation and self-translation that are implied in the plays by the Caribbean author Derek Walcott with particular attention to the issue of translating passages written in the French-based Creole of Saint Lucia, into French and into English. By looking at these instances of self-translation, we will see how the authority of the author over his own text allows him to make choices in self-translations of his own words which would almost surely be condemned if it were the work of another translator.

Introduction

This article will analyse the several stages of translation and self-translation that are implied in Derek Walcott’s plays and, in particular, the issue of translating passages written in the French-based Creole of Saint Lucia, into French and into English. If the latter can tell us how Walcott has translated himself, the former is particularly interesting because these translations entail a passage towards a language which shares its history with the source language. This could be an advantage, as Christine Raguette argues, when she writes:

Nous avons la chance, nous francophones, d’avoir à notre disposition une variété de langues parlées dans toutes les régions francophones de l’espace caraïbe – créoles et variantes françaises parlées par les îliens. (...) Nos difficultés ne seront jamais comparables à celles rencontrées dans d’autres langues, comme l’italien créolisé, par exemple, dans lesquelles il n’existe aucune forme d’italien puisqu’aucune île de la Caraïbe n’est italianophone, et qui n’a donc pas tous les points de référence que nous trouvons en

français. Dans ces cas, les choix de traduction sont nécessairement d'un autre ordre. (Raguet 2010: 72-73)

This is certainly true, because in the case of French in the Antilles, and in the case of other languages which have been subjected to a process of creolization, different versions of French can be used in the translation, but what must also be remarked is that dealing with a language that has “Creole variations” can also engender different problems, since it is not always easy to distinguish between the French-based Creole, and the French in the translation, as we will see.

Self-translation

Derek Walcott made a broad use of self-translation, especially in his plays. Self-translation, or auto-translation, was defined by Anton Popovič as “the translation of an original work into another language by the author himself” (Popovič 1976: 19). When the concepts of “self-translation” and “auto-translation” are discussed in translation studies, they thus refer to something which would not apply to the corpus of Derek Walcott, since he has never translated a full work of his own into another language. However, Rainier Grutman and Trish Van Bolderen indicate that “like translation in general, self-translation can be viewed both in a narrow sense and from a much broader, even metaphorical, perspective” (Grutman, Van Bolderen 2014: 323), and it would be limiting to consider self-translation only as the translation of a full work, since – obviously taking proportion into account – even the translation of shorter passages or of excerpts of a work does entail some of the same problems, challenges and possibilities involved in translating a full work.

What really defines self-translation is not the length or completeness of the work translated, but rather the “self”, the fact that the author is his own translator, therefore I will use this term to refer to passages of different length (a word, a line, a full song) which appear together in the texts of Walcott’s drama in two different languages. Before I begin to analyse the texts, however, I need to clarify that the simple use of words and expressions in another language can obvious-

ly not be defined as a self-translation, but rather needs to be pointed out as an example of the very common linguistic hybridity of most postcolonial writing, and indeed of much postmodern and contemporary writing. I will therefore not study simple cases of linguistic hybridity, in which words in languages different from the main language of the work appear in the text, but only those passages in which actual translations of words and expressions that appear in the text are given, implicitly or explicitly, in the same work.

The different positioning of the self-translator in the passage which takes the text from the author to the reader, through the translator, obviously carries many implications: first of all, self-translation could solve the problem of interpretation of the author's intention, cultural background and intertextuality, as: "self-translators can access their original intention and the original cultural context or literary intertext of their original work better than ordinary translators" (Jung 2002: 30). According to Helena Tanqueiro: "no matter how close the author-translator relationship may be in conventional translations and no matter how much the translator strives to reach the 'real intentions' of the author, there are always elements coloured by the subjectivity of that other party to the process: i.e., the translator" (Tanqueiro 2000: 55). However, though self-translation could solve a few problems, as already noted, this does not mean that this practice solves these problems completely, as the self-translator might deal with very similar issues to those encountered by any other translator. There is in fact one aspect which is usually underestimated in analysing self-translations: having a single person embodying both roles, author and translator, does not mean that these two roles cannot be differentiated, as Grutman and Van Bolderen aptly point out:

The authors of both versions are the same physical person. Which is not to say that these authors are absolutely identical: the self-translating persona often appears later on in a writer's career (Vladimir Nabokov being one of many examples), and some bilingual writers even choose to differentiate between their respective personae in each language (think of Karen Blixen/Isak Dinesen in Denmark, Jean Ray/John Flanders in Belgium, or Julien/Julian Green in France). (Grutman, Van Bolderen 2014: 323-324)

The degree of distance between the author and the self-translating persona is decisive for the latter to interpret faithfully the words he or she has written as author, and in extreme cases one could go as far as to say that the self-translating persona could be further distanced from the author than another translator.

This is not the case for the self-translations I will analyse, which were almost always carried out at the same time as the writing, but this differentiation must be kept in mind to avoid any oversimplification of the implications of this process. What is interesting about self-translations is that the author-translator has much more authority than a simple translator, which grants him different possibilities while working on his own writings rather than on somebody else's texts. Grutman confirms this, by saying that: "what is ultimately at stake here is the old notion of authority, of which original authors traditionally have lots and translators none" (Grutman 1998: 257). While critics of translations are always ready to attack a translator's work because of its supposed unfaithfulness to the original, in fact, they seem much more reluctant to do so when the translator is the author himself, even though self-translations are at times very distant from their respective originals, and could very easily be defined as new versions of a work, rather than actual translations.

Furthermore, the practice of self-translation is not disconnected from the reality of the colonial and (especially) of the postcolonial era, with the dissolving of the colonial empires and the formation of new nations, which caused a double binding to the languages and the cultures of the colonising state and to those of the newly-independent nations, as in the case of Walcott. Jan Walsh Hokenson and Marcella Munson suggest in fact in their work on the history and theory of literary self-translation that it is this peculiar cultural and political situation of living between languages to have given rise again to the practice of self-translation, which was already very fruitful in early modern Europe:

Self-translation was a common practice in the ambient translingual world of early modern Europe, when bilingualism was the norm, and writers increasingly translated between Latin and vernaculars. While persisting

among cultured elites, literary bilinguality and self-translation diminished during the consolidation of the nation-states. That historical reduction in the verbal compass is a familiar story. Yet even that narrative neglects the translative practice of explorers and colonizers encountering Asia and the Americas and translating their European texts for indigenous peoples or, conversely, their travel journals for readers in Europe. In the past century as well, wars and deportations propelled writers into new languages where many flourished as self-translators. More recently many post-colonials have challenged the dissymmetry of native and colonial languages by writing and translating in both, not unlike medievals addressing both Latin and vernacular audiences in the dual text. (Walsh Hokenson, Munson 2007: 2)

This practice is therefore crucial for an understanding of postcolonial writing in general, also because most postcolonial writing has been largely considered as a form of translation, though in different ways: on the one hand, because – as in the cases we will analyse here – actual translations coexist on the same page with the respective original words in another language, or because the authors have offered versions of their works in more than one language, and on the other hand, because even the simple act of writing, in a culture that involves a double linguistic and cultural belonging, is often considered as a process entailing translation. In fact, as Paul Bandia has written, referring to African writings in European languages, with words that could apply just as well to Caribbean writings in European languages: “as a postcolonial text, Euro-African writing is characterized by a form of linguistic and cultural hybridity that is achieved, for the most part, through specific translation practices. It has been said that postcolonial texts are themselves translations often based on multiple linguistic and cultural systems” (Bandia 2003: 129).

Though I believe that describing any text written in the postcolonial context as a translation is too generalising, and would not help us to analyse the instances in which translation is directly present, we must certainly keep these words in mind while analysing self-translations by Walcott, which could thus be considered as a retranslation of words that they already had to translate from Creole into English, or the opposite.

We must also remember, however, that we are dealing with an author for whom English has never been a foreign tongue, nor a secondary one in respect to Creole, but rather the chosen language of expression.

Self-Translation and Translation in Derek Walcott's Plays

I will now analyse one of the most interesting aspects of Walcott's self-translation, which is the use of variation instead of repetition when the same passage is translated several times in the same context. The first example I will analyse comes from a song from *Moon-Child*, where the Creole and the English texts are mixed:

Imps: *Voyez de l'eau ba moin*
Moin ka brulé.
SEE HOW I TURNING, TURNING
I HOT YES, I BURNING, BURNING (...)
Voyez de l'eau ba moin
Moin ka brulé!
Voyez de l'eau ba moin
Moin ka brulé.
THROW WATER ON ME
I'M BURNING (MC 83-84)

If we look at the two different ways in which Walcott has translated the passage in Creole "*Voyez de l'eau ba moin / Moin ka brulé*", we can see that the second occurrence offers a translation that is lexically closer to the original, "THROW WATER ON ME / I'M BURNING", while the first occurrence was rendered by "SEE HOW I TURNING, TURNING / I HOT YES, I BURNING, BURNING". This first translation, however, allowed Walcott to add an end rhyme to the passage in English, which recovered the double internal rhyme of the original: '*voyez-brulé*' and '*moin-moin*' that was lost in the second translation. The double translation therefore functions in this case as a possibility for the author-translator of giving both the literal meaning and a re-interpretation recovering some of the rhythmic aspects of the original.

Another song in *The Haytian Earth*, dedicated to the story of Ogé and Chavannes, the leaders of the mulatto revolution that anticipated

the slave revolt in Haiti, shows us a process that is probably closer to rewriting than to translation:

I

*C'était bel jour comme 'jourd'hui.
Eux prendre les deux mulattres:
Ogé avec Chavannes.
Eux 'taient aller Paris
En culottes et cravats
Eux pas 'taient Nègre savannes
Pour demander leur droit,
Leur droit, leur droit, mulattres.
Before the French Assembly,
And what they did to them
You will see, you will see!*

II

*Mais mulattres trop couillons,
Pis eux ni grands cabanes.
Eux croient eux c'est gens blanc
Et, Nègres ka rester cabrits
Z'animaux et moutons,
Alors jourd'hui, jourd'hui
Bon Dieu fait eux pardon
Eux prend Ogé ec Chavannes
Pour faire crucifixion.*

III

*Bon Dieu, toute mouné c'est même
Mulattres, bechés et Nègres,
Mais nous sourds, nous aveugles,
Tout n'omme eux c'est une race
Messieurs bi-dim, bam-bam
La guerre kai commencer
A'nous aller la place
A'nous La Place des Armes. (HE 310-312)*

I

*It was a lovely day
A day just like this one.
They took the two mulattos
Named Ogé and Chavannes
And stretched them in the sun.
The two, they went to Paris
In trousers and in ties
To plead the mulattos' cause*

II

*These two men they were fools
Because they had good beds.
They thought that they were free,
They had a right to ask it,
Brotherhood, liberty.
They learnt good French in schools
But what was in their heads
Will roll into a basket.*

III

*God, all men are one race
But men are deaf and blind,
They pleaded for their case
But now their plea is wind,
Wind in the marketplace.
And Justice, she so blind!
And Justice, she so blind!*

It is quite evident, in reading the poem in its Creole and English versions, that they are about the same story, but that they tell it quite differently. Although the first lines could in fact make us think of a simple translation, there are differences both in the events described, and in the ways they are described. The structure of the stanzas changes from the original Creole to the English translation, but it is not regular in either of the two versions, whether it be in Creole (with the first and last stanza composed of eight lines, and the second of nine lines), or in English (with stanzas of eleven, eight and seven lines respectively). The rhyme structures of both versions are also irregular, though both present several end rhymes, and in one case Walcott chooses the same rhyme in Creole and English, the rhyme ‘race-place / *race-place*’ in “*Tout n’omme eux c’est une race / (...) A’nous aller la place*” and “*God, all men are one race / (...) Wind in the marketplace*”.

In the first stanza, the English version adds that who took Ogé and Chavannes “stretched them in the sun”, and announces that we will see “what they did to them”, but the second stanza is even more significant since it translates: “*Eux croient eux c’est gens blanc*” (meaning, ‘they thought that they were whites’) with: “They thought that they were free”. The passage that says: “*Nègres ka rester cabrits / Z’animaux et moutons*”, comparing black people to goats, animals and sheep, is not translated at all, while the English version tells us about the reason for which they feel they have a right to ask for their freedom: “*They had a right to ask it, / Brotherhood, liberty. / They learnt good French in schools*”, something the Creole version does not do. Something very similar happens in the third stanza, when “*Bon Dieu, toute moune c’est même / Mulattres, bechés et Nègres, / (...) Tout n’omme eux c’est une race*” is translated simply with “God, all men are one race”, which avoids mentioning the different racial groups of the colonial system.¹ The English version erases therefore the whole racial question, and the matter is quite crucial since the failure of the mulatto revolt was also due to the fact that the mulattos were not supported by either side, the white French colonials or the enslaved black Haitians. This is certainly a case in which the authority of the self-translator over his translation is fundamental, since such a powerful alteration on such a delicate subject in the work of any oth-

er translator would be strongly criticized, and the translator would not only be accused of a simple translation mistake, but his or her integrity would certainly be questioned as well.

The last verses of the second stanza and the last verses of the third stanza also present us with very different versions of the events: in the second stanza, in fact, we are told of a different death for Ogé and Chavannes, crucifixion in the Creole version and beheading in the English translation, and interestingly, neither of the two seems to be the actual reason for the death of the real Ogé and Chavannes.² In the third stanza, while the Creole version called to arms, to a war at its beginning and the people congregating at the *Place des armes*, the English translation limits itself to a complaint against the blindness of justice (and of the people enacting it), with: “*And Justice, she so blind! And Justice, she so blind!*” replacing “*Messieurs bi-dim, bam-bam / La guerre kai commencer / A’nous aller la place / A’nous La Place des Armes*”.

Another interesting song from Walcott’s *The Haytian Earth* is the one in which Pompey sings for his wife and for his country:

*Alors, Yette ’trappait morceau terre,
Et i’ commençait planter,
Eux deux, yeux c’est même couleur,
Terre-a, et jamette shabine,
Et pour lui-même, moi ka chanter
Et pour Christophe, Dessalines...
(Other PEASANTS lead by POMPEY join her and cross the stage with forks,
sacks, scythes.)
So Yette find a piece of land
Where she teach herself how to plant,
Her skin the same shade as the ground,
And you’ll see why I sing this chant
For her, my rose and my queen
And for Christophe and Dessalines. (HE 333-334)*

The translation into English keeps a similar rhyme scheme to the original, with two major endings for the end rhymes, if we consider half-rhymes, going from the original AAABAB scheme to AAAABB, and because, as I observed for the previous song about Ogé and Cha-

vannes, in four cases out of six, the rhyming words are the same in Creole and in English: “*terre-land*”, “*planter-plant*”, “*chanter-chant*” (although the grammatical category here is different), and obviously “*Dessalines*”. This shows once more that keeping the same rhyme as in the original is a choice Walcott makes willingly, whenever possible, whether rhyme concerns words with the same meaning, the same ending, or both at the same time.

The choice of keeping the rhymes as often as possible, however, forces Walcott in this case to make different lexical choices, losing a few very Creole terms. In particular, in the passage “*Eux deux, yeux c’est même couleur, / Terre-a, et jamette shabine*”, which is rendered as: “*Her skin the same shade as the ground*”. The second verse of the Creole describes in fact Yette as a “*jamette shabine*”. Both these words are not translated into English, and both of them carry quite important meanings in the Caribbean context. Lise Winer writes in her definition of *jamette* that the word is “widely supposed” to derive from the French “*diametre* ‘diameter’, i.e. outside the boundary of social respectability”, but might also derive from Wolof, “*jam* ‘slave’ + Fr[ench] *-ette* ‘female’” (Winer 2008: 460). If the Wolof derivation would seem to indicate a female slave, the word is in fact most commonly believed to derive from the French word “*diameter*” to indicate anybody below the “line”, the “diameter” of acceptable and respectable social behaviour, it is strictly connected to the evolution of Carnival in Trinidad,³ and has with time acquired the meaning of “prostitute”. “*Shabine*” is instead the word used to indicate “a person with a light or red complexion, curly often reddish hair, ‘Negro’ features; often with freckles and light-coloured eyes. (...) mulatto of fair complexion with reddish negroid hair” (Winer 2008: 805), as Winer writes, or “*Métis de Noir et de Blanc à la peau, aux yeux et aux cheveux généralement clairs, ces derniers étant frisés ou crépus*” (Confiant 2007: 259), as Confiant writes in his *Dictionnaire créole martiniquais-français*. Although Pompey’s use of the term “*jamette*” for his wife is not to be taken as an insult, it is certainly not the same as the English version we find a few verses later, “*my rose and my queen*”, meant to rhyme with “*Dessalines*”, as “*shabine*” did in Creole.

While in most cases the English translation follows the Creole, in some cases in *Moon-Child* we can see that the opposite is happening, but this obviously does not change the fact that the repetition is there to give both the Creole and its English translation, and in general, as we have seen, the author does not seem to have departed much from the original, which also suggests a repetition that is not relevant to the text, if not to translate the meaning of the words in Creole for the Anglophone reader. We can speak in these cases of a “translation couplet”, defined by Newmark as “literal translation or translation label plus transcription” (Newmark 1981: 32). This very common technique used in translation has in fact the same words coexist in two different languages, right beside each other, to convey at the same time the original form of the term and its meaning. And it is certainly significant for an understanding of Walcott’s relationship with translation to remark that he uses in his own writing a strategy which belongs to translation theory and practice.

There are other cases in which Walcott translates the same word in two different ways, offering a double translation. Here are some examples:

The loup-garou: (*Seated at a table*): Waiter! Over here!

Maman de l’eau : Waiter! *Garçon!*

The white owl: Boy!

The planter: That would be you. (*MC* 36)

Here “*garçon*” is both preceded and followed by a translation, the first one being “waiter” and the second one being “boy”. This double translation serves to reveal two different meanings of the same word, since “*garçon*” could be translated either way into English, and thus it gives us a wider definition of the term.⁴ The same happens with the order of the demon in *Ti-Jean and his Brothers*:

Demon’s voice: *Faire ca mwen di ous!*

(Do what I commanded!) (...)

Bolom, faire tout ça mwen dire ous!

(Child, do all that I ordered you!) (*TJ* 97)

The same sentence is translated differently in the same context, since “*faire ca mwen di ous*” and “*faire (...) ça mwen dire ous*” – though not spelled in the same way – use exactly the same words to convey exactly the same meaning, but they are translated differently, with “I commanded!” translating the first occurrence, and “I ordered you!” translating the second. Both the verbs used to translate “*di/dire*” convey a stronger meaning than the one implied in the Creole verb “*dire*”, but they are synonymous, which means that Walcott is not giving completely different translations, but rather offering a simple lexical variation of the same translation.

Another example of this process comes from *Ti-Jean* again:

Devil: *Bai Diable-là manger un 'ti mamaille!*

(Give the Devil a child for dinner!)

Devils: *Un, deux, trois 'ti mamaille!*

(One, two, three little children!) (*TJ* 89)

Devils' voices off: *Bai Diable-là manger un 'ti mamaille!*

Un, deux, trois 'ti mamaille!

Bai Diable-là manger un 'ti mamaille!

Un,

deux,

trois...

(Give the Devil a child for dinner!

One, two, three little children!

Give the Devil a child for dinner!

One,

two,

three...) (*TJ* 100-101)

Devils' voices off: *Bai Diable-là manger un 'ti mamaille!*

Un, deux, trois 'ti mamaille!

Bai Diable-là manger un 'ti mamaille!

Un, deux, trois 'ti mamaille!

Old Man: Aie! Feed the Devil the third, feed the Devil the third. (*TJ* 131)

The same sentence “*Bai (...) manger*”, which is present five times here, is in fact translated three times as “Give (...) for dinner”, as it is also translated twice in *Moon-Child* (MC 45, 59), but in the last two occurrences it is translated as “feed”, an equivalent of the previous translations, which however offers once again a variation.

This play was also translated into French in 1997, by Paol Keineg, with the title *Ti-Jean et ses frères* (TJ-FR). This translation is particularly interesting for the wide presence of the French-based Saint Lucian Creole and of the subsequent English translation by Walcott in the source text. The Saint Lucian Creole is certainly easier to understand for a French or Francophone reader than for any other non-Caribbean reader, since the Creole is at times very close to the French.

Keineg chooses to translate all the Creole passages into French, by using Walcott's own translations into English as the basis for his own translation, but with one difference: Walcott, as we have said, often uses variation in the translations of his own words, while Keineg removes this variation. If we look at another translation of the same play, the Italian one translated by Annuska Palme Sanavio for Adelphi, we can see that the translator in this case follows Walcott and thus introduces a similar variation in her Italian version of the English translations by Walcott of the passages in Creole. The reason is very probably to be seen in the fact that the French translator had a direct contact with the Creole, because he could understand it quite easily through his French, while the contact of the Italian translator with the Creole occurs mostly through Walcott's translations into English. In this case, Walcott influences thus the translator with his own translations, because what Palme Sanavio is translating is not “original”, but Walcott's self-translation in the original text, while Keineg is translating directly from the Creole.

Another interesting aspect of this translation is that Keineg at times replaces the Creole with French, especially in passages in which the two are very close, but do not coincide exactly, as in the case of Walcott's “*bon jour*” (TJ 105, 117), replaced by “*bonjour*” (TJ-FR 25, 38-39), or “*bètise*” (TJ 127) instead of the French ‘*bêtise*’, and replaced with “*sottises*” (TJ-FR 48), both without italicization in the French version. Perhaps,

the risk in keeping the Creole was to have something too similar to the French, but which could look like a typographical error. It is in fact revelatory that almost the same expression is left in Creole when there are more signs that it is not a mistake in French, but a different language, as in Ti-Jean's greeting to the old man, "*bon jou, vieux cor*" (TJ 138; TJ-FR 59), which is kept in Creole and in italics in the French translation.

To look at another play, which has been translated into French, we can see that in a song in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Walcott uses the same process of varying the translation of the same word as pointed out above, by translating the verb "*levez*" both as "rise" and "wake up", and the verb "*descendre*" both as "come down" and "go down":

Singer: I'll show you how it happen: *Il dit Levez, Makak*. [He said Rise, Makak] (...) *Quittez charbon en sac*. [Leave your bags of coal] (...) *Negre ka weh twop misere*. [Niggers see too much misery] (...) *Ous kai weh ou kai weh*. [You'll see it for yourself] (...) *Il dit Levez, Makak*. [He said Wake up, Makak] (...) *Il dit Descendre, Makak*. [He said Come down, Makak] (...) *Descendre Morne Makak*. [Go down Monkey Mountain] *Il dit...* (DMM 263-264)

Once more, both translations are correct, and reveal different perspectives on the same term, by expressing different meanings that these words possess. Is Makak "coming" down the mountain, or is he "going" down? Is he "waking up" or is he "rising"? The Creole terms used implied this ambiguity, and the double self-translation by Walcott keeps and favors this ambiguity. If we look at the French translation of this play, entitled *Rêve sur la montagne au singe* (DMM-FR), and published by the Swiss publisher Éditions Demoures in a translation by Claire Malroux, we can see that this variation is not always respected. In the case of this passage I just quoted, for example, the variation for the verb "*levez*" is kept, but the same does not happen for "*descendre*", which is the French equivalent of both solutions found in English by Walcott:

Le chanteur : *Il dit Levez, Makak*. (Il a dit : Lève-toi, Makak.) (...) *Il dit Levez, Makak*. (Il a dit : Réveille-toi, Makak.) (...) *Il dit Descendre, Makak*. (Il a dit : Descends, Makak.) (...) *Descendre Morne Makak*. (Descends de la Montagne au Singe.) (DMM-FR 58-59)

An intriguing aspect of this translation which could seem like a detail, but which becomes decisive for an understanding of the linguistic complexity of the original, is that the translator chooses to avoid using italics for most of the passages in Creole, as we can see in the following examples:

Ça qui religion-ous?	Ça qui religion-ous ?
Levez la tête-ous!	Levez la tête-ous !
Montrez-moi la main-ous!	Montrez-moi la main-ous !
Marchez! Marchez! (DMM 219, 222)	Marchez ! Marchez ! (DMM-FR 16, 18-19)

This strategy often brings the reader to perceive the French-based Saint Lucian Creole and the French as languages of the same status, and even fuses them together at times, since it is not always easy to tell the Creole apart from the French. When we read in the French version “*Qu’on entende la langue officielle*” (DMM-FR 17), which translates “Let us hear English!” (DMM 220), the question is whether we have not heard too much of the “official language” through a hiding of the Creole in this French version. On the other hand, in at least one case, the choice is exactly the opposite: Walcott uses the italics for the term “*diablesse*” (DMM 236), to signal the Creoleness of the term, and the translator keeps these italics, treating it as a foreign term, though “*diablesse*” (DMM-FR 32) is obviously also a French word.

Walcott’s language, clearly divided between English and the French-based Creole, becomes here often a mashup of the two. If the result can be a more homogenous language, and a fascinating way to unveil the French bases of Creole, which allows to perceive more easily and more naturally the proximity between the two languages, on the other hand, the linguistic complexity of the original is obviously somehow lost.

“A more daring variation”: Conclusion

Walcott’s self-translations contained in his drama are of different kinds: some respect the metre and the rhyme structure, while some do not, and some are closer to the original text while others seem to be more rewritings than simple translations. The language chosen for

the translation also varies: while in some texts he translates from Creole into English, for some other songs (mainly in the cases of implicit self-translation), Walcott chooses to translate into Caribbean English Creole.

A fundamental aspect of all of Walcott's translations, however, is variation: he offers several times more than one translation for the same words, even when they appear in the same context and in the same lines, or in the same song. This process engenders in the target text a wider perception of the terms or lines translated, whose multiple meanings are revealed through a variation in translation. Introducing variation to replace repetition is quite a risky choice in translation, and is certainly one that many translation critics would not accept from a translator who is not the author of the original as well, and therefore a self-translator, since keeping the same intratextual connections of the original is fundamental in order to avoid losing textual coherence.

Commenting on Joyce's self-translation of passages from his *Finnegans Wake* into Italian, Jacqueline Risset wrote that the text was not to be taken as a "pursuit of hypothetical equivalents of the original text (as given, definitive) but a later elaboration representing (in relation to the first text seen as really – literally – 'work in progress') a kind of extension, a new stage, a more daring variation on the text in process" (Risset 1984: 6). Although we are dealing with a practice that is clearly very different from that followed by Joyce in his translations into Italian, and although we are dealing here with much shorter examples, what we can see also in Walcott's translations is a certain kind of non-definitiveness of the "original" text, both in English and in Creole, which is revealed and displayed by a translation which does function as an "extension" of the meanings implied in the original. By giving more translations for the same words, Walcott is not only varying but also extending the "text in process", to use Risset's words. He is putting on the page several possible meanings and forms for the same words, and this allows them to coexist and to offer a wider perception

of the text, pointing towards an unveiling of the inner fluidity of all drama, and indeed of all literature.

This kind of translation can thus offer us a hint at how translation could contribute to creatively reshaping the text, and to offer a wider image of the text than the one we would have by holding only the original source text in our hands. More specifically, it can testify to the amount of creativity that can be introduced in translation when one is not forced to deal with the supposed authority of the author over the text, and it can open up to a perception of translation as a much more creative textual, linguistic and cultural practice of interaction and exchange, especially in a multilingual context, such as the Caribbean.

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¹ Walcott's "*bechés*" stands in fact for *békés*, a term indicating the white descendants of the European settlers in the French Antilles, and the division into mulattos, *békés* and blacks seems to point at the tripartite social class distinction of the country, rather than simply to the skin colour of its inhabitants. To this purpose, it is very interesting to read Aimé Césaire's essay on Toussaint L'Ouverture, in which he tells the story of the three attempted revolts of Haiti, the first by the white colonials, the second by the *mulâtres* and the third by the black slaves, with only the latter one achieving the actual independence of the country (Césaire 1961).

² According to David Patrick Geggus: "twenty rebels were executed, Ogé and Chavannes suffering the excruciating punishment of being broken on the wheel" (Geggus 2002: 11).

³ According to Carol Martin: "Jamette or jamet refers to followers of *canboulay* bands in the latter half of the nineteenth-century carnival. Carnival during this period is sometimes called 'jamette carnival'. Jamette also refers to women who followed *kalinda*. Later its usage designated prostitutes and street-tough women who followed *steelbands*" (Martin 2004: 288).

⁴ It must be remembered that "boy" was used in the colonial context also for adult natives, or more specifically for servants. Though this is not the use it is made of the term in the context of Walcott's writing, an echo of that acceptance of the term is obviously present.

Friday October 12, 2018
Round Table : translators, editors and publishers

Chair: Marie-Nadia Karsky

This round table addresses play translations and the various roles and tasks involved in bringing translations to life. Let us introduce the speakers: Marianne Drugeon, a member of the Maison Antoine Vitez, teaches theatre and translation at the University of Montpellier and translates British theatre, particularly Tom Stoppard; Nathalie Rivère de Carles, teacher of English drama at the University of Toulouse, directs English and bilingual publications of plays for the series *Nouvelle Scène* anglaise and also co-translates plays; Caroline Schlenker directs acting workshops in English in Grenoble, using acting as a tool for language learning, and is currently working with local actors on a translation of the play *Fool for Love* by Sam Shepard; Michael Raab, a translator and lecturer in Frankfurt, worked as a dramaturg in various theatres in Germany and has translated authors from Agatha Christie to Michael Frayn; Sarah Vermande, an actor and member of the Maison Antoine Vitez for over 15 years, has translated a Debbie Tucker Green play and done co-translations of Linda McClean with Blandine Péliissier; Séverine Magois, also a drama translator from the Maison Antoine Vitez, has regularly won awards for her translations, and is Daniel Keene's agent in France; Blandine Péliissier is a feminist activist and actress, a stage director, and co-translator with Sarah Vermande and Kelly Rivière, specializing in Scottish women playwrights; Maggie Rose, a playwright and teacher of British theatre at the University of Milan, is a member of the Scottish Society of Playwrights and has widely published on translation and re-writing.

The round table begins by discussing how the decision is made to translate a particular play or playwright. Schlenker found Sam Shepard's play *Fool for Love* a good choice for several reasons. She loves the

playwright and this play in particular, and was interested, as an actor, in May, a strong female character. She was also intrigued by the challenge of bringing it to the French stage and making it accessible to a French audience while remaining true to Shepard's American voice. Rose began her work as a translator by translating authors she wanted to make known in Italy. In recent years, she has focused on the Scottish repertoire, creating the very first anthology of Scottish plays translated into Italian. More recently, she did a project called Intercultural Dialogues, theatre workshops with writers coming to Milan to translate plays of playwrights never staged before in Italy. Vermande translated one play at the request of the playwright, and otherwise chooses plays that she either wants to see in her native language or that she would love to act in. Dugeon, an academic specialist of Anglophone theatre more than a translator, explained that her translations have been the result of two chance meetings. The first was in the form of a workshop she was asked to organise at the University of Montpellier, where she is currently teaching, which invited translators to work with students on a play. Later, a colleague offered to co-translate a Stoppard play. Rivère de Carles primarily publishes play translations and has so far chosen the plays recommended by translators or playwrights.

The round table next discusses the speakers' experiences with co-translation specifically, as many of them primarily work with other translators on their projects. As an actor, a translator, and a director, Péliissier appreciates the process of acknowledging multiple ways of interpreting a text. She also believes that co-translating finally produces a better play because each of the co-translators must be more selective about the words they choose. Vermande finds co-translating with other translators both easier and more difficult than collaborating with a director or actors. She appreciates that she and other translators have the same access to the original language and to the tools, while directors and actors often have their own instinct about the text and lack a firm understanding of the original language. Conversely, working with other translators challenges her to be more selective about word choice, to defend interpretations, and to avoid reverting to comfortable preferences. Péliissier also finds working with actors to be difficult,

because they do not always understand the nuances of the original language and therefore often do not understand the translations of these nuances. Magois typically prepares the text before meeting with co-translators, and in this way, they work quickly to arrive at a final co-translation. However, her first co-translation involved a translator she had never met, so they first had to establish that they would work well together from both an artistic and ethical standpoint. They then worked on the text directly together, which took more time but which Magois also found very stimulating.

Following the discussion on co-translations, Raab addresses the relationship between translation and dramaturgy. He began as a dramaturg, and after learning more about gestural language he was able to transition into translation for the second part of his professional life. He likes the lightness, elegance, and directness of plays and so uses modern idioms to make it seem as though the character is speaking words he or she has just thought of and that have never been spoken before. He finds this easy to do because he feels more comfortable with colloquial language than with heightened, poetic language. Translating into German is a challenge for him, though, as the language in the source text does not easily allow for this.

Finally, the round table addresses the publication of play translations. Rose's translations are primarily for production in the UK and in Italy; however, she does place an emphasis on the importance of publication to make the texts known. Vermande raises the thorny question of the circulation of unpublished translations. The Maison Antoine Vitez makes these available to a wide audience, yet it is important to stop doing so once a publication is available for purchase so that an unfinished version of the translation does not circulate. Rivère de Carles adds that most publications of translated plays do not sell well. They finance the publication of new playwrights by publishing them alongside the works of well-established authors. Pélissier emphasizes the importance of distributing translations to multiple reading committees, even if the play is not published, to ensure the play

is read by many. However, translators do not earn much money from translations and often receive little or no recognition for their work.

(Transcript and summary by Isabel MILKOVICH, Master's student, University Grenoble Alps)

The “devenir-French” of the Play: Contemporary British Theatre in France and in French

Elisabeth ANGEL-PEREZ

Abstract: This essay will concentrate on the contemporary British plays that have recently been staged in France and in French and, while focusing on the reasons behind the French stage directors’ choices, I will try to elucidate what intrinsic qualities of this imported theatre are revealed when it is appropriated by French directors. Finally, I will consider the extra amount-of-being granted to the original by the “devenir-French” of the play.

“The French understand nothing about what I’m doing, no need to insist”. These were Pinter’s words after the disastrous reception of his first play to be performed in France and in French – *Le Gardien* (*The Caretaker*) – in Roger Blin’s 1961 production at the Theatre de Lutèce in Paris. Fortunately, time has passed since the French theatres’ categorical refusal to stage new voices from across the Channel (be they Irish or British, Beckett’s or Pinter’s) and fortunately Claude Régy, after Roger Blin’s miserable attempt, dug out *The Lover* and *The Collection* from the bottom of a forlorn drawer and brought together Delphine Seyrig and Jean Rochefort (Théâtre Hebertot, 1965) in a successful production. He had a second equally triumphant go at Pinter with *The Homecoming* in 1966. An avid discoverer of new voices, Claude Régy – who also revealed Gregory Motton, David Harrower, among so many others in France –, has been essential in the development of new British voices and aesthetics on the more than overcautious French stages. His Pinters were followed by Jean-Laurent Cochet’s 1969 new production of *Le Gardien* featuring brilliant actor Jacques Dufilho. All these productions were to kick off Pinter’s magnificent career in France and, around Pinter, this was to trigger a new departure for British playwrights alongside the still very much

praised Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, William Douglas Home or Noel Coward.

The question of the circulation of texts and spectacles across borders is an invitation to ponder on what this circulation reveals of plays written in England, when appropriated by European directors, actors, translators. I shall concentrate on the French example and leave aside the question of the British stage directors or companies coming to France with their British productions (Simon McBurney's *The Encounter* (2016), Forced Entertainment's *Table Top Shakespeare* (2018), for instance). What is it that French directors go for when they decide to stage a play written by Howard Barker, Sarah Kane, Edward Bond or Martin Crimp, by Simon Stephens, Dennis Kelly, Alice Birch or debbie tucker green in French and in France? What is it that they find in these texts during this process of appropriation, that they do not find in plays written in their own language and by people sharing the same immediate culture? What does this reveal of the intrinsic quality of the imported theatre?

Conversely, whereas it certainly is a rich experience for the author to see his text translated and propelled to live a life of its own – Mark Ravenhill, for instance, loves the “resonance” a play has, at the international level, once the immediate concrete creation has taken place, when the play is passed along to and appropriated by other cultures: this exchange, he says, makes him be “a better writer” (in Rebellato: xiii) – is it not an equally rich experience for a stage director to stage a play not in its original language but in translation? Could we suggest that the original text, when translated, contrary to the “traduttore traditore” motto, gains a richer substance? Could we claim that translation into another verbal language – and not only translation from page to stage – confers on the play what I would like to call an “extra amount of being”? Is a translated text – and as a matter of fact a text translated and retranslated many times – somehow closer to the “unconscious” of the text, as Régy suggests in a luminous interview he gave to Jérôme Hankins? In this interview, Régy pleads for translation: “it is only by the sum of the translations – and we’re getting close to

quantum mathematics –, it is only by the synthesis between the different possible translations of a text that we perhaps could be allowed to touch upon what belongs to the inviolable unconscious of this text,” Régy states, adding that a many-times-translated text would therefore come close to “an ideal tongue” which “would not be a tongue that one could speak out” but a tongue that remains in the/an idea” (Régy and Hankins).

I will start by giving a brief and inevitably very partial panoramic survey of British theatre in France and in French, and, while focusing on the reasons behind the French stage directors’ and translators’ choices, I will try to elucidate what intrinsic qualities of this imported theatre are revealed when it is appropriated by French directors. And finally, I will tentatively try to grasp the nature of this potential “extra amount-of-being” granted to the original by the “devenir-French” of the play.¹

1. Brief panorama of British theatre in France and in French

Probably because there has been an incredible upsurge in dramatic creation in Britain from the 90’s onwards, a large number of British plays have been performed in France. While some important 20th century playwrights made their way to the Comédie-Française (Pinter, Stoppard, Bond), or to other prominent institutions (Pinter, Barker at the Odéon-Théâtre de l’Europe; Bond and Kane at the Théâtre National de la Colline), others, younger or less “established” playwrights inspired French directors in search of new and urgent voices (for instance, Rémy Barché staged debbie tucker green’s *Stoning Mary* [2015] and Arnaud Anckaert, Alice Birch’s *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* [2016]).

An overall survey reveals that, Pinter apart, Sarah Kane and Martin Crimp come first, at the top of the list: there are more than thirty-three Kane plays listed in the BNF database only over the past five years. When one looks at the programmes of (mainly state-funded) French theatres over the past ten years, one realises that some British writers are over present while others, although celebrated in the

UK and translated, find it hard to make it to the forefront of the French stage. Yet, the general impression is one of a powerfully asserted, even if irregular, presence of British theatre on the French stages. Whereas Mark Ravenhill, Dennis Kelly, and Simon Stephens² constitute a group of (very) often staged dramatists, David Harrower, David Greig, Jez Butterworth now have a confirmed reputation in France, while Nick Payne, Mike Bartlett, Tim Crouch, Alice Birch are powerfully emergent new voices. Even if more confidentially, debbie tucker green or Nick Gill, for instance, have aroused the interest of several stage directors while for some reason, leading dramatist Caryl Churchill, whose *Cloud Nine* and *Fens* were done by Paul Golub and Le Théâtre du Volcan bleu at La Cartoucherie some thirty years ago, announcing a luminous French career, had their work only partially promoted in France by directors who could afford taking chances (Peter Brook and *Far Away*, Ostermeier's reading of *This is a Chair*) or by (younger) stage directors who were brave and adamant enough in their commitment to try: Aurélie Van Den Daele with *Top Girls* in Paris, Catherine Hargreaves with *Un grand nombre (A Number)*, in Lyon, Rémy Barché with *Coeur Bleu (Blue Heart)*, in Reims, or, Guillaume Doucet with *Love and Information*, in Rennes, among others, were part of them.

Another striking phenomenon is that France has also been the place where a number of playwrights who were not or no longer produced in Britain were and still are celebrated. Of course, Edward Bond and to some extent, Howard Barker, are particular cases. Edward Bond's privileged relationship with Alain Françon at the time when Françon was at the head of Le Théâtre de la Colline, his partnership with Christian Benedetti and the Theatre-Studio of Alfortville for whom a number of his shorter plays were written and his historical friendship with Georges Bas and Jérôme Hankins as his translators and director for the latter gave the French audience prevalence over the British public to discover some of his most important plays: *The Colline Pentad* was explicitly written for Françon and the world creations of these plays occurred in France. *The Sea* was recently done at La Comédie-Française, also directed by Françon.

Another *mal-aimé* of the English stage, poorly treated at home in spite of flamboyant debuts, Howard Barker, has also made it more easily abroad than in his own country. Yet, for Barker, France was not an easy target and it needed the implication and commitment of audacious directors (Hélène Vincent, Jean-Paul Wenzel, Jerzy Klesyk), of very brave publishing houses – Les Editions Théâtrales and Les Solitaires intempestifs – to have him make his way to what was to be his French consecration: the Barker season at l’Odéon-Théâtre de l’Europe, programmed by Olivier Py in 2009, followed more recently by his *Und* with Nathalie Dessay staged by Jacques Vincey in Tours, Paris and all over France (2015-2017) and by Claudia Stavisky’s *Tableau d’une execution* (Lyon and Paris, 2016-2017).

One last figure of notorious outcast needs to be mentioned here: that of Gregory Motton, revealed by Claude Régy who staged *Chutes* (*Downfall*) (Théâtre Gérard Philippe St Denis, 1992) and *La Terrible voix de Satan* (TGP, 1994). Gregory Motton made his way to the Odéon (*Cat and Mouse [Sheep]*), la Comédie-Française - Vieux Colombier in 2004 (*Gengis chez les Pigmés*, dir. Thierry de Peretti)¹³ at a time when he had only been produced once in the past fifteen years in Britain in a theatre with more than ninety seats. In 2004, British critic Michael Billington noted Motton’s presence abroad, which he interpreted in the following manner: “Ignored in his native Britain, Gregory Motton is widely performed in France and, watching the premiere (at the Comédie-Française) of his latest piece, it is not difficult to see why. Motton studiously rejects naturalism and instead offers a comic-strip satire on capitalist consumerism in the style of Jarry, Ionesco or Vian. He is like an absurdist with Marxist tendencies” (Billington).

The list of the British plays done over the past ten years, in a small number of significant state-funded theatres in Paris and elsewhere in France may be helpful to understand the various reasons that account for the circulation of some texts rather than others. Over the past ten years, L’Odéon – Théâtre de l’Europe which had a British season as early as 1993-94, dedicated a whole cycle to Howard Barker (2008-

2009) and then welcomed the successful productions of Pinter's *Le Retour* (*The Homecoming*, directed by Luc Bondy in 2011-12), Warlikowski's *Phèdres* (montage of texts by Kane, Euripides, Seneca, Coetzee, in 2015-2016), and of ground-breaking Simon McBurney's *The Encounter* in 2017-2018.⁴ An even much bigger representation of contemporary British drama is to be found when considering the programmes of La Colline (whose vocation it is to stage contemporary voices), Théâtre de la Ville, le Théâtre des Célestins (Lyon), or La Comédie de Reims.

Théâtre National de La Colline

2001: Martin Crimp's *La Campagne* (*The Country*) / Luc Bondy

2008-2009: Crimp's *Face au mur* (*Fewer Emergencies*) / Hubert Colas

2010-2011: Simon Stephens's *Pornographie* / Laurent Gutmann

Dennis Kelly's *Occupe toi du bébé* (*Taking Care of Baby*) / Olivier Werner

2014-2015: Crimp's *La Ville* (*The City*) / Rémy Barché

along with various festivals (Festival Impatience; Festival des écoles publiques, etc.) ; Dennis Kelly's *DNA* or Caryl Churchill's *Coeur Bleu* (*Blue Heart*) / Barché or *Ceci est une chaise* (*This is a Chair*) / Julien Fisera

Théâtre de la Ville

2008-2009: Martin Crimp's *La Ville* / Paquien

David Harrower's *Blackbird* / Claudia Stavisky

2010-2011: Complicite's *Shun-Kin*

2011-2012: *Dr Seuss* / Katie Mitchell

2012-2013: Pinter's *Une petite douleur* (*A Slight Ache*) / Marie Louise Bischofberger

Crimp's *Tendre et Cruel* (*Cruel and Tender*) / Brigitte Jaques-Wajman

Mike Bartlett's *Contractions* / Mélanie Leray

2015-2016: Howard Barker's *Und* / Jacques Vincey

Comédie de Reims

2009-2010: Sarah Kane's *Manque* (*Crave*) / Simon Delétang

2012-2013: Crimp's *La Ville* / Rémy Barché

Crimp's *Play House* / Rémy Barché
 2013-2014: Crimp's *La Ville* / Rémy Barché
 2015-2016: Pinter's *L'Amant (The Lover)* / Rémy Barché
 Crimp's *Play House* / Rémy Barché
 debbie tucker green's *stoning mary (lapider marie)* / Rémy
 Barché
 2017-2018: Crimp's *Le traitement* / Rémy Barché
 2018-2019: Dennis Kelly's *Debris* / Le collectif du Corpus Urbain
 Pinter's *La Collection* / Ludovic Lagarde
 (John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* / Ian Burton, Robert Carsen)

Théâtre des Célestins (Lyon)

2009-2010: Anthony Neilson's *Le Monde merveilleux de Dissocia (The Wonderful World of Dissocia)* / Catherine Hargreaves
 David Harrower's *Blackbird* / Claudia Stavisky
 2012-2013: Pinter's *Une petite douleur (A Slight Ache)* / Marie Louise Bischofberger
 2013-2014: Howard Barker's *Innocence* / Association nÖjd and Howard Barker, Gerrard McArthur
 2014-2015: Pinter's *Dispersion (Ashes to Ashes)* / Gérard Desarthe
 2015-2016: Mark Ravenhill's *Piscine (pas d'eau) (Pool, No Water)* / Cécile Auxire-Marmouget
 2016-2017: Barker's *Tableau d'une exécution (Scenes From an Execution)* / Claudia Stavisky
 Barker's *Und* / Jacques Vincey
 David Greig's *Les Événements (The Events)* / Ramin Gray

This eminently partial survey, which says nothing of the commitment to new writing of so many fantastic other big and small places throughout France, nonetheless gives important information as to the visibility of certain playwrights. Looking at these data makes one wonder what is the mechanics at work in the circulation of these texts in state-funded theatres in France.

2. Why circulate these plays? What does this circulation reveal of their poetics?

The nature of the British plays translated into French and done in France reveals very different economic logics at work on both sides of the Channel. Whereas Gregory Motton's plays attracted the best French stage directors, Jez Butterworth's major success, *Jerusalem*, has not even been translated. What is there, then, in these contemporary British plays, that motivates the interest of stage directors, translators and agents? If audience response in the original country does not account for the choices made over here, the reasons have to be looked for in the poetics of the plays themselves. What is it, then, that the directors find there and that they cannot find in French theatre?

2.1. Poetic Motivations

To try and answer this question, I have interviewed several stage directors, among whom Rémy Barché, Christian Benedetti and Marc Paquien – and read quite a number of directors' comments on their choices when interviewed to speak of their productions and I will, in this article, try to synthesize them. Leaving aside the still much in favour traditional British humour, these poetic reasons fall into three sometimes overlapping categories: novelty of the approach, strength of the dramaturgy, capacity to address immediate contemporary issues.

The novelty of the approach is perhaps best exemplified by science-oriented plays, a thriving trend in Britain as brilliantly shown by Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, Liliane Campos and Solange Ayache, which has hardly any equivalent at all in France.⁵ These scientific plays or "epistemological comedies" (a kind of drama in which wit blends in with philosophy and with science [Campos: 336]) have aroused the interest of Catherine Hargreaves (Anthony Neilson's *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*), Arnaud Anckaert and Marc Paquien (Nick Payne's *Constellations*), and some time ago, of Philippe Adrien (Stoppard's *Arcadia*). The aim of these plays is to propose new metaphors to understand humanity: chaos mathematics and unpredictable determinism

in the case of *Arcadia*, superimposed states (“multiverses” vs universes) in the case of *Constellations*, for instance. Science allows for a new analytical prism and also contributes new structures to the plays themselves: the parallel universes of Nick Payne’s *Constellations* account for the rhapsodical, paratactic structure of the play; Simon Stephens’s *Maria* takes its cue from the Fibonacci sequence.

This new focus, therefore, does not only affect the themes of the plays but also renovates dramaturgy and strengthens the quality of the writing, two reasons that rank first in the reasons mentioned by my interviewees. Claudia Stavisky, when staging Howard Barker’s *Scenes from an Execution*, made this very clear: “this language is extraordinary: there’s no fat at all, it’s all muscles.”⁶ Christian Benedetti, as for him, celebrates Sarah Kane’s mastery of dramaturgy – “the last scene of *Blasted*, on the devastated stage,” says he, “encapsulates the entire history of theatre and of the Christian western world.”

Yet, more important than anything, is the capacity British plays have to address immediate contemporary issues. Laurent Gutmann, who created *Pornography* by Simon Stephens in France (La Colline 2010, in the trans. by Severine Magois) comments: “What I am interested in – and this is what French theatre doesn’t do much of – is the way British theatre brings in immediate history. In France I feel like an orphan in this respect. Why have we, in France, installed such a distance between the stage and the representation of the world? As if theatre was bound, in order to be theatrical, to introduce this distance between the stage and the world?”⁷

All these dramatists endorse their contemporaneity such as described by Agamben: “The contemporary is he/she/they who firmly hold(s) their gaze on their own time so as to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness. All eras, for those who experience contemporariness, are obscure. The contemporary is precisely the person who knows how to see this obscurity, who is able to write by dipping their pen in the obscurity of the present” (Agamben: 28). All these plays address urgent and immediate issues radically, frontally, often in a style that breaks free from realism while nevertheless maintaining concrete situ-

ations – and this is the tour de force. Edward Bond's plays for young audiences such as, for instance, Jérôme Hankins's *Le Bord* (*The Edge*) or Christian Benedetti's *Existence* are of this nature. Edward Bond's great cause is to create the conditions for our better understanding of what is going on in the world, and this is only possible through emotions and affect – precisely what theatre can create: emotions help us rationalize, Bond says. How can one get to address the contemporary issues of the world while not giving up the concreteness of the situation which is the guarantee of emotion? Probably by maintaining both the idea of a story and the necessity to reach out beyond it: Sarah Kane, Alice Birch, Debbie Tucker Green are dramatists who do not dismiss the “story” but who transcend anecdote to the benefit of a broader (more epic?) scope. These playwrights create a new drama, which subsumes the fictions they write. Their plays, therefore, propose a superimposition of the intimate and of the historical and this is of much interest to a number of French stage directors.

For instance, Hubert Colas, who directed plays by Sarah Kane and Martin Crimp, said he wanted to direct *Cleansed* of course because of the challenge it represents but above all because: “there was something in her (Kane) that was being abused by what was/is happening in the world and that she was expressing in her writing, that she was expressing from where she was, that is to say England, and from this difficulty to live, from the ambivalence (her being in two places at once) she was experiencing and from the confrontation of this ambivalence with a society that seeks standardization at all costs.” (Colas: 38) Indeed, Kane's drama is both intimate and historical. Kane constructs a subject-world for herself, for ‘hermself’, maybe for hermselves: “– I gassed the Jews, I killed the Kurds, I bombed the Arabs, I fucked small children while they begged for mercy...”, her character says in *4:48 Psychosis* (Kane: 25); in her plays, the character's body becomes the *locus* of the intimate and of the historical or of the collective, somehow radicalizing what was already at stake, although in a different way, in Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*. In the latter, Rebecca tells of her own intimate history as metaphorizing and epitomizing the barbarity of the Shoah.

To synthesize, let us say that what deeply crystallizes the French directors' interest in contemporary British drama is its demanding and challenging dramaturgy and its radical political commitment.⁸ The sense of urgency which animates it prompts new theatrical and poetic forms to shock us awake and make us aware of the emergency. British theatre emerges as a sort of theatre that compels you to take your stand in the world. This political radicalism – what Bond calls “the reason for theatre” – urges the plays to embrace, endorse, address the issues of the world at large thus contributing to reinvigorating the community of humans we are part of.⁹

2.2. *Shared traumas*

In spite of Brexit, one of the intrinsic qualities of contemporary British theatre lies in its capacity to import other countries' concerns and traumas, and particularly historical traumas, onto its own stage. I will suggest that this capacity to elaborate British stories on traumas taking place elsewhere predisposes it to being, in its turn, circulated. This section will concentrate on a sample of plays that made an impact in France and that reveal a predisposition to give the community access to situations originating elsewhere.

Of course, Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (*Anéantis*) does just that. The play premiered in Louis-Do de Lencquesaing's production at Théâtre National de la Colline, before it was done over and over again, and most noticeably by Christian Benedetti at Théâtre Studio of Alfortville, or by Daniel Jeanneteau and Thomas Ostermeier (Avignon and Schaubühne), while in Belgium Yves Bombay was doing it just after the Marc Dutroux criminal case. The play, as is well known, relocates Srebrenica in Leeds, and beyond Leeds, reconstructs Srebrenica as an emblem of War, since Kane blotted out the reference to this particular war when she decided to replace the Soldier's name, originally named Vladek, by the generic SOLDIER. Therefore, Srebrenica as the metonymy for war is relocated in a luxurious international hotel room which could be anywhere in the western world. Similarly, Pinter relocates the Shoah in London with *Ashes to Ashes*, which has been staged

in France several times since its creation, in 1998, by Pinter himself with Christine Boisson and Lambert Wilson at the Théâtre du Rond Point in Paris.¹⁰ Crimp situates his *Cruel and Tender* and the Iraqi /Second Gulf War (2003) context in one of these “nonplaces” that Marc Augé theorizes (Augé; Schaaf 2016): “a temporary home close to an international airport.” This “nonplace” allows for an essentialization of what is at stake in invasion and terror independently from the geographical-political-social chronotope of the play. This is, of course, made all the more possible thanks to the Greek hypotext as the play is a rewriting of Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*. The play was created by Luc Bondy in London and Paris and then done in French in the wonderful production of Brigitte Jaques-Wajman (2013, precisely at the time of the operation Serval in Mali and at the time of Opération Sangaris in the Central African Republic). The same Crimp imports Iraq into smug Suburbia in his very cynical *Advice to Iraqi Women* (Royal Court, 2003), done in France by Hubert Colas. The opening of a shared traumatic stage is also what animates David Greig’s *The Events*, for instance, created in France by Ramin Gray (Théâtre de la Manufacture, festival Ring 2016, trans. Dominique Hollier) which transplants Norwegian Anders Breivik’s 2011 slaughter into a different community every night. Each night, a local non-professional choir is assembled and placed under the direction of fictional Reverend Claire and a member of the choir is, at the last minute, given information that they are the ones who perpetrate the attack. Greig explains: “I wanted the audience to watch the choir watching and experiencing the play – part of the play is the experience of watching the choir be affected” (Griffiths; Schaaf 2018).

Simon Stephens’s post-July 2005 *Pornography* (Edinburgh, then Birmingham Rep.) created in France by Laurent Gutmann, (La Colline, trans. Séverine Magois), addressed the London bombings by developing a particular poetics which consists in obliterating the monstration or even the narrative of the trauma. The play, on the contrary, concentrates on different kinds of more or less ordinary people who all, but to various degrees, committed a transgression. The only reference to the bombings comes in the shape of a random list of victims

– an intrusion of the real in the fiction – whose names are spelled out at some stage during the play. This traumatic aesthetics – *troumatic*, as Lacan puts it (etymologically, trauma, means ‘wound’), pierces holes (*trou*) in the fabric of life –, while speaking of Britain, also speaks of people belonging to all societies in which terror is developing. Being entirely constructed around an absent centre and an ellipsis, *Pornography* is easily transportable. Not only are the 2005 London bombings addressed, but also the Charlie Hebdo 7/1 attack or the Bataclan slaughter 13 November 2015 in Paris, or the Molenbeek events in Brussels 22 March 2016, or Barcelona in 2017.

The circulation of traumas in these terror-based plays does not obliterate their specificity but addresses every one of us and allows for an ethical engagement from all. The presence of somehow dis-identified subjects makes them both capable of addressing contemporary topical urgency, and eligible for the community of humans we are. This is very clear in debbie tucker green’s perhaps even more destabilizing and deterritorialized plays with their decentered subjects. The aids infected patient, child-soldier or stoned woman, in *stoning mary* (trans. by Emmanuel Gaillot, Blandine Pelissier and Kelly Rivière), created in Reims by Rémy Barché are enacted by white actors/tresses: “The play is set in the country it is performed in. / All characters are white.” (tucker green: 2), the note on the text says, even though they share the same often ethnicized diction.

As a matter of fact, apart from *stoning mary* and *born bad*, debbie tucker green’s plays have not yet been translated, not because of a lack of interest on the side of French directors, but because of the author’s resistance to be translated when she does not exactly know who the translators are, and what position of enunciation they have. In her plays, this circulation between black personae and white voices or vice versa, allows for the circulation of responsibility and points, as shown by Lynette Goddard, to the impassivity of the occidental world (Goddard: 183). Not only do they foreground an example of post-imperial “vision of colonial violence and disorder spreading back to the met-

ropolitan center” (Poore: 61), but, through a transnational, liquid approach, they also promote an ethical encounter with the other.

With these plays that welcome the trauma of the others, an un-essentialist, fluid subject (Bauman: 2) is being composed which has more to do with cosmopolitanism than with universalism. If, as Mark Ravenhill points out in his Preface to Dan Rebellato’s *Theatre and Globalization*, “universal” often means imperialist... “cosmopolitanism” such as theorized and foregrounded by Rebellato is very convincing and helpful as a counter-discourse to either universalism and globalization (Rebellato: 67 sq.) to characterize the British stage. I would claim that British theatre produces another kind of space, in which the epic, the mental and the historical come together, another kind of space – some sort of “traumatopia,” the opposite of the re-Britishizing plays of the moment,¹¹ reinvigorating the community around a work which is therefore always in the making and always resistant to completion. This community, reorganized around a work perpetually uncompleted and in the making (see *The Events*), promotes the “inoperative community” that Jean-Luc Nancy has in mind. The inoperative community is elaborated around the idea that a community should be founded not on a project but on an ontology. Nancy always rejected the idea of a community founded on the completion of a work as an impassable horizon and preferred the idea of “désœuvrement” (“in-operability”), i.e. the work in its perpetual incompleteness (Nancy; Aubert). This community around the never-ending and never to end work is what guarantees the being *with* and not only the being *for* or the being *in*, a space that speaks *with* all and not only *for* or *to* all: a traumatopia easily translatable or transportable and never completed.

This tendency to circulate issues and situations, and therefore to be circulated, points to the capacity these plays have to open meaning. This anti-essentialist vision of the subject promotes some kind of placelessness which is also eminently present in language: to vocalize the words of the other almost means that language contains the possibility of its own translation.

3. The “Devenir-French” of the play

The last section of this article concerns language in its fluidity, in its “liquidity”, in its openness, in its transposability. The paradox of these British plays is that they simultaneously sound very British (accent, rhythm, slang – “tip that wog”, says Kane’s Ian in *Blasted* –) and nevertheless are structurally ready to accept the other within themselves. This textual welcoming of the other, and maybe this textual “hermaphroditism,” to use Claude Régy’s expression, allows for the advent of an increased and more intense space of encounter.

3.1. “Linguistic hermaphroditism”

In an interview he gave Gwenola David, when asked why he directed so many foreign plays in translation, Claude Régy made this inspiring statement: “I finally realised that my taste for foreign plays was not due to mere chance, but that I loved to find myself in this ‘linguistic hermaphroditism’, in other words, I loved to situate myself in between two languages, neither totally in(side) one language nor totally in(side) the other” (David).

In parallel, playwright Mark Ravenhill confesses:

I’m fascinated by the way a work mutates and is reborn through translation and re-production. I think, now, when I make a piece of theatre there is always the **concrete**; that is the beginning: how **this** particular actor with **this** particular audience can use **this** word or **this** gesture to better capture the sense of being alive at **this** moment in **this** city in **this** culture. But there is also **the resonant**. And this resonant is for me: I wonder what this will mean in other countries and cultures? (Rebellato, xiii-xiv)

Opting not for a play in its original version with subtitles, not for an “adaptation”, nor for a “tradaptation” but for a “translation”, has somehow come to mean that there is a palimpsestuous urge to feature the original identity of the play along with its newly gained French identity. We have known, ever since Claude Régy made it so brilliantly obvious, that what is at stake in translation is the opening of “a virgin space” which is so much more than the text. I will argue that translated plays allow for the original to expand and acquire an “extra

amount of being". This is what is at stake in their "devenir French"¹² which means, and I am quoting from Deleuze and Guattari's *One Thousand Plateaus*, "–with the shape one already has, with the subject one is, with the organs one has with the functions one fulfils–, to try and extract particles whose movements we make as close as possible to the thing we are becoming and thanks to which we are becoming this thing" (Deleuze and Guattari: 334).

All good translation inscribes the text in this process of becoming and makes it clear that, as Deleuze and Guattari explain, all "becoming" is of a "molecular" nature: the good translation should escape being a molar entity (a French text as opposed to an English text) so as to constitute a molecular entity, thus creating a space of hybridization which re-authorizes the text. Hence translations allow the text to prosper and augment its depth by one extra layer so to speak.

Claude Régy, in the already mentioned interview he gave Jérôme Hankins, about David Harrower's *Knives in Hens*, points to the difficulty there is to translate – not the words themselves – but the immensity of what is not written. He insists on the necessity to create a language in between the target language and the source language, a gaping language, a frontierless language, which opens a chasm of possibilities for the actors and readers: "This liberates, Régy says, the presence of a life yet to be written at the heart of the writing" (Régy and Hankins).¹³

I would suggest that this is an added richness which is not only due to the linguistic conjuncture (that is the sedimented history of those who speak a language, their "conception of the world", in Gramsci's words [Lecerle: 100]) but to the fact that, according to Régy, there is an "unconscious of the text" that pleads for an "ideal tongue" to be headed towards even if it is never to be spoken (Régy and Hankins).

Where Ravenhill conceives of a "resonance", Régy of a "virgin space", Barthes offers the very useful concept of "signifiance", translated by Richard Miller in *The Pleasure of the Text* by "significance". "Significance" is half way between semiotics and phenomenology: "What is significance? It is meaning in so far as *it is sensually produced*"

(Barthes: 97).¹⁴ Eliane Escoubas, in an article dedicated to Barthes as a phenomenologist, describes significance as “overbrimming the intended meaning”, as “a third level, on top of the signifier and of the signified” (Escoubas: 108).

To explore the relevance of this concept and analyse the “devenir French” of the text, let us consider Christophe Pellet’s translation of Martin Crimp’s *Attempts on Her Life*. Contrary to Kane’s preferred “neuter”, difficult to maintain in gendered languages, which foregrounds her quest for the plenitude of androgyny,¹⁵ Crimp’s obliteration of Anne as a woman – which is the main topic of the play – is made particularly perceptible in French. What I would like to contend is that Crimp in translation is augmented by the sensuous presence of Anne’s absence.

In the play, as we know, Anne is continuously reified and commodified. She is constantly decategorized by the metaphorical regime – much stronger than the comparative regime – (Anne is a woman/ Anne is a cigarette/ Ann is a TV set) and indistinctly compared to human and non-human referents: “She’s a terrorist threat/She’s a mother of three/She’s a cheap cigarette/ She is Ecstasy” (Crimp 1996: 59); elsewhere Ann is a fast-running “car”, the “New Anny”... “The New Anny” – in French ‘**une** voiture’ therefore – “comes with electric windows as standard” (scenario 7, Crimp 1996 : 30) – des « vitres électriques » (feminine, again). In French, Crimp’s stage is almost systematically feminized: “une machine de guerre, une menace terroriste, une cigarette sans filtre, une pillule d’ecstasy, une lame tranchante” (Crimp 2002: 183). All the words in the French version are feminine, although not all of them are feminine in other Latin tongues: in Spanish, for instance, in Rafael Spregerburd’s translation (that I could read thanks to Clara Escoda), a cheap cigarette is “*un cigarillo barato*” and “the edge of a knife” (“une lame tranchante” in French) is “*el filo del cuchillo*” which masculinizes Ann precisely on two somehow phallic objects. The absent woman, the missing female, Anne, is never to be seen, but in the French version, her “being female” somehow resists and invades and shapes out everything around her, as if the whole ob-

jectal world around us, marked by HER absence, was somehow cognitively recategorized as feminine because used to predicate HER. Interestingly enough, the words Martin Crimp comes up with in English, out of a cognitive process of recategorization prompted by Anne as a MISSING FEMALE, so as to implicitly or analogically denote HER, become explicitly feminine in French.¹⁶

This is an example of the clandestine activity of the lexis, this extra-amount of being I want to elucidate. Christophe Pellet's translation tries to say what is not written but only sensed as being present, the "signifiante" of language, what overbrims the word in its acceptance: "À partir de l'en-deçà du texte, faire entendre l'au-delà du texte.", Régy says in his interview with Jérôme Hankins (Régy and Hankins).

A slightly different but not less interesting vision of Ann emerges from the Spanish version with its well-chosen occurrences of the masculine. We could argue that Crimp's stage "becomes" feminine as it becomes French: the Deleuzian concept is particularly helpful here in that it shows that the "becoming-woman" "*le devenir-femme*" of Martin Crimp's text – is not concerned with imitating what a woman is as an entity (what Deleuze and Guattari call "molar") but with producing "micro-particles" of femininity, "atoms of femininity" capable of shaping out and of impregnating the social/objectal field, and of producing a "molecular" woman in the virgin space of the translation (Deleuze and Guattari : 338).

To a certain extent, Crimp's text pleads for a "metamorphic" translation such as theorized by Bracha Ettinger and Carolyn Shread (Ettinger 1992; Shread 1999), i.e. a translation consisting in bringing out the marginal or prevented voices concealed within the text. One cannot not notice the feminized soundscape perhaps unconsciously conceived or experienced by Crimp and his gendered use of the however neutral English words (on gendered words, see Sardin).

Paradoxically, while Brexiteers would tend to make us adhere to the idea of a reinforced identity politics in Britain, British theatre proves eminently circulation-prone and as if shaped by an inbuilt sense of "resonance". Stage directors, translators, agents, publishers who are

committed to promoting this circulation have unmistakably sensed this.

The radicality of British texts, both in politics or in dramaturgy, along with their capacity to open an ethical space which keeps re-founding the community account for their intense circulation. The “becoming-French” of the playtext, its molecular transformation which is never completed makes it clear that, just as the staging is always engraved in ephemerality, the play-script appropriated by a French director and in French invites us to re-think about the concept of closure in a different manner. At the end of his already much cited here interview, Régy quotes Levinas who speaks of “an aptitude that the human speech has which consists in overbrimming the intentions that shape it”. British theatre does just that. When translated, it does it even more.

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² Ravenhill’s *Shopping and F***ing*, *Some Explicit Polaroids*, *Handbag*, *Pool (No Water)* were very often done ; Simon Stephens’s *Pornography* (trans. Severine Magois, dir. Laurent Gutman), (trans. Severine Magois, dir. Claire Devers) or Harper Regan (trans. Dominique Hollier, dir. Lukas Hemleb) were very successful.

³ *Chutes* was presented at the TGP, Saint-Denis, in 1992, directed by Claude Régy (TGP, Saint-Denis, 1992). *Ambulance*, by Antoine Caubet (Dijon, 1994, and TGP, 1995). *Reviens à toi (encore)*, by Éric Vigner (Albi and Théâtre de l’Odéon, 1994). *La Terrible Voix de Satan*, by Claude Régy (TGP, 1994). *Chick-*

en, by Henri Bornstein (Bayonne, 1996). *Loué soit le progrès*, was created by Lukas Hemleb (Odéon - La Cabane, 1999). *Chat et souris (moutons)*, directed by Gregory Motton et Ramin Gray was created in French at the Théâtre de Gennevilliers en 1999. *La Terrible Voix de Satan* and *Chutes*, by Olivier Maurin, (Oullins, Lyon, 1995 – 1996) ; *L'Île de Dieu*, by Catherine Marnas (Marseille, 2000). *Un message pour les cœurs brisés*, by Frédéric Béliet-Garcia (Théâtre de la Tempête, 2001). *Gengis parmi les Pygmées*, by Thierry de Peretti (Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, 2004). *Des Vacances au soleil*, Festival de la Mousson d'été, broadcast on France Culture en 2007.

⁴ <http://www.theatre-odeon.eu/fr/mediatheque-et-archives#programmes>

⁵ with the notable exception of Le Théâtre de la Reine Blanche in Paris, run by a physicist, and entirely dedicated to science-oriented plays (those of Jean-François Peyret, Alain Prochiantz, for instance).

⁶ *La Terrasse*, 25 oct. 2016, n° 248.

⁷ <https://www.telerama.fr/scenes/lever-de-rideau-5-laurent-gutmann-monte-pornographie,63484.php>

⁸ Christian Benedetti insists on Britain's specificity, compared to other European countries: "they had Thatcher! Thatcher's social violence necessitated radical plays: writers have been obliged to struggle so that theatre could remain this place which allows for the other political spaces to exist – theatre guarantees democracy" (interview with the author, sept. 2018).

⁹ When asked what is "the reason for theatre" (Bond's terminology)? Laurent Gutmann answers: "to alleviate one's solitude. One starts directing plays to alleviate one's own solitude and then one goes on because one understands that this motivation is also the spectator's" <https://www.telerama.fr/scenes/lever-de-rideau-5-laurent-gutmann-monte-pornographie,63484.php>

¹⁰ The play has been recently revived under another title – *Dispersion* – at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, Gérard Desarthe, 2014, precisely in a growing context of anti-Semitism in France.

¹¹ *Brexit Shorts: Drama from a Divided Nation* (2017) or Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy's near verbatim *My Country: a Work in Progress* (National Theatre, 2017).

¹² I like the explicit hybridity of the phrase and therefore decided to keep "devenir" instead of the too monolithically British "becoming-French".

¹³ "Et il s'agit bien de faire naître une sorte de langue intermédiaire qui n'est pas tout à fait la langue d'arrivée telle qu'elle se pratiquerait si elle était autonome – et qui n'est plus non plus tout à fait la langue de départ. Une langue intermédiaire entre la langue de départ et la langue d'arrivée. Une langue béante, une langue sans frontières, qui ouvre beaucoup de possibilités au jeu des acteurs,

mais, me semble-t-il, aussi également au lecteur. Cela libère la présence dans l'écriture d'une vie qui n'est pas écrite" (Régy and Hankins).

¹⁴ "Qu'est-ce que la signifiance ? C'est le sens *en ce qu'il est produit sensuellement*" (Barthes: 97).

¹⁵ Gendered languages make it difficult to maintain the ambiguities of the neuter which is so important for Sarah Kane. "Neutraliser l'identité sexuelle, ce n'est pas construire une rhétorique de l'exclusion (le narrateur ne serait ni un homme ni une femme) mais une dynamique fondée sur l'oscillation (le narrateur évoque parfois un homme, parfois une femme) " (Fort: 78).

¹⁶ Pierre Cotte suggests that grammatical gender reflects the categorizing tendency of the mind (Cotte 1999: 55). Elise Mignot elaborates: "In [Cotte's] view, gender is metalinguistic, i.e. expresses (in an abstract way) what nouns do" (Mignot 2012: 39-61).

Maltese Audiences and Theatre in English – choice and controversy

Vicki Ann CREMONA

Abstract: Anglophone theatre is spread across the world, mainly due to Britain's colonial past and the global diffusion of the English language. Although Malta achieved independence from Britain in 1964, plays in English, generally by English authors, continue to dominate the Maltese stage. This essay traces the development of theatre in the English language in Malta, giving a brief overview of its growth under colonial rule, and presenting its current state. It distinguishes between English theatre, that is, theatre written by British or American playwrights, and theatre in English which is written or devised by Maltese authors and actors. It discusses efforts towards more professionalism, given that theatre in Malta is mostly amateur, except for some semi-professional companies. It shows how the choice of English theatre in Malta has often depended heavily on two main characteristics: success in the West End, or the polemical quality of the subjects dealt with giving rise to public discussion, also due to Maltese cultural characteristics and religious choices. It examines the choice of Anglophone authors on the Maltese stages, and the reasons for their selection, as well as any influence they may have exerted on local writers. It shows how English-language theatre was initially the expression of colonial power, and how progressively, it was used to express Maltese political dissent, and exploited to fight for freedom of expression in the theatre, and the abolition of censorship.

As in many other countries under the rule of empire, theatre productions in English started out as a colonial phenomenon, after Malta became a British colony in 1800. The islands obtained their independence in 1964 and became a republic ten years later. Very little has been written about theatre in Malta in general, and even less about English

theatre on the islands. The place and importance of theatre in English in the Maltese contemporary scene can be better grasped if it is placed against the historical evolution of theatre on the islands. This article presents a first effort to trace the development of theatre in English in Malta and presents the research that has been carried out up to now, which is derived mostly from newspaper articles commenting on performances, companies or theatres. It will show how English-language theatre was initially the expression of colonial power, providing entertainment mainly for British troops stationed in Malta. It will discuss the formation of Maltese theatre troupes acting in English, and show how progressively, theatre in English was used to express Maltese political dissent, and later exploited to fight for freedom of expression in the theatre. It shall distinguish between English theatre, that is, theatre written by British or American playwrights, and theatre in English that is written or devised by Maltese authors and actors.

Before the arrival of the British, theatre productions on the islands of Malta and Gozo were generally staged in Italian, and this tradition continued well into the twentieth century. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, performances in the Maltese language also started to appear (Cremona 2014: 131). The first recorded play in Maltese, a melodrama entitled *Caterina, ix-Xbejba ta' l-Irdum* (Caterina, the Maiden of the Cliffs), by Luigi Rosato (1795-1872), was staged in 1838 (Galea 1997: viii) and this trend started to spread across the two islands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The performance took place in a public theatre, today known as Teatru Manoel,¹ which had been built in 1732 in the capital, Valletta, by the ruling Order of St John of Jerusalem (known as the Order of Malta). In 1861, the British ordered the building of a Royal Opera House, despite Maltese disapproval (TNA 193, 1861). This was paid out of Maltese coffers and was intended to provide a larger space to entertain the British troops and subjects stationed in Malta. It was first inaugurated in 1866 and rebuilt five years after it burnt down in 1873, only to be bombed in 1942. Whereas professional companies were – and still are – brought over from abroad, all local theatre companies in

Malta are amateur, although there is a marked drive towards greater professionalism both in acting and staging.

From Theatre for the Troops to General Public Entertainment

At the dawn of the twentieth century, although Malta had been under British domination for a hundred years, theatre in English in the Maltese islands was not as flourishing as one would expect. While the Maltese bourgeois classes frequented the theatre mainly to watch opera,² the British stationed in Malta created amateur companies to stage English-language performances intended to entertain their comrades, British military and naval personnel, and their families. Various companies sprang up, with the participation of both British men and women (Xuereb 2010: 34). English theatre and entertainment companies were also brought over for the troops' amusement and provided distraction both for the British residents and the Maltese. Perhaps the most renowned of these was the Bandmann Repertoire Company (Balme 2015), which visited Malta in 1901 during a tour of the British colonies, travelling as far as India (DMC 2 January 1901: 2). Through a phenomenon of acculturation, Maltese dramatic companies, inspired by the British initiatives, as well as by the Italian "Risorgimentisti" exiles who sought refuge in Malta, also started developing their own dramatic companies, producing performances in Italian or Maltese (Galea 2010: 12).

The major theatre buildings were managed by Italian or Maltese impresarios, however, new private spaces of performance started to appear. Theatre in English was also staged in various places including private houses and the naval canteen, which was periodically transformed into a theatre to entertain the troops. Although at the time, the British and Maltese amateur actors never mixed, British and Maltese spectators started mingling more and more in the theatrical venues, giving rise to new inspiration in manners, dress, and theatre forms.

The last twenty years of the nineteenth century were rather tumultuous ones and were very much linked to what became known as the "Language Question", that is, the primacy of Italian, which was the

official language of administration and the courts, or English, the language of the colonialists, and which the British wanted to impose instead of Italian. Maltese was still considered a dialect spoken by the lower classes, until its status as a language was officially recognised in 1932. The Language Question became closely linked to the insistent demand of the Maltese for self-government, and it was on this political basis that it was fought. However, it meant that a whole section of the public stayed away from attending performances in English, either because they did not understand the language, or because they did not want to learn it or be associated with anything English in any way. Moreover, apart from a handful of persons appearing in chorus numbers, the first time any proper speaking part was given to Maltese actors in an English play was in 1949, when an upper middle-class Maltese couple, Victor and Marguerite Mercieca, were given important speaking parts in the play *The Chiltern Hundreds* by William Douglas Home (Mompalao de Piro 1985:47).

Both before and after World War II theatre audiences, who were used to opera and operetta, enjoyed British works such as *Captain Reece of the Mantelpiece* by Robert Marshall, first produced in 1914, or those by Gilbert and Sullivan, as well as “Reviews” which included various popular British songs. American musicals, particularly those by Rogers and Hammerstein, were later introduced on the Maltese stage,³ but were already well known through cinema. English plays, particularly those by authors such as Noel Coward, Ben Travers, and A. A. Milne were frequently staged, some only a few years after having been staged in the UK. This was the case, for example, of Terence Rattigan’s *French without Tears*, performed in 1940, only four years after it premiered at the Criterion Theatre, London. British entertainers, such as the actor and comedian George Formby, came to Malta during the war (TOM 3 September 1943: 4).

Theatre in English took a new impetus just after the war also thanks to the launch of drama festivals. The first festival, composed of one-act plays, was organised in 1945 by an Irishman, James Allen, who belonged to the Malta Unit of the Christian Movement Toc H⁴. Al-

though the majority of actors in a company had to be composed of British service personnel, the groups were allowed to “supplement their casts with civilians” (TOM 23 October 1944: 3). The festival took place in the Command Hall of the British troops from Monday 11 to Saturday 16 February 1946 (TOM 9 February 1946: 5) with three one-act plays every night, and the best three re-staged on Saturday. The companies could not use scenery or backdrops, though props were allowed. An English professional, Miss Frances Mackenzie, from the British Drama League, was the final adjudicator (TOM 11 February 1946: 5). Although Toc H sponsored the third Festival, which was launched on 17 February 1947, responsibility for its organisation fell to the Malta Drama League, which had been founded in March 1946 and was affiliated to the British Drama League (TOM, 23 March 1946: 5). It allowed both English and Maltese dramatic companies to participate, as well as combined Anglo-Maltese groups (Schranz, Cremona 2000: 585).⁵ Maltese spectators were allowed to enter the Command Hall to watch the performances (TOM 14 December 1946: 5).

English Theatre in Malta after Independence

Malta achieved independence from Britain in 1964, but the production of plays in English did not dwindle. Malta’s oldest theatre company, the Malta Amateur Dramatic Club, founded in 1910 and better known as MADC, had formerly only allowed British citizens to perform in the plays it produced. After independence, it started accepting more Maltese into its acting ranks, following the advice of Lord Louis Mountbatten (Mompalao de Piro 1985: 66). However, it was only in the 1970s that the company committee and the bulk of the actors were mostly made up of Maltese (Galea 2017: xvi). The company is known traditionally for two annual performances: a play by Shakespeare, and a Christmas pantomime. Since 1951, MADC has staged a Shakespeare play every summer in the grounds of the President’s (formerly Governor’s) summer residence at San Anton Palace, in Balzan.⁶ Initially, this was the only annual performance where

Maltese had some speaking parts. The company produced its first pantomime, *Aladdin*, in 1911 (Mompalao de Piro 1985: 113) but the tradition of the Christmas Pantomime was only developed later by the Ariel Players, a company that was made up of members from the Royal Air Force. In 1978, the Ariel Players was disbanded due to the withdrawal of the British forces from Malta. The MADC took over the pantomime tradition and was the sole company to produce this type of Christmas entertainment until 2008 (MI, 20 June 2008).

Today there is a choice of pantomimes, both in English and Maltese, and they attract the largest audiences, and consequently the greatest revenue, for the companies who stage them. For this reason, there is stiff competition among the various companies to attract the public to their shows. The scripts are penned by Maltese authors, and though the characters are generally taken from fairy tales, the plot also deals with very Maltese topics, especially hot political issues. Christmas 2018 saw the launch of a new kind of pantomime, called “Pantomime in the Dark”. The performance, in English, took a Maltese mythical bogeyman, “GawGaw” as its subject. It took place in pitch darkness. The audience was asked to put on headphones and made to touch different textures and experience a variety of smells. Endorsed by the President of Malta, its stated aim was to “focus on the inclusion and involvement of the visually impaired, because Panto is everyone’s to enjoy” (MT, 5 December 2018)⁷.

The fact of allowing more Maltese into a company that was initially restricted to British actors meant that the MADC became the springboard for many local actors and directors, some of whom were to rise to great prominence on the Maltese scene. In particular, Francis Ebejer (1925-1993), perhaps the most famous playwright and director in Malta to date, directed his first English play, *Marching Song* by John Whiting in May 1963, with an all-English cast (Mompalao de Piro 1985: 64) – one month before the author’s death and ten years after its first production. The play, which deals with the nature of violence and of personal responsibility, has been defined as “anti-melodramatic” and as being written in a “spare style” (Trussler 1966: 146). It was

certainly appreciated by Ebejer, who in 1961 had won first prize for his *Vaganzi tas-Saif* [Summer Holidays] in a competition organised by the Manoel Theatre, which had become Malta's most prestigious theatre. This play was staged by another company, Maleth which, at the time, only staged plays in Maltese, and only started producing plays in English in 2000 (Galea 2017: xvii). Ebejer, who wrote plays both in Maltese and in English, was highly influenced by the Theatre of the Absurd, in particular by Samuel Beckett, and his play *Boulevard*, produced in 1964, has echoes of *Waiting for Godot* and Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Three years later, he tried his hand at directing a musical, *The Boyfriend*, by Sandy Wilson, first performed in London in 1954. In 1971, the play was turned into a film starring Twiggy and directed by Ken Russell. The high standards set by Ebejer in theatre direction were to become one of his hallmarks. The MADC did not present any plays in Maltese before 1969, when it staged *Ir-Raheb*, written by Erin Serracino Inglott and directed by then upcoming Lino Farrugia.

Another important company producing plays in English was the British Institute Players, a drama company founded in 1944 by Major Cathcart Bruce and made up of both English and Maltese amateur actors. The company was run by the British Council and enlisted the services of British professionals to help train actors (Farrugia 2002: 40). Ethel Farrugia, who at the time was working for the British Council, was responsible for organising a course in professional drama which led to the opening of the first theatre school in 1977: the Manoel Theatre School of Dramatic Art (MTADA).

Comedy and thrillers featured predominantly in theatre programmes in the sixties. Noel Coward, and later Neil Simon, as well as George Bernard Shaw's *Plays Pleasant* often appeared in the programmes. British touring companies acquainted the Maltese public with a range of plays, from comedies by William Douglas Home, to more reflective plays such as *The Edwardians* by Vita Sackville West, Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne, or Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. These new trends in-

fluenced Maltese choices: MADC produced Pinter's *The Caretaker* in 1969, nine years after it premiered in Britain (Mompalao de Piro 1985: 119). The choice of using young directors was to prove decisive as they brought about considerable change in the choice of texts and direction. Moreover, British influence also opened Maltese theatre up to new international theatrical developments. The presence in Malta of British authors such as Nigel Dennis and his wife Beatrice contributed to renewing acting methods. Peggy Ash, the wife of the British Consul who had spent time in Poland, introduced the new training methods of upcoming international directors such as Jerzy Grotowski, which led to the founding of the group Teatru Workshop. The work of one director in particular, John Schranz, was to influence the creation of a number of small companies working on physical theatre in the early 1990s.

Theatre and Protest

In the 1970s and 80s, with the rise of the Malta Labour Party to government and its anti-colonial policies, Maltese language and identity were deliberately emphasised to the detriment of English. Consequently, although English plays continued to be performed at the Manoel Theatre and elsewhere, the production of Maltese plays within this main theatre increased. Interestingly though, many new companies sprang up, producing plays in English that had never been shown to Maltese audiences, and new theatre spaces were found or adapted. Comedies, particularly by Alan Ayckbourn or Neil Simon, were popular choices. Moreover, the Maltese discovered various authors through new, young directors who were determined to propose alternative texts, such as Max Frisch's *The Fireraisers* or Maurice McLoughlin's *A Letter From the General*, or American texts, such as Arthur Miller's *View from the Bridge*, and in 1978, a memorable production of *The Crucible*. In 1979, a new, semi-professional repertory company opened its doors. This was the Atturi Theatre Group, led by Karmen Azzopardi, who was considered one of Malta's finest actresses. The company, performing both in English and Maltese (original

texts as well as translations) managed to attract a niche audience that became loyal to it because of the quality and versatility of its performances, which tackled new themes. It introduced many modern British playwrights to Malta in a new theatre space, lodged within a purpose-built playhouse situated inside the ballroom of a luxury hotel, the Phoenicia Hotel, on the outskirts of Valletta. It produced plays that had recently appeared on the London stages, from comedies such as Alistair Foot and Anthony Marriott's *No Sex Please, We're British* in 1974, three years after it was launched in London, to more serious ones such as the Pulitzer Prize winning: *The Subject Was Roses*, by Frank Gilroy, or Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. Other companies began to imitate Atturi's repertoire: MADC staged plays such as *Butterflies are Free* by Leonard Gershe, which it actually managed to take to Solihull in the UK. One of Malta's main theatre critics, Paul Xuereb, stated that "the weaknesses of the production are due mainly to the performers" (Galea 2017: 73), a recurrent problem when theatre can only rely on amateurs.

The political situation in Malta in the 1980s was very tense as a large proportion of the population protested against a government that stayed in power mainly due to gerrymandering.⁸ A new type of theatre for the Maltese public, expressing political questioning and dissent, began to develop. Newly-founded, as well as older companies used theatre to probe, challenge and even condemn the then current state of affairs. The most important of the new companies was certainly Ateatru, a dynamic group of young people who created a sort of theatrical organisation that encouraged actors and directors to stage works that had never been seen in Malta before, providing a minimum of financial aid to help them develop their productions. This group staged original works in Maltese and English. Plays which dealt with political themes, such as Howard Brenton's *Hitler Dances*, or those raising social issues, such as *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* by Peter Nichols – which deals with a couple's acceptance of a child with cerebral palsy – were preferred. Ateatru also began to translate into Maltese English authors, such as Harold Pinter, as well as non-English playwrights – such as Dario Fo, Jean Genet, Fernando Arrabal or Ber-

tolt Brecht – whose style influenced Maltese playwrights such as Alfred Buttigieg. Ateatru was accused of being an “anti-socialist” group by the Labour newspaper *Weekend Chronicle* because of its choice of plays that contained subversive elements (4 April 1987).

In 1987, the Nationalist Party won the elections. The change in government helped to release much of the social tension that had accumulated. In the theatre, this was reflected in the late eighties and early nineties by a spate of comedies. However, plays by Peter Schaffer, Michael Frayn and translations of authors such as John Bowen were also staged. Meanwhile the rise in experimental theatre reflected that occurring in other countries. This was the period when British companies such as DV8, Frantic Assembly or Théâtre de Complicité were being constituted as “collectives” and developing in the wake of other foreign companies such as Eugenio Barba’s Odin Teatret. Many of these companies were influenced by the work of directors like Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook. The Maltese companies followed an evolution that was similar to that developing on the continent and also partly in Britain, albeit on a much smaller and amateur scale. Devised theatre, with its process of physical training and work that focused mainly on the body, grew in importance. Rather than adopting texts written by established playwrights, the groups preferred to develop their own. The British Council contributed to this new tendency by bringing over a series of performances and workshops that were based on devised and physical theatre. This type of theatre created a generational divide, leading theatre critic Paul Xuereb to exclaim:

Young people are much readier to accept sheer virtuosity as the main ingredient of the theatrical art. Moreover, a generation tuned to the garishness, stunts and surrealistic atmosphere of a thousand video clips is psychologically prepared for what, to me, is a show whose surface gorgeousness and ingenuity frequently serves to distract the audience from perceiving its hollowness. (2017: 224)

Xuereb’s disapproval contrasted greatly with the plays’ popularity, and this type of theatre reached a peak in the nineties, with the formation of a number of groups practising devised theatre.

Training Actors for the Stage

Between the 1950s and early 1960s, the British authorities and the British Council took great pains to help professionalise radio presenters who would later move on to television. Such was the case, for example, for the first Maltese TV presenters such as Charles Arrigo (1929-2006), who had also been trained for radio, as well as new voices such as Mary Grech and Charles Abela Mizzi, all of whom received training at the BBC studios and were to work for the Malta Television Service (MTV), inaugurated on 29 September 1962. A few actors were also provided training in the UK; this was notably the case of Ethel Farrugia (d. 2017), who was sent to a “comprehensive drama course” in London (Farrugia 2002: 40) and trained with the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. Farrugia performed in various British theatres before returning to Malta and was to become a leading actress and director. Karmen Azzopardi also received training in London: she attended the Actor’s Studio and was trained as a broadcaster by the BBC.

Nothing much was done by way of training up to 1977, when MTA-DA was set up by means of a Technical Cooperation Agreement between the British Council, the Ministry for Education, and the Manoel Theatre. The school laid “text-based emphasis” on training (Aquilina 2015: 91). It was headed by the English theatre director and actor Adrian Rendle, who was assisted by Peter Cox, an expert in Theatre in Education. The two men continued to foster British theatre traditions through the acting styles they taught, as well as the repertory they chose for their students both through the Junior (14-17 years) and Senior (18+ years) courses. The school later changed its name to the Mikelang Borg Drama Centre and continued to stage plays in English as well as Maltese, or English translations of plays by authors such as Molière or Chekhov. Plays by Shakespeare were part of the school curriculum, however, more contemporary plays such as *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas were also staged. More recently, in 2012, the Teatru Manoel Youth Theatre (TMYT) was formed under the direction of Scottish theatre practitioner Denise Mulholland as part of the theatre’s education programme,⁹ and has proved a launching pad for young actors. Most of

the productions, which were based on devised theatre, were in English. The company has now been taken over by another UK practitioner, Ian Moore. Moreover, British drama schools, such as Stagecoach and Helen O'Grady, have opened franchises in Malta. However, a number of young people aspiring to become professional actors go abroad, particularly to Britain, to specialise in acting.

The beginning of the new millennium was marked by a series of initiatives to promote the arts. The most important among these were the formation of an Arts Council, which prepared a cultural policy for Malta that was launched in 2011, and a new space which was Malta's millennium project: St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity. This space, situated in Valletta, comprises a small theatre, music room, rehearsal rooms, *art et essai* cinema, and art gallery space. It was an ideal place to bring the arts together and create collaborative projects between different art forms. The theatre was inaugurated by a British performance, sponsored by the British High Commission, called *England our England*, which put together a sequence of texts by three British actors making fun of Britain and Britishness. The centre was to house important playwrights, such as Edward Bond, who spoke of their art and led workshops. Moreover, in collaboration with the University of Malta and Arts Council Malta, the Centre housed other authors such as the Oxford-based Macedonian writer Stefan Goranowski, the award-winning English playwrights Fraser Grace, well known for his play *Breakfast with Mugabe* and Cathy Crabb, author of *Beautiful House*, *Moving Pictures*, and *Beyond the Fourth Wall*.

Theatre and Censorship

New trends and controversial subject matter in contemporary English-language plays and productions provided the means for theatre to confront taboo subjects in Malta. These plays created huge polemic when first staged on the island, used to more generally conservative productions, certainly in Maltese-language theatre. At the turn of the twenty-first century this theatrical confrontation led to a struggle against the censorship board, known as the Classification Board of

Film and Stage, which had been constituted in 1937, and ultimately, to the total abolition of censorship in 2012.

The tussle was already present in the 1990s, when censorial action was taken on the grounds of blasphemy. In 1996, the British company Cheek by Jowl staging John Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* was asked to remove a scene where the Duchess, played by Anastasia Hille, kicks a cross across the stage in sign of despair at the knowledge that she will be imminently murdered. Moreover, Hille was not allowed to appear nude on stage. The censorship raised huge controversy in the papers. The next year, the Reduced Shakespeare Company was banned from producing *The Bible – the Word of God*, again for the reason of blasphemy. However, plays such as *The Vagina Monologues* by Eve Ensler, staged in 2002, provided direct confrontation with taboo subjects. The play inspired the author Trevor Zahra to write a male equivalent, produced in 2008, called: *Minn wara ż-żipp* (From behind the zip). One Maltese production, *Porn the Musical*, with lyrics written by Malcolm Galea and music by Kris Galea and Boris Cezek, participated in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2009. The show, initially acted by Maltese amateur actors, was transferred to Off West End the next year, where it was performed by British professionals at Theatre 503 and directed by Paul Robinson (Honeycombe 2010).

Meanwhile, Malta had discovered *In-Yer-Face* theatre. In March 2003, the British actor Nigel Charnock performed his solo play *Frank* at the theatre belonging to the University of Malta (now known as Valletta Campus Theatre). Paul Xuereb commented on the actor's "limitless ability to take risks with his audience, that enabled him to needle that audience on the values and traditions prevailing in that society" (STOM, 2 March 2003). That same month the censorship board tried to stop the performance of Patrick Marber's *Closer* and withdrew its decision after the Maltese company, Theatreworx, appealed. Another theatre company, Unifaun, and its director Adrian Buckle, were determined to continue to show this type of theatre to the Maltese public. Their production of *Paul* by Howard Brenton in 2007 was only allowed to go on stage after they had removed a scene that was considered of-

fensive to the Virgin Mary. In January 2009, their play *Stitching* was banned outright. This decision sparked off a veritable war against censorship, which was fought in the Maltese courts on the basis of the right to freedom of expression. The author, Anthony Nielson, even came to Malta to testify in court (Cremona 2016: 249). The ban was upheld by the Maltese courts in November 2010, and the decision was confirmed by the Maltese Constitutional Court in 2012. In 2013, the company took the case to the European Court of Human Rights and in May 2018, eight years after the Maltese court's decision, the judgement was overturned and the company was awarded €10,000 in legal expenses and another €10,000 in damages (TOM, 15 May 2018). The play was staged at the Manoel Theatre Studio in September 2018. On 12 July 2012, the Minister for Culture announced the removal of censorship and stated that theatre companies were henceforth allowed to classify their own productions (TOM, 12 July 2012: 12). Since then, Maltese efforts to write *In-Yer-Face* pieces, including by Adrian Buckle himself, have been made, and nudity and blasphemy on stage are now accepted.

Other controversial topics have been brought to the stage thanks to English-language authors or translations. This was the case with *Lampedusa* by Anders Lustgarten, performed in 2016, which deals with topics that have greatly affected Malta and the Mediterranean: illegal immigration, the drowning of hundreds of migrants, as well as poverty and welfare. The play was staged both in English and in a Maltese translation on different nights. The Welsh playwright Brad Birch was commissioned to write a play inspired by corruption in football by the recently launched national theatre, Teatru Malta. His play, *Game*, was performed at the Malta Football Association's Trophies Lounge at the National Stadium at Ta' Qali in June 2018.

Very recently, verbatim theatre styles, inspired by English theatre trends, have been adopted to address challenging issues. The journalist, playwright and director Herman Grech decided to use theatre to discuss abortion, which is illegal in Malta under any circumstance. All debate about the subject in public fora and newspapers has been wrought with emotion. Through his playscript, *De-terminated*, the

author's intention was to try and stage a discussion about the subject "without hysteria" (MT, 11 October 2018) taking advantage of the fact that theatre provides a captive audience who are forced to listen to both sides of the argument unless they walk out. Grech's text, in English, was based on interviews conducted in 2017 with Maltese women who had gone through abortion and men who had experienced this reality, as well as with pro- and anti-abortionist activists, and tried to present their arguments without taking sides.

Legacy

What is the legacy of English theatre in Malta? British theatre is a main point of reference for any Maltese company wanting to perform, also due to the strong links established through time, and the fact that English, one of Malta's two official languages, is understood and spoken by the majority of the population. The bulk of foreign texts staged in Malta are English, especially those having obtained success on the London stages. Maltese theatre buffs travel to Britain to watch plays. British influence on Maltese playwriting is still very much present; themes and trends in Britain have influenced Maltese authors writing their own playscripts both in Maltese and in English. Various devised performances have also been produced in the English language.

This study has established the direction for a much deeper study on theatre in the English language in Malta. It has shown how theatre in English developed initially as a colonial phenomenon, but gradually created collaboration between English and Maltese actors and directors. Professional training for actors and directors was first introduced by British experts who enabled the development of a higher level of theatre production. In part, this training continues to be led by British directors. Moreover, contemporary British plays have been staged to voice political dissent and to oppose censorship. Certain Maltese playwrights are also choosing the English language to express controversial ideas. In sum, British theatre and English plays will continue to remain a beacon towards which Maltese theatre is attracted and against which it can measure itself.

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¹ The theatre is named after the Portuguese Grand Master Antonio Manoel de Vilhena (1663-1736, ruled 1722-1736) who ordered it to be built. It was run by a foundation, called Fondazione Manoel, that was set up by the Grand Master himself (Xuereb 2011: 2).

² Opera attendance increased greatly in the course of the nineteenth century, and was spread across all social classes (Miceli 1999:21).

³ *South Pacific*, staged by MADC and directed by Ian Cox, was staged in 1970. The musical was staged on Broadway in 1949, and the film was produced in 1958.

⁴ A play reading and discussion about the organisation of the Festival was held at the Headquarters of Toc H was held in November 1944 (TOM 1 November 1944: 4).

⁵ In June 1946, a Maltese writer, Nikol Biancardi organised a festival for plays in Maltese (*Times of Malta*, 25 June 1946: 8), and in October of the same year, the Malta Drama League organised a playwriting competition for plays in the Maltese language.

⁶ In 1938, a play by Shakespeare was staged there for the first time. *As You Like It* was presented as a charity performance in aid of the Civil Hospitals (Mompalao de Piro 1985: 38).

⁷ The authors, Marta Vella and Vikesh Godhwani, are both trained actors, and Godhwani lives in London and works professionally in the London theatres.

⁸ In the 1981 elections, the electoral commission shifted the electoral boundaries in such a way as to favour the Malta Labour Party (PL), which remained in power.

⁹ The programme, known as Toi-Toi, was the brainchild of musician and music therapist Rosetta Debatista, who created a series of programmes to open the arts to the broadest possible audience, ranging from very young children to senior citizens. Teatru Manoel Youth Theatre and Teatru Manoel Youth Opera are offshoots of this programme.

¹⁰ Scottish-born Denise Mulholland directed the TMYT from its founding in 2013 to 2018. The Youth theatre is currently directed by Ian Moore.

On *Rebentats* (TNC, 2018), the First Catalan Production of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*: Construction and Audience of Catalan National Theatre

Marta TIRADO

Abstract: *Blasted* (1995), by Sarah Kane, was staged for the first time in Catalonia in December 2017 at Temporada Alta Festival (Teatre de Salt), and then it was performed, from January to February 2018, at the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya (TNC, Catalan National Theatre). The production played a crucial role for both consolidating the Catalan National Theatre as part of the European theatrical scene and developing the reception skills of the country's "general" audience that represents the national citizenship. Both changes can be explained by the fact that *Blasted* was programmed at the TNC, which is the main public institution of drama and performing arts in Catalonia. On the one hand, the TNC has the goal of reinforcing the theatre written and staged in Catalan through translating and performing the classical works that belong to the European theatrical repertoire, as a way of rooting its national theatre in the continental dramatic tradition. By including a contemporary piece like *Blasted* in the TNC's annual programme, the Catalan repertoire was expanded and became linked with the postmodern Western tradition. On the other hand, the incorporation of the experimental dramatic form of *Blasted* into the Catalan theatrical canon challenged the usual realistic parameters of the TNC's theatre programme, forcing the institution to revise its model of reception and to diversify its regular audience's prototype. Presenting the different audience reactions to *Blasted*'s Catalan production, the essay analyses to what extent Kane's play also contributed to changing the horizon of expectation of the TNC's regular theatre-goers.

Introduction

The first Catalan production of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (*Rebentats*) played a crucial role in changing the theatrical landscape of Catalonia, primarily in two ways: on the one hand, it contributed to consolidating Catalan theatre (that is, theatre produced in Catalonia and in the Catalan language) as a national entity that is part of the European theatrical tradition; on the other, it made it possible to develop the theatre-reception skills of the ordinary Catalan theatre-goer beyond the conventional dramatic frame and its familiar model of reception.

My doctoral research on Kane's work gave me the opportunity to participate in this production as dramaturge and assistant director. The production premiered in December 2017 at Teatre de Salt, Girona, during Temporada Alta Festival, the leading international theatre festival in Catalonia, and then, from 11 January to 11 February 2018, it went on to be performed in the Sala Petita ("small auditorium") of the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya (TNC), Catalonia's national theatre, located in Barcelona. The artistic team for the production comprised young professionals, including the director, Alícia Gorina, the set designer, Sílvia Delagneau, and three actors: Pere Arquillué (Ian), Marta Ossó (Cate) and Blai Juanet (Soldier).

This article aims to explore the two statements made in the opening paragraph. In order to do so, it begins by analysing the cultural role adopted by the TNC currently in relation to the context of European theatre; secondly, it explores the impact of the production on the TNC's regular audience by discussing the various reactions that the performance generated, which reveal the challenge that *Blasted* continues to pose as regards conventional stage-audience relationships.

Consolidating and transforming Catalan national theatre

The contribution of the production to consolidating Catalan national theatre as part of the European theatrical scene needs to be framed in relation to the role the TNC plays as a public institution responsible for promoting cultural values and a literary heritage that

represent the Catalan nation as a whole. The TNC thus forms part of the long-standing European legacy of national theatres that emerged in the 17th century to reinforce the “national” values embodied by imperial and monarchical powers by entertaining and educating the aristocratic elite. This original model of national theatre, most clearly embodied by the Comédie Française, has changed over time to fit into new political environments and their interpretation of national identity, state and citizenship/audience. As S.E. Wilmer shows in his contribution to the volume *National Theatres in a Changing Europe* (2008: 9-20), the 18th and 19th century prototype of a national theatre responded to the rise of municipalities and bourgeois nationalism precisely by supplying its bourgeois audiences with drama in vernacular languages meant to “educate” them in national culture. In contrast, according to Bruce McConachie (2008: 53-55), the national theatres founded in the late capitalist, global environment of the past and current century have had to orient themselves towards a broader, more varied cross-section of the population and bear in mind potentially divergent parameters such as regionalism, multiculturalism and transnationalism. The TNC brings together different aspects of these three European models. This is primarily reflected in its idea of the audience as a representational paradigm of national citizenship, its preferential choice of a canonical theatrical repertoire and its linguistic strategy to legitimise Catalan theatre. In this context, as will be shown, the premiere of *Blasted* evinced both the TNC’s affiliation with the European development of national-theatre prototypes and, crucially, the change of model implemented by the institution’s current management, which aims to place the theatre in the liminal space between national and transnational concerns.

Founded in 1996, the TNC arose from the Spanish process of democratisation after Franco’s death in 1975 and the consequent recognition of Catalan national identity and autonomy. In this cultural and political context, the main purpose of a national Catalan theatre with full public funding was to consolidate and vindicate the language, cultural traditions and theatrical legacy of Catalonia. The Teatre Lliure, a public theatrical foundation created in 1976 by a young

company, shared those objectives. However, in contrast to the TNC, its municipalist profile linked to the city of Barcelona instead of the whole of Catalonia and its specific interest in the European innovative theatrical staging rather than the “dramatic” one mean it does not align with the national-theatre scheme. As Marvin Carlson argues in “National Theatres: Then and Now” (2008: 30-1), the desire to emphasise the Catalan national difference —and, especially, the cultural position of Barcelona, which is “far more European oriented than insular Madrid” owing to its geographical location, historical bonds with the continent and internationalist artistic and national aspirations— has made the European model the main point of reference for the TNC.

In line with one of the general characteristics of European national theatres, the TNC was designed to represent and educate the Catalan nation as a whole. As described in the institution’s statutes, this means that the theatre is viewed as a “public service” that is responsible for “facilitating access to culture for all citizens of Catalonia through the performing arts” (TNC: para. 5).¹ According to McConachie, national theatres “must address (or seek to address) a part of the national people that can legitimately represent the whole of it” (2008: 50). In view of the impossibility of actually addressing or reflecting a multifaceted society, Loren Kruger (2008: 36) conceives the national theatre audience as a “synecdoche” of the wider populace. The TNC makes a similar logical leap when it defines its mission as set to “orientate the theatre programme towards the [general] interests and needs” of the citizens of Catalonia (TNC: para. 5).² In other words, like the historic European bourgeois national theatres, the TNC identifies (with) a “representative” cross-section of the population; this leads to the formulation of a reception model that fits this target audience and, ultimately, to the choice of a canonical repertoire that is deemed compatible with an “average” education. In the case of the TNC, its public mission of facilitating access to the performing arts for the general Catalan population has entailed programming a theatrical repertoire whose aesthetics and content can be recognised, and thus understood,

by an audience of “all” ages, social classes and cultural backgrounds, and that is broadly supposed to reflect the national identity.

However, like other national theatres that emerged in Europe at the end of the 20th century, the key point of reference taken by the TNC in order to legitimate and promote the Catalan national culture and language and, at the same time, show that it has assimilated European values and artistic standards has been the continental national-theatre concept that emerged in parallel to the modern, bourgeois definition of nation. Therefore, the choice of this model implies that the supposedly “average” national citizen educated in “general” cultural standards to whom the TNC addresses its theatrical programme is actually the current equivalent of the historic bourgeois population, namely, a fundamentally middle-class audience. This has entailed the adoption of the theatrical repertoire established in Europe in the early centuries of the national theatre, based on, as Dragan Klaic (2008: 222) explains, “the traditional canon of the European *Bildung* [...], meaning a mixture of Greeks, Shakespeare, Molière, Ibsen, Chekhov, some domestic classics and the contemporary hobbyhorses”. This repertoire was essentially nourished by the classic dramas derived from, and reinforced by, the founding of leading continental national theatres in France, Germany and Russia. The cultural hegemony of these countries made their repertoire the model that the rest of European national theatres should embrace: Molière, Racine and Corneille from the Comédie Française; Schiller, Goethe and Lessing from the Hamburg National Theatre; and Chekhov from the Moscow Art Theatre. In the Catalan case, as Carlson pointed out in 2009, “the TNC is still building its reputation and attempting to find a middle ground between a national and a European theatre” (31). Thus, the institution’s “key role in creating a canon” (Albertí n.d.: 35) for an (imagined) national public underpins its distinct preference for the repertoire of the European *Bildung* performed in the Catalan language, in addition to the touchstones of Spanish classic drama (Calderón, Lope de Vega and García Lorca) and leading figures of the Catalan theatrical heritage, most of them 19th and 20th century authors who adopted classical, Romantic or realist aesthetics.

Such a canonical repertoire fits into the traditional dramatic paradigm based on Aristotle's classical structure of the three unities of action, time and space, which, according to Peter Szondi, was established as the "absolute" form of European drama. The main characteristics of an "absolute drama" are a causal, progressive plot based on the interpersonal interchange of dialogue and mimetic reproduction of the action to the point that the stage is conceived of as an isolated, yet parallel, reality comparable to that of the audience. As Szondi shows in *Theory of the Modern Drama* (1987 [1956]), this dramatic paradigm was established and subsequently honed and updated during the modern age (1500-1800), when the first European national theatres emerged. Its perpetuation until the end of the 19th century, when it went into crisis, resulted in a large part of the works that belong to the European theatrical repertoire corresponding to this aesthetic paradigm. Therefore, for centuries, the ordinary theatre-goer has been exposed to and encouraged to acquire the interpretative skills that correspond to "absolute drama", as opposed to the experimental, postmodern parameters found in *Blasted*. From the perspective of Stanley Fish's theory of interpretative communities (Bennett 1997: 41), the European regular audience became more receptive and competent with regard to traditional drama, given its recurrent exposure to plays based on this dramatic mode.

In sum, over the modern age, European national theatres simultaneously defined their canonical repertoires and their audience and reception models. Based on that model, the TNC has sought to fulfil its institutional purpose of facilitating "general" access to the performing arts by designing a theatre programme that is primarily focused on a repertoire of plays whose structure aligns with the traditional paradigm of "absolute drama". At the same time, the reverse can also be concluded: by consistently favouring the traditional dramatic canon in its repertoire, the TNC has recurrently projected the same specific audience profile and traditional reception model. In this context, the premiere of a contemporary play like *Blasted*, which is widely known for the way it challenges the traditional dramatic paradigm and pushes the audience's interpretative framework and its horizon of expecta-

tions beyond its limits, conveys the current TNC management's willingness to redesign the Catalan dramaturgical canon by opening up its rather restrictive repertoire, potential "representative" audience and aesthetics of reception.

Before the premiere of *Blasted*, the rupture of the traditional dramatic form and the explicit representation of violence and sex that feature in Kane's oeuvre had excluded her plays from the international repertoire of the TNC. However, Klaic (2008: 222-23) includes Kane among "the contemporary hobbyhorses" that have been added to the repertoire of recently founded national theatres, among which Carlson (2008: 30-31) counts the TNC. Aside from the TNC's *Blasted* (*Rebentats*), the few works by Kane that have been staged in Catalonia have been restricted to the alternative theatre scene. *Crave* (Ànsia) (1998), the first of Kane's plays to be professionally produced in Catalonia, premiered in 2000 at Sitges Teatre Internacional, a performing arts festival that was designed to provide a space for the most experimental works produced in the Iberian Peninsula. Significantly, the production was directed by Xavier Albertí, the current artistic director of the TNC. Since then, and particularly in recent years, local productions of Kane's plays have achieved slightly more visibility, but always on the stages of Catalan drama schools and alternative theatres, where plays written by contemporary playwrights, in addition to experimental performances, are welcomed: *4.48 Psychosis* (*La psicosi de les 4.48*) at La Seca-Espai Brossa (2015) and Sala Beckett (2017), and *Crave* (Ànsia) at Sala Atrium (2019). These venues attract a niche audience that is generally better equipped to engage with the kind of postmodern dramatic and theatrical language found in Kane's work.

As noted above, the fact that, for the first time, *Blasted* was included in 2018 as the type of drama that the TNC considers appropriate for its public signals the theatre's disposition to broaden the framework of its repertoire beyond the traditional dramatic paradigm. Since Albertí became artistic director in 2013, the TNC's strategic goals have incorporated "diversification of the theatre programme" by "embracing other artistic languages and sensibilities" (TNC: para. 4).³ The

latter objective is also indicative of the interest of the TNC's current artistic team in expanding the theatrical reception competence of its regular public to encompass postmodern dramatic and performative language. This, in turn, denotes a reformulation of the audience model linked to the bourgeois prototype, because it opens up the possibility of attracting a type of theatre-goer who is more receptive to formal theatrical innovation. At the same time, the presence of *Blasted* on the 2017/18 season programme responds to the TNC's desire to update the Catalan repertoire in order to align it with the transnational agenda of other European theatres. The *Projecte artístic per al Teatre Nacional de Catalunya* [Artistic Project for the National Theatre of Catalonia],⁴ written by Albertí, emphasises the institutional aim to “create a canon with regard to contemporary texts” by means of programming “contemporary authors and texts that are still not part of our canon” (Albertí n.d.: 35).⁵ The artistic mission statement further underlines “our audience [...] does not know much about works written by key authors such as [...] Sarah Kane” and that it is the TNC's duty “to endeavour to make [these authors] known” to the Catalan public (Albertí n.d.: 50).⁶ By deciding to stage *Blasted* (*Rebentats*), Kane's first play was therefore claimed by the TNC as a reference piece in the contemporary European repertoire that should be used to build the Catalan one.

As both Carlson (2008) and McConachie (2008) point out, national theatres like the TNC that have recently opened with the purpose of celebrating their distinct languages and cultures need to establish a classic repertoire in the vernacular to legitimise their canons before the audience that embodies a synecdoche of the general population. The practice of translating the European dramaturgical canon into Catalan to gain admittance for Catalan culture into the continental tradition was adopted at the time of the *Renaixença* (1833-1892), a late Romantic cultural movement designed to reinforce the nation through linguistic and literary restoration. As Helena Buffery notes in *Shakespeare in Catalan: Translating Imperialism* (2007), translating the works of one of the most iconic canonical European playwrights into Catalan has contributed to giving authority to Catalan theatre

itself. Buffery maintains that, by constructing its own Shakespearean canon at a linguistic, performative and critical level, the national theatre, which culturally speaking, had so far reached a minority culture, has sought and ultimately achieved, recognition within majority cultures and even transnational theatre. In this vein, “guaranteeing and encouraging use of the Catalan language in the performing arts, and spreading Catalan cultural heritage” (TNC: para. 6)⁷ counts among the TNC’s goals.

Unsurprisingly in the light of the above, then, the TNC marked the premiere of *Blasted* in Catalonia with the publication of Kane’s complete plays, *Sarah Kane: Obres completes* (2018), translated into Catalan by different translators linked to the national theatrical scene. The translation of Kane’s début play is by Albert Arribas. As in the *Complete Plays* volume published by Methuen Drama in 2001, the *Skin* screenplay was also included. The “Preface” to the Catalan volume, written by Albertí, underlines the significance of the publication in relation with Catalan theatrical culture and argues that Kane “is the most recent great classic in contemporary dramatic writing [playwriting]” (2018: 11).⁸ Among the multiple reasons mentioned by Albertí to support Kane’s status as a contemporary classic, it is worth highlighting the connection he makes between Kane and other European playwrights whose dramaturgical authority has been invoked in the past to strengthen Catalan theatre: “[her work] invites us to consider the traces that our cultural landmarks have left in us, which are so obvious in Kane’s dramaturgy: from Shakespeare, Seneca and T.S. Eliot, to Beckett, Bond and Pinter” (2018: 11).⁹ Albertí’s “Preface” resonates with Buffery’s argument on translations of Shakespeare into Catalan; taken together, both lines of reasoning strongly suggest that the premiere of *Blasted* at the TNC and the concomitant translation of Kane’s complete works into Catalan positioned the British playwright as a figure of authority in European drama for the Catalan “general” public. Thus, Kane’s incorporation into the Catalan public theatrical repertoire contributes to both broadening and consolidating the Catalan national theatre, most particularly, its contemporary canon. Kane’s inclusion into this hitherto monolithic dramaturgical canon

—consisting of Western male playwrights whose cultural authority has been historically assigned by the theatrical institutions that represent the power of consolidated European nation-states— also opens up the possibility of critically reframing its conventional repertoire in accordance with the need for “inclusiveness” of a transnational, “convivial” contemporary theatre (Holdsworth, 2010: 71-72).

The aesthetic and ethical coherence and complexity of Kane’s work has led it progressively to achieve wide recognition among Catalan academics and practitioners as a contemporary classic that is indispensable to comprehend the postmodern drama that has emerged in recent decades and to open the audience’s mind beyond the traditional realist limits of our national theatre. By contrast, Kane and, specifically, *Blasted* were virtually unknown among the TNC’s habitual audience until the play’s premiere, as evidenced through their frequently visceral reaction, which is discussed below. In consequence, both the TNC’s and the production’s artistic teams thought it necessary to explicate and publicise the significance of the premiere of *Blasted* in Catalonia. Rather than seeking to prepare spectators for Kane’s unusual dramatic language, however, their aim was to try and ensure that they would appreciate the cultural change that the performance signified for Catalan theatre.

First of all, emphasis was placed on the work’s status as a contemporary classic so as to appeal to the cultural values of the TNC’s ordinary theatre-goer and justify the play’s inclusion in the season’s programme. Thus, at the press conference to present the production, Pere Arquillué, the actor who played Ian and a well-respected figure in Catalan theatre, stated that *Blasted* “is a piece of stratospheric importance, one of the most significant from the 20th and 21st centuries” (Cervera: para. 1).¹⁰ At the same press conference and in the programme notes for the play, Alícia Gorina, the director, pointed to Kane as “the mother of the kind of theatre I usually stage” because it rejects naturalism and “vindicates another way of understanding the theatre” (Gorina: 2).¹¹ Gorina has indeed focused her theatrical career on exploring the aesthetic and narrative limits of theatricality and reality on stage; she

has directed contemporary plays and performances that address spectators who are predisposed to having the conventional dramatic frame challenged. To conclude, Gorina reiterated Albertí's words regarding the canonical status of Kane's first play: "staging *Blasted* (for the first time in Catalonia) is not only a question of theatrical justice, but also a personal need to recover and comprehend the classics" (Gorina: 2).¹²

Secondly, reference was made to the controversial reception of *Blasted* in Britain in 1995 both in order to illustrate the play's historical role within contemporary dramaturgy, and also to warn the audience that Kane's piece was going to disrupt the usual canon of the TNC, despite its general acceptance as a classic. To achieve this objective, the programme notes and the press dossier for *Blasted* included academic publications (Saunders 2002), an interview with Kane (Rebellato 1998) and Jack Tinker's review of the play's premiere in Britain (1995).

Both previously mentioned concepts were echoed across the media, with particular emphasis in the specialist press, which helped underline the historical value of the *Blasted* premiere in Catalonia. On the opening night, Oriol Puig, the theatre critic for the online cultural magazine *Núvol*, accurately captured the media's recognition of this key moment in Catalan theatrical history on Twitter: "Now that *Blasted* has finally been premiered in our home, it's official: we have just reached adulthood" (oriolpuigtaule 2018).¹³ In sum, before and on the night of the premiere the artistic team worked in tandem with the (specialist) media to frame the first Catalan production of *Blasted* as a key moment to start broadening the reception habits of the TNC's regular audience.

Developing a competent reception of postmodern theatre in Catalonia

As mentioned with respect to Fish's model of reception, the premiere of *Blasted* (*Rebentats*) required redefinition of the TNC's general audience prototype. In particular, this meant expanding the theatrical competence of the ordinary TNC theatre-goer, whose horizon of

expectation is usually circumscribed by the traditional parameters of “absolute drama”. Even though the first half of *Blasted* fits this paradigm, the radical disruption of dramatic conventions in the second half, clearly conveyed on stage under Gorina’s direction, demanded that the TNC’s regular theatre-goer revise their horizon of expectation to try and reduce the distance between their habitual interpretative codes and *Blasted*. This process was reflected in the attitude of members of the audience during and after the performance and the opinions they posted on social networks, as well as in in Eva Piquer’s article published on the digital cultural magazine *Catorze*, to which I return briefly in due course. The three main types of reaction described below are indicative of the normally unheard voices of ordinary audience members who are neither theatre scholars nor (specialist) journalists and who, therefore, can be said to synecdochically represent the Catalan nation.

The challenge that *Blasted* posed to the TNC’s regular spectator’s habitual modes of dramatic and theatrical reception became apparent through a reaction of incomprehension or even rejection of the production, which was strongly expressed during the first weeks after the opening night. As was the case when the play premiered at the Royal Court in January 1995, some members of the audience left their seats in the middle of the performance, particularly in scenes depicting explicit violence and sexual abuse, namely, when Cate is forced to masturbate Ian (scene 1) and when the Soldier rapes Ian and finally eats his eyes (scene 3). Other spectators remained in the theatre to express their displeasure at the end of the performance by staring directly at the actors and not clapping. This hostile response confirms Josette Féral’s claim that “[t]he lack of narrativity and failure of representation in performance frustrates the spectator [...] and, furthermore, the audience’s competencies —on which theatre relies— are destroyed” (see Bennett 1997: 74).

In spite of their familiarity with the similarly hostile reception of the play in London in 1995, the production’s artistic team, all of whom recognised *Blasted* as a touchstone of contemporary drama and were,

moreover, aware of the conventional parameters circumscribing the TNC's "average" spectator's horizon of expectation, were still somewhat surprised by this type of reaction. In addition to the twenty-three years that had elapsed since the premiere of the play in 1995, another reason why the hostile response was somewhat unexpected was Gorina's approach to the staging. Ian's devastation in the last three scenes was represented through disrupting the performative naturalism that had governed the stage until the Soldier's arrival and adopting a distinctly non-naturalistic scenic language, more symbolic than realistic, instead of emphasising the brutality of the violence. The violence was conveyed without glamour or excessive display beyond the "linguistic" parameters that are frequently used in the media and art to represent barbarity and achieve an impact on the audience. In accordance with Kane's aim that the dramatic disruption in *Blasted* would suddenly present "all those [violent] familiar images [...] in an odd theatrical form, which provided no framework within which to locate oneself in relationship to the material" (quoted in Saunders 2002: 28), Gorina's production did not "authentically" recreate or represent the violence by trying to imitate real brutality, which is what would have happened in naturalist theatre. For instance, Ian's rape was represented by means of a symbolic action by the Soldier: he shook the bottle of champagne that he had previously simulated inserting into Ian's anus and completely soaked Ian—who remained dressed throughout the scene—with its contents. Likewise, the Soldier performed the act of eating Ian's eyes by licking the entire face of the actor who played the role of Ian. Both situations emphasised Ian's pathos and humiliation and sought to make the audience feel the sense of repugnance and discomfort caused by the direct perception of actual pain and cruelty evinced in the text. As is widely known, when Kane wrote the play she aspired to create "experiential theatre" that manages to carry the audience "to a place of extreme mental discomfort" (quoted in Saunders 2009: 47), so as to "avoid going there in reality" (quoted in Langridge and Stephenson 1997: 133). This implies an affective model of reception that, unlike the TNC's usual semiotic or intellectual one, is based

on firstly appealing to the spectator's corporeal experience of pain and then inciting them to reflect on its causes and consequences.

The audience's anger was also expressed on social media. A mere two days after the premiere, the following comment was posted on Twitter:

After watching *Blasted* and its feast of disgusting scenes, I wonder why Pere Arquillué accepted a role in such a nauseating play and why the TNC has programmed it. Some members of the audience left the theatre before the end, when there was timid applause out of politeness. (AngelBergada23 2018)¹⁴

This is clearly reminiscent of Jack Tinker's review of the premiere of *Blasted* at the Royal Court (*Daily Mail*, 1995), whose headline, "Disgusting Feast of Filth", has often been highlighted, including by Kane herself, as paradigmatic of the British press's furious attack on the play. As in the just quoted Twitter post, other audience members also rebuked the manager of the TNC for having programmed the piece, arguing that the text did not have the dramaturgical quality required by the cultural institution: "the audience is exhausted after watching *Blasted*, a very poor and meaningless text. Everything is gratuitous in the play. [...] Albertí, please, do not programme rubbish like this" (rocamorar 2018).¹⁵ As Kane suggested was the case in 1995 and as the first part of this article has indicated, incomprehension of the play in Catalonia was also probably due to the audience's inability to "read" the play's deviation from the "absolute drama" model as defined by Szondi, which led them to focus only on the play's barbaric content. Unlike the vast majority of plays staged at the TNC, *Blasted* did not offer a familiar, "clear framework within which to locate" (Kane quoted in Saunders 2009: 52) and interpret it, because the naturalism of the hotel room in the first two scenes is brutally disrupted by the surrealism of the irruption of war at the end of scene two. In consequence, the play "asked the audience to craft their own response" to the atrocities represented (Kane quoted in Langridge and Stephenson 1997: 131), forcing spectators to confront a painful reality that they perhaps had rather ignore. As a response, the members of the TNC

audience who rejected the performance also focused more on criticising “the representation of violence [...] rather than actual violence” (Kane quoted in Langridge and Stephenson 1997: 131), just as the British press did in 1995.

As the run of the production continued, the public perspective on *Blasted* progressively shifted: a substantial proportion of spectators understood and accepted TNC’s attempt to move away from its usual theatrical frame of reference, even when this meant they remained in a permanent state of dissatisfaction during the performance because they did not manage to sufficiently broaden their competencies in response to the play’s “new” dramatic and theatrical parameters. As Anne Ubersfeld points out, the impossibility of apprehending the text’s meaning and establishing personal identification with it puts the audience in the “essential situation of spectatorial dissatisfaction” (related in Bennett 1997: 73). Faced with Kane’s play, this segment of spectators expressed their perplexity and the emotional and physical impact they felt at being confronted with the play’s dramaturgy and staging, but they refrained from passing judgement on the dramaturgical quality of the text. Their bewilderment, also shared on social media, revealed how they were lost for words, unable to describe the play or their own emotional experiences: “I have been left wordless” (eliramirez82 2018); “*Blasted*. I don’t know what to say. Maybe... uffff...” (amartells 2018).¹⁶ Other witnesses precisely conveyed how the emotional and visceral impact sought by Kane’s experiential theatre was achieved through Gorina’s non-sensationalist, understated staging of extreme forms of violence: “Uncomfortable, direct, intense, acid, indigestible. A very hard but attractive work, it produces feelings of rejection and attraction all at once. [...] I left the small auditorium of the national theatre in shock” (VictoriOliveros 2018).¹⁷

The section of the public that is keenest to keep up with theatrical premieres in Catalonia and equipped to confront theatrical experimentation, including Catalan theatre practitioners, received *Blasted* with enthusiasm. Its premiere was seen as a promising change of direction for the TNC, whose usual artistic and dramatic policy many of

them had previously not felt close to. Some of them therefore praised the inclusion of Kane's play in the canon of the Catalan national public theatre as well as the new form of staging, watching and understanding theatre put forward by Gorina:

A text replete with harshness. Pere Arquillué is unrecognisable. An honest stage proposal, free of pretentious effects. Bravo, Alicia Gorina. I hope it means a change of direction at the national theatre and is not just a one-off. More brave moves, more women! (onaborras 2018)¹⁸

The last phrase in the quoted tweet refers to the recent "On són les dones?" (Where are the women?) campaign to denounce the lack of women in the artistic and management teams of the leading productions and theatres in Catalonia. This relates to the previously mentioned possibility of the Catalan premiere of *Blasted* contributing to the establishment of a more diverse, inclusive theatre repertoire and industry in Catalonia.

As mentioned earlier, the production took a risk in its choice to represent the violence of the atrocities depicted in the play through non-naturalistic means. By way of Delagneau's set design, the dramatic rupture between the two halves of *Blasted* and the change of perception Kane wanted to trigger in the audience were foregrounded. With the audience sitting on either side of the stage and a muslin around the perimeter of the stage separating them from the actors during the first two scenes, the impact of the bomb on the wall of the hotel room was rendered by the Soldier bursting onto the stage, tearing down the curtain and then relentlessly dismantling the scenography to the point of turning the luxurious hotel into a devastated battlefield. Without the curtain, the audience was forced to directly see and confront the new, violent reality, as well as each other across the stage.

Some members of the audience went so far as to defend the ethical need to programme and perform *Blasted* so as to confront (as a society and through the performing arts) the experience of despair and brutality and reflect on how this affects humanity: "*Blasted* is hard to watch and assimilate, but absolutely necessary right now. Violence surrounds us and manifests itself in multiple ways... even masked as

justice... and the same people always have to experience it" (melindroacid 2018).¹⁹ The writer of this comment identified one of the main objectives of Kane's "experiential theatre": "If we can experience something through art, then we might be able to change our future, because experience engraves lessons on our hearts through suffering" (quoted in Langridge and Stephenson 1997: 133). In other words, Kane attributed a cauterising function to theatre, whereby showing "real" violence and suffering on stage and making the audience experience it will lead them to resist it in life. In his *Artistic Project*, Albertí (n.d.: 15) similarly vindicated the cauterising value of contemporary British theatre and suggested that this was the social function the TNC should adopt in relation to its repertoire, so as to shine a light on and take responsibility for the most salient collective wounds that affect the contemporary world. The culture journalist Piquer (2018: para. 4–5) also identified the curative value of *Blasted*, derived in her opinion from it forcing the audience to face the intrinsic violence in all human beings, so they can confront it in real life. Piquer viewed the scandal generated by the play's Catalan premiere with concern as denoting a collective refusal to face our pain as a society.

On the basis of the different audience reactions that have been described, it can be concluded that the Catalan premiere of *Blasted* at the TNC clearly challenged the frame of dramatic and theatrical representation that the "ordinary" Catalan theatre-goer is used to, still largely defined by what Szondi calls "absolute drama". Consequently, a large proportion of spectators were taken out of their comfort zone as their horizon of expectation was unsettled. In dramatic and ethical terms, this means that, hopefully, the theatrical competence of "ordinary" Catalan theatre-goers was expanded, as was the Catalan contemporary theatrical canon that the TNC is responsible for establishing.

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Blasted (Rebentats): Ian (Pere Arquillué) and the Soldier (Blai Juanet).
Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, 2018. ©Felipe Mena



Set design of *Blasted* (*Rebentats*). Scene 1. Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, 2018. ©Felipe Mena

¹ In the Catalan original, “servei públic”; “Facilitar l’accés de tots els ciutadans de Catalunya a la cultura per mitjà de les arts escèniques [...]”

² “orientar la programació als seus interessos i necessitats [...]”

³ “[garantir] la diversitat de programació [...] tot integrant altres llenguatges i sensibilitats artístiques.”

⁴ Hereinafter, *Artistic Project*.

⁵ “crear cànon pel que fa als textos contemporanis [...] programar aquells autors i textos contemporanis que encara no formen part del nostre cànon [...]”

⁶ “el nostre públic no coneix [...] massa l’obra d’autors fonamentals com ho poden ser [...] Sarah Kane, [...] i hauríem de fer un esforç per conèixer[-los].”

⁷ “Garantir i potenciar l’ús de la llengua catalana en les arts escèniques i difondre el patrimoni cultural propi.”

- 8 “és l’últim gran clàssic que ens ha donat fins ara l’escriptura dramática contemporània.”
- 9 “ens convida a plantejar-nos les petges que han deixat en nosaltres les grans fites de la nostra cultura, que a l’obra de Kanes son tan evidents —des de Shakespeare, Sèneca o T.S. Eliot, fins a Beckett, Bond o Pinter.”
- 10 “És un text estratosfèric, un dels més importants del segle XX i del XXI.”
- 11 “Sarah Kane [...] és la mare del teatre que jo faig.”; “per reivindicar una altra manera d’entendre l’escenari.”
- 12 “Per mi, fer *Blasted* (per primer cop a Catalunya) no és només una qüestió de justícia teatral, sinó també és una necessitat personal de recuperar i entendre els clàssics.”
- 13 “Ara que per fi s’ha estrenat *Blasted* a casa nostra, ja és oficial: hem arribat a la majoria d’edat.”
- 14 “Després de veure *Blasted* i el seu festival d’escenes repugnants, em pregunto per què Pere Arquillué va acceptar un paper en una obra tan fastigosa i per què el Teatre Nacional la programa. Alguns espectadors han sortit abans i, al final, tímids aplaudiments per compromís.”
- 15 “Rebentats hem acabat els espectadors de *Blasted*. Un text fluixíssim, sense cap mena de sentit. Tot gratuït. [...] Albertí, fes el favor de no programar porqueries així.”
- 16 “M’he quedat sense paraules.”; “*Blasted*. No sé qué dir. Potser... Ufff.”
- 17 “*Blasted*, d’Alícia Gorina: incòmoda, directa, intensa, punyent i difícil de digerir. Obra molt dura però captivadora, que produeix rebuig i al mateix temps atrau. [...] Vaig sortir commocionada de la Sala Petita del TNC.”
- 18 “*Blasted*: Un text carregat de cruesa, Pere Arquillué irreconeixible, una proposta honesta i lliure d’efectismes pretenciosos, bravo, Alícia Gorina. Espero que això sigui el principi d’un canvi d’aires al Teatre Nacional i no un bolet. Més valentes i més dones!”
- 19 “*Blasted* al Teatre Nacional és difícil de veure i procesar.. però molt necessària ara mateix! La violència (no cal que sigui explícita) ens envolta i es manifesta de molt diverses formes... fins i tot disfressada de ‘justícia’.. i sempre la pateixen les mateixes.”

Echoes of Contemporary Anglophone Theatre on the Greek Stage

Elizabeth SAKELLARIDOU

Abstract: In the post-dictatorship era (1975 and after), the new sociopolitical situation in Greece has called for new radical plays in political thinking, sexual ethics and gender politics to be produced on stage. Under this ideological demand, the new British socialist and later the so-called “*In-Yer-Face*” theatre had, and still has, a great impact on Greek audiences. The keen interest in contemporary political British theatre continued well into the twenty-first century and was further intensified in the period after 2008 when a protracted situation of economic and social crisis heightened the spirit of anger, revolt and despair in the hearts of Greek citizens. At the same time the older generation of writers, with their thematic and stylistic diversity, never fell out of favour. However, as the indigenous dramatic production has been maturing both in writing skills and thematic diversity, there has also been developing a concurrent stronger critique over the reasons for the persisting popularity of contemporary British plays on the Greek stage with commercialization often being blamed for winning over more quality-based criteria. Also, the postdramatic tendencies of many theatre directors complicate further any attempt to pin down the motivation of specific production choices. Besides, in the last two decades, German docu-drama as well as Hispanic theatre have made a remarkable entrance into the Greek theatre market, thus introducing new parameters of competition over the Greek stage. However, one can say for sure that, because of greater familiarity with the English language (if not the culture), contemporary Anglophone theatre continues to hold its primary position in the attention of Greek theatre practitioners and audiences and, equally, as a source of thematic and stylistic inspiration for contemporary Greek playwrights.

When Mark Ravenhill visited Athens for the Greek premiere of his famous *Shopping and Fucking* in 1997, he told the director of the Greek production Thomas Moschopoulos:

All of you in the rest of Europe tend to face theatre as a form of “art”, and this is obvious in the staging of our plays. By contrast, we [in Britain] see it as a form of entertainment and sometimes as a forum through which we can occasionally expose our social, political and ideological positions.¹

Knowing Ravenhill’s playful, postmodern style, one should be cautious about this rather sweeping statement which, under close scrutiny, sounds both monocular and monocultural. It is monocular because it reflects Ravenhill’s subjective view on culture and art and it is monocultural because it treats “the rest of Europe” – the continent – as a compact, homogeneous culture, a view which is more than utopian in the multiplying and deepening ruptures within the European community of so many different cultures and mentalities.

The limited space of this essay does not permit a lengthy account of the particularity of the Greek case with respect to its history, nationhood and identity. The present state of multi-layered and protracted socio-economic crisis which has struck the country has certainly affected its theatre both in the themes tackled in the indigenous dramatic production and in the choice of foreign plays for production on the Greek stage. However, Greek dramaturgy has only recently turned, in a more consistent way, to the hazards and complications of life in Greece not only under the heavy legacy of persisting social and political pathogenies of the nation itself² but also under the pressure of the sweeping changes in global ethics and macropolitics. The relative lack of challenging new Greek playwriting has naturally been partly filled by the import of contemporary plays from abroad, with British plays apparently being at the top.³ However, things are not as simple as that.

The State of Modern Greece, since its foundation in the early 19th century, has traditionally split its political affiliation among the foreign powers that initially supported the country’s independence from Ottoman rule. Political division was also reflected in the Greeks’ divided cultural sympathies among four different European language-

es and cultures: the French, the English, the Russian and the German. Percentages have fluctuated and continue to do so, according to changing ideological, economic and educational parameters, which create shifts in cultural interchanges between Greek nationals (especially young skilled professionals) and foreign cultures.

Precisely because of all these historical and cultural complications, my methodological choice for the present essay has been to cross my subjective position as a British-bred academic with a parallel, direct access to French language and culture with the views of various other theatre theorists and practitioners. I therefore sent out to writers, directors, critics and translators a questionnaire on a number of issues relating to the impact of contemporary British theatre on theatre activities in Greece.⁴ The answers I received converge on many points but they also diverge significantly on issues of cultural preference (just as initially expected in my research) and they also differ with respect to the special position held by individual respondents within the theatre world. Working through all these different voices, I have tried to group together some significant issues on which there seems to be a major convergence of opinion, leaving for later more contradictory issues which might require closer analysis.

Writers and their works

Regarding contemporary British playwrights who still have an impact on the Greek stage and dramatic writing, the first name is by far that of Sarah Kane, mentioned in all the answers I received. As elsewhere in the world, the views on her work have gradually matured, going now beyond the hagiography surrounding her name as a self-killing young writer. In a recent review one could read:

We cannot but wonder what [Sarah Kane] would be writing about today. [...] As we are distancing ourselves from the emotional tension of her untimely death, her works, [...] almost prophetic for the years to come, will always tell us something unexpected, something deserving to stoop over and read it again. (Bozoni 2017: 1-2)

The title of another theatre review brings to the fore the eloquent question: “Why does Sarah Kane’s work continue to overwhelm the audience?” Matina Kaltaki asserts that Kane “surpassed the limits of her life: she became the first ‘classic’ of the twenty-first century” and suggests that “we will continue to deal with Kane’s works again and again, just as it happens only with great writers and with important theatre” (Kaltaki 2018a: 3). “Classic” is an almost standard qualifier attached to Kane’s work all through Greek theatre criticism. That this is not just a journalistic exaggeration can be proved by the fact that the highly respected theatre director Lefteris Voyatzis, who looked at Sarah Kane’s work in the early 2000s,⁵ was among the first to express an insightful view about the diachronic quality of her work with respect to both her subject matter and her language, “a language which creates a whole verbal universe, just as in the great classics” (Loverdou 2008: 2).

Other familiar or favourite names to Greek theatre-goers apart from Kane (and of course the older generation of writers like Beckett, Bond, Churchill, Pinter and Stoppard) are Howard Barker, Martin Crimp, Mark Ravenhill, Simon Stephens, Martin McDonagh, followed by a list of lesser known writers such as Dennis Kelly, Duncan Macmillan, Anthony Neilson and Tim Crouch. All these names of course differ so much from one another in style and thematic approach that it would be naive to group them together simply on account of their appeal to Greek theatre audiences and practitioners. Provided that in crisis-stricken Athens there are asymmetrically big numbers of theatre venues and yearly performances (the latter may be estimated to roughly 1200 per season (Kaltaki 2018b), it is hard to put down the motives and aims of individual productions and the exact features of the targeted audience for each. Contemporary Greek theatreland is still a partially charted territory and it will take several years of intense research to have a full view of how and why things have developed the way they have during this period of meagre means and miserable prospects.⁶

It is therefore crucial at this point to ask some more general questions concerning, first, the reasons why British theatre (irrespective of names) seems to hold the top position in recognition, practice and reception in Greece today and, second, the reason why some writers and plays are more popular than some others, still greatly revered, and yet left at the level of legends, rarely if ever to be seen on stage. Does British theatre appeal to the Greeks just because of its greater cultural accessibility by comparison to other languages and cultures? Or is this appeal rather due to the themes, the stylistic features and the stage techniques (including interactive, immersive theatre and digital technology) used by the British professionals today?

It seems, as most of my respondents have pointed out that, because English is beyond doubt the second language taught and spoken in Greece,⁷ English culture is far more accessible than others to the Greeks since their early teens. For the same reason Britain has always been an attraction for higher studies, theatre training and, lately, for highly qualified Greek professionals. As theatre people in particular confess – especially translators and directors – London is a regular destination for them to have access to new plays and performances, new trends in playwriting and stage aesthetics. For all these cultural and economic reasons there has been a growing cultural exchange between Britain and Greece, which has developed a sense of familiarity (even though often superficial) and has created a very favourable climate for the reception of British theatre in Greece.

For those who adopt a rigorous critical stance towards the popularity of British theatre in the Greek theatreland – like for instance theatre theorist and critic Dimitris Tsatsoulis, actor and playwright Tsimaras Tzanatos and director Thomas Moschopoulos – it is mainly for pragmatic reasons that a dominant anglophile trend in current theatre activities in Greece has emerged. Access to language, easy travel to London and the success of a new play's production in London or New York are mentioned as major factors for the import of British plays to the Greek stage. Under such considerations, Tzanatos makes a clear point that, unfortunately, Anglophone plays are chosen for the

Greek stage “not because of their dramatic dynamism but as a fad and an easy way out.”⁸ By contrast, as many theatre voices remark, more deserving writers in thematic inventiveness or poetic style, like Caryl Churchill or Howard Barker, remain less frequently produced. Barker especially, although unanimously accepted as a great writer, has been turned into a legend rather than an actual presence on the Greek stage because of the demanding, costly production of his major plays. Playwright Akis Dimou voices the disappointment of many other theatre people over the fate of Barker’s theatre in Greece quite emphatically: “I am struck by the fact that – with the exception of the production by the New Stage company of Lefteris Voyatzis [*The Dying of Today*] – a dramatist of the status of Howard Barker has not been sufficiently introduced to the Greek public.”⁹ In his assessment of the situation, Dimitris Dimitriadis, one of the most prestigious Greek dramatists of the last few decades goes into more painful depths:

This kind of dramaturgy [such as Barker’s] has little hope of finding followers, as was the case with earlier representatives of English theatre, precisely because the level of culture and interests of most contemporary writers does not allow them [i.e. the audience] to move beyond the limits of a naive and shallow recording of reality, with no other dimension either on the level of language or that of structure.¹⁰

Slightly shifting the perspective, one should also point out that, despite Sarah Kane’s continuing impact as a “new classic”, there have also been reservations about the way *In-Yer-Face* theatre has transferred to the Greek dramaturgy and the Greek stage aesthetic. Moschopoulos observes that, although this type of theatre has been influential on new writing in Greece, “it emerges mostly as mimesis rather than as fruitful dialogue and it remains pretty alien to the initial context that generated this style in the first place.”¹¹

No doubt, this kind of nagging criticism on how British theatre fares in the Greek theatrical landscape *does* reflect a certain reality about theatre’s commodification and yet it is only one aspect of the whole truth.

Towards some more constructive perspectives

There is a counterargument that can place things in a much more positive light. Putting aside the theatre industry factors and the dire economics of theatre producers, which may determine the preference for particular types of plays and the popularity of certain writers (topicality of subject matter, small-cast plays or low-budget productions), a basic factor that makes contemporary British theatre so attractive to Greek directors and audiences is undeniably its strong socio-political orientation. The post-Brechtian British tradition and its more recent variants developed by the writers of the 1990s and the new twenty-first century generation offer a well-constructed model of political theatre for a world in crisis,¹² which is most suitable for the deep and complex crisis that Greece has plunged into for almost a decade now. It is true that Greek playwrights have started responding to the confusion, the anguish and the despair of this turning point in human history but this writing is still sporadic and disorganized and it is still looking for an identity and a form hard to be found in its distant classical heritage. By contrast to the huge rupture in the continuity of the Greek cultural and theatrical tradition, the respective new British output has a strong tradition to fall back on concerning both the choice of subject matter and the styling of the debate for the stage. As a consequence, English plays are more trusted on the whole than the indigenous dramatic output, very often undeservingly so, as many new Greek writers point out.

Nina Rapi, a Greek writer who lived and wrote in Britain for about twenty years before returning to Greece, is quite outspoken about “the deep inferiority complex of the Greek psyche, which raises to great heights even mediocrities from the West and undervalues Greek plays that may well be far better than the Anglophone ones chosen for production.”¹³ Rapi is an interesting case of a new, hybrid Greek writer, who has integrated her prior British experience to the Greek socio-historical situation and the gender and sexual politics of the new generation. If Caryl Churchill’s *Top Girls* and Mark Ravenhill’s *Shopping and Fucking* first brought to Greece the messages of feminism and the gay

movement in 1983 and 1997 respectively, Nina Rapi is now among the original Greek voices of political and identity unrest.

Rapi is one example of fruitful intercultural creativity that has formed a distinct style of writing, crossing borders and opening a dialogue with her British peers. Lena Kitsopoulou is another striking example of a hybrid writer who has crossed the borders of local theatre and has made a name abroad. Kitsopoulou has created a Greek model of *In-Yer-Face* theatre which is certainly not mimetic because it is not only based on the writing of extremely violent and aggressive theatre scripts but is simultaneously transformed into a stage aesthetic by the artist herself – a performer, a singer and a director who can give flesh to her own fictional creations. Her theatre is a vibrant physical experience – anarchic, insolent and sarcastic – which involves her audience (in Greece and abroad) in a highly affective way. Even if her dramatic and stage tactics can be compared to those of Sarah Kane and Martin McDonagh, her strategies diverge from her Anglophone peers because her constant references to Greek history and folk tradition as well as her corporeal presence make her political anger and existential agony a genuine experience of “precarious living” in the social wasteland of the Greek capital and the chaotic existence of our age worldwide.¹⁴

The theatre institutions

There are yet other positive aspects concerning a fruitful intercultural exchange between Greek and British theatre. An issue to consider at some length, for instance, is the case of the Neos Cosmos (New World) Theatre, whose founder (and current artistic director of the Greek Festival), Vangelis Theodoropoulos, has twice decided to celebrate seminal moments in the life of his theatre through the production of contemporary British plays. Those were Simon Stephens’s *Motortown* for the 10th anniversary of the theatre in 2007 and *Heisenberg* for its 20th anniversary in 2017. As Theodoropoulos explained in a lengthy interview on the occasion of the more recent celebration, one of the aims of the Neos Cosmos Theatre has been to create a supportive haven for new artists and a friendly theatre space for

the neighbourhood (Anonymous 2018). Artistic diversity, collectivity and solidarity are the basic features of this dynamic theatre organization, whose progressive ideology lies behind its repertory and management strategies. Contemporary British plays have always ranked high among the successful productions of this theatre. Apart from the Stephens plays mentioned above, Martin McDonagh's *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (2003-4), Dennis Kelly's *The Orphans* (2010/2011-12) and Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets* (2017-18) (and some others) have been identified by Theodoropoulos as "hav[ing] left a strong mark through time [and] having an influence on the character of the theatre itself" (Anonymous 2018). For the stern theatre critic, the fact that the Greek productions of these plays followed immediately after their London success may raise questions about the motives behind the particular choices: have the commercial hit or the topicality or dramatic quality been the criteria of selection? However, despite such eloquent reservations, the popularity of a play should not necessarily be dismissed as a sign of populism or consumerism on the part of a theatre which aims at encouraging larger audiences to attend, provided of course that the quality of the production meets the standards of good theatre, which Neos Cosmos usually does.

There have been several other independent theatre organizations (all receiving State subsidies in the past), which have made contemporary British theatre one of the highlights of their repertoire. Their role must be stressed here because they have been on the whole much more attentive to British developments than the two National Theatres of the country (in Athens and Thessaloniki) and the Art Theatre of Karolos Koun, which had been much more open to modern Anglo-American theatre in the past.¹⁵ For example, Yannis Houvardas' Theatre of the South at the Amore theatre has hosted some earlier signposts of the new British theatre such as Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1997) and Patrick Marber's *Closer* (1998). These acclaimed productions, both directed by Thomas Moschopoulos (who is developing an international director's profile),¹⁶ do not leave any room for speculation about the actual cause of the plays' great success on the Greek stage. The high standard of the productions was appre-

ciated by the Greek audience of the 1990s, which was craving for the exploration of contemporary sexual ethics and politics that did not find a bold and articulate expression in the Greek dramatic writing of that time.

Equally important was the contribution of director Lefteris Voyatzis and his Nea Skini (New Stage) Company, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, in drawing Howard Barker and Sarah Kane to the attention of the Greek public (together with reviving an interest in Harold Pinter's plays). His productions of two of Sarah Kane's plays (*Cleansed* in 2001 and *Crave* in 2003) and the production of Howard Barker's *The Dying of Today* (2009) were distinguished for the deep appreciation of poetic language and a correspondingly fine aesthetic in the *mise-en-scène* and have acquired a prominent position in the recent history of the Greek stage.

Mentioning Voyatzis's dedication to the quest for a new form to match the complexities of demanding dramatic texts inevitably sends me back to Ravenhill's earlier quoted statement which stresses the different priorities existing in continental and in British theatre. My earlier reference to his remark was rather dismissive. Making now a slight shift in perspective and while I still stand by my introductory comment, I have to admit that the concern for form *does* rank high in all Greek theatre practices that go beyond the targets of a sheer commodity spectacle. All serious directors and experimental theatre groups place the investigation of new performance possibilities at the very centre of their work and this keeps them alert to artistic messages from all over the globe.

In search of a new theatre aesthetic

Limiting my scope again to possible influences from the British stage, I should stress the role that Forced Entertainment seems to have played as well as the experimental work of Tim Crouch, mostly hosted in another fringe art haven in Athens, Bios, which has also established a close cooperation with the British Council. Bios, as an alternative art hub, has bred a new generation of directors eager for further stage

experimentation. Although as a fringe space it does not appeal to the larger audiences of more mainstream (and yet quality) theatre venues like the ones mentioned above, it is the centre of attention of a smaller group of practitioners and theatre-goers who care for more avant-garde developments. Theatre critic Ileiana Dimadi illustrates quite vividly the mixed reception of Forced Entertainment's shows and Tim Crouch's theatre by the Athenian audience. Drawing a comparison between the types of art they represent, she subtitles her short article in a wittily humorous way as "The Brits we adore for troubling us". Commenting on their ambivalent reception as either "provocatively exceptional" or "revoltingly annoying," as well as "unforgettable or masochistic" experiences, she insists that nonetheless "we will not miss the performances of these two angry Brits" (Dimadi 2011). Because Dimadi's journalistic style may sound a bit frivolous, I will pair it with the view of another Greek writer and director of the younger generation, Elena Penga, who, like Nina Rapi, is in open dialogue with the current Anglo-American theatrical trends, which she adapts to the Greek socio-cultural environment without showing any sign of an authorial "anxiety of influence."¹⁷ On the contrary, both these writers seem to enjoy the challenge of cross-cultural osmosis and they feel at ease, for instance, when expressing their admiration for Caryl Churchill's versatile style and thematic diversity.

These two women writers, together with many other theatre practitioners of the younger generation, prove that Greek theatre artists are finding their own voice and style in tackling the complex situation of a country and a world in crisis. Intercultural loans from Britain and elsewhere begin to be processed critically by a more "Europeanized" and more "internationalized" Greek theatre¹⁸ which develops in two major directions: on the side of text-based theatre there is a focus either on a more or less social materialist analysis of urgent political issues of local and global interest (e.g. the work of Lena Kitsopoulou, Yannis Tsiros, Andreas Flourakis among others) or on a more poetic (but less popular) discourse, where echoes of sociopolitical reality are distilled into a more personal, mythical universe (e.g. the theatre of Dimitris Dimitriadis, Yannis Mavritsakis and Tsimaras Tzanatos,

which follows patterns similar to those of Howard Barker). On the other side, there is an emphasis on devised and verbatim theatre (e.g. the work of young directors Georgia Mavragani, Anestis Azas and Prodromos Tsinikoris), on performance issues and stage aesthetics, including the new hybrid challenges of immersive environments and all other possibilities offered by digital technology.

Conclusion

Summing up my brief survey on the responses of the Greek theatre and stage to Anglophone influences (English, Irish and American), I want to argue that, although lately challenged by Spanish social realistic drama and German docudrama and devised theatre, British theatre in particular continues to matter in Greek theatre life. Its contribution is felt in three distinct but also related areas: as an animating force for the Greek stage, as an inspiration for Greek writers and as an affective appeal to large Greek audiences, who crave plays of social unrest and social inquiry that seem to respond to their own precarious existence as citizens of Greece, Europe and the world.

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¹ Quoted by Thomas Moschopoulos in his electronic answer to my questionnaire concerning the influences of contemporary Anglophone theatre on the Greek stage and dramaturgy. All translations from Greek are mine unless otherwise stated.

² In their answers to my questionnaire both director Thomas Moschopoulos and playwright Nina Rapi hint at the necessity of an in-depth psychosocial investigation of the state of the contemporary theatre in Greece. In this domain Constantinos Tsoukalas's recent sociological study *Greece of Oblivion and Truth: From a Prolonged Adolescence to a Violent Maturation* (Η Ελλάδα της λήθης και της αλήθειας: Από τη μακρά εφηβεία στη βίαιη ενηλικίωση, 2012) is often quoted as a useful research resource.

³ There is of course no unanimous agreement on this issue among theatre scholars, critics and practitioners but the majority seem to agree that Anglophone theatre comes first in preference and influence on Greek theatrical life.

⁴ All answers are kept in my electronic archive and are accessible upon request from esakel@enl.auth.gr

⁵ He staged *Cleansed* in 2001 and *Crave* in 2003, actually introducing Sarah Kane to the Greek public.

⁶ In addition to scattered reviews and short articles published in the press and the research projects conducted in theatre departments of Greek universities, two very useful volumes of collected essays on the situation of contemporary Greek theatre have been published in recent years. These are two special issues, one in the academic journal *Gramma* entitled "The Geographies of Contemporary Greek Theatre: About Utopias, Dystopias and Heterotopias," ed. by Savas Patsalidis and Anna Stavrakopoulou (*Gramma* 22.2, 2014) and a second one in the *Journal of Greek Media and Culture* entitled "Dramaturgies of Change: Greek Theatre Now," ed. by Philip Hager and Marissia Frangou (*JGMC* 3.2, 2017). The two studies stress the gradual "Europeanization" and 'internationalization' of contemporary Greek theatre respectively.

⁷ The British Council's steady role in promoting British culture in Greece should not be underestimated here.

⁸ Tsimeras Tzanatos. E-text held by Elizabeth Sakellaridou.

⁹ Akis Dimou. E-text held by Elizabeth Sakellaridou. There has been one more major production of a full-length Barker play, that of *Scenes from an Execution* at the Porta theatre in 2001, directed by Constantinos Arvanitakis. Smaller-scale productions have dealt with two one-act plays, *Und* and *Judith, Twelve Encounters with a Prodigy* and *Thirteen Objects*.

¹⁰ Dimitris Dimitriadis. E-text held by Elizabeth Sakellaridou.

- ¹¹ Thomas Moschopoulos. E-text held by Elizabeth Sakellaridou.
- ¹² Vicky Angelaki gives a very comprehensive analysis of the “Hydra of crisis” in her far-ranging book *Social and Political Theatre in 21st Century Britain: Staging Crisis* (2017, p. 5).
- ¹³ Nina Rapi. E-text held by Elizabeth Sakellaridou.
- ¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of the theatre of Lena Kitsipoulou as well as that of Yannis Mavritsakis, mentioned later in this essay, see my relevant chapter in the collective volume *Contemporary European Playwrights*, ed. by Maria Delgado, Bryce Lease and Dan Rebellato (Routledge, forthcoming).
- ¹⁵ Naturally, National Theatres have different policies than independent theatre institutions and commercial theatre as well. The State Theatre of the North has only recently shown a greater interest in contemporary British theatre. Dennis Kelly’s *Orphans* is now in its second run after a sold-out season last year. Patrick Marber’s *Closer* is opening shortly. A new Martin Crimp play is currently under consideration for a possible future staging. Similarly, in the National Theatre’s repertoire of 2018-19 Anglo-Irish theatre is represented by two plays by Duncan Macmillan and Conor McPherson respectively.
- ¹⁶ Moschopoulos has been invited to direct a production of Pinter shorts at the Soulpepper theatre in Canada in February 2019. He has also directed Jez Butterworth’s *Mojo* at the Porta theatre in 2015.
- ¹⁷ It is worth noting that Elena Penga translated and directed Tim Crouch’s play *My Arm* at the Neos Cosmos Theatre in March 2012.
- ¹⁸ This is the assertion of the editors’ introduction in both volumes on the current developments of Greek Theatre mentioned earlier in this essay. For details see note vi.

Contemporary Anglophone Theatre on Montenegrin Stages from 2000 to 2015

Vesna TRIPKOVIĆ-SAMARDŽIĆ

Abstract: This essay deals with the reception of contemporary Anglophone playwrights in four Montenegrin theatres from 2000 to 2015. The 23 Anglophone plays that were staged by these theatres belong to different theatre genres and different time periods. The insight into the reception of the plays, based on the data obtained from the theatre archives, shows that “classic” playwrights (T. Williams, A. Miller, E. Albee, S. Beckett and H. Pinter) retained their popularity with the Montenegrin audience; at the same time, theatre practitioners showed great interest in adapting more contemporary playwrights, such as N. Wood, P. Quilter and E. Bond. Theatre reviews and interviews with leading Montenegrin theatre practitioners and theatre scholars reveal that the decisive factors that contributed to the selection of the plays and to their positive reception by critics and audiences were: high artistic value and the widespread popularity of the texts, the theatrical relevance of the plays, the talent and skills of the stage practitioners and the appeal of the specific theatre genre. The plays reflected the trend towards the politization of contemporary theatre in Montenegro, which was the theatrical response to the challenges of modern times. In the context of the problematic social and political reality of Montenegro in the first fifteen years of the 21st century, the plays addressed the most burning issues of Montenegrin society in the period of transition and, generating greater audience participation, managed to challenge the accepted notions underpinning the Montenegrin patriarchal society.

From the earliest times, Montenegro was “the battlefield of human and social drama”¹ (Perović 2014: 109): unfavourable circumstances delayed the appearance of an organized form of theatre, but the “dy-

namism of everyday war reality replaced [...] and compensated for the need for this kind of collective artistic expression" (*ibid.*: 111). In spite of this, Montenegrin theatre has a rich history which draws from diverse cultural traditions.

Anglophone playwrights were present in large numbers and adapted for the Montenegrin stages long before the period described in this paper. The theatre and performance archives reveal that in the period from the 1950's to 2000 the most popular Anglophone playwrights on the stages of the Royal Theatre Zetski Dom, the Montenegrin National Theatre and Nikšić Theatre were: Shakespeare, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, William Inge, Edmund Morris, Somerset Maugham, George Bernard Shaw, Margaret Mayo, Agatha Christie, Ben Jonson, Samuel Beckett, J.B. Priestley, James Gow, Arnaud d'Usseau, Norman Krasna, Barry Connors, Brandon Thomas, Avery Hopwood, Robinson Jeffers, Alan Paton, Reginald Rose, Joseph Kesserling, Sean O'Casey, Paul Zindel, Harold Pinter, John Patrick, Elmer Harris and Oscar Wilde.

The study of the reception of contemporary Anglophone playwrights in Montenegro in the period from 2000 to 2015 is based on the research carried out in two state theatres (the Royal Theatre Zetski Dom, Cetinje and the Montenegrin National Theatre, Podgorica) and two city theatres (the City Theatre Podgorica and Nikšić Theatre). In the Montenegrin National Theatre, eleven contemporary Anglophone plays (out of seventy-one premieres held) were staged in the period from 2000 to 2015. Of the fifty-two premieres held in the Royal Theatre Zetski Dom (the oldest state theatre in Montenegro) in the same period, five premieres were stage adaptations of contemporary Anglophone plays. The difference between the two city theatres is much bigger, both in terms of the number of plays produced in this period (fifty-two premieres in the City Theatre Podgorica and only nineteen premieres in Nikšić Theatre, the second-oldest theatre in Montenegro) and in terms of the number of contemporary Anglophone plays that were put on their stages (seven plays in the City Theatre Podgorica and only one in Nikšić Theatre).

The contemporary Anglophone plays that were staged in these theatres belong to different theatre genres (tragedy and absurd drama, tragicomedy, vaudeville, black comedy, comedy of errors, farcical comedy, and children's plays) and different time periods: from "classics" such as T. Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), through to those published in the second half of the 20th century, such as S. Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* (1964), W. Allen's *Death* (1975), C. Durang's *Beyond Therapy* (1981), A. Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden* (1991), to the more recent ones, such as N. Wood's *Warrior Square* (2004) and P. Quilter's *Glorious* (2005). It is obvious from the list that some "classic" playwrights (T. Williams, A. Miller, E. Albee, S. Beckett and H. Pinter) retained their popularity with Montenegrin audiences and critics after 2000. At the same time, the theatre practitioners showed great interest in adapting modern-day playwrights, such as Edward Bond, Steven Berkoff, Ray Cooney, Patrick Marber, Martin McDonagh, Peter Quilter and Anthony Neilson. In order to understand the factors that contributed to the reception of these particular authors and their plays, we should look at the specific political, social, economic, and cultural environment in Montenegro from 2000 to 2015.

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century theatre practitioners in Montenegro continued to explore in their works universal, existentialist themes, but also tried to find "dramaturgical and theatrical expression capturing the decades during which Montenegro was partly an active participant, and partly an observer of the events in the former Yugoslavia" (Lukan: 186). Summarizing the last decade of the 20th century, renowned Montenegrin theatre scholars and practitioners wrote indignantly about the civilizations ruined in the name of religion, "interconfessional inquisitions surpassed by the wicked ideologies of the past century" (Perović 2002: 6), "dilettantism, arrogance and immorality" (Radulović: 8), which brought about "the sinking of the fatigued and displaced Montenegro into the darkness of the province" (Radojević 2002: 7). No sooner was this traumatic decade over than another turbulent period in Montenegro's history (2000-2015) started, bringing the disintegration of the common state with Serbia,

Montenegro's proclamation of independence, the beginning of the EU accession process and the big investment boom. With xenophobia and fundamentalism still present in the "colonized" Montenegrin society going through the transition and "self-definition", the theatre practitioners were made to face new traumas which only covered "old scars and still unhealed wounds" (Perović 2002: 6): refugee issues, the problem of impunity for war crimes, corruption, political favouritism, nepotism, prosecution of political and societal opponents, police violence and all sorts of discrimination. Their stage works also brought to the surface other, wider issues such as "the absurd waiting for the recognition of the natural rights of the nation" (Brković 2002: 3), "forms of cynicism which reflect the relationship of the International Community to the small countries today" (*ibid.*), "the trend towards globalization [which] brings unification and a new form of colonialism" (Radojević 2002: 7) and "the beginning of a new, very subtle totalitarianism [...] with less faith in authentic communication between different worlds" (Brković 2002: 3).

Each of the adapted Anglophone stage plays which was premiered in one of the four Montenegrin theatres deals with a number of themes (existential, political, family) that overlap. However, the plays are here divided into three larger groups, each presenting *one* particular aspect or layer of meaning accentuated during the theatre production. Thus, the first group of plays, referred to as "existentialist", includes the plays that deal with universal problems, such as: the absurdity of human existence and the despiritualization of the modern world (*Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*), the corruption of our civilization and degradation of humanity in times of liberal capitalism (*Have I None, Existence*), the hypocrisy and degeneracy in modern society (*The Lying Kind*), the lack of love and emotional intimacy in the era of technologization and globalization (*Closer, Beyond Therapy*), the absurdity of reality (*Glorious*), transience, materialism and alienation (*The Giving Tree*), the contradictions between past and present and the conflict between fantasy and reality (*Fool for Love, A Streetcar Named Desire*). The second group includes the plays that deal with the political issues of current relevance for Montenegrin society: the consequences

of ethnic conflict (*Warrior Square*), the mechanisms of repression in a totalitarian regime (*Party Time, Death and the Maiden*), the opposition between the individual and the collective and the defiance and revolt against the system (*The Tiger, Death*). The third group of plays highlights “family” issues, such as: the crisis of marriage and the limits of ‘liberal’ societies (*Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Goat, or Who’s Sylvia*), patriarchal family relationships (*The Beauty Queen, A View from the Bridge, The Homecoming*) or anxiety, hypocrisy and hypertrophic sexuality seen as the manifestations of contemporary collective neurosis (*Kvetch, Run for Your Wife*).

The results of this research are based on the analysis of all the listed stage plays. However, as the overview of the reception of all the plays would take up much more space than required by this article, this essay will include only the plays that are representative of each group in terms of the themes addressed, the specific directorial approaches and their popularity.

The Beauty Queen was the longest-running stage play in the Montenegrin National Theatre (it has been performed more than 100 times since the premiere in 2004). By adapting McDonagh’s *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, the tale about a turbulent and manipulative relationship between an ailing mother and her daughter, the director Ana Vukotić created a production focused on “family madness” typical of patriarchal mentality, i.e. the phenomenon of “egoism of the elderly justified by the ‘divine order’ of the patriarchal society” (Brković 2004). As cited by the director, the main reason for the selection of this particular play was a tremendous similarity between an Irish milieu and that of Montenegro (Ćetković 2005). The director explained that two main reasons for the play’s popularity among theatregoers and critics were the play’s strong appeal to different generations who can identify with the characters in the performance as well as the combination of different actors’ sensibilities on stage (*ibid.*). The play has been highly regarded both by the critics and audiences and won awards at regional and international festivals. According to the critic Brković (2004), the story about a patriarchal mentality

which required actualization and the “transposing of Irish topoi into Montenegrin ones” was effectively put on stage owing to the director’s “remarkable creative potentials”, her “clever, accurate, suggestive and sometimes lucidly humorous approach” to the play and her focus on the manipulative relationship between the mother-tyrant and the enslaved daughter. The critic also praised the lead actress Dragica Tomas, who, due to “the shift of the interpreting modus towards humour” managed to create one of her most memorable roles (*ibid.*)

Other popular Anglophone plays staged in the state theatres were Sam Shepard’s *Fool for Love* (4 seasons) and Murray Schisgal’s *The Tiger* (3 seasons). Both plays were premiered in The Royal Theatre Zetski Dom. The universality of Shepard’s play (the primacy of love, the sufferings of individuals struggling with their own conflicting emotions), as well as the provocative theme (incest taboo) strongly appealed to the Montenegrin theatregoers who were made to rethink established social restrictions and their own feelings of hatred, fear and intolerance to “non-standard” forms of love. Another reason why this play made a stunning effect on the audience was the fact that the young stage directors Jelena Milačić and Emir Ćatović put it on stage in a minimalistic way, with no music, so that the audience was able to focus on the acting and identify with the characters (Čolpa 2012). *The Tiger* tells us another story which contemporary theatregoers in Montenegro could easily identify with: the frustrations of “a little man” who, dissatisfied with his own life and the system he lives in, wreaks his anger and helplessness on his victim, trying to find a “tiger” within himself. The pathological situation in which the executioner and the victim get closer, the stage director’s (Petar Pejaković) minimalistic aesthetics and the use of alternative techniques (having the audience together with the actors on stage) aimed at intensifying communication between the spectators and the actors all make this stage play even more appealing.

Other plays staged in the state theatres were on the repertoire for one to two seasons. At a time when the Montenegrin economy completely depended on the oligarchs, Bond’s *Existence*, an effective por-

trayal of the cruelty of neoliberal capitalism, was a text Montenegrin audiences could easily identify with. The play was positively received both by the theatre critics and by the theatregoers. It was described as an artwork that possesses “the minimalism and ultimate purity of the scenic language” as well as the extraordinary “intensity of the atmosphere” (Tasić 2012). The critics praised the way the stage director R. Vojvodić experimented with the spectators’ perception and her ability to stage Bond’s poetics of violence in such a forceful way that the relationship between the torturer and the victim is “metalinguistically reflected in the relationship between the theatre apparatus and the viewer” (I. Čukić 2013). The originality of the production in this stage work contributing to “the authenticity of the total experience” (Tasić 2012) is evident in the choice of the setting for the premiere in Kotor: the sacral space of the church of the Holy Spirit, quite different from Bond’s stage setting (a room in an old building) described in the production notes, which accentuates the degradation of humanity and “conscientious search for lost innocence and forgotten virtue” (Tasić 2012) but also allows us to read the play as “the criticism of the sacred but also of all public, ethically non-indifferent discourses that allow ethics to depart from the experience of righteousness, from life, to freeze in abstractions and there die” (Nelević 2012). In addition to the new setting, the inserted ending – excerpts from Bond’s *Rough Notes on Justice* (and injustice) with which the stage director (unlike Bond!) gave back the main protagonist the power of speech, is seen by the critics as the necessary contribution to the director’s vision of the play which, in her staging, becomes a violent attack on the viewer, but also serves as an act of liberation (Čukić 2013).

Another “effective recapitulation” or “settling of accounts with the 20th century” (Milosavljević 2001) was the show called *Requiem of the 20th Century*, the most demanding project in the history of Montenegrin theatre (Brković 2000a) and “the biggest challenge for the local theatre industry” (Brković 2000b). *Party Time* is the first performance in the project and, in the words of most of the critics, the best part of the trilogy (Brković 2000b) because it is “the closest to the Balkan socio-psychological pulse” at the end of the twentieth century (Per-

ović 2000). Four of Pinter's short plays: *The New World Order* (1991), *One for the Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988) and *Party Time* (1991) were grouped under the same title *Party Time* because they address the same theme – the legacy of totalitarianism. Slovenian director Eduard Miler was praised by the critics for creating such “an exciting polyphony, an oratory which reveals various forms of violence rooted in all forms of life, the kinds of fear and anxiety” (Nelević 2001) and for putting the focus on the phenomenon of repression and the mechanisms by which it is activated not only in totalitarian, but in more developed societies in which the strategies of repression are more sophisticated (Novović 2000). Furthermore, the process by which the characters constantly alternate their roles of victim and torturer serves in this play only to show us that these voices belong to “the general history of violence” (Nelević: 2001).

In the City Theatre, most of the shows have had a long run (up to 10 seasons). This theatre's programming policy of staging internationally popular comedies is, as noted by the critics, aimed at meeting the needs of the audience, which does not imply the exclusion of “cautiousness and intelligent dialogue” (Nelević 2008). The longest-running plays in this period were: R. Cooney's *Run for Your Wife* (10 seasons), the worldwide popular vaudeville about a taxi driver's futile attempts to explain himself to two wives and two police officers, A. Neilson's *The Lying Kind* (10 seasons), a shocking black comedy about our reality made up of a tangled web of lies and deceits and P. Quilter's *Glorious* (5 seasons), a true story about the amazing success of the worst soprano in the world. The huge success of *Run for Your Wife* could be attributed to the entertaining plot line, brilliant cast, especially the charismatic lead actor (Nikolić 2000) and the talent of the young stage director I. Bogićević, who sticking to the rules of the vaudeville genre (which is not commonly found on Montenegrin stages) staged the story of people's inability to communicate, and, solving “a number of complex situations with filmic scenes and dynamism” (*ibid.*) made a play which appealed to a wide audience. Though set in a different time and place, the stage play *Glorious* had current relevance for the Montenegrin theatregoers because it tells us a story about a woman

who managed to transform herself into a central event of a province like ours “with her own efforts, bribes and corruption” (K. J. 2014). In such a way, as observed by the director, the female protagonist revealed the absurdity of our reality and “‘the triumph of lies, kitch and deceit’ in our time in which it is hard to differentiate between fake and true values” (M.I. 2014). The serious social message of the play combined with its playfulness made a strong impression on the “usually shy local theatre audience”, who burst into laughter every time they heard the brilliant actress D. Drakić sing out of tune (Mučalica 2017). The positive reception of *The Lying Kind* could also be explained by the current relevance of the play: the plot revolves around the white lie (made up by the police officers to protect the frail, elderly parents from the news of their daughter’s death) that sets off a whole chain of “deceits, provisional interpretations, grotesque situations and errors” (Nelević 2008). In spite of the challenge of translating British black humour to suit the Montenegrin context, the genre of black comedy allowed stage director M. Manojlović to bring to the surface Neilson’s harsh criticism of society and deal, through comedy, with such serious issues as paedophilia, transvestitism, child abuse, dementia and deaths of humans and animals.

Most of the Anglophone plays produced in this theatre after 2000 (*The Lying Kind*, *Glorious*, *A View from the Bridge*, *Beyond Therapy*) are still being performed. Nikšić Theatre, in line with its traditional programming policy of adapting classics, staged T. Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the world-famous work about lost youth, transience, fear of death and fantasy’s inability to overcome reality. The stage play, directed by Croatian director Ž. Orešković, was received exceptionally well both by the audience, not only in Montenegro, but in the whole region, confirming the attitude that theatre audiences in Montenegro are more attracted to classical theatre (G. K. 2004). In the words of the critics, the performance served as a good example of “the aesthetically-based creative courage producing good results” (G. K. 2005) and of the theatre house capable of producing the most complex professional projects (*ibid.*). However, despite its enormous success, the play has not been included in the repertoire since 2004/2005.

This insight into the reception of the individual plays shows that the decisive factors in the selection of these particular texts was the high artistic value and widespread popularity of the texts. A great number of these plays are still being performed on the world's stages and most of them have been adapted for the screen, which has obviously aroused strong interest in the plays among theatregoers in Montenegro. Another important factor that has contributed to the selection of the plays and to their positive reception by the critics and the audience was their current relevance, i.e. viewers' receptiveness to the themes (the possibility for contemporary spectators to identify with their characters) (Radulović 2013). In most cases, the positive reception of the plays was the result of the talent and skills of the director who knew how to stage the play and, thanks to fruitful cooperation with other theatre practitioners, convey its specific meanings to theatregoers in Montenegro. In some cases, it was the combination of different actors' sensibilities on stage and the appeal of the specific theatre genre that have contributed to the favourable reception.

Lidija Dedović, the director of the Royal Theatre Zetski Dom and one of the most famous Montenegrin stage directors confirms that the "official" criteria for the selection of plays (not only Anglophone) are in line with the results of this research:

The most important criterion [...] is the content of the selected text and the absolute relevance of this content for the audience, presented in a truthful, uncompromising, sensuous, analytic, and transformative way! Then, it is indispensable to have the feeling for the choice of the stage director who will stage that particular text and that particular theme which reflects an idea about the world, man and time. This requires talent, instinct and education. Of course, a high-quality acting team is taken for granted. For us in the theatre this is a recipe which helped us achieve the greatest international fame since the theatre Zetski Dom was founded. (personal interview, October 7, 2018.)

The same demand is imposed upon the theatre critics in Montenegro today. On the occasion of Biennial of the Montenegrin Theatre, 2012, N. Nelević, one of the most renowned Montenegrin theatre critics and playwright in Montenegro, said that it was the task of

the theatre critic today to study “how the theatre is immersed in its time and how it responds to the different challenges of modern times” (J.N. 2012). The dominant trend of the Montenegrin theatre in the first two decades of 21st century seems to have responded to this demand.

Several trends in contemporary Montenegrin theatre have emerged as the theatrical responses to the challenges of modern times: a trend towards “the politization of the theatre by means of the fictional dramatic text”, a trend towards the development of postdramatic and communicative theatre and a trend towards women’s playwriting (J.N. 2012). Bearing in mind the problematic social and political reality of Montenegro in the first fifteen years of the 21st century, it was not surprising that the theatre felt the need to deal more directly with political and social issues and (re)enter a dialogue with society. The twenty-three contemporary Anglophone plays that were put on the stages of the Montenegrin theatres during this period played an important role in this dialogue. These stage productions addressed the most burning issues of the Montenegrin society in the period of transition and, having been aimed at generating greater audience participation and involvement, managed to challenge the accepted notions Montenegrin patriarchal society is based on. The apocalyptic and dystopian vision in *Endgame* and *Have I None* reflects the state of emptiness, hopelessness, disorientation and passivity in Montenegro after the collapse of the values of civilized society, but also expresses severe criticism of neoliberal capitalism. Some stage plays challenge the stereotyped images of refugees and asylum seekers (*Warrior Square*) or spur the activism against gender-based violence (*Death and the Maiden*); others raise our awareness of the psychological modes of power functioning (*Party Time*) and of the ills of modern society (*The Lying Kind*) or point to the collapse of patriarchal family relations (*Beauty Queen*) and to the destruction of an individual in the modern age (*Death*). In some cases, the theatre practitioners found that postdramatic strategies were “more suited to dealing with social issues” (Carrol, Jürs-Munby, *et.al.*: 3), and chose to abandon the theatre building in favour of some other space that carries other meanings (church in

Existence), invite the audience on stage (*The Tiger*), or deviate significantly from the stage directions and the script of the original play, such as the productions of *Waiting for Godot*, which transformed it into an alternative comedy in which the main character is played by a woman.

Positive reception of the contemporary Anglophone plays staged in the four Montenegrin theatres shows that these theatres have, after so many years in an environment of war and isolation, turned towards “the decontamination of the legacy of the painful 1990s” (J.Lj. 2013: 144) and that they have been quite successful in developing the concept of “openness through the internationalization of theatrical production” (*ibid.*).

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¹ My translation unless otherwise indicated.

Transpositional Exchanges: Contemporary Anglophone Drama on the Czech National Stage

Clare WALLACE

Abstract: This essay proposes an examination of the role of Anglophone theatre produced in translation by the Czech National Theatre since 2000. Setting aside work by Shakespeare and plays from earlier historical periods, it will concern itself with productions of modern and contemporary work. Drawing on the theatre's archives, the first part of the essay will survey the presence of work of Anglophone provenance in the repertoire and the theatre's programming decisions. The second part will investigate specific case studies, in order to explore the ways in which the work has been artistically interpreted and critically received. Case studies will treat the following productions: Tom Stoppard's *Rock'n'Roll* (premiere: 2007), Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London / Zemětřesení v Londýně* (premiere: 2015) and Caryl Churchill's *Love and Information / Láska a Informace* (premiere: 2016).

Scanning through the theatre listings for autumn 2018 in Prague alone, productions of English language plays in translation include: Martin McDonagh's *The Lonesome West*, and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, Caryl Churchill's *Escaped Alone*, and *Cloud Nine*, David Greig's *Midsummer*, David Mamet's *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* (2 productions), *American Buffalo*, and *November*, Patrick Marber's *Dealer's Choice*, David Hare's *Skylight*, Edward Bond's *The Sea*, Duncan MacMillan's *Every Brilliant Thing*, Dennis Kelly's *After the End*, and *Orphans*, Mike Bartlett's *Cock*, Irvine Welsh's *The Sex Lives of Siamese Twins*, Moira Buffini's *Welcome to Thebes*, Rebecca Lenkiewicz's *The Night Season*, Paul Rudnick's *The New Century*, Tracy Letts' *August Osage County*, Peter Morgan's *Audience* ... a list that does not include several comedies by Woody Allen, whodunits, farces and evergreen versions of *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

Anglophone theatre certainly crosses into the Czech language and cultural space with remarkable frequency, and most visibly so in the repertoires in the capital city. It is present in the theatrical canon, as is to be expected, via Shakespeare, but also with productions of G.B. Shaw, Oscar Wilde and Samuel Beckett. If the RADAC 2018 conference took the privileged position of Anglophone-origin theatre post WWII for granted, then in former Eastern bloc countries, such a phenomenon is more aptly traced from the paradigmatic transformations of 1989 and the evolving cultural politics of Central and Eastern Europe following the fall of the Iron Curtain. As my opening anecdote implies, within a contemporary Czech context the significance of work of Anglophone provenance seems undeniable, catalyzed (even when that work is presented in translation) by the dominance of English as a second language of choice propagated via forms of cultural globalization, and prioritized in the education system since the fall of communism. Yet to trace the influence of contemporary Anglophone theatre on European stages is something of an invidious task, not least because of the hazards of essentializing what Anglophone theatre might be, of generalizing about European stages, or of getting lost in so much local detail that no one is listening. Nevertheless, the flow of cultural impulses and interchange within European theatre is surely of consequence, particularly in a climate of resurgent nationalisms and at a time when political borders have become a matter of much negative energy and mistrust. Understanding such flows and the nature of these exchanges requires “thick description” (see Geertz, 1973: 3-32), an attention to the nuances of context, artistic traditions, the roles of individuals, groups and material constraints in interpretation of cultural practice. Moreover, considering the movements of theatrical influence also requires an acknowledgement that they are, frustratingly, neither regular, programmatic nor reciprocal. In what follows I want to explore some of the cultural dynamics of Anglophone drama as it crosses into and circulates within a Czech setting, admittedly in a preliminary and partial way. My approach is informed by three criteria: first, to focus on the National Theatre in Prague, second to focus on work staged since 2000, and third, to concentrate on new writing.

The paper does not pretend to account for translational practices specifically, neither does it deal with the adaptational and translational politics of producing Shakespeare (a topic much more extensively discussed in scholarly work in any case) or other canonical earlier works. Rather it considers what the selection, production and reception of recent Anglophone drama in Czech translation might communicate, and the ways new meanings may accrue to work through transposition to another social and theatrical context.

Prague currently has more than 50 theatres, some are repertory institutions with their own ensembles, some are very small, some are production houses, a few are venues for hire. According to the National Information and Advice Centre for Culture (NIPOS) statistics for 2017, over 5.8 million people attended theatre performances across the country, with half a million of those attending performances (Drama, Ballet and Opera) in the National Theatre, an organization which consists of four branches: Drama, Ballet, Opera and *Laterna Magika* and four buildings (See *Národní informační a poradenské středisko pro kulturu*, 2017: 2ff).

The Czech National Theatre is a massive, state funded historical institution that is at the forefront of mainstream national theatrical culture. Often referred to ironically as the golden chapel on the riverbank, it is not a light-footed organization, but it is data rich. A grand manifestation of cultural nationalism, the truncated history of the Czech National Theatre can be traced from an idea in the 1840s, a foundation stone in 1868, the ceremonial opening of the building in 1881, a fire less than a month later that destroyed the core of the building, a subsequent groundswell of countrywide donations, rebuilding and reopening in 1883. The National Theatre is inevitably a symbolically overdetermined space of cultural self-formulation that bears the imprints of the political environments, not only of its nascent, but of the ideological transformations of the twentieth century. The motto above the proscenium arch in the main building – “*Národ sobě*” – is translated variously as the nation for itself, or to itself, or on behalf of the nation. It is emblematic of the proclamations of national

theatres emergent across Europe in the nineteenth century, it is also typical in that it both preceded and anticipated the establishment of the nation state of Czechoslovakia that came into existence, finally, only in 1918. Yet as Loren Kruger notes, despite the emphasis on “national singularity,” national theatres are rooted in “multiple, entangled identities and cultural indebtedness” (2008: 37) that “has always existed in a *transnational* field” (2008: 35). I am particularly interested in how in the twenty-first century the tension between national singularity and the transnational, global or cosmopolitan is negotiated and articulated in the selection and interpretation of work of English language provenance in the nation’s premier institution.

Following the Velvet Revolution in November 1989, as Czech theatre historian Jarka Burian and others have described, the theatre community newly liberated from the constraints of the communist regime, not only returned to suppressed works and writers, but also found itself disorientated in the face of utterly new conditions and evolving economic realities (See Burian, 2000; Stefanova, 2000; Reslová, 2000, 2003; Vojtíšková & Lorencová, 2015). The risk of generalization notwithstanding, there is critical consensus that theatre in Prague throughout the 1990s embraced postmodern/postdramatic experiment, shunned social realism or topical relevance, and could boast of a number of influential young directors. But also, it struggled to find a new generation of Czech playwrights (Reslová, 2003: 77-81),¹ and this has remained a topic of ongoing concern. Until 1997, under the artistic direction of Ivan Rajmont,² and then until 2002 under Josef Kovalčuk, drama at the National Theatre revisited European and Czech classics, with the occasional inclusion of modern canonical work by J.M. Synge, Eugene O’Neill, Harold Pinter or Samuel Beckett.

By the 2000s, thanks to multiple factors – political, social and technological – attitudes and practices were changing. Altered senses of community and proximity as a consequence of the internet, new conditions of funding, Czech accession to the EU in 2004, the development of festivals, international cultural projects and so on, were

pivotal, as were specific individuals. A key stimulus was the new artistic director of drama at the National, Michal Dočekal, who during his tenure from 2002-2014 actively sought to stage contemporary work alongside classics, and to position the National in a European context through transnational co-operation, festivals and programming.³ Another figure influential in bringing Irish and British works to the repertoire was Jan Hančil, dramaturg at the theatre between 1997 and 2006, and presently Rector of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague.⁴ In addition, Lenka Kolířová Havlíková, who worked with Dočekal as dramaturg from 2002-2012, was instrumental in the production of many Anglophone works in Czech translation on the institution's stages including Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* (Stavovské divadlo / Estates Theatre, 2004), Edna O'Brien's *Virginia* (Divadlo Kolowrat / Kolowrat Theatre, 2005), John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt* (Divadlo Kolowrat / Kolowrat Theatre, 2007), Tom Stoppard's *Rock'n'Roll* (Národní divadlo / National Theatre, 2007), Tracy Letts' *August: Osage County* (Stavovské divadlo / Estates Theatre, 2009), Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (Nová scéna / New Stage, 2010), Edward Bond's *Saved* (Nová scéna / New Stage, 2010) and Lucy Prebble's *Enron* (Stavovské divadlo / Estates Theatre, 2012). Notably Havlíková was dramaturg for the two National Theatre productions of Sarah Kane's work in translation in the early years of the decade, *Phaedra's Love* (performed in a temporary festival space called Bouda in the centre of Prague, 2003) and a much-discussed production of *4.48 Psychosis* in 2003 at the Kolowrat Theatre that ran for 41 performances. Havlíková in turn is a close associate of an important figure in the translation scene, Jitka Sloupová, co-founder in 1990 of the drama and literary translation agency Aura-Pont, and translator of numerous contemporary English language works.⁵

A second aspect was the popularity of *In-Yer-Face* theatre, and a 1990s generation of new British and Irish playwrights (in particular Mark Ravenhill, Sarah Kane, Patrick Marber and Martin McDonagh) whose work was being translated and staged throughout the country. An engagement with British new writing is manifest in Czech theatre periodicals from the late 1990s and early 2000s, as is illustrated by

the translation of an article by Aleks Sierz on *In-Yer-Face* theatre published in *Svět a Divadlo* (*World and Theatre*) in 2000, before his book of the same name was published in 2001. Several Czech theatre makers have participated in Royal Court Theatre residencies, giving rise to conversations about the differing priorities and aesthetics of English and Czech theatre and the influence of such collaboration on the register, tone and form of some contemporary Czech playwrights' work (Hoffmannová, 2006: 588-597).⁶ As will be clear below, the repertoire of the Czech National Theatre in the first decades of the twenty-first century also reflects something of these broader tendencies. Concentrating on new writing in this context solicits consideration of the currency of contemporary work and the issues to which it attaches, points I will illustrate later in more detail via the case studies of the National Theatre productions of Tom Stoppard's *Rock'n'Roll* (2007), Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* (2015) and Caryl Churchill's *Love and Information* (2016).

Production patterns: drama in translation on the National stages

Even though it is not the remit of the drama division to be a hub for new work of Czech or foreign origin, in reviewing the lists of premieres in the National Theatre archive, some patterns do emerge that indicate something of the impact of Anglophone theatre in this high profile, mainstream space. First of all, throughout the period the distribution and proportion of work of English language origin is largely stable (Figure 1). Within the total of Anglophone plays in translation between 2000 and 2018, adaptations of Shakespearean works and non-Shakespearean classics (such as *School for Scandal*, *Pygmalion*) account for slightly more than a third of all productions while the remainder consists of modern and contemporary drama (Figure 2). Finally, in looking at the nation of origin of Anglophone works, it becomes clear that, at present, British work dominates (Figure 3).

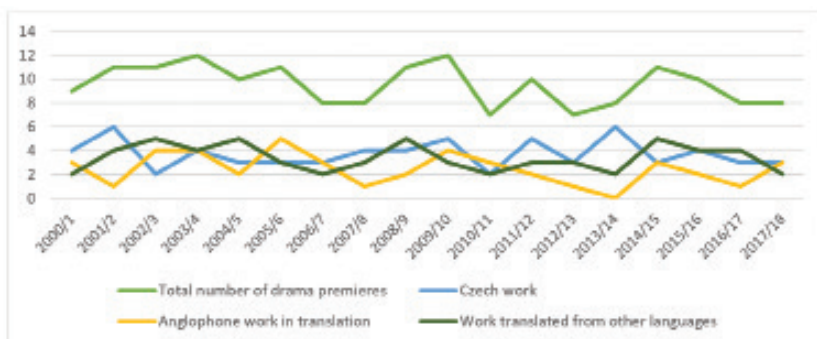


Figure 1: Premieres at the National Theatre 2000-2018

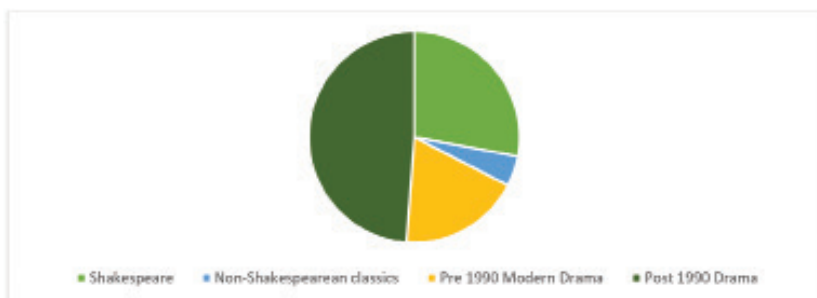


Figure 2: Distribution of Anglophone work produced 2000-2018

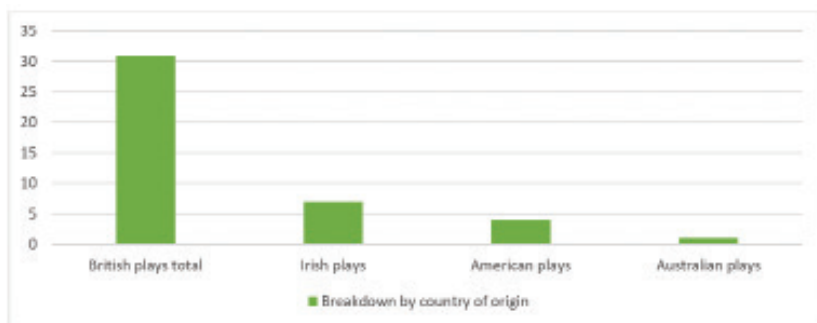


Figure 3: Country of origin of Anglophone work produced

Space is a crucial factor in this picture. Between 1991 and 2014, the National Theatre rented a studio in the attic of the Kolowrat Palace near the Estates Theatre seating up to circa 70 spectators. This technologically ill-equipped space was regularly used for drama in translation including Tom Murphy's *Bailegangaire* (2000/1), Martin Crimp's *The Country* and Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* (2002/3), Joe Penhall's *Some Voices* (2003/4), William Nicholson's *Retreat from Moscow*, Crimp's *Fewer Emergencies* (2005/6), John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt* (2006/7), Brian Friel's *Performances* (2008/9), and David Harrower's *Blackbird* (2009/10). Notably, a common denominator among all these works is a sense of scale – small casts and the artistic priority given to dialogue or, as in the case of Kane, poetic verbal content. The symbiosis between the simplicity and intimacy of the Kolowrat space and the verbal/textual focus of these productions contributed to the dominant perception of Anglophone theatre, or more accurately British and Irish theatre, as author propelled, heavily invested in dialogue with fine roles for character actors and, often, dramaturgically conventional.

It must be noted that such work contrasts with the idiom of Czech theatre culture which has historically been highly visual, conceptual and non-naturalistic. These qualities are celebrated by the Prague Quadrennial, a festival inaugurated in 1967, that showcases scenography, theatre architecture and performance design from around the world. The legacy of the Prague School, a rich heritage of scenographic experimentalism, and the influence of directors, and a predisposition towards satire, irony and the grotesque (arguably fostered by a heritage of avant-gardes as well as the visceral absurdities of not only the communist regime, but the Munich Agreement humiliation of Czechoslovakia in 1938) are important aspects of how work is chosen for staging and how it is evaluated (see Jungmannová and Vodička, 2016). More practically, at the National Theatre since 2014 the available stages for drama have been the New Stage, with an auditorium of 400 seats, the Estates Theatre with a capacity of 669, and the historical main stage, with a capacity of 986. Unsurprisingly, small-scale new dramas are generally deemed unfeasible in these spaces. As

a consequence, when the institution ceased to use the Kolowrat space, a move which coincided with the appointment of the new artistic director for drama, Daniel Špinar, the repertoire became less accommodating of a certain form of Anglophone drama exemplified by the works listed above.

Daniel Špinar (1979-), who was appointed resident director at the theatre in 2014 and Artistic Director of Drama at the National Theatre in 2015, is exemplary of a generation of post-1989 Czech theatre makers who have imbibed both the provocations of 1990s Anglophone new writing and the more experimental frameworks of contemporary European postdramatic theatre practice. A graduate in acting from the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, Špinar's graduation work was the role of the character Tim in Mark Ravenhill's *Some Explicit Polaroids*. His concept for drama at the National Theatre titled "New Blood: National Theatre Drama in the 21st Century," (see Špinar, 2014) emphasizes a commitment to extending the work of his predecessors, but also to innovation, attracting new audiences and making theatre of relevance to the present moment. Špinar's preference is for expansive, iconoclastic staging, that actively rejects realism, inclining toward postmodern eclecticism, irreverence and irony. Thus, the current interaction of material conditions and aesthetic predilections strongly conditions the processes of adaptation and transposition of work both national and international. In addition to some sense of local aesthetic or contextual relevance, the works selected must in some way have the scale and pliability to performatively and imaginatively occupy these institutions' large auditoriums, to support often elaborate stage designs and (re)interpretation through the lens of prevailing dramaturgical tastes and concerns of the company, director and dramaturgs at the institution.

Rock'n'Roll: The echo chamber of the past?

Tom Stoppard's Czechoslovak political retrospective *Rock'n'Roll* opened at the Royal Court Theatre in London on 3 June 2006 before transferring to the Duke of York's Theatre in July that same year. The

Czech National Theatre mounted the play in translation in February 2007, shortly before the completion of its West End run. In many respects, their haste was to be expected. Stoppard's drama presented a unique fusion of Anglo-Czech concerns. Here was a play by a British playwright of Czech descent that addressed normalization, ideology and the nature of resistance. It synthesized a richly affective period soundtrack, with a specific local history of oppression, dissidence and liberation that was, and still is, strongly associated with Václav Havel. For all these reasons, *Rock'n'Roll* was rich with potential significance for Czech audiences, but also for these reasons its transposition to a Czech setting produced a diffraction of associations that amplified and complicated the cultural politics of the work.

Stoppard somewhat self-deprecatingly outlines the background to the play in his introduction to the printed text. In addition to references to his own childhood memories, and his encounters with Havel and other dissidents, he maps the initial associations of his central character, Jan, with Tomas, the protagonist of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984). But the more meaningful point of reference, as Stoppard describes, is the bitter exchange between Havel and Kundera about realpolitik and small nations, and the value and meaning of protest – a dialogue by now well-documented, but much less well known in the Anglophone sphere than Kundera's novel. In the wake of the suppression of the Prague Spring by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Kundera published an article titled "The Czech Lot." Kundera's provocative suggestion that the negative reactions to recent political events were overblown, drew a strong response from Havel, rejecting the political quietism of Kundera's position. Kundera's rejoinder "Radicalism and Exhibitionism," charges Havel with pointless, potentially damaging, virtue signalling.⁷

The play, Stoppard is careful to note, is but a "diagram" of Czech experience from the Prague Spring to the Velvet Revolution and its characters do not neatly correspond to a defined set of antagonists. Rather, in established Stoppardian fashion, it paces around well flagged ideological debates with a surfeit of wit, articulacy and resonant detail:

youthful Czech PhD student, Jan, debates Communism with Cambridge Marxist academic, Max, and questions his friend Ferdinand's efforts to resist communist normalization, while the complacency of British 1960s so-called rebels is ruthlessly satirized. These thematic strands are augmented by references to materialism, debates about music and freedom of expression, Sapphic poetry, cancer and the way love might bridge cultural differences and time. The dense fibre of its content is dressed at regular intervals with a thumping soundtrack of rock and pop music from the period ranging from Pink Floyd and the Rolling Stones to the Beach Boys and John Lennon. *Rock'n'Roll* reduced many of its British and American reviewers to gushing accolades. Notably, the focus of responses often betrayed the ways a fondness for nostalgic atmosphere and clever dialogue, masked a lack of interest in the political contours of the history Stoppard distills, as was neatly illustrated when *New York Times* critic Ben Brantley rhapsodized over the New York production as "triumphantly sentimental" while at the same time mistaking the date of the Soviet invasion.⁸

It should come as little surprise that a Czech audience for whom this history was local and lived, rather than exotic and distant, might not be moved in exactly the same way by the flow of sentiment. The play was translated by Jitka Sloupová, who worked to domesticate the speech of the young Czech characters, to make them sound less, as she puts it "like Oxford wits" and yet "still let them remain 'Stoppardian' characters" (Sloupová, 2018). Those characters, inevitably, resonate differently. The association of the play's protagonist with Stoppard was reinforced by the resemblance of the lead actor David Prachař with his mop of curly dark hair and strong features, to Stoppard in his youth. Most strikingly, if in London or New York Max comes across as an idiosyncratic, but nonetheless loveable ideologue, then in Prague the unpalatability of the character's political views and the impact of his behaviour looks a good deal less excusable, and Stoppard's incipient Toryism goes unproblematised. For some, as Sloupová recalls, Max was simply regarded as a lunatic (Sloupová, 2018). More subtle local meanings attached to the character Eleanor, Max's wife. A classics scholar of formidable intellect, Eleanor resists the levelling logic of

materialism as she battles with the devastating effects of cancer. Her situation recalls something of Havel's much-loved and long-suffering first wife, Olga, who died of cancer in 1996.⁹ Finally, the simple joyous uplift at the play's end, when a Rolling Stones concert stands as a synecdoche for a new political order, by 2007 rang a little false with audiences who experienced first-hand the transitional turbulence of the "wild nineties," when the term "tunnelling" was coined to describe the wide-ranging asset-stripping and corruption that characterized the privatization fever of the post-socialist scene.

The production, directed by Ivan Rajmont, treated the play in a very respectful, naturalistic manner. Rajmont strategically augmented the local dimension to Stoppard's fulsome celebration of Western rock by incorporating a concert with the surviving members of the underground rock band, the Plastic People of the Universe. Consequently, a key detail in the play's plot – Jan comes to understand the impossibility of remaining apolitical as a result of arbitrary persecution of the members of the band – is made present and central in the Czech interpretation of the play. Stoppard leans heavily on the connotative charge of not only the music, but also the lyrics, a semiotics that fails to transmit across language barriers with ease. The incorporation of the Plastics in the Czech staging therefore worked on a number of levels that supplemented and modulated the affective scope of the original, first to help bridge some of the gaps that beleaguered the appreciation of Stoppard's carefully curated musical references, but also to some extent to reverse the priority afforded to the Western hits in the play. A third aspect of this gesture lay in giving space on the national stage to a dissonant genre of musical performance, one that thumbed its nose at the noblesse of the gilded proscenium of hallowed national pride. In doing so, the production arguably posed questions about the very nature of that space, its history, to and for whom it might claim to speak.



Photo: Tomáš Adamec. The Plastic People greet the National Theatre, 2007

Rock'n'Roll played a very successful run in the repertory at the Czech National Theatre until June 2011, totalling 73 performances. The reception of the play mixed compliments for the lead performers with reservations about its form, especially about the extremely static and verbose second half. Interestingly, the Czech production crystallized the tension between the play's historical and conceptual overreach and its inherent formal conservatism. The surreal novelty of having aging, underground rockers take the stage in the "golden chapel" was noted and commended by some, nevertheless, the staging as a whole was criticized as dramaturgically flawed, lacking tension and dynamism. Signposting each historical period with surtitles might have made sense to audiences elsewhere who would not distinguish 1968 from 1977 or 1989. Under the sharp eyes of Prague (re)viewers, the mismatch of the music-loving protagonist, Jan, standing beneath a sign reading autumn 1968, carrying albums only released in the 1970s, elicited some acerbic remarks (Mikulka, 2007). To some extent the opportunity for theatrical reflection on the relatively recent past was welcomed by some reviewers (see for instance Šprincl, 2007). But Czech theatre since 1989 has an ingrained ambivalence about openly political themes handled in such a naturalistic manner. It would be inaccurate to claim that Stoppard's play with its authorial

predispositions has alleviated that ambivalence, however its run at the National Theatre might fairly be said to have opened debates about future approaches.

Deterritorialization? New scenes, new blood

In stark contrast to both the form and focus of a play like *Rock'n'Roll*, several recent choices of British plays for presentation on the National's main stages are indicative of the trajectory of these new approaches. In the 2014/15 season, a translation of Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* by Lucie Kolouchová was chosen and directed by Daniel Špinar for the New Stage (Nová Scéna) and ran for 27 performances. If *Rock'n'Roll* needed to gesticulate across a translational abyss, Bartlett's play was dramaturgically speaking a common language. There seemed little friction between Bartlett's fragmented, eco-apocalyptic epic play and the aesthetic of the production on the New Stage.

Dan Rebellato has written of the apparent lack of irony in the 2010 London production, probing the potential of "radical naivety" as a political gesture facilitating moments of impossible sincerity (2013: 18). The Czech interpretation of the play definitely reinstated ironic distance maintaining, as one reviewer described, a sympathetic oscillation between seriousness, delight, irony and colourful grotesque (Mikulka, 2015). Špinar and dramaturg Jan Tošovský amplified its cabaret qualities to incorporate the full ensemble and played with music stylization and a blend of retro and contemporary costuming. They also trimmed the dialogue in order to somewhat efface focus on family relationships and to distance themselves from any clear political platform (though clearly the play does not advance one either). The production featured visually arresting and expansive stage images. In the first half, these images are vibrant and chaotic. The set design by Henrich Boráros filled the broad flat space of the New Stage with bold, metaphorical topographies, most notably a large upended pink house and back wall projections. In the second part, the stimulations of clutter and colour are replaced by a minimalist white screen to pro-

duce a soberer set of effects, a shift in rhythm and a predominantly monochrome tone.

Earthquakes in London was enthusiastically reviewed in Prague, seen as an artistically successful synthesis of word and image, and a play that addressed contemporary crises in a nuanced and semiotically fluid fashion. Bartlett's play is a richly suggestive, tonally ambivalent text that clearly could be readily adapted to the local aesthetic tendencies towards grotesque modes and bold stage semiology with little distortion. Despite the director and dramaturg's caution around distinct political themes, *Earthquakes in London* cannot but be seen as a work reflecting on contemporary and globally felt anxieties about the environment and the future that extend beyond the national to transnational ethical dilemmas.



Photo: Petr Neubert. Mike Bartlett, *Zemětřesení v Londýně*, 2015.

Following the success of the Bartlett play, the National opened Caryl Churchill's *Love and Information* translated by Jakub Škorpil in the 2015/16 season, also at the New Stage. This work premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in 2012 and as Rebellato has observed, it shares something of the indeterminately personal, yet generalized “apocalyptic tone” already evident in *Earthquakes in London* (Rebellato, 2017). *Love and Information* met with some mixed responses in the British media at the time of its initial outing. Its lack of plot or character foot-

holds and extended associational logic is challenging but undoubtedly contiguous with a recognizable form/content direction in Churchill's twenty-first century work. Inevitably, part of the appeal of the play is its formal plasticity: structured in seven titled sections comprising numerous short scenes; 51 in all, plus more than 12 optional extra fragments or effects, so the final number and arrangement may shift in different productions. Stage directions indicate that the sequence of sections should remain fixed, while the order of the scenes within each section (apart from the final scene) is up to the director, who may also choose where or if to include the remaining suggestions.

The original English production used a minimalist tiled white box set with changes of lighting and minimal props. The effect was a somewhat sterile, closed space in which a series of vignettes about the disjunctive nature of contemporary communication unspooled. By contrast, the Czech production opted for a distinctly different attitude to space and, consequently, meaning that altered the tenor of the play. As the National Theatre website attests, director Petra Tejnorová and dramaturg Jan Tošovský framed Churchill's text as a postmodern "detective" drama or psychodrama suggestive of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. This concept dominates the dramaturgy resulting in a work markedly dissimilar to that presented originally in English, sometimes in fruitful and inventive ways, especially as the desire for coherence and stable meaning is repeatedly denied or complicated by the play text. Again, to a noticeable extent, the ambition of the director and dramaturg to create an epic work, resulted in the use of a large cast of performers and scenographic complexity that was certainly not without interest and nuance. Nevertheless, the production seemed keenly anxious that the generous space of the New Stage be filled. The stage design by Antonín Šilar rose to the challenge with all sorts of props and micro-environments. However, in contrast to Boráros's concept for *Earthquakes*, the proliferation of scenes – a glass-faced laboratory, a crime investigation room, a kitchen, a speedboat and so on – failed to cohere in a powerful visual image for the show. The already fragmented nature of the text with its absence of plot or characters was not aided by the semi-realism of these scenes, but rather produced a

sense of confused tension and aimless exposition. Although the goal may have been to mimic the play's accumulative logic, at 135 minutes without an interval, the effect evolved from being mildly interesting to actively gruelling. It must be noted that this, too, is an aspect of the play's performative outcomes in other productions elsewhere, but it was especially pronounced in the Prague production.



Photo: Jan Hromadko. Caryl Churchill *Láska a Informace* 2016

By contrast with the response to *Earthquakes in London*, the Czech reception of *Love and Information* was generally negative. Reviewer Ester Žantovská remarked on how the detective rationale and visual dramaturgy overwhelmed any subtlety of language in Churchill's text (2016). Similarly, others noted the production's distrust of the poetry of Churchill's language that resulted in a sequence of banal pseudo-realistic Lynch-inspired scenes. I would suggest that these responses arguably seek more poetry in the original text than may be on offer. *Love and Information* is above all a durational speculation on feeling and knowledge, one that is deliberately associational, formulaic and alienating. Despite its postdramatic potential and topicality, it is not an easy piece; regrettably the Czech production's framing of the per-

formance as a postmodern riddle proved misleading and counterproductive, revealing the pitfalls of concept over coherence. Arguably too, in broad thematic terms the play perhaps shared too much territory with *Earthquakes in London* and as such fell foul of a sense of facile, yet unspecified contemporary relevance.

National stages, cosmopolitan impulses

As is evident from this brief and preliminary survey, new Anglophone drama in translation is diffracted through the lens of Czech sensibilities, at times with marked differences in message and aesthetics that alter how those works might be habitually received in Anglophone contexts. So, for instance, the national historical specificities of a play like *Rock'n'Roll* inevitably resonated differently within the Czech context in ways that drew attention to Stoppard's own nostalgia and, paradoxically, the inherent formal stasis of a work about political change. More recently, the Anglophone origin work in the repertoire of the National Theatre appears as an experimental platform for globally experienced senses of anxiety, precarity or states of alienation in ways that are sometimes remarkably effective and dramaturgically illuminating, sometimes diffuse and vague. In his critical contribution to *National Theatres in a Changing Europe*, Dragan Klaic questions the basic premise of national theatres in a twenty-first century context where "spirit of the nation, national identity, and national character – have become worn out and deprived of consensual meaning" (2008: 217). Klaic is dismissive of what he calls the "smorgasbord" approach to repertory programming. He argues for "a more focused and profiled programming, derived from critical analysis of reality rather than from a bookshelf of old plays" so that theatres "can hope to reconnect with their culturally diverse local constituencies and creative peers across Europe and serve as a platform for reflection and critical thinking on an emerging Europe-wide civil society" (2008: 227). A decade later, confidence in any Europe-wide civil society must surely feel less secure. Yet the challenge he poses is one that can be seen at work within the creative culture of the Czech National Theatre where

the transposition and adaptation of contemporary Anglophone theatre in translation plays a distinct role in debating what the contours of that civil society and its concerns might be on the national stages.

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¹ Marie Reslová in *The World of Theatre* ed. Ian Herbert and Nicole Leclerc (London: Routledge, 2000) sums up the seasons from 1996-1999 p.77-81, somewhat negatively, focusing on the strains of market conditions and the tendencies of directors like Jan Antonín Pitínský and Petr Lébl.

² Ivan Rajmont (1945-2015) was director in the 1980s at Divadlo Na Zábřadlích, and first artistic director at the National Theatre Prague after 1989. He worked there until 2013.

³ Michal Dočekal (1965-) Artistic Director at the National Theatre 2002-2014. Currently Artistic Director at Městská divadla pražská (Prague City Theatres) which comprises three theatres: Divadlo komedie, ABC, and Rokoko in the centre of Prague. Městská divadla pražská is part of the Union of Theatre in Europe so part of its mission is co-operation on both a national and international level.

⁴ Jan Hančil (1964-) has worked extensively in the theatre sector as a translator, dramaturg and teacher. Among his translations from English to Czech are David Mamet's *Oleanna* (trans 1998) and Conor McPherson's *The Weir* (trans 2000). As dramaturg at the National Theatre his work includes Tom Murphy's *Bailehangaire* (2000), Conor McPherson's *The Weir* (2000), John Osborne's *The Entertainer* (2001), Martin Crimp's *The Country* (2002), Joe Penhall's *Some Voices* (2003) and Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* (2006).

⁵ Jitka Sloupová (1953-) is the translator of more than thirty plays from English to Czech including works by Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Sam Shepard, David Hare, Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Patrick Marber, Tony Kushner, Martin Crimp and many others.

⁶ Mark Horošák, Petr Kolečko, Katerina Rudčenkova are among those who have participated in Royal Court writing programmes.

⁷ The Kundera Havel exchange is archived with commentary here <https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2011/SOC403/um/Cesky_udel.pdf> and a useful synopsis in English by Benjamin Herman "The Debate That Won't Die: Havel And Kundera On Whether Protest Is Worthwhile" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* 11 January 2012 <https://www.rferl.org/a/debate_that_wont_die_havel_and_kundera_on_whether_protest_is_worthwhile/24448679.html>.

⁸ Brantley's review, "Going to Prague in 1968, but Not Without His Vinyl," *New York Times* 5 Nov. 2007 originally mistook the date for 1967, an error corrected in the title, but not in the body of the article available online.

⁹ In the play, Eleanor angrily warns her Czech doctoral student, Lenka, not to attempt to seduce Max before she dies. It is indicated that after Eleanor's death Lenka and Max have a relationship. Less than a full year after his first wife's death Havel married actress Dagmar Veškrnová, a move that was initially critically received. While this may not have been an allusion intended by Stoppard, it is an association many Czech spectators would undoubtedly have noticed.

Angels in America: Performing American Border-Crossing on the French Stage?

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Abstract: By looking at several productions in France of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1992), this contribution explores the meaning of American cross-cultural performance. Considering with Schechner that theater is a "performance text" defined by its context, dramatic traditions, actual performances, reception and repercussions, the essay discusses to what extent Kushner's play blurs the perception of American theater in France by offering a fecund hybrid style. First, it will delineate some epistemological categories framing the French reception of American performance by pointing out how US shows are often filtered through a binary vision of American theater as either psychological realism (Tennessee Williams) or cutting-edge avant-gardism (Robert Wilson). Then, after highlighting the play's postmodern themes and style, the essay will uncover the echoes and limits of this reception model by testing it through the productions of Brigitte Jaques-Wajeman (1994; 1996), Krzysztof Warlikowski (2004), Ivo van Hove (2008) and Aurélie Van Den Daele (2015-18). They all provide historical, political, social and esthetic figurations of America on the European stage. If a number of clues (negative reviews) could suggest a cultural bias toward US drama, the staged play overall complicates the meaning of cultural transfer thanks to the artists' creativity. The success of the play further implies that its "fabulous" epic style could be a measure of a new hybrid American theatricality. The final section focuses on a few tropes (speed, fluidity and queerness) and sheds light on the cross-cultural creative processes of the play's staging. Ultimately, it underlines the potentiality of the anthropological gap yielded by a performance text.

On the contemporary French stage, American theater appears to be a minor influence. Is this merely poetic justice aiming at redressing the US domination on screen and in contemporary art or is it an erroneous perception that needs to be corrected? Upon closer inspection, there is no denying that American plays were staged in France by major artists. It harks back to one of the four most influential interwar French directors,¹ Georges Pitoëff, who produced O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* in 1929. Since then, broadly speaking, American theater in France has been seen through two main lenses: psychological drama (e.g. Tennessee Williams) or experimental performance (e.g. multimedia performances by the Wooster Group). Although these polarities obviously oversimplify both American productions and French reception, they can be helpful to get a general sense of the influence of the American esthetic and culture on the French stage (Bradby and Delgado 232-266). By analyzing the French fate of *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner, this essay offers to reflect upon the complex meaning of theatrical border crossing in the late 20th and early 21st century.

Angels in America, first produced in the US in the early 1990s, has rapidly become a classic performed throughout the United States and Europe. In France, the play has been staged by French female directors Brigitte Jaques-Wajeman (1994, 1996) and Aurélie Van Den Daele (2015, 2017, 2018), but also by famous European directors: the Flemish director Ivo Van Hove (2009, 2014) and the Polish director Krzysztof Warlikowski (2005). This international production history has yielded a varied "performance text" (Schechner 22) that will be explored thanks to an interdisciplinary methodology, in order to reflect on the construction of the role of American theater in France as a complex phenomenon with fluid boundaries. Cultural influences, cross-pollination and esthetic matrixes are difficult to measure as they are indirect, speculative and elusive. They run into many problems including the very *instability* of the meaning of broad terms like "culture", but also "national culture". "American theater" and "French reception" are equally problematic terms homogenizing notions that are anything but monolithic. Yet those notions cannot be entirely done away with as they can prove useful to identify trends in world theat-

rical creations in the tradition of Richard Schechner's *Between Theater and Anthropology*. The collection of clues gathered from theater history, reception theory (reviews), theater practitioners' testimonies, performance analysis, cultural analysis and queer theory can help frame the meaning of contemporary cross-cultural theatricality.

To what extent have themes grounded in an American context (AIDS, homosexuality, and spirituality in the Reagan years) and couched in a postmodern epic style come to embody a new hybrid American theatricality abroad? Can *Angels in America* be a measure of the influence of American performances in France? Or, have we moved beyond cultural differences with the rise of an international theater beyond borders?

Let us first consider briefly the dominant trends in the history of American theater in France to better understand how they frame the contemporary stage. Within that framework, *Angels in America*'s productions and reception in France will be studied through significant themes, showing how artists and critics faced, reproduced or resisted cultural borders. In the end, this essay contends that *Angels in America* through cultural differences productively cross-fertilizes the French stage.

Framing American Theater in France: Cross-cultural Misperceptions?

Despite the American cultural omnipresence in Europe, theater has remained modest in its influence. As a study of French international theater programs² and especially French theater history books (Viola, Biet et Triau, Neveux) suggest, German, Polish or British theaters have been more significant on the French stage, creating a stronger sense of European cultural commonality. Does it mean that there is a resistance to or an impossibility of cultural transfer from the United States to Europe? By looking at the reception of a few American plays, we can try to identify some matrixes of cultural transfer.

Paradoxically, the fate of Tennessee Williams's most famous play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, can provide some background to the reluctance of welcoming American theater in France as a serious theatrical innovation. Indeed, the 1951 film adaptation especially magnified psychological realism through the Actor's Studio acting method, thus contributing to a melodramatic vision of the play that plagued the later versions of the play and of American theater in general. Despite the fact that the film shared with the 1947 Broadway production the same director (Elia Kazan) and male lead (Marlon Brando), it lost some of the more innovative qualities of Williams's work and Kazan's staging, such as its symbolic and magic realism (Lemoine 2011: 28-31). Something similar occurred with the transfer of the play to France, mixing cinematic and theatrical worlds but also American and French esthetics between mainstream and avant-garde stages. As early as 1949, an avant-garde French version adapted by Jean Cocteau and starring French actress Arletty as Blanche introduced the American playwright in Paris. But quickly thereafter, many of Williams's plays would be billed in France with a "boulevard" seal of approval in the privately owned theaters such as Théâtre Edouard VII (Kerjan 104-109). A more mainstream and commercial production environment recast Williams and American theater in general, as less artistic and especially steeped in a conventional psychological realism.

This reductive vision of Tennessee Williams has started to change, complicating the meaning of American theater in France. Indeed, recently, Williams has attracted public theater productions more frequently breaking away from the bourgeois stigmata of private theaters.³ Tellingly, in 2011, *A Streetcar Named Desire* was the first American play to be added to the famous "répertoire" of the venerable *Comédie-Française*⁴ thanks to a production directed by the historical figure in American experimental theater, Lee Breuer at the *Salle Richelieu*. This official integration of American theater on the public French stage was dampened by mixed reviews (Savran 263). Yet, the radical potential of Williams's work, also renewed by the recent scholarly studies in the United States (Savran), was confirmed by the

experimental staging by European directors like Frank Castorf in 2000 and Krzysztof Warlikowski in 2010 (Maurin 2001; Lemoine 2014). This trend to rekindle the potential of established American theater extends to other classical American playwrights such as Arthur Miller with the productions of *The Crucible* (Théâtre de la Ville, 2019 and 2020) and the noted Ivo van Hove staging of *A View from the Bridge* (Odéon, 2015 and 2017). This trend points at the other way American theater has been perceived in France, that is to say, as a token of avant-gardism.

In short, American productions since the early 1960s have also been considered as a measure of experimental art, starting with the “Nancy Festival” (Festival Mondial de Théâtre founded in 1963) and amplified in the 1970s by the “Paris Fall Festival” (Festival d’Automne). Michel Guy, its founder, highlighted the creative potential of cultural exchanges by promoting many American artists (Bradby and Delgado 232-247). This presence of the American postmodern avant-garde in France became highly visible with the Living Theater in the 1960s when they stormed Avignon in 1968 (Jouve; Jacquot; Pasquier). Other American artists have been regularly invited to the Nancy Festival and Paris Fall Festival since the 1970s, most famously, Robert Wilson (over 20 times since 1972) imposing his groundbreaking Theater of The Image. In the 1990s, the “Exit Festival” at Maison des Arts de Créteil was a new international multimedia performance festival, reinforcing the construction of American theater as experimental by bringing over troops like the queer multimedia Big Art Group. In addition to the productions supported by French theaters (Théâtre de la Ville, T2G etc.) and festivals, the French critics (be they academics or otherwise)⁵ also shaped this dual perception of American theater. Ultimately, this polarity does not reveal so much what American theater is as it points at *how* Americanness was constructed on the French stage, furthering the question of contemporary American transfers. At best, it suggests a genealogy of the reception necessary to unpack the meaning of *Angels in America* in France and its potential contributions to the discussion of cultural crisscrossing.

Angels in America: Americanness and Border Control?

Angels in America fulfilled the promise of a new generation of US playwrights in the early 1990s. Developed in San Francisco (Eureka Theatre) and Los Angeles (Mark Taper Forum), it was acclaimed on Broadway in April 1993 as the savior of a gloomy Broadway season (Butler and Kois 4-167; 170-218). In that sense, it epitomizes contemporary American drama.⁶ The play took a scathing look at the 1980s through the plight of two dysfunctional couples: one torn apart by AIDS, as Louis abandons his sick lover Prior Walter; the other, Harper and Joe, crumbling when the veil of rigorous Mormon traditions is torn away by valium pills and homosexuality. The failure of love, politics, and spirituality also produces an entertaining, moving and innovative show. The play has been praised for its hybrid style mixing realism, TV series, and symbolism in a Brechtian epic structure (Geis and Kruger 3). Kushner called his work the “theater of the Fabulous”, claiming a queer genealogy:

If the great antecedent form of gay theater was theater of the ridiculous, then the new theater that ... all of us who are lesbian and gay and working in the theater now are creating is something that I'm calling “theater of the fabulous.” (Vorlicky, 74)

This collective label is a way to assert queer existence through a multilayered style. Kushner elaborated on this style with a food metaphor, comparing playwriting to baking lasagna:

A good play, like a good lasagna, should be overstuffed: It has pomposity, [...] It is pretentious food. [...] Pretentiousness, overstatement, rhetoric and histrionics, grandiosity and portentousness are [...] American tropes [...]” (Kushner 1995: 61-62)

Interestingly, the Italian food metaphor connects Americanness to an esthetic of excess rooted in cross-cultural perspectives. *Angels in America* is defined by its layers of cultural references, which becomes in and of itself a palimpsest for transnational possibilities, in other words, it is an open text ready to welcome crisscrossing with other cultures.

In France, *Angels in America* was first staged by famed actress and director Brigitte Jaques-Wajeman⁷ at the Festival d'Avignon in 1994 to finally get full production in November 1996 in Paris at the Théâtre de la Commune.⁸ Overall reviews were good (*Avant-Scène*), marking it as an innovative piece presented in prestigious venues. Yet there were tensions about whether it belonged to the avant-garde trend of American drama in France or fed the realistic drama branch. Enthusiastic reception of the play was not shared by all; for *Le Nouvel Observateur* Jaques failed to deal convincingly with the unique style of the play: "Brigitte Jaques is ill-at-ease with the mixing of the marvelous and the social satire. Her staging fails to move beyond naturalism and, at times, is stuck in the rut of well-made melodrama (...) "⁹ (Quirot). Interestingly, the interpretation of American theater as overly traditionally "naturalist" is transferred here to the staging of Jaques as a sense of failure—even if the critic praised the way Jaques directed the actors. A less subtle rejection of the play and American theater at large was the 1996 editorial in the theater paper *Cassandre*, in which a theater scholar considered American theater as a mere echo of Hollywood domination and commodification of the world, referring more specifically to Robert Wilson, Peter Sellars and Tony Kushner. *Angels in America* and the work of Regnault and Jaques are reviled as a mere catalogue of archetypes under the domination of neoliberal American ideology. Besides the alienation of theater by cinema, Deshoulières denounces the play for its superficiality, identity politics, political correctness, cheap moralism, and psychological realism (Deshoulières 11-12). All these recriminations operate as a disparaging stereotype that only needs to be alluded to (especially here "psychological realism") in order to debunk American theater.

This same mechanism will unexpectedly be used with the next major production of *Angels in America* in France staged by Polish director Krzysztof Warlikowski in Avignon in July 2007 and in Paris in May 2008 at the Théâtre du Rond Point. In an interview for the Avignon website, the interviewer's last question seems to worry about too much realism: "The play's dramaturgy is mostly grounded in a very realistic tradition. Did you keep that realistic approach?"¹⁰ (Perrier).

The question is all the more surprising as Warlikowsky's *mise en scène* freely translated *Angels in America* into his experimental style. This was well received by the French audience in Avignon and by many critics (Solis; *Le Monde*) despite some disappointments (Gapp). This success seemed to confirm the transferability of the American play both in time and space as it yielded powerful images about homophobia, politics and the rise of extreme conservatism in Poland, as Warlikowsky underlined in his interview (Perrier). In Warlikowsky's staging of scene 6, Roy Cohn, Martin Heller, and Joe Pit (Kushner 1993: 63-69) wear gorilla and monkey masks moving around with simian gestures, conveying the Reaganite political and legal corruption but also revealing the transnational law of the jungle that presides over human minds and bodies. The director manages to conjure up the hybrid political, social and theatrical bodies, in keeping with Cohn's early line "I wish I was an octopus, a fucking octopus." (Kushner 1993: 11) and visually question human nature across cultures. Cultural policing, then, seemed to collapse thanks to theatrical creativity.

A similarly successful cultural crossing characterized Aurélie Van Den Daele's adaptation at the Théâtre de l'Aquarium in the fall of 2015. Thanks to good reviews, it toured France in 2016 and 2017 (Lyon, Toulouse, Creil and Montluçon) and was performed in Paris again in October 2018 at the Théâtre Montfort. Daele first thought of getting rid of the US context of the play but she realized that it should be worked in:

At first, I hoped to produce an "allegorical version", which would have allowed us to go beyond the contextual elements of the play. [...]. But the references to American culture were so numerous that they kept resurfacing: Mormons, New York Jews, the lexicon, the political allusions... So, we finally chose to espouse the American context without overemphasizing it but taking on the American references that touched upon our collective consciousness (a Coca cola can, the choice of the soundtrack)...¹¹ (Lemoine 2018)

Daele's approach was full of simple but highly operative solutions to infuse the stage with its original theatricality. Symbolic of this was the use of a small rectangular screen displaying various messages. One

read: “this is not America” aptly questioning the American identity of the play itself and the limits of staging it in France. While humorously stating the obvious for the French audience, it also smartly echoed the line uttered at the opening of the play: “You do not live in America. No such place exists” (Kushner 1993: 10). Conversely, Jaques’ sets displayed a series of American flags on top of the massive brick wall, which sealed off the horizon upstage, over-determining the Americanness of the play and its heavy-handed effort to guide the spectator through a forest of American signs.

This excessive attempt to grapple with the Americanness was also apparent in the 1994 23-page program providing the audience with a lexicon (Lichtenstein *et al.*). Interestingly, there was a glossary in the London program, showing that this strategy was more about culture than language (Butler and Kois 104). The effort is commendable but betrayed a certain level of anxiety that the New York gay Jewish wit assailing the Reaganite *doxa* would not transfer well. A quick glance at the lexicon of the 1994 program offers a crash course in Americana, featuring US politics (“Supreme Court”), historical figures (“Rosenbergs”, “McCarthy”), American History landmarks (“Mayflower”, the “melting pot”), local politics (“Ed Koch”), Jewish culture (5 Yiddish terms), and religion (“Mormons”). Gay culture is emphasized by a playful non-definition as the word “gay” refers to “homosexual” and “homosexual” to “gay” (Lichtenstein *et al.* 1994: 8), suggesting that no translation is needed here as the American term has already pervaded French culture but also offering an ironic meta-comment on the limits of a glossary to access a whole culture. Furthermore, this lexicon can be understood as a symptom of the difficulties of transferring a play from one culture to another.

This defensive glossary did not shield the play from being attacked for its poor script, which was reminiscent of the way Tennessee Williams’s work was often treated (Savran 2014: 264-5). An online review of Van Den Daele’s show berated the play in the following terms:

The problem resides in the play itself despite the fact that it was shortened. Tony Kushner works on stereotypes in order to establish a behavioral

typology. But the confrontation of flat characters sometimes yields boredom for the audience. We can only regret that the play was not abridged further.¹² (Cassou-Noguès)

Daele, like Warlikowski before her, found many echoes linking Reagan, Trump, and the rise of nationalism in Europe in the play (Lemoine 2018). Clearly, European directors do not seem to find limitations in the script but rather a powerful poetic springboard for a wide reflection on our contemporary world. The resistance to Kushner's text by French journalists and scholars revives the tactics used to reject American influence (Neveux 52-56) but it mostly underscores the friction that comes from crossing borders. On a cultural political level, theater scholar David Savran, discussing Williams's presence on the French and German stages in the 2010s, sees this tension as a form of resentment towards American hegemony and "an attempt by Europeans to reassert the universality and health of their own culture" (Savran 2014: 272). For Savran, these kinds of international cultural skirmishes support a strategic rejection of American drama in France as a result of Cold War politics, explaining the limited portent of American playwrights.

American Theatrical Vitality and Queerness: Blurring Borders?

Such an ideological split could be nuanced by cultural history itself where many cultural bridges were built by the US government through the CIA during the Cold War (Quessard) and, then, by theater history showing the constant flow of American work onto the French stage. Thus the circulation of *Angels in America* could symbolize how cultural globalization erodes nationalistic models without systematically denying differences and variations. The play must be inscribed in the tradition of American and European theatrical exchanges, as exemplified in the 1970s by Grotowski's "Theatre of Sources" that attracted major theater practitioners (Schechner 254).

Kushner's work triggered similar circulations, as theater critic of the left-leaning daily *Libération*, René Solis went to New York as a special reporter to review *Angels in America Part I* in 1993. His article lauded

the writing despite his lukewarm review of George C. Wolfe's staging, stating: "*Angels in America*'s success relies indeed on an exceptional script: funny and poetic, epic and direct, fantastic and simple"¹³ (Solis 1993: 37-38). All the productions of *Angels in America* discussed so far,¹⁴ interrogate the effect of cultural transfer and seem to suggest that a potential momentum over the very foreignness of the material can emerge. Maybe this is merely due to the anthropological gap brought by an external gaze; as artistic director of the New York Theatre Workshop puts it: "There's something about someone from outside the culture looking in. They can see the metaphor better than we can (...)" (Butler and Kois 104).

This anthropological and theatrical circulation, destabilizing cultures through otherness and esthetics is at the heart of Ivo van Hove's work. He produced about fifteen American plays, including *Angels in America* in 2008. His staging of the play, which influenced Daele (Lemoine 2018), featured a bare stage with few obvious references to America (Maurin 219). Yet, according to theater scholar Maurin, van Hove is fascinated by New York as a site of infinite potentialities, boasting the supreme value of modernism: speed ("New York is the stage of quicksilver", Maurin 2016: 234). Indeed, abundance, fluidity, and speed could define the esthetic structure of *Angels in America* adopted in many European productions. The recurrence of the term "speed" in the press file of Jaques' first Avignon staging (*Avant-Scène*) illustrates how the play's subject matter and unique style is perceived as emerging from the quicksilver of (post)modernity. One of the translators, Gérard Wajcman, praised the combination of high and low culture and mentioned enthusiastically the interpolation of Shakespeare, Corneille, Benjamin, Brecht, musicals, TV series, melodrama, sex and street slang. But, for him, that list coalesced thanks to the play's vitality in the face of death: "*Angels in America* is probably the most vital voice we are given to hear in contemporary theater today"¹⁵ (Wajcman). This forceful presentation certainly explains why Jaques picked the script both for its sense of urgency and for its epic scope mixing intimacy and History (Biet 2017: 15).

Daele's staging praised for its visual impact, its fluidity and its moving quality supported by superb acting captured the postmodern sense of rhythm required by the many "split scenes" and registers of the play. Potentially complex scenes, such as Harper's valium-induced journey to a snowy Arctic, were met with inventive solutions such as the use of ping-pong balls flooding the floor. Such ideas allowed to convey the fluidity of the play, which is key, as Declan Donnellan insisted when he staged the London opening: "I kept the scenes fluid and overlapping", finally winning over Kushner who admitted "he made it dance" (Butler and Kois 103). So *Angels in America* contributes to blurring the distinction between high and low art, realism and avant-garde. It thematically, stylistically, and structurally performs postmodern hybridity to go beyond fixed representational categories and challenge narrow nationalistic perceptions through troubling potentialities such as queerness.

The queer perspective of the play, as an aspect of the American postmodern zeitgeist, also explains Kushner's success and influence in France. Overall, since the 1960s American theater has tackled gay identity politics with greater visibility than French drama, building a legacy mobilized in *Angels in America* through camp acting (i.e. "fabulousness"), drag queen acts, and historical references to earlier gay plays. Theater historian John Clum asserts: "More than anyone before him, Kushner has linked in a positive way the traditions and conventions of classic American drama with those of gay theater" (Clum 313). In the 1990s, AIDS definitely made homosexuality a pressing issue in the United States widely addressed by theater (Roman) while in France it rarely reached the stage.¹⁶ Indeed, French productions about homosexuality have been confined to intimate, personal visions or abstract poetic visions. The Argentinian performer and playwright Copi was one of the exceptions with *Une visite inopportune*, (1988); Olivier Py and a few others could constitute a French trend.¹⁷ Yet, other major French contemporary gay playwrights in a universalist tradition, including Jean-Luc Lagarce or Bernard-Marie Koltès,¹⁸ mainly refused to provide an esthetic discourse that directly addressed gay and lesbian issues. The significance of queer issues, however, has grad-

ually become more visible on the French stage, avoiding the quick dismissal that often collapsed queerness into didactic/activist art. *Angels in America*, by making visible an unabashed LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Queer) consciousness, captured by the ironic yet explicit outdoor sex scene (Kushner 1993: 52-58), has contributed to an articulation between queer imagination and political action on the French stage.

This political and social angle of Kushner's work was illustrated by the two French productions of *Angels in America* that were associated with fund-raising or social awareness events. In the 1996 program, a brief paragraph (Lichtenstein *et al.* 1996: 2) explains that 5 francs of all purchased tickets will be donated to AIDS associations (SIDA Info Service and Sida Solidarité Spectacle). Similarly, Daele's 2017 production was associated with a month of events around queer issues marketed as "A Queer Month around *Angels in America*." The cast and the director came to several events at the theater through conventional Q&A sessions, but also to gay cultural places such as the Gay and Lesbian bookstore in the Marais (Les Mots à la bouche). The cultural scope of the play underlines the resonance of the work in everyday life. This exemplifies how theater can trouble the strict division between art and society by constituting a productive exchange between the two, as Van Den Daele asserts: "It's the idea that, yes, maybe, theater can lead to action, but it is also the idea that theater must feed off other crafts to grow"¹⁹ (Lemoine 2018). Indeed, in turn, this social involvement underlines the power of the play to raise many questions across the Atlantic favoring reverberations and intercultural performance knowledge.

Conclusion

Olivier Py, the director of the Festival d'Avignon, explained how, in the 1990s, French theater practitioners resisted new trends, especially the German postdramatic, by focusing on a new poetic playwriting (Lagarce, Gabilly, Rambert) and by rejecting the previous domination of Brecht, Claudel, Beckett and Genet. Tellingly, Py fails to point to the American performance art tradition established since the 1960s

(Py 55-56), which is acknowledged by Thies-Lehmann as a source of influence for postdramatic innovations. So Kushner's work could be the ideal candidate to bridge these trends in a way that helps suggest a theater that can create esthetic and cultural cross-overs.

Angels in America offers a hybrid theatrical genre (politically and esthetically) which appeals to spectators and theatrical practitioners, connecting to the two-pronged presence of American theater in France: the experimental and the mainstream. The European productions of the play explored a variety of styles, from the dramatic and symbolic staging of Jaques-Wajeman and Daele to the international (post)dramatic esthetics of van Hove and Warlikowski. The rise of an international experimental trend could turn out to be a limitation of American theater in the framework of the French contemporary stage, failing to bridge the chasm between different groups of theatergoers and reinforcing a sophisticated global theater pitted against a local poetic drama.

Yet, this whole "performance sequence" (Schechner 16), from the Euro-American dramatic matrix to the performance repercussions ("aftermath" Schechner 19) reveals the creative potential derived from border crossing. The global anthropological and theatrical circulations can seep through French theater (Py) and society, but more importantly can connect varied cultural practices of representation with the productive energy of the performance. *Angels in America*, ends on a call for diversity, "interconnectedness" and "More Life" (Kushner 1994: 148), a forward thrust that celebrates history and the paradoxes of cross-cultural performance.

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¹ "the 'Cartel' of four directors: Louis Jouvet, Gaston Baty, Charles Dullin and Georges Pitoëff" (Bradby and Delgado 3)

² A complete program of Festival d'Automne can be accessed at <https://www.festival-automne.com/archive>. A scholarly analysis is to be found in Bradby and Delgado.

³ *La nuit de l'iguane*, Georges Lavaudant, MC 93 Bobigny and MC2, Grenoble, 2009 ; *Ménagerie de verre*, Daniel Jannetau, La Colline, 31 Mars au 29 Avril 2016 etc.

⁴ Out of 2,662 plays registered since 1680 Williams is the first American and non-European playwright included in the Répertoire. "*Un tramway nommé désir* : Le répertoire de la Comédie-Française", Agathe Sanjuan, conservateur-archiviste de la Comédie-Française, Comédie-Française Press file, 12 janvier 2011 PDF. <https://www.comedie-francaise.fr/fr/evenements/un-tramway-nomme-desir10-11> (accessed Oct 5, 2018) He will be followed in 2012 by Naomi Wallace and her play *One Flea Spare*.

⁵ In the 1970s Jotterand (1970) and Pasquier (1978) highlighted experimental theater. More recently in overviews of theater, like *Qu'est-ce que le théâtre*, 2006 (Biet and Triau 66; 71) or more specific essays (Neveux) exemplify the quasi absence of reference to American productions. If the influential German publication *Postdramatic Theater* by Thies-Lehmann relies widely on Robert Wilson as a major post-dramatic influence on the world stage, he maintains this dichotomy by only considering American productions deemed experimental.

⁶ The rave reviews of the 2018 New York (and London) production underlines its continuous significance: "flat-out fabulous revival of Tony Kushner's '*Angels in America*,'" Ben Brentley, "Review: An '*Angels in America*' That Soars on the

Breath of Life”, *The New York Times*, March 25, 2018. See equally enthusiastic reviews: “Broadway Review: ‘*Angels in America*’ With Andrew Garfield, Nathan Lane,” Marilyn Stasio, *Variety*, March 25, 2018.

⁷ In 1976, Brigitte Jaques-Wajeman co-founded with François Regnault the Pandora theatre Company. Between 1991 and 1997, they headed the Centre dramatique national d’Aubervilliers : Théâtre de la Commune. Tellingly, she had previously staged *The Night of the Iguana* in 1991 at the Théâtre Les Célestins in Lyon. https://www.lesarchivesduspectacle.net/?IDX_Spectacle=31964. (Féral)

⁸ The exact sequence was : “Millenium Approaches » July 10 1994, Festival d’Avignon (Cloître des Carmes) ; September 27 - October 19 1994 at théâtre de la Communauté française de Belgique ; November 4 – December 31 1994 at Théâtre de la Commune/Pandora ; April 16 1996 – January 1st 1997 at Comédie de Genève ; November 13 - 22 1996 at Théâtre de la Commune/Pandora. Information available at <https://www.compagniepandora.com/site/spectacles/angels-in-america/> (accessed Oct 5, 2018)

⁹ Original text: “Brigitte Jaques est mal à l’aise avec ce métissage du merveilleux et de la satire sociale. Son spectacle ne parvient pas à décoller du naturalisme, il s’empâte parfois dans le bon boulevard bien ficelé. Mais le metteur en scène sait diriger les acteurs (...)”

¹⁰ Original text: “La forme dramaturgique de la pièce s’inscrit souvent dans un très grand réalisme. L’avez-vous conservé ?”

¹¹ Original text: “A l’origine du projet, je souhaitai livrer une “version fable” qui permettrait de toucher au-delà du côté contextuel de la pièce. (...). Mais les références extrêmement nombreuses et particulières nous rattrapaient sans cesse : les mormons, les juifs new yorkais, le vocabulaire, les allusions politiques... Nous avons donc choisi d’épouser la question américaine, de ne pas la surligner mais de l’assumer avec des clins d’œil à l’inconscient collectif (canettes de cocos, choix de la BO...)”

¹² Original text: “La difficulté tient à la pièce elle-même, pourtant écourtée. Tony Kushner travaille sur les stéréotypes afin de faire une sorte de typologie des comportements. Mais à faire s’affronter des personnages sans nuances, on ennue parfois le spectateur. On peut regretter qu’il n’y ait pas plus de coupes dans la pièce.”

¹³ Original text : “Le succès d’*Angels in America* repose bien sur un texte d’une qualité hors du commun : à la fois poétique et drôle, direct et épique, simple et fantastique.”

¹⁴ We could also add Peter Eötvös who transformed the play into an Opera, performed in Paris in November 2004, or the school project version of an acting student Armel Roussel in Brussels (June 2012).

¹⁵ Original text: “*Angels in America* c’est peut-être la voix la plus vivante qu’on puisse entendre dans le théâtre d’aujourd’hui.”

¹⁶ Elizabeth Taylor’s line in Christophe Honoré’s play *Les Idoles* conjuring up famous gay playwrights who had died of AIDS, reproaching them for their lack of political commitment in the 1990s is spot-on. *Les Idoles* by Christophe Honoré at the Odéon Théâtre, as witnessed by the author on January 29, 2019.

¹⁷ The French publication of a catalogue around AIDS plays includes Copi’s play and *Le jeu du veuf* by Olivier Py under the heading dramatic scripts (another section was dedicated to didactic plays) *Catalogue des outils de prévention : théâtre*, CRIPS, 2, septembre 1995.

¹⁸ “Il prétendit ne rien avoir à écrire à propos d’homosexualité – motif peu présent dans son œuvre –, allant jusqu’à reprocher à Patrice Chéreau d’avoir donné, en 1987, une version aux connotations trop directement sexuelles de sa pièce *Dans la solitude des champs de coton* (1986)” (Renouard 278.)

¹⁹ Original text : “C’est l’idée que le théâtre peut se prolonger en action oui, mais aussi que le théâtre doit se nourrir d’autres corps de métiers pour s’enrichir.”

Thursday October 11, 2018
**Round Table: Theatre Practitioners (actors,
directors, translators, writers...)**

The participants are introduced by Christine Kiehl, vice president of RADAC. Christina Chatzivasileiou comes from the School of Drama, Faculty of Fine Arts, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Her field of study is mostly *In-Yer-Face* theatre, she is also a stage director and recently staged *The Reunification of The Two Koreas* by Joël Pommerat; Jérôme Hankins is a renowned stage director and translator. Catherine Hargreaves is a teacher at ENSATT in Lyon, stage director, writer and translator; she directs the company Les 7 Soeurs. Isabelle Starkier is an actress, stage director and professor of drama studies at the University d'Evry. Arnaud Anckaert is co-creator of *Le Théâtre du Prisme*, actor and stage director.

With the guidance of Christine Kiehl, the stage directors gave their thoughts about the main issues in drama studies: the choice of a play to stage, the original language of the play, the problems of translation (such as the transposition of rhythm from one language to the other, the place of academic translation on stage, the question of invention in translation), their relationship with authors and how they direct.

Christina Chatzivasileiou starts the debate with very interesting notions about the choice of a play for a stage-director. For her, the language in which the play is written does not matter at first as it seems to her that the play chooses her rather than she choosing the play.

In a similar way, Arnaud Anckaert speaks of the “intuitive choice” of a play. His own feelings have a role to play in his choices. For instance, he felt a form of kinship with the characters of the play *Disco Pigs* by Enda Walsh when he staged it with his partner Capucine Lange. Likewise, with the play *Orphans*, he felt abandoned as his company was facing a period of crisis. For him the choice of a play is not

rational but instinctive and immediate, in spite of trivial factors such as finances. As for Catherine Hargreaves she does not choose plays of a specific type, such as *In-Yer-face* – but rather plays in which she finds something that echoes with her own experience as in the play *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* which tackles identity disorders and complex relations to reality. This theme echoed with her personal life as her sister had Down's syndrome. All the authors of the round table acknowledge the important role of their own artistic sensibility in their choices of play, even though they do not seek this kinship with the characters or the themes. They choose a play first for its text.

Christina Chatzivasileiou also introduces the discussion around another main issue for the stage-director: the translation of a play. She immediately distinguishes the academic translation of a play and the staged translation. For her the main difficulty of translation resides in the rhythm of the source language and its transcription into the target language; in her own case the rhythm of English is hardly compatible with the rhythm of modern Greek. While the grammar of English allows short and striking sentences, the grammar of Greek prefers long flowing sentences. This difficulty is even more pronounced when staging *In-Yer-Face* plays such as works by Sarah Kane or Martin McDonagh. Jérôme Hankins continues the discussion on this topic with the example of the translation of Edward Bond's plays. These plays made him question the academic rules of translation and go for a more inventive form of translation, a translation that enhances the ideas of the text. He addresses Christina Chatzivasileiou: "I feel that these English authors have really helped us invent a new form of French. And perhaps in Greece, what you're doing, is perhaps creating a new Greek language, that's what translation should be, you know, inventing language." For Jérôme Hankins, the stage allows the translator great freedom to be creative.

Violent language is another issue in the translation of *In-Yer-Face* plays. Christina Chatzivasileiou gives the example of the repetition of words such as "fuck" in Sarah Kane's plays. The repetitive effect of a short word in English is not the same as the periphrasis used in Greek.

Arnaud Anckaert admits that he removed some of the occurrences of the word in the plays he staged. The violence of the play is not necessarily conveyed by the repetition of violent words. There are other means to stage this violence. Catherine Hargreaves links this topic to her work with the actors. The rhythm of the play is also displayed through the body of the actor. Thus they also have their say in the translation of the text.

The works of Sarah Kane are referred to throughout the discussion. Christina Chatzivasileiou reminds the audience of Kane's words: "To be a stage-director is to be in a state of crisis." The notion of crisis is related to the responsibility the stage-director has towards the play, the characters and the author's work. Jérôme Hankins explains this notion of crisis by taking up the concept of the "Third Crisis" developed by Edward Bond, which corresponds to the present time.

All the participants describe directing for the stage work as a collaboration with the actors and each of them has a different method. For Christina Chatzivasileiou, improvisations form the basis of her work with the actors, while the text is rehearsed only at the end of the rehearsals. The improvisations aim at a better understanding of the play. On the other hand, Isabelle Starkier does not do improvisations with the actors; the rehearsals are more a dialogue between her, the actors and when possible the author of the play. While Arnaud Anckaert's method is much vaguer. The understanding of the play is already an extensive work, and is the responsibility of the stage-director to the author's work. He takes the example of the play *Every Brilliant Thing*, on which playwright Duncan Macmillan worked for ten years. Jérôme Hankins acknowledges the work of the actors in rehearsals so that the stage-director has to leave them a space of freedom in their interpretation of the text. Catherine Hargreaves concluded the discussion about stage-directing with the idea that there are as many ways of directing a play as stage-directors, but that every time the focus should be on the audience.

At the end of the round table, the questions of the members of the audience led the discussion back to the topic of translation and direct-

ing. Christina Chatzivasileiou spoke about the role of actors in the translation and the author: “A Good Author is a Dead Author”. Isabelle Starker concluded the discussion with the remark that in translation the spirit of the text is more important than the letter.

The round table of the authors tackled numerous topics that are still subject to debate in theatre studies. Christine Kiehl noted that it would be interesting for stage-directors to discuss their perspectives on the question of translation with the translators invited to the other round table.

(Transcript and summary: Séverine BADIN, Master’s student,
University Grenoble Alps)