

TEATRONAZIONALE
TEATRO
STABILE
TORINO

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

THE TEMPEST

TRANSLATION AND ADAPTATION ALESSANDRO SERRA



THE TEMPEST

by William Shakespeare
translation and adaptation Alessandro Serra

with (actors and characters)
Fabio Barone - *Ferdinand*
Andrea Castellano - *Boatswain/Spirit*
Vincenzo Del Prete - *Stephano*
Massimiliano Donato - *Alonso*
Paolo Madonna - *Sebastian*
Jared McNeill - *Caliban*
Chiara Michelini - *Ariel*
Maria Irene Minelli - *Miranda*
Valerio Pietrovita - *Antonio*
Massimiliano Poli - *Trinculo*
Marco Sgrosso - *Prospero*
Bruno Stori - *Gonzalo*

direction, set, lighting, sound, costumes Alessandro Serra
lighting collaboration Stefano Bardelli
sound collaboration Alessandro Saviozzi
costume collaboration Francesca Novati
masks Tiziano Fario
language support Donata Feroldi
overtitle translations Max Pardeilhan

head of artistic, programming and training department Barbara Ferrato
head of production department Salvo Caldarella
head of set production Marco Albertano
stage manager / stage engineer Marco Parlà | electrician Stefano Bardelli | sound engineer Riccardo Di Gianni
seamstress Rossella Campisi | set production Ermes Pancaldi
set construction Laboratorio del Teatro Stabile di Torino - Teatro Nazionale | set and technical workshop
coordinator Antioco Lusci, stagehands Andrea Chiebao, Luca De Giuli, Lorenzo Passarella
company manager Danilo Soddu | photography Alessandro Serra

Teatro Stabile di Torino - Teatro Nazionale | Teatro di Roma - Teatro Nazionale
ERT - Teatro Nazionale | Sardegna Teatro
Festival D'Avignon | MA scène nationale - Pays de Montbéliard
with the cooperation of Fondazione | Teatri Reggio Emilia
Compagnia Teatropersona



In *The Tempest*, everyone seeks to seize, consolidate or increase their power. Prospero fails to govern. In other words, he wields power improperly, and soon his own brother, his own blood, plots against him with the King of Naples and sentences him to death by water. Gonzalo rescues him by secretly endowing him with power far greater than political power: magic. However, in the words of Simone Weil, "Whoever is uprooted himself uproots others". Hence, as soon as he arrives on the island, Prospero uses his magical power to steal it from Caliban, whom he first adopts as his son and then enslaves. He then does the same with Ariel, freeing him from slavery but condemning him to a twelve-year servitude. Mere dynastic interests drive even his approach to Ferdinand and Miranda. In *The Tempest*, as in

all romances, we find the theme of the union of two kingdoms. As soon as they set foot on the island, Antonio talks Sebastian into killing his brother to become King of Naples. Only Gonzalo, in Shakespeare's superb monologue written in the words of Montaigne, envisions an ideal society without violence in which all things are to be shared, with no sovereign power, and in complete harmony with Nature. Indeed, in the first scene, hierarchies are reversed when faced with Nature: in a raging storm the Boatswain commands, not the King, for what do the wild waters care about the rank of a King!

However, it is Nature that is actually in control, and when Nature decides to reclaim its space, the sailors can do nothing but intone their reflective requiem: "It's all useless, let us pray! We are all doomed!" They are all about to drown, but actually, no one dies. Instead, it is a baptismal immersion, an initiation into one's inner labyrinth followed, according to Gonzalo, by a moment of self-discovery, having lost self-possession. During the tempest, the supernatural bends down in the service of man. Prospero lacks any sense of transcendence, yet his rough magic ensnares the spirits of Nature, unleashes the storm and raises the dead. But Ariel, a spirit of the air, teaches him the power of compassion and forgiveness. Do you truly believe that, spirit? I would, were I human.

On this stage-island, everyone begs for forgiveness, and everyone repents, except for Antonio and Sebastiano. They, unsurprisingly, are the only ones immune to the beauty and ecstasy that envelops the others. The fact that Prospero rejects vengeance just when his enemies are lying at his feet: is his greatest spiritual exaltation. The Supernatural appears precisely when Prospero forsakes it and renounces using it as a weapon. But Shakespeare seems to imply that the supreme power lies in the power of the Theatre. *The Tempest* is a hymn to theatre delivered by the theatre. Its magical powers lie precisely in this unique and one-time opportunity to experience metaphysical dimensions thanks to a company of boorish comedians treading wooden boards, making do with just a few props and a handful of patched together costumes. Therein lies its age-old fascination: everything happens before our eyes, everything is real and yet so clearly simulated, but, above all, this superhuman power only occurs if an audience is willing to listen and see, imagine, and share the silence to create the ritual. People will always have a longing for the Theatre because it remains the only place where human beings can exercise their right to an act of magic.

Alessandro Serra

Whoever is uprooted himself uproots others

Alessandro Serra interviewed
by Antonio Moresco



Chiara Michellini

Moresco - I am a little dense as I speak, especially still being affected by what I have just seen. However, I'm not quite as dense when I write, I become slightly more perceptive and think of things that do not come to mind when I speak. Offhand I can say that the production is wonderful and that the closing moments are extraordinary.

At first, I was somewhat puzzled by this square of bare planks centre stage, but gradually I realised that in actual fact it was exactly right and forceful.

This is a distinctive *Tempest* compared to other editions. Among other things, *The Tempest* is a radical meditation on the theatre, on the relationship between reality and imagination. So the fact that the island is stripped of all landscape elements and is just a bare stage as highlighted best at the end when the beam of light widens, seems to me an inspired and powerful choice. Just as the island is a theatre, the theatre is an island.

I considered it to be a play that displayed considerable poetic and theatrical coherence. Compared to other works by Shakespeare, this is a complex piece to stage. It is a kind of novel, almost like a fictional fairy tale. Hence it had to be brought to the stage using invention and possibly even a certain necessary profanation. This is how you have brought *The Tempest* into being again. This last work is a melting pot of countless things, but you know that better than I do because you have personified it. It is a transition from one world to another: a former animistic world is a new world superseded by, which ultimately proves to be no less disturbing than the previous one. The figure of Prospero, which the actor personifies brilliantly, is conveyed as a figure that hovers between two sides, with one foot here and one foot there. In the present age, we humans are running into a wall. Not only because of this latest, horrific war we are faced with, but also because, as a species, either we make a quantum leap and show significant inventiveness, or we are screwed.

This show activates all of this going back a long way, especially considering that the 17th century was an incredible age, with Shakespeare, Cervantes...

The former also explored at length this transition between reality and imagination, at a time when every horizon of life and the world needed to open up once again. In other words, *The Tempest* also relates to Don Quixote and his transition, not between reason and madness, but between one delirium and the next, the delirium of one-dimensional reason that prevails over the earlier chivalric and fable-like delirium. Yet your work is a very intense production, by no means a reduced production, quite the opposite, it is very rich. At the same time, however, it has none of the ostentation of the theatre that suffocates everything, which captivates but fails to elicit feelings or reflection. On the contrary, this

production strikes a wondrous balance between essentiality and richness of invention. At this point, however, I would like to explore an issue we discussed before the performance began. Why did you select *The Tempest*, considering that you told me it was the last in the line?

Serra - The third but last of the list, the third but last of Shakespeare's plays.
Moresco - Incidentally, what are the other two?

Serra - The next-to-last of the great masterpieces is perhaps *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but *Romeo and Juliet* too, I don't know, it depends on the state of the world and how we are evolving... When I was eighteen, I started to read *Swann's Way* and found it awful and dreadfully dull, and then ten years later, I re-read the *Recherche* two times in a row... The odd thing, which I've been thinking about for a few days now, is that after the success of *Macbett*, when people asked about my future projects... I repeatedly told different journalists that I wanted to work on a trilogy about power and stage, Richard III and King Lear. But of course, this is something I still want to do, I really wanted to analyse power from these three different perspectives... those of these three minor characters. When I decided to work on *The Tempest*, I shelved this project on power, so to speak, and when I began to translate the text and rewrite it in Italian, I became conscious of its tremendous political force, which today seems even more relevant because wars are always fratricidal. This land is my land! I was here first! Palestine, Ukraine, the whole world, every border, the fence of one's semi-detached home...

Prospero's island is the world, an immense and minimal space surrounded by the Mediterranean, which is still full of corpses today, and which everybody wants to conquer, possess and destroy. There is a crescendo of usurpations: the island starts as paradise on earth, filled with spirits, sounds and sweet melodies; Ariel, a spirit of the air, inhabits it. Sycorax commits the first instance of violence, Caliban's mother, who arrives at the island with child and immediately imprisons Ariel in a cloven pine tree and lays her egg before she dies. Once the egg hatches, Caliban finds himself alone, master of the island. On his arrival, Prospero, the usurped Duke of Milan, frees Ariel only to enslave him and adopt Caliban, subsequently taking the island from him and enslaving him too. *I am subject to a tyrant, a sorcerer, that by his cunning hath cheated me of the island*. The escalation continues, the castaways are the same people who had taken Prospero's duchy, and two are now plotting to kill Alonso, the King of Naples. So far, nothing new; it resembles one of the many Elizabethan *Revenge Plays*. But Shakespeare's alchemic genius transforms coarse substance into gold. The story becomes myth,

and reality is transcended: Prospero stages his revenge but does not carry it out, and above all, within the story, there is also a parody of revenge. The comic characters plot to kill Prospero and end up in a foul-smelling puddle. Shakespeare simultaneously parodies power and himself... it's like writing the *Odyssey*, and at the same time, its parody, Joyce's *Ulysses*.

However, this was not why I decided to stage *The Tempest*, and yet this is what moves me most today. So when I now listen to the actors' voices and once again hear those words of hatred and forgiveness, they strike me so strongly that it is almost as if I am hearing them for the first time. When Miranda calls Caliban an abhorred slave, Miranda, the most wondrous Miranda, speaks like the most common racists and says: abhorred slave, which any print of goodness would not ta She expresses her utter contempt for the native who knows no language, *When thou didst not, savage, know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like a thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes with words that made them known*. It is the most violent form of commiseration, the kind that the West unleashed on the colonial world: the violence of language that results in disowning one's roots and frequently rewriting cosmogonies for the benefit of European slaughterers. Even Gods change name and appearance...

Caliban replies: *You taught me language; and my profit on't is, I know how to curse you*. The fact that English, French, Spanish and Portuguese are all spoken throughout the world today results from this violence, which has led to millions of deaths. Miranda seems cruel enough already, but she is not done; she continues and speaks of vile race. This is Shakespeare's greatness, it is neither a romantic novel nor a TV series, but it is actual life, life lived, which is why he places these words into the mouth of this wondrous creature, who is angelic in name and etymology. A creature so inclined to be moved and to feel love for others, but for others like herself, others who are white, beautiful, blond and blue-eyed, not others who are different or deformed, others who are born on the island and unable to provide her father's dynastic continuation. This does not reflect Shakespeare's thinking; it is merely a mirror that he created and placed before his Elizabethan audience and before us today. So when we accept the mandate enshrined in his words, when we set this mirror before a spectator, what occurs is that the sight of ourselves is often unbearable. Hence, his splendid scenic devices, narrative devilry, vulgarity, allusions, and comicality are all devices to guide spectators to face their very own mystery. These same clichés lure the soul and lead spectators to experience the archetype.

Yet Shakespeare achieves this masterly feat through words: there are no captions, no punctuation; everything is in the words and the sound.



Amazement, for example, is one of the work's radiant words; it means astonishment and wonder; *Thaumaston* is astonishment that leads to *Katharsis*. Prospero's purpose is revenge, but the result is initiation: the tempest itself does not cause deaths but castaways in a state of ecstasy. It is instead a baptismal immersion, an initiation into one's inner labyrinth at the end of which, according to Gonzalo, *and all of us found ourselves when we lost control of ourselves*. Once ashore, the characters are all immersed in a state of stupor, so to speak, in the throes of this altered consciousness, and so too, in some sense, are Stephano and Trinculo, under the influence of alcohol. The same will be true for Caliban. His wine-induced, altered state of consciousness leads him to kill Prospero and worship a drunkard as if he were a god. Prospero is clearly behind the chance encounter between Stephano and the barrel of wine. Again, it is he who confounds their minds with heavenly liquor, just as Caliban says. Here again, Shakespeare is prescient, as if he was already describing the violence involved in the introduction of alcohol to cultures that lack the enzymes to metabolise it, as in the case of the aborigines, the Maori, who were warriors and have now been reduced to a nation of alcoholics. We gifted them with spirits and viruses that annihilated them. Those few who survived suffered physical violence, they were enslaved, and wherever we were unable to use direct violence, we resorted to the most brutal violence of all: replacing their language with ours. This is precisely what Caliban is and has been exposed to.

Actually, what strikes me so intensely today was not really the reason for which I came to work on this play. The power was, what you said, the power of the theatre. During the lockdown period, when we were confined to our homes and I saw shuttered theatres... something totally outrageous. What's more, we were insulted and humiliated by all this online or television surrogacy, I saw... I felt... the purging of human scum, because the virus wasn't a war. War has one advantage: the painful advantage that once the war is over, the best emerge. Waging war requires the very worst human beings while building peace and rebuilding from the rubble requires the very best: the finest poets, the finest politicians, the finest entrepreneurs. They cannot lose sight of humanity as they still carry the scars of degradation at its worst on their bodies. The pandemic killed many while hugely enriching others. It left many poorer, but it did not create a wound that, once healed, might cast a glimmer of hope. On the contrary, the very worst emerged, especially from whoever seized power during these two years and from whoever administered it, and we are now heading in that direction...

That's why I decided to gather up my clothes since they are Teatropersona company costumes, and also gathered up my collaborators, Stefano, Francesca, Alessandro, Tiziano, and especially the Teatropersona actors, Andrea, Massimiliano, Chiara, as well as others who joined the project over the past years, like Bruno and Massimiliano, and other young students: Paolo, Fabio, Irene, Valerio... And then three amazing people I met during these last two years: Vincenzo, Jared and Marco. So this is the point, the point is to celebrate the theatre through the theatre, and to reaffirm that the theatre is the actor: if you wish to achieve something truly remarkable and important, that is, if you want to transcend appearances for a few instants and attain a metaphysical dimension, the only way to go is through a company, a human group. The theatre will emerge renewed from this pandemic only if it chooses to reappropriate its nature as a collective ritual, together with its humanity and materiality. All this is about my life, so I cannot be moved by my life, but I am moved by the Theatre's superhuman and straightforward strength and the powerful political nature of this genuinely moving play.

Moresco - This is because things are still undefined in Shakespeare. He did not introduce the Manichean separations that were to come later, and within his work, things and forces are still undefined. For instance, as you say, Prospero is driven away by a usurper, and then he replicates the same mental process when he lands on the island. It's like Greek theatre, the *Oresteia*: Agamemnon kills Iphigenia and then is in turn, killed...

Serra - As Simone Weil says: 'Whoever is uprooted himself uproots others'.

Moresco - Of course. Therefore the mechanism is the same, and Shakespeare observes it clearly, but for him, things and forces are not distinct and struggle against each other even within the same forms and minds. Moreover, in those years, European nations were starting to colonise vast areas of the world. A century later, this colonisation was emblematically represented, not only in its mechanism but also in its ideal projections, by Robinson Crusoe, a shipwrecked man who washed up on another island and eventually found Friday, who became his slave... Shakespeare captures this mechanism from the outset, having the ability to leave things undefined and move beyond them. That is why he is so forceful, why he keeps producing meaning and opposition: things and forces are indistinguishable in him because he is not Manichean. And then he also has this presence within him of the dream, of delirium, because Prospero too is caught

up in a delirium. His usurpers are inside a delirium of power; he too is inside a delirium, the delirium of imprisoning people through sorcery, magic, and so on. In other words, he reveals all the illusions and dreams, but also the delusions that underpin our imagination, which has been handed down through the centuries. There are also these extraordinary characters: Caliban, Ariel... but how did he ever come up with them! So basically, it's true that when you read it, you might say: what a wonderful literary text. Still, at the same time, you feel it has fewer dramaturgical options than other tragedies and comedies by Shakespeare. But thanks to this rigour, this intensity, this freedom and even this profanation, the dramaturgical force emerges precisely because nothing helps you penetrate the fairy tale with superficial suggestions. There are only the creaky boards... I hope they'll continue to creak...

Serra - But they should creak just as I want them to...

Moresco - I hope you do not take an attitude based on power and leave them free to creak as they damn well please, because it's a noise that makes you think of the stage and Shakespeare's idea of the world as great theatre...

Serra - I will let them creak; they have their own life, there's no doubt about that.

Moresco - I hope that your power over those boards will only stretch to a certain point...

Serra - But that's exactly what I want, that's why I chose the theatre and not films, that's why I use real, delicate, old objects, discarded by society and likewise the costumes. The very boards of the stage are worn, worm-eaten, weathered and worn. The Stabile's technical department is to be highly praised for having accepted the challenge of recreating a worn-out stage that was also reminiscent of a Zen garden. And then there are the actors, who, thankfully, squeak along with grace and anarchy. Actually, another reason that *The Tempest* increasingly moves me is that I identify with it... it frightens me. Still, it is so evident that I recognise myself in the character... even when he is utterly detestable. I was saying this on the phone yesterday... I was saying that he's a character... a detestable character, and it is not all that easy... You only have to read him to understand that he's a very unpleasant character, but it's exactly because he's so surly that he's ultimately very touching. In this respect, I think he's very Chekhovian, a thoroughly mean-spirited character who is utterly devoid of



transcendence despite his height and in spite of dealing with transcendence. His studies insulate him from the world... it's a bit like what's happening to the West... in recent years, we have developed this passion for the East, not least in theatrical terms, but above all in spiritual terms. So now we have all these yoga courses with unpronounceable Sanskrit names, and Vipassana, transcendental meditation, Tibetan meditation, all aimed at ensuring our wellbeing as rich Westerners, all to promote our own wellbeing: we have taken whatever we needed from the East. We have researched, we now know everything, we know all the breathing techniques, yet like Prospero, we have forgotten one key feature that underpins all this: compassion. Without compassion, Buddhism can become a bi-weekly activity that allows you to live better and relax, not to become angry when an engineer fails to aim the spotlight as you had intended... But it is still egoism that constantly drives us... everything must be in the service of Westerners who must always feel their best, must be happier and happier, albeit remaining substantially, profoundly unhappy. A spirit of the air will teach Prospero compassion. Ariel tells him that: *if you now beheld them, your affections would become tender.*

Dost thou think so, spirit?

Mine would, sir, were I human.

And mine shall... This is Prospero's initiation, his human evolution ahead of his spiritual evolution. Perhaps the West, too, needs a visit from Ariel to rediscover compassion.

Moresco - Another thing that struck me about Prospero's character is that he possesses an explosive ambivalence within himself. Yet at the same time, he is the role to whom Shakespeare entrusts some of his most despairing and intimate thoughts... Moresco - Another thing that struck me about Prospero's character is that he possesses an explosive ambivalence within himself. Yet at the same time, his is the role to whom Shakespeare entrusts some of his most despairing and intimate thoughts... Like in the ancient scriptures, like in *Gilgamesh* or in the earliest books of the *Bible*, where things and forces were not as divided as they were later believed to be, good and evil, God and the devil... God saying: "I repent for the evil I meant to do towards men"... Good grief! But that means that God can also commit evil! Then instead, a conceptual geometric structure was added to it, which developed through separations and antinomies. However, in the beginning, things were indistinct and explosive; light and darkness were one and the same before the first line of the Bible, when God enters and separates, or thinks he separates, light from the darkness. Thus began our whole specular mental mechanism. Shakespeare still retains this undivided vertical

power, which is strange because he was born and worked in a century when all the mental illusions of modernity began to develop. In this respect, he is truly a violent and sinister barbarian, as Voltaire said of Dante. If you want, a most refined barbarian, but ultimately he really is a barbarian, precisely because he does not accept this machine-like simplification within the indistinct, like the so-called barbarian, in whom all forces remain together, but multiplied...

Moresco - And even Ariel... because, just like light and darkness, heaviness and lightness cannot do without each other: without lightness, there would be no heaviness; without heaviness, there would be no lightness.

Serra - Somehow, all the characters are linked to language and the violence of imposing one's language. We also wondered what Caliban, Ariel and Prospero's secret languages might be. Caliban surely learned a western language from Prospero and Miranda, but what was his mother tongue? If you work backwards, his mother, the witch Sycorax, was from Algiers, so what was the language there... Arabic? What language? Othello's? Caliban and Othello are two absolutely mirror-like characters. They are both foreigners and speak a foreign language, so when you play Othello, you're meant to speak poor English (or Italian), with perhaps an odd accent and cadence. He cannot speak fluently because he is a foreigner... They are both foreigners, both barbarians; as the text says, Othello was already fighting at the age of seven. Such savages learn English from very highly learned people, which is why Shakespeare has them speaking in sublime verse. They may mispronounce, but they speak in verse. When this transformation takes place.. let's say when their more savage nature awakens, i.e. when Othello decides to kill Desdemona and Caliban to deliver the sleeping Prospero to Stephano, they both speak in prose. Language is the mirror of the soul, and from verse, they shift to prose.

Nevertheless, they are still savages: one a creature of darkness and the other a foreign Moor. Othello is called upon to fight, but ultimately, his lieutenant Cassio is appointed governor of Cyprus. Cassio, the white man! Othello is used and sidelined. Similarly, Caliban is totally unsuitable to partner Miranda, and hence the scandal of the Moor marrying Desdemona: something unheard of! So language... It sounds ridiculous... There are so many elements that are not simply themes that the author addresses, but rather energy sources that radiate from every syllable...

There is a constant interplay of mirrors between the play and the spectators in *The Tempest*. Prospero and Miranda are spectators at the performance of the

tempest; the castaways are spectators at the banquet; Ferdinand and Miranda are spectators at the masque. And lastly, watched by all, the curtain opens to reveal the lovers playing chess. And then there is one last audience, the people in the stalls.

In the epilogue, the magic is definitively transferred to the audience, the magic of one's interior imagination that becomes embodied in an applause that is both a tribute and a farewell, but equally a magic formula that dissolves the spell and releases the actor from all ties to the character.



The enchantment that springs from tangible matter

by Alessandro Toppi

A 278 square metre expanse of wood. With small hollows - woodworm or warps that complement the 1% slope of the proscenium - and a multitude of grazes visible to the naked eye. Overhead, 15 metres of latticework; in the foreground, a wide-open curtain with counterweighted electric hoists to the side. Unfinished walls against the back of the stage, ropes and cables everywhere. There is an endless array of seats: 345 in the stalls, 696 in total. Five tiers of boxes, embellished with gilded scales, leafy friezes and lamps. I count 241. Three are out of order. A crate filled with screws and bolts labelled "Fritto misto", a broom with green bristles and a walled-up door that apparently has something to do with a legend about the ghost of a little girl. This is the location: the Teatro Argentina in Rome with its down to earth tangibility. It is the venue for a workshop from 24 August to 2 September 2020. The title of the workshop, with eighteen participants, is *Hamlet. Silence in Shakespeare* and will be led by Alessandro Serra. However, I will hardly ever hear Shakespeare's name despite taking notes. So what do I notice instead? What do I experience?

First and foremost, Chiara Michelini, who works from a score of smooth flows, pauses, takes and concentrated gestures, helping the participants' bodies become more self-aware and more lightweight, neutral, ethereal and consequently ready to move on to the stage. "Your breath is a gentle wind, your body is sinking, your heels are sinking", "I looking for quality in movement", "by inhaling the space between the vertebrae expands, by exhaling the spine grows heavy" and "go with the rhythm", "there isn't a right or wrong way", "take your time". Eventually, they stand up again: eyelids lowered, their expression serene: the space between the legs is that of two hands, the chin is angled as if to hold a grapefruit to one's neck, and the air simply flows between arms and body. And then? Then, an unimaginable amount of work under the guidance of Alessandro Serra: both coordinated and uncoordinated, consisting of exercises, improvisations, suggestions and stumbles, red faces and perspiration. For example, I look over my notes and read: a dance performed clutching a stick that leads to an attachment, like an epidermic-material symbiosis between man and object until Serra mercilessly requires a farewell.

Or. Two arrays - Two walls? Or two armies? Are they a double Birnam wood? - advancing slowly so as to meet mid-stage in perfect unison. This, it seems to me, is a way of learning to listen: to those who are beside me and move with me, and to those who are facing and approaching me. Then again. A song with no polyphony. Everyone joins in with their own tone, dissolving into the choir. Now, the word "choir" is a keyword, so much so that it appears thirty-one times in my diary. "Be a choir", "dissolve into the choir", "I must hear the choir", says Serra, and "I disappear into the choir and am enhanced by it: I simultaneously expose my insignificance, yet shine through the ensemble". That's not it. I think of actors and actresses sinking and rippling like a wave; I think of races at variable speeds, in which you have to choose and chase your partner or your victim; I think of a carpet that doubles as tapestry, frame and backdrop; I think of an afternoon devoted to *Hamlet*, not acting him or producing micro-directions but exploring gaps in the plot, the chiaroscuros in the story. And I think of the geometry that constantly governs physical (com)presence. Lines, points, diagonals and the circle, the triangle and the rectangle, which - Serra explains - "is the form man uses to represent himself: paintings, cinema screens, TVs, smartphones are rectangles; the stage we are now treading is a rectangle".

Additionally: countless acting references (Eleonora Duse's stage entrances, Eduardo De Filippo's juggling, Umberto Osini acting with his hands in his pockets, Danio Manfredini, César Brie, Eugenio Barba, the objects from Samuel Beckett's *The Endgame*, Pina Bausch's reiteration of a fragment); book recommendations (Tadeusz Kantor's *Stille Nacht*, Bruno Schultz's *Cinnamon Shops*, László Krasznahorkai's *Melancolia della resistenza (Melancholy of Resistance)*, Yves Lebreton's *Étienne Decroux*); the names of certain painters (Rembrandt, who used black to render the invisible; Hopper, whose light would bend plants in the vases; Hammershøi, on whose canvases time flows), a number of unexpected quotations (Francis Bacon's "fortuity", Mozart's "silence between notes", the rose window of a theatre in Città di Castello which reads "I am seen so that I may see") and an endless number of high and low references which likewise contribute to the practical and theoretical questioning of the foundations of theatre: Mike Tyson's power, Mario Bava's films, the video in which Maradona warms up by becoming

one with the ball and how Chekhov lights up the room in the third act of *The Cherry Orchard*, Bergman's *The Rite*, Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, the grief Amy Winehouse expresses when she sings. So ultimately, what is all this? "A petty job at times, but nobly done": these are "games that require strength" and "humble tasks" that tend "to lofty goals" and are performed "for love", as young Ferdinand would say in *The Tempest*. It is the vast quantity of raw material that the sacred theatre calls for. And it is a pursuit of density; it seems to me, a yearning for beauty, a way to inflame the air, the means to make space and time more sensitive. It is a yearning for verticality. Only on the fifth day did I realise that twenty-three stage costumes were hanging from the ceiling of the Argentina. They were lowered just a few hours before the conclusion of the workshop. The actresses and actors swoop down on them like children when they see a mountain of toys. Just as Stephano and Trinculo do when they grab the clothes laid out by Prospero in Act IV, Scene 1 of *The Tempest*. These designs, which connect the roof (the sky) and the wooden boards (the earth), immediately bring to mind the vertical dimension of Shakespeare's theatre, which is both structural (the three levels of the understage, the stage and the balcony) and cultural: "You can be sure that for Shakespeare and his audience - with the extraordinary array of peoples in a state of transformation, with ideas that erupted and then collapsed - there was a total lack of security. And that was positive because it created a deep-seated sense that behind this chaos, there existed a singular potential for understanding, related to a different order, which had nothing to do with the political order. We find this sense in all of Shakespeare's plays, and if we refuse to accept the reality of a world of spirits, we would do better to burn these plays, for they would no longer make any sense. His plays were a meeting ground between spectators and actors, where moments of life could be observed with great intensity, instant by instant. Throughout, an invisible dimension matched what was visible. The action was thus both horizontal and vertical", as he wrote in *Forgetting Shakespeare?*

Peter Brook. Hamlet's ghost, if you like, or the witches who climb over a monolith and burst onto the stage, marking the beginning of *Macbettu* (with a dance that anticipates a destiny). It should be clear that this otherworldly alterity, this spell, is a landing place. It is reached - once it is reached - by dealing with tangible things.

Take *The Tempest*. It is a work that has no primary literary sources but which instead resonates with fragments of apocryphal dramas (*Mucedorus*¹), plots from the Commedia dell'Arte (*Li Tre Satiri* - *The Three Satyrs*²), with echoes of old magical tales (*El Espejo de Príncipes y Caballeros* - *The Mirrou of Princely Deeds and Knighthood*³); it combines the *masque* with Montaigne's political reflections and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; it mingles religious discussions, tales of shipwrecks and the echoes of British colonial policy. The play is a compendium of situations, archetypes and clichés that are present in almost all of William Shakespeare's previous plots: from *Othello* to *The Comedy of Errors*, from *Love's Labour's Lost* to *King Lear*.

It is, in fact a prosaic, human and technical endeavour from which poetry ultimately flows. Shakespeare writes taking into account the tools, the furnishings and the features of the space available (darkness reigns, for instance, since the company uses an indoor hall); Prospero's role was written for Richard Burbage, who has aged prematurely, and, for the first time, the sequence of events matches the actual duration of the play. These are constraints, tricks, experience and skill. They are ploys and ruses: we might say they are lead that turns into gold.

He brings literature and theatre to life in a distilled form through his daily work, perfecting the tempo, fine-tuning the choral quality, and identifying the deeper meaning of each phrase and term. After all: "The magic of the theatre consists precisely in this unique and one-time possibility of accessing metaphysical dimensions through the quackery of four wooden boards, a company, a handful of objects and a heap of patched-up costumes", Alessandro Serra would say. That is how a world comes into existence that is truly believable. The boards are indeed an island. Ariel is really invisible, the sailors' garments are still dry despite the shipwreck, and there is a cave, brambles and a murky lake. The sun does indeed go dark at noon. Indeed the green sea rages against the celestial skies. Indeed the wind utters a name that the thunder strikes like a drum. Is this not also true of Alessandro Serra's theatre?

I could swear that I indeed saw time unfold (AURE) and I indeed saw a body sculpted by a light swinging horizontally (*L'ombra della sera* - *The Shadow of the Evening*) and I indeed saw life waning while waiting (*Frame*); I indeed saw sleep

¹ *Mucedorus* is a romantic comedy, published in 1598 (sixteen quarto editions were printed between 1598 and 1668), but it was already staged in 1590. It is one of the most widely printed works of its time and one of the most popular and performed of its period. While some have attributed it to William Shakespeare, it is now considered an apocryphal work.

² A commedia dell'arte canovaccio by an anonymous author. Echoes of the work probably reached London theatre circles. *Li Tre Satiri* (*The Three Satyrs*) describes the antics of Zanni and Burattino, sailors shipwrecked on an island governed by a sorcerer whose assistants are spirits in the shape of satyrs.

³ *El Espejo de Príncipes y Caballeros* is a cycle of chivalric poems, published between the mid-16th century and the early decades of the following century. The first part was in three volumes, and was published in Saragossa in 1555. Its author, Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra, recounts the adventures (including a shipwreck on an enchanted island) of Emperor Trebacio of Greece and his two sons, El Caballero del Febo and Rosicler, and was translated into English in 1578 under the title *The Mirrou of Princely Deeds and Knighthood*.



being killed, spells being cast and trees moving forward (*Macbettu*); I indeed saw a woman cry, rise from her chair and depart, leaving her halo and her entire past as her dowry (*The Cherry Orchard*). It matters little whether this was due to a shaping machine or to plaster dust, to confetti or smoke, to a torch moved in the wings, to the use of pane carasau, to an old wardrobe used for playing hide-and-seek, to an off-stage joke, to an embrace repeated or to the well-planned position of two bodies standing still in an empty space. The important thing is that suddenly, and without any warning, I became connected with something inexpressible and elevated that lived within me - who knows since when - and within my chest.



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