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Staging Dario Fo and Franca Rame: Anglo-American Approaches
to Political Theatre (review)

Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio

Comparative Drama, Volume 41, Number 1, Spring 2007, pp. 115-119 (Review)

Published by Western Michigan University

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cdr.2007.0000>

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In her madness, however, Ophelia both curses and blesses the community (197) before uniting it again to mourn at her grave (194). The change in Hamlet, Goodland argues, testifies to the effectiveness of her mourning (198).

The argument of Goodland's last chapter is essentially contained in its title, "Inverting the Pietà in Shakespeare's *King Lear*." In place of the mother mourning her son, we now have a father mourning his daughter. No lamenting woman could howl, rage, interrogate heaven, or wish for death more effectively than Lear himself. The Virgin Mary, Goodland notes, "undergoes a similar arc of emotion." And while she does not call for vengeance, Mary Magdalene does. Parts of this chapter, such as the popularity of monuments and funeral sermons in Elizabethan England, repeat ground covered to varying degrees in several prior chapters. But the section that examines paternal mourning is new, and leads directly to Shakespeare's substitution of male for female tears. In *King Lear*, as Goodland points out, Cordelia's most extensive grief occurs offstage. She "does not speak her grief; first Lear and then the Gentleman speak it for her" (213). But if silent, private grief indicates the sincerity of Cordelia's grief, Lear's grief is given voice, even in the presence of his daughter's body (a feature of Catholic funerals, but not Protestant ones). Michael Neill, noting the lack of ritual consolations in *King Lear*, finds this the logical extension of the Protestant severing of continuity between the living and dead. Goodland, however, argues that Lear's mourning "is haunted by the Virgin's mourning over Jesus" and that this constitutes ritual "for the play in the world" (216). The audience is encouraged to weep with Lear, as medieval mourners once wept with the lamenting women.

KATHRYN JACOBS

Texas A & M-Commerce

Stefania Taviano. *Staging Dario Fo and Franca Rame: Anglo-American Approaches to Political Theatre*. Warwick Studies in the Humanities. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005. Pp. ix + 136 + 10 color plates. \$79.95.

The larger questions this book trades in moved me to think of two analogies. The first one is between the quality of Fo and Rame's satirical humor and that of another classic author of comedic theater, Molière; the second, between the quality of this humor and the situatedness of political theater. Both analogies are powerful and revealing. The theater practices that bring onstage the historical

realities of what lies offstage are what Sartre, in his twin role as playwright and theorist, used to refer to as *théâtre de situation*. In this discursive context, theater is inevitably situated and therefore political. The skill of Fo, Rame, and others before them is their ability to navigate the situatednesses at hand and make their complexities resonate with meaning. Taviano's book honors this ability as it inscribes practices typical of the Fo/Rame theater into specific transcultural and bilingual contexts, including those of theater venues and production systems in the United Kingdom, New England, and the US West Coast.

Both Fo and Molière were actor-playwrights whose major collaborators were female family members, Madeleine and Armande Béjart for the French playwright, Franca Rame for the Italian. Like his successor, Molière fiercely attacked those in power while his perceptiveness gave away an uncanny affinity for them. Today most commentators agree that Molière's scripts capture the best part of the caustic humor that made them irresistible when he and his female collaborators starred in them. However, Molière's onstage death while performing the title character in his own *The Imaginary Invalid* tells a different story. Much as Jean Baptiste Poquelin was trying to keep offstage the reality of his health condition, the physical presence of his body onstage allowed his frailty to kick in. The irony of Molière's performative insistence—as an alleged hypochondriac sick enough to die on the spot—measures a theater practice's inherently situated and political character. Molière, like Fo and Rame, must have believed that the presence of original performers significantly affects the production of a play's meaning. Taviano's book takes on the two Italian performers' concern with the life of the theater beyond their own, even as it also accounts for their awareness of how the transformation of one's oeuvre into a classic can affect its meaning. Fo's preoccupation with the evacuation of political content from his theater is further justified by his status of Nobel Prize winner, an honor he turned into an occasion to insist on the importance of his wife's contributions. By inscribing the UK and US productions of Fo and Rame's plays into the wider contexts of transcultural discourses in our ecologically fragile yet highly mediatic era, Taviano's study aptly addresses these complex and interconnected issues.

As a former theater scholar who has moved to life-writing and interdisciplinary work about ecological systems, I feel both prepared for and challenged by this review. In 1984, I wrote my first article on Franca Rame and her creative role in the Fo/Rame theater. It was based on a lengthy oral-history interview that went against the grain of my training in comparative literature, since, as a critic, the last person I was supposed to trust was the author. My trust turned out to be well placed, for twenty years later, Rame incidentally confessed to me that the experience of being treated as an author was a first for her too. As a

beginning scholar, I bet my dime that Fo and Rame's work would have a global impact well beyond their time and original cultural arena, even as I made my modest contribution to it. The uncommon occurrence of a performer being awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, in 1997, as well as the vast extant bibliography, in several languages, dedicated to both Rame and Fo, indicates that my bet was a winner. Over the years, my focus on cultural ecology has diverted my research energies from the theater. However, my interest in Fo and Rame's development has persisted, with a study of their unfolding collaborative relationship and a translation/adaptation of one of their works.

As I read into Taviano's book, I found the preoccupations that motivate her study germane to some I have encountered in working with Fo/Rame materials. For example, while involved with a 1990s San Diego-based experimental theater group, I found existing translations of *An Open Couple* so disappointing for anyone transcultural enough to be familiar with the original, that I decided to do my own, for which job I enlisted the help of the director and a Southern California native speaker. We focused on the script's flow and on rendering the vernacular character of the original. Taviano's book describes how the English text of a foreign play for the mainstream London stage comes into being, which aptly explains the production mechanisms responsible for the stiffness I observed in the translated scripts. As Taviano explains, the only person with a direct knowledge of the original language and culture is the hired hand who comes up with the literal translation, a rough draft that is then used as a basis for the script written by the production director (7–9).

Taviano suggests that most misunderstandings, equivocations, and generalizations observed in extant translations can be attributed to this practice, which generates gaps in the play's signification system. In production, these gaps end up being filled by stage business based on original-culture stereotypes that the host culture especially cherishes and with which it is familiar. In the UK, these include representing Italians as working-class people given to male camaraderie, gesticulations, and rough speech, with the added bonus of highlights on the common staples of Italian cuisine; in US Eastern Seaboard cities, one must add aspirations to upward mobility and Mafioso attitudes. The West Coast mellows this down to stylishness, good taste, and a somewhat generic Europeaness. Taviano's book connects these stereotypes to features in the staging of the Fo/Rame plays in these respective regions, thus indicating how the Fo/Rame English language production history provides valuable tools for a general transcultural analysis of these regions' respective theater and entertainment industries. Besides translation practices, stage business, and the use of cultural stereotypes, other areas on which Taviano's analysis focuses include press releases and reviewing systems and how they affect theater attendance and public opinion; political

systems and how they affect the issuing of entrance visas and therefore an artist's ability to perform in and/or contribute to the production of his or her work abroad; and historical legacies and how they determine what viewers expect from shows and how they think about political performativity.

Taviano finds that while the UK and the US Eastern Seaboard have not been conducive to productions of the Fo/Rame plays that enhance their political and culturally transforming intent and commitment, the West Coast, and especially the San Francisco Bay Area region, has been conducive to such endeavors. This does not surprise me, since the culture and theater practices of that region, including the legacy of the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the rebellious, communitarian, and slightly utopian spirit of Bay Area hippies and other alternative lifestyle communities closely align with Rame and Fo's perspectives. Indeed, the avant-garde production of *We Can't Pay, We Won't Pay* I once saw in San Francisco cast the main characters as Hispanic workers, thus applying the Brechtian principle of reterritorializing a script into the situatedness of its host cultural arena. The play is about rampant inflation in the 1970s, and how low-wage workers deal with it by practicing *autoriduzione*, or customer-imposed price reductions at retail stores. Realistic as it is, this practice also displaces the reductive stereotypes often applied to Italians onto the Hispanic population of the US West Coast region, something to which this population could object.

A further consideration in assessing Taviano's perspective is that it inevitably presumes a pristine context where none of the adulterations and commercializations typical of the UK/US systems occur. For the Fo/Rame plays, this context is supposedly Italy. Yet when Fo plays to Italy's bourgeois viewers, his performance, and reception thereof, is adulterated too. When performing in Italy, the company often chooses unconventional arenas accessible to low-income people, like stadiums, piazzas, and other public spaces. Yet Italian audiences can also act as sheer consumers, and there is no guarantee that they will be intent on listening for the satire's political meaning. Much of what we get out of the theater has to do with what we bring to it. Unlike most of the fare that passes for entertainment in today's media, the kind of entertainment Rame and Fo offer is laudably nonviolent, imaginative, mordant, and more than respectful of any audience's intellectual dignity—but it is also excruciatingly funny and there is no reason why low-wage viewers should not enjoy it for the sheer hell of it.

With these considerations in mind, I'd like to conclude with some observations about the usefulness of Taviano's research in a global, transcultural context. Taviano's findings about Fo/Rame theater productions in English decode the trappings of the UK/US entertainment industry to which these transcultural

projects are subject. The status and prestige the Fo/Rame theater has acquired only makes these trappings more visible. Hence, the analytical production history Taviano offers is both representative and unique. It inspires transcultural theater practices that avoid these trappings and are more attuned to the use of idioms, references, and rhythms, while they also involve teams that include insiders to both cultural arenas. This delineates the book's potential also to help others envisage the more genuine and transformative transcultural theater practices of the future.

SERENA ANDERLINI-D'ONOFRIO

University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez

Penny McCarthy. *Pseudonymous Shakespeare: Rioting Language in the Sidney Circle*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006. Pp. xxiv + 257 pp. \$94.95.

"And as no chemic yet th'elixir got, / But glorifies his pregnant pot / If by the way to him befall / Some odoriferous thing, or medicinal": thus Donne, fondly noting that while alchemists may never succeed, in the course of their efforts they often make useful incidental discoveries—or at least help to pass the time. Penny McCarthy's *Pseudonymous Shakespeare* might be considered in this light. For 150 years, epitomized by the famous Thomas Looney, clergymen, physicians, computer programmers, actors, judges, and a few (usually nonliterary) scholars have tried to show that Shakespeare did not write his works, or that he was really Bacon, Marlowe, Oxford, Elizabeth I, the Countess of Pembroke (of whom more later), or a committee. McCarthy is not like them. On the contrary, she wants not to take away the writings of the man from Stratford but rather to add to them, and to fill out his early life by attaching him to Leicester and the Sidney Circle and having him become Mary Sidney's lover and, from the age of ten or eleven, leave pseudonymous writings scattered across the literary landscape. It is a breathtaking ride, and one can see why she comments that "the few scholars" who read drafts of her book "felt disabled from venturing comment" (ix).

However, with or without such help, written with an attractive buoyancy of tone, the book emerged. Here, as fairly as I can put it, is the argument. A particular pseudonym, R. L., found in or attached to diverse works written or published between 1575 and 1601 (xiii), is Shakespeare. The case starts with the account of the Kenilworth entertainment of 1575 and considers a variety of works signed R. L., who turns out to be a young page in the Kenilworth household, in fact, "Shakespeare's juvenile self" (215); he is promoted by the Leicester