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### **Edipus (1994)**

by Giovanni Testori  
directed by Federico Tiezzi  
scenes by Pier Paolo Bisleri  
costumes by Giovanna Buzzi  
lights by Juray Saleri  
with Sandro Lombardi  
Debut: Florence, Teatro di Rifredi, 13 January 1994

### **Sandro Lombardi, *Edipus* (1994). Presentation**

by *Andrea Scappa*

On stage to welcome *Edipus* was a small blue theater with a bed facing sideways, also blue. This was the dominant color chosen by director Federico Tiezzi, the Yves Klein blue of Derek Jarman's film of the same name<sup>1</sup>, of 'the 'now, a little before dawn, when the morning is already here but it's still night, [...] that time Bergman called "the hour of the wolf" [...]'.<sup>2</sup>

With *Edipus*, in 1994, Magazzini started up a fruitful dialogue with Testori's dramaturgy that would lead the company to do *Cleopatràs* (1996), *Due lai* (1998), *L'Ambleto* (2001), *Erodiàs* (2008) and *I promessi sposi alla prova* (2010). Almost a year after Giovanni Testori's death, Tiezzi, in the play's program notes, recalled his profound esteem and trust for Testori, their mutual recognition and common visions, in these words:

"Seventeenth-century Florence!...' Testori said to me after seeing my *Ritratto dell'attore da giovane*. It was 1985, in Milan, perhaps in November.[...] He proposed staging his wonderful *Confiteor*. I didn't do it because that text gave me a physical agony, like opening myself up (the same self-scrutiny that certain texts by Strindberg force on me) . [...] We had mutual friends and often spoke indirectly through them since we seldom had a chance to get together. We talked about a possible *Arialda*. We met at his plays. At the Pergola, after the premiere of *In exitu*, I ran up on the stage to hug him. We met in the corridor, and as we said goodbye, by one of those strange acts of fate, we tripped against each other and almost fell from the clash. We held each other up."<sup>3</sup>

*Edipus* is the last play Testori wrote, in 1977, for his *Trilogia degli Scarrozzanti*, comprising two other two chapters, *L'Ambleto* (1972) and *Macbetto* (1974).

*Edipus* was part of a directorial triptych with which Magazzini intended to explore the Oedipal relationship between father and son. Alongside Testori's *Porcile*, written by Pier Paolo Pasolini and also staged in 1994, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which he did various versions of in the late 1990's and early 2000's. In these three texts the presence of cumbersome paternal shadows, the powerful Laius in *Edipus*, Mr. Klotz the wealthy landowner in *Porcile*, the ghost of the murdered king in *Hamlet*, enabled Magazzini to question the fact that "fathers have reason on their side and sons have vision on theirs. In the end the sons realize that reason governs vision, enabling it to be communicated."<sup>4</sup> So, for Magazzini, after dealing with the multilingualism of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Testori's language, magmatic, earthy and baroque, contaminated by dialects, Latinisms and Frenchisms, stood as yet another object of investigation in the language of "an Italy that doesn't exist, literary, dialectal and lowly."<sup>5</sup>

*Edipus* is also the story of a wandering hack actor who, after he has been ditched by the lead actor, who has been cast as a transvestite in a cabaret company, and by the leading actress, who has shackled up with a furniture maker from Meda (a small town near Milan), must play all the parts in Sophocles' tragedy: Laius king of Thebes, Jocasta his wife, Oedipus their son, and the god Dionysus. To pull it off, Sandro Lombardi, the universal hero in the role of the unlucky actor, goes through on-stage quick changes of the costumes designed by Giovanna Buzzi, who collaborated with many of Magazzini's productions, especially Testori's. He becomes the Pope-dictator Laius with a miter and a precious liturgical vestment adorned with scrap metals and old pots, the *mater baltracca* Jocasta with tiara, pearls, a chic robe and a foxtail, and Dionysus with a red wrap, magically lowered from above. Oedipus, however, the same hack actor, white-faced, his "expressionist" eyebrows outlined in black, wearing a bowler and tails, the emblems of what would become a regular cabbie's stage costume, a combination of Totò and Pierrot, already seen in *Ebdòmero* and which Magazzini would subsequently utilize frequently, for example in *Cleopatràs*. The different characters, besides being typed by the costumes, emerge in a clear and gutsy from Lombardi's multifaceted portrayal, which pegs each of them in their postures and vocal registers. The actor, along with Tiezzi, identified three different voices in reading "Laius [...] as an old actor who no longer makes people laugh, as an entertainer in a De Chirico painting.

<sup>1</sup> M. G. Gregori, *Edipo, tragedia per un solo attore*, interview with Federico Tiezzi, in «l'Unità», January 10, 1994

<sup>2</sup> F. Tiezzi, *Tra le ombre del padre (note di regia e immagini)*, in *Edipus*, pamphlet edited by Sandro Lombardi, no.5, Edizioni l'Obliquo, 1994, p. 14

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

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Jocasta is almost folded over on herself with a whispering voice, Edipus has a cabbie's voice which is the variation of the voices conveying a feeling of the characters in this powerful, rather agonizing text, which calls for a bit of levity.<sup>6</sup> This careful work on vocal and linguistic register could again be heard in the radio version of *Edipus* which Lombardi recorded for Radio 3 and broadcast on November 28, 1994.

Lombardi, unable to see Franco Parenti's 1977 video of *Edipus*, was the first and the last to have acted it in the history of Italian theater when Magazzini chose to take on this single act play, basing the construction of his Cabbie on what all those who had seen it told him and drawing inspiration from a Lombardy filtered through the prism of Gadda, Manzoni and the novels of Testori, from "great mountaineer theater" and all the Lombard "realist" painting of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>7</sup>

The original text was expunged of the passages connected to the historical context in which it was written, especially where it speaks of the "historic compromise" between church and state (all references, for example, to the "socialighi" – socialists and "Feste Unitariche" – Feste dell'Unità), and interpolated with the final words of Carlo Emilio Gadda's *Il castello di Udine*, much loved by Testori, with Mina's *Un anno d'amore* and Ornella Vanoni's *Canzoni della mala* in the acknowledgments, to emphasize its Lombard and meta-theatrical roots. In fact, in *Edipus* the plan of the classical tragedy and that of the story of this group of itinerants overlap "so that Oedipus's hatred of his father becomes the hero's of the actor who has ditched him, and his attraction to his mother Jocasta combines with his amorous sentiments towards the lead actress, his ex-girlfriend and stage partner."<sup>8</sup> This aspect is underlined by a process of estrangement that involves the secrets and glitter of the theater: the Cabbie gives directions to a stagehand behind the scenes as to lighting changes, and still to him, asks him to prompt his lines, speaks directly to the "spettaculanti", comes on stage from the hall with his makeup kit, signals the raising and lowering of the curtain by lifting and settling his bowler; Dionysus's red wrap rains from the trellis and Laius's liturgical vestments fly towards it.

In 1994 Federico Tiezzi won for *Edipus* the Ubu Prize, he for best director and Sandro Lombardi for best actor.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> S. Lombardi, *Diario e appunti delle prove*, in *Edipus*, pamphlet edited by Sandro Lombardi, no.5, Edizioni l'Obliquo, 1994, pp. 20-21.

<sup>8</sup> F. Manzoni, *Edipus ora sono io*, intervista a Sandro Lombardi, in «Corriere della Sera», 13 novembre 1994.