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## **Leo de Berardinis and Perla Peragallo, *Avita muri* (1978)**

*By* Leo de Berardinis and Perla Peragallo

*With* Leo de Berardinis and Perla Peragallo

*Debut:* Florence, Rondò di Bacco, January 26, 1978

## **Leo de Berardinis and Perla Peragallo, *Avita muri* (1978). Presentation**

by *Donatella Orecchia*

In January 1978, Leo de Berardinis and Perla Peragallo brought to the stage *Avita muri*, “a tragicomic ballad of death.”<sup>1</sup> The idea of an actual encounter with the world of the lumpen proletariat, which had largely kept alive Marigliano’s experience, was now becoming completely passé. And *Avita muri* was a painful confession of this failure.

Leo is a “shabby Pulcinella trying to speak in Florentine dialect,” Perla “a lame Colombina on crutches”<sup>2</sup>: two masks of the Neapolitan tradition which in southern Italy represent, respectively, the lumpen proletariat, with its perennially unsated hunger; and purity along with the concreteness of the land and procreation.

Two traditional masks that have here become passé. He speaks in Florentine dialect, and she is lame; he is arrogant and their dialogues are trite, mangled proverbs from a popular culture that has gone to seed. As “survivors they grope for words they can no longer find, exchange meaningless dialogue, fish for outworn clichés from the most corny vaudeville, cross-purposes that surpass the early Ionesco, they make do with a *caccavella*<sup>3</sup> elevated to the dignity of a child, improvising above the Stravinsky of the soundtrack a wonderful concert with two empty beer cans and their voices in microphones.”<sup>4</sup> “*Avita a’ muri*,” they whisper at varied pitches, “you have to die” (adding: “because you don’t know how to live”).

From Stravinsky, who sets the initial tempo, and from the mangled proverbs, the two actors pass on to another abstract language in which “sound and noise, singing and speaking are all one” and the concert improvised on beer cans becomes “an atrocious chanting on a now dying humanity.”<sup>5</sup>

In the second part of the play the two actors reappear in opposite roles, repeating each other’s lines, which thus appear even more worn and dingy.

At the end, in a burst of light, the two actors advance against the backdrop of a picture postcard of Naples, while the amplifiers blast *Me so n’mbriacato ‘e sole*. Then, facing the audience from downstage, they close with a joke: “We took the wrong road once again ... unfortunately ... fortunately.” The nightmare seems over, life endures, but it is a wretched life, frayed and boorish, which is expiated by living.

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<sup>1</sup> L. Lapini, *Una tragicomica ballata di morte*, in «Paese sera», January 28, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> F. Quadri, *Avita muri*, in «Panorama», February 14, 1978.

<sup>3</sup> Typical Neapolitan musical instrument, made of a pot covered with a taut skin, at whose center a stick is rolled up and down, rhythmically, to produce a vibrating sound.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> G. Davico Bonino, *Pulcinella, Colombina poi la fine del mondo*, in «La Stampa», April 7, 1978.