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[Author](#) || Carlo Titomanlio
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Enzo Moscato - biography

by *Carlo Titomanlio*

Enzo Moscato was born in Naples in 1948. He grew up in the Spanish Quarters, the beating heart of the essence of the city, but also the emblem and the synecdoche of its most profound contradictions and problems. Moscato himself recognises that it was during his childhood that he developed and interiorised a complex relationship with the Neapolitan soul: “all the Neapolitan culture I still carry around with me I absorbed in those ten years in the Quarters” (Moscato in Nadotti, 1995).

His family successively moved to the more modern area of Fuorigrotta, and Moscato studied philosophy and psychology (graduating in 1974 at the Federico II University in Naples). He then moved to Rome, and all of these events seemingly distanced him from his linguistic, cultural, affective roots. His first work for the theatre, *Carciuffolà*, premiered in the capital in 1980; and Moscato would have stayed in Rome, had it not been for the tragic circumstance of the earthquake, which shook the city of Naples in 1980. The devastating Irpinia earthquake in November of that year, which also seriously damaged the city of Naples, lead Moscato back to his hometown, which he has never abandoned since. In 1982 he staged *Scannasurice*, a sort of “infernal descent” into the shattered urban and moral landscape of the post-earthquake city.

In the early 1980s Moscato worked as a teacher, on a temporary contract, in one of the city’s high schools; and during this time, his writing and his theatre played a fundamental, though secondary, role. He didn’t receive praise for his work until 1985, when he won the Riccione / Ater Prize with his play *Pièce Noire*. This first recognition was followed by many others: Moscato went on to win the IDI and the UBU Prizes in 1988, the Biglietto D’oro AGIS in 1991, the UBU again in 1994 and the Franco Carmelo Greco Prize in 2004.

In 1986, Moscato created the first nucleus of what would later have become the Compagnia Teatrale Enzo Moscato, an organisation dedicated to research, to teaching, and to cultivating a relationship with tradition. Taking on the role of artistic director, Moscato lead the company with Claudio Affinito, who assisted him as an organiser.

1986 also saw the untimely death of Moscato’s fraternal friend Annibale Ruccello, extraordinary actor and dramaturge who had been close to Moscato and to his work since the late 1970s, when they had met in Rome and found in each other a deep cultural affinity. Moscato’s reaction to the loss and profound suffering provoked by Ruccello’s death was the composition, in that period, of *Compleanno*, a plaintive monologue on the themes of separation and absence, written precisely as an homage to his late friend and as a way to creatively overcome his trauma: “I studied philosophy and psychology, and when I speak about the theatre, the language I use is close to these disciplines. So I think I can say that beyond the theatrical value of the piece, this is a text which has its origin in my own desire to creatively overcome and respond to this sense of loss, to this sense of mourning. The text became a text about Absence, with a capital A, because absence seems to me to be the true protagonist of the theatre since the theatre was born” (Moscato in Barsotti 2005).

From *Compleanno* onwards, Moscato’s has worked tirelessly and uninterruptedly on a vast production, both as a writer and as a performer, a production which incorporates comedies, melologues, one-acts, recitals, poetic fragments. It’s not an easy body of work to anatomise and classify, also because the author’s tendency is to continuously decompose and re-elaborate his own work: “[e]very piece I make is an epitome, a recapitulation of what came before, and always contains some sort of opening onto what will come next. It’s hard to follow me on the basis of the texts. The texts I register for copyright have often bled into one another (...) there’s a mobility of elements and materials in my texts, a systemic logic to the whole, which I myself have to write down in order to not forget things or get confused.” (Moscato in Barsotti 2005).

An element which however remains constant throughout his work is a research into language: the theatrical word employed by Moscato is a very singular one, which fuses a strong presence of dialect with expressions and structures that come from elsewhere (such as foreign words, technical jargon, neologisms and expressions from the everyday). It’s a pastiche which moves unflinchingly from a high, cultivated, lyrical and literary register to a low register which incorporates various kinds of ‘popular’.

Another constant presence in Moscato’s work over the past thirty years is the music, which features almost always, in a way similar to the comedies of his fellow countryman Raffaele Viviani: “I’ve always sung, since I sucked my mother’s milk... the fact of telling life through song is normal in my part of Italy. Also my brother, the eldest, was a singer, and I feel like I’ve always had song inside me: but I mean this in the most banal of ways, I’m not referring to song as poetry, as a metaphor of a higher kind of language. From *Scannasurice* onwards, I’ve always had songs on stage, like Viviani. Viviani and I see the song, the popular song, as democratically equal to the poetic word” (Moscato in D’Angeli 2003).

Moscato’s musical activity has also resulted in the release of four albums, which are the recordings from four of his performances. In *Embargos*, *Cantà*, *Hotel de l’Univers* and *Toledo Suite* the artist also took on the role of chansonnier, revisiting the Neapolitan musical tradition. Moscato has also worked in cinema, with collaborations which have been sporadic but nevertheless important to his work; and, in cinema, he has always been an actor: “I have never directed a film – it’s a dream of mine, and I’ve written a few scripts – but I’ve never had the chance. So I’ve always been directed by others, and I’ve always been very respectful: if somebody wants to get their experience as a director on me, then I’m happy to let them”

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(Moscato in Barsotti 2011). Since taking part, in 1992, in Mario Martone's much-loved and discussed first feature, *Morte di un Matematico Napoletano*, Moscato has been directed by Pappi Corsicato, Raoul Ruiz, Stefano Incerti, Antonietta De Lillo, Pasquale Marrazzo, Massimo Andrei.

Moscato's printed production is vast: some of his pieces have been published (Ubulibri has anthologised his works into the collections *L'Angelico Bestiario*, 1991, *Quadrilogia di Santarcangelo*, 1999 and *Orfani veleni*, 2007), and Moscato has also published collected poetry and stories, critical contributions in edited volumes and interventions in the most important theatrical journals. Moscato is also the author of a number of translations of theatrical texts, used by directors such as Cherif and Armando Pugliese.

In recent years, Moscato has taken on the position of co-director of the Mercadante Theatre in Naples, he has conducted playwriting workshops at the University of Salerno and at the "Suor Orsola Benincasa" University in Naples, and he has been the artistic director of various projects and initiatives, amongst which the "Benevento Città Spettacolo" Festival.