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Author || Serena Terranova
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Roberto Latini. Ubu Roi (2012)

By Alfred Jarry

Adaptation and direction Roberto Latini

Music and sounds Gianluca Misiti

Scene Luca Baldini

Costumes Marion D'Amburgo

Lights Max Mugnai

with Roberto Latini

and with Savino Paparella, *father Ubu*

Ciro Masella, *mother Ubu*

Sebastian Barbalan, *Queen Rosmunda, Tsar Alessio*

Marco Jackson Vergani, *Captain Bordure / Bear*

Lorenzo Berti, *King Wenceslas / Specter / Nobles*

Guido Feruglio, *prince Bugrelao*

Fabio Bellitti, *palotini / Orsa / Messaggero*

Technical direction Max Mugnai

Technical collaboration Nino del Principe

Assistant director Tiziano Panici

Production management Federica Furlanis

Promotion and communication Nicole Arbelli

Photo Simone Cecchetti

Fortebraccio Theater production

A project realized in collaboration with Teatro Metastasio Stabile della Toscana

First performance Prato, Teatro Fabbricone, 1st February 2012

Replies:

Prato, Teatro Fabbricone, 2-11 February 2012 - Ravenna, Rasi Theater, February 28th 2012 - Modena, Teatro delle Passioni, 1-3 March 2012 - Rome, India Theater, March 21-25, 2012 - Reggio Emilia, Teatro Sociale Gualtieri, 2-3 October 2013 - Milan, Piccolo Teatro Studio Melato, 9-13 October 2013 - Prato, Teatro Fabbricone, 5-6 April 2014 - Bogota, XIV Hiberro-American Festival de Teatro de Bogota, April 16-20, 2014 - Perugia, Bertolt Brecht Theater, April 24th 2014 - Rovereto (TN), Auditorium Fausto Melotti, 29 April 2014 - Forli, Diego Fabbri Theater, 2 May 2014 - Cuneo, Toselli Theater, January 15th 2015 - Castiglioncello, Castello Pasquini, January 18th 2015 - Casalecchio di Reno, Public. The Casalecchio di Reno Theater, 21 January 2015

Nominated as best director at the 2012 UBU Awards

* During the 2013/2014 season, the actors Simone Perinelli and Fabiana Gabanini will be replaced respectively by Guido Feruglio and Fabio Bellitti

Roberto Latini/Fortebraccio Teatro, Ubu Roi (2012). Presentation

by *Serena Terranova*

The scene is a boundless plane, a huge white carpet that smooths the inner edges of the theater box, the ground of a horizon. The characters of *Ubu Roi*, directed by Roberto Latini, emerge from this milky background as evoked presences, interpreters of another place that materializes before the spectators in a slow set of apparitions.

The curtain rises on a hotplate at center stage. One by one, figures identical to each other make their entries, bodies dressed in white robes, wearing monkey masks. One after another, these sexless, ageless souls take their places on small white stools, each holding a stick on which a fishing line is braided, with a sausage dangling from it. They lay the sausage on the already heated hotplate and roast it, eyeing each other and now and then uttering a low moan. A piece of music interrupts the silence. It is the sci-fi sound of a wormhole opening, a sudden hiss broken up into progressively fainter fragments. This noise will act as a curtain at other points in the performance, to introduce new scenes and signal changes of atmosphere and action. On this first flash Roberto Latini enters, disguised as Pinocchio, with a nose made of white paper, a red jacket on and a metal chain dangling from his neck.

It is the sign of the chain that at once recalls another great Pinocchio, that of Carmelo Bene, who brought it on stage several times over more than thirty years, starting in 1962¹.

¹ Carmelo Bene portrayed *Pinocchio* on several occasions and with different stagings, from 1962 to 1998. Besides his theatrical productions there were also one television and three radio versions. For further details see Donatella Orecchia's website, *I Pinocchi di Carmelo Bene* at <http://goo.gl/Wn5O5h>.

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Carmelo Bene is one of Roberto Latini's points of reference for a scenic tradition of a Theater witnessed and apprehended on stage, valid for its formal and concrete expressions as well as for the theoretical elaborations that grew out of it. In this sense, Latini appropriates Carmelo Bene's Pinocchio mask to signal that he's referring in *Ubu Roi* not to Collodi's puppet but to the one Bene reworked and resuscitated, and this is what the spectators are urged to acknowledge.

Latini-Pinocchio carries a microphone on a boom, a tool that recalls Bene's research over the years on sound amplification and the on-scene voice². Latini plays with that mike in a corner and soon after, in the new silence, Papa and Mama Ubu (played respectively by Savino Paparella and Ciro Masella) start up a heated discussion, planning in detail an eight-day conquest of Poland.

From here on the piece worms continually in and out of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* fable, in a plot that Roberto Latini opens up to other materials, splicing them onto the different folds of the story. In each of his inventions Latini is accompanied and amplified by that mike.

The work done on the text by the director and the actors appears at once as a process of linguistic absorption. Papa Ubu is a figure linked to the image of the abyss: his pockets, which those nearby fear ending up in forever; the length of his guts, an endless intestine that expands into a potent, strapping obesity; or again the abyss of the terrible "trap door," a black hole in which he flings his enemies and creditors. Savino Paparella's voice seems to come straight from the center of his body and then is amplified in swirls of sound, a voice that even when it touches the high notes comes off stony, grave, hard. Ciro Masella's Mama Ubu is a tribute to the monstrosity of the character's spirit: the female figure is played by a man, who embodies this overlap with zealous ridiculousness, alternating the squalls of a cruel hysterical woman with the whimpers of a frightened child.

Mama Ubu enters wearing red gloves which she will take off only during the banquet scene, where she will act barehanded. After the death of the king and queen of Poland, these red gloves return, covering her forearms. Her eyes often turn to those unsightly hands and as the performance proceeds her whole costume turns redder and redder. Vergani's Bordure, the captain who in Jarry's story changes sides as suits his convenience, has a garbled duck-like speech, fusing his consonants and stuttering; he has a slight limp in one leg and a hook in place of his right hand, which he unsheathes, at times as a weapon that makes him all-powerful, and at times as a precious object to be sacrificed when he is ready to swear loyalty.

Before the agreement between Papa Ubu and Bordure is sealed, the scene is introduced by Latini's Pinocchio, who speaks for the first time. As he lies supine on the ground, the sentences he utters are from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible to feeling as to sight? Or art thou but a dagger of the mind, a false creation, proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?"³ At this point we must mention a well-known aspect of Jarry's text, namely the fact that the entire *Ubu Roi* has its origin in *Macbeth*, which in turn is intertwined with a prankish legend of the boarding school in Rennes that Jarry attended as a boy.

Inside the text

Ubu Roi developed around Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and its epigraph is this statement openly denouncing any link with Shakespeare. The male figures, Macbeth and Papa Ubu, have similar starting points and commit actions that correspond from one plot to the other. In particular, both are captains respected by the King's troops and are awarded at the beginning of the story with new aristocratic titles; both commit regicide at the urging of their wives, and both Papa and Mama Ubu, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, are bloodthirsty, barren, childless couples. There are other similarities between the plots, but the clearest is the one between the two female figures. Mama Ubu and Lady Macbeth play a decisive role in determining the action. The main difference in the situations of the two male characters is that at the end of Shakespeare's play Macbeth dies while Papa Ubu survives⁴.

Roberto Latini goes beyond the *Macbeth/Ubu Roi* dramatic nexus to delve into the relationship between Shakespeare and Jarry, and concoct a genuine dialogue between the two authors. Whenever Latini's Pinocchio speaks through his mike he delivers Shakespearean texts: besides *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*. At times these splicings continue as a parallel world, close to Ubu's but not exactly able to contaminate it; at others his inserts are dialogic, and the two dramaturgies fuse. One example is the scene where Boggerlas, the son of King Wenceslas and Queen Rosamund, finding himself bereft of both parents, sees the apparition of his father's ghost, who urges him to revenge. Nothing could be closer to *Hamlet*, an opportunity Latini exploits to speak from a corner of the scene on the text of Boggerlas, reciting in his place (this time without his mike) the lines from Shakespeare.

Like Artaud, Latini represents Shakespeare as Jarry's *double* and brings this identification on stage by assembling one play inside the other, or rather *next to it*, allowing them to be constantly heard but *to speak* to each other directly only when strictly necessary. The key from one world to the other is that third element we mentioned earlier: the mask of the Pinocchio character

² In particular we refer to his *Radiovisioni* project (2003-2009) but in general the research deals with Roberto Latini's entire artistic career.

³ W. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act II, Scene I, <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/macbeth/full.html>. Roberto Latini recited this verse with variations: the translation used in the play was Latini's own.

⁴ Alfred Jarry's Papa Ubu saga proceeded in fact with three other texts after *Ubu Roi*: *Ubu cocu* (1898), *Ubu enchainé* (1899) and *Ubu sur la butte* (1901).

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re-represented by the figure of Carmelo Bene, who with this costume of references acts as a bridge between Shakespeare's verses and Jarry's play.

In turn, the figure embodied by Latini-Pinocchio seems to be a sort of *double* of Papa Ubu, two puppets whose lives come together to rule each his own world, his own reality. Pinocchio is therefore a necessary step for the spectators to familiarize themselves with Papa Ubu's story. It is from this tangent world animated by Shakespearean ghosts that the spectators observe and contemplate *Ubu Roi*.

Playing *Ubu Roi*, from text and stage

At the conclusion of this background on Roberto Latini's *Ubu Roi* we are faced with a work whose complexity does not leave us indifferent. Jarry's text is not playable in a realistic way. It takes place in Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic Sea and in internal and external settings; the characters are innumerable (in addition to the main ones there are "the entire Russian army," "the entire Polish army" and other groupings); some stage solutions require feats of engineering, such as the Debraining Machine and the trap door for the suppression of the Polish nobility. It is important to mention this aspect of the text, for, as much as and more than others, this great late nineteenth-century work needs to be re-elaborated. It stands as a starting point, "an opportunity," as Roberto Latini says in his director's notes. And it is important also because it intrinsically declares its birth as puppet theater, and therefore tends toward an abstract representation that requires a symbolic, anti-realistic direction.

Roberto Latini's fruitful intuition was his awareness of being involved with an idea of theater and not with a simple text, and that the basis of this idea lies in Papa Ubu's puppet-body, a manipulating and manipulated puppet king.

The initiatory bridge that Latini offers the spectators to experience this theater is another puppet, Collodi's Pinocchio, transformed as we have seen through one of Carmelo Bene's re-elaborations, which in turn is "spoken" by Shakespeare's verse. This whirlwind, brilliantly synthesized on stage, seems one of the best answers to the contemporary relationship with both scenic and historic tradition. Roberto Latini's research does not stop *at* the text but passes *through* it to reveal its internal, sediment traces, and to offer other possibilities closer to our time and sensibilities.

It's a chase after the ghosts of Jarry's theater, who manifest themselves in a variety of coexisting forms (surrealism, linear narrative, characters overlapped with a multiplicity of signs, musical games), ghosts that don't literally reveal themselves as such but relive through the feelings and inspirations of their new author, an artist who now crosses over to them in an attempt to flush them out, lead them and be led by them into a new atmosphere.