

[Title](#) || Mario Ricci. *Moby Dick* (1971). Description-synopsis  
[Author](#) || Cristina Grazioli  
[Translation from Italian](#) || Flora Pitrolo  
[Published in](#) || «Sciami», 2019. [nuovoteatromadeinitaly.sciami.com]  
[Rights](#) || All rights reserved. © Sciami 2019. Visit [term and condition](#) on sciami.com  
[Number of pages](#) || pag 1 di 2  
[Language](#) || ENG  
[DOI](#) ||

## **Moby Dick, 1971**

*directed by* Mario Ricci

*from* Hermann Melville

*scenes by* Claudio Previtera, Mario Romano, Carlo Montesi

*with* Claudio Previtera, Angela Diana, Lillo Monachesi, Carlo Montesi, Deborah Hayes

*music by* Modern Jazz Quartet, Richard Strauss

*film by* Guido Cusolich

*First performance* Palermo, III Review of the Teatro Nuovo (New Theater and Cabaret Theater), November 1971

*Replica*

Rome, L'Abaco Theater, January 1972

Florence, Rondò di Bacco, Italian first global information about the research theater (Research 1), 19-20 April 1972

Rome, Festival of Unity, 29 September 1972

Edinburgh International Festival, [August / September] 1972

Belgrade, BITEF, September / October 1972

Rome, L'Abaco Theater, March 1973

## **Mario Ricci. Moby Dick (1971). Description-synopsis**

by *Cristina Grazioli*

We offer a brief synopsis of the show, highlighting some of the processes used and referring the reader to the director's own accurate description (published in "The Drama Review" and then in the book edited by Quadri) for more detail.

The scene opens in the dark. At the centre, from upstage, Ahab appears (Claudio Previtera). He stands still in the dark silence for a minute, then slowly advances towards the proscenium dragging his wooden leg (the leg of the actor, stuck in a barrel), where a light has come on. He is followed by the first of the fish-actors (Carlo Montesi).

The other figures enter (some from the back of the stage, some from the side): they wear simple tunics and black tights, they have silvery fish heads and watery movements; they place their animal body parts in the spotlights that are scattered across the stage and hold up props (a harpoon, for example) that produce sounds as they are beaten and struck. From the start, the viewer's attention is thus lead towards images that are revealed through lights and sound.

The piece, inspired by Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, is guided by the concept of travel (already addressed by Ricci in *James Joyce* in 1968 and then in *Il lungo viaggio di Ulisse*, 'The Long Voyage of Ulysses', in 1972). Here, the theme is tackled through dream-like cadences and image associations: the actors combine gestures that evoke the context of the theme (they simulate rolling waves, as if moving in the water) and anti-naturalistic movements (they advance in a zig-zag pattern or emit inarticulate screams).

The actors' movements and sounds correspond to the movement of light, that is marked by the spots that move rhythmically: the visuals and the soundscape are very precisely score. The actors as 'character-sailors' are also those who build the scene: they bring in ladders that reconfigure the space, they erect sails upon which the films will be projected, accompanied by the actors' on-stage presence as silhouettes.

In the half-light of the piece, visual references are given by objects painted glossy white, or by the glittering fabric of the tunics and the silvery fish heads. Ahab, who can't be seen, can thus only be perceived through these 'signals'. As the actors-fish and the shape-sailors move on stage, the captain repeatedly tries to build a house of cards which, because of its sheer scale, promptly collapses. After a number of tumbles, we hear the whistle of the boatswain, and the stage slowly fades to black as the sails-projection screens are unfurled.

Significantly, in Ricci's own description we find the use of the film in brackets: the film is hence totally incorporated into the stage image, assimilated by the language of the show.

This same reasoning lies behind the choice of images projected onto the sails (also unravelled by the actors): first a seascape, then an interior. The sequences, shot by Guido Cusolich, alternate images of landscapes with film showing Ahab and the sailors on a fishing vessel. The projected image bleeds out of the sails, not only onto the bodies of the performers but also onto the back and sides of the stage and onto the monstrous, multi-material body of Moby Dick, creating an effect whereby the image we see is constantly decomposed and re-composed. The projected images sometimes coincide with the real ones on stage; at other times, the images are mismatched.

The images on stage, sequential and overlapping, see the fish-men emerging from the sea, then the sailors as the silhouettes, then the shape of the whale on which the figure of Ahab is projected, racing away. The general impression is very unsettled: sea and figures move and overlap, to the sound of Strauss's waltzes.

The sails repeatedly open and close – when they are closed for the last time, the projections end and the stage goes to blackout.

In the following scenes, we witness the 'actor-fish-sailors' manipulating props and stage materials. They move in unison at times, and at times out of joint, interacting with the projection. This highlights the plasticity of the real bodies: the real figures are alternated with their doubles.

Ahab returns to his house of cards.

Title || Mario Ricci. Moby Dick (1971). Description-synopsis

Author || Cristina Grazioli

Translation from Italian || Flora Pitrolo

Published in || «Sciami», 2019. [nuovoteatromadeinitaly.sciami.com]

Rights || All rights reserved. © Sciami 2019. Visit [term and condition](#) on sciami.com

Number of pages || pag 2 di 2

Language || ENG

DOI ||

The four actors bring to the stage and ‘choreographically’ unfold a huge sheet of paper, a scene accompanied by the sound of the Modern Jazz Quartet music. From the paper, they construct a large paper boat.

The ladders brought in earlier are attached to one another with a simple mechanism to become the jaws of the whale, whose gigantic open mouth swallows all: Ahab disappears in the darkness and his screams remain audible, fading in the distance.

It should be noted that, in Ricci’s description of the piece, actions, materials and objects – all of which are extremely simple – are disentangled by way of a series of *variations* which are painstakingly described in terms of lighting, choreography, and sound.