

[Title](#) || Straccioni e commedianti verso l'utopia di Lucio  
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### **Lucio. 1978.**

*directed by* Alberto Ardizzone  
*scenes by* Giovanni Lo Cicero  
*with* Alberto Ardizzone, Fabio Cangialosi, Gaspare Cucinella, Toti Giambertone, Marisa Randi, Franco Scaldati, Patrizia Urso  
*production* Cooperativa Teatrale Gruppo 5  
*premiere* Partinico, 1978

### **Lucio. 1990.**

*directed by* Chérif  
*scenes and costumes* Tobia Ercolino  
*music by* Bruno De Franceschi  
*with* Maria Amato, Gaspare Cucinella, Elvira Feo, Paolo La Bruna, Vito Savalli, Franco Scaldati  
*production* Piccolo Teatro Città di Palermo  
*premiere* Milan, Teatro dell'Elfo, December 1990

### **Lucio. 2014.**

*directed by* Franco Maresco  
*with* Mimmo Cuticchio, Melino Imparato, Gino Carista  
*scenes and costumes* Cesare Inzerillo and Nicola Sferruzza  
*original music by* Salvatore Bonafede  
*video editing by* Francesco Guttuso and Giuliano La Franca  
*production* Teatro Biondo.  
*premiere* Palermo, Teatro Biondo, 8-13 April 2014

## **Straccioni e commedianti verso l'utopia di Lucio**

by *Viviana Raciti*

Initially presented with the name *In the Shape of a Rose* (1976), *Lucio* was staged between 1977 and 1978 but only published 20 years later in a collection edited by Valentina Valentini; the volume also includes an audio recording of Scaldati playing every one of the piece's characters. Scaldati's choice to record each voice is intimately connected to the meaning of the text, which is built around the myth of 'Lucio' who is at the same time a movement towards the light and manure, essence of the theatre and mutilated man. Lucio is not merely the brilliant memorable actor or its much more mediocre version which appears on stage: every character appears to exist on stage as a choral expression of that single idea of a character, a declination of an aspiration towards the light, which is the poetic élan of Scaldati's oeuvre as a whole.

The characters are angels, children, rag-doll mice, tramps and actors. None of them present a clear psychological set-up, and the situations in which they exist – more than the situations in which they act – are the only clues we get to understanding them. We deduce fragments of information about the bodies of Crocifisso, Pasquale and of Lucio: we know that they're deformed, that one is legless, that one is blind and that Lucio – we learn towards the end of the text – is a hunchback and is missing an arm. While for the first two characters the effects of mutilation create a strong interdependence of the two characters on stage, Lucio's mutilation is always seen as a limitation and as an object of derision by his partner. We know little about these individual characters, but we know that they have a total lack of nastiness, of evil: Lucio and *Illuminata* talk, eat, play, they make plans for the future; *Illuminata* speaks to some flowers, and none of these actions bear a real weight on the performance's narrative progression. Like the two mice which appear – called Ziù and Zié – all the characters appear to fantasise about a long-gone era, often paired with a food which no longer exists (the mice remember the cheese and the milk the moon was made of, Pasquale and Crocifisso recall the names of foods – all typical Sicilian dishes – which they might have savoured some day). Some characters are awoken from their dreams, other even get killed, as Crocifisso will, murdered by his companion Pasquale and resuscitated by two angels, Ancilù and Ancilà, whose task the spectators will understand – in its ruinous consequences – only as the action progresses.

*Lucio* is constructed with an Aristotelian structure of beginning, middle, and end; this is not declaredly made explicit, but it is a structure interceptible through the successive appearance of characters (who determine the changes in situations and scenarios). The temporal dimension is crystallised, frozen, and the jumps between one action and another point to how the role of the plot is marginal in the piece: in this composition for many voices, the weight lies in the situations between one character and another, which often take place in isolated dialogues between couples. The question-and-answer dialogues are often interspersed with the fragmentation of a single text divided between two voices. The conversations between Crocifisso and Pasquale often carry an absurdist element, which crosses over into a non-reality; often these exchanges carry no actions, but only memories and desires – as the text itself puts it, 'it's all words'.

Nature is omnipresent in *Lucio*: people speak to flowers and fall in love with the moon, and although nature never answers (like a mute god), it is also never seen as a malignant or oppressive force. The presence of food in the piece is also linked to

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this presence of nature; as is the fact that the man to be saved by the two angels is found in the sea, which also, mysteriously, produces the presence of the moon. Death as a condition of being reoccurs frequently throughout the piece: characters are about to die (like the man at sea), risk dying (like the two tramps), or even die and are reborn. Death seems reversible here: it's a liberation. And further to this, the text displays a displacement of salvation and perdition, according to which to go to heaven you have to go to hell first, and those who are saved are the deformed. As Scaldati himself confirms, the ambiguity, the duality of the human being is at the basis of his theatrical vision. The *dramatis personae* is made of up indissoluble couples, in which one component cannot subsist without the other. But the theme of the double, of duality, is also portrayed on an interior level, as the characters experience a series of confusions about their identity: they wonder if they are male or female, alive or dead – questions, posed simply but never simplistically, which are at the root of the entire existential condition of our era. The duality of light and darkness is also ever-present in the piece, and one never occurs without the other; and while the light appears to signify aspiration, desire, muse, Lucia-as-lover talking to the flowers – and darkness, on the other, murkiness, obscurity, nighttime and the place where characters test the limits between life and death – darkness is also seen as a condition of the imagination, a locus of unrealised possibilities. As a metaphor this leads quite directly to the idea of the theatre, which as a theme runs through the text. And apart from being the stage upon which some characters (the comedians) try some scenes out, we get the impression that the theatre would be the ideal environment for the entire performance, as the only place in which such different characters and situations can meet each other and coexist without conflict.

Although the theme of the sacred is present in the two angels, in the names of the two tramps (*Crocifisso* means 'Crucified' and *Pasquale* means 'Easterly'), these symbols pertain not to a 'Catholic' tradition but to a pagan world in which the idea of the sacred as human manifestation of deep love and respect transcends the organisational aspects of the church. There's something of this presence of the sacred in *Illuminata*'s first dialogue with Lucio, in which Lucio counteracts her speaking to his singing, having given in to the abyss of drunkenness. And yet, there's never any malice in these vignettes: both ideal love, seen as an aspiration towards something, and real love towards a person or a thing are always expressions of an innocent, boundless love, a love curious of the other sex like children might be, a love generous in sharing what it has with its loved ones, be those loved ones dogs or cripples. Love is staged through words, though embraces; there is one exception to this, which seems to confirm the rule rather than contradict it – this is found in a dialogue between Lucio and *Illuminata*, in which the latter has somehow fooled the old man sleeping next to them in order to extort some money from him. It's an action without outcomes, and it is given as such in the piece: it is not the route to take. Instead, what appears incessantly is a collective fear of solitude, of loneliness: the characters are together, and when they're not, they suffer. They can no longer live or go about their business. When they do find each other, they no longer ever want to separate (see *Ancilù* and *Ancilà*), or they stay together although they hardly get on, or although one sees the other as a dead weight (like *Crocifisso* is to *Pasquale*) or as a threat (*Illuminata* wants to stab Lucio, *Pasquale* eventually murders *Crocifisso*). The 'other', then, is the companion with whom the characters have to stick, have to travel the journey of the piece, the only one with whom it's possible to revoke a mythical past; characters stick together in spite of their mistakes, their faults, their bad experiences.

In terms of the language of the piece, some figures of speech return more than others: apart from the many alliterations (a long ironic game, for example, is constructed on the Sicilian words *sasizza* and *munnizza*, 'sausage' and 'rubbish'), consonances, anaphorae, we find a series of simple metaphors which are almost unrecognisable as such, which are part of common language – for example the 'burn', which isn't fever, nor illness, but love. Other examples are the personification of natural elements (the wind as a 'friend'), the naturalisation of human characters (Lucio as 'manure'), and many synecdoches (*Illuminata* is called 'golden teeth' or 'fairy eyes'), and paradoxes ('you have more canines than a hundred donkeys'), lists and enumerations.

The language *Lucio* is written in is Sicilian, but once removed from its daily use, and it is a Sicilian which displays an enormously rich variety of sounds. Although hidden and not consistently respected, there is enough of a metric cadence built into the text to make the listener feel gently rocked by the language, accompanied by the many consonances and rhymes which illuminate the spaces and the links between the words. The ways the various characters express themselves are similar, it's the content that changes: the Lucio / *Illuminata* couple's conversations are centred on love (real or staged), the *Crocifisso* / *Pasquale* couple speaks about elementary, base desires (hunger, urination, survival). The two angels are interestingly very 'human': their scenes are about helping a dying man, but they go about saving him in precisely the opposite of what would be the sensible way; the two mice, finally, are the only ones who always speak in rhyme, and the content of their speech is dream-like – they speak of that mythical by-gone era when mice lived on the moon and ate milk.