

too far, admitting that the dichotomy is what the original *Richard III* by and large embraces.

Once on the throne, the usurper realizes it is time for serious worrying. *Kuninusubito* depicts Richard's transition from a jovial villain to an agonizing hero as that of a figure who, having long believed he had been confined in the shadow, begins to get frantic and restless once he is brought out into the light of day, desperately resolved to hold on to his newly acquired source of anxiety. The word "shadow" is a keyword emphasized in the adaptation text, and the Shadow (performed by Junjun, a skilled mime) accompanies Richard until the moment of his coronation. After that he momentarily retires, but then comes back to stab Richard in the final battle scene. It was a striking directorial touch – Richard killed by his own shadow – and quite effective in highlighting Richard's ego split due to the emergence of his conscience.

Works cited

Matsuo, B. *Narrow Road to the Interior*. Transl. Sam Hamill. Boston and London: Shambhala, 1991.

King Lear at the Cameri Theatre of Tel-Aviv

Reviewed by TALI SILBERSTEIN

"But even the want of that for which I am richer –
A still-soliciting eye, *and such a tongue*
That I am glad I have not, though not to have it
Hath lost me in your liking."

(Cordelia in *King Lear* 1.1.230–33)

The production of *King Lear* at the Cameri Theatre of Tel-Aviv for the theatre season 2007–2008 was directed by a Georgian director, a non-Hebrew speaker, the widely-known Robert Sturua. But this is not the main reason for choosing the above words of Cordelia as a motto for this review. Sturua's adaptation of the play, and its consequent translation into Hebrew by Dori Parness, omits large extracts from the play's dialogues. Actually, some of its most famous parts are removed. Instead, this production puts a strong emphasis on the play's physical aspects.

The first and most crucial instance of this emphasis on physicality is the use of props, bodies and gestures. To give but a few examples: Regan trying on Lear's crown for measure (1.1); Gloucester stumbling on high heels throughout the play; Kent gratifying himself over the memory of Cordelia while in the stocks (2.2); Regan playing with Gloucester's plucked-out eye, relishing its feel and taste (3.7); Regan and Goneril's sexual advances to Edmund, culminating in a foursome entanglement of bodies (the sisters', Edmund's and Cornwall's) at the beginning of that same scene; Lear dragging Cordelia's dead body by a rope, at the end of the play. These are all images of deficiency and displacement, looking for fulfillment through lust of all kinds – a lust for human contact, for sex and passion, if not love, and mostly for power and control. This lust is doomed never to be fulfilled. Deficiencies accumulate to total loss at the end of the insane quest to quench them.

This emphasis on physicality is also visible in the use of the stage. The most striking structure in the setting is an array of colourful fluorescent light bars, in straight and spiral shapes, protruding from above downwards. It brings to mind a board-game known in Israel as "Ladders and Ropes". In this game, by throwing the dice, you get to either climb a ladder or go down a rope, thus getting closer to or further away from the ultimate goal: getting to the top, and getting there first. This association is strengthened upon discovering that the stage contains actual ropes and ladders, symbolizing the characters' present positions, future desires, and subsequently the fall from their positions and the loss of what was so vehemently desired.

Getting high and dropping low, coming from above and arriving from below, is a central device in this production. A ladder leads to Edmund's quarters, but to get back down he needs a rope, from which he drops elegantly, superhero-like. He forces Edgar to climb there himself, supposedly to hide from their father, and when Edgar needs to come down he does it clumsily, with Edmund pushing him further down through a door in the stage floor (1.2). When Edgar comes back with a vengeance, he will be the one to jump effortlessly from above onto his brother (5.3). Goneril enters majestically, appearing high on a platform pulled by her servants (1.3). Later she will be thrown on the stage by her wrathful father, the way her sister Cordelia was treated at the beginning of the act (1.1–1.4). Then, Lear himself will end up lying on the ground, with Edgar covering him with a blanket as Kent did for Cordelia (4.6). The fool, Lear's loyal follower, jumps from above; in contrast, the sisters' soldiers crawl ominously from below. In the end the soldiers win a hollow victory that marks the end of Lear's royal family and leaves the kingdom bereft of a ruler.

These aspects of physical can be seen as layers of suggestion: the use of superficial and obvious elements is the outward layer, and the use of space carries a more latent meaning. But then there is another aspect of physicality, the least

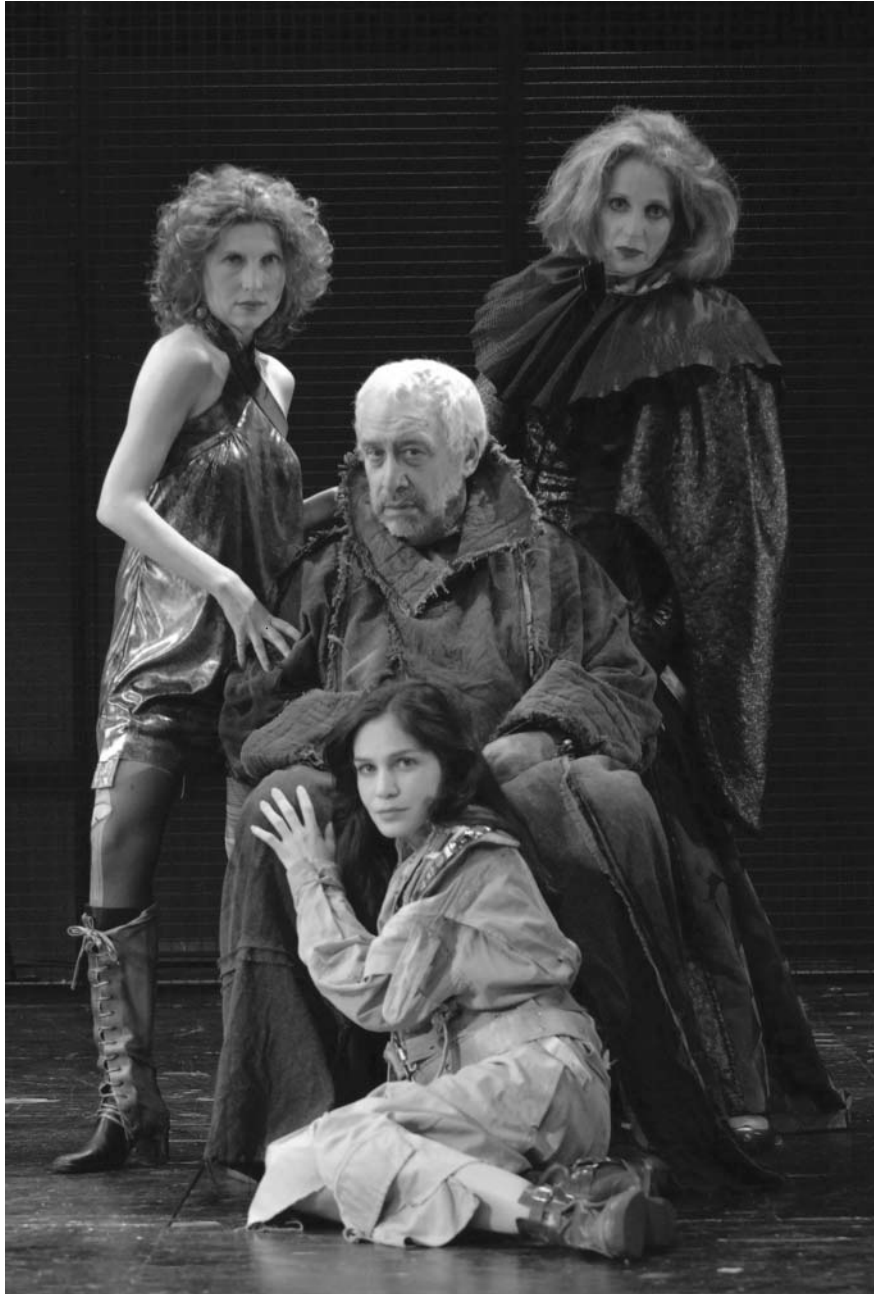
self-proclaimed, and that is the matter of presence. The props and gestures are the trimmings, the use of the stage is the backbone of the production, but the question of presence and absence is its thematic core. The play starts with the king's absence. The whole cast is on stage, waiting in silence and suspended motion, shared bewilderingly by the audience. Lear takes his time, entering after several minutes – a long wait in theatrical terms. This staging of the opening of the play is an initial statement of the production's emphasis on presence as means of characterization and thematic expression. But when considering the dramatic aspect, the "choreography" of presence and absence may be somewhat bewildering.

Throughout this production, Lear's presence can only be described as minor. On the one hand there is this big, broad-framed figure, with the booming voice of the well-known Israeli actor Yossi Pollak,¹ dressed in long and multi-layered robes which add to his heavy-set presence, laying his forceful hands on everyone around him – both physically and figuratively. On the other hand, in this production Lear seems to be a mere catalyst to the loftiest ambitions and basest desires of the characters around him, especially the younger generation. He wanders on and off stage, most of the time mumbling his lines in rage, in madness or in misery, and it is as if his withdrawal leaves a vacuum into which all other passions may suddenly flow, leaving total destruction in their wake.

It is no wonder, then, that Cordelia's part is minimized as well. Her only role is to be banished by her father – thus signaling the beginning of the self-induced evaporation of the old regime – and then to return in order to try and fill the consequent void with a more rational and promising regime than her sisters'. Her failure brings down the house, so to speak – the house of Lear, which is rotten to the core and beyond redemption. In this play, whoever is banished is destined to come back – Cordelia, Edgar, Kent – and whoever is striving to latch on sentences himself to damnation – Goneril, Regan, Edmund. Those who relinquish their presence, who step back, are destined to come back. Those who are busy only with conquering ground and establishing their presence finish their quest in the gutter. These two sets of characters mirror and replace each other, as can be seen above, regarding the use of space. And Lear wanders among them, like a ghost from a lost kingdom.

It is curious why Sturua left out two of Lear's most famous lines from his closing monologue, mourning Cordelia: "Thou'lt come no more, / Never, never, never, never, never." (5.3.283–84). These lines are a striking example of Shakespeare's simple genius, relating most clearly to the most enigmatic and heart-breaking aspect of human presence/absence: the fact that we cannot accept

¹ The rest of the major parts were played by Shiri Golan (Goneril), Keren Mor (Regan), Neta Garti (Cordelia), Eli Gornstein (Albany), Avi Termin (Cornwall), Asaf Pariente (Kent), Ohad Shachar (Gloucester), Micha Selektar (Edgar), Oded Leopold (Edmund) and Rami Baruch (Fool).



King Lear-Pollak and three daughters, photograph by Gadi Dagon



Titus Andronicus, video still, Giannis Tsiropoulos



Twelfth Night, photograph by Alexandros Sotiriou

the simplest truth, the most basic physical fact, that when someone is dead, he/she is gone; extinguished; not present any more, in any shape or form. To our human hearts the absence of the beloved dead has its own presence, which is actually an especially strong presence. This is perhaps the greatest of human paradoxical abilities, the dual and contradictory culmination of our rational and emotional powers.

Cordelia does not die “in the gutter” as her sisters, but in her father’s arms. Her death brings him back to his senses, but also brings him his greatest ever and unsustainable grief. This moment is illuminated by one spotlight, which then fades out, ending the play with final and all-encompassing death instead of its original hope for the kingdom’s future. “So dark” are Sturua’s Lear’s final words, a phrase opposite to the one which initiated creation. The end of the world in this production is on a personal and existential note, not on a familial, social or political one.

Shakespearean Challenges on the Athenian Stage

Reviewed by XENIA GEORGOPOULOU

During the theatre season 2006–2007 several Shakespearean productions (including adaptations), both old (such as Eleni Merkenidou’s monologue *Tempest*, directed by Damianos Constantinidis, with Efi Drosou) and new, were presented in the Athenian theatres. The new productions included *Much Ado about Nothing*, directed by Rania Oikonomidou and starring, in the roles of Beatrice and Benedick respectively, Renia Louisidou and Charis Romas, mostly known from television series, but also excellent stage actors; an atmospheric *Twelfth Night*, directed by Nikos Kamtsis (also starring actresses mostly known from TV series, such as Yro Loupi as Olivia and Katerina Tsavalou as Feste); and a fresh, inventive, and really enjoyable *Comedy of Errors* by the theatre group “Petai” (mostly consisting of graduates and students of the Art Theatre “Karolos Koun” Drama School, one of the oldest and most prestigious ones in Greece), directed by Dimitris Degaitis for one of the two stages of the Art Theatre “Karolos Koun”.

There were also a couple of adaptations: *Romeo and Juliet: Like a Tale* (where Shakespeare’s story was paralleled – though perhaps not very convincingly – with the tale of the lead soldier and the ballerina) by the group “361 Grades”, adapted and directed by Spyros Steriadis, who also played the male title role, and hosted by Nikos Kamtsis at his theatre, “Topos Allou”; and a very interesting *Macbeth*, directed by Giorgos Gallos. The all-male cast of the latter,