Despite the irreverence and farcicality of the play, this cast of young actors manage to convey the sense of beauty underlying some of the most renowned Shakespearean texts. This feeling is reinforced at the end by the low-keyed song by Sylvia Meyer – a Uruguayan composer and singer of urban ballads – with the harmony of its music and lyrics describing Hamlet's suffering: the parody here is subtler than the clowning and the acrobatics, or the ridiculous costumes.

Like the original troupe of Americans, these Uruguayans are young, agile and versatile in their multiple roles, laying special emphasis on the metadramatic, probably a growing concern among actors who have recently graduated from acting schools.

All in all, the comedy is hilarious. Madness with method; the mingling of kings and clowns; the demystification of an author who would probably have hated so much formality and so much pedantry around his figure and his writings.

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King John

Dir. Nikos Hatzopoulos
"Amore" theatre (upper stage)
(A production by "Theatro tou Notou")

Measure for Measure

Dir. Thomas Moschopoulos
"Porta" theatre
(A production by "Theatro tou Notou")

Troilus and Cressida: First Shot

Adapt. and dir. Raia Mouzenidou
"Dipylon" theatre

Reviewed by *Xenia GEORGOPOULOU*

Writing a review on *one* of last season's (2004–2005) Greek productions of Shakespearean plays would be a hard task, as it would entail choosing from a handful of really interesting works. Thus, I decided to spread this review over three of them.[1] Last season several Shakespearean plays appeared

[1] Although the space does not allow a full review of three productions, I thought that even a brief account would give an idea of the directors' interesting approaches.

on the Athenian stage. Three of them were presented by "Theatro tou Notou" ["Theatre of the South"], based at the "Amore" theatre. These were *The Winter's Tale*, directed by Lilo Baur, on the main stage; the rarely performed *King John* (first production of the play in Greece), directed by Nikos Hatzopoulos, on the much smaller upper stage; and *Measure for Measure*, directed by Thomas Moschopoulos, presented at the "Porta" theatre.[2] The other two productions were *Troilus and Cressida: First Shot* at the "Dipylon" theatre, adapted and directed by Raia Mouzenidou;[3] and *The Tempest* at the "Amphitheatre", directed by Spyros Evangelatos.[4] My short reviews will deal with *King John*, *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida: First Shot*.

Before I comment on *Measure for Measure*, the most elaborate of last season's Shakespearean productions by "Theatro tou Notou", I would like to say a few words about the simpler but interesting production of *King John* by Nikos Hatzopoulos, who proved that a good performance does not have to employ elaborate sets (a plain table and a few stools did all the work) or costumes (the different parts played by the six actors[5] were indicated by minimal props);[6] all that is really needed is a strong text (although *King John* may not be one of Shakespeare's strongest plays, it is still Shakespeare) – and, in the case of a production in a foreign language, a strong translation (provided in this case by Hatzopoulos himself[7]) – and a team of actors who can deliver it properly, especially when movement is restricted by a small space, like the upper stage of "Amore". Hatzopoulos added short introductory pieces to clarify the dramatic time and place of a rather complicated play in these respects, and used percussion instruments (played live by the actors) between the scenes, providing the production with a crystal-clear structure. It is notable that in his *King John* Hatzopoulos underscored an element added by Shakespeare to the history he dramatised: the comic element, which often emerges in this play. However, the director

[2] The three plays were chosen along with other non-Shakespearean plays by the artistic directors of "Theatro tou Notou", who this year concentrated on the theme of betrayal. It is worth mentioning here that "Theatro tou Notou" provided a "Shakespeare card", with which one could watch all three shows at half price.

[3] Mouzenidou also adapted and directed *Romeo and Juliet* in 2003 (and staged the play itself in 2003–04).

[4] Evangelatos has staged various Shakespearean plays, among which the rarely presented *Titus Andronicus* in 1977 (the only production of the play in Greece).

[5] The parts were shared among Maria Kallimani, Eleni Kokkidou, Despina Kourti, Fanis Mouratides, Yiorgos Simeonides, Cosmas Foundoukis.

[6] The set was designed by Maria Vassilaki and the costumes by Ioanna Tsami.

[7] Hatzopoulos also provided the translation for the same season's production of *The Winter's Tale* by "Theatro tou Notou".

did not eliminate the moving nature of other scenes (such as those of Arthur's plea for mercy or Constance's madness). Hatzopoulos's mise en scène presented a timeless troupe of skilled actors performing the vicious circle of power.

Thomas Moschopoulos's *Measure for Measure* was a modern costume production, supported by electronic music (by CotiK[8]) and technology (mainly the use of video). The set was also modern, almost minimal (mostly consisting of a long plexiglas table used in various ways), with symbolic connotations.[9] The conference room where the Duke appointed his representative and where the latter's decisions were made was half black and half white, and so were the chairs on the two sides of the room, possibly implying the dangerous mixture of virtue and sin in a power figure like Angelo. It is not by chance, I think, that the good Escalus sat on the white side, whereas Angelo moved mostly on the black side. After the Duke's departure, an empty armchair at the back of the stage, and in the middle, lit from above (as if to indicate his appointment by God), seemed to denote his absence.

Although Moschopoulos's production was rather dark, it was not exclusively so. The comic element (ideally supported by a translation that was otherwise a clumsy mixture of vernacular, slang and archaic words, of prose and rhyme[10]) was present even in the serious scenes, without effacing, however, the gravity of certain moments. The various comic touches reminded the audience that the play is supposed to be a comedy, and secondary characters such as Lucio, Pompey and Barnardine[11] often offered a much more enjoyable performance than the leading parts.[12] However, the final scene clearly underlined that the play is a *problem* comedy. Isabella's long pause before she silently accepted her place by the Duke's side, the forced kiss by her future husband and the general numbness is what remained at the end of the play.

Although the moral theme of the brothels was used as a Leitmotiv throughout the production, the main issue was obviously political corruption. The prostitutes (played by both female and male actors) were rather treated with sympathy, and the mise en scène was clearly set against Angelo, taking

[8] CotiK also wrote the music for the same season's production of *The Winter's Tale* by "Theatro tou Notou".

[9] The set and costumes were designed by Elli Papageorgakopoulou.

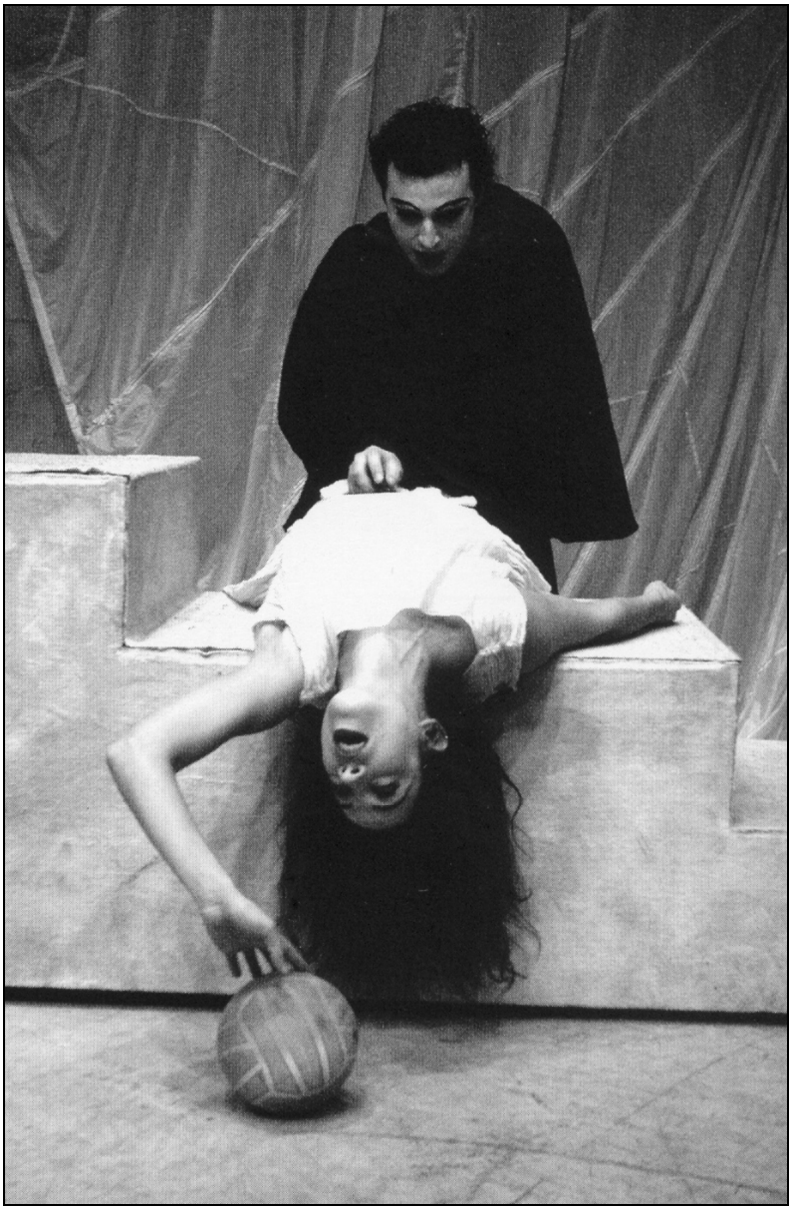
[10] The play was translated by two of the leading actors of the production, Anna Mascha and Yiannis Dalianis; the translation was subsequently modified for the show by the director.

[11] The above roles were played by Yiorgos Glastras, Thanassis Demou and Dimitris Pleiones respectively.

[12] The leading parts were played by good old members of "Theatro tou Notou", such as Yiannis Dalianis [Angelo], Anna Mascha [Isabella] and Akis Sakellariou [Duke].



The cast of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Abridged) (dir. Mario Ferreira)



Marvina Pytichoutis (Cressida) and Yiannis Gounas (Pandarus) in *Troilus and Cressida*: First Shot (dir. Raia Mouzenidou)



The cast of *King John* (dir. Nikos Hatzopoulos)



Sara von Schwarze (Gertrude), Itay Tiran (Hamlet) and Gil Frank (Claudius) in Hamlet (dir. Omri Nitzan)

the side of the Duke. However, the tableau vivant of the finale, the Christ-like Duke surrounded by twelve characters in positions that clearly alluded to paintings of Christ's Last Supper with the twelve apostles, ironically underscored that most of the onstage unions were *forced* by the omnipotent Duke. The very last image before the curtain falls, an eye figuring on multiple screens (symbolising, perhaps, the omnipresent Duke) was reminiscent of Queen Elizabeth's gown in the Rainbow portrait, full of eyes and ears, and, at the same time, of the omnipresent CCTVs of the 21st century.

The adaptation of *Troilus and Cressida* by Raia Mouzenidou proved that the director had not yet finished with *Romeo and Juliet*, a play she had been exploring for at last three years. In fact, *Troilus and Cressida: First Shot* was to a great extent a comparison of the two plays. Focusing on the love story of Troilus and Cressida,[13] Mouzenidou compared it with that of Romeo and Juliet,[14] putting the two plays together in a parallel construction (comparing, for example, the vows the two sets of lovers make, or Pandarus and Friar Lawrence[15] as intermediaries). Mouzenidou kept the story of Troilus and Cressida at the centre of the stage, whereas the Romeo and Juliet part was presented in some kind of sub-stage on the left side of the main space.

While focusing on the love stories, Mouzenidou could not possibly eliminate their context (even though no battle or fight was represented on stage). Recalling the motto "make love, not war", the director approaches the two plays as Shakespeare's chief anti-war dramatic works and underlines their globality. She regards the Trojan war in *Troilus and Cressida* as the equivalent of a world war and the feud between the two families in *Romeo and Juliet* as a kind of civil war. The relevance of the plays in any era was articulated in *First Shot*. The set and costumes by Giuliano Monotti were minimal, alluding to no particular historical era. The mannequin body members scattered on the stage, heads and torsos, arms and legs, could belong to any soldier or civilian killed during any war. And the video art by Nikos Zappas[16] was, as the director states, a modern comment on Shakespeare's always modern text.

[13] Troilus and Cressida were played by Dimitris Moroyiannis and Marvina Pitychoutis (who also played Helen) respectively.

[14] Romeo and Juliet were played by Marios Leonidou (who also played Diomedes) and Yakinthi Papadopoulos respectively.

[15] Both Pandarus and Friar Lawrence were played by Yiannis Gounas.

[16] Nikos Zappas also played the part of the Trojan Paris.