

Enrico Bernard, ed. *Autori e drammaturgie: Enciclopedia del teatro italiano contemporaneo*. Terza edizione aggiornata. Roma: Editori Associati, 1993. Pp. 365.

The present work is the third edition of an annotated bibliography of Italian theatre from 1950 to 1992, compiled by the director of Editori Associati, who is himself a playwright. The only work of its kind, it brings together the contributions of thirty-two researchers and the collaboration of the three most important institutions in the field, namely Società Italiana Autori Editori (SIAE), Istituto del Dramma Italiano (IDI), and Società Italiana Autori Drammatici (SIAD). The entries are alphabetically arranged by playwright and are chronologically structured, and they include the titles of the plays with the dates of their first stagings as well as a critical introduction to the playwrights.

Although not a massive work, the book represents a virtually complete purview of contemporary Italian theatre. The editor is fully aware of the originality and scope of his work, which he presents on the title page as the first encyclopedia of post-war Italian theatre, and states in the preface that no effort was spared to make it as inclusive as possible. Furthermore, proportionately less space is given to well-known authors than to those who have somehow fallen by the wayside and appear to be in need of retrieval.

Readers familiar with other works published by Editori Associati will not be surprised to find such emphasis on what is not part of canonical knowledge and in fact they may recognize in it an aspect of a far-reaching editorial strategy, which is to make available works that, in the perception of the editor, ought to play a more significant role in shaping our idea of the development of Italian theatre, works which the vicissitudes of history have unfairly turned into rarities for specialists. In this respect, it is worth recalling that in recent years Editori Associati has issued a reprint of Nicola Sabbattini's *Pratica di fabricar scene e macchine ne' teatri*, the most important treatise on baroque stagecraft; Pirro Ligorio's study of Roman theatres and amphitheatres, *Delle antichità di Roma*; a facsimile reprint of the Medici edition of Prospero Bonarelli's *Solimano* complete with Callot's renowned illustrations; and a number of plays, modern and not, which are not part of the established repertoire. In general large publishing houses, in response to the demands of school curricula and popular university programmes, tend to attach themselves to the canon and do not wish to issue works that might challenge the received critical tradition. The editorial recovery of those works is the special task of small publishers with a clear sense of mission and with a desire to modify the general perception of what they regard as the real configuration of culture.

*Autori e drammaturgie* is part of such a revisionary strategy. Starting with the assumption that the history of contemporary theatre cannot be reduced to an account of a small repertoire of modern classics, Bernard offers us a critically annotated bibliography of staged plays in which the works that are well known to the scholarly community are surrounded by hundreds of others that have never come to the attention of conventional audiences and authoritative critics. The picture that emerges is complex and heterogeneous. The first thing that one learns from *Autori e drammaturgie* is that post-Pirandellian theatre in Italy has been indeed extremely rich and varied, much more than one could possibly surmise from even a very careful perusal of the professional reviews and official literature. The encyclopedia includes more than 600 authors, many of them with an impressive number of plays staged in theatres throughout the country. Some of the places of performance mentioned are provincial or alternate theatres far removed from the field of interest of mainstream audiences, a fact which satisfactorily explains why so

many of the plays recorded in the encyclopedia have remained buried in obscurity. Only plays that have actually been staged are listed in the bibliography, but the critical introduction to the playwright contains references to other unstaged texts as well as a general appraisal of the author's position (mostly along thematic lines) in the development of contemporary Italian theatre.

Although the work aims to be a complete account of theatre as such, it is clear that the kind of theatre which falls within its scope is theatre that privileges the written word. This encyclopedia, in other words, is chiefly a compilation of playtexts; works that exist primarily as performance texts and which cannot be consigned to the printed page are naturally not included, whatever their significance, aesthetic as well as ideological, in Italian theatre. Among these are the many monologues which, towards the end of the Seventies, performers of great merit wrote for themselves as part of a movement which sought to reaffirm the centrality of the actors against the convention that totally subordinated them to the aesthetic supremacy of the directors. Similarly excluded are the often politically charged cabaret performances which suddenly flourished in Italy after the abolition of theatre censorship in 1962, as are the numerous experimental productions which in more recent years have called great attention to themselves as cases of veritable *scrittura scenica*, consisting primarily of lights, sounds, images, mime, and only secondarily of conventional language. These are all composite theatrical products in which the written texts do not figure as a sufficiently large base to warrant cataloguing them as playtexts. The editor has therefore wisely excluded them from the encyclopedia, supplying instead a series of short essays that cover all such forms and that offer the reader a general purview of the situation with a few well chosen examples.

The list of playwrights may contain a few surprises for readers acquainted only with the highlights of mainstream Italian theatre. The names of such seasoned performers as Nino Manfredi, Vittorio Gassman, Mario Maranzana, and Giorgio Albertazzi, or those of distinguished scholars like Mario Apollonio, Luciano Codignola, and Vito Pandolfi, or, indeed, of film directors Michelangelo Antonioni and Lina Wertmüller, and many other names, which we are accustomed to seeing in altogether different contexts, may well cause us to wonder at how effectively success in one field may filter out of perception attempts at success in another. The fact is that they have all written plays, plays that at some point were staged, and the encyclopedia duly records for us titles, dates and places of first performances. Even Umberto Eco started out as a playwright, the author of *Le forbici elettroniche* (Teatro del Corso, Milano, 1960), long before he wrote the works that made him famous.

The editorial design behind the compilation *Autori e drammaturgie* is not difficult to see: retrieve back to memory what has been forgotten, bring to the attention of the community at large what was shown only to small audiences, relativise the historical merit of the few by setting them in a background defined by the many, and thereby democratise the distribution of credit for the development and present configuration of the living theatre in the country. The revision in critical attitude that this design aims to bring about radically challenges the established ways of looking at contemporary Italian theatre, while the evidence that the book offers in support of its argument is such as to convince this reviewer that we would do well to take that challenge very seriously.

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