Shakespeare en devenir
ISSN électronique 1958-9476
shakespeareendevenir@univ-poitiers.fr

N° 18 | 2024

Hamlet, Thy Name Is Woman: Cross-Gendered Casting in Antonio Latella's *Hamlet* (2021)

Par Francesca Forlini

Publication en ligne le 14 décembre 2024

> **Pour citer ce document**

Francesca Forlini, « Hamlet, Thy Name Is Woman: Cross-Gendered Casting in Antonio Latella's *Hamlet* (2021) », *Shakespeare en devenir* [En ligne], n°18, 2024, mis à jour le 14/12/2024, URL : https://shakespeare.edel.univ-poitiers.fr/index.php?id=3182.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License CC BY-NC 3.0.

Article distribué selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons CC BY-NC 3.0.
Attribution | Pas d'utilisation commerciale.

Pour tous les articles mis en ligne avant le 01/01/2020, la reproduction et la représentation sont formellement interdites sauf autorisation expresse du titulaire des droits.

Introduction

1 Theatre is hardly new to cross-gender casting. The tradition of men portraying women on public stages dates back to Greek drama: men played female roles in the playhouses of Shakespeare's London and Japanese Kabuki. In recent centuries, the idea of switching the gender of parts in either direction when reviving Shakespearean plays has continuously come in and out of fashion. Cross-gender casting experienced a boom in the Anglophone world in the 1990s, with actresses like Sarah Bernhardt claiming their right to Olympian roles like Hamlet, a tradition most recently added to by Maxine Peake (2014), Tessa Parr (2019), Michelle Terry (2018) and Cush Jumbo (2020).[1]

2 Embracing this practice with cautious enthusiasm, contemporary Italian theatre has recently opened up to cross-gendered casting and to its capacity to illuminate and problematize specific aspects of the text performed. This is the case for Antonio Latella's *Hamlet*, staged at Piccolo Teatro Studio Melato in 2021. Defying the performing conventions traditionally associated with the role, this production featured a young she-Hamlet, played by Federica Rosellini. As Latella articulates, by transcending gender binaries, the unconventionality of this casting choice was originally designed to urge audiences to engage with the text on a deeper level: "For me, the Hamlet of the 21st century goes beyond sexuality, beyond the distinction between woman and man [...]: in the classics, the words have no genitals, they are of such a higher level as to make a difference".[2] However, the timely staging of the production during the wave of mobilisation that shook the cultural and creative sectors following the diffusion of the international feminist movements of #metoo and #metootheatre significantly affected the reception of this casting choice.

3 Focusing on the ways in which Latella's *Hamlet* resonated with Italian audiences and critics, this article contributes to the debates around the use of cross-gendered casting in the reviving of Shakespearean plays within the context of women's struggle for

equality. On the one hand, it offers a perspective on the gender imbalances that affect the Italian theatre sector, and on the other hand, it considers the potential of Latella's production in promoting social change.

1. Women in Italian theatre: the rise of Amleta, a platform for change

4 Performing artists and cultural workers played a crucial role in the radical mobilisation that shook the Italian creative sector between 2011 and 2016, with activities located in occupied spaces such as Macao in Milan and Teatro Valle in Rome.[3] Despite collective reflections on workplace inequalities stemming from these experiences, Italian theatre has been slow to address power imbalances connected to gender. Significantly, the first systematic attempt to map gender inequalities in the Italian theatre sector dates back to 2017, a landmark year that witnessed countless of women joining the #metoo movement and turning to social media to denounce sexual harassment in the entertainment industry.[4] In 2017, Daniele Di Nunzio, Giuliano Ferrucci and Emanuele Toscano published a study on the living conditions of performing artists and cultural workers in Italy. In this study, they evidenced the vulnerable position occupied by women in terms of pay gap, underrepresentation, and underemployment.[5] Similar issues were raised by the survey conducted between 2017 and 2020 by Amleta (2020), an Italian collective founded during the Covid-19 pandemic with the aim of mapping the presence of women in Italian national theatres and TRIC (Theatres of Significant Cultural Interest).[6]

5 Echoing the Italian counterpart of Shakespeare's most famous character turned into a feminine entity by replacing the final vowel of his name from "o" to "a", Amleta was created at a time of extreme uncertainty. Following the closure of theatres and the suspension of live events, social media and digital platforms configured themselves as fundamental spaces for communication

and information. Far from daily routines and without the perspective of returning to the stage, the artistic community started addressing a variety of issues with the intent of establishing a more ethical system in the context of the performing arts.[7] In Italy, reflections on gender inequalities, discrimination, and harassment in the workplace played a crucial role in the debate led by theatre workers and artists, which came together in newly formed activist groups. As illustrated in an article by Chiara Pizzimenti, before the outbreak of the pandemic, the call for action led by the #metoo and #metootheatre movement in Italy fundamentally resulted in a failure.[8] Despite the increasing interest in the issue of discrimination and abuse faced by women and minorities in the Italian entertainment industry, and the publication of research discussing the extent to which these issues affected the arts and cultural sectors, information activism failed to undermine the masculine domination of theatre stages and audio-visual production. This was partially due to the lack of statistics and data on women's actual presence and conditions in the industry. In addition, when the #metoo movement started spreading in Italy, it did so in a sector that was still scarcely cohesive, as workers' cooperatives and freelancers' associations had only recently started to operate at a national level.

6 The creation of Amleta contributed significantly to this unification process.[9] As the advent of Covid-19 exacerbated the issues faced by women, making a position already characterised by precariousness and vulnerability more apparent, spreading awareness about malpractice in the workplace turned into a form of communicative and political action. This allowed women to move from an individualised understanding of their subjective experiences towards a level of collective awareness.[10] Since its creation in 2020, one of the major preoccupations of Amleta has been to map the presence of women in the Italian theatre sector. To date, Amleta has conducted two surveys collecting data on a voluntary basis over a time span of three or four years, coinciding with the duration of the public funding plan of the FUS (Fondo Unico per lo Spettacolo dal Vivo). The first survey, published in 2020, focused on the period between 2017 and 2020. The most recent

survey, published in 2024 within the framework of the Gender Equality Plan 2022-2024 in collaboration with the University of Brescia, took into consideration the period between 2020 and 2024. Significantly, both studies have evidenced persistent gender disparities within the sector, confirming the existence of structural barriers and gender discrimination that limit women's access to and career progression in leadership and creative roles within the theatre sector.

7 According to Amleta's 2024 survey, women make up only 35.1% of the workforce, and their presence varies considerably depending on the role and type of auditorium considered. More specifically, female directors, playwrights and adaptors are underrepresented compared to performers (see fig.1).

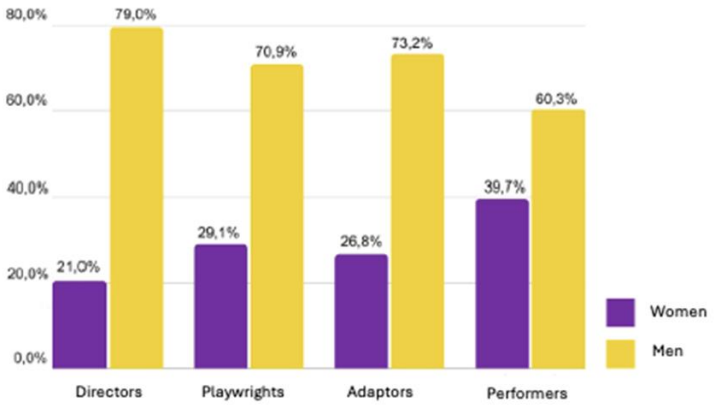

Figure 1. Presence of women and men in National Theatres and TRIC, divided by role.
Crédits. Amleta, "Presentazione Mappatura 2020-24", 2024, URL. Accessed 29 March 2024.

8 In TRIC and secondary halls, that is, in the context of reduced status and visibility, the presence of women is slightly above the national average (see fig. 2 and fig. 3). However, the incidence of female workers in terms of productions and hospitality remains very low, ranging between 20-30%. Female directors, playwrights, and adaptors are underrepresented compared with performers.

Crucially, no woman in Italy has ever been entrusted with the direction of a national theatre. Taken together, these data offer a comprehensive perspective on the cultural setting that affected the reception of Latella's *Hamlet*, a show whose cross-gendered casting choices resonated with many audiences and critics as a call for action to promote gender equality in the theatre sector.

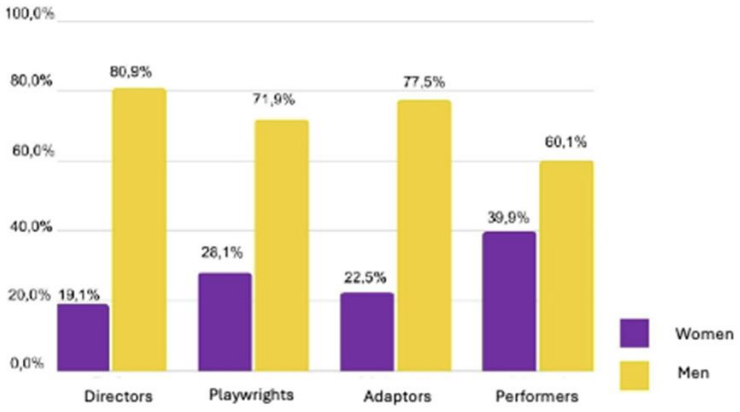

Figure 2. Presence of women in National Theatres, divided by role.
Crédits. Amleta, "Presentazione Mappatura 2020-24", 2024, URL. Accessed 29 March 2024.

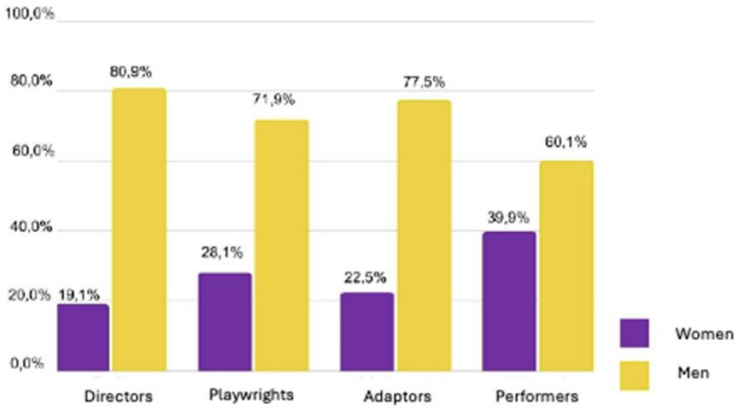

Figure 3. Presence of women in TRIC, divided by role.
Crédits. Amleta, "Presentazione Mappatura 2020-24", 2024, URL. Accessed 29 March 2024.

2. Latella's *Hamlet:* a play to be listened to rather than watched

9 As evident from the press articles released after *Hamlet*'s premiere, Latella's decision to cast a woman in the title role was widely interpreted as an act of inclusion and protest for gender equality within the Italian theatrical landscape.[11] By challenging traditional casting norms and offering a platform for a female actor to embody one of Western drama's most iconic characters, Latella signalled a commitment to breaking down barriers and fostering greater diversity on stage. However, according to Latella, the true originality of this casting choice goes beyond mere symbolism. It lay in inviting audiences not only to watch but also to listen attentively to every word in the text. Latella emphasized that, in the context of the 21st century, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* transcended notions of sexuality and gender distinctions. Discussing his unconventional casting choices, Latella asserted that his intent has always been to demonstrate that the power of Shakespeare's text lies in its universality and timeless relevance, as the words themselves possess a profound significance that transcends physical attributes. In essence, Latella's staging was meant to encourage audiences to engage with the play at a deeper level, focusing on the essence of the text rather than on the gender of the actor portraying the main character. This approach underscored the notion that the themes and messages conveyed by Shakespeare's *Hamlet* are inherently human experiences that resonate across genders and cultures.

10 The production's intentions are clear in its staging, which represents a significant departure from conventional performances of *Hamlet*. Latella's production unfolds against the backdrop of Teatro Studio Melato in Milan, one of the most renowned Italian-style theatres in Italy. At the beginning of the show, the actors enter the stage all dressed in white, wearing an oversized two-piece suit that stands out against the bare stage of the production.[12] They settle to the side, sitting on the steps that surround the central stage, occupied only in the last row by spectators, while the others,

seated on stools, look out over the orange railings of the four tiers of galleries. Throughout the performance, the lights remain on for most of the show, blurring the line between performer and audience and encouraging active participation from the spectators. This strategic choice undermines the conventional relationship between stage and auditorium, inviting the audience to fully engage with the performance. Once alone behind the lectern, it's Stefano Patti's turn to break the silence. With Brechtian detachment, Patti's Horatio reads the stage directions that open Shakespeare's text. Taking up the role of mediator, as suggested by the navy tailored suit that sets him apart from the other actors, he performs the task entrusted to him by the dying Hamlet when he says:

> O good Horatio, what a wounded name,
> Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me.
> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
> To tell my story.
> (V.2.290-295)[13]

11 Echoing Giovanni Testori's role in *I promessi sposi alla prova* (2019), Patti's Horatio acts as a go-between between who officiates the ancient rite of the theatre and who takes part in it. Half career manager half Gen Z politician, it is through his eyes that we witness Hamlet, wearing a too-large white dinner jacket, advancing from the back of the stage and kneeling at the prayer stool where she will remain for the first hour and a half of the play. Antonio Latella's production is thus cast as a ritual in which the audience is called upon to take part as explicitly asked at various times during the long six and a half-hour show. "All rise, enter the King and Queen of Denmark", says Horatio, and members of the audience and actors alike stand up in unison.

12 As far as audience participation is concerned, a great deal of emphasis is placed on the embodied and critical activity of listening.

Spoken, political, poetic: words play a central role in Latella's production. A performance that begins, precisely, with Horatio reading Shakespeare's text and ends pretty much in the same way, with Horatio going over the lines of Act 5 while Hamlet is literally lying on the ground in a dead-like state. "This Hamlet will be a show to be listened to rather than watched", the director commented in an interview,[14] in which he stressed his intention to challenge a culture "forged in the age of print" and thus "fascinated by the spectacle" much more than by "the politics and practices of collective listening.[15] "At my third Hamlet in thirty years", he expanded, "I decided to make a *tabula rasa* and try to hear these words as if they were completely new. This is what I am asking the audience to do: to make a *tabula rasa* within themselves".[16] In the case of his 2021 production of *Hamlet*, Latella's aim resulted in a series of unprecedented choices: the famous "To be or not to be" monologue was pronounced offstage by a Hamlet hidden in the same square pit in which the actors of the dumb show crafted for Claudius and Gertrude in Act 3 had earlier performed, as the prayer stool from the first section of the show turned around empty. Additionally, the famous scene of the duel between Hamlet and Laertes was stripped of its theatricality and brought to life by Horatio's intense and moving interpretation. All actors silently witnessed Fortinbras' arrival solely through Stefano Patti's words, spoken from the lectern.

13 In full Brechtian fashion, Antonio Latella conceived Hamlet's female casting as an alienation device, so to encourage spectators to maintain a double consciousness of the character and of the actress playing the role. However, dissonances in the reception of the play were made evident by subsequent accounts of spectators and reviewers, bringing forward the possibility that this aim was only partially achieved and that Latella's cross-gender casting choice resonated with the audience differently than intended:

> Classics must be readapted to fit modern taste. However, the role of the biological body, an element that is always a signifier in the theatre, cannot be erased. Thus, if all bodies are "political", in Federica Rosellini's roaring physicality there is also implicitly a protest against patriarchy.[17]

14 As evidenced by Mario De Santis's review published on *Huffingtonpost*, Latella's attempt to configure Rosellini's body as neutral ground was not entirely successful. Instead of shifting the attention towards more abstract-like qualities of the play, Rosellini's androgynous Hamlet embodied a wealth of contradictory messages rooted in the lived experience of performance.

15 On a performative level, biological differences acted as a disruptive force, reshaping the map of gender implicit in Shakespeare's text. From the Ghost, "the armoured emblem of patriarchy that Hamlet can never match", to Ophelia, "the virginal sacrifice to father, brother, lover and king", all roles were charged with newfound political implications.[18] Hamlet's antagonism against the rottenness of history and politics made by men, took the shape of a feminist social critique questioning totalitarianism and patriarchy's role in it. From this perspective, Hamlet's clashes with Ophelia and Gertrude acquired new relevance. Cast in the role of two girls broken by the pain caused by the power struggles that killed their fathers, Hamlet and Ophelia suddenly found themselves in very similar positions, holding little power in a world ruled by men. This caused different segments of the show such as the Nunnery and the Closet scenes to be perceived as a comment on choice and female identity in a patriarchal world.

16 Similarly, the Oedipal elements that traditionally loom over Gertrude and Hamlet's relationship were overshadowed by Rosellini's act of gender redefinition. Frustrated and unable to articulate anything but adoration for the dead and hatred for the living, Latella's Hamlet proved uncapable of nurturing any kind of empathy towards Gertrude and thus remained utterly oblivious to her journey from female sign to female subject, which culminated in her account of Ophelia's death in Act 4 Scene 7.[19] A death that the

audience witnessed on stage, as Flaminia Cuzzoli's Ophelia dived in the pool placed centre stage—a set design element reminiscent of Strehler's *Faust* (1989, 1990)—and then re-emerged, floating in her black, translucent clothes while her brother held her lifeless body, meditating revenge (fig. 4 and 5). Little did Latella's choice to entrust another actress, Anna Coppola, with the traditional male roles of the Ghost and Fortinbras to alter the power structures at play in this new configuration. If anything, the doubling of cross-gender casting choices reinforced the fundamental questions raised by the play. Is Hamlet a universal figure whose dilemmas we share indistinctly, male or female? Or rather, should we frame him as a "feminine character" whose words invite a woman's voice?

Figure 4. Laertes (Ludovico Fededegni) and Ophelia (Flaminia Cuzzolo) in *Hamlet* (2021), dir. Antonio Latella. **Crédits**. Masiar Pasquali, 2021. Piccolo Teatro, URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

Figure 5. Franco Graziosi in *Faust* (1989), dir. Giorgio Strehler.
Crédits. Piccolo Teatro, "Faust, frammenti", URL.
Accessed 28 March 2024.

17 Compared to the most recent productions featuring a female Hamlet that have proven successful in the anglophone world, Latella's *Hamlet* did not propose a complicated montage of feminine and masculine impulses but rather a spiritual and physical fusion of female and male, a sort of 'pre-gendered version' of the character that was convincingly supported by Hamlet's ambivalent and shifting attitude to gender as manifested in Shakespeare's text. Indeed, more thoroughly than in other tragedies, in *Hamlet* the main focus is on the character's "sweet", "gentle" and "piteous" attitude, a feature traditionally associated with female sensibility in Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre. In Shakespeare's text, Hamlet denounces women as performers—"ambling", "lisping", disguised as "Niobe, all tears"—yet he describes himself as woman-like in his

grief and his failure to achieve revenge. When it comes to eloquence, he resents:

> That I, the son of a dear murdered,
> Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
> Must like a whore unpack my heart with words
> And fall a-cursing like a very drab. (II.2.501-505)

18 He then speaks of himself as a battleground contested by female forces (III.2.56-61) and dismisses his intuition before the duel with Laertes as "such a kind of gain-giving / as perhaps would trouble a woman" (V.2.187-188). The insistence on Hamlet's feminine nature is reiterated by other characters throughout the play. So, for example, Gertrude clings to a positive faith in her son, affirming that he is "as patient as the female dove" (V.1.265), while Claudius condemns Hamlet's "unmanly grief" (I.2.94), a feature that is duplicated in Laertes, who is ashamed of his tears for Ophelia, whose death makes him fear that the woman in him "will be out" (IV.4.187).

19 This oscillation between male and female was utterly reinforced in the production by the new translation that Latella commissioned to Federico Bellini. Among the three main versions of *Hamlet*, the first Quarto of 1603, the second Quarto of 1604 and the Folio version of 1623, Bellini kept in mind the so-called 'good Quarto', to which he proceeded to make some additions. This included the integration of the passage in Act 3 Scene 2 of the Folio, where Hamlet instructs the First player about the role of the clown. The choice probably stood out to audience members familiar with Shakespeare's play, since the addition appears neither in the rather courtly Italian translation by Eugenio Montale (1943), nor in the versions by Raffaello Piccoli (1946) and Luigi Squarzina (1952), which were conceived specifically for the stage, nor in the most recent translations by Agostino Lombardo (1995) and Rocco Coronato (2022). In the preface to the published version of his translation, Bellini justified his choice affirming that:

> There are some additions or modifications that I consider significant, taken in particular from the *In-folio* of 1623 and the first *In-quarto*, or Q1, of 1603 [...]. The interpretative basis of this version of Hamlet is in fact mainly concerned with the relationship between truth and lies or, if you prefer, between reality and its representation.[20]

20 To further emphasize the artificial and metatheatrical nature of the play, Bellini's translation retains other aspects of the source text. The title, for one, was kept in English, as did all honorific titles as well as the iconic "farewell" that kept being reiterated throughout the play, remarking the artificial tone of the narration. Crucially, Hamlet was free to retain its English name. A privilege that was not granted to any other character in the play and that held a liberating potential on stage since the Italian language does not have a female version of the name by which to acknowledge a female version of the character. Yet, "there's the rub". In translating Shakespeare's text into Italian, Federico Bellini and by extension Antonio Latella were confronted with a linguistic impossibility. As Italian grammar does not provide neutral forms, they were forced to choose between female pronouns and desinences and their male counterparts. Thus, the universalization and de-gendering of Hamlet's character auspicated by Latella, was met with the intrinsically oppressive binary cage of the Italian language. Finally, Bellini and Latella vouched for the male option, hoping to achieve a de-familiarizing effect. For the audience, however, this choice casted once more Hamlet's body as the battlefield of the story of how masculinity appropriates, objectifies, and disempowers women.

3. Challenging tradition: Italian Women Defying Gender Norms in *Hamlet*

21 In constructing the figure of an actress/prince whose very presence exposes artifice, Latella was inevitably forced to deal with the visual and theatrical references to the character that were most vivid in the imagination of the audience. As we will see, these included a very limited number of women. Italian theatre is not new to cross-gender casting. It is well known that up to the Italian Renaissance, when the work of actresses on the Italian stage started being documented, male non-professional actors played women's parts with the exception of women dancers and singers who participated in *Intermezzi*, the spectacles that occurred between acts.[21] The absence of women on the Italian stage is a practice that may have been influenced by the theatrical traditions of ancient Greece and Rome, where acting was considered an exclusively male occupation, predominantly performed by slaves. Although there is a small number of surviving documents providing insight into the early stages of *commedia erudita*, many sources such as letters, diaries, and chronicles attest that the practice of cross-gender casting for women's roles was widely accepted by the Renaissance audience as a convention.[22] However, if the practice of casting male actors in women's roles was already normalized by the end of the 16th century, the same could not be said for women playing male roles. The first Italian actress listed in a surviving company notarial document was one Lucrezia Senese, cited in a Roman contract of 1564. However, it is safe to infer from other documented examples, that *commedia dell'arte* troupes introduced female performers as early as the 1540s.[23] It is worth noting that, even after actresses were introduced, not all female roles were played by women. However, once the taboo was broken, female performers quickly became established in the roles of heroines or *Innamorate*.

22 Needless to say, this did not grant permission to take up one of the greatest roles in Western drama. The first attested account of an Italian woman playing Hamlet dates back to 1878, and was attributed to Giacinta Pezzana, an actress most famous for mentoring Eleonora Duse. The story of how Pezzana came to play this role is closely intertwined with the history of Italian independence and national unity, as well as with the creation of the first national theatre in Italy's newly established capital, Rome. At the turn of the century, the rise of middle-class values persuaded Pezzana to lend herself to a calculated experiment. Her Hamlet *en travesti* was ridiculed by conservative critics, but supported by the emancipationist press, which shared her desire to challenge "masculine brains" and her conviction that "in the field of art, intelligence has no sex".[24] This statement comes really close to Latella's comment about his own production of *Hamlet*. Interestingly, this is not the only parallel between Rosellini and Pezzana's performances. Writing about her acting style, Giulia Tellini described Pezzana's performance as "alienating, almost Brechtian", so much that it imposed "a critical distance between actor and character".[25] A comment that may sound familiar compared to Latella's *Hamlet.* Also, the costumes for the 1878 production were designed to replicate the Elizabethan fashion. Something we partially witness in Latella's production, when in the second section of the show all actors remove the uniforms they have been wearing and dress in mourning with large skirts, feminine dresses and cassocks in full Elizabethan fashion.

23 Coming back to the issue of actresses playing Hamlet, Pezzana's experiment remained a *unicum* in Italian history for a very long time. The second actress to claim the role was Manuela Kustermann, who starred in Giancarlo Nanni's production of *Hamlet* in 1978, that is seventy-nine years after French actress Sarah Bernhardt's legendary performance. Kustermann came to the role after having interpreted Ophelia in the 1963 *Hamlet* production by Carmelo Bene, which, together with the performances by Vittorio Gassman (1952) and Giorgio Albertazzi (1963), remains one of the most iconic in the Italian tradition. Although there are few extant testimonies documenting Kustermann's take on this role, the

reviews paint a contradictory portrait of her performance. On the one hand, reviewers appreciated Kustermann's masculine treatment of the character.[26] On the other, critics complained that Kustermann's androgynous portrait of the character lacked muscular interpretation, affirming that Kustermann's vocal features made her Hamlet look closer to a child rather than a man.[27] Neither a man, nor a woman, simply a person. Giancarlo Nanni's attempt to raise the character above sexuality is something that can be easily related to Latella's production, since the director's intent was not to exploit cross-gender casting to take a radical position in relation to dominant patriarchal stereotypes of gender and sexuality but rather to play with reality and its representation to turn Shakespeare's text "into something rich and strange" (I.2.400).[28]

24 The exploration of the divide between fiction and reality into theatre has been one of the major preoccupations of most recent Italian productions of *Hamlet*. Interestingly, two of these featured the same actress, Elisabetta Pozzi, playing the title role. The first is a sophisticated version staged in period costumes and directed by Walter Le Moli in 2002. The other is a reworking of the text based on notes written by Pozzi and other actors who had played the role since the beginning of the 20th century, entitled *Notes for Hamlet* (2018). Another three productions of *Hamlet* were penned by Antonio Latella. The first is a contemporary adaptation that featured the heavy influence of *Nekrošius* staged in 2001. The second is a reworking of the text in the form of a museum exhibit entitled *Not to be — Hamlet's portraits* (2008). In this version, Latella divided the text into six thematic rooms and eleven scenes to be experienced separately or all together for a total of 15 hours.[29] Latella's third encounter with *Hamlet* resulted in the production discussed in this study: the first one to feature an integral version of the play and also to pay tribute to the history of Italian theatre by making apparent the ghosts that haunted the stage hosting the production.

25 Indeed, Act 3 of Latella's 2021 *Hamlet* opened with a long line of costumes being brought to the stage (see fig. 6). These included the costumes used by Strehler for his *Harlequin* (1947) and *The Cherry*

Orchard (1976), and the costumes of Ronconi's *Lehman Trilogy* (2014-15).

Figure 6. Federica Rosellini in *Hamlet* (2021), dir. Antonio Latella. In the background, it is possible to see the long lines of costumes from the Piccolo Teatro Collection.
Crédits. Masiar Pasquali, 2021. Piccolo Teatro, URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

26 It is to those empty shells that Latella's Hamlet dedicated his famous directions to the actors, emphasizing that theatre's utmost function is to hold "the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (III.2.20-22). "The only true ghost that exists is that of the theatre, the memory of the stage protects and preserves history", Latella reportedly affirmed.[30] It is perhaps for this reason that, in the second part of the production, all the actors appeared dressed in black, in the Elizabethan fashion, and gave free rein to all the possibilities of their art: Federica Rosellini's *Hamlet* inaugurated the section by singing "Lamette" (1982), a hit song by Italian pop-rock singer Donatella Rettore whose lyrics sounded as an ironic anticipation of the events to come:

> Give me a razor blade I'll slit my wrists
> This moth night becomes wicked
> It promises well it promises so well
> […] I'm already talking to myself
> And I draw in the air
> Of course I've sinned a little but what a pleasure
> […] Feel how this blade slices
> From right to centre zac!
> From top to bottom zip![31]

27 Similarly, Flaminia Cuzzoli's Ophelia sang "Vinegar & Salt" (2000) by Hooverphonic, accompanied by Laertes on the piano: "I like the things that you hate / And you hate the things that I like / But it hurts / Honesty's your church / But sometimes / It's better to lie".[32] Throughout the second section, all actors danced, ran and played, only to fly away like soap bubbles towards the painful epilogue of the story, when reality became too difficult to represent. At that precise moment, storytelling took the place of acting, Strehler's and Ronconi's costumes packed away and forgotten. Set against the backdrop of the dark piece of land representing the cemetery, the actors stood in their pews, an image that seemed to be taken straight from Tadeusz Kantor's *The Dead Class* (1976), while the narrator/director Horatio gave voice to the lines of Claudius (Francesco Manetti), Gertrude (Francesca Cutolo), Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (Andrea Sorrentino), unaware victims of the spiral of death and despair in which the court was about to fall. The duel between Hamlet and Laertes and the ensuing tragic epilogue took the shape of a compelling narrative, urging to be passed down through generations. This cry for theatre emphasized the importance of embodied orality on stage, highlighting theatre's responsibility to preserve and hand down the tales that have shaped humanity.

28 To conclude, Latella's *Hamlet* was an intense and bruising piece of high stakes drama. Predicated on the in-between, attention to processes of representation abounded in Latella's staging, as characters blurred the line between reality and fiction. Immersing

the audience into a place of suspension, Hamlet's story was told in the hope that it could invalidate itself, implode in the telling and cease to represent the people whose stories it conveyed to embrace its universality. Paraphrasing the comment by Italian actor Giorgio Albertazzi on the *Hamlet* he played in 1963,

> we play *Hamlet* because reality weights us down and humiliates us, and imagination raises us up. We play *Hamlet* because we cannot decipher the mystery of life and death, because *Hamlet* is the cry of protest of the last men in the Western world before the end, before "silence".[33]

Bibliography

AMLETA, “Mappatura 2017/2020”, 2020. URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

BANDETTINI, Anna, “Amleto è donna, la provocazione di Antonio Latella: "Per ritrovare il senso dell’altro che l’uomo non ha"”, *Repubblica,* 23 May 2021, URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

BELLINI, Federico, “Introduzione”, in William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, trans. Federico Bellini, Milano, Scalpendi, 2022.

BORCHI, Alice, “Teatro Valle Occupato: Protesting, Occupying and Making Art in Contemporary Italy”, *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, vol. 22, n°1, 2017, p. 126-129.

CARLSEN, Hjalmar Bang, **TOUBØL**, Jonas & **BRINKER**, Benedikte, “On Solidarity and Volunteering during the Covid-19 Crisis in Denmark: The Impact of Social Networks and Social Media Groups on the Distribution of Support”, *European Societies*, vol. 23, n°1, 2021, p. 122-140.

CASE, Sue-Ellen, *Feminism and Theatre*, London & New York, Methuen, 1988.

CASULA, Clementina, **BERTOLINI**, Sonia, **BATAILLE**, Pierre et al., “From Atypical to Paradigmatic? Artistic Work in Contemporary Capitalist Societies”, *Sociologia del Lavoro*, n°157, p. 1-27.

CHIAPPORI, Sara, “Antonio Latella firma il suo terzo Amleto: ‘Nei classici le parole non hanno sesso’”, *La Repubblica,* 5 June 2021, n. p. URL. Accessed 17 May 2023.

D’ANCONA, Alessandro, *Origini del teatro italiano*, 2 vol., Turin, Loescher, 1891.

D'OVIDIO, Marianna, **COSSU**, Alberto, "Culture is Reclaiming the Creative City: The Case of Macao in Milan, Italy", *City, Culture and Society*, vol. 8, n°7, 2017.

DE SANTIS, Mario, "L'Hamlet di Antonio Latella, più lotta che dubbio", *Huffingtonpost*, 13 October 2022, URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

DI NUNZIO, Daniele, **FERRUCCI**, Giuliano, **TOSCANO**, Emanuele, *Vita da artisti, ricerca nazionale sulle condizioni di vita e di lavoro dei professionisti dello spettacolo*, Rome, Fondazione di Vittorio, 2017.

FARRO, Antimo Luigi, **MADDANU**, Simone, "Occupying the City: From Social Housing to the Theatre", in Enzo Colombo and Paola Rebughini (eds.), *Youth and the Politics of the Present*, London, Routledge, 2019.

FIORE, Enrico, "Progetto Non essere—Hamlet's portrait—regia Antonio Latella", *Sipario*, 6 July 2008, URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

FIORE, Enrico, "Latella trasforma Amleto in un museo", *Il Mattino*, 30 giugno 2008b.

GIANNETTI RUGGIERO, Laura, "When Male Characters Pass as Women: Theatrical Play and Social Practice in the Italian Renaissance", *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 36, n°3, 2005, p. 743-760.

HOOVERPHONIC, "Vinegar & Salt ", *The Magnificent Tree*, Columbia, 2000.

HOWARD, Tony, *Women as Hamlet: Performance and Interpretation in Theatre, Film and Fiction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

LACEY, Kate, *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age,* Cambridge, Polity, 2013.

MARIANI, Laura, *Il tempo delle attrici. Emancipazionismo e teatro in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, Bologna, Editoriale Mongolfiera, 1991.

NACLERIO, Emanuela, “Traces of solidarity: Performing artists’ Efforts Against Individualisation and Isolation during Covid-19 Pandemic”, *Sciences et actions sociales*, n°18, 2022, p. 21-34.

NACLERIO, Emanuela & **GIORGI**, Giulia, “Spotlight on Discrimination at Work: Italian Actresses’ Construction of Digital Spaces of Feminist Struggle”, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 00.0, 2023, p. 1-17.

PANIZZA, Letizia, *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society,* London, Routledge, 2000.

PIZZIMENTI, Chiara, “Il #MeToo? Zanardo: ‘In Italia non è mai stato pop’”, *Vanity Fair*, 16 December 2019, URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

POESIO, Paolo Emilio, “Amleto davanti allo specchio”, *La Nazione*, 29 July 1978.

PORRO, Maurizio, “Antonio Latella: ‘Il mio Amleto è una donna che mette al centro i dubbi’”, 21 May 2021, *Il Corriere,* URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

RETTORE, Donatella, “Lamette”, *Kamikaze Rock ‘n’ Roll Suicide*, Ariston, 1982.

ROMANO, Serena, “Manie istrioniche”, *Il Mattino,* 17 March 1979.

SANTOLINI, Egle, “L’Amleto di Latella? È una donna”, *La Stampa,* 3 June 2021, URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

SCHERMULY, Allegra Clare, **PETERSEN**, Alan & **ANDERSON**, Alison, “‘I’m not an Activist!’: Digital Self-advocacy in Online Patient Communities”, *Critical Public Health*, vol. 31, n°2, 2021, p. 204-213.

SHAKESPEARE, William, *Hamlet,* in Greenblatt, S., Cohen, W., Howard, E., et al. (eds.) *The Norton Shakespeare*, New York & London, W. W. Norton & Company, 2015.

SHAKESPEARE, William, *The Tempest ,* in Greenblatt, S., Cohen, W., Howard, E., et al. (eds.) *The Norton Shakespeare*, New York & London, W. W. Norton & Company, 2015.

TELLINI, Giulia, "Medea da Adelaide Ristori a Giacinta Pezzana", *Drammaturgia,* 13 October 2005, URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

Notes

[1] See especially Tony Howard, *Women as Hamlet: Performance and Interpretation in Theatre, Film and Fiction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

[2] Sara Chiappori, “Antonio Latella firma il suo terzo Amleto: ‘Nei classici le parole non hanno sesso’”, *La Repubblica,* 5 June 2021, n. p. URL. Accessed 17 May 2023.

[3] While denouncing precarious working conditions, activists joining these occupations also experimented with the autonomous management of cultural spaces and working relations. See Marianna d’Ovidio and Alberto Cossu, “Culture is Reclaiming the Creative City: The Case of Macao in Milan, Italy”, *City, Culture and Society*, vol. 8, n°7, 2017, p. 12; Alice Borchi, “Teatro Valle Occupato: Protesting, Occupying and Making Art in Contemporary Italy”, *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, vol. 22, n°1, 2017, p. 126-129; Antimo Luigi Farro and Simone Maddanu, “ Occupying the City: From Social Housing to the Theatre”, in Enzo Colombo and Paola Rebughini (eds.), *Youth and the Politics of the Present*, London, Routledge, 2019, p. 141-152.

[4] Emanuela Naclerio and Giulia Giorgi, “Spotlight on Discrimination at Work: Italian Actresses’ Construction of Digital Spaces of Feminist Struggle”, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 00.0, 2023, p. 1-17.

[5] See Daniele Di Nunzio, Giuliano Ferrucci and Emanuele Toscano, *Vita da artisti, ricerca nazionale sulle condizioni di vita e di lavoro dei professionisti dello spettacolo*, Rome, Fondazione di Vittorio, 2017.

[6] Amleta, “Mappatura 2017/2020”, 2020. URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

[7] See Hjalmar Bang Carlsen, Jonas Toubøl and Benedikte Brinker, “On Solidarity and Volunteering during the Covid-19 Crisis in Denmark:

The Impact of Social Networks and Social Media Groups on the Distribution of Support", *European Societies*, vol. 23, n°1, 2021, p. 122-140; Allegra Clare Schermuly, Alan Petersen and Alison Anderson "'I'm not an Activist!': Digital Self-advocacy in Online Patient Communities", *Critical Public Health*, vol. 31, n°2, 2021, p. 204-213. Emanuela Naclerio, "Traces of solidarity: Performing artists' Efforts Against Individualisation and Isolation during Covid-19 Pandemic", *Sciences et actions sociales*, n°18, 2022.

[8] Chiara Pizzimenti, "Il #MeToo? Zanardo: 'In Italia non è mai stato pop'", *Vanity Fair*, 16 December 2019, URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

[9] Emanuela Naclerio and Giulia Giorgi's most recent study on the subject has shown how Amleta has managed to consolidate a safe digital space to develop an Italian community of actresses providing support and cohesion against discrimination and violence (2023). See *ibid.*

[10] Clementina Casula, Sonia Bertolini, Pierre Bataille, et al., "From Atypical to Paradigmatic? Artistic Work in Contemporary Capitalist Societies", *Sociologia del Lavoro*, n°157, 2020, p. 1-27.

[11] The reference is to Anna Bandettini, "Amleto è donna, la provocazione di Antonio Latella: 'Per ritrovare il senso dell'altro che l'uomo non ha'", *Repubblica,* 23 May 2021, URL. Accessed 28 March 2024; Maurizio Porro, "Antonio Latella: 'Il mio Amleto è una donna che mette al centro i dubbi'", 21 May 2021, *Il Corriere,* URL. Accessed 28 March 2024; Egle Santolini, "L'Amleto di Latella? È una donna", *La Stampa,* 3 June 2021, URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

[12] For images from Antonio Latella's production of *Hamlet* visit the website of Piccolo Teatro, URL. Accessed 17 July 2024.

[13] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* in Greenblatt, S., Cohen, W., Howard, E., et al. (eds.), *The Norton Shakespeare*, New York & London, W. W. Norton & Company, 2015.

[14] Anna Bandettini, *op. cit.*

[15] Kate Lacey, *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age,* Cambridge, Polity, 2013, p. viii.

[16] Egle Santolini, *op. cit.*

[17] Mario De Santis, "L'Hamlet di Antonio Latella, più lotta che dubbio", *Huffingtonpost*, 13 October 2022, URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

[18] Tony Howard, *op. cit.*, p. 17-18.

[19] Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, London & New York, Methuen, 1988, p. 117.

[20] Federico Bellini, "Introduzione", in William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, trans. Federico Bellini, Milano, Scalpendi, 2022, p. 6.

[21] Laura Giannetti Ruggiero, "When Male Characters Pass as Women: Theatrical Play and Social Practice in the Italian Renaissance", *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 36, n°3, 2005, p. 744.

[22] Alessandro D'Ancona, *Origini del teatro italiano*, vol. 2, Turin, Loescher, 1891.

[23] Letizia Panizza, *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society,* London, Routledge, 2000, p. 183.

[24] Laura Mariani, *Il tempo delle attrici. Emancipazionismo e teatro in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, Bologna, Editoriale Mongolfiera, 1991, p. 78.

[25] Giulia Tellini, "Medea da Adelaide Ristori a Giacinta Pezzana", *Drammaturgia,* 13 October 2005, URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

[26] Paolo Emilio Poesio, "Amleto davanti allo specchio", *La Nazione*, 29 July 1978.

[27] Serena Romano, "Manie istrioniche", *Il Mattino,* 17 March 1979.

[28] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* , in Greenblatt, S., Cohen, W., Howard, E., et al. (eds.) *The Norton Shakespeare*, New York & London, W. W. Norton & Company, 2015.

[29] Enrico Fiore, “Latella trasforma Amleto in un museo”, *Il Mattino*, 30 giugno 2008b.

[30] Maurizio Porro, *op. cit.*

[31] Donatella Rettore, “Lamette”, *Kamikaze Rock ‘n’ Roll Suicide*, Ariston, 1982.

[32] Hooverphonic, “Vinegar & Salt “, *The Magnificent Tree*, Columbia, 2000.

[33] Enrico Fiore, “Progetto Non essere—Hamlet’s portrait—regia Antonio Latella”, *Sipario*, 6 July 2008a, URL. Accessed 28 March 2024.

Quelques mots à propos de :
Francesca Forlini

Francesca Forlini completed her Ph.D. in English Literature at Roma Tre University with a thesis entitled *Towards an Eco-Logical Theatre: Space and Site-specificity in Contemporary British Theatre*. Her main research interests are in post-war and contemporary British theatre, as well as in international adaptations of Shakespeare. She has a longstanding focus on inter-disciplinary studies with a strong commitment to the collaboration of the arts and humanities with the social sciences, especially in the intersections of drama, theatre and performance with geography and climate research. Since 2018, she has been collaborating with the Eco Logical Theater Fest in Stromboli under the direction of Alessandro Fabrizi.