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Introduction

No other literary genre is as cross-cultural in its boundary passages as dramatic theater is. Whereas poetry and fiction undergo a translation and virtually no more changes in their foreign adaptations, theater entails an almost endless variety of metamorphoses, some of which can be structural rather than simply formal (and formal ones are meaningful as well). Theater proves a very fruitful site for the investigation of transnational dynamics: besides the translated text, all other non-verbal signs can convey similar or different meanings in the foreign staging of a play. Each time that a dramatic work is translated and staged outside its cultural boundaries, such a number of elements come into play as to totally recreate it.

The staging of a play involves many more adaptations and changes than the "simple" translation of a novel or a poem. The play is translated, sometimes adapted – and this happens in other *genres* as well – but then it has to be *acted* and *directed*, not to mention *visualized* on stage. A director, the actors, the scene designer – and non-verbal features such as lights, music and costumes – will create a version of the play that can range from a close reading and rendition of the original atmosphere with a strong "respect" of its cultural matrix, to a free adaptation where the setting, the dialogues, the costumes, and other features can be changed to better fit (or shock, or inform, or stimulate) members of the host culture. In extreme cases, the play is totally reinvented so as to speak more directly to the audience of the receiving culture, retaining little of the original background where it took shape. Theater is therefore the literary genre that acquires the most varying significance in transcultural passages.

The outlook, the voice, the costumes of actors, not to mention all the aspects of the single performances that are subject to variations at every show (props, proxemics, body language, and actors themselves as signifying icons), all vary in transnational productions of plays. This feature has

become a field of academic speculation in the past twenty-five years – from Pavis' "hourglass theory" onwards (1-20) – and only lately opened up to more specific translation theories (Bigliazzi, Kofler, Ambrosi 1-26). This has allowed theater, especially in times of rewriting practices, to reappear in previously unimaginable forms, such as Shakespeare's plays performed by African-American companies (an early envisioning that anticipated modern trends), or Carlo Goldoni's comedies set in an American Chinatown instead of eighteenth-century Venice, transgender versions of Tennessee Williams' plays or Jacob Gordin's Yiddish theater appropriations of Russian classics for the immigrant audiences of New York, to name just a few self-evident examples taking place on American stages.

Tennessee Williams started writing at a time when, after the direct – or indirect – trauma of dictatorships and of the war, all of the Western world was looking at American culture in search of new, wider, more democratic artistic horizons. Intellectuals and artists all over the world were eager to appropriate his controversial works, mingling their own innovative ideas with his: Japanese born Seki Sano in Mexico (see Djelal Kadir's essay in this section), Jean Cocteau in France, Ingmar Bergman in Sweden, Luchino Visconti in Italy, Laurence Olivier in Great Britain (Kolin 40-82) soon signalled the transcultural potential of Williams' properties. Add to this that most of his plays were turned into films during Hollywood's Golden Age, when the United States exported the American Way of Life mainly through their motion pictures, and the whole import of Williams' oeuvre in an international context is all the more evident.

If the political undercurrent of these theatrical pieces was not always evident to Western audiences and readers, it could hardly be overlooked in countries of the Eastern Bloc, where Williams' works enjoyed a clandestine circulation among curious readers (Clericuzio 107). Then, when the political opposition between the Western and the Eastern blocs started fading, even the countries in which Americanness was deemed a threat and a sinful example of capitalist degeneration slowly relinquished the controlling grip of censorship and started staging his plays (Shaland 5-20, Slavova 213-31) in a seesaw approach that ranged from a denunciation of "America's spiritual wasteland" (Slavova 220) to an actual fascination for the "sins" allowed by Western freedoms.

The American government and its diplomatic representatives in Europe were aware of the power of cultural artifacts in the process of exportation of the American Way of Life, under the rubric of Western Democracy. Their main field of action was understandably Germany, where any remnant of the Nazi past had to be cleared with a re-education to democracy. This task was carried out by the Information Control Division (ICD) of the Office of Military Government for Germany (OMGUS), which had a drama unit responsible for the translation and the promotion of American plays for the Western German public, and which supported the translation and the staging of *A Streetcar Named Desire* first in Pforzheim and then in Berlin (Wolter 201, 205).

Italy was a borderline case, an "enemy ally," a former Fascist state which was under Allied military occupation, and whose cultural activities were controlled, between the first landing in Sicily (July 1943) and January 1, 1946, by the Psychological Warfare Branch (PWB), an office of the Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ) with a mixture of British and American personnel (Pizarroso Quintero 16-34, Forgacs and Gundle 218). The main focusses of the PWB in Italy were radio and the press, at the time the most widely-followed means of communication, and the easiest to control. Entertainment, too, was controlled; but whereas the film industry – for propaganda as well as for economic reasons – was a field of intervention and in some cases of competition between Italy and America (Forgacs and Gundle 146-67), the various offices of the Allied Military Government in Italy didn't seem to have specific concerns with theater and the little archival evidence that can be found of their intervention has more to do with approved than with vetoed scripts. This might have had to do with the nature of plays staged in the mid-40s (which had no sign of anti-Americanism while some films did) and with the smaller audiences of theatergoers in comparison with the masses that, before the advent of television, still crowded movie theaters: at the time of the invasion of Sicily, officers of the PWB brought into the country some 7,500 reels of "the best American films to be distributed in Italy" (Pizarroso Quintero 47) as a proper means of political propaganda.

At the date of the first performance of a Williams play in Italy, December 1946, the PWB had been suppressed for a whole year and, though cinema

was still a fruitful site for the American "potential and actual political impact" in Italy (Forgacs and Gundle 155), theaters were left to their provincialism and to the slow and difficult process of internationalization that single directors or producers were attempting. Italian stages were so hampered by wartime limitations that they could not even aspire to be globalized: early in 1945 some Northern Italian cities were still occupied, and their theaters out of service. At the same time, the cultural horizons of theatergoers, directors, and producers were quite narrow, steeped in a provincialism that was hard to shift toward a multicultural viewpoint. There was a physical occupation and a cultural monopoly that needed to be demolished in order for new ideas to find their way in the theaters. When *Lo zoo di vetro*, Williams' first work to be presented to Italians reached the stage in Rome on December 13, 1946, some members of the audience felt the need to hiss and boo the performance, shouting that instead of that foreign play, the company should have put up an Italian work (Guerrieri 3).

This narrow-minded reception – mainly due to the "cultural autarky" that Italian society had imbibed under Fascism and in the following years (Forgacs and Gundle 104) – was not reserved to Williams alone: another booing had hit the news six years before when the Cialente-Merlini company had staged Thornton Wilder's *Piccola città* (*Our Town*) in Milan. The police had had to intervene to stop the audience running riot: the dissent had ended up in an all-against-all brawl, while from the wings Elsa Merlini (who played Emily) pleaded with the actors playing the dead not to stir from their chairs (Afeltra 12). The play apparently garnered violent and sour welcomes in most Italian cities. The story goes that a young Pier Paolo Pasolini was in the Bologna theater the night of March 2, 1941, where *Piccola città* was staged, and during the inevitable fight between company and audience, he joined the actors on stage and started spitting on the scandalized public (Casi 34). As I argue in my essay, Italian censors soon realized that the Tennessee Williams-Luchino Visconti connection could pose some threats to their idea of an ethical ("clean," of course, would be their expression) theater show.

This section of *RSA Journal* has its roots in a panel I organized at the Fourth International Conference of American Drama and Theater held in Seville, Spain, on May 28-30, 2012. The theme was: "American Drama and its Stories," the title of the Conference: "The Romance of Theater." Our panel – namely "Transnational Perspectives on Tennessee Williams" – hosted colleagues from the United States, Italy, Belgium, and Serbia, even though Radmila Nastic, coming from the University of Belgrad, eventually decided not to submit her paper for publication.

The paper I read in Seville was published the same year in *A Streetcar Desire. From Pen to Prop* in its original, short form. Being part of a wider research on Tennessee Williams and Italy, the piece contained some observations that have led to the essay I'm presenting here, in which a number of previously unpublished documents regarding Italian stage censorship have been consulted to shed light on what was considered the *dangerous liaison* Williams-Visconti.

More insight into the transnational dynamics involved in cultural practices regarding Tennessee Williams' *ouevre* is offered by Giuliana Muscio, who studies the casting of the 1955 Oscar-winning film *The Rose Tattoo*, based on the play expressly written for Anna Magnani. Collard and Michiel's essay, on the other hand, shows how transcultural features do not only apply to the adaptations and receptions of plays, but pertain also to the exchange of ideas, inspirations, and mutual influences between artists of similar aesthetic credos. "Reciprocity and complicity," to use terms from the essay, between Jean Cocteau and Tennessee Williams are instrumental to the understanding of both artists. "Imitation" has not only to do with texts, but also with bodies, in an atmosphere of constant metamorphosis.

Two pieces fill the gap, so to say, left by Nastic's essay: Vincenzo Bavaro's insightful analysis of a less canonical play (*Eccentricities of a Nightingale* is a much less studied and produced version of *Summer and Smoke*) on the background of contemporary Hong Kong society and through the directing style chosen by David Kaplan. Lorenzo Piciarelli's essay juxtaposes *Orpheus Descending* to another French writer, namely Jean Paul Sartre, and to his play *La Putain Respectueuse*, to underline one more trend in the Williams-and-Europe paradigm.

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