CHAPTER 4

". . . a great crisis of identification and understanding of reality": Strehler's Journey Through Shakespeare

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Abstract

Shakespeare's plays proved crucial in Strehler's career in many respects as they provided 'narratives' through which he could interpret the sequence of cultural, political, and social crises that he acknowledged, experienced personally, and more or less directly addressed in his own theatre. This chapter explores how, through specific Shakespearean plays, these crises – which were both individual and collective – raised in Strehler questions on the nature of history. It also explores Strehler's interrogation of the meaning of man in a world dominated by monotonous and nonsensical power games from the perspective of a cyclic view of history. Strehler's encounter with Shakespeare is examined through his own writings as well as reviews and other related material. This constitutes a second-level focus mapping onto the role of different types of narratives in our reconstruction of Strehler's own dynamic understanding of Italy within the international context over a time-span of thirty years.

Keywords: Shakespeare; Strehler; crisis, narratives; history

1. ". . . everything could move in a direction or in its opposite"

In the years following the Second World War, theatre was at the core of a process of cultural, social, political, and aesthetic transformations in Italy. Looking for narratives which, while being capable of giving structure and order to events (White 1980, 1987), would serve social and ideological intents, and eager to offer universal themes which would please different tastes and social strata (see Prosperi

1978), translators, directors, and actors turned to the classics of European and international theatre. This choice was one of necessity, meant to sharpen the moral and civic conscience of those who would contribute to make some sense of the absurdity that war had just revealed; but it was also one closely related to the emerging awareness of living a "singular moment" of potentiality when, as Giorgio Strehler (1921-1997) defined 1945, "everything could move in a direction or in its opposite . . . everything could be born and everything could die" (qtd in Kessler 1974, 22)[1]. It was indeed the feeling of experiencing a moment of crisis – cultural, as well as civic, political, and social – the feeling of "crossing . . . an epochal threshold", as Koselleck would put it (2002, 240), that urged intellectuals to find new directions and answers to construct a meaningful sense of reality. Postwar theatre was at the epicentre of this process. It reflected the uncertainty of the time by staging the political and social anxieties explored in works by Sophocles, Gorkij, Ibsen, Molière, and Büchner. Indeed, these authors were a major impetus behind Italian intellectuals' elicitation of their own narrative of the crisis in the hope of moulding a new understanding of man and his role in the world. In this crucial hiatus between past and future, Giorgio Strehler's intuition of an "art theatre for everybody" (Hirst 1994, 6) and his fertile appropriation of Shakespeare's plays in discourses about the crisis offered new possibilities of social and political transformation. In particular, this essay will attempt to reconstruct Strehler's encounter with Shakespeare by looking at Strehler's own writings as well as the reviews and the documental material recording how experiences of crisis cropped up and were tackled in his Shakespearean productions. The focus will lie not so much on the productions themselves, as in the narrative interplay between different discourses around Strehler's selective uses of Shakespeare's plays. It will lie in how those discourses registered and at the same time produced trajectories of meaning around his exploration of the dialectic between man and history when history was itself becoming for him an issue of critical inquiry.

2. A New Cultural Scene. The Piccolo as a Civic and Political Response to Italian Theatrical (and Cultural) Postwar Isolation

Strehler's approaches to dramaturgy significantly contributed to the development of a new cultural scene in a country where practical considerations on renewing theatres were initially subordinated to political expediency aimed at giving the country new public infrastructures in place of those demolished by the recent bombings. Strehler's idea was indeed to transform what he had been considering a too "cosmopolitan, bourgeois, even petty-bourgeois" theatre (Grassi and Strehler 1964, 27) into an institution which needed to be at the core of the public affairs and the newly inaugurated Republic.

Milan, the emblem of the Italian Resistance movement, was the cultural and economic centre which would lead the country through the uncertainty of this critical time. It was here that, as pointed out by Coduri, a "political process of democratization of the institutions, with the reforming task of the intellectuals and artists integrated into this process" started (2013, 119-20; see also Poli 2007). Theatrical and political idealists with foresight firmly believed that, despite – or because of – the difficulties of the moment, cultural reconstruction processes could be the answer to solve what was perceived as a moral, economic, and political crisis, and help the country establish a new fabric of meaning about its past. Still paying the penalty of a Fascist organisation which "beneath its revolutionary appearance and its military rhetoric . . . consolidated petty-bourgeois tendencies" (Grassi and Strehler 1964, 28), postwar Italian theatre was eager for an urgent change. However, despite Giorgio Strehler's *Mitteleuropean* education, Italian theatre was isolated from the rest of Europe, with no real opportunities to experiment or even to dialogue with what had been happening elsewhere (Egle Mambrin 2013, 116-123, see also Ronfani 1986).

In order to resist this 'closure' in the choice of the subjects available and in line with the vision of an institution that, in keeping with the values of the Resistance and with the dream of a democratic society, now needed to be conceived as central to the citizens' wellbeing, Paolo Grassi and Giorgio Strehler gave birth to the first civic public theatre in Italy funded by the government: the Piccolo Teatro in Milan (1947). The fact that this cultural and social adventure was supported by politics – in the figure of Antonio Greppi, then Mayor of Milan, and Lamberto Jori, responsible for the cultural

activities in the city – served the purpose of emphasising the urgency of a relationship between intellectuals and the Italian governmental institution which would prove necessary in leading the country's social and cultural rebirth in this very critical historical time. As Paolo Grassi wrote in an article published in the Italian newspaper *Avanti!* on 25 April 1946, and significantly entitled "Teatro, pubblico servizio" ("Theatre, Public Service"), "just like the underground and the fire services, this very valuable public service must rely on the municipal support of the civic theatres" (Grassi 1946).

This close connection between cultural centres and political establishment proved to be particularly fruitful when Grassi and Strehler identified the venue for their artistic adventure: a building in Via Rovello 2 originally known as Cinema Broletto and later (in 1943) turned into the infamous site of the Comando della Legione Ettore Muti, a police station notoriously renowned for the tortures that took place in its rooms; a commemorative plaque is still affixed on its façade as a living memento. By contributing to the transformation of the urban and social function of this building, Grassi, Strehler, and Greppi established from the very beginning the driving force of a civic project designed to revalorise Milan through a redefinition of its historical sites. "In a town that had to start anew", says Coduri, "the role of culture was recognized as fundamental in building a democratic society, but also fundamental was considered the democratization of culture and the spreading of education" (2013, 120. See also Guazzotti 1965).

The Piccolo became therefore a social, moral, and spiritual project, as Apollonio wrote in a letter to Grassi (Locatelli 2015, 58), a 'public service' committed to promoting culture among the citizens. Of course, it was a risky ambition for Grassi and Strehler to enlist a new class of spectators among "the working class and the young, in the workshops, the offices, the schools, providing simple and convenient season tickets to strengthen the relationship between the theatre and the spectators, offering, nevertheless, high-quality performances at the best possible price" (qtd in Acquarone 2009, 35). No longer focusing on pure entertainment, the Piccolo immediately revealed a Brechtian influence in offering itself as an instrument to shake the consciences of theatergoers and educate them to a new civic and social responsibility; it was an aesthetic and 'political' move that had a great impact

on Italy's national theatre for many decades. Grassi recalls that the spectators at the Piccolo were

> generations who, by attending our performances, have developed their awareness of the society, of the social commitment, of the ethical conscience, of the civic maturity, [because of] the questions and the problems raised by the texts we have performed . . . I have always agreed with Gramsci's theatrical conception, namely of a theatre which starts before and ends after, which, even at its utmost aesthetic level, does not end with the performance. (qtd in Piselli 2005, 11)

Thus, 1947 marked the beginning of a new phase for the Italian theatre and a new, successful path to cope with the Italian cultural and social postwar crisis while bringing the name of the country back into the international limelight. Conceived of as a challenge to contemporary theatre and as an opportunity to offer a new range of plays so far precluded by Fascist impositions (see Tessari 1996, 82-3), the Piccolo Teatro rejected both extreme experimentalism and subservience to fashions. As stated in the "Lettera Programmatica per il P.T. della città di Milano" (a sort of Manifesto for the Piccolo Teatro of the City of Milan), the intellectuals involved in the project rejected "the experiments of pure literature . . . the decorations of pure scenic design . . . the unnecessary endorsement of fashion . . . any concession to the sensuality of the multitude . . . clichés, commonplaces, the conformism of political and social practice" (Mazzocchi and Bentoglio 1997, 34). The civic and social function of this new 'public service', focused on "the spectators – the theatre's quiet and committed chorus" (ibid.), was determined to offer a high-quality repertoire, but also to avoid cultural elitism (an absolute pre-condition for Strehler and Grassi). Shakespeare was one of the solutions.

2. Strehler, Shakespeare, and the "circle of history"

Strehler's career was punctuated by the direction of twelve Shakespearean productions

(Dymkowsky 2000 and Poli 2007) and, as seen in Chapter 3 of this volume, a collaboration with Renato Simoni for the 1948 *Romeo and Juliet* performance inaugurating the Verona Shakespeare's Festival at the Roman Theatre (see below Appendix to this chapter). In that year he also directed *Richard II* at the Piccolo and *The Tempest* at the Boboli Garden in Florence. As discussed in the last section of this essay, *The Tempest* proved crucial in his career and this becomes apparent in the light of the overall trajectory of Strehler's experiments with Shakespeare between 1948 and 1983; an experience deeply concerned with the sequence of cultural, political, and philosophical crises that he acknowledged, experienced personally, and more or less directly addressed in his own theatre. These crises – which were both individual and collective – raised in him questions on the meaning of man and history in a world dominated by monotonous and nonsensical games of the powerful which, as he showed in his 1965-1966 production bearing this same title, *Il gioco dei potenti* (*The Game of the Powerful*), made humanity resemble anonymous circus figures fighting on the stage of life, always and repetitively in the same way. As Strehler himself declared in an interview to Ralph Berry, "all the plays of Shakespeare are to be seen as a grand allegory of history in which all those with power are kings, who kill each other for power, the power which corrupts. It's a process from which the people are absent" (qtd in Berry 1989, 126). Indeed, he was fascinated by what he defined as a "cyclic view of history" (ibid.). From its outset, Strehler's encounter with Shakespeare was, indeed, in the name of history and politics.

Luigi Squarzina has drawn a telling portrait of Strehler's civic commitment and response to moments of crisis (both domestic and international), starting precisely with *Richard II*, a play focused on the psychological complexities of characters trapped in historical, political, and philosophical questions arising from a discussion on the legitimacy of power. *Richard II* opened the second season of the Piccolo and foreran the Director's later much debated and deeply engaging experiment with *Henry VI* (*The Game of the Powerful* mentioned above). Squarzina recalls how on that 23 April 1948, while "the curtains of Via Rovello opened and closed infinite times in that triumphant night, in the middle of Europe there fell what Churchill called *the iron curtain* between

the communist countries and western democracies" (Squarzina 2009, n.p.). That night followed the Italian general elections only by few days, which had seen the conservatives led by Alcide De Gasperi crush the opposition of reformists Palmiro Togliatti and Pietro Nenni, inaugurating the long-lasting Christian Democrat 'age' of the so-called First Republic. Echoes of this radical opposition could be perceived in Strehler's *Richard II*. The war of the Roses was shown on a bare Elizabethan-like stage, with the avail of simple props and papier-mâché horses. With "those naive means" Strehler wished to prove to the audience that "one of the greatest theatrical cultures had needed nothing else to achieve the sublime and the horrible" (ibid.). Despite Alberto Savinio's harsh critique lamenting the disappearance of language under the burden of theatrical gesture (Savinio 1948), and occasional jokes on the grotesque use of papier-mâché horses (e.g. Dini 1948), the production was acclaimed for its overall freedom from bourgeois conventions, reflecting the audience's simple tastes, and its attempt to refine them (e.g. Florindo 1948; Dini 1948).

Between *Richard II* and *The Game of the Powerful*, another Shakespearean history play, *Richard III* (1949-1950), supplied Strehler with yet another story of death and destruction deeply ingrained in history, whose implications stretched far beyond its time towards the present. The play's nonstop engagement with death and fear was not received favourably. Violence was not exorcised on stage, but exhibited in its most obsessive and mournful tones. The play was unanimously judged a funereal production: placed on a fairly bare stage, resembling a morgue, as Dino Buzzati vividly put it, Richard failed to get into the part, to become the real protagonist, intent as he was on pursuing glory and death. His tragedy was a "monodimensional statement of human hell, a word very familiar to us", wrote Riccardo Rebora (1950, n.p.). Memories of one such hell were still fresh. As Raul Radice pointed out,

> [m]an's negative and destructive potentials have already been posited in absolute terms. Compared to them, even the nuclear bombs say nothing new . . . This is why Strehler . . . has given the performance a sense of doom under the sign of a dominant black, of vivid

> lights, of doors opening and closing with no hand pushing. (Radice 1950; see also Tempera 2004)

But Shakespeare's play also offered Strehler the possibility to investigate and stage something even more radical: the "presence of the Monstrous in us" which Strehler's generation had discovered through the "traumatic experience" of war. As the Director himself avowed, "behind Shakespeare's monsters there lurked the 'black dog' of Vittorini's men", i.e. the black symbolism of Fascism (qtd in Lombardo 1979, 281).[2] The production was not a success precisely for the overwhelming burden of darkness and monotonous horror it displayed. It is perhaps not coincidental that the 1953-1954 production of *Julius Caesar* was entirely forgetful of Fascist Caesarism.[3]

In 1957 Fascist allusions sneaked into another Shakespearean play, *Coriolanus*, but this time from a different angle, no longer obsessively bleak and horrific, but alienating. Strehler deemed it especially difficult to deal with this play also on account of the paucity of relevant criticism which, for him, was always a necessary condition to interpret and adapt texts for his own productions. However, he found a dialectic between the absolutism of the patrician general and the political manipulations of the tribunes 'representing' the plebs which he thought would be relevant to his time. Discarding the idealist interpretation of the tragedy as one of pride, Strehler read Coriolanus as an "entirely irrational [figure], entirely outside history, detached from the collectivity around him". The production also focused on

> the succession of relations among plebeians – decisions and indecisions, mistakes and victories – and of the tribunes with the plebeians. In the light of reality, the unity and coherence of the patrician class is only revealed to be illusory and the definition of moral incoherence towards the plebs is revealed superficial and arbitrary – as, on the other hand, the duplicity, the personalistic politicalness, the ambition of the tribunes is transformed into and objective position of class struggle which opposes its politics to another politics.

(Strehler 1957-1958)

Stimulated by Brecht's invitation to look at the play more closely, after hearing Strehler say that "it's horrible, fascist, impossible" (Hirst 1993, 69), the performance's message turned out to be quite clear and acutely implicated with the recent past that *Julius Caesar* had shunned; this is how it was perceived by reviewer and dramatist Ghigo De Chiara:

> For him [Coriolanus], war is the only way to prove patriotic: what this patriotism is appears distinctly when his country no longer coincides with his interests and ambitions. Then, once established that 'l'État c'est moi', Coriolanus goes armed against Rome, joining forces with the worst enemies of his own people. This is the thesis underlined by Giorgio Strehler's *mise en scene*. This pressing and lucid analysis of that Fascism which over the millennia has represented the constant temptation of the reactionaries (who often firstly seek the diversion of the batons, and then of the imperial adventures, when their power is impeded by constitutional laws), such an analysis – I was saying – has found on the stage of the Piccolo a disconcertingly effective dimension. (De Chiara 1957)

Marking a turning point, after which Strehler committed himself more consistently to the "ethics and stage devices of epic theatre" (see Hirst 1993, 63ff.), *Coriolanus* prepared the crucial experience of *The Game of the Powerful*, which, inspired by the three parts of *Henry VI*, Strehler revived twice, consecutively in the 1964-1965 and 1965-1966 seasons.[4] Suffice it to mention one instance of how the play bent to the Director's ideological intent of underlining "both the pacifism and the condemnation of pseudorevolutionary spontaneism and amateurish maximalisms" (Squarzina 2009). The episode was Jack Cade's revolt, which he changed in the finale so that the rebels instead of simply being pardoned are eventually convinced to enrol themselves in the army and are seen to parade while singing patriotic hymns. The play was evidently a contemptuous

representation of war policies and political games: “since 1960”, writes Squarzina,

> war has been fought in Korea, in 1964, the conflict in Vietnam . . . turns out to be the war between the United States and North Vietnam. The Long March has led Mao to Beijing, but in Taiwan a second China has been given birth to with the support of the Americans, who are unable to get rid of Fidel Castro from Cuba; not to mention the Germans who are separated by a fatal wall but ‘live under the same roof’. (Ibid.)

Squarzina’s identification of the *Henry VI* plays’ engagement with international crises and war interests is reinforced by the production’s possible allusions to a national threat of economic crisis which “is looming ahead with increasing contrasts between the Communist Party and the centre-left, two Roses that, far from the example set in Great Britain, no third dynasty can unify” (ibid.).

Thus, the grandiose spectacle mounted at the Teatro Lirico with thirty actors and stars such as Valentina Cortese and Franco Graziosi, was received as “an extraordinary metaphor not only of the past, present, and future Italian situation, but also of History per se, fluctuating over the abyss” (ibid.). However, once again the critical reaction was not unanimous; Strehler’s dissatisfaction, compounded with the frustrations experienced in the following years and increased by the scene of contestation of 1968, and the attacks he received from the younger generation, led to his resignation as Artistic Director of the Piccolo Teatro (Horowitz 2004, 97), to found another experimental theatre: Teatro e Azione (Theatre and Action).

Strehler’s bond with his audience, in particular with the young generations, was broken. Accused by the New Left of being too reactionary, conservative, and disinclined towards experimentalism (which he had intentionally avoided in order to widen his audience), he “was targeted as one of the establishment figures against whom the students voiced their discontent” (McManus 2008, 446). Student criticism was also coupled with the disapproval of groups of intellectuals who reacted against his idea of a theatre that – they felt – was too subservient to the

ideologies of the government financing it. Looking for theatrical experimentation, in 1967 Nuccio Ambrosino, Corrado Augias, Eugenio Barba, Franco Quadri, Dario Fo, Luca Ronconi, Aldo Trionfo, Italo Moscati, and Carmelo Bene – to name but a few – had met at Ivrea and drafted a Manifesto entitled *Per un convegno sul nuovo teatro* (*For a Conference on the New Theatre*). They were advocating a theatrical renewal, currently perceived to be at a stalemate (see Visone 2010 and Coduri 2013), through avant-garde experimentalism; a political theatre which could explore the potential of playtexts through a dialogue between actors, directors, and audience, in contrast with Strehler's vision of a 'Director's theatre' (Tessari 1996, 121-5).[5] These ideas were again voiced, one year later, by Pier Paolo Pasolini, who in 1968 drew up his own *Manifesto per il nuovo teatro* (*Manifesto for a New Theatre*). There Pasolini considered as prospective audience only that part of the middle-class which comprised "the most advanced groups . . . namely those few thousands of intellectuals from every city whose cultural interest, though maybe naive, provincial, is real" (Pasolini 1968, n.p.). Certainly influenced by the Ivrea experience, Pasolini alluded to Giorgio Strehler with scorn:

> A Lady attending civic theatres, never missing any important 'opening nights' at Strehler's, Visconti's or Zeffirelli's productions, is warmly advised not to go to the performances of the New Theatre. Or, if with her symbolic, pathetic fur coat, she will attend the performances, she will find at the entrance a sign on which it is written that ladies with fur coats will have to pay thirty times more than the normal cost of the ticket (which will be very low). (Ibid.)

As stated in an article published by Arturo Lazzari (A.L.) in *l'Unità* on 22 July 1968, in his resignation letter Strehler had claimed "independent choices and responsibility" presumably prompted by a feeling of "[d]issatisfaction, bitterness, and frustration" which eventually led him to abandon the Piccolo. He found it too difficult to deal with the younger artists and their disinterest in

the playtext. After all, for Strehler, the director's understanding of the text and the potential for creative work in the theatrical production had to be necessarily subservient to critical discourse (as demonstrated by his letters written to Agostino Lombardo in his artistic maturity). In his "Appunti di regia della *Tempesta* del 1978 (seconda edizione)" ("Notes on the direction of 1978 *La Tempesta* – second edition)", he would insist on the pivotal attention to be paid to the original words. By referring to his two productions of *La Tempesta* (1948 and 1978) and, in particular, to his 1972 Italian production of *King Lear*, he underlined the power of Shakespeare's language to speak to different audiences in different times, as evidenced by the resounding success of his *Re Lear* "on the international stages, in these years, in different languages" (Strehler 1978-1979). But texts were of no interest for "'young' people who are too ignorant, pretentious, cynical, and therefore 'spoiled' to be the 'youth' – supported by 'old' people who are busy playing the part of an assumed youth". Strehler could not accept the "desecration" of what he considered "a whole to be understood and communicated. The text as a unique matrix for the theatre – which indicates, drives, suggests every sound and gestural solution because it contains it, because it belongs to it" (ibid.).

This was a turning point in Strehler's career when, through Shakespeare, he voiced his own artistic and personal crisis. It is not a coincidence that in 1972, when Strehler returned to direct the Piccolo, he chose to stage Shakespeare's *King Lear*. In an interview published in the newspaper *Gazzetta di Parma* he claimed that the play revolved around a "generational clash", and acknowledged that, "while there are playtexts which I have been dreaming of producing for years and of which now I care little about, I am now fascinated by a playtext that I have never thought of producing and that *I now feel I must produce*" (Mezzadri 1972). He thus expressed an artistic and existential urgency following the events of the late 1960s, from the Ivrea Conference, to Pasolini's *Manifesto*, and, of course, the 1968 protests. His return was hailed as a reaction to that crisis which was both "a crisis of the institutions" and a generational one, as Benvenuto Cuminetti underlined in his review of the *Re Lear*'s premiere:

> It [Strehler's resignation] was a break connected with the crisis of institutions, with a desire to do theatre in a different way, with a commitment to realising alternative experiences with more flexible structures and with groups determined to become protagonists of that same dramatic proposal. . . . The 'crisis' of these years has not been accidental, the questions and the requests of renewal were grounded, many of the experiences matured against the background of the contestation are reference points that cannot be eradicated. (Cuminetti 1972)

That political and social context foregrounded Strehler's awareness of the precarious relation between the young and the old, two worlds constructed on radically different ideologies whose mutual incommunicability positioned their protagonists on opposite fronts. This is what stands behind Strehler's choice of *King Lear*. Shakespeare's play provided him with what Burke called an "equipment for living" (1973) in times of crisis, a 'narrative' of a generational gap which could help unfold the depths of a distance between "few 'survivors', like prehistoric animals, oppressive and tragic in their historicity . . . [and] a pack of 'youngsters' . . . , almost the image of today's ruthless youth, hair, faces, manners, even cruelty and uncertainty" (qtd in Kessler 1974, 180). The young are shown to clash against those "prehistoric animals" in a "dialectical conflict" that, as described by Mimma Forlani in a review of 1974, was

> scenically foregrounded in their remarkably different costumes: the kings are made out of papier-mâché, their garments are worn out, their pale faces are framed by white beards; the young ones, instead, have windswept hair, metal curls and clawed hands, flaming lips ready to burn. The young are the sons of the twentieth century, the old instead come from the next world (their different perspectives could not be better highlighted), sort of wrecks who continue to survive even if by now they seem to have nothing more to say. (Forlani 1974b; see also Forlani 1974a and 1974c)

This *Re Lear* was the result of Strehler's agonised meditation upon the parabola of old age, and a further example of how Shakespeare's plays provided a filter through which Strehler could investigate the implications raised by the uncertainty of the times in Italian history and in his more personal experience. The performance was to be revived at the Paris Odéon in the 1977-1978 season, when Strehler was also to repeat his early production of *The Tempest*, a play which, as he wrote in 1983, "had secretly and constantly remained present in [his] long investigation of Shakespeare – and therefore on man and his history" (Strehler 1983). Indeed *Re Lear* and *La tempesta* are secretly bound.

3. *The Tempest* as "the ultimate question upon man's destiny and history"

Strehler remarked that since his 1948 edition of the play at the Boboli Garden in Florence, "in an enchanted night, with fountains and water plays, fireworks and the divine unconsciousness of youth",

> many other Shakespearean texts have come to the fore in a long journey that has reached *King Lear*. And it is from *Lear* that, years later, *The Tempest* starts: from certain achievements or understandings derived from the work carried out on an abysmal masterpiece which is first and foremost a journey towards knowledge, a road through darkness leading to a particle of light – human and poetic. (Strehler 1977-1978)

The records of that early production show Strehler's fresh interest in metatheatre, which in the 1978 and 1983 repeats enlarged its scope to recover and emphasise the original didactic concern of The Piccolo, as well as a need to respond to the time's anxiety produced by "mass media" culture and "confusion of languages" and more personal questions about theatre. "I do not know", he wrote in the same 1978 piece, "if this choice reflects a somewhat 'obscurely collective' need, or if instead it

is, more than on other occasions (almost an exception), a deep need of my theatricality, now at its last turning. I do not know whether the ultimate message of *The Tempest*, so desperately alone, may represent something necessary in today's terrible distraction" (ibid.). For Strehler, who had to cope with that need in the late 1970s, after the cultural and personal crisis of 1968 and his experience of *Lear*, Shakespeare's plays meant pursuing that theatrical and ontological truth (and meaning) which are at the heart of his artistic quest. The choice of working on *The Tempest* is indeed Strehler's personal challenge as "an artist" to stage what he describes as an "impossible", unachievable play. Strehler wondered

> whether this unquiet light of hope-hopelessness, this ultimate interrogation on man's destiny may shake the fibre of that 'summary of the world' which is the audience. It seemed to be so for *King Lear* too, but then we realised that the human collective – that collective bombarded by the mass media, the confusion of languages – instead wanted to gather themselves around great words written by a great man and poet who after many centuries could still speak 'directly' to our contemporaneity; and who knew how to gather, together, in an astonished and understanding silence. (Ibid.)

La tempesta was Strehler's way of attempting a comment on the conditions of man and his role in history. But it was also Strehler's way of showing the contradictions of a theatrical machine which, particularly in this play, is glorified as a powerful "means of knowledge and history" while at the same time exposed as "useless, terribly useless or insufficient" to make sense of – but also 'because of' – the "movement of life that always exceeds it" (ibid.).

Earlier on, in 1948, in obvious disagreement with the premises stated in the "Lettera Programmatica", that first production was all but a rejection of the "decorations of pure scenic design". This is how it appeared in Gian Giacomo Colli's detailed description:

> The stage, or more precisely, the multi-level structure on which the final set was built, was constructed on the island dominated by the *Fontana dell'Oceano* . . . The fountain features a statue of the Ocean-god created by Giambologna, in a high and dominant position . . . Around the island, bordered by a series of balustrades, is the artificially constructed basin, encircled by a footpath separated from the water by a barrier, accessible from four directions roughly corresponding to the points of a compass. The island is attached to the mainland by two bridges facing East and West. The entire area was divided in two. The part from where the frontal view of the statue was visible, became an amphitheatre, with the two bridges, that were probably used as entrances and exits from the set, to close the semicircle. . . With the lowering of the curtain of water, there appeared a deserted, rocky island. Among little meadows made of raffia full of openings and traps (from which appeared Ariel, Iris, Ceres, the spirits, nymphs) stairways and statues emerged, and also mountains which fell straight to the water. The bottom of the basin was full of branches of reddish coral. The spaces in the balaustrades were filled with lemon plants lit by footlights. At the top of the island sat Giambologna's statue, like a sort of vanishing point, in front of which opened Prospero's cave. (Colli 2004, 177-8)

Strehler's continuous attention to the theatrical machine, which keeps questioning the spectators' awareness of the deceptiveness of their theatrical experience (where the realms of reality and fiction are closely interrelated) resulted in a lavish production. And yet, despite the visual triumph, he had not overlooked the text.

Already at that early stage, before its 1977-1978 revision, he had identified the potential for experimentation offered by the *Commedia dell'Arte* which he had famously been working on in the first 1947 season with his much acclaimed version of Carlo Goldoni's *Arlecchino servo di due padroni* (*Servant of Two Masters*). His innovative choice was to cast Trinculo and Stefano as two characters of the *Commedia*, resembling Pulcinella and Zanni, respectively, and to have them speak

in Neapolitan and Venetian dialects. The suggestion, for the latter choice, came to him from the "Coragio, bully-monster, coragio" cue in Stefano's address to Caliban in 5.1.258, which he interpreted as unequivocally Venetian. Philological details aside, which would suggest more caution, Strehler was irremovable in this respect, although not quite happy with the final result. In his epistolary exchanges with Agostino Lombardo (translator for the 1977-1978 production), he remembered that "the 'words' translated in a Neapolitan dialect by Quasimodo-Vittorio Caprioli-Strehler" in fact did not work well (Colombo 2007, 53; see also Perlman 2015: 371-2). Salvatore Quasimodo himself had lamented the detrimental effect upon Caliban of the "two drunken devils speaking in jargon", who ended up downplaying his role to that of a "melancholic buffoon" (Quasimodo 1948).

On the whole, however, the two 'masks' turned out to be very enjoyable and generally well received by Italian critics who found these comic figures entertaining: "with their jokes [they] amused even our contemporary shrewd spectators" (Bemporad 1948). This linguistic choice was also applauded in the 1977-1978 version of the play where the new translator, Agostino Lombardo, could find a good compromise between the dialect and a regionally nuanced Italian. Even John Francis Lane, a foreign critic who generally disapproved of Italian performances of Shakespeare, praised the clowns coming "straight from the *Commedia dell'Arte*", without looking like the "refined eighteenth-century version familiar from productions Strehler's own well-traveled *Servant of Two Masters*, but the knockabout Italian comics of the sixteenth-century, the kind which Shakespeare probably saw himself and which were the equivalent of the Elizabethan clowns he created for his audiences" (1979, 309).

And yet, in the 1948 production, Strehler's attention to *Commedia dell'Arte* (perceptible in the use of masks typical of that tradition) may also be read as a possible reminder of Italy's lack of national cohesiveness in a crucial moment for the country. The adoption of the Neapolitan and the Venetian dialects by two figures of discreditable conduct (although very entertaining) might have indeed raised questions on Italianness and socio-regional discriminations in a period when any real

connection between North and South was alarmingly lacking. As Grassi and Strehler acknowledged, "the permanent problems of the Italian theatre are the fundamental problems of Italy. The most important of these is the problem of the Italian nation" (Grassi and Strehler 1964, 28). According to them, after the Second World War, Italy was still perceived as "a federation, only now in the process of becoming a nation. There are insuperable obstacles to the diffusion of culture, to the diffusion of theatre, . . . between North and South . . . Every great modern theatre is linked to a nation" (ibid.). Strehler's attempt to bring to the scene two different masked characters, one Venetian and one Neapolitan (but both originating from the *Commedia*), "speaking in jargon" might have possibly prompted his spectators to address issues related to (lack of) national identity. In keeping with the socially committed ethos expressed in the manifesto of the Piccolo Teatro and in line with Strehler's desire of laying the foundations for an (Italian) great modern theatre, this *La Tempesta* was in fact successfully responding, as Grassi and Strehler point out, to the Piccolo's main aspiration of "liv[ing] in the historical and aesthetical reality of its time, and . . . develop[ing] with its time" (Grassi and Strehler 1964, 37). Strehler's insistence on the importance of national cohesiveness, together with *La Tempesta*'s celebration of social peace – particularly evident in the 1948 production's grandiose finale "with a display of fireworks" (Mason Vaughan 2011, 136) – powerfully contributed to the growth of a civic awareness of this postwar audience who, according to Colli, could find in the piece "a metaphorical celebration of recovered social peace as well as of the theatre as a rediscovered social space" (2004, 183). Strehler, however, was never completely satisfied with this production, as he felt that it had been brought on stage "with few rehearsals, little meditation [over the play], much anxiety wiped out by the urgency of 'bringing the show to stage' whatever it takes" (Strehler 1992, 21). But that was only Strehler's first experiment with how this playtext could help his long-life exploration of the dialectic relationship between man and history.

A second *La Tempesta* (1978), now in Agostino Lombardo's translation and with Luciano Damiano's set design, seemed to be the necessary answer, at least in part, to the political turmoil of the late 1970s. During "the Years of the Bullet" (Ginsborg 1990, 379) Italy was indeed traumatised

by the many (left and right) militant groups who fought their ideological battles through violent action. This second *La Tempesta*, Strehler wrote,

> was born at a time which to me had all the overtones of the Apocalypse. It was the tragic season of Aldo Moro's murder. Yet a degraded Apocalypse where everything was mixed up, everything (insurrection, calculated murder, political ritual) was nullified within a horrible apathy. History was not outside the place where we were building our performance. (Strehler 1983)

History had invaded the theatre, although not as directly as one might be brought to surmise by this statement. In a conference discussion of 1979, Strehler specified that "*The Tempest* cannot contain a lecture upon our contemporaneous historical problems, it has nothing directly to do with the kidnapping of Aldo Moro, nor with the crisis of our society" (1979, 301). The play was instead more profoundly connected with what he defined as "a great crisis of identification and understanding of reality which is one of the problems that are in front of us – this journey towards an understanding of mankind is extremely important precisely in front of the blindness of a certain historical moment" (ibid.). Shakespeare's play was once again appropriated to address a "crisis of identification and understanding of reality", to disentangle the mysteries of a cyclic nature of history, which is constantly punctuated by iterative crises. Thus, he worked on

> images, sounds, meanings that, by 'going against' a certain kind of contemporary history, reveal themselves, today as well as yesterday, as an active gesture of rejection of nothingness, a violent attempt to contrast this disintegration of the intellect . . . *The Tempest* is 'a desperate play' but, at the same time, an active one, which does not demand the suicidal gesture of the refusal to be men, but it demands to be better men. (Strehler 1979, 301)

After all, Shakespeare's last play was "a terrible story, and one revived thousands, millions of times in different ways in mankind's history"; it was a "story of usurpation and crime, of betrayal between brothers" (Strehler 2002, 5), of a disorder (the antimasques) resolved by Prospero's final power to re-establish order. As remarked in Luigi Lunari's review of 28 October 1978, here Strehler "continue[d] the reflection on power and History". Whether this was his only concern,[6] it is undeniable that Shakespeare's last play attempted to discuss the idea of the power of men, of magicians, of politicians, of art itself, and by consequence, and no less important, of the director over his spectators.

The dream island where Prospero (the man, the magician, the master of politics, the director) abandons his powers and seals social peace is the result of a long meditation upon, and solution to, the profanity of violence, the demeaning of sense, and the vanity – and corruptibility – of power. It is, therefore, to this ideological context that this *Tempest* belongs, and it is against this context that this production must be read: as a further attempt to "snatch another fragment of truth about the world" (Strehler 1977-78). Its being staged at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan, in "a closed space with well-defined volumes with which one can play or clash" (Grassi and Strehler 1964, 40), made it less spectacular than the former production. The scenography was simpler, far from the magnificence of the Boboli Gardens, reflecting a "more limited view of human potential" (Mason Vaughan 2011, 137) against betrayals and disappointment. The production was then repeated in 1983 in France, opening the first season of the Théâtre de l'Europe, and again in Rome and Milan (season 1983-84). That was Strehler's own last Shakespearean word upon theatre and history:

> . . . the ultimate cry of the failure of a human and wonderful project, which has not succeeded. It [*The Tempest*] is the ultimate question upon man's destiny and history, upon its contradictions and poetry, and therefore upon theatre. Theatre as the closest paraphrase to life. And it leaves within ourselves – now that we are at our last cues – not a bitter taste,

> it is too great for this, but a quiet feeling of deep pain, as if in the light of sunset, when we would like that everything were born in the light of a first day of creation; it leaves a deep suffering for this human destiny that so painfully tries to unfold itself for mankind, and not against it. (Strehler 1983)

Conclusion

In a span of time (1948-1984) which has proved critical to the country's history and to Strehler's personal career, Shakespeare's plays represented a journey towards an (im)possible understanding of mankind. At the core of all these plays, there is Shakespeare's attempt to comprehend man's fascination with evil and power. In Strehler's productions the same fascination resurfaces in the formulation of narratives upon the complexity of history and its dialectic relationship with man. Indeed, while proving useful in coping with, and interpreting, the social, political, and artistic crises that originated in particular historical and personal moments, Strehler's productions of *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Coriolanus*, *The Game of the Powerful*, *King Lear*, and, more evidently, *The Tempest* (the first and last of his Shakespearean works) also provided a space for the Director to investigate the inscrutability of the "circle of history", as he himself seems to allude when he unravelled the ultimate message of his *La Tempesta*:

> And yet, at the same time, *The Tempest*, which closes for the last time for us precisely at the moment of our realization of being in check, conveys to us another quiet and deep awareness that it is only mankind's achievement – which is not only the achievement of pity, justice or tenderness, but the acceptance of human reality as it is, beyond the sweet utopia, beyond the iridescent screen of the great projects, the hard, harsh reality – only the achieved and accepted reality may really help man to take the world in his own hands not to destroy or humiliate it, as he seems to be doing at every turn of its history. (Qtd in Berry 1989, 126)

Although subservient to the artistic value of a piece where Prospero's (and the director's) magic remains the main theme (see Mason Vaughan 2011, 138 and 143), *La Tempesta* represents a final attempt in Strehler's career to voice, through Shakespeare, the anxieties generated by crucial political periods in Italian history and culture. And, through this last play, the "impossible" journey to understand mankind has come to an end.

This is what the documents we have examined in the reconstruction of Strehler's encounter with Shakespeare tell us at one level. But there are also other levels we are concerned with here. Unless we have visual recordings of the productions, as in the case of *The Tempest* of 1978, we can only access them through what we can read about them, and it is precisely those writings that weave a 'narrative of multiple crises' that no single production may ever contain or convey individually. What they tell us is a story of the Italian attempted recovery from traumatic memories of war and Fascism at a time of perceived possibilities for change and cultural renewal. Strehler's *Richard III*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Coriolanus* mark different stages in this respect, and the reviewers' reactions, especially with regard to *Richard III*, tell us that Italian audiences, at times criticised for their generally simplistic bourgeois tastes, were unprepared to see reflected on stage the 'monstrosity in us' recalling too fresh memories of unbearable violence. These were significantly erased in Strehler's *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare's most connoted play in Italy for its Fascist indelible memories, and were tackled from a different, more analytical, angle in his *Coriolanus*. This was perceived and appreciated. The fact that poets, writers, and artists such as Savinio, Quasimodo, and Pasolini did not spare critique shows that critical militancy was alive at various levels in 1948 as it was in 1968, and that theatre in Italy was a cultural arena and hotbed of ideas potentially endowed with political meaning. It is singular that in 1948 Savinio criticised Strehler for lack of attention to the text of *Richard II* on the same ground on which in 1978 Strehler himself was to criticise the young's incapacity to understand Shakespeare's language. But thirty years separate the two dates and what for Savinio was excess of theatrical gesture as an unfortunate dramaturgical choice

harmful to the power of language for Strehler was to become the symptom of a deeper cultural crisis involving the youth's intellectual paucity. In the same 1948 Quasimodo thought that the experiment with dialects in *The Tempest* was detrimental to Caliban, and like Savinio's, his critique was dramaturgical and interpretative, although Strehler's choice might have a had deeper cultural commitment to questions of national identity. But in 1968 Pasolini's attack was on a different note, it was unquestionably socio-political. The times had changed and at that point the debate on theatre was inevitably politically inflected. The crisis registered in the late 1960s and 1970s involved social and generational conflicts, and this also translated into what for Strehler became a deeper perception of a broader and more essential crisis concerning history and the game of the powerful. Squarzina's more recent reconstruction of Strehler's civic commitment puts into perspective the critiques of connivance with the establishment he received in those years, which testify to a period of social and cultural turbulence characterised by neat political binarism and opposed extremisms. Strehler's own memories disclose his painful awareness of that critical period at various levels, personal as well as socio-cultural. His encounter with Shakespeare unfolded for him the narrative of the game of the powerful as a circle in history that man could not escape: a story of cyclic repetitiveness of power policies that does not leave scope for hope, exposing the delusory nature of all pseudo-revolutionary projects. In those years other Italian directors were to cope with similar issues from different perspectives; but what is of interest here is that beyond each single production, Strehler's journey through Shakespeare spells out, in the narratives of the times about it and in Squarzina's retrospective view, two closely connected moments of cultural transition in a time-span of thirty years in Italy's history: the late '40s, when a feeling of change did not fully admit memories of the recent traumatic experience of war and the Italian Ventennio, and the late '60s and '70s, when doing away with the 'fathers' was the Italian, and international, youth's response to the past and commitment to a new, different future. Shakespeare was for Strehler a response to both; he was also an answer to his own painful questions about the recent past as well as the contemporary generational crisis. His memories and the ones of those who entered the discussion weave for us a

complex narrative of those times.

Appendix: Strehler's Productions of Shakespeare

1947-1948	*Richard II*	translation: Cesare Vico Lodovici scenes: Gianni Ratto costumes: Ebe Colciaghi music: Fiorenzo Carpi cast: Armando Alzelmo, Antonio Battistella, Lilla Brignone, Antonio Crast, Carlo D'Angelo, Renata Donati, Mario Feliciani, Ettore Gaipa, Nino Manfredi, Grazia Migneco, Marcello Moretti, Franco Parenti, Camillo Pilotto, Gianni Santuccio, Giancarlo Sbragia venue: Piccolo Teatro Milano, 23-04-1948
1947-1948	*The Tempest*	translation: Salvatore Quasimodo orchestra leader: Ettore Gracis scenes: Gianni Ratto costumes: Ebe Colciaghi music: Fiorenzo Carpi cast: Antonio Battistella, Lilla Brignone, Carlo D'Angelo, Giorgio De Lullo, Mario Feliciani, Ettore Gaipa, Nino Manfredi, Marcello Moretti, Camillo Pilotto, Luisa Rossi, Gianni Santuccio, Edoardo Toniolo venue: Giardino di Boboli, XI Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Firenze, 6-06-1948
1947-1948	*Romeo and Juliet*	translation: Salvatore Quasimodo director: Renato Simoni (assistant: Giorgio Strehler) scenes: Pino Casarini costumes: Emma Calderini music: Mario Labroca cast: Edda Albertini, Antonio Battistella, Lilla Brignone, Giorgio De Lullo, Marcello Moretti, Renzo Ricci, Gianni Santuccio, Gualtiero Tumiati venue: Teatro Romano, Estate Teatrale Veronese Verona, 26-07-1948
1948-1949	*The Taming of the Shrew*	translation: Cesare Vico Lodovici director: Giorgio Strehler scenes: Giulio Coltellacci costumes: Ebe Colciaghi music: Fiorenzo Carpi cast: Antonio Battistella, Silverio Blasi, Alberto Bonucci, Lilla Brignone, Marcello Moretti,

		Gianni Santuccio venue: Piccolo Teatro Milano, 17-02-1949
1949-1950	*Richard III*	translation: Salvatore Quasimodo director: Giorgio Strehler scenes: Giulio Coltellacci costumes: Giulio Coltellacci music: Fiorenzo Carpi cast: Edda Albertini, Lilla Brignone, Filiberto Conti, Carlo D'Angelo, Ottavio Fanfani, Mario Feliciani, Gina Graziosi, Grazia Migneco, Marcello Moretti, Antonio Pierfederici, Renzo Ricci, Lellina Roveri, Gianni Santuccio, Renata Seripa, Edoardo Toniolo, Pietro Tordi venue: Piccolo Teatro Milano, 15-02-1950
1950-1951	*Henry IV*	translation: Cesare Vico Lodovici director: Giorgio Strehler orchestra leader: Umberto Andrea Cattini scenes: Pino Casarini costumes: Ebe Colciaghi music: Fiorenzo Carpi cast: Lia Angeleri, Mario Bardella, Antonio Battistella, Marcello Bertini, Giulio Bosetti, Piero Carnabuci, Ferruccio De Ceresa, Giorgio De Lullo, Ottavio Fanfani, Ettore Gaipa, Gianni Galavotti, Gianni Mantesi, Vittoria Martello, Andrea Matteuzzi, Diego Michelotti, Aida Montini, Marcello Moretti, Renato Navarrini, Attilio Ortolani, Camillo Pilotto, Checco Rissone, Sandro Ruffini, Gianni Santuccio venue: Teatro Romano, Estate Teatrale Veronese, IV Festival del Teatro Drammatico Verona, 7-07-1951
1950-1951	*The Twelfh Night*	translation: Cesare Vico Lodovici scenes: Gianni Ratto costumes: Ebe Colciaghi music: Fiorenzo Carpi cast: Giulio Bosetti, Lilla Brignone, Ernesto Calindri, Renzo Giovampietro, Anna Maestri, Marcello Moretti, Checco Rissone, Gianni Santuccio, Lia Zoppelli venue: open air theatre, di Palazzo Grassi Venezia, 25-08-1951
1951-1952	*Macbeth*	translation: Salvatore Quasimodo scenes: Piero Zuffi costumes: Piero Zuffi music: Fiorenzo Carpi masks: Amleto Sartori cast: Carlo Bagno, Mario Bardella, Marcello Bertini, Giulio Bosetti, Lilla Brignone, Antonio Cannas, Lieta Carraresi, Nino Cestari, Ottavio Fanfani, Mario Feliciani, Raoul Grassilli, Gianni Mantesi, Vittoria Martello, Camillo Milli, Marcello Moretti, Diego Parravicini, Gianni Santuccio venue: Piccolo Teatro Milano, 31-01-1952

1953-1954	*Julius Caesar*	translation: Eugenio Montale scenes: Piero Zuffi costumi: Piero Zuffi music: Fiorenzo Carpi cast: Elsa Albani, Tino Carraro, Giulio Chazalettes, Ferruccio De Ceresa, Giorgio De Lullo, Ottavio Fanfani, Mario Ferrari, Arnoldo Foà, Ivo Garrani, Francesco Pettenati, Carlo Ratti, Enzo Tarascio, Romolo Valli venue: Piccolo Teatro Milano, 20-11-1953
1957-1958	*Coriolanus*	translation: Gilberto Tofano scenes: Luciano Damiani costumes: Ezio Frigerio music: Fiorenzo Carpi cast: Antonio Battistella, Wanda Capodaglio, Tino Carraro, Giancarlo Dettori, Ottavio Fanfani, Gabriella Giacobbe, Franco Graziosi, Cesare Polacco, Relda Ridoni, Enzo Tarascio venue: Piccolo Teatro Milano, 9-11-1957
1964-1965	*The Game of the Powerful* (*Form Henry VI*)	translation: Cesare Vico Lodovici scenes: Giorgio Strehler, Carlo Tommasi costumes: Enrico Job, Giorgio Strehler music: Fiorenzo Carpi masks: Donato Sartori cast: Luciano Alberici, Armando Alzelmo, Gastone Bartolucci, Ildebrando Biribò, Giulio Brogi, Lino Capolicchio, Carlo Cataneo, Valentina Cortese, Renato De Carmine, Ottavio Fanfani, Gabriella Giacobbe, Franco Graziosi, Elio Jotta, Gianfranco Mauri, Antonio Meschini, Glauco Onorato, Corrado Pani, Ferdinando Tamberlani venue: Teatro Lirico Milano, 21-06-1965
1965-1966	*The Game of the Powerful* (repeat)	venue: Teatro Comunale Firenze, 18-10-1965
1972-1973	*King Lear*	translation: Angelo Dallagiacoma, Luigi Lunari scenes: Ezio Frigerio costumes: Ezio Frigerio music: Fiorenzo Carpi cast: Tino Carraro, Carlo Cataneo, Renato De Carmine, Gabriele Lavia, Ida Meda, Orlando Mezzabotta, Ivana Monti, Giuseppe Pambieri, Ottavia Piccolo venue: Piccolo Teatro Milano, 6-11-1972
1973-1974	*King Lear* (repeat)	venue: Teatro Metastasio Prato, 27-11-1973
1974-1975	*King Lear* (repeat)	venue: Donizetti Bergamo, 21-02-1974
1974-1975	*King Lear* (repeat)	venue: Politeama Genovese Genova, 11-10-1974
1977-1978	*King Lear* (repeat)	venue: Théâtre Odeon Parigi, 2-11-1977
1977-1978	*The Tempest*	translation: Agostino Lombardo scenes: Luciano Damiani costumes: Luciano Damiani music: Fiorenzo Carpi cast: Massimo Bonetti, Tino Carraro, Mimmo Craig,

		Giulia Lazzarini, Armando Marra, Michele Placido, Fabiana Udenio venue: Teatro Lirico Milano, 28-06-1978
1978-1979	*The Tempest* (repeat)	venue: Teatro Lirico Milano, 24-10-1978
1983-1983	*The Tempest* (repeat)	venue: Théâtre Odeon Parigi, 3-11-1983
1984-1985	*The Tempest* (repeat)	venue: Olympic Arts Festival Los Angeles, 7-07-1984

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[1] If not otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

[2] As Tempera has remarked in this respect, in "Elio Vittorini's *Uomini e no* (1945), a novel dealing with partisan actions and black-shirt retaliation in 1944 Milan, 'Black dog' is the nickname of a fascist chief universally feared for his cruelty. Through *Richard III*, Strehler investigated the kind of evil men turn to when, incapable of being loved, they settle for being feared. The programme notes read: 'The deformed Plantagenet uses his intelligence to avenge himself of the horror caused by his body. He will not have love, but he will conquer power.' Strehler's Richard borrowed a terrible beauty from the symbolism of death that was favoured by the members of the Salò Republic squads: 'Four men in black advanced at the sound of drums. And Richard created the void around him . . .'" (2004, 129).

[3] On which see Silvia Bigliazzi, "Fascist Crises: Shakespeare, 'thou art mighty yet!'" (Part 1, Chapter 1 in this volume).

[4] For a recent discussion of the play see Perlman 2017.

[5] For the protagonists' later testimonies on the event, which marked a turning point in the Italian awareness of the state of theatres and acting, including the contrasts between the protagonists and their delusions, see e.g. Bo 1987.

[6] Which has been denied, for instance by Arthur Horowitz, who has claimed instead that he "did not attempt a reflection of the social, economic, or political conditions of the 1970s, [but] it most assuredly was a product of Strehler's theatrical past and informed by his experiences – real, imaginary, and theatrical" (Horowitz 2004, 112).