

SHAKESPEARE IN JAIL

Hamlet in Rebibbia: from stage to live streaming performances

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Abstract – “Since I have known art, this cell has turned into a prison” was the last line of *Caesar Must Die*, the film directed by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani and winner of the Golden Bear for best film at the 62nd Berlin International Film Festival. Now, after six years, the doors of Rebibbia open again to the world to let art in. The company of prodigious inmates/actors, directed by Fabio Cavalli, come back to Shakespeare in order to stage *Hamlet in Rebibbia*: the tragedy of revenge. If *Caesar Must Die* was a perfect blending of theatre and cinema, where everyday life in jail was mixed with theatre rehearsals, in an alternating montage of color and black and white scenes that culminated in a film disguised as filmed theatre, *Hamlet in Rebibbia* is a completely different kind of experiment. *Hamlet* is the universal symbol of the dialectic between Revenge and Justice and has a direct connection to the problems that dominate the prison context and the origins of many inmates. For this reason the tragedy perfectly suits the actors in the prison’s company and the place where it is staged. However, the aim of the director Fabio Cavalli was to bring the resulting play outside the jail. In order to reach as many people as possible, the play was shown all around the country through full-HD live streaming performances. Following the example of the National Theatre Live, Fabio Cavalli experimented with a new kind of theatre that, with the help of digital technologies, could go beyond the physical borders of the stage and meet cinema halfway. The aim of this paper is to take *Hamlet in Rebibbia* as a case study to investigate the relationship between theatre and cinema when one medium verges on the other in order to create a new, vibrant and meaningful work of art.

Keywords: Shakespeare; adaptation; cinema; streaming; theatre.

1. Introduction

“Cinema has the power to connect different destinies. At least for a few hours, free or imprisoned, we will dream the same dream” (ROMAsette 2017, online). With these words the director Fabio Cavalli introduces the collaboration between the 12th Rome Film Fest and Rome’s Rebibbia prison, an experiment of integration between theatre and cinema, free and imprisoned people.

For the second time the Rome Film Fest symbolically broke down the barrier between city and prison, and from 30th October to 2nd November 2017 returned to Rebibbia and to its wonderful actors who, after the great success of *Caesar Must Die*, the film directed by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani and winner of the Golden Bear at the 62nd Berlin International Film Festival, come back to Shakespeare and to a drama of revenge and justice.

The dream of Fabio Cavalli found its realisation in the Auditorium of the New Complex at Rebibbia, with the premiere of *Hamlet in Rebibbia*, a performance that was broadcast in full-HD live streaming from the prison directly to the Auditorium of the MAXXI museum, Teatro della Tosse in Genova, Teatro dell'Arca (inside the District Penitentiary of Marassi), Teatro Massimo in Cagliari and Teatro Eliseo in Nuoro. The event was a product of the collaboration between the Fondazione Cinema per Roma, the Department of Penitentiary Administration and the Department of Philosophy, Communication and Live Performance at the Università degli Studi Roma Tre, with production support from La Ribalta – Centro Studi Enrico Maria Salerno.

Written and directed by Fabio Cavalli, *Hamlet in Rebibbia* saw on the stage the inmate actors of the Free Theatre in Rebibbia – the G12 High Security section of the new complex of Rebibbia prison, helped by Vanessa Cremaschi who played the part of Gertrude and Chiara David in the role of Ofelia. The special project of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism 2017 featured the artistic direction of Laura Andreini Salerno, music by Franco Moretti, set design by Franco De Nino and Fabio Settimi, costumes by Paola Pischedda with the organization of Alessandro De Nino. “The avantgarde of the new expressivity of the stage” (ROMAsette 2017, online) – this is *Hamlet in Rebibbia* as described by the director Fabio Cavalli. It opened the doors of the prison to the world, with a work of art that was at the same time theatre, cinema, and web.

Born as a theatre performance, *Hamlet in Rebibbia* was conceived to be staged in a concrete place in front of an audience, exceptionally invited inside the complex of Rebibbia, like all the other plays staged by this company, including *Caesar Must Die*, but this time a new element was included: cameras. The presence of cameras made this performance different from all the others that took place in Rebibbia, because through the broadcasting they gave to the play the opportunity to be watched by a wider audience, at the same time as it was performed.

Cameras had already overcome the gates of Rebibbia for the shooting of *Caesar Must Die*, but in that case the intent was completely different because the directors Paolo and Vittorio Taviani were shooting a film, later edited with colours, music, cuts, and all that concerned their final idea of that work, according to the cinematic codes. On the other hand, *Hamlet in Rebibbia* was recorded at the same time as it was being performed live, and broadcast in live streaming, without editing or cuts. In this way the eye of the camera is not the eye of the

director, but the eye of the audience itself that watches exactly what is happening on the stage, even if it is not physically present.

Live streaming productions from a prison are still unexplored territory in Italy, even if live streaming performances have already had great success all over the world with the National Theatre Live and its shows like *Hamlet* (by Lyndsey Turner with Benedict Cumberbatch, now seen by over 900,000 people worldwide and still in theatres), or *The Winter's Tale* and *Romeo and Juliet* (directed by Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford, and presented by the Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company in live streaming from the Garrick Theatre in London). *Hamlet in Rebibbia* is a pioneer in this respect, because it lets the audience into an unknown place, different from all the theatres they are used to, not only for the unique place where the performance is staged, but also for the actors, who are not professionals, but imprisoned men with unique stories. Both elements make the live streaming an added value to this performance, turning it into an experiment, not only from an artistic but also from a social point of view.

Cameras can go where most people cannot and are able to explore all those places that usually are closed to sight, like the dressing rooms of the theatre, the private space of rehearsals, or even that obscure space that extends inside the gates of Rebibbia. Cameras can go beyond physical and mental barriers, and by filming what they see, they can carry the audience wherever they want. In this respect the tools of cinema can bring theatre to a different level, by driving a theatre performance, a work of art so connected to the space and time in which it is happening, beyond its physical limits, to make it become something else, a middle ground between cinema and theatre that can be displayed anytime and anywhere.

2. Hamlet: a universal drama

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a tragedy of revenge and justice. Starting with the young prince, called upon by the ghost of his father to revenge his murder on Claudius, he is obligated to be the killer, the executor. But he refuses to act without evidence of the crime and, in order to bring to light the guilty, uses the theatre as a weapon by staging the killing of his father in front of its alleged murderer. In his mind, revenge and justice are two sides of the same coin and there is no other way to restore order than to exchange death for death.

Hamlet reflects the fates of many of the actors in the prison's Company. And all our destinies – says Fabio Cavalli, the director of *Hamlet in Rebibbia* – Can we not argue that the corruption in ancient Denmark is no different to what's going on in Rome, Naples and Reggio Calabria today? What feuds, betrayals and struggles between clans are painting the city streets with blood, staining the palaces of a far-away dark power? The leap in space and time from Elsinore castle to our metropolises is almost imperceptible. (ROMAsette 2017, online)

The director of *Hamlet in Rebibbia*, Fabio Cavalli, brings to light in these words how a tragedy written at the beginning of the XVII century could be closer than we might think to our own history and reality, afflicted in the same way with power games and blood conflicts, and how the lives of the fictional characters of *Hamlet* resemble in words and actions those of the inmate actors staging the play. They are at the same time far away in space and time but unbelievably close as the words of Shakespeare immediately recall those yelled by people fighting in the streets of Rome, Naples, Reggio Calabria, and all over the world.

Rome looks like Elsinore; Rebibbia looks like the high stone castle where Hamlet lives. Within this framework, *Hamlet in Rebibbia* acts like a mirror of the human condition of the inmates, even if it is told in Shakespeare's words. All are Hamlet, Claudius and Laertes, and everyone is searching for justice, mourning a killed parent, or paying for his crimes. This common condition makes the characters more accessible to the inmate actors, even when they speak in an unknown and complex language, or act in an unfamiliar way.

As Paolo and Vittorio Taviani showed in *Caesar Must Die*, the words of Shakespeare could be the very words that are usually uttered among inmates in the corridors, cells or yards of Rebibbia, in a timeless space where there are no princes or kings, but just men. Salvatore Striano, who played the part of Brutus in *Caesar Must Die* and now, as a free man, is a successful writer and actor, explains how Shakespeare's plays are deeply connected to the lives of inmates:

I lie back down with a heavy heart. Shakespeare is like that: he interrogates you; he slaps you around, he sets the world out in front of you, shining a big bright light on it that you can't ignore. And he almost chases you down in his eagerness to make you understand. If we're going to talk about my sins, past and present, I'd have preferred to have Hamlet come and visit me. How many Hamlets have I known back in my neighbourhood? How many fathers murdered, and not always by the Camorra. In Naples you don't only worry about not dying, you have to be careful how you die. When you're killed in a duel between two feuding gangs, there's no shortage of flowers at the cemetery: you're a god in a way you never were in life, because you died with honour. But if you're killed for being an infame, because of a tip-off, or the betrayal of a friend, then everyone abandons you, because slowly, the truth that cost you your life convinces even your own family that you didn't deserve to live. You die twice. After the tragedy and the tears, after the wailing and the despair, the voice of the neighbourhood begins to tell another story, one where you're an infame, and that if you hadn't been a traitor you wouldn't have died. Eventually, it's not even worth the trouble of taking flowers to the cemetery for you. As a reaction to all this, your son ends up becoming another Hamlet. How many sons are there in Naples who can't decide whether or not they should avenge their father? Will they kill me, or won't they, these sons wonder. (Striano 2017, pp. 335-336)

According to the words of Salvatore Striano, a man who has clearly seen the common features between the tragedies of Shakespeare and those taking place in

the streets of our countries, Hamlet could live today in Naples, Rome, Reggio Calabria, wherever there is an unpunished crime and thirst for revenge. And recognizing this character as someone close to personal history and goals makes it easier for actors to understand and embody him on the stage.

The same is true for *Julius Caesar*, performed by the same company in *Caesar Must Die*. Here the parallels between Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and the everyday life of inmates were depicted by showing the actors playing *Julius Caesar* on the stage of the prison in front of an audience in their stage costumes, in an alternate montage with the rehearsals of the play in all parts of the prison, even in the private spaces.

The contrast between the play and real life was also underlined by the use of colour, so that the play scenes were filmed in colour and the rehearsal scenes in black and white. The film in fact opens in colour with the inmates staging the death of Brutus, and gradually the audience and the small stage are revealed. But after a few minutes a caption informs us that this is the high-security wing of Rebibbia prison, and the actors, that shortly before were on the stage, are locked back one after the other in their cells. The colour switches to black and white and the scene time travels back in showing the inmates, six months earlier, speaking about the play with the director. The actors present themselves during the auditions in their own dialects and the play begins. From this moment on rehearsals are mixed with everyday life scenes from the prison and all the scenes are in black and white, except the last one where the inmates are playing again on the stage in front of the audience. But even if fiction and real life were so carefully separated by colours in the final editing of the film, the language cancels this distance and makes it a compact work, where the men more than the characters are in the spotlight and move in their world in a realistic and spontaneous way, so that it is almost impossible to distinguish between fiction and reality.

Unlike *Caesar Must Die*, *Hamlet in Rebibbia* has no editing, because it is not a film, even if there are cameras in front of the stage of Rebibbia, and cannot rely on black and white scenes or other cinematic codes to help the actors and the director to express themselves. The play can rely only on what is happening under the eyes of the audience in the *hic et nunc* of the performance. *Hamlet in Rebibbia* is broadcast in "live" streaming, without filters, showing common men on a stage playing a Shakespeare tragedy with the words they know, trying to see themselves in the histories of the characters they embody. In this attempt they seem very comfortable in the shoes of their characters, and more than actors seem to be just men trying to overcome death, pain, and the desire for revenge in their own way. Madness and violence are their allies, on the stage as in life, and both these dimensions merge and blend into one another in a feeling that is familiar and universally true.

Jan Kott in *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary* describes *Hamlet* "as a sponge [that] immediately absorbs all the problems of our time", a play that is always

modern despite the age when it is staged because of the universal human feelings expressed.

Many generations have seen their own reflections in this play. The genius of Hamlet consists, perhaps, in the fact that the play can serve as a mirror. An ideal Hamlet would be one most true to Shakespeare and most modern at the same time. Is this possible? I do not know. But we can only appraise any Shakespearian production by asking how much there is of Shakespeare in it, and how much of us. (Kott 1974, p. 52)

It does not matter if the actors wear medieval clothes or contemporary t-shirts, because Hamlet will always work as a mirror for the audience, and for actors too, as it happens in *Hamlet in Rebibbia*. *Hamlet* actually speaks about universal issues like love, family, politics and betrayal and everyone can find himself in these lines, especially the inmate actors of Rebibbia, who immediately felt that the play was familiar and perfectly tailored to their lives. As Salvatore Striano underlines, showing how closely related life and theatre could be, Shakespeare's works are so close to modern human behaviours that they seem to be written in this age and just for the stage of Rebibbia.

I wonder if the audience is aware that we're talking about ourselves here, that nothing is more real than the human dynamics this play depicts. From Naples down, Shakespeare's on home territory. (Striano 2017, p. 383)

One of the strengths of *Hamlet in Rebibbia* is that it leaves spectators in constant doubt: Who is speaking? Are these the words of characters written by Shakespeare, or the words pronounced by men staging a play? Are those speaking kings in a castle or inmates in a prison?

Life and theatre meet and blend into one another on the stage of Rebibbia to such an extent that sometimes it is impossible to part fiction from reality. But the deep comprehension of the Shakespearian works by the inmate actors does not only occur through the comprehension of universal human feelings and behaviours, but also through the understanding of the language of Shakespeare, its deep meaning, shades and loose ends.

3. What language does Shakespeare speak?

In this depiction of contemporary human behaviours, the words pronounced on the stage play a key role and it is very important for the actors to understand what they are saying, even if it is spoken in a foreign language, written for a 17th century audience. In order to make this clear, director Fabio Cavalli chose to cancel the space and time distance between the dramatic text of Shakespeare and its performance text on the stage by translating the text from English into Italian, and then from Italian into the native dialects of the inmates.

Roman Jakobson, in his essay *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation* (2000, pp. 113-118), argues that a verbal sign can be translated into other signs of the same language (intra-lingual translation), into another language (inter-lingual translation), or into another nonverbal system of symbols (inter-semiotic translation). According to this theory of translation, the first stage of adaptation in *Hamlet in Rebibbia* concerns the Shakespearean text and the inter-lingual translation of the English text into Italian. But the next and most important stage is the intra-lingual translation because the text has been translated from standard Italian into the native dialects of the inmates. At last, the dramatic text has been translated into a performance text, which includes all the cultural codes not connected with the language (general kinesic codes, proxemic codes, vestimentary codes, cosmetic codes, pictorial codes, musical codes, architectural codes, etc., cf. Elam 2005, p. 36), and makes it also a case of inter-semiotic translation.

The coexistence of these three kinds of translation is even more evident in *Caesar Must Die*, where the Shakespearean dramatic text has been translated from English into Italian, following the inter-lingual translation process, and then intra-lingually translated from standard Italian into Roman, Neapolitan, Sicilian and Apulian dialects, in order to make the text more understandable for the inmates than standard Italian, and easier to translate into a performance. Here the adaptation of the dramatic text into the performance text is enhanced by the use of dialects, deeply connected with the cultural codes expressed on the stage and more stimulating for the inmate actors who had to translate Shakespeare texts into gestures, movements and emotions. Paolo and Vittorio Taviani in fact chose to perform Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in the native dialects of the actors with the precise intention of bringing the play even closer to their lives and feelings, in a common and comprehensible language, the same they spoke in their everyday life, in prison as outside.

We asked ourselves what we could do for them, how we could show their reality – says Vittorio Taviani in an interview – and we thought that *Julius Caesar* might be a good choice. Everybody knows the story of Brutus and we wondered how the text would sound if translated into the Neapolitan dialect of these “men of honour”. They were simultaneously in their own world and in Shakespeare's. The play is about the power, betrayal, and assassination of a leader. We thought that perhaps we could include their experiences, their personalities, and their realities into the play. They could easily identify with these characters. With the film, we wanted to show life, the trauma lived by these prisoners, violence, suffering, failure, grief. (Lux Prize 2012, online)

Shakespeare here speaks another language that is not standard Italian, but Neapolitan, Sicilian, Roman and many other dialects of southern Italy. The result is powerful, because the actors speak their own language and are closer than ever to the characters they are playing. The translation of Shakespearean texts into

many different Italian dialects made the text shorter and simplified, but the inevitable loss in the language was compensated by a stronger performance by the inmate actors that mastered this language and were able to melt it with gestures, movements and intentions of the characters they were playing.

As has been said, the translation of Shakespeare's plays from standard Italian into the local dialects was a key element also of *Caesar Must Die* and, as Paolo and Vittorio Taviani remember, this was a spontaneous choice of the actors, not an idea of the directors. It was not a refined experiment to create a linguistic *pastiche*, but occurred almost as an epiphany:

One day, by chance, we saw six or seven prisoners sitting around a table, reading our screenplay, and writing. Some of the actors were translating it into their own dialect – Neapolitan, Sicilian, Apulian. They were helped by their fellow prisoners who were not in the cast. We realized that the dialectical distortion of the lines did not weaken the serious tone of the tragedy but rather it gave them an edge. (Latto 2013, online)

Playing with the language of Shakespeare was also the idea of the director Fabio Cavalli in 2005, when he met the future actors of Rebibbia prison for the first time. He presented to the inmates his project to stage *The Tempest*, but not in its ordinary version. He wanted to stage with them the Neapolitan translation made by Eduardo De Filippo in 1983. The play had never been performed before and it was a challenge for a group of amateurs, but it was also a fateful encounter that changed their life forever, as remembers Salvatore Striano:

When I started reading *The Tempest*, I realized something. We love Eduardo, but he's inadvertently making our situation worse. He writes about our world, and he makes family tragedies familiar in a way that is immediately comprehensible to us. Whereas Shakespeare... Reading him was like diving into a body of water when I couldn't even see the bottom. It was like diving into something bigger than I've ever encountered before. We allowed Eduardo into our group, and he became our leader. But in doing that we were locking ourselves up again. Forming another gang. It was just another way never to come out. This is what Cavalli meant when he tried to present Shakespeare to us: 'Theatre allows you to face up to your feelings.' Feelings, not situations. 'All right, then,' I say, to whittle away any remaining resistance. 'Let's put on Eduardo's *Tempest*, not Shakespeare's?' (Striano 2017, pp. 223-224)

Eduardo's *Tempest* was staged in Rebibbia in the Neapolitan dialect in 2005, and the experiment turned out to be a one-way trip. At the beginning Shakespeare spoke to the inmate actors of the G12 through the translation of Eduardo De Filippo, in a language that they knew very well, and later his plays became part of their lives, filling their days with readings, rehearsals and reflections on their current situation, sometimes so close to that of their favourite characters. Thanks to Fabio Cavalli and his dedicated work in Rebibbia the inmates have come to

know Shakespeare more and more deeply through the years, and his characters became so close to them that the line between fiction and reality has become almost invisible.

4. Inside and Outside

Even if the fourth wall that divides the stage from the audience and the space of theatre from that of reality is so thin that it is almost impossible to see, it has been there all the time. *Hamlet in Rebibbia* took place in a well-defined physical space, on the stage of Rebibbia prison in front of the audience of the theatre, and at the same time it could also be watched in other theatres and cinemas thanks to live broadcasting. In this second case the performance is seen through the lenses of cameras, another wall that separates actors and audience.

In this last “wall” lies the basic difference between stage and screen performances because in a theatre, actors and audience are separated by a distance ranging from a few feet to hundreds of feet in a large auditorium, and everyone in the audience needs to see the action and hear the dialogue on stage, so theatre actors must exaggerate their movements and speak loudly to bridge the gap. On the other hand, in screen performances there is a camera that eliminates the distance between performers and observers. Cameras, lights, microphones, special effects, and music all serve to enhance an actor’s performance, so no embellishment is needed. The goal of an actor framed on a screen is to replicate reality and cameras help him in picking up every twitch, inflection, and subtle pause, so that he can speak and gesture to the other actors as he normally would. This difference is very clear during the National Theatre Live broadcasting of theatre performances, as underlined by Ben Caron in 2016, when the Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company had presented its first season at the Garrick Theatre in London:

One of the things we did with the actors, where possible, was talk about finding a different performance level on the night. Stage performances are, by definition, different from screen performances – something that feels natural in the theatre can seem exaggerated on screen. [...] The challenge with projecting plays to the big screen – because it’s a new form – is to find the middle ground between theatre and film. We’re not trying to make a film, we’re trying to give people a live experience, yet it’s always going to be different because the audience is watching a screen. (Warner 2016, online)

In this middle ground between theatre and film lies *Hamlet in Rebibbia* that was taking place at the same time in the well-circumscribed space of Rebibbia and in many cinemas and theatres all over Italy, through the live broadcasting becomes a “live” experience for all intents and purposes. The performance is perceived as live by the audience attending the show in front of the stage inside the prison

Rebibbia, and at the same time by people watching it from outside. Even if they are watching a screen, with the help of cameras, they can watch and feel the actors close, just like the audience inside Rebibbia. Cameras have the power to overcome distance and break the walls of the performance as they do with the walls of Rebibbia, because they can put people inside the prison and the actors outside at the same time. The paradox is that at first sight the scene takes place in a very closed dimension that includes the narrow space of a stage and the gates of the prison, but at a closer look, it is evident that cameras cancel all the space limits. And if this is true for every live streaming performance that can be watched at the same time throughout the world, it is even more obvious in the case of *Hamlet in Rebibbia*, where the actors are inmates and are not allowed to move physically in the outside world. In this case the play and its live broadcasting is the only way to overcome the walls that surround the prison and to step into the world.

The space of the prison is a very characteristic place, very different from any other theatre, as the director Fabio Cavalli remarks:

The prison has features that are not found anywhere else. [...] Concentration places cannot be compared to anything in free people's everyday life. [...] What can be perceived by a spectator who enters a prison to watch a play? Can he see what is really happening or is it like a mirroring? How much distance can he maintain from the content? I believe that the spectator in the prison sees what he projects on the performance. That said, I could say that staging the same play in conventional theatres like Argentina, Eliseo, Quirino and so on, cannot have the same impact that we have with the "enclosed" stage. Inside is different from outside. Even if the play has a high artistic quality, the theatrical event in the prison has a different value. We don't know how much is added or subtracted, but it is different from a traditional show. Anyway, our aim is to help the spectator to forget where he is, because art should aim to be universal. (Di Fabio 2015, online)

Inside is different from outside, and to stage a play in a prison involves a series of rules and limits, especially for the audience invited to attend the show inside the prison that requires special permissions, has to pass security checks and can watch the show only when the prison grants access to outsiders. All these limitations make the access to the live performance difficult from the outside and that is where live streaming performances come into play, opening doors that were closed before, and giving an exceptional point of view on a world, as that of prison, unknown to most.

5. Hamlet is finally free

Time and space, the distance between the event and its audience is the main difference between theatre and cinema. As André Bazin explains:

Theatre seems naturally inclined to establish a distance between the audience and the play. Complete illusion is difficult to create because of the actual presence of the players on stage. This presence in the flesh requires a strong and active will from the spectator to abstract the actors and to institute the illusion of a fiction. [...] Stage fiction would only give a weak impression of reality because theatre is much too real. As the actors are present in the same time and space as the spectators. (1967, p. 99)

A play happens under the eyes of the audience; they see it at exactly the same time as it happens. It can be perceived with all the senses and is therefore an extremely concrete experience. It is as real as its performers who can be seen, listened to, and even touched, and for this reason it is difficult to perceive it as fiction. On the other hand, cinema is perceived as fiction because it happens far from the audience and from real life. It is more like a dream, far away and untouchable, as Christian Metz says:

Even if the spectators perceive film images as a show occurring 'live', a movie is a recorded event, which is experienced after some delay. One of the particularities of the film is to topple everything it nominates into an accomplished time. The actors played their parts in the present during the shooting and, each time the film is shown, this 'past present' works in the present mode again. If in the theatre the action is performed, in the cinema it is reported. (2000, p. 423)

What happens on the screen belongs to an indefinite time and space and reaches the audience only at a later stage, after a long process of editing that transforms the initial performance into a complex narration, told by the director-narrator that shows on the screen his point of view on what is happening, instead of a simple recording of the performance. As Sarah Hatchuel underlines:

The film, therefore, presents itself as a closed sequence of events, as a fictional narrative with a beginning and an end, produced by a telling authority. This narrative is inclined to conceal its enunciation by virtue of the medium. What is perceived is not the object itself but its shadow. The film unwinds from the distance (like a play on stage), but also in the absence (unlike a play on stage). The screen completely segregates the film and the audience. Real life can never interfere with the reported action. (2004, p. 67)

Despite what happens in the film performance, where the audience is virtual and the narration needs to be as realistically involving as possible, in the theatrical performance the narration is created by the spectator who catches with his eyes what is happening on the stage according to his own point of view, and plays a

part in effecting the performance that he is watching by interacting with it. The presence or the absence of a live audience involves also different performance conventions and techniques, as Maurice Hindle remarks:

The very different conventions of performance and reception operating in theatre and film also mean that movie actors need to use rather different performance techniques if they are to communicate with us effectively. The sound amplification technology, enabling a cinema audience to hear what is being said from anywhere in the screening auditorium, means that actors are not required to ‘project’ their voices in the way stage actors do. Instead they need to speak more at the level used in the interactions of everyday life that we all experience. Without a live audience to cater for, film actors instead perform more exclusively to/with one another, such that the ‘eye of the camera’ is satisfied, the ultimate decision in this regard normally remaining with the film’s director. (2007, pp. 3-4)

But who is the narrator in *Hamlet in Rebibbia*? It was a play for all intents and purposes when it was staged in Rebibbia under the direction of Fabio Cavalli, but it became something else when people all around the world were watching it. It was then not a film but a photographed version of the stage production, filmed with advanced visual and sound technologies and refined multi-camera filming techniques. In this case the narrator was whoever combined wide-shots of the stage with close-ups, determining which elements were in wide-shots, close-up and mid-shots, as well as controlling the movement and duration of those shots. However, his aim was not to give his own point of view on what was happening on the stage, like a film director, but to give the viewer a high-quality, finely detailed image in a comparable way to how someone watching the show in the theatre would have seen it. It was therefore an experience shared by the people in the theatre inside the prison and those who were watching the show outside, and even if the emotional involvement experienced by a cinema audience was very different from that achieved in the playing space, the recorded screen event could give a coherent and vivid sense of what it was like to be in the theatre watching the play. Unlike films, these broadcasts were completely live experience, and even though they also involved creative filming and editing techniques, they allowed people to engage with the performance with the same feeling existing in theatre.

This means that *Hamlet in Rebibbia* had two kinds of spectators: those who were watching the performance live, and those who were physically remote from what was filmed and edited in another time and place; still, all of them were watching the same play. In this way this *Hamlet* was no more and not only in Rebibbia, but indeed potentially everywhere. It could open all the doors and climb over all the walls that surrounded the stage, thanks to the magic of broadcasting. Hamlet was free to go wherever he wanted and to speak with all kinds of people, at least for the time of the show. And this freedom of expression that paradoxically came from a place of confinement made this play unique, a

successful experiment that showed that art can cross all boundaries and awaken the consciousness of all people involved, spectators and actors included.

6. Conclusion

Once again, the inmate actors of the Free Theatre in Rebibbia have accomplished a miracle. By staging a Shakespeare's play with all the features of a universal tragedy, where characters act and speak like men who are more accustomed to fighting in the streets than on the stage, they have captured the essence of Hamlet's drama. And it didn't matter that the play was changed, simplified or translated in order to be understandable to a bigger audience, because its value was not diminished, but rather amplified. The actors were ready to put all of themselves into the roles they played, their feelings, experiences, origins, lives, and, by doing this, have figuratively come down from the stage in order to go, at least for the time of the play, out into the outside world.

This is called freedom, the most precious good and also the most difficult to achieve in places like Rebibbia. Here art is the only key to open the door of the mind, the only way to be free to go anywhere, with no limits of space and time. And Fabio Cavalli gave to his company of talented actors this key, allowing them to discover unexplored worlds and to look at their reality from a new point of view. Art has the power to show reality through the mirror of fiction – as noticed in the last sentence of *Caesar Must Die*, “Since I have known art, this cell has turned into a prison” – and *Hamlet in Rebibbia* follows this path, by showing the reality of prison through the fiction of a Shakespeare play in a perfect combination of theatre and cinema, with a live streaming performance that cancelled the physical distance between actors and spectators and brought the world closer.

The last words are assigned to Salvatore Striano, one of the inmate actors of the Free Theatre in Rebibbia, that explains how Shakespeare saved his life, showing him the world through art, and how important it is to bring art from the inside world of fiction to the outside world of reality, in order to reach as many people as possible.

Shakespeare, give me my freedom. Give it to me now. If you truly give it back to me, I promise to give you ten years of my life. Ten years in which I'll take your philosophy – of giving, doing, loving – out into the world. Ten years during which I'll take the truest emotions of mankind and put them on stage, and in your words. Because what we need today is someone who can help people interpret the world, and artists need to go out among the people and teach life.' I clench my fists, concentrating on the winking of that minuscule star, bright and indomitable, like my hope. 'I promise to be there, Shakespeare. I'll be wherever I can be of service – in prisons, in schools. In the streets and right in the midst of the evils of the earth and I'll be afraid of nothing, ashamed of nothing, and there will be words for all,

and forgiveness for all. But give me my freedom. Give me my freedom. (Striano 2017, pp. 404-405)

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Acknowledgments: I would like to thank La Ribalta Association – Enrico Maria Salerno Study Center for permission to use their pictures.

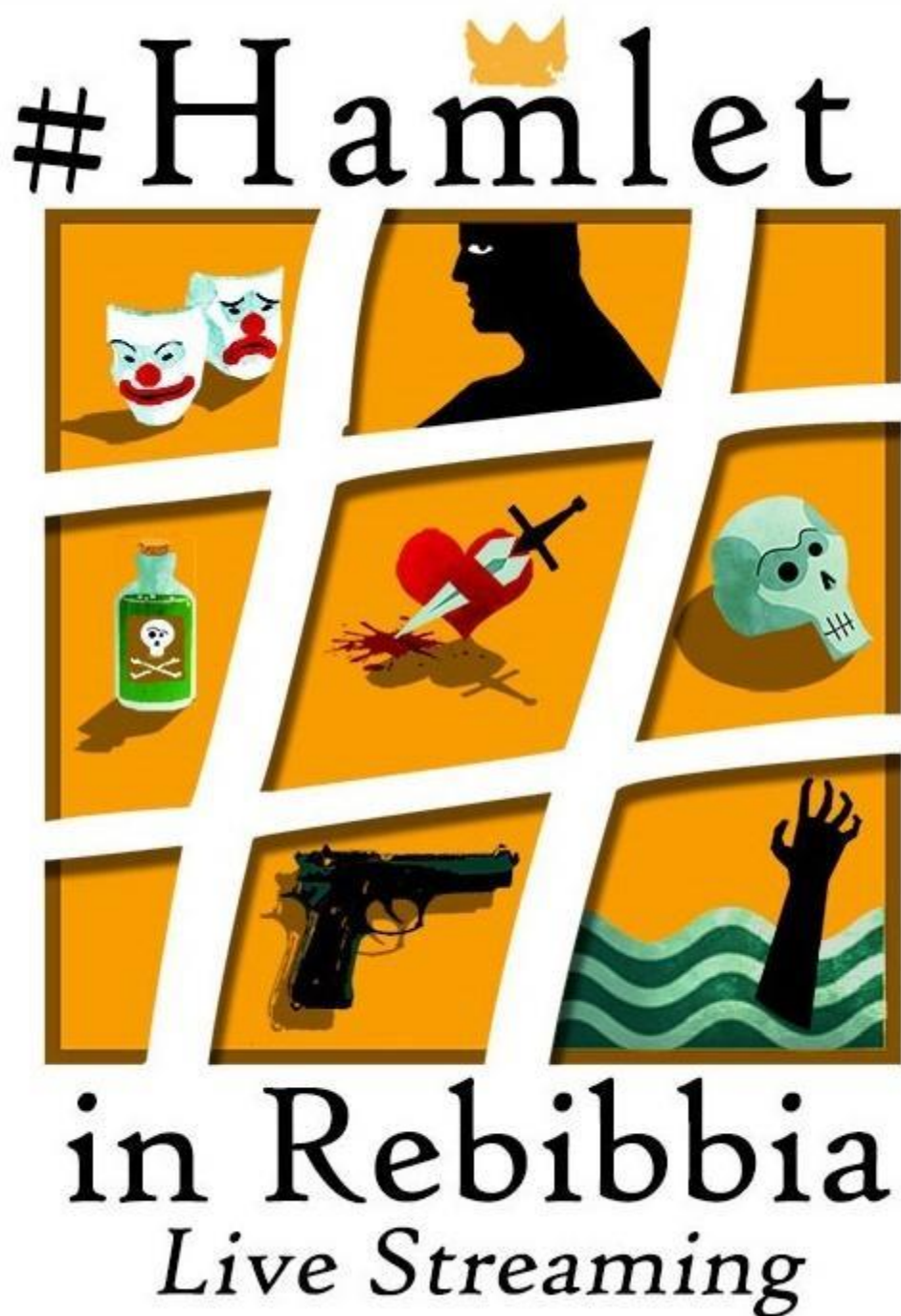
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Annexes



Picture by Alessandro De Nino (La Ribalta Association – Enrico Maria Salerno Study Center)



Picture by Paolo Ferrari (La Ribalta Association – Enrico Maria Salerno Study Center)



Picture by Paolo Ferrari (La Ribalta Association – Enrico Maria Salerno Study Center)



Picture by Paolo Modugno (La Ribalta Association – Enrico Maria Salerno Study Center)