

Ermanna Montanari

Dialect as Discipline

1.

Dialect? To start with it should not be written down, it cannot be written, its animal sounds cannot be reproduced. It is pure music, barbaric dance. It is an arcane language that does not speak properly; a tongue that forgets language, a tongue without language, a swollen tongue. Hateful tongue, stinking of the cowshed; birth tongue at once very close and very distant. An interior icon, obedient to the tiniest forces, threat to freedom, a bridge to reach the "duty-free" zones within contemporary cultural codification: dialect flows into shadows and immense emptiness. It lights the blue touch paper and sends flickering signals through the flames of the explosion.

2.

First I propose a journey: Campiano-Paris-Campiano, a pata-physic journey through detail. I am translating Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* into my Italian dialect that comes from Romagna. The act of translation is monstrous, the meeting between two natures ready to betray each other. Jarry himself was a translator and a creator of monsters.

First monstrosity: Campiano, the village where I lived as a child. I must elaborate as usual and insert swamps and frogs. The dialect is a discipline; the manifestation of a vision. Jarry was born in Laval, a village in Brittany. I must find the Celtic culture and the contractions of a language.

Jarry and Paris: *Ubu Roi* is the plot; the bicycle a vision of art. Life is connected to the work of literature. Alchemists are never separated from their laboratories. There is a continual exchange from one play to the other, the key of one work lies within the other. Ubu appears as a "terrestrial act".

The low and high in continual relationship, different styles, languages, inventing words, modifying verbs: as with Giordano Bruno, the process towards the work contains shit and sublimity; the gold gets distilled and success is found in the purity of the doer. Absolutely: Jarry accepts that he embodies smut. Father Ubu is similar to all of us in our lowest state.

Reading and translation, French to the dialect of Romagna: *Merdre=Medraza, Assom' je=acupia.*

*Life is connected
to the work of literature.
Alchemists are never
separated from
their laboratories.*



Ermana Montannari in *Siamo asini o pedanti?*

Marco is working on scene VII, act I of *Macbeth* and on scene I, act I of *Ubu Roi* in workshops in Bologna, Polverigi, Ravenna. What will the title of our performance be? *I Polacchi (The Poles)*? The origin of Ubu's character?

Let Jarry take us towards the year 2000 with his ring.

3.

For the presentation of the book *Sarah Bernhardt, Colette and the Art of Cross-dressing* by Laura Mariani, I wrote:¹

You kicked me, Laura
 as if I were a jenny (female donkey).²
 Think, you told me, think.
 What is a woman? Eh?
 What is a woman? I don't know, I don't know,

*T'am ei dia di chilz, Laura
 coma sa fos una sumara.
 Pénsa, t'am givta, pénsa.
 Sél mai una dona? Eh?
 Sél mai una dona? A ne so, a ne so,*

what should I know, I would answer.
 And she would kick me again.
 Think, think, what is a woman, eh?
 What is an actress?
 Is it your being a woman that makes you move?
 And, tell me, where does your voice come from?
 Have you ever cross-dressed?
 Tell me, tell me, as I must write
 a book on the art of cross-dressing!
 But what have I to do with all this?
 I said to myself, quietly,
 and I didn't understand,
 as if I were a jenny.
 And Laura kicked me,
 kicked me.
 She annoyed me so much!
 I wanted to put her on a cross.
 To keep her still... and silent.
 I told her two things, so that she would shut up,
 very little was enough:
 "EKPUMENEKMARUTUVAIA-
 EKPUMENEKMARUTUVAIA
 Everything, everything deep
 loves a mask."
 I must have said many other silly things
 that I don't remember now.
 She went away.
 And what did she do then?
 She wrote the book and put me
 into it, saying that I am a jenny .
 Oh dear, oh dear, she was
 right! She was right!
 And now I am here, and nothing comes to me,
 not even a word
 because I left the jenny in the shed,
 tied up, the jenny.
 She is the only being that could speak.

sut ca séipa, ai dgeva.
E lì, d'arnòv, cun i su chilz.
Pénsa, pénsa, sél mai una dona, eh?
Sé mai un'attrice?
È la li d'at fa mòvar?
E la tu vosa, din do d'vènla?
At sit mai travistida?
Dimal, dimal, ca io da scrivar
unlivar sora e teatar!
Mo me sa jetri?
Am dgeva, piani,
an capeva,
come sa fos una sumara.
E la Laura l'am chilzéva,
l'am chilzéva.
L'am daseva un fastigi!
C'a l'a j avrep inciudéda in t'la crosta.
Accè la sarep stiada ferma... e zeta.
A i o det dò paruàl parché la s'invies,
l'è bastià pòc:
"EKPUMENEKMARUTUVAIA-
EKPUMENEKMARUTUVAIA.
Tutto, tutto ciò che è profondo,
ama la maschera."
A i o det nec quel iatar, mo adés
a n' um arcòrd.
Lì la s'é inviàda.
E pu, sala fat?
La i à scret e livar e l'am i à mes
dentar, dgend ca so una sumara.
Vigliaca d'la miseria, la i aveva
rasòn! La i aveva rasòn!
E adés a so qué, e un um vé
fura gnànca una paròla
parché a i o lasià in t'la stala
la sumara, lighiàda.
Lì, d'è l'onica d'a putrep scorar.

Translated from Italian by Julia Varley

ERMANNA MONTANARI (Italy) was
 born in Campiano in 1956. She is
 co-founder of the Teatro delle Albe and,
 since 1983, has worked with the company as
 an actress, writer and set designer. She has
 organised five of the events of *Il linguaggio*
della dea (The Language of the Goddess), a
 meeting on female discourse.

1. The following text is in dialect with only one line in
 comprehensible Italian.
 2. One of Ermanna's theatre characters is a donkey.