

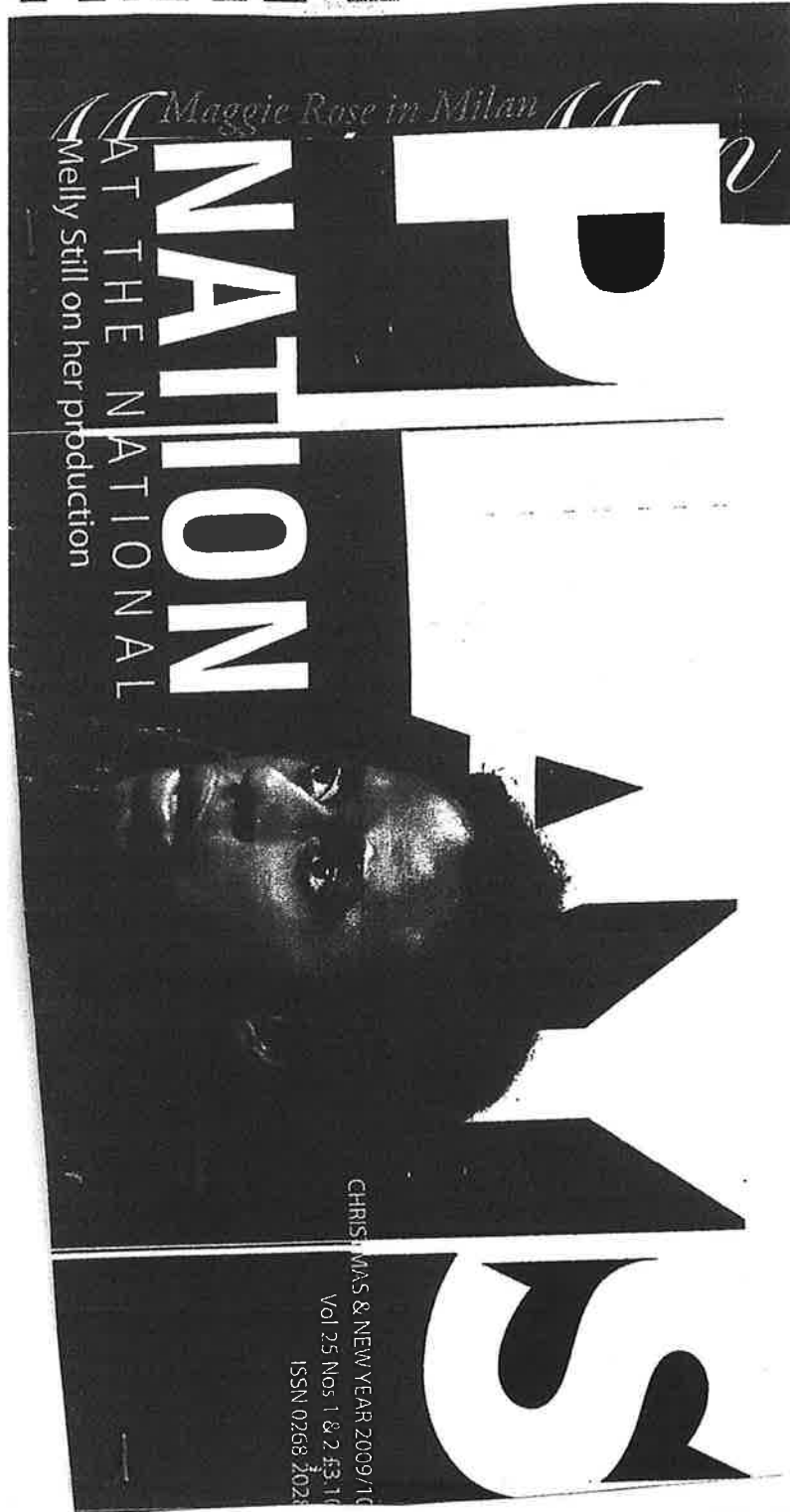
MARGARET ROSE
(PLAYS INTERNATIONAL)

Maggie Rose in Milan

Melly Still on her production

AT THE NATIONAL

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In October at Milan's Franco Parenti Theatre, a cycle of Pinter plays and films, entitled 'Around Pinter,' was on offer. I caught productions of *L'Amante (The Lover)* and *Calapranzi (Dumb Waiter)*.

Andrée Ruth Shammah, artistic director of the Franco Parenti, is at her third edition of *The Lover*. The play, she admits, continues to intrigue her for its ambiguities and dreamlike qualities. Whereas in past editions she concentrated on the two major roles of Pinter's two protagonists, namely husband or wife as opposed to lover, this time she has delved into the many facets within each of these very different roles. Consequently, the husband and wife are much more playful and teasing than in previous productions, allowing the audience to perceive, from time to time, the underlying tension and passion in their marital relationship. In his Italian version (in Alessandra Serra's fine translation) the play's context becomes upper class Milanese society.

Anna Galiena, as the wife, switches magnificently from the part of an affluent but bored Italian housewife to the role of the sexy, uninhibited lover, while the suave and dashing Roberto Triforò is every inch a successful Milanese businessman, who works hard but does not neglect life's pleasures. In an age in which Internet's Second Life has thousands of followers, one has to admit that Pinter got there first, exploring the individual's need for eroticism through the interpretation of multiple roles, as an escape from the boredom of humdrum existence.

Instead the *Dumb Waiter*, in a production directed and performed by Lorenzo Costa and Ivana Monti, struck me as less engaging. At the heart of the play, it seems to me, is a male relationship based on a violent and sometimes ruthless clash between Pinter's two killers. So if, as in this staging, you choose to cast a woman, Ivana Monti, in the role of Gus, you're off to a difficult start. Despite her male attire, Monti did not prove a convincing sparring partner for Costa's Ben. From time to time, the dark comedy invoked by the dumb waiter, brought some comic relief, but the production on the whole lacked pace and tension.

At Milan's Piccolo Teatro, I saw Manfred Karge's *Max Gericke (Man to Man)*, directed by Walter le Moli for Parma's Teatro Due. Karge's well-known play is based on the real life story of Elda Gericke who, following her husband's death, makes the audacious decision to impersonate him in order to continue drawing his wages as a factory worker. Seeing the economic recession of Germany in the period between the two World Wars, Ella has little choice if she wishes to survive. For the role Elisabetta Pozzi turns herself into a decrepit, elderly figure, whose grotesque mask-like face mirrors the harsh reality of Ella's struggle to survive. On an almost bare stage, dressed in a man's suit, Max/Elda sits slouched in an armchair, except for an occasional shuffle around the stage to get himself a drink.

The truth of the story only gradually unfolds, until, with great pain, the surprising revelation of this change in identity comes to light. In a recent interview Pozzi has remarked, 'I still get goose bumps to think that apart from certain details relevant to the situation in Germany at the time - everything that Max speaks about is so real and up to date.' In Pozzi's interpretation of the piece, 20 years after she first performed the role, its tragic power has not diminished.

The end of October also sees Milan's very own theatre festival, with a large number of shows on offer at three or four euros a time both in regular theatres and in site-specific venues. At the Out Off Theatre I caught the first part of a trilogy, entitled *In and Around Ineptitude*, written and directed by Francesca Macri and Andrea Trapani of the Biancofango company. In *Punta di piedi (On Tiptoes)* is set during a training session of an amateur football team in Florence. In what is a one-man show, Andrea Trapani plays two roles, the first of a trainer and the second of an 18-year-old boy, nicknamed Mastino (bulldog) who aspires to play in the team. The trainer oozes virility, goading his young team to improve their game and conform to masculine stereotypes. While Trapani's very physical performance invites spectators to use their imagination to conjure up various members of his team, the spotlight soon hones in on Mastino - his name could not be more paradoxical - who is a deeply dysfunctional figure, both physically and psychologically. As Mastino relates his attraction for one of his team mates, his physical appearances slowly changes. He begins to dance and his femininity grows more and more apparent. The finely-honed script, shifting between the fast-paced jargon of a football training ground and lyrical language as the writers plumb the inner depths of this tragic figure, is brought to life by Trapani's admirable actorial skills. In the end Mastino's marked fragility in this macho world has engaged all our sympathy.