

The Prince restored. As told by Fabrizio Gifuni and Sonia Bergamasco

I have to confess that I don't especially love Saint-Exupéry's little prince. I've never understood how this funereal, saccharine fable could move any reader, whether child or adult. It seemed to me that phrases like "You can only see things clearly with your heart" were destined for lists of famous quotations, or for packages of chocolates. This is why I was so stunned by the extraordinary adventure in acting that Fabrizio Gifuni and Sonia Bergamasco have made of it. There is only one way, in my opinion, to represent the tenuous poetic universe of Saint-Exupéry, which is to use the resources of the theater of figures, objects and puppets, as did the great Swedish director/puppeteer Michael Meschke many years ago, and in his wake, the Theater of Crumbs. Gifuni and Bergamasco have chosen the opposite path, that of a simple reading. But renouncing an unwieldy staging does not damage [the piece] at all; rather, it exploits their test of bravura to the max.

For the rest, one cannot say that the version presented at Teatro Franco Parenti in Milan is completely lacking in a basic visual-spatial structure: while Gifuni performs mostly from behind a lectern, Ms. Bergamasco is seated on an emblematic swing which she uses as a prop, and at the end, they are lit up as if to guide the little protagonist on his way home. Positioned between the two of them is percussionist Rodolfo Rossi, whose sound details make up an integral part of the project's style.

But at the center of it all are the two actors, like two perfectly tuned instruments. He has the role of narrator, and by changing his tone of voice to fit the various characters - the king, the lamplighter, the fox that wants to be tamed - he demonstrates his usual technical virtuosity: he walks onstage in full house light and turns directly towards the audience as if to communicate something, then at a certain point he activates who knows what source of energy and passes imperceptibly from speaking in ordinary tones to weaving astonishing verbal textures.

She, perched languidly on the swing, pronounces the words of the Little Prince in a childlike little voice full of mysterious femininity and not without ambiguously sensual echoes. Her storytelling is almost the pure exercise of a talent flaunted almost too much, in the long run. And yet through their acting, all of a sudden emotion emerges, a sort of intellectual emotion in the presence of a range of effects that only an actor can evoke from next to nothing.

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