

Luigi Lunari

Senator Fox (1979)

Written 1979, first production Milan, Italy, 1980,
directed by Lorenzo Grechi, with Lorenzo Grechi and Miriam Crotti;
then again 1987 and 1988

Translated into French, English, German, Flemish, Estonian, Spanish
and Japanese

Main productions:

Teatro San Babila, Milano, Directed by Augusto Zucchi, with Renzo
Montagnani and Anna Canzi in the main roles.

Maison de la Culture de Nantes, 1998. Directed by Jean Luc Tardieu
with Pierre Mondy and Catherine Rich, in the main roles. Then in
Paris – same direction and same cast – at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint
Martin, 2004.

Casa de la Cultura, Lavalleja (Uruguay), 1987. Directed by Melitòn
Gonzales, with Ramòn Montserrat and Mirta Freccero in the main
roles.

Raamteater in Antwerpen (Belgium), 1999. Directed by Dirk
Lavrysen with Roger Bolders and Magda Cnudde in the main roles.

Theatre Endla Pärnu (Estonia), 2000, directed by Tiit Palu with Jaah
Rekkor and Carmen Mikiver in the main roles.

Teatro di Palazzo d'Arco, Mantova (Italy), directed by Aldo Signoretti,
with Adolfo Vaini and in the main roles.

Published

in Italian: "Sipario", January 1981, Milano;

in French: Collection MCLA, Volume X, Nantes 1998, et "L'avant-
Scène", n.1041, Janvier 1999, Paris, (French text by Rosetta Morselli
et Nicole Thévenin);

in German: c/o Felix-Bloch-Erben, (German text by Alfred Bergmann)

The Plot

The idea of "Senator Fox" comes from the basic situation of Ben Johnson's "Volpone, or the Fox".

A powerful local politician from a provincial town, with fingers in a lot of more or less lawful pies, is struck by a heart attack; his political colleagues, members of the same party, take advantage of this situation to "kick him upstairs" thus getting rid of him. This is done by getting him elected Senator and so having him sent to the capital away from his rackets.

Fox is in fact completely cured, (has in fact completely recovered) but pretends he is dying in order to play the same trick on his competitors as in Ben Johnson's "Volpone" : they try to outdo each other in involving Fox into their swindles, each one in the hope of being named his political heir and successor.

A subplot intervenes with the main one: the love story – deliberately traditional and trite – between Fox's daughter Maria Vittoria and his secretary Giacomo Colombo . The marriage reveals itself as impossible when we discover that Colombo is, in fact, Fox's natural son , but all ends well when we discover that it is Maria Vittoria who is not Fox's daughter.

But this revelation is fatal for the Senator; in his corrupt political cynicism, he had kept faith with the purity and sanctuary of the family; when these values fail he has another heart attack and this time he dies . "He still had some feelings ", states Colombo "and a strange sort of faith in something: so he died: where real politicians die only of old age".

The Press

"Senator Fox" is a satirical comedy. Satire is as old as the theatre itself...but on the Italian stage its memory would have been lost but for Dario Fo's great breath of mocking wind. Welcome then to this satirical comedy in middle-class garb, a satirical comedy in collar and tie , where Fo's satire is in jeans and jumper; there is a great need for this and not only in the theatre.

(Corriere della Sera, Milano, 1981)

"Senator Fox" is a vitriolic comedy on the power and its rackets.

(Le Figaro, Paris, 1998)

It is the right and pleasure of the stage to magnify to a pitiless caricature the weaknesses of our power mongers; Luigi Lunari makes full use of this right. He is between Mirbeau's polemical violence, the ribaldry of the Italian comedy and Elizabethan laughter. His main

character is called Fox and his play is in a certain way a skit of Ben Johnson's famous farce, except that we are in the age of Berlusconi and of State allocations that vanish up in smoke.

(Les Echos, Nantes, 1998)

Luigi Lunari must really have enjoyed himself sketching the picture of the Italian political universe. His play, translated and adapted into French exports, with a smile, a universal situation, as there are crooks everywhere, but we must admit that this is no longer a surprise... In the role of Fox, Pierre Mondy is irresistibly efficient ... Catherine Rich is dazzling; her gentle grace and dreaming naturalness are truly wonderful. It's absolute happiness jest to hear her recall the peaceful joys of marriage, or the wild pleasures of a mystical embrace.

(Press-Océan, Nantes, 1998)

"Senator Fox " is a universal work; no, a thousand pardons: it's a typically Italian play, as never with us in France has a political figure become involved in such rackets. Voltaire would ask: " what motherland would a free, wise man without prejudices choose for himself?" To this question his advisor would answer that this country is yet to be found . Today France is that country and we can laugh, at our ease, about the ways and morals of other nations. We are good republicans, free and without prejudices . There was indeed a certain Pagnol who in 'Topaze' described an unscrupulous politician, but this was before the last war! There was also a certain Mirbeau, who, in Le Foyer , dared report political and social lies; and further, there was a certain Brecht who one day spoke of "Verfremdungseffekt", but that was a long time ago: they are all dead and we are alive. Let's hurry and laugh about it before we cry.

(L'Avant-Scene, Paris, 1999)
