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Digging in the Dust
Dialogue between man and woman by *Saverio La Ruina*

ABSTRACT: *Dust. Dialogue between man and woman* is a play by playwright, actor, and stage director Saverio La Ruina. It represents the third part of a triptych – alongside the monologues *Dissonorata* and *La Borto* – that examines gender relations and violence against women. Unlike the first two plays, the violence depicted in the ten dialogue scenes of *Dust* is not primarily physical but rather psychological and verbal. Yet, within a couple's relationship, a daily existence marked by subtle and persistent domination, by sharp words that wound – ephemeral as the dust from which the play takes its title – can be equally tragic. Like dust, these words envelop and confound the woman, undermining her certainties and dismantling her identity.

This study seeks to demonstrate how the gradual disintegration into dust of the romantic relationship is enacted through the exhausting repetition not only of the characters' dialogues but also of a static visual situation, unchanging and self-replicating. In shifting from monologue to drama, La Ruina compels the audience to witness something they would rather not see, Exposing—without any form of sublimation—the tragic core of the play in all its raw and unsettling essence.

KEYWORDS: Gender Violence, Theatre, Saverio La Ruina, Hate Speech, Dust.

How can one ask how best to lead a life when one feels no power to direct life, when one is uncertain that one is alive, or when one is struggling to feel the sense that one is alive [...]?

Judith Butler, *Can one lead a good life in a bad life*¹

1. *Dust. Dialogue between Man and Woman* is a play by Italian playwright, actor, and stage director Saverio La Ruina². The work, premiered nationally in January 2015 at the Teatro Elfo Puccini in Milan, marks a significant departure and a stylistic and compositional turn in the author's dramaturgy, which had, over the past decades, been characterized by the monologue form. From *Dissonorata. An Honor Killing in Calabria* (2006)³, which inaugurated a long and successful phase of monologue-based plays, to *La Borto* (2009)⁴, *Italianesi* (2011), and the more recent solo pieces *Masculu e fiammina* (2016) and *Via del Popolo*, La Ruina's work has consistently explored intense personal and social themes through solo performance⁵.

With *Dust*, the monologue gives way to a dialogue between two characters. Nevertheless, this work can be seen – together with *Dissonorata* and *La Borto* – as an original and consistent triptych. These plays are not united so much by their

dramaturgical form as by their shared thematic focus: an investigation into the experience of violated femininity within gender relations⁶.

La Ruina's female-centered monologues *Dissonorata* and *La Borto* recount the familial, social, and cultural tragedies of their respective protagonists, Pasqualina and Vittoria. Pasqualina is portrayed as a poor, unassuming woman, who moves about in slippers and speaks in a very dense Calabrian dialect. Her story is that of a peasant girl, forced to tend sheep in a backward and archaic southern Italy, where girls like her do not receive an education but instead wait for a husband chosen by their families. They are taught to keep their eyes lowered and avoid familiarizing with others. Pasqualina's relatives do eventually find her a suitor, but she must wait for her older sister to marry first, though no prospective husbands come forward. As time passes, Pasqualina grows increasingly afraid that her fiancé will lose interest and that she will be left unmarried, worse still, an "old maid" (*zitellona*). Eventually, she gives in to the suitor's insistence and becomes pregnant, but the man disappears. Seduced, abandoned, and dishonored, she is subjected to her family's brutal punishment: to cleanse the shame, they douse her in gasoline and set her on fire. She survives, and on Christmas Day, hidden away in a stable, she gives birth to Saverio, a conclusion that unmistakably evokes both Christological symbolism and autobiographical resonance.

After Pasqualina – her body disfigured by the violence inflicted upon her by male brutality – *La Borto* introduces another *mater dolorosa* who takes the stand to defend herself against the judgment of men and of God. This time, it is Vittoria, forcibly married at just thirteen to a man twice her age, ugly and crippled, «a sort of monster». By the age of twenty-eight, Vittoria is already the mother of seven children and pregnant with eighth. Faced with her husband's indifference – and driven by shame, despair, and hunger – she is compelled to feed the brutal machinery of illegal abortions. She turns to the *mammane*, shadowy village figures who served as clandestine substitutes for official medicine, mutilating women's bodies with their arsenal of knitting needles and other such instruments of cruelty.

In both monologues, the stage is empty except for a single female character seated on a chair, portrayed by La Ruina himself. He lends voice and body to these protagonists through subtle gestures toward femininity, suggesting rather than fully inhabiting female dress, without disguise, makeup, or wigs, and with no attempt at impersonation. In both plays, the author's Calabrian-Lucanian dialect is adopted as the language of the performance, grounding the text in a specific regional and cultural identity.

With *Dust. Dialogue between Man and Woman*, the final pièce in this trilogy centered on the feminine, everything changes, beginning with the dramaturgical architecture of the play itself. La Ruina takes on a radically different role: no longer that of the victim, but of the perpetrator; no longer embodying modest and heroic women, but assuming instead the uncomfortable position of a man – at once domineering and deeply fragile – incapable of sustaining a healthy relationship with his partner, portrayed by Cecilia Foti.

The language of the characters also shifts: the lush, soft sonorities of the Calabrian-Lucanian dialect give way to a stark, linear Italian which is, in this case, synthetic, intentionally banal or predictable, mirroring the stark realism of power dynamics within intimate relationships. The social background of the protagonists changes as well. In place of the illiterate peasant women of southern Italy, we now encounter two contemporary professionals: she is a schoolteacher, he a successful photojournalist for *L'Espresso*, both embedded in an urban, culturally and socially elevated environment.

Even the semantic function of the stage space is transformed. Whereas in the monologues, the nearly bare set – wholly absorbed by the actor's body – suggested an open space, capable of hosting a multiplicity of narrative threads and characters, in *Dust* the sparse scenographic design offers no such expansiveness. On the contrary, it serves to narrow an already claustrophobic and dusty space in which the drama unfolds, reinforcing the sense of emotional and spatial suffocation.

And yet, what remains, in perfect continuity with the two previous dramatic works, is La Ruina's meticulous exploration of violence against women. In the two monologues, the violence was physical, even atrociously so; in *Dust*, it is psychological, insidious and bruise-free, not immediately visible, yet profoundly lacerating. If physical blows represent the most overt form of violence that can erupt within a relationship between a man and a woman, equally tragic is a daily existence marked by subtle and persistent domination, by cutting words that humiliate, nearly imperceptible, like the dust evoked in the play's title. Just like dust, these words envelop and disorient the woman, eroding her confidence, courage, and ability to smile, ultimately dismantling her sense of self. La Ruina's staging – structured as a one-act play and the result of a long, scrupulous process of preparation involving interviews, readings, and both direct and indirect testimonies – aims precisely to give shape to this *malamore*, or toxic love. He investigates the psychological mechanisms and perverse dynamics into which a fragile and unhealthy form of love can degenerate. The play dissects the grey area

of gender violence, a space that may become the prelude to more extreme outcomes, or, as in this pièce, persist in the form of verbal torture and pathological control.

2. At the center of a stage almost empty, with only a table, two chairs, and a single painting, we find the unnamed man and woman, still relatively new to their relationship, having just returned from a party at her friends' home.

From the very first scene, the relationship begins to show signs of malfunction. On one side stands the man: alienated, yet deliberately orchestrating a slow and methodical erosion of his partner's sense of peace. Offended, he accuses her of having ignored him throughout the evening and of failing to introduce him to her friends as her *boyfriend*. On the other side stands the woman, who – initially embarrassed, then increasingly filled with astonishment, guilt, frustration, and humiliation – repeats a *refrain* that recurs obsessively in each scene: «I'm sorry», «love, sorry», «love, I'm sorry, you're right»⁷. She begins apologizing immediately, embarrassed, for not having treated him like a boyfriend at the party. She apologizes again, awkwardly and with growing confusion, when he accuses her of stroking her neck too freely while speaking, an act he interprets as a seductive signal. She apologizes once more, disappointed and disoriented, when he criticizes the lone painting hanging in her apartment – a gift from a female painter friend – which depicts a female figure he finds overly sensual, morbid, erotic, something that «disturbs [him] a lot»⁸. Notably, the painting will disappear from subsequent scenes. In the same sequence, she continues to apologize, now visibly unsettled, when he points out that plucking her eyebrows makes her gaze resemble that of the aggressive woman in the painting. He not only criticizes the gesture but demands – orders – that she stop doing it.

In a steadily intensifying verbal and emotional *crescendo*, driven by his obsession with control and possession, the man expresses irritation because she addressed him without using the term «love». She finds herself apologizing yet again, visibly intimidated, when he catches her smoking, despite their mutual decision to quit, and accuses her of being unreliable. She apologizes, distressed, when he confronts her about a chair that has been moved in her apartment. The interrogation over the possible reasons that might have led her to move the chair occupies an extended scene, one that merits closer attention for its high degree of psychological coercion. This dynamic is sustained, as in other moments of the play,

by a meticulously constructed rhetorical pattern that renders the man's language both hammering and razor-sharp:

HE: Did you move the chair?

SHE: Ah, yes... yes, I moved the chair the other day.

HE: And why did you move the chair?

SHE: Well, I moved it because...

[...]

He places a chair in front of his own.

HE: Can you sit down and tell me here?

She sits.

[...]

SHE: Love, I think I bumped into it the other day before going to work because I was in a rush and...

HE: But do you think you bumped it or did you bump it?

SHE: Well, I believe I bumped into it. Yes, if I moved the chair, I bumped into it.

HE: And why did you bump into it? It's been there a while, no? I've never bumped into this chair since I've been coming here. Why did you bump into the chair?

SHE: Well you know, I can't remember...

HE: So think about it.

Pause

SHE: But maybe because I was sleepy, you know going to work, maybe I was late.

HE: You were late? And why were you late?

SHE: I can't remember now exactly whether I was actually late, but...

HE: Eh no, because you're never late, so you'd remember if you were late that morning.

SHE: Yes, maybe I was late, maybe the alarm didn't go off.

HE: And therefore: you were late because the alarm didn't go off, you were rushing, you bumped into the chair and moved the chair. Hm, I understand. And how come the alarm didn't go off? The alarm always goes off.

[...]

SHE: You know, I can't remember if the alarm went off or didn't go off that morning?

[...]

HE: And so why did you say the alarm didn't go off? Before you said that the alarm didn't go off.

SHE: But I'm not really very sure at all, sorry. I thought, I was trying to think.

HE: But you're sure then that you weren't late for work?

SHE: Yes, I believe so... I don't know, love, I'm sorry.

[...]

HE: [...] For sure, not remembering whether, I mean... No? Love, why not think a little bit seriously about it?

SHE: I can definitely think about it, love, I'm sorry, but... I swear... I don't know, I'm sorry... I didn't... But the chair doesn't go there, should I put it where it was before? Because... that is, if it disturbs you, I don't...

HE: It doesn't disturb me. That is, are you aware how important it is to be present to yourself when someone does things?

SHE: Yes, love, I'm sorry, you're right.

HE: But that's not it. It's that you cannot answer no, nothing, I moved it because I can't remember. To nothing can one answer saying I can't remember, the cleaning lady, me, you, the cat... No. If you have the craving to move the chair you have to justify your motive to me. We sit down, we talk about it and we understand what this desire of yours to move the chair derives from⁹.

For the man, the reason the woman moved the chair lies in her psychological and personality traits. The scene unfolds as a detective-like, obsessive, and grotesque interrogation, just one of many hallucinatory investigations that punctuate the dramatic structure of the play. Each functions as a fragment of circumstantial evidence, gradually revealing underlying psychological dynamics and behavioral patterns. These mechanisms transform even the briefest moments of tenderness into subtle emotional blackmail, into forms of excruciating coercion. Even the early gestures of intimacy typical of a new relationship – such as when she, complying with his demand to tell him everything («I want to know everything about you, your past, who there was before me... »)¹⁰, confides in him about a rape she suffered years earlier – slowly degenerate into conflict. What begins as vulnerability and disclosure soon becomes a crude interrogation, where the man takes on the role of public prosecutor and the woman becomes the accused, pinned to a chair, forced to absorb both his morbid insinuations and the weight of his deep emotional fragility. Just like a defendant on the witness stand, she submissively repeats the same stories over and over: the devastating episode of the rape, chance encounters with friends, her past relationships, how many times she told them «I love you» and the story of a completely forgotten ex, a certain Ivan Donato, who alongside the rape becomes one of the main charges leveled against her.

After a relentless barrage of questions and conjectures that gradually wear down the woman's exhausted psyche, the accusation against her is finally articulated: that she is a liar and, ultimately, that she deserved what happened to her for being out on the street at three in the morning. The following are the final lines of a scene conducted entirely over the phone, dominated by yet another detailed account from the woman of the sexual violence she endured years earlier:

HE: For fuck's sake, but if you go out at three in the morning to smoke and walk the streets of Rome with a short dress on, what do you think will happen? They're going to bring you a bouquet of flowers? Let's tell it like it is, when it comes down to it you deserved it... and when it really comes down to it, you were also asking for it.

SHE: (*Weeping*) Love, you tell me what to say and I'll say it, what to think and I'll think it, what to do and I'll do it.

HE: Are you crying? All right, I'll get off. I'll call back when you're done.

SHE: But do you want us to talk to someone, should we get help from someone?

HE: No, you and me are enough¹¹.

The mechanism of psychological dismantling and the creation of a void around her, like the aftermath of a military strike, is fully set in motion («You and me are enough...»; «Look at yourself in the mirror, go look at yourself in the mirror, go, go. Look at those wrinkles... But where are you headed with this load, this weight?»)¹². Toward the end of the play, it even ensnares the man, causing fragments of his own morbid ramblings to explode – fragments that reveal layers of old relational deposits, that dust of jealousy, fear, and fragility from which his mind has never truly been immune.

3. In this new theatrical work, the treatment of language continues to surprise, with the deliberate choice of a sterile, flat, and colorless Italian. La Ruina's meticulously controlled rhetorical strategy transforms this austere language into a sharp instrument of torture, sufficient in itself to generate conflict and precipitate the implosion of the romantic relationship. Whereas in his earlier monologic dramaturgy the director had constructed a poetic architecture through the use of intimate tonalities – composing, with his plain and affectionate narration, pieces of a lyrical mosaic – the dialogic structure of *Dust* allows him to experiment with unprecedented modes of dramatic development and to delineate his characters without any lyricism. Instead, he works with surgical precision on the stylistic and syntactic register of the text, as well as on the semantic level, maintaining a constant and even more focused attention to textual pragmatics than in his previous dramaturgy.

While a detailed linguistic analysis falls outside the scope of this discussion, it is worth noting, at the pragmatic level alone, the frequent pauses that punctuate the dialogue between the two characters. In this play, these pauses are no longer lyrical, as in the earlier monologues, but are charged with tension, contributing to the infusion of a new register of male aggression into the drama, not in the indirect

form of scenic narration, but in the mimetic mode of dramatic representation. Equally frequent are the discourse markers, which the director skillfully employs while mostly preserving the original syntactic arrangement of the utterances. However, he assigns strong intonational prominence to certain elements within them, aiming to emphasize the peaks of the man's relentless aggression and to phonetically delineate his disturbed psyche («You know how many women I said it to before you? *Zero*. Therefore *I* love you. *You* don't love me»)¹³. The rhetorical device of repetition, previously observed in *La Ruina*'s earlier monologues as a precise compositional technique and a distinctive stylistic hallmark, also reappears in *Dust*¹⁴. Yet, unlike in the monologues, here the repetition of words or entire phrases no longer produces a rhythmic, lyrical, or empathetic reinforcement. Instead, it effectively serves the director's purpose of conveying the obsession of a troubled mind and rendering increasingly suffocating the space in which the verbal bombardment of his character unfolds. Some examples are as follows:

HE: Sit down.

SHE: Why, what do we have to...

HE: Sit down.

They sit.

HE: Come on, let's tell each other everything, I want to know everything about you, your past, who there was before me [...]¹⁵.

HE: You're not confused, you're untrustworthy. You see why we always have to repeat the same things? You force me.

SHE: Yes, so now we have to talk again about when I was seventeen?

HE: Yes, we'll talk fifty times about when you were seventeen if necessary. In fact, you know what we'll do? We'll make some nice tea, even the Indian since you like it so much, and we'll repeat it all from the top.

SHE: All from the top?

HE: Yes, all from the top. Sit down¹⁶.

HE: Anyway you know how it is, no? I come down, we make love and it all goes away. That's how it always goes, no? Hey. Anyway you know how it is, no? Eh? We make love and it all goes away...¹⁷.

This latter phrase, in particular, functions as a crude refrain, one that returns significantly at the very end of the play, reiterated by the man like a jarring, discordant incantation, an autistic-like litany aimed at freezing the time of this toxic love, trapping it in an endless loop of identical frames.

4. In addition to the static and monotonous repetition either identically or with minimal variation of words or entire utterances, *Dust* introduces another striking innovation: the reiteration of scenic sequences, likewise either identical or only slightly altered. The construction and gradual erosion of the romantic relationship – a progression that, on stage, does not culminate in a sensational crime or overt physical violence (save for two brief episodes), but is instead left intentionally unresolved in an open-ended finale – is built precisely on this exhausting replication. Not only are the characters' lines repeated, but so too is a visual situation that remains immobile and unresolved («Sit down»; «We sit down, we talk about it and we understand...»), persisting even into the epilogue.

The entire dramaturgical structure unfolds as a series of deliberately unevolving *tableaux*, in alignment with the director's declared intention not to tell «a story with a coherent narrative arc», but to dissect and analyze *in vitro* «a pure behavioral pattern»¹⁸, in an effort to uncover «the roots of a pathology» and expose «the “slippery ground” where such pathology takes hold»¹⁹. Through the cold, photographic detachment of repetition, *La Ruina* restores to the scenic image its full power of contagion, compelling the spectator to confront what they would rather look away from. It is precisely this objectivity and seriality that allows *La Ruina* to isolate and expose the tragic core of the play in all its repellent clarity, without sublimation, without theatrical embellishment or spectacle. The result, for all the risks of the comparison, recalls the compulsive repetition with minimal variation found in the work of Andy Warhol.

5. Warhol, too, practiced a kind of «reportage without emotion». With the «pitilessness of a reporter» Warhol sought to identify the tragic within the everyday – just think of the *Death and Disaster* series (1963) – refusing any compromise, insisting on «the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth»²⁰. As the critic Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco aptly observed:

Warhol's work is a descent into hell that lasts an eternity. [...] He offers no solutions, no Ariadne's thread to guide us out of the labyrinth. Because at that point, his task is done. The atomic bomb explodes before our eyes one, two, three, four, thirty times; a man commits suicide one, two, three, six times; “Che” dies on canvas two, four, six, endless times – he always dies. [...] The power of Warhol's image lies in its radical openness: it's one, ten, countless; it can be yellow, silver, or red; it is clear or solarized or blurry; it captures the key moment, but also the just-before or just-after. Crime and tragedy have become part of our morning routine, like sipping coffee with the newspaper. A monk burns in Saigon, just as two astronauts burn in their capsule, just as a driver

burns in the wreckage of his Rolls-Royce. We begin to feel fear only when the image assaults us in an unexpected place, at an unexpected time – say, in an art gallery²¹.

Warhol's extraction of images «from the inflation of things»²² and their replication in unexpected contexts, syllabized rather than narrated, does not diminish their meaning. On the contrary, it amplifies their power. In this light, Warhol's repetitions, as Hal Foster has noted from a different critical perspective, «not only reproduce traumatic effects; they *produce* them as well [...]. Somehow, in these repetitions, then, several contradictory things occur at the same time: a warding away of traumatic significance *and* an opening out to it, a defending against traumatic affect *and* a producing of it»²³.

La Ruina's staging, like Warhol's canvases, generates these two opposing emotional responses: detachment and contagion; emotional defense and, simultaneously, an inescapable immersion in the tension of the seen. Like Warhol, La Ruina creates a sterile kind of reportage, with the dispassion of a journalist, extracting from the overexposure of everyday experience the drama of psychological gender violence and transplanting it into the unexpected and privileged space of the theater, a place from which one can see what often escapes perception in the immediacy of real life.

6. This call to look a little longer creates in the spectator an oscillation between two types of perception: one cautious and distanced, the other affective and destabilizing. This duality mirrors what Roland Barthes identifies in *Camera Lucida* as the *studium* and the *punctum*. The *studium* is the field of cultural interest, where we engage with images intellectually, supported by background knowledge that the image may enrich, contradict, or confirm. It is «a kind of education (knowledge and civility, “politeness”）」²⁴ that allows the observer to participate in «in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions»²⁵. Through the *studium*, images become cultural artifacts – sources of information or knowledge – without involving passion. As Barthes writes, «The *studium* is that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: I like / I don't like. The *studium* is of the order of liking, not of loving; it mobilizes a half desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes one finds “all right”」²⁶. In contrast, the *punctum* emerges when cultural defenses lower and intellectual engagement gives way to a more visceral response. For Barthes, the

punctum belongs to the realm of *to love*, not *to like*; it wounds, it disrupts the *studium*, and pulls the viewer into another dimension. As Barthes continues:

The second element will break (or punctuate) the *studium*. This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument: the word suits me all the better in that it also refers to the notion of punctuation, and because the photographs I am speaking of are in effect punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points; precisely, these marks, these wounds are so many points. This second element which will disturb the *studium* I shall therefore call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole – and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)²⁷.

In *Dust* the *punctum* intervenes to disrupt the *studium*, to shatter the polite, culturally filtered engagement with the subject matter. If *studium* is a form participation, sometimes even a moved participation, whose «emotion requires the rational intermediary of an ethical and political culture»²⁸, *punctum* is a wound. It originates on stage, and strikes the viewer of *Dust*, leaving a mark, and burning open scars.

7. La Ruina's dialogue – at times hastily dismissed, perhaps solely through the lens of *studium*, for its apparent textual predictability, its supposed poetic or dialectical limitations, or its refusal of theatrical spectacle²⁹ – finds in these very “shortcomings” a new dramaturgical force. Like Greek tragedy, it is a drama of the word. It consciously reduces the Aristotelian *opsis*, the spectacularism and fascination of the show, in favor of a lucid linguistic mechanism³⁰. As Giovanni Cerri noted of Attic tragedy: «*Opsis* is truly reduced to the simple vision of characters speaking, and the actor's gestures are almost entirely resolved into oratorical movement»³¹. In *Dust* too, «gestures and physical movement are reduced to a minimum». Just as Greek tragedy is «a *fabula stataria*, not a *fabula motoria*»³², so *Dust* relies not on dramatic twists but on language, on autistic-like minimal gestures (such as the man's incessant finger-tapping), and on obsessively repeated images to convey the phenomenology of conflict.

It would have been easier, perhaps, for La Ruina to stage a femicide, to rely on the shock of a wounding twist but ultimately fleeting. That path would have comforted the audience with a neat moral dichotomy between good and evil, victim and perpetrator. Staging overt violence would have offered absolution to all: men,

who could reassure themselves (“I’m not like him”), and women, who could judge the victim (“Why doesn’t she run?”). But this is not La Ruina’s goal. Instead, he drags the audience into the *dust* and forces them to dig into it and sift through the apparently insignificant grains from which systemic violence is composed. He dissects the small, daily acts of moral and psychological abuse to which no one is entirely immune – abuse that seeps like fine dust into homes, families, and friendships. During the performance, confronted with the suffocating repetition of words and static scenes, the spectator is laid bare: struck by the *punctum*, they recognize with embarrassment and discomfort a phrase, a glance, a gesture, a slight, once committed or endured. The recognition of how easily one might *become* the characters on stage evokes unease and agitation not only in women – who feel, on their skin, the claustrophobic inferno the protagonist inhabits – but also in men, confronted by a male figure who exposes their vulnerabilities and blind spots. In the shift from monologue to drama, from narrated violence to represented violence, La Ruina’s uncompromising aim is to prevent the spectator from remaining comfortably seated, to compel them to engage, to become involved. The monotonous, unsublimated repetition of the same event becomes an invitation to look deeper, to grasp the *quidditas*, the essential whatness of things.

The rhetorical device of repetition, already a defining compositional and stylistic feature of La Ruina’s monologue-based work, thus takes on a broader function in *Dust*, enriching the author’s poetics with a precise and previously unseen strategy of vision. It is a vision that simultaneously wounds and nourishes, that forces one to pause, and in the wounds it opens, generates awareness.

Note

¹ J. Butler, *Can one lead a good life in a bad life?*, «Radical Philosophy», 176, November/December, 2012, p. 12.

² The original title of the play is *Polvere. Dialogo tra uomo e donna*. The Italian text is published in S. La Ruina, *Teatro (Polvere, Masculu e fiammina, Saverio e Chadli vs Mario e Saleh)*, Imola, Cue Press, 2022. In addition to the English translation by T. Haskell Simpson, which is the source for the quotations in this article, La Ruina’s text has also been translated into Spanish under the title *Polvo* by Diana Volpe (an unpublished stage translation), and into Chinese under the title 尘 (*Dust*) by Zhou Ting, and published by Beijing Language and Culture University Press in 2022.

The play has also toured abroad as follows: 2016 – *Dust*, directed by Anna Bahow, Victory Gardens Theater, Chicago; 2017 – *Polvo*, directed by Diana Volpe, European Union’s International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, Caracas; 2018 – *Polvo*, directed by Diana Volpe, La Caja de Fósforos, Caracas; 2023 – *Polvo*, directed

by Orlando Arocha, Centro Cultural de Arte Moderno, Caracas. A new production is currently being prepared in Mexico City. Here we limit ourselves to highlighting a few key milestones in the long artistic journey of Saverio La Ruina, beginning in 1992, the year in which the theatre company Scena Verticale was founded, with La Ruina serving as founder and artistic director alongside Dario De Luca. In 1999, Scena Verticale launched the festival *Primavera dei Teatri*, dedicated to contemporary stage languages, a festival that, over the years, has received numerous awards from both audiences and critics and has just celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. La Ruina's artistic output is intense and prolific: starting in 1996 with *La stanza della memoria*, the company's debut work, followed by *De-viados* (1998), and the Shakespearean trilogy *Hardore di Otello* (2000), *Amleto ovvero cara mamma* (2002), and *Kitsch Amlet* (2004), all polyphonic works, performed by two or more voices, leading gradually to the essentiality of the monologue. For further discussion of La Ruina's theatre, see A. Albanese, *Identità sotto chiave. Lingua e stile nel teatro di Saverio La Ruina*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2017.

³ *Dissonorata. Un delitto d'onore in Calabria* premiered in September 2006 as part of the Roman festival *Bella Ciao*, and received numerous accolades: a double Ubu Award in 2007 for Best Actor and Best Italian Play, the Hystrio Prize for Playwriting in 2010, and a nomination for the ETI – Gli Olimpici del Teatro Award in 2007 for Best Solo Performance. *La Borto* premiered at Teatro India in Rome in November 2009 and likewise received both the Ubu Award in 2010 for Best Italian Play and the Hystrio Prize for Playwriting in the same year.

⁴ *Dissonorata, La Borto, and Italianesi* were published by Titivillus in 2014. This volume, edited by Leonardo Mello, serves as a key reference not only for Mello's own introduction (pp. 7-12), but also for the four additional essays on La Ruina's monologue-based dramaturgy, authored respectively by Goffredo Fofi (pp. 165-168), Gerardo Guccini (pp. 169-175), Renato Palazzi (pp. 176-180), and Paolo Puppa (pp. 181-189).

⁵ The play *Via del Popolo*, written and performed by Saverio La Ruina and produced by his company Scena Verticale, had its national premiere on December 6, 2022, at the Teatro Menotti in Milan. It was awarded the 2023 Ubu Prize for Best New Italian Play and was nominated for the 2023 *Le Maschere del Teatro Italiano* Award for Best New Playwriting. For a historiographic overview of current trends in contemporary playwriting and the various profiles of monologue performers, see at least: M. Ariani, G. Taffon, *Scritture per la scena. La letteratura drammatica nel Novecento italiano*, Rome, Carocci, 2001, pp. 223-295; P. Puppa, *Il teatro dei testi. La drammaturgia italiana nel Novecento*, Turin, Utet, 2003, pp. 159-209; Id., *La voce solitaria. Monologhi d'attore nella scena italiana tra vecchio e nuovo millennio*, Rome, Bulzoni, 2010; G. Guccini (ed.), *La bottega dei narratori*, Rome, Dino Audino, 2005; N. Pasqualicchio (ed.), *L'attore solista nel teatro italiano*, Rome, Bulzoni, 2006; G. Guccini, D. Tomasello (eds.), *Autori oggi, un ritorno*, «Prove di Drammaturgia», XV, 2, 2009; S. Soriani, *Sulla scena del racconto*, Civitella in Val di Chiana, Zona, 2009.

⁶ *Polvere. Dialogo tra uomo e donna* had its national premiere in January 2015 at Teatro Elfo Puccini in Milan, presented alongside the two monologues *Dissonorata* and *La Borto*, thereby affirming its role as part of a trilogy on gender-based violence.

⁷ All textual quotations cited hereafter are taken from S. La Ruina, *Dust. Dialogue Between Man and Woman*, translated by T. Haskell Simpson, «The Mercurian. A Theatrical Translation Review», 5, n. 4, Fall, pp. 174-210, <https://the-mercurian.com/2016/07/25/dust-dialogue-between-man-and-woman/>. The Italian edition of the text can be found in

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- S. La Ruina, *Teatro. Polvere, Masculo e fiammina, Saverio e Chadli vs Mario e Saleh*, Imola, Cue Press, 2022.
- ⁸ S. La Ruina, *Dust. Dialogue between man and woman*, cit., p. 189.
- ⁹ Ivi, pp. 190-192.
- ¹⁰ Ivi, p. 182.
- ¹¹ Ivi, p. 200.
- ¹² Ivi, p. 210.
- ¹³ Ivi, p. 203. Our italics.
- ¹⁴ On the function of repetition as a distinctive stylistic feature of La Ruina's theatre, see A. Albanese, *Identità sotto chiave*, cit.
- ¹⁵ S. La Ruina, *Dust. Dialogue between man and woman*, cit., p. 182.
- ¹⁶ Ivi, pp. 203-204.
- ¹⁷ Ivi, p. 210.
- ¹⁸ R. Palazzi, *Violenza sottile come polvere*, «Il Sole 24 ore», 8 February 2015, p. 38.
- ¹⁹ M. Giovannelli, *La Ruina: la violenza, la polvere*, <http://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/scene/la-ruina-la-violenza-la-polvere> (last accessed 18/6/2025).
- ²⁰ M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Warhol: The American Way of Dying*, «Riga», 33, Marcos y Marcos, Milano, 2012, p. 76, our translation.
- ²¹ Ivi, p.73, 77.
- ²² Ivi, p. 78.
- ²³ H. Foster, *Death in America*, «The MIT Press», vol. 75, Winter, 1996, p. 42, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/778898> (last accessed 24/06/2025).
- ²⁴ R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflection on Photography*, transl. by Richard Howard, New York, Hill and Wang, 1981, p. 28.
- ²⁵ Ivi, p. 26.
- ²⁶ Ivi, p. 29.
- ²⁷ Ivi, pp. 26, 27.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ See R. Francabandera, *Polvere: La Ruina dal solo al passo a due*, «Pac. Magazine di arte & culture», 2015, <http://paneacquaculture.net/2015/01/23/polvere-la-ruina-dal-solo-al-passo-a-due/> (last accessed 15/06/2025); C. Roviada, *Nitidezza in polvere*, «Stratagemmi», 1/02/2015, <http://www.stratagemmi.it/?p=6683> (last accessed 19/05/2025).
- ³⁰ Any reference to Aristotle's downplaying of the scenic and spectacular component of theatrical performance must necessarily take into account the important critical contribution of Marco De Marinis, who, through a detailed textual analysis of the *Poetics*, has demonstrated that Aristotle's conception of *opsis* is far more complex, nuanced, and even contradictory than what text-centered and philological interpretations from the sixteenth century onward have suggested. See M. De Marinis, *Aristotele: la teoria dello spettacolo nella «Poetica»*, in *Visioni della scena: teatro e scrittura*, Bari, Laterza, 2004, pp. 5-17.
- ³¹ G. Cerri, *Il dialogo tragico e il ruolo della gestualità*, «Engramma. La tradizione classica nella memoria occidentale», 99, July/August, 2012, http://www.egramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=830 (last accessed 19/06/2025). See also G. Cerri, *La tragedia*, in *Lo spazio letterario della Grecia antica*, vol. 1, I, Salerno, Rome, 1992, pp. 301-334; Id., *La tragedia greca: mimesi verbale di un'azione verbale. Saggio di poetica*, «Vichiana», IV, 7, 1, 2005, pp. 17-36.
- ³² *Ibid.*