

TRANSLATION

Literature and Theatre/An evening with Dacia Maraini

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An evening with Dacia Maraini at the “Martin E. Segal Theater Center.” The Italian writer, novelist, poet, essayist, playwright, in the United States for a series of meetings, among which two in New Jersey with students from the Coccia Institute at Montclair State University and from Drew University, and then in New York where she was hosted by The Graduate Center for a reading and performance of her work. The event was organized by Jane House Productions in collaboration with the Italian Cultural Institute, CUNY Graduate Center, and The Living Theatre. An interesting night with a large and attentive audience who demonstrated their appreciation for one of the most widely translated of Italian women writers, a woman who knew how, with her art, to occupy positions that traditionally have been the privilege of male intellectuals. “Maraini,” as Jane House explained, “has been an actor on the Italian literary scene since the 1960s, contributing with her work to sharpening her readers’ critical perceptions vis-à-vis contemporary society. She has fought, above all, for women, and in her books she strongly denounces the injustices and abuses they have suffered. Furthermore, she was co-founder in the 1960s of Teatro del Porcospino and in 1973 of Teatro La Maddalena, in Roma, an experimental theatre for women. Among her most important works are *Mary Stuart*, *Dreams of Clytemnestra*, *Dialogue of a Prostitute and Her Client*, and *Stravaganza*. Her books have inspired many films, such as *L’età del malessere*, *Teresa la ladra*, *Storia di Piera*, and she herself wrote screenplays for directors such as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Carlo Di Palma, and Margarethe Von Trotta.” Maraini, one of the spectators, was there for the projection of clips from some famous films and watched the readings taken from *Camille*, a biographical drama about Camille Claudel, the French sculptress, a student and lover of the great Auguste Rodin, who died in a mental hospital, *Mary Stuart*, and *Notarbartolo: A Just Man*. The works were brilliantly interpreted by Monica West, Kathy Lee Hart, Silvia Giampaola, Judith Malina, Oliver Henzler, Hanon Reznikov, Raymond McAnally, and Sam Tsoutsouvas. First a spectator and then in conversation with the audience to whom she explained, among other things, her preference for the theatre over writing novels. “I love the theatre—she said—because it taught me so many things and, even if you can’t change the world by creating theatre, perhaps you can make people examine their conscience, you can excite some new thought. Furthermore, writing for the theatre, unlike writing a novel, which requires a “solitary act,” always entails confronting someone, and one can say that it is only finished when the play is put on stage. Also the concept of time is different, in the novel you have the perception of time passing, while the theatrical representation is always in the present.” The past and history give Maraini inspiration for themes about the present and as she herself says “the past gives you the necessary distance to judge things in the right way and sometimes it can speak forcefully in the present. Let’s take the example of *Notarbartolo*. This man was killed because he believed in the law and in applying it justly, and for that reason he was considered a ‘revolutionary’. I wrote this work to remind us that just people still exist in this world. In Sicily, where *Notarbartolo* happens, our memory of what happened to Judge Paolo Borsellino is still very much alive, and he was murdered because he wanted

to apply the law.” A special appreciation of the Italian author was expressed by Judith Malina, founder of “The Living Theatre,” who considered her works for the theatre “a way of continuously confronting oneself as well as reality.” And it’s not without reason that Alberto Moravia, in the introduction to *La Vacanza*, of 1962, writes of Maraini “I would like therefore to talk above all about the quality of your literary talent, at least as I see it up to now. So, you are above all a realistic writer. What do I mean by realistic? I mean the kind of writer who loves reality for what it is and not for what it should be, that is only and exactly because it is reality; and who does not turn away from any part of that reality, however unexpected it may be.”