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Maraini is celebrated for one evening in Manhattan  
and her Theatre Excites New York

by Flavio Pompetti

New York – A warm welcome was given to Dacia Maraini by the New York theatrical community during an event celebrating her work as a playwright which took place at the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center of CUNY, the City University of New York on Wednesday night.

Short film clips that document her activity as a screenwriter, from the dialogue of *Fiore delle Mille e Una Notte* by Pasolini, to the presentation of selections from *Mela* (1981) and *Strada* (2002), were projected on a screen, with introductions by the translator and Italian theatre scholar, Jane House. Then a group of New York actors, among them the founder of The Living Theatre Judith Malina and the artistic director of the group since the death of Julian Beck: Hanon Reznikov, brought to life several characters created by Maraini, beginning with the drama dedicated to Camille Caudel, a model and inspiration for the sculptures of Auguste Rodin, which text was translated into English by Dr. House. "Translation is a necessary evil" said Maraini in the discussion that followed the presentations. "It's inevitable that a certain vitality in the text is lost, but it allows for communication that would otherwise be impossible."

An absorbed audience, and there were few available seats in the hall, responded enthusiastically to the acting, and received in exchange a little gem of an expressive interpretation of a short monologue from *Mary Stuart*, recited by Judith Malina with a hoarse and abrasive voice. "We are here to pay homage to one of the finest contemporary writers on the international stage" said Malina to the audience, "and the absence of her plays on our stages speaks volumes about the crisis in American culture." The two women have known each other for a long time and collaborated in the past. At the present time, Maraini is writing a surreal text for Malina where the protagonist is an elderly Cleopatra, now a refugee in Roma in the Egyptian community in Trastevere.

The final tidbit of the evening, the presentation of some scenes from her most recent play: "Notarbartolo, a just man," which tells the story of the marquis Emanuele Notarbartolo, mayor of Palermo and governor of the Banco di Sicilia, assassinated by Cosa Nostra in 1893 in what was the first "very important homicide" of a man who attempted to clean house while administrating public institutions. It's an homage to the determination of one person who became a hero without fighting for an ideal or a political cause, but for the simple and unforgivable love of justice. Maraini has barely finished writing it, and its premiere should happen in Palermo during the 2007 season.