

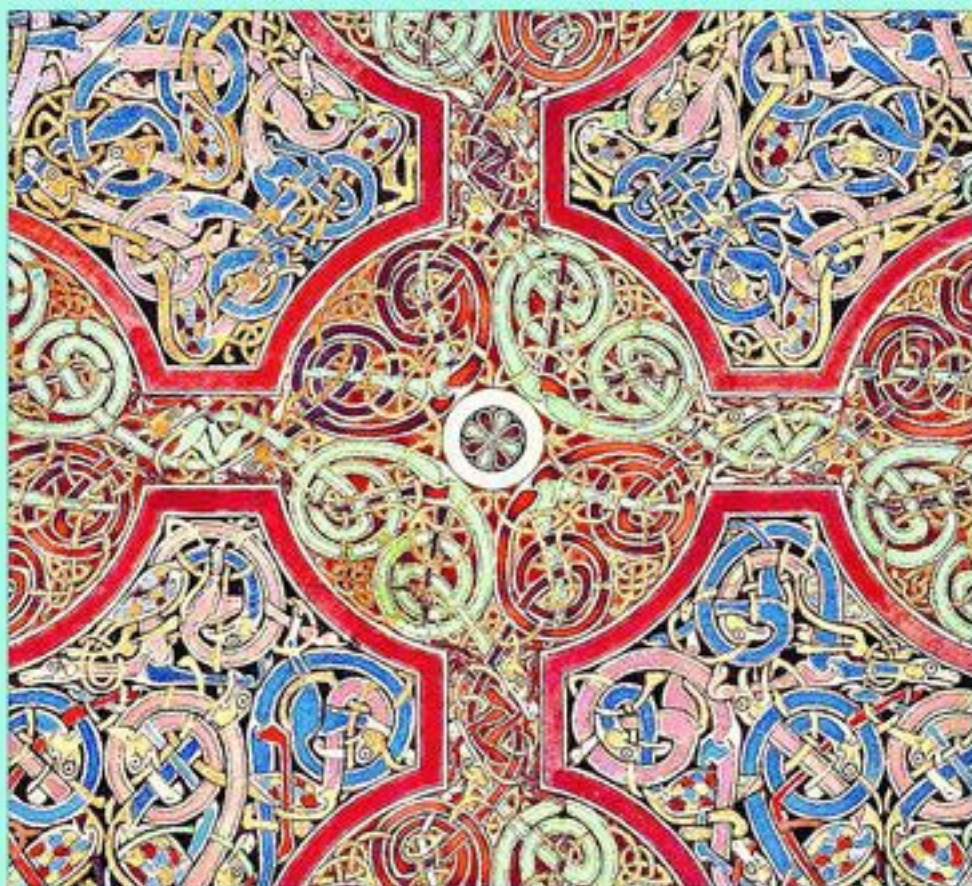
# TLS

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## The genius of Lindisfarne

Alexander Murray

NON È TEMPO DI NOSTALGIA

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It is just four months since the death of Franca Rame, Dario Fo's wife and a central figure in Italy's theatrical and literary life for over half a century. Shortly before she died, at the age of eighty-four, Rame gave a long interview to her British translator, Joseph Farrell, published here in book form and laid out as questions and answers. It ranges widely over Rame's long and tumultuous life, touching on the highs and lows of her marriage to Fo, her work as an actress and playwright, her involvement in left-wing social campaigns, her kidnap and rape by neo-fascists and the founding, with Fo, of a militant theatre group, La Comune, in 1970. During their performances, political updates and scandals were incorporated even as they were happening. A constant thorn in the flesh of the political establishment, quick to espouse the causes of the poor, the marginalized and the exploited, Rame eventually served for nineteen months as a senator – for a party in opposition to Silvio Berlusconi – before resigning. They were, she told Farrell, the unhappiest months of her life. She called the assembly “an iceberg of feelings”.

Born into a family of puppeteers and strolling players, Rame grew up hard-working, committed to justice, intolerant of pomposity and corruption, irreverent and humorous. Her first appearance on stage was when she was eight days old. She was also striking to look at, tall, with blond, Nordic features. As Fo's principal actress, often appearing in monologues she had written herself, she dazzled audiences in theatres around the world. To Farrell's repeated questions about the extent of her collaboration with Fo, she described their working process of editing, rewriting, altering, scrutinizing and acting out every line. Her role, she said, had been to steer him towards ever greater improvisation; but it was Fo who was the “genius”. When, in 1997, Fo was awarded the Nobel Prize, he referred to Rame as his “muse”. Always outspoken, full of theatrical vignettes, forthright in her opinions – Simone de Beauvoir was “odious and rude”, Sartre a “rascal” when it came to sex – she was also scornful of much modern theatre, saying it had become too slow and mannered. As Farrell shows, she makes an excellent subject. Her life, she told him, had been full of excitement, and her marriage, for all its blips, extremely happy. Were she to be born again – something she profoundly hoped would not happen – she would not “change a single comma of my life”.

CAROLINE MOOREHEAD