

AND...

SHOW LIVE BROADCAST on July 10 on France 2 and Culturebox, then available on Culturebox during six months, and broadcasted on July 23 in the Irish Cultural Center - Festival Paris l'Été (Paris)

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Site Louis Pasteur Supramuros de l'Université d'Avignon

Dialogue artists-audience with Thomas Jolly and the team of *Thyeste*, July 8 at 16:30

The Lessons of the University with Thomas Jolly, July 9 at 12:30

Within the mind of a spectator. Neuroscience, a new approach to the spectator, with Thomas Jolly, Région Paca, July 11 at 14:30

Encounter Research and creation in Avignon, *The game and the rule!*

Games of balance, gods, power, and sacrifice, with Thomas Jolly,

National Agency of Research, July 11 at 11:00, cloître Saint-Louis

NAVE OF IMAGES

Église des Célestins

– *Chroniques du Festival d'Avignon* by Thomas Jolly (2016), July 7 to 23 juillet at 11:00

– *Le théââtre* by Thomas Jolly (2018), July 7 to 23 juillet at 14:30

FNAC ENCOUNTER

with Thomas Jolly, July 11 at 17:30, Fnac Avignon

PEDAGOGICAL FILE

Pièce (dé)montée produced by Canopé, available on festival-avignon.com

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- September 27 and 28, 2018, Théâtre de l'Archipel
- Scène nationale de Perpignan
- October 16 to 19, Comédie de Saint-Étienne, Centre dramatique national
- November 6 to 8, Le Quai, Angers
- November 14 to 20, Le Grand T théâtre de Loire-Atlantique, Nantes
- Novembre 26 to December 1st, La Villette - Paris
- December 5 to 15, Théâtre national de Strasbourg
- December 19 and 20, Théâtre des Salins, Martigues
- January 25 and 26, 2019, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Charleroi (Belgium)
- January 31 and February 1st, La Coursive Scène nationale de La Rochelle
- February 12 to 16, Les Célestins, Théâtre de Lyon
- March 6 to 8, Théâtre de Caen
- March 15 and 16, anthéa Théâtre d'Antibes
- March 22 and 23, Le Liberté, Scène nationale de Toulon
- March 28 to 30, La Criée Théâtre national de Marseille
- April 3 and 4, Théâtre Firmin Gémier La Piscine, Châtenay-Malabry
- April 24 to 28, Théâtre du Nord, Lille

72th
EDITION

In order to bring you this edition, over 1,750 people, artists, technicians, and organisational staff, have worked tirelessly and enthusiastically for months. More than half of them are state-subsidised freelance workers.

FESTIVAL-AVIGNON.COM



#FDA18

THYESTES

Thyestes tells the story of a crime so awful, it reportedly altered the course of the sun's orbit when it heard it. While Atreus reigns in peace over Mycenae, his twin brother Thyestes seduces his wife and steals the golden lamb. Atreus's fury leads to a savage vengeance: he feeds his brother his own children's flesh. The tragedy Thomas Jolly has chosen to adapt is Seneca's most extreme, most savage, and the one where the supernatural is most present. Its themes—adultery, theft, infanticide, and cannibalism—are impossible to represent, and the means invented to present them—pain, rage, and harmful intentions—im-placable. Doubtless because Thyestes isn't the only victim of this attack that makes even thinking impossible... Atreus's sudden and radical transformation into a monster reflects the collapse of the order of the world. There is no more balance or harmony to be found. All that under the watchful eyes of the future, of "impotent youth faced with the chaos with which they will have to live and grow up." *Thyestes* is a way for Thomas Jolly to talk about "the compact of mutual indulgence" which Seneca already defended a few thousand years ago.

THOMAS JOLLY

A child of the theatre, Thomas Jolly made his entrance in Avignon with his adaptation of *Henry VI*. Well-known for his theatrical series in the Ceccano garden about the history of the Festival for its 70th edition, he has gone from a rising star to an ambitious and popular director in under a decade. His approach to great texts (Shakespeare, Seneca) focuses on the figure of the monster and on the difficulty of representing what cannot be represented, with shows that are extreme both in terms of form and duration. With his company, La Piccola Familia, he sees theatre as a political art and always strives to explore History to question what's at the core of people and, beyond that, of their organisations.

SENECA

At once a philosopher and a dramatist, Seneca was also Nero's tutor then adviser, and has had a large influence on western thought. As a Stoic, his philosophy is supposed to bring solace and self-mastery.

Thyestes by Seneca, translated by Florence Dupont, published in Théâtre complet by éditions Actes Sud, is on sale at the bookshop in the Maison Jean Vilar.



FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON 72°

JULY 6 7 8 9 10 | 12 13 14 15
COUR D'HONNEUR DU PALAIS DES PAPES

INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS JOLLY

It's the first time you've adapted an ancient dramatist. Why did you choose Seneca's most brutal tragedy?

Thomas Jolly: During the eight years I spent adapting Shakespeare, I explored the authors who inspired him, or from whom he clearly borrowed. Among them was Seneca. I then decided to focus on *Thyestes*—the most desperate, dark, and violent tragedy I have ever read. It doesn't tell a story of war, of oracles, or of civilisations, but a story of family and twinship. This private setting serves as a starting point for Seneca to explore humanity confronting itself. I think he forces us to face end of thought that the tragedy creates. Questions about the "impossible theatre", like killing a child on the stage, and of the transformation of man into a monster, have always been at the centre of my work. In Seneca's plays, the theatricality of the characters follows a very particular and precise path: they first appear in the grip of an inconsolable sadness (*dolor*), which they turn into anger (*furor*), which drives them to an act of ultimate violence (*nefas*), which itself makes them no longer human. Every one of Seneca's plays follows the journey of a being who, faced with an impasse, turns into a monster, like Atreus. This metamorphosis is fascinating to bring to the stage with the actors and to give the audience to see. With Seneca, I also discovered that the Romans supposedly brought theatre to the city to ward off the plague. This theatre as constitutive of a society echoes my own convictions. In particular since my work on the history of the Festival d'Avignon, a sixteen-episode series called *Le Ciel, la Nuit et la Pierre glorieuse* (*The Sky, the Night, and the Glorious Stone*). Jean Vilar created the Festival d'Avignon as a tool of its time to bring the country back together after World War II. Like him, I believe in the idea that the theatre, for twenty-five hundred years, has been the basis for society. From the Dionysia to decentralisation, theatre through the ages has been an art constitutive of cities, peoples, and nations. Perhaps even a healing one. In Seneca's theatre, the cycle of vengeance has no end; tragedy is a way to shake our understanding and force us to think about it. He never loses sight of the fact that in order to live together, we need a compact of mutual indulgence.

The play opens with the almost magic appearance of the ghost of Tantalus, whom the Furies free from Tartarus to invade the palace where the action takes place. The supernatural plays an important part. How did you tackle this specific dimension?

One could easily compare *Thyestes* to science fiction, especially because there is such discrepancy between the human actors and the forces of their environment, which are much bigger than them. In the text, the elements, the buildings, the climate, the wall, the framework of the building, the sky, the wind, the stars, everything down to the organs of the characters is personified and is a constant source of signs. Atreus and Thyestes are like living membranes (or organisms) moved by nature. Seneca's theatre isn't psychological, nor is it narrative. It stands very far from our modern conception of theatre. The actors wore masks and played several parts within the same play. They didn't try to embody the characters, there was no identification.

It's first and foremost a theatre of the voice, in which the story doesn't matter much in the end—in that sense, it is perhaps closer to opera, where pleasure doesn't come from the thinness of the libretto but from the vocal and scenic unfolding of the work. It's a theatre of pure pleasure: the interventions of the chorus are even moments of "reflexive relaxation", where one takes pleasure in listening to the way the author unfolds his poetry about Fortune, Power, etc. Effects, poetry, dance, music... Seneca invites us to an instance of total theatre: an archaic theatricality based on the voice and body of the actor, together with another theatricality of oversized spectacle.

Henry VI, Richard III, The Raft of the Méduse, Thyestes: children and childhood are recurring themes in your work. That question was already there in your very first show, *Arlequin poli par l'amour*, which was about the end of childhood. Atreus's sacrifice happens out of sight: the Chorus receives the story of the sacrifice from a messenger who saw it happen. How did you deal with that question?

In ancient Rome, the question of the individual didn't exist, nor did anyone question religion: the world was only a medium between the gods and men. That's why I think what Atreus does is akin to terrorism. To avenge himself, he lashes out at the balance of the world. It is humanity as a whole he attacks, trying to drag it down with him because of the evil he feels. He corrupts the ritual of the sacrifice by replacing animal meat by human flesh, and thus perverts a system that keeps the life of humanity balanced. He seeks to commit a crime commensurate with his pain. Committing that crime means breaking the rules of humanity, which makes him a monster. The crime is so terrible that the sun itself refuses to see it: at the end of the show, the world is plunged in darkness, to the point that the humans fear that the Apocalypse is upon them. This attack against humanity changes the future. In this tragedy, the true victim isn't Thyestes but the children: those sacrificed by Atreus, but beyond that, a generation that will have to live after this crime. It's the young people who watch powerlessly as the world order collapses, and who will have to live and grow up in a sunless, chaotic world. The true victim of this tragedy is the future represented by the children, who are like the chorus of humanity as a whole. The Cour d'honneur will therefore be haunted by this sacrificed, wounded childhood. Right from the start, I wanted to open the show with a horde of children whose appearance is almost macabre, ghostly. I see them as being summoned by Tantalus, who comes back from hell to infest the tragedy. It's also a reminder that posterity is one of Atreus's obsessions, like all great tragic characters who care less about the present than about the future, of the continuation of their lineage. In that sense, Atreus's feeding Thyestes his own children can be read as a way to turn back time and negate both Thyestes's and his own descendants. Thyestes is "pregnant" with his sons, who can no longer be born. I also like the feeling of strangeness, even dread, that the presence of a child onstage can cause. I never have young adults playing the roles of children: I think it's absolutely necessary to put the voice, body, fragility, and singularity of the child at the centre of the stage. Which is why I asked the Maîtrise populaire of the Opéra comique and that of the Opéra Grand Avignon to take part in the show.

—

Interview conducted by Francis Cossu and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach