

AND...

PRESS CONFERENCE with Blandine Savetier,
July 14 juillet at 11:00, cour du Cloître Saint-Louis

LIVE BROADCAST OF THE SHOW
On facebook.com/festival.avignon

THOUGHT WORKSHOPS

Encounter Research and creation - Crossing worlds

After the war! with Blandine Savetier, July 9 at 14:30,
Cloître Saint-Louis

Week-end for a Republic of Hospitality I

Amnesty International France, SOS Méditerranée, Licra
July 13 and 14, site Louis Pasteur Supramuros - Avignon Université

ODYSSEYS LIBRARY

July 6 to 20 (except on Sundays), bibliothèque Ceccano

THE ODYSSEY

Is Ulysses really so happy to have returned to Ithaca? Blandine Savetier knows that the fate of the Greek hero and victor of the Trojan War isn't to live out his days on his island. To the contrary, the gods who, from shipwreck to shipwreck, dictated the rhythm of his Mediterranean odyssey, still predict him the discovery of many new shores. That's probably why the director focuses her reading of the ancient poem on the journey, which she sees as "an always renewed thirst for adventure which transforms people." This process of metamorphosis is at the heart of the series of the 73rd edition which, in thirteen episodes of about an hour each, tells the epic and suspenseful story of a popular and mythological hero. The Festival d'Avignon and its partners wished to entrust the performance of this seminal text to the actors of the 1er Acte programme and to citizens from Avignon, allowing us to listen, under the olive trees of the Ceccano garden, to a great diversity of voices, echoing Ulysses's own adventures.

BLANDINE SAVETIER

Blandine Savetier created her first show in 2002, with Jean-Pierre Siméon's *Stabat Mater Furiosa*. Two years later, she founded the company *Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure*. Since then, she has directed over fifteen plays based on great works and by creating a hybrid theatre, made of diverse materials and disciplines. Her plays are always incredible performances and have both social and poetic ambitions. An associate artist with the Théâtre national de Strasbourg, she has long worked with 1er Acte, a workshop programme which aims to promote diversity on theatre stages.

HOMER

The name of **Homer** was already synonymous with epic poetry as a whole in Ancient Greece. Nicknamed "the Poet," he wrote in a language full of vivid images and easy to scan, which still fascinates readers with its flamboyant descriptions.

The Odyssey by Homer, translated by Philippe Jaccottet,
published by La Découverte, is on sale
at the bookshop in the Maison Jean Vilar.

73rd
EDITION

In order to bring you this edition, over 1,700 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



#FDA19



FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON 73RD

JULY 6 | 8 9 10 11 12 13 | 15 16 17 18 19 20
JARDIN DE LA BIBLIOTHÈQUE CECCANO

INTERVIEW WITH BLANDINE SAVETIER

Over the past 5 years, the series in the garden of the Ceccano library has become a mainstay of the Festival d'Avignon. Why did you choose to adapt Homer's *Odyssey* with amateur actors and young professionals of diverse cultural backgrounds?

Blandine Savetier : It was a commission by the Festival d'Avignon, which reawakened one of my old dreams for the theatre! Exploring Homer's *Odyssey*, this seminal poem, in the garden of the Ceccano library, under the plane and olive trees and the Provence sky is like a dream. I re-read the text and let myself be carried away by this story of men, gods, and demigods, but also by the epic quality of the poem, its great oral and mythological power. I also found in the *Odyssey* those Mediterranean landscapes which, for a great traveller like me, are like resources. And then there's the sea and the islands, two key elements in my relationship to the world. I love islands, I've spend a lot of time thinking about the condition of islanders. How to live in a place limited by the immensity of the sea? Those questions that appear throughout the *Odyssey* found an echo in me. For this project, the Festival d'Avignon asked me to work with the actors of the *ler Acte* programme, which trains culturally diverse youths aged 18 to 26 who want to become theatre or cinema professionals. A programme I know well because I've played an active part in it ever since it was created. My experience with those youths was amazing. We learnt a lot from one another, particularly about the relationship to the text, richer due to their diverse backgrounds, to their different life experiences. They all have a parent or grandparent who was an exile. It's part of their history, it's in their memory. Like Ulysses, they live several lives at the same time, and they're very resilient. There are also other people onstage, amateurs from some neighbourhoods in the greater Avignon area, as well as a Japanese percussionist. Such diversity to explore the *Odyssey* seems to me a beautiful homage to Homer and Ulysses.

How did you work on the language of the *Odyssey*? How did you adapt it for the stage with your dramatist Waddah Saab?

The *Odyssey* was composed to be heard. Which is why I chose to base my work on the translation by Philippe Jaccottet, which he wrote as a young man. Like Homer, he's a poet, and his writing is as oral as it is fluid. His translation aims first and foremost to make us feel the poetry in Homer's text, "*for the text to come to the listener like those luminous statues and columns come to the traveller in the crystal-clear air of Greece,*" as he beautifully puts it. We worked on this adaptation like we would have on a screenplay for a TV series, building a sort of suspense, hoping to make the audience want to hear the next episode. It was a real balancing act between meaning and rhythm, because the *Odyssey* is a coherent whole whose episodes always echo one another. In substance, what we wanted to do was show the modernity of the *Odyssey*, highlight the complexity of Ulysses and of the other characters,

none of which can claim to hold absolute truth or justice. The gods themselves are amoral and the way passions are unleashed leaves only so much place for reason. There's a proto-Shakespearean quality to this epic that needs to be rediscovered, which Philippe Jaccottet's translation manages to do.

What's the story of the *Odyssey*? Who is Ulysses?

Ulysses is at once a hero and an anti-hero. He also refuses the immortality offered by the goddess Calypso, choosing instead to leave and become mortal again, but also to be free and to write his own story. This choice stands in direct contrast with the modern rejection of old age and death haunting Western societies. Progress in the fields of artificial intelligence, nanotechnologies, and genomics has given rise to the transhumanist movement, now aiming explicitly for immortality. Ulysses forces us to face the pipe dream of immortality and the loss of freedom it entails... I also saw in Ulysses' journey the opportunity to delve into the history of Man as an explorer who goes forth to meet other people. This journey of knowledge, which we understand through Ulysses, goes through the islands, which are like experimental societies. Every island on which Ulysses washes up allows him to acquire some new knowledge and transforms him. Few people know that Ulysses' wanderings don't end with his return to Ithaca. As the seer Tiresias told me, he'll have to leave again after returning to his island and his family, and to wander until he finds a people who've never known the sea. From this point of view, the *Odyssey* isn't the epic story of Ulysses' return to Ithaca. Rather, it is the story of a never-ending desire for adventure, journeys, new encounters, and conflicts which transform human beings. The story of continuity in metamorphosis. Homer doesn't present one worldview, he confronts several different worldviews. He also forces his contemporaries—and us—to question their relationship to the figure of the hero.

Women play a unique part in the poem...

The story explores the power of women, their capacities, if the context allowed them to use them. Women in the *Odyssey* have powers and desires which aren't necessarily those of their husbands. And the poem doesn't pass judgment on them. It shows, through their adventures and the adventures of the goddesses, what a different world might look like for mortal women. Women in the *Odyssey* are inspiring because Homer exalts their strength and imbues them with knowledge of the world of the unconscious. Emily Wilson recently translated the *Odyssey* into English from a feminist perspective. She thinks that Homer showed what a world where women are the equals of men could look like. He never describes them as depending on a man. Samuel Butler, an English author from the 19th century, even argued in 1897 that Homer was a woman, because he featured them too prominently...

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