FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON

OF IMAGINATION

INTERVIEW WITH CLARA LE PICARD

What changes did you make to *Bluebeard*?

Clara Le Picard: At the end of Charles Perrault's fairy tale, the wife leaves with her brothers and her sister after Bluebeard's death. She therefore never becomes an adult, but remains forever in the realm of childhood. I didn't find this binary model interesting: I can either become a woman and die, or live but remain a child. In our musical drama, Bluebeard's wife goes through the same stages of fear, anger, rebellion, and vengeance, but she also goes further: she realises that blood can't wash away what's been done and that only words can unveil terrors. Bluebeard imagined he'd murdered women, but that was nothing but his most personal fear. She convinces him to talk about it and convinces him that together they'll be stronger, that he'll stop being Bluebeard, that they'll be happy. The idea was for the woman to complete her metamorphosis by working together openly and by refusing to be her husband's accomplice in taboo and secrecy. The point was to show a female character who wouldn't be terrorised by strength and who, through her kindness and sharing, would manage to free Bluebeard from what made him a monster, which would in turn lead him to adulthood as well.

Parallel to Bluebeard's story, a fiction plays out in the present with your cast. Is that a recurring element in your shows?

Yes, I like to create parallels between what's at stake in those fictions. We often start with a preexisting fable, but try to give it an existence on the stage, where there's no past or future, where time is real. I like the border between the time of the room and the time of the stage to be porous, for them to be weaved together so that the audience no longer knows for sure where and when they are, and for that confusion to remain. It's hard to do that by creating a complete fiction, like a traditional play that would begin with someone saying, "The year is 1643, and my name is Cunégonde." Such a beginning means that the audience have to try on their own to picture themselves in 1643. For a while, I played in a rock band, which may be why the artificial time of the theatre seems so strange to me. I like interacting with the audience. Even if in this show, they play a less active and obvious role than in the previous ones, they are still invited to participate. We tell them what we're going through, explain it to them, give them the keys to understand what's going on. I couldn't go on stage and just pretend that they aren't there. Starting with a neutral presence, natural and almost quotidian, allows you to go much further later, in particular into lyricism. This show is also about appearances: Bluebeard looks like a monster, but he may not be one; it looks like we're going through our everyday lives, but we may not be… Just look at how we use some very artificial and sophisticated elements: lyrical singing, dance, and music. The idea was to begin with a simple setting, with something that didn't look like much, and then, with the help of both imagination and some technical effects, to enter that woman's head.

Was everything already written when you started rehearsing?

The whole thing was there at the writing stage, and rehearsals only enriched it. Maud Pizon, for instance, really does dance notation; she loves rediscovering old dance texts and she's very interested in new dance writings. I also wrote this text for Or Solomon, our composer, whose beautiful melodies create striking impressionistic atmospheres. I wanted to work with them, so I started thinking about a show that could bring us together while dealing with things I care deeply about. I gave them the whole story; the rewriting of *Bluebeard* and the fiction that takes place between us. Of course, we're only pretending to be discovering what the letter says, but that's how we make sure that the story works completely. I really wanted the music to require a real degree of virtuosity. I wanted the fate of that woman, faced with a Bluebeard that's more fantasy than reality (we hear but can't see him), to be expressed lyrically on the stage. I like to explore deep questions at the theatre. After all, you go there to be moved.

What's the purpose of the technical and historical notions that come back time and again in the show?

If I have the opportunity to borrow an hour from a number of people's lives, I like the idea that they'll come out of it changed, of course, but at least they'll come out knowing more about important notions. Those explanations are also part of the successive stages that lead to fiction. We make sure that no spectator could at any time think, "Well, that was too easy, this piece of information didn't matter, it's all fake." For instance: no one, except for specialists, knows about dance notation. So if we pull a dance score out of the envelope without explaining what it is, its very existence betrays the fiction. That's why Maud explains what Labanotation is, that there are several different types, etc. It's important for the fiction itself that Maud be seen right away as a specialist in everything, because she's the one who, throughout the show, will be constantly trying to date the work, to figure out who its author is, through technical and historical details, from dance notation to the invention of the CD. At some point, she pauses in the middle of her reading: "Incredible, this could have been written by Isadora Duncan." "Who's that?" "She's an icon of free dance, she was the first to dance barefoot again…" Her explanations punctuate the fiction just as they create it. All the hints she finds lead to one period or another, one author or another. She investigates. My character is more interested in the psychology of the characters and in their relationships. I'm the director: I organise, I go see the costume designer, or the technician. And I'm the one who finds herself trapped by that letter.

Is the idea to find an elsewhere within to escape one's status as a victim, to deny aggression?

Yes, or at the very least to question seemingly-irrevocable presuppositions. There's an implicit link that ties a victim to the one who tortures her psychologically: if the victim refuses that link, there can be no psychological torture. If I refuse the contract of trust of the anonymous letter, that is, the threat of reprisals if I disobey, nothing will happen. It's an opportunity to make the audience think about the question of what we're willing to accept. Battered women who managed to cut that tie say that one day, they thought, "Wait, I can leave the house. I can make a choice." But what they most often say is that that logical link, built in the long-term, is like a spider's web in which they were caught. Our society, right now, is similarly caught in its own desire for security. We're trapped in the logic of terror caused by terrorism, while it would also be possible to look at it another way and realise that we're in no danger. There are maybe 8,500 radicalised, dangerous people in France? There's 66 million of us. What place do we give that information. We live at a time where everything prepares our minds to be victims. This show is also aimed at younger audiences because childhood is a time at which we're particularly victims. I wanted to tell children that an active brain can allow you to reject dangerous and destructive logics. We don't have to let Bluebeard be a blue beard. We can also turn him into a normal man by facing the conflict head on.

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