



GULLIVER, THE LAST VOYAGE

INTERVIEW WITH MADELEINE LOUARN AND JEAN-FRANÇOIS AUGUSTE

A few years ago, you adapted the fourth chapter of *Gulliver's Travels*. What does this new trip through the Laputa archipelago show?

Madeleine Louarn: Jonathan Swift's novel allows us to project ourselves into a story one could call "out of time," but which gives us the opportunity to tackle some very timely questions. When *Gulliver's Travels* was published in 1726, Jonathan Swift was in a perfect position to see the "crises" that shook the 18th century and the United Kingdom: industrial and technological revolutions, new political utopias, etc. This philosophical tale echoes our own experiences. It's about worlds going through transformations, about the doubt and anxiety such transformations can cause. The questions it asked are amazingly timely.

Jean-François Auguste: How can we talk about "the end" through the bodies of men? How are our own bodies affected by the time we live in? What does it mean today to speak of the end of the world, of the self? How can we deal with our weaknesses? Can science, innovation, or transhumanism provide a response to our anxiety? Swift's strength resides in his ability to ask those questions with humour, depth, philosophy, and self-deprecation.

For this creation, the actors of Catalyse took part in the writing. Did that have an impact on how they then performed the story?

Madeleine Louarn: They really approached the question of writing head-on. Leslie Six and Pierre Chevallier, the playwrights with whom we worked, spent two years leading workshops with the actors. We tried to keep as close as possible to their words. This research focused on two major axes: to make them write about the characters they were going to embody, and about Gulliver's world. This work unveiled their powerful and ever-surprising imagination, which allowed them to approach the stage from a new angle.

Jean-François Auguste: They were all the more involved because of it. We wanted to stage a real meeting between Swift and the Catalyse actors. Many of the motifs and texts we use in the show come from their writing. It leads to a more familiar relationship to the characters, to the words. And it makes the pleasure of performing more intense.

How will you depict this journey onstage?

Jean-François Auguste: The third chapter of *Gulliver's Travels* takes place in the four islands of the Laputa archipelago. Each of them is unique, and explores the themes of our dramaturgy in its own way. Plastic artist Hélène Delprat helped us showcase those four very distinct worlds. The costumes of the characters who inhabit them were designed by Clémence Delille. And Alain Mahé, with whom we're collaborating for the first time, will be in charge of the sound design. Although the themes we tackle can seem dark or difficult, we want to have fun with our approach.

Madeleine Louarn: For each of those islands, we tried to make ours and expand on Jonathan Swift's biting humour. The freedom of his imagination was very stimulating, and so was our desire to create a show for all audiences—which could speak to children, teenagers, and adults alike. Several levels of meaning and humour and often interlaced.

You've been working together for several years now. Can you tell us how you approach directing as a duo?

Madeleine Louarn: It's not that complicated. We work hand in hand. One of us will have an idea, and we then delve into what will become a shared vision. It's a rather instinctive process, which we've used for over ten years now.

Jean-François Auguste: What I find beautiful with the Catalyse actors, is how important performance is to them: the fiction, the embodiment of and projection into a character, the awareness of the narrative... The work we've done together has led to the creation of a world none of us could have imagined. Together, they are like a dreaming machine. And it impacts our way of thinking about the creative process: how to feed their ideas? What exercises can we give them so that they make theirs the show's motifs? Their characters? How can the music support their performance in terms of rhythm or intent? Each of us brings his or her own sensitivity and experience to the work.

How can we develop a shared vision today?

Madeleine Louarn: What inspires us both is the work we've been doing with the Catalyse actors. When they're onstage, we see something, and it's something you can't run out of. They're always surprising us, leading us to different places. During the writing workshops, for instance, they led us to motifs or characters we'd never thought about.

Jean-François Auguste: The work of a director is to watch living beings working onstage. And the Catalyse actors don't work like other actors. They deal with the time and space of the stage differently. In their work, they deal, each in their own way, with the imagination behind the shows, their poetry, their meaning. It's always surprising. That's what makes the work we do together so interesting.

Madeleine Louarn: Actors are at the heart of our work. The vision we're developing together is all the more powerful that the themes we're tackling, just like in *Gulliver*, revolve around our human condition and are linked to our own times.

Interview conducted by Marion Guilloux in February 2021 and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cleach

Note: In 2019, l'Entresort became the CNCA (National Centre for Adapted Creation). This place of work, reflection, and transmission allows multidisciplinary artists to come together to research the question of the adaptation of handicapped people, in the new buildings of the SEcW in Morlaix.