



FESTIVAL

D'AVIGNON

KING LEAR

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

TRANSLATION AND DIRECTION OLIVIER PY

2015 Creation



© Olivier Py

[...]

KENT

je dois partir...
à l'appel de mon roi commence un long voyage

ECOSSE

jamais nous ne vivrons ce qu'ont vécu nos pères
nos souffrances et nos vies ne seront pas si longues
il nous faut obéir à la loi du désastre
reste la vérité comme un dernier devoir
dans ces temps de malheurs à quoi bon des poètes ?

King Lear, translation Olivier Py

LE ROI LEAR

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



2015 Creation

Running time 2h35 without intermission

Translation and direction Olivier Py

Scenography, set design, costumes and make up Pierre-André Weitz

Lights Bertrand Killy

Sound Rémi Berger Spirou

Assistant to the direction Thomas Pouget

Assistant to the costumes Nathalie Bègue

Technical and production Festival d'Avignon

With

Jean-Damien Barbin *The Fool*

Moustafa Benaïbout *Cornouailles, A messenger*

Nâzım Boudjenah de la Comédie-Française *Edmond*

Amira Casar *Goneril*

Céline Chéenne *Régane*

Eddie Chignara *Kent*

Matthieu Dessertine *Edgar*

Émilien Diard-Detœuf *Oswald, Bourgogne*

Philippe Girard *Lear*

Damien Lehman *France*

Thomas Pouget *Écosse, A servant, A old man*

Laura Ruiz Tamayo *Cordélia*

Jean-Marie Winling *Gloucester*

Music

Prélude n°16 by Frédéric Chopin

Sonate n°2 by Salvatore Sciarrino

Ouragan by Philippe Hersant

Partiels by Gérard Grisey (recorded music)

Okanagon by Giacinto Scelsi (recorded music)

Due notturni crudeli n°2 by Salvatore Sciarrino

Makrokosmos 1 by Georges Crumb

Sonate n°6 by Galina Ustvolskaïa

Sonate n°2 by Giacinto Scelsi

Musica ricercata n°2 by György Ligeti

Thrène à la mémoire des victimes d'Hiroshima by Krzysztof Penderecki (recorded music)

Makrokosmos 11 by Georges Crumb

Quattro pezzi su una nota sola n°4 by Giacinto Scelsi (recorded music)

La Lande by Philippe Hersant

Musics live are interpreted on piano by Damien Lehman

Production Festival d'Avignon

Coproduction France Télévisions, Les Gémeaux - Scène nationale de Sceaux, National Performing Arts Center - National Theater & Concert Hall (Taipei), Les Célestins Théâtre de Lyon, anthéa Antipolis Théâtre d'Antibes, La Criée Théâtre national de Marseille

With the support of Région Île-de-France, Adami and Spedidam

With the artistic participation of Jeune Théâtre National

Residency at La FabricA of the Festival d'Avignon

Thanks to Comédie-Française

Show premiered on 4 July 2015 at the Cour d'honneur du Palais des papes, Avignon.

Show broadcast on France 2 TV and available on Culturebox until January 2016.

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2015-2016 TOURS

2015

- from 1st to 18 October: Gémeaux Scène nationale, Sceaux
- 4 and 5* November: Théâtre Liberté Toulon
- from 11 to 14 November: Odyssud, Blagnac
- 19, 20* and 21* November: La Criée, Théâtre national, Marseille
- from 25 to 28* November: Théâtre des Célestins, Lyon
- from 3 to 5 December: Théâtre National/Bruxelles
- 10 and 11 December: anthéa Antipolis théâtre d'Antibes

(* Shows proposed in audiodescription by Accès Culture / Contact : Mercedes Perez, +33 (0)9 81 09 68 99
production@accesculture.org - www.accesculture.org)

2016

- from 18 to 20 March: National Theater & Concert Hall à Taipei, Taiwan

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festival-avignon.com    

AND ALSO...



Le Roi Lear by William Shakespeare translated by Olivier Py is published by éditions Actes Sud-Papiers.



Le Roi Lear by William Shakespeare, directed by Olivier Py is available in DVD by France Télévisions Distributeur.



Le Roi Lear is subject to a *Pièce (dé)montée*, pedagogical file created by Canopé:

<http://crdp.ac-paris.fr/piece-demontee/piece/index.php?id=lear>

Festival d'Avignon website:



- show:

<http://www.festival-avignon.com/fr/spectacles/2015/le-roi-lear>



- video extracts :

<http://www.festival-avignon.com/fr/webtv/le-roi-lear-extraits-video>



- replay on Culturebox until January 2016 :

<http://www.festival-avignon.com/fr/webtv/le-roi-lear-mis-en-scene-par-olivier-py-a-la-cour-d-honneur-du-palais-des-papes>



- « Dialogue artistes-audience » :

<http://www.festival-avignon.com/fr/webtv/dialogue-artistes-spectateurs-le-roi-lear>



- « Young critics in Avignon » :

<http://www.festival-avignon.com/fr/webtv/jeunes-critiques-en-avignon-le-roi-lear>

Other websites:



Pearltrees:

<http://www.pearltrees.com/festivaldavignon/olivier-py-le-roi-lear/id13627975>



BnF:

http://data.bnf.fr/12265840/olivier_py/



Wikipedia:

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olivier_Py



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SHORT TEXT

King Lear, a play for the twentieth century? To support this argument, Olivier Py offers his own translation of Shakespeare's work. In the Cour d'honneur, humiliated fathers wander while their children plot. Between wars and self-delusions, all are busy digging their own graves and rushing towards oblivion.

PRESENTATION TEXT

King Lear, a play for the twentieth century? Convinced that it could be, Olivier Py worked on a new translation of Shakespeare's play, which he directs in the Cour d'honneur of the Palais des papes. A translation in free verse, sharp and in the present tense, to render the infernal machinery that is set in motion as soon as Lear asks the huge and unfathomable question that is at the heart of every family. Before surrendering his power to his daughters, he wants to know which of the three will express her love for him most emphatically and thus receive the largest share of his legacy. Cordelia's silence, more than just a proof of her integrity, shows the powerlessness of words when faced with reason wielded as an instrument. This silence drives Lear to madness, and everyone to ruin. Like a prophecy of the disasters to come three centuries later, the falsification of language and its acceptance lead to a bloodbath, in which even brothers and sisters turn on each other. On the wide open stage of the Cour d'honneur, Lear and Gloucester, disgraced fathers, wander aimlessly while their children plot. All are busy digging their own graves, heroes and villains, old men and young heirs; between wars and self-delusions, they rush headlong towards the end of the world, towards oblivion.

Renan Benyamina for the Festival d'Avignon / Translation Gaël Schmidt-Cléach
(for any use of these texts, please mention the author and inform the Festival d'Avignon).

STATEMENT OF INTENT

“Is this the promised end? Or image of that horror?” Kent asks Edgar at the climax of the catastrophe that is *King Lear*. Every new generation has their own idea of what the end of the world would look like, formed by watching the end of a world, of their world. The 20th century was the most abominable of all, the result of the victory of technology, of an immeasurable uncertainty about language, and of the banalisation of evil. This infernal trinity has never stopped growing, becoming more powerful and more authoritarian. Which is why, even more so than *Macbeth*, *King Lear* has been called a modern play, a work echoed by the 20th century in all its darkness.

It all begins with a doubting of language, with the idea that language might not have been what created the world but rather little more than a fallen angel arguing for its own interests, a language that has forgotten it is but the child of the Father. Cordelia seems to follow Wittgenstein, whose *Tractatus Philosophicus* ends with this lapidary declaration, our only hope when faced with the powerlessness of language: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.” In fact, it is Wittgenstein who echoes Cordelia by trying to point to a truth that would exist beyond words, out of the reach of men. Regan and Goneril accept the idea that language should serve monetary interests. The reign of money ushers in an era of absolute power for technology, a technology that no longer serves all men but merely the most powerful among them and will eventually invent a war that is a war in name only, leading it into the unspeakable horror of mass extermination.

With the catastrophe that is the impossibility for language to attest to the love of the father, Cordelia puts an end to the metaphysical perspective of the Renaissance; language is now useless, and will forever remain so. *King Lear*, written shortly before the brand of philosophy championed by Descartes conquered the world and a metaphysical approach to history became the peoples' idol, marks the end of the Renaissance, of this world where the fool's word is wisdom, where there isn't just one madness but different kinds of madness. Different kinds of madness that talk and use words. When Cordelia goes silent, the fool starts talking, and with him the poetic heroism of Shakespeare, who sees that his world is about to end.

Theologically-speaking, the insult to the father that begins with the prostitution of language is but the beginning of the Apocalypse. Shakespeare, who still believed in astrology in *Romeo and Juliet*, painfully mocks it in *King Lear*; the sky is dark, or as Gloucester says, “all [is] dark.” It is not us who are blind but the light that has gone out. Lear's tragedy isn't caused by his own actions; Oedipus is blinded for having committed the unforgivable, but Gloucester has his eyes plucked out almost for no reason, just so that he can see what needs to be seen, that “all is dark.” Lear's mistake is not moral in nature but political, yet it still leads to the end of the world. He accepts the falsification of language, which is enough to destroy the world. And it is doubtless his attempt at doing good, at democratising power, at giving up his own violence, that is the cause of his own downfall. Good without context

is the sin of the century of reason. *King Lear* prophesies what will happen to the modern world, this world of reason, this world where the fool, the madman, is the one who doesn't deny his own madness.

Which brings us to this original slaughter in more ways than one, the brother killing his own brother while the sister kills her own sister; this isn't war anymore, but rather the possibility of systematic extermination. As is often the case in Shakespeare's plays, there is a snowballing effect that leaves the characters incapable of controlling their own destinies. But if *Romeo and Juliet*, the first tragedy, is a tragedy of freedom, *King Lear* is a tragedy without freedom, a tragedy in which characters never have their say, a voiceless tragedy in which all you can hear is the roaring of the storm. Lear's madness is but an acute awareness of the loss of all meaning.

An insult to the father, but also an insult in the name of the father, which destroys the primordial order. It is in the body of the father and the body of the king that order starts dissolving, that a breach is opened through which the entirety of the world is sucked up. The name of the father, as Lacan revealed in his seminar, is at the heart of the construction of language, and thus of the subconscious. Here it is denied, forgotten, mocked, and annihilated in a long road paved with trials and insults, leading ultimately to Cordelia's light. Lacan, in an enigmatic pun, transcribed the "nom du père" (name of the father) as "les non dupes errent" (the non-naïves that err). It would seem far-fetched if it weren't for this play, in which those who do not believe err. In which the loss of faith leads to wandering, the wandering both of those who believe in evil and of those who believe in oblivion. And what is faith built on, faith in oneself, in the future, in the other? On nothing but an act of language, nothing but a promise of language.

The 20th century put an end to the political era, to that hope bigger than religions whose end was as tragic as Lear's, that is, an end with no survivors. It is that story that we have to tell again and again, in order to find in its ruins the material for a possible reconstruction. *King Lear* is an opportunity to see what we cannot see in a single life, the death throes of messianism.

Olivier Py, July 2014

INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIER PY AND PIERRE ANDRÉ-WEITZ

You've rarely directed Shakespeare. Why choose *King Lear* today?

Olivier Py: I've always dreamt of directing *King Lear*, which I think is the greatest play in the western canon. It took me thirty years to work up the nerve to translate it and create this show, it's the result of long years of reflection about Shakespeare. In France, we endlessly translate Shakespeare over and over again, it's like a giant workshop that never closes. Every era brings something new to it. And every *King Lear* is a reflection of his time. This one is dark, radical, dazzling...

What more do you want to say, or what do you want to say differently, with your version of *King Lear*?

O.P.: I've always felt that *King Lear* offered a theory about the twentieth century. It may seem anachronistic, but I think the play is precisely about what happened between 1914 and 1989; in other words, about the 20th century. If I had to come up with a subtitle for the play, it would be "Cordelia's Silence". The main question of the play, to me, is the interpretation of this silence. Today, it takes on a very different meaning than it would have in the nineteenth century. The twentieth century was marked by a double silence: the one that, in philosophy, led to doubting the power of language, and the one that could but follow Auschwitz. The nature of those two silences is actually the same. They correspond to what Heidegger called devastation. The world started doubting the power of language to reach its ends, which led to a political catastrophe. There's a reason why theatre theorist Jan Kott compared Shakespeare to Ionesco, and above all to Beckett. He saw Beckett in *King Lear*—when it would of course be more correct to see Shakespeare in Beckett—and understood that that play was the prophecy of what would happen in Europe, three centuries after its writing.

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Cordelia's silence would therefore be a failure of speech?

O.P.: In the nineteenth century, her silence was seen as a sign of integrity, of a rejection of lying borne out of love. A century later, it's a last-ditch effort to save the spoken word. Faced with her father, Cordelia is suddenly like an actress on the stage who discovers that words have lost all meaning. She's petrified by this impossibility to reach meaning through language. There is, right at the start, this philosophical questioning about language. What can language do? Can it do anything at all? The final lines are almost like an answer to that question. The duke of Albany says, "The weight of this sad time we must obey; speak what we feel, not what we ought to say." Shakespeare tells us that in times of darkness, only the spoken word at its most honest can save us.

What key principles did you follow for your translation?

O.P.: I chose a very clear and intelligible French, without trying to modernise the text. I wanted the play to be fast-paced, because English is a much faster language than French.

French takes its time to develop and spread out, whereas Shakespeare's English is like a headlong rush towards oblivion. Bonnefoy used to say that French makes everything metaphysical, while English is ontological. My translation has fewer words than all the others, even though I cut next to nothing from the text. *King Lear* has to be a headlong rush. If it isn't, you lose something much more important than the literal meaning of the words. In Shakespeare's world, one is aware that life is short, one is forever chased by the storm, by death, by worry and by war. It's a haunted play. There's only time for one line before the fall.

Should this headlong energy also influence the performances?

O.P.: I would like to find, in the performances, this incredible violence, this conflagration of the violence of our modern world, this lost struggle between man and machine. The Cour d'honneur also offers its own aesthetics: you have to embrace it. It's a struggle with the elements, with the sky, with words. If you don't talk at the sky, you lose the last twenty rows. The Cour d'honneur is a machine made to destroy bourgeois theatre. It is the place of the impossible, so you have to play the impossible, and play with the impossible.

How are you planning on occupying the space of the Cour d'honneur of the Palais des papes?

Pierre-André Weitz: You can't just drop a set in the middle of the Cour d'honneur. The play therefore begins with an empty stage, wide open, forty-four metres by thirty. It began almost as a reference to Jean Vilar. The goal of the scenography is to show the Cour, to establish its existence as political. Then we turn this space, at first very pure, into total chaos. Because the Cour is also a metaphysical place, which both lets you see and represents the sky. It is a giant cube of nothingness which can only be filled by this most immaterial of things, the spoken word. We also wanted it to be a scenographic meditation about the circle, the hole, the gap, about this void that sucks in the characters and the story...

Madness, as is often the case in Shakespeare, is a central theme in *King Lear*; how did you choose to portray it?

O.P.: *King Lear* is a double play. There are, in a way, two King Lears: Lear himself, betrayed by his daughters, and his faithful friend Gloucester, betrayed by his sons. It's a year with two eclipses, and with two humiliated fathers. Horror strikes twice; one father is humiliated, then another one. Thus all fathers are humiliated, God included. This repetition, this doubling, leads to a terrible feeling of vertigo, and provides us with a literal "image of the promised end."

Why does *King Lear* still speak to us today?

O.P.: Because losing the values of humanism is almost a danger for Europe.

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Interview conducted by Renan Benyamina for the Festival d'Avignon / Translation Gaël Schmidt-Cléach (for any use of these texts, please mention the author and inform the Festival d'Avignon).

OLIVIER PY

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The author, director and actor, Olivier Py was born in 1965. After studying at the National Superior School of Theatre Arts and Techniques (Ensatt), he entered the National Conservatory of Dramatic Art Paris in 1987, while studying theology.

His first play, *Oranges and Nails*, was created by Didier Lafaye at the Essaïon Theatre in 1988. In the same year, Olivier Py founded his own company and he staged his own plays, including *Gazpacho*, *a Dead Dog*, *The Adventures of Paco Goliard*, *The Servant*, *an endless story* a twenty-four

hour cycle performed at the Festival Avignon in 1995, or yet *The Face of Orpheus*, created in Orleans and presented at the Festival d'Avignon in the Cour d'honneur of the Popes' Palace in 1997. At that time, Olivier Py also staged texts of Elizabeth Mazev and Jean-Luc Lagarce.

Appointed in 1998 as the director of the Orleans National Drama Centre, he created *Requiem for Srebrenica*, *The Water of Life*, *The Joyful Apocalypse*, *Epistle to Young Actors*, *To the World as it doesn't exist...* Other directors mounted his plays: *Theatres* by Michel Raskine, *The Exaltation of the Labyrinth* by Stéphane Braunschweig, *The Servant* by Robert Sandoz... In 2003, Olivier Py put on *The Satin Shoe* by Claudel. He wrote and directed a trilogy, *The Winners* in 2005. The same year, he directed *A Cry from Heaven* by Vincent Woods in Dublin. In 2006, at the invitation of Jean-Michel Ribes, he presented "The Great Py Parade" in Paris at the Théâtre du Rond-Point – six shows of which he is the author and director, five reruns and a new creation: *Comedy Illusions* also performed in all of France.

In 2006, on the occasion of the closing of the 60th Festival d'Avignon, Olivier Py staged a tribute to Jean Vilar, *The Vilar Enigma* in the Cour d'honneur of the Popes' Palace. It was also at the Festival d'Avignon in 1996 that he performed the character of *Miss Knife* for the first time, whose singing tour was presented in Paris, Lyon, New York, Brussels, Madrid, Athens... and which was the subject of two discs published by Actes Sud. In 2012, *Miss Knife* went on the road again in France and in the world with a new show.

As an actor, Olivier Py has also starred in shows by Jean-Luc Lagarce, François Rancillac, Éric Sadin, Pascal Rambert, Nathalie Schmidt, as well as in the films of Jacques Maillot, Cédric Klapisch, Michel Deville, Laurent Bénégui, Peter Chelsom, Martin Provost or Noemie Lvovsky. He has also directed two films: *Eyes Closed* in 1999 for Arte and *Mediterraneans* in 2011 for Canal +.

Appointed in March 2007 as the head of the French national Odeon-Theatre of Europe, he created the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus in 2008, *The Water of Life*, *The Girl, the Devil and the Mill* and *The True Fiancée*. From 2009 to 2012, he translated, adapted and directed a trilogy of Aeschylus (*Seven against Thebes*, *The Suppliants*, *The Persians*), played outside the walls as “street theatre” for the non-public. In 2009, he took up *The Satin Shoe* by Claudel at the Odeon and also created *The Children of Saturn* at Ateliers Berthier. In 2011, he created *Adagio [Mitterrand, the hidden things and his death]*, presented *Romeo and Juliet* at the Odeon, taken on tour in France and abroad and created, in German, *Die Sonne*, commissioned by the Volksbühne in Berlin. In 2012, he completed his full works of Aeschylus with *Prometheus Bound*.

From March 2012 to September 2013, in addition to a new album and a tour of *Miss Knife*, he staged *Vitrioli* by Yannis Mavritsakis in Athens, at the request of the National Theatre of Greece, and several operas in Europe. For a dozen years, Olivier Py has indeed regularly tackled the opera with, among others, *The Tales of Hoffmann* by Offenbach, *Tristan and Isolde* and *Tannhäuser* by Wagner, Britten's *Curlew River*, *Pelléas and Mélisande* by Debussy, *The Rake's Progress* by Stravinsky, Hindemith's *Matthias the Painter*, Meyerbeer's *The Huguenots*, *Carmen* by Bizet, *Claude* by Robert Badinter and Thierry Escaich, *Alceste* by Gluck, Verdi's *Aida* or Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*.

Olivier Py has been entrusted with the management of the Festival d'Avignon starting with the 2014 edition, a position he is holding since September 2013. For the 68th Festival d'Avignon, he creates a new comedy: *Orlando or Impatience*, taken on tour in Europe. He also presented *Vitrioli* and a new version of *The Girl, the Devil and the Mill*. In 2015, he created for the 69th Festival d'Avignon *King Lear*, performed in the Cour d'honneur of the Popes' Palace, and presented *Hacia la alegría* within the framework of *Villes en Scène / Cities on Stage*.

Most of his work is published by Actes Sud Editions, including a *Full Theater* in three volumes. It was translated into English, Italian, German, Slovenian, Spanish, Romanian and Greek. With Actes Sud he published a political essay, *Cultivate Your Storm* in 2012, in 2013, *The Thousand and One Definitions of Theater* and *Siegfried by night*, in 2014 *Excelsior* and in 2015 *Le Cahier noir*.

As an artist and citizen, Olivier Py takes a stand and engages in many political and societal struggles: the war in former Yugoslavia, the illegal immigrants or the Russian atrocities in Chechnya. He denounced the Sarkozy bill on immigration, the “intolerable sexual intolerance of the Church”, and supports personalities like José Bové, Jovan Divjak, Mahmoud Darwish, Denis Robert and Florence Hartmann, in their struggles, he provides a forum for Romas, prostitutes, anti-globalization militants and Syrian resistance...



CONTACTS

Julie Bordez, Production director

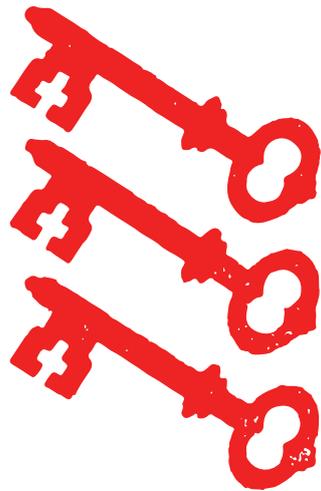
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