

THOSE WHO WANDER AREN'T WRONG

When most of the population decides to vote blank, the government, amazed, is thrown into a panic. They were convinced they would be easily reelected, but instead have to face the apocalypse. The ministers meet to try to understand what happened. Is it a conspiracy? Who would have planned it? What exactly is a blank vote anyway, and what does it mean? How should they react? Panic-stricken, they declare a stage of exception and task the director of the department of Truth with investigating the situation. Meanwhile, a maverick journalist films the private consequences of this political cataclysm. Watching characters trapped both within the disorder of their own conscience and within a system about to topple, Maëlle Poésy asks the audience whether democracy still allows for dialogue. In order to delve into that question while keeping a certain distance, she has imagined, along with writer and playwright Kevin Keiss, a fantastic comedy that plays on the absurdity and the inner logics of the democratic system. A revolution through the ballot box that allows us to gauge the ever-increasing gap between the two Greek roots of the word democracy, power on the one hand, and the people supposed to hold it on the other. Thanks to, or because of, the consequences of a single vote, the young director studies, in this all-too-realistic fiction, the notions of representation, incarnation, and dialogue. Because to continue to dialogue is always to refuse to be robbed of one's power.

MAËLLE POÉSY

As a child, Maëlle Poésy already loved climbing onstage to take part in shows directed by her father, who founded the Théâtre du Sable. After studying at the Conservatoire de Paris and at the Sorbonne, the actress, born in 1984, finished her training by participating in masterclasses in modern dance. She then followed her passion at university by analysing the formation of emotion in the work of Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and James Thierrée. In 2007, she was accepted into the London Academy of Drama and Music and the École supérieure d'art dramatique du Théâtre national de Strasbourg, and joined the latter. In 2008, she appeared in Hanoch Levin's *Winter Funeral*, which she put on with part of her class. Since then, she has created numerous shows with the company Crossroad (Marieluise Fleisser's *Purgatory in Ingolstadt*, *Candide Si c'est ça le meilleur des mondes...* (*Candide, If that's the best of all possible worlds...*) based on Voltaire, Anton Chekhov's *The Bear* and *Swansong* at the Comédie Française), laying the foundations of her "theatre of the confrontation," fascinated by movement, a true "rhythm factory" that questions society, its individual components and collective mechanisms.

KEVIN KEISS

A postdoctoral researcher in classical literature and a specialist in ancient theatre, Kevin Keiss—author, translator, teacher, director, and playwright—met Maëlle Poésy at the École supérieure d'art dramatique du Théâtre national de Strasbourg, where he studied from 2008 to 2011. Since then, he has collaborated on all her projects, most notably writing *Candide Si c'est ça le meilleur des mondes...*, adapted from Voltaire. In 2015, for that creation, Kevin Keiss became artist-in-residence at the Centre national des écritures du spectacle (CNES) at the Chartreuse of Villeneuve lez Avignon.

JOSÉ SARAMAGO

An autodidact hailing from a humble family, José Saramago (1922-2010) published his first novel, *Land of Sin*, in 1947. His talent wasn't recognised until the publication in 1980 of *Raised from the Ground*, forcing him to work various jobs in the publishing and print media industries. A member of the Communist Party who played an active role in the Carnation Revolution, his political positions transpire in a body of work that includes prose, poetry, essays, and plays. He is the only Portuguese writer to have won the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1988.

INTERVIEW WITH MAËLLE POÉSY AND KEVIN KEISS

Historical, literary, cinematographic, plastic: the influences of this show, which you wrote with Kevin Keiss, are many.

Maëlle Poésy: I'd wanted to treat the question of democracy in a show for a long time. *Those Who Wander Aren't Wrong* was born of that desire. It's the story of a revolution through the ballot box, an imaginary situation taken to its logical extreme, which drives the characters to choose a side and in the end to reveal their true nature in spite of their original lack of self-awareness. Like in *Oedipus Rex*, the play is about investigating the cause for this "white plague" that descends upon the country. It's an earth-shattering moment, where everyone reveals themselves when faced with the incredible. For this creation, we started with the novel *Seeing* by José Luis Saramago, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1998. The central question of the novel—that of democracy, expressed through a massive blank vote that the government cannot understand—echoed our own interrogations about democracy and what it represents for our generation of thirtysomethings. We kept the premise of the book, and the idea of seeing things both from the point of view of the politicians and from that of an investigator who tries to understand what happened. And while the latter embodies a certain growing awareness, we added our own vision to the dramatic story. To build the play, we spent a lot of time exchanging with people about those themes during our residence at the Centre national des écritures du spectacle in the Chartreuse of Villeneuve lez Avignon, while calling on different inspirations, from the worlds of literature and cinema, but also from history, like the recent democratic crises that shook Western countries or older episodes like the Siege of Paris and the Commune. Using magical realism, the play questions our relationship to the democratic system and in particular our individual responsibility faced with this power that acts on society. I also remembered that documentary by Chris Marker, *L'Ambassade (The Embassy)*, in which you can see people, trapped together after a military coup, slowly reveal their true nature. Here, trapping people together allows us to examine the different reactions of the Ministers who, after the vote, have to look for more personal and intimate answers to understand the situation. A situation that the audience follows as it unfolds. For us, it was important for the audience to share the time of the characters, in order to create a simultaneity between what happens onstage and the interrogations it creates in the audience. The direction uses metonymical codes of representation that the audience can then complete, using their own imagination.

How do you work with the playwright? Is the text set, or does it evolve during rehearsals with the actors?

M.P.: We complete each other pretty well. He had a literary education while mine was visual, because of my practice of dance, of performance. In general, we think about the play together, discussing many related subjects, but also talking about other fictional worlds. Those discussions allow us to come up with characters who will embody ideas, to determine the themes we want to talk about, and to build the puzzle of the play, its synopsis. Afterwards, Kevin writes the scenes on his own, and we read them aloud together to feel their organic rhythm. We then start a process of reorganisation, of back-and-forth, which ends with a first draft that we give the actors. The final text is written during rehearsals, during its confrontation to actors immersed in a process of dramatic and choreographic improvisation. The play evolves according to the new things that arise from the work we do in rehearsal in collaboration with the artistic team, and to Kevin's propositions. Throughout the creation, I adjust the pieces of the puzzle, until the shape of the show becomes obvious to me.

In this play, what relationship did you imagine between these two events, one democratic (the vote) and one climatic (the rain)? How did you come up with the idea of a deluge, a tool straight out of mythology, that hits the stage?

Kevin Keiss: In José Saramago's *Seeing*, it pours on election day, until the city's inhabitants leave home under a radiant sun. In *Those Who Wander Aren't Wrong*, the

rain doesn't stop. It's a pouring rain that falls on the city. It rains, and it's hot, as if it were monsoon season. You can hear the rhythm of the rain, its melody. It intensifies the political crisis by becoming a sort of cosmic event. Like divine retribution. Think about the symbolism behind water, at once life-giving and cleansing. Water is rising, as if foreshadowing the fall of a civilisation. Rain cleanses and transforms perceptions, it shrinks the space, makes it electric. It heightens the differences in sensation between the inside and the outside. There are two categories, those who are in the dry and those who aren't. Beyond that, I think that rain has a powerful poetic dimension. It reminds me of Rilke's lines in *Loneliness* (1902): "*Loneliness is like the rain/It rises from the sea toward evening/And from distant plains moves into sky/Where it ever belongs/And from the sky it falls upon us in the city.*"

M.P.: At the beginning of the play, the audience is intrigued by an "inside cloud" that finds its way into the room. They see it before the characters do; this image creates an impulse, triggers reflection. This climatic ceiling, a sign that something no longer works in the world of the characters, is like a metaphor for the obliviousness of the politicians, who can't or refuse to see it. We're talking of course about our own obliviousness. More generally, I'm fascinated by the question of the temporality of the stage. I see the theatre as a place that can talk about the present of a person, but also about his or her past and future. I like to create spaces that can change, sets that transform, that show the passing of time, the unfolding of history, but also the movement of thought. The stage you get to see in the end is often the result of past moments. In this play, the two accidents, one climatic and the other democratic, invade the stage little by little, leave traces, and provide a physical symbol for a society that's crumbling, no longer able to respond democratically to the questions it asks itself.

Your government has Ministers of Defense, Justice, the Army, and Culture, but no Minister of Economy. Why this choice at a time when the relationship between finance and democratic attrition is the object of much debate?

K.K.: Our government is indeed characterised by its unique denomination when it comes to the various ministers. I imagined there had been a reduction rather than a multiplication in the number of positions. The Minister of Economy is also the Minister of Defense, and is also in charge of the budget. The Minister of Justice is also in charge of the Ecology, of Agriculture, and of Public Health. Culture is associated with Family Affairs, Youth, and Brotherhood. It's the same for most of our ministers. Here, there's no false modesty when it comes to holding multiple posts. The title itself is irrelevant, what matters is power. Some portfolios remain more classic. The Interior is still the Interior. There's a Minister of Sports, the Armies, and Foreign Affairs. But that isn't what makes our government truly unique. What strikes you when you look at the stage is this government's parity, which is perfectly respected. There's no expert, no adviser, no chief of staff. The representatives of the people carry on with this democratic ceremonial they might be the only ones to believe in.

M.P.: The economy is yet another question. It's trying to figure out who really holds power. It could be the subject of an entirely different show. What I'm interested in here is questioning the individual responsibility we all share. How can we let things not be in our control anymore? I wanted to question politics through the prism of the relationship between the people and their representatives. *Those Who Wander Aren't Lost* is about the frailty of the democratic system, and above all about how surprisingly easy it is for this system to turn into totalitarianism if it isn't protected and regularly questioned in its very foundations. The play is also about our inability to ask fundamental questions, an inability that leads to obliviousness, to a decline. We therefore focused on processes of self-delusion and on the notion of individual and collective responsibility by asking the question of the common good, of what it still represents in our modern societies. Hence the necessity to keep our eyes open.

JULY 6 7 8 9 10
THÉÂTRE BENOÎT-XII

FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON 70^e

AND...

WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Research and creation by the French National Research Agency with Maëlle Poésy,
July 9 at 14:00, cloître Saint-Louis

Télérama dialogues with in particular Maëlle Poésy, July 16 at 11:00,
site Louis Pasteur de l'Université d'Avignon

TOUR DATES OF THOSE WHO WANDER AREN'T WRONG AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- November 5 2016 at La Piscine, Théâtre Firmin-Gémier de Châtenay-Malabry
- November 8 at Rayon-Vert, Scène conventionnée de Saint-Valéry-en-Catx
- November 17 to 19 at Théâtre du Gymnase-Bernardines de Marseille
- November 26 at La Ferme du Buisson, Scène nationale de Marne-la-Vallée
- December 1 and 2 at Granit Scène nationale de Belfort
- December 5 to 18 at Théâtre de la Cité Internationale de Paris
- January 10 to 11 2017 at Théâtre-Sénart, Scène nationale de Sénart
- January 18 to 19 at Centre dramatique national de Sartrouville et des Yvelines
- January 26 at Phénix, Scène nationale de Valenciennes
- January 31 at Rive Gauche de Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray

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