

LE ROI LEAR

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.

The show will premiere on 4 July 2015 at the Cour d'honneur du Palais des papes, Avignon.

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

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

OLIVIER PY

Actor, poet, director, and man playing an active part in the life of the city, Olivier Py's research has led him down all possible political and poetic paths to meet the present and try to give it meaning. In this adventure that takes him from trestles to stages, the living word plays a key part. It is at once the question and the answer that haunts his entire body of work. He calls on the words of Aeschylus, of Claudel, of Shakespeare, but also on his own, in long and daring plays. As the director of the Centre dramatique national d'Orléans, of the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe, then of the Festival d'Avignon, he's never ceased to demonstrate his faithfulness to public theatre and to the concept of decentralisation. *King Lear* and *Hacia la alegría* are two plays where what is most intimate meets the most universal questions.

PIERRE-ANDRÉ WEITZ

From the glitter of *Miss Knife*, shimmering in cabarets, to the monumental convent of the *Dialogues of the Carmelites* for the opera, Pierre-André Weitz works on different scales but with the same care on the costumes and sets he designs. Trained at the Strasbourg conservatory, where he specialised in lyrical arts, and at architecture school, he soon falls in love with scenography. He has worked with Olivier Py since 1993. Like the architect of *Hacia la alegría*, he refuses and challenges the immobility of matter, creating moving devices that play with space and height. Floors to inhabit, stairs to climb, facades to graffiti: Pierre-André Weitz's scenographies often allow both the actors and the audience's gaze to rise.

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.

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 / Translation Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

AND...

King Lear in the Cour d'honneur: an exclusive digital option

- on 6 July, the robot Uby will be in the Cour d'honneur to act as the eyes and ears of the audience of the Café Europa in Mons (Belgium)
- on 8 July, *King Lear* will be broadcast on France 2 and Culturebox with a slight delay - 10:35p.m.
- starting 8 July, worldwide trial of augmented-reality glasses for surtitles, for English- and Chinese-speaking volunteers
- starting 9 July and for 6 months, *King Lear* will be available on Culturebox, with additional content: an interactive player will let you discover the characters' comments, the Fool's asides to the audience, and all the extra material; follow the characters on Twitter: @RoiLearAvignon, @FoolAvignon; the text is entirely available in audio description for the blind, subtitled in its original version and in Mandarin.

LEAR MINIATURE Direction Olivier Py, from 4 to 13 July at 09:00 pm
Place du Palais des Papes, free admittance

AND...

SHOW

- *Hacia la alegría* by Olivier Py, from 7 to 14 July at 06:00 pm
L'Autre Scène du Grand Avignon-Vedène

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Site Louis Pasteur, free admittance

- 7 July at 01:00 pm, Radio creation week: *Le Roi Lear* or « *I don't like classics* »
with Radio Campus Avignon and Radio Campus France

- 9 July at 5:30 pm, *Dialogue artists-audience* with the team of *Le Roi Lear*

- 18 July at 11:00 am, Télérama dialogue: *Shakespeare, again!* with Olivier Py

- 23 July at 11:00 am, *The Mediterranean as a "single soul"*

Clôître Saint-Louis, free admittance, please sign up on recherche-creation-avignon.fr:

- 9 July at 10:00 am, Encounter Research and creation: *Power, morals and seduction* with, among others, Olivier Py / Organised with the Agence nationale de la recherche

THE NAVE OF IMAGES Église des Célestins, free access

- 6 July at 02:30 pm, *Le Roi Lear* by William Shakespeare / Direction Daniel Mesguich (1981) / Realisation Jean-Marie Coldefy

SYMPOSIUM FAITH AND CULTURE *Shakespeare and the faces of power*
with Olivier Py / 11 July at 11:00 am, Chapelle de l'Oratoire, free admittance

FICTIONS FRANCE CULTURE *The Suppliants* by Aeschylus

Adaptation Olivier Py / 14 July at 08:00 pm, Musée Calvet, free admittance

ÇA VA, ÇA VA LE MONDE ! - RFI *Je, soussigné cardiaque (I, The Undersigned Cardiac Case)* by Sony Labou Tansi (Congo), with Eddie Chignara / 16 July at 11:30 am, Jardin du Gymnase du lycée Saint-Joseph, free admittance

ON ARTE *Orlando ou l'Impatience* by Olivier Py, 5 July at midnight

TOUR DATES OF LE ROI LEAR AFTER THE FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON

- from 1st to 18 October 2015: Gémeaux
Scène nationale de Sceaux

- 4 and 5 November: Théâtre Liberté,
Toulon

- from 11 to 14 November: Odysseus,
Blagnac

- from 19 to 21 November: La Criée,
Théâtre national de Marseille

- from 25 to 28 November: Théâtre des
Célestins, Lyon

- from 3 to 5 December: Théâtre
National Wallonie-Bruxelles

- 10 and 11 December: anthéa Antipolis
théâtre d'Antibes

- from 18 to 20 March 2016: National
Theater & Concert Hall, Taipei, Taiwan.

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EDITION

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