



ORLANDO OU L'IMPATIENCE

INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIER PY AND PIERRE-ANDRÉ WEITZ

***Orlando, or Impatience*, is the first play you have written and directed as director of the Festival d'Avignon. It will be played in the permanent house of the Festival, the FabricA. Did you write it with that place in mind?**

Olivier Py: *Orlando, or Impatience*, is a manifesto, a text at once systemic and programmatic. Programmatic because it talks about politics, a manifesto because it talks about the theatre and about poetry, and systemic because it talks about everything, as usual... I wrote it for this year's edition of the Festival d'Avignon, and it does indeed talk about the FabricA. It's almost incidental: it's a choice I made because I wanted to rehearse early to be able to focus on the organisation of the Festival in May and June. The FabricA let me do that. It is the most important thing to happen to the Festival in years. It gives the Festival a perennial and year-round presence in the city. It allowed for the nomination of an artist as director, and we can now begin an artistic and public relations work much more intense with the people of Avignon and of the surrounding area. That isn't to say that I won't work, in years to come, in the Cour d'honneur. I don't believe in creating a hierarchy between the venues used during the Festival, they are all part of what makes its memory.

Within your work as a playwright, you describe *Orlando* as in keeping with what you started with your *Illusions comiques (Comic Illusions)*...

O.P.: Yes, although nothing forced me to make it a comedy to talk about the themes it tackles. It would probably be more accurate to say that it was comedy that chose me. I wanted to talk about serious things, and I didn't know how to do it without writing a comedy. If I mention those two plays together, it's because *Illusions comiques* was already a systemic and programmatic manifesto. There's a certain freedom in comedy that you won't find in other genres. Through it, I am able not to tackle one particular subject, but to make "everything" my subject. It becomes thus theatre as totality, and totality as theatre. It might seem weird, but that's how my brain works. When I want to write a systemic play, comedy is the only genre I can think of. I think I realised it when directing *The Satin Slipper*. When a play is long and systemic, it has to cross genre boundaries, to be at least part comedy, and that part then proceeds to contaminate and spread throughout the rest of the lyrical poem. In France, we created a genre that would be a form of specific intelligence that forbids itself nothing. Comedy in the 17th century was a sort of catch-all genre, like Corneille's *L'illusion comique*, for instance. If I use this word, if I claim it as my own, it's because it suits me. As a poet, you have to accept what you are, and me, well, I like to laugh. And at this point in my life, probably also because of the current political environment, my own lyrical poetry has no choice but to hide within a comedy.

Are your comedies more political than your other plays?

O.P.: I don't think so. Politics, by which I mean what has to do with the governing of the state, always comes with philosophical or aesthetic questions. Of course, it is a little more obvious in my comedies, because they contain biographical elements, and my life has often included dialogues with politicians, including the highest authorities of the state, something which my artistic vocation didn't *a priori* imply. In *Orlando*, I talk about that, too.

So it's an autobiographical play?

O.P.: It is, in a new way, since I am now at the age where I can play both fathers and sons. I'm too old to play Orlando, though. He looks like the young man I once was, and the successive fathers he meets look like the man I am now or will be. It's true even of the character of the Minister who, on a spiritual, metaphysical, and mystical level, looks a lot like me. One could say this play is a sort of diffracted biography, but it isn't auto-fiction at all.

The full title is *Orlando, or Impatience*. Why this "impatience?" Why this search for the father?

O.P.: Impatience, to me, is synonymous with a sort of thirst for spirituality. Impatience is what drove me, sometimes, to writing. It is knowing something while knowing you will never know anything. It's a picture of the present, which has little to do with the news. The present includes things that aren't new, that aren't of the current times. That's why, at the beginning of the play, Orlando is a young man looking for his father, a quest that takes time. He grows less and less young as he meets all those men who could be his father. It's a little like the character of the Minister who is always there, never growing older but evolving nonetheless. Sometimes you meet the same person under different guises. That's the case with the father. The relationship with the father is a theme I keep coming back to. Except now, I could also be a father. I think every member of the audience will interpret those fathers and those different forms based on his or her own experiences. They might think of me when faced with this form of theatre I might call "hedonistic." Or maybe not. They might see a political theatre, or a more metaphysical theatre, a philosophical-clownish theatre, or a Beckettian theatre... But those different forms don't necessarily correspond to the play's five acts; they collide and mix together.



Through those different forms, are you also offering your vision of the world of today?

O.P.: You have to, otherwise why would you write? I don't think of my theatre as a theatre of questions, though, but as a theatre that shows the many possible answers. I've grown tired of plays that do nothing but ask questions. I think you have to offer answers, rather than *an* answer, which would be almost despicable. Neither God, nor engagement, nor Art, nor frugality, nor love can be *the* answer. I don't think theatre should depict the Apocalypse, but rather ways to escape it. We need to identify living powers rather than dying ones.

Since 1990, Pierre-André Weitz, you have done the sets, costumes, and make-up of Olivier Py's plays and operas. How do you work together?

Pierre-André Weitz: We start working together at the very inception of a project. We try to establish right away a relationship between the text and the space in which it will be played. When the text is by Olivier Py, like *Orlando*, he tries to figure out what he wants as he writes. We both consider that a good scenography is a series of games that represent all the different kinds of theatre. Something like a choreography of the spaces, very lyrical, very musical, but always closely tied to the text. We want to show theatre in movement, which is why we show the machinery and the engineers that manipulate it. It's an aesthetic and dramatic choice, but it is never purely illustrative.

So you don't create a space for the actors to play in?

P.-A. W. : It's more of a space-time within which the actors play, if you will. I'm not interested in static sets, but the change from one image to another fascinates me. That movement is what is going to trigger, in the audience's heads, their own imagination. I create spaces, volumes, and the audience puts up the wallpaper. What we try to do with Olivier Py is to represent the ephemeral, that of the words, of music, of my architecture. I build the various elements of this architecture in a very classic way, but the way we move it is anything but classic.

How did you picture *Orlando*?

P.-A. W.: I create both sets and costumes because I believe they are closely connected. For *Orlando*, we have to be able to represent all the forms of theatre the play talks about. There will be wooden chassis stuck to moving structures, which we will therefore be able to move around all the time. This will allow us to show both sides of the theatre, but also to build very modern cities whose architecture constantly changes to always offer different vanishing points. The actress whose role it is to travel through the different forms of theatre will change costumes every time, and each costume will be of a different material, of a different colour, bringing up a different theatricality each time. The audience should feel that they are at the theatre when they watch a show by Olivier Py, when they listen to his texts. Theatre, for us, means showing a fake reality that is nonetheless "true," it's always being in the ephemeral. The show should remain in the audience's memory, but without making that deep an impression, either.

You've been doing this for a while. Do you feel like there's been an evolution in your work?

O.P.: My impression is that it is the world around me that changes, which in turn changes the light cast on what I write. Like a lot of artists, I have an obsessional personality. The questions I asked myself when I was twenty weren't motivated by the circumstances, so they haven't changed. I feel that the questions I've asked myself come back time and again, that my will to make theatre a great spiritual adventure in an ever more materialistic world has only deepened. Which is why I don't feel too unhappy today. I'm working the same furrow, so to speak, and I think I'll work it till the end. I don't really have a choice. My writing has never been what you'd call trendy. It has never been linked to societal topics, to materiality and temporality, but rather to those essential and eternal things I've tried to identify. Some questions relating to new media are fascinating, but they don't play a big part in my writing. I think that theatre is a constant within a world that's always changing, technologically- and socially-speaking. As Satoshi Miyagi so beautifully put, I am a "living anachronism."

Interview conducted by Jean-François Perrier.

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