

Myth and Theatre



Interview with Camille de Bonhome

by Iulia Stoicanea



Camille de Bonhome is a Belgian director, actress and playwright born in Liège. During her acting studies (EICAR) and theatrical sciences studies in Paris (Sorbonne-Nouvelle), Camille De Bonhome, was trained as an intern with dancer **Rosalba Torres** and director and author **Jan Lauwers** (Needcompany). After her graduation, she settled back in Belgium and worked as an assistant director and playwright for: **Peeping Tom**, **Eurudike De Beul** (KoudVuur), **Guy Cassiers** (Toneelhuis) and **Jonathan Littell** for his first movie. Parallel to her experiences as assistant and playwright, she developed and initiated a theatre project with a group of artists that she herself brought together. Previously, Camille had worked on two projects based on **Interior** by Maurice Maeterlinck and on the writings of the Spanish author Javier Marias. These works were created for and with the help of De School Van Gaasbeek (Brussels), particularly for the September Festival. She created **In Dreams Begin Responsibilities** at De Grote Post, Festival de Liège, and at Les Ateliers Claus, Brussels, in 2018. She has worked on a new project, **Les Antigones** for which she presented a performance at BOZAR (Brussels) and created an installation for Europalia in October 2019. Last autumn, she conducted a workshop and directed a performance in Bucharest for the 9th edition of the Bucharest Fringe, The Independent Theatre Marathon Festival.

Iulia Stoicanea: From my point of view, your work has a certain diversity to it. From the video installations that you put together to the workshops and performances you direct, all of them are very unique in their own way. Therefore, my question is, where do you draw inspiration from?

Camille de Bonhome: I think that my first inspiration comes from the people I work with, the performers. Who they are and what kind of thing they are able to propose on stage but also, what they could represent or what kind of images they could create. And when you saw the work in Bucharest, you could maybe see also, that I really start from them. Even if I don't know them yet, I try to start from what they propose and then I develop. Of course, everything for me starts with narration and mostly mythology and this is the very beginning

and what we always go back to. I have also probably been influenced by the directors I worked with, or some performances I saw but that is unconscious. You don't always know what your memory selects.



I. S.: *I have assisted to the process of building up a performance when you were last time in Bucharest. This fluidity; this natural way of putting pieces together was eye-opening to me in the sense that it amazed me what beautiful things you can create from just a story, from a narrative. Is this how you usually work? Does this way of creating a performance work better for you, as opposed to building a performance based solely on a script? How do you prefer to work?*

C. d. B.: I always work this way, it's very important to me. But, in order to be able to work this way, I prepare a lot. It's kind of weird, actually. Because I don't have a script, but I am very prepared, I know exactly what kind of situation I want to explore. If you are prepared, if you have a strong frame, then you can just break it, and you can let the people in the frame, and let them break your frame. I try to be as organic as possible, even if I don't have a lot of time, like it happened in Bucharest, because I make theatre for the people who are on stage and from them. You have to find a balance between what you want to work on and also create a huge space for the performers. In the end, I have the final word, but I don't actually create anything, I propose the frame, but I think they create the entire thing.

I. S.: *What made you choose the world of theatre? What influenced you in such a way that you chose this path?*

C. d. B.: I started as a ballerina, for years, that was my first dream. But I couldn't fulfill it. And then I started with theatre a very long time ago, and I guess it comes from where I'm from. My family is a big family, really based on appearances. What you should be, how you should speak, what you should study... And behind those perfect images is all the mess. So I think I was very soon aware of what representation is. That's what I work on: images that have a story that is different from the situation they depict. So, at first I chose to be an actress, but I wasn't that good at it, and I realized very soon that I had to be on the other side. I was really interested in the work of other actors, and that was very clear.

I. S.: *How much different is the role of the director from that of an actor for you? What are the main differences between the two of them from your point of view?*

C. d. B.: An actor, for me, is always in some kind of danger. That's why I start from them because the conflict already exists between them and the stage. I'm not taking any risks, you know?

(Laughs.) I just put them on this kind of dead wood, which is the stage. And also, they hold all the responsibility, because I really give the work to them at the end. In contrast to that, I think that an actor is also much more free than a director because he doesn't see what's happening, he is the actual happening. The director is more logical, and you have to put it together, to feel what works. And as a director, I have the whole look, the whole picture from outside. So there is also a big difference of perspective.

I. S.: *What are your expectations after you put out a performance? Do you have certain expectations or if you have a certain impression you have to make on the audience? Do you hope the audience gets a certain message?*

C. d. B.: Not really. I really want to make theatre for a regular audience. And it's not so easy because there are a lot of professionals going into theatre and the real audience of people out of this industry is not so easy to find anymore. I really like to talk to people who don't go a lot to theatre, because they have a real, virgin, unfiltered look. I really like that and I really like to talk to people afterwards, but I don't expect anything, they also can just leave in the middle of my show, I really don't care. I certainly don't have something I want to maybe teach them, I just want to try to share some questions, or some thoughts or images and try to make them aware that every story is a lie as much as a truth.

I. S.: *I know that you have founded the company Myrrha alongside Manolo Sellati, your frequent collaborator. Can you tell me more related to it and the work that you create through it? Does the work within the company differ from your individual work?*

C. d. B.: The company is really not that official. We started to work together 5-6 years ago, I think. Manolo is a philosopher and a dramaturg and at some point I needed to put some words to this work relationship because it's unique. I guess I also always dreamed about a real company or a 'troupe' like in the times of Molière, because for me it's the most romantic thing on earth, but it didn't happen. So there are no differences between my projects and those with Manolo. Sometimes we work together from the start, sometimes it's much more punctual. Manolo is very good at giving some intellectual food to a project and opening up a question. He is the first person I talk to when I want to develop an idea. Together, we share a theatrical practice which is demanding, based on process and creates a new questioning.

I. S.: *The workshop that you conducted last time in Bucharest had the starting point the Romanian myth of Meșterul Manole. How did you choose this myth? What drew you to start working from it?*

C. d. B.: I always work with mythology. I love it. I found the myth one day, but I don't remember exactly how I came across it. I really wanted to work on sacrifice, which is the second part of a cycle I am working on. The first one was on lies and biography and the second part on sacrifice. Because sacrifice can be very sacred, but also profane, because we are also always working on process, I thought it was a perfect story – to work on sacrifice in relation to the creation. So when I found it, I was really impressed by it because, like Manole, every artist who is trying to create something, builds during the day and at night everything could collapse. I was also impressed by its importance in Romania, we don't have such a myth in Belgium, we don't have that kind of relationship to mythology. And then it was very funny, because when I first spoke to some Romanian people about it, they questioned my choice

and were asking why I chose it. So, I liked this idea too, that the myth is less appreciated nowadays and I opened myself to other interpretations of it.

I. S.: *Since the theme of the workshop was sacrifice and what it represented for the participants, I want to ask you, what is sacrifice for you? What does this concept mean to you?*

C. d. B.: The whole project started because one of the actresses we worked with for a long time decided to stop acting. She had to find another job, earn more money because she is a single mother of two children. It broke my heart for many reasons. I saw in her story a very concrete and contemporary idea of sacrifice. But sacrifice is first linked to ritual from which the first form of theatre is born from our Western conception of theatre. So there are two forms of sacrifice, first a profane one that we can all recognize and a sacred one, which is much less concrete. And the central question is: what is still sacred in our society? By *sacred* I understand something you don't control and don't want to control, something you don't understand, something that is beyond you and you can't explain, something magic and mysterious, something that is not a part of our rational and productivity based society. But for me, creation, artistic process is very close to that. That's why I want to work on the relation between creation and sacrifice/sacred through this project.

I. S.: *And lastly, what are you preparing for the future? What are your next projects?*

C. d. B.: Everything has been postponed due to the pandemic. So I will make the film part of the sacrifice-project in September and then we have a residency to develop the performance part of it, that will start from the interrogation idea that we worked on in Bucharest. I will also be working on a new creation that is a solo with Sandro Mabellini. The project is based on a text of French writer-director Pascal Rambert. The premiere will be in April 2021. Then I will start the research for the third episode of a cycle (the sacrifice-project is the second one). This third part is based on territories and the mythology of enemy brothers. We will start to work in Luxembourg and so I decided to create the first step around Europe and the first signature of the Schengen Agreement.

Iulia Stoicanea este absolventă a Secției Teatrolgie și Management Cultural, Facultatea de Teatru, UNATC „I.L. Caragiale” București, colaborator al Teatrului „Ion Creangă”, al Teatrului „Masca” și al revistei academice *CONCEPT*.

Iulia Stoicanea is a graduate of the Theatre Studies and Cultural Management Department of the Faculty of Theatre, UNATC „I.L. Caragiale” Bucharest, collaborator of the „Ion Creangă” and „Masca” Theatres and the *CONCEPT* academic journal.

