

ETIENNE GUILLOTEAU

FEU



a) a body lying there, repeating itself

A body – or better said, the shadow of what once was a body- is lying in the far left corner of the stage. Made from rough lumps of charcoal glued together, one arm and half a leg missing, the sculpture by young Belgian artist Jean-Loup Leclercq looks gnawed and battered. It represents Polyneices, who according to Greek Mythology died while fighting his brother Eteocles for the throne of the city of Thebes. The new ruler, Polyneices' uncle Creon, ordered to leave his body unburied on the battlefield. A very cruel punishment, because according to ancient beliefs, when one was not properly buried, their soul was not allowed to pass to the afterlife. Polyneices' sister Antigone wants to rectify what she considers unjust and, in defiance of Creon's edict, sets out to bury her brother's body. In his tragedy 'Antigone', the Greek playwright Sophocles focuses on the intense confrontation between niece and uncle that follows.

In *Feu*, his interpretation of the Greek classic, choreographer Etienne Guilloteau

leaves Leclercq's sculpture untouched for the full duration of the performance. It functions as a quiet reminder of a conflict in the past (between Polyneices and Eteocles), that has already led to a new conflict, erupting on stage (between Creon and Antigone). It can therefore also be read as a terrifying omen of the death and disaster that this new conflict will cause.

b) a confrontation of unequal forces, with tragic outcome

That new trouble is ahead is announced by the sharp, ominous sound of four electric guitars. Standing at the back of the stage behind a transparent curtain, the Dutch-Belgian electric guitar quartet ZWERM embodies the chorus that appears in Sophocles' original play. At the same time, they represent the power of tyrants like Creon. Their music also sets the atmosphere. When early in the performance, dizzying sounds seem to fall in a downward spiral, oozing a post-apocalyptic feeling, you need no words to understand that something terrible has just happened... This particular fragment is based on an existing composition, 'Round round down' (2012, Clinton Mc Callum for ZWERM). For *Feu*, Guilloteau -together with the musicians- decided to work mainly with existing material, sometimes adapting or transforming it. Here and there, new elements or pieces were added. The music covers a broad spectrum, ranging from contemporary classical to experimental rock.

The dance of *Feu* is as eclectic as the music. If ZWERM represents the powers in command through music, then Argentinian dancer Cecilia Lisa Eliceche lets Antigone speak through her posture, gestures and movements. Antigone's fearlessness is immediately evident when Eliceche enters the stage and looks the musicians, for seconds, straight in the



eye. You could call her brave, but perhaps also overconfident, embodying the Greek notion of 'hubris'. A little later, Eliceche executes highly complex technical dance material. Guilloteau, whose performance loosely follows the structure of Hölderlin's adaptation of Sophocles' original text, wanted her to physically struggle when embodying the moment that Antigone enters in a dialogue with Creon. At other times, movements relating to unbalance (like standing on one leg,...) provoke a sense of vulnerability. Again, without words, dynamics are made clear through the body.

Guilloteau's decision with *Feu*, to create a dance solo, is in line with Sophocles'

legacy. Sophocles specialist Jacques Lacarrière said that "with Antigone, for the first time in the history of theatre a character separates herself from the group, like a solo in an orchestra." It is impressive how the young and quite petite 'soloist' Eliceche faces the firm wall of the sound of her 'orchestra'- as if it was the tour de force of Antigone to challenge a tyrant. Just like Eliceche, she too fought with unequal resources, standing alone (even her sister Ismene refused to help her) against the many.



The clash of the two artistic media is also meaningful on other levels and connects with the content. Just like ZWERM and Eliceche speak different (artistic) languages, so too do Creon and Antigone belong to different worlds. Antigone stands for old traditions. She recognises her familial duty and respects the laws of the Gods: she defies Creon's decree, despite the

consequences she may face, in order to honor her deceased brother. Moreover, as a girl, she belongs to the private sphere, although she forces her way through to the public domain that in Ancient Greece was dominated by men. Creon stands for new beliefs, viewing man-made laws as the guarantors of peace and happiness. Sophocles lets neither triumph. Antigone dies but Creon loses everybody who is dear to him. His son Haemon, who was engaged to Antigone, kills himself and his wife Euridyce commits suicide, with her last breath cursing her husband. Creon blames himself for everything that has happened. The order he valued so much has been protected and he is still the king, but he is left a broken man.

c) a Greek tragedy, repeating itself

Just as Sophocles didn't focus on who was right and who was wrong, Guilloteau also doesn't choose sides. Transcending the anecdotal, he relates the ancient Greek tragedy to a broader socio-political historical awareness. The sculpture of Leclercq is very meaningful in this regard. In referring to both a battle that has ended and a new battle that is about to start, the sculpture symbolises a never-ending cycle of violence. Reminiscent of all too familiar images on current conflicts and disasters as published by mass media, the sculpture in its metaphorical power literally speaks of matter 'unburied': of a history that, just as the soul of Polyneices, is not put to rest and therefore repeats itself.

Similar to how Leclercq's sculpture speaks metaphorically, ZWERM and Eliceche not only stand for a clash between the two individuals (Creon and Antigone) that they represent, but also evoke the clash between different generations, convictions and worldviews, as our history has seen many. They therefore testify of a chain of conflicts, driven by notions of order versus revolution, laws of men versus laws of Gods and tensions



between the personal and the political, that have marked our society ever since the birth of democracy up until now. Guilloteau makes these links explicit through images, audio and video fragments of ao. Hannah Arendt, commenting on the Watergate Scandal (a major political scandal in the US in the 1970s, concerning abuses of power by the Nixon administration, that finally led to the resignation of Nixon as President of the US in 1974), prints from the series 'The Disasters of War' by Goya (early 19th century) as well as images of Marilyn Monroe, according to some an icon of femininity and female resistance. Do however also pay attention to details. The t-shirts of the musicians and the dancer, with names of different bands (The Police, Nirvana, Guns' n' roses) not only refer to their respective role, but also to rock culture that symbolises a 'drugs, sex and rock 'n roll' attitude and sometimes presumptuous belief of being bigger than laws and life. It proves how Guilloteau shapes his choreography with much care and an extreme eye for detail. In the end, one question remains. Why does this tragedy happens over again and again, if in the end, no one wins and everybody only loses?

Julie RODEYNS

Note: seen at Kaaitheater (Brussels), 28/11/2015, when due to terrorist alert, increased checks and security measures were still put in place.

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