

«*Dream On !*» was a theatre experiment in discussion, improvisation, rehearsal and the collective elaboration of quarrels both ancient and contemporary. Our aim was to rework and relocate the themes of the ANR-AGON project in theatrical language and experience, without losing contact with the early modern world. We embedded the ancient quarrel about 'la force de l'imagination' inside a contemporary story, set between Afghanistan and Oxford, between school playground and courtroom, between justice and revenge.

The work culminated in a new theatre show conceived and written by Wes Williams and Angharad Arnott Phillips, Youth Arts Co-ordinator with special responsibility for Outreach and Schools at the Pegasus Theatre, Oxford. The set was designed by Nomi Everall, and the sound design was by James Ball, both also at the Pegasus Theatre. As part of the project, we also made a short film produced by Kris Deedigan and Wayne Bentley, of mylifeproductions.co.uk, a company who specialise in work with young people from disadvantaged urban areas.

The show emerged out of a series of weekly workshops, with an intergenerational group of twenty regular participants, which took place between November 2012 and May 2013; the company was made up of youth theatre members (aged 11-18), students from Oxford University and Brookes University, academics, local professional theatre artists, refugees, and a film production company based in London. After several months of preparation, we started collective work the 7th November. The group met each on Wednesday evenings between 6 and 8.30pm (except during the school holidays), all the way through to May. There were also three intensive 'week-end' workshops: 23/24 February, 16/17 March and 27/28 April. Technical rehearsals were on 18-21st May, and the shows on 22-25th May.

«*Dream On !*» explored questions about how disputes, quarrels, and controversies arise, and how they might be either resolved or further problematised through the force of the imagination and the peculiar power of dreams. We investigated both dreams and the role of theatre itself under a number of connected signs:

- as the products of the social, conflicted unconscious
- as traces, both public and intimate, of lives made more vulnerable by war, exile adolescence, family, and/or school.
- as a challenge to Knowledge and Authority (legal, medical, scholarly...)
- as proof of the power of the imagination, a power at once clichéd and contested, both in the 'early modern' age and today.

The theatre itself represented both the school courtyard and the judicial courtroom.

Key texts explored in the project include: *Arrest notable de la Cour de Parlement de Grenoble, donné au profit d'une Damoiselle, sur la naissance d'un sien fils, arrivé quatre ans après l'absence de son mary, & sans avoir eu cognoissance d'aucun homme. Suivant le Rapport fait en ladite Cour, par plusieurs Médecins de Montpellier, Sages-Femmes, Matrones, & autres personnes de qualité* (Paris: 1637) ; Guillaume Lamy *Discours anatomiques ... Rev. & augm. de toutes les plus curieuses decouvertes des anatomistes modernes* (Bruxelles: & se vend a Paris, Chez Laurent d'Houry, 1685) ; J. A. Blondel, *The power of the mother's imagination over the foetus examin'd. In answer to Dr. Daniel Turner's book, intituled A defence of the XIIth chapter of the first part of a treatise, De morbis cutaneis* (London: John Brotherton, 1729; J. Nagera (1969), 'The imaginary companion: Its significance for ego development and conflict solution.'

Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, 24, 165–195; M. Taylor, *Imaginary Companions and the Children Who Create Them* (Oxford University Press: 1999); W. Williams, *Monsters and their Meanings in Early Modern Culture: 'Mighty Magic'* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

The discussion over the six month research and rehearsal period traced the lines that run from insults traded in school or the street to recent legislation about hate speech; it explored the difficult journey that a child, or a soldier might follow as they travel from Afghanistan to Oxford, from the school courtyard to the judicial courtroom, or from the past to the present. The characters we developed ranged from those we consider our common enemies (the Taliban, bullies in school, people traffickers, sexual predators...) to those we might imagine to be our protectors (teachers, family members, lawyers, soldiers, friends...). Out of all this, and a 'brassage' of the very diverse experiences of the group, we devised a dramatic experiment, which explored the contours of dreams, and the difficult transition from dream to reality (and back again). The resultant show tried to capture both the energy and the trauma of argument and quarrel and the difficult claims of reconciliation, forgetting, and justice.

The story, plot, or intrigue (the show was also mystery play, which left its central mysteries deliberately unresolved) wove together three principal strands:

- the experience of two of the group, who themselves had made the difficult journey to England from Afghanistan as young teenagers: walking, crammed on to a boat, hiding inside or under a lorry;
- experiences and stories generated by other members of the group, all turning on a set of connected fantasies and fears: revenge for harm done in the past, the effort required to find the right way to obtain retribution or justice;
- a version of the Annunciation story (told in both the Koran and the Gospels), and its echoes in the early 17th-century trial of Magdeleine d'Auvermont, a woman made pregnant through the force of a peculiarly powerful erotic dream.

Following the intricate lines of convergence between educational, religious and legal systems and beliefs – from insult to questioning; from appeal to sentence; from guardian angel to imaginary friend – we established a range of distinctive new perspectives on the key question of the question in relation to affect, to pain, to the experience of conflict and to the key issue: when does a quarrel end? In this respect it is worth noting that our work was given extra (if unintended) 'relevance' by two events that took place within the space of the final week of the performance: the beheading of an off-duty soldier in a London street by a man who imagined himself to acting in the name of Islam and those injured by war in Afghanistan, and the revelations, in court, of the 'grooming' and sexual abuse of children within Oxford itself.

To conclude: « *Dream On !* » conjugated six months of collective work into a show lasting an hour and half, which ran for just five performances, and seen by a capacity audience totalling 525 people. A separate post-show discussion and debate session was hosted by Ertegun House, Oxford University, on the 29th May. A number of AGON members in Oxford University also now have a strong, and ongoing, creative relationship with the Pegasus Theatre.

The short film, a video of one of the Pegasus performances, research images used for the design and for workshop discussion, still photographs from the production, some of the publicity

materials, and some elements of audience response can all be accessed online.