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Eva Urban

Multilingual Theatre in Brittany: Celtic Enlightenment and Cosmopolitanism

In this article Eva Urban describes a historical tradition of Breton enlightenment theatre, and examines in detail two multilingual contemporary plays staged in Brittany: *Merc'h an Eog / Merch yr Eog / La Fille du Saumon* (2016), an international interceltic co-production by the Breton Teatr Piba and the Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru (the Welsh-language national theatre of Wales); and the Teatr Piba production *Tiez Brav A Oa Ganeomp / On avait de jolies maisons* (2017). She examines recurring themes about knowledge, enlightenment journeys, and refugees in Brittany in these plays and performances and puts forward the argument that they stage cosmopolitan and intercultural philosophical ideas. Eva Urban is a lecturer and researcher in the English Department and an Associate of the Irish Studies Research Centre, CEI/CRBC, at the University of Rennes 2, France. She completed a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Cambridge and is the author of *Community Politics and the Peace Process in Contemporary Northern Irish Drama* (Peter Lang, 2011). She has also published articles in *New Theatre Quarterly*, *Etudes Irlandaises*, *Caleidoscopio*, and edited book collections.

Key words: European drama; French theatre; Breton theatre; Welsh theatre; social and political theatre; refugees; Romanticism.

Merc'h an Eog / Merch yr Eog / La Fille du Saumon / The Daughter of the Salmon

Tiez Brav a oa Ganeomp / On avait de jolies maisons / We had nice houses

CONTEMPORARY Breton and multilingual theatre in Brittany is influenced by Celtic legends, medieval mystery plays, and literary Romanticism. Its practice also belongs to a rich historical tradition of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought integrated with nineteenth-century republican thought and socialist thought of the twentieth century. This includes socially engaged theatre in the Breton language as developed, for example, by Emile Cloarec and the Paotred Plouiann company in Ploujean in the nineteenth century; the 'social theatre'¹ in the Breton language and in French by Pierre-Jakez Hélias in the 1950s and 1960s; and recent contemporary theatre in the Breton language (and multilingual) as staged by the Brest-based Teatr Piba.

Key themes of Breton mystery plays as staged by the Paotred Plouiann reappear in

the modern deconstructions of these plays by Hélias and in the Teatr Piba's experimental contemporary productions. These include symbolism around enlightenment, knowledge, personal journeys, cosmopolitanism, and tropes of strangers and refugees arriving in Brittany.

As Gourlay has shown,² Emile Cloarec, mayor of Ploujean (1892) and founding member of the Regionalist Breton Union, sought to strengthen the republican and educational function of popular theatre in the Breton language in the nineteenth century. He also opened new republican schools for all social classes, a school for girls, and initiated education programmes for adults.³ The values of a citizen's education promoted by Cloarec played a crucial role in theatrical performances staged in the Breton language by the Paotred Plouiann. Connections were established between the theatre, the promotion of regional culture, the Celtic language of Brittany, and free critical thought.

As developed by Enlightenment philosophers, the concept of critical thought led to republicanism and to the ideal of 'Liberté,

Egalité, Fraternité'. For example, according to Bernard Garcia, 'Voltaire as well as Condorcet incarnate the century of critical thought, the century of the Encyclopedia, of the theorization of political liberties and the rights of man, the century of commitment to tolerance against injustice, the century which believed in progress, in happiness, and in human perfectibility'.⁴ As Garcia emphasizes, Condorcet exercised an important influence on the establishment of the French secular and free state school system.⁵

In this article I shall argue that the connections between critical thought, republican education, promotion of regional culture and the Celtic language of Brittany, pursued in Cloarec's project of a Breton citizens' theatre, was sustained in the socialist vision of Hélias's modern Breton theatre in the twentieth century. Hélias was a secular republican, Breton regionalist, and revolutionary socialist. As a modernist, symbolist, and absurdist dramatist, he had been influenced by modern European drama and Greek mythology, the Irish drama of John Millington Synge and Sean O'Casey, and by Breton legends and folklore.

Like Cloarec, he was also dedicated to popular education. Ronan Calvez and Man-naig Thomas argue that the dramatic works of Hélias belong to the genre of 'social theatre' ('*théâtre social*') as defined by Jean Jaurès.⁶ They explain that these plays, in a manner close to Bertolt Brecht's dramaturgical theories, 'have the attribute of wanting to provoke the spectator's reaction and to make him think'.⁷ I believe that this attribute evolved from the spirit of the eighteenth century Enlightenment which encourages independent thought and critical reason, scientific pursuit, and reflection on questions of moral philosophy and social justice.

The Teatr Piba's contemporary theatre in Brittany, both in the Breton language and in multilingual work, is socially committed, often performed for school audiences, and accompanied by educational material. The work of these three generations of theatre makers and dramatists also shares interceltic, intercultural, and cosmopolitan approaches as well as a strong element of literary

Romanticism that revisits medieval legends and mystery plays of Brittany and the wider Celtic world.

Enlightenment and Romanticism, Wisdom and Cosmopolitanism

Merc'h an Eog/Merch yr Eog / La Fille du Saumon / The Daughter of the Salmon (2016), an international interceltic co-production by the Breton Teatr Piba and the Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru (the Welsh-language national theatre of Wales), builds on Irish, Welsh, and Amerindian mythologies and folk tales around the sea and the Salmon of Knowledge as a symbol for enlightenment journeys. The use of European and international legends and folklore to symbolize Enlightenment journeys is another feature that this form of 'social theatre' shares with Brecht's work.

As Maria Shevtsova has illuminated, Brecht uses Chinese and European legends and folk tales to dramatize an Enlightenment journey in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.⁸ And Clare Brennan, in her *Guardian* review of the Aberystwyth performance of *Merc'h yr Eog* on 7 October 2016, points out that 'there is, as the title (*The Salmon's Daughter*) suggests, a poetic, folktale quality to the story, which is powerfully present in the look and sound of the production'.⁹

Like earlier Breton mystery plays, *Merc'h an Eog* centres around interceltic journeys across the sea. The Teatr Piba production *Tiez Brav a oa Ganeomp / On avait de jolies maisons / We Had Nice Houses* (2017) stages the welcome of refugees to Brittany. A similar trope already occurs in the sixteenth century *Ancient Mystery of Saint Gwénolé*,¹⁰ in which refugees from Britain, fleeing the violent invasion by the Anglo-Saxons, are welcomed in Brittany.

My analysis will focus on the ways in which romantic Celtic legends dramatized in the Breton tradition of 'social theatre' reveal a critical, scientific, and moralist spirit. The connections between knowledge, Enlightenment journeys, and Cosmopolitanism dramatized in these plays have also been made by international Enlightenment thinkers. Accord-

ding to the French eighteenth-century playwright Charles Palissot de Montenoy's play *Les Philosophes* / *The Philosophers* (1760), was in the Enlightenment century 'the true sage is a cosmopolitan'.¹¹ This statement resonates with the wise King Kado's proclamation in Hélias's play *Ar Roue Kado* / *Le Roi Kado* / *King Kado*: 'All true kings are vagabonds'.¹²

In *King Kado*, the old itinerant bard Kado is an enlightened humanist philosopher who personifies the trope of the bard/traveller/gypsy/cosmopolitan/Jew/immigrant/refugee persecuted by the powerful who feel threatened by his liberty and knowledge. The cosmopolitan Kado proclaims a universal sense of liberty and tolerance with his bon mot: 'Everyone turn with their own planet!'¹³ This not only highlights his universal attitude but also implicates a sense of individual freedom which resembles the bon mots of Enlightenment tolerance and spiritual liberty by Frederic the Great ('*jeder soll nach seiner Façon selig werden*') and by Maximilien de Béthune ('*plût a Dieu . . . que vous fussiez si prudent que de laisser à chacun gagner Paradis comme il l'entend*').

Just like *King Kado*, Hélias's *An Isild A-Heul/Iseult Seconde* / *Iseult the Second* (1969) also deals with the concept of cosmopolitanism as this play builds on interceltic and intercultural legends: The interceltic legend of Tristan and Iseult and the Greek myth of the travelling Ulysses, lost at sea and captivated by the sirens. The central theme of *Iseult the Second* is that of strangers arriving in Brittany from across the sea (Tristan) and from elsewhere in the world (the cosmopolitan Greek merchant Charmès who compares Tristan to the hero of Greek mythology Ulysses). When the seafaring Tristan from Ireland/Cornwall is still dismissed as a 'foreigner' after having settled in Brittany and after having married the local Breton princess Iseult the Second, he demands to know the reason:

ROZILI: I thank you, foreigner, for having called your guard dog. He would have eaten me alive.

TRISTAN: Why do you call me a foreigner?¹⁴

Rozili's hostile answer evokes the desire to possess others, to plant them in the ground like trees; it implicates medieval feudalism's control over the movement of people:

ROZILI: He is without name, without allegiance and without land, he who finds not his contentment by living with his own. You will cease to be a foreigner in a country when you are planted like a tree. Not before.¹⁵

In *On Jurisprudence*, Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Adam Smith refutes the idea that an immigrant lacks allegiance to his newly chosen country of residence:

Again, of all the cases where one is bound to submit to the government that of an alien comes the nearest to a voluntary or tacit contract. He comes into the country not asleep but with his eyes open, enlists himself under the protection of this government preferably to all others; and if the principle of allegiance and obedience is ever founded on contract it must be in this case. Yet we see that aliens have always been suspected by governments, and have been laid under great disabilities of different sorts and never have any trust or employment in the state; and yet they have shown more strong and evident signs of an inclination to submit to the government than any others; and the obligations they are under to obedience are to those of a native subject as that of one who voluntarily enlists into the fleet compared to that of a pressed man.¹⁶

Smith's argument that only foreigners are free to form contracts with governments as local citizens have no choice in the matter suggests a reason for the suspicion towards foreigners expressed by authoritarians past and present. Freedom of movement and choice of allegiance destabilizes feudalist authoritarian control over a people 'planted like a tree' in the soil.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau pays tribute to the 'great cosmopolitan souls, who cross the imaginary barriers which separate the people, and who follow the example of the sovereign being that has created them as they embrace all of humankind in their benevolence'.¹⁷ The contemporary cosmopolitan philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah defines Enlightenment cosmopolitanism as a combination of 'obligations to others', and a 'shared citiz-

enship' with respect for the differences of individuals and the rich potential to 'learn from our differences'.¹⁸ The notion of world citizenship also implies judicial responsibility, hospitality, and a critique of colonialism, as theorized by Immanuel Kant in his *Perpetual Peace*.¹⁹ As Sankar Muthu explains in the following passage from *Les Lettres écrites de la Montagne*,²⁰ Rousseau appealed for a 'profound meditation' on human diversity by a 'simple desire to learn'.²¹

Shall we never see reborn the happy times when Peoples did not pretend to Philosophize, but the Platos, the Thales, and the Pythagorases, seized with an ardent desire to know, undertook the greatest journeys merely in order to learn, and went far off to shake the yoke of National prejudices, to get to know men by their conformities and their differences, and to acquire that universal knowledge that is not exclusively of one Century or of one country but of all times and of all places, and thus is, so to speak, the common science of the wise?²²

Philosophers' Journeys

The desire to learn by travelling was shared by many international Enlightenment thinkers. John Brewer describes the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Adam Ferguson as a 'frequent intellectual and cultural tourist' who enriched his own thought through a symbiosis of his knowledge of Scotland as well as other countries and other languages:

Ferguson had a Cosmopolitan mentality: in one letter from Italy he referred to Edinburgh, after hearing its name, as *O Dulcia Verba* – oh sweet words.²³

Adam Smith's and David Hume's journeys to France and across Europe were transformative experiences which influenced their philosophical works.^{24,25} Voltaire and the Breton Enlightenment philosopher de Maupertuis sojourned at length at the court of Frederic the Great of Prussia. Voltaire also travelled in the Netherlands and in England where he met Alexander Pope and developed an interest in Shakespeare. The Breton Enlightenment thinker Jacques Cambry toured the world as well as his native Brit-

tany.²⁶ Balcou describes Cambry as an anti-colonialist cosmopolitan, who, during his trip to Saint-Domingue, 'discovered the colonial system with horror'.²⁷ He maintains that 'Cambry's passion for travelling is a fundamental attribute of this writer: as if these earthly journeys were just an introduction, an initiation to enable him to travel towards the real light/enlightenment'.²⁸

I am suggesting that this strong link between Enlightenment, travel, and cosmopolitanism also manifests itself in all the plays and performances examined here.

As founder of the Académie Celtique, the 'encyclopédiste' Cambry was a passionate advocate for the Breton language, regionalism and Celticism. The aspects of literary Romanticism and its links with the humanist thought of the Enlightenment in Cambry's work are well illustrated in Balcou's account of Cambry's *Voyage dans le Finistère*.²⁹ Théodor Hersart de la Villemarqué offered an interceltic tour of romantic legends in *La Légende Celtique, en Irlande, en Cambrie et en Bretagne* (1859).³⁰ According to Erwan Chartier, this international intercelticism has medieval origins,^{31, 32} and became a defining feature of European literary Romanticism with the *Poems of Ossian* (1773)³³ by James McPherson.³⁴ This interceltic Romanticism remains an important feature of the contemporary Breton theatre.

Interceltic Legends and Scientific Enquiry

Merc'h an Eog / Merch yr Eog

La Fille du Saumon

The Daughter of the Salmon:

The interceltic dimension of the co-production *Merc'h an Eog* (2016) by the Teatr Piba and the Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru incorporates not only the multilingual element of Breton, Welsh, French, and Creole, but also romantic legends and poetry. The play, co-written by Breton author Azilis Bourgès and Welsh author Owen Martell, was directed by Breton director Thomas Cloarec and Welsh director Sara Lloyd. It was performed in Brittany and in Wales in the Breton, Welsh, French, English, and Gua-

deloupean Creole languages with translation apps provided for the audience. The protagonist of the play, Mair, is a young Welsh woman who lives in Brittany with her Breton partner, Loeiza. After returning to Wales for her aunt's funeral, Mair loses herself in childhood nostalgia. The following analysis is based on the performance staged at La Maison du Théâtre in Brest on 17 November 2016.

Taliesin and the Salmon of Knowledge: Water and the Natural Sciences

Merc'h an Eog was inspired by the Irish legend of the Salmon of Knowledge (*bradán feasa*) and by the mythology surrounding the Welsh bard Taliesin which inspired Arthurian legends and Romance in both Brittany and Britain. For example, the Breton and British figures of the wise Merlin in Arthurian Romance are linked to Taliesin/Thelgessin, to the Irish legend of the Salmon of Knowledge, and to the Irish bard Fingal.

The legend of the Salmon of Knowledge tells the story of Fionn MacCumhaill, named after the Gallic God Vindonnus who, according to Ingeborg Clarus, 'was a personification of wisdom'.³⁵ In the Irish language, 'fios' also means 'wisdom' and 'fionnadh' means 'illumination/enlightenment'.³⁶ As a young apprentice of the old wise bard Finegas, Fionn accidentally burns his thumb when touching the salmon he has been asked to cook for Finegas.

The fish had absorbed the world's wisdom and knowledge from nine nuts of the nine hazel trees which grew by the source of the river Boyne in Ireland. The nuts had fallen into the water and the salmon had eaten them. When Fionn puts his thumb into his mouth to cool it down, he is given the gift of clairvoyance.³⁷ He then embarks on further journeys of apprenticeship. Clarus explains that the omniscience of the seer associated with Fionn and with Vindos is an ability that is even more pronounced in the Welsh figure of Taliesin.³⁸

Taliesin is also associated with the Salmon of Knowledge, as in one of his metamorphoses, he transforms himself into a salmon.

As explained by Thomas Cloarec, 'The salmon is one of the forms taken by Taliesin, the wise man and mythical Welsh poet, during his metamorphoses which shield him from the vengeance of the witch Céridwenn'. Taliesin had, 'through a voluntary accident, acquired omniscience when he took Ceridwenn's son's place beside her magic cauldron' and some drops of her magic potion fell on his forehead.³⁹

Welsh scholar Meirion Pennar also stresses the Celtic concept of metamorphosis when she describes Taliesin as 'the bard supreme who self-consciously towers above the rest; the seer and shape-shifter whose work epitomizes the notion of reincarnation which supposedly forms the crux of Celtic religious belief. The poet of such lines as these':

Eil gweith ym rithad
The second time I was charmed
Bum glas gleissad,
I was a silver salmon,
Bum ki, bum hyd,
I was a hound, I was a stag,
Bum iwrch ymynydd.
I was a mountain buck.⁴⁰

Pennar distinguishes the professional bard Taliesin, who wrote *The Poems to Urien*, a 'master of the short eulogy', from a collection of poems written at a later stage from the point of view of a poet who possesses supernatural powers. This last figure is the Taliesin of the legend *Chwedl Taliesin*, printed in the *Myvyrian Archaiology* in 1870 (*Mabinogion*).⁴¹ *The Book of Taliesin* from the thirteenth century was edited by monks who celebrated the 'medieval cult of Taliesin' of the eleventh century. It includes a selection of poems attributed to the historical poet Taliesin and a sequence of poems celebrating the legendary figure of Taliesin.⁴² The historical Taliesin lived in the sixth century and conducted his poetic activity mainly in the north of Britain because of the 'mobility between these different lands of the Cymry'.⁴³

Merc'h an Eog integrates the medieval legend *Chwedl Taliesin*⁴⁴ as well as themes which occur in the ancient poems collected in *The Book of Taliesin*. These poems unearth universal preoccupations in the Celtic world.

For example, the conflict of the Celts of Britain with the Anglo-Saxons is a central theme of the poetry of Taliesin, as much as in the Breton mystery play *L'Ancien Mystère de Saint Gwénolé*.

In *Merc'h an Eog*, this intercultural dimension is extended into a wider world with the inclusion of the Creole language and Amerindian mythology which also employs the salmon as a symbol of knowledge connected to ideas of reincarnation: for example, in a Haida Indians' legend, the Salmon Boy undergoes a metamorphosis via the body of a salmon in order to become a shaman and healer.⁴⁵

According to Franz Boaz, in Californian Indian 'creation tales', material objects are transformed into living beings; for example, 'the creator carves salmon out of wood'.⁴⁶ According to tribal legends in the Columbia River Basin in a 'grand council of all creation', the Salmon 'offered to feed the people' the creator was planning to create, and the Water 'promised to be the home to the salmon':

In accordance with their sacrifice, these two receive a place of honour at traditional feasts throughout the Columbia Basin. These ceremonies always begin with a blessing on and the drinking of water, followed by a prayer of thanksgiving on and the serving of wy-kan-ush, the salmon.⁴⁷

This idea is performed in *Merc'h an Eog*, when Mair's Amerindian neighbour Jean offers her his traditionally cooked fish feast. He explains that he conducts this ritual feast-sharing each year to mark the anniversary of leaving his homeland.

Cloarec's and Lloyd's mise-en-scène is constructed around the motif of the sea and the movement of water. This is a central motif in the poems in *The Book of Taliesin*. The 'preoccupation with the movements of the oceans and the wind'⁴⁸ is particularly striking in the poem *Prif Gyuarch Geluyd*. The effect also works on a metrical level in this 'fast-moving poem that uses several metrical patterns'.⁴⁹ The poem's formal structure mirrors the idea expressed in the text of the flux of water symbolizing the movement of knowledge. According to Marged Haycock,

the speaker uses metaphors around the flux of water to describe both Taliesin's scientific knowledge and the manner in which he gained it:

Not only is he endowed with wide-ranging knowledge (from the springs on the heights of Mount Sion to the slime of the ocean depths), but he has the sense, the wit (*synhwyr*) to win for himself the foremost drink of honour.⁵⁰

The speaker asks and answers a series of questions about the natural sciences; for example, he asks, 'Why does the sea surge?' (*Mor pan dyuerwyd?*).⁵¹ The text and stage setting of *Merc'h an eog* are also structured around the symbolism of knowledge as represented by the flux of water and the ocean. Just as in the metrical structure of *Prif Gyuarch Geluyd*, the performance's dramatic structure around moving water symbolizes the protagonist's spiritual journey. As Tom Campbell explains in *Adam Smith's Science of Morals*, Smith uses scientific analogies about water to theorize the human quest for happiness:

Just as protozoa will move randomly round a tank of water until they reach water of the right temperature, so human beings rest content only when they have achieved a state of happiness. We have seen that Smith regards this as a state of tranquillity, or the absence of irritation; not necessarily a state of inactivity but of smooth operation. Those actions which tend to produce such a state are reinforced while others are left behind or not repeated.⁵²

A similar image of an aquarium with dynamic fish is represented in *Merc'h an Eog*. The prologue introduces the symbolism around water and the salmon in a similar way to the poem *Aduwyneu Taliesissin* in *The Book of Taliesin*, which celebrates fish as beautiful when in harmony with the environment: 'Atwyn pysc yn y llyn llywyawot / Fair is the fish in its shining lake.'⁵³ Similarly, the performance suggests that fish symbolize humans on a journey towards inner harmony. They are returned to a transformed haven: the aquarium has been cleaned and the water has been renewed. This environment is mastered by a sort of natural agent, represented

by the mysterious Brechtian figure of 'L'homme / The Man'.

*A Man stands in front of an aquarium, in which swim two fish. He holds two buckets in his hands. After a little while, he lifts the two fish from the water, releases them in one of the buckets, he caresses them. Then he begins to scrub the aquarium. He pours another bucket full of fresh water into the aquarium, then he lets the two fish glide back into the aquarium from the first bucket.*⁵⁴

This metatheatrical performance within the play symbolizes the dynamism of every being in its dynamic environment. The figure of the 'Man with the Salmon' cites the idea presented in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (read by protagonist Mair in the play) that the human soul is composed of an ocean of disharmony which surrounds an inner paradise island. This may be compared to Smith's idea of inner tranquility and to Seneca's recommendations in *On the Tranquillity of the Soul*.⁵⁵ In *Merc'h An Eog*, the 'daughter of the Salmon', Mair, leaves the tranquillity of her soul to venture into a wild ocean of emotional turmoil. An ocean of emotional turmoil is also symbolized by Tristan's constant urges to go to sea in Hélias's *Iseult the Second*.

Water and Rocks: Journeys and Metamorphosis

For most of the duration of the performance images of the sea or a flowing river are screened in the background. Several scenes are set on a beach in Wales centred around a rock. Another scene is set in a Thalasso Spa hotel in Brittany. These stage settings symbolize the ancient association of thermal water and seawater and the movement of waves with healing. Mair and Louiza's Spa holiday hints at a malaise on Mair's part, resulting from her grieving process and the painful realization of the end of her childhood spent on her aunt's farm in Wales. For Mair, the countryside of her childhood gains a religious dimension which is dramatized in the stage design by the ancient sacred symbol of the rock.

Many legends with Celtic and medieval origins attribute a sacred spirit to rocks.

Ancient religious Judeo-Christian sites are often situated on rocks or in rock caves. For example, according to Lebrun,

on the first page of *La Colline inspirée*, Barrès evokes the places where 'the spirit breathes'. These are sacred sites: the Mount Sion, le Mont-Saint-Michel, the great pilgrimage destinations: Lourdes, Vézelay. . . .⁵⁶

In *Merc'h an Eog*, the rock also represents sea adventures and the longing to travel to far-away destinations. As Mair speculates, her uncle Gwylim with his stories about journeys to the Cap-Horn and shipwrecks arriving on their beach, might have inspired her own sense of adventure:

Gwylim was also once a small boy with a head full of dreams, who knows, perhaps he dreamt of reaching the Cap Horn, and why not? But until now he had to make do with only his beautiful stories. But who knows if I myself wasn't inspired by these stories of naval vessels and shipwrecks that would land on our little beach?⁵⁷

However, Mair's memories of Gwylim's romanticist storytelling also reveal a tendency for melancholia shared with her uncle – a sense of loss caused by incomplete or never attempted journeys, by never having tried to reach 'the rock' in the distance.

In an interview with me, Cloarec elaborated on this sense of melancholia and on the symbolic meaning of 'following the salmon' to embark on and to complete one's own personal journey to the 'rock':

For me, following the salmon, that is resolutely to accept that no matter what we have to embark on a journey anyway and that the best defence is attack, or the best defence is to move forward, it's definitely not to move backwards, certainly not until the journey is at its end, because if not we just resign ourselves to a melancholic life.⁵⁸

The Rock, 'Haven of Poets'

The opening scene of the play, set around a rock on a Welsh beach, dramatizes the preparations for the funeral reception for Mair's aunt. It is accompanied by a video in which waves crash against rocks to the backdrop of a Welsh mountain, and by melancholic music;

subtitles translate the Welsh conversation of the protagonists into French. This theme echoes again the poetry of the *Book of Taliesin*. The poem *Buarth Beird* (*Haven of Poets*) confers a religious importance to the security and stability represented by the rock in the midst of the violent waves and currents of the ocean, symbol of the inner soul or sanctum.

This mystical rock transcends the waves 'according to God's great plan'. It is also connected to the metamorphosis associated with the Welsh bard Taliesin and with the Salmon of Knowledge of the Irish and Amerindian legends. It represents the poet himself and his poetry, symbolizing dynamic transformation as well as the idea of a metaphorical haven for the poet and his poetic creation:

Wyf kellt, wyf dellt, wyf datweirllt;
I'm a cell, I'm fragmented, I change my
form;
Wyf llogell kerd, wyf lle ynnyet.
I'm a repository of song, I'm a dynamic
state.
Karaf-y gorwyd a goreil clyt,
I love a wooded slope and a snug shelter.

The concept of a dynamic rock as shelter also features in *Merc'h an Eog* as the round platform on which the rock is installed rotates in between scenes. This indicates not only the transformation of the set design, but also the symbolic metamorphosis experienced by Mair. As Cloarec explains, 'starting with an extract from the *Mabinigion* and in particular, the story of Taliesin', they 'attempted to make it their own', and to 'very freely try to tell a story of the present' that would speak of 'the interior metamorphoses' experienced by the Protagonist Mair on her 'interior journey'.

These are symbolized through nightmares, staged in the style of a gothic or surrealist painting. In Act III, Scene iii, two dancing figures with cows' masks alluding to her childhood farm appear in Mair's dream, and the Man with the Salmon enters the room and asks her if she ate her fish (which had previously been offered to her by her neighbour Jean). He then tells her that there is space for her in the aquarium, and she gets into it and plays in the water while the Man

watches her with amusement and relates a story from his childhood. It is a parable about a wooden box labelled 'Lux'/'Light' which he found on a beach near his grandfather's house and which sparked his imagination.

Years later, he found the same kind of soap box somewhere else in a supermarket and realized that, 'No, the box is not important, there is no need to torture oneself!' He encourages us to fill the box metaphorically labelled 'Light' in our own lives with enlightenment for our personal journeys. We should avoid becoming stuck in static nostalgia for childhood places, which he suggests are just empty soap boxes without the interior dynamic life that once filled them.

Act III, Scene iv opens to reveal the rock transformed into a cave with a window and an interior illuminated by a red table light. This represents Mair's magic box or haven. She washes her clothes in a basin, symbolizing her spiritual transformation. This scene is accompanied by a video of a flux of water flowing over rocks. The performance ends as Mair announces the need to return to her inner self and thus to continue her life's journey; and a video is screened of Mair swimming along a stream in the manner of a salmon on his life's journey.

A Haven for Refugees in Brittany

Tiez Brav a oa Ganeomp
On avait de jolies maisons
We Had Nice Houses

The symbolism around the rock as haven, representing stability and security, is shared with the Teatr Piba's multilingual production *Tiez Brav a oa Ganeomp* (2017). The idea of shelter is the key message communicated by the title – *We Had Nice Houses* – and by the set design: three white walls cut into a geometrical pattern which could constitute a house.

The performance was developed from recorded testimonials in the native languages and a creative workshop with refugees in Brest. These multilingual recorded testimonials were played in the performance,

and translated into French and Breton by the single performer on stage, while subtitles were screened in the French and Breton languages. The following analysis is based on the performance staged in Languennec at the Breton-language festival on 20 May 2017.

In the small theatre space part of the audience are seated on cushions on the ground and a Middle Eastern ambience is created with lamps and soft warm lighting. Audio recordings are played alternating with songs. The performance opens with the monologue of a Breton woman, Marion, who tells the audience in Breton (translated in French subtitles), that she cannot imagine the possibility of leaving 'her rock' (*ma roc'h eo*). The metaphor of the rock is employed here to evoke her 'home' and her loved ones who give her emotional shelter.

During her monologue she views photos of her family on her mobile. Its gliding digitalised images suggest a portable home. This effect parallels the movement of the rotating rock in *Merc'h an Eog*. However, as Marion cannot imagine losing her homeland, she can't imagine the experience of a refugee. Adam Smith argues that, 'As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.'⁶³

The very title of the play, *We Had Nice Houses*, endeavours to arouse empathy for refugees by provoking the audience/reader to think about their own sense of home and thus to imagine what it would mean for them if they were to lose it. As explained by director Stéphanie Coquellin in an interview with me, the title of the play directly quotes a refugee. It implicates the desire of the refugees to communicate to the Breton public that they had nice houses and comfortable lives, just like the community that welcomes them in Brittany.

Coquellin tells of how she realized that many people don't think of refugees as people who resemble them, or who had normal lives before their enforced exile, but they see them as 'other'. This led her to create a play that would represent testimonials of the lives that the refugees enjoyed before they fled the war

in Syria, in the Balkans, and elsewhere. She explains that the refugees were grateful for the opportunity offered to them to give an account of their experiences, particularly to tell of their lives before they had to flee their homes.⁶⁴

Consequently, all the testimonials included in this play express a desire to be known as individuals with a history, families, jobs, status, possessions. The refugee Adamou's pain is communicated particularly strongly when he maintains that 'Nobody knows where we come from,' and 'It's very painful, practically nobody knows who we are.'⁶⁵ We can imagine how painful it must be to be deprived of the human need to be known; to be instead assigned to the category of 'refugee' or 'immigrant', categories designed to be abstract; one's life story, history, profession, achievements unrecognized.

The objective of the performance is to provoke reflection towards rehumanizing those previously categorized in a cold and abstract manner as 'other', and thus to enable a new capacity to identify with them. Jill Dolan has effectively theorized the capacity of such civic performances to build empathy for others. She argues: 'Art, perhaps, can make the body politic feel others' suffering more acutely, moving us closer to real democracy, if people can be persuaded toward radical change through empathy and unexpected identifications with those once considered other or alien to them.'

Alluding to classic debates about the dramaturgy of political theatre, she suggests that 'maybe political change does happen through empathy as well as through Brechtian alienation'.⁶⁶ Dolan's argument recalls Enlightenment sensibilities. Adam Smith, for example, uses the theatre as an example to explain the effects of sympathy and fellow-feeling:

Our joy for the deliverance of those heroes of tragedy or romance who interest us, is as sincere as our grief for their distress, and our fellow-feeling with their misery is not more real than that with their happiness.⁶⁷

He goes further and uses dramaturgy to ex-

plain the role of sympathy in real life: sympathy for others is felt by spectators who witness a 'performance' of the other's suffering or joy: they decide if this 'performance' deserves their sympathy.⁶⁸ This means that the 'director' of the 'performance', as is literally the case in *Tiez Brav a oa Ganeomp*, must have sympathy for the 'audience' too, in order to provoke sympathy for the protagonists' plight.

This sympathy for the audience is expressed when, instead of asking the audience to identify themselves with her own current situation, the refugee Naheb identifies with their habit of living in peace and of only being confronted with war and refugees on television. In an Arabic voice-over translated into French, she crucially identifies with their inability to imagine that they could ever be themselves in the situation of a refugee:

Long ago, I saw groups of refugees on television. I found that sad, and I also thought that these people were very different from me, I never thought that this could ever happen to me. I could never have imagined that I would ever be in the position to look for refuge in a country of which I know hardly anything. Not in order to find work, nor for the pleasure of being a foreigner, nor to become rich or whatever . . . but in order to find a bit of peace. In order not to die.⁶⁹

The idea of a secure haven is also signified by the arrival of a United Nations vessel to rescue shipwrecked refugees. The recorded voice of Suhaib speaks of her renewed hope when she was rescued by the United Nations after already having consigned herself to the fate of drowning. The idea of a haven is here also represented by the image of the outstretched helping hand of one person towards another, motivated by human solidarity.

I left Turkey for Samos. We had been on the boat for nine hours. The people were crying. The children were crying. And at that point I told myself that all was lost. We didn't know where we were going, we were lost. My life was over. That was it. And I had accepted the idea . . . that this was the end. And just as I had put that into my head, lights appeared at the horizon. And it was a vessel of the United Nations. Charity workers who saved refugees. The first contact with Europe was the outstretched hand of a British captain. I will never

forget his face. The logo of the ship. Never. I will never forget these images.⁷⁰

Solidarity against cultural divisions is also created between Marion and Suhaib when Suhaib speaks about the important sentimental value of her gold chain, presented to her by her mother. Like the family photos on Marion's smartphone, this heirloom suggests the notion of a portable family refuge. Another symbolic link between the two women is created by the 'song of mourning and of hope' (*chant de deuil et d'espoir*), sung by Marion in the Breton language to a melancholic melody from Syria. This was offered to the Teatr Piba by Syrian refugee Suhaib who contributed a testimonial and participated in the production workshop. Marion sings:

Song of mourning and of hope, song of migration in the Breton language – to the melody offered by Suhaib and recorded in an interview. She holds a precious gold chain in her hand. She plays with the chain, lets it glide in between her fingers under the front-stage light.⁷¹

Another link of proximity is created between the Breton woman Marion and the Nigerian woman Adamou, who both use smartphones and tablets to communicate with their loved ones. The play concludes with Berthe's suggestion of finding a new haven and family in exile:

Everybody I meet, everybody I get to know, they are my family.

They are my family on whom I count, I am creating family here in France. . . . I am creating my family. And it's because of that; I create my family here, I create my family here in France.

Perhaps you?⁷²

The last question, addressed to the audience, encourages them to include new arrivals in their communities.

Similarly, *Le roi Kado* by Hélias concludes with a theatrical appeal to the audience. The protagonist, bard, Shakespearean fool, vagabond, humanist philosopher, and dramaturg Kado argues passionately for human empathy for the sufferings of others. To make his point, he stages a Shakespearean play-within-a-play that exposes the folly and

cruelty of the history of humanity's obsession with power. He prescribes the role of the bard, poet, playwright, and theatre maker as that of enlightening the people about moral sentiments and to awaken their empathy for others.

Kado personifies the tradition of a humanist Enlightenment theatre in Brittany. In the last scene, he describes himself as an *alter ego* of the play's author, Pierre-Jakez Hélias: 'I am King Kado.'⁷³ This is a role inherited between generations, like the enlightenment and educational role of the Breton theatre:

Your fathers have baptised my fathers in this way, you have conserved my name and I hope that my son Kado, who is a teacher of Latin, will bear the crown after me.⁷⁴

In this manner he concludes the play with an explicitly staged manifesto for the Breton tradition of a 'social theatre' in which Hélias encourages new generations of Breton playwrights and theatre makers to follow in his footsteps. This rich tradition of Breton enlightenment theatre continues with the work of the Teatr Piba.

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