



CREATION, Original Version

Histoire par celui qui la raconte/ The story told by the storyteller

Choreography: Latifa Laâbissi
Centre Pompidou, under the
auspices of the Autumn Festival

It starts off with a rather long blackout which nudges the audience toward a sort of dream world, a place before light and before fire. From these disturbing shadows we begin hearing sounds, more or less identifiable as human: whining, moaning, ecstasy, anger. Sometimes there is a group explosion, roaring, sometimes an isolated voice can be heard wailing. For the choreographer Latifa Laâbissi, for whom all imaginary detours are to be considered, especially those involving the “fundamentals of dance” – the Creation could have originated in sound, one which liberates, frees our desire --

After this nocturnal- feeling beginning, the work then opens on an empty stage.

Magnum Chaos

Nadia Lauro's set is a striking “forest,” a series of rectangular white paper panels suspended from the rafters, like so many trees. Suddenly humans, men and women wearing animal pelts, Cro-Magnons – emerge from behind the panels. The first Woman (Jessica Batut) is powerfully built, muscular – and is apparently unacquainted with the Word, communicating nonetheless with a strong Belgian accent and specifically Flemish expressions. The audience howls. The second Woman appears, Latifa Laâbissi, her friend, apparently hailing from warmer climes, perhaps a barely civilised Africa. They engage in a fierce, astonishingly whacked-out dialogue. And then the Man arrives a bit later to pose in *tableaux* illustrating scenes from *Genesis*.

The representation of the Cosmos and the setting up of the elements is also extremely disturbed. It is in fact complete chaos, one in which Lucas Cranach's Eve would immediately lose track of her apple. A child comes to play in the madness, seemingly unworried about adding to the disorder in the difficult development of the human being, floats around awhile, wearing sky blue, then disappears, never to be seen again. Then a woman grabs the mike for the finale – wearing a clown nose and tube socks to accessorise her animal pelt. She sings the *Marseillaise* to a little classical karaoke tune, but with a rural accent, while also telling a bizarre story about a paranoid knight, a strange Dulcinea del Toboso and a horse which has crashed with all four feet in the air.

Both the beginning and the end of the piece are rather abrupt, the choreographer is clearly not interested in making concessions to present a pretty dance or a plausible storyline. Classical storytelling rules are tossed out the window, but there is still a plot in play, even an epic tale.

Minority

In *Histoire par celui qui la raconte*, the imaginary body, apotropaic, serves as a lever for the story. Latifa Laâbissi, 44, comes from the dance of the 80s, where storylines were considered taboo, but she has not entirely given up using narrative elements in her creative process, even if hers are neither traditional nor linear. She retains the gaps in her story as springboards for changes of direction or subject.

Her previous piece was a rather painful solo, her dancer's body gone to seed, naked except for an American Indian headdress. Alone onstage except for the feathered thing on her head, she did not hesitate to question sexist and colonial posturing, a *camouflage self-portrait* which pulled no punches, leaving the bitter aftertaste of a lost battle. This *Histoire par celui qui la raconte* is less sacrificial. The humor which is fortunately present in the solo spills over joyously in this work, especially in the off the wall singing of the French national anthem.

“What bothers me, in a recurring and powerful way, is our minority status,” says the choreographer. Her dance definitely reflects this idea, the constant positioning of

the social and the political bodies, and the forceful staging of the conflicts this causes. Each dancer is, in effect, a consenting minority – yet they play off each other so well.

Latifa Laâbissi says it all too clearly, preferring to veer from one tangent to another, and this is how she works out the movements for her piece, which are not in the least abstruse. Two Protestant nuns were in the theatre (a veritable first for the Autumn Festival, apparently) – and *they* got what was going on in the piece, “It’s the Creation story told by different people with different accents.”

There is also a secret fear that one day the different cries will be wiped out, the noises which trigger our desires and keep us alive – Olivier Renouf’s score is both appropriate and helpful, as the dancers seem to prefer grunts and groans to fancy diction for their own expression. This eccentric *Genesis* and its focus on the individual is salutary, delightful. And you laugh a lot, heartily, right down to your own socks.

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Libération