

PENELOPE IN GROZNYJ

Full length play in five acts by Marco Calvani

“I’m drinking to my ravaged hearth,
My life’s ill-fated path,
To loneliness that stays with us,
And to you I raise my glass.
To lies on lips disloyal to me,
To deathly cold eyes,
To this world so full of cruelty,
To God’s not saving us.”

(Anna Akhmatova)

Characters:

PENELOPE

TELEMACHUS, her son

HELEN, her cousin

PIRAEUS, friend of Telemachus

THEOCLYMENUS, friend of Telemachus

EURICLEA, the old nanny

LAERTES, father of Ulysses

MELANTHO, young woman

ATTORIDE, young woman

HIPPODAMIA, young woman

ANIMONE, young woman

APHROSIA, young woman

ANTINOUS, Russian major

AMPHINOMUS, Russian captain

CASSANDRA, Russian doctor

LEOCRITUS, Russian soldier

Plot and author’s notes:

Chechnya. Penelope is a lone woman. Her husband Ulysses has been far away for quite a few years, it’s been some months now since news has arrived from the West, neither one of them have enough money to make ends meet or to maintain their son’s studies. Telemachus is a restless adolescent who lives with rancour and hatred. Piraeus and Theoclymenus, his only friends. Euriclea, the old wet nurse. Laertes, her father-in-law retired in silence. Melantho, a young student. Elena, the beautiful cousin.

We are in Groznyj, the phantom capital of a phantom country. We are in an abandoned school, destroyed by the bombardments, occupied now by Russians/Proci, commanded by Antinous, who’ve made it the headquarters where they hatch their cruel plans and perform their perverse games. The Homer’s mythical Penelope and her controversial solitude is transferred to the Chechnya of today, a

country where torture is the norm, where executions without trial are routine and raids and plundering a cliché. A land battered by a cold winter and by the war, menaced by the flames of bloodthirsty independent militias and put in still more danger by a corrupt army, complicit in and profiteering from ruthless political designs. A country in which basic human rights no longer exist.

With the re-writing of the Greek myth and its epic personalities, this play seeks to reconstruct daily life in a time of war, so giving life to a violent metaphor and the effect of power on men's bodies and words.

A ferocious analysis of a land destroyed, of an Olympus without gods, and of a defenceless people, by now deprived of all hope and solidarity.

Production history:

First performance: 5 December 2009, Kunsthaus Tacheles, Berlin. Directed by Marco Calvani.

With Maria Mendizabal, Lydia Biondi, Nicolà Hendrik, Bing Taylor, Alberto Alemanno, Elisa Alessandro, Luca Celso, Karen Di Porto, Filippo Gattuso, Giovanni Izzo, Letizia Letza, Nicola Mancini, Roberta Mastromichele, Marta Pilato, Enzo Saponara, Emilia Verginelli

Play created on the occasion of the Italian ReStyle Project Festival of Berlin, December 2009.

Play finalist at the Borrello Prize 2011.

Originally written in Italian

Available also in English