



A HEART IN WINTER

5 years old +



Conseil des arts
et des lettres du Québec



Conseil des arts
du Canada Canada Council
for the Arts



CONSEIL
DES ARTS
DE MONTRÉAL

Montréal



Marketing

Véronique Grondines

veronique@theatredeloeil.qc.ca Office : 514 278-9188

Théâtre de l'œil

*Puppetry is to theater what poetry is to literature,
its conscience and its soul.*
(Roman Paska)

Photo : L. Gniwesch



" We were looking for a fresh perspective to work on our next production. Once again, we enlisted the contribution of a new generation of artists to the development of our dramaturgy."

André Laliberté, founder and former Artistic Director

Le cœur en hiver, a heart-warming tale

Le cœur en hiver is Théâtre de l'Œil's 26th production. The play is freely based on Anderson's classic tale, *The Snow Queen*, and tells the story of a courageous little girl called Gerda who overcomes many challenges as she searches for her lost friend Kay. While Gerda is no stranger to adventure, her friend Kay is completely frozen under the Snow Queen's spell.

Story

Le cœur en hiver tells the story of a little girl called Gerda as she searches for her lost friend. Her journey is fraught with adventures and pitfalls that challenge her determination. When she finally finds her friend Kay in the Snow Queen's palace, his heart is cold, placated by the icy spell that has frozen his joys as well as his sorrows. Will Gerda manage to melt his frozen heart?

Le cœur en hiver questions how we react to life's hardships. It is a touching and vibrant show with many complex and surprising twists, just like life itself.

A tale revisited by Étienne Lepage

Photo : L. Desrochers



When invited by André Laliberté to submit a project for her puppet theatre directorial debut, Catherine Vidal suggested *The Snow Queen*, a cherished story that evokes fond childhood memories. Because the original story's style was out-dated and its moralizing message called for a re-write, Étienne Lepage came aboard to work his magic. Although he has kept many of the adventures from the original story as well as several characters encountered on Gerda's journey, the playwright created the narrator role and wrote new dialogue. His sharp pen transformed Gerda into a bright and determined little girl, guided by her emotions and able to make important choices.

"My Gerda isn't naïve like Anderson's character who spends much of her time hollering and crying," says Lepage. "I wanted her to be strong, intelligent and guided by her emotions, yet capable of reasoning and of making choices. She understands that life can be difficult, while Kay remains in denial and escapism. As such, he is 'frozen'. And yet, beauty and pain are different aspects of the same thing, like a rose and its thorns."

A clear and fluid mise en scène

Photo : M.-C. Hamel



Catherine Vidal's stage direction focuses on flow and the rotating set allows the story to transition from one scene to the next as if turning the pages of a storybook. In an interesting play with perspective, puppeteer-actors Karine Sauvé and Pierre-Louis Renaud bear an uncanny resemblance to their Gerda and Kay puppets characters. Nicolas Germain-Marchand and Estelle Richard, who performed in five other Théâtre de l'Œil productions, play all the other characters and narrate the tale, as well. The stage director is backed by a solid

team and can count on a little help from experienced puppeteer Stéphane Heine, who also assisted André Laliberté on *Corbeau*.

“When it comes to puppets, the technical requirements are always very specialized,” says Catherine Vidal. “I direct puppets much like I direct actors, except that puppets can never react on the spot. The actor must transfer the movement to the puppet. This requires that every gesture, every movement be choreographed.”

On a rotating set



The scenography, puppets and accessories are the fruit of Richard Lacroix’s creative imagination. Richard has been with the company since... ouch! It’s been so long we’ve come to simply say he’s been with us “forever”. His creations deliver many surprises: characters that turn into puppet theatre structures, a dress that unfolds into a garden in full bloom...



Illustration : Richard Lacroix

“Sometimes a scene will start off with actors, then conclude with puppets,” says Richard Lacroix. “We wanted to find a way to make scenic elements appear and disappear and that’s why we came up with the idea of a rotating set, a dynamic element of the performance space. It isn’t an innovation in itself, but it’s the perfect configuration for this show. The narrators rotate the set like they would turn the pages in a storybook. And it’s quite the challenge to figure out what to hide from the audience and what to show!”

Tour – A Heart in Winter \ Le cœur en hiver

FESTIVALS

Festival International des Arts de la Marionnette à Saguenay (Canada, 2017)

Vancouver International Children's Festival (Canada, 2017)

Calgary International Children's Festival (Canada, 2017)

Ottawa Children's Festival (Canada, 2017)

2018-2019

CANADA

Île-Bizare – Sainte-Geneviève (Qc) – Pauline-Julien

Montréal (Qc) – Maison de la culture Claude-Léveillée

Montréal, NDG (Qc) – Maison de la culture Notre-Dame-de-Grâce

2017-2018

CANADA

Jonquière (Qc)

Sudbury (On) – Théâtre du Nouvel-Ontario

Montréal (Qc) – The Place des Arts

Montréal (Qc) – Conseil des Arts de Montréal touring program
10 districts

Laval (Qc)

Drummondville (Qc)

Longueuil (Qc)

2016-2017

CANADA

Shawinigan (Qc)

Montréal (Qc) – Focus Québec

Montréal (Qc) – 2 districts

Terrebonne (Qc)

Saint-Jean-sur-le-Richelieu (Qc)

Sorel (Qc)

Gatineau (Qc)

Trois-Rivières (Qc)

Sherbrooke (Qc)

Ottawa (On)

Calgary (Alb.)

Vancouver (C.-B.)

2015-2016

CANADA

L'Assomption (Qc)

Beloil (Qc) – L'Arrière Scène

Québec (Qc) – Les Gros Becs

Montréal (Qc) – Maison Théâtre

Ottawa (On) – National Arts Center



Théâtre de l'œil

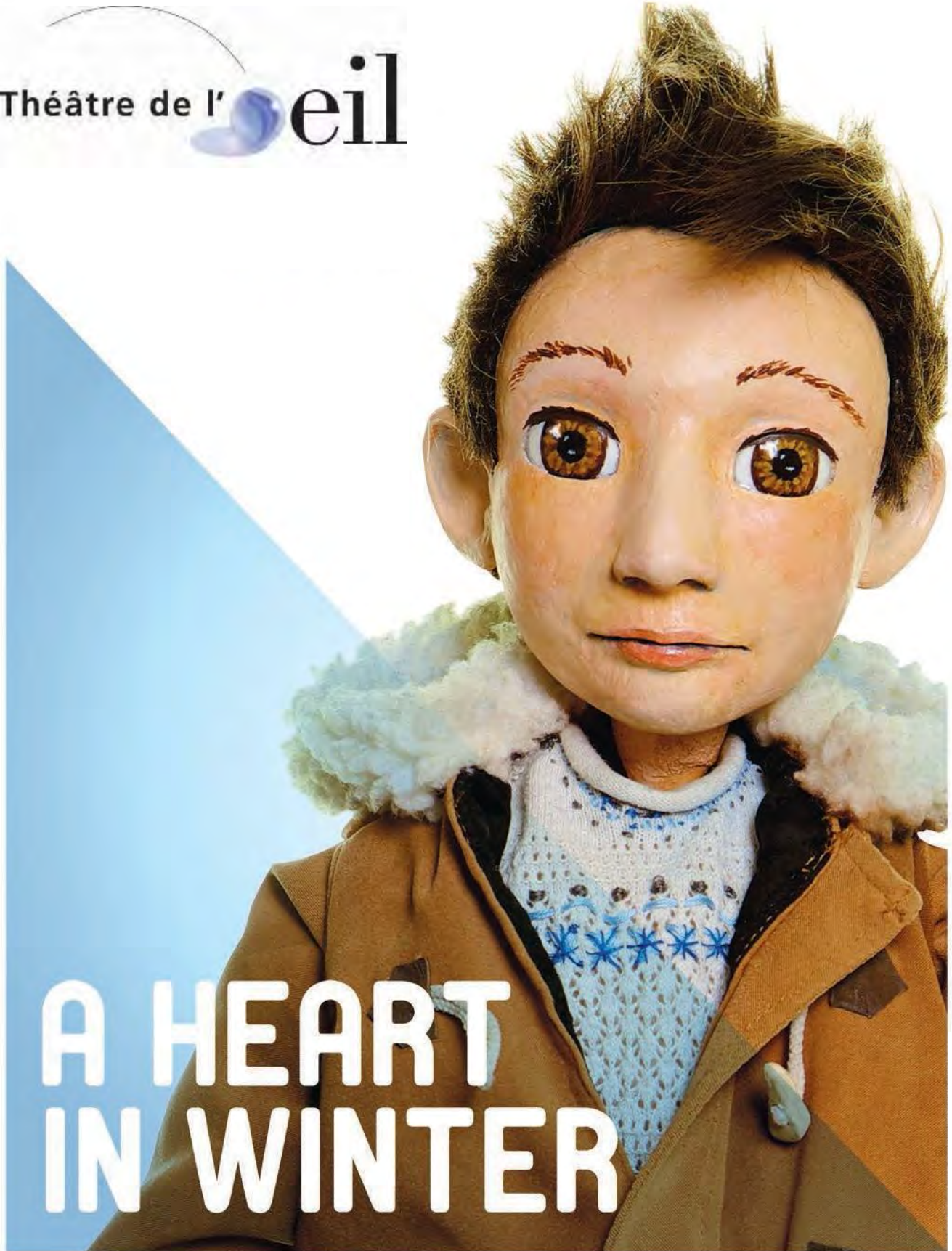
Script	Étienne Lepage
Stage Direction	Catherine Vidal
Puppet and Set Design	Richard Lacroix
Sound Design	Francis Rossignol
Lighting	Alexandre Pilon-Guay
Artistic Consultant	André Laliberté
Puppet Consultant	Stéphane Heine
Original Cast	Estelle Richard or Maude Desrosiers-Lauzon Karine Sauvé or Philomène Lévesque Rainville Nicolas Germain-Marchand Pierre-Louis Renaud
Stage Manager	Gilles Perron
Sceneshifter	Catherine Germain or Mélanie Whissell
Workshop Supervisor	Richard Lacroix
Production Team	Ève-Lyne Dallaire, Éliane Fayad, Judianne Godbout, Loïc Lacroix Hoy, Denise Irlès, Jocelyne Losier, Fany Mc Crae, Noémi Paquette, Gilles Perron, Christine Plouffe, Véronique Poirier, Angela Rassenti
Rotating Set Consultant	Vincent Rousselle
Construction	Productions Yves Nicol
Study Guide	Julie Laviolette
Interviews with the Creative Team	Michelle Chanonat
Cover Page – Graphic Design	Passerelle bleue
Photo	Michel Pinault

Le Théâtre de l'Œil would like to thank Eveline Payette, Cultural Mediation and School Outreach Officer at L'Arrière Scène (Belœil, QC). Her advice was valuable in putting together this Study Guide and in producing the "Making of" video for the show.

Simon Boudreault - Artistic Director
Joël Losier - General Manager
Véronique Grondines - Market Development Manager
Gilles Perron - Technical Director
Anne-Sophie Deleuze - Marketing and Administrative Assistant

911, rue Jean-Talon Est, bureau 211, Montréal, QC, H2R 1V5 CANADA Tel.: (514) 278-9188 Fax.: (514) 278-9189

info@theatredeloel.qc.ca | www.theatredeloel.qc.ca



A HEART IN WINTER

Reviews

“This sad story (that is not actually sad) is told in a brilliant fashion by actor-puppeteers who live and breathe Lepage’s story.”

“Everything hinges on Catherine Vidal’s remarkable stage direction. The young audience reacts instantly every time a character’s line, an element of the set or a simple gesture invites a response. During the whole performance, we are left with the impression that every one of the show’s elements are converging, coming together to highlight Lepage’s story.”

Michel Bélair, **Le Devoir**, November 23, 2015

“This puppet theatre adaptation of Andersen’s *Snow Queen* is splendid, thanks to the combination of Théâtre de l’Œil’s experience and young stage director Catherine Vidal’s ingenuity. Étienne Lepage’s playful and modern take on the tale completes this winning trio. The resulting show is insightful, sometimes dark, yet always entertaining. This is high-quality youth theatre.”

Josée Lapointe, **La Presse**, November 14, 2015

“Lepage’s story is grounded in a strong narrative voice that engages the young audience by speaking directly to them and delivering several amusing nods. And it works wonderfully...”

Daphné Bathalon, **MON(theatre).qc.ca**, November 10, 2015

“Fun, inventive and very effective. *A Heart in Winter* even manages to harness the grandiose thanks to the fertile symbiosis between scenography, costumes and props.”

Sophie Pouliot, **Revue JEU**, November 10, 2015

“The show as a whole is a success with its many surprises and contagious energy that made everyone laugh, captivating the large audience made up of both schoolchildren and adults. It must be said that *A Heart in Winter* is driven by an admirable team...”

Brigitte Manolo, **artifactstories**, November 7, 2015

Vancouver Children's Festival celebrates its 40th anniversary!

Author: Edwine Veniat // *Invitation culturelle* [Cultural Invasion] // Volume 17, Number 10, May 30-June 13, 2017



Photo par Michel Pinault

[...]

A Heart in Winter

"The quality of Théâtre de l'Œil's work is remarkable!" exclaims Katharine Carol [General and artistic director for the festival]. In addition to being TDO's 26th original production, *A Heart in Winter* is a rewrite of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen*, long before Disney did its own re-adaptation, notes André Laliberté, co-founder and artistic director of Montreal-based TDO.

The set is mounted on a rotating stage, which provides a magical touch. The puppets are front and centre in a style that takes a fresh approach to clichéd "rag doll" theatre techniques.

One noteworthy thing about the play is that it delves into the cruelty of Andersen's fairy tale. It dares to show that, just like in real life, stories don't always have happy endings. Despite the bittersweet storyline, Mr. Laliberté thinks that it is a good thing to have an audience of children as well as teenagers because they are asked to reflect on the complexity of life: "*A Heart in Winter* deals with how we react to the difficulties of existence. The play is touching and high-energy. It also has a number of amazing and complex surprises in store for us, like life itself," he explains.

The francophone cast also handles the English-language performances: "Our team has worked hard to achieve fluency in English, including its characteristic intonation patterns," says Mr. Laliberté, who has forged a reputation for thoroughness and perfectionism.

[...]

The Vancouver International Children's Festival runs from May 29 to June 4. More information at www.childrensfestival.ca.



Following Life's Path

Yves Leclerc, *Journal de Québec*, December 10, 2015

A Heart in Winter is a theatrical adaptation of *The Snow Queen*

The feature film *The Snow Queen* was an immense box-office success. Théâtre de l'Œil's retelling of the tale, presented at Les Gros Becs, is an ingenious adaptation that takes a look at courage, at the choices we must make and at life itself.

Now playing until December 27, *A Heart in Winter* is an adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's tale about Gerda, a little girl who goes off in search of her friend Kay, who is lost. The show is intended for 5- to 8-year-old children and has nothing in common with the Disney Studios' version. After meeting the Snow Queen, Gerda's friend Kay decides to join her at her palace, where his joys and his sorrows are frozen and he doesn't have to face life's hardships anymore. Kay and Gerda always managed to find ways, despite their difficulties and poverty, to laugh and have fun. Until an unexpected encounter with the Snow Queen during a snowstorm changed Kay's outlook on life. "What's the use of living?" he says to his friend who doesn't understand his sudden change in attitude. Gerda decides to go off and search for him and must face a series of obstacles that will challenge her determination.

A Heart in Winter features both puppets and actors. The show is structured around a rotating set that brings forward the various characters and elements of the *mise en scène*. Over the course of her journey, Gerda will encounter a magician, a couple of crows (that made the young audience laugh), a band of robbers that keep animals in cages, an Inuit woman and the Snow Queen.

Reunion

The little girl eventually finds Kay. He tries to convince her to stay at the palace, but Gerda chooses life and decides to return home.

A Heart in Winter tackles life's obstacles and hardships as well as the courage it takes to make our own life choices.

The show, directed by Catherine Vidal, is entertaining. There is a lot of action and the characters and set are colourful and spectacular.

A Heart in Winter ends a bit abruptly when Gerda says farewell to Kay and decides, with the return of spring and its flowers and birds, to return home. In so doing, she chooses to face life's challenges.



THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

Winter in Your Heart

Michel Bélaïr, *Le Devoir*, November 23, 2015

A Heart in Winter

Script by Étienne Lepage. Stage Direction by Catherine Vidal. Puppet and Set design by Richard Lacroix. A Théâtre de l'Œil production presented at L'Arrière Scène and at the Maison Théâtre, and coming soon to Les Gros Becs in Québec City (December 8–27). A show for children 6–10 years.

There's a lot going on in a child's life between the ages of 6 and 10: socialization, learning in a school setting, and daily contact with others outside the family circle. But there's also much more. Without resorting to any pop psychology clichés, there is no doubt that reality shock can be so overwhelming that some children have a hard time adapting.

This is just a glimpse at what this dark and difficult story is about. I saw the show last week at the Maison Théâtre, before it travels to Québec City. It was a full house and the children's complete attention on the show was palpable.

The story told by Étienne Lepage is based on Andersen's *The Snow Queen*. Lepage rewrote the tale while maintaining its overall structure. He still tells the story of little Gerda's search for her friend Kay, who goes missing in the middle of a winter's day, seduced by the Snow Queen. But Lepage's take is more spirited, less moralizing.

A Long and Difficult Journey

Driven by the fraternal love that binds the two friends, little Gerda goes looking for Kay as the snow melts and spring is just around the corner. The journey will be long and difficult. All along the way, many attempts will be made to thwart her quest: the Spirit of the River, the Old Lady Who Knew Magic, and a band of robbers who will try to hold her back, even resorting to threats. But nothing will stop her. Gerda wants to find Kay and she will succeed by putting her trust in unlikely allies.

But once Gerda makes it to the Snow Queen's palace, she discovers that her friend Kay does not want to go back with her to his former life filled with endless new beginnings and many disappointments. Kay has chosen to no longer feel anything: he has allowed the cold to take over his heart and his soul. Gerda accepts his choice, but decides that she will stick with life's little pinpricks and the many simple pleasures it has to offer ... and she returns home alone. The curtain falls.

This sad story (that is not actually sad) is told in a brilliant fashion by actor-puppeteers who live and breathe Lepage's story. Their performance is well rounded and their words are luminous. With the show's use of multiple repetitions, you'd think the characters came straight out of a Daniel Danis play. This repetition helps focus your attention, making the obvious that much more obvious. Likewise, the set design is remarkably simple and clear; the children in the audience must face Gerda's and Kay's conflicting choices without any gimmickry.

Everything hinges on Catherine Vidal's remarkable stage direction. The young audience reacts instantly every time a character's line, an element of the set or a simple gesture invites a response. During the whole performance, we are left with the impression that every one of the show's elements are converging, coming together to highlight Lepage's story. And more importantly, we are reminded that we all react differently to life's difficulties. Even when we're somewhere between 6 and 10 years old...



Review

Daphné Bathalon, *Monttheatre.qc.ca*, November 10, 2015

While winter's cold winds are still far off, Théâtre de l'Œil is presenting a tale that will warm many a child's – and adult's – heart at the Maison Théâtre (Montréal) and then at Les Gros Becs (Québec) in December.

Children today are well acquainted with the story of *The Snow Queen*, revisited and popularized around the world by Disney's successful rendition. Théâtre de l'Œil and playwright Étienne Lepage decided, for their part, to go back to Hans Christian Andersen's tale and offer up a colourful version that still manages to maintain the tale's somewhat unsettling aspects and its cruel moments ... just like in real life!

Gerda and Kay are happy children, oblivious to the fact they are poor. They know how to appreciate life's simple pleasures, even a rose bush that pricks your finger. But one evening during a snowstorm, Kay finds himself outside without a coat and he meets the Snow Queen, the mythical being everyone is meant to encounter at some point. In a gust of cold wind, Kay feels his heart go numb and he agrees to follow the queen into the deep winter's night in order to never again feel the cold.

As usual, Théâtre de l'Œil works its magic on stage with a multitude of adorable puppets created by Richard Lacroix (also the show's scenographer). Gerda and Kay are especially endearing. Both borrow a few features from their performers, the excellent Pierre-Louis Renaud and Karine Sauvé. We had the opportunity to appreciate Karine Sauvé's energy in *Les grands-mères mortes*, presented at Aux Écuries last season. Here, she instills a generous dose of liveliness in her Gerda character. The little girl with the golden locks contemplates life with wonder as she advances on her journey. Her candour is charming, emphasized by Étienne Lepage's capable pen and the actor's *ingénue* performance.

Irresistible creatures populate *A Heart in Winter's* many landscapes, beautifully lit by Alexandre Pilon-Guay. The revolving stage on which the sets are built reveals many surprises to the audience over the course of Gerda's quest. A hilltop covered in garbage becomes a flower-covered dress worn by a magician; a snow-covered hill hides an old hermit; and a malevolent river sprawls out, like a mermaid... Never actually showing the Snow Queen is another of the production's ingenious ideas. The children readily admit, as they leave the theatre, that they nonetheless imagined her as she was portrayed in the Disney Studios' version. Stage director Catherine Vidal avoids the problem by letting the audience hear the queen's voice without actually seeing her, adding to the mystery that surrounds the queen, who is neither wicked nor kind, but simply an echo of winter's (and life's?) essence.

Lepage's story is grounded in a strong narrative voice that engages the young audience by speaking directly to them and delivering several amusing nods. And it works wonderfully, even though some of the repetitions can be a little irritating. Lepage, who admits he never had children or even puppets in mind when he wrote the story, offered up quite a challenge to the stage director. The narration, provided by a number of characters and by the actors themselves (who are occasionally chased off-stage), offers many downright comical dialogues, but also more serious moments of reflection on the determination and the courage it takes to make your own decisions.

As we all know, tales that haven't been through the Hollywood wringer can sometimes be quite harsh and cruel. The end isn't always a happy one. Lepage's *A Heart in Winter* doesn't soften the blow. As he states in the show's program: "The world can be a tough place and that's why we must love it with a lot of determination." And this is the lesson Gerda learns as her quest comes to an end. She understands that, even if she failed to convince Kay to leave the icy kingdom where he is shielded from any pain or sorrow, there *is* a way to continue being happy, or at least try to be, one step at a time.



A HEART IN WINTER: SET FREE, LIBERATED?

Sophie Pouliot, *Revue JEU*, November 10, 2015

It is impossible to ignore the fact that the feature film adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen* took the box office by storm around the world in 2013. Catherine Vidal, stage director of *Avant la retraite*, who was herself approached by Théâtre de l'Œil, enlisted playwright Étienne Lepage (*Robin et Marion*) to write *A Heart in Winter*, an adaptation of the tale that is radically different from the Disney Studios' version.

Kay and Gerda are two happy, but poor, children who don't understand poverty because life still offers them many things they can appreciate (flowers, birds, sunshine). They are deprived of their blissful ignorance when, on a bitter cold winter's day, Kay crosses the street without his coat and has an ill-fated encounter with the Snow Queen. She convinces him that nothing beautiful ever lasts in this world and offers to put an end to his suffering by taking him to her kingdom. There, he will no longer feel any emotions, so he won't have to suffer any longer from pain or disappointment. His faithful friend Gerda will face many adventures in an attempt to free him from this artificial paradise and bring him back to life with all its joys and strife – just like *Orpheus in the Underworld*.

This tale full of many adventures enjoys its own unique and playful language, the coexistence of puppets of all kinds (hand, rod, bunraku, etc.) as well as the interplay between the puppets and the Jack-of-all-trades performers who are actors, manipulators and narrators at different times during the show. Fun, inventive and very effective. *A Heart in Winter* even manages to harness the grandiose thanks to the fertile symbiosis between scenography, costumes and props. At one point a heap of garbage turns into a flower-covered hill where an actress emerges, playing the part of a magician. Later, a pile of snow opens up to reveal a masked performer playing the role of an Inuit woman in her igloo. These fascinating, even magical, worlds are constantly created and transformed before the spectator's eyes (thanks, in part, to a revolving set where half of the stage is always behind the curtain).

But despite this fairy tale visual environment, the production has clearly decided not to give the young audience any illusions. Manichaeism is taken out of the equation, and when characters are despicable, there isn't a spell, an unhappy childhood or a chronic want for love that justifies their boorishness. The river is quite pleased to have stolen from and lied to Gerda; the rose enjoys hurting others with her thorns. It goes without saying that life, even with its beautiful moments and encounters, is more than just a barrel of laughs. The ending is even bolder since it is not at all sugarcoated, unlike the vast majority of performances for young audiences. Furthermore, what came across as slightly destabilizing at first is actually very unsettling when we consider the show's metaphorical content.

In a way, like in J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, the characters are confronted with an ontological dilemma (although here, the situation is less subtle): They can either choose life and what comes with it: aging, grief and suffering, or choose death, represented here by a spirit-like Snow Queen, her presence simply expressed through amplified voice and lighting, like a malevolent goddess or a more or less schizophrenic form of consciousness that can entice someone into putting a definite end to their torments.

Many clues lead us to believe that the Snow Queen character symbolizes death. First of all, there is the insistence on the fact that all humans will, inevitably, encounter the Sovereign during their lifetime. Then, there is the fact that she comes to those who are hovering between life and death, and when she appears she tries to convince the agonizing individuals to put an end to their suffering by following her to her kingdom, where nothing will ever spoil their peace and quiet. Kay chooses to stay in the queen's ice palace over leaving with Gerda and having to face life's challenges.

In any event, Gerda fails to save her friend and must learn to be happy without him, with a little help, in part, from the flowers and from the sun that keeps her warm. An important lesson in resilience, no doubt, but it remains to be seen whether parents of 6- to 10- year-olds will be comfortable with the bitter cold allegory behind this nevertheless superb production.

The Colours of the Heart

Brigitte Manolo, *artfactstories*, November 7, 2015

***A Heart in Winter* / Théâtre de l'Œil / Story by Étienne Lepage / Stage Direction by Catherine Vidal / Maison Théâtre until November 22nd**

By the time November and its first cold spells came along, the grey skies cleared and a blazing sun shone on the beautiful red and gold autumn colours. It was time to take a fresh look at Andersen's tale of *The Snow Queen* and allow a life full of warmth to escape from the kingdom of ice.

This is the story of a young boy named Kay who is swallowed up by the Great North, and of his friend Gerda (these are the original, somewhat odd, character names) who sets off to search for him. The tale is revisited by

playwright **Étienne Lepage** and stage director **Catherine Vidal** in an effort to nurture a little hope at the onset of winter (and the onset of the disillusion of growing up, while they're at it).

This puppet theatre features an extravagantly ingenious and creative set design that honours the master of children's tales. The production has the ability to transform a life of poverty into an incredible adventure set in fantastical and frightening places. The circular set, separated down the middle by a curtain, is equipped with a rotating rim on which a series of tableaux are presented: the knitting grandmother's home, a blanket of snow, the river and the green mountain, the forest inhabited by crows, the palace and the royal chamber. Painstaking care is taken to present the animals in this tale as realistically as possible, including the reindeer and the birds. For example, the horse that leads the sleigh is made of plastic sheeting that reflects the light when it is folded, thereby imitating the horse's slight nod when its head is at rest, showing that it is very much alive.

The supporting characters are veritable countries with singular characteristics, whole chapters devoted to a personality trait that our protagonists – especially Gerda – will both discover and confront. The river waters lead Gerda to believe that there has been a drowning, which would answer the little girl's questions and put an end to her quest. And the myriad flowers on the hill and its soothing charm delicately erase her worries and her sorrow as she forgets her troubles. Unfortunately, both these scenes are based on lies and manipulation. With the help of clever twists and turns, the tale offers a series of lessons that mark Gerda's journey. These lessons are not moralizing, pointing out errors or weakness of will when facing temptation. Instead, they highlight the values the young girl holds dear, the loving nature of her heart and her optimism.

Having only a few worldly possessions opens our eyes to the value of the littlest of things; nothing is as precious as friendship. It cannot be bought or stolen and may change over time or fade. And then there's the sad, strong and sorrowful conclusion: we must not give up on those who have given up on themselves, but instead let go of the belief that we can save them when, instead, they must save themselves.



Étienne Lepage's playwriting is always lively and entertaining, especially for younger audiences. It never underplays a character's wickedness or the nasty games they play. His writing simply and brilliantly reinforces the distinction between gesture and action, between the ever so important intention and the sometimes disappointing outcome. The difference between what we wish life could be, majestically, and our meagre means to aspire to anything truly useful. The playwright expresses this gap in how we understand the meaning of life through the use of stylistic devices such as truisms, repetitions and pleonasms. Kay and Gerda "love by loving", "look by looking", "move forward by moving forward". This way, it seems as if the progress, the steps taken, the efforts and the occasional shortcomings are as important, rich and essential as the goal, the objective or the purpose. At the same time, there is the care we take in doing things, because it is sometimes not enough to simply watch when part of ourselves can become involved, consciously and willfully, as we watch. This will is what Kay has lost, and what pushes Gerda to see the beauty of the present moment and beyond.

Put this way, the project seems candid, maybe even utopian. **A Heart in Winter** by **Théâtre de l'Œil** is in fact hilarious and quick-witted. It tackles all kinds of twisted and comical situations that are as many journeys into far-reaching emotional worlds that colour individual's lives without necessarily changing the course of their personal stories forever. This anti-determinism, underscored by the references to insecurity and the focus on the children's courage, makes us feel good and sets the play apart from other tales that lean towards fatality. The revolving stage also offers a surprising mix of genres, combining object theatre, narration, puppetry and audience call-outs, and enables the narrator to play a variety of roles, including a chorus, a prop and an actor.

The show as a whole is a success with its many surprises and contagious energy that made everyone laugh, captivating the large audience made up of both schoolchildren and adults. It must also be said that *A Heart in Winter* is supported by an admirable team. **Francis Rossignol** creates a luxurious and imaginative soundscape, **Alexandre Pilon-Guay's** lighting plays with half-light and contrasting temperatures, while **Richard Lacroix's** puppets and set design embrace every possible season and emotion. And then there are the energetic performers, excellent manipulators and voice actors: **Nicolas Germain-Marchand**, **Pierre-Louis Renaud**, **Estelle Richard** and **Karine Sauv  **. And everything ran smoothly, even on opening night!



A Heart in Winter: Life is No Fairy Tale

Jos  e Lapointe, *La Presse*, November 5, 2015

Stage director Catherine Vidal (*Le grand cahier*) and playwright   tienne Lepage (*Rouge gueule*) are part of the driving force behind Qu  bec theatre. At the invitation of Th  atre de l'Œil, they have come together to breathe new life into Andersen's tale, *The Snow Queen*. A very different take from the Disney feature film, *A Heart in Winter* is a modern and lucid puppet theatre show. The artists behind the work spoke to us about their play. At the Maison Th  atre, starting today.

Why retell a tale instead of creating an original story?

Catherine Vidal: The moment Andr   Lalibert   (Th  atre de l'Œil) contacted me, this was the story that came to mind. I loved it so much when I was a little girl! So I suggested the idea to Andr   and mentioned that it would be really great if   tienne Lepage could work on the adaptation. And   tienne said yes.

Étienne Lepage: I like constraints. I'm a playwright that changes style and universe from one project to the next. Working to order allows me to write things that I otherwise wouldn't have written. The tale's advantage lies in the fact that the story, actions and structure are already established. This allows me to take care of all the rest, the style, the form.

You say you have overhauled Andersen's tale. How so?

E. L.: This is a story about Gerda as she goes off in search of her friend Kay, locked-up in the Snow Queen's castle. I kept the storyline, but not the story's moral stance. Andersen had created an opposition between intelligence (evil) and emotions and faith (good). I didn't like this dichotomy: associating intelligence with wickedness isn't fair. Intelligence is emotional. We can choose to deny the world as it is or, like Gerda, use our intelligence and sensitivity to say: I accept that life is hard, but it also offers much beauty.

You tampered with puppet theatre and fairy tale theatrical codes?

E. L.: In a fairy tale, the narrator is omniscient. I chose to create a narrator that is part of the story; a narrator with personality that even goes so far as to share his or her views [Translator's note: the narration is shared between a number of characters]. And I wrote many more dialogues.

C. V.: For my part, I decided to share the narration among the characters and I created a scenography where you can see the puppeteers. We also stretched the concept of "characters-as-places" that carry their worlds from one place to the next.

What's the big challenge when working with puppets?

C. V.: We not only direct actors, we also direct actors who must bring an object to life. We therefore must figure out, for example, how a puppet will sit down, without imitating a human. If it works, we've found the puppet's truth. But simply finding this is something in itself.

When we think of *The Snow Queen*, the Disney version necessarily comes to mind.

C. V.: I know. But we started the project before the movie was released! I haven't seen it, but it seems that they've strayed away from the original story. Our version is closer to the original tale, even though the moral and the ending aren't the same.

E. L.: It's interesting because I didn't keep as much as a word from the original. I re-wrote the entire tale. But I did keep the adventures and those who know the tale will recognize it.

But your show isn't anything like the Disney version either.

E. L.: Not at all! Especially the ending that we will keep to ourselves.

C. V.: It may be a little anti-Disney, but it isn't dark either.

E. L.: It touches upon life's cruelties and difficulties. But the show is playful and entertaining from beginning to end. There is laughter and it isn't "heavy".

When you work for a youth audience, do you have a message in mind?

C. V.: I believe we have a duty to be honest. But I agree with André Laliberté when he says we also have a duty

not to end on a pessimistic note.

E. L.: We must be careful when it comes to offering hope.

C. V.: Offer some light without resorting to any grandstanding or to camouflaging the real issues. This is why I appreciated Étienne's take.

E. L.: However, I get the impression that there's no limit to what can be tackled in youth theatre. My only question is: Will it draw them in? Will they be interested? After that, we can talk about just about anything, and so much the better. They are at an age when they can discuss issues, think things over and bounce around ideas. Children are great at dealing with complex issues, better than adults.

What goal do you wish to reach through youth theatre?

C. V.: Whenever I read this tale, it stirs my emotions, and I am certain that this is what's behind my choosing to work in theatre. To offer experiences to people. It's the same for youth audiences: I want them to experience something, something more than just a television set that's always turned on. I want them to be moved.

At the Maison Théâtre, November 5th to 22nd. For 6 to 10 years old.

© La Presse, Ltd. All rights reserved.



A Heart That Will Not Grow Cold: Interview with Catherine Vidal for “A Heart in Winter”

Olivier Dumas, *MonThéâtre.qc.ca*, October 28, 2015

Now that *Avant la retraite*'s second run at Théâtre Prospero is behind her, and before launching preparations for *Le Miel est plus doux que le sang*, scheduled to be performed in February at Théâtre Denise-Pelletier, Catherine Vidal is reconnecting with some of her creative companions to work on *A Heart in Winter*, a children's theatre production.

At the Larue & Fils café just opposite the Jarry metro on a sunny Friday morning, the gifted stage director talks about the obvious pleasure she took in the painstaking task of directing this production. André Laliberté, Artistic Director of Théâtre de l'Œil well-known for its puppet theatre productions, asked her to submit a project. Vidal had already performed in *Holy Cow!*, a Théâtre de l'Œil production that goes back to 2007. "I immediately thought of one of my favourite stories, *The Snow Queen* by Hans Christian Andersen, where a girl must overcome many obstacles," says Catherine Vidal.

A Heart in Winter tells the story of an adventuresome girl called Gerda as she searches for her friend Kay who has gone off with the Snow Queen. The queen promised him that in a world of ice, he would never again be cold or experience any painful emotions. Playwright Étienne Lepage (with whom she worked on *Robin et*



Marion) rewrote the original story, especially the ending that seemed too moralistic. “The opposition between scientific reasoning and religious fervour seemed rather out-dated,” she says. “There is therefore no duality between good and evil. In our adaptation, the Snow Queen numbs Kay’s pain in order to make him give up on life’s beauty, while Gerda faces thorny challenges on her journey. We didn’t want a wicked queen. She even gives our heroine the choice of leaving or staying. In Andersen’s version, Gerda often cries and I didn’t want her to shed tears or show any weakness,” says Vidal, deploring, in passing, the Disney machine’s tendency to “polish” stories.

After having mulled-over a few potential titles like *Et tu n’auras plus jamais froid* or even *Les Promesses de la reine-neige*, the choice fell on *Le cœur en hiver / A Heart in Winter*, with Claude Sautet’s feature film in mind.

Another influence also guided the ideas behind the production: the works of Gertrude Stein. “The story is built using a series of loops. Some words are repeated. The narrator is neither omniscient nor neutral. He or she is involved in the story and makes judgments [Translator’s note: the narration is shared between a number of characters]. The narrator even tells Gerda that the show cannot end the way she thinks it will, and let’s us know that he doesn’t fully control the story. The story unfolds despite the narrator’s efforts,” says an enthusiastic Catherine Vidal as she mentions, among her references for *A Heart in Winter*, French stage director Joël Pommerat and the animated film *My Neighbour Totoro*, by Japanese director Hayao Miyazaki. “We are a long way from the archetype of the weak and submissive female. Gerda reacts to events and continues on her way despite the ordeals. She doesn’t run away from stormy encounters, like when she meets the Little Robber Girl character that looks something like a *trash* version of Pippi Longstocking, who carries a knife, traps animals in cages to overcome her loneliness and threatens to cut Gerda’s throat.”

For the stage director, the desire to move away from the stereotypical nice and obedient little girl was compounded by the need to break away from the typical structure of this type of repertoire. “I went to the scenographer and designer and said: How about we produce a show without the usual puppet theatre set-up? Because some of the characters, like the Old Lady Who Knew Magic, could hardly be represented by little figurines since they represent a world that is larger-than-life.” With its revolving set, the story’s structure gives the impression of going from one world to the next effortlessly. At the beginning of the final scene when Gerda reaches the ice palace after facing perilous adventures, the queen could not be represented by a human figure.

“We only hear her voice as if it were some form of consciousness speaking or even a goddess. She couldn’t be reduced to a physical object because of her grandiose, almost maternal nature, and she never acts like a cruel stepmother.”

In the same scenographic spirit, it was a challenge to find a way to represent the river where Gerda tosses her shoes in exchange for information that will help her find her friend. “An actor is covered with a blue cloth that transforms into a stream.” It is a metaphor for life: the four seasons are represented by the river (spring), the Old Lady Who Knew Magic and her flowers (summer), the forest and its robbers (fall) and, of course, the world of ice (winter). Fortunately, the show’s creators added a few humorous moments to Andersen’s sometimes violent tale. As Catherine Vidal points out, “The Little Robber Girl puppet that threatens Gerda’s life was deliberately made to be smaller than her victim.”

Despite the fairy-tale approach to the story, *A Heart in Winter*'s themes never border on infantilization. "The play deals with the opposition between death and life. Kay reminds us of the children that are medicated in order to be neutralized. Gerda teaches us self-discovery and resourcefulness. We aren't offering any candy to the children – we are primarily presenting them with questions. Even as the play comes to an end, the narrator asks Gerda if she thinks the intended conclusion is too sad. She answers his question with a bittersweet 'yes and no'."

This first foray into children's theatre for the experienced actor's director did, however, require a lot of discipline: "I'm working with an assistant (Stéphane Heine) to help me with the finer details. This is the first time I've rehearsed every day from 9 to 5." The experience, however, turned out to be a positive one that is rooted in her values. "Gerda discovers life's hardships and chooses to deal with them. She doesn't allow herself to become insensitive or numb like her friend Kay and she doesn't feel sorry for herself. I chose to underscore that her destiny is the result of effort, courage and determination." Before going back to fine-tuning the many moods of the courageous little girl as well as the other characters from *A Heart in Winter*, Catherine Vidal shares her profound joy at creating theatre that portrays positive images in this day and age. "It seems to me that young women are now more self-confident, like the female character in *Des couteaux dans les poules* (one of her recent works) who wants to escape her difficult situation. One of my dreams is to see the principal roles in *Hamlet* played by women because existential questions concern everyone."

[English translation by Denise Babin]