

Theatre, co-education and gender equality workshop. Debunking the myth of Penelope

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And Telemachus said to her [Penelope] coolly:

(...) You should go back upstairs and take care of your work, spinning and weaving, and have the maids do theirs. Speaking is for men, for all men, but for me especially, since I am the master of this house." HOMER, The Odyssey I

INTRODUCTION

Theatre is a powerful tool for personal and professional development. Learning drama and acting techniques can encourage participation and a gender perspective, the empowerment and promotion of people, groups and communities; at the same time, we can enjoy ourselves while developing our expression, self-knowledge and communication skills.

In this workshop we seek to provide training in drama techniques, body expression, oral narration, and improvisation from the point of view of co-education, gender equality, joint responsibility, and non-sexism.

Our work on theatre and co-education revolves around the myth of Penelope.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, the character of Penelope was clearly intended as a model: faithful, devoted, beautiful and concerned about her husband's worries, thus acting as a female contrast to the male hero, Ulysses.

Nevertheless, the myth of Penelope, which represents the patriarchal tradition of submissive, obedient women, can be deconstructed and adapted to a time and a reality it was not conceived for.

Updating myths is indicative of the change society is experiencing and contributes to this necessary change. Is there anything better than theatre to achieve this?

Theatre

Theatre is action. Acting is doing. Through theatre and drama, by putting ourselves in someone else's place, we banish the idea and the stereotype that women "are" and men "do".

BLOCK 1: PLAYING, CREATIVITY, ACTIVE LISTENING, TEAMWORK

Our approach to the theatrical experience will be based on play and dynamic participation, to gradually discover our own expression and communication skills, imagination, creativity and confidence. Play and theatre allow us to enjoy ourselves, to imagine, create and experience situations which help us think.

We learn to express and understand our emotions, interact with others, and develop our fantasy.

Throughout this workshop, we will learn to work in teams, to take account of others' needs, to work with a goal. We will also develop our imagination, voice and listening skills; we will no longer be afraid of looking ridiculous or speaking in public, and we will learn to build a character through small improvised scenes.

In this workshop we will open a space for play-based participatory reflection and action. We will employ liberating educational techniques to promote self-knowledge and encourage us to share our ideas and views on everyday problems with the other students.

Objectives

- Developing self-esteem and self-reflection to improve, both individually and collectively, by playing through theatre.
- Discovering the peculiarities in one's and other students' expression and learning to value oneself and value those peculiarities.
- Becoming aware of the potential of one's body and voice as an expressive instrument.
- Fostering teamwork with a focus on harmony, creativity and responsibility.
- Promoting respect, tolerance and problem solving.
- Improving interaction and social skills.
- Removing inhibitions and addressing shyness and low self-esteem problems.
- Better controlling one's emotions and expression of feelings.
- Working in a fun, creative and playful environment.

BLOCK 2: EXPRESSION. EVENTS IN ONE'S LIFE AS A BASIS FOR IMPROVISATION

Events in the students' own lives will be employed to create small fiction pieces. Our aim is to highlight stereotypes, violent and sexist behaviours, gender roles, etc., in the context of drama and collective creation.

The elements involved in dramatic action and theatre will be addressed:

- Character: arc and characterisation
- Action as a driver of social transformation
- Circumstances in a scene
- Dramatic conflict

Scenes will be based on improvisation and students will have complete freedom to express themselves, use their own words and find an organic working dynamic.

Objectives

- Developing one's presence and nurturing imagination as a driver of change and alternatives to the existing reality through theatre.
- Discovering different acting methods.
- Understanding improvisation dynamics.
- Learning about the art of oral narration. Working on basic aspects such as diction, rhythm, timing, etc.
- Using sketches as a basis to create individual narratives, monologues, or a collective play.
- Understanding the structure of every dramatic action.

BLOCK 3: ACTING OUT SCENES FROM DRAMA TEXTS. SOCIAL THEATRE

We will act out scenes from the texts analysed during the course, focusing on plays by Itziar Pascual, Margaret Atwood and Oriana Fallaci, and Xohana Torres's poetry.

Objectives

- Living the theatrical experience from start to finish, from developing a character to staging and acting out a scene.
- Combining personal and theatrical experience.
- Knowing about and expanding the resources available on stage.
- Improving actors' self-awareness on stage.
- Working on a variety of genres: comedy, tragedy, etc.

Penelope

In *The Odyssey* we find a concept of women typical of the patriarchal structure of pre-classical societies, rooted in ancient folklore. Penelope represented the romantic woman faithfully awaiting her husband's return, emphasising fidelity and conjugal love as features of an archetype of the ideal woman which would be adopted by Christianity.

The views on the model represented by Penelope have gradually evolved, and she is now regarded as an example of independence and intelligence, someone who questions herself and her fate, through the female construction of her own story.

The myth of Penelope, however, is always linked to her husband's story: without Ulysses, without Troy, Penelope would await no one's return, and her fame would have already been silenced in the collective imaginary.

What if we looked at the myth from the perspective of the heroine and made her the protagonist?

In this workshop we will work on texts which are not intended to demythologise Ulysses, but rather to destroy the Greek myth and reconstruct it from a current perspective: what we are aiming for is remythologisation. We, female authors, give a voice to Penelope, a voice of her own, to convey her thoughts and wishes. We do not defend the Penelope who waits, but the one who, just like her husband did, set sail. Because maybe women have not been represented in official history.

In summary, we aim to provide the female point of view, but not as a merely intellectual exercise. This should encourage women as well as men to analyse, reflect on and, above all, experience, through the different texts and their own experiences, how sexist values have been built and why they must be banished to build a more egalitarian society.

Sources the workshop will be based on:

Homer's *Odyssey*

Ovid's *Heroides*

Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca*

Buero Vallejo's *The Dream Weaver*

Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*

Itziar Pascual's *Las voces de Penélope* ('Penelope's Voices')

Oriana Fallaci's *Penelope at War*

Robert Graves's *Homer's Daughter*

Joel Coen's *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

Schubert's "Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel"

Air's "Le voyage de Penelope"

Joan Manuel Serrat's "Viaje a Ítaca", based on a poem by Kavafis

Aerosmith's "Only women bleed"

"La meua xiqueta", traditional Valencian lullaby

Contents

- A look at the myth of Penelope in words (Homer, Ovid, Apollodorus) and music (Schubert).
- Penelope's "other" life through Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*. The role of self-esteem and stereotypes in education.
- Itziar Pascual's "La mujer que espera" ("The Woman Who Waits"). Why does Penelope not leave? What is she afraid of? Fears.
- Oriana Fallaci's *Penelope at War* and Joel Coen's *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Penelope is no longer afraid.
- What about emotions? And love? Should we sacrifice ourselves for the sake of love?
- Penelope, mother and wife. The productive and reproductive woman.

- Penelope in the 21st century: from the woman who waits to the woman who acts. Penelope must make her voice heard and rebel against her story.
- What about Ulysses? Working for re-education, co-education, and integration of women and men. Social theatre.

METHODOLOGY

All classes will consist of the following:

Warm-up

- Self-discovery and connecting with one's body and environment. Body expression as a way to connect with oneself and the environment.
- Relaxation as a basis for creation. Caring for oneself and self-respect as requirements for others to respect one's body and space.
- Psycho-physical warm-up (preparatory exercises before the dramatic action).
- Movement: the body on alert and ready for work.
- Voice exercises, connecting with each one's voice and power of expression: I am, I have my place in the world, therefore I express myself.
- Attention and listening techniques.

Team and discussion exercises

- The importance of group analysis, identification and creation.
- Debate on the myth of Penelope based on the texts studied during the course, on female and male roles, micro-sexism, sexism, etc. What they are/how we experience them. Discussing private life (relationships, home, etc.) and public/social life (advertising, films, compliments, employment, paternity/maternity leaves, etc.).
- The Greek chorus as a way to develop movement skills and teamwork.

Practical theatre exercises

Most of the time in each session will be devoted to these exercises. The objective is to develop concepts such as arrangement, the body, articulation and speaking on stage, playwriting, improvisation, oral narration, character creation, and collectively staging a small play with the material created during the workshop.

- Being aware of the expression skills of one's body:
 - Concentration, relaxation and listening games.
 - Oral expression: articulation, projection and diction games.
 - Body expression.
 - Creative group dynamics.
 - Developing actors' presence.
 - Expressive creativity.

- Improvisation

Developing the authenticity of students/actors based on improvisation as a first step towards finding the truth and playing. We will develop authentic characters. Improvisation allows us to exercise and stimulate imagination in an effort to “find the truth”.

- Character building

Students will practise character building and creation on stage: each character's objectives, their emotional state, the development of a specific sensory work, inner thought as the guiding thread, physical actions, conflicts, circumstances and transitions.

- Scenes and monologues

---The goal of the scene and each of the characters in it, their thoughts, body work and emotional state will be analysed and developed. Scenes will be developed with a focus on creativity and originality, and stage directions will also be taken into account.

---Practice with monologues, fables and scenes.

---Play analysis: analysing and understanding the texts to act them out.

---Collective scene creation. Introduction to social theatre. Community theatre.

Targeted at:

Women and men with or without previous experience, wishing to live the theatrical and acting experience from a social perspective.

*Sabes, Ulises... ¿Te importa que te llame Ulises? Me hiciste daño. Y me hiciste bien. Me regalaste el desgarrro envuelto en papel de celofán. Pero al romperme, me vi atrapada en la historia; en la mirada de esas mujeres que aguardan tras la celosía de una ventana. Y decidí salir. Rasgar mi piel para tomar otra... **Y volé***

*You know, Ulysses... Do you mind if I call you Ulysses? You did me wrong. And you did me good. Heartbreak was the gift you gave me, wrapped in cellophane paper. But when I got broken, I found myself trapped in the story; in the look of those women waiting behind a lattice window. And I decided to go out. To tear my skin apart and take a new one... **And I flew away***

Las voces de Penélope (Penelope's Voices), by Itziar Pascual

Assessment: Students must attend at least 80% of total course hours.

Continuous assessment of the practical work carried out during the course.

HOUR BREAKDOWN

- From 16 October to 18 December 2018
- Tuesdays from 4 to 7 p.m.
- 10 sessions
- 30 hours – 3 Credits
- 30 ESI hours

- 16, 23 and 30 October
- 6, 13, 20 and 27 November
- 4, 11 and 18 December

VENUE: Salvador Allende Room (Auditorium patio)

PLEASE NOTE

IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE COURSE CERTIFICATE, STUDENTS MUST:

*ATTEND AT LEAST 80% OF TOTAL COURSE HOURS

*HAVE PAID FOR COURSE FEES

*PASS TEACHER'S ASSESSMENT TEST

*COMPLETE COURSE SATISFACTION SURVEY
