

NOTES FROM A WANDERER - Simon Parker, writer

Simon Parker is a London based writer, teacher and performer who works across artforms, collaborating with visual artists, dancers and physical theatre makers. His shows have been staged in London, Edinburgh and California. Most recently he has been a finalist for the Galtelli Literary Prize, longlisted for the Bruntwood Playwriting Award and highly commended by the BBC Writersroom. Simon also runs creative writing, reading and drama groups for the homeless and vulnerable of London.

A woman appears. She wears a chalk blue coat, seams cut from the fifties, a nineteenth century paper mask, a cut out cutting her off. Blue court shoes lift her, shape her, levitating heels two inches from the ground. Who is she? She stands unmoving, staring at us, her audience, her mirror, her her. She appears confident, or riddled with doubt, unable to make an appearance or... Her left arm is raised, hand holding up the curtain from which she has emerged. Is this gesture protruding from the uninhibited certainty of Self, "Look at me", or is she clinging to the velvety seascape folds, uncertain whether to let it fall, her feet heard running away never to be seen again? We are looking, watching, judging, waiting. Who is this woman?

A ripple of anxiety runs through the audience

She waits. We wait. Is she what we want? Are we what she wants? Is she what she wants? Should she present herself to us, are we presentable to? The mask renders her comic and tragic, threatening and pitiful. What mask lies beneath that mask?

Her hand drops, her foot is lifted, held. The walk gives one away, the walk makes one's way, we must walk one way or another. Knee bent, the foot hovers. The tentative, agonising descent to terra firma is a journey, a step into the unknown. The ankle twists, the foot turns. What will this turn out to be? Touchdown. One step at a time. One small step for womankind. Heel. Heal. I'll go on. Another lifting, another looking for a place to land. Footfalls. Whose footpaths are these?

The space is explored. A path taken. Feet fall more regularly. The shoes must go. Her feet slide free but they are cast. Statuesque. Design has deformed foot. Custom has triumphed. The empty space between heel and ground is full. Toes take the weight, all that she must carry. Habit holds us in pain.

Whose shoe is it anyway? The magical thinking of men who set out to change women: Lucia Berlin, the great American writer, had a husband, a sculptor, who made her sleep with her face into the pillow, hoping to correct the nose that wasn't quite right. He could create the face that he wanted to look at. She left him, taking her imperfectly perfect nose with her

A discovery: my heel can resist, fight, the pressure to totter can be tramped down. A return to nature: the foot, flat and firm, on the ground leads to a recasting, euphoria. The ecstatic dance of liberation that won't be allowed to last. Seize it while you can, the space, their eyes, your liberty, that seascape which hid you. Haul it down. Howl with delight.

Swallowed in the seascape, a skirt's fold enfolding her. Buried beneath the weight of what she must wear. Fashion constricts: you must fit in, you must fit into it. The bustle bursting forth, the collapsing farthingale, a material swamp. Not waving but drowning. Collapse

Resurrection?

A rectangle of paper. The blank slate. Something to hide behind, something to emerge from.

How? Who determines what marks will be made?

Slit. Slice. Cut. Score. Gash. Carve. Sliver

Strips of paper torn free, become her shield, her hair, strands, she is Medusa, limbs freed, unruly locks, sheets torn, she is hair, an untutored semaphore: see me, I'm free

The shower curtain, the cubicle, the wardrobe. A transformation, a disappearance. Now you see me, now you don't. Limb, face, finger, shoulder. The leering eyes of peeping tom. The pornographer's glance rendering her absent. No thing. Paper thin, she is blown away with an insatiable rustle

Every woman has to eat her own face off. Every woman has to eat her own face off and look like she is enjoying it

The bird is drowned. This feather brained fantasy of a washerwoman who must toil, cleansing all. Plunging these wild women, these silly geese, Leda's swan, into the water. The weary world returns. What must be done. Clothes must be cleaned, women must be dressed, hair must be dressed up. Water, fountain of fertility, can give birth to another type of woman. The frelange. Paper pasted to hair raising heights, a tower that might topple, a head that must not wilt under the weight. No such luck for Marie Antoinette

Cut