

Two images of Cristina keep on coming back to me as I am trying to take in the news of her death yesterday, the 19th of July 2008.

My last meetings with her were in Denmark. She arrived in Holstebro on the 3rd of June 2008 to perform and lead the Balinese ensemble in Odin Teatret's multicultural itinerant performance *The Marriage of Medea*.

The Balinese ensemble arrived by bus and I together with Odin actors and the participants in an international workshop had welcomed them with a parade. I had just been indoors to change and take make-up off my face and returned to see Cristina looking terribly pale and frail arm under arm with Eugenio. She looked as if she hadn't eaten for weeks. We took her to her room, tried to make her drink and called the doctor. She was taken to hospital, where she stayed the whole duration of the Festuge (festive week).

The doctors thought she had some strange exotic illness, a few days later they suspected tuberculosis and put her in isolation. I went to visit her that day, having to wear gloves and a mask. I don't think she really recognised me, because she spoke English to me. Usually we spoke Italian together. She was lying on the bed in a flannel white pyjama. She looked tiny. I thought I could pick her up in one hand. Then the doctors decided she had a pneumonia, but they could not recognise the virus of the infection.

Straight after the closing performance of the Festuge, on the 15th of June, I took all 32 Balinese in costume to say hello to her. The bright colours of their costumes were in strong contrast with the hospital environment. Many of the Balinese cried as they left the room. But I was still feeling the happiness and optimism of when she had told me on the phone that she did not have tuberculosis.

I promised her I would see her again before leaving the next day on tour for Brazil. Her brother and sister had arrived from Italy. Eugenio and Nando Taviani had just been in to see her. She seemed happy when I walked in the room she shared with other three Danish women. She smiled at me as she explained that the doctors could not find out what was wrong. She promised me she would eat and get stronger. I was there with Mirella Schino and Claudio Coloberti. We joked, I held her hand. Again she smiled. I was only worried by her short breath, but convinced it was one of these bad bronchitis and pneumonias that people seem to get these days, with fevers that come and go and a feeling of exhaustion.

Cristina told me that when she did not have fever she did some exercises because she wanted to keep her muscle tone, but when the fever came she felt depressed.

She had been through a very hard time: in January she got typhus, she had to change house and build a new one fighting the jungle, she had to prepare the Balinese ensemble to come to Denmark, their tickets, their visas, their passports, their money, but most of all their performances, rehearsals, costumes, music. She had prepared a big repertory of different Balinese performances as well as the scenes for *Medea*. We thought we were going to send the Balinese to Germany and Italy after Denmark.

Then I left on tour to Brazil with Eugenio and all the other Odin actors, the Balinese packed and left for Bali, and Cristina was let out of hospital to stay a week at our theatre so she could get stronger before going to Milan in Italy where her brother and sister would take care of her.

The 30th of June she was again in hospital, in Milan. Five days later we heard that the doctors had diagnosed a cancer in the lungs, liver and brain. Cristina was moved to another hospital

specialised in terminal illness and pain. Everything precipitated. I had planned to go and see her as soon as I got back to Europe.

The doctor could not believe the coincidence: Cristina was supposed to perform in that same hospice the 24th of July. He recognised her name from the announcement. I wrote her a letter, saying I had to believe in miracles and please to fight to surprise us again with her capacity of dealing with death. Cristina had nearly died in a car crash in Australia during her travels as a young woman, and it was after that experience that she decided to work and settle down in Bali.

Then we heard that she was unconscious and taking morphine. The Odin tour ended and I was alone in Brazil at a Magdalena meeting. I could not sleep. Suddenly I was wide awake and I thought: Cristina has died. I slept and dreamt of a funeral which was also a theatre parade. That day when I opened my email I received the news: Cristina had left us. She lives on the hearts of those who loved her said the email.

I think the Balinese ensemble still does not know. We tried to contact them when we knew how serious Cristina was, but it is not easy to talk on the phone of such things without much language in common. We decided we would write them a letter after seeing Cristina the 23rd. But we have not managed to see her and say good-bye. We have not managed to hear from her what she wants for the future of the heroic work she has achieved in Bali.

Her tiny body and her smile come back to me; and with those two last images, her white streaks of hair; her long hair that she let loose in dramatic scenes of the Canolarang, the high tones of voice when she made the ansel (impulse) as Panji to give the musicians the sign of her change, the way she improvised with the Topeng half-masks making fun of professors and food at ISTA (the International School of Theatre Anthropology) sessions, how she avoided the bones under her back as she lay down in Ur-Hamlet after the battle, how she helped us buy the coloured Balinese fishing boat and was as excited as we were at the idea of sending it to Denmark. I remember our Indus lunches looking out at the rice-fields, our training together in the mornings, her playing, translating, directing all at the same time.

And then my memory goes back further: when I saw her playing with I Made Djimat at a temple, when she brought to Denmark a Topeng done by women accompanied by the only Gamelan of women musicians, during a tour in Italy giving a demonstration. I remember how she would talk of the voice classes received from Ni Nyoman Candri, and the quality of stillness she created in her own classes. I remember the successful meeting she had with Ana Correa of Yuyachkani during the last Transit festival.

I never thanked her enough for the privilege of seeing the Gambuh performances, lit by fire, in the Batuan village temple. How will I be able to listen to the magic continuous sound of the Gambuh flutes knowing that Cristina is not there?

She asked the old masters to teach the young boys and girls, to pass on the tradition and technique, she managed to get funding from the Ford Foundation to pay food and costumes, rehearsals and travels, publish a book and a DVD.

I also remember that day at the Lotus restaurant in Ubud, when I asked her to create a performance of her own to bring to Transit; it was to be the work that built a bridge between Bali and Europe for her, that would allow her to conquer again her European looks and her childhood songs. She was planning to work more on this performance, to add video projections with Helen Varley Jamieson in New Zealand, to be directed by Rossella Viti in Italy, to collaborate with her students in France.

I never saw her refuge, the white house in Salina, in the south of Italy, where she always tried to spend some days every time she came to Europe.

She worked with Artha in Paris, with Ralf R  ker in Berlin, with pupils in Bali. She still had so much to do and she was beginning to think more of her own artistic path after having done so much for the traditional Balinese dances, enjoying her capacities as a director as she combined her Asian techniques with European stories.

It was her turn to enjoy her results. It is so unjust. It hurts so much. Cristina, who ate and lived in the healthiest possible style, is no longer here to teach us. She lives in our memory and in her work that must find a way of continuing.

My dear friend, if only I could have said goodbye, if only ...

Julia Varley

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