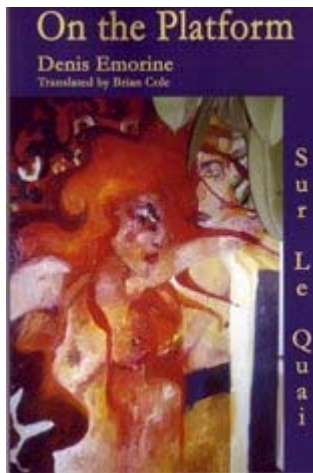


**Reversals in Love: On the Platform/Sur Le Quai, a one-act play by**



Reversals in Love: On the Platform/Sur Le Quai, a one-act play by Denis Emorine, translated by Brian Cole

Review by Michael Todd Steffen

The Princess in the fairytale is playing with a ball and the ball rolls into a well.

A Frog hops up onto the well and announces that he (grnouille, “she” in French) will retrieve the ball for the Princess if the Princess will take the Frog back to live in the King’s palace with her. I may restore something precious for you (no less than your whole

world in the globe of the ball), but for a promise. Once the Princess has her ball back, she doesn’t want to keep the Frog hanging around, though he follows her back to the castle to make things miserable for her anyway.

This see-saw up-and-down and back-and-forth shift in roles between lovers is enacted in the very strange play *On the Platform* by Denis Emorine.

At their initial greeting at the station waiting for a train from Paris, the young lady Laure holds the upper hand, with her youth and engagement to the young man she awaits. Marek is a middle-age man who appears to want to dissuade Laure of her certainty in young love in order perhaps to have a chance at a romance with her himself. The situation is classic, Samuel Beckett in Sunday clothes. Marek is 45ish, uncertain of his profession, expressive of a desire for a less certain set of circumstances—for the incredible intervention of love?

Laure is not yet 20 years old, awaiting her fiancé to arrive on a train from Paris, quite happy with life’s uncertainties and serendipity, possibilities and adventures.

Another twist: Laure is a native French person (Western European). She has an enthusiasm for her freedom and its potential to blossom.

Marek is “of Polish extraction” with some bitterness. He despairs of or disdains her idealism, and appears to want to undermine Laure’s commitment to her fiancé.

MAREK: ...By the way, who is Julien?

LAURE (smiling): I already told you. The man I love.

MAREK: You didn’t say that. You said “my fiancé”.

LAURE: Well?

MAREK: It’s not the same thing!

The delayed train from Paris arrives. Julien is not on this train. Laure claims that her fiancé is only late, that he must have missed this train and will be on the next one.

When the play takes a bizarre turn.

Enigmatically Marek announces to Laure that he is “The Messenger.” Laure is baffled. As Marek insists that he is “The Messenger” we sense the strange shift. Laure loses confidence:

LAURE: I really do not understand you. Now you make me afraid! Don’t look at me with those eyes!...

The advantage of the situation has shifted with his strange announcement and her fear. The Princess doesn’t want the Frog to come home with her.

As we read to the end of the play, we find that Marek is possessed of a prophetic gift, he is an angel or Orson Well’s third man. He knows already that Julien has been killed trying to jump onto the train back in Paris. Laure has been called to a window in the train station as the play ends. In the background she can be seen slumping and falling into the arms of “two men.”

On the Platform is written in choice demotic French—Y’ en a marre...Fusillez-moi tout ca...But also, Les années bien remplies passent si vite. D’autres comptent double sur l’échelle du temps... Emorine is a prize-winning poet who has attained a wonder theatrical patience for timing. The translation by Brian Cole, another award winner from London, is superb.

Everything the play offers is fine, yet strange, strange in a way I believe which announces a silence. Works of art now and then use little tricks to get what is an invisible idea to the public in an acceptable way. It is Emorine’s prop of the surprise of “The Messenger” that leads us to wonder at a fecund silence. Did Marek have Julien killed? I like better to wonder whether Laure isn’t an escapee from a psych ward and Marek is playing the situation ever so delicately and roundly to bring her back in. But ultimately the author has left something personal to each reader with this wonderful play, their curiosity to decide what happens next. It is a well-hosted read, and don’t miss the choral effect of the other three passengers waiting on the platform.

On the Platform/Sur le Quai by Denis Emorine and translated by Brian Cole includes the French text. It is priced at \$14.00 from Cervena Barva Press/  
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