

Door Jaap Twiest / 13 april 2023

Narratief getouw- trek op een minima- listisch toneel

Eind maart speelde Inge-Vera Lipsius' tweede toneelstuk: *Quad Loop*. Een stuk over de vijftienjarige kunstschaatsster Kamila Valieva - zonder personages.

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Narratives in a Tug-of-War on a Minimalistic Stage

Highlighted in *Neerlandistiek*
By Jaap Twiest / 13 April 2023

Four women actors (Nora Korfker, Maria Marbus, Amy Rombout, Aniek Venhoeven) stand along a single line. They are looking out in different, unspecified directions. All are dressed the same—in black shirts, black trousers, black shoes. All have their arms neatly folded behind their backs. This is all there was in the way of a stage set in Inge-Vera Lipsius's second play *Quad Loop*. More was not needed, as it turned out—the play unfolded in the form of an audio drama with visual elements.

After her directorial debut that brought up classical overtones—a stage adaptation of W.F. Hermans's novella 'Paranoia'—Lipsius has chosen to follow a rather experimental path. In this absurdist piece, the young director explores the relationship of sport with media and politics. The play is about the Russian athlete Kamila Valieva who caused an uproar in the international media. During the 2022 Winter Olympics, the fifteen-year-old figure skater was found to fail a doping test. Since then, Valieva's name has come to stand for something larger than herself, and the scandal has taken on a life of its own. Was this premeditated or an unfortunate mistake? Should Valieva have been allowed to participate in the Games or not? And what does this mean for the credibility of Russian athletes?



Tijdens een repetitie. © Arjen Veldt.

No characters

And all was done with the striking absence of characters... A mosaic of quotes from sports journalism and other press interspersed with original writing, the play was shaped by the reactions of the media rather than by the events themselves. And almost from the start, it became clear that the actors were not embodying anybody. Rather, they stood for narratives—amorphous perspectives that gradually took on an increasingly political charge, clashed and tried to drown each other out. The shock of the doping scandal added fuel to the fire, and the tone grew harsher, the debate fiercer. The storylines seemed to face off for center stage, they—literally and figuratively—crisscrossed each other.



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Ironic confusion

When all these narratives are rendered as a shouting match, the cacophony becomes wryly comical. The quotes came more and more quickly; conflicting statements were tossed back and forth at lightning speed. The discourse about Valieva became almost impossible to follow (my compliments to the actresses for the flawless pronunciation of all the Russian names at such a pace). Things became increasingly confusing. Should we believe the Russian backlash or the Western one? WADA or RUSADA? Is a punishment justified or not? Lipsius's play is a painful exposé of how the struggle for truth in the media can actually obscure the truth.

We see a similar ironic method in Alfred Schaffer's poem 'Staat verzekerd' ('The State Assures'). Schaffer rearranges quotes from a government brochure on radicalization and counterterrorism:

*We eavesdrop. We infiltrate. We collect and study
information about suspicious persons and groups.
What the government is and is not allowed to do is laid down in laws*.
Laws are being amended to better combat terrorism.
(From: *Schuim (Foam)*, 2006)*

A brochure that is meant to enlighten only raises more questions. The rather dubious role assumed by the government in the context of counterterrorism suddenly comes to light.

Person and persona

Similarly, *Quad Loop* sheds light on the power of the media. The media creates a distorted version of reality that shapes our understanding of the world. This starts with the choice of subject matter: by choosing what to highlight, they also choose what not to highlight. I couldn't help but laugh when the following exchange took place after Valieva's routine: "But where are the others [of her team]?" "Who?" As if the world had forgotten that there were any other athletes besides Valieva.

The media storm told a story *about* Valieva, not *her* story. In doing so, the international media created a persona separate from the person herself: next to the figure skater Valieva, a plaything of a political tug-of-war was born. Harsh criticism, and harsh criticism on that criticism. Eventually, it all becomes too much for her. When, in spite of everything, the fifteen-year-old Valieva is allowed to continue participating in the Beijing Games ('everything is as it was, except for that first element'), she succumbs to the pressure. Harsh coach, harsh criticism on the coach, and so on.



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Figure skating is about falling and getting up again. With *Quad Loop*, Inge-Vera Lipsius exposes an important parallel between the person and persona of Kamila Valieva: falling and getting up, again and again. The play achieved this through an inventive juxtaposition of quotes from sports news; the narratives whisked by unrelentingly, at a greater and greater speed. The result was something completely different from Lipsius's directorial debut. Experimental and minimalistic. I would like to see more of her work.

Direction and montage text: Inge-Vera Lipsius

Cast: Nora Korfker, Maria Marbus, Amy Rombout, Aniek Venhoeven

Photography: Arjen Veldt