

## **From Somebody to Many**

### **Interview with Milena Buziak**

**How did you discover this text? What did you think, how did you react when you first read it?**

My first reading of the text was very emotional. I love stories, and this one has all the hooks: complex and engaging characters, simple but poetic language, a plot that avoids falling back on stereotypes, a point of view that allowed me to see the world I live in with fresh eyes. I read it in one sitting, and I was completely captivated from beginning to end. And at the end I smiled through my tears, I took a deep breath, and I said to myself, "That's the story I want to tell. That's the story we need to hear nowadays."

**You're working with a Syrian artist who produces video animations using human hair. What can you tell us about this unusual artistic practice?**

Hair is a vector of memory, and it often defines our identity as well. The scene where Youmna cuts Nour's tousled hair to make her look like a boy is a crucial moment in the play: from that point on, Nour becomes someone else. When I read the script, I immediately thought of **Khadija Baker's** work as a kind of testimony. Some of her animations are very concrete – a bird flying away, a tree taking root – while others are more abstract. Khadija's visual universe invites viewers to interpret the images in their own way, using their own imagination.

**What was your approach to directing the performance of a deaf actress?**

All our conversations are conducted through an interpreter, so there's always a slight lag. We developed work and communication tools as we went along, without taking anything for granted. As I made every decision, I tried to put myself in the shoes of an audience member hearing this story for the first time, but also of an audience member *seeing* rather than hearing it. As well, as with any translation, certain images in one language aren't the same in the other. It took a fair bit of trial and error before we arrived at a satisfactory translation of the French script into Quebec Sign Language.

***Traversée* deals with an extremely current topic, namely, migrant children. How do you tackle difficult subject matter in a play for young audiences?**

Young people live in the same world as adults, and they face the same reality. It's important for me to address that reality with them in a sensitive way, a way that offers an alternative to the perspective they may get from the news or the Internet. I want to transmit the hope that things can change and that we're stronger together than individually, despite (or perhaps because of) our linguistic, cultural and other differences. Youmna puts it very well in the play: "Sometimes, being somebody takes many people."