UNE TRAVERSÉE

A performance of the *Compagnie Tchaïka*

Premiere on 18th November 2025 at Théâtre de la Cité and Festival Marionnettissimo of Toulouse

Loosely based on *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll



TOURING DOSSIER

Cast and Credits

Direction and playwriting **Natacha Belova** and **Tita Iacobelli**

Performed (alternately) **by Emilie Eechaute, Lou Hebborn, Elise Reculeau, Marina Simonova** and **Tita Iacobelli**

Puppets Design **Natacha Belova** and **Marta Pereira**

Scenography **Aurélie Borremans**

Sound Design **Simón González**

Costumes **Jackye Fauconnier**

Choreography, outside perspective **Nicole Mossoux**

Lighting Design **Aurélie Perret**

Assistant Director **Maël Christyn de Ribaucourt**

Set Construction **Ralf Nonn**

Production **Thérèse Coriou** and **Charlotte Evrard**

Production Compagnie Tchaïka, DC&J Création, with the support of the Belgian Federal Government's Tax Shelter program and Inver Tax Shelter

Coproduction Théâtre de Liège, Le Vilar, Théâtre les Tanneurs, Maison de la Culture de Tournai/Maison de la création, Théâtre de la Cité & Marionnettissimo, Théâtre Antoine Vitez, Casteliers, Centre National de la Marionnette – Le Sablier, Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes in Charleville-Mézières – with the support of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, Wallonia-Brussels International, Wallonie-Bruxelles Théâtre Danse and the French Community Commission

Duration: 60 minutes

For adults and children aged 10 and up

SYNOPSIS

In the ruins of her house, destroyed by war, a young child is playing with a kitten. Though fantastic stories she tells herself, she is trying to make sense of this new world through the looking glass, and she embarks on a survival game where compromises, despair and empowerment foster growth.

A game to keep her from losing herself and forgetting her name and roots. A game one must take part in, even if only as a Pawn, on the grand chessboard, even though it would have been better to be Queen.

Through the eyes of a child, **Une Traversée** explores the mysteries and mechanisms of consciousness and imagination that come into play to cope with the absurdity of our world on the brink of collapse, torn apart by the folly of war.

Inspired by the masterpiece of Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*, Natacha Belova and Tita Iacobelli, using puppetry and object manipulation, plunge the audience into this world now devoid of all rationality, where the absurd logic of a child's fantasy suddenly becomes salvation, a vital tool against the manipulation of words and the dominance of wicked ideas.

A child's perspective on an absurd world torn apart by the folly of war.



GENESIS AND DIRECTOR'S NOTE

by Natacha Belova, March 2023

The war between Russia and Ukraine started two years ago.
Often, during the interminable days of the onset of this war, I have thought, heard and read from my Russian and Ukrainian friends the sentence "it's like a dream, a crazy dream". It's such a terrifying dream and it's so difficult to wake up. As if it were no longer your own dream but — just like *Through the Looking-Glass* — it is the Black King's dream, and you are trapped inside it, paralyzed.

"Once the Black King wakes up, you vanish, you vanish like smoke."

I remember how Soviet and Russian propaganda works, but how can anyone believe in the impossible just to support this war?

"One can't believe impossible things", says Alice.
"I daresay you haven't had much practice", says the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half -an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

Millions of adults and children are trying to cope with this nightmare, they live in basements, they move, they are going crazy and… they get used to it, which is *probably the worst.*

Since October 2023, all eyes have been on Palestine and Israel and the war raging there. The media have seized on these tragic events, international backing is divided and people are getting lost in the maze of (dis)information.

My brain cannot comprehend this reality. The performance inspired by *Through the Looking-Glass* wouldn't make any sense if I were capable of doing something sensible about the war. The aim is not to work on these specific conflicts, but rather to address how we are lost in the face of the disaster of armed conflicts.

This is what made creating *Une Traversée* necessary.

A play about a child who navigates disaster through play, and, in her fiction, the reality is laid bare to the bone.
In the absurd logic of the fantasy genre, we are scratching at the origins of discourse and word manipulation is turned around to lose its power.

WRITING

Une Traversée is inspired by Lewis Carroll's book, which fits perfectly the theme the female stage directors wanted to explore from the early stages of the project: the absurdity of the world through the eyes of a young girl. Starting from a child in a migration situation allows us to create a special connection with the reality we are dealing with.

The progression of the chapters in *Through the Looking-Glass* invites us to go through the steps of adapting to today's world, in a playful and quirky way.

At first glance, the story unfolds randomly. But in fact, it makes complete sense. It simply follows the rules of a game that is unknown to the child. It's a game of survival, of compromises that foster growth, but also help us make sense of the society around us.

The narrative dynamic is driven by the desire to reach a destination, to not lose oneself. And, at the same time, not to lose her name and personality. It is a game and a girl is ready to play.

Movement does not depend on her. And the closer she gets, the further away she gets. But she's always ready to play. To pretend, to hold on to the fleeing Queen, to hang onto the Sheep's beard, to cling to the slipping Knight, to do whatever it takes not to fall, to stay in the game, prepared to go to any lengths to avoid being boxed into a rigid image, not to get used to the "impossible", not to be trapped in someone else's dream.

The child observes the world of adults through the looking-glass. She takes part in their game and, at the same time, she is not there. She is asleep. She is not afraid. When incomprehension reaches its limits, she starts shaking the Black King and he turns into a kitten.

"What if we are all part of the same dream. Only I do hope it's MY dream, and not the Black King's!
I don't like belonging to another person's dream."

SPACE AND PRESENCE

Starting point

A little girl is playing in her room. A child's bedroom like any other: the shelves are filled with notebooks, dolls and stuffed animals, books and drawings. The coat rack is overflowing with clothes; the balls and roller skates are lying around on the colorful rug. Everything is normal, but strangely quiet. Is it a memory? A mirage? A dream?

It's a starting point that will become a point of no return. Everything is going to disappear. But it is with the pieces of this image that the child will build their path to survival.

Collapse

A child sits on a chair, surrounded by ruins. She starts to play: she summons up ancient figures, who appear as fragments of her memory, the memory of the "old" world, a mirage of the "after-world", and its unknown future.

In this game with vague rules and absurd dialogue, she moves forward, drawing and erasing her interlocutors. She is looking to reach the end of her journey, to win a game she doesn't fully understand, but where the stakes are vital: to be able to stand up from her chair. To walk. To escape this ruin holding her prisoner.

The people through the looking-glass

The characters come to life before the audience's eyes, the black garbage bags transform into the Black Queen, the piles of clothes turn into the White Queen, and the floating pieces of plastic become mosquitoes that tell jokes. A school locker room stirred by a quake becomes a train, while jackets turn into passenger-animals. This welcoming land is an enchanted forest that makes you forget your name and that seems to breathe, to stretch, to expand and contract like a breathing lung… The one of the Black King, who is dreaming. He sleeps in this suspended space, dreaming of this child, of her world. Maybe she is part of his dream?

With this uncertainty, the abandoned balls become twins, *Tatati and Tatata*, the child's guides. They whisper to her that she's part of the sleeping king's dream and that, to not wake him up, she must proceed with caution, as if walking through a minefield. A silent challenge, an invisible struggle, where every step counts and where the balance between reality and dreams is becoming increasingly fragile.

The child is searching for her place in this perpetually changing world. The realm of imagination reveals itself, unfolds and rips apart at every moment. A kingdom scarred by conflict and by the violence of a game whose rules can never be fully understood.

The question remains unanswered: who is dreaming and who is dreamed in this journey between shadow and light.

Puppet and its puppeteers

The child is portrayed by a puppet, controlled by three women. These women, like guides or protectors, are there to accompany her, sometimes taking part in her encounters, sometimes staying out of the spotlight, silent observers of the world the child creates and destroys at every moment. Their presence is a comfort on this frontier between the fantasy and the devastated reality.

The puppeteers' performance visibly displays the capacity of imagination and Alice's changing perspectives. This child guides us, creating universes and summons these characters, while incorporating her behaviors and details from her experience that deeply moved her. Through this unfolding, external hostility becomes apparent, the senseless conflict in a kind of inner struggle, that challenges her identity and her social status. All she had ever known to be "normal" has been shattered. She must rebuild everything to stay alive.







TOURING SCHEDULE

2026

December 11 > 13: Festival CRUSH, Les Tanneurs (Belgium)

2027

January 26 > 28: Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival, Chicago (USA)

February 18 > 21: Teatro Metastasio, Prato (Italy)

March 11 > 12: Les 3 scènes - Grand Saint-Dizier (France)

April 01 > 02: Centre Culturel de Nivelles (Belgium)

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