

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a black long-sleeved dress, stands on a stage with her arms outstretched. Behind her is a large, light-colored projection of a bare tree. The background is a warm, orange-brown color with some architectural elements visible at the top.

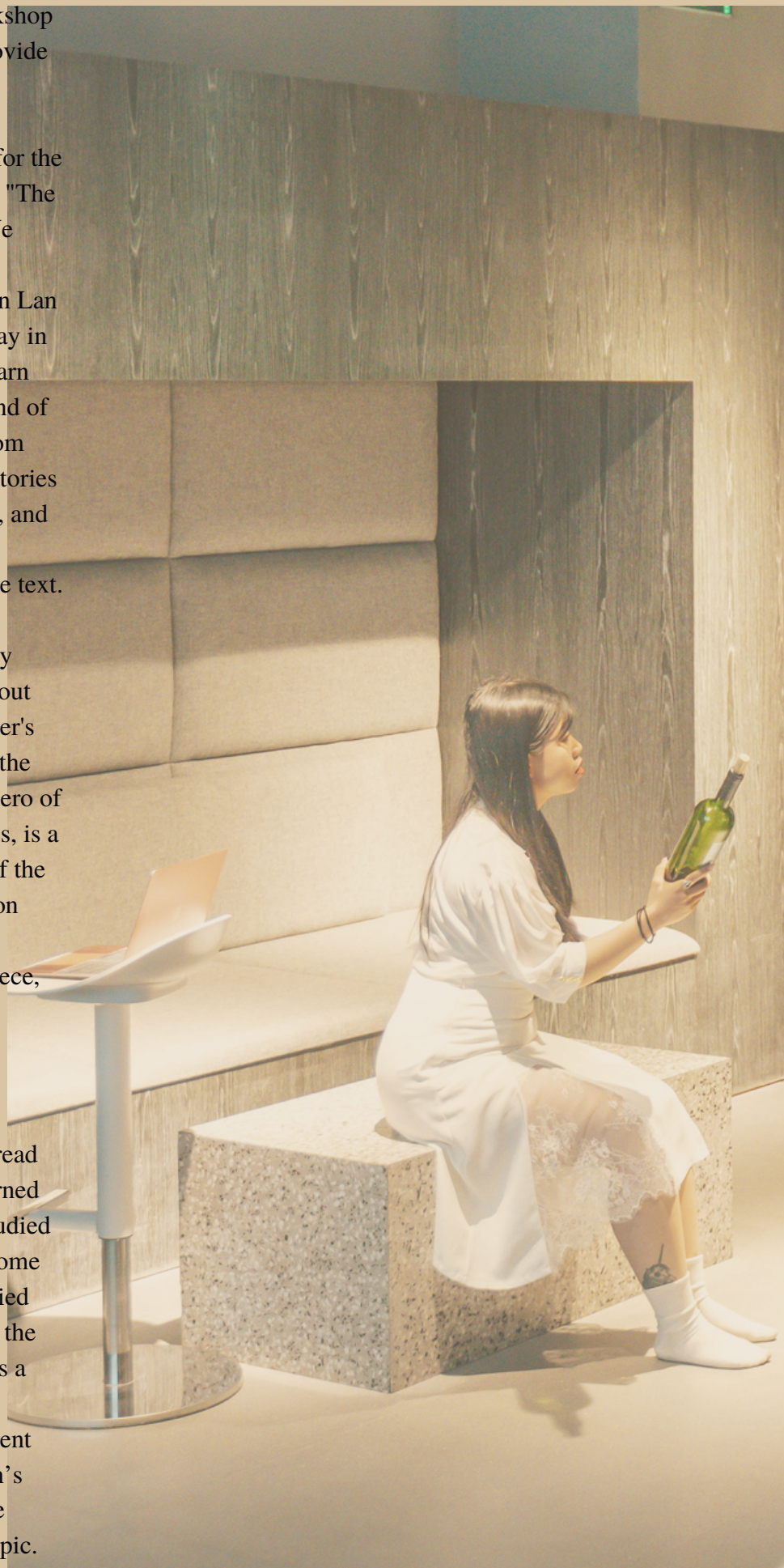
**Director's Notes on
Poetic Drama**

**The Wreath
of Achilles**

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This experimental workshop was held in order to provide some references for presentation style and theatrical construction for the upcoming rehearsals of "The Wreath of Achilles". We therefore met with the playwright and poet Lan Lan during our one-week stay in Aranya, Beidaihe, to learn the historical background of the story of Achilles from Homer's Epic and the stories behind writing the play, and to talk about how the playwright interprets the text.

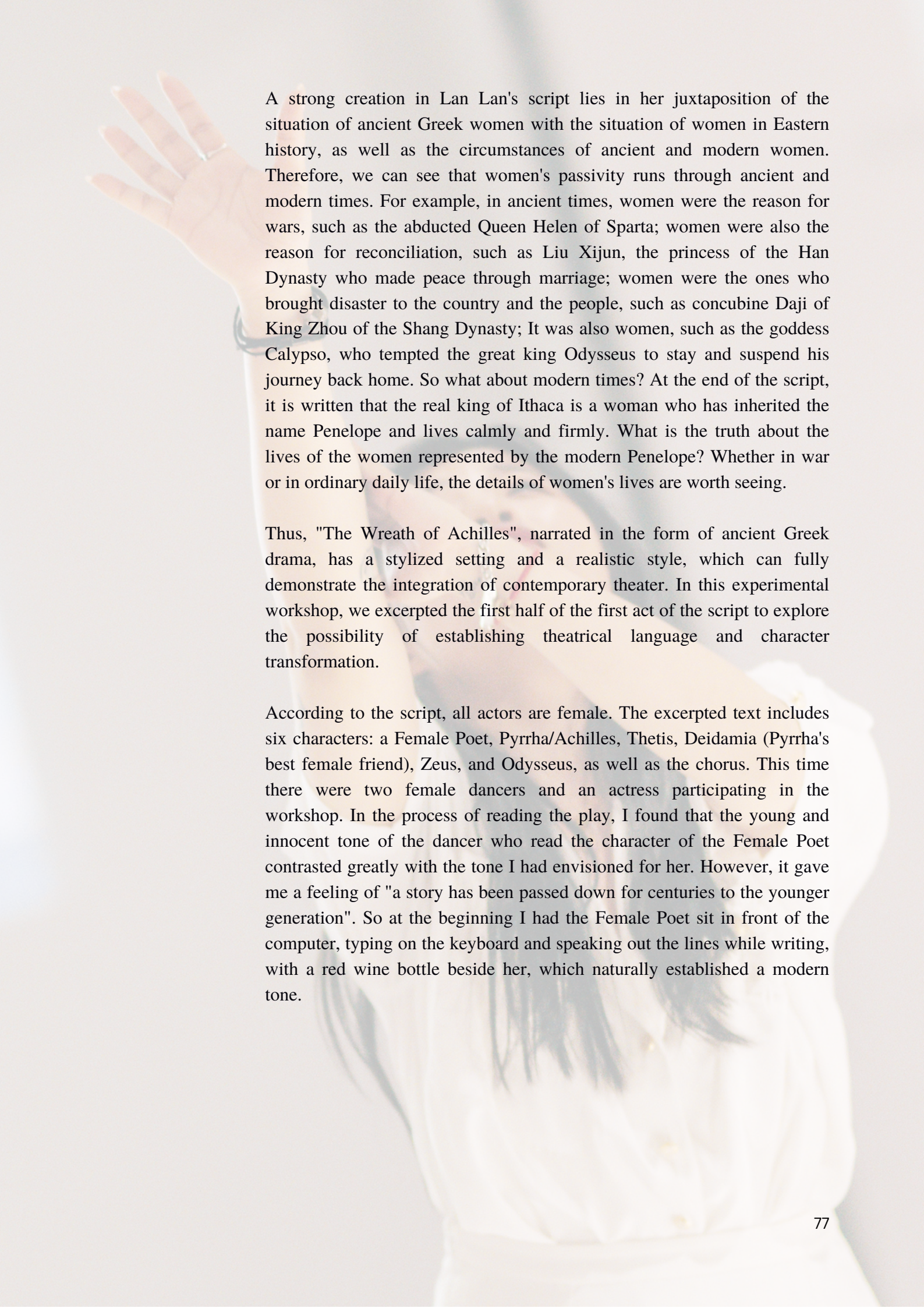
Lan Lan's text creatively reimagines the story about the Trojan War in Homer's Epic, and puts forward the idea that "the greatest hero of ancient Greece, Achilles, is a female". This version of the story is actually based on historical data. As an honorary citizen of Greece, Lan Lan has visited the country multiple times, interacted with locals, traveled to the islands mentioned in the epic, read historical accounts, learned about the locals, and studied some local literature. Some scholars who have studied Homer's Epic also hold the opinion that "Achilles is a female." Therefore, the Trojan War has a different version in poet Lan Lan's script than it does in the well-known Homer's Epic.



When doing research for this script, I read "The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II" by the Nobel Prize winner and Belarusian writer S.A. Alexievich. She said: "There is this concept of 'lighting performance' in optics, which is about the camera's ability to capture images. Women's memory of war is based on their own emotional tension and pain as the strongest lighting performance... Women's war is a war accompanied by smells, colors and a microcosm of life." Thus, in this version of the story, we need to try to examine and feel a war from a female perspective, to think about the situation and significance of women in a war, to think about how we handle conflicts, how we make choices, and how we adhere to beliefs. In the script of Lan Lan, the female hero Achilles leads the Achaeos to cross the ocean to fight on the Trojan battlefield. At the same time, she shows great sympathy for the misfortunes and miseries that happen to women, and deeply detests the lies and deceits of the world in power. At the end, she chooses to leave the Trojan battlefield and return to her hometown to become a doctor who heals the wounded and rescues the dying.

In fact, in the study of the Homer's Epic in which Achilles was a male, it was also found that people liked Achilles not only because of his strong combat capability, but also because he was more human than other ancient Greek heroes. He had a deep connection with friends, cried, reflected on the ethics of honor and thought about the value of life. From this perspective, masculinity and femininity have achieved fluidity and unity in Achilles.





A strong creation in Lan Lan's script lies in her juxtaposition of the situation of ancient Greek women with the situation of women in Eastern history, as well as the circumstances of ancient and modern women. Therefore, we can see that women's passivity runs through ancient and modern times. For example, in ancient times, women were the reason for wars, such as the abducted Queen Helen of Sparta; women were also the reason for reconciliation, such as Liu Xijun, the princess of the Han Dynasty who made peace through marriage; women were the ones who brought disaster to the country and the people, such as concubine Daji of King Zhou of the Shang Dynasty; It was also women, such as the goddess Calypso, who tempted the great king Odysseus to stay and suspend his journey back home. So what about modern times? At the end of the script, it is written that the real king of Ithaca is a woman who has inherited the name Penelope and lives calmly and firmly. What is the truth about the lives of the women represented by the modern Penelope? Whether in war or in ordinary daily life, the details of women's lives are worth seeing.


Thus, "The Wreath of Achilles", narrated in the form of ancient Greek drama, has a stylized setting and a realistic style, which can fully demonstrate the integration of contemporary theater. In this experimental workshop, we excerpted the first half of the first act of the script to explore the possibility of establishing theatrical language and character transformation.

According to the script, all actors are female. The excerpted text includes six characters: a Female Poet, Pyrrha/Achilles, Thetis, Deidamia (Pyrrha's best female friend), Zeus, and Odysseus, as well as the chorus. This time there were two female dancers and an actress participating in the workshop. In the process of reading the play, I found that the young and innocent tone of the dancer who read the character of the Female Poet contrasted greatly with the tone I had envisioned for her. However, it gave me a feeling of "a story has been passed down for centuries to the younger generation". So at the beginning I had the Female Poet sit in front of the computer, typing on the keyboard and speaking out the lines while writing, with a red wine bottle beside her, which naturally established a modern tone.



In the script, Deidamia, Zeus, and Odysseus are all played by another dancer. Applying different physicalities is one of the ways to switch between male and female characters, so I asked the female dancer to create different physicalities for each of the three characters. In terms of sound, I attempted to use software to record and change the voice of the female dancer, using clear tone and physicality changes to indicate when the characters of Zeus and Odysseus appeared. On the other hand, this presentation can also be aligned with the modern tone.

Pyrrha/Achilles and Thetis are also played by one actor. Pyrrha is the female name of Achilles, when living as a woman on Skyros Island, and Thetis is the mother of Pyrrha/Achilles and the goddess of the sea. Due to the fact that the actor who played Pyrrha/Achilles and Thetis needed to leave this residency in advance, we have made a decision to ensure that scenes of these two characters only appeared on screen for the presentation of the workshop's results. The filming of these two characters' scenes was carried out in the Aranya Community Hall. The hall has a balcony, which was separated from the interior by glass, so we made use of this glass to divide the space for the two different characters. The lighting of these two separated space was different, and the sound of the waves could still be heard on the balcony, which just helped to create the atmosphere of the two characters.

A woman in a black dress is captured in a dramatic, expressive pose, leaning forward with her arms extended. The background is a plain, light-colored wall, and a large, dark shadow of a tree or branch is cast across the scene, partially obscuring the woman. The lighting is soft, highlighting the contours of her dress and the texture of the background.

Due to the use of filmed footage, we had a variety of scene options for the Pyrrha/Achilles part. We went to shoot the opening scene in a typical bare woods in northern China in Aranya, hoping to convey the atmosphere of silence. For the vivid childhood memories of Pyrrha/Achilles on Skyros in the script, we still used images to present the flash of memories of her playing on the beach with her friends in film language.

Video footages were used pretty much in this presentation of this workshop results, so in order to unify the theatrical language, in the scenes of Zeus, Odysseus and the chorus, we also used imagery empty scenes to combine with the live performances of the actors. Moreover, the script itself also reflects on modern life, so at the beginning of the presentation, I also added videos of modern female soldiers from various countries on the battlefield and during training. The presentation started from modern life and was connected to historical records about female soldiers. Then, I introduced the background of Homer's Epic on screen, followed by entering another version of the story of the ancient Greek hero told by a modern young female poet. As a result, the live physical interpretation, lines, images of research material, and filmed scenes were intertwined, forming a modern presentation of the form and story of ancient Greek drama.

Due to limited time and resources, this presentation only demonstrated the experiment with theatrical language and character transformation methods during the workshop, without presenting the spatial setting (the underworld) and visual tone of the script. I believe that when rehearsing the entire play, due to changes in the performance venue, the presentation style will develop largely into a totally different one.

Translated by Iuliia Baturu