

YVES BONNEFOY, TR. FROM THE FRENCH BY
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The Children's Theatre

He was walking in the woods when he heard that laughter, those exclamations, that joy. And what to do but stop, heart thumping, and listen to the children's voices through the curtain of branches, then venture towards them, the other world? He advanced, parting those branches, those leaves that slapped him, but gently, in the face. Actaeon, too, pushed them away, when it was hardly light laughter that called from beyond, but a gulf from which rose smoke, bitter smoke, as though a fire had taken hold in the undergrowth, soon to put an end to the world.

A stage rises in a clearing. Very rough, with lopsided supports and half a dozen planks, and three or four uneven poles holding a vast, faded, and torn cloth between stage and sky. Behind, more trees, trunks tightly pinched, now dark. The stage is no more than a meter off the ground. The children climb on and off it easily, a little girl has just jumped down with her feet together but she stumbles, she almost falls against the back of a little boy in a red sweater. Laughter. The boy turns, mimes punching her, she yells, pretends to yell.

Then she puts her foot in his joined hands and braces herself, and again she's on the stage. She turns towards the audience, if there is one. "I am the queen," she exclaims, "you are the king." In effect, they are the queen and the king, the unveiling is finished, the trial done, night can fall this morning, and the fire cease to coil its trail of death beneath the dead leaves, and the stones.