

**WISE Italy**

*presents*

**POLITICS TAUGHT TO MY GRANDCHILDREN  
A European Bildungsroman**

Like Europe W.I.S.E. is a patchwork of many stories, influenced by different mentalities, experiences and life views, bound by a mutual view of democratic structures. W.I.S.E. originated from a Europe-wide discussion on the topic of politics – on the hopes, lessons learned and contradictory experiences in our European democracies. Over 60 witnesses, from the countries involved (Germany, Great Britain, Italy and Poland), born between 1915 and 1949, told us something of their political biographies thus laying the foundation for the twelve chapters of this European “Bildungsroman”.

The chapters dedicated to Italy are:

**Chapter I – WELL BEGUN IS HALF DONE  
by Sonia Antinori**

It is dark. Where are we? Three actors begin a search for political orientation. In order to do this they follow in the footsteps of contemporary witnesses from the post war period to the present, who have told their stories and recounted their observations. Poetic, humorous and sharply satirical miniatures of the post war political history of an Italian harbour town, build the basis of their search for a political position in the here and now. “Is it a comedy or a tragedy?” The journey begins immediately after the war and ends in the “Realm of Anti-politics”. A “Comtragedy”. It is getting dark. It could become a tragedy, however something new is created from the dark.

**Chapter IX – CONSTANT DRIPPING WEARS AWAY STONE  
by Sonia Antinori**

In the visiting room of a women’s prison an ex-judge visits a female prisoner. The man, who gave up his judicial office out of conviction, exchanging it for an educational vocation, tries to induce her to make an admission of guilt and encourages her to so preserve her honour. The woman on the other hand waves blame away; “I am not guilty”. She simultaneously urges the judge to accept a share of the blame for her husband’s death. What begins as a cautious rapprochement develops visibly into a controversial clash on the questions of human dignity, social ethics, guilt, sin and fair justice. Yet amongst the controversy lurk the personal stories, motives and backgrounds of the protagonists. Bit by bit, layers are stripped away from each of them, as in the peeling of an onion.

## **Chapter XII – WHEN I AM SHIPWRECKED, I HAVE NAVIGATED WELL** by **Sonia Antinori**

“Can you hear me?” So begins the speech of an adult daughter to her absent father. He had been a left wing activist in the 1970’s and was never there for his daughter. It is both a heavy accusation and a declaration of love. We become witnesses; to a desperate attempt to close the wounds which being abandoned leaves, to the evocation of a relationship and a search for truth. The reconstruction of a paternal biography, accusations, self-reflection and the relentless depiction of a personal search for orientation, ultimately lead to a surprising discovery.

### **DIRECTOR’S NOTES**

#### **Chapter I**

At first the stage is dark, it then becomes light and it is empty. Three actors stand on the empty stage; at the zero hour in Nowhere.

Sonia Antinori based the development of chapter I on improvisation, created by actors from witness stories. According to the directions the actors are NOT stage figures, but function through their story-telling as searchers instead. They occasionally slip into characters from the stories, but slip out again just as quickly.

From the background an older couple follow the search. The man and woman are both “real” WISE project witnesses and unlike the displaced actors have a fixed position at the back of the stage. They each sit in comfortable armchairs beneath the light of a classical standard lamp. In front of them is the wide stage on which the actors are lost. Above them are a table and chair which dangle from the stage ceiling.

The world turns upside down. It is up to the three young people to put all they have into finding orientation. From the zero hour to the realm of anti-politics, they tread a path shadowed by urgent and demanding questions: Where are we? Where is the journey going? What can we do? If we do not know where we are, then we will not arrive anywhere.

This certainty and the prospect of a journey, from the start of the post war period to the amorphous “Realm of anti-politics” of the present, turn the play into a “Komtragedy” – It begins as a comedy and ends as a tragedy; if it were not for the witnesses testimonies, which ultimately lend new qualities to the search.

#### **Chapter IX**

*Two things fill the mind with ever new, increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me. I do not seek or conjecture either of them as if they were veiled in darkness or extravagances beyond my horizon; I see them before me and immediately connect them with the consciousness of my existence.*

*Immanuel Kant*

There are questions which we prefer to avoid – questions of personal responsibilities in a social context, questions of personal guilt, of the deep rooted reasons for existential fear; a despair that suddenly fills us in the middle of everyday life. Our consumer society offers us many distractions and entertainment. There are thousands of options designed to prevent us from asking these questions.

What would an experimental arrangement to prevent this look like? Let us take a narrow rectangle, precisely marked on the stage floor; as soon as you enter it you feel the relentless constriction of this arbitrarily drawn border. The protagonists are not allowed to cross the white lines, because the constricted space represents a prison visiting room, a women's prison. There is hardly room for a table and chairs here; light falls through a barred window that hangs high over the stage and the bars throw long shadows into the room.

A guard controls admissions and exits. Always present, he remains faceless. He represents power and the total control of the penal service: An anonymous storyteller/angel/prison officer – we do not get to know anything about him, or his motives. He is externally neutral, in charge of keeping the order that he represents. The presence of this figure exaggerates the constriction of the room. Not only is protagonist's manoeuvrability reduced, but all action is regimented, even the volume of conversation.

A woman prisoner stands within this rigid framework and gazes at the barred sky. The guard lets in a man who is visiting at her request. The sobering relentlessness of the setting is reminiscent of Kafka's tales. On a non-verbal level it is about power play, in various forms and manifestations – the room is a boxing ring, confessional, interrogation room, predator's cage and drill arena.

The chair. There are two people, and one chair at a table. As the plot progresses the chair becomes a significant means of communication – It continuously represents an element of imbalance, demarcation, discrimination. It functions as a conventional object; a proffered seat, sometimes for the guest, sometimes for the lady. It is a symbol of domination; the seated inquisitor. It serves as a retreat and ultimately becomes a place of subjugation. The confinement of the space forces the protagonists into a dense choreography, a *pas de deux* of mutual scrutinisation.

Hovering over everything is something which conjures up threat in the woman and vocation and chance in the man. Just like an individual lifetime visiting time is strictly limited. The occasional sound of dripping water makes this tangible. It is time to reveal true colours here and now. By peeling layers away little by little, they reveal more and more of themselves through their stories, positions and arguments. Removing layers little by little, they reveal more and more of themselves through their arguments, position and stories, without ultimately revealing their secret – until the bitter end, when the ex-judge's theory of the futility and inhumanity of the penal system is confirmed.

## **Chapter XII**

Absolutely everything is thrown into a far-reaching accusation which is also a declaration of love. Is it possible to make an accusation without condemnation? What happens if the accusation is also a loving solicitation, an appeal: Do you hear me? Hear me! Hear my voice!

This is an immensely intimate appeal to somebody who is seemingly absent. The father is inaccessible, but perhaps now, through the appeal, becomes accessible in a "God-the-Father" like way. (This is associated with the biblical story of Job. Job the just and God forsaken. A child is just, because it simply cannot be unjust yet. Therefore a just child who is forsaken, becomes a forsaken child. This is the basis for one of the four layers of this text; the appeal is also a confession.)

The staging of Sonia Antinori's text focuses on differing perspectives contained within the monologue. These various positions strive for a truth and in their whole

they create polyphony, as in an inner chorus or inner parliament. Each voice is a voice of evocation.

The first evocation is manifested in the attempt to reconstruct the father's life from biographical fragments, political facts and personal speculations. The hypothetical reconstruction of the father's biography evokes an Italy from the post war years until the early days of the student movement.

By contrast, the direct appeal to the present/absentee father is characterised by a deep intimacy. The audience become eavesdroppers on the appeal to the father: We, in the audience could imagine that he is here amongst us, or perhaps not. Nevertheless, the THERE that has been invoked is in the here and now, its past is evoked by the appeal.

Eavesdropping on the inner voice, the "voice of the soul", either demands, or occasionally, causes a change of perspective: This eavesdropping, this "listening to yourself" brings the protagonist's inner self to the exterior and turns the speaker into a listener of her own voice: An evocation of the dialogue with her soul.

Last, but not least, it is about the confession of her own story, which is connected to that of her father and is existentially damaged by his absence. The evocation of her story with pictures, myths and demons is joyful, rigorous and relentless; Childhood stories, self-accusations, aggression, apology, romantic yearning and merciless analysis stand side by side.

These four voices are assigned varying stage locations, diction and technical resources. Differing perspectives are developed gradually. The content and the narrative attitude of the text become mirrors and antagonists, making the conflict-rich complexity of this "relationship conjuration" tangible to the audience. We are invited to listen to, and see into, varying aspects of the soul and the world. We are witness to the protagonist's struggle with a truth that can and will be her own in the end. Between confession and reconstruction, and appeal and reflection, the staging questions biographical constructions with a radical subjectivity.

This is a position which denies "objective" truth in terms of political ideology and which cannot, or will not make use of a universal truth. This position challenges the audience to question their own dealings with truth, political beliefs and biographical constructions.

The radical subjective construction of the relationship's history and the logic, with which the protagonist consistently follows her own confession, eventually lead to a picture puzzle: From close up it seems to be harmonious in its fragility.

Yet, in the end, the other person's truth comes into the picture and the story takes on a new light. Perhaps now it can be told and understood differently. Do you hear me?

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