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Oerknal variaties

Theater Adhoc

★★★★★ [Toneel](#)

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The uncertain vacillation of awareness

By [Loek Zonneveld](#), published 2 March 2018

The beginning of everything. That's the subject matter of this hour or more. Although *Oerknal variaties* packs in enough material for a whole day. The day of the beginning. Was the beginning of *everything* a switch that suddenly went 'on'? Or was it something gradual, something slow? Narrator Jan van den Berg explains the difference between two 'schools' on this thorny question. But by then he has already begun – because his story begins with the beginnings of the narrator himself.

Theatre originated with the agreement that a good storyteller tells a story, and other people in the space listen. This benign arrangement in fact entails a *separation* of consciousness, which can lead to a *creative* spirituality. When at some point the narrator in *Oerknal variaties* brings up the inevitable opening sentence of the Old Testament, 'In the beginning God created...', he reveals that the word 'created' is a mistranslation. It should be *separated*. In the beginning God (or the gods) separated elements that were already there.

This is not a semantic game. It's a serious matter. After all, this is what happened to the narrator himself. In the extraordinary beautiful poetic opening of the show, the narrator describes his own beginning – his birth, which was premature. Separated way too soon from what shortly before had been one. The breaking of the waters of the female cavity in which an embryo develops into a human being is the beginning of the separation between what subsequently is called the *mother* and the *baby*.

Shortly after his premature birth, the narrator is still a terribly vulnerable lad. One who sprang into the world far too quickly and ended up in the hospital like a kind of Snow White in a little glass box. Because there was no stopping him. The opening lines of this show about the beginning of everything are so rich and so moving and delivered with such a light touch that it is simply impossible for the rest of the evening to go wrong. It's the beginning of something festive. Before the story has even actually begun, there's no stopping it, so to speak. What with the playful elegance of that first quarter of an hour you don't even realize that this story is also an inquisitive quest, full of talkative clowns who in (un)ordinary life are called 'scientists'. Know-it-all, stubborn and at times conceited sleuths. Just like Jan van den Berg.

But fear not, dear audience! A physics lecture this could never be. First of all, Van den Berg is much too good of a performer for that. And secondly, his expressive language is artfully supported by music. When for instance the narrator describes in words what a *primordial soup* could be, his musician, Jacq Palinckx (a sweet old rocker, but that image quickly changes when he lets loose, once *he* begins) has already been playing his curious set of instruments laid out on the floor and showing what a primordial soup actually *sounds* like. Correct that: *could sound like*.

For another unmistakable primordial strength of *Oerknal variaties* by Theater Adhoc, directed by Dirk Groeneveld, beautifully designed by Hannie van den Bergh, wonderfully lit by the wizard Gé Wegman, is that the production, for your gay science pleasure, knows hardly anything with certainty. It stammers out a possibility, a *not knowing with certainty*. For instance, the narrator was certainly present at his own birth, but he himself knows nothing about it. He only has it on *hearsay*. For this uncertain vacillation of awareness, Jan van den Berg repeatedly uses a beautiful old word, *looming*, from the East Frisian '*lomen*', moving slowly, and the Sanskrit *dhumá*, vapour. Insights looming up out of the mist of *not yet knowing*.

Needless to say, I left this show feeling enriched and intensely happy.

(Translation: Jane Bemont | Elegant English)