

Spain: Engaging with la Crisis Through Theatre

Juan Carlos Rubio's *Las heridas del viento*

Juan Carlos Rubio has had quite a hit with *Las heridas del viento* [The Wounds of the Wind]. The play first premiered over a decade ago at Miami's Teatro 8, in a production produced by the Hispanic Theatre Guild and directed by Juan Manuel Cifuentes. Ten years on, the play has been seen in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Spain and Uruguay. Cifuentes' production was first presented in Spain in 2006 but it is the author's 2013 staging that remains in circulation. It has played across Spain, with a three-day run at London's Courtyard Theatre as part of the London Spanish Theatre Festival in June 2015. The play has a simple premise: David (Dani Muriel) is sorting through his father's personal possessions in the aftermath of the latter's death. It is an emotionally charged situation that allows for family secrets to tumble out, forcing David to confront both an overly rigid idea of his father as well as his own sense of self.

Rubio's staging and Manuel Guerra's lighting design are simple but effective. Upon entering, David switches on the lights, allowing the audience easy access into the intimate family space. David then begins confiding in them about his father's foibles and characteristics. Dealing with his father's legacy involves coming to terms with the type of man he was—Rafael is conjured as a palpable presence through David's narrative: a methodical, organized man who was not able to talk about his emotions and feelings. A respected lawyer who was always a stickler for detail, his life remains a mystery to his son. David is quick to identify his brother Manuel as having inherited his father's traits—while he positions himself differently, as a more open person. A metallic box with a lock reveals a package of letters which David begins to pick out as a glamorous woman (Kiti Manver), made up and dressed elegantly as if going out to a formal event, reads out the contents of the letters from the opposite side of the stage. The audience is lulled into the assumption that these are letters from a female lover.

As Manver removes her wig, however, she reveals that the signatory of the letters is not a woman but a male lover, Juan. In front of the audience, Manver continues her metamorphosis from a Joan Collins-esque middle-aged woman to a sixty-something man. The construction of a male identity is fabricated before the audience's eyes: eyebrows, earrings and lipstick removed as the face is stripped of adornments. The trappings of femininity are literally put away in a case and the newly constructed Juan is ready to meet David. The supposedly liberal David who was so clear that he was decidedly not like his father, is not able or willing to confront the fact that Rafael might well have been gay.

Manver imbues Juan with a wit that moves from warm to corrosive in an instant. Juan has had to live his life in the closet but he insists on dignity and respect and shows little time for David when he accords him neither. Juan is also an elegant flirt and seduces both David and the audience with his compelling stories. The fiercely heterosexual David tries to keep his guard up but he is taken in by Juan's ornate narratives: his tale of a cat that turns out to be an elaborate fiction, his revelations about how Rafael and he met, his career as a teacher.

This is in many ways an "odd couple" play with the two men positioned as diametric opposites that come to share an emotional space as the play progresses. Juan has a mischievous wit and a playful sense of humor. He has a dapper sense of style – sharp suit, burned orange striped tie and matching handkerchief –

which contrasts with David's more casual attire. David wants to do things by the book; Juan asks the questions that Rafael never posed. Juan is the mechanism that allows David to look into his own past, come to terms with his grief and make sense of his formal relationship with his father. The production sees each actor invade the other's stage space as a way of enacting the emotional shift experienced by both characters. At the end there is no part of the stage that Juan has not invaded. David weeps for the father he senses he never knew. But the play shows that when faced with information about his father that he finds difficult to stomach, he pulls away from Juan.

Dani Muriel presents the 32-year-old David as an infantilized adult; he still lives in the family home and his prudish attitude to Juan's revelations suggest that the progressive politics of post-Franco Spain may not be as forward-thinking as they appear. Melancholy hovers over the play's end as David reveals that he only began to know his father the day he died. Juan accepts the relationship with Rafael on its own terms. David struggles to do this. He wants to know everything and cannot accept that some things can simply never be known. It is, perhaps, for this reason that he will never be satisfied. At the play's end, he is as restless as he was when he first appeared on stage.

The play's ability to talk about dysfunctional families, domestic secrets, and the weight of the past has clearly resonated with audiences in Spain. Manver's role as Juan articulates the power of transformation, destabilizing established understandings of what constitutes "male" and "female." A song by Italian chanteuse Mina Mazzini evokes an era and a generation trapped within the ideology of the dictatorship whose encounters with the international came through the culture that reached Spain during this time. *The Wounds of the Wind* is about the need to look into the past, about the importance of confronting demons in the closet and of the importance of working with those that we might not immediately identify as our allies. The "them and us" polarized language of Spanish politics is clearly alluded to in the play. At a time of austerity too the empty stage—two simple chairs, four onstage lights operated by the cast and Félix Ramiro's simple, clean cut costumes – signal a theatre of economy that prioritizes clear storytelling and direct address. The production continues on tour until the end of 2015.

Federico García at the Grec Festival

Federico García Lorca lives on in theatre not merely through his plays but also through a persona that has been the subject of numerous stage and screen works. His ghostly presence haunts contemporary Spanish culture, a reminder of a life cut short at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. In *Federico García*, at the 2015 Grec Festival actor Pep Tosar collaborates with flamenco guitarist Jesús Guerrero, dancer Jesús Carmona and singer Alba Carmona to evoke scenes from the writer's life which are juxtaposed with extracts from his work; these are framed against the final train journey he took from Madrid to Granada. This journey is now taken by five Lorca scholars (Antonina Rodrigo, Joan de Loxa, Allen Josephs, Domingo Ródenas, and Mario Hernández), accompanied by his niece Vicenta Fernández-Montesinos García. All six reflect on the writer, albeit in overly appreciative terms; *Federico García* becomes hagiographic homage where the loss of Lorca rings out like a flamenco lament.

Alberto Conejero's La piedra oscura

There is a fine line between commemoration and hagiography and it is one that Alberto Conejero's *La piedra oscura* [The Dark Stone] also explores, again through the idea of mourning a loss. The discourse of absence conspires to render Lorca as pervasive a figure as the one conjured by Tosar. Only here the

loss is double because Lorca is also the name that cannot easily be uttered. *Federico García* is a play about reflecting on history, myth, and biography. This degree of reflection is simply not possible in 1937, in a Nationalist camp where dissent is closed down and debate most certainly is not encouraged.

Conejero's play takes place in a prison cell in Santander where Republican soldier Rafael Rodríguez Rapún is receiving treatment after having been wounded in action. Watching over Rafael is a young Nationalist soldier, Sebastián, about to turn eighteen and clearly anxious about the responsibilities he has been given. The audience first sees him sitting with his eyes closed, his arms out like a bird, shouting orders in a hysterical manner. He clutches his rifle to himself as if it were a safety blanket. He looks ill-at-ease, confused, and afraid.

Sebastián has been entrusted with guarding the injured Rafael and the play charts the men's relationship from initial suspicion to a tenderness that sees the traumatised Sebastián confess, at the end of the play, that he is anything but the "man of action" he is expected to enact; he's a child and not yet eighteen. The play witnesses the men's growing emotional intimacy—from positions of initial suspicion to warmth and tenderness, a space where difference can be recognised and respected. It is, like *The Wounds of the Wind*, a play with lessons for contemporary Spain where political discourse remains sharply divided with little inclination to find the shared intellectual spaces that dispense with the vocabularies of antagonism.

The set is simple and bare; a grey battered environment that speaks of poverty and abandonment. Two chairs line the back of the stage and a makeshift cot sits stage right where Daniel Grao's Rafael spends much of the play. Grao has matinee idol good looks with a rugged demeanour and enough stubble to suggest a young Spanish Indiana Jones. He's a dominant presence, even when still on the bed, his physical prowess testifying to a position in the Athletic Madrid team (although not the A team as he reminds Sebastián). Nacho Sánchez's Sebastián has a lean and hungry look. He sulks and paces, looking around him with an edgy sense of panic and mistrust. He wants nothing to do with Rafael, fearing contamination will mar his own shaky allegiances. At first, he reveals only fragments about his past—the desire to be a musician, his accidental recruitment to the Nationalist cause, confused political alliances. His voice is jumpy and tense, a veritable contrast to Rafael's confident tones and easy manner.

Rafael Rodríguez Rapún was an engineering student when he joined La Barraca, the student theatre troupe that Lorca co-directed between 1932 and 1935. Touring to the rural villages of Spain, it presented new productions of the Golden-Age canon that would assist with the Second Republic's literacy program. Rodríguez Rapún served as secretary of the company and while he never considered himself a homosexual, he and Lorca did embark on a two-year relationship that marked the writer profoundly. Rodríguez Rapún's death is the stuff of legend. Lorca's biographer Ian Gibson writes that María Teresa León, the wife of Lorca's contemporary Rafael Alberti, and director Cipriano de Rivas Cherif believed that Rodríguez Rapún wilfully sought his own demise on hearing of Lorca's assassination, joining the Republican cause and talking of wanting to die. Taking a course in artillery, he was given the rank of lieutenant and dispatched to northern Spain, commanding a battery close to Santander. He was seriously injured following an air attack where he seemingly refused to take preparatory measures by throwing himself to the ground. He died in the military hospital in Santander a year to the day of Lorca's own death (*Federico García Lorca*, Pantheon Books, pp. 472-73).

While Conejero consulted Rodríguez Rapún's family in researching the play, he doesn't stick to this version of the facts. Instead, he chooses to have the character of Rafael sentenced to die by firing squad. It

is Sebastián who is given the task of imparting the news to Raphael and it is to Sebastián that he confesses the lasting legacy of his love affair with Lorca. In turn, at the end of the play, Sebastián also has something of his own to confess to Rafael; he tells him his name, something particular and unique that he was unwilling to divulge at the play's commencement. He also confesses that he is unsure as whether he believes in God. His absolute convictions have been shaken by the encounter with Rafael.

The production has a claustrophobic intensity created by the single location in which the two men are contained. Rafael's language is expansive and open; Sebastián's more truncated and hesitant. I wonder if Sebastián would have known about Lorca. His prior education suggests not, but this is a minor quibble in a play that draws its power from the distilled quality of the conversations between the two men. Rafael's preoccupation with legacy is one that contemporary Spain should heed. He is keen to preserve Lorca's cultural inheritance for the future. He urges Sebastián to make contact with Modesto Higuera—another colleague from La Barraca—or the writer Rafael Martínez Nadal in the hope that Lorca's manuscripts can be saved. (Perhaps this is a swipe at the Lorca family who are not associated with the safeguarding of his artistic inheritance.)

Argentine director Pablo Messiez's direction is clean and clear. There is an economy of gesture, and a willingness to let the silences speak of the gulf between the two men and their positions. The outside world intrudes through the sound of the sea, shots and cries, shuffling sounds, slamming doors, and raised voices. The dirty checkered floor of Elisa Sanz's set suggests a chessboard where the men move carefully in order not to be caught out. Rafael's bandaged body and blood-stained clothes speak of his injuries and traumas. Sebastián's body is tightly wrapped in a uniform that accentuates his spindly frame and sense of ideological containment. Grao's Rafael is rooted to the spot as he speaks of leaving Lorca in Madrid; he weeps into his pillow when told of his impending death. The men's growing relationship is played out in their gestural language as much as their words. At first, when Rafael asks for water, Sebastián thrusts the water bottle out to him, evading contact. By the end of the play, he is assisting him to dress and they embrace before Rafael leaves the stage – the execution rendered through a bright light and shots that echo across the stage as Sebastián comes to terms with Rafael's physical absence. In *The Wounds of the Wind* Juan and David are not able to find the shared space that Sebastián and Rafael encounter at the play's end. As an audience, we are called to bear witness and to reflect on our own behavior, to think about cultures of discord and dissonance and to try and understand the position of the other. It is a production that demonstrates once more the ways in which culture is trying to carve out a space for discussion that the political sphere evades. And it testifies to the legacy of Lorca—both as an intellectual and as an icon whose presence continues to haunt contemporary Spain.

The production sold out when performed at Madrid's María Guerrero's theatre's Sala Princesa at the beginning of this year. It returned between 18 September and 19 October following three performances at London's Courtyard theatre in late June 2015.

Chekhov at the Latina

At Madrid's Latina Theatre, a series of early Chekhov pieces are imaginatively reworked into a lithe, metatheatrical production, *Atchúusss!*, set in the backstage area of a fading theatre. Carlos Alfaro, as director and designer, creates a space with scarlet curtains and late nineteenth-century furniture. Two-way decorated mirrors allow the audience access to the actors' dressing rooms. It is a fluid performance arena where props and furniture are wheeled on and off as necessary under the watchful eye of the two

characters who frame and contextualise the ensuing action: elderly actor Dimitri (Enric Benavent) and pianist-cum-prompt Nikita (Ernesto Alterio), a Cat-in-the-Hat like individual with boundless energy and scissor-like legs, who underscores the action with Mariano Marín's jolly melodies. The bottle in Dimitri's pocket and the actor's languid demeanour testifies to lean times where roles are perhaps not as prolific as they once were and employment comes through ushering rather than acting. "I love theatre," he observes, "but I hate the audience." Nikita's presence creates the mechanism through which Dimitri's glorious past roles can be reenacted through a series of amusing vignettes that provide acerbic comments on social mores and double standards.

The first of these, "The Seduction," involves a bourgeois married couple. The wife Irina (Malena Alterio) is pursued from afar by an aging lothario, Andrei, played by Benavent who seduces her from afar through her hapless husband, Niko (Fernando Tejero). The second, "The Governess," is another cruel tale where a meek governess, Julia (Malena Alterio) comes in to receive her wages from her boss (Adriana Ozores) who begins an elaborate game, deducting roubles from her monthly 40-rouble salary to the point where the amount shrinks to the paltry sum of 10 rubles. It is a virtuoso performance by Ozores whose energy and self-righteousness is simply accepted by the servile Julia. Ozores flutters and flaps while Alterio remains rooted to the spot. While the ending boasts an unexpected surprise, the vignette is a telling comment on exploitation and abuse that resonates all too clearly in present-day Spain.

There is a greater degree of clowning and farce in "The Bear," as a grieving widow, Popova (Ozores), tries to send away a farmer Grigori (Ernesto Alterio) who is owed money by her ex-husband. An elderly butler (Tejero) struggles to keep up with the ensuing action as Popova tries to rid herself of Grigori on numerous occasions, only to find that his refusal to go is now contaminated by a physical attraction for the widow in black. Doors slam open and shut, the wobbly butler struggles to cope with the warring couple, like a toy thrown between them in the kind of banter that resembles a 1940s screwball comedy.

"The Marriage Proposal" similarly negotiates a farcical register as leprechaun-like hypochondriac Sebastián (Tejero) calls on his animated neighbour Natalia (Malena Alterio) to make a proposal of marriage. He is a vain being with a large hat, a flustered manner, and a misplaced sense of style. Misunderstandings come to the fore and each takes up a series of entrenched positions that look to bring them to blows. The comic timing is impeccable as the couple bicker and bite in cartoonlike fashion, with Sebastián's turns offering a welcome respite to the madcap action, a moment to sit back and wait before the next verbal onslaught.



A bank manager (Ernesto Alterio) and his secretary (Fernando Tejero) are hounded by an elderly woman (Adriana Ozores) in *Atchúusss!!!* at Madrid's La Latina theatre. Photo credit: Javier Naval.

The final piece, "A Helpless Creature" continues the vaudeville routine as an elderly woman (Ozores) and her niece (Alterio), pleading penury, visit a bank manager (Ernesto Alterio) in search of a one-off payment. Refusing to be put off by his earnest secretary (Tejero), they stage a fuss (the niece echoing her aunt's plaintive cries) until he gives in due to sheer exhaustion. It's another virtuoso piece with vocal crescendos that reworks the genre of the picaresque—the aunt is a fitting heir to *Celestina*, able to use her wiles and guile to get what she wants. The plaintive begging is a performance in itself—a melodrama of orchestrated means—incorporating elements of the Yiddish theatre, as Marcos Ordóñez notes in his review of the performance (*El País*, 26 June 2015). But it is also a tale that could have been authored by Quevedo or Valle-Inclán. The tone of the grotesque is also borne out in María Araujo's costumes, with their cartoonish dimensions—the cut may hark back to the late nineteenth century but the colors are distended to the point where they stretch the registers of naturalism. The piece has a circular quality. At the end, Dimitri returns to address the audience and close the performance. He is a more cheerful figure, more animated and dynamic. He has been restored by the power of theatre and in urging the audience to celebrate each hour of life, he recognises the importance of culture as a space that invigorates and animates, where laughter is generated and emotions are stirred. It's a timely reminder of the solidarity that theatre is capable of generating. The full house on a hot Madrid evening responded with cheering and

prolonged clapping to a virtuoso ensemble piece where individual energies are directed to the collective cause.

La Re-sentida's *La imaginación del futuro*

Argentine theatre has had a regular presence at Barcelona's Grec Festival for many years. Now it is the Chileans who are coming, building on the Argentine tradition for acerbic political theatre that tears through niceties and exposes the power dynamics that govern social behaviour. La Re-sentida is a young Chilean company established in 2008 that promotes a poetic theatre unafraid to grapple with wider political issues that continue to dominate Chilean society. *La imaginación del futuro* [Imagination of the Future] imagines a scenario inside Salvador Allende's cabinet room, immediately prior to Pinochet's coup. Here the President does not commit suicide but is rather packaged by his cabinet into a commodity that can be sold to the people. This Allende is far from the idealised hero that stares back at the viewer in black and white portraits of the time, but is instead a narcoleptic President whose coterie of ministers and advisors—all dressed in black—swarm around him trying to package his message into a more "voter friendly" format that will keep the police, judiciary, and military happy.

The production begins with the recording of Pinochet's now legendary 11 September radio message to the Chilean people; the stop-start formula allows the ministers to try to manipulate his socialism into a neo-liberalism that has no boundaries. While Allende may identify himself as a socialist, his ministers are cautious; they want to ensure that Chile promotes US interests at all times. He insists, however, on speaking to the US President, refusing to kowtow to him, and ends the conversation with a barrage of expletives to the horror of his ministers. These bouts of non-conformity, however, are few and far between. Increasingly confused, frightened and indecisive, he is unable to confront the coterie of advisors who huddle around him, allowing them to clamp down on practices that promote social equality. This Allende is a rather ineffectual figure at the mercy of the warring PR factions. He is a less than attractive orator and appears weak and infirm. It's a far cry from the nostalgic hues through which Allende is often presented.

Actor Rodolfo Pulgar—who survived torture during the Pinochet regime—is expertly cast as the bumbling Allende. But while Allende's 1973 broadcast is the starting point for the piece, *Imagination of the Future* is about the present and the climate of social discontent evidenced in the four years of mass youth demonstrations and protests demanding changes to higher education and enhanced rights for women and indigenous communities. Indeed, anachronisms abound—Allende makes a reference to Hannah Montana and the PR gurus are dressed in contemporary attire. The play's blending of myth, history, and fiction with the tools of representation has a visceral effect.

Imagination of the Future is not verbatim theatre but is rather an imaginative take on how Allende might have been branded by the new generation of communication experts that dominate contemporary politics. At one moment he is talking too fast, at another not fast enough. The backdrop is too red, the suit too formal. Allende is dressed up like a doll—a suit one moment, a track suit the next—made up, touched up and moved like a puppet. He is pushed and pulled in different directions by those who are supposedly there to support him. Neo-liberalism rages in the cabinet as the ministers down brand fizzy drinks—consumption is one of the production's key motifs—and run around promoting different idealistic backdrops for the President. The athletic performances of the cast, spinning around the stage like out of control toys, convert this into a piece of *danztheatre*. As the action proceeds, the stage opens up beyond

the cabinet office. The different scenarios see the PR gurus hit the streets to probe some of liberalism and neo-liberalism's more frightening facets. A twelve-year-old boy, Roberto, is used mercilessly to elicit funds. Twenty euros from each audience member will offer him the education he needs. When the audience makes no effort to hand over the money, one of the cast assaults an audience member, removing her clothes in anger in the hope that she will shame him into confronting why it is easier to generate funds for pornography than humanitarian aid. Roberto, used to entice pity and shame on his first appearance, is later shot in the street. Each appearance sees him used as an object by different factions to further their cause.

The aggressive performance style—at times the visceral theatre of Rodrigo García appears as a potent referent—lends the piece a confrontational tone. As an audience, we are made to feel uncomfortable about the abuses enacted on stage, from cruelty towards children to the consumption of cocaine in the inner circles of government. *Imagination of the Future* is a play about the ways in which humanity is increasingly perceived as a target or statistic. When politics becomes about control and commercial clout, the humanity and idealism of the enterprise is lost. The plastic mannequins of idealized children wheeled out to create the "perfect image" are a far cry from the living, breathing bodies that charge around the stage. The one-size-fits-all approach, promoted by the synchronized dances of the bathing beauties in technicolor swimsuits offers little disparity or dissent. Director Marco Layera reminds the audience that democracy is a space for confronting uncomfortable realities; we leave the auditorium exhausted by the Manichean chaos and human casualties left by these politicians in their wake.



Josep Maria Pou in the title role of Sócrates discussing his fate with Carles Canut's Crito. *Juicio y muerte de un ciudadano* (*Socrates. Trial and Death of a Citizen*) directed by Mario Gas. Photo credit: Jero Morales/Festival de Mérida.

The difficulties of confronting the legacy of a dictatorships is all too present in *Imagination of the Future* where the failure of the Chilean Left to deal with the infrastructure of the Pinochet years is shown to have consequences for the present. In *Socrates. Juicio y muerte de un ciudadano* [Socrates. Trial and Death of a Citizen] the predicament of another citizen, the Greek philosopher Socrates, is used to probe wider concerns about how democracy functions that are all too resonant in contemporary Spain. The play, crafted by Mario Gas and Alberto Iglesias from the writings of Plato, Xenophon, Aristophanes, and

Diogenes Laertius, uses Socrates' trial and subsequent death (poisoned with hemlock) in 399BC to ask a series of questions about what it means to participate in a democracy. Gas writes, appropriating Jan Kott's famous phrase, of framing Socrates as "our contemporary" and the production is tellingly dedicated to the Greek populace and their government. The casting of Josep Maria Pou, one of Spain's most respected actors who has spoken out against divisive political posturing, as Socrates also allows for a particular resonance within Spain. The polarised political discourse of twenty-first century Spain finds an echo in the "them and us" vocabulary through which Socrates' opponents function. The stage area—marked out by benches that suggest both a theatrical venue and a parliament—brings the audience into the discussion from the opening. Paco Azorín's empty stage with raked bench-seating provides the sense of a participatory space; the seven actors remain on stage throughout, moving across the seating as both spectators to and participants in the action. The audience members are addressed as "citizens" and are invited to participate in the debates articulated on stage. They are urged to put their phones to one side and refrain from taking photos; our attention is sought and the effect is like that of sitting around a campfire listening to a story that intrigues and alarms.

The audience first sees Pou's Socrates rolling up his sleeves as if preparing for a hard day's work. He introduces himself to the audience in veritable Brechtian manner and joins the other six actors positioned at the back of the stage. He is one of them, part of a community whose governing principles he engages with and confronts. There is no attempt to opt for naturalism here but neither is there for pontification. Rather compact storytelling punctuated by telling commentaries indicate why the committed, learned, outspoken, fearless Socrates had to be silenced. There are also no narrative surprises—the audience is told that Socrates will be poisoned by one of the chorus members. Pou's down to earth philosopher is honest about what he knows and doesn't know: "I only know that I know nothing but I know something." Socrates' entire discourse is based on questioning and probing, on refusing to accept givens and aspiring to more just society. By better knowing yourself you can better help others. Socrates' dialectics and celebration of logical argument are enacted through the dialectic tone of a production determined to put over different viewpoints.

Those who know everything are the so-called democrats perverting democracy. The citizens who conspire to have him tried resemble the plotters in *Julius Caesar*. Socrates observes them from the onstage benches. Two of the citizens defend his thinking; two others oppose him. The stage mutates into a court where the audience are addressed as fellow jurors and the chorus move in and out of testimonial roles: some for, others against. He is found guilty of corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens by a majority of sixty and is sentenced to death. He refuses to provide a viable alternative sentence, as with going into exile, and asks instead to be celebrated for his contribution to knowledge. Pou's Socrates stands tall center stage throughout.

The production's stand-out scene sees Socrates visited by Carles Canut's Crito who begs him to go into exile with the funds of wealthy supporters who are willing to assist him to escape. Socrates quietly refuses. The men sit side by side, conversing and confiding. It is a brilliant enactment of Socrates own ideas on friendship. It is also an encounter that recalls their dialogue as Lear and Gloucester in Bieito's *King Lear*; unadorned, simple and devastating in its scenic efficacy. It is, however, not just the stubbornness of Lear that comes to mind here. There is something of Stockman's obduracy in Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*—another play that has been playing to stand out audiences in Miguel del Arco's 2014 production.

Gas's production stresses a culture of defiance that links Socrates, through Pou's words, to a wider rota of defiant heroes that includes Galileo and *The Crucible's* John Proctor: "I am born every day, I live across all eras and will never die." Pou avoids the rhetoric of Marsillach's characterisation of the role in 1972. He rubs his head, shrugs, and converses in easy tones. He looks intently at his accusers, his disciples and the audience. There is a commitment in the level of engagement that remains in the voiceover that comes towards the end of the play as he reflects on his qualities and flaws. The voiceover is accompanied by a washing of his arms on stage; a cleansing of body and mind, a sharing of inner thoughts with the audience. There is not a single wasted gesture; rather an economy of corporal and verbal language. Occasionally, his large hands weave around his words like butterflies, something delicate rather than ornate. He has an easy conversational tone that contrasts with the empty rhetoric of Pep Molina's accuser Meletus. Molina's register is too inflated in my view; his Meletus too dastardly and too obviously the "bad guy" to be entirely credible. At times I wondered if he was acting in another production. Borja Espinosa gives a far more convincing performance as the second of the three accusers Anytus. Guillem Motos and Ramon Pujol have a credible complicity as his two loyal disciples and their retelling of his final moments has a breathtaking simplicity.

I was not convinced that Xanthippe's monologue to the audience, giving her point of view of her husband's position, is necessary. Amparo Pamplona creates a down-to-earth housewife carrying baskets home that disrupts the compressed progress of the trial, spilling out into the stalls. The focus on Socrates' public persona does not make the scene necessary or entirely relevant to the action. Her overly fussy orange dress and blue apron invades the visual purity of the rest of the production. Antonio Belart's costumes are simply cut white linen trousers and shirts with a beige cloak-cum-toga. There is something monastic about them. The actors are barefoot, their feet touching the ground, as grounded indeed as the play itself.

The production was to become the biggest hit of the Grec Festival, reaching over 6,300 spectators during its run at the Romea. Leaving the theatre I was struck by the level of animated discussion conducted by the audience: a need to engage with the theme of democracy and how it applies to contemporary Spain. *Socrates, Trial and Death of a Citizen* is a production with an urgency that engages with what it means to be a citizen and how participatory agency works. The producers responded to the clamor for tickets with a further run at the Romea from 24 September to 18 October, with dates planned for Madrid and a tour across Spain in 2016 to follow.

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