

Corruption, capitalism, class, memory and the staging of difficult pasts: Barcelona theatre and the summer of 2018



In the week in which Spanish Prime Minister's Mariano Rajoy's implication in the promotion of a culture of political corruption and cronyism saw his Popular Party government fall from government with a new coalition headed by the Socialist Party's Pedro Sánchez sworn in on 1 June, it's not perhaps surprising that the theatrics of the Spanish parliament should provide a compelling 24-hour live performance. Rajoy refused to enter the Congress to hear the no confidence vote against him and his party, a week after the party's former Treasurer Luis Bárcenas was found guilty of money laundering and imprisoned, for 33 years with a fine of €44million. Bárcenas is only one of a group and beneficiaries of the Gürtel scandal which saw businessman Fernando Correa run a corruption racket bribing Popular Party politicians between 1999 and 2006 to secure lucrative construction, public works and high profile events contracts. In the week in which the PSOE came together with Podemos, the Basque Nationalist PNV party, and two Catalan pro-independence parties to bring down Rajoy's government, I was struck by the number of theatre productions that were openly engaging with both a culture of disillusion and issues of accountability, capitalism's excesses, the boundaries between entrepreneurialism and criminality and the ways in which a responsible democracy considers its ethical responsibilities.

Spain's culture of austerity has created an enterprising generation of theatremakers who have crafted an aesthetic working across small-scale empty spaces. These include La Caldrica whose hit *Fairfly*, garnered a range of awards when first produced at Teatre Tantarantana in March 2017. Now enjoying a month-long run (17 May to 17 June) at the Villaroel, Joan Yago's deft four-hander, in a sharp, pacy production by

Israel Solà, sees a group of four employees facing redundancy from a company that produces baby food, hit on the idea of launching their own start up that promotes a different ethos to that of the corporate world. Their vision will promote the organic, ethical values and a respect for nature. They hit on the idea of using fly lava as the basis of a nutritional range for babies and toddlers, food that will be tasty, healthy and nourishing. The highly strung Santi (Aitor Galisteo-Rocher) his evangelical partner Marta (Vanessa Segura), the measured, bubbly Irene (Queralt Casasayas) and her partner Pere (Xavi Francés) who handles the recipes spend much of the play gathered around a round white table – the staging’s central scenographic element – sat on four pea green chairs that rest on a tasteful beige rug. The table is both the location of their brainstorming – as ideas and business plans fly between them – and the site over which they do battle as the play progresses. Driven by a capitalist push, the sparks fly as they euphorically put together both the marketing and the product – the latter too often driven by the former. The ‘performance’ of a professional corporate ethos leads to an amusing phone call with a potential investor where Santi wants to play the executive who is too busy to take the call. The quartet are seen to invent a plan of action as they go along. Speed dating fairs lead to a catch phrase – *alimentación infantil para cambiar el mundo* (children’s food to change the world) – a jingle and a promotional campaign where seeks to ensure *Fairfly* stands out in a congested market.



Struggling to keep the company together: Irene (Queralt Casas) confronts her colleagues Santi (Aitor Galisteo-Rocher), Pere (Xavi Francés) and Marta (Vanessa Segura) in *Fairfly*. Photo: Anna Fàbrega, courtesy of Focus.

As the initial euphoria of the first year gives way to some lack lustre figures, Marta seeks to encourage new working relationships with the supermarket chains and corporate distributors that the four had initially sought to distance themselves from. Idealism is replaced by frustration, and the rush of the early cash sees Marta, Santi and Pere distance themselves from Irene who wants to ensure that principles are not all sacrificed in favour of corporate greed but even Irene is not averse to using underhand tactics if they assist with promoting her interests.

There's a lithe quality to the writing which is sharp, funny and dynamic. Yago demonstrates a good ear for the language of advertising and the quartet absorb a culture where slick slogans count for more than a worthy product. Santi samples the formula of fly lava concocted by Pere and his face betrays an initial disgust that gives way to pleasure when he realises that they are on to a possible winner. The quick-fire dialogue is matched by a nimble, energetic production where the foursome move with a matching sense of purpose. The passing of time is suggested by intersecting scenes where Marta's pregnancy is announced, progresses and then gives way to an unseen baby (then toddler) who remains an off-stage presence. The group's dynamism gives way to a tiredness as the strains in the working relationship spill over into the personal sphere. Irene resents that Pere is in the lab, Santi has to resort to medication to manage his moods and Marta appears permanently frazzled. When an outbreak of gastroenteritis which appears to result from insecticides puts further pressure on the brand, the table becomes a site of antagonistic verbal warfare.

The staging – in the round – reinforces the circularity of the action: the same ideas (around successful commerce) returned to; the frenzied behaviour of the characters who speed up and slow down as if they are wound up clockwork toys; the same positions around the table; the same clichés that are churned out. The ending returns to the opening: the characters in pursuit of a dream where acquisition is all. Albert Pascual's set and lighting keeps the action focused on the central table. Audience and cast stare at each other in a circle of complicity. There is something of Jordi Galcerán's comic satires in Yago's compact writing and while the characters never really develop, the premise of the play doesn't really require this. The cast's high energy sweeps the production nicely along. Aitor Galisteo-Rocher's nervy Santi, Vanessa Segura's controlling Marta, Queralt Casasayas' determined Irene and Xavi Francés's 'just going it along with it' Pere together provide a vision of a twenty-something generation who have convinced themselves that changing the world is all about a culture of individual attainment which trumps all over values.

Seven years back, Iván Morales's *Sé de un lugar (I Know of a Place)*, (See *WES*, vol. 24 no. 1 (Spring 2012, pp 66-7) was a hit at La Seca, a former factory in the fashionable Born district. He's now back at Poble Nou's Sala Beckett – Barcelona's key venue for new writing - with a new play, *Esmorza amb mi (Have Breakfast with Me)*, that brings two couples experiencing emotional struggles into a series of encounters where their sense of self is severely tested. The audience first see Sergi (Xavi Sáez) at work, as a physiotherapist tending to Natàlia (Anna Alarcón), a filmmaker working as a barmaid with a six-year old son. He is treating her following a nasty accident where she was knocked off her bike by a car. Unable to move her legs when we first see her, Sergi is undertaking intense physio to assist her on the road to recovery. Confucius helps him find a sense of peace – with a set of answers to help him hide a past that he is seeking to put behind him. He lives with Carlota (Mimi Riera), a sculptor turned singer who has her own issues around commitment, and the relationship as he openly confesses to Natàlia is not going as smoothly as he would wish. A spirit of complicity (rather than professional etiquette) prevails between them and sets up the beginnings of a friendship that continues post-treatment. Carlota and Salva

(Andrés Herrera), a musician who enjoyed a degree of notoriety on the independent music scene and now earns a living writing jingles for advertising campaigns, watch the action from the audience, seated in a raked configuration that recalls a nineteenth-century anatomy theatre. The play is very much a dissection of these two intersecting relationships with each placed under the scalpel in painful close-up.



Anna Alarcón (Natàlia) and Andrés Herrera (Salva) in Iván Morales' *Esmorza amb mi* (*Have Breakfast with me*) at the Sala Beckett. Photo: Ona Millà, courtesy of the Sala Beckett.

Salva joins Natàlia for Scene Two, displacing Sergi from Marc Salicrú's set which is dominated by an industrial table that can be lowered into a bed. And it is here that Salva confesses a deep attraction to

Natàlia. They may only have had five dates but he is smitten and he admits it openly. She, however, is out at sea, trying to come to terms with her accident and the resulting lack of mobility that leaves her asking a series of questions about her life, her commitments and her future. Salva measures his life against Burt Bacharach songs, a reference system that Natàlia is unable to identify with. While Sergi appears to tip toe with precision and a careful attention to detail, Salva lunges forward with broad, thudding steps accentuated by his heavy boots. The men's discussions about Burt Bacharach songs are the terrain for trying to talk about things that they can't articulate openly. Their scene in a bar is in many ways the production's high point.

Natàlia decides to pick up her work as a filmmaker, returning to a documentary on indifference in love that the pregnant Carlota becomes part of. Staged in a traverse that asks the audience to confront each other and with the actors emerging from the audience and playing from the raked seating, this is a production where nothing is hidden.

Natàlia's mobility, at first severely impaired, with Herrera and Sáez lifting her from the bed to the wheelchair, improves as the play progresses. She is handed crutches and begins to walk at first unaided and then in the final scene on her own two feet.

This is in many ways a play about finding one's way. Its seven scenes show the characters trying to make sense of emotions they can't quite articulate or control. Carlota loves Sergi but she has secrets – divulged to Natàlia – including a lover that Sergi is aware of. Natàlia found herself unable to work as a filmmaker; bar work offered her an alternative that wouldn't require the same amount of emotional investment. Salva wants a countercultural lifestyle but he can't escape professional success with a Midas touch that eludes Natàlia. Iván Morales's direction is precise and focused. Gestures are clean and economical. Characters watch each other with a predatory attention. They dance around each other with words, only able to really to speak about the things that matter with those they know least. Audience complicity is built into the very fabric of the piece. The characters move among us, share revelations while they are sat with us. They watch each other closely and carefully. And we, the audience, are witnesses to this world of raw emotions where the characters seesaw between evasion and disclosure as they intersect in a series of encounters. For each the past remains something that they can never quite shake off and while some things become clear, others remain a mystery to the production's very end.

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (here presented as *La importància de ser Frank*) in David Selvas's snappy, hugely entertaining production passes from a sell out six-week run at the Teatre Nacional de Catalonia for a further month-long run at the Teatre Poliorama. It is one of the hits of the season. Like *La Cubana's Gente bien* (*European Stages*, Vol 9, 2017, <http://europeanstages.org/2017/04/26/re-framing-the-classics-la-cubana-reinvent-rusinol-and-the-lliure-revisit-beaumarchais/>), this becomes a piece about the hypocritical social mores of the Catalan bourgeoisie and the importance of keeping up appearances whatever the cost. The creative team have spoken of *La La Land* and the work of Wes Anderson as influences on the look of the production but the colourful aesthetic of Almódovar's *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* is also present in José Novoa's scenography and Maria Armengol's swinging sixties costumes, creating something of a technicolour universe for this screwball comedy of manners. There's a contemporary feel to the production – although not a mobile phone in sight – but the anachronistic mix of costumes – from the twenties to the sixties – suggest a gloriously artificial pastiche.

Algernon ‘Algy’ Moncrieff’s apartment has a fashionable minimalism, with flashes of campness both in the décor (as with the deer with flashing lights on their antlers) and the home help (Norbert Martínez’s prim and proper butler, Lane). David Verdaguer’s Algy is a dapper man about town replete with swish dressing gown, cravat and smart waistcoat. He steps out with confidence, his long scissor-like legs giving him an impulsive sense of purpose. Miki Esparbé’s John/Frank Worthing could be his double – sporting the same tousled hair cut and beard – only the clothes are a little less emphatic in colour and cut. This is a man who doesn’t quite have Algy’s confidence or presence. John knows he has an uphill battle trying to persuade Lady Bracknell (Laura Conejero), the snobbish mother of his love interest Gwendolyn (Paula Malia), that a gentleman found as a baby in a suitcase at Victoria station is fit to marry her daughter. As Algy gets brighter with his colours, John gets darker with his suits and more conservative with his cuts as if wanting to ‘fit in’ more easily.

Play runs through Wilde’s piece: Algernon has created an imaginary friend Bunbury who he visits in the country whenever he wants to evade an engagement in town, Jack has invented a roguish brother Frank who he escapes to London to see. Here play is evident in the language (Cristina Genebat’s sparkling translation is nimble and agile), in the frenzied comings and goings and in the musical numbers. Here the duo play instruments – a keyboard features in Algy’s apartment – breaking into song and dance at heightened emotional moments when prose doesn’t quite suffice.

The complicity and compatibility between Paula Jorner’s Cecily – Jorner is also responsible for the original songs that feature in the production – and Malia’s Gwendolen – is evidenced as much through the coordinating colours of their outfits as through music and dance. John/Frank’s flirtatious exchanges with Gwendolen on the sofa are choreographed with expert precision, the couple popping up and down like Jack in the boxes. Cecily is more gregarious and feisty, her mustard box dress, pop socks and bob giving her something of the look of a brunette Twiggy. Armed with a guitar, she has a response to Algy’s wit in song as well as speech. The songs move from indie ballads to full blown pop numbers. And the verbal duet with Gwendolen over which of the two has a right to Frank is handled at breathtaking speed.

The plants that litter Manor House in Acts Two and Three serve also aids for disguise and camouflage. This is a veritable hothouse with emotions charged and tempers quick to explode. The comings and goings of Algy, John, Cecily and Gwendolyn in Acts Two and Three have much of a farce in their rhythm. Doors lead out to other rooms and to the garden beyond the expansive glass doors at the back of the stage. Laura Conejero provides a dynamic Lady Bracknell with a sense of gravitas that has the quartet of younger characters turning to flattery or silence as a means of coping with her reprimands. We first see her in an elegant emerald-green tight-fitting fifties-cut suit. It’s a costume choice that places her as an earlier generation to her nephew and daughter. It suggests she comes from a different era. Her body language too is more contained than that of the sprawling quartet of lovers who roll and run across the stage and sprawl across the sofa. The sombre skyblue wool suit Lady Bracknell spots in Act Three with formal black gloves further sets her apart from the more playful colours of the younger characters. She stands in stark contrast also to Mia Esteve’s timid Miss Prism, who melds into the background with her white shirt and white frizzy hair. Norbert Martínez, doubling up also as Reverend Chasuble, is also a man whose beige and light brown attire echoes his beige, pale character. The pair’s coming together offers a colour combination as perfectly matched as that of Gwendolen and John/Frank and Algy and Cecily.

Seeing the production on a warm afternoon with an audience of teenagers from local schools was a veritable treat. The young audience roared with laughter for much of the production and greeted the end –

with green confetti falling to announce the forthcoming nuptials of the three pairings -- with loud applause. David Selvas's production is the wittiest, smartest production of the play I've seen in years, shaking off the Victorian dust to render it a blisteringly contemporary play about the codes of etiquette that govern lives and loves.

The Greeks have been very present in the Barcelona theatre scene this year. At the Teatre Lliure, Lluís Pasqual's *Medea* with Emma Vilarasau drew on both Euripides and Seneca in its lean retelling of the myth. Adapted by dramatist Alberto Conejero – who has completed Lorca's unfinished *Play Without a Title* –, the one-hour production, evolving on a bleak, desert-like terrain designed by Alejandro Andújar, dispensed with the chorus. It was the audience that Pasqual put into this role, expected to formulate its own views on the ensuing action. Vilarasau's angry protagonist, spitting out words like venom, provided a portrait of irrationality. She could not be reasoned with, she would not listen. At a time when Catalan politics appears especially polarized, the reading couldn't be more timely.

At the Romea, Alberto Conejero has also provided the version for Carme Portaceli's *The Trojan Women*, set in a desolate Aleppo with Aitana Sánchez-Gijón as an angry Hecuba. The impassioned production inscribes the histories of women left behind by war – a heartfelt cry for justice articulated by the vulnerable who often serve as conflict's hidden victims.

Portaceli's staging, which opened at Mérida the previous summer, was followed by Oriol Broggi's *Oedipus* with Julio Manrique in the title role. Broggi, collaborating with Roger Orra on the set, provided an abstracted pastoral landscape of olive branches, tall bales of hay and rural furniture. Alongside the Greek music that sounded out as the production commenced, this denoted an idealized Mediterranean. Loose-fitting tunics in a range of neutral shades – Oedipus is differentiated in darker grey and black trousers and shirt – further accentuate the 'timeless' atemporal setting.

The set spills over into the auditorium. The audience becomes part of the world of the play with Miquel Gelabert's Teiresius walking through the auditorium to reach the stage. There is a stillness to the production – a contrast to the fury of *Medea* – that feels overly stilted. The focus is very much on Julio Manrique's Oedipus and his journey to discover who he is. He has moments of rash anger – as when he throws down Teiresius's staff. The other characters – Marc Rius's Creon, Mercè Pons' Jocasta, Ramon Vila's Messenger, Carles Martínez's Chorus, Clara de Ramon's Antigone -- keep their distance and watch him cautiously, afraid of what he might do. Manrique crafts a jittery, quick moving Oedipus. He is the only character with any sense of urgency. The rest of the cast move almost as if in slow motion. Only towards the moment of Oedipus' realization does Pons' Jocasta come into her own, looking down in panic and horror to face her husband-son as he insists on forging ahead with the decision to discover the truth. It's the production's central moment, raising the stakes to a moment of panic and terror.



Julio Manrique's *Oedipus* centre stage with Antigone (Clara de Ramon) and Jocasta (Mercè Pons) in Oriol Broggi's production at the Teatre Romea. Photo: David Ruano, courtesy of Focus.

Jeroni Rubió Rondon's adaptation also features fragments of Wajdi Mouawad's writings on Oedipus and *Oedipus at Colonus* (Broggi staged a fine production of Mouawad's *Scorched* in Barcelona a number of years back; see *European Stages*, vol, 1, 2014, <http://europeanstages.org/2014/02/26/barcelona-making-theatre-at-a-time-of-crisis/?singlepage=1>), but the voiceover commentaries on the myth that open and close the production feel rather leaden. An ill-judged intrusion – the actors standing behind the bales of hay to move them across the set – appeared almost comical. The poetry of the spoken word felt flattened by a production where the storytelling felt comfortable rather than urgent.

The issue of historical memory has not been a comfortable one for Spain which has struggled to come to terms with the legacy of a bloody Civil War whose scars remain all too evident 80 plus years on. 100,000 bodies are thought to still lie in the mass graves across the length and breadth of the nation and providing a nuanced history of the War and its aftermath has not been easy for a nation where Francisco Franco is still lauded as the nation's saviour by a significant proportion of the population. *In Memoriam: la quinta del biberó* (*In Memoriam: The Baby Bottle Brigade*) is a piece of testimonial theatre, first seen in September 2016 at Girona's Temporada Alta festival and now returning to the Lliure for a month (7-30 June), following an earlier run from 14 October to 13 November 2017. Written, directed and designed by Lluís Pasqual, it centers on a group of Catalan combatants recruited in April 1938 to form part of a brigade to fight in the Battle of the Ebro. Nicknamed the baby bottle brigade by the Minister of Health,

Federica Montseny because they looked in her words as if ‘they were still drinking out of a baby’s bottle’, these 32,000 teenagers, born in 1920 or 1921, were drafted to form part of the campaign to fight on the Aragón front. Less than 10% of those recruited made it back home – Pasqual’s uncle Luis was one of those who was killed -- and it is their testimonies, collected from interviews and diary entries from survivors, and letters and notebooks from those who died at the Front, that make up the narrative of *In Memoriam*.



Signalling the process of composition: the actors with their research sources at the opening of Lluís Pasqual’s *In Memoriam*. Photo: Ros Ribas, courtesy of the Teatre Lliure.

In Memoriam is structured as a four-act play – from inscription to the battle’s end with the aftermath articulated in the third person by the actors. A giant screen stage projects the names of those who formed part of the baby bottle brigade. Six actors dressed in contemporary dress, four musicians and a singer stand at the back of the stage. The actors move forward and sit at a long metallic table that takes up the width of the stage. They have books in front of them that they are looking through. They begin to speak. They have their own names (Quim Àvila, Eduardo Lloveras, Enric Auguer, Lluís Marqués, Joan Solé, Joan Amargos) but begin to speak as others. These ‘others’ are not characters per se, rather embodiments of the different testimonies that come together to create the fabric of *In Memoriam* and each persona is differentiated – accents testifying to their diverse geographical backgrounds, ideals and personalities (from the joker to the stoic). The actors make the stories their own, shedding their own clothes and then emerging in the basic uniforms of the combatants. As the Battle of the Ebro commences, and the excessive summer heat saps their energies, much of their scrawny uniform is further discarded. In the cold winter temperatures as the Ebro is lost, they shiver in the cold winter temperatures with little

protection. As the rhetoric deployed by politicians on both sides of the conflict is stripped away, so are the men's layers of clothing. As they move to the production's end, they look like *King Lear*'s Poor Tom: skeletal and malnourished. *In Memoriam* is documentary theatre realized across the bodies of the actors; voice is given to those who were not previously able to speak about their experiences. 'Sobre ellos (Over them), Pasqual told me, 'cayó el más absoluto silencio' (fell the most absolute silence).



Dealing with the horrors of the trenches in the Battle of the Ebro: Lluís Pasqual's *In Memoriam*. Photo: Ros Ribas, courtesy of the Teatre Lliure.

The actors' process of preparation is signaled to the audience. They step into role in the opening scene. The introductions are short and to the point. Behind them posters serve to recruit to the Republican cause. Throughout, the actors are framed by images of the conflict – young men marching to war, trucks transporting new draftees, the arid landscape of the Ebro, soldiers with rifles raised about to fire, austere trenches. The screened images are both a backdrop to the action, a scenography that serves to remind the audience of the wider histories into which these men's stories fall, and an iconography that shapes how both actors and audiences see the Civil War. The men look small in comparison to the giant images on the screen behind them. They have to deal with the weight of the histories captured in these frozen images. They have to tell their stories as a way of offering narratives that both converge and differ. Bodies and stories are thus layered in ways that recognize the complex relationship between memory, history and representation.

Quim speaks sadly of having been forced by his father, who believed ‘the Republic was worth more than my own life’, to sign up. The law may have said that you needed to be eighteen to be conscripted but Quim was three months short of his seventeenth birthday. ‘It was an illegal act’ he observes. The pragmatic, upbeat Lloveras speaks of turning up at the Town Hall building, supplies were scant. All he was given during the eight months he formed part of the Republican Army was a pair of espadrilles: everything else came from home or the bodies of those who who perished on the battlefield. Being 17 then is like being 12 now: ‘we didn’t know anything about the world. Enric chooses to sign up, keen to get to the front until a sergeant deflates his enthusiasm: ‘Don’t be in a hurry to die’. The discreet Lluís has ideals and wants to write – his father gives him a small notebook and a pen – but he is realistic about his chances of survival. Joan Solé remembers their mothers following them in the rain as they all talked enthusiastically about killing fascists, not expecting to end up in the trenches. Joan Amargos cuts through the rhetoric of Dolores Ibárruri, the Communist Party orator known as La Pasionaria (The Passionflower): to her battlecry that ‘it is better to die on your feet than live on your knees’, he replies that he prefers ‘to live on his knees because there’s still then the hope that things might change’.

On the screen the word Incorporation is projected; it points to the process of narrating the men’s recruitment into the Republican forces, a veritable baptism of fire. A lieutenant who warns the conscripts that they are going to the slaughterhouse is killed. Discipline is maintained through intimidation: step out of line and you are shot. Lloveras notes that with ‘some bullets, espadrilles and a cap’ you are part of the Republican Army. Training is minimal. Lluís watched a new volunteer blow himself up because he didn’t know how to use a hand grenade. The weapons are so old that rifles sometimes explode in a soldier’s face. As Enric notes: of the six in his first squadron, only Lloveras and he remain.

The opening has set up the process of storytelling – the men sitting and sharing their experiences with an audience. Only when *The Wait* (effectively Act Two) begins do the men stand up and begin moving into role. Their uniforms are makeshift and basic, their footwear flimsy. They continue – narratives interspersed with action. We hear that a soldier who deserts in fear of being sent to the Ebro is brought back to the squadron by his parents. He is shot the following day. We witness the sense of excitement at the men’s two-hour leave in Tortosa; fireworks light up the stage as they dance to a *pasodoble* accompanied by the musicians. Quim gives the musicians a piece by Monteverdi but it’s soon replaced by the ‘Anthem of Riego’ and ‘The Internationale’ to which the men sing along. At this point, they remain optimistic about the Republicans’ chances of victory.

Projected image of soldiers writing letters home feature as the men read and write letters to and from their loved ones. Quim speaks in the third person about a letter that his family still have, dated 23 July, two days before arriving at the Ebro. It’s a letter that acknowledges the censoring of mail. The move to the Ebro is accompanied by fragments of Purcell’s *King Arthur* - a work about civil conflict that also merges the spoken word and song. The men walk across the metallic table now raised to form a tightrope, an indication of the precarious journey ahead. They sing as a collective, with newsreel footage behind them narrating the progress of the eleven divisions of the Republican Army on the Ebro battlefield. The uplifting tone of the Republican newsreel, with no mention of losses, however sits in stark contrast to the stories narrated by the men in the production’s third act, *Resisting*.

The metallic frame now falls to create a trench in which the teenage soldiers, muddy and dirty, stand and sit like pop up dolls. The rocky landscape projected behind them looks bleak and inhospitable. They have an abundance of fleas but almost no ammunition. One of the men has a high temperature. They are on

their own; officers are always absent, evoked in conversations by the men as distant beings. Rumours replace commands. Mortar bombs land. Planes sound in the distance. Pleasures are small but treasured: Enric speaks of the delights of rolling a cigarette. The fratricidal nature of the conflict is made manifest as soldiers call out to each other across the battlefield: Lloveras speaks of a soldier on the opposing side realizing that a Republican lieutenant close by is his brother in law. There are moments of fraternity across the political divide – a football match (not liked by the high command), tobacco sent in a mortar bomb. The men find solace as they can: Quim has an amulet that he hopes will bring him luck in what he terms ‘the lottery’ of the battlefield. He also has sheets of a Monteverdi score found in a burned out church on the day he was inducted that he keeps with him; he writes on them as a way of keeping up with events as they pass. The actors then step out of role to discuss how they might imagine what happened in the trenches. They speak of the material they draw on: images, the testimonials they have heard and read. And they articulate the need, in Joan Solé’s words, to ‘give voice to all of the voices because this is the history of a lot of people, of an entire generation’. Enric articulates that they are only six actors, and that they inevitably fixate largely on one figure to try and imagine what he might have felt, and you then begin to imagine one character and through that one character ‘you are explaining what happened to all of them’. The actors speak in third person about what happened to characters they have embodied. Lluís tells of having fallen asleep on watch, the commanding officer orders a (mock) execution that leaves him traumatized. He is later shot; his colleagues remove his notebook and clothes that they can be used by others but they cannot bury this Polynices; they are not permitted to. Lluís speaks of himself as *disappeared in action* and observes that Spain is second only to Cambodia as the country with the highest number of disappeared persons from a civil conflict. Joan Solé runs away for a night and returns to be shot, buried by Lluís in an olive grove by the road.

The fourth section, Retreat, begins with a video noting that the Ebro battle lasted for 115 days. Those forced to remain to protect the retreat have nothing to eat but roots and grass; they drink their own urine. They narrate their post-Ebro future. Joan Amargós testifies to worst horrors when taken prisoner by Franco, inhuman concentration camp conditions where Catalan prisoners were singled out for particularly harsh treatment. Enric writes a letter from Argéles-sur-Mer refugee camp where over 100,000 were held in the aftermath of the war. He holds a gun to his head as Monteverdi’s *Il combattimenti di Tancredi e Clorinda* – an encounter between two enemies in war who are lovers off the battlefield - is sung by the tenor at the back of the stage, accompanied by the four musicians: violinists Oriol Algueró and Ricart Renart, cellist Oriol Aymat, and harpsicord player Dani Espasa. Lloveras loses a leg and is then sent to the Valley of the Fallen for nine years to construct the controversial basilica and mausoleum where Franco’s remains still lie. (Spain’s current Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has begun moves to have Franco’s body removed from the Valley of the Fallen, a controversial initiative that the late dictator’s family are contesting.) Quim one of the volunteers who remained on the front to allow the retreat of the remainder of the Republican troops is killed. He recounts his death in the third person speaking of the espadrilles, gas mask, letters and sheets of music that he had dated by hand – war songs and Monteverdi - , that were sent to his parents. Monteverdi’s *Il combattimenti* acts as the soundscape to which the men narrate what happened to them at the end of the War. Each places a candle at the front of the stage and Lloveras asks the audience to stand for a minute’s silence to remember all those who died at the Ebro. They then accompany tenor Robert González, voices united in an act that both commemorates the dead and inscribes their narratives into the broader histories of the Battle of the Ebro. These men are now given the burial – albeit theatrical – denied in 1938.

When seen in Madrid’s Centro Dramático Nacional, a member of the audience stood up, shouting out

that Pasqual had produced a fascist staging. This is a production that hasn't satisfied audience members who argue for a continuing need for positivist narratives of the Republic. The Republic is certainly not idealized in the production. The mobilizing speeches of Lieutenant Colonel Enrique Lister, the Leader of the Fifth Army Corps at the Ebro, speaks of 'not going back... we will win' and Catalan President Josep Tarradellas 'victory is definitive and secured' are contrasted with the combatants who speak of their fear, shame, typhus, and exhaustion and with General Yagüe, the Nationalist commander's comments on the 'fiction of the Red's capacity for resistance'. Prime Minister Juan Negrín's call to arms 'to resist is to win' is juxtaposed with Franco's satisfaction at announcing 60,000 Republican dead at the Ebro. Franco speaks of the Munich agreement signed by Britain, Italy, France and Germany to stop the advancement of communism; Negrín's oratory reaches out to France and Britain to resist totalitarian forces in Europe. These different versions of the same events co-exist uneasily.

Irresponsible rhetoric is seen to have a decisive role in the conflict. It creates evident parallels with the situation in Catalonia where rhetoric has again proved irresponsible and influential. Joan Amargós speaks in a resigned manner of a campaign they knew was lost from the start: they were all just 'cannon fodder'. Perhaps, until the Left can acknowledge the mistakes of the past, it risks repeating them again. The jovial Enric mentions that he 'came to defend the Republic but the Republic didn't really defend me'. A sense of betrayal hangs over the men's words. The reflective Joan Solé, known by the other men as the philosopher, speaks of the conscripts as just 'puppets', the men all look to an end that involves defeat. One critic may have referred to it as a 'monument' to the baby bottle brigade (Javier Paisano, *Diario de Sevilla*, 25 November 2017), but I would see it more as a living, breathing engagement with a difficult past. Pasqual has spoken of it as a 'civil ceremony' – albeit one I would argue infused with religious imagery. *In Memoriam* is about the ways we consider the amnesia of the past, the speaking out about matters that were silenced or censored. It is about the ethics of the historical narratives that are told and the responsibility a civilised society holds to the dead. Pasqual recalls that his father was never able to talk about his brother who died at the Ebro front; *In Memoriam* gives voice(s) to those whose deaths and experiences in war could not previously be discussed. The impressive team of actors show history as a process to be engaged with – actively and ethically – and as such the piece offers a powerful commentary on how to make a political theatre that evades the easy but seductive rhetoric of propaganda.

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