

The return of the repressed: the ghosts of the past haunt Barcelona's stages

Madrid's Teatro del Barrio has had a regular presence at Barcelona's Teatre Lliure during Lluís Pasqual's time as artistic director (2011-18). *Ruz-Bárcenas*, a verbatim production on People's Party treasurer Luis Bárcenas' testimony before Spain's Audiencia Nacional (High Court) and *El Rey (The King)*, an acerbic look at King Juan Carlos played during 2014-15, *Masacre (Massacre)*—a tale of capitalism's excesses—the following season. The 2018-19 season features two pieces: a rehearsed reading of *El pan y la sal (Bread and Salt)* on 29 and 30 September and a staging of *Mundo Obrero (Workers' World)*, a tale of the Spanish working classes, at the end of the season from 13-30 June 2019.

El pan y la sal is a rehearsed reading, with a text by Raúl Quirós, which draws on verbatim testimony from the 2012 trial at Spain's Tribunal Supremo (Supreme Court) of Investigating Judge Baltasar Garzón. Head of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange's legal team since 2012, Garzón is best known for his crusading role in relation to corruption and human rights violations. He was the presiding judge who tried the 1990 "Cocaine Coast" trial of Galician drug traffickers who brought in Colombian and Central American cocaine into the Iberian mainland through the North Eastern Coast of Spain. He was also responsible for the London arrest of Augusto Pinochet in 1998 and for bringing the Argentine ex-Naval Officer Adolfo Scilingo to trial in 2005—the latter was later convicted of crimes against humanity and given a 640-year jail sentence. Within Spain, he is known both for his anti-terrorist work and for his pursuit of state-legitimised corruption in both the Socialist and People's Party Governments: the former for its covert deployment of death squads to annihilate supposed members of ETA and the latter for a widespread corruption and money laundering scandal that involved payment of politicians to secure lucrative construction contracts.

In September 2009 a right-wing trade union, Manos Limpias (Clean Hands), filed a complaint against Garzón for "prevarication," alleging that he had intentionally violated a 1977 Amnesty Law that forbids any investigation of crimes related to the Franco regime. In opening up an investigation into the deaths of 114 individuals during the Civil War and the dictatorship that followed Franco's victory in 1939, Garzón was accused of abusing his powers. He argued that the crimes against humanity he investigated were not subject to the 1977 Law—seen as initiating the "pact of silence" or "pact of forgetting" where Spain effectively "erased" its contentious past and refused to look back in an attempt to forge a new unified democratic nation. In the case of the disappeared, Garzón posited, there is a continuous crime of kidnapping that effectively trumps both the 1977 legislation and a statute of limitations. In 2014, Pablo de Greiff, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice and reparation visited Spain, requesting Mariano Rajoy's People's Party government to withdraw the Law, but it remains a cornerstone policy of the transition to democracy.

22 witnesses were called to testify by the defence in Garzón's trial, family members of those who lie in the 2,591 mass graves which are scattered across Spain—Andalusia, Aragón and Asturias having the greatest concentration. Garzón, already disbarred for eleven years in February 2012 for wiretapping conversations between prisoners and their lawyers in the Gürtel People's Party corruption scandal, was tried simultaneously in three cases relating to supposed abuse of authority in what was seen by human rights activists as targeted persecution. State prosecutors had upheld the defence's recommendation that the case not be brought before Spain's Supreme Court but the panel of seven judges chose to allow the

trial to go ahead. While later found not guilty of abusing his powers, he was still judged erroneous to have initiated an investigation into events that were protected by the Amnesty Law.

First presented at Teatro del Barrio in October 2015, the 2018 rehearsed reading is again produced by Teatro del Barrio, this time in association with the Teatro Español—where it premiered on 20 September—, Barcelona’s Teatre Lliure and Seville’s Teatro Central. Directed by Andrés Lima with a cast of eleven taking on twelve roles, *El pan y la sal* is positioned as a play about Historical Memory. Its subtitle “historical memory on trial” points to the focus as does a prologue which sets up both the events leading up to the trial and the reading’s *raison d’être*: “to acknowledge the victims, to ensure that they can honour their disappeared parents and grandparents; to help with exhumation and disinterment, to remember so that this can, in some way, be healed.” *El pan y la sal* gives voice to those whose calls for justice have been side-lined by successive Spanish governments. The transcripts from the trial have been reordered, some legal and technical terms amended by Quirós, and the characters of the Prosecuting Lawyer and the Public Prosecutor merged for the reading.

Beatriz San Juan provides a simple set, which gives the impression of a rehearsal environment, a work in progress. At the Lliure, the Fabià Puigserver auditorium has the faces of the disappeared covering the walls across the back of the stage; they stare out at the audience. Two blocks of seating stage left and stage right. Four tables on stage: two at the centre for Garzón and the witnesses. Stage right and stage left tables for the prosecution and defence. The actors mingle on stage, scripts in hand and bottles of water on the tables further reinforcing the sense of a rehearsal. Andrés Lima comes to the front of the stage and delivers a quote from Eduardo Galeano, underscored by Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in C Minor, *Pathétique*: “Does history repeat itself? Or are the repetitions only penance for those who are incapable of listening to it? No history is mute. No matter how much they burn it, break it, and lie about it, human history refuses to shut its mouth. Despite deafness and ignorance, the time that was continues to tick inside the time that is. The right to remember does not figure among the human rights consecrated by the United Nations, but now more than ever we must insist on it and act on it. Not to repeat the past but to keep it from being repeated. Not to make us ventriloquists for the dead but to allow us to speak with voices that are not condemned to echo perpetually with stupidity and misfortune. When it is truly alive, memory doesn’t contemplate history, it invites us to make it” (Galeano, *Upside Down: A Primer for the Looking-glass World*, New York: Picador, 1998, p. 210).



The giving of testimony: Gloria Muñoz and Andrés Lima in *El pan y la sal* (*Bread and Salt*) presented by Teatro del Barrio at the Teatre Lliure. Photo: Gonzalo Bernal.

Galeano's quote serves to provide one context for the events that follow, demonstrating the role of culture in offering a frame for the re-presentation of history. An introduction by the author—delivered again by Lima—provides a further context, situating the emergence of grass root memory associations, the case presented to the Audiencia Nacional (High Court) in 2006 by relatives of the disappeared asserting their right to know where the remains of their loved ones lie and the circumstances and events leading to their death, as well as a call for the authorities to act to ascertain 'the truth' of these complaints. The case is taken up by Garzón but the Ministry of Justice shuts down the case before Manos Limpias brings the charge against Garzón for perversion of justice which is admitted by the Supreme Court on 27 May 2009 so initiating what has come to be known in the press as "the trial of historical memory."

The stage is set. The case for the prosecution is presented by lawyer Joaquín Ruiz de Infante – later also the legal representative of the People's Party former treasurer Luis Bárcenas. (A Spanish audience will have been aware of this association as Bárcenas' trial received major media coverage between October 2016 and May 2018 when he was handed a 33-year jail sentence and a fine of 44 million euros.) In the role of the prosecuting lawyer, Antonio San Juan, one of the founders of Teatro del Barrio, crisply lays out the allegations against Garzón: it is not the role of the judiciary to amend the law but rather apply the law. In his view, Garzón contravened this understanding.

Microphones amplify the speaking voice, providing focus to whoever is giving testimony. The Judge and the Prosecution and Defence lawyers also have microphones that lend authority to the speaking voice. Investigating judges often acquire quasi-celebrity status in Spain—overseeing the criminal investigation, gathering evidence, and making a decision as to whether a case should be brought to trial. The inquisitorial model where judges enjoy a greater degree of visibility therefore differs from the US and the UK's adversarial system of justice, where the judge is more of an arbiter. It is perhaps not surprising that Garzón was drawn on by Almodóvar in his characterisation of the police inspector-cum-performance artist played Miguel Bosé in 1991's *High Heels*. Garzón also appears as a prominent character in both journalist Nacho Carretero's 2015 nonfiction book on the Galician drug cartels and the 2018 television series *Fariña* (meaning "flour" the Galician term for cocaine) based on Carretero's book, now available on Netflix as *Cocaine Coast*.

Garzón (played by the imposing, white-haired actor-director, Mario Gas) sits in the centre facing the back of the stage. Lima takes on the role of the presiding Judge, Carlos Granados Pérez, again positioned centre stage. Stage right, Alberto San Juan's Ruiz de Infante, the Prosecuting Lawyer, who leans forcefully forward to deliver a barrage of questions that allege Garzón's long track record of attempting to frame the deaths of those placed in Civil War mass graves as genocide. At times the feeling is that Ruiz de Infante is only held back by the table; San Juan proffers a focused and firm Ruiz de Infante. Stage right, Ginés García Millán as Garzón's lawyer Gonzalo Martínez Fresnada, rebuts key points. The match has begun. Words fly across the stage. Garzón and his lawyer spill out a process of systematic annihilation which concurs with that of other totalitarian regimes in Europe in the period between 1933 and 1945 and a targeting of Garzón by Manos Limpias for his commitment to promoting the rights of the relatives of disappeared persons to pursue justice. What is not articulated by any of the characters is the position of Amnesty International, noted by Nuria Espert, one of the performers in the 2015 and 2018 Madrid readings, that the pursuit of Garzón could be linked to his investigation of the Gürtel corruption scandal. Garzón's investigation of both cases relating both to state-endorsed corruption and state-endorsed human rights violations are linked: the traditional impunity related to both are legacies of sociological Francoism that disproportionately favor the right.

The courtroom drama here used not to illustrate the failings of an individual but rather to highlight the ills of a law that impedes justice. There are no plot twists, no surprise witnesses, just arguments and rebuttals. The witnesses come forward. Firstly, Emilio Silva Barrera, President of the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory [ARMH] (played by Francesc Orella). He speaks plainly; there is an absence of rhetoric in his words. His grandfather was one of the disappeared, exhumed from a mass grave in Ponferrada, León with 13 others in 2000. He speaks of his grandmother who in the 33 years he knew her, never spoke of her husband for fear of reprisals. In writing about the exhumation of his grandfather's grave, he received letters from others seeking information on lost loved ones, asking for assistance. He delineates the setting up of ARMH, using UN guidelines to establish a database of the disappeared; "we didn't have any training in Human Rights, because we hadn't been taught" he notes. Spain may not have prepared its citizens for the grey areas of a democracy but some have risen to the challenge of negotiating their own way through different decisions that underpin democracies. Silva lays out a process of reporting what they find to the local authorities when a mass grave is opened. He also makes clear that "the victims in this country have never had the conscience or the consciousness of victims." The Francoist state had a debt to those who had fallen at the hands of the left but those on the left who had suffered a similar fate were silenced. "We wanted justice to act, in the way it does when a crime is committed."

Ruiz de Infante tries to personalize the issue—a vendetta pursued by Garzón against the regime—but Martínez Fresnada opts for an approach that sees Garzón positioned as part of a transnational movement of figures seeking justice for human rights violations committed by the regime. Garzón positions his interpretation of the law alongside that of international bodies and regulations, including the Nuremberg Charter. No international law experts were permitted to testify but the witnesses who do give evidence are key to this process. 81-year old María Martín López (María Galiana taking on the role that Nuria Espert performed in the first three performances of the Madrid run), speaks softly, about the murder of her mother on 20 September 1936, killed for not handing over 1,000 pesetas that she did not possess to the authorities. There is a powerful tension in the contrast between the atrocity of the dead and the soft tone with which it is delivered. There was a witness to the atrocity, and her father tried to get recognition of the crime, but was met with threats. This is not about financial damage—as she informs Felipe González, Spain’s Prime Minister between 1982 and 1996—but about collecting her mother’s remains and giving proper burial: a request that recalls Antigone’s determination to bury her vanquished brother Polynices. María looks at the photos of the disappeared at the back of the stage before returning to her seat. Her mother is thus positioned as one of many whose images stare out at the audience.

Angel Rodríguez Gallardo, a historian played by Emilio Gutiérrez Caba, speaks of filing a complaint to the National Court in 2006 based on unresolved violent crimes from 1936 in Pontearreas. He delineates the difficulty of accessing records – “access to the State’s archives has not been easy” and access to prison and Police archives has not been possible but the opening of the Army’s archives in 1999 has demonstrated a systematic plan on the part of the Francoist authorities to annihilate those with Republican affiliations: “acts of genocide” as he terms it. Angel wants to know what happened and recognizes the need to exhume the graves and have public access to closed archives.

Josefina Usulén Jiménez (Natalia Díaz) looks hesitantly at the microphone before testifying. It is as if she doesn’t quite trust it to provide an unmediated amplification of her words. She files a case with the High Court to secure justice for her grandfather, a member of the CNT grouping of labour unions who was taken from his home together with his pregnant wife when her father was a five-year old child. Her grandfather’s sister was lied to by the Falange when told that both her grandmother and the baby she was carrying had been killed. Only after 1978 was she able to discover that her father had a sister that she has been unable to locate to date—the records of the hospital where her mother supposedly gave birth have had key pages removed. Josefina’s testimony links the forced adult disappearances to the stolen babies of the Franco era—it is thought up to 300,000 were taken from their biological mothers and given to parents loyal to the regime in a practice that continued well into democracy.

Fausto Canales Bermejo (José Sacristán), the son of a disappeared person, is again led to the stand in a manner that suggests a man not used to public speaking. His complaint is based on the disappearance of 10 persons in 1936 in Pajares de Agaja, one of which was his father, whose remains appear to have been transferred without permission to the Valley of the Fallen in 1959. Fausto delineates the 50 children left without a father by the Falange’s actions. Sacristán looks out at the audience and up at Ruiz de Infante. Ruiz de Infante may seek to show that Fausto knows that his father is dead but Fausto is steadfast in making his case: he has not seen his father since he was two years old and the latter remains a disappeared person, victim of a crime that has yet to be investigated. María del Pino Sosa Sosa (Gloria Muñoz) from the Canary Islands has also given evidence in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg about the disappearance of her father, but in Spain her call for information is similarly met with no response. She was just three months old when her father was disappeared: “They took the bread

and the salt from our homes,” she observes. Destitution followed for many of those in her position.

The sound of digging offers a further unsettling accompaniment to the testimonies. There is a terrifying sense of history repeating itself again and again in the evidence of each of the six witnesses. They come from the length and breadth of Spain, indicative of the scale of the disappearances. According to UN records, Spain is second only to Pol Pot’s Cambodia in its number of disappeared persons—those who have gone missing through enforced disappearance realised by state officials or individuals acting with state consent. There is a shocking pattern to what the witnesses recount. A terrible familiarity to the ritual that takes them from their position as an audience member, accompanied by Laura Galán from their seat, to testify. It’s a routine they each follow. Each stands alone as they are interrogated by Ruiz de Infante. There is a stillness to their testimony, a lack of fuss to what they recount. For many, poverty was experienced in the aftermath of the disappearance. All swear that Garzón is only known to them through his media presence. All recount forced kidnappings. All have spent decades trying to find answers. All testify to the lack of funds received by the state to support their work and the silence of the authorities to which they have appealed for information. All clamour for justice.

The stature of the actors associated with the project, including those of a generation born immediately before (María Galiana) and during the Civil War (José Sacristán), those born under Franco (Emilio Gutiérrez Caba, Francesc Orella), and figures whose careers have been forged in democratic Spain (Alberto San Juan, Andrés Lima) adds a further weight to the project. Gas, arguably the Patrice Chéreau of the Spanish stage, has a stature within the industry – and a commitment to political causes -- that makes him an appropriate choice for Garzón. Lima presides over the action in the dual role of Author and Judge. For Pepe Viyuela, who appeared in the 2015 reading, the play had echoes with his own family situation: his grandfather left Spain in 1939 and the resting place of a disappeared relative was located through a historical memory association. Nuria Espert suffered censorship from the regime for daring to stage works that challenged the values promoted by the dictatorship. *El pan y la sal* discusses matters that cannot be reduced to one generation; the unresolved issue of sociological Francoism concerns all Spaniards. Furthermore, the reading contributes to a wider debate about Spain’s democracy in process: a work in progress commenting on a democracy in progress. The decision to present *El pan y la sal* as a rehearsed reading—never complete, never polished, never finished—is key here. The giving of testimony is foregrounded, the scripts are a reminder of the piece as *rehearsal*. Democracy as an ongoing negotiation, an ongoing rehearsal process. Justice may not have been rendered in the Supreme Court with the verdict that at once acquitted Garzón of the charges of opening the investigation into crimes committed during the Civil War and its aftermath but also reprimanded his “error” of labelling these crimes human rights violations because the 1977 Amnesty Act does not allow them to be categorised in this manner. The reading, however, offers another trial in the public sphere, a way of presenting the testimony anew in different venues across Spain where the audience can provide their own judgements and continue the process of ensuring democracy remain not a closed door but an ongoing process of negotiation and discussion. Theatre becomes, as Schiller indicated in 1784, an alternative space for justice.

El pan y la sal refuses to make Garzón its protagonist. It is the giving of testimony, the need to narrate that which has been erased or silenced, that emerges as the focus of the piece. Hence the coming together of all the witnesses at the end to the front of the stage to deliver the play’s epilogue, summarizing the results of the trial and its legacy. Lucio Battisti’s rendition of “Il mio canto libero” closes the performance – an ode to individual liberty, the need for truth (whatever that might constitute) and the challenges faced by a couple in negotiating a society they view as hypocritical.

Mario Gas dedicated the Barcelona reading of *El pan y la sal* on the 29th September to the memory of Carles Canut, the actor and artistic director of the Teatre Romea who had died a few days earlier. I last saw Canut as Crito in Gas's production of *Socrates* with José María Pou, another piece (reviewed in *European Stages*, [vol 5](#)) which dramatizes antagonistic positions and asks important questions about the role of dissent in democracy.

It is perhaps therefore not so strange to see Martin McDonagh's *A Skull in Connemara* returning to the Villaroel in a production by writer-director Iván Morales. A past bound up with unexplained circumstances, a death with more than a whiff of mystery about it, and skeletons rattling in the closet, this is a play where the secrets of the past lie desperately close to the surface. Mick Dowd (Pol López) has the unenviable job of disinterring graves in the small town of Connemara as a means of making room for the newly deceased. He is aided in this yearly endeavour by an excitable young man, Mairtin Hanlon (Ferran Vilajosana). This week Mick has to focus on an area of the graveyard where his wife Oona, who died in an unexplained car accident seven years earlier, is buried. Watched over by Mairtin's elder brother Thomas (Xavi Sáez), a policeman, the two men go about their macabre business. Only Oona is missing from the grave. A night of drunken revelry follows with Thomas disrupting the aftermath to accuse Mick of murdering his wife – a bullet hole in the skull he brings in seems to confirm this. Mairtin, however, confesses to Mick's murder, a confession which appears fictional when a bloodied Mairtin enters mentioning he's the casualty of his own drink-driving. Resolution comes in the form of Mairtin's revelation that Thomas hoped to gain recognition and possible promotion by fabricating the case against Mick: Thomas drilled the hole into Oona's skull in the hope of incriminating Mick. When exposed by his brother, Thomas runs out in embarrassment.



Mick Dowd (Pol López) and Mairtin Hanlon (Ferran Vilajosana) in Martin McDonagh's *La calavera de Connemara* (*A Skull in Connemara*) in a production by Iván Morales at the Villaroel theatre. Photo: David Ruano.

Iván Morales directs this second play in McDonagh's Lenane trilogy with an attention to high action

theatrics and a veritable tone of absurdism. Marta Millà's Maryjonny Rafferty, Mairtin's grandmother—here looking sprightlier than in any of the English-language productions I've seen to date—lulls the audience into a false sense of security. Visiting Mick after her bingo game, the pair exchange insults over poteen—copious quantities of the drink are downed during the play. Pol López's Mick is an intransigent being; defensive, slightly taciturn, and with a “don't care” attitude to most of what comes his way. López has an air of Toby Jones about him, a character actor whose unconventional looks and comic timing have proved a powerful calling card. He shifts and shuffles, flops into his armchair and curtly dismisses most of the insults that come his way. Marc Salicrú's traverse set is a mass of dried grass which climbs up the ways at the side of the auditorium. The impression is that of a claustrophobic rural world that cannot easily be escaped.

Hints to Thomas's deviance come early. He watches the action from the back of the theatre, strumming a guitar with his eyes fixed on Mick. This is a man who appears to model himself on either Elvis or Billy Fury, with a leather jacket and teddyboy hair cut to match, who is determined to pursue Mick until he can either decipher the truth or create an alternative that the community will accept. Fiction will do just as nicely as reality. Xavi Saéz—seen earlier in 2018 in Morales's own *Esmorza amb mi (Breakfast With Me)* (see *European Stages* vol. [12](#))—swaggers with a misplaced sense of certitude. His younger brother has a more manic energy. The audience first see him dancing to the frenzied music he is listening to on his headphones, a worn shellsuit jacket covers a Manchester United football shirt and dirty joggers. The impression is that this is a man not terribly perturbed about his appearance. He charges around the stage with the feckless spirit of a headless chicken while his elder brother watches like a cautious fox.

There is something animal-like in the moves of all the characters. Millà's Maryjohnny dressed in warm tones of brown and rust, lifts her neck like a turkey. Mick sprawls in his armchair like an old dog. He moves like a tired, elderly man but his unlined face shows that he is aged by the ravages of alcohol rather than the trials and tribulations of life. He exploits the animated, naïve Mairtin without due concern for the younger man's welfare. Ferran Vilajosana's Mairtin goes into overdrive, playing with the skulls they dig up as if seducing an imaginary friend. The mist over the set as the graves are plundered render a sense of the gothic but Silvia Kuchinow's lighting is a little too bright to render the scene really menacing.

That said, the performances are all strong. Saéz is a bullying presence, kicking his brother, threatening Mick and lingering in the distance like a bad smell. He wants to play the tough guy but a cigarette is followed by an inhaler as he struggles to breathe. López's Mick is an altogether more relaxed figure, biding his time before winding up the hapless policeman. Vilajosana's Mairtin is shoddily handled by all. Keen to have fun, keen to belong, keen to be part of the action, he is tossed from pillar to post by both the older men. In the play's final scene, he is a bloodied and confused being.

The play's third scene as the drunken Mick and Mairtin smash up the skulls and bones of the community dead they have disinterred is a rite of revelry and unadulterated theatricality. Bones splinter and scatter, hovering dangerously close to the audience. Mairtin uses a cross as a guitar, crashing across the stage like a demented child. Later waving a hammer in each hand, he hurls himself around as skulls collide in the air to the sound of Sinéad O'Connor's “Nothing Compares To You”—O'Connor has spoken out repeatedly about the historical abuses of the Catholic Church. The scene's climax is both exhausting and exhilarating. It also feels terribly pertinent to a nation where the fate of the nation's mass graves remains such an open wound and where the decision to disinter Franco from the Valley of the Fallen has provoked such protest from the dictator's family and supporters.

At the production's end, there is a terrible sense that the secrets remain buried. Oona's skull doesn't contain an answer to the mystery that hangs over Mick. Mairtin walks off uncertainly—not before having bumped into the wall going out—injured, unwell, disorientated and alone. Thomas continues wheezing. Mick remains, the sole custodian of the enigma surrounding his wife's death, a bottle of poteen still at his side. The production ends as it began, Maryjohnny calling in on her way back from bingo with insinuations and insults revealing that there has been no sense of closure.

Claudio Tolcachir's Timbre 4 theatre company returned to Madrid from 30 October to 4 November of 2018 with a further run of performances of *La omisión de la familia Coleman* (*The Coleman Family's Omission*) at the Teatros del Canal. The now legendary production has enjoyed over 2,000 performances, been seen by over 265,000 people and been presented in over 22 countries since it first premiered at the company's fifty-seat theatre in the Boedo district of Buenos Aires in 2005. Its swansong dates in Madrid have been accompanied by the Catalan-language premiere of the play in Barcelona, translated by Jordi Galceran and again directed by Tolcachir, playing between 26 October and 9 December at the Romea theatre, a venue which has hosted previous productions by the Argentine director.



A (disunited) family at play in *L'omissió de la família Coleman* (*The Omission of the Coleman Family*).
Photo: Felipe Mena.

Stage left, a bed draped with clothes. An ironing board and Singer sewing machine. Chairs filled with folded clothes. A bicycle perched by a chair and table. Under the table, boxes of shoes. There's a lot of clutter in the Coleman family home. There are signs of activity in this domestic environment but Memé (Roser Batalla) and her son Salva (played by Sergi Torrecilla, in the Spanish-language original he is known as Marito, creating a balance in the sound of the two names) are sitting comfortably on the sofa with no signs of wanting to move. Neither wants to get up to make breakfast; both converse through insults. Dani (Ireneu Tranis)—Damián in the original—communicates through violence, picking Salva up roughly to get him moving. Dani is an elusive presence, coming and going as it suits him, stealing to fund

his drug-taking, and modelling himself on his absent father. Dani's twin Gabi (Bruna Cusi), is lean, boyish, enterprising, agile and hardworking. Verónica (Vanesa Segura), the eldest sister, is the only one of the four who has left the family home. She now lives with her wealthy husband and children and visits intermittently, although significantly without her children. At the centre of the family is grandmother Leonora (Francesca Piñon) first seen in trainers and a tie-dye jacket with flared orange stripe trousers. Nothing quite matches but it doesn't matter. For this grandmother has her own style and appears to be the only person that the rest of the family listen to. She is the matriarch that holds this ungovernable family together.

There are mysteries aplenty in the family. Verónica and Salva share one father, Dani and Gabi another. Both fathers are conspicuous in their absence. The family tree is a mystery that slowly reveals itself. Memé lies to get her own way. She wants to be indispensable; she craves attention. She claims that Verónica wants her to babysit her children but Verónica avoids contact with her mother. It's her grandmother she comes to see.

Leonora relies on her granddaughter to help hold the home together. Gabi first enters with a big bag of laundry to take out. Gabi and Leonora communicate through coded dialogue to evade Memé. For the hippyish Memé has lost a grip on the house and all who live in it. She doesn't appear to have realised or care that the washing machine broke a month ago. She leaves it to Gabi to try and get Salva to remove his socks for washing, a thankless task. She seems incapable of the most basic tasks, including putting the kettle on for breakfast. Memé just doesn't want to grow up. Salva, like his mother, has arrested development. Refusing to get out of his pyjamas and wearing a woolly hat at all times, he remains a passive being. Gabi removes the washing; Gabi takes the bicycle to go off to the laundry; Gabi makes clothes; Gabi cleans up. Her brothers bicker, fight and just look on.

Memé is also brutally honest, mentioning that she never really wanted children. She is needy and childish. She begs Gabi for money and then pleads with Verónica to let her move in with her. She surrounds Gabi while the latter tries to work, trying to secure her younger daughter's attention and refusing to intervene as Dani and Salva fight. She is incapable of hanging her mother's clothes in the hospital wardrobe, won't tend to her son's injury—a wound she inflicted on his arm with a knife—and in the end abandons the desperately ill Salva as she blackmails Verónica into allowing her to move in.

Memé flirts with the doctor at the hospital and asks him for contraceptives. With her unkempt straight hair and vacant expression, she is an image of self-obsession. Gabi and Verónica have a maturity that their mother lacks. Verónica is neatly turned out—the audience first see her in a fitted pink jacket and well-cut trousers—a contrast to the loose attire of the rest of the family. She brings in the two outsiders—the doctor Eduardo and taxi driver Ferran—who are audience surrogates, asking pertinent questions about the family's past and present situation. Only Ferran soon finds himself attracted to the enterprising Gabi. Entering the home of the Coleman family, he falls under their spell and pulls away from Verónica.

Francesca Piñon creates a larger than life Leonora. She has a prodding stick to animate her idle family members into action—an implement she hides behind the sofa to stop others stealing it. She separates the warring brothers and prods Salva and Memé into the shower. She is funny and smart; and moves with a sense of purpose, a no-nonsense pragmatism that contrasts with her daughter's dreamy ways. Her cackle cuts through the riotous chaos. She's the focus for the family, even in Act 2 when her daughter and grandchildren all congregate around her hospital bed. In the final scene, her passing leaves a void in the

family that they all struggle to cope with. The news that Salva has leukaemia doesn't move Verónica to help; Salva can only lash out at his sister with threats and intimidation and she, along with her mother, just walks away.

Salva never quite grasps what is going in. He is convinced his grandmother is pregnant, that the pills she takes are all out of date and has a mean streak when it comes to Verónica. He wears his woolly hat at all times, not quite aware of the difference between public and private spaces. He won't remove his clothes to go in the shower and insists on referring to Verónica's children as midgets. There's a menacing darkness to his character, who prods mercilessly at the family's wounds. He drinks gin that fuels his rude remarks and attacks Ferran (Biel Duran), Verónica's driver, for no good reason. There's a wickedly funny moment as Salva, Memé and Dani fight over Salva's gin bottle, Gabi tries to deal with Leonora who appears to be unconscious, while Salva tries to wake her with an atomiser, and then the three younger siblings sing "happy birthday" to Leonora while waiting for the ambulance. Tolcachir choreographs the end of Act 1 as pure farce.

The family members don't even have a name in common. Salva and Leonora have the Coleman name. Verónica is a Zanelli, even though she and Salva share the same father, and she grew up with her father rather than her mother. Gabi and Dani are Müllers. It's a complicated family tree with omissions a plenty, but isn't every family complicated and dysfunctional in its own way? "A normal family" says Memé and each character has their own ideas of what constitutes the "normal." This is a family that sees it as "normal" to take a shower at the hospital while visiting their grandmother. They no longer have hot water at home and it's easier to shower at the hospital than arrange to have the problem sorted at home. Dani sees it as "normal" to steal whatever the family need from elsewhere in the hospital—a radio for grandmother, a comb, soap. Soon Memé's underwear is hanging from the IV pole in the hospital room as the family set up a new residence around Leonora's bed. It's "normal" for Verónica not to allow her children any contact with the rest of her family. It's "normal" for Memé to sleep with Salva, to barter and bargain her way through life and then abandon her son when he may need her most. Salva is literally alone on stage at the production's end.

Tolcachir orchestrates the action with a keen attention to pacing. Sergi Torrecilla's Salva charges around while his brother Dani, in Ireneu Tranis's lean performance, sneaks around the stage. The performances are uniformly excellent. And while the characters' speech patterns may not have the lithe speed of the original Argentine cast, Galceran has rendered an idiomatic translation with a keenly comic edge. Albert Faura's lighting helps differentiate the shifts across the four days of Act 2. The balance between high comedy and unsettling grotesque remains acute, and highly pertinent to an age where few appear willing to listen to what the opposition is saying.

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