

The Show Must Go On

It happens every night: I am lying on that filthy mattress and everything starts all over again. I do not speak; that is, I only mumble semicoherent phrases. When there's a pause in their dialogue, a few of my words can be heard. For example: "demon," "the fire of heaven," "labyrinth," "the depths." Something like that. Real mysterious. Or whole sentences, slurred and broken up. "I'm the forerunner of the apocalypse," or "The bomb explodes in silence," etc. It is not a rigid text, I can improvise. The director wants an experimental and therefore ambiguous play. The words vary with my state of mind.

In the past I used to concentrate a lot, I gave myself over entirely to the interpretation. The words came out with such force that I thought they poured straight out of my soul. I said, for example, "the depths" with a special and frightening intonation so that even I was affected. But as time goes by, we begin to relax and loosen up. Perhaps I am getting tired. Or I am turning into a real professional. Anyway, the words keep blooming, they are a second nature to me now.

On Tuesday, which is the worst day of the show (the coldest one), I barely pronounce my lines. They're just hoarse little sounds. On one Tuesday, I almost fell asleep. And it seems that nobody noticed the difference. Anyway, the words keep blooming, they are a second nature to me now.

My role is above all static: it serves as a counterpoint to the dynamic force of the other parts. I lie in bed, paralyzed with some sort of disease. Whether mental or physical the author did not quite specify. The author merely offers a text open to interpretation, a text in which people can identify themselves. With me lying there and the other characters full of life, exuberant. People quietly make their choice: me, or the other two. Or even both: the simultaneous fascination of two opposites: the instinct of life and the instinct of death: a conflict. Myself, inert, and those two, talking and acting out the rest.

The rest is as follows. She is a young woman, beautiful and healthy. Tania. My wife. He, her lover. An unscrupulous and virile guy, in spite of the fact that in real life, the actor is a fag. But not here on the stage. Here he is a real man.

In the first scene, they enter the living room with caution, so they won't wake me up. But we are separated by only a wall and an open door. The

set consists of two adjoining parts. The living room, austere and modernly furnished. Clean and functional. Well lit. My room, however, is dirty, dark, and stinking. Cobwebs, etc. The director asked the stage designer for an atmosphere that would reflect, besides existential problems, society itself. The old and the new, I suppose: the conflicting forces of the social environment.

But they don't know that I can hear those words of love. The door is open and I am listening. My mind is afflicted but not yet paralyzed like my body. This is one of the fundamental approaches to the play: the intellectual as cripple. A cancer which, starting from the brain, first neutralizes the body and then turns, suicidally, against the brain itself. That's what some critics wrote. But the author—the author explained nothing.

They enter the room and begin to talk:

"You have a right to be happy, Tania; you're young."

"But he's my husband, Felipe; I loved him."

"You used to," he says.

"Yes, Felipe, *I used to.*"

And so on and so forth, until they fall into each other's arms and make love, very tenderly. It's the lyrical moment of the show.

On the following day she is overly attentive toward me. Because she feels guilty, obviously. In the past I hated her because of this. But there was nothing I could do, night after night, and so I became indifferent. The two of them mean nothing to me now. In the beginning I hated her. Paralyzed and raving and with that hacking cough, like a tubercular person, infuriating myself and infuriating Tania and Felipe. After all, they are full of energy and vitality. This is what the author is driving at, I think: I am the symbol of the final fate of every man, returning to mother earth, rotting. They convey the blind and changing force of nature. Or of a new society, who knows. So that when Tania becomes pregnant, this, for me, has an obvious meaning: the child as the new life which appears while I depart. It was the last work of the author. Finished on the day before he committed suicide, which turned out to be excellent publicity.

But Tania and Felipe. In subsequent scenes, they start to abandon their precautions. They even make love on the floor of my own room. A sadistic perversion, probably. And, besides, I'm garbage, a zero. They don't need to hide themselves anymore. And the director asked for realism: a brutal exasperation of the senses, counterpointing my inertia. Tearing their clothes, kissing and biting each other. And cruelty, the director asked for. They even dance around my bed. A sensual and satanic dance. While I cough and sputter those incoherent phrases and words.

It happens every night, at nine o'clock. The beautiful Tania going through the whole cycle, starting with pity for me and attachment to the past and

ending with her unbridled passion for that pederast. Every night. For two hours. With me tied to those filthy rags and the thing going on. Until their passion reaches its climax.

Then she kills me. Yes, I am assassinated. Just before, there's the final monologue in which she says, among other things, that she is cutting my life short as an act of mercy. And also to add impetus to nature, to help it along, she coolly claims. Some critics mentioned historical determinism, added to man's freedom to accelerate the process. But there is a lot of rationalization on Tania's part, I believe. What she really wants is to enjoy without hindrance the pleasures of the flesh.

She mixes poison into my medicine. The poison slowly annihilates my forces, while Tania continues her monologue. And I move my lips, without uttering a sound. There were some attempts to interpret my silent words in this scene. Including a theory that transfers to the audience the responsibility of filling that blank. Tania ends her monologue and I go on moving my lips. Some people stand on their chairs, trying to catch my words. And I die. Silence.

Then the curtain falls and the applause starts up. There is a standing ovation and shouts of "bravo," "bravo." Some days, especially on Saturdays, there are as many as five curtain calls. And they do not stop applauding. This has been going on for more than two years already.

The show is terrible: grotesque, vulgar, and obvious; at some moments even lapsing into semi-literacy. The show is, mostly, pathological. But the public likes it. It's on every night, except Mondays.

Translated by Marilia Yoshimasu and John Batki

GUSTAVO SAINZ / MEXICO

Self-Portrait with Friends

I, for example, misanthropic, sullen, hunchbacked, prone to rot, innocuous exhibitionist, immodest, always disagreeable or discourteous or gray or timid according to the dullness of the metaphor, a sometime erotomaniac, and as if that weren't enough, a Mexican to boot, sleep badly and very little for the past few months, in fetal positions, under heavy covers, white or striped sheets, an electric blanket or in the open air,