

Theater

Mirror, Mirror On the Wall

How can a play reflect that part of the human condition that no one wants to talk about, or that when they do, they are very careful to keep its secrets from touching their own lives? Contemporary theater that retains traditional discourse and dramatic structures cannot respond to or represent this situation. Nor can the problem be resolved all at once; rather it requires years of experimentation with innovative dramatic forms and speech. *Mirrors* (*Especjos*), a new play that recently opened in Mexico, takes important steps along this long path.

Mirrors is the creation of a rather odd couple: Juan José Gurrola and Raúl Falcó. Gurrola is an internationally recognized playwright and actor with 30 years of experience. Falcó is young, knowledgeable in all aspects of theater and guided by an indomitable energy to reach the peaks of his profession.

Mirrors reveals the authors' difficult lives in the hallucinations of an aviator who unfolds as classic characters: as Narcissus, the handsome man who scorns Eco the nymph and becomes the dandy (the Marquis), who lurks by the pool to feed his spirit on the passionate storms that rage within him.

"That's why not much can be said... Yet again the wax will melt. And once more you will fall into the water that will be your grave where you shall live forever more."

In the cabin of his plane, crashed into the desert on the way to New Delhi, Marquis Narcissus hallucinates a variety of situations that take him from Paris to a sleazy nightclub in the Caribbean. He enters into a philosophical dialogue with Tiresias, confidant of the gods of Olympus, and is condemned to live the rest of his life without Eco's love, whom he once

scorned, trapped in the fleeting love of prostitutes. He will live in the Hell of the fleeting love of prostitutes, love that is bought. Life is constructed in the play through the constant repetition of the daily routine, using the speeches of classic authors such as Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz, Saint John, Villaurrutia and others as the main vehicle for expression. The work is part of an effort to create a new kind of theater, in a world whose logic of development seems to have gone astray; theater that obliterates dramatic conventionalisms: lineal time development, ordered sequences, the narrative climax and all the categories that stifle meaning. It is theater that seeks to fuse art and life into a single, simultaneous experience, that erupts in front of the audience and invites reflection.

The artifice created in *Mirrors* is developed by borrowing the pictorial techniques of a collage, introducing fragments of other separate works into a new and inter-related whole. The technique generally consists of four elements, although they may not always be applied precisely. They are: the section, the previously formulated materials or message, the assembly and discontinuity or heterogeneity. "That way the audience witnessed scenes in which they could see Desdemona, Lady Macbeth and others together for the first time," according to noted Mexican theater critic Bruce Swansey.

Something similar happens in *Mirrors*. Fragments of literary classics move from one context to another. Each quote mutilates the linearity of discourse and time, conveying a double meaning: the original fragment in its context and a new meaning emerging from the new whole. The play blasts out in all directions, yet retains a classic concern: man's fate, love submerged in base passion and all of the contradictions that shape contemporary life.

The absence of a narrative core, an indication of the play's modernism, explains Raúl Falcó, "allows us to use psychic manipulation in profoundly realist theater where we enter the subconscious realm. *Mirrors* unfolds strictly within this rigor and this necessity, while at the same time there is strong dose of reiteration that adds a new element with each repetition as part of fiction's privileged domain." A verbal surface is structured that reflects and represents the characters and situations that enunciate it.

If this were not the case theater would cease to be a "mirror" for life and for the customs that confine us. After all, it is a place of the spirit where St. John, Sister Juana Inés (also of the Cross), Villaurrutia, López Velarde, don Francisco de Quevedo and Lucientes all converge, contributing together to the show's new interpretation.

According to Gurrola, it's a matter of washing down the scaffold where both directors have been the hangmen: they start out by judging themselves. "We both know that there is a scaffold behind intelligence and we want to cleanse those frames for theater. We use a variety of weapons, the most outstanding of which include visual and verbal violence, vengeance, pornography —of great importance— which never becomes eroticism"

AN ILLUSION OF REALITY

"Love's enigma was completely protected...and I saw that I was with death, and I saw that in life, I was dead," intoned Sister Angélica. The excellent acting by Juan José Gurrola (Tiresias), Mauricio Davison (Narcissus, alias "The Marquis"), Gabriela Araujo (Sister Angélica), Mariana Botey (Eco) and a dozen other actors creates the daily reality of modern society, marked as it is by increasing emotional complexity and incomprehensibility.

The tragic-farce in two acts and countless disconnected scenes, contrary to its essence, abandons the realist illusion and opens the way to a literary journey that erodes away any trace of credibili-

ty by affirming a mixture of representations in which man's dark side appears and assaults the viewer.

At times humorous, at others dramatic and shocking, the play dilutes and equates sexuality with all of the desires of whoring. Sexuality does not exist, only relationships that are initiated through language: "What is said and what is named defines the possibilities that bodies will come together in one or another way; it is not necessary to understand because it is perceived." That is what creates the possibility that the viewer will identify with what happens on stage.

The constant flow of scenes from different periods completely does away with time as measure and linearity. Rather, it gives way to history's great cycles that seem to repeat themselves in the dialogues of a Greek tragedy, or those of Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz, St. John, Villaurrutia and even Shakespeare himself: "Contemporary man is made up of the same elements as his ancestors, and he continues to suffer from the same contradictions despite the modern world's invasion of us, presenting the same situation behind a different appearance, but at the root of things, we are still the same salt."

The challenge for new theater lies in how to treat these unresolved problems, without turning to moralistic formulas or terrestrial forms in use since Aristotle's *Poetics*. An echo of this reaches those viewers who seek a different response to their reality.★

Ramsés Ramírez



Photo by Carlos Gariel

The aviator hallucinates in *Mirrors*

Gaby's difficult way of writing.