

DRAMA REVIEWS

Spanish Baroque

By ROSETTE C. LAMONT
THE EXTRAVAGANT TRIUMPH
OF JESUS CHRIST, KARL
MARX AND WILLIAM SHAKES-
PEARE. INTAR, 420 W. 42ND
ST. 279-4220.

On its glitteringly zany surface, Fernando Arrabal's new play might appear as an anarchist's satire on leftist Latin American dictatorships. This point of view comes as a shock to the intelligentsia, the academic establishment, and the community of Latin American dissident writers in exile. This group finds it difficult to reconcile the present cartoon version of Castro's regime with Arrabal's previous anti-Franco stand so eloquently crystallized in *Guernica* and *They Put Handcuffs on Flowers*.

Arrabal, however, cannot be expected to follow any party line. *The Extravagant Triumph* does for Castro what *The Great Dictator* did for Hitler, with the exception that the former is alive and well.

Brilliantly directed by Eduardo Manet, Arrabal's tragic farce introduces us into the throne room of El Caballo. The throne is a modern reclining board director's leather chair with two red telephones on the arm rests, presumably hot lines to the CIA and the KGB.

Randy Barcelo's ingenious set is riddled with trap doors and portraits that flip over. For example, Lenin's portrait can be replaced at a flick of a secret switch with a traditional Epinal icon of the bleeding Christ. Clearly, the Gospel according to Saint Marx, like the teachings of the Church, is one of the many masks of absolute power.

Arrabal fills his tiny stage with sadomasochists, asexual transexuals, puritanical terrorists, voyeuristic provocateurs. All issue from closets and water closets, or disappear



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Ron Faber as Fidel

into them like so many jacks-in-the-box gone wild. One of the funniest is Gasparito, a masochistic transexual who keeps on popping out of a tiny hiding place to proffer all manner of services or servicing. He is the perfect Odalisque to a master who deigns to be idolized at a distance, accepting to be fanned by a great red palm, the communist's concretization of a Baudelairean reverie.

Fortunately for the frustrated Gasparito, a butchy terrorist happens on the scene. The erotic encounter between the manish female clothed in her chameleonic jungle fatigues, and the androgynous male veiled in Salome fashion, provides a scene worthy of Apollinaire's *Tiresias' Paps*.

The two creatures' revelation to one another of their hidden parts (sexual and theatrical), their sudden urge to try it straight, provided the kind of Elizabethan nonsense we enjoy in Shakespeare's comedies of error (thus the Shakespeare in the play's title).

Naseer-el-Kadi, last seen Off Broadway in Arrabal's *The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria*, and Cecilia Flores seduce each other with all man-

ner of foreplay, playing it to the hilt among the tropical palm trees of the backdrop.

Their amours are echoed by the sado-masochistic embraces of a dedicated bald Minister of the Interior (Thomas Korpache). The latter, a dedicated Stalinist, burns with a single urge, that of having his nipples singed by a lady's cigar. Not content with this slight ache, loga begs to be whipped; having been turned down, he inflicts "the discipline" upon his own back. There is a hint of onanism in the fact that the holy orgy takes place in a water closet, with the self-destroyer draped over the toilet bowl.

In the second act, the Minister of Justice is kidnapped by a James Bond Pussy Galore type who plans to install him in the White House. As to El Caballo, he is replaced by his double. Plus ça change. Arrabal's political satire embraces the whole of our small planet.

The Extravagant Triumph is also a portrait of the artist as a no-longer-young man. Ron Faber, who plays the dictator with passionate intensity, is made to look like Arrabal. At the end of the play, he is foretold that he will suffer a triple death: the first is a violent murder, that of his double, the second is a return to infantilism — we see him wheeled in a baby carriage bleating "ca, ca, ca" — and the third is yet to come.

Is this fit punishment for having once written that "the Holy Ghost wears a bra"?

Arrabal's new political satire—an exposition of the dramatist's fears, longings, and convictions—is Spanish baroque *a la avant-garde*.

Rosette C. Lamont has just received a Rockefeller Foundation Grant to write a book on the metaphysical farce.