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Middle of the World

by
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translated by
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(Excerpt in English)

Description:

In 1987, during the hardest years of Pinochet's hard regime, 77 actors and actresses were threatened by the military dictatorship with expulsion from the country if they did not cease their artistic activities. "Expulsion from the country" was a euphemism, bearing in mind just how the regime operated and the far from trivial fact that these threatening notes were stained with blood. In light of this, the Sidarte actors' syndicate sought help from numerous well-known international figures. Small acts of solidarity in the form of letters and video recordings arrived from Spain, the United States, France... But one of the actors contacted, perhaps the most famous and successful at the time, Christopher Reeve, Superman himself, went a step further than just sending a message of solidarity. Ariel Dorfmann, the playwright who contacted him, recalls how, after hearing how serious the situation was, Reeve stayed silent for a few seconds and then said: "What exactly can I do to help?"

Reeve spent seven days in Santiago de Chile attempting to mediate with Pinochet's military dictatorship for the freedom of those 77 actors and actresses belonging to the Sidarte syndicate. History tells us that he never actually met Pinochet. But history also tells us that, a short while later, those 77 men and women inexplicably received letters of reprieve. In any case, this isn't a story about Reeve's heroism, even greater off-screen than on it. Nor is it a portrait of a country broken by cruelty... It is simply the love story of a man who could never love.

Mitad del Mundo is about forgiveness, but not about our capacity to forgive each other – it is about the act, perhaps more important and even more difficult, of forgiving ourselves.

Mitad del Mundo was performed (in its original Spanish version) at Teatro Echegaray in Málaga, as a co-production between Factoría Echegaray and Feelgood Teatro, in February/March 2019. It was directed by Fran Perea and performed by Ana Loig, Javier Márquez and Miguel Guardiola.

Reviews:

“An original treatment of a little-known historical event, which brings face-to-face two figures of great iconic value, with a language that places the word itself at the centre of the dramatic action.”
Jury of the Spanish Playwrights Association, on awarding *Mitad del Mundo* its 2018 prize

“What makes *Mitad del Mundo* an important play is its extraordinary approach not so much to history, but to the way history is defined, and immortalised, using such a vulnerable, unpredictable and incomplete instrument as human language.”

"Díaz Morilla constructs an encounter that never took place: one shared onstage by Reeve and Pinochet on account of the safety of those threatened. The author enjoys the freedom to weave a far-reaching meta-theatrical game thanks to his sharp identification of fiction and dream; but, with even greater fortune, he has the benefit of being able to pluck at the finest strings of history with a story that vindicates, and how, the power of theatre when it comes to telling ourselves as stories.”

Pablo Bujalance, Málaga Hoy

“...some extremely powerful characters, very well drawn both in their personalities and in their respective moral convictions.”

Óscar Romero, Diario SUR

“The drama fuses dream and reality, it superimposes planes to make theatre within theatre, it breaks boundaries with the audience and reconstructs them in an instant.”

Regina Sotorrío, Diario SUR

More information on this performance (in Spanish) can be found at:

<http://feelgoodteatro.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/dossier-mitad-del-mundo.pdf>

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

-GENERAL: 70. A soldier, aged more by experience than by years. He never stops being a military man: when he's asleep, when he's playing with his grandchildren, even when he's dreaming. You and I know who he is.

-REEVE: 35. He's Christopher Reeve, but he's also Superman.

At the start of the play we have only a large screen at the back of the stage, onto which various sequences of images will be projected. The actors will position the few elements of scenography as and when they are needed for each scene – these will remain on stage.

SCENE I

REEVE and GENERAL appear from left and right. REEVE is carrying an old-fashioned radio and GENERAL holds a stool. GENERAL puts down the stool and REEVE places the radio on it. They stand on either side of the radio. They look at the audience. REEVE switches on the radio. An old song is playing, probably the protest song Romanza del gorila, by Gloria Martín. The words are accompanied by projected images of the Chilean people. GENERAL turns the dial on the radio, an oldish voice booms out: "Pinochet is speeding up the touchline, he's like an arrow, a lightning bolt, Pinochet, the fearless, invincible defender courageously tries to stop him, but Pinochet is undaunted, unrivalled, untouchable! He shoots, but Pinochet is waiting in goal, nimble as a gazelle, wild like a gorilla... No one has ever got the ball past him, how?! who could...?!" GENERAL turns the dial. Another voice, gentle and resonant, female this time: "It is with infinite pleasure that we welcome to our studio today the band of the moment, loved by men, women and children alike... You hear them wherever you go, in the barber's shop and in the grocer's, Los Pinochet. Tell us, César Augusto Pinochet, as singer and leader of the band Los Pinochet..." GENERAL turns the dial again: The same gentle, mellow tone, like an obedient robot with no critical capacity: "During the afternoon, anticyclone Pinochet will move along Costa Pinochet, although it will stop short of the province of Pinochet." REEVE begins to speak and the radio and Reeve overlap, without drowning each other out.

REEVE

(to audience) I once played third guard from the left in Cinderella. I've played a psychopath... and a tree. In 'The Winter's Tale' I played a bear and, on film, I even played a Nazi soldier. None of them are easy roles, are they? How do you play a tree? What does a bear dream about? Or worse, how does a Nazi soldier look you in the eye? Well, you see... Those weren't my most difficult roles. I found the hardest role of my life was trying to convince that man, during those few days, in that city: Santiago de Chile, 1987. This is the story of the seven days I spent there, trying to save seventy-seven men and women who received a letter soiled with blood. Oh yes, there are plenty of testimonies, lots of books saying that this story didn't happen the way I'm telling it, that this isn't at all accurate, that we never even met... Well, I'm telling you that it's memories that get things wrong. You know what they say: stories can't be wrong. By definition there's no possibility of error: they're stories. Now, imagine just how unusual, how absurd, this story is... (cont'd)

REEVE walks towards GENERAL, who is still immersed in the radio broadcast and doesn't hear him. REEVE places his hands on GENERAL's shoulders.

REEVE (cont'd)

This, the love story of a man who couldn't love, a story in which the protagonist is a monster, it's the dream of a man who couldn't dream...

GENERAL looks at the radio sadly, powerless, he seems for an instant to give in.

Then GENERAL smiles. He leaves.

REEVE (cont'd)

Hey, don't look at me like that!... Is that condescension? (He bursts out laughing) No, my friends... I didn't "play Superman" like I played a tree, a bear or a Nazi... I "was Superman," and right now, on a television in Denver... on a poster on a wall in Bombay, in a military office in Santiago de Chile... *(He smiles)* I'm flying.

SCENE II

GENERAL returns with a huge desk, which he places at one side of the stage, followed by two chairs and an enormous flag... similar to the Chilean flag, but clearly not the Chilean flag.

GENERAL settles into a chair. He removes various things from the drawer: an intercom, a pen, some papers, a telephone... He signs a document without much interest. He glances at his watch and...

GENERAL

(To no one, like a military command) Come in.

Enter REEVE. GENERAL doesn't get up, he glances at him from behind the shelter of the desk.

GENERAL

You have to stand to attention.

REEVE

Pardon?

GENERAL

Stand to attention. You have to stand to attention in front of me.

REEVE

Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't... How do I do it?

GENERAL

How do you do what?

REEVE

Well... Stand to attention.

GENERAL

All right, well... You put your arm like this and...

REEVE salutes clumsily, intentionally?

GENERAL

Fine, fine, take a seat, Mr... Mr Reeve.

REEVE

You know who I am?

GENERAL

But of course. (He pauses) You've come a long way.

REEVE

A very long way. You have no idea.

GENERAL

Whatever you say, Mr Reeve. What do you want?

REEVE

I don't want anything for myself, I'm speaking on behalf of the actors and artists of the Sidarte collective, which...

GENERAL

Yes, yes, yes. You, Sidarte or the bitch that brought you into the world, what is it that you want?

REEVE

We want you to give the 77 their freedom.

GENERAL

They are free.

REEVE

No, they aren't. And you know it.

GENERAL

They're free to do whatever they want, just as they please.

REEVE

We want them not to fear for their lives.

GENERAL

No.

REEVE

...

GENERAL

I can't promise some people I don't even know that they won't fear for their lives. Even I fear for my life. (cont'd)

Pause.

GENERAL (cont'd.)

Did you know that a few months ago some lowlifes tried to attack me? In my car with my grandson, can you believe it? And the car exploded and five of my men died, but of course, you don't care about that... The fact that they were called Pablo Silva, Cardenio Hernández... That means nothing to you. And yes, my man, I fear death too, even though I saw the image of the holy Virgin Mary in the shattered glass. (cont'd)

Pause.

GENERAL (cont'd)

So you see, I do know what I'm talking about and I can tell you that you should fear for your life too.

REEVE looks at the floor, thoughtful.

GENERAL

Yes, it's a threat. You can take it as one if you want.

REEVE

That's not what I was thinking. I was thinking... what kind of person says that they tried to kill HIM, when he was sitting next to his grandson?

Pause. GENERAL looks at him angrily for an instant.

GENERAL

You can take it as a threat, yes. But it's a fact at the same time. We should all fear for our lives. Even more so in a foreign country, in a climate of... what is it your friends call it? A military state. It's called Order, my man. Order. You shouldn't play with words. A military state is one thing, Order is another.

REEVE

You know perfectly well that the threatened actors weren't involved in the attack against you, against your men, against your grandson.

GENERAL

Even so, they should be afraid.

REEVE

Well, that's precisely the slogan they're going to use, that will be the opening phrase in their statement tomorrow.

GENERAL

...

REEVE

"We have decided not to fear death."

GENERAL

Excellent decision. It's a pity that death doesn't care about that, whether they fear it or not, it comes just the same.

REEVE pulls a bloodstained note from his pocket.

REEVE

(Reads) "You have thirty days to leave the country."