The Boy Who Cried Wolf In the Court of Madrid

La Opinión • Espectáculos

TEATRO

El pastorcillo y el lobo en la corte de Madrid

'La verdad sospechosa', de Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, comediógrafo nacido en México en el siglo XVI, se presenta en una inteligente y graciosa producción en inglés

"The Truth Suspected," by Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, a comedy writer born in Mexico in the 16th Century, in a bright and witty production in English

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Thanks to an inspired translation by Dakin Matthews and stage direction grounded on the virtue of simplicity and the transporting power of rhythm, The Antaeus Theatre Company is mounting a smart and classy production of "La verdod sospechosa" (here called "The Liar") by Juan Ruiz de Alarcón.

The playwright was born in Mexico in 1581 and studied in Spain, where he turned himself into one of the premiere practitioners of the Golden Age Comedia. In this particular theatrical tradition, one cannot talk about motivation in the modern sense of the term, inasmuch as the characters--or better, character types--are driven by a single defining impulse which remains unchanged over the course of the play. These character types, simple and energetic, do not reflect on what they are doing, or how they do it, but instead move forward compelled by an inborn instinct which does not let them deviate from their rut, no matter where it leads.

This being so, the comedy works in today's world on the strength of the technical facility with which it is constructed and the rapid rhythm imparted by the director Anne McNaughton, who keeps the focus steadily on the action of the plot and downplays any psychological complications.

Once this is understood, the twists and turns of the plot grab the audience's attention and hold it to the very end, without the need of any further complexity. In fact, there is nothing beneath the surface here; all is in plain view, and quite satisfying just as it is.

The plot deals with the adventures of the young Don Garcla who, upon his return to Madrid after pursuing his studies in Salamanca, is powerless to resist his obsessive compulsion to tell the most barefaced lies (albeit with a kind of poetic *brío*) on whatever slight occasion presents itself.

This liar, of a wonderful imagination, but also a sadly unredeemable one, has no intention of doing ill, nor does he lie for profit or gain, but rather on compulsion-and expects his lies to have only a momentary effect, forgotten almost as soon as he speaks them. In other words, he has no idea of the consequences of his actions--so typical of an immature young man still stuck in his adolescence.

The biggest problem is that the consequences of his actions not only do not disappear but, on the contrary, inevitably keep on developing of their own accord, and become impossible to stop.

Except with yet another lie. Until finally the same thing happens as in "The Boy Who Cried Wolf"--by the time the liar tries to tell the truth, everyone suspects him.

Although Don Garcia's lies initially weave the net of deception in which everyone will, sooner or later, become entangled, the interesting thing about this comedy is that, quite subtly and ironically, not only does Don Garcia deceive others, he is himself deceived--by reality.

And right from the start--because all his misadventures are grounded on the fact that he thinks the woman he loves is named Lucrecia, when in fact it's Jacinta he's been dealing with.

So all the time he writes love letters to "Lucrecia" (who because of them falls madly in love with him), in reality he's been courting Jacinta... And so the misunderstandings go on multiplying themselves, which are better seen than spoken of here.

The cast maintains a high level of excellence, one and all, in the rhythm of playing and in the ease with which they embody their respective types, capturing the exact quality of their characters. John DeMita, with an attitude of innocence and readiness for all occasions, dazzles as Don Garcia, as do Dakin Matthews as his comic and philosophical servant Tristán, and Nike Doukas as a venturesome, fascinating, and impudent Jacinta.

Mikael Salazar (Jacinta's jealous lover) and Marcelo Tubert (Don Garcia's father) play with energy and intensity.

The version is a modern one in the sense that not only is the English quite contemporary (which makes it that much easier to understand), but also the production does not try to recapture a bygone era, either in manners or gesture. or in costume which tends, perhaps for reasons of economy, to favor clothes somewhat too subdued and colorless for the Madrid Court of the seventeenth century