

Toward a New Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary Catalan Drama

SHARON G. FELDMAN
University of Richmond

Abstract

In the contemporary Catalan theatre scene, mobility is often synonymous with prestige, and success is frequently measured as a function of international range and reputation. Moreover, for dramatists writing in Catalan, ever-conscious of the precarious condition of their language and cultural identity, their paradoxical position of both political distance and proximity in relation to Spain has, perhaps, accentuated their yearning to belong to a larger global sphere. Given Catalonia's status as a stateless nation (or, as a disputed territory), it may not come as a surprise, then, that plays emerging from this corner of the world often appear to advocate a type of cosmopolitan European identity, one that actively embraces otherness and difference, overlapping citizenships, and the broad complexity of relationships among the global, local, national, and regional. It is a brand of cosmopolitanism—reminiscent of the work of cultural theorist/philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah—that seeks to move beyond the confines of the nation-state to encourage new paradigms of solidarity and interconnectedness that accentuate cultural and linguistic pluralism. How have Catalan playwrights attempted to satisfy, both literally and figuratively, a desire to transcend the local and the particular, to reach beyond their most immediate geographic space and move beyond local borders, both spatial and political? I shall examine a sampling of recent Catalan plays in light of this “new cosmopolitanism.”

Keywords

Kwame Anthony Appiah, Carles Batlle; Catalan drama; Cosmopolitanism; Josep Maria Miró

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University of Richmond

On the Triple Frontier

Olvidémonos de ser turistas, a work by Catalan dramatist Josep Maria Miró, which premiered at the Sala Beckett in Barcelona in January 2018, begins in a hotel room in Brazil in the present day. There, Martí and Carme, a Barcelona couple, married for thirty years, appear—at least at first glance—to be vacationing near Iguazu Falls and the so-called Triple Frontier, where Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay converge. Yet, not long after the opening scene, Carme furtively vanishes while in pursuit of a mysterious young man whom the couple encountered during an earlier sightseeing expedition. Martí, consequently, sets off in search of Carme. No longer tourists anymore, they find themselves engaged in separate journeys, traveling by bus and traversing borders until, eventually, they reunite in the provincial capital city of San Fernando del Valle de Catamarca, in northwest Argentina. As they endeavour to resolve an enigmatic situation concerning their son who, during the economic crisis seven years prior, abandoned Catalonia for Argentina, they also seek answers to questions related to their own sense of identity—cultural and existential.

Indeed, there is a decisive moment in the play in which Martí asks: “¿Por qué tanta gente necesita irse a otro lugar?” (2018f, 468). He poses the question over sips of *mate* during an unexpectedly philosophical discussion with his Argentinian bus driver, Mauricio, who has left Buenos Aires for a more nomadic sort of existence. The question encapsulates, in a sense, the preoccupation (or even obsession) with mobility and transcendence, geographical and spatial, that surfaces throughout much of Miró’s theatre—and, I would add, a large corpus of contemporary Catalan drama. It is a preoccupation that is further accentuated in this particular instance by the epigraph with which Miró introduces his text: a poem by Basque writer Bernardo Atxaga titled “37 preguntas a mi único

contacto al otro lado de la frontera” (Miró 2018f, 448). The speaker, contemplating the same issue of mobility pondered by Martí in the play, begins with the rhetorical question: “Dime, ¿Es feliz la gente allá al otro lado de la frontera?” (Atxaga 1990, 37). Here migrations do not only occur in the physical geographic sense; they are also emotional. Indeed, sometimes, they are metaphoric and entail a break with monolingualistic paradigms as well.

Travel and Translation

As evident in the title of the play and the aforementioned quotes, the original text of *Olvidémonos de ser turistas* was written almost entirely in Spanish in a version of the Spanish language in which the Argentinian lilt in the characters’ voices and the smell of *yerba mate* seems to waft from the page. This might appear to be a rather unusual gesture on the part of a playwright born in Vic in 1977, whose artistic trajectory thus far has been marked by several major Catalan theatre awards and by his frequent collaborations with the public *Teatre Nacional de Catalunya*. Still, Miró’s plays have, in effect, already garnered great success in Spanish translation throughout Spain and Latin America. To cite one significant example, the Argentine production of *El principi d’Arquímedes* (2011), translated by Eva Vallinés Menéndez and directed by Corina Fiorillo, premiered at the *Teatro San Martín* in Buenos Aires in March of 2014 and remained there for nearly an entire year before touring the country. Catalan theatre has thus arrived and has been in full bloom for quite some time along the illustrious Avenida Corrientes. *Arquímedes*, furthermore, has been translated into no fewer than 15 languages.

On 24 January 2018, *Olvidémonos de ser turistas* premiered, in the original Spanish, at the *Sala Beckett* in Barcelona as part of a series of activities highlighting Miró’s work. Gabriela Izcovich, an Argentinian director/actress/playwright who had already left a sizable imprint on the Barcelona theatre scene, was tasked with staging the production, which featured an international cast from Catalonia, Spain, and Argentina (Lina Lambert, Pablo Viña, Esteban Meloni, and Eugenia Alonso). After Barcelona, the production moved on to the *Teatro Español* in Madrid and then to the *Teatro del 25 de Mayo* in Buenos Aires and the *Teatro Solís* in Montevideo, thus epitomizing what Belén Guinart once called a “montaje de ida y vuelta” or a “round-trip production” in relation to the theatrical bridges, mutual

artistic contamination, and cross-cultural exchange that has existed in recent years between Buenos Aires and Barcelona (2001, 9).¹

Travel and translation have habitually served jointly as barometers of the vitality of the Catalan theatre scene. The news of the November 2017 premiere of Sergi Belbel's 1993 work *Després de la pluja* at the *Comédie Française*, the first play from Catalonia ever to be produced at the most hallowed temple of Parisian theatrical life, was an overt reminder of the international presence of Catalan drama abroad. Soon after, Belbel's play, staged under the title *Après la pluie* by Swiss director Lilo Baur, opened the imposing door of the *Comédie* to Catalan dramatist Lluïsa Cunillé, whose *Massacre* premiered there in January 2020 under the direction of Tommy Milliot.

In Catalonia, mobility is often synonymous with prestige, and success in the theatre is frequently measured as a function of international range and reputation. Moreover, for dramatists writing in Catalan, ever conscious of the precarious condition of their language and cultural identity, their paradoxical position of both political distance and proximity in relation to Spain has, perhaps, accentuated their yearning to belong to a larger global sphere. Given Catalonia's current status as a stateless nation (or, a disputed territory), it may not come as a surprise, then, that plays emerging from this corner of the world often appear to advocate, through context, content, and form, a cosmopolitan European identity that actively embraces otherness and difference, overlapping citizenships, and the broad complexity of relationships among the global, local, national, and regional. It is a brand of cosmopolitanism reminiscent of the work of cultural theorist/philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah that seeks to move beyond the confines of the nation-state to encourage new paradigms of solidarity and interconnectedness that accentuate cultural and linguistic pluralism.² How have Catalan playwrights attempted to satisfy, both literally and figuratively, a desire to transcend the local and the particular, to reach beyond their most immediate geographic space and to move beyond local borders, both spatial and political?

As Helena Buffery has shown in her work on the various "afterlives" in Catalan that Shakespearean texts have assumed over time, translation has often helped to satisfy these cosmopolitan proclivities and has played a crucial role in the dissemination of

¹ See, also, Feldman (2010).

² See, also, Habermas (2003).

international drama within the Catalan-speaking lands (2007). Historically, since the nineteenth century, the Catalan theatre scene has eagerly embraced the presence of an international repertoire that has been translated into Catalan. In a converse sense, translation has unquestionably occupied a vital function in the circulation of Catalan drama beyond the Catalan-speaking lands. Yet the desire for transcendence has been fulfilled in other ways, in addition to translation. In the pages that follow, I shall examine a sampling of recent Catalan plays in the light of the current spirit of cosmopolitanism, which accentuates the values of multilingualism and intercultural openness and inclusiveness.

“Rooted” Cosmopolitanism

I am certainly mindful that to speak of cosmopolitanism within the context of Catalan culture is a far-from-novel idea and, perhaps, in some contexts, even a cliché. As Kathryn Woolard has mapped out in vivid detail, the Kantian idea of a “citizen of the world” has, since the nineteenth century, been appropriated and contorted in varying ways by citizens of Catalonia and Spain, occupying multiple positions along the political spectrum, that is to say, by Catalanists and Castilianists alike (or, within the current political climate, by *independentistes* as well as *unionistes* or *constitucionalistes*) (2016, 152). Such appropriations never fail to allude to the tensions between what is, on the one hand, a modern, outward-looking, broadminded view of the world (i.e. cosmopolitanism) and, on the other, an insular, backward-looking, provincial perspective, associated with the most intransigent forms of nationalism. Curiously, while a cosmopolitan perspective would ostensibly be irreconcilable with the notion of nationalism, this is not necessarily the case within the framework of Catalan politics. It is a somewhat paradoxical situation that has prompted Montserrat Guibernau to distinguish between the hermetic view of Spain once imposed by the so-called “authoritarian nationalism” of the Franco regime—a view that continues, for many, to resonate today—and that which fostered so-called “democratic nationalisms” defended by the Catalans, Basques, and Galicians, which celebrate the richness of their corresponding linguistic and cultural heritage (2013, 24). Guibernau thus perceives within this framework a certain degree of compatibility between the objectives of both democratic nationalism and cosmopolitanism, especially in their shared commitment to human rights and social justice and in

their opposition to intolerance, racism, and xenophobia (2013, 19).

Guibernau's view, which appears to merge nationalism with cosmopolitanism in a somewhat surprising or ironic way, is evocative of the image of the "rooted cosmopolitan" conjured up by Appiah in his semiautobiographical reflections: one who is "attached to a home of one's own, with its own cultural particularities, but [takes] pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people" (1997, 618). This is not, therefore, the self-indulgent bourgeois cosmopolitanism associated with what Appiah calls "liberals on safari" (Appiah 2006, 214; Woolard 2016, 152); it is, rather, a worldview of global equality and responsibility that seeks intercultural openness and inclusiveness. In a word, it is about "community." According to Appiah:

The cosmopolitan also imagines that in such a world not everyone will find it best to stay in their natal patria, so that the circulation of people among different localities will involve not only cultural tourism (which the cosmopolitan admits to enjoying) but migration, nomadism, diaspora.

(1997, 618)

Multilingualism and Mobility

An extensive list of Catalan plays written during the past two decades reflects the spirit of Appiah's rooted cosmopolitanism. Some of the works that I have in mind include *Suite* (of 2001) by Carles Batlle; *Salamandra* (2005) by Josep Maria Benet i Jornet; *Trànsits* (2006) by Batlle; *Marburg* (2010) by Guillem Clua; *Fum* (2013) by Josep Maria Miró; *Quebec-Barcelona* (2012) by Mercè Sarriàs, which was performed as a bilingual French/Catalan production; *La travessia* [The Crossing] (2015) by Miró; *Islàndia* (2017) by Lluïsa Cunillé; the aforementioned *Olvidémonos de ser turistas* by Miró; and *Nòmades (o el camell blau)* [Nomads (or the Blue Camel)] (2016–19) by Batlle. It will be clear from this list of ten plays that the work of Miró and that of Batlle is especially relevant here, and I shall be returning to both dramatists. These are plays in which the theme of a journey, travel, migration, mobility, nomadism, diaspora, or multiple sorts of wandering becomes a defining element that is somehow reflected in the spatiotemporal structure of the text. Each work conjures its own geopathological map of the world, transferring to an exterior physical space certain interior desires, anxieties, and emotions. In some cases, the voyage can be likened to an epic journey or odyssey. More often

than not, it is a quest that entails a transcendence or evasion of the space of Catalonia.

By way of example, in Benet's *Salamandra*, the characters embark on a whirlwind journey that begins in the Southern California desert and moves subsequently to Idaho, Germany, Greece, and France, with references to New York and Egypt surfacing along the way. The journey ends, finally, in Barcelona. In *Marburg*, Clua employs a Kushnerian sensibility with regard to space and time, alternating the action among four different locations situated on four separate continents at four distinct moments. All the places share the name "Marburg," and all share the effects of an illness in the form of a blood disorder, which constitutes the central axis of the plot. In Cunillé's *Islàndia*, which premiered at the *Teatre Nacional de Catalunya* in 2018, the circumstances of the economic crisis compel an adolescent boy to leave his home in Iceland and embark upon a journey that entails his many wanderings throughout the City of New York in search of his mother. In Batlle's *Trànsits*, the action is set on a moving train: the protagonist is on his way to an abstract northern country, returning home to a mysterious language and unnamed land that he left behind many years earlier, when he abandoned a war-torn landscape for a more peaceful Barcelona.

The allusion in *Trànsits* to a "mysterious" language is one of many ways in which multilingualism is invoked in these plays. Language in the theatre, whether on the stage or in the realm of the audience, is, as Marvin Carlson has observed, always a deeply local affair (2006, 1 19). Hence, it is only natural that, in Catalonia, the linguistic conditions of diglossia or, even the more inclusive heteroglossia would somehow be reflected in its theatrical life. In *Speaking in Tongues* (2006), a study of multilingualism in the theatre, Carlson goes against the grain of Bakhtinian convention, which would relegate the phenomenon of heteroglossia—the coexistence of a range of languages, discourses, voices, and perspectives—to the realm of the novel. In its varying forms, heteroglossia has had an almost ubiquitous presence throughout theatre history, ranging from Greek drama to intercultural experimentation (such as that of Peter Brook or Ariane Mnouchkine) to the use of supertitles that spectators in Catalonia are no doubt accustomed to seeing and reading. For Carlson, "heteroglossic cultures in the modern world," moreover, are "more common, more complex in their linguistic mixing and more visible politically and theatrically than at any time in the past," although he does acknowledge what is often the subordination of one language to another more dominant form of discourse (2006, 15 17).

With regard to Catalonia, Buffery has proposed what one might call a kinder and gentler – that is, less hierarchical – view of linguistic politics than Carlson, as she prefers to envision Catalonia, in heteroglossic terms, as a place “where all languages might begin to be seen and heard on their own terms, rather than simply maintaining the oppositional frame of the dominant versus the subordinate, or the major versus the minor” (2013, 83).

I would like to think that Buffery’s description has begun to hold true for the heteroglossic landscape that is the space of Catalan theatre today, perhaps as a cosmopolitan reflection of the decline of the authoritative nationalist project that was Francoism, as well as the normalization – or, even Europeanization – of the Catalan stage. Recent programming for Catalan audiences, often with supertitles in Catalan or Spanish, has included performances in Dutch (*Romeinse tragedies* [Roman tragedies], an adaptation by director Ivo van Hove of William Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Anthony and Cleopatra*, performed by the Toneelgroep Amsterdam at the *Teatre Lliure Montjuïc-Sala Fabià Puigserver*, Barcelona, 2013); Polish (*Wycinka Holzfällen* [Woodcutters], an adaptation by director Krystian Lupa of Thomas Bernhard’s *Holzfällen*, performed by the Teatr Polski we Wrocławiu as part of the Festival Temporada Alta at the *Teatre El Canal de Salt*, 2014); English (William Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, directed by Declan Donnellan, performed by Cheek by Jowl at the *Teatre Auditori de Sant Cugat*, 2017); Italian (Luciana Maniaci and Francesco d’Amore’s *Il nostro amore schifo* [Our lousy love], directed by Roberto Tarasco, staged at *Almería Teatre*, Barcelona, 2019); French (Alexandra Badea’s *Je ne marcherai plus dans les traces de tes pas* [I shall no longer walk in your footsteps], directed by Vincent Dussart, staged at the *Sala Ovidi Montllor/Institut del Teatre*, Barcelona, 2020), and a combination of Catalan, Spanish, English, French, Chinese, and German (*Kingdom*, created by the homegrown Catalan collective Agrupació Señor Serrano, staged at the *Festival Grec/Teatre Lliure Montjuïc-Sala Fabià Puigserver*, Barcelona, 2020). One need only glance therefore at this recent programming highlighting the work of several internationally renowned directors to see that, although a play may be *monoglossic* in its presentation, its production values may also assume or account for the presence of an audience that is *heteroglossic* or, at the very least, open to the reception of a multilingual performance culture. Thus, the cultural context for the theatrical cosmopolitanism that interests me here is intrinsically multilingual.

As a corollary to the multilingual programming that I have outlined, the 2017 production of *Històries d'Istanbul, a contrapeu* – the Catalan adaptation of a play by Turkish playwright-actress-director Yeşim Özsoy Gülan – stands as an additional paradigm within this heteroglossic theatrical space. The production, which premiered at the *Teatre Lliure Montjuïc-Espai Lliure* under the direction of Joan Arqué with a cast of Catalan actors, incorporated original music and a sound space created by the Catalan musical group, Nuú. Rendered into Catalan from the original Turkish by Carles Batlle with the assistance of Yldiray Ileri, the text captures the paradoxical essence of the city of Istanbul as a bridge between East and West, a space of mutual encounter and overlap, where artistic modes and languages rooted in both past and present, in Asia and Europe, and in the religious and secular worlds all converge. Inspired by the oral storytelling tradition of the Turkish *meddah*, Özsoy's play takes poetic elements and rhythmic patterns drawn from Ottoman musical traditions and merges them with contemporary European languages of the stage. As Batlle observes, “quan parlem de Turquia, també parlem d'un “no lloc,” un espai indefinit entre allò que culturalment s'ha batejat com a “Pròxim Orient” i Europa, és a dir, un país extraeuropeu i extraoriental al mateix temps” (2020b, 193). It is in this vacillating sort of “no place” – neither completely European nor completely Asian, which fuses multiple performance languages to move beyond the specificity of Catalonia, that we can find a metaphoric representation of multilingualism.

Multilingualism Through Metaphor

Generally, in the Catalan plays in question, multilingualism is not portrayed in a literal, “authentic” sense; rather, it emerges in a figurative way, as a form of artifice. Linguistic verisimilitude or authenticity is not the ultimate goal; instead, the linguistic crossings and transfers that emerge in these cosmopolitan works are evoked by way of the theme of mobility or through the figure of the traveller or the nomad, whose presence also becomes a structural element. For Zygmunt Bauman, nomadism embodies the fluidity and liquidity – the ebb and flow – that characterizes the phase in the history of modernity in which we currently find ourselves immersed. In his words, “We are witnessing the revenge of nomadism over the principle of territoriality and settlement. In the fluid stage of modernity, the settled majority is ruled by the nomadic and exterritorial elite” (2000, 12). Given such fluidity, the nomad serves as

an extremely fitting metaphor for the characteristically fluctuating or even provisional and precarious quality of Catalan identity. To illustrate this point further, I would like first to revisit the work of Miró and, more specifically, *Olvidémonos de ser turistas*. I shall then move on to discuss the work of Batlle.

Although *Olvidémonos de ser turistas* was originally performed entirely in Spanish, Miró did reveal to me, most intriguingly, that he originally wrote the first scene, a dialogue between Martí and Carme, in Catalan (2 January 2018b). The aspiration to create a multilingual text was there, but he yielded to pragmatics and decided to make the text monolingual when Izcovich and the Argentine and Spanish actors came on board for the production. Such a move, at the time, seemed more convenient and expedient. Moreover, he notes that when the Argentine actors travelled to Barcelona to rehearse and perform in the production, their sojourn in Europe was a kind of destabilizing reverie, stirring mixed sentiments that mirrored the emotional experience of the characters in the play as it compelled them to confront directly their own existence on the “frontier” (30 December 2017). Yet, when a definitive version of the text was finally published in a volume of Miró’s collected works (*Teatre reunit 2009–2018*), he took advantage of the opportunity to transform the opening dialogue back into the original Catalan, thus engaging the multilingual theatrical landscape through a process of self-translation (2018f).³

Miró is himself a frequent traveller and itinerant wanderer, and *Olvidémonos de ser turistas* is inspired by his multiple trips to Argentina. He has observed how, when traveling, if you stop and begin to perceive things through different eyes – that is, through the eyes of those who live in the place that is your destination – you may suddenly forget that you are a tourist: “se t’oblida que ets turista i t’adones que ets ciutadà d’un món complicat . . . amb responsabilitats i coresponsabilitats múltiples . . . i penses que n’ets part, amb tot allò bo i dolent” (2018b). Miró’s words echo Appiah’s cosmopolitan concern regarding solidarity and interconnectedness among the members of a community as well as the pleasure derived from the presence of those other, different places.

While *Olvidémonos de ser turistas* represents Miró’s first – and, to date, only – work in Spanish, it is not the first by him to take place in a hotel in a far-off land; rather, suitcases, hotels, and exotic places, in

³ In earlier drafts of the play, the characters of Martí and Carme were known as “Enrique” and “Carmen,” names that were less suggestive of their identity as a Catalan couple.

addition to nomads and refugees, emerge frequently in his theatre. An enticing air of mystery flows throughout many of his plays, and his characters often inhabit tenuous, indeterminate landscapes, spaces upon which they are able to project their innermost fears and desires. In one of Miró's earliest plays, *La dona que perdia tots els avions*, awarded the prestigious Born Prize in 2009, the protagonist is a self-described "professional tourist" a woman who regularly lives out of a suitcase, as she travels the world from hotel to hotel in a nomadic, transient state of being that eventually brings her to the capital city of a tropical island. In *Fum*, which premiered at the *Teatre Nacional de Catalunya* in 2013, two Catalan couples meet by chance in a hotel in which they are forced to take refuge for three days, as they suddenly find themselves in the midst of an unsettling situation of political insurgency. In *La travessia*, awarded the Frederic Roda Prize in 2015, the setting is not a hotel, but the protagonist happens to be a nun working for a humanitarian organization in a dangerous but unnamed area of the world that is fraught with violence. It is also a multilingual zone, populated with nomads, a space that could easily lend itself to the creation of a multilingual *mise en scène*. These are plays that are situated in politically and socially fragile, distant, anonymous lands, and within these provisional spaces, Miró coaxes us into viewing his equally fragile characters from varying angles, thereby engaging us in a play of perspectives that, at times, acquires cinematic dimensions. Indeed, the title of *Fum* appears to allude to the elusiveness of a truth for which the spectator is compelled to search among abundant smoke and, perhaps, abundant languages as well as clouds of doubt that billow forth.

Nomads and Wanderers

Although Carles Batlle's *Nòmades (o el camell blau)*, awarded the Premi Octubre de Teatre Pere Capellà in 2019, has yet to be staged, it has special relevance here, for it foregrounds certain conditions of cultural hybridity that underpin the cosmopolitan framework that I have begun to outline. In earlier works, such as *Combat* (1995), *Les veus de Iambu* (1997), *Oasi* (2001), *Temptació* (2003), and the aforementioned *Trànsits*, Batlle engaged in the creation of allegorical spaces of cosmopolitan desire upon which he engraved an aspiration to transcend the local and the particularities of "home" here, Europe.⁴ These are works in which he considers the challenges of

⁴ See, also, Feldman (2009, 254-87).

cultural hybridity within the space of contemporary Europe, portraying hybridity as an unavoidable, ever-present, and even necessary state of being, which permeates not only the realm of national cultures but also that of artistic creation (Werbner 2015).⁵ Perhaps, then, it is in the aforementioned figure of the nomad, to which he has lent the title of his play (arguably his most ambitious work to date), that Batlle has found an apt personification of the conditions of hybridity that have interested him all along. It is the same nomad that emerges in the philosophical writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri: the displaced being that moves through a fluid space, defined according to his or her own unstable existence (1987, 474).

Nòmades is based, in part, on an episode in the life of Batlle's maternal grandfather, Agustí Jordà Biosca, the circumstances of which first surfaced in two of his earlier plays: *Bizerta 1939* (2001) and *Zoom* (2010). Taken as a trilogy, which Batlle has titled the "Trilogia de Bizerta" (2020b, 37), the three works offer distinct ways of approaching the collective trauma of the Spanish Civil War, a trauma inherited through the direct transmission of his grandfather's oral history. Towards the end of the war, Jordà, a corporal in the Spanish Republican Navy, fled to Cartagena, a port city on the Mediterranean coast. He was subsequently evacuated with his fleet to Bizerte, on the northernmost tip of Tunisia, where the French colonial government impounded his ship. As Enric Gallén elucidates, Jordà found himself interred in a concentration camp, Meheri-Zebbeus, situated in the Tunisian desert, which serves as the backdrop for some of the scenes in *Nòmades* (2020, 10-11).

With *Nòmades*, Batlle takes his brand of theatrical cosmopolitanism a step forward, through an intercultural approach to performance in which, in a manner similar to Özsoy's *Històries d'Istanbul*, he proposes a hybridization of languages of the stage, fusing a contemporary European polyphonic theatrical idiom composed of varying textures and voices with theatrical traditions originating in the Maghreb. *Nòmades*, thus, provides an uncommon example in recent Catalan drama of intercultural performance, what Patrice Pavis defines as "a more or less conscious and voluntary mixing of performance traditions traceable to distinct cultural areas" (1996, 8). Batlle offers the following initial guidance in the opening

⁵ Werbner draws upon the distinction between two concepts of linguistic hybridization proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination*: unconscious (organic) hybridity and intentional (aesthetic) hybridity. She then situates these concepts within a cultural context.

notes of his text:

Així doncs, a l'hora de muntar-la, cal pensar en els narradors de rondalles i els rapsodes de les places del Magrib: imaginar com juguen amb els materials i amb les formes expositives de què disposen per captar i mantenir l'atenció dels seus auditoris.

Es podrà, doncs, combinar el drama convencional, la narració (i la narració coral a diverses veus – decidir què es diu, què no es diu, qui ho diu i com ho diu), els joc dels titelles, els objectes, les ombres, l'expansió musical o la projecció d'imatges. I també barrejar la tonalitat tràgica i els accents més col·loquials.

L'obra es pot interpretar amb un nombre indefinit d'actors i actrius.

(2020e, 376)

The foregoing description, which envisions a *mise en scène* of both intimate and epic dimensions, recalls the “overwhelmingly exhaustive and exhausting” aesthetic practices posed by North American playwright Tony Kushner (Kushner 1995, 60-61).

Although *Batlle's* text is written in Catalan, the voice of a narrator (or narrators), a kind of choral persona who mediates between the “real-life” realm of the audience and the fictional realm of the stage, at times also functions as an interpreter of the multiple languages whose presence is evoked in the play. The figure of the narrator also makes *Nòmades* one of the most “rhapsodic” of *Batlle's* plays. In crafting the text, he drew upon the notion of a rhapsodic impulse in contemporary theatre developed by French playwright/director Jean-Pierre Sarrazac in reference to the rhapsodists, or performers, of epic poetry in classical Greece (*Batlle* 2020b, 37). For Sarrazac, the *théâtre rhapsodique* is a collage of hybrid conception composed of multiple discourses, an assemblage of epic, dramatic, and lyrical elements, woven together like a patchwork of multicolored snippets, “cousu de moments dramatiques et de morceaux narratifs” [sewn from dramatic moments and pieces of narrative] (1999, 36).

Nòmades has a three-part structure: “La Crida,” “El Llindar” and “El Xot.” Here we are far from the idea of “home” that was present in *Batlle's* earlier works. The intermingling of European and North African theatrical traditions is echoed in the spatiotemporal complexity of the play, for the action alternates among several different time periods and places that include Barcelona, El Chott el Jerid, a large endorheic salt lake near Tozeur, Tunisia, and Meheri-Zebbeus, also in Tunisia. The figure of the nomad takes on special

relevance here, its image filtered through the subjective influence of adventure novels, popular music, and films, such as David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) or George Lucas' *Star Wars* film series. The characters include a young European couple, generically named "Home" and "Ella." They exemplify the type of rooted cosmopolitanism described by Appiah, anchored to their own home but appreciating the presence of other places and peoples. The man's desire to travel through the Tunisian desert is motivated by his love of Italian pop music; hers is a result of her research as a university professor specializing in ancient myths. Two literary characters also make an appearance in the play: Kara Ben Nemsî and his loyal servant and friend with an infinitely long name Hachi Halef Omar Ben Hachi Abul Abbàs Ibn Hachi Davud al Gossarah. Battle has plucked them from the nineteenth-century novels of German writer Karl May, such as *Durch das Land der Skipertaren* [*The Evil Saint*, trans. 1979] (1892) and the *Von Bagdad nach Stambul* [*Caravan of Death*, trans. 1979] (1892), which are often situated in the Islamic world. Kara, befittingly, speaks dozens of languages fluently. Battle's text also includes, naturally, a character inspired by his grandfather, a Republican corporal, who, at the end of the Spanish Civil War has been captured and taken to a concentration camp in southern Tunisia. In the end, he will escape and wander the desert atop a legendary blue camel. All the characters in the play are, in effect, nomads, whose stories overlap and are replicated like variations on a similar musical theme, as they zigzag across space and time.

Curiously, all this travel to and fro is interspersed with allusions to two Italian pop songs of the 1980s. One reference appears in the form of an epigraph at the beginning of the text containing lyrics to the song "Nomadi" [Nomads] (1986), written by Juri Camisasca. The other, "Il treno di Tozeur" [The trains of Tozeur] (1985), was famously performed by Francesco, or "Franco," Battiato and the singer known simply as "Alice" as the Italian entry in the Eurovision Contest of 1984. As the character of the man recalls, his desire to travel to Tozeur was inspired—as outrageous as it may seem—by Battiato's song:

*Nei villaggi di frontiera guardano passare i treni
Le strade deserte di Tozeur
Da una casa lontana, tua madre mi vede
Si ricorda di me delle mie abitudini.
E per un istante ritorna la voglia
Di vivere a un'altra velocità
Passano ancora lenti i treni per Tozeur.*

[In the border villages they watch the trains go by
 The deserted streets of Tozeur
 From a distant house, your mother sees me
 She recalls my old ways.
 And for an instant the desire returns
 To live at a different pace
 The trains to Tozeur still pass slowly.]

(2020e, 405-06)

The Italian lyrics of both “Il treni di Tozeur” and “Nomadi,” songs that bring a literal dash of multilingualism to the play, invoke the figure of the traveller or wanderer, the fluid being who traverses frontiers, unwilling to obey established norms of territoriality and always in search of some form of transcendence. We can only wonder about the conditions of a future *mise en scène* of Battle’s *Nòmades*. It would no doubt mark a culminating point in terms of the current spirit of cosmopolitanism that has imbued the Catalan stage, one that shows no signs of relenting.

The foregoing sampling of plays and productions offers a glimpse into the varying ways that multilingualism informs the cosmopolitan impulse on the Catalan stage. From literal displays of multilingualism in the programming of international theatre and in plays such as *Quebec-Barcelona* or the revised version of *Olvidémonos de ser turistas* to the more figurative manifestations grounded in artistic pretence, as seen throughout *Nòmades*, all contribute to the creation of a performance culture that presumes a worldview that emphasizes the values of global equality and community. It is a cultural space that enables spectators to be transported afar and to circulate among distant lands, but also to commune within an inclusive space, perhaps inspiring in them a new sense of solidarity and even pleasure derived by the presence of others, as well as a renewed consciousness with regard to cultural pluralism.

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