

IL PICKWICK

Tell me "ti amo" and don't laugh at my expense

English translation

It is Saint Juan's the Beheaded night, the night of the witches, midsummer's night. The party begins in the theatre's foyer, where a *tammurriata* starts playing. It is a propitiatory and magic sound that should be danced with men on one side and women in front. The band *Ars Nova Napoli* is playing from the stair that leads up to the gallery and the audience, amused, listens and keeps the rhythm. The music spreads outside the theatre as well, where the public is lining up to enter, or sitting at the bar sipping a drink. It is a holiday night, and you can feel it in the air.

When we enter the theatre, we are offered a glass of white wine, some of us get to sit on the stage, on a few chairs at the back. We can now hear the music coming from outside, as if we entered the house and closed the blinds. The speaker announces that the show is about to begin, we silence our phones and finish our wine, the public gets quite as the lights go off. The festive atmosphere we left outside is here again on stage: we really entered the house. Juan and Cristina dance while tidying up the kitchen under a decoration of coloured light bulbs.

It is Saint Juan's night for the servants Juan and Cristina as well as for the countess. Strindberg's play, in Lorenzo Montanini's show, is transferred from Sweden to the South of the world: Colombia. Here Julia is disobedient and absent-minded, often stiff in her body, unpleasant in her voice and foolish in her behaviour. She wants to dance and she is dressed like a ballerina: a long white tutu and a chignon. She was taught never to submit to any men, but her living without any oppression transformed it in a thirst to command, ordering any men to do what she pleases. Not only because Juan is her servant, but also because he is a man. And her desires, on midsummer night, when the sun meets the moon and thus when male and female have their encounter, are desires of love.

Miss Julia wants to be loved and wants to be loved by a servant. The distance between the two is not only between the sexes but also between classes, and the opposition is in language as well: not just "tu" and "voi" as in Swedish, but it is the language they choose to speak that changes. Cristina and Juan speak in Spanish and gossip about the countess in Spanish. Julia speaks English and Juan speaks English to her, mixing it with Spanish when he can't seem to find the right words. It is Julia then to speak some Spanish to him as well, and, considering that we are in Italy, that the music was a *tammurriata*, she slips in a: "Tell me *ti amo*".

The actors' movement is like a dance. They always act facing each other, almost never towards the audience, and that's why some of us can be sitting on stage, and just have a different point of view from who is sitting in the parterre or in the gallery. Man and woman get together and move apart, they attract and repel each other, as in a *tarantella*. But their dance is not a happy one. The music is always played live by Helen Hee on a violin; she sits on one side, observing and reacting to the action: her chords vibrate strongly.

During Saint Juan's night dreams should come true, but Miss Julia's dream is a nightmare, and the nightmare comes true when she wakes up the day after. The Mass for Saint Juan the Beheaded is about to begin and Juan chops the head off Julia's bird which becomes an apple on stage. The countess that swore never to submit to any men became a slave to her servant. The night she spent in Juan's room took away her honour but she was never truly free. She would run away but she is stopped, the only way out is death. This day is a bloody day. The music gets more and more dramatic, the movement frenzy: she is now dancing alone, back and forth on the stage, on top of the table, on the windowsill, she is the bird and this is her cage. When she manages to break free, she realises that the sun is nothing but a yellow lamp, that there is no freedom.

Miss Julia is a captivating show from the very beginning when we are invited to take part in the celebration, to dance and sing music from our traditions. The mixture of languages is fascinating, not only for how they sound but also for the impact they have on the story, for how they help us understand the identity of the characters. We don't struggle to follow the action and everything is a delight for our eyes and ears.

And I feel sorry for Julia. Tina Mitchell's interpretation is pushed almost to a caricature and we are brought to laugh at Julia's expense every time she strikes a pose, every time she tries to command. Someone behind me, at some point said: "Here comes the dumbass!". The other two

characters instead, are always serious. We laugh and make fun of her becoming accomplices, gossiping with the servants: we are told she lost her mind and we mock her every time she comes in with her silly dress, her serious expression, her hand out ready to be kissed. And we laugh when she comes in with her birdcage to tell Juan that she wants to bring it with her, because it is the only creature to love her. But Julia is a heroine who fights against the power of men and only in the end we understand we should have never laughed at her expense.

(by Sara Scamardella)