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OPENING IN NEW YORK

Satire in a limp-wristed iron hand

By WILLIAM A. RAIDY

NEW YORK—Fernando Arrabal, the theater's peaceful, but decidedly unquiet anarchist has usually expressed his aversion to political oppression in terms of his contempt for the extreme right as epitomized by the Franco regime, which forced him to be a long time from his Spanish homeland. In his newest play "The Extravagant Triumph of Jesus Christ, Karl Marx, and William Shakespeare," having its English-translation American premiere at Inter, the playwright now effectively cannonades the left.

Satire, whether his target be political repression, established religion, middle class complacency or the inhumanity of war, has most often been the dramatic device used by the author of such widely acclaimed works as "The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria" and "The Automobile Cemetery." "The Extravagant Triumph..." translated by Miguel Falquez-Certain turns to force. Or at least this production, directed by Eduardo Manet, turns to force.

"The Extravagant Triumph of Jesus Christ, Karl Marx, And William Shakespeare" is set in a "people's dictatorship," not unlike Cuba, where a cigar chomping khaki-clad strongman known as "The Stallion," rules with an iron hand connected to a rather limp wrist. Arrabal's tragicomedy emerges as a curious hybrid of Sam Shepard and Charles Ludlem. A space man from the future mixes with transvestites, masochists, who like the more extreme forms of humiliation, and CIA agents, dedicated to world socialism. Sexuality and political identities are changed as casually as headgear. There's a fantastically pro-Albanian terrorist (and part-

time lesbian) who's arrived on the island in the name of freedom. The only problem is she thinks she's in Chile! The Castro-like dictator, whose only true conviction seems to be that he loved and feared his mother, secretly keeps a drag queen hidden away in a padlocked closet that almost resembles a doghouse. His head minister, who's a spy for Washington as well, likes to be whipped, chained and what-have-you. (Mercifully most of this "Pleasure" takes place in a toilet which slides away off-stage when things start to get "heavy"). As for the man who has stepped off a flying saucer. I'm not really quite sure what he's doing in this island of "revolutionary retards," which has become a resort city for the Russians. (The revolutionaries quote Ignatius Loyola, convinced they're reciting Lenin.) He does predict that the anything-but-macho dictator will die three deaths...and three deaths he does die!

Ridiculous: The Spanish playwright, through the antics of his assorted transsexuals and ideological idiots, spouting "Viva la Revolucion"; The Stallion as a failed playwright and altar boy manque, thrown out of the seminary for saying that the Holy Ghost wore a bra.

Meanwhile "The Extravagant Triumph..." turns into a bit of anarchy itself. The playwright is obviously having his fun, some of it less hysterical and obscene than it sounds. The production is an uneven one and I think that the whole proceedings might have come off better if presented in a more abstract vein.

Ron Faber plays the man in the cigar and combat uniform and he is rather over comedic. I suspect Arrabal had a far sicker and more sinister character in mind. Naseer El-Kadi plays the transvestite in a delightfully arch manner. Madeleine Le Roux makes a brief, but quite electrically charged, appearance as a CIA lady in red late in the play.

Randy Barcelo has created a jungle bunker, the Stallion's hideaway fortress, inhabited by snakes, political and otherwise, that is a perfect setting for Arrabal's madness. As for "The Extravagant Triumph of Jesus Christ, Karl Marx and William Shakespeare," let's look at it as the gentle anarchist having a little fun on his literary night off. INTAR Hispanic American Theatre is located at 420 West 42d St., along Manhattan's Theatre Row.