

An Approach to the Theatre of Xesc Forteza

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Abstract

Twenty-five years have passed since the death of Francesc Forteza, popularly known in Mallorca as Xesc Forteza or, simply, Xesc. He was the first actor in the company that bore his name and for which he very often wrote the plays they staged. The months when he was not acting were spent on writing the piece that would open at Christmas, usually at the Saló Rialto or the Teatre Principal in Palma de Mallorca. Until now, nobody had attempted to examine his theatrical production. But with this study, we will have the first critical reading of his work and an insight into the context in which it was produced. The ready abandonment of tragedy and dedication to comedy, the portrait of the wealthy middle classes and their servants; the (self-)censored plays and the most libertarian and politically incorrect works written during the period of Spanish democracy; priests, thieves, police officers, women, homosexuals, nuns or immigrants, the approaches that work and are repeated, and the ever-present audience's laughter.

Keywords: Xesc Forteza, *Margaluz*, Joan Bibiloni, Mary Santpere, Artis company, Xesc Forteza theatre company, *Majòrica*, Majorcan comedy, regional theatre, popular theatre, mainstream theatre, comedies of manners

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An Approach to the Theatre of Xesc Forteza

*To my father, who taught me to laugh
together at Xesc's jokes*

The actor, playwright and theatre director Francesc Forteza Forteza (Palma, 1926-1999), was popularly known in Majorca as *en Xesc Forteza* or, for short, *en Xesc*, to the point that “the Majorcan audience identifies theatre with Xesc Forteza. There are thousands of people who have never seen any other play, and who are faithful, year after year, to the actor’s premieres” (Melià, 1992: 9). In 1991, he was awarded the Siurell de Plata Prize by the newspaper *Última Hora*; in 1997, he received the Ramon Llull Prize and, since 2003, a municipal theatre in Palma has borne his name. The ten volumes of his *Obres completes* (1999) were published posthumously by his family. Following the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death in 2024, in a fine initiative by the City Council of his hometown, the Xesc Forteza Commemorative Year was organised with the revival of the play *Ca ses monges* (1986). Since his death, as usually happens, his name has begun to fade from minds and, currently, only his work remains.

His theatre production is far from negligible, and forms an important part of both his career as an actor and director and of the Catalan and Majorcan repertoire. However, almost nothing had been written about it, so this article is, with complete certainty, the first academic approach. Here we will analyse the background of a family lineage dedicated to theatre, his career as an actor (comedian), his time at the Artis company, and the creation of the Xesc Forteza company. But, leaving aside other facets and incursions that will obviously come to light, Xesc wrote a significant number of the plays that he staged for both companies. This is, above all, what we will focus on here: his career as a playwright, the themes he dealt with, the characters he introduced or the style and language he used. Now, perhaps, what would be most urgently needed would be to start a detailed biographical profile as part of the public collection “Biografies de Mallorquins”.

From a lineage of actors (1926-1947)

Xesc was the grandson of Francesc Forteza Cortès, whose nickname was *es Torner* (Palma, 1861-1951), so named because he worked as a turner in a jewellery store on Carrer dels Oms in Palma, whom he greatly admired. He was famous in the late 19th the early 20th centuries. Right away, he joined the Catina-Estelrich company (1927-1938), which he never left, playing a prominent role as an actor and director.

His son, Francesc Forteza Messana (Palma, 1901-1978), also joined in 1927 and worked there as a romantic lead from 1933 to 1938, when it was dissolved because “at that time using the language of Majorca in public events was seen as separatist” (Estelrich, 1922-1925/1935-1938, unpublished, Mas i Vives section, 2003: 166). He excelled in dramatic roles in contemporary Majorcan comedies such as *Es metge nou* (1930) and *L’amo en Sion* (1932) by Miquel Puigserver; *Mestre Lau es taconer* (1933) and *El tio de l’Havana* (1934) by Josep M. Tous i Maroto, and *Un al·lot de barca* (1935) by Gabriel Cortès.

Xesc, his nephew, who at the age of seven had already taken part in a school performance of the *Pastorells*, at eleven performed with the company in *El tio de l’Havana* (Mesquida, 1999: 121). And as a young man he participated in productions by the Cercle d’Obrers Catòlics (1877-1975) located in Carrer de Sans in Palma, encouraged by his father, its president (Arrom, 1997: 104). Some young actors trained there, such as Xesc, his brother Joan (Palma, 1918-1995), Manuel Tubert (Palma, 1923-2007) and Maruja Alfaro (Barcelona, 1930-Palma, 2024).

During the Spanish Civil War, he took part in performances at the Teatre Azul (1936-1938) and then joined the Agrupació de Teatre Regional (1947), because “when a few years later Majorcan theatre was revived, it was labelled – in Spanish – with a name that has weighed on it like a slab: ‘*Teatro regional*’” (Llompart, 1964: 214). In other words, it was regarded as subordinate to real *theatre*, *national* theatre in Spanish, which disdained Majorcan theatre as provincial, dialectal, rural, shabby, old fashioned, not at all cosmopolitan and lacking in value(s). A label that “became less common until it disappeared at the end of the sixties” (Serra, 1985: 6) just as there had never been any *regional* poetry or narrative.

Ars gratia artis, in genitive (1948-1967)

Soon, the aforementioned Agrupació de Teatre Regional became the (semi) professional Artis company (1948-1969), which, after the Second World War, obtained permission to perform in Catalan. They would pay tribute to his grandfather when, aged eighty-seven, he retired from the stage: they performed *Un al·lot de barca* by Gabriel Cortès again and premiered *Hotel Cosmopolita* (1948) by the same author.

Francesc Forteza also made his debut at the Teatre Líric as a playwright with the tragicomedy *Fi de trajecte* (1953). He had taken on the direction the same year, but he asked to direct his own play there (Janer, 1975: 184; Arrom,

1997: 105). Xesc ceased to be the romantic lead and became the lead actor after the fateful accident that claimed the life of Joan Valls (Palma, 1904-1958), “a comedian with positive gifts who had contributed greatly to the success of the plays” (Llompart, 1964: 216), words that could be similarly extended to Xesc himself, who “inherited his leadership until he became independent” (Planas, 1999i: 5).

In the post-war period, only local writers were performed in Catalan, never foreign ones, who were always translated into Spanish. Of course, no Valencian or Catalan writer could see their plays staged if they wrote in Catalan. As for foreigners, much later, there would be the risky experiment of Molière’s *Le médecin malgré lui* translated as *Es metge per força* (1959).

Forteza sporadically participated in special collaborations with film productions such as Luis García Berlanga’s *El verdugo* (1963). In 1964, journalist Pau Llull and impresario Pepín Tous, who ran the Tagomago nightclub, sought him out to do cabaret. He travelled to several European countries to perform a show with the musical group Els Valldemossa and the singer and dancer Margalida Llobera, known as Margaluz (Palma, 1940-2006).

In the same period, he was given the opportunity to work at the Paral·lel in Barcelona and for one year he worked with the Artis company while directing the Colsada company, which performed at the Teatre Espanyol in the city. Shortly afterwards, he took on direction and lead actor duties with the Alicia Tomàs company, with which he fully entered the field of musical revue. However, he did not stay in Barcelona for long “because he did not like the atmosphere, and a little because he missed Majorca” (Mesquida, 1999: 123).

Xesc, who had been part of the Artis company for twenty years and directed it for twelve, resigned as director in 1967 due to incompatibilities between the company and his music hall performances. They wanted him only to direct. It is worth reproducing Cristina Valls’ words regarding their separation: “There was a black tide. Jealousies and quarrels, a real fire burning... The Company did not agree to the conditions that Xesc proposed... I was disappointed [...] We no longer worked together with Xesc” (Janer, 1975: 229). They had put on more than one hundred and fifty productions in Catalan that “prevented the island society from losing its relationship with Catalan theatre at very critical moments” (Mas i Vives, 2003: 54).

The Xesc Forteza theatre company (1967-1999)

The same year he founded a professional company under his name, with Margaluz as the first actress, playing a foreigner, and Joan Bibiloni (Palma, 1943) in his first important role (Caldentey, 1967: 11). Her husband, the aforementioned Pau Llull, was the manager and public relations officer of the brand-new company. They would perform good theatre “in Majorcan” — not *regional* — while staging Spanish, foreign and, if necessary, Majorcan pieces. Thus came the long-awaited premiere of *Ninette i un senyor de Majorca* (1967), based on Miguel Mihura’s *Ninette y un señor de Murcia* (1964), of which the film version had also been released; but it received some unfavourable

reviews due to the Spanish-influenced turns of language, among other shortcomings (Thomàs, 1969: 16). However, the good result achieved encouraged him to continue translating and adapting Spanish playwrights.

On the other hand, it is surprising that, on only two occasions, Xesc dared to work with plays by other Majorcan playwrights: *Por* (1977) by Antoni Mus, which the previous year had been awarded the Ciutat de Palma - Bartomeu Ferrà theatre prize, and *Es marquès de sa Rebassa* (1990) by Pere Capellà, which, in reality, was based on a production in which Forteza had already performed in the premiere by the Artis company in 1953.

The Teatre Principal became his natural habitat. He performed there throughout the 1960s. Otherwise, he used the Rialto, renovated in 1975 as a theatre, where he moved that year following a renovation of the Teatre Principal and remained there until they returned once in 1990 and, definitively, from 1994. Finally, we highlight the Sala Mozart at the Auditorium Palma (inaugurated in 1969), which they only used during the first half of the 1970s, or some occasional premieres in our venues outside Palma, also in that same decade, in Manacor or Esporles (Companyia Xesc Forteza, 1997).

The regular season usually began with a show around Christmas with approximately 110 or 200 performances (far more than any other theatre group) for two and a half months or more. Then three or four more summer months, with almost daily performances in the neighbourhoods and villages of the rest of the Balearic Islands; but never on the continent because “going out to the mainland makes the budgets too expensive, you have to think that there are 22 people, and moving them and accommodating them in places like Valencia or Barcelona is very difficult” (Reus, 1990: 61).

Because of censorship, he avoided politics, the clergy, sex and the military (Mira Mira, 1997) and leaned towards always very gentle condemnation of certain behaviours with a rather burlesque tone. He used the most colloquial register of the language with words borrowed from Spanish and linguistic errors, but at the same time quite genuine turns of phrase, rejecting the literary essay and other forms as anti-theatrical — one only has to look at the titles. He aligned himself with those who felt that, to be believable, actors must express themselves as the *well-off middle class* do — to borrow the title of one of his plays — from middle age onwards; the composite sketch of those who regularly go to the theatre, who tried to see themselves reflected there in order to laugh at themselves.

In the introduction to the first volume of the *Obres completes* (Forteza, 1999a: 3) Xesc acknowledges that linguistically he would also have liked to attract the attention of future scholars. Perhaps we need to wait until the centenary of his birth or these twenty-six years that have elapsed since his death are not enough to assess his work fairly... It is true that the theatrical and linguistic interest — and the sociological one, perhaps, too — is greater than the literary value of some pieces that also were not excessively ambitious.

Plays written by Xesc Forteza

Youthood with the Artis company

He himself regarded *Fi de trajecte* (1953) as a fiasco and did not return to writing drama. In the play, Miquel is a young scatterbrained man who seduces the maids, but has an accident that leaves him disabled in both legs and has to move around on crutches. This withers him and leads to tragedy. The comedy flows through the flat and secondary characters, but the audience did not react well because what they really wanted were dramatic scenes, and Miquel's misfortune was not amusing. It is a tragicomedy written according to the new nihilistic and existentialist trends that left everyone with a bad taste in their mouths. Suau noted that "this journey through life, whose only purpose is to live, has nothing Christian and very little human about it" (1953, Janer section, 1975: 183), in the same way that Bonet already saw that "the best of *Fi de trajecte* — or rather *Final de trajecte* — is what most people will not like. That is, the fatal denouement" (1953: 7). In any case, "it was a whole lesson for the writer who, from now on, would have much greater control of his audacity" (Alomar, 2005: 177).

The increased criticism of the company, accused of commercialism and of subordinating work to economic gain, came after the success of *Can Miquetes* (1956), which had already premiered at the Teatre Principal and was the first of a line of vaudeville comedies that would almost never stop. The leading character could show off his histrionic ability, since his lines were heavily conditioned by his comic features. The sociopolitical critique that may be present is very subtle because Nofre, the lead character, is a smuggler and, due to censorship, the playwright is forced to present him to us as an abject character; "of a man, he has very little," indicates the initial stage note (Forteza, 1999a: 69). In these early plays, in keeping with his age at the time, Xesc played the role of a young man.

The comedy *Hem de casar sa nina* (1959), which is about a girl who is married off again and again with the intercession of her parents, as the title suggests, was a farce. It repeats the plot of *Can Miquetes* with a happy ending, but these are topics which he does not deal with in depth. Xesc is studying for his banking exams, but Pilar informs him that what matters in this Spain, which cannot be mentioned as referring to Franco's, although it is obvious, are contacts.

Casau-vos i vos diran vós (1960) is a vaudeville show that stays within the realm of acceptability and good taste. It mirrors the middle class that it aims to make laugh. In *Pobre..., però deshonorat* (1962), the plot seems to be modelled on the previous one. The first foreign tourists mainly from Sweden wearing bikinis had just arrived thanks to the recent Francoist Stabilization Plan. Tourism would change in Majorca in a few years. If Joan learns languages, he will leave the local girls he flirts with and will begin to interact with foreign women, and he has already decided on a Catalan woman who is a tango dancer in a night club. Drugs appear for the first time, replacing the smuggling of *Can Miquetes*, in some sectors of the population but with a much more resounding social rejection.

1966 saw the premiere of the last and most ambitious play that Forteza wrote for the Artis company: *El dimoni ja no fa por a ningú*. With features reminiscent of Faust, it is influenced by *Las cinco advertencias de Satanás* (1935) by Enrique Jardiel Poncela, with whom our playwright has sometimes been compared (Alomar, 2005: 203); but the criticism is once again very veiled, almost burlesque, in order to satisfy everyone.

The first part is set in hell with Barrufet and a young and silly demon, Tanet (Xesc). However, the scene is still surprising in relation to all the previous plays, in which there was room for imagination. And it is not limited to this act but Tanet's presence extends throughout the entire performance. A risk was once again taken in front of the audience, but a minimal one, always within the limits of comedy. With the open attitudes of the sixties, people began to stop believing in hell and demons...

With a Mephistophelian appearance, it is now the old female friend who plays Faust and proposes a pact with the devil, but it will not be in exchange for eternal youth because hers, compared to the present, was boring. She sells him her soul in exchange for spending the little time she has left in the body of a twenty-year-old woman. In the end, the young demon lets himself be seduced by the charm of the Majorcan paradise where "there will never be a saint" (Forteza, 1999b: 229) and with a happy ending that reconnects him with his usual audience.

Period of maturity without the Artis company

In the first staging of *Trumfos oros* (1972), some years have passed since the previous one. Xesc begins to play a role of dirty old man, looking older than his own age. We have spoken similarly of Margaluz or Bibiloni, but it is also true that he would include actors from Artis company "who had not signed that letter of dismissal" (Arrom, 1997: 107) such as the aforementioned Tübert, Joan Maria Melis (Santander, 1926-2018) or Francisca Bover (Palma, 1938 - Montuïri, 2025), who would return with them in 1978. Maruja Alfaro was cast in the same production, but only participated on two occasions.

And despite being the same age as Melis, in *Trumfos oros* he played the role of Xesc's son, and Bibiloni was Melis' brother. The old man's scandals clash with conservative morality and could affect the business; but Ramon, the father, claims that the hotel is his and does not plan to stop seeing his love, a recurring story in various later plays. Here he begins to jump out of the window as he will do in *Majòrica*, although the ironing board he will use in 1981 is now a ladder. The ability to weave two conversations at the same time without both talking about the same thing is very well resolved — the only one who knows everything is of course the audience. The tone of comedy has gone up a notch, as if Xesc's company was entering a second period, that of maturity.

Bon repòs i bon remei (1973) was the title of the fourth monologue in *Símbola en negre* (1973) — the other three belonging to Aldo Nicolaj according to the version by Adolfo Lozano Borroy and Xesc himself. What the writer does, therefore, is include the latter in the *Obres completes*. Only Margaluz and he appear. It is the story of a widower and a widow who give each other another chance. The cemetery setting is atypical, and the ending is bold and irreverent.

In *Una de lladres i serenos* (1975), Xesc is forced to wish that all the kidnappings that occur in the world were also a farce because, obviously, he always imbued himself into everything that happened around him. Manuela has become old before her time, but Joan, the lead character, does not feel at all comfortable in a world that, in the mid-seventies, was beginning to modernise. Joan has a certain continuity with Ramon, the dirty old man from *Trumfos oros* and, in fact, he responds to the archetype of the womaniser character that we identify with Xesc because the stereotype works for him and he reproduces it again and again — hence Fuster Lareu finds him “conservative” (Forteza, 1999d: 6). Joan pretends that he has been kidnapped and directs the entire rescue operation in order to collect the money that his mean wife is withholding. The telephone conversation between the wife and the kidnapped man reaches the point of hilarity.

Fermat i ben fermat (1976) has never been staged. It was not possible because of censorship. There was only a dramatized reading of it last year on the occasion of the Xesc Forteza Year. The title alluded to the most famous phrase of the period after Franco’s death known as the Transition. The death of Joan’s father resembles Franco’s too suspiciously for people not to make the connection. With Xesc, that could not end up becoming a joke; in a way, he was settling accounts with a regime that he had feared greatly and that had had a castrating influence on him (Mira Mira, 1997) as there was a lot of hidden self-censorship that we will obviously never discover.

The character thinks about going to live abroad in a full democracy “but by making four jokes and saying ‘I don’t want to get involved in anything,’ everything is already resolved” (Forteza, 1999d: 229). Franco’s death is depicted on stage, understood as the “father” he had been because they had known him almost forever. Military men and priests seek to impose their power as a perpetuation of the squabbles of the different Francoist families. Xesc had in the end triumphed in that State and he also had to fear political change a little: his theatre was now, fortunately, forced to change course... It is a farce. Bridging the gap with what Alexandre Ballester did with the myth of Albopàs, here Spain is Rolderà S. A., a company. In the end, it seems that the playwright was most resentful about the Church, because he says that he was not at all interested in politics, but he did joke about morality, which annoyed the priests and this had certainly caused him problems.

The years of the Transition

Es viatge del «tio» capellà (1976), with music by Toni Morlà, is the first “slightly musical” comedy. A family arranges a cruise for the uncle priest that will lead to something that could not have happened during the Franco regime: giving up the priesthood, because he returns with an Italian lover, something to which his sister-in-law Pepa — the island woman always more conservative than the man, like Manuela in the previous play, undoubtedly due to the education received — cannot consent. Moreover, his theatre was not moving forward either in terms of including topless actresses — it was not about taking those same conservative Majorcan ladies who sat among the audience out of their comfort zone — or in political matters — in order not to offend anyone.

Xesc plays the role of the main priest, with a religious vocation that is quite weak, because his mother had admitted him to the seminary at the age of ten.

The music of *Téntol...! És una guerra femella* (1978) was again by Toni Morlà (Morlà, 2001: 91). It included for the first time in the cast the charismatic Catalan actress Mary Santpere (Barcelona, 1917-1992), mother of three female characters: Margaluz, F. Bover and Elionor Valleriola. Women have little space as protagonists in Xesc's plays, but if *S'home és el rei* ("man is king"), as Morlà's song says (because the music has not yet completely disappeared), it was rather due to the patriarchal context of the time. Marta and Arnau are young and may have grown up with different customs from her parents or older sisters. The confrontation is set up with the two armies of the "female war" with Marta, who faces her mother and the man, Arnau, shaking the whole system and making people laugh, because the old Remeis was also comical for the Majorcan audience with their extreme machismo. Xesc's role here is quite subordinate if it were not for the fact that he plays Joan, who gives in to his wife and adopts a role that gives him a certain prominence in the second part. It is obvious that with banners, demonstrations and revolutions, Xesc has soaked up so much democratic, sexual, territorial, and legal demands, and above all, the independence of women that was incipient in those years of the Transition.

Remeis soon transfers her loyalties to Marta; she changes sides because this ends up being a conflict between males and females. For the groups, political terms of the time such as *ultraconservatives*, *reformists* or *revolutionaries* are borrowed, and demands such as for contraceptives or words such as *movement*, *rupture*, *amendment*, *demand* or "*consensus*" are exploited. The male position represents the immobilism of the bunker and they the women, the advance, although later the tables are turned – it is therefore impossible to identify either of them with Francoism – with slogans such as "*Homes al paredón / Men to the wall*" or "*Prou de dictadura mascle / No more male dictatorship*". We can relate it with *Fermat i ben fermat*, although the constitutional context of 1978 is not exactly that of 1976. It is a parody of a democracy that has barely begun.

In 1979, Xesc proposed a trilogy of "ascerbic comedy". The titles are *Separar-se està de moda*, *Hem guanyat ses eleccions, i ara què?*, and *Què en feim des vell?* The first is a comedy in which he and Alfaro played adults and the play had the usual formula of three marriages. The other four actors are Bover, Bibiloni, Melis and M. Llobera. The women are once again more conservative. Margaluz herself takes the role of the recurring foreigner, who would soon become the folkloric character of *Majòrica*.

In *Separar-se està de moda*, the aforementioned old couple find themselves in a lawyer's office with two young men who have come there to separate from their respective wives, taking advantage of the new political situation. They want to go and live with foreign women. The two generations of the audience overlap on stage: the older ones who are united for life and the string of divorces, especially among younger people, who also attended the performances or were often their sons and daughters – but seen from the stage, it was funny.

In *Hem guanyat ses eleccions, i ara què?*, the names of the political parties to which each of the six characters belong appear, the same as in the other two plays because they were performed together. The parties are PSOE, UCD, PCE, Coalició Democràtica (AP) and the independents. The communists with the Catalan flag, the socialist, with the Majorcan flag, and CD with the Spanish flag. It is also the time of the first women politicians since the Republic. The mayor uses Adolfo Suárez's anaphora of "I have to promise you and I promise you", and the president is already portrayed as an authority with Franco, the king or the pope. The idiot mayor, Jordi, is with the independents because it is Xesc and it was not appropriate for them to identify him with any party. The centre and right manage to keep everything the same, but the mayor goes crazy because power corrupts and becomes a kind of dictator in the style of Woody Allen in *Bananas* (1971).

As for the last play, *Què en feim des vell?*, Xesc also plays an old man because, without doubt, the formula was successful. His role is that of a dirty old widower who is a scoundrel, but actually he is not really: he touches the thighs of the day labourer, smokes secretly, eats lavishly... It is as provocative a comedy as the previous ones — the second play is the most satirical. The topic of language teaching in school comes up, which was then being tentatively implemented and already appeared in the previous play. In the middle of this is all the linguistic controversy of Majorcan versus Catalan of Pep Gonella; Serra also appears, a learned man who teaches people how to speak Majorcan well — he always calls the language Majorcan because it is the common and traditional way of referring to it on the island — but, in reality, he corrects both words borrowed from Spanish and Catalan words which are accurate (for example, *pròxim* instead of *proper*) or words that sometimes sound too Catalan, such as *doncs* or *nosaltres*.

The first version of *Majòrica* dates back to 1981. At that time, the two couples were Forteza and Alfaro, and Bover and Bibiloni, with Margaluz playing a neighbour. In 1987, following the death of the empresario Francesc Pigrau, the widow, Mary Santpere, was again included in a production by the company to try to cheer her up. It is Xesc's most emblematic play, the most performed (at least 402 times) and most popular since the screening of this second version on TV3. This is where the importance of Xesc's comic persona is demonstrated, perhaps, because at least all Majorcans recall the television adaptation above all.

The couples lived in council housing (hence their size and proximity to each other) in a humble neighbourhood, when his plays usually portrayed the middle class. Montse is Catalan (Santpere), Seferino, a man born in Murcia who speaks broken Majorcan (Bibiloni), and Rosarito is an Andalusian who does not speak Majorcan, but understands it, because she worked at the Molino in Barcelona (Margaluz) like Montse. Sidoró (Forteza) is long-term unemployed and does not feel strong enough to work, but does want to do his own thing, or Seferino, who goes on strike; the latter's daughter prostitutes herself and Sidoró's son, imprisoned for drug trafficking, is released from prison that week. It is curious: Seferino does not ask for sick leave so they do not think badly of him, because he is not from here, and Sidoró admits that

it is true, but that it is not like before because now *forasters* (the traditional and derogatory way of treating those who spoke Spanish in Majorca) are in the majority. Rosarito is very canny, and forces Manitas to pretend to be mute because artistically it is more challenging. But, of course, they make a fuss while they rehearse their show and the conflict is established. It is perhaps Xesc's most grotesque play, since the situation of the main couple is pitiful, who have to pay the neighbour couple who prostitute themselves in exchange for money because they are broke.

Gent d'abans des Moviment (1981) returns to the same clichés. It begins with Xesc, the protagonist, on stage with a lover and then explains to us that he is there because at home everybody ignored him, as in *Una de lladres i serenos*. Esteve, who seems to never have rocked the boat, introduces a very mild criticism of a regime that did not allow him to do anything. As in the aforementioned play, she has money and is once again more conservative. The histrionic generational changes gave a good time to an audience that knew that she was telling the truth, but that in the end it was all a farce. Simple and without the roundness of other dramas, something that is criticised and attributed to the great success of *Majòrica*.

Xesc in "Democracy"

Xesc Story (1982) is the result of more than fifteen years of working in music halls: actually, the subtitle is *Una revista de sis reials*. He returns to music, now with Cosme Adrover. It seems a different play from the previous ones. The environment certainly is. Xesc has left the typical family of the audience and moved on to the one closest to him, the company of actors that has been looking after him for years. In the second part, however, it boils down to the same clichés: Maria will have a child because, despite taking precautions, the system has failed. The character of the effeminate man was unprecedented in his previous plays. Then another girl enters with the same problem as the first, and the protagonist is forced to marry her before her pregnancy is noticed. The same with the third. They all want to get married because a single mother was still frowned upon at the time. In any case, the tropical Cuban setting, the Torre del Oro or New York present us with unprecedented sets — more typical of the trips he made with the company at the end of the season —, expensive and difficult to transfer to the stage. It seems that Xesc, however, had been intending to stage it for some time.

Pocavergonyes S.A. (1983) does not shy away from the world in which we live of thefts, embezzlements and coups d'état like the one that had occurred in Spain two years earlier, already mentioned in the previous play. It is a comedy that looks back at the time when we islanders could still leave the key in the lock. In both this play and the previous one, outsiders or *forasters* who do not even understand Majorcan begin to appear; but if in *Majòrica* there were mutes who spoke, here there may be those who only pretend not to speak Catalan and the audience can believe it because at that time this group of people already existed. The plot may be a little reminiscent of *Siau benvingut* (1966) by Alexandre Ballester, but it soon moves away from it because the vagabonds and members of the wealthy class never crossed paths.

Macià once again reproaches national Catholicism for having had to go to Perpignan to watch pornography or to Biarritz to the casino. The Catholic woman is almost a cliché, and the play ends with the usual joke about thieving politicians that was also beginning to be used.

Un matalàs per a un gramòfon (1983), like the previous two, is from the time the socialists came to power. Some maids who have lived in the Germany of the Berlin Wall now can enjoy free time. The servants and children already act differently with money, which one of them, Maria, still knew how to save. The cliché of the *indiano* who returns rich from America, a long tradition in Catalan literature, had never appeared. A very well-crafted comedy of entanglements.

Dimoni, món i carn begins in 3005 BC, not very usual for Xesc. And it begins with the playwright addressing the audience, as he had done in *Gent d'abans des moviment* or would do in *Catxin dena quin estiu*, and promising them that he will return the money if they wish. There are four stories: the first concerns cavemen. Xesc has been called sexist, and it is true that it is not politically correct today to read the link he makes between the woman and the devil because of the snake and Paradise. Xesc explains that he has not been able to determine how people spoke back then, but the monosyllables are understood by context, the keywords or longer words are like ours (*guapa, dona, fred, foc, bo-bo...*), and, moreover, acting and mime play a part, of course. Otherwise, his theatre does not change at all.

The second takes place in the Middle Ages and is in Majorcan, although it is an anachronism because it is set before the conquest of King Jaume and, at the same time, it is already a Catholic land. Pixedis, Casilda or Timoteu are names that were meant to be funny. It is a theatre with many reminiscences of Serafi Pitarra in the vein of *La venganza de Don Mendo* (1918) by Muñoz Seca or the aforementioned *Marquès de sa Rabassa* without, however, reaching the depth of those pieces.

The romantic drama of 1885 ends in a duel for love because the theme is always this, even though the dates change. And the last story takes place one hundred years later because the play was premiered towards the end of 1984. The woman is sexually unresponsive again and her husband reproaches her. She embraces feminism whereas he is now more conservative. Here the woman is always at fault, as happened in the 19th-century duel (she is the one who shoots), and the ending of the fourth story is not politically correct either.

Ca ses monges is also a bit different. There are more characters than usual. The thieves think they have entered the bank through a tunnel, but they actually end up inside a convent. Xesc seems to return to the world of robbery of *Una de lladres i serenos*, always with the purpose of mockery. It is a play that he must have doggedly wanted to perform for years, but it would have been impossible before because it was so irreverent. The “democratic” Xesc increasingly emerges, and also the most politically incorrect, as we said.

The final period

In *Quin trutger* (1988), we see that Xesc is getting old, but he does not give up. A new generation enters the stage formed by those young couples who suddenly separate and use another kind of language, which his theatre also adopts. Moreover, between the characters of Marta and Mateu, the couple's problems develop because he is older than her. Xesc draws on these generational conflicts of the time which, taken to the extreme, made people laugh a lot: the children want to remain at their parents', but they prevent them from continuing, now that they can, with their lives.

Jubilat ve de jubileu (1989) is a flashforward in the sense that Xesc portrays a decrepit old man even though he has not yet reached that age. It is not, as we said, the first time he does this. Donya Dora, the actress Margaluz – strangely Xesc gets involved in politics – plays a member of the Partido Popular (PP), which at the beginning of that year was called Alianza Popular (AP), and leaves the stage with a lieutenant coronel who at first speaks in Spanish but will soon turn to Catalan because theatre is a convention. It seems that Xesc does not forgive Franco's regime, and now Ventura clarifies that, if he fought at the front with Franco's troops, he did so out of obligation and not like Gervasi, who joined freely. It is again exactly the same as in the previous play because here the young members of the family feel that the old Ventura, after retiring, throws them out of his home.

In *Puja aquí, voràs Portopí* (1991), divorces were so common that those happily married were the unusual ones. The woman has empowered herself in such a way that Aina has decided to separate from Pere, 60 years old (Xesc), to go with Nico, whose hypocorism shows that he is a much younger man, aged 35, and she, 50. He is an architect and has made a fortune thanks to the world of construction, which then was experiencing a boom. It seems that the role of the latter is inverted and that it is her rather than him that needs movement. Nico works for Pere, who does not fire him so that he does not report him for unfair dismissal.

She asks Pere to have half of everything and it is then when he addresses her, with a gesture of contempt, the famous Majorcan saying "*puja aquí i veuràs Portopí!*" in reference to a coastal area in Palma and which people use when they do not agree with a question or do not want to participate. But the lawyer advises to behave and avoid hysteria because she is entitled to ask for what she wants and it is necessary to avoid trial. They have come across this trend we mention, as if the most normal thing was separation. For Rafel, the lawyer, it is usually because they have someone else, and this is the result of the repression suffered. It is strange because the first scene is not very comical (the second changes, which also happens in other plays) despite having some gags and threats which today are quite difficult to reproduce, paradoxically located in Xesc's final period.

I vostè, què hi fa aquí? (1993) is a vaudeville. All the proscenium must look like a roof to make it possible to escape. In *Majòrica* a flat is loaned to someone to use for his love affairs, but now he repeats it with the *wealthy middle class* more identified with most of the audience that attended his theatre. The stage note indicates that the three women should be mature,

over forty-five, but pretty. The whole story of the homosexual character of Tomeu is also not acceptable today, but allowed Xesc to feature a reality that existed and that, at least, could be used to make people laugh but later almost disappeared because it was no longer funny.

In *S'ha acabat es bròquil* (1994), the criticism of TV also becomes a constant feature. Those who had looked after their children now had to care for their parents, which is what Elisenda (Margaluz) somehow complains about. She will start work and he will do half of the household tasks. That incipient feminism clashed against an atavistic machismo, but Xesc suggests that it is her job to do the housework. One of the problems is how the other men — or some women — would accept it, mocking him or treating him as less than a man to degrade himself because socially it was still frowned upon.

In *Classe mitja acomodada* (1995) the family owns a hotel. The grandfather, Xesc, broaches the subject of the Spanish Civil War again, but his son, Joan Bibiloni, refers to some events of the time and his father eventually mentions some contemporary cases of corruption which have not had anything to do with him, such as the tunnel of Sóller or the Brokervall case — and the woman ironically says that it would be a luxury to go into prison because all the important politicians have ended up there. Xesc is part of the third generation, and continues to be the dirty old man who makes people laugh; Bibiloni and Margaluz are in the second generation (the children) and young actors appear such as Joan Monse or Marga López as the grandchildren who have grown up and, between the first and the third generation, they will forge ahead. The moral lesson of the old couple is that this lifestyle of modernity has ruined the children.

Balearicus 96 revives the characters of *Majòrica 81* sixteen years later. It is the continuation. The daughter of Sefe and Aina, a latent character in the earlier play, appears now, as do Sidoro, and Montse, who finally leaves prison. The only novelty is that Sidoro has a brother who was scatterbrained and has died, but who has left some money. Montse appears later here, accompanied by her Argentinian partner, and played again, of course, by Alfaro, because her husband had died in 1995, to try to cheer her up (Nova Televisió, 2025).

In *Catxin dena quin estiu* (1997) the main characters are again from the *wealthy middle class* as in plays such as *Puja aquí, voràs Portopí!* Xesc returns to the origins of his career, which had begun with a tragedy, but here this starts from a true story and a tragic event such as the birth of a child whose mother dies in delivery. The father, who is her lover, must take care of him. But he now manages to add the comic touch necessary so that it matches with all the rest, which perhaps he did not manage in the early stages with *Fi de trajecte*.

By way of conclusion

It is worth saying that without Xesc, the “master of ceremonies”, the company that bore his name would try continue his path, but they did not last long.

They definitively broke up in 2005. They had had to find someone different to direct it — because only on rare occasions did Xesc submit himself to the orders of others —, and found Mateu Grau (Santa Maria del Camí, 1961). The actors Bover, Bibiloni and Melis continued, and Lina Terrassa, Maria Reus, Aina Segura, Mercè Marrero, Joan Carles Bestard or Maria Magdalena Aguiló joined. They performed three new plays: *En tombar es cinquanta* (1999), based on *The Prisoner of Second Avenue* (1971) by Neil Simon, translated by Catalina Forteza (Palma, 1965), Xesc's daughter, and adapted by Joan Bibiloni; *Coses que passen* (2000), based on plays by Anton Chekov, Karl Valentin and Michael Frayn, translated and adapted by C. Forteza and M. Grau; and *Millor per s'octubre* (2002), again adapted by Bibiloni and Xesc's daughter from *Mejor en octubre* (1997) by Santiago Moncada, now under the direction of Paco Monleón.

Back to our playwright, we think it is worth reproducing the words of Guillem Frontera about Xesc in the book-interview that Pere Antoni Pons devoted to him:

[Xesc Forteza] was renowned for writing very Majorcan-spirited comedies of manners.

Yes, I don't think he did justice to himself. It is also true that, when he did a slightly ambitious play, for example an adaptation of Mihura, *Niní [sic] y un señor de Mallorca*, which was an enormous effort, he also had the pay copyright and yes, it was successful, but could not be compared to the amazing successes he had with the plays he wrote, produced, directed and performed, a success of which he kept everything because he did everything. When he did a Molière or something for television, he lost money (2017: 201).

Frontera is right about him. Xesc saw it as unavoidable to change the kind of theatre that the Artis company did and tried to offer something different with *Fi de trajecte* or the seven performances of *Es metge per força* (1959, an adaptation by Martí Mayol of *Le médecin malgré lui* by Molière), in which he would stand out in the role of Argan. Or when, years later, he performed the lead role in *L'avar* (1987) by Molière, staged in a production by the Centre Dramàtic de les Illes Balears and the Anselm Turmeda company under the direction of Pere Noguera. And in *La gran il·lusió* (1988), by Eduardo De Filippo, directed by Hermann Bonnín with the Centre Dramàtic de Catalunya, which ran for one hundred days at the Teatre Romea. The reviews, as usual, stressed his magnificent gift as an actor (Pons, 2017: 201; Benach, 1988: 68).

Frontera, who had adapted Molière's *L'avare*, clarified that "Xesc Forteza was a fabulous miser. For my first tv adaptation, *L'hostal de la bolla*, by Miquel dels Sants Oliver, I suggested that he play a role in it. It was the first time that Xesc Forteza participated in a TVE drama" (2017: 200). It was 1978 and it was directed by Sergi Schaaff. Forteza also participated in *Son Puiggròs* (1979), also written by Frontera and directed by Lluís Maria Güell, and *L'any sabàtic* (1989), by Lluís Josep Comeron, and with a script by Frontera. All three directors were amazed, according to the novelist, by the possibilities that Xesc offered as an actor; but he really earned money with his plays.

We know that throughout his life he combined productions of his own with those by others. We should remember that at the age of twenty-nine he had begun to write and premiered a play of his own but, on many more occasions, he performed in plays by other contemporary playwrights such as Pere Capellà, Joan Mas and Martí Mayol because he still could not decide on the plays that he performed.

This alternation would continue with the Xesc Forteza company, which, nevertheless, and perhaps to distance himself from *regional* theatre, only on two occasions he ventured with other Majorcan playwrights and never with anyone from the other Catalan-speaking territories – the only case is a translation by Joan Oliver of *Visquem un somni* (1970), by Sacha Guitry. In contrast, translated by him or someone else, and with the titles slightly changed, after adapting *Ninette*, he would stage other plays by Spanish playwrights such as Juan José Alonso Millán, *El alma se serena*, adapted the same year of its premiere in Madrid as *Na Catalina de plaça* (1969); he returned to Mihura with *La decente* (1970), adapted as *Som una dona decent* (1970); then came the aforementioned *Visquem un sòmit* (1971); he continued with *Usted puede ser un asesino* (1958) by Alfonso Paso, *Mort, qui t'ha mort?* (1971); *Vaja una nit* (1972) based on *Solo una noche* (1967) by Ángel Monteagudo; *Sopar per dos* (1970), under the same title, by Aldo de Benedetti (1972, revived in 1979 as *Ella, es disputat i s'altre*) and *Cita de amor* (1962) as *S'hora de ses cites* (1974); *Armonia in nero* (1965), by Aldo Nicolaj, as *Simfonia en negre*; *Une nuit chez vous... Madame !* (1947) by Jean de Létraç, as *Un vespre a ca seva, senyora* (1974); *My Fat Friend* (1972), by Charles Laurence, *Na Vi(c)ky sa grassa* (1975); *No Sex Please, We're British* (1971), by Alistair Foot and Anthony Marriott; *Prou de sexe, som de dretes* (1977); *L'Orchestre* (1962), by Jean Anouilh, becomes *Orquestrina de senyorettes* (1980); *Els consensos d'en Nofre* (1985), based on *Strike Happy* (1960), by Duncan Greenwood, and *Me n'afluix per no triar* (1998), which in Spanish was *Agnus Dei*, by Ferran (or Fernando) Soto, with which he returned much later to the Spanish playwrights. Generally, he had to resort to them when he did not feel inspired to write anything or found that a play could better connect with his audience, although he still had to obtain the copyright.

Xesc took the audience of the Artis company with him while the company tried to change under the direction of Gabriel Janer Manila – who would quit in 1967 after the fiascos of *Dos nins de 70 anys* (1964) and *Sa paret de sa vergonya* (1967) – and Antoni Mus, who also resigned two years later after having directed in 1968 both *Siau benvingut* by Alexandre Ballester and *L'inspector*, by Gogol, in a free version by Baltasar Porcel. Soon after, following the direction of Enric Torres, the Artis company definitively disappeared only two years after the departure of Xesc.

It is worth recalling the *xueta* background of many of the outstanding members of Majorcan theatre in general such as the actors of Francesc Fuster (1886-1974), the Catina Valls siblings (1906-99), Cristina (1901-82) and Joan, the members of the Forteza family (his grandfather, his father, his uncle, his brother and him) or Catalina Valls (1920-2010). Their presence in the literature of the Balearic Islands can be seen from the *Renaixença*: Marian

Aguiló, Tomàs Aguiló, Tomàs Forteza, Ramon Picó i Campamar, Gabriel Cortès, Miquel Forteza Pinya, Jaume Pomar... For the actors — as well as for the writers — theatre became a road to overcome their own personal and social issues while enjoying prestige and recognition at a time when the genre still had a strong influence.

Another fact to bear in mind is the rejection caused by regional theatre, *regional* – in Spanish – or, mockingly – even *requional* – which, significantly, replaced the “Majorcan comedy” from the period before the Spanish Civil War — in opposition to the true Spanish theatre, which despised regional theatre for being “stunted, parrochial and insignificant” (Llompert, 1964: 214). This did not please the playwrights, who left or premiered plays outside the islands during the so-called “brain drain” period (Llorenç Villalonga, Blai Bonet, Baltasar Porcel, Alexandre Ballester, Xesc Barceló, Guillem d’Efak, Jaume Vidal Alcover...). Neither the intellectuals nor theatre critics of the time such as Antoni Serra (the toughest) and Antoni Maria Thomàs from *Última Hora*, Joan Bonet from *Baleares*, Bartomeu Suau (the most prudent) from *Diario de Majorca*, which are the three most important outlets: some sought a more pro-Catalan and politically committed line (Serra, Thomàs) while others such as Bonet were anti-ethically “renowned Franco supporters” (Alomar, 2004: 33), but all constrained this type of theatre.

In contrast, the play titles are attractive and popular since *Na Catalina de plaça*, “understood for only being yet another element of advertising influence” (Thomàs, 1969: 16) with the traditional song even included in the piece. Very Majorcan set phrases which he resumed with the subtitle *Majòrica*, *D’oca a oca i tir perquè me toca*, and curiously also in the last pieces, such as the aforementioned *Puja aquí, voràs Portopí!*, and *S’ha acabat es bròquil*. For him, *Catxin dena quin estiu* could also have been called *Mal d’altri rialles són*, and still took to the stage *Me n’afluix per no triar*, which would force Xesc, already sick, to abandon the stage on the advice of doctors and family: he almost died on the job, as is common in the profession.

He no longer focuses on the upper class as he did in *Puja aquí, voràs Portopí!* or *Classe mitja acomodada* but he addresses the middle and working classes, often represented by the servants or the leading characters of *Majòrica* or *Ca ses monges*. Similarly, to further connect with the audience, the action is set in Palma, in contrast to what usually happened in regional theatre, which tended to depict rural settings, because he never wanted “a regional theatre, I don’t know what it is, I am from Palma, I am a citizen” (Arrom, 1997: 107) and with a cast almost all from Palma.

There are many female characters, because his theatre pleased women as much men, many of them from Majorca, but also from the mainland (Catalan, Andalusian) or foreign (French, Italian, Swedish) or inspired by those he must have met the Tagomago nightclub or on his journeys abroad. Those from here, chaste, decent and conservative, and those from outside Majorca, licentious, libidinous, but also free from the Catholic morale that constrained those from the Balearic Islands.

He has been compared to Diabéticas Aceleradas, the music band Ossifar, the singer Tomeu Penya and the actors Rossy de Palma or Agustín “El Casta”,

but also with Lina Morgan or Paco Martínez Soria. He has been called the Majorcan Molière, the Majorcan Joan Capri or the 20th-century Majorcan Charlot. A man, in any case, who greatly deserved this first academic article.



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