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hISTORY

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(fragmento en inglés)

*There is no one on the stage. Yves Montand's *Le Chant des Partisans*¹ is heard. After a moment, MARC BLOCH and a BOY enter, walking to the execution wall. They stand with their backs to it. The BOY seems terribly scared.*

BOY

(This will hurt.)

MARC BLOCH affectionately takes hold of his arm.

MARC BLOCH

(No, my boy, it won't hurt at all.)

Sound of guns firing. The music suddenly stops.

MARC BLOCH

(at the same time as the shots): *Vive la France!*

MARC BLOCH and the BOY fall to the ground, dead.

*

GERARD

(to the audience): General Millán-Astray: “¡Arriba España! ¡Una, grande y libre! Death to intelligence!” Long live death!”²

Pause.

¹ Yves Montand sang several versions of this song. The one used in this play actually begins with another song: the Horst Wessel Lied. Then the steps of a group marching in formation are heard and, finally, a whistle. All this happens before Montand begins to recite the first verse, after which he sings those that follow.

² The direction that the character of Gerard should quote General Millán-Astray and Miguel de Unamuno—addressing the audience—at the beginning of this scene is just one possibility. This was the option chosen for the original staging of the play when it was directed by Pau Roca in the Sala Beckett in Barcelona. His idea was that the last paragraph citing Unamuno should be spoken alternately by Sophie and Gerard as if present life were being breathed into this scene from 1936 with an exchange between two characters who are reliving the moment. But there are several ways of staging this: two actors performing the scene the whole time, or not addressing the audience, et cetera. Total freedom. If the work is performed outside of Spain, a brief introduction of the two historical figures may be necessary before the scene begins.

GERARD

(to the audience): Miguel de Unamuno: “You are waiting for my words. You know me well, and know I cannot remain silent. Sometimes remaining silent is the same as lying because silence can be interpreted as assent. But I have just heard this senseless, necrophiliac cry of ‘Long live death!’” And I, who have spent my life writing paradoxes that have provoked the wrath of people who don’t understand them, I who am an expert in this matter, must say that I find this ridiculous paradox repulsive. General Millán-Astray is an invalid. There is no need for us to say this in whispers. He is an invalid of war. So was Cervantes. It might be expected that a mutilated man who lacks the spiritual greatness of Cervantes would find horrible solace in seeing how the number of other mutilated people multiplies around him. Unfortunately, Spain today has too many mutilated people. And, if God does not help us, it will soon have very many more. This is the temple of intelligence, and I am its high priest. You are profaning its sacred domain. You will win because you have more than enough brute force. But you will not convince. In order to convince it is necessary to persuade, and in order to persuade you will need something that you lack: reason and right in the struggle. I see that it is useless to ask you to think of Spain. I have spoken.

In a park, in the early hours of the morning, SOPHIE and GERARD are drinking cans of beer.

SOPHIE

What are you reading?

GERARD

A history book.

SOPHIE

Which one?

GERARD

It’s by a French historian.

SOPHIE

Which one?

GERARD

The Historian’s Craft by Marc Bloch.

SOPHIE

What?

GERARD

The Hist—

SOPHIE takes the book.

SOPHIE

How come you’re reading this?

GERARD

I'm doing a master's in History. I have to read it for one of my subjects.

SOPHIE

Oh no! Please.

GERARD

What?

SOPHIE

Your teacher's called Daniel Vinyals.

GERARD

Yes. How did you know?

SOPHIE

He's my dad.

GERARD

No.

SOPHIE

Yes.

GERARD

No.

SOPHIE

Yes.

GERARD

No.

SOPHIE

Yes.

GERARD

Vinyals is your...? He's a walking institution, your dad!

SOPHIE

Sure.

GERARD

He's a very good teacher. I mean he's a great historian! I really admire him.

SOPHIE

You're not the only one.

GERARD

So you're his daughter.

SOPHIE

What do you think of the book?

GERARD

It's fantastic. But I don't understand a word.

SOPHIE

Ah, right. Very coherent.

GERARD

You didn't tell me what you do. Or did you?

SOPHIE

Yes, I told you.

GERARD

Did you? Shit! Sorry.

SOPHIE

No! I'm just teasing you.

GERARD

Ah, OK. It's just that sometimes I'm a bit absent-minded and...

SOPHIE

Right now I don't have a job.

GERARD

Ah.

Pause.

SOPHIE

But if I had to tell you... You know what? I think I like too many things.

GERARD

That happens to me a bit too.

SOPHIE

I studied biology. I like photography and I love drawing.

GERARD

Ah, that's great.

SOPHIE

In fact... I don't know how to put this.

GERARD

Go on. Tell me.

SOPHIE

Now, I mean before, when I saw you in the bar, I thought 'I'd love to draw him'. And I've been watching you.

GERARD

Ah.

SOPHIE

I don't want you to think I'm crazy.

GERARD

No. No. It's a form of flattery, isn't it?

SOPHIE

And just now I thought, 'And what if I drew him?'

GERARD

Here? In my book?

SOPHIE

Naked.

GERARD

...

SOPHIE

If you need to feel more comfortable, I'll strip off too.

GERARD

What? Are you an exhibitionist or something?

SOPHIE hands back the book.

SOPHIE

Don't take any notice of me. I'm a bit pissed and just rabbiting on. But, yeah, I was serious about one thing.

Pause.

SOPHIE

Yeah well, I'd like to draw you. Some day.

GERARD
Some day.

GERARD whistles Le Chant des Partisans. After a moment SOPHIE joins in. They whistle together.

GERARD
You know it?

SOPHIE
Of course I do. It's *Le Chant des Partisans*, the song of the French Resistance. You think I'm dumb or something?

GERARD
Well, anyway, with your dad and all, you get no points for that.

SOPHIE
Why were you whistling it?

GERARD
That song reminds me of... The other day I saw a documentary about the Second World War on telly. They played that song. It took me back. I don't know, but it's a period I admire. I mean, I admire... It's really fucked, I know, but there are so many incredible stories, so many incredible people. Sometimes when I see a certain view or when I'm listening to this song, I imagine those men, there in thick forest, in some lost part of France, walking along, very determined, with their loaded rifles at their backs. On a mission. Knowing what they're fighting for. Knowing that they have to fight. And, bloody hell, you're risking your life but you have to! You had to. I think about all their stories, in the time that's gone by, and how near and yet so far they are from us. And I don't know...

SOPHIE
So, you're one of those fanatics then.

GERARD
Fanatics?

SOPHIE
I can see it in your face. You love history.

GERARD
Do I?

SOPHIE
You love it.

GERARD
Well, I had the idea before that you love fucking in public places.

SOPHIE

I do. But you didn't show much interest.

GERARD

I like other things apart from history, OK?

SOPHIE

Gerard.

GERARD

What?

SOPHIE

Get naked.

*

THE PROFESSOR

(*to the audience*): What do you think is the aim of studying history? The past? The great deeds and the great men of those times?

In the eighteenth century, Voltaire complained that, "It seems that for 1,400 years France has only had kings, ministers and generals".

And what if we changed the prism through which we look at history? And what if we stated that the aim of studying history is people and their consciences? Then, my friends, the possibilities of history would be infinite and so would its field of study.

Would you dare to take up the challenge?

What I have just said did not come from me. I wish it had. These are the words of a French historian called Marc Bloch.

To end the class, I was going to talk about some densely theoretical concepts. In brief, something very boring, the kind of thing you love. But only yesterday I came across a quote from Marc Bloch and I'd like to share it with you. He says, "*Understanding* is a word pregnant with difficulties but also hope. Moreover, it is a friendly word. We are too quick to judge. It is so easy to shout 'Off to the firing squad!' We are never sufficiently understanding. Whoever differs from us—a foreigner or a political adversary—is almost inevitably considered evil. Even when dealing with unavoidable conflicts, a little more intelligence of spirit would be necessary, all the more to prevent them while there is still time. [...] History must help us to get through this difficult situation. It includes a vast experience of human diversities, a continuous contact with men. Life, like science, has everything to gain from it if only these contacts could be friendly."

And this was written by a man who fought in two world wars, who was a member of the French Resistance, and who was finally executed by the Nazis.

Pause.

THE PROFESSOR

History is not remote from us or from our society. History is one more part of our commitment as

human beings.

So look, a historian and a judge share part of a path. They both want to know the facts and to get to the truth impartially. But once they are informed of the facts, their paths separate. The judge asks, “Who is guilty?” and the historian is content to ask “Why?” accepting that the answer isn’t always simple.

History must not judge. History must understand.

Pause.

THE PROFESSOR

Thank you very much. See you next class. Ah! By the way, if anyone’s interested, and this is voluntary, I suggest writing a review of *The Drowned and the Saved*, a book by Primo Levi. Any takers?

Silence.

THE PROFESSOR

Now don’t fight over it, eh?

THE PROFESSOR gets ready to leave. GERARD gets up and goes over to him.

GERARD

Daniel.

THE PROFESSOR

Hi, Gerard. How are you? You’re looking a bit peaky.

GERARD

Ah right, but it’s nothing... I was out late last night.

THE PROFESSOR

So, what do you want?

GERARD

It’s about the review.

THE PROFESSOR

Are you interested?

GERARD

Yes.

THE PROFESSOR

Great. Someone’s finally showing some interest!

GERARD

So, *The Drowned and the Saved*...

THE PROFESSOR

By Primo Levi. Have you read it?

GERARD

No.

THE PROFESSOR

It's a marvellous portrait of the human soul.

GERARD

Ah, fantastic.

THE PROFESSOR

But you won't do this review.

GERARD

Ah, won't I?

THE PROFESSOR

You'll do some research on Marc Bloch.

GERARD

But... About his thought or—?

THE PROFESSOR

No, about the death of Marc Bloch.

GERARD

About his death?

Pause.

GERARD

But wasn't he executed by firing squad?

THE PROFESSOR

Yes.

GERARD

Ah. So, that's it then.

THE PROFESSOR

"So that's it." "So that's it." Gerard...

GERARD

What?

THE PROFESSOR

Never take things at face value. Friendly advice.

GERARD

I don't do that!

THE PROFESSOR

OK, OK. It was just a bit of advice.

Pause.

THE PROFESSOR

And you're not asking if I'm offering anything in return?

GERARD

No.

THE PROFESSOR

Very good.

THE PROFESSOR starts to leave.

GERARD

A higher grade?

THE PROFESSOR

Do the research!