

Play on Lorca staged in Madrid in face of right-wing protests

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A play dealing with the last hours of the poet Federico Garcia Lorca, leading up to his murder by the fascist Falangists, has finally been staged in Madrid, for one performance only.

The play, *Lorca eran todos* (*Lorca Was All of Us*), by the Catalan playwright Pepe Rubianes, was to have been presented at Madrid's Teatro Español early in September to mark the 70th anniversary of Lorca's murder. It had already enjoyed a successful run in Barcelona last year.

The Madrid production was attacked by right-wing forces, with religious groups pledging to demonstrate outside the venue.

The protests centered on comments made by Rubianes in January on Catalan television. In an interview on Catalonia's public television station TV3, Rubianes denounced leaders of the right-wing Popular Party (PP) nationally and locally. He also described listeners to the Catholic network Cope Radio as a "cult." His most controversial comments concerned Spain itself.

A supporter of Catalan nationalism, Rubianes said on the mid-afternoon show, "F—k Spain. Let them stuff Spain up their f—king arses and see if their balls explode."

Rubianes's outburst offered the right wing, which routinely denounces calls for regional autonomy or separatism as treason to Spain, an excuse to organise an attack on freedom of expression.

When the Catalan Audiovisual Council (CAC) declared that it had received only one complaint about Rubianes's comments, the Catholic newsgroup *Hazteoir* set up a website to encourage people to protest.

Rubianes was sued over the comments and issued several apologies. In seeking to clarify his remarks, he

said he was referring to "the Spain which killed Lorca, allowed [Antonio] Machado to die of sadness in Colliure, and let Miguel Hernandez die in prison."

All three poets were victims of Franco's forces, targeted for their support for the Republic. Lorca was shot and dumped in an unmarked grave. Antonio Machado, a pacifist who had welcomed the Republic, was forced to flee Spain and died in France in 1939. Hernandez was sentenced to death by the Franco regime for his republican activities. The sentence was commuted to three years' imprisonment, and he died of tuberculosis in jail in 1942.

In the face of continued threats of violence against the theatre and the cast, death threats against him personally, and the announcement that the religious group *Alternativa Española* would demonstrate outside the show, Rubianes took the decision to cancel the performances.

The PP mayor of Madrid, Alberto Ruiz-Gallardon, was not satisfied with a personal climb-down and told a hastily convened press conference that the playwright would not be performing at Teatro Español, as the municipal authorities "will not contract him." PP leader Mariano Rajoy said Gallardon's decision not to allow the show to go ahead was "good."

In response, Rubianes compared Spain to the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The PP-led offensive met with opposition from other quarters as well. Mario Gas, the director of the Teatro Español, threatened to resign in protest.

Gallardon was forced to issue a disingenuous statement denying that any censorship had taken place and stressing that Rubianes had made the decision himself to cancel the production.

The right-wing campaign also prompted a trade union to offer its auditorium as an alternative venue for the

production. When *Lorca eran todos* was finally staged, a spokesman for the theatre company said they wanted to make a good job of the play as “there’s something symbolic about all this.”

Rubianes did not attend the one-off performance. But some 100 right-wing protesters demonstrated outside the union auditorium and hurled abuse at the audience as they entered.

This is not the only presentation to face such attacks this year. In March, Leo Bassi’s *The Revelation* also faced right-wing violence, including two separate arson attacks—one on his dressing room—numerous bomb threats, and demonstrations orchestrated by *Alternativa Española*, a conservative Christian group. Local authorities cut funding to the festival that staged it.

Bassi described his performance as a “tribute to secular values” and a defence of atheism. Counterdemonstrations were held in support of both Bassi and Rubianes.



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