

At the Romea, there is an opportunity to see the work of a very great actor: Josep Maria Pou, the wry, gruff Marco en Josep Maria Flotats's fine 2000 staging of Art, here takes the role of the self-made Tom Sergeant in David Hare's 1995 play SKYLIGHT...

...Richard Eyre's understated production of Skylight at the National Theatre eight years ago was marked by a profound understanding that this is an actor's play. There can be little doubt that Michael Gambon and Lia Williams' revelatory performances rooted the production converting it into one of the year's key productions...

...While Kyra and Edward may show themselves able to negotiate the awkward physical conditions, the arrival of Josep Maria Pou's large, lumbering Tom ambling through the living-room-cum-kitchen throws a real spanner into the works. While Marta Calvo's Kyra and David Janer's Edward wear their street credentials with pride, Pou's Tom is a different kettle of fish. The immaculate black leather gloves, camel cashmere coat and olive green scarf speak of impeccable taste. Pou's Tom hangs over and across the space with an awkwardness that announces his "difference". His large, elegant hands cradle the whiskey glass which brings both fortification and protection. Calvo's Kyra is, in contrast, a diminutive figure, swamped in jumpers and shawls; her shield against Tom and the intimacy that Tom heralds. Theirs is an epic encounter, marked by moments of physical closeness and tender affection, by abrupt face-on encounters across the table, by Tom sitting at the table confessing as if on trial, by the physical distance that emerges as in the wake of each re-instating their schismatic values...

...Pou is a large actor in every sense of the word; the grave forehead, the ever so slightly hunched physique, the exhaustion conveyed through the most delicate of shoulder movements, the faintly raised eyebrows, the ever so slightly twitching mouth; there is a methodical and meticulous attention to detail here in every instant of this performance which rises to face the challenges of each of the work's changes of texture and tone.

Pou's characterisation of the tortured Tom sits alongside the other great performances of his career; his angry, hostile Roy Cohn in Flotats' staging of Angels in América in 1996, his compassionate, observant Dorn in the same director's The Seagull a year later. Like Gambon, this is an actor who never allows the epic to swamp the intimate, who can allow humour to emerge, unexpectedly, in the bleakest moments.

Calvo rises to the challenge of performing alongside him, providing a stillness that acts as a memorable counterpoint to his aggressivity, a quiet confidence that confronts his self-importance and sense of self-belief. In the hands of lesser performers, this could be reduced to a debate of big bad capitalism against the "good" compassionate humanity celebrated by Kyra. What emerges, however, is a far more subtle tale of class divisions, manipulation, betrayal, loss and the possibility of remaining "true" to one's ideals whatever they may be or whatever that may involve.

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