

# María Sánchez

## More or Less 300

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of how all my senses, my  
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"It's alright," I said to her as she rested her head on my shoulder and allowed tears to fall quietly down her cheeks. The other women instinctively came closer and, although we hardly knew each other, we all embraced and breathed together as though we shared only a single lung and a single feeling. I don't know exactly why, but there are things that only women feel, things that only women never forget, whether they have lived a lot or a little. What is it that brings us together? What joins us to all other women?

To live more or less three-hundred kilometres from Ciudad Juárez, the Mexican town where for eleven years more or less three-hundred women have been murdered and an uncalculated number of disappearances have taken place, or to live thousands of kilometres away with oceans in between, does not change my feelings of indignation when confronted with these facts. What is this struggle? Or should I say, what is this war? Gender? Impartiality? Equality? Women's rights? Why? Are women's rights not supposed to be human rights? Is the female gender vulnerable? And what about the male? I am only asking.

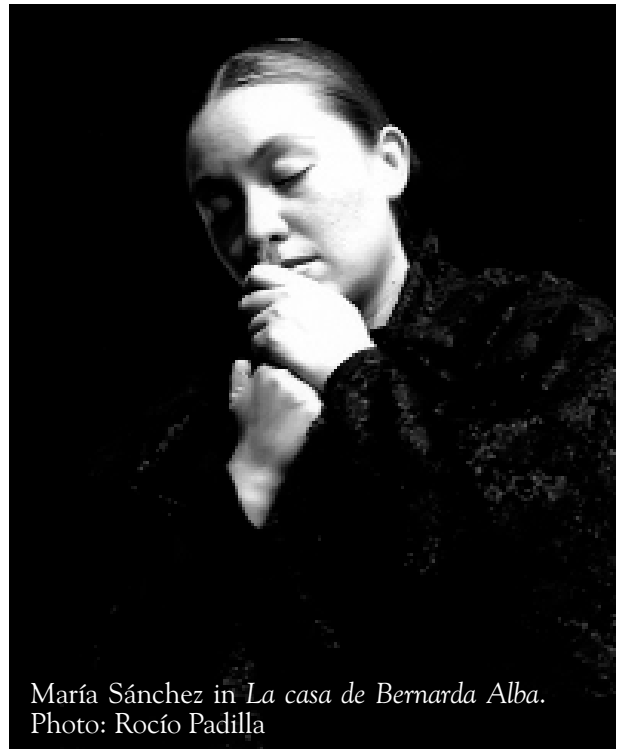
"Adam's rib", "behind every great man there is a great woman" - behind? - "the devil walks in women's clothes", "evil woman", "she had to be old!" "fuck you!", "you bitch!" ... I can fill this page with commonplace phrases like these; or with newspaper headlines in which the authorities excuse themselves and nothing is done; or with people's judgemental comments on these women: "she went around dressed in a very provocative way, that is why they raped her"; "the problem is that they are indecent young girls"; "they provoke what happens to them, they walk down immoral paths." But on the exit highway from Juárez, five pink crosses placed in a bed of stones, with "her" photograph at the centre already faded by the sun and the rain, tell me that these girls are no different, that they are just like you or me. For exactly this reason I am the one who must scream: "Never again! Not one more!" although the cry gets lost and once again a newspaper headline announces: "Another

woman is found dead in Ciudad Juárez."

Some paintings: my body begins to move to imitate the pictures. A few songs that I like: they tell me that I am one of them. My voice opens up, I sing the songs. Stories to tell: I tell them. My heart beats strongly: I feel passionately for this work of mine. I read, I move some more, my body remembers, my body knows, I allow it to decide. I see the faces of the women, I use my own: I see their eyes, I use mine. A performance is being created. Other women arrive. They are women from other places, who live on the other side of the sea, but who know what you and I know. I search for them and they allow me to meet them. They are the women I scarcely know and who embrace me saying "It's alright". I rest my work on their shoulders and I calmly let a tear fall.

Like the root buried deep in the earth that allows the tree to feed itself and grow branches and flower, like the sap that comes up from the root and circulates all around the tree, similarly these murdered women - buried or not, found or missing - nourish and allow my work to grow in the desert. I have been preparing this work for two years and it has started to take form. But the root that pushes and pulls me, that guides me, the root that unites me to you and to them, the root that allows me to breathe is theatre.

As a theatre person, as a woman like you, I have searched for my motive and purpose in making theatre, pursuing the reason that makes me continue. What is it? Perhaps there is no motivation in my head. Maybe my motivation cannot be rationalised or reasoned with. The anguish of not knowing weighs on my chest, consuming my time and my life. To be able to breathe I can only continue to do it, to cry out in this way, with my body, my voice and my theatre (and I call it "mine" in the same way that we say "my God", "my child", when we appro-



María Sánchez in *La casa de Bernarda Alba*.  
Photo: Rocío Padilla

priate to ourselves what we love). This is how I face life and what I see happening in front of me, searching for an answer. In this quest perhaps I will find some explanation that will give me peace, but meanwhile I continue looking, although in my desperation I wonder why I cannot just stick a picture on each lamp post, at each factory corner, on the door of each of the houses and say:

*Missing.*

*A reward will be given to any person who is able to give trustworthy information for the clarification of this case which remains to be solved.*

But even if nobody answers I will continue searching untiringly like those mothers who look for their daughters who have disappeared. They live to search; it is this search that keeps them alive. They will not have rest until they find something, whatever it may be, whatever is needed for them to let out their cry, a cry

that is suspended on the thread of uncertainty. I will search as they do, I will look for my motivation until I find it - or her - dead or alive.

I have spoken of my current work, of what it means for me to stage it, of how all my senses, my intellect and my heart have been involved in its process of creation, but it was not always this way. Looking back I dare to say that I am a different person after making this performance.

Previously my commitment was not the same, previously I conformed by giving voice to invented characters, by re-creating instead of creating, and I must admit that that was a lot easier. But, without devaluing those who choose to work in this way, I was always left with the feeling that if this was all, if my commitment to this profession was only to learn speeches and to recite them naturalistically and believably, then I was in danger, because if I remained lukewarm, theatre would spew me out of its mouth. I had to become either cold or hot.

The heat that burns came in the form of books that were the go-betweens in this romance between theatre and me. They helped revive the flame and they told me that, yes, there was more. I learned that I could make theatre with my body and my voice, in which I needn't stop being myself, helping spectators to recognise a character that gave them something more than just a few lines of text.

Reading a book that I didn't choose, but that chose me, *Theatre - Solitude, Craft and Revolt*, I discovered that the director Eugenio Barba and the actress Julia Varley would step on Mexican ground. I invested all my energy in being able to be there, I wanted to know what would happen. I needed to ask Eugenio Barba: "How did he know? How did he know exactly what words I needed to hear?" And what I feared happened. Being there in front

of them, I could not say or ask anything, but my stomach recognised the feeling of a strange certainty.

It was then that without hesitation I said... "Yes, I promise - I said to theatre - I promise to be faithful in sickness and in health, to love and respect you every day of my life." I knew then that my commitment was now real and I had to respond to it with work, sweat and tears.

This performance was born also from this commitment. For this reason it is a watershed for me. My life in theatre or theatre in my life (I don't know how to put it because I am no longer sure who chose what), will never be the same again. I am convinced that the comfort of the tepid temperature will no longer tempt me; in this profession one cannot live otherwise. I prefer to be a floe of ice, or to be the flame before becoming ashes.

Translated from Spanish by Julia Varley

MARÍA SÁNCHEZ (Mexico) was born in 1975 in Chihuahua, where, after graduating from the Arts Institute of Chihuahua University, she now works as a television presenter. María Sánchez has worked as an actress in more than thirty productions and in 2002 she received a prize for best actress as Adela in *La casa de Bernalda Alba* in Chihuahua. She is now preparing a solo performance directed by Jill Greenhalgh.