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Photo: David Cimetta

Trump is Speared and Smeared as Ubu Roi

by Jonathan Stein

In these days of demagogues and dictators, some artists have been turning to the classics: re-staging *Coriolanus*, seen this summer at [Shakespeare-in-the-Park](#) in New York, and Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, opening now at [Lantern Theater Company](#). The always imaginative director/choreographer [Melanie Stewart](#), playwright Brian Grace-Duff and an exuberant Rowan Theater cast have created an inventive work for the Fringe Festival. Rather than re-staging the proto-[Theater of the Absurd](#) *Ubu Roi*, they have given us a new, in your gut (including your rectum) Trumpian Ubu.

Alfred Jarry's 1896 play about a mad, boorish, cowardly king eliminating rivals with a feces-covered toilet brush and having to personally collect taxes after realizing he killed off all government workers closed after one night. It lived on into the next century via Dadaism and Surrealist art, a potent meme for European fascism. More recently Trump's election spawned a call last year from playwright [Paula Vogel](#) to writers around the world to do an Ubu Trump sketch for President's Day, February 19. Trump is too often viewed through a reality TV lens; this Rowan production gets much closer to the outrageous truths of this President through a wildly physical Theater of the Absurd that revels in the scatological and the hyperbolic.

Maggie O'Connor's vulgar, aggressive Ubu is crowned with the splayed legs of small naked dolls, and begins her reign with an inauguration party where celebrants offer up fresh turds to the new President. The daughter Ivubala (Liz Culver), always entering in gusts of pirouettes, wants the whole moon or at least a plantation, but instead receives instructions to "go fuck that Russian." The wife, Echolina, is a mannequin in a black dress, speaking through Ubu only when her nipple is squeezed. Vice President Pughpance (Nick Flagg), donning an ecclesiastic-like hat and obsessed with his asshole, seeks divine intervention to end the Mueller investigation, only to find that he is entreating none other than Ubu (we assume written before our President declared himself the "Chosen One").

The scatological goes hand-in-hand, we might say, with the gluttonous. The Trump followers search with Zombie-like fervor for a

saturated fat burger fix, cheered on with vigor by a Trump loyalist, the dynamic Magubu (Mackenzie Trush). Gluttony meets murder at the dinner banquet where, to Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto #3* and a manic Baroque-infused "Burger Ballet" by participants, the investigating Special Counsel Mulemount (Adriana Santilli) is murdered with a poisoned burger. Ubu, despite asserting innocence and sadness, simultaneously admits to murder. Protesters shout, "No Ubu, no wall," though Ubu diverts their protest into a race for his inheritance. To the sole surviving protester who seeks to "invent a new way to fight," Ubu delivers a fatal shot. It could have been on 5th Avenue.

[*In America, That is to Say No Where*](#), Rowan Theater Presentation, Performance Garage, 2019 Fringe Festival, Sept. 5 & 6.

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