This is a new edition of a play script first published in what I believe was a very small edition in 1986. As far as I can see, the text of the play remains unchanged and the foreword I wrote for that edition has been retained in this one. What is new is four pages of music written specially for the play by Manwel Pirotta when it was performed at the Manoel Theatre in December 1986.

Buttigieg deserves to be better known than he is. This play, performed less than five months before the May 1987 election that put an end to the gloomy and strife-ridden years of MLP governments, made a good impact on the mostly young audiences who saw it, and his other, shorter plays performed by Ateatru, a daring and imaginative drama group of the early Eighties, of which he was a co-founder and leading light, were also successful. His long absence from the theatre has now ended with his recent appointment to the Manoel’s Management Committee.

The title refers to the unsuccessful revolt led by a number of priests against the rule of the Spanish Grand Master Francisco Ximenes de Texada in 1775. Buttigieg adopted a technique drawn from Brecht but more especially from the Brechtian playwright Peter Weiss whose Arat/Sade (which is also being performed during the coming season) was staged by Ateatru in the early Eighties as I pointed out in my foreword. Buttigieg may also have been influenced by Alfred Sant’s Fid-dell tal-katidral.

As in the Weiss play, in Rewwixta the action depends on a constant interrelationship between past and present, between what happens in a play within the play in which the events leading up to the revolt and the revolt itself are depicted, and the reality being lived by the actors performing the play within the play.

The time of the play is 1795, a couple of years before the death of Grand Master de Rohan, and the play within the play is performed by Maltese students at the Bishop’s Seminary in the presence of the Bishop, Labini.

The Rector of the Seminary is a wily old priest who would like to ingratiate himself with the authorities by contrasting the despotic rule of Ximenes and his predecessor Pinto with what he calls the benevolent rule of De Rohan. What happens, however, is that the student actors get out of hand, showing their disapproval of De Rohan’s government and insulting the Italian bishop, who has replaced the Maltese bishop Pellerano for his failure to defend the rights of the Maltese.

Even the Rector’s final trick – that of bringing on the real Mannarino, just released after 20 years in prison – backfires, for the old man has no brief for De Rohan, and urges the young men to overcome their disagreements and unite to fight oppression in any form.

Buttigieg’s dialogue is frequently humorous, as it brings out people’s hidden agendas and the way in which young people rush in gladly where later in life they will fear to tread. For the 1986 audience the play’s references to contemporary politics were clear, Pinto and Ximenes stood for Mintoff and KMB and the fiasco of Mannarino’s insurrection due to the fear of his Maltese brethren to support him is a clear indictment of all those disgruntled Maltese who failed to come out clearly against Labour’s repression of free expression.

Even today, however, I suspect the play should still be effective, for its warning against letting autocratic governments grip the country is one that will never be outdated. Its fresh approach to both history and contemporary politics should attract one of our talented young groups to have a bash at it in the future, considering especially what a dearth there is of good new plays.
The play’s the thing by Paul Xuereb, The Sunday Times, 14-9-2003