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**FROM LORCA TO LIDDELL:
THE EMERGENCE OF
POSTDRAMATIC THEATER IN SPAIN***

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In *Postdramatic Theatre*, arguably the most systematic overview of the methods and meanings of performance art as it has evolved since the 1950s and 60s, Hans-Thies Lehmann lays out the bases for assessing how theoreticians and practitioners working within this field have reconceptualized the locus and process of theatrical creativity and thereby challenged conventional understandings of the stage-audience relationship. For the purposes of this study, I should like to underscore those points in Lehmann's essay that are especially salient in this regard, for their relevance to the particular brand of performance art that has developed over the past several decades in Spain in general and, as others have indicated (Abuín, Checa, Cornago), in works by Angélica Liddell in particular, the main subject of this analysis and one of Spain's leading contemporary performance artists. As Lehmann and others emphasize, postdramatic theater is, first and foremost, a *present-ation* rather than a *re-presentation*. Performance artists exploit the *immediacy* and *presence* that are inherently theatrical—"theater is the site not only of 'heavy bodies' but of *real gathering*," Lehmann reminds us (17; *emphasis* his)—in *extremely* new ways. They achieve this primarily through their daring and often daunting use of, precisely, these "gathered bodies," thereby inculcating the audience with a uniquely acute awareness of

a dynamic that is essentially theatrical. The reformulation of the traditional “presence” of the character as the “present” tense and experience of an individual who seems more authorial than literary—Liddell speaks of a “reaffirmation of the individual” that results in the “disappearance of the character in favor of the voice of the author” (“Un minuto” 69; Abuín 165)—is achieved through strategies that are sometimes verbal, always para- or non-verbal, and that transform the actor’s body into the ubiquitous and all-encompassing stage sign under which all other stage elements are subsumed. As we are commonly told, this development is rooted in trends—“theatrical autofiction” (Szondi, Abuín González); “las dramaturgias del yo” (Checa); “the fierce reaffirmation of the individual” (Liddell, “Un minuto” 69)—that are nascent in early modern epistemologies and/or ontologies,¹ that lead in the late 19th and early 20th century to modernism’s break with bourgeois conventions and that culminate in postdramatic theater’s “monologized and lyrical reflections of—and I would add, ‘on’—a central ‘I’” (Szondi, Abuín).

As has been discussed and as performance artists repeatedly demonstrate, the public display of self-awareness through a heightened emphasis on physicality and presence have had profound implications for how we have come to understand dramatic space, processes of artistic creativity and, ultimately, the actor-audience relationship. Marina Abramovic’s three-month/8-10 hour-daily commingling with spectators in an open space on the 2nd floor of New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in “The Artist is Present” or the often disconcerting intermingling of actors and spectators in many of the “acciones” that La fura dels baus has offered in unconventional locations are highly visible and especially poignant examples of how postdramatic theater has led to a rethinking of the performance space—sometimes but not always a stage in the conventional sense— as the prime or even exclusive locus where creativity springs forth, unfolds, occurs. To one extent or another, creativity thus becomes a shared *experience*, as the public is drawn into the spectrum of the authorial presence that Liddell speaks of. As an *experi-*

ence, it suggests the transformation of the performance space into a *place*, if we accept that spaces that are *conceived* and/or *perceived* (Lefebvre, Saar and Palang) become *places* when *experienced* sociologically or anthropologically, through ritual or ceremony (Augé, Tuan). The “para-ritual forms, as well as the (often deeply black) ceremony of the body and of presence” that Lehmann (69) attributes to postdramatic theater and that Liddell emulates in personal ways, as we shall see, lend pertinent support to these assertions.

In terms of artistic creativity, a net result of this trend has been for acting—or, perhaps more appropriately, *being*—to take relative if not absolute precedence over writing, in opposition to dramatic theater strictly speaking, characterized as it is by “the primacy of the text” (Lehmann 21). Precedence becomes absolute in non-scripted experiences such as many of those on display in Abramovic’s exhibit at New York’s MOMA, in which creativity or authorship seems to occur more or less spontaneously through performer-audience communication that is either non- or paraverbal, always corporal. In the case of *script*-based performances, artists in their role as authors often develop, as has Liddell, a particularly lyrical style that draws attention to itself, that takes on a bodily materiality or opaqueness (“fuerza material y tactilidad poética”: Cornago, “Atra” and “La poesía” 129), a presence of its own and, as such, mirrors the strategies of immediacy such as they are emphasized in real time and projected, thematically, through acting or, rather, actions. Liddell’s characteristic penchant for Artaudian cruelty and for an aesthetic of the grotesque is a case in point. Scenes of self-inflicted pain or wounds—of her cutting her legs, for instance, and eating bread soaked with her own blood—or, in full view of the audience, of her beating her vagina with pebbles, before inserting them, while chanting “mi cuerpo es mi protesta, no quiero tener hijos” are examples of “deeply black ceremony of the body.” As such, they represent the stage correlative of the hauntingly lyrical writing style in this and the other pieces that Liddell published under the title of *La desobediencia* and that she performed in Spain (Cornago, “Poesía escénica” 136; Villora 5; *Desobediencia*) and abroad

(*Yo no soy bonita*). On stage or in the written text, these moments are clearly intended to stun and to disturb, to prick the soul by wounding the eyes with Calderonian or Goyesque marvels of monstrosity:

Es una época de muerte. Me dejo llevar por ese flujo y me veo *monstruosa*, me siento horrible, de ahí *la identificación con el monstruo*, porque no me siento a gusto en medio de lo que me rodea. Hay que ir en contra, hacer las cosas con rabia, cultivar la ira, la rabia, alimentarla, ir en contra de las cosas *para que la reacción y el choque se haga con fuerza*. (Villora 13; emphasis mine)

Indebted as Liddell and so many other performance artists are to Artaud's faith in "cruelty" and ritualized chaos (Abuín) as a regenerative panacea in these modern times of crisis ("época de muerte"), her practices are designed expressly for dismantling remnants of the barriers separating spectators and the spectacle, for undermining what Lorca's alter-ego, his "Director" in *El público*, condemned in one of high modernism's most virulent attacks on the foundations of bourgeois theater and on its corresponding notions of theatrical space, identity, and social structures:

Si Romeo y Julieta agonizan y mueren para despertar sonriendo cuando cae el telón, mis personajes, en cambio, quemán la cortina y mueren de verdad, en presencia de los espectadores. ... Hay que destruir el teatro o vivir en el teatro. ... Hay que resistirlo todo porque hemos roto las puertas, hemos levantado el techo y nos hemos quedado con las cuatro paredes del drama. (*El público* 184)

The disturbing potential of dying *really* ("morir de verdad") that Lorca contemplates is fully explored when stage artists begin slashing their own flesh *really*, in full view of the audience, or, as was the case in her *Rhythm 0*, when Marina Abramovic subjected herself to the bloody and traumatic consequences, the possibility of death being one, of her

placing loaded pistols and daggers for her spectators to use on her at their will (*Rhythm 0*).

With respect to the breadth and consistency of her contributions and in the terms laid out above, Angélica Liddell (pseudonym for Angélica González) stands out as a leading figure within the field of performance as it has evolved in Spain over the past several years. In a field that in Spain has been dominated to a large extent by Catalan companies favoring large-scale ensemble productions (Els Comediants, Els Joglars, La Fura dels baus), the Madrid-based Liddell is exceptional for the performances she offers most commonly in Madrid's *salas alternativas*—the erstwhile Ensayo 100, the Salas Pradillo and Cuarta Pared and the Casa Encendida, for instance—or in single performances or 2 to 3-day runs in theater festivals designed to showcase works by “emerging” or non-canonical artists, such as the Festival Alternativo de las Artes Escénicas or La Escena contemporánea. She takes company with artists who are, by and large, disassociated, perform or (as in Liddell's case) as a matter of principle, from social, economic and political power nodes—the mainstream commercial or national theaters—that dominate in Spain. Liddell's short stints in *experimental* or *second-space* zones of Madrid's public theaters—the Teatro Valle-Inclán's “Sala Francisco Nieva” (*Perro muerto* and *Ricardo*) and the Teatro Español's “Centro de Creación Contemporánea” lodged in the Matadero, the city's repurposed slaughterhouse (*La Casa de la fuerza*)—along with her success in two high-profile festivals—Madrid's Festival de otoño (*La Casa de la Fuerza*, 4-8 Nov 2009) and the Festival de Avignon (*Ping Pang Qiu* and *Todo el cielo sobre la tierra [El síndrome de Wendy]*, 5-11 Jul 2013)—are, to an extent, exceptions that confirm the rule, her receipt of the Premio Nacional de Literatura Dramática in 2013 notwithstanding. Most importantly, even when accompanied on stage by Gumersindo Puche, cofounder of Atra Bilis, the company through which she has marketed her work since the early 1990s, Liddell's performances are primarily about her, that is, about the various meanings and messages she transcribes and transmits through her interpretation and theatricalization of self and about the rapport

that she is thereby able to establish with her audience. This has largely been the case in the more than 30 titles attributed to Liddell throughout her two-decade career before audiences and it is poignantly so in “Actos de resistencia contra la muerte,” the second of Liddell’s four trilogies and the one that is arguably singularly important for understanding her development and contributions to the field of performance art or postdramatic theater in both Spain and, considering that her work has appeared in more than 10 languages, abroad.

To begin with, the three works comprising “Actos de resistencia”—*Y los peces salieron a combatir contra los hombres; Y como no se pudo ... Blancanieves; El año de Ricardo*—mark an important turn in Liddell’s development that is, at once, both ideological and aesthetic. As has been suggested and against the backdrop of the drama of the degenerate family that forms the nucleus of her earlier “Tríptico de la Aflicción”—*El matrimonio Palavrakis; Once Upon A Time in West Asphixia o Hijos mirando al infierno; Hysterica passio* (2000-2002)—the socio-political themes that predominate in Liddell’s “Actos de resistencia” (2003-2007)—primarily, but not exclusively, immigration in *Peces*, war in *Blancanieves*, politics in *Ricardo*, and nationhood, democracy and society in all three—signal Liddell’s move to frame what is constant in her work, her aesthetics of physicality, suffering and cruelty, within the broader spectrum of a highly charged transnational socio-political consciousness (Abuín, Cornago). If the “authorial self” in performance art is to be taken as the individualized prism through which social crises are experienced, refracted, projected, and ultimately imposed upon the spectators, this becomes acutely so in Liddell’s “Actos de resistencia.” Liddell’s move to stress the transnational over the domestic frame of reference coincides, moreover, with an equally significant move to foreground her metadramatic discourse through an emphasis that is unprecedented for her at this point in her career. The incisive and provocative reflection on the body as the focal point of contestation that the artist develops in both the script and performance of these works recalls the shorter “acciones”

that she presented during the same period (*Desobediencia*) and it becomes, along with the socio-political frame of reference, a major source of this trilogy's coherence. To the extent that such reflections bring the audience, not just into the spectrum of the performance as an action to behold, but to the intimate source of production, where we participate in her ruminations as the artist both ponders and performs her "body" as "protest," for instance (*Desobediencia*), Liddell deepens the reach of the actor-spectator coexistence foreboded by Lorca through his dramatic alter ego—his "Director"—more than a half a century prior, in plays—*El público* and *Comedia sin título*—that, coincidentally, were being premiered at long last in their first high-profile Spanish productions precisely when Liddell was launching her career on stage.² Allusions to *Macbeth* in *Blancanieves* and the use of Shakespeare's *Richard III* as the conceptual frame of reference for *El año de Ricardo* represent less subtle indications of Liddell's desire to situate herself within the spectrum of a theatrical tradition that she interprets, through her intertextualities, as inherently revolutionary and cruel. The various correlations that connect Liddell's work and Lorca's "destructive" avant-garde plays, whether latent or intentional, help to elucidate that legacy vis-à-vis a modernism that, as Lehmann discusses and Liddell demonstrates, is fundamental for understanding postdramatic theater in its post-modern context.

Performing bodies, constructing the self

"Mi cuerpo es mi voluntad ... mi cuerpo es el fin del mundo. ... ¿De qué estamos hechos, Dios mío?" (*Trilogía* 82)

Thus does Angélica Liddell's Richard summarize the existential quandary that postdramatic theater seeks to explore as it beckons us to test the limits of our tolerance and endurance, the nature of our existence as human beings living in the shadows of today's deformity and depravity. That the body here and now should become the locus of such dramatic inquiries is, as Richard reminds us, a matter of

primary concern in this work and in the others that constitute Liddell's "Actos de resistencia contra la muerte." For these works are configured not in the linear sense of an action unfolding *dramatically* on some pseudo-chronological plane, but rather as vertical descents into the intimate psychological core of what is ongoing and immediate. Divested of any of the referents to *real* time or space that characterize drama in the Szondian-Lehmannian sense, they are configured as a portrait of the individual will ("voluntad") and of the landscape of knowledge that sharpens progressively as that will and knowledge become more clearly *incorporated* into the main actor's body. More importantly, these works entice us to search for the tragically elusive answer to Ricardo's terrible question concerning the nature of self or identity in these immoral times when individual will and knowledge are defined and delimited by the frontiers and texture of our own wretched self.

In all three "Actos" this vertical descent unfolds within the framework of a triangular relationship involving the actors (Liddell and Puche) and the audience, a relationship that coalesces around the image or idea of the suffering, grotesque and perverse—or, rather, perverted—self. That image or idea is projected by Angélica Liddell, as "Putá" (*Peces*), "Blancanieves" (*Blancanieves*), or "Ricardo" (*Ricardo*), as she monologues with her spectators. In *Peces*, she draws us through a string of references to shipwrecked immigrants toward the culminating metaphor of Africanized fish that, morphed into the immigrants they have devoured, threaten to eat racist sun-loving Spaniards on the beaches of Andalusia. In both *Blancanieves* and *El año de Ricardo* the authorial self—Liddell as Snow White or Richard—represents rather than describes the powers of destruction that she has internalized from the culture of violence and injustice that envelopes her (us) in our "época de muerte." She comes to epitomize trends that she claims humankind has legitimized as "pleasurable" ("la forma de legitimizar el inmenso placer que a los hombres les proporciona el ejercicio de la crueldad" [*Trilogía* 37]). She does so as part of her journey toward her ultimate expression of self-affirmation:

La infancia no existe. ...
 El mundo corre un grave peligro.
 La madre pinta una cuna.
 Voy en pijama por el desierto.
Soy la salvaje. (Blancanieves in *Trilogía 45*; *emphasis mine*)

¿Quién *me* impide entonces ejercer el mal entre
 semejante piscina
 de piedad?
 Si al final cuando ponga en marcha *mi único acto*
 bondadoso,
 perfectamente controlado y medido,
 todos pensarán que también *soy un hombre*.
 Ni del todo bueno.
 Ni del todo malo.
Simplemente un hombre. (Ricardo in *Trilogía 70*;
emphasis mine)

Such comments cap, in short, the sharpening of our understanding of the nature and limits of the authorial will and knowledge, an experience that, as suggested, forms the core of Liddell's conversation with her audience. Our status as the addressees in this conversation and the fact that we share that status with Liddell's stage partner, Gumersindo Puche—that is, with “Señor Puta” in *Peces*, the soldier in *Blancanieves*, Catesby in *Ricardo*—is suggested as Liddell slips between the second person singular and plural, a slip-page that becomes almost imperceptible when she broaches the most disturbing implications of her story:

Córtame las orejas
 con el ventilador antiguo. ...
 ¡Mira! Puedo bailar con vísceras en los pies
 sobre un mantel de picnic. ...
 ¡Vomita en otro sitio, cerdo!
 ¡Me *has manchado* el puto vestido! ...
 He calentado mi cuchillo con la sangre de otros niños.
 Y me ha gustado, *icabrones!*
 ¿Qué *habéis hecho con mi bondad?* (Blancanieves 12;
emphasis mine)

One must surmise that the pinnacle of tension resulting from our becoming implicated in such disturbing accusations, as the collective assassins of childhood innocence, is intended to dull our awareness of any distinguishing barrier between her and us, fact and fiction. The use of audio recordings to project the “Soldado’s” voice in *Blancanieves* and “Catesby’s” in *Ricardo’s* last scene elide further the interstitial zones that separate, on the one hand, Liddell’s intended interlocutors (Puche and us), and, on the other, her spectators and spectacle, in that these recordings seem to issue from the space we inhabit. They are the voice of the criminal and accomplice that sits among us, is in us. The various ways in which a speechless Puche maneuvers Liddell’s body in the 2005 staging of *Blancanieves* and in the 2007 production of *El año de Ricardo* seem designed to perform the implications of our complicity in the darkest way. For the highly energetic and, at times, buffoonish Ricardo, he functions as a sort of personal trainer, stretching her legs and arms and otherwise conditioning her for the physical tours de force to follow. For the child whose loss of innocence is projected as resulting from unimaginable cruelties, he assumes the appearance of the most diabolical of Pygmalions who fabricates *Blancanieves* as a fairy tale figure (heavy makeup and costume reinforce Liddell’s doll-like appearance) in the terms proposed by this play. He fabricates her victimhood, that is. He often does so in tandem with the voiceover corresponding, in the script, to the “Soldado” speaking for the battalion who raped and tortured the young girl. We surmise him to be that Soldado. We surmise, that is, our own uneasy association or identification through him with that same Soldado. Similarly, his actions are synchronized at regular intervals with the musical interludes that punctuate the scenes of this and the other plays and that gloss the action in haunting ways. In the opening scene, Puche’s/Soldado’s savage moans and screams and his wildly contorted movements and gestures are synchronized to Jim Morrison’s “This is the End,” the play’s prophetic overture. Later he dresses *Blancanieves* and drags her around the stage to the tunes of Morrison’s “I love you the best” (“Indian Summer”), powdering her face, applying

her lipstick and trimming her nails in preparation for the girl's rape monologue. He does this, moreover, right after *Blancanieves* describes both the suffering that she experienced—a “dolor que empieza en la lengua y termina en los tobillos” (*Trilogía* 41)—and the lessons in evil that she derived from the fairy tales her father read to her as a child. In so many ways the spectacle is designed to reinforce audibly and visually what *Blancanieves* encapsulates in her most damning of condemnations (“¿Qué habéis hecho con mi bondad?”): that, via the models of conduct and being we exemplify, we are implicated in the engendering of this (our own) horror.

Bodily functions, effects and meanings

No duerme nadie por el cielo. Nadie, nadie.
 No duerme nadie.
 Pero si alguien cierra los ojos,
 ¡azotadlo, hijos míos, azotadlo!
Haya un panorama de ojos abiertos
 y amargas llagas encendidas. (38-43; *emphasis mine*)

The experience of seeing is thus foregrounded in “*Ciudad sin sueño*” (*Poeta* 151-55), one of Lorca's most celebrated New York poems, linked as this experience is to the poet's graphic portrayal of human pain and suffering: “amargas llagas encendidas.” As the playwright-poet suggests here and elsewhere, the representation of pain is hardly fortuitous. It is intended expressly for exacting maximum effect on the reader as viewer, for violating our vision in a way that recalls Buñuel and Dalí's opening scene in *Chien andalou*, a film that came out just months before Lorca composed this poem (both in 1929). The extraordinary if not paradoxical case of the imperative “haya” reinforces this notion. Denizens of modernity's urbanized domain, having lost our capacity to “soñar” in the duplicitous Spanish sense (sleep/dream), to surrender ourselves, that is, to the deeply visionary and liberating powers of the imagination, shall be forced to endure what we ourselves have achieved: bondage, through eyes pruned open, to pupil-rending horrors.

Lorca treats seeing similarly in both “1910” and “Aurora,” in both cases in conjunction with the child who, like Liddell’s *Blancanieves* and like the buried “niño” in “Ciudad sin sueño” (“lloraba tanto / que hubo necesidad de llamar a los perros para que callase”; 12-13), are likewise enslaved to the eye-wounding act of seeing. In “Aurora” (*Poeta* 161) Lorca situates the child at the epicenter of his apocalyptic portrayal of a modernity characterized by the utter lack of any hope or future

La aurora llega y nadie la recibe en su boca
 porque allí no hay mañana ni esperanza posible.
 A veces las monedas en enjambres furiosos
 taladran y devoran abandonados niños. (9-12)

and by individuals who “vacilan insomnes / como recién salidas de un naufragio de sangre” (19-20). Through his allusions to a welter of “blood” and to the unwanted “host”—the “dawn” we fail to consume—and, especially, through the suggestion that, in today’s world, this virtual “host” is materialized as “coins” that attack in “swarms” in horrific ways (“taladran”), Lorca transforms his child into the sacrificial victim of capitalism’s perverted Eucharist: our punishment, no doubt, for idolatrizing Wall Street’s golden calves. In “1910” (*Poeta* 112) the child’s eyes—Lorca’s own 20 years prior: “aquellos ojos míos de 1910”—are pivotal for the various oppositions that structure this poem according to similar thematic patterns on both the literal and figurative planes of significance—present and past, modernity and tradition, New York and Granada, adulthood and childhood, to name the most obvious—and they form the thread that leads us to the culminating spectacle of pain and suffering in the poem’s final verses, a pain related here to the poet’s nostalgic yearning for authenticity, truth and meaning, for the lost innocence (“desnudez”) of an idyllic past: “Hay un dolor de huecos por el aire sin gente / y en mis ojos criaturas vestidas isin desnudo!” (20-21; *emphasis mine*).

The art of perverting—a deviation, the transformation of a recognized model or norm into what it is patently *supposed not* to be—constitutes an essential bridge linking the

modernist and postmodernist gestures in Lorca and Liddell respectively, to the extent that that bridge may be predicated on their mutual and respective perversion of childhood. As mentioned, Blancanieves is instructed in the ways of evil by the very fairy tales that she was read and has consequently become. She was consumed by them, literally and figuratively, in a way that Lorca's child is consumed by the desecrated tools of his (our) salvation. In all such cases, the bitter irony of the situation is a cruelty designed to exact maximum effect on the audience, insofar as these situations undermine our expectations and challenge our most sacred beliefs. In all such cases, in Liddell's and Lorca's works at least, the motif of the eyes is directly linked to the intended impact of situations whose cruelty culminates in the act of their representation. Within this framework, the fact that, in *Peces*, the anthropomorphized fish swarming dangerously near the Spanish shores are identified by their "eyes"—"¿Se da cuenta, Señor Puta, de que ... se han comido a tantos negros que los peces empiezan a tener ojos de hombre?" (*Trilogía* 22)—gains special significance. Not only are they the empire striking back, as symbols of the sacred these fish enact a retaliation by our own spiritual sustenance in an immoral world or, in keeping with Lorca's model, a desecrated capitalism that has come to devour us.³ They become striking examples of the consequences of a derailed pedagogy, of a story-telling that has resulted in a Dantesque *contrapasso*, a Frankensteinish punishment corresponding to the sins of those who wield authority in today's economically dominant societies. Similar symbolisms may be read into Blancanieves' numerologically significant "seven questions" concerning the nature of justice, truth, good, and evil in relation to humanity and the modern State. They are the "last" that this *agnus dei* manages to pose from her putative cross given our inability to formulate meaningful answers, to resolve the cyclical plague of war—the "Madrastro-guerra"—to which we are subjugated (*Trilogía* 37, 39-40), to unfetter ourselves from the shackles of our own hypocrisy.

In sum, the representation of or allusions to children in both Lorca and Liddell have crucial implications for the

bodily/performative dimension of the works under consideration, particularly in view of the archetypal frame of reference that both artists bring to bear. The traumatized or deformed child, an echo that harkens back to healthier times, is symbolically embedded in the core of our soul as a manifestation or symptom of modern psychology. The trilogy's final work, *El año de Ricardo*, beginning as it does with Catesby (Puche) citing Ecclesiastes and with Ricardo washing Catesby's feet, develops further the scriptural/archetypal thrust of the earlier works while raising the stakes on the psychosomatic dimension of the performance. Our trajectory through the evolving portrayal of the tyrant follows Shakespeare's model by leading us, at the play's end, to the tyrant's dream, to our deepest point of penetration into his turbid subconscious. The supernatural curse that infiltrates Richard's soul in Shakespeare, through the dream that precedes his demise, recurs toward the end of *El año de Ricardo* in a supreme example of Liddell's dark and disquieting lyrical style, when the children whom Ricardo frightens in scene 1 return as vivid specters of his heinous crimes:

Recuerda cómo se derramó mi cerebro sobre la arena.
 Mira cómo sangran mis heridas en presencia del
 asesino. ...
 Recuerda nuestra carne troceada.
 Mira cómo sangran mis heridas en presencia del
 asesino. ...
 Recuerda cómo me desangré sobre la tierra amarilla
 mientras tus soldados pasaban por encima de mi
 cabeza.
 Mira cómo sangran mis heridas en presencia del
 asesino. ...
 Recuerda mi cuerpo carbonizado.
 Mira cómo sangran mis heridas en presencia del
 asesino. ...
 Recuerda los agujeros de nuestros cuerpos.
 Mira cómo sangran mis heridas en presencia del
 asesino. (50-51)

It goes without saying that Liddell's lyricism here, as elsewhere, derives partly from devices that, like this litany of imperatives, underscore the rhythmic auralty of the text, in this case as a sort of disturbing incantation, a reminder of the repetitions, alliterations and other acoustic devices by which Lorca orchestrates "Ciudad sin sueño" as the "nocturn" promised in the poem's subtitle ("Nocturno del Brooklyn Bridge"). The convergence of the audible and the visual—the words "mira" and "recuerda" are beats—in a passage dedicated to bodily suffering represents an especially poignant example of the "fuerza material y tactilidad poética" (Cornago) upon which her writing is predicated generally. By transforming memory and seeing and, by implication, all the collateral damage they produce on bodies, into the instruments of her play's musicality, she renders uniquely eloquent homage in this passage to the performative dimension of poetry as "corpo-voce" ("body-voice"; Gasparini).

As suggested, the role of the audience in this equation is essential, given the various ways in which Lorca and Liddell conceptualize intended aesthetic effects. Their allusions to gorging and surfeit are central in this regard in that, related as these themes are to the image of "devoured children," they evoke the metaphor of cannibalism as predatory capitalism. That "vomiting" should result from such gorging and that it should be imposed upon us via performance as our rightful punishment, as poetic justice, adheres firmly to the logic of both the aesthetic of the grotesque and its ideological implications. The "mujer gorda" who leads the pack in Lorca's "Paisaje de la multitud que vomita" (*Poeta* 143-44) and the (apparently) blood-vomiting figure in his contemporaneous drawing "Muerte de Santa Rodegunda" (Oppenheimer 120-21) anticipate, along with other such references, "Angélica's" desire in *Peces* to "hacer vomitar al público, / como Dios vomita a los pobres, / como los pobres vomitan fango" (*Trilogía* 12). "La Puta's" conclusion at the end of this piece that, given our disgusting nature, were the anthropomorphized fish to eat us they would end up vomiting *us*, provides the crowning touch to this play's underlying bitter irony.

Generating the work of art here and now: the artist as scapegoat

Yo, poeta sin brazos, perdido
 entre la multitud que vomita,
 sin caballo efusivo que corte
 los espesos musgos de mis sienas. (36-39)

The correlation linking the plasticity of a rhetorically charged language and the portrayal of the body that is central to Lorca's and Liddell's art resonates uniquely in the image of the poet or stage director that recurs in Lorca's verse, drama and drawings. The defenseless, mutilated poet, alienated from his exceedingly materialistic world, appears as something of a martyr in "Paisaje," and in this sense he resembles the figure of the "Desnudo rojo" that Lorca relates to the agonizing and defenseless Director. Divested of the tools of his artistic salvation (his "caballo efusivo," as it were), the Director is threatened for his artistic transgressions in the play's final scene, abandoned on a desolate and frigid night. It bears recalling how Lluís Pasqual emphasized the sacrificial nature of the Director-like "Desnudo" in his history-making premier of *El público* in 1987 (*El público*), mentioned above. Hanging as if crucified from a bedspring, bleeding from open wounds, the "Desnudo's" agony is rendered all the more symbolic by the scriptural phrases he utters—"Padre mío, aparta de mí este cáliz de amargura" (*El público* 166)—and all the more shocking as the Enfermero prods his wounds with a rod. At such moments of profound self-referentiality—the Director's transgression is, of course, Lorca's—one senses that the "artist is [truly] present," to cite Marina Abramovic, that the instance and locus of the original creative utterance is here and now, on the figurative altar (stage) of the María Guerrero just as it was in the gallery in Naples, Italy, where Abramovic performed *Rhythm 0*. In Lorca's case, in his avant-garde writing at least, that utterance is linked in suggestive ways to the Dionysian notion and image of the artist as an archetypal scapegoat.⁴

Liddell adopts similar techniques with parallel effects. As indicated, she accentuates the perlocutionary force of her

stage language in order to sharpen our sense of her dialoguing with us here and now as the dismembered and defenseless speaker/artist. Such metaliterary tags as the questions “¿Cómo empiezo?” and “¿Cómo seguir?” at and toward the beginning of *Peces* are but two such examples. Her reflections on the meaning and role of language in society tend to objectify communication, similarly, and produce the same results. European whites exist because they abide within language, she claims, whereas Africans do not, as they remain “fuera del lenguaje” (*Peces* 9) that we have the privilege of inhabiting, as we do now. Her commentary on historical memory and the Jewish holocaust—“los muy cretinos se pusieron a escribir” whereas others did not (*Ricardo* 84)—draws our focus toward the linguistic-literary dimension of our experience with her, the basis for lessons we hear in her class, like it or not. For if language is in fact able to reach “más allá, más allá ... / más allá de lo escrito. / Como si lo escrito sudara” (84) as Liddell so hopefully asserts, her unsettling irreverence toward such a sacred topic as the Jewish holocaust and toward one of its prime victims—in scene 10 she reads and comments mockingly Primo Levi’s *If This is a Man*—must certainly represent a moment in which her words do precisely that. They shock us into questioning our preconceived paradigms of understanding. We sweat along with the words we hear and ultimately speak (“como si lo escrito sudara”).

As Lorca suggests, this is risky business for artists, and Liddell is also clearly cognizant of the risks. The trembling, horrified child in *Blancanieves* or the disfigured butt of public mockery in *Ricardo* may be embodiments of common ills. It is also patently clear from what she shows and tells in *Lesiones incompatibles contra la vida* and *Yo no soy bonita*, two shorter “acciones” or *happenings* that, as mentioned, coincide more or less with her “Actos de resistencia contra la muerte” (*Desobediencia*), that such projections correspond to what the world has made of her, in spite of herself, a “protesta” in short, a living, breathing embodiment of the grotesqueness that we have begotten and that she hurls right back at us:

Soy una epidemia de resentimiento.
 No quiero tener hijos.
 Es mi manera de protestar. Mi cuerpo es mi protesta.
 Mi cuerpo renuncia a la fertilidad.
 Mi cuerpo es mi protesta contra la sociedad, contra la
 injusticia, contra el linchamiento, contra la guerra.
 Mi cuerpo es la crítica y el compromiso con el dolor
 humano. (*Lesiones*)

These manifestations of her self-awareness as a “planta maldita con frutos de bendición,” to cite José Zorrilla’s eulogy to Larra, are directly related, moreover, to her fascination with the aesthetic value of her own blood, as evidenced in some of her “acciones” and in her following declaration:

Quiero evocar la imagen del Cristo de Grünewald. ... La sangre tiene una potencia estética brutal. Es preciosa: la utilizo pictóricamente. Para revelar lo interno, empiezo por la superficie. Hago lo privado público. Cuando eliges la fuerza, la sangre y la autoconfesión, en el fondo estás hablando de tu fragilidad. (Vallejo)

That the bread and blood of primitive rituals⁵ should converge in Liddell’s work, as they did in Lorca’s, in such visual and tangible explorations of the artist’s own fragility (*Yo no soy*), in a *truly* “[black] ceremony of the body and of presence” (Lehmann 69), ultimately calls into question the spectator’s understanding and appreciation of the artistic value and significance of self-sacrifice as a *real* event. It challenges us to believe in the transubstantiation of the stage artist as a symbolic “desnuda roja” and, therefore, in the transformative value of performance for us all, here and now.

NOTES

* I dedicate this essay to the staff at Madrid’s Centro de Documentación Teatral, whose exemplary generosity and diligence have made this and so many other studies possible.

1. “The Drama of modernity came into being in the Renaissance.” As a “time-bound concept,” drama “was the result of bold intellectual effort made by a newly self-conscious being who, after the

collapse of the medieval worldview, sought to create an artistic reality within which he could fix and mirror himself on the basis of interpersonal relationships alone" (Szondi 7).

2. Lluís Pasqual's historic productions of *El público* and *Comedia sin título* premiered in Madrid's Centro Dramático Nacional-Teatro María Guerrero in 1987 and 1989, respectively. Liddell relocated from Cataluña to Madrid in the 1980s and wrote her first work, *Greta quiere suicidarse*, in 1988.

3. As Juan Eduardo Cirlot explains (366-67), the tendency to interpret the fish as a symbol of the sacred or spiritual is widely attributed to its assimilation with the sea, the *Magna Mater*, and to its fecundity (abundance of eggs).

4. In their introduction to *Poema del Cante Jondo; Romancero gitano* (19-54), Josephs and Caballero offer a useful overview of Lorca's theory of "duende" and of the corresponding influence of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* on Lorca's writing.

5. "Entender el sentido dionisiaco del toreo no es difícil cuando recordamos que Dionysos se representaba muchas veces en la forma de un toro que se sacrificaba mediante el *sparagmos* ... y cuya carne se comía en la celebración llamada *omophagia*. ... El misterio mitraico —el más cercano en el tiempo al Cristianismo— consistía precisamente en sacrificar un toro cuya sangre da el vino y cuyos testículos dan los cereales. El día de su celebración era el 25 de diciembre y su sede en Roma fue el lugar ocupado hoy por el Vaticano" (Josephs and Caballero 44, n. 39).

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