

LORCA'S SERVANTS, THE AUDIENCE, AND STAGE AUTHORITY

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Although pertinent comparisons between Federico García Lorca and numerous prominent early contemporary European theater figures can certainly be made, perhaps the most felicitous is to Antonin Artaud whose meditations on stage-audience relationships in *The Theater and Its Double* continue to remain influential (see Soufas, *Audience* ix-xiv; "Beside" 191-96). Artaud is more concerned with the theater spectacle as an integrated totality while predecessors such as Konstantin Stanislavski, Bertold Brecht, and Luigi Pirandello, more engaged in ratifying the authority of the stage director, tend to express their theater goals in theories of acting. Indeed, Stanislavski's major contribution is a system for training actors that marshals a personal emotional repertoire gathered from actual experiences independent of the performance. Since the source of inspiration is finite and the actor's contribution is variable, each performance, progressively understood as an organic hybrid of text and gesture, is necessarily unique (Wiles 15-19). In sharp contrast to the imperious Stanislavski in his willingness to collaborate in his productions, especially with those whose interpretations are antagonistic to his own, Brecht's most significant innovations, nevertheless, are also centered in a disciplined system of acting. To counteract the complacency and passivity inherent in the mere contemplation of the stage, a constitutive aspect of Brecht's theater becomes the "alienation effect," the systematic interruption of the realist stage illusion, which requires that the actor step outside the role in order to make the audience aware of more important issues (Brecht 136-40). Pirandello extends these meta-theatrical interruptions more fully into the domain of the audience in order to uncover the deeper reality hidden beneath comfortable surface appearances and social masks. Pirandello's innovations are the formal consequences of a theory of humor in which tragicomedy and not high tragedy becomes



the most appropriate vehicle to communicate such intuitions and to challenge audiences to accept a theater model that intrudes upon their previously more comfortable domain (Pirandello 107-25).

Beginning well after Stanislavski, Brecht, and Pirandello become prominent yet building upon their contributions, Artaud shifts the emphasis from the body of the actor to the totality of the production in order to "leave no portion of the stage space unutilized" and to create "the sense of a new physical language, based upon signs and no longer upon words" in which actors also become "animated hieroglyphs" (Artaud 54). In contrast to Brecht's distancing effects, Artaud's theater demands the incessant intrusion upon the domain of the theater audience in order to leave no room whatsoever for complacent, passive contemplation of the stage. This, in fact, is the basis for what Artaud calls the "theater of cruelty." The stage must be remade into an extended visual complex that embodies new epistemological conditions which the spectator is given no choice but to embrace. The elimination of the distance that was so important to Brecht becomes primary in Artaud's conception of a reconfigured stage. Thus, the "four wall" 19th century arch proscenium stage is to be replaced by its exact antithesis: "The hall will be enclosed by four walls, without any kind of ornament, and the public will be seated in the middle of the room, on the ground floor, on mobile chairs which will allow them to follow the spectacle which will take place all around them" (Artaud 96). Although this rather fanciful idea was never actually put into practice, it nevertheless suggests the intensity of Artaud's commitment to erasing all barriers between performance and audience. Such a desire is also embodied in Artaud's notion of the "Single Creator" who fulfills the function of both playwright and director-producer. Although Pirandello and Brecht had effectively attained such a status, as did others, Artaud's Creator imposes directorial vision on the audience in a performance environment that has eliminated the distance between actors and audience. The "theater of cruelty" is fundamentally a forced marriage between stage and audience that demands "a thorough involvement, a genuine enslavement of the attention" (Artaud 92). With such ambi-

tious goals, it should not be surprising that Artaud's productions are not well received. Indeed, his principal effort to translate his insights into practice, an adaptation of Shelley's *The Cenci*, marks a significant failure from which his directorial career never fully recovers.

Although Lorca's theater confronts rather different circumstances, the evolution of his thinking about the Spanish stage—the need to discipline the theater-going public as well as actors—is directly reflected in his creative agenda. Perhaps chastened by his own initial box-office failure with *El maleficio de la mariposa* and progressively alluded to via meditative moments in early plays such as *Mariana Pineda*, *La zapatera prodigiosa* and *Amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín*, he undertakes a serious and extended examination of performance possibilities in his experimental play *El público* which in spite of its unconventionality becomes the foundation stone of his commercial theater of the 1930s. It is from an acute awareness of the considerable authority of theater audiences to dictate Spanish theater practices that Lorca's mature art begins. As much as directorial authority to further the incipient cause of theater professionalism, he also understands that the expansion of such authority is inextricably linked to the overturning of the dominant position of the audience.

Lorca, in fact, dramatizes the theater functions as he increasingly comes to understand *mise-en-scène* in terms of a struggle between dramatic authority, the province of the playwright and stage director, and the prerogatives and privileges of an entrenched theater-going public dedicated to the theatrical status quo. As his theater develops, there appear characters not only in the role of stage director-playwright—the *poeta* of *La zapatera prodigiosa*, the Director of *El público*, the Autor of *El sueño de la vida* (*Comedia sin título*)—but those, particularly his servants, also progressively identified with the audience and audience authority (for a related discussion, see Balboa Echevarría). Lorca understands early in his career that he must confront what Artaud, at the level of actual stage practice, could not: the issue of what a theater audience will do when challenged with a potentially uncomfortable dramatic situation that forces it to become more actively involved in the representation than it might

choose. He offers strong testimony that under present theatrical circumstances the innovative agenda he desires for the Spanish stage will be impossible without a thorough reordering of the theater equation. The triumph of stage direction and professionalism is thus inextricably tied to capturing, maintaining, and, ultimately, dominating the theater audience's attention.

From the earliest plays, Lorca is very much aware of the province of the audience in the theater production, which he dramatizes on stage with intensifying frequency as his theater becomes more viable commercially, by means of the relationship between a principal character and the servant(s) most closely associated with that character. In terms of moral values but more importantly his/her physical vantage point within the household, the servant becomes a barometer of stage/audience relationships. Hardly a physical presence at all in the early *Mariana Pineda*, the all-but-invisible servant nevertheless becomes the intermediary who serves to expose the intensely private life of Mariana Pineda to public scrutiny and eventual condemnation by virtue of the physical transportation of the flag that Mariana sews within her "four walls" for the cause of freedom. The two farces written thereafter witness the appearance of intermediaries ineffective in blunting the potentially destructive effects of a disapproving audience of onlookers: the subservient Zapatero in *La zapatera prodigiosa* who abandons his outspoken wife only to return as a puppeteer to unwittingly incite the on-stage audience of townspeople, via his marionette theater, perhaps to even greater violence against the Zapatera than had been contemplated in his absence; Marcolfa in *Amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín*, the first real servant to appear in Lorca's theater, who proves to be an ineffectual intercessor for the unchecked erotic fantasies of Perlimplín and Belisa that undermine farce and create instead the conditions for tragedy. By the moment of Lorca's seemingly most unconventional plays, *Así que pasen cinco años* and *El público*, the servant is arguably the most conventional character of all, appearing in the role of personal valet in a now-familiar role to announce the presence of disapproving and ultimately destructive outside entities, embodied collectively as an audience, the pub-

lic. The servant function thus serves to underscore the fundamental themes of Lorca's theater: the conflicts between private desires and public conventions, between what is or can be revealed and how such revelations are or can be received, and between the overlapping spheres of the playwright/director and the theater audience.

In the aftermath of his intense meditation on the state of stage/audience relationships in *El público* Lorca's sustained and rather successful effort to establish an innovative agenda for commercial theater during the 1930s (see Fernández-Cifuentes 158-71) unfolds to a noteworthy degree with the assistance of servants and the servant function. Among the many other things that emerge on Lorca's stage, a vital aspect of his efforts to expand performance possibilities is to dramatize the reclamation of the space of the stage for the sake of the performance from the dominant gaze of the audience. If *El público* depicts the frustration of the desire for a truly innovative theater, the tragic consequences of an imbalance in the theater equation, in the so-called "rural plays" — *Bodas de sangre*, *Yerma*, and *La casa de Bernarda Alba* — Lorca becomes progressively confident of his capacity to represent themes that earlier had boded ill for him both personally and professionally. A portion of this growing confidence is communicated through the figure of the servant who becomes progressively more assertive. In fact, the servant is consistently associated with issues regarding vision and seeing, and Lorca uses the servant's role in this trio of plays to delineate more explicitly the visual dynamics that constitute play-making as he progressively comes to understand it. The overarching goal, and perhaps what truly constitutes these plays as a "trilogy," is the validation of the decisive authority of the stage and performance values over the dead weight of the conventional perspectives of the theater audience.

Recalling Artaud's call for a "theater of cruelty," what would amount to the literal enslavement of the audience's attention, Lorca institutes his own more subtle version of the same phenomenon in his commercial theater by giving over the stage to the audience, that is, by endowing his audience with the capacity for an effectively omniscient vision only to reverse the phenomenon, gradually or abruptly, as

the play unfolds. This is certainly evident in *Bodas de sangre* as Lorca reclaims authority over his audience by means of a process which initially concedes, only subsequently to reverse, the spectator's privileged vantage point with regard to stage events. Such a phenomenon that is best characterized as one of greatly enhancing audience vision at the outset only to deny it such a capacity by the play's conclusion. *Bodas de sangre*, in fact, seems hardly a stage play at all by the midpoint of the first act since the audience can virtually project the likely course of dramatic events. Indeed, and more appropriate to melodrama than to serious theater or tragedy, it has become more than clear by the time that the marriage arrangements are agreed to by the parents at the Novia's house that Leonardo is strongly motivated to thwart the Novio's plans to marry the Novia, which will likely entail the spilling of blood proclaimed in the play's title. Lorca makes it exceedingly easy for even the most inattentive spectator to project precisely such a scenario—as Artaud and others had often reminded, even a member of the audience tempted to fall asleep after having eaten a large dinner before coming to the playhouse. If the non-events in act 1 were not enough, the final scene, between the Novia and her servant, makes the situation unmistakably explicit.

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This final scene, an intense dialog between the Novia and her attendant, takes place in the privacy of the Novia's room as the parents and the Novio conclude the wedding plans in another part of the house. This scene thus actually overlaps with the previous one and is also perhaps simultaneous to the departure for home of the Madre and the Novio. It is at this point in which the servant confronts her mistress with the information that she is well aware of what has taken place previously, that the Novia has been visited by Leonardo who has talked to her at her window, as well as what has transpired that very evening as the wedding arrangements are discussed: Leonardo, on horseback, had been looking all along into the house and listening from the open window. Although it is not made explicit, in the absence of didascalia, how Lorca intended to proceed in the staging of this scene in which the servant points to the space outside the window where Leonardo had situated him-

self—and where the sound of his horse can be heard as he departs—the act of pointing could certainly be in the direction of the “fourth wall,” the invisible separation in arch proscenium stage configurations, where the audience is situated. Assuming this to be the case, the audience, which has occupied a privileged vantage point throughout the act that allows it to constitute a present and future scenario of the likely progression of events (indeed, the audience possesses information far superior to that of all the characters) now in this final scene also inhabits a space that corresponds exactly to the point where the usurper Leonardo had been standing. What takes place, therefore, is that as the Novio witnesses the act of his becoming a *novio* via the formal wedding agreement that transpires in the parlor, the audience also witnesses a more intimate scene from a point of a view diametrically opposed to the Novio’s.

It does not require an active imagination to understand that, even from the outset, the Novio’s dream of starting his own household is to be a futile one. In effect, he is a cuckold before the fact. The audience, however, has viewed this sequence of events from a double perspective which corresponds to the respective vantage points of both of the men. The locus of vision of the one is the “vanishing point” of the other, the beginning and ending of a scenario from which, ironically, both parties are excised as a consequence of the formal wedding plans. Neither man, therefore, can see enough while the audience, through the vehicle of the servant who indicates the exact spot from which this doubled vision is achieved, is allowed to see everything, indeed, more than everything. The servant in this instance acts as the medium by which a hidden tragic potential is exposed and by which the audience attains an exceptional vantage point that in fact surpasses even the type of omniscience enjoyed by the typical narrator in a realist novel. The competing scenarios of the Novio and Leonardo thus coalesce in the consciousness of the spectator whose enhanced capacity for vision reconfigures the drama effectively into a meta-drama centered in the privileged vantage point of the theater audience. At this point, therefore, what takes place on stage seems actually to move the locus of the representation off-stage. The final scene of act 1 whose protagonist is the

Novia's servant thus adds considerable profundity to what on the surface seems little more than melodrama. More important than public utterances is the uncovering of a hidden agenda. The servant is, therefore, indispensable in effecting such a complication of conventional expectations.

Subsequent to this crowning moment, however, beginning in act 2, viewing relationships begin to change drastically. Instead of being a witness to the type of "blood wedding" the spectator has already projected, the audience is immobilized, left behind at the Novia's cave at the exact point from which Leonardo watched her earlier, outside her bedroom window, as the wedding party travels ten leagues to the ceremony and back to the reception. What had earlier seemed to be an omniscient and mobile perspective enhanced by a dramatic context that consciously alluded to vast spaces (between the properties of the wedding couple) diminishes quickly to a much reduced and stationary point of view. The audience neither sees nor hears any of the events preceding the escape of the Novia and Leonardo. Indeed, on-stage dialogue throughout this tableau consists largely of peripheral remarks or chatter that has little to do with an unfolding drama. Throughout this time, the space of the stage is filled by wedding guests who saunter across the stage only to be surprised by cries at the end that the adulterous couple has fled the scene. In contrast to the spectator's earlier dominant perspective(s), in this act the stage progressively becomes bereft of tangible and material contents. Rather than to affirm the spectator's earlier imaginative scenario, the stage now confirms precisely the opposite: like the fleeing couple, the representation itself has begun to elude an audience that had earlier projected a predictable outcome.

As act 3 begins, that diminished perspective is reduced further. The apparent climax at the conclusion of the sixth tableau continues to underscore the spectator's exclusion, indeed, his excision from direct visual participation in the representation, as the deaths of the Novio and Leonardo are merely alluded to by their off-stage cries. In the final tableau, a scenario exactly the opposite of the vast tracts of space alluded to in act 1 emerges. Space effectively collapses as the final scene takes place in a completely white room

where “no habrá ni un gris, ni una sombra, ni siquiera lo preciso para la perspectiva” (788). In a capacity the exact opposite of the Novia’s servant in act 1 who is present to underscore the pervasiveness of the spectator’s gaze, the servant girls in this scene re-enact what has been happening in the play since the moment of maximum vision. As the Novia returns to this imprecise locale to lament with the Madre, the servant girls are rolling into a ball the thread produced from a blood-red skein of wool, that is, literally, “enredando la madeja” as the plot complications also reach their climax here, in the presence of the servant girls, and not in the deaths of the principals. The oscillating parameters of vision—from omniscience to excision and blindness—are thus presided over by Lorca’s servants to mark the scope and limits of the audience’s capacity to frame events. Originally in possession of the totality of the field of vision, the audience by play’s end can only witness a symbolic reenactment of the conditions by which it has been blinded. Events do not unfold along a plot line, but rather, like the thread that the servant girls wrap into a compact ball, they return to a point of origin from which another round of tragedy is now poised to begin.

The phenomenon of “accompanied vision” intensifies in *Yerma* whose principal content consists of Yerma’s progressively more far-afield wanderings from her home over an extended time period, more than five years, in pursuit of answers to the dilemma of her apparent barrenness, and her husband Juan’s response to that obsessive behavior, his attempt to restrict and control her movement. As Yerma’s frustration over her childlessness grows and she starts to search more actively for answers to her impasse, the previously not-unsympathetic Juan, who at one point offers to find a child for the couple to adopt, which Yerma rejects, reverts to more stereotypical behavior in that he brings into their home, to perform a servant’s role, his spinster sisters to whom it falls to keep watch over Yerma in order to keep her close to home. The visual surveillance that Juan institutes in his house via his sisters/servants underscores the paradigm to which all relationships in the play respond, a system of value based upon visual tokens, Juan’s progressively more visible and productive agricultural domain in contrast to

the phantom emblem of the child, the icon of Yerma's worthlessness in a society dominated by the need to produce and re-produce. The series of discursive encounters with a variety of women over the course of the drama—indeed, the play's primary content—who dispense advice, assign blame, or offer examples for Yerma to consider, reject, embrace, or emulate collectively outline the parameters of such a system premised upon the need for visible tokens of value, be they in the form of agricultural products or children. Yerma's problem is one of "vision" in the sense that what she visualizes, the child, grows progressively dimmer as it competes with the value system in which she is situated and which over the course of the play becomes progressively linked to the prosperity of her husband's farmlands. It is in contrast to the visual bounty of Juan's thriving agribusiness that her personal barrenness is intensified.

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The surveillance initiated in the sister-servants continues and multiplies in the audience of onlookers-commentators whose collective effect is to embody the public, vision-predicated discourse that continues to assault Yerma even after she resigns herself to a childless marriage. Yet the vast temporal dimension that serves to disrupt realist space in this drama also forces the audience to juxtapose these largely static tableaux separated by ever greater expanses of time. Thus the play becomes fully representable only by means of the spectator's mental juxtaposition of disparate temporal moments which in practical terms serve to force the relocation of the primary site of the representation to the spectator's imagination/consciousness (see Fernández-Cifuentes 219). As Juan becomes progressively associated with the visual on-stage events of the pastoral setting that he comes to dominate, so too the audience becomes a primary medium since in order for the temporally disconnected scenes to make sense as a representation the audience must reconstitute the play mentally. Yerma's murder of Juan is thus an act of violence against the stifling discourse, which has told her that she is worthless, but also against the theater audience, the only agent capable of containing and constituting her wanderings into a coherent spectacle. Throughout the drama, the eyes of the servants have been displaced and

supplemented by a succession of agents of surveillance. Just as Juan becomes the visible embodiment of the system of values that has led to Yerma's personal tragedy, so too the audience is the agent that has constituted the scene of her public impasse.

Juan's murder is thus also an act of excision of those elements represented through the community of spectators that has consistently reaffirmed a position which excluded Yerma. Her complaint is ultimately against conventional, repressive modes of seeing and understanding as emblemized in Yerma's sister-in-law servants and which have prevented her from understanding the depth of her tragedy. To represent the true dimension of this tragedy, therefore, requires the overthrow of the dominant discourse embodied in the cultural-social values and the property of her husband, expressed in the play in scenic, visual terms. Juan's murder is also his removal from the scene of Yerma's personal tragedy, conditions which had hitherto prevented her from giving concrete form to her grief. At a meta-dramatic level, Juan's murder depicts another act of elimination, the audience's from the space of the stage whose values it has long dominated. As the present play concludes, Yerma awaits another scenario to emerge, the hitherto un-representable tragedy that now begins to unfold, to her alone. With Juan's disappearance, the fertile lands he was responsible for bringing into fruition will soon become a wasteland (*yermo*), a more appropriate scene for a tragedy ultimately presided over by one named Yerma. As Yerma acknowledges the loss of all hope for a child, she nevertheless creates new possibilities for the portrayal of her grief, which may now proceed from the private and intimate perspective she had previously been precluded from relating. As much as for the desperate search for a means to become fertile, the play is more appropriately about the search for a means to represent a more profound drama that now begins to unfold. Yerma's final declaration is to indicate that, unburdened of the dream of the child, she will now be able to "*descansar sin despertarme sobresaltada, para ver si la sangre me anuncia otra sangre nueva*" (880). Part of this "new blood" is also a new mode of theatrical representation, the possibilities of which are only beginning to become

evident.

While seeming to herald a return to the standard four-wall realism of the arch proscenium stage, *La casa de Bernarda Alba* is actually the culmination of these earlier manipulations of audience perspective underscored by the servant function. What seems to be an almost exact reduplication of the nineteenth-century formula for play-making instead becomes an intensified means of achieving the very effects about which Artaud theorized yet failed to achieve in a commercially viable manner in his own productions. A significant deviation from realist expectations is the pronounced theatrical consciousness of the play's characters. The initial words of Bernarda Alba, after the funeral guests have departed, could very well be those of a stage director after a performance: "¡Andad a vuestras casas a criticar todo lo que habéis visto!" (984). In fact, owing to the looming prospect of reduced economic circumstances in the household because Angustias is to inherit the lion's share of the estate and leave the house, Bernarda can no longer depend on economic means or the stability of her husband's name and their marriage to uphold her position in the community. To assure her continued viability within her closed society, Bernarda resorts to theatrical means in order to define the conditions under which an honorable social life will proceed with her as the new head of the household. Such conditions require that the house itself become the scene of a very unconventional type of theater in which the *mise-en-scène* consists in exactly the opposite of what an audience would expect in a performance: the absence of anything that could be expressed visually or verbally that would be considered untoward regarding the house, that is, Bernarda's "playhouse." Bernarda's stunningly unorthodox theatrical strategy is thus to contrive a theatrical scenario in which the "script" consists of silence and the scenario is bereft of all action. As Bernarda understands her new position, only the absence of all negative discourse about her house will assure her authority and status. Lorca conceives a double drama, one whose goal is to fulfill his protagonist's desire to maintain silence about the inner workings of the house while the other, which the theater audience witnesses, represents the practical, "backstage" efforts of Bernarda to

assure that the primary scenario proceeds according to her will.

From the outset, however, it again becomes evident that the theater audience occupies a point of view that is much more well-informed than Bernarda's. Indeed, Bernarda's entries into the scene are primarily at moments of stress or disagreements among the daughters – when the facade of silence is threatened. As would a stage director to reposition the actors, she enters the scene only to quell disturbances that threaten her understanding of the necessary relationship between her house and the townspeople. The theater audience, however, from the outset knows exactly what is happening and cannot help but realize that Bernarda is most ineffective in achieving the “stage” conditions that she considers essential. The theater audience, however, does not witness what happens in a room of four walls but rather occupies a much more intimate point of view, as an integral part of the household itself a position analogous to that of the servants, that is, inside the house and privy to the inner workings while not actually becoming an active participant in Bernarda's progressively uncontrollable scene. Throughout the theater of the thirties, the servant function, therefore, has become progressively identified not only with intimate and enhanced viewing perspectives but also with the authority of the theater audience in relation to the visible spectacle of theater.

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From very early in *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, it becomes apparent that the house does not belong to Bernarda in any meaningful sense but in fact to another off-stage player who has been able to disturb the privacy and silence that Bernarda so covets. This, of course, is Pepe el Romano, who is to marry Angustias, yet who is also secretly involved with Adela. Yet what is not apparent is that the point of view of the audience is so superior to that of the blinded Bernarda that effective “ownership” of the scene by this point resides in the gaze of the audience. It is the only medium capable of containing the contents of a private drama that at every moment threatens to spill out into the public domain. What Lorca does, in effect, is not simply to make the situation more intimate by his choice of setting but rather to situate the drama, via the servant function – more intensely so than

in any of his earlier plays—in the imagination/consciousness of his audience. The site in which the phrase “la casa de Bernarda Alba” has meaning is precisely in the mind of the spectator of this drama, since the audience becomes fully invested as the “owner,” the de facto “stage manager” of this property. The audience thus occupies the role originally coveted by the frustrated stage director Bernarda. Its omniscience is also threatened by the embodied yet invisible force referred to as Pepe el Romano, whose sexual predations threaten to overturn the theatrical formula (a literal “four wall” approach to theater) that Bernarda has instituted for the continued stability of her house. When Pepe succeeds in destroying this precarious balance after Adela commits suicide upon being told that he has been killed, Bernarda’s house is diminished, her authority is eclipsed, and the town, which upon Bernarda’s downfall loses what hitherto had been its most authoritative and condemnatory moral voice, is itself fundamentally changed.

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A force more powerful than the physical presence of Pepe el Romano, however, is the ultimate victor in this struggle. The actual Pepe is an equal casualty in these negotiations in that the wedding between him and Angustias no longer remains a possibility. Everyone, including the seemingly invincible Pepe who comes “por el dinero,” loses and is substantively diminished. Also attenuated in this final moment, however, is the theater audience itself whose omniscience remains intact only for so long as “la casa de Bernarda Alba” is a viable construct. The audience’s omniscience is also eclipsed as a play that purports to be about a “house” becomes instead an occasion to introduce a new protagonist, an invisible yet destructive actor called by the servant Poncia “una cosa muy grande” (1032). Indeed, Poncia alludes to the true visual dynamics in this house when she makes the claim that “[l]as viejas vemos a través de las paredes” (1014). This is literally true in reference to the capacity of the audience to penetrate the protected spaces of the house, as is her statement that “hay gentes que leen también de lejos los pensamientos escondidos” (1032). Nearly every statement that Bernarda’s long-time servant makes is cogent testimony to the viewing relationships that evolve in this drama.

In relation to Artaud's notion of a radically new configuration for theater with the walls of the stage surrounding the audience, Lorca accomplishes a stunningly similar effect here through more subtle if no less hostile means. Unbeknownst to the average theatergoer, he creates the precise conditions for "cruelty" in the exact Artaudian sense in that the audience has no choice except to function as the omniscient container of the radically unstable contents of the house. The audience and not the stage "houses" this drama. Meaning is not produced on stage but rather only in the consciousness of the audience. Far more "cruel" than the character associated with dictatorial cruelty in the management of her house are the viewing relationships in the play. What destroys Bernarda and her daughters and diminishes the moral underpinnings of the townspeople is an invisible protagonist yet ultimately the same force that the Director of *El público* proclaimed earlier that it was his mission to seek the means to bring to light, "el perfil de una fuerza oculta cuando ya el público no tuviera más remedio que atender, lleno de espíritu y subyugado por la acción" (665).

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This is the authoritative protagonist that presides over the scenario of *La casa de Bernarda Alba*. A hidden force — yet visible enough to the servants — destroys everything and everybody, including its purported vehicle, Pepe. All fall in the house of Bernarda Alba that ultimately doubles, again, as the impotent site of Spanish theater practice, especially the theater audience which has significantly invested in its seemingly traditional yet untenable structure. The most profound message of the play is that there are no suitable mediums to contain such a force, which exactly coincides with the destructive insights of the unstageable *El público*. Lorca thus ironically gives form to a situation in which stable form is not possible. In doing so he creates the fundamental conditions of "cruelty" that correspond both in spirit and letter to Artaud's theories as he continues to align his art with the radical theater sign that guided the vision of *El público*. *La casa de Bernarda Alba* is not simply meta-theater; rather it is a play within a play within yet another play directed and staged by an unseen protagonist which as it wreaks havoc on Bernard's household also acquires the resonance that Artaud associates with stage hieroglyphics. It

dislodges the theater audience from its comfortable bourgeois moorings and makes it impossible for it to remain outside the "four walls" of conventional theater. Putting his audience in a situation in which it is impossible to escape from the unrelenting demands of consciousness, fundamental conditions for a theater of cruelty, Lorca forces that audience inside those walls in order to have it experience and partake of, like the daughters and like the servants in Bernarda's house, the same degradation and cruelty that his characters suffer.

In *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, the destructiveness of misplaced desire is identical to that of *El público*, the only difference being its physical "housing" in a different and more "comfortable" context. What Lorca accomplishes in his reordering of stage relationships is also the creation of conditions whose referent is not the visible scene but rather a more intimate personal drama that resists and defies mere representation while discovering what Artaud's theater never could, a viable means to communicate such ideas before a theater audience. Seen in this light, Lorca's steadfastness to his theatrical ideals and his commitment to modernist reform remain strong throughout his career. While taking strategic but not substantive detours in his commercial plays, he remains absolutely faithful to his creative-destructive vision in *El público*, the foundation stone of his theater throughout his lifetime. Increasingly prominent in this quest is the role of the servant who in *La casa de Bernarda Alba* effectively becomes the playwright's mouthpiece for his desires for a new formula for play-making that invests ultimate dramatic authority in a domain beyond the reach of the theater audience's gaze. Not unlike the servants in the Spanish *comedia*, especially the figure of the *gracioso* who, like Poncia, while remaining faithful, reluctantly, to his master, also frequently speaks to the theater audience to communicate important moral truths, the servant function in Lorca becomes the occasion for the dramatist to give greater form, presence, and voice to the invisible forces beyond the margins of the stage truly at work in these plays.

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