

The Incomplete Finish of Lorca's *The Public*: A New Key

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Abstract:

Lorca's most innovative drama, *The Public* (1929-30), pretends to be incomplete, yet poses the problems of his imperfection as a playwright, of his vacillation between two styles, and of the play's contrived fragmentariness. Our study traces the two styles, "open-air theatre" and "theatre-beneath-the-sand", to Gabriele d'Annunzio, his mistress Eleonora Duse, and Duse's admirer, Margarita Xirgu. Examining the scene-by-scene conflict between the two theatres offers a new method for grasping *The Public*. In scene 1, the Director debates with his own passions and critical faculties, he arguing for "open-air theatre," and they for "theatre-beneath-the-sand." Scene 2 stages a symbolic contest between the two conceptions. The Director's double, the Figure in Bells, symbolizes "open-air theatre"; his lover Gonzalo's double, the Figure in Vine-Leaves, represents "theatre-beneath-the-sand". Scene 3 presents *Romeo and Juliet* as a drama of "theatre-beneath-the-sand", but draws symbols from "open-air theatre". Scene 5 parodies an auto sacramental, allegorizing the agony of theatre, while offering multiple possible explanations for the public's destruction of the theatre to protest its revolutionary *Romeo and Juliet*. Scene 6 shows the fatal but inconclusive struggle between the Director, now championing "theatre-under-the sand", and the illusionist, seeing theatre as sleight-of-hand, a view compatible with "open-air theatre".

Keywords: García Lorca, *El público*, modernism, avant-garde, d'Annunzio, Duse, Wedekind, history of theatre, dehumanized art.

Some works of world culture do not require the finished state for maximum appreciation. Michelangelo's sculpture *The Pietà* movingly represents Christ and his mother not fully separated from the original stone, suggesting the imperfection of humankind. Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony in B-Minor*, if completed by a different composer, would lack the authenticity of its original form for listeners. Velázquez's portraits of Juan de Pareja (1615) and Pablo de Valladolid (1635) give these figures reality by having them emerge from empty canvas. In *The Maids-in-Waiting* (1656), Velázquez immortalizes artistic incompleteness in finished form: he paints the infanta Margarita Teresa and her entourage interrupting his meticulous portrayal of her parents, reflected in a mirror. Modernist Spanish literature experiments with artistic incompleteness. Unamuno's novel *Mist* (1914) hints at being a novelistic plot that makes itself as it goes (Unamuno 1995, 178). His work *How to Make a Novel* (1927) alternates between essay on novel-writing and novelistic narrative without a dénouement. Likewise, in his most avant-garde play *The Public*, poet-

playwright Federico García Lorca, Unamuno's admirer (Lorca 1989, III, 607), offers what passes for an incomplete drama while gathering force from its rough edges.

Lorca's friend Rafael Martínez Nadal calls it an "Unfinished Play" (Nadal 1974, 3). Nadal recalls his self-praise before reading it to the Morla family, whom he was about to shock: "You'll see what a play it is! Most daring, using a completely new technique. It's the best thing I've written for the theatre." (19) Almost finished, it merely needed "correcting and polishing." In July 1936, he telephoned Nadal to hear him read the "final version" (19). The manuscript appeared in print posthumously with the date August 22, 1930 (Lorca 1989, II, 672). Therefore, the play was complete enough to satisfy Lorca. Nadal may have labeled it "unfinished" because it exists simultaneously as both complete and incomplete, like Velázquez's portraits.

Lorca's subtitle and content indicate incompleteness: "Drama in twenty scenes and a murder." The drama is only six scenes long: 1, 2, 3, 5, an unnumbered one, and 6, with three murders. The present study shows that the work poses the problems of the self-acknowledged imperfection of its author as a dramatist, his oscillation between two styles, and the planned fragmentariness of the drama. For Gwynne Edwards (2013, 61), "Lorca regarded *The Public* as unrepresentable at the time of its composition, principally on ground of public taste and attitudes." In 1933 Pablo Suero remarked that Lorca "assigns no importance to anything he has does (...). If you talk to him of *Blood Wedding*, he speaks with enthusiasm of two works that he has not been able to perform and that are, for him, the theatre he wants to make. Those works are titled *When Five Years Pass* and *The Public* (Lorca, 1989, III, 544-45). Lorca's view of *The Public* as merely a wish conveys its incompleteness. Suero stresses lack of plot continuity in *When Five Year Pass*, yet the same applies to *The Public*: "Do not seek in *When Five Years Pass* the conventional connection of plot and scenes, the technical development of every day. As technique, perhaps antecedents could be found in some instances of Wedekind's *The Earth Spirit* and *The Spring Awakening*. But the fantasy and technical courage of García Lorca go further." (Lorca, 1989, III, 553)

When Five Years Pass unfolds in the protagonist's head (Rodrigo 2005, 206); and *The Public* is the Director's dream-vision (Nadal 1974, 63). Forms easily flow into other forms, as when male characters become females. Lorca's most rigorous critics err in attributing to him æsthetic or moral messages (e.g., Newberry 1969, 285; Nadal 1974, 30-31). As dehumanized art (Newberry 1969, 286), *The Public* renounces transcendence in theme and self-importance (Ortega 2005, III, 874). Lorca offers no solutions, we submit, but merely problems in metatheater, the relationship of life to art, and homoerotic passion. Æsthetic enjoyment lies in riddle-solving as the drama unfolds in anguished, unfinished fashion, with reader/spectators choosing interpretations to their own tastes.

The play counterposes two conceptions of theatre without prioritizing either. One is open-air theatre, a more traditional vision of drama as a series of universal symbols, as conceived by Gabriele d'Annunzio; the other is theatre-beneath-the-sand, an avant-garde conception, erasing the dichotomy of fiction and fact and staging the crude realities of sexuality and death. Every scene creates dramatic tension by sharply contrasting the two theatres. The notion of open-air theatre

stems from d'Annunzio, a source we reveal for the first time. Lorca read his theatre and filtered his ideas through statements of d'Annunzio's one-time mistress, Lombardian diva Eleonora Duse, whose æsthetics Lorca likely learned from Duse's admirer, Barcelonese actress Margarita Xirgu. In interviews, letters, and conversations, Lorca preferred theatre-beneath-the-sand, yet never abandoned open-air theatre, oscillating between the two styles from 1926 until his death. The oscillation in *The Public* explains its unfinished texture amidst many finished passages. We trace its two dramatic conceptions to their probable sources before examining the conceptual clash scene by scene as a new method for grasping the play.

Lorca owned d'Annunzio's first open-air drama, *A Spring Night's Dream* (1897) in Spanish translation (Fernández-Montesinos 1985, 29). Translator Ricardo Baeza found Duse to be d'Annunzio's artistic equal (Baeza n.d., 17-18). He conceptualized open-air theatre; she performed it. In the *New York Herald* (1897), d'Annunzio announced his plan to reform theatre, restoring its roots in beauty. He would construct a temple to the tragic muse near secluded Lake Albano and open his festival theatre in the warmest spring months among olives and fig trees, with twisted branches imitating the "convulsions" of the maenads, Dionysus' followers (Bell 1991, 287-88). This setting would recall "the rural and Dionysiac origin of the Drama." D'Annunzio distinguished this theatre, on its "serene hillside, from the cramped urban theatres, where (...), before a crowd of stupid imbecility, actors and actresses display their attainments." To revive tragedy, d'Annunzio required that drama regain "its ancient ceremonial character. (...) 'Open the windows! Let the wind and the sun enter!' That is the cry of a man suffocating in a closed room. (...) The Drama, although now descended to the lowest depth of abjection, (...) is always the one living form (...) in which [the poet] can embody for the crowd (...) the revelations of Beauty." (Bennett, 1897, 5)

Overhearing d'Annunzio (Weaver, 1984, 199), Duse, three years later, intensified his contrasts between true drama and actors' exhibitionism, open air and closed door. In 1900 poet-critic Arthur Symons published Duse's views remembered from recent conversation:

To save the theatre, the theatre must be destroyed, the actors and actresses must all die of the plague. They poison the air, they make art impossible. It is not drama that they play, but pieces for the theatre. We should return to the Greeks, play in the open air: the drama dies of stalls and boxes and evening dress, and people who come to digest their dinner.

The one happiness is to shut one's door upon a little room, with a table before one, and to create; to create life in that isolation from life. We must bow before the poet, even when it seems to us that he does wrong. He is a poet, he has seen something, he has seen it in that way; we must accept his vision, because it is vision.

Since Shakespeare and the Greeks, there has been no great dramatist, and these gathered up into themselves the whole life of the people and the work of their contemporaries. (Symons, 1906, 336-37)

Duse's air-polluting thespians included actors in the grand French classical tradition,

romanticism, naturalism, and positivism (Re, 2004, 91). Avoiding Sarah Bernhardt's elaborate costumes and jewelry, Duse affected naturalness by donning "big and long Greek tunics, with soft folds and wide sleeves that accentuated arms and hands" (Re, 2004, 99). Yet she rejected Greek conventionalism. In an Athens museum, she had seen a tragic actress's mask rigidifying grief. She preferred flexible expressions: "In Rome (...) they have found a bronze head, which has lain under water for centuries; the features are almost effaced, but it is beautiful, as if veiled." (Symons, 1906, 339) Duse's face served as a "mask for the tragic passions", though an ever-shifting one (Symons, 1906, 340). Audiences loved her subtle expressions, stares, and well-controlled hand movements (Re, 2004, 69). The bronze head could have inspired Lorca's conception of theatre under the sand, veracious, avant-garde drama. Moreover, Duse's phrases overheard by Symons and subsequently translated to multiple languages reappear in *The Public*.

In Lorca's theatre, one cannot overstate the impact of Margarita Xirgu, to whom he confessed in public he owed all his successes onstage (Lorca 1989, III, 669). She everywhere carried a signed photograph of her æsthetic model Eleonora Duse. Xirgu knew Duse's æsthetics and made it her own (Rodrigo 2005, 42). Five years after interviewing Duse, Xirgu met Lorca in 1926. She starred in five of his major plays. Therefore, Duse's opinions on theatrical history, communicated to Lorca by Xirgu, could have passed into the metatheatre of *The Public*. Duse "revolutionized theatre." She early humanized woman in the theatre and became "the first modern actor" (Sheehy 2003, 5). However, while receptive to open-air theatre, she resisted the avant-garde, refusing to perform Pirandello's plays. Xirgu, amenable to acting in Pirandello's dramas, shunned Lorca's avant-garde production. It was Xirgu who most trenchantly must have impressed on Lorca the duality of his playwrighting.

In winter 1927, Lorca endeavored to read Margarita two plays which he hoped would inspire her performances. One was his tragic farce *The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife*, which she premiered in Madrid Christmas eve (Rodrigo 2005, 206). The other, *When Five Years Pass*, eluded her grasp. She intuited Lorca's two dramatic styles, the more traditional one, which he would call "open-air" theatre, and the revolutionary one, to be labeled "theatre-beneath-the-sand." Of *When Five Years Pass*, Xirgu relates, "I didn't understand it, and I told him so. Federico tried to explain it to me, but I persisted in not understanding it. Independently, some scenes and the verses seemed very beautiful to me, but what I did not understand was the work as a stage performance." (Pedro 1949, 14)

Let us examine the five major scenes of *The Public*, even more advanced than the subsequently written *When Five Years Pass* (Nadal 1974, 99). The Director moves between the two conceptions of theatre without transition and, like Lorca, cannot exclude either. The idea of the dramatist as a poet could have come from d'Annunzio via Duse. Amidst the ruin of theatre, Duse looked with hope at the revered reality of the poet, isolated at a table, busy creating. *The Public* opens with the Director seated in a jacket while engaging in creative activity. Around him exists a theatre in crisis. The scenery symbolizes creativity: in the decor, the color blue predominates, symbol since

Baudelaire of the Ideal orienting the poet. On the wall, a hand symbolizes human power: Galen saw the hand, opposing the thumb to the other fingers, as the key to mastery of the world (Laín 1986, 112-13). Windows showing X-rays represent the poet's ambition to "expose the truth that lies beneath appearances and façades" (Edwards 2013, 48-49). At opening curtain, everything suggests the poet's empowerment. He dialogues with his servant in an exchange five times repeated throughout the drama about the approach of his public, yet always referring to his changing existential status. At first, he shows his ability to master his own affects, but as scene 1 progresses, he loses control over his creativity. The manservant announces to him the arrival of the public twice during the first scene. Both times the Director bids him to let them enter. The first public consists of four white trumpet-blowing horses – the Director's raw animal passions. Although equine symbolism abounds in Lorca before *The Public* (Nadal 1974, 185-217), the view of humankind as an animal circus stems from Wedekind's *The Earth Spirit*, whose animal tamer symbolizes the implied playwright. He threatens his characters, the animals, with whip and revolver (Wedekind 1921, 1). Likewise, when the horses refuse to depart, the Director asks his servant for a lash, then makes him open the doors and let the animals disperse so that (following d'Annunzio) he can stage open-air theatre (Lorca 1989, II, 600). Because he inhibits spontaneity in life and art, the horses protest, twice calling men "abominable", and twice reversing the syllables to form "blenamiboá," which represents horses as mirror opposites (601).

At a table like Duse's poet-playwright, the Director receives a second group of actors whom the servant introduces as the public. The protagonist, constantly rôle-playing, switches a blond wig for a dark-haired one (601), then faces three dark-bearded men in tailcoats (601). Man 1, Man 2, and Man 3 represent the Director's critical faculties. As theatre critics, they wear the formal evening attire Duse deplored for ruining theatre. The Director and these three perform a play within a play of open-air theatre, disfavoured by his new "public". Addressing the main character as "Mr. Director of Open-Air Theatre", they sarcastically congratulate him on his latest play, "extremely original" with a "pretty title", *Romeo and Juliet* (602). The theme concerns a man and a woman in love, yet Man 1 poses the pan-erotic possibility of the two lovers belonging to any species, while the Director insists they would never renounce their identities as Romeo and Juliet. When Gonzalo, Man 1, always impassioned, inquires whether the Director believes the two characters were in love, he shows the superficiality of open-air theatre by admitting he is not privy to characters' intimacy. This angers Gonzalo, whom Man 2 warns that in nature such an inquiry is suitable, but not in art. Gonzalo takes a revolutionary stance towards theatre (601), which Man 3 defines as the truth of graves (602). Man 2, ambivalent towards the two theatres, underscores the theatricality even of theatre-beneath-the-sand: its graves would have gas lights, advertisements, and rows of seats. Questioning the verisimilitude of open-air theater, he inquires how Romeo performed his most elementary body functions, and whether these are not somehow beautiful (603). Man 2 criticizes the Director's superficiality for not having descended into Juliet's grave. The true protagonist of the play, he says, is Cupid's flower from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare 1965, Act III, sc. 1, ll. 1-163, p.

35), whose victims fall in love by chance, like Titania with Bottom – a comic episode, which seriously disturbed Lorca since adolescence (Lorca 1994, 30). The Director, experienced in psychological surfaces, not depths, denies this is the issue, but Gonzalo, in love with him, disagrees. He deems it necessary to “bury the theatre”, infected with “cowardice”, cause of its superficiality. Gonzalo threatens suicide to inaugurate genuine theatre, for him, theatre-beneath-the-sand (Lorca 1989, II, 603).

The Director shuns such drama for its dire consequences, threatening for his family and outraging the public. If he removed the “railings on the bridge” from one type of theatre to the other, the transitions easing æsthetic passage, along would come the “mask” to devour him, social convention governing mores and punishing non-conformists (604). When the resourceful Man 2 proposes making the threat of the mask a new dramatic plot, the Director objects: the relationship between life and literature requires reckoning with conventional morality and avoiding repulsive plots. Gonzalo reminds that certain materials help dodge such unpleasantness - tin foil, gypsum, mica, and cardboard. Such devices deceive, and Gonzalo prefers breaking through the roots to initiate underground theatre (605).

As the Director’s former lover, Gonzalo asks whether, under his disguise as critic, the poet recognizes him. A struggle between the two theatres ensues in the conflict between Gonzalo to promote theatre-beneath-the-sand and the Director to avoid it with open-air theatre. Fearfully, the Director rejects his relationship with Gonzalo as alien to the true plot of their play. In self-defense, the Director calls upon his former mistress Elena to enter from backstage, her domain of open-air theatre. Yet, before she appears, Gonzalo forces the Director into a dramatic exercise in verisimilitude. In an innovative variation on the use of the dressing screen in Wedekind’s *The Earth Spirit*, present in an artist’s studio but unused (Wedekind 1921, 3), Gonzalo pushes others behind a screen, from which they emerge revealing their subconscious selves. The transformation suggests veracious theatre-beneath-the-sand, caused by Gonzalo’s impulsiveness. The representation of Enrique’s subconscious unveils further disguises, debuting a play within a play within a play. From behind the screen, while pronouncing lines attributed to the Director, comes an actress dressed as a boy in a harlequin costume. Underneath the Director’s dignified façade lies an effeminate self, costumed as an entertainer. Asking for lipstick, he/she receives some from Man 2, the flexible theatrical critic, whom he/she pushes behind the screen. Out comes another female, a woman in pajamas. Unseemly truths unveiled onstage dismay the Director. He again summons Elena, queen of open-air theatre and a comical caricature of a diva (Lorca 1989, II, 608).

With a given name similar to Eleonora Duse’s, Elena dresses like her in a Greek costume (605). Elena’s white hair matches that of the later Duse, met in person by Xirgu when age contributed to Duse’s “tragic image” (Re 2004, 100). Elena’s eyebrows, comically blue, parody the ideal. Duse’s friend, the actress Yvette Guilbert, regarded her eyebrows as “mobile (...) interpreters of the pride of her beautiful forehead” (Symons 1969, 66). Elena has “feet of gypsum”, material used to avoid unpleasant theatrical verisimilitude. Her dress, open in front, displays thighs covered with

“tight pink mesh” like a ballerina’s. Her dialogue conveys the self-conscious melodrama of a veteran actress. Seeing Enrique as an effeminate boy, baring too much intimacy, the ostensibly decorous Elena scoffs, “The same as ever?” Yet she engages in complicated love-affairs like Duse – and like Wedekind’s Lulu. She demands that Man 3 sadistically abuse her, and accuses him of infidelity with her own paramour, Enrique. Echoing Wedekind’s *The Earth Spirit*, where the servant carries Lulu the “human animal” away in his arms (Wedekind 1921, 2), the haughty diva Elena commands the Director’s servant to remove her, whereupon he obsequiously lifts her in his arms (Lorca 1989, II, 610).

Scene 2 immerses the spectator into another play within a play, whose technique matches open-air theatre, but whose theme of homoerotic strife belongs to theatre-beneath-the-sand. At the end of scene 1, Enrique and Gonzalo announce the start of this play (Lorca 1989, II, 610). The action unfolds in a Roman ruin, symbol of the ruins of theatre (as viewed by d’Annunzio and Duse). The two actors, Enrique’s and Gonzalo’s doubles (Nadal 1974, 40), wear symbolic costumes, with Gonzalo’s Doppelgänger covered in red grapevines, and Enrique’s hidden under small bells. The vines, a Dionysian symbol, represent theatre at its origins; the little bells belong to a jester, entertaining audiences at court. Dionysianism suggests a return to nature; jongleurism, cultural activity. The first costume stems from d’Annunzio’s *A Spring Night’s Dream*, open-air drama wherein a Tuscan aristocrat kills his wife’s lover. She, bathed in his blood, goes mad embracing the body all night. Wishing to unite with trees, bushes, and grass, she dons a mask of leaves and binds her hands with grass (Re 2004, 107-08). Hence, Gonzalo’s costume, red like blood, consists of leaves. Enrique’s costume points to Lorca’s proclivity, dating from childhood, to entertain those around him like a jongleur (Lorca 1989, III, 497). Gonzalo, guided by natural impulse, tends toward theatre-beneath-the-sand; Enrique, culture-oriented, toward open-air theatre. Their love-battle takes the symbolic form of a dance of the Figure in Bells to the flute of the Figure in Vines. Nadal identifies a mythical source: Bacchus, enamored of the dancer Cyssus, metamorphosed into ivy, next a vine, and finally a fig-tree. Lorca’s jester leads and expects the leafy figure to follow (Nadal 1974, 82). Dancing, he says, is “the only way I have of loving you” (Lorca 1989, II, 612). The leader fancies his own conversion into any object, while the follower must imagine another object favouring the first; for pan-erotic love signifies that a lover can assume any guise. Hence, when Enrique’s double asks what his interlocutor would become if he were a cloud, Gonzalo’s double responds he would be an eye (to contemplate that cloud); if the Figure in Bells changed into an apple, his counterfigure would become a kiss (to adore the rosy, cheek-like form). Yet one metamorphosis proposed by the Figure in Bells is dung, provoking the Figure in Vine-Leaves to suggest becoming a fly (611). The poetic level of dialogue frequent in open-air theatre descends to the level of theatre-beneath-the-sand. Moreover, twice, when the leader inquires what if he became a moonfish, his respondent twice proposes changing into a knife, threatening him harm (612, 613). The moonfish image, recurring throughout the play (cf. 642), is Lorca’s lunar modification of the myth from Plato’s *Symposium*, where Zeus punished mankind for pride by cutting the human being in two like a flatfish (ψῆττα),

severing him from his other half, thereby leaving half a side only (Plato 1991, 191 d 4; cf. Nadal 1974,79). When Enrique's double reproaches Gonzalo's for not letting himself be dominated, the latter scorns him for superficiality. The Figure in Bells wants to seek love elsewhere in the ruins (Lorca 1989, II, 613).

His opportunity brusquely arrives. The Emperor of the Roman Ruins appears, needing to choose between the two characters to achieve wholeness of being, the fusion of two halves for perfect unity (Nadal 1974, 79). Can nature or culture save theatre, ruled by the Emperor? Both candidates vie for him, with the jester scorning the natural man for nurturing himself on roots – an allusion to theatre-beneath-the-sand. The Emperor decides to “espouse” the one in vine-leaves, proud that the Emperor knows him: theatre has Dionysian roots. However, *The Public* lacks a clearcut thesis. The Figure in Vine-leaves, symbolizing truthful theatre, removes his vine-leaves and there emerges a nude of gypsum (Lorca 1989, II, 619), artificial material making theatre palatable to everybody. The Figure in Bells, rejected for someone as “theatrical” as himself, cries, “Treason! Treason!” (620). Interrupting the scene by upending a column of the Roman ruin, he bursts the illusion of dramatic reality by shifting into reverse the drama's forward movement. The column unfolds into the dressing screen of scene 1, with the three theatre critics and the Director as they were before the screen transformed them (620). On both sides of the screen, everyone protests about the treason: the Director, his double the Figure in Bells, even Gonzalo with his deceptive double. The temporal order of the drama disintegrates, contributing to its unfinished feel.

Scene 3 also conveys irregularity. The scenery changes, for a wall of sand suddenly appears, introducing theater-beneath-the-sand (Lorca 1989, II, 621). Countering expectations of forward-moving action, the dialogue detains it while the Director and the three literary critics assess scene 2. Gonzalo expresses guilt for the betrayal perpetrated by his gypsum double. He feels reluctant to commune with innocents like children or the sky. The Director and the three critics marvel at the fierce struggle between the two rivals in the Roman ruin. The duel, represented in symbolic form proper to open-air theatre, never attained the epic proportions of demigods that the three critics indicate (621). Gonzalo, uneasy about his unlimited desire, deplors the anus, favoured by homoeroticism, as the punishment, humiliation, and downfall of humankind, alien to restrained classical beauty (621-22). Had he and Enrique been true men, argues Gonzalo, they would not have succumbed to desire. The three critics and the Director plan to assassinate the Emperor, hostile to genuine theatre (623). Gonzalo determines to commit the regicide (625). The Director and Gonzalo begin wrestling as they had in the previous scene, but here in physical, not metaphorical, fashion while exiting (626). Men 2 and 3 follow their example to symbolize erotic intercourse (627). This scene, patently sexual, oversteps the bounds of open-air theatre.

Abruptly, there begins a long play within a play of what misleadingly promises to be theatre-beneath-the-sand. The wall of sand opens, exposing Juliet's sepulchre in Verona. Yet, just as scene 2 exemplified open-air theatre with elements of theatre-beneath-the-sand, so scene 3 mixes theatre-beneath-the-sand with open-air theater. Nothing exists in pure form in *The Public*. The play chosen

for the theatre-beneath-the-sand is *Romeo and Juliet*, the same drama the Director earlier selected for open-air theatre (sc. 1). Juliet's costume belongs to open-air theatre, no less than does Elena's (sc. 1): she wears a "white opera gown", exposing two naked breasts of pink celluloid, material which avoids offending delicate sensitivities (Lorca 1989, II, 627).

She leaps from the sepulchre, as surprising as a phantom jumping from the grave. Although this act augurs theatre-beneath-the-sand with its truths about death, her initial soliloquy belongs to poetic drama classifiable by Lorca as open-air theatre. Juliet expresses loneliness like Lorca's conventional character Doña Rosita the spinster (Lorca 1989, II, 961). She has seen no friend after traversing "more than 3,000 empty arches," a vast cemetery. Using her operatic talents, she sings as Shakespeare's Ophelia did before drowning (Shakespeare 1966, Act IV, sc. 3, l. 177, p. 146). A key to her aria lies in Lorca's early poem, "The Death of Ophelia." Ophelia dies in a backwater "amidst the clear waves of a river of illusion" (Lorca 1994, 420, l. 3). Into four lines, the speaker compresses Ophelia's tragedy: "The tender wonder of the strange woman/ who passes in the tragedy of the phantasmal prince/ Like a dream of clouds/ Modest and chaste." (422, ll. 59-62). Juliet's song also immerses her in a dreamy atmosphere. Like Ophelia's river of illusion, Juliet's "sea of dream" has a misty covering to form a "sea of white land," with empty cemetery arches filling the sky. Just as Ophelia dies in the water, Lorca's Juliet imagines the train of her dress passing "through the ships, through the algae" (Lorca 1989, II, 628). Unlike Ophelia, though, Juliet lives obsessed with time like Doña Rosita. She has yearned for night, bringing Romeo. She sings that the train of her dress passes through "a sea of time", with beach bordering on death ["Beach of the woodcutting worms" (628)]. Swimming through the temporal sea, she imagines herself a "crystal dolphin through the cherry-trees", a gracefully pure phantom passing through the pure white of the cherry orchard. She ends her soliloquy repeating her loneliness, her sense of drowning in dreams: "Oh loneliness without an arch! Sea of dream!" (628).

Following her song compatible with open-air theatre, reality outside the staged illusion of fantasy brusquely encroaches on her play within a play. Juliet complains of people gathering at the foot of the stage, brandishing swords and arguing about love and theatre. Her audience comments on her performance. Juliet stubbornly affirms the theatrical illusion, concentrating on loving within the play. A white horse holding a phallic sword speaks to her of love. In scene 1, white horses symbolized the Director's animal passions, exhorting him to cultivate theatre-beneath-the-sand. When horses become symbolic characters, we have open-air drama, notwithstanding the theme of sexual passion, proper to theatre-beneath-the-sand. Within this hybrid play, the white horse attempts to seduce Juliet. She wishes for "love that lasts only one moment" (Lorca 1989, II, 628), addressing him as if he were Romeo. In Shakespeare's tragedy, Juliet implores Romeo, "I must hear from thee every day i' the hour, / For in a minute there are many days - Oh by this count I shall be much in years/ Ere I again behold my Romeo" (Shakespeare 1965, Act. III, sc. 8, ll. 44-47, 85). Juliet's concern with time also appears in her apostrophe to night to return Romeo to her: "Come gentle Night, come loving black-brow'd Night, / Give me my Romeo. And when I shall die/ Take

him and cut him out in little stars, / And he will make the face of heav'n so fine/ That all the world will be in love with Night/ And pay no worship to the garish Sun" (Act III, sc. 2, p. 70). Hearing the white horse ask her when she will realize the perfection of a day, endowed with morning and afternoon, Juliet adds, "And with night" (Lorca 1989, II, 629). The horse divides night from day – like Shakespeare's Juliet –, and tells her that in a day he can assuage her anguish and chase away the marble of her tomb by carrying her away on his back. Asked for their destination, he responds the dark of night, and she dejectedly answers he will return her to the sepulchre, convincing her that true love is impossible (630). Ironically, the white horse repeats her own earlier words: "Love that only lasts a momento." (631) She yearns for freedom from the "stinging swarm" of magnifying glasses, as a "tumult of voices and swords" beyond the stage again interrupts the dramatic illusion (631).

Juliet gathers from the white horse's speech that love tends toward death. In her dialogue recurs the image of the moon, Lorca's death symbol (631). A black horse enters as a death-figure (Nadal 1974, 213), finding that while everyone desires her, this cosmic eroticism coexists with the inevitability of dying. In the dark steed's rhetoric appear images juxtaposing life-symbols with death-symbols. Juliet scorns these statements as confusing, but the black horse avers that the vital yearning of the blood for form goes accompanied by the world-wearying monotony of the wheel of life (Lorca 1989, II, 633). The lugubrious animal reminds the assembly of horses, augmented by three more white stallions with (phallic) canes, that he slays innocents, "slits the throat of doves" (633).

A scene rich with life and death symbolism, harmonious with open-air theatre, suddenly collects imagery suited to theatre-beneath-the-sand, staging unseemly truths associated with dying. The black horse crudely hints at the proximity of death ["Oh sea buttressed on the penumbra and flower in the buttocks of the dead man" (II: 635)]. The sea refers to Juliet's aria; the flower, to an esoteric painting by Bosch (Nadal 1974, 81). Repulsive images multiply, recalling Man 2's earlier question whether Romeo's basest body functions cannot afford aesthetic pleasure; for the three white horses, preparing to mate with Juliet, spurt their water from their canes, behaving towards her as they do towards their mares (Lorca 1989, II, 636).

When the drama-beneath-the-sand attains its nadir of unseemliness, Gonzalo and the Director halt it. The Director, attired as the effeminate harlequin of scene 1, demands open-air theatre. One white horse refuses, using Gonzalo's words (sc. 1) that he and his colleagues have inaugurated "true theatre", theatre-beneath-the-sand. The dark death-steed repeats Man 3's words (sc. 1), but with authority: "So that the truth of sepulchres be known" (Lorca, 1989, II, 637). The white horses with canes parrot Man 2 (sc. 1) and reveal half-heartedness about partaking in drama without theatricality: "Sepulchres with advertisements, gas lamps, and long rows of armchairs" (637). Gonzalo, seeking genuine theatre, sees the play just interrupted as a "first step," but demands that the white horses with canes be banished for cowardice vis-à-vis the public. Another white horse defends his comrades by saying that no one onstage doffs his mask. Gonzalo protests that he wears no mask (637), but the Director, garbed as Harlequin, retorts, "There is nothing but masquerade": in theatre and life, everyone counts on false forms (638). Gonzalo claims to have struggled with the

mask until he has at last seen Enrique naked, unmasked. However, the eloquent white horse likens theatre to a lake, which he says is mere surface, appearance. Gonzalo, irritated, counters that the lake is volume, depth. The white horse laughs that a single volume contains a thousand surfaces. The reader or spectator must decide.

Enrique scorns the superficial theatricality of Gonzalo's love, for he displays it only before others, as in the Roman ruins (sc. 2). Gonzalo defends his public display because he abhors the mask and has removed Enrique's (638-39). While Gonzalo professes his love, Enrique, calling him an animalistic "lion's slave", ironically embraces the white horse as a new lover. Gonzalo, undeterred, advances on Enrique. In self-defense, Enrique disclaims his identity as the lover Gonzalo seeks, and undresses, tossing his harlequin costume behind a column and appearing dressed like a ballerina. Behind the column, another theatrical fiction emerges when Enrique's empty harlequin costume becomes animated, identifying itself as Enrique. As Gonzalo continues his pursuit, Enrique keeps doffing and donning comic disguises, while the empty garments become the Director's doubles (Lorca 1989, II, 641, 645). This episode shows the playwright's self-mockery. The doubles, originating during Gonzalo's erotic pursuit of Enrique, parody scene 2, the love-dance between their doubles, with each one corresponding to a symbolic garment, one of vine-leaves, the other of bells. Juliet, Man 2, and Man 3 also join the *mêlée*. Doubles multiply: Man 3 disguises himself as Romeo (643), and even a boat's foghorn passes for Juliet's nightingale (645). On or offstage, all life feels hilariously theatrical.

The transition to the following scene provides another rough spot in the drama, for the script lacks scene 4, leaping from 3 to 5 (647). Yet the theme shows continuity with scene 3. Calderón's auto sacramental, *The Great World Theatre* (1633-36), catholicized the theatricality of life. Lorca studied autos in 1927 when Manuel de Falla set Calderón's masterpiece to music (Orringer 2014, 181). *The Public*, written several years afterwards, contains the unpolished fragment of an auto sacramental in d'Annunzio's religion of art, with badly rehearsed minor actors and a poorly equipped, apologetic prompter (Lorca 1989, II, 655). The work allegorizes the agony of theatre (Newberry 1969, 291). The audience, remote and indifferent, applauds as the curtain falls on the theatre-beneath-the-sand version of *Romeo and Juliet*. The star of the auto, playing the agonizing Jesus, wonders when *he* will receive attention. His Male Nurse says he must await the public's opinion of *Romeo and Juliet*. The auto, like previous plays within the play of *The Public*, mixes theatre-beneath-the-sand with open-air theatre. The setting, stylized as in open-air theatre, centers around the dying figure's bed, looking "as if painted by a primitive painter" (Lorca 1989, II, 647). The Christ figure, with red skin and blue crown of thorns (647), resembles an individual crayoned by a child. The theme of dying and the actors' matter-of-factness smack of theatre-beneath-the-sand. The Male Nurse, unmindful of healing, euthanizes the patient, bleeding his body (648). Because the allegory of theatre in agony relies on public reaction to the avant-garde Shakespearean tragedy, and because signs of its failure are multiplying, the Christ-figure audibly yearns to die (648). He recites lines from the Gospel on Christ's Passion as he hears adverse news from the Male Nurse, with each

piece of information hastening his end. The Male Nurse serves both as chorus and driving force of the auto. The Nude asks the Nurse the audience's desire and their opinion of himself, only to learn that they demand the Director's death and say nothing about theatre in agony (647). It unsettles the Nude that no one knows anything about Gonzalo, defender of drama-beneath-the-sand and potential saviour of theatre, except that the public pursues him in the Roman ruins (648). Asking whether the audience was permitted to exit the theatre-under-the-sand – as if to determine their attitude towards the new æsthetics –, the Nude learns that uneasy soldiers and engineers have all exits blocked (648).

New obstacles, hindering the completion of the auto, diminish its illusion of reality. While the Nude prays his Father to forgive humanity, the Male Nurse argues with the prompter about props and scenery (654-5). As the Nude commends his spirit to his Father, the Nurse scolds him for hastening the death-scene, and asks the thieves to bring the shroud while careful not to let the wind blow off their wigs (656-57). Finally, after the Nude declares that everything is consummated, his bed rotates on its axis, removing him and bringing Gonzalo to view, stretched out in critic's attire and exclaiming "Agony!" (657) If the Nude symbolizes the agony of theatre, Gonzalo advocates destroying conventional theatre to save the art. Yet no reader can take these agonies seriously: the lighting, say stage directions, turns silver like a movie-screen, while the Nurse and Thieves exit backwards to dance steps (657). Everything on the set bespeaks a masquerade!

Five students assume the Nurse's function as chorus, narrating the Director's fate before deriving æsthetic implications. In vain, critics ascribe their æsthetics to Lorca, when he takes no position, leaving artistic dilemmas unresolved. The students find that the horses, accompanied by the Director, have escaped the theatre by breaking through the ceiling over the stage (649). In short, he left the theatre guided by his passions. On witnessing the play below through a theatre skylight, Elena broke into horrified screams, arousing the masses and provoking the bloody revolution, which left her a merry widow (650). The reasons for the revolution stay a mystery, and readers must choose from differing opinions. One boy recounts that the public wants the Director dragged around by horses because that boy discovered the drama's shocking falseness on seeing the smallness of Juliet's feet, too feminine for a woman (652). The students offer three additional explanations for the revolution. Student 4 finds it caused by the veracity of theatre-beneath-the-sand: the actors playing Romeo and Juliet truly made love. Contrariwise, Student 2 ascribes the uproar to audience awareness of the actors' inability to make love (due to sameness of sex?): their "skeletons" or bodies loved each other, but their "costumes" rebelled, and Juliet's train got covered with "little toads of disgust" (652). Student 4 provides another explanation: revolution erupted when the audience, deceived, discovered the "true" Juliet, the actress hired to play her, bound and gagged beneath the seats (652-53).

The æsthetic lessons derived from all this are equally as problematic, allowing readers to choose the most convincing if any. For Students 1 and 2, the Director eliminated the need for the actors playing Romeo and Juliet to be male or female. The public erred by looking beyond the

costumes, causing the agony of theatre. Actors, once costumed, can belong to any species. Student 4 disagrees, thinking it ridiculous for one being to strive to be another. Student 2 views all theatre as masquerade: anyone can be anybody else if the public does not penetrate beyond the letter of the script. Student 4 blames the Director for unveiling the inner workings of many theatrical illusions to the public. The students detest the public's destructiveness. Like Ortega in *The Dehumanization of Art*, Student 1 holds that spectators should never participate in the drama (Newberry 1969, 285-86). Students 1, 2, 3, and 4 deplore the public's murders of the actor playing Romeo and of the two Juliets, the male one onstage and the female one under the seats (Lorca 1989, II, 658). Yet Student 1 follows the example of the stage Romeo, enamored of the male Juliet: overcome by æsthetic enjoyment, he offers his homosexual love to Student 5 (659). Further, just as the public has dismantled the theatre, in the atmosphere of revolution, Student 1 yearns to destroy everything – roofs, families, books (660). His judgment about proper æsthetic distance becomes suspect, along with all his opinions.

The final scene of *The Public* repeats details of scene 1, showing the play's circularity (Nadal 1974, 52). As in *When Five Years Pass*, no time may have elapsed, with each happening merely a possibility in the Director's mind. In scene 1, he was a director of open-air theatre, but here considers himself a director of theatre-beneath-the-sand. The blue decor reappears, but an eye replaces the hand, while trees with clouds lean against the wall. A horsehead adorns the ground. Whereas the hand in scene 1 represented the poet's power, the eye here reduces him to a powerless spectator, with the public in control. The trees and clouds against the wall indicate the inefficacy of the dramatic illusion, often destroyed throughout the play. The earthbound horse-head signifies debasement of passions by diminished author and unruly public. The Director wears the suit of scene 1 but enters with an illusionist equating theatre to magic. The equation negates theatre-beneath-the-sand, presenting real life. Magic, thinks the Director, leaves the destruction of theatre unaccomplished (Lorca 1989, II, 663). The illusionist, conceiving the Director as only a "man of masks", sees his magic curtain as a panacea for all theatrical problems (663). He disdains the choice of a "trite" tragedy like *Romeo and Juliet*. The Director, however, preferred an everyday occurrence with a universally known example, originary and limited to a single instant. Hence his theatrical experiment destroyed mediocre theatre by staging Shakespearean drama, which Duse recommended for open-air theatre, except that the Director's actors would really have loved and died onstage. Neither the Director nor Lorca completely dispenses with open-air theatre. The magician, like Man 2, prefers the plot of the love-inducing flower from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Given Shakespeare's premise of love subject to chance, the public could have accepted the plot of a boy enamoring the actor Gonzalo (664). Yet the Director argues the efficacy of a drama as wedded to death as *Romeo and Juliet*. For days he tunneled through to Juliet's tomb, struggling with roots along the way to "destroy the theatre" in Duse's sense of doing away with superficial convention (665). In conventional theatre, Romeo and Juliet die onstage but revive after the final curtain; the Director's Romeo and Juliet would ignite the curtain and perish before the spectators (666). The Director

dared gamble on love giving new form to the costumes.

Little did he suspect where this gamble would lead. In scene 2, whenever Enrique's double suggested becoming a moonfish, Gonzalo's proposed turning into a threatening knife. In scene 6, Gonzalo's mother, dressed in mourning, demands the Director to return her son; fishermen took her a decomposed moonfish, identified as Gonzalo. Perhaps the moonfish, born in the imagination of Enrique's double, materialized into Gonzalo, Enrique's other half, who committed suicide as he threatened, due to Gonzalo's unrequited love. Or he could have martyred himself for his art like the Christlike nude to create theatre-beneath-the-sand. Lorca offers no answer, letting the reader decide. Gonzalo's mother threatens to sue the Director for her son's disappearance, but upon departing, discovers all exits unusable. The illusionist solves the problem, wrapping her in his omnipotent cape and making her disappear (668).

Nevertheless, the Director refuses to regard theatre as sleight-of-hand. A last episode apparently discredits his refusal, depending on spectator standpoint. In Wedekind's *The Earth Spirit* (Wedekind 1921, 10), the painter Schwarz, to charm his model Lulu, asks her, "Aren't you cold?" Lulu counters, "God forbid! No. How did the question occur to you? Are you so cold?" "Not today, No", answers Schwarz." "Thank God!," says Lulu, "One can breathe easily!" In Lorca's play, when the illusionist fans himself, the Director complains of the cold. Yet he refuses to allow the Servant to kindle the heat. The cold strikes the Director as a cheap theatrical trick after he has proudly destroyed theatre, razing doors and roof. The Servant cannot withstand the cold, but the Director orders forbearance. Both perish, their last words repeating the phrases so often heard, announcing the public's arrival and admitting it. This time, the illusionist makes it rain white gloves as the Director's new public. Backstage, disembodied voices intone the same exchange, announcing and admitting the public, as if from beyond the grave. The magician vigorously waves his fan, bringing snowflakes, a frigid public (Lorca 1989, II, 672). Has the Director succumbed to magic, or expired because the play is done and theatre-beneath-the-sand requires death onstage? The reader must decide, for Lorca compels no solution. In conclusion, we have just analyzed *The Public* by studying deliberate uncertainties in its script, produced by two conflicting conceptions of theatre. We have thereby explained irregularities in stage directions and dialogue between the magician and the Director (sc. 6), the students (sc. 5), the Nude and his nurse (sc. 5), Juliet and the horses (sc. 3), the Figure in Vine-Leaves and the Figure in Bells (sc. 2), the three theatre critics, the Director, and his passions (sc. 1).¹

Endnotes:

1. An unnumbered scene in rhyme, unlike the remainder of *El público*, parodies Thespis's carriage. It satirizes the mask, conventionalism paralyzing genuine theatre. Thespis carried around masks to represent mythical characters he dramatized. The present carriage, a wardrobe on wheels, holds small masks with different expressions, all bleating like sheep, standing for public conformism. A Shepherd Bumpkin recites poetry of forced rhymes in *-eta* for *careta*, "mask", "poeta", "Julieta", nonsensical like Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" (Lorca's "gipaeta"): Lorca 1989, II, 662-3.

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