

JEAN COCTEAU AND
FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA:
THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

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by

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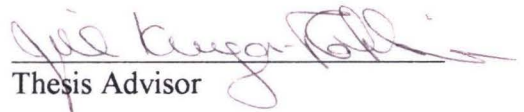
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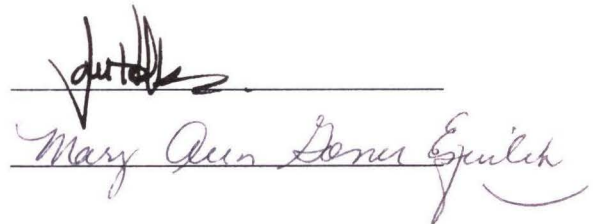
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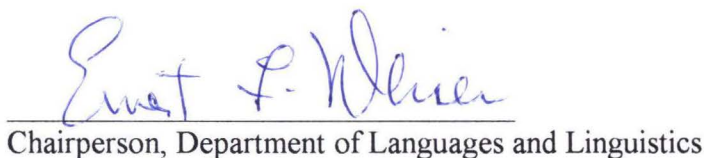
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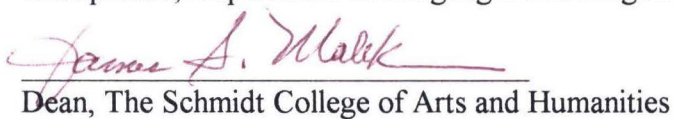
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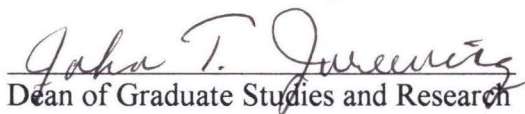
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ABSTRACT

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The traditional, realist, dramatic concept of coherent character identity is ruptured by the two plays Les Chevaliers de la table ronde and El público. Cocteau's and Lorca's works, which are usually labeled as surrealist due to their apparently disjointed nature, are actually embodiments of the poet-playwrights' continuing attempts to reveal that identity, including gendered identity, is a performance. The metadramatic elements of the plays such as discourse, costumes and gender are unstable and voluntarily changeable; they have repercussions beyond the proscenium. Cocteau and Lorca invite their audiences to consider the performative nature of their identities.

To Ken, Kenny and Franklin-Xavier

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Introduction

This thesis will compare the fragmentation of character in Jean Cocteau's Les Chevaliers de la table ronde (1937) with similar effects in Federico García Lorca's El público (1930). The two works have been described as surrealist due chiefly to their oneiric qualities and to the recurrence of bizarre or shocking elements in them, or as expressionist because of the strong monologues, the non-representational "mise en scène," the tendency toward distorted and illogical discourse, and the lack of plot.

I believe that a comparative analysis of Les Chevaliers de la table ronde and El público will show how the representation of character in these two plays ruptures the traditional, realist, dramatic concept of coherent character identity. What is more, the metadramatic elements of the plays extend this fragmentation beyond the limits of theater, since as Richard Hornby explains, "the theatrical efficacy of role playing within the role is the result of its reminding us that all humans roles are relative, that identities are learned rather than innate" (72).

The premise of my thesis is that these plays are best seen not only as examples of surrealism or expressionism, but as embodiments of the poet-playwrights' continuing attempts to reveal that identity, including gendered identity, is a performance that disguises the underlying multiplicity of the self. I wish to contrast Ginifer in Les

Chevaliers de la table ronde and the Director in El público, whose characterization in their respective dramas defies the theatrical conventions of their time, 1920-35.

In order to understand how these two characters defy theatrical conventions, it is important to understand what these conventions were in the 1920's. As Jon Whitmore explains in Directing Postmodern Theater, there are a series of signs that serve as the reference point for a conventional play. Whitmore divides these signs into two systems: the primary system and the secondary system. For Whitmore, the primary system consists of three areas--linguistic, visual, and aural--and it is a reference point for the semiotics of the theater in terms of "performer, and mise en scène" (13). Whitmore's secondary system refers to the olfactory and tactile areas, which are not as prominent in a conventional play.

Historically, in France and in Spain, the semiotics of the theater follow similar patterns of change, but these changes do not occur at the same time. That is, theater evolves from realist plays to farce, grotesque, and to psychological plays, from the nineteenth century to the twentieth, although these trends do not predominate in the same decade in France and in Spain.

In France, the notion of representing a slice of life, or at least a segment of it, derived from the naturalist movement in literature, starting with Émile Zola in the narrative of the late nineteenth century, and continuing in the theater until the early twentieth century. In France, the major rupture with conventional theater appears at the end of the nineteenth century as Alfred Jarry presented his play Ubu Roi at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in 1896. This puppet play was the first to disrupt the conventional aesthetics of

the French theater in terms of the semiotics of theater. First of all Ubu Roi is non-mimetic: there are no actors, the movements are mechanical, the facial expressions are stilled because of the puppets, and in terms of the visual dimension that realist theater offers, the costumes and the stage are not representational of the world of the audience. Not only is the traditional semiotics of theater completely overturned but also the grotesque and absurd portrayal of the cruel and triumphant stupidity of Père Ubu and Mère Ubu is shocking for the audience. Other styles that developed in France at the beginning of the twentieth century are Marcel Achard's farce, Jean de la lune, and Jules Romains' satirical farce Knock, as well as the intimist play Aimer in which the protagonist mirrors the audience.

The majority of plays onstage in France in the 1920's are psychological. The essential preoccupation of the stage is the bourgeois drama, through which the "real life" of the middle class is being represented on stage. Gestures are mimetic, language is popular or colloquial, and the mise en scène is an imitation of the interior space of the bourgeoisie. In other words, the action, the setting, and the characterization in these plays reflect the lives of the bourgeois members of the audience, and therefore seem "real" or "transparent" to them. This type of play, validated by its overwhelming popularity, is sound, always moralist. Its signs convey one meaning about pre-war society--its undeniable beauty, its fullness, its happiness.

Part of that trend is the very quiet, very polite plays of Paul G raldy. The style of G raldy in reaction to the very complicated intrigues of Feydeau's farce, for instance, is simple. In terms of the semiotics of the theater, G raldy's play Aimer (1921), provides

dialogues that are very civil and refined. There is no emotional anxiety presented, and none of the characters' discourse questions the validity of the system. As Michel Corvin explains in "Subversions: de Jarry à Artaud", "le théâtre, en effet, en 1920 comme en 1680, était un art de société" (826). G  r  ldy's plays do not try to defy the norm of discourse, the complexity of the soul is suggested rather than expressed, and the characters speak "naturally." G  r  ldy's dialogues are concise. The other characteristic of G  r  ldy's plays is the visual element which seems transparent: the set is the reflection of the public, "le grand public, de bourgeois ou d'employ  s, qui fait ses d  lices du Boulevard" (Corvin 826), that comes to see its life, hopes, and disillusion represented on stage. In addition, the stage directions such as "tr  s   tonn  e," "int  ress  e," "amus  e," validate the audience's sense of normative values.

In contrast, and as early as 1916, the Dadaist movement which condoned a complete revolt of the poetics in order to reveal the truth and the authentic, is created. The impact of Dadaism is to destabilize the familiar elements of a play, such as the visual and the dialogues, to provoke and shock the audience. It is against this background that Surrealism emerged in France. Although Ubu Roi helped the movement, it is with Apollinaire's play Les Mamelles de Tiresias: drame surr  aliste (1916) that Surrealist theater may be said to have begun. Most probably Apollinaire did not intend the connotation given today to the word surrealist, but from his play, and the influence of Cubism in art, a literary movement, known as Surrealism, was developed.

Surrealism started as group of three poets, Andr   Breton, Louis Aragon, and Philippe Soupault, who created in Paris in 1919 a literary magazine called Litt  rature, and

published the first surrealist text, Champs magnétiques, in that magazine. As the group initiated a climate of liberation, especially for poetry, and became more known, poets such as Paul Eluard, Robert Desnos, René Crevel, as well as painters, such as Max Ernst, Francis Picabia, joined in. The purpose of the French Surrealists was to systematically explore the unconscious impulses and to transform them into works of art, poems, or paintings.

As the declared spokesperson, and leader of the French surrealists, André Breton published in 1924 the Manifeste du surréalisme, followed by the Second manifeste du surréalisme in 1930, in which he asserts the theories of this particular group of artists. In the first manifesto, Surrealism is described as a “dictée de la pensée, en l’absence de tout contrôle exercé par la raison, en dehors de toute préoccupation esthétique ou morale” (Breton 23). Under Breton’s influence, Surrealism became a movement in which the sign is dissociated from its usual signified, through expression of the subconscious. Therefore Surrealism was viewed as the challenge to logical reasoning, and it became a viable movement thanks to the simultaneous translation into French of the Freudian psychoanalytical texts. Surrealism regarded as ideals the dreamlike evocation of recognizable objects, jumbled and distorted, as well as the destruction of conventional concepts, such as patriotism.. In accordance with the idea of liberating the unconscious, the aesthetic of Surrealism proclaims the freeing of the unconscious through automatic writing. In terms of its implications for the public, it is evident that Surrealism does not wish to present under any form a coherent vision of the social structure, but on the contrary insists on shocking the public, so that for instance Eluard writes “la connerie est

française, la vérole est française, les porcs sont français” (qtd. in C. B. Morris, I) to prove that nothing is taboo, and that everything can be ridiculed.

Although the aesthetic theory of Surrealism elevates automatic writing as the purest method of creation, the Surrealist practice seems to differ. Aragon’s or Eluard’s poems, for instance, do not show a distorted and jumbled thought process through the automatic writing, but are very clearly written, and probably include the effects of rewrite. Although revolutionary in its theories, Surrealism was not a well-defined literary movement, but offered vitality and fresh influences in the inter-war French scene.

In Spain, as noted above, similar trends emerge in the theater of the twentieth century, although they do not coincide chronologically with the French ones. Theater in Spain is a reflection of the European theater, although as Gerald G. Brown explains in Historia de la literatura española,

el teatro es sin duda el género literario en el que España tiene menos que ofrecer al conjunto de la cultura europea . . . no apareció un Calderón. Aun cuando no podía esperarse que escritores como Unamuno, Valle-Inclán y Azorín tomaran por asalto el teatro comercial, pertenecen a un período en el que la obra de Ibsen, Pirandello, Giraudoux y Claudel conseguía en mayor o menor parte el aplauso . . . pero en la escena española, escritores de esta talla quedaron casi totalmente eclipsados.

(190)

In Spain, Jacinto Benavente, the leading playwright up to the twenties, wrote plays similar to those of Gégaldy--well polished and polite dramas about bourgeois society.

From today's perspective Benavente's plays portray a very distant and very stable, unified world. In an article entitled "Proteccionismo y libre cambio," Benavente reaffirms that "la vida española es tan apacible que apenas ofrece asuntos al autor" (qtd. in Ruiz Ramón 30). Benavente is not a revolutionary; he is for the status quo, although it may seem, to the modern reader, a paralyzing status quo. For that reason, Francisco Ruíz Ramón explains that Benavente did not revolutionize theater technique:

el dramaturgo renovador y revolucionario, dentro del contexto español, que fue Benavente durante las décadas finales e iniciales del siglo, dejó de serlo, sin merma del valor literario de su producción entera, durante la segunda década del siglo XX en que se produce la crisis de la estética realista finisecular y el teatro europeo emprende nuevos rumbos, de los que Benavente queda al margen. (26)

In Benavente's plays we see that the realistic world is suggested, first of all, by discourse. So as Ruiz Ramón points out, in Benavente's plays, "lo propio de la mayoría de los personajes benaventinos es que pasan el tiempo hablando, sin otra finalidad aparente que la de satisfacer esa necesidad de las personas civilizadas cuando están juntas. Y hablan siempre con soltura, con elegancia, con naturalidad, con brillantez y agudeza de ingenio" (24). Discourse, as one of the primary elements in theater, is as muffled as footsteps on a carpet. There is no emotional anxiety presented, none of the characters' discourse puts into question the validity of the system, although as Ruiz Ramón notes, there is irony or satire. A conventional dialogue is used to foreground and validate a mode of thinking, a way of life, a status quo.

Even the visual signs that predominate in Benavente's plays reflect a conservative viewpoint. The set is designed to mirror the values of the audience. As Ruiz Ramón explains, the set is "siempre definido por la elegancia a la moda y puesto con gusto" (28), that is, with the good taste of the middle and upper class. The set reflects the passivity of Spanish life and its triviality, since it is full of its little things, such as pillows, fragile chairs, frames. Antoine, the French director of the beginning of the century condoned this type of setting because "il faudrait dans les décorations d'intérieur . . . ne pas craindre la profusion des petits objets, la diversité des petits accessoires. Rien ne donne à un intérieur un aspect plus habité. Ce sont ces imperceptibles choses qui font le sens intime, le caractère profond du milieu qu'on a voulu reconstituer (qtd in Sarrazac 716).

Thus the visual, that primary sign Whitmore notes, is important here in Benavente's plays to validate the dominant order of polite society by mechanically portraying its interior spaces. As Ruiz Ramón suggests "la función de la dramaturgia benaventina ha seguido siendo desde la primera a la última pieza invariables: reflejar lo 'actual'" (25).

The third system of semiotic signs mentioned by Whitmore is the aural one. In Benavente's plays oftentimes the same stability (or conservatism) represented by the mise en scène is suggested by a soothing, harmonious type of music. Percussion instruments, such as cymbals and drums, are out of place: the aural tone of the play is as melodious as its discourse, and as harmonious and structured as the set. Thus all the elements, the discourse, the décor, the music, are in unison: together they portray a harmonious, ordered world, the hushed interiors already familiar to the audience. The plays thus

reassure the public of the stability of their quiet, mannered world as they reflect and reinforce its images and values.

As with the French theater, Spanish theater encompasses also the farce, but this movement appears after 1911 the main period of Benavente's realist theater. The grotesque is an important part of the Spanish theater of the twenties, with the plays of Valle-Inclán, whose "esperpentos" purposely distort any traditional conception about society, as in Luces de bohemia (1920). Society's grotesque characteristics are furthermore accentuated by the distortion of the mirror that reflects the play itself, and "esta imagen esperpéntica de la realidad nos obliga a una toma de conciencia: la conciencia que vivimos una realidad esperpéntica, la conciencia de que son grotescos unos valores generales en los que se fundamenta la realidad concreta que nos rodea" (Ruiz Ramón 124). Valle Inclán's conception of the theater is as significant in Spain as Jarry's was for France. As Ruiz Ramón points out, Valle-Inclán's theater "constituye en su esencia *la invención de un teatro*, y no solamente un teatro más entre los otros" (93).

It is in this context of Jarry and Valle-Inclán that critics have sought to define the works of Cocteau and Lorca, but their attempts to link these authors with specific literary movements have been largely unsuccessful for several reasons. They cannot be called exclusively expressionists, since not all their plays reflect experimentation within the theater. Moreover, they cannot be called surrealists, because, although Cocteau and Lorca tried to be involved with the movement, they were rejected. In 1916, long before Lorca's involvement with "Surrealism in Spain," Cocteau was rejected by both groups, the Surrealist and the Dadaists, hence his surprise expression in an interview in Cahier du

cinéma, in which he says “on finira par dire que j’étais surréaliste” (qtd. in Rivière 52). It is important to note that surrealism is not simply a group of characteristics but also a group of individuals whose goals differ. In addition, although it seems that Breton’s manifesto on surrealism was the movement’s primary documents in France, in Spain the situation was a bit more confusing. There Surrealism took different forms depending on whether the manifesto was published in Madrid or in Barcelona. This plurality and the lack of a single “authority” explains the difficulty in defining Lorca’s works as surrealist.

Neal Oxenhandler, in Jean Cocteau and the French Scene, divides Cocteau’s theatrical production into three groups, the minor works created during and after World War One, the inventive works, and the plays produced in the late 40s (126). Although Oxenhandler tries not to describe Cocteau as a surrealist, his examples suggest connections between Cocteau’s works and surrealism. The irreverence and vulgarity of the surrealist appear for instance in Orphée, as in the irreverence of Orpheus’ poem “Madame Eurydice reviendra des enfers” which, as Oxenhandler points out, infuriates the judges “because the initial letters of the words when placed together spell MERDE” (135). Another critic, Bettina Knapp, who devotes one small section to Les Chevaliers de la table ronde in her book Jean Cocteau, links the play to surrealism when she claims that the play was “revealed to Cocteau by a dream” (89), as if it pertained to the school of automatic writing of Breton and Soupault. Cocteau’s preface to Les Chevaliers de la table ronde also suggests that it was a product of the unconscious: “Le poète est aux ordres de la nuit. En 1934, j’étais malade. Je m’éveillai un matin, déshabitué de dormir, et j’assistai d’un bout à l’autre à ce drame” (Cocteau 72). However, as for any other work of automatic

writing, such as those done by Breton, there was a rewrite, and in his preface, Cocteau acknowledged it rather than emphasized the automation, as did the surrealists.

Literary criticism on the relation between surrealism and Lorca's writing is abundant, and El público has often been seen as the ultimate example of surrealism in Spain. But, however important the movement may appear for Spanish literature of this period, it is not well defined, and therefore critics continue to debate the exact influence of surrealism in Spain. C. B. Morris's study of surrealism indicates that surrealism has an ambiguous relationship with specific authors, since, although Breton and Eluard came to Barcelona, surrealism was a not well-defined intellectual movement in Spain. If surrealism is defined as a group of French artists publishing their manifesto in Paris, then surrealism did not exist in Spain except for such Spanish artists as Dalí and Buñuel, who were in France during that time, and were members of the French surrealist group. Moreover, as Paul Ilie explains in The Surrealist Mode in Spanish Literature: An Interpretation of Basic Trends from Post-Romanticism to the Spanish Vanguard, "no manifestos or statements of purpose describing the theory behind literary surrealism were produced in Spain. Nor did any group of writers organize a movement in order to chart the direction of their experimental practices" (1).

Yet, the influence of surrealism was felt across the Pyrenees, and as Morris explains the French manifestos were translated, in the literary magazines such as L'Amic de les Arts, published in Sitges from 1926 to 1928, and Hélix, which was published in Villafranc del Panadés from 1929 to 1930 (13). Thus the influence of the French surrealists was present, and, as Alberti recalls, "Le surréalisme correspondait parfaitement

à cet état de protestation et de révolte qui était celui de l'Espagne. D'une manière imprécise nous cherchions autre chose. Le surréalisme, introduit chez nous avec retard, était pour nous l'image d'une jeunesse confusément tourmentée, et nous convenait" (qtd. in Morris 9).

Lorca did join with Dalí, Miró, and Ernesto Giménez Gaballero, who met every Monday night on the terrace of the café Colón in the Plaza de Cataluña (Morris 15), but he did not participate fully in the movement, so it is not possible to categorize Lorca's work as surrealist. Lorca did not view himself as a surrealist, and was ambivalent about the surrealist movement, so, as Miguel García Posada explains in his article "Lorca y el surrealismo: una relación conflictiva," Lorca "con algunos dibujos decía haber cercado algunos días al sueño, pero sin caer del todo en él" (8).

Still, even without a clear consensus on the definition of surrealism in Spain, and without Lorca's explicit participation in the movement from France, there are clear indications in Lorca's works that link him with the surrealists' practice and theory. For this reason alone many critics have designated his works as surrealist. For example, in his article "El público y La casa de Bernarda Alba, polos opuestos en la dramaturgia de Lorca," André Belamich explains that Lorca's play "se presenta como el fruto de una imaginación desenfrenada, una prueba más de la literatura surrealista" (79). It seems that for Belamich there is an absolute need to categorize the play as surrealist, therefore the most "extreme" signs are decoded as "bizarre" and thus "surrealist." For him, surrealist techniques such as the visual scenes about dreams serve to fragment identity. He does not note, however, that other defining elements of surrealism, such as the prominence of

dreams and its logic, do not appear in the play. As Belamich defines it, the play, like the surrealist movement, “rompe con todos los moldes tradicionales, inventa técnicas atrevidísimas, somete a sus personajes a una serie de metamorfosis increíbles y, sumiéndonos en el sueño, libera el poder imaginativo” (89). So although Belamich does not seem quite convinced that El público is a surrealist play, he seems to want to convince us that it is. This need to categorize is understandable insofar as a conventional reading of El público fails, prompting our repeated attempts to classify the play in order to better understand and delimit it.

Some critics analyze Lorca’s works in light of the psychoanalytic component of surrealism, hence their preoccupation with identity in his plays. Literary critics have been quick to see in Lorca’s plays, and in El público particularly, a possibility for a Freudian analysis. Such is the analysis of Julio Huélamo Kosma in “La influencia de Freud en el teatro de García Lorca.” In this article, Huélamo Kosma says that since “las obras de Freud empezaron a traducirse en España muy temprano, en 1922 . . . sin hecho este conjunto de hechos actúa como base de la común atracción que los creadores artísticos experimentan el surrealismo y sus orígenes freudianos están en el ambiente”(59). Although he explains that the poetic works of Lorca are not at all tinged with a Freudian perspective, he adds that in terms of El público, “se observan rasgos que permiten postular muchas y premeditadas correspondencias” (62). For Huélamo Kosma it is the preponderance of references to the unconscious that is clearly visible. As he explains,

El público como Así que pasen cinco años son obras en las que Lorca dramatiza una pugna de orden inconsciente donde las preocupaciones más

íntimas e inconfesables de un individuo luchan por manifestarse, es decir, por liberarse de las instancias psíquicas que las reprimen hasta el punto de hacer imposible la armonización de lo que podríamos llamar la “realidad y el deseo. (64)

In my opinion, the influence of surrealism in the works of Cocteau and Lorca is most apparent in the relationship between the author and the audience. Like the surrealists and some of their predecessors, Cocteau and Lorca do not attempt to reflect the lives or values of the bourgeois audience that attended theatrical performances of their day; rather these authors sought to shock, offend, and awaken them. As Cocteau said, “Ce fameux état de surprise se résume par cette phrase de Diaghilev ‘étonnez-moi!’ L’idée d’étonner ne m’était pas venue. J’étais d’une famille où on ne pensait pas du tout à étonner. On croyait que l’art était une chose tranquille, calme, disparâtre . . . on n’avait pas à choisir” (qtd. in Steegmuller 62). Cocteau, who comes from an upper-class family, participated early on in the shaking up of French theater, hoping to inject in his plays the same vitality of performance, setting, and music as he had seen with the Russian Ballet of Diaghilev in 1909.

Lorca also defies the aesthetic preferences of the audience. El maleficio de la mariposa (1920), for example, sets the tone for the later plays he will write: using the puppet, as well as fragmenting character, disrupting, the illusion of reality, and implying the fragmentation of the audience itself, which sees itself reflected in dehumanized and grotesque form. This play was Lorca’s first great box-office failure, because of the public’s inability to accept the message and the form. As Nelson Cerqueira writes in the

“Poetic Language in the Plays of Lorca and Cocteau,” “both Lorca and Cocteau are overtly interested in the effect of poetic language in the theater . . . the rediscovery of poetic drama, a kind of magical realism in which characters present an inability to face life as it is and consequently persist in fantasies and dreams, dancing between the real and the surreal” (21) .

I believe that Les Chevaliers de la table ronde and El público emphasize the fragmentation of identity through surrealist techniques and psychoanalytical ones. Thus it is in terms of the semiotics of the theater, as set forth by Whitmore, that both plays destabilize a system of signification, and reconstitute it in other terms by presenting identity through anti-mimetic, conflicting semiotic signs, quite unlike the norm of identity as constituted by the social signs reflected in the theater of Benavente and G  raldy.

It is in light of this type of performance that Hornby’s ideas on identity as a performance become particularly relevant in analyzing Les Chevaliers de la table ronde and El p  blico. As Hornby points out, drama operates as language does; that is, instead of mirroring life, drama, as well as language, is a means of thinking about life itself. The protagonists of Les Chevaliers de la table ronde and El p  blico, Ginifer and the Director, do not just question their identity, but also help the audience question their own identities, and the nature of identity itself. Hornby presents four axioms that explain the interconnections between plays and “real” life: 1) a play does not reflect life, but instead it reflects itself; 2) one play relates to other plays as a system; 3) this particular system intersects with other systems such as culture, and Hornby calls culture associated with drama “the drama/culture complex” (20); 4) it is through such a drama/culture complex

that we, the audience, interpret life. These axioms enable us to view Les Chevaliers de la table ronde and El público as plays reflecting themselves, since really both plays are metadramas staged by a director. Merlin is the director of Ginifer in Cocteau's play, and the Director is the director of Romeo and Juliet in Lorca's play. Moreover each play, I believe, belongs to a metadramatic system within Cocteau's plays or Lorca's plays. Cocteau's play Orphée or Lorca's La zapatera prodigiosa embody a similar concern with identity as performance. The performative aspect of the play is determinant and demonstrates that indeed identity, including gendered identity, is a performance. It is in this context, the performative one, that Cocteau's Les Chevaliers de la table ronde and Lorca's El público elucidate the problematic of identity.

Chapter 1

Les Chevaliers de la table ronde : The Multifaceted Identity

Les Chevaliers de la table ronde was written by Jean Cocteau between 1933 and 1934, in Switzerland, while visiting a friend, Igor Markévitch, to whom the play is dedicated. Cocteau wrote the play for several prestigious actors of the French scene in the thirties, Louis Jouvet, Lucienne Bogaert, and Michel Aumont. However, when the play was performed in October 1937, at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre, in Paris, other actors performed it. Gabrielle Chanel created the costumes, and Cocteau created the décor and directed the play. As Knapp points out, the play did not receive the acclaim that Cocteau hoped for (92). But Knapp's argument that political unrest in Europe caused the failure of the play is disputable since the Front Populaire in France in 1936-37 was favorable to the arts, while concentrating mainly on social and economic reforms. The political climate of the time probably had no effect on the failure of the play. The play was performed for the second time in Paris in September 1995, with Jean Marais in the role of the King Arthur, and it has since been well received not only in Paris but in many others cities in France as well. Knapp also suggests that the first performance of the play was shortlived because "it [the play] does not live as drama . . . and gives the impression of having been artificially constructed" (92). That trait explains better the failure of the play in Cocteau's day.

Dramatic criticism of Les Chevaliers de la table ronde, which is not abundant, has often sought to analyze the play in terms of "la poésie du théâtre" as defined by Cocteau in Les Mariés de la tour Eiffel: "une grosse dentelle, une dentelle en cordages, un navire sur

la mer” (45). However ambiguous Cocteau’s statement may appear, two critics, Laura Doyle Gates and Lee-Hahn Hyoung-Won, have analyzed his drama according to that definition.

Gates explains in “Jean Cocteau and ‘la poésie du théâtre,’” that “actor, stage, decor, and gesture function in an esthetically unified ensemble. The impact of the ‘poésie du théâtre’ is intended to be more visual than dramatic or literary” (436). For Gates, the poetry of the theater creates the “unified ensemble” with the aid of Cubism, music, and the ballet of the twenties. These elements provide the “cordages,” clearly distinct and visible. Although Gates’ definition of the “unified vision” is interesting, it fails to consider the disunifying intent of Cubism, for instance, which foregrounds the visual fragmentation of objects and people and therefore the plurality of the sign, including the sign of the self. Gates also includes music in her totalizing vision of Cocteau’s work; however, music according to Whitmore, does not always signal resolution and harmony, especially in the twentieth century. Gates’ assertion about music in Cocteau’s work is arguable since music in Cocteau’s plays, although present, is often more chromatic than harmonious. In La Machine infernale, for example, ragtime is the music used to announce the queen’s entrance; thus the informality of the music conflicts with our expectations of the regal. In Les Chevaliers de la table ronde music is also out of context, since Cocteau in his directions lists three works by Purcell, from the high Baroque period, far away from the legend of King Arthur and Sir Lancelot. In addition, the public does not expect music of any sort in a drama. So, although music is included in the play, its role is not only to

frame the scenes, but also to demonstrate that music itself is a sign, and it is problematic like the other signs in the play, as I will explain shortly.

Lee-Hahn Hahn in La Poésie du théâtre chez Jean Cocteau, suggests that Les Chevaliers de la table ronde “a changé la quête du Graal en la remplaçant par la recherche de la poésie” (352). Again Lee-Hahn Hahn’s assertion revolves around the idea of poetry of the theater, as defined by Cocteau. For Lee-Hahn Hahn, the poet derives his function from the Greek word for “poet” meaning “creator.” As a result, the role of the poet is to formulate a new “poetic” genre of theater that combats darkness, lies, and artifice. These two critiques of Les Chevaliers de la table ronde are typical examples of the criticism of Cocteau’s work: the critics focus almost exclusively on the poetic rather than on the performative aspect of the play.

Annette Shandler Levitt in “Jean Cocteau’s Theater: Idea and Enactment” argues that the preface of Les Mariés de la tour Eiffel serves as the preface for all of Cocteau’s work, since it “offers in an informal, non-dramatic mode his manifesto of the theater” (363). If so, why did Cocteau write a different preface for each of his works? More pointedly, In Les Chevaliers de la table ronde, Cocteau writes that “tant de merveilles se sont produites et ont libéré le théâtre des règles qui le limitaient de toutes parts . . . que je crois un autre genre de préfaces utile en 1937” (71). The preface of Les Chevaliers de la table ronde does not refer to the poetry of the theater, but rather to the performance. Cocteau is careful to clarify certain aspects about the set: “je recommande au metteur en scène de confier à un spécialiste du truquage le subterfuge par lequel les échecs se meuvent sur l’échiquier”(77), and on the performance, he adds: “Je recommande aux

acteurs jouant les doubles rôles de la reine et de Blandine, de Lancelot et de Ségramor -- fin du troisième acte--de faire en sorte que la substitution ne soulève pas la moindre méprise. La ressemblance véritable est inutile” (77).

In the same article, Levitt tries to validate the idea of poetry of the theater in Les Chevaliers de la table ronde, with Galaad as the poet. She does note the importance of performance, however, and posits that “Knights is very much concerned with role-playing, if not explicitly with acting in the theater” (367). Thus she does point out some aspects of the performance, such as costume, music, and discourse.

Performance, encompassing performers, director, and public, is crucial for the understanding of this play. The importance of performance is underscored by the metadramatic elements; hence, “the play,” directed by Merlin with Ginifer as the performer and King Arthur’s court as the audience of Ginifer’s performance, parallels its englobing play, Les Chevaliers de la table ronde, directed by Cocteau for a Parisian audience. Consequently, the unsettling performance of Ginifer not only provokes the other characters in the play, such as Lancelot or Galaad, to be aware that their identities derive from role-playing, but it also has the same potential for the public of Les Chevaliers de la table ronde.

The play has three acts and takes place in an “intoxicated” castle. The “detoxification” of the castle is provided by Galaad, although Cocteau, as if aware of the challenge that this presents, remarks in his preface: “s’il me fallait raconter cette pièce, voici comme j’essaierais de m’en sortir” (73). The first act takes place at the court of King Arthur. Merlin the Magician, “Merlin l’enchanteur,” lives at the court, and, with the

help of his servant, Ginifer, attempts to control the events. Ginifer, who is an invisible spirit, “appropriates” the bodies of some of the other characters, such as Gauvain, Lancelot, The Queen, in order to help her/his master Merlin assert his control over the events that take place in the castle of King Arthur. Unexpectedly, Galaad, or “Blancharmure,” arrives at the castle to unmask Merlin and his treacherous ways. In order to avoid losing to Galaad, Merlin sends Lancelot, Gauvain, Ségramor, and Galaad on a quest for the Grail, to divert them, directing the party to his castle, the Black Castle. In the second act, at the Black Castle, Merlin, with his magic, controls the minds of Lancelot and Ségramor through a series of dreams, but his ploy is discovered by Galaad, who delivers the true Gauvain from the dungeon, where he had been held captive by Merlin. In the third act, back at Camelot, King Arthur ascertains the truth about the liaison between the Queen and Lancelot, and kills Lancelot. At the end of the play, the Queen dies, Ginifer disappears, Merlin is forced to recognize his defeat, and Galaad leaves the castle which is now “désintoxiqué.”

In order to understand Ginifer’s character and her/his implications concerning identity, it is crucial to comprehend that Les Chevaliers de la table ronde presents a director, Merlin, who in the metadramatic structure of the play helps to present identity as performance. Merlin’s direction establishes Ginifer’s identities as performances.

The convention that the director shall be invisible is ruptured in Les Chevaliers de la table ronde by the visibility of Merlin, who, as the director of Ginifer, directs her/his performance. Thus the castle of King Arthur becomes a stage, and Merlin is the director, who attempts to control the performance of the other characters, as well as the behavior

of Ginifer, through his direct intervention in the play. Merlin, in his quest to masterdirect the performance at the court of King Arthur, decides when the performance starts and how it will start, and who the performers will be. Merlin uses the word “Silence,” meant as a warning that an important remark is to be announced, to start his interaction with Ginifer (84-87). This word signals the start of the play-within-the-play. Merlin’s intervention is constant in the first act, and he hopes to control Ginifer, reminding him that: “ta conduite est de plus en plus indigne. Tu te vautres dans la paresse et dans le vice. Le désordre règne et le vol, et la débauche”(84), but he adds: “j’ai besoin de toi” (85). Merlin readily provides Ginifer with part of the dialogue, and explains the performance to her/him: “la table est presque vide. Les plus nobles sont loin. Ils se battent sur les routes contre les fantômes et des mirages . . . Ils bondiront à ta suite; et si le roi essaie de vous retenir parle fort. Et s’il essaie de reculer la quête, frappe sur la table: “Quoi bel oncle! Vous nous prêchez un acte déloyal?” (86). Through his main character, Ginifer, Merlin has control, and he knows when to remove himself from the stage to have Ginifer interpret her/his role. Although Merlin’s stage directions prevail in the first act, they tend to weaken as the play progresses, hence diminishing the importance of Merlin, who cannot provide cohesiveness to the main performer. As Ginifer sincerely remarks “Vous vieillissez, patron. Si j’étais vous, je laisserai tout tomber” (142). However Merlin tries to assert his power as a director one more time, in Act II:

MERLIN. Exige! Savez-vous, mon jeune prince, dans quelle mesure toute
cette mise en scène est désapprouvée par le roi?

SEGRAMOR. Vous osez!

GAUVAIN. Il ose prétendre que le roi est son complice!

MERLIN. Tout doux, Messire Gauvain.

LANCELOT. Pourquoi pas l'instigateur de cette mascarade?

MERLIN. Je ne me disculperai pas. J'attendrai qu'on me relève de mon silence. (140)

Merlin's directorial techniques fail to produce the performance he wants.

Since it appears to Merlin that his direct intervention does not produce the expected results, he tries to use his "magic" to control the situation or the performance in Act II, the stage directions about the setting indicate that a game of chess is about to start: "Les pièces d'échecs qui gisaient en désordre sur la table se dressent sur l'échiquier" (117). Surprised to see a game of chess, Ségramor does not fail to notice the size of the pieces:

SEGRAMOR. Et quels échecs! Messire, Messire, touchez-les! Je n'en ai encore jamais vu d'aussi grands.

LANCELOT. Ni moi. Ségramor, remets cette reine où tu l'as prise et ne dérange pas le jeu (*il s'approche*) car la partie est en train, et même fort en train. L'échiquier propre. On dirait que les joueurs viennent de s'interrompre. (120)

Although Merlin is not visible in this intervention, he manipulates the set to control the performance of the characters, Lancelot and Ségramor, but here again he fails, since Lancelot is able to control the game of chess by repeatedly trying to counter Merlin's "magical" presence: "Le drôle joue bien...Il est vrai que je ne joue pas mal quand je veux

(*il joue*) et je veux. Echec!... Echec!... Echec!... (*une pièce frappe l'échiquier bruyamment.*) Seriez-vous mauvais joueur?" (120). Here as well, Merlin's attempts to control the performance are futile since Lancelot prevails in his desire to win the game. The performance of Merlin as a director fails as miserably as his game of chess. Lancelot's reaction "échec!" is revealing since in French it means "failure," and thus symbolizes the failure of Merlin as director of this play-within-the-play.

The last possibility for Merlin to control the situation is his attempt to control the plot, which becomes quite confusing as multiple characters take the action on their own. Furthermore, Merlin's efforts are thwarted by the unforeseen arrival of Galaad, who overthrows Merlin as the director and becomes the new director: "j'arrive à temps...Inutile je devine tout....Laissez ce personnage, nous réglerons ses comptes après. Un travail urgent nous exige" (135-36). Galaad is ready to direct the end of the play that is being performed within Les Chevaliers de la table ronde.

Therefore Merlin's endeavors have less impact on the performance of the play within Les Chevaliers de la table ronde. However, his failure to direct provides a possibility for the performer to expand his own repertoire of role playing. Merlin is faced with Ginifer, the reluctant performer, who rejects his suggestion of staying in character. This allows other characters to reveal themselves through her/his performance of them; her/his poor performance also dooms Merlin's plot to failure.

Ginifer as a character is crucial to the relationship between identity and performance. Ginifer is ostensibly invisible, and that, I believe, is the important element for the play. As Cocteau says, "Ce qui me frappe, en considérant Les Chevaliers d'un oeil

extérieur, c'est le personnage principal, personnage invisible de Ginifer" (72). Ginifer can exist only through others and through her/his performance, thus allowing the role to be disunited. Ginifer's invisibility is described in the preface, but nothing prepares the spectator for it on stage. Ginifer dramatically ruptures the norm of character representation.

In a performance of Les Chevaliers de la table ronde, several actors "play" Ginifer. Within the play itself, however, Ginifer is not only a character but also an actor playing the other characters. So for instance, the Queen and the false Queen are played by the same actor, as are Gauvain and the false Gauvain, or Lancelot and the false Lancelot, allowing Ginifer's role to exist. Furthermore, Ginifer becomes also an actor playing not only Gauvain, but also the Queen, and Lancelot, with her/his performance directed by Merlin. Ginifer does not perform just one character, and thus does not stay in "character" in order to give a seamless performance in which the actor's own identity is subsumed in the role. On the contrary, the inconsistency of Ginifer's performances, and therefore of the other characters in the play, suggest that identity is a performance. As Ginifer acts, the role has no stable signs to suggest that identity is stable, on the contrary there is not one identity, but a series of roles. What is more, the fact that Ginifer performs both male and female characters suggests that gender is also performative. Ginifer's discourse, gestures, and gender are all part of the performance.

The discordance between discourse and the body disrupts the continuity of character performance in Les Chevaliers de la table ronde. The roles that Ginifer performs take a life of their own and have a very different discourse than the one which is expected.

For instance, the Queen and Gauvain have to contend with an unexpected side of themselves. This provokes an imbalance in what is normally expected from the regal when Ginifer reverts to her/his former “invisible self” : “Le faux Gauvain. - Plus je me cache et plus le roi me cherche. J’y trouve mon compte et vous vous y trouvez le vôtre. De quoi m’avez-vous chargé? D’ensorceler Artus, de le distraire, d’être son favori, son âme damnée, de l’avoir en main et de le conduire où je veux...où il vous plaît qu’on le mène” (84). Gauvain becomes a conniving and manipulative nephew, who speaks his mind to King Arthur “votre orgueil détestable vous empêche de lever les yeux sur la jeunesse qui vous sert et qui se crève pour vos plaisirs” (90), and is not to be trusted. Therefore Gauvain’s discourse accentuates his multiple identities.

Cocteau uses discourse as a sign and shows that the sign is multiple, and that discourse can be adapted to the role performed. Since the play can be seen and interpreted at different levels, the public may see the Queen as a buffoon or as a fragmented self, addressing Merlin “Méchant homme! Est-ce ma faute si vous me confiez des rôles difficiles? Je vous avais prévenu. Vous n’écoutez jamais personne. Je n’oublie pas les phrases apprises par coeur, mais il y en a d’autres. Croyez-vous qu’on puisse improviser, tomber juste, avoir l’air naturel?” (136).

Les Chevaliers de la table ronde offers another rupture between discourse and body with Ginifer’s mispronunciations, such as:

MERLIN. Quand le roi t’appelle, tu te caches.

LE FAUX GAUVAIN.C’est exprès.

Il prononce : esprès.

MERLIN. Ex...

LE FAUX GAUVAIN. Quoi, ex...?

MERLIN. Exprès, pas exprès. Tu nous perdras un jour avec tes fautes ridicules. (83)

In these lines Merlin knows that Ginifer's mispronunciations are more than a blunder, and reveals Ginifer's inevitable reversion to her/his old self. Ginifer's discourse shows that s/he has a hard time conforming to what is expected of her/him. As Ginifer's conformity disappears, the identity of the role s/he inhabits becomes a performance. "Gauvain" is now the King's nephew who stumbles on his words, and the "Queen" in Act II is a drunk who has lost the regal attitude. Merlin has given Ginifer an important role, but Ginifer snaps out of character when Lancelot, believing him to be the drunken Queen, slaps "her," and she exclaims "Au secours! Il m'a frappée, il m'a giflée! Au secours! (*elle se roule par terre dans une crise de rage.*) Patron, patron, j'en ai assez. A l'aide! A la garde! On frappe la reine, on manque de respect à la reine! Ho! La sale brute! Il m'a fait mal. A moi!" (135). It is not the character--the Queen--that is being slapped, but the actor (Ginifer) performing the Queen. Therefore s/he naturally protests, as an actor, and leaves behind her/his performance. In this exchange between Lancelot and the false Queen, Ginifer's discourse disrupts the performance of the Queen, showing that the role of the Queen is just that, a performance.

Another rupture occurs between gestures and body. Ginifer's performance is not always true to the character s/he portrays throughout the play. In the realist theater, discourse is punctuated by gestures, and both represent one unified character. In Les

Chevaliers de la table ronde, Ginifer becomes disconnected from the character s/he performs, and always seems to want to revert to his own self, endangering Merlin's play:

MERLIN. Mais, petit malheureux, ne te rends-tu pas compte du danger de notre situation? Déjà tout le château s'étonne de ce Gauvain qui ressemble à Gauvain comme la lune ressemble au soleil.

LE FAUX GAUVAIN. C'est le contraire, patron. Comme le soleil ressemble à la lune. Croyez-vous que le bel oncle voyait de même oeil le vrai Gauvain, le Gauvain à la figure de Carême, le chaste fiancé de sa fille et le Gauvain que je lui montre, moi depuis que vous m'avez fait prendre sa forme. Félicitez-moi d'être gai et d'égayer le roi. (83)

This out-of-character impersonation could be interpreted as a stage device to provoke laughter. However, in the context of identity, it is clear that Ginifer's performance marks an identity crisis. Ginifer's body is not synchronized with his movements at the court of King Arthur. Whether Ginifer performs the false Gauvain or the false Queen, no matter what the role, the gestures do not coincide with the body whose character s/he performs. Consequently from the very beginning there is a disjuncture between Ginifer, his gestures and costumes, and his "observable" performance. Hence the exchange between Merlin and the false Gauvain:

MERLIN. Incorrigible. Et maintenant, il faut aller te vêtir. L'heure de la fête approche.

LE FAUX GAUVAIN. Me vêtir?

MERLIN. Mettre une armure. Je ne suppose pas que tu comptes assister à cette cérémonie en uniforme de valet de meute.

LE FAUX GAUVAIN. Vous vous trompez j'y compte.

MERLIN. Le roi exigera que tu t'habilles.

LE FAUX GAUVAIN. Je ne vois pas où se trouve le scandale. Si vous croyez que c'est une sinécure de ne plus vivre dans sa peau. Pour une fois que vous m'avez fait prendre une forme qui me plaise, il est normal que j'en profite. Et je me plais beaucoup en Gauvain. (87)

As Hornby points out, "role playing within the role occurs in three broad types: voluntary, involuntary, and allegorical" (73). Ginifer's performances are clearly involuntary, since they are produced and directed by Merlin, but they may also denote a weak sense of identity, and show that voluntary roles are also just that, roles:

ARTUS. Que faisiez-vous là?

LE FAUX GALAAD. J'écoutais...c'est à dire...je, je...

ARTUS. Vous écoutiez aux portes?

LE FAUX GALAAD. Pas précisément, pas précisément. Vous comprendrez bel oncle. (*il se reprend*) Beau sire...où ai-je la tête?

(166)

Galaad/Gauvain/Ginifer is confused as to what is expected of her/him at that point. The performance is jeopardized because of Galaad/Ginifer's eavesdropping, and therefore it is hard for the character to retain a cohesive identity. Galaad/Gauvain is comfortable in this

voluntary role-playing, the eavesdropping is a natural gesture for their role, and they perform it naturally, as a part of themselves.

As an example of discordance between gestures and body, the performance of the “Queen” is revealing, because the differences between gestures and body are so flagrant. The Queen’s role is a difficult one, and from the actor’s perspective there is a need for spontaneity that the role might not allow easily. So in Act II, as Ginifer performs the false Queen, Lancelot cannot understand what is happening:

La porte du fond s’ouvre; paraît la fausse reine, l’oeil fébrile, sa robe retroussée par un pan à la taille. Bottes, cravache.

LANCELOT. *il recule.* Madame...Est-ce possible! Est-ce vous?

LA FAUSSE REINE. Vous en faites une figure. On dirait que je tombe de la lune. Qu’y a-t-il donc d’extraordinaire? (*elle prononce extraordinaire*) Me prenez vous pour une ombre? Oui, c’est moi, c’est bien moi. (125)

Lancelot cannot reconcile the costume with what he knows of the queen’s accoutrements. As the exchange between Lancelot and the Queen progresses, the Queen’s gestures become common: “elle tombe assise dans un fauteuil” (126), “Lancelot veut l’embrasser, elle le repousse” (127)), and tells him “*la bouche pleine* .- Quand j’aurai mangé je te parlerai et quand je t’aurai parlé, je verrai Ségramor. (*elle boit.*) J’ai dit. *Elle cligne de l’oeil. La stupeur, le malaise de Lancelot augmentent au fur et à mesure que la fausse reine se laisse aller*”(131). The role/identity of the Queen is but the performance of a drunken woman, and although Ginifer is invisible in a physical way, it is her/his nature,

her/his “essence” which enables the Queen to act that way. The “Queen” presents no stable signs, since the role keeps on changing her. Therefore the Queen can be the wife of Arthur, and the lover of Lancelot, and a woman who drank too much. She is multiple, and each time it is a performance, since it is with a deliberate effort that her role is revealed.

Ginifer’s bad acting also allows Galaad to present one side of his identity. What is more, Galaad’s performance is as convincing to the rest of the court and the audience of Cocteau’s play when he is the one who has all the right answers, as when he is the false Galaad, trying to convince the King that all was a game, a play after all, and he exclaims:

LE FAUX GALAAD. *criant, derrière Artus.* - . Écoutez-moi que diable! Il me faut vous apprendre que je vous ai trompé et que je m’en accuse, et que j’étais de mèche avec Lancelot, et que Lancelot redoutait la loyauté, la clairvoyance, la franchise de votre ministre Merlin, et que tout était une frime, le fauteuil, le Graal, la quête, et que Lancelot me soufflait mes paroles et mes actes, et que j’étais embarqué de force dans un complot. (*il s’aperçoit qu’Artus n’écoute plus.*) Bonté divine, on dirait qu’il ne m’écoute même pas! M’entendez-vous, Sire Artus? Autant haranguer une statue. Ma foi tant pis. (167)

Everything is a play, a make-believe world in which there are only performances.

Galaad’s multiple identities are revealing performances, and just as convincing. The actions at the court were just a play and Galaad was just part of it. He can be viewed as a

righteous character or as a conniving one. As for Ginifer, there is no reason not to perform either the Queen or Galaad, since both are just performances. So as the false Gauvain remarks to Merlin, who reproaches him for paying too much attention to his costume: “Voilà que je contemple mon costume! Vous qui me reprochiez de n’en avoir point” (87). Ginifer knows that it is her/his performance, as an actor with a costume and dialogue, and their disruptions that will suggest to the other characters and the audience that identity is but a performance, and that identity is then a perceptual issue.

Finally, it is crucial to see that Ginifer performs both female and male characters, that s/he can be the Queen as easily as Gauvain or Galaad. As for the discordance between body and discourse or body and gestures/costumes, identity is a performance, no matter what gender the character performs. This is of course the most unsettling characteristic of character representation, yet it is only a performance, since it is Ginifer who is acting. As Judith Butler points out in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, “the effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (140). This illusion of permanence is what the audience of the play-within-the play, and the audience of Les Chevaliers de la table ronde, have to understand as the performance evolves. As the play progresses, the audience of Cocteau’s play faces the same dilemmas as the characters in Merlin’s play. That is, the audience in the play--the King, Blancharmure, Blandine, Lancelot--observes Ginifer’s performances, and observes the change in the characters such as Gauvain, the Queen, or Galaad. The characters in the

play are confronted with the incohesiveness of essence and image within character and identity, pointing out their role as public of the play-within-the-play. Similarly, the “real” audience of Les Chevaliers de la table ronde assumes at the beginning of the play that there is cohesion of characters in terms of discourse, costumes, and gender, yet the audience’s awareness of the subterfuge is demanded for the relation between role and identity to be established. Consequently, the public should decide, as Cocteau suggests in the preface, “si les forces qui dirigent le premier acte et le dernier rendent la vie plus ou moins agréable” (75). The audience becomes aware of the fact that the disruption of the image and essence in the characters suggests also the disruption that exists in their own lives. They identify as performers/audience in order to participate into Les Chevaliers de la table ronde.

Chapter 2

El público : Identity Beneath the Sand

According to Ian Gibson, Lorca wrote El público after his trip to New York, during his sojourn in Cuba, in 1929 (294). The whereabouts of the manuscript, not only during the Spanish Civil War after Lorca entrusted it to his friend Rafael Martínez Nadal, but also during the years of the Franco regime, are uncertain. El público has been shrouded in much mystery, further increasing its recent popularity among Lorca's plays. I suggest, however, that the disappearance of the manuscript, and its recent recovery, have also contributed to it being misunderstood.

One of the main critical commentaries on El público is Rafael Martínez Nadal's study, Federico García Lorca and "the Public": A Study of an Unfinished Play and of Love and Death in Lorca's Work. In the prologue, Martínez Nadal meticulously reconstructs the whereabouts of the play between 1929 and 1936. In 1936, as Martínez Nadal relates it, García Lorca gave him a package, saying, "if anything happens to me, destroy it all" (16). Inside were the first draft of his still unpublished play El público, and some personal papers. Martínez Nadal confided the manuscript to a friend in Spain during the Civil War, and it was only in 1958 that he recovered it. In 1976, Martínez Nadal published the integral transcription of the manuscript.

Gibson suggests that there are some inaccuracies in Martínez Nadal's version. For example, Gibson points out that the dialogues in Martínez Nadal's book about the play and his last visit are too "word-perfect" to be accurate (444), and that Martínez Nadal never "clarified" the problem of the disappearance of personal papers that accompanied

Lorca's manuscript (445). In her prologue to the Cátedra edition of El público, María Clementa Millán also notes that the number of manuscripts is not very clear. There seemed to be at least three: "nuestra edición está basada en el único manuscrito de El público hoy conocido . . . debió de servir de base al que el autor leyó en 1931 . . . que a su vez precede al que consideraba definitivo y que yo vi en el restaurante Buenavista en julio de 1936" (108). Many versions of the play may well have existed at one time, since Lorca was known to write his poems and plays which he read aloud to friends and later modified (Gibson 289); still, only one unfinished version has been published to date. Martínez Nadal explains that the play was read in the early years of the 1930s: "In the late autumn 1930 or beginning 1931 Lorca read El público to a group of friends in the house of the Morla family. 'You'll see what a play it is! Most daring, using a completely new technique. It's the best thing I have written for the theater!'" (19).

The play was never performed until the 1986-87 season in Madrid and Milan, and in Paris and London in 1988 (Delgado 11). This may be in part due to the fact that El público is considered one of Lorca's "unperformable" plays. As C. Christopher Soufas explains in Audience and Authority in the Modernist Theater of Federico García Lorca, "for an audience to view a play like The Public, it must accept the play unconditionally or simply refuse to continue to watch it--that is leave the theater" (18). As Lorca told an Argentinian newspaper La Nación about El público,

It stages the personal drama being enacted in each member of the audience's mind while he is following the play, often without his fully realizing what's happening. And since the inner drama of each of us is

often very poignant and usually not very edifying, the members of the audience would get up at once in indignation and prevent the performance from continuing. Yes, my play is not for performing. It is, as I once defined it, “a poem for booing.” (qtd. in Gibson 365)

Although criticism on Lorca’s work is abundant, very little of it considers El público, in part because its conceptual difficulty and the explicit treatment of homosexuality have hindered critical efforts in Spain and in the United States until recent years. Virginia Higginbotham declares that “as long as the complete text of El público remains unpublished it is impossible to estimate its artistic value” (65). Critics of the play have tended to follow the standard critical trend of looking for surrealism in Lorca’s works, such as Bélamich, or more recently Huélamo Kosma in “Lorca y los límites del teatro surrealista español,” in which he sees the play full of “recursos con estos modos surrealistas” (212). Another trend has been the psychoanalytical one, and Huélamo Kosma again explains the play in these terms: “ambos grupos de personajes representan dos embates sucesivos del inconsciente” (66). Another critic, Andrew Anderson, sees in El público the example of an expressionist play, since “como se sabe, los personajes expresionistas suelen ser genéricos, faltándoles el nombre propio y siendo denominados más bien por su edad, su sexo, relación familiar o profesión” (217). This type of analysis, although interesting, fails to note the ambiguity in defining the main protagonist, namely the Director, in terms of his age or his gender. In El público these are the most important variables, because they destabilize the character, and consequently foreground that identity is a performance. Some of the criticism about the play has focused on the sexual identity

of the Director, reflecting a biographical approach, since the Director is seen as reflecting Lorca's own homosexuality. Other critics, such as Luis Fernández Cifuentes, tend to explain the dynamic of the play in relation to "los que dictaban las normas de verosimilitud" (167). In his article, "Poder y resistencia en el teatro de García Lorca," Fernández Cifuentes explains that "las obras de García Lorca no se gobiernan por una establecida doctrina...reúnen más bien comportamientos, actividades, decisiones que ponen en tela de juicio la pertinencia de autorizadas disyuntivas como poder, libertad, sumisión y rebeldía, legislación y poesía, amor y soledad" (158). Fernández Cifuentes further comments that the resistance to authority is derived from solitude and also from discourse. It is important to note, however, that the Director's discourse shows not just the solitude suggested by Fernandez Cifuentes, but also the Director's own fragmentation.

Soufas also deals with authority and explains that

the continuing lack of consensus about the theater of Federico García Lorca is in significant measure a consequence of a critical unwillingness to understand his literary production in relation to Modernism . . . the conventional supposition that verbal (symbolic) and visual (iconic) signs function as mutually interdependent mirrors is progressively abandoned [by Lorca] in favor of a new configuration that privileges one of these sign systems over the other. (2)

Soufas explains that Lorca was aware of the limitations imposed by the conventions of traditional theater, and, using a Modernist approach including the disruption of words and images, he engaged himself in depicting "the disintegration of traditional authority into

struggles for power” (11). For Soufas, the implied message of El público lies in the constant battle between the audience and the director. Moreover, the Director becomes fiercely engaged with representing a play in a theater “beneath the sand,” that is, a theater which is provocative and self-revealing. The Director’s loss of authority in El público is marked by “the index”(18), that is the traces of authority in the play that signal a shift of power. I wish to show that these “indexical signs” are not only traces of authority, but also signs of identity. My analysis of Lorca’s El público departs from Soufas’s because I focus on the concept of identity, including gendered identity, as a performance.

The term “beneath the sand” provides the image necessary to define a forever changing identity, a performance. The imagery of “beneath the sand” suggests layers of sand, each layer built up from the layer below it. If one layer changes its shape, this in turn, causes the layer above it to change its shape. Layers affect other layers until ultimately the external shape is transformed. To understand the always changing external shape one must look “beneath the sand.” To understand the always changing character one must look at the underlying discourse, costume, and gender.

The action in El público centers on a main character, a director, who wants to cast a young boy in the role of Juliet in Shakespeare’s play Romeo and Juliet. The performance of Juliet by a fifteen-year-old boy, although conforming to Elizabethan standards, becomes a problem for the performance within El público because the public does not accept any other type of character representation than the one which is verisimilar, i.e., a “realist” one, with Juliet played by a girl. At the end of El público, the public kills the director.

Since El público is metadramatic, the Director not only directs the performance of Romeo and Juliet within the play but also performs in El público as a director who must choose between two different performances for his play. He must choose either a traditional performance within the “theater of the open air,” that is, a play with conventional realist aesthetics, or a riskier but more honest performance in the “theater beneath the sand,” that is, a play in which truths are revealed through radical, non-representational aesthetics. The concerns of the Director about the performances form the basis of the action of El público. In his efforts to direct his play, the Director becomes engaged in performing different roles. The various performances of the director show that his identity is not stable, and that performance is a type of identity. The Director performs because he is in search of authenticity in the theater, the “theater beneath the sand,” and he therefore has to confront the inauthenticity of the performance he initially directs in the “theater of the open air.” His search for authenticity spurs a series of transformations in his own self-representation that suggests that signs of characterization and identity are artificial. Thus the theater beneath the sand becomes an ideal setting to reveal the truth about identity, that it is a construction performed according to a system of codes.

These codes are presented to the Director by three men who at the beginning of the play urge the Director to direct Romeo and Juliet with a new aesthetic of the theater. Although the premise of their conversation may lead the audience of El público to believe that these three men are quite pleased with the performance they saw, their ironic comments soon show that they are not: “Venimos a felicitarle por su última obra ...originalísima ...Un hombre y una mujer se enamoran” (122). Whereas the initial remark

about the play “originalísima” conforms to the expectation of the audience that came to see Romeo and Juliet, a play about passion, it is not what the three men, dressed alike, suggest to the director. It is clear that the three men, who surprisingly seem to be “the three wise men” helping to establish new beliefs in theater, have not come to praise the director but to offer an alternative for his representation and staging of Romeo and Juliet. From the outset, their performative ideas of Romeo and Juliet rupture the connection between character and every element of the theater, such as costume, gender, and discourse. They quickly make demands to the director for another genre of performance:

HOMBRE 1. Es a los teatros donde hay que llamar; es a los teatros
para...

HOMBRE 3. para que sepa la verdad de las sepulturas.

.....
HOMBRE 1. (*Interrumpiendo.*) No hay otro. Tendremos la necesidad de
enterrar el teatro por la cobardía de todos. (123)

The Director fails to acknowledge that the play could be performed with other characterizations “¿Y la moral? ¿Y el estómago de los espectadores?” (124). The Director is extremely reluctant to initiate any changes, because for him the performance has to be true to the text.

The Director at the beginning of the play does not understand why these men come to see him, since he cannot conceive Romeo and Juliet as anything else but a man called Romeo and a woman called Juliet, and the Director does not understand the question.

HOMBRE 1. Romeo puede ser un ave y Julieta puede ser una piedra.

Romeo puede ser un grano de sal y Julieta puede ser un mapa.

DIRECTOR. Pero nunca dejarán de ser Romeo y Julieta.

HOMBRE1. Y enamorados. ¿Usted cree que estaban enamorados?

DIRECTOR. Hombre... Yo no estoy dentro... (122)

The Director has a conventional view of the play in terms of the characters and the performers. Romeo is supposed to be Romeo, and no one else, or nothing else. In addition, the Director assumes that no other interpretation is possible, and therefore asks one of the men “¿Pero qué es lo que quiere de mí? ¿Trae usted una obra nueva?” (125). For the Director, Romeo and Juliet is a single, eternal work that can be represented only in one way, close to the text, true to Shakespeare. The other characters, the three men, insinuate that each performance of Romeo and Juliet is a new work and therefore the Director is a kind of author, an author of performances. However, the Director believes that the text is the play, and the three men believe and suggest to him that the performance is a play, so that there is in fact a multitude of possible plays: “Hombre 1. ¡Y qué bonito título ! Romeo y Julieta!... Sí, sí. Director del teatro al aire libre, autor de Romeo y Julieta.” (122-23). The Director is unaware of the creative power of performance, thus the three men mock him and his poor sense of creation and communication of the play. Their irony positions the Director as a failure. He has not recognized the importance of authorship, and therefore cannot stage Romeo and Juliet in “the theater beneath the sand.” The Director does not see that what sets one performance apart from another is in fact the manipulation of the conventions of theater: the discourse, the costumes, the gender. The

three men, therefore, imply that as a director, he has failed, because he has not “author/ized” Romeo and Juliet, and that in order to succeed as a director he has to manipulate the semiotics of theater, he has to reinvent their use, and become himself an author. Each performance is a different play, because a play is constituted by all of the conventions of the theater.

At the beginning the Director resists changing the conventions of the standard Shakespeare theater, but the men persist:

HOMBRE 1. Tendremos necesidad de enterrar el teatro por la
cobardía de todos.

HOMBRE 1. (lentamente) Tendré que darme un tiro para inaugurar
el verdadero teatro, el teatro bajo la arena.

.....
DIRECTOR. (reaccionando) Pero no puedo. Se hundirá todo. Sería dejar
ciegos a mis hijos y luego ¿qué hago con el público? ¿qué hago con el
público si quito las barandas del puente? (124)

The Director wants to please a public that came to see Romeo and Juliet, but he changes his mind, and decides nonetheless to present the play under the new light of “the theater beneath the sand,” although the public might not be ready for it. The Director recognizes that he has no choice, and exclaims “se hundirá mi teatro. Yo había hecho los dramas mejores de la temporada, ¡pero ahora...!” (126), and he is willing to use his “magic” as director to provoke the public, and a student says: “El Director de escena evitó de manera genial que la masa de espectadores se enterase de esto, pero los Caballos y la revolución

han destruido sus planes” (173). So the Director has in effect changed his views, and his discourse, hence his character, to defend a more provocative version of Romeo and Juliet.

In Act VI, the Director explains to the magician:

Mis amigos y yo abrimos el túnel bajo la arena sin que lo notara la gente de la ciudad. Nos ayudaron muchos obreros y estudiantes que ahora niegan haber trabajado a pesar de tener las manos llenas de heridas. Cuando llegamos al sepulcro levantamos el telón. (183)

The Director has no regrets, as he explains what happened to the prestidigitator. He was so resolute on changing the conventions of theater from the “theater of the open air” to the “theater beneath the sand” that indeed the performance was overwhelming for the public--a public which now negates his participation into the turmoil of the performance. His discourse supports completely another type of performance, a performance that allows identity to be revealed as fragmented and multiple, yet frightening for a public not well versed in its active role. Moreover, the Director does not see any other alternative for the performance of Romeo and Juliet:

DIRECTOR. Y demostrar que si Romeo y Julieta agonizan y mueren para despertarse sonriendo cuando cae el telón, mis personajes, en cambio, queman la cortina y mueren de verdad en presencia de los espectadores... ¡Hay que destruir el teatro o vivir en el teatro!...

PRESTIDIGITADOR. Si avanzas un escalón más, el hombre te parecerá una brizna de hierba.

DIRECTOR. No una brizna de hierba, pero sí un navegante.

DIRECTOR. No una brizna de hierba, pero sí un navegante.

PRESTIGITADOR. Yo puedo convertir un navegante en una aguja de coser.

DIRECTOR. Eso es precisamente lo que se hace en el teatro. Por eso me atreví a realizar un difícilísimo juego poético en espera de que amor rompiera con ímpetu y diera nueva forma a los trajes. (184)

Ultimately the Director understands the demands for a different genre of performance. He has recognized the importance of the performances' genre:

HOMBRE 1. Prefiero acabar de una vez. ¡Elena! (Inicia el mutis.)

DIRECTOR. Oye, ¿si me convirtiera en un pequeño enamo de jazmines?

.....

DIRECTOR.(Abrazando al Hombre 1.) Me convertiría en una píldora de anís, una píldora donde estarían exprimidos los juncos de todos los ríos, y tú serías una gran montaña china cubierta de vivas arpas diminutas..... Yo me convertiré en lo que tú desees. (143-45)

In order for the performance of Romeo and Juliet or any performance to be beneath the sand, it has to reveal identity itself as a performance, a construction, and dismantle traditional character representation.

The first signs of the theater that are used to challenge the stable identity of the characters are costumes and actors. The realist conventions of theater, as seen for example in Benavente's plays, suggest that one character will have one costume, and that one actor will perform one character. However, in El público both concepts are ruptured,

leaving one character played by many actors, and one character wearing many costumes. In El público, changes in costumes and actors are used to represent the transformation of the Director into a fifteen-year-old boy, or Enrique, one of the three men, or Arlequin. The first indication of this costume change occurs behind the screen in the first “cuadro,” as the stage direction indicates: “(*El Hombre 3 saca un biombo y lo coloca en medio de la escena*)” (125). Although the audience sees the screen, its presence is all but symbolic. The convention of the screen, imagistically a changing room, conveys the symbolic meaning of erasure of one identity for another, without dismissing entirely the previous one, which is preserved by the presence of the screen.

The Director is forced by the three men, to disappear behind the screen. The screen is the visual mechanism of character change, since the Director goes in as the Director and comes out as Enrique. The audience expects only a change of costume, but gets much more than that: the character’s/actor’s representation of identity has changed. The Director’s changes occur flawlessly, because it is a well-rehearsed performance, thus the presence of the screen is very effective. It signals to the Director, to the male actors on stage, as well as to the public, that there is no unity in the characterization of the Director, that all is a performance, a variable performance, and that his separate identities are revealed each time he goes behind the screen, as if it were an X-ray screen. The screen reveals only one fragment of “the human.” Thus each time it is a different part of himself which is shown--a fifteen-year-old, Enrique, Arlequin-- and as he changes costumes the Director performs a different aspect of his characters; he reveals that his identity is altered, and he forces the public of Lorca’s play to acknowledge that identity is

a role in performance. Any part of the costume can be changed, as any part of himself can be altered through the screen. Thus when “El Director cambia su peluca rubia por una morena” (122), once more the Director is acting the role of an actor who tries on different costumes as his identity as a director is defined. The Director is acting, and to perform well, he has to find the correct costume. So the series of costumes in El público represents the elusiveness of the essence of character and shows that performance is identity defined or reconstructed each time. The screen, which serves as a visual reminder of this process, unveils the new identity, yet the screen is a visual icon of a performance taking place: “(*Los Hombres 2 y 3 empujan al Director. Este pasa por el biombo y aparece por la otra esquina un muchacho vestido de raso blanco con una gola al cuello. Debe ser una actriz. Lleva una pequeña guitarrita negra.*)” (126). The stage directions are always important in Lorca, and “debe ser una actriz” marks the first visual transformation of the Director. Not only does he come out from the screen as Enrique, but Enrique is performed by a woman. Thus the costumes’/actors’ representation of character enact, in El público the constant flux between identity, gendered identity, and performance.

This fluctuation is depicted in the second scene with two costumes, not two actors--“Figura de Cascabeles” and “Figura de Pámpanos”-- who interchange their roles to fool the authority figure of the Emperor:

FIGURA DE CASCABELES. Yo haré tu papel. No te descubras. Me costaría la vida.

NINO. ¡El Emperador! ¡El Emperador!

FIGURA DE CASCABELES. Todo entre nosotros era un juego.

Jugábamos. Y ahora serviré al Emperador fingiendo la voz tuya. (136).

Once again the confusion between performance and identity is actively complicated since one character/costume, can represent another costume, in what happens to be a play being performed:

FIGURA DE CASCABELES. ¡Traición! ¡ Traición!

CENTURION. ¡Cállate, rata vieja! ¡Hijo de escoba!

FIGURA DE CASCABELES. ¡Gonzalo! ¡Ayúdame, Gonzalo!

(La figura de cascabeles tira de una columna y ésta se desdobra en el
biombo blanco de la primera escena. Por detrás, salen los tres
Hombres barbados y el Director de escena).

HOMBRE 1. ¡Traición!

FIGURA DE CASCABELES. ¡Nos ha traicionado!

DIRECTOR. ¡Traición! (139)

The Director is intervening on stage as the screen unfolds, the inert column is replaced by the screen, and once again costumes are revealed as just a masquerade, an artifice during a performance. The “Figura de Cascabeles,” the Director, asks for the help of Gonzalo, Man 1, who has revealed to the Director that to direct under the sand is to understand that performing is self-identification.

The other component of the semiotics of theater that is ruptured in Lorca’s play is the unity between character and gender or gendered body. Traditional conventions of theater dictate that the character and its performative representation are unified in gender

(unless of course there is a farcical element introduced in the play, but that is not the case in El público where the problematic of identity is not grounded on comical elements). The Director is not only changing costumes in order to perform, but he is also changing gender to prove that, in order to create and direct in the theater “beneath the sand,” he first has to reveal the truth about himself. As Butler explains: “gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from various acts to follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (140). In the third scene, the Director performs different characters and both genders simultaneously. The Director changes costumes, suggesting that gender is like a costume: it is a construction, artificial and superficial, and the Director is playing that role well:

DIRECTOR. ¿Enrique? ahí tienes a Enrique. *(se quita rápidamente el traje y lo tira detrás de una columna. Debajo lleva un sutilísimo traje de bailarina. Por detrás de la columna aparece el traje de Enrique. Este personaje es el mismo ARLEQUIN blanco con una careta amarillo pálido.)* (158)

Thus the Director, who tries to direct a play in the theater beneath the sand, in the theater that reveals the truth, identifies with a ballerina in his performance. The “performative accomplishment” of the Director is not only to clothe himself as a ballerina, but also to be able to assume that identity:

DIRECTOR. No Guillermina. Yo no soy Guillermina. Yo soy la Dominga de los negritos. *(se arranca las gasas y aparece vestido con un maillot*

todo lleno de pequeños cascabeles. Los arroja detrás de la columna y desaparece seguido de los CABALLOS. Entonces aparece el personaje TRAJE DE BAILARINA.) (159)

The Director performs as the dancer in yellow tutu, and this gender transformation exposes him to further perform as a costume of a ballerina. The performance as a costume is the ultimate resistance to the conventional “power” of character representation. The character has no stable identity, and thus the resistance to a normative and unique representation is culminating with costumes--with no “core” identity-- reiterating identity as performance, including gendered performance.

This constant shifting--from Director to Enrique, to the Man with vine leaves, to a ballerina, to a costume of ballerina--destabilizes the ground of identity, as Butler suggests:

If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the spatial metaphor of a ‘ground’ will be displaced and revealed as a stylized configuration, indeed, a gendered corporealization of time. The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of substantial ground of identityThe possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction. (140)

In performing the costumes as well as the role of the dancer, the Director deconstructs identity, and purposely detaches himself from the concept of “abiding identity.” The Director’s fragmented performance of identity and gender deconstructs not only his own identity but also those of Juliet, Romeo, and the public. As Butler explains:

significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief .(140)

The Director’s “performative accomplishments” are certainly “discontinuous” acts, yet the public is not asked to believe but to question. The change of gendered costumes and bodies reveals gender as a construction, a performance, rather than a continuous, eternal essence.

Discourse, which is defined in part by what we say and do not say, also serves to construct identity, and discourse in El público also fragments identity. For example the character of the Director does not have a consistent discourse throughout the play. As the character representation varies with great latitude, so does discourse. As a result, there are in the Director’s discourse fragments of discourse which are primarily borrowed from other characters, reversible, nonsensical, and poetic.

As the Director’s identity fragments among the different roles he performs, so does his discourse. Throughout the play, the Director adapts his discourse to fit the gendered body he performs. Thus there is no cohesion, but a series of discourses. At first

the Director hesitates to change the genre of performance: “Pero no puedo. Se hundiría todo. Sería dejar ciegos a mis hijos y luego ¿Qué hago con el público?” (124). This remark foregrounds the later change of discourse since doubts are becoming more evident. Moreover, the Director’s first passage behind the screen is the catalyst for the change since, after that, the discourse changes because the verb is in the past perfect: “Yo había hecho los dramas mejores de la temporada, ¡pero ahora...!” (126), foregrounding something that will no longer happen, a finality, a readiness for something else in the Director’s performance. As his view on theater shifts from the “theater to the open air” to the “theater beneath the sand,” the Director’s discourse becomes protean, thus as the second scene starts, the Director is now performing as a statue of vine leaves, “Figura de Cascabeles,” in a dialogue with another statue, and he reformulates an earlier dialogue between Man 1 and the Director in the first scene “Romeo puede ser un ave y Julieta puede ser una piedra” (122), since now the “figura de Cascabeles” is saying: “¿Si yo me convirtiera en nube?...¿Si yo me convirtiera en caca?...¿Si yo me convirtiera en manzana?” (131). The “theater beneath the sand” allows the actor to perform and to borrow discourse from another character, thus furthering the fragmentation and the lack of cohesion. In the sixth act again, the Director borrows from Man 1, validating the “theater beneath the sand”: “Si yo pasé tres días luchando con las raíces y los golpes de agua fue para destruir el teatro” (183), which the first Man of the first scene rendered into: “Usted tiene la culpa de que las moscas hayan caído en cuatro mil naranjadas que no tenía dispuestas. Y otra vez tengo que empezar a romper las raíces” (125). As the two statues

interchange their roles with their voices only, they exclaim, both at the same time, to the Emperor, “Uno soy yo” (137), demystifying the uniqueness of each of them.

To further establish that identity is a performance, El público includes a discourse which is reversible, such as the that of the “costume of the dancer,” “Gui - guiller - guillermi - guillermi. Na - nami - namiller - namillergui. Dejadme entrar o dejadme salir” (159). As the name of the dancer is cut and reversed, the reversibility of the name suggests that a first name is as hollow as a costume, and that, much like costumes, names are interchangeable, providing no cohesion of the self. Thus identity is just what the performance directs us to do: “Dejadme entrar o dejadme salir.” The name of the ballerina has more than one referent, and to add to the performative aspect of identity, in El público they all belong to a costume. The name is no longer the ultimate reference of the representation of character, but a protean part of the performance.

Nonsensical discourse also ruptures the link between word and identity. As the character of the Director tries to ascertain his role in directing Romeo and Juliet, other characters in El público are left on their own, as if they were rehearsing. The fifth scene presents two characters; a male nurse and a naked man on the cross. Their dialogue, which lacks cohesion, suggests that the “self” also lacks a core discourse and identity. Clearly in this scene there is a reference to Christ, but the character representation of Christ is not the one that the “real” audience expects--the savior--but much more the character representation of a complaining and delirious patient, thus shocking the public of Lorca’s play:

DESNUDO. Y de Gonzalo, ¿se sabe algo?

ENFERMERO. Lo están buscando en la ruina.

DESNUDO. Yo deseo morir. ¿Cuántos vasos de sangre me habéis
sacado?

ENFERMERO. Cincuenta. Ahora te daré la hiel, y luego, a las ocho,
vendré con el bisturí para ahondarte la herida al costado.

DESNUDO. Es la que tiene más vitaminas.

ENFERMERO. Sí.

.....
DESNUDO. ¿Cuánto falta para Jerusalén?

ENFERMERO. Tres estaciones, si queda bastante carbón.

DESNUDO. Padre mío, aparta de mí este caliz de amargura.

ENFERMERO. Calláte. Ya es éste el tercer termómetro que rompes.

(166)

As the stage directions of the fifth scene explain, the public of Romeo and Juliet is applauding the play (“Al levantar el telón se oye una selva de aplauso” 165), as the “Desnudo” and the “Enfermero” appear on stage. However, the act starts with the represented figure of Christ being desanctified, and being treated like another character in the play: “En el centro de la escena, una cama de frente y perpendicular, como pintada por un primitivo, donde hay un Desnudo Rojo coronado de espigas azules” (165). As the character of Christ is performed on the stage, the nature of identity and belief about identity is completely destabilized. The representation of Christ bewilders and transgresses the “realist” tradition of character representation. Consequently, the public is

also destabilized in its ultimate Christian beliefs. Nothing, including religion, has a core, all is a performance.

Poetic language further fragments character by suggesting that a series of metaphors can lack cohesion, such as when Man 1 tells the Director about the play Romeo and Juliet: “Romeo puede ser un ave y Julieta puede ser una piedra. Romeo puede ser un grano de sal y Julieta puede ser un mapa” (122). The lack of a unique referent for the metaphors denotes the lack of essence of a character. Moreover, poetic language reaffirms the fragmentation of identity, by linking identity to costume. The imagery foregrounds the originality and the intricate structure--scissors and embroidery--of a costume “Director. (Frio y pulsando las cuerdas.) Gonzalo, te he de escupir mucho. Quiero escupirte el frac con unas tijeritas. Dame seda y aguja. Quiero bordar. No me gustan los tatuajes, pero te quiero bordar con sedas” (126).

This fragmentation has profound implications for the viewing public especially in a play entitled El público. The audience of Lorca’s play is presented as problematically as the characters of El público. The audience of the play (the horses, the students, the women) observe the Director’s rupture of character and do not like what they see: “Dama I. Es horrible perderse en un teatro y no encontrar salida” (171). Like the public within the play, an active audience is confronted with the incohesiveness of essence. If identity is a performance, then one would surmise that the role of the public of Lorca’s play is as well ultimately just a performance, and the identity of each of its members is equally fragmented. The public-within-the-play of the fifth act foregrounds the importance of the public which, at times, is shocked. The seamless ability to change from one gender to the

other, from one costume to another effortlessly, is what ultimately most disturbs the audience that come to see El público:

MUCHACHO 1. El público quiere que el poeta sea arrastrado por los caballos.

DAMA 1. Pero ¿por qué? Era un drama delicioso, y la revolución no tiene derecho a profanar las tumbas.

DAMA 2. Las voces estaban vivas y sus apariencias también. ¿Qué necesidad teníamos de lamer los esqueletos?

MUCHACHO 1. Tiene razón el acto del sepulcro estaba prodigiosamente desarrollado. Pero yo descubrí la mentira cuando vi los pies de Julieta. Eran pequeñísimos.

DAMA 2. ¡Delicioso! No querrá usted ponerles reparos.

MUCHACHO 1. Sí, pero eran demasiado pequeños para ser pies de mujer. Eran demasiado perfectos y demasiado femeninos. Eran pies de hombre, pies inventados por un hombre.

DAMA 2. ¡Qué horror! (168)

The horror is not so much in finding out that Juliet was in fact a young man interpreting the part of a young woman, but, maybe, that the manipulation of the character representation was so well done that the subterfuge was indiscernible, yet quite believable. The subterfuge is incredible for the audience of the play-within-the-play, as well as for the public of El público. Thus the public is manipulated into believing that the on stage identity of the characters is unique and true, when in fact it is just momentary, and that the

created character, Juliet, is an image of femininity constructed by a man “eran pies de hombres, pies inventados por un hombre”(168). The manipulation extends to not only costumes but to gender as well as the construction of gender, and afterwards the public is left to understand that it was a game, a performance. El público seeks to challenge the public’s expectation of “reality.” As the students who attend the performance of Romeo and Juliet explain:

ESTUDIANTE 1. Ahí está la gran equivocación de todos y por eso agoniza el teatro: el público no debe atravesar las sedas y los cartones que el poeta levanta a su dormitorio. Romeo puede ser un ave y Julieta puede ser una piedra. Romeo puede ser un grano de sal y Julieta puede ser un mapa. ¿Qué le importa eso al público?

.....

ESTUDIANTE 2 . Es cuestión de forma, de máscara. Un gato puede ser una rana, y la luna de invierno puede ser muy bien un haz de leña cubierto de gusanos ateridos. El público se ha de dormir en la palabra, y no ha de ver a través de la columna las ovejas que balan y las nubes que van por el cielo. (169)

The public is in Lorca’s play an integral art of the play:

ESTUDIANTE 4. La actitud del público ha sido detestable.

ESTUDIANTE 1. Detestable. Un espectador no debe formar nunca parte del drama.

ESTUDIANTE 2. El Director de escena evitó de manera genial que la

masa de los espectadores se enterase de esto, pero los Caballos y la revolución han destruido sus planes. (173)

The observations of the public are what divulge and seek to explain, identity as a performance.

The public of Romeo and Juliet is represented not only by the students and ladies, but also by the horses who performed at the beginning of the play. The horses represent the public of the theater of the open air, the conservative public. However, the students as well as the three men represent the new type of public, the public with a creative role, the public imagined and addressed by Lorca in the prologue of another play La zapatera prodigiosa (1930):

Respetable público...(Pausa). No, respetable público no, público solamente, y no es que el autor no considere al público respetable, todo lo contrario, sino que detrás de esta palabra hay como un delicado temblor de miedo y una especie de súplica para que el auditorio sea generoso con la mímica de los actores y el artificio del ingenio. (85)

Thus the artifice is visible on stage, but also perceived by the public who partakes in the performance of El público. Not only is identity questionable on stage, but also away from the stage. There is no core identity on stage, since it is a performance, as there is none outside the stage, thus the public is now a participant in the performance which was named after it, as if to honor it, but more to harangue it. The public of Lorca's play is a participant in a game of magic, as the presence of a magician attests: "Me parece que usted, hombre de máscara, no recuerda que nosotros usamos la cortina oscura" (181), and

representation, with discourse, costume, and gendered bodies. All is perception, all is a game: “la representación ha terminado hace horas y yo no tengo responsabilidad de lo que ha ocurrido” (187). Ultimately, each person creates her/his own play depending on her/his active role as public. Thus gender becomes merely a costume: Arlequin, magician, or ballerina. Gender is only a construction, only one element of the performance of identity on stage and potentially beyond the theatre.

Conclusion

Cocteau and Lorca: The Search for Identity

Cocteau's Les Chevaliers de la table ronde and Lorca's El público present a similar theme--identity and its representation--and suggest that identity is a performance. Moving away from the very controlled thematic plays of the realist theater of the early twenties in France and in Spain and from a very conventional aesthetics in terms of the semiotics of the theater, both playwrights expose identity, including gendered identity, as a construction and a performance. As Hornby explains:

Role playing within the role sets up a special acting situation that goes beyond the usual exploration of specific roles; it exposes the very nature of the role itself. The theatrical efficacy of role playing within the role is the result of its reminding us that all human roles are relative, that identities are learned rather than innate. (72)

My comparative analysis of Les Chevaliers de la table ronde and El público shows that the representation of character in these plays ruptures the realist dramatic concept of coherent character as presented in the plays of G r ldy and Benavente in the early part of the twentieth century. Also the plays present the semiotic of signs, such as discourse, costumes, and gender, as unstable. However, the lack of cohesion of the characters in

Cocteau's and Lorca's plays has repercussions beyond the semiotics of these plays, specifically in the performative aspect of the public. All of Cocteau's and Lorca's works, but especially Les Chevaliers de la table ronde and El público suggest to the public that identity is a role that is fragmented and multiple. The public of these two plays is represented as a character in the plays. To the extent that it sees itself reflected in the public-within-the-play, it is also fragmented, inconsistent, and unstable. In these plays, the public is active, engaged in the performance, contrary to the plays of G r ldy and Benavente in which the public was reassured to see on stage the representation of their value system. The reflection of the public was assured by signs that are stable. Not only did the public see itself in the plays of G r ldy and Benavente, but it also viewed itself as separate from the activity on the stage. It did not have to be engaged in the performance. However, in Les Chevaliers de la table ronde as well as in El p blico, the validation of a status quo no longer exists: it has been replaced by the frightening realization that no signs are stable, least of all those that constitute character, and by extension identity. The public, then, experiences a loss of the sense of cohesion.

Cocteau's Les Chevaliers de la table ronde destabilizes characters by rupturing the unity of their discourse, costumes, and genders. The metadramatic elements of the play, the representation of the director, actor, and public, extends this fragmentation to the concept of identity. Ginifer defies realistic conventions of discursive unity by mixing registers and speech patterns, which often conflict with the "character" s/he seeks to perform. Thus for example, there is a clash between Ginifer's colloquialisms and the regal costume of the Queen when s/he performs this role. Likewise, there is a contrast between

the demure Gauvain and the King's outspoken nephew. The bodies of the characters Ginifer performs also disrupt the stable concept of gender, since the same character--Ginifer--is performed by male and female actors. Ginifer acts the role of the Queen or Gauvain with ease but then steps out of character. This changeable performance suggests that these signs of discourse, costume, and gender are arbitrary. The role-playing, in turn, unveils identity as a performance, a construction of potentially changeable signs.

Lorca's El público also presents identity as a performance by similarly manipulating discourse, costumes, and gender. As a series of unstable signs, the Director's discourse becomes unstable for him since in order to define his role as a director, he adopts the discourse of various characters. His character is further fragmented by the ever changing costumes he wears as he seeks to stabilize his role. The costumes themselves may be roles, as in the case of the "traje de ballerina"; suggesting that character is a superficial ephemeral construction. There are further disjunctures between character and body. The bodies of the characters can be female or male, as in the Arlequin, and in addition, the character may not be represented by a body but by a costume. Therefore the representation of character can be an arbitrary construction. Ultimately, the most disturbing aspect for the audience to accept is not only the change of gender but the ease with which it occurs. The Director changes into a ballerina costume, and performs not only as a ballerina, but also as a costume, combining the gender/costume/body aspect of the performance. The theater audience can no longer identify itself with the stage audience. The ever-changing set of costumes, genders, and bodies demonstrates the lack of essence.

Cocteau and Lorca demonstrate in their plays their willingness to destabilize a system of signification and present an alternative by exploring identity through anti-mimetic, conflicting semiotic signs. The metadramatic elements of the plays, in turn, imply that the characters--including the director, the actors, and the public--symbolize a broader concept of identity, which then becomes a set of roles in constant flux. The public then as an integral part of the theatrical representation must confront its own implicit fragmentation. Les Chevaliers de la table ronde and El público, then, are perfect examples of an aesthetic ensemble that forces the audience to perceive character and its own identity not as a stable essence but as shifting sand.

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