



LIEBESTOD - EL OLOR A SANGRE NO SE ME QUITA DE LOS OJOS - JUAN BELMONTE THE REEK OF BLOOD SMILES OUT AT ME HISTORY/IES OF THEATRE III

INTERVIEW WITH ANGÉLICA LIDDELL

You speak of the emotion in Juan Belmonte's work as a torero; are you talking about an absolute emotion that would be particularly perceptible in this art, which ceaseless forces man to face his mortal fate?

Angélica Liddell: The emotion in Belmonte's work elevates consciousness to a sublime level. Emotion is the aesthetic supremacy of the *torero*. For Juan Belmonte, bullfighting is a spiritual exercise, to the point that he forgets that he has a body; that's why emotions can reach the infinite spaces Pascal wrote about. According to Ramón Pérez De Ayala, the time of bullfighting ended with Juan Belmonte. Belmonte used to say that he fought bulls as he was and as he loved. He saw love and art, love and being, as one. Unfortunately, today's lack of spirituality weakens all the arts, and not only the art of bullfighting. In art, tragedy has been replaced by the sense of duty, by democratic responsibilities, by social activism. We've confused the law of the State for the law of beauty, which means the end of art.

How would you define that emotion in relationship to you and to dramatic creation?

After reading the biography written by Manuel Chaves Nogales and José Bergamín's work about bullfighting, I realised that I make theatre the way Juan Belmonte fought bulls. I'm talking about the intention and the shadows, the feelings, the intransigence of the man from Triana*, this suicidal anxiety, this desire to die. I make theatre the way others fight bulls. There is a complete identification between the art of bullfighting and my way of being onstage. This unceasing quest for tragic beauty in expression doesn't mean risking one's life but giving all you can, fighting with death as an urge. I understood I was looking for the same thing Juan Belmonte was, I'm looking for the sublime moment, for transfiguration, for overwhelming enthusiasm, for the blinding light, for this lyrical feeling that washes over you when you love. I'm looking for the double dangers that echo in the depths of the soul. Sometimes I find them, sometimes I don't. It's not a question of will. You can will yourself into loving, nor can you will yourself into being a bullfighter, Juan Belmonte says. Will is for rehearsals. Once you're onstage, all that remains is danger and transfiguration. An offering.

You write that bullfighters are writers in blood...

It's from Friedrich Nietzsche. He says we have to write in blood, and we'll find that blood is spirit. The Pirañica* used to say that, when she sang well, she could taste blood in her mouth. I carry that image inside me always, that way of expressing myself, that transfiguration. I talk to my ghosts. I let them possess me. I'm not an actress. Actually, I don't like actors.

What is the place of bullfighting in today's society? Is that art the symptom of the human quest for passion?

Today's society is incapable of understanding *torero* because it is ice cold, empty, ignorant. It has no sense of beauty, and lacks the sensibility and intellectual and aesthetic refinement needed for bullfighting and its culture to be understood and practiced. Our society is vulgar, mediocre, it strives for nothing but social and political consensus and has been impoverished by incentives that have led to the creation of a points system for culture, a culture of general interest rather than spiritual interest; it's a society that favours stupidity over complexity, a society full of rights but without gods or rites, full of itself, without any conscience of the sacred. And bullfighting exists above all to give pleasure to the gods, just like theatre is a sacred space.

Is there a symbolic bridge between the end of a love and the death of the bull in the arena?

It has nothing to do with the end of love, it's connected to the very essence of passion, to its climax, which is death. Love only becomes real in death. It's in that sense that we could talk about a symbolic bridge between death from love (*liebestod*) and death in the arena: sacrifice and consecration, obeying to the end to the demands of something that is much larger than our own will.

In *Liebestod*, what form does the relationship between the story of Tristan and Iseult as told by Richard Wagner and that of Juan Belmonte take?

My plays are always conceived as crossroads, the place where you meet the ghosts of hanged men and those who have run away from the law. They're created with the power of the unconscious. Juan Belmonte and Richard Wagner cross paths to talk about a history of theatre which is the history of my roots, of my depths. They cross paths to give voice to my darkness, to the origin of my plays. The sky falls and hell ascends to the throne of God. I'm not that worried about what will be understood; what worries me is what can't be understood, the sense of wonder, of epiphany when faced with the inexplicable. What I'm interested in isn't to reproduce reality but the real, that is, the invisible. That's what the title says, paraphrasing Francis Bacon: the smell of blood keeps staring at me.

Is emotion—including love—a possible link towards eternity? How do you want to show that on a theatre stage?

Bullfighting, like poetry, is love transformed into geometry. The harmony of infinite spaces reaches its apex in bullfighting. The only expression of the soul is beauty, that's our link to eternity and to the face of God. Onstage, I try to draw the face of God. I never know if I quite manage to do it.

Is *Liebestod* the epic of bullfighting?

Not only. It's also an offering. It's the work of a mortal woman in love. It's also an immolation. It's what I see as my history of theatre.

Male figures are everywhere in *Liebestod*. Do you see bullfighting as a male art? Who are those figures?

It's not a male art but a sexual art, it's an art in which what matters isn't only the sperm of man but that of the animal, it's violent sex, with all the beauty that violence contains. The feminine and the masculine merge together in bullfighting. They mate. In *Liebestod*, I split in two. On the one hand, I'm a torero, I have a bloody, phallic, and erotic relationship with the audience. I am phallic. I fornicate with the audience. But when I find myself in front of the bull, I let it penetrate me, I'm a vulva, offered to its penis, to its power, to its delicious raptures, I want to be possessed by the bull, impregnated by this seminal power, by the dark and mortal energy of animal sex, which is in the end the energy of love, of the shrines. And to complete the Holy Trinity, I make an offering to the third person, the unique and divine recipient of this gift.

Interview conducted by Moira Dalant in February 2021 and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cleach

* Triana is a neighbourhood in Seville, famous for its toreros, its flamenco singers and dancers, and its artisans.

* Pirañica* Ana Blanco Soto, known under the stage name Tía Anica la Piriñaca, was one of the greatest flamenco singers of the 20th century.