

Xavier VILLANOVA

Sentio et excrucior ergo sum

A pure feeling that transcends cognition.

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Noh 能楽 playwright.

If I wanted intellectual satisfaction, I'd stay home and read a book. If I wanted a story with believable characters, tremendous actors, and easy entertainment, I'd turn on Netflix and binge on *House of Cards*. But, if I wanted to be profoundly shaken, I'd go to the theatre.

Drama, to me, is a red X marked genre on a black map that pinpoints the location where we can open our chests to have our foundations shattered. Nothing more, nothing less. Why would any sane person get all dressed, venture full sail into the unnerving traffic jams, pay the price, board a shabby chair, and await the darkness before and after the tempest, if that lost individual does not want some irreverent actor to stare him in the eye, breathe in his ear, spit: This is our collective wound, Thomas, come, touch it, kill your doubts, feel my warm blood, stick your finger inside my fracture, so we can both confirm our frailty and once more, atone for our wrongs.

In literature festivals all across the world, people ask if books are going to yield to e-readers, which is similar to asking why theatre hasn't been replaced by TV or cinema. Well, it's because people don't buy a paperback just for the unviolated sequenced words, as theatre suppliants don't undergo the ritual just to fulfill their craving for tales of human descent into the Maelström. We walk into the mystery to be confronted, to see and be seen, to move and be moved, to publicly objurgate the gods only to face our fate with grace, claiming like *Oedypus at Colonus*, after arriving at his final resting grove, *For my sufferings and the long time that has accompanied me and, thirdly, nobility, teach me to acquiesce.*

When, fixed in our appointed place with the lights still on, we feel a rising tension; yes, it's about to begin; once the machine sets in motion, there'll be no stopping until the curtain falls, severing our self-assurance, leaving us deprived of our most cherished certainties.

How and why would we want to challenge our identities in this way, that construct of self that we so eagerly build upon day in and day out? For the same reason Mexicans eat *chile* and drink *Mezcal*, or anyone in this world rides a rollercoaster... It is, as Nietzsche laid out, to "gaze long into an abyss, [so that] the abyss will also gaze into thee"; to have the contrast of death's closeness with a poetic sense of tragedy make us feel alive. And where does it start? With a play, a checkered agent of chaos inscribed with interspaced blades and sufficient ambiguity to enable a sentient being to inhabit this shifting quicksand territory and emerge vulnerable, broken, and raw.

It is imperative, hence, for the playwright to renounce all pretenses of acting as a wise-all-knowing creator. If a play is to be the trigger that sets off inescapable emotional time bombs

once the actors viscerally explode on stage, then the writer must set aside his wit and summon that which rives him.

When a play is written from a bleeding perspective, the actor knows he is in Orestes hands, the tragic ancient Greek hero who unwillingly slayed his mother, and whose scarlet drenched palms seek absolution from hamlet to hamlet. He will, just like Prometheus, be required not to ACT, in the sense of doing, but rather its opposite: to WITHSTAND the perennial devouring of the thousand-eyed eagle that consumes his bowels every sunset, only to find them replenished each sunrise.

To draft for the theatre is to be involved in a never-ending process that allows the tide to hit so hard that the audience might very well wreck in the emotional aftermath. When people applaud as soon as the darkness falls after one of my plays, I recognize failure. But, if there's an abiding silence of prostration, then purpose has been served and the gods can feast.

Hamlet: *Hum, I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play,
Have, by the very cunning of the scene,
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaim'd their malefactions;
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak.
With most miraculous organ.
Shakespeare Act II, scene 2*