

**Recreating Shakespeare:  
*You are my destiny (Lo stupro di Lucrezia)*  
12<sup>th</sup> World Theatre Festival  
Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb,  
26 September 2014**

Remedios Perni  
*Universidad Isabel I / Universidad de Murcia, Spain*

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

*Director and adaptation:* Angélica Liddell

*Cast:* Joele Anastasi, Ugo Giacomazzi, Fabián Augusto Gómez Bohórquez, Julian Isenia, Lola Jiménez, Andrea Lanciotti, Angélica Liddell, Antonio L. Pedraza, Borja López, Emilio Marchese, Antonio Pauletta, Isaac Torres, Roberto de Sarno, Antonio Veneziano. Chœur ukrainien, Free Voice: Anatolii Landar, Oleksii Ievdokimov, Mykhailo Lytvynenko.

*Set design:* Angélica Liddell

*Music:* the Ukrainian Choir Free Voice, Händel

*Produced by:* Atra Bilis

*You are my destiny (Lo stupro di Lucrezia)* is the title of Angélica Liddell's theatrical take on Shakespeare's poem *The Rape of Lucrece*. The Spanish playwright and her theatre company, Atra Bilis, premiered this production on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2014 at the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb as part of the 12<sup>th</sup> World Theatre Festival, where the production was widely applauded. After this success, Atra Bilis toured the play throughout Europe: Venice, Modena, Valencia, Paris and Berlin were just some of the cities where it was staged. What might have attracted the theatre-goers to Liddell's recreation of the Lucrece myth is its quite innovative and even provocative point of departure: instead of victimising Lucrece,

Liddell turns her into the only protagonist of the play, while Tarquin becomes a mute character, almost an object of study exemplifying the consequences of desire.

Angélica Liddell's interest in Shakespeare is well known. She has adapted and directed three of his plays, namely *Hamlet* (*La falsa suicida*, 2000), *King Lear* (*Hysterica Passio*, 2003), and *Richard III* (*El año de Ricardo*, 2005), and the long narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece* (*You are my destiny*, 2014). In *You are my destiny*, as on the previous occasions, Liddell presents a radically free version of the Shakespearean text. Her aesthetics being a hybrid of baroque and contemporary aesthetics and anachronistic twists, Liddell manages to combine Shakespeare's words with her own lyrical monologue, and also with scenes extending to fifteen or twenty minutes where all the spectators can hear is noise (objects falling, screams), music (Händel or the Ukrainian Choir) or silence.

For about two hours and twenty minutes, Liddell provides her audience with a series of performance events, rather than a conventional play, in which only ten lines from Shakespeare's poem are quoted (in Italian in this specific production):

But will is deaf, and hears no heedful friends;  
 Only he hath an eye to gaze on beauty,  
 And dotes on what he looks, 'gainst law or duty.

'I have debated even in my soul,  
 What wrong, what shame, what sorrow I shall breed;  
 But nothing can affection's course control,  
 Or stop the headlong fury of his speed.  
 I know repentant tears ensue the deed,  
 Reproach, disdain and deadly enmity  
 Yet strive I to embrace mine infamy. (Proudfoot *et al.* 2014, 495–504)

By selecting these lines, Liddell focuses on Tarquin's convulsions of the mind. As Liddell herself has written for the programme notes, what interests her is the power of desire over will, the ways in which Tarquin convinces himself that he needs to obey his sex drive, even if he is destined to lose everything afterwards. More traditional interpretations of *The Rape of Lucrece* emphasize either the woman's act of self-destruction to regain dignity or the political consequences of the rape, which leads to the people's uprising, the dethronement of the Tarquins, and the founding of the Roman Republic. Therefore,

the average spectator feels completely astonished when facing the fact that this new Lucrece is mainly fascinated with her rapist's possible motivations and ready to assume what has happened, and go on living and loving her abuser.

Nevertheless, Liddell's version is much more complex than this. Even though Tarquin is said to play a relevant role here, it is Lucrece—played by Liddell herself—who draws most attention to herself, as she is on stage throughout and speaks most of the text. Whereas we hear Tarquin's voice all through the first half of Shakespeare's poem, we only hear Lucrece in Liddell's recreation. But, instead of acquiring the voice of a victim who can articulate her thoughts only in terms of patriarchal ideology, as she does in the poem (lamenting the consequences of men's power but feeling incapable of questioning such power), this new Lucrece speaks about her own observations and experiences (a stay in Venice, a dream, her encounter with Tarquin in Hell) and, furthermore, she dares to deconstruct and decode her own language, yelling, spitting and filling her mouth with beer.



As pointed out by Coppelia Kahn, before being raped Lucrece is a paradigm of the importance of female chastity for the patriarchy; after her suicide, she constitutes a political symbol for the government of men (1997, 34). In Liddell's hands, Lucrece revolts against decency, becoming a sort of punk icon in her leather jacket, a fallen woman drinking alcohol, and a prostitute in a black satin nightgown who offers relief to a group of soldiers after the battle. Thus Lucrece does not provide the patriarchal order with a dead female body to avenge. In that sense, Liddell's work reminds us of *King Kong Theory* (2007) by Virginie Despentes, who has challenged sexism and patriarchy since she survived a rape when she was young.



The staging of the rape of Lucrece itself is challenging due to its iconoclastic nature. It is evoked by a band of drummers playing with increasing speed and intensity while Lucrece is screaming, bawling and shaking violently on the stage. In the meanwhile, Tarquin walks in and stands still. He looks apathetic, insensitive. For more than fifteen minutes, the spectators are confronted with Lucrece's suffering and the abominable idea of her rape at the hands of this man and the ten drummers, who embody Tarquin's violence symbolically through sound. Later in the production these same

drummers appear onstage again. This time they look exhausted; they lean against the wall and cry. They are soldiers and Lucrece is now a nurse who assists them.

In Liddell's version, Lucrece does not commit suicide but undergoes a series of painful scenes showing both her decadence and rebellious will. Towards the end of the play, she addresses herself to the audience as if summarising the whole series of events:

And this is how a rapist came and turned me into his lover.  
Because, among all the men who surrounded me, father, husband  
and friend, fans of my virtue, slaves of their ambitions, with my  
blood still warm on the knife, the only one who spoke of love, the  
only one who did not speak of his fatherland, the only one who did  
not speak of war, the only one who did not speak of politics, the  
only one who preferred to lose everything and gain an instant of  
love was the rapist, Tarquin. (Liddell 2015, 53–54)<sup>2</sup>

Then, instead of stabbing herself and dying publically to restore her chastity, as the patriarchal society seems to demand, this Lucrece celebrates her passionate love with a beer shower. She challenges and subverts social order, and in this way she emancipates herself from what a victim is expected to do as a victim.

But, of course, Angélica Liddell is not so naïve as to conclude her performance here. She ultimately shows a Lucrece who, regardless of her subversive love revelation, is still rooted in our cultural codes and structures. The last scene presents an intriguingly ambiguous "happy" ending. The actors on stage (mainly the drummers, travestied and forming couples) dance to the sound of *You are my destiny*, by Paul Anka. Lucrece is happy at first but then, as the song progresses, her face becomes more and more frightened, whereas Tarquin remains apathetic and uninterested. Finally, a hearse descends from the theatre ceiling, half-covered in flowers, very slowly. This is Lucrece's ironic end.

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<sup>2</sup> My translation from the original text in Spanish.



In contrast with other productions based on *The Rape of Lucrece*, Angélica Liddell's recreation of the myth defies the audience's expectations from beginning to end. She substitutes the image of rape with the sound and noise of rape; and she questions the social demands regarding rape through both the exploration of the abuser's drives and the suggestion of a subversive behaviour on the part of the survivor. Finally, when Liddell seems to signal that a new life is possible after the trauma she disarms the spectators with an ultimate ironic twist: Lucrece's destiny is not a socially reintegrated Tarquin; Lucrece's destiny is death. Equally moved and devastated

after more than two hours of beauty and darkness, the spectators cannot but applaud in tears.

### References

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