

Shadow Boxing

Carmina Narro

This play opened in 1996 as part of the cycle “In This Corner” at the Contemporary Theater Forum, run by Ludwig Margules.

Cast:

Andrés Belaunzarán ALVARO GUERRERO
Julia SURIA MCGREGOR

Set and Lighting

Carlos Trejo

Director

Carmina Narro

Scene:

The time is now. On the stage is a long, narrow table, one by nine meters, with two chairs, a candelabra with candles, a bottle of red wine and two wine glasses. The upstage end of the table is partially set for an extremely romantic dinner; the audience may sit at the downstage end.

The room has a coatrack and three doors: one is the entrance, and the other two lead to the kitchen and the bedroom.

Drawings by Lydia Peña



Andrés enters from the kitchen. He is forty-ish, although it is difficult to be exact about it. He brings in two table settings and table napkins. He is so meticulous setting the table it becomes exasperating. He exits to the bedroom.

There is a knock at the door, and a few moments later Julia enters after opening with her own keys. She is wearing a mini-skirted tailored suit and a trench coat. She is in her early thirties. Andrés comes in wearing a bow tie.

JULIA: And those glasses?
 ANDRÉS: I bought them today, for today.
 JULIA: I bought these shoes, but not for today.
 ANDRÉS: You don't have to tell me that.

(Julia takes off her coat and moves toward the coatrack.)

JULIA: Does it still fall over?
 ANDRÉS: No, I fixed it.

(She hangs her coat on the coatrack, which falls over from the weight.)

ANDRÉS: Fuck!
 JULIA: Forget it. It's okay.
 ANDRÉS: I swear I did fix it—I thought—for today.
 JULIA: I'll put it on the chair.



ANDRÉS: No, wait, I'll put it in the bedroom.

(Andrés exits. Julia looks with almost imperceptible deprecation at the set table. Andrés enters.)

JULIA: So you've had a lot of free time...
 ANDRÉS: Yeah, I've hardly gone to the lab.
 JULIA: Did you have a relapse?
 ANDRÉS: No, I gave myself a vacation. But do sit down, please.
 JULIA: I thought you were never going to say it.
 ANDRÉS: Why do I have to say it? This is your house.
 JULIA: That's news.
 ANDRÉS: It's in your name.
 JULIA: Then you should pay me rent. *(Pause.)* Sorry. Could you pour me some wine?
 ANDRÉS: It has to breathe.
 JULIA: More?
 ANDRÉS: No, of course not.

(He pours her a glass of wine.)

JULIA: Well, I wanted to talk...
 ANDRÉS: I made duck in plum sauce with applesauce.
 JULIA: Too sweet.
 ANDRÉS: ... and sauerkraut.
 JULIA: Why red wine, then?
 ANDRÉS: You don't like white.
 JULIA: You eat fowl with ...
 ANDRÉS: With the wine of your choice! *(Pause.)* Sorry.
 JULIA: How have you been doing?
 ANDRÉS: Not good.
 JULIA: Mmmm...
 ANDRÉS: I haven't been doing well at all, Julia.
 JULIA: You haven't asked me how your son is.
 ANDRÉS: If something were wrong, by this time you'd have had me hunted down and locked up.

(After a moment, Julia laughs spontaneously.)

ANDRÉS: Lately, I've come to the conclusion that the only reason you married me was that I made you laugh.

JULIA: It's a good reason.

ANDRÉS: For you, maybe. Shall I serve dinner?

JULIA: No, not yet. I'm not that hungry.

(Julia goes to pour herself some wine. Andrés gets up.)

ANDRÉS: Let me.

JULIA: No, please, don't Andrés. *(Pause.)*
Don't try so hard...

ANDRÉS: No, no way. *(He gives her the bottle.)*
You do it.

(Pause.)

JULIA: I called you at the lab because I wasn't going to come, but you say you're on vacation.

ANDRÉS: Yes, I was at the lab.

JULIA: The answering machine picked up.

ANDRÉS: Yeah.

JULIA: Why didn't you answer?

ANDRÉS: Because I was with the rats. My little rats.

JULIA: That's why you didn't answer?

ANDRÉS: I was petting them, well, one of them.

JULIA: What?

ANDRÉS: Well, I was going to ... operate on her. I told you about this.

JULIA: No, you never told me you went to the lab to pet rats.

ANDRÉS: The little things know it when you're going to kill them, and I have to pet them so they feel you love them before you open up their little bellies. Fuck! I work with them, how can I not love them? I cry a lot when I open up their heads and eyes. Their little eyes...

JULIA: So you cry over the rats...

ANDRÉS: Yes.

JULIA: Mmmmm.

(Short pause.)



ANDRÉS: Shall I serve dinner?

JULIA: Please, you're talking about disemboweled rats and you want me to have dinner.

ANDRÉS: It's the only thing I can talk about.

JULIA: And your *assistant*? Why didn't she answer?

ANDRÉS: I fired her.

JULIA: Why?

ANDRÉS: Because she put a wheel in their cage. You know, the kind they make spin themselves when they walk.

JULIA: That's why you fired her? She did it so they could have some fun.

ANDRÉS: You don't understand.

JULIA: What don't I understand?

ANDRÉS: I've never seen anything crueler.

JULIA: Well, if you took them for a ride on a roller coaster you might lose them.

ANDRÉS: Don't you understand? They run and run endlessly believing they're going somewhere and never move from that spot ... and then I come around with my scalpel...

JULIA: Oh now, don't start crying...

ANDRÉS: No, I've learned to control myself.

JULIA: Andres, I wanted to talk about...

ANDRÉS: Not hungry yet?

JULIA: No. I want to talk to you.

ANDRÉS: We are talking.

JULIA: It's always the same.

ANDRÉS: Julia, you know...

JULIA: I can't live with you. I can't. Do you understand that?

ANDRÉS: Why not? We live in the same city.

JULIA: I tried my best, my very best.



ANDRÉS: Where have I heard that? Where have I heard that?

JULIA: I did everything possible...

ANDRÉS: Curiously enough, the only one who believes in those “possibilities” is you.

JULIA: Don’t start, Andrés.

ANDRÉS: Because to me, the only thing clear are your “impossibilities.”

JULIA: It doesn’t surprise me that you think that... It surprises me that you’re treating me to your duck in plum sauce—which really is not your forte at all, by the way—and that you are dumb enough to come up with the sissy idea of setting up these ridiculous candles when the only thing I want is to have nothing to do with you. Am I making myself clear?

ANDRÉS: How’re things at the brokerage house?

JULIA: Am I making myself clear?

ANDRÉS: At least you’ve learned to say, “Am I making myself clear?” instead of the unbearable, “Do you understand?”

JULIA: Yeah, Andrés, whatever you say.

(Andrés gets closer to her.)

ANDRÉS: Julia... *(He touches her gently.)* Julia... I’ve put up with a lot from you, a very lot. Heavy stuff. You know it. And you haven’t taken it into account.

JULIA: Don’t talk to me like that.

ANDRÉS: You have to be with me. *(He moves away from her.)* Do you want more wine? *(He pours. She drinks.)* Drink, drink a bit more. You’re a better person when you drink.

JULIA: You can stay here all your life if you want. The only thing I need is...

ANDRÉS: When you drink you become more... loving? Don’t you miss me? Because I miss myself with you. I miss “us.”

(Pause.)

JULIA: Your son wants...

ANDRÉS: My son is not invited to this dinner.

(Andrés exits to the kitchen. Julia is tense. He comes back with snacks on a plate.)

ANDRÉS: How about some crackers with oyster mousse?

(He hands them to her, she eats reluctantly. He takes out a small dark coloured flask and puts it on the table. Julia is disconcerted and talks with her mouth full.)

JULIA: What’s that?

ANDRÉS: Acid.

(Julia spits out the cracker.)

ANDRÉS: What kind of manners are those, Julia? *(Short pause.)* Well, I always

knew elegance was not your thing. Despite your Italian suits. What's missing is elegance of the mind.

JULIA: Why do you have that here?

ANDRÉS: I am a biochemist. I'm Andrés Be-launzarán, glad to meet you.

JULIA: Why do you have that? Why put it on the table?

ANDRÉS: Are you scared of me?

(Julia gets up and walks to the door.)

JULIA: Have dinner by yourself. Alone. Do you hear me? Alone.

ANDRÉS: You'd better not think of leaving. *(Pause.)* I just want to finish our conversation. The duck isn't bad. If you don't want to try it, that's okay. Sit down. *(Pause. Julia sits down.)* You don't treat a man who had cooked for you like that. I'm ashamed of you, Julia. "Julia." What a lovely name.

JULIA: What's this all about? Please tell me.

ANDRÉS: Let's say it's because of the fuzz on your cheeks. I remember once, I came home late and you were asleep. Driving through the city I kept thinking I would catch you in my bed with another man. I came in, you weren't with anybody else and you had left the light on. I took my shoes off so as not to waken you, and I crawled to the bed on all fours to smell you to find out if you had been fucking somebody. And, oh, yes, you smelled of sex, but then I saw fuzz on your cheeks. I came closer, just a centimeter away from your face to see it... See it... Your breathing filled the room. You woke up and let out a tremendous cry. *(Pause.)* Such bad taste. Remember?

JULIA: How can I forget.

ANDRÉS: You want a cracker?

JULIA: No, thanks.

ANDRÉS: No acid in them.

JULIA: What are you getting at, Andrés?

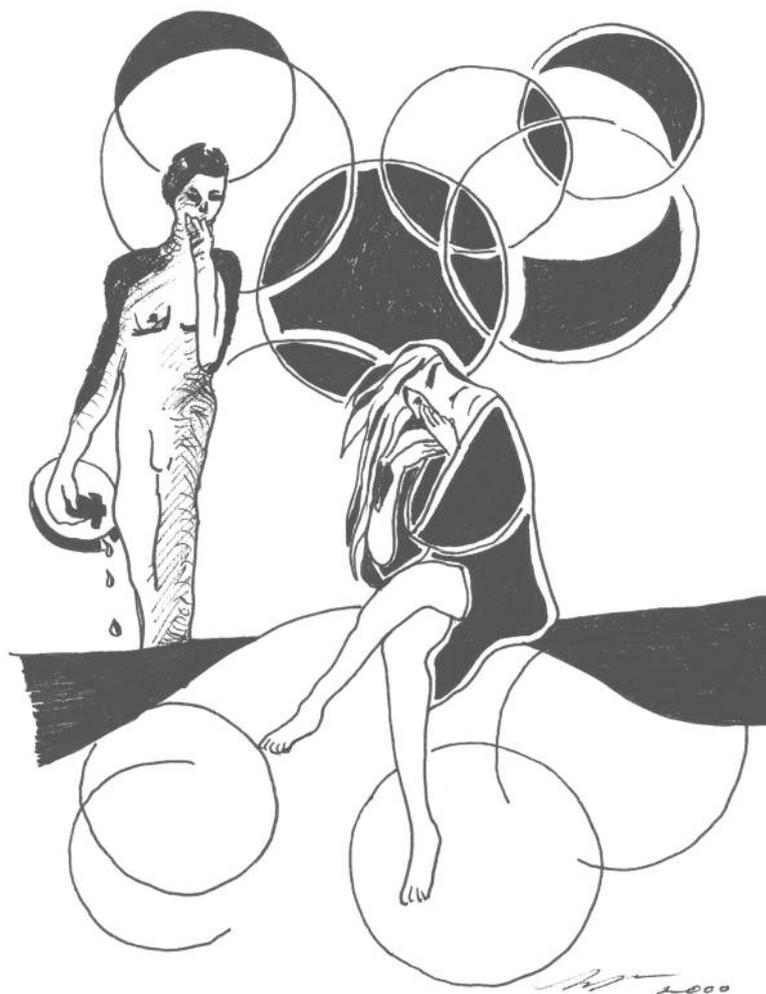
ANDRÉS: Do I have to be getting at something? Ever since you arrived, you've been unsociable.

JULIA: I don't believe anyone could be sociable with you.

ANDRÉS: Why? Because I haven't fucked the whole neighborhood? That's why I'm not sociable? I'm not sociable because I can't stand people. I don't need them. You need people because you can't go through life surrounded by mirrors so you can look at yourself all the time.

JULIA: Why do you want us to be together? To get back at me because I never loved you?

ANDRÉS: I know you love me. But I have to



protect you against yourself. *(Pause.)*
 Unbutton your blouse. *(Pause.)* I said,
 unbutton your blouse.

JULIA: No.

ANDRÉS: No?

JULIA: I'm not doing anything with you.

ANDRÉS: Neither am I. Show me your breasts.
(Pause.) Though it is interesting to
 sleep with a woman who has been
 in the bed of every man she ever met.

JULIA: You talk as if you really cared. I'm
 not going to feel guilty about it at this
 stage of the game.

ANDRÉS: I don't believe you left a single
 friend of mine alive.

JULIA: You don't have any friends.

ANDRÉS: Show me your breasts.

(Julia gets up to leave.)

ANDRÉS: You want me to smack you? Do you
 know how many times I'd rather you
 hit me instead of having to listen to
 your insults? You know why? Because
 I'll never be able to forget them. I do
 have a good memory. *(Pause.)* If you
 stay the shock might give me amnesia.

JULIA: I'd rather die.

ANDRÉS: "I'd rather die." You're so cheap, real-
 ly. Stop looking at that bloody flask
 and pay attention to me!

JULIA: You're the cheap one. You've always
 settled for a little attention.



(Pause.)

ANDRÉS: Julia, Julia, Julia... It would be good
 if so much pain were to some pur-
 pose... if it went somewhere... or
 became something beautiful... but I
 don't believe it would, really. I've
 always wanted the impossible...

(Pause.)

ANDRÉS: I know I'll always miss you. But it
 doesn't really matter. Believe me. I'll
 be just fine.

(Pause.)

ANDRÉS: I'll get your coat.

*(Andrés goes to the bedroom while Julia breathes
 a sigh of relief. He comes back and opens the
 coat behind her, but Julia is uneasy about him
 being behind her.)*

ANDRÉS: Please...

*(Julia accepts with mistrust. Andrés takes a rag
 with chloroform out of his trouser pocket and
 puts it over her face. They struggle a while until
 she passes out. Then he sits her carefully on a
 chair that by this time must be with its back to
 the audience. He takes out a rope and quickly
 ties her hands and feet to the chair. He sits in
 front of her and looks at her for a moment, tak-
 ing a large drink of wine from his glass. He gets
 up and nimbly picks up the flask of acid and
 pours it on Julia's face without looking at her.
 Julia screams horribly, tries to free herself, but it's
 useless. Slowly she becomes still.)*

ANDRÉS: You're going to have to understand,
 that the way you look now, I'm the
 only one who can still love you.

(Fade out.)