

# THE PERSISTENCE OF DALI

## AN ABSURDITY IN ONE ACT

By **Robert F. Ciccotelli**

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## THE PERSISTENCE OF DALI

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**SYNOPSIS:** *THE PERSISTENCE OF DALI* is an absurdist piece of theatre that seeks to explore the great twentieth century surrealist artist's life, theories and philosophies. Combining references to actual works of art, documented statements, and biographical details, the play explores, both in a comical and profound manner, the brilliant Spanish painter that was Salvador Felipe Jacinto Dali.

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 Men, 3 Women)

SALVADOR DALI .....An artist. (42 lines)

BRYNN .....A middle aged woman from Liverpool, England. (46 lines)

VLAD .....Brynn's American nephew. (78 lines)

ESTA .....Vlad's best friend, from America also. (80 lines)

GYPSY DANCER .....A traditional flamenco dancer. (No lines)

### SETTING

Dali's studio in his home in the village of Port Lligat, two miles from Cadaques, Spain.

**TIME:** The mid 1980s.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

Three independent flats, 4 x 8 feet, covered with a scrim material, stand at upstage left, upstage centre, and upstage right. On the flat at upstage left, painted on the scrim material is a replica of Dali's "*The Burning Giraffe*" (1937); on the flat at upstage centre, a replica of "*The Persistence of Memory*" (1931); and on the flat at upstage right, a replica of "*The Anthropomorphic Cabinet*" (1936). These three flats remain on stage at all times while other set pieces are brought in by characters as needed.

## MUSIC

A small Spanish guitar ensemble, in the orchestra pit provides traditional flamenco music before, during and after the performance.

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ACT 1, SCENE 1

**AT RISE:**

*Lights: Black. The GYPSY DANCER dances the flamenco downstage centre; she begins slowly, then progresses to a passionate flourish; a flamenco guitarist in the stage's orchestra pit accompanies her. Slowly, a single light, directly above, illuminates her with a tight circle of light. When she finishes, BLACKOUT. A single light behind the upstage centre flat illuminates DALI standing behind the scrim with his classic pose. BLACKOUT. A counter on wheels and three stools are rolled in from the wings by BRYNN, VLAD and ESTA to downstage centre. DALI quickly moves to downstage centre counter and stands behind it. The others sit diagonally at downstage right. Throughout the play, BRYNN continuously knits while VLAD and ESTA doodle in their sketch books. Lights: Downstage wash.*

**DALI:** Today, we begin with a *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans*. (*Aside.*) A *Premonition of War*. Followed by a little *Rhinocerotoc Gooseflesh* and, my speciality, *Gala with Two Lamb Chops Balanced on her Shoulder*. Ending, of course, with a *Soft Self-Portrait with a Rasher of Grilled Bacon*.

**BRYNN:** What, no *Anthropomorphic Bread*?

**VLAD:** And no *Meeting of the Illusion and the Arrested Moment--Fried Eggs Presented on a Spoon*?

**ESTA:** Dude, I just want some *Ordinary French Loaf with Two Fried Eggs Riding Without a Plate*.

**DALI:** When I was six, I had a dream. I dreamt that my family took a vacation to Seville. In my dream, we went to a taverna where a gypsy was dancing. She danced the flamenco. She danced, first slowly and sensually, then her steps quickened, building to a flurry of tapping and clapping and tapping and clapping, until it ended in a whirlwind of feet and hands and arms and legs . . . It scared the shit out of me. And I woke up.

**BRYNN:** Oh my, how fascinating . . . but what happened to the Boiled Beans?

**VLAD:** And the Gooseflesh and Lamb Chops, man?

**ESTA:** Not to mention the Rasher of Grilled Bacon?

**DALI:** Oh yes. Excuse me. I do apologize. Let us begin. First, we'll need this. Then this. And this. Oh, and this too.

*DALI takes a small, portable gas stove, cooking utensils and food from under the counter. He then begins to cook; he grills some pork chops and cooks some fried beans.*

**VLAD:** What's he doing?

**BRYNN:** Don't ask me, dear.

**ESTA:** Has he gone crazy?

**BRYNN:** Don't ask me, dear.

**VLAD:** Where's his canvas?

**ESTA:** And his paints?

**VLAD:** And his brushes?

**BRYNN:** I'm sorry, but don't ask me, dear!

**VLAD:** Are you going to say something?

**BRYNN:** Why don't you say something.

**ESTA:** Somebody's gotta say something.

**BRYNN:** Why don't you say something.

**ESTA:** Why should I say something?

**VLAD:** Well, I'm not saying something.

**ESTA:** You always say something.

**VLAD:** Occasionally, I say something, but usually . . . I mean nothing.

**ESTA:** Nothing?

**VLAD:** Nothing.

**ESTA:** Then why say anything at all?

**VLAD:** Because, at times, something should be said.

**ESTA:** Isn't this one of those times?

**VLAD:** This is one of those times.

**ESTA:** Then say something!

**VLAD:** What are you crazy? I'm not saying something.

**BRYNN:** Oh for pity's sake, do shut up, both of you! I'll say something . . . Signor Dali, aren't you forgetting something?

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**DALI:** Forgetting? Ah yes, of course. Thank you. Thank you.  
*Cannibalism in Autumn* should always begin with *Fish with Red Bowl*.

*DALI produces a large fish. Then plops it into a red bowl.*

**BRYNN:** Oh my, I'm afraid I'm lost.

**VLAD:** You're lost?

**ESTA:** Don't give it to me. I'm always lost.

**DALI:** *One Second, Before Awakening From a Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee Around a . . . Pomegranate.*

*DALI produces a pomegranate.*

*BLACKOUT. A single light fades up behind flat at upstage right. The GYPSY DANCER dances behind the scrim. Crossfade downstage light.*

**DALI:** The gypsy possessed me that night, so many years ago. Her passion, her fire, was overwhelming. In my dream, I couldn't stop watching. I was totally mesmerised. Before me, dancing, was life itself. Life full of passion. Passion full of life.

**ESTA:** What's he talking about?

**VLAD:** You're asking me? Some gypsy woman.

**ESTA:** You think she was hot?

**VLAD:** Do I think she was hot?

**ESTA:** Yeah, man, do you think she was hot?

**VLAD:** Is that all you ever think about?

**ESTA:** Flamenco dancers are hot, man. What can I say?

**VLAD:** She wasn't hot.

**ESTA:** Are you sure? They're usually hot.

**VLAD:** She wasn't hot.

**ESTA:** How do you know? She could have been hot.

**VLAD:** She could have been hot, but she wasn't.

**ESTA:** How do you know?

**VLAD:** Because if she had been hot, instead of saying she scared the shit out of him, he would have said, "She gave me a major woody!"

**ESTA:** You're right. She probably wasn't hot.

**BRYNN:** Will you two shush! Signor Dali, please excuse my American nephew and his friend. They're with me on vacation and I thought they would appreciate a lesson from a Master. *(Pause.)* While you're . . . cooking, do you mind if I ask you some questions?

**DALI:** Please, feel free, Madam. I have no secrets, other than the ones I keep.

**BRYNN:** Thank you. I was just thinking, watching you just now, how in the early twenties you went to the San Fernando Academy of Art in Madrid. You were kicked out for criticising the lecturers. Would you say you were an angry young man?

**VLAD:** Eww, Mr. Avante-Guard, Post-Modern Anarchist. Who did he think he was?

**ESTA:** He thought he was King Shit, that's who he thought he was.

**BRYNN:** *(To the two.)* I said shu . . .

**DALI:** Let me give you some bit of advice. In order to acquire a growing and lasting respect in society, it is a good thing, if you possess great talent, to give, early in your youth, a very hard kick to the ass of the society that you love. After that, be a snob. In that respect, you're lucky I'm even talking to you snivelling piles of rat shit.

**BRYNN:** Now you've done it. He's pissed off at us good. Now be quiet, already.

**VLAD:** It's his fault.

**ESTA:** Your fault.

**VLAD:** His fault.

**ESTA:** Your fault.

**VLAD:** His.

**ESTA:** Yours.

**VLAD:** His.

**ESTA:** Yours.

**BRYNN:** Shut up, both of you! And be silent. I apologize, Signor Dali. Please, continue. *(Pause.)* Tell me, in our history books it says that during the late twenties and early thirties, you developed your paranoiac-critical method and your aesthetic theory of objectivity.

**ESTA:** Yeah, what she said.

**BRYNN:** And then you were rejected by the other Surrealists.

**VLAD:** And especially by that writer guy, what's his name, Andre something.

**BRYNN:** Andre Breton.

**VLAD:** Yeah, Andre something. Whatta ya gotta say about that, eh?

**DALI:** First, democratic societies are unfit for the publication of such thunderous revelations as I am in the habit of making. Second, I was merely *criticised* by the other Surrealists, not *rejected*. And third, Andre Breton is a, how do you say . . . dickhead.

*BLACKOUT. A single light fades up behind flat at upstage left. The GYPSY DANCER dances. Crossfade downstage light.*

**DALI:** She danced the flamenco and I was terrified. She burned with life and I was humiliated. It was like seeing the face of God. And I knew, I utterly knew, I was unworthy to see that face.

**ESTA:** He needs a therapist, man.

**VLAD:** Or a priest.

**ESTA:** When do you think the last time he went to confession was?

**VLAD:** To a priest or a therapist?

**ESTA:** Does it matter?

**VLAD:** Yes, it matters.

**ESTA:** How does it matter?

**VLAD:** You lie to one and tell the truth to the other.

**ESTA:** Who do you lie to, man?

**VLAD:** When was the last time you were in a confessional?

**ESTA:** Oh yeah, man.

**BRYNN:** Your work is heavily influenced by the theories of Sigmund Freud. Did you know Freud once said that that elaborate moustache you're in the habit of wearing was obviously compensating for your erectile dysfunction? *(Pause.)*

**DALI:** And Freud loved to suck on a good cigar. *(Pause.)*

**BRYNN:** What direction do you think your work would have taken if you had not read Freud's book *The Interpretation of Dreams*?

**DALI:** I would have been a surrealist.

**BRYNN:** But you are a surrealist.

**DALI:** Exactly.

**ESTA:** I had a dream once. I was on a date with my mother. I paid for dinner. I drove her home. But she wouldn't give me a kiss goodnight. What's with that?

**VLAD:** You're messed up, man. Don't talk to me anymore.

**BRYNN:** What was your intent for the phenomenological aspects of the paranoiac-critical method?

**VLAD:** What the hell is she talking about?

**ESTA:** Shut up. I want to hear his answer.

**VLAD:** You don't even know what she's . . .

**ESTA:** Shush.

**DALI:** Paranoiac-critical activity makes the world of delirium pass onto the plane of reality.

**VLAD:** What the hell does that mean?

**ESTA:** Shut up, man. This is deep stuff. I'm really starting to dig this guy.

**VLAD:** Dig? Dig? The guy's freakin' looney-tunes man! Digging.

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