

THE THEATRE OF ANTONIO BUERO VALLEJO

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This work is dedicated to my husband
and my two sons, with appreciation
for their confidence and
understanding during
its preparation.

PREFACE

The character and quality of the drama as a medium of expression in Spanish literature is of great interest to this writer. The works of Antonio Buero Vallejo, one of the outstanding contemporary Spanish playwrights, offered an interesting thesis subject inasmuch as they presented a wide variety of topics, developed in a professional and artistic manner. Since the re-establishment of the arts within a land recently devastated by Civil War this author has held a position of eminence in the theatre. His plays demonstrate sensitivity and concern about the problems of his country, and also contain universal values flavored with the Spanish characteristics of costumbrismo and realism.

The writer wishes to express her sincere and grateful appreciation to Dr. A. W. Woolsey for his inspiration, assistance and guidance in preparing this thesis. She is also most appreciative of the constructive and helpful suggestions made by Dr. Elizabeth Scone and Dr. W. D. Johnson.

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CHAPTER I

THE THEATRE IN SPAIN SINCE 1939

The Spanish theatre has a long and distinguished heritage. The people of Spain demonstrate the same enthusiasm for the performing arts that characterized the pagan festivals dedicated to Dionysius from which the Greek Theatre evolved. The roots of their drama originally grew from the Church, as did that of all European countries. Yet in Spain the simple dialogues and primitive portrayals of Bible stories and church liturgy developed into a genre which incorporates and reveals the qualities of the Spanish people. The strong popular spirit, the conflict between the real and the ideal, the stoicism, the exaggerated sense of honor, the sense of humor, the democratic spirit—all these qualities can be found in Spanish drama, making it a truly representative art form. In spite of the tendency to resist foreign influences, dramatists of Spain through the years have demonstrated an ability to choose the best of foreign ideas and, by distillation through their own inimitable point of view, produce a work typical in nature. The autos sacramentales, those dramatizations of religious festivals at Christmas and Easter, were at first simple dialogues between shepherds. These primitive dramatic works grew

in importance, and the gracioso, an important character in the Golden Age drama, evolved out of the comic elements which originated in the few lines spoken by these shepherds.

Angel Valbuena Prat briefly outlines the history of the Spanish theatre, emphasizing its national character.¹ He cites the versatile poet Gómez Manrique as the first author of simple dramas following the Auto de los reyes magos that was presented during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It is believed that many dramatic works had been lost in the intervening years. Juan del Encina followed Gómez Manrique toward the end of the 15th century, and to him belongs the title patriarca del teatro español, for he took drama out of the Church and brought it to the attention of the nobility. Valbuena Prat then cites Gil Vicente as contributing ricas modalidades encantadoras to the development of the drama.

The classicist trends of the 16th century did not take hold in Spain, and Valbuena Prat makes the following note on this subject:

Sólo España e Inglaterra resuelven la cuestión con la audaz creación de un drama nacional, liberado de los tópicos de las unidades. El teatro de la época de Lope de Vega, y el del período isabelino inglés se dan la mano.²

The height of Spanish dramatic creation was attained by Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, Tirso de Molina, Ruiz

¹Angel Valbuena Prat, Historia del teatro español (Barcelona: Editorial Noguer, S. A., 1956).

²Ibid., p. 8.

de Alarcón and other Golden Age dramatists. Spain's dominance was at its peak at this time, making it a veritable Golden Age, and providing a tradition which has been revered by succeeding generations.

In the 18th century men like Ramón de la Cruz, Leandro Fernández de Moratín and others made their contributions to the Spanish stage in many cases adhering to the classic requirements of the unities, while at the same time giving a decidedly Spanish flavor to their works.

The Romantic period discarded all restrictions imposed by observance of the unities, and the drama flourished under such creative talent as that of Saavedra, Hartzenbusch, García Gutiérrez and Zorilla.

The 19th century ushered in the realistic theatre, represented by Bretón de los Herreros, Tamayo y Baus, and culminating with José Echegaray. These authors wrote plays with social and moral implications, however, many of their works retained some of the influence of romanticism in that they were melodramatic and sensational.

Jacinto Benavente was the playwright of the modern era of dramatic production in Spain. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1922. Valbuena Prat has this to say about him:

En la escena de España hemos podido comprobar cómo el signo del teatro decaía notablemente. Al fuerte Echegaray, grande en sus efectismos y aún en sus caídas, sustituía el débil Benavente, que, a pesar de sus cuatro o cinco grandes creaciones, es el responsable del teatro más banal, superficial y anodino, que puede escribir un gran talento que dice las cosas a medias y alterna el sí con el no. Es más responsable

Benavente de lo que puede creerse, ya que vivió en una época grande en que el teatro universal tenía problemas claros y figuras destacadas. Basta comparar su obra con la de un Shaw, un Pirandello, y hasta un Lenormand. Benavente crea un "patron de comedia", un teatro de "repetidor", que aunque a veces quiera asustar, como en La infazona, se le ve pronto esa insuficiencia para el gran teatro, esa falta de grandeza, aún tocando lo grande, y sobre todo una posición a "dos velas", que gusta a una anodina clase media y esteriliza todo camino seguro.³

Valbuena Prat may be rather harsh in his criticism of Don Jacinto. His prodigious output of dramatic works over a period of more than sixty years entitled him to a high place in the contemporary Spanish theatre. Benavente provided an important link between the melodrama tinged with realism of Echegaray and the costumbrista theatre of the Quintero brothers to the present day when epithets such as Theatre of the Absurd, Theatre of Revolt, Theatre of the Impossible reflect the artist's reaction to a world torn apart by two world wars and now living in the shadow of annihilation. Alfredo Marquerie writes as follows about Benavente:

La primera consideración que suele hacerse ante la cantidad de obras que componen el repertorio de don Jacinto es que esa fecundidad perjudicó su calidad. Nosotros disentimos de tal opinión. Porque si en su extensa obra se pueden espigar una docena de títulos fundamentales, y ¡claro que se pueden!, ésa es justamente la hoja de servicios que nos muestra cualquier otro autor de fama internacional que no sea español. Luego Benavente llevará siempre de ventaja a sus contemporáneos centenar y medio de obras, que, dicho sea con permiso de sus detractores, no serán todas malas, y que, por lo menos, tuvieron en su inmensa mayoría

³Ibid., p. 657.

la virtud suficiente para alcanzar cifras honrosas de representación en los carteles y sirvieron para conmovier, para divertir, para hacer pensar a muchas generaciones de espectadores.⁴

Benavente himself has defined the ambition of the playwright as: "Escribir con nervio, con lágrimas, con todo el alma de muchas almas, es eso: dar la vida."⁵ He was true to this conviction. Storm Jameson has described Benavente's works as being "in the highest tradition of the Spanish drama, and a symbol of its promise."⁶ While the perspective of history accentuates Benavente's importance in the development of Spanish drama, this promise was fulfilled by one who followed him: García Lorca.

Federico García Lorca is now acclaimed as one of the truly great poetic dramatists of the contemporary stage.

Allan Lewis describes him in the following manner:

Lorca ranks as one of the major figures of the contemporary theatre and is the only Spanish playwright since Calderón to achieve international recognition.

... Lorca became the poet of the people, the welcomed cry against a pagan-Catholic order too proud to confess its anguish. His sharp images of nature reflect the violence and vitality of passions held back by the law of caste and order.⁷

⁴Antonio Marquerie, Veinte años de teatro en España (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1959), p. 23.

⁵Ibid., p. 35.

⁶Storm Jameson, Modern Drama in Europe (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920), p. 239.

⁷Allan Lewis, The Contemporary Theatre (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1962), p. 242.

García Lorca published his first play in 1920, but his trilogy, Bodas de sangre, Yerma and La casa de Bernarda Alba, composed in the pre-Civil War years, demonstrates his great talent. Lorca's promise of great potential was terminated tragically by the dramatist's untimely death during the first months of the Civil War.

The hostilities caused tremendous devastation in Spain, and the creative talent of the country suffered. Angel del Río makes this observation:

La guerra de España, por su índole y por sus causas, no permitió la neutralidad. Era consecuencia de la división del mundo, pero también culminación de la trágica división de las dos Españas que hemos visto reflejada en la literatura a partir del siglo XVIII. Su resultado inmediato, por lo que a nosotros nos interesa, fue el de interrumpir violentamente el desarrollo normal de la literatura en las últimas generaciones y el de obligar a los escritores, viejos y jóvenes, a tomar partido.⁸

Angel del Río relates the fate of some of the outstanding men of letters during and after the War. Unamuno was confined to house arrest and died in Salamanca. Azorín and Baroja went to Paris. Juan Ramón Jiménez and Machado left the country inasmuch as they were in sympathy with the Republican forces. Ortega Y Gasset, according to del Río maintained an equivocal position, and in 1948 returned to Spain and founded the Instituto de Humanidades. A number of authors took up residence in other countries. Among

⁸Angel del Río, Historia de la literatura española (New York: Rinehart & Winston, 1963), p. 352.

them are included Américo Castro, Tomás Navarro Tomás, Fernando de los Ríos, Jorge Guillén and others.

The violent interruption of creative endeavors caused by the War was not easily forgotten. The economic, social and political orders of the country were devastated, and the victorious totalitarian regime instituted severe and stringent measures to rebuild the structures of the country. The creative arts did not fare too well during this period of reconstruction. Although many of the outstanding artists, writers, musicians and poets had left the country, many had remained and accepted the new authority. These authors did not write about the war. Angel del Río makes this comment:

Fenómeno curioso, si bien explicable, es que la guerra civil, con todo su tremendo dramatismo, no haya encontrado aún intérprete en la literatura y apenas se reflejara al principio como tema en las obras de valor. Su influjo indirecto se advierte en la actitud de muchos escritores, mas la tendencia general ha sido la de volver cada autor a reanudar⁹ el hilo de su obra eludiendo en lo posible el tema.

The Spanish government provided subsidies to aid the re-establishment of the arts. Alfredo Marquerie comments on this support:

El Estado realizó una doble y bien orientada labor a través de los organismos oficiales creados al efecto. Subvencionó tres teatros: el Español, el María Guerrero y el Nacional de Cámara y Ensayo, y creó los premios anuales para autores, actores, actrices, compañías y empresas, galardones que estimularon notoriamente la producción. Además,

⁹ Ibid., p. 354.

el trofeo "Calderón de la Barca" alumbró la aparición de nombres nuevos al lado del tradicional "Lope de Vega", instituido por el Ayuntamiento de Madrid.¹⁰

The problem of government control which accompanies government subsidy is a reality in totalitarian countries, attested to by the fact that many dramatic and literary works have had to be published outside the country, and, in the case of the drama, have never been produced. Whether or not this inhibits creative effort is an unanswerable question. In Spain there were few outstanding literary works published in the first decade after the war.

This brief resumé of the history of the drama in Spain and its situation at the end of the Civil War provides the background for the introduction of the author whose works are the subject of the present study.

Antonio Buero Vallejo is one of the outstanding contemporary Spanish playwrights.

Vallejo es el primer dramaturgo después de la guerra civil que habría de distinguirse por la continuidad del estilo, por su inteligencia aguda, su don poético refinado, su viva intuición psicológica y una virtuosidad técnica que inspira confianza.¹¹

In the ten years following the end of the war the drama in Spain had not had a play that exhibited the

¹⁰Marquerie, op.cit., p. 12.

¹¹Jacqueline Van Praag Chantraine, "Tendencias del teatro español de hoy: Antonio Buero Vallejo y 'El Buerismo'", Cuadernos Americanos, Año xxii, CXXX, 1961, p. 254.

dramatic creativity shown by Buero Vallejo's Historia de una escalera. The following observation was made upon the opening of this play at the Teatro Español in Madrid, on October 14, 1949:

Antonio Buero Vallejo se inicia así en la escena española con un legítimo y rotundo triunfo. ... Desde las primeras escenas de Historia de una escalera, el público que asistió anoche al estreno tuvo la impresión de que se hallaba ante la obra de un autor auténticamente nuevo, con una preparación cultural y un sentido de teatro engarzados exactamente al momento en que vivimos.¹²

Buero Vallejo, a young man of thirty-three, had won the "Lope de Vega" prize with Historia de una escalera, and the "Alvarez Quintero" prize with his one-act play, Las palabras en la arena. This was a tremendous accomplishment, and is a good indication of the quality of his dramatic creativity.

Today Buero Vallejo is considered one of Spain's outstanding contemporary playwrights. His theatre will be the subject of this study, with regard to the dual concepts he expresses, his use of violent death as a climax, the importance of stagecraft and set arrangement, his use of music and sound, and time and historical inspiration in his dramas.

¹²Federico C. Sainz de Robles, Review of Historia de una escalera, by A. Buero Vallejo, Teatro Español, 1949-1950 (Madrid: Aguilar, S.A., 1951), p. 94.

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE OF ANTONIO BUERO VALLEJO

Antonio Buero Vallejo was born on September 29, 1916, in Guadalajara, northeast of Madrid. His father was a military engineer, and the family had many cultural interests. Antonio was exposed to the arts from an early age since his father was interested in the theatre and this influence was evident in the home environment. The boy was educated in his native city, and when he finished the bachillerato he was sent to school in Madrid to pursue the career of a painter. As a young man he had demonstrated some writing talent and had won a prize in a literary contest organized by the student association of the normal school and the Guadalajara Institute.¹³ He confesses that in spite of his desire to paint, he had always engaged in writing. "En realidad siempre había escrito cosas; y aun recuerdo mi primer verso—de los poquísimos que he escrito—a los nueve años."¹⁴

He enrolled in the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Madrid in 1934, and Carlos Fernández Cuenca describes this period

¹³José Sánchez, Introduction to Historia de una escalera, by Antonio Buero Vallejo (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. x.

¹⁴Ibid., p. xi.

of his life in the following words: ". . . soñaba con ser un gran pintor y cubría lienzo tras lienzo con bodegones, con figuras y con retratos, siempre aplicando a su pintura un concepto realista."¹⁵

His studies were interrupted in 1936 when the Civil War broke out. He enlisted in the Republican forces, and although he did not serve in a position of any great political importance he was imprisoned when the hostilities ceased and served six years as a political prisoner.

Upon his release from prison he endeavored to resume his artistic career. He was moderately successful in that he was able to sell some paintings, but Fernández Cuenca describes his decision to give up this career as follows:

Pero la pintura propia cada vez le satisfacía menos, en una crisis espiritual y formal hecha de sentimientos y de preocupaciones. La firma "Buero" que ponía en sus obras empezó a merecer cierta consideración profesional; si aún no cubría del todo sus necesidades humanas, ya la pintura le ayudaba a vivir. Hasta que un día su sentido crítico le dictó una conclusión tremenda: se reconoció mediocre y sin fuerzas para librarse del amaramiento en que se hundirán las ilusiones. Mas esta meditación de autocrítica trascendental le descubrió horizontes nuevos, con el despertar de la conciencia literaria.¹⁶

He wrote his first play, En la ardiente oscuridad, in a relatively short time in 1946, because he had long felt that blindness could be a dramatic vehicle for theatrical

¹⁵Carlos Fernández Cuenca, "El autor y su obra preferida," Correo Lit. April 1, 1953. p. 12.

¹⁶Ibid.

expression. This play was not produced for several years, and another work provided the means for his becoming known.

In 1949 he submitted Historia de una escalera in the competition for the "Lope de Vega" prize. This contest is sponsored by the Municipal Government of Madrid, and 1949 was the first year the contest had been held since before the Civil War. The play was awarded the prize, and was presented at the Teatro Español in October of that year. The work won immediate approval, and the success is described in the following way:

Con arreglo a las bases del concurso, el Lope de Vega debe estrenarse en el Teatro Español, lo que se hace en octubre de 1949, días antes de la anual reposición del Tenorio. El inesperado éxito de crítica y público aconseja mantener la obra en cartel suspendiendo, por primera vez en la historia de esta sala, las tradicionales representaciones de la obra de Zorilla.¹⁷

This same year Las palabras en la arena won the prize awarded by the "Asociación de los amigos de los Quintero." Since that time Buero has written fifteen dramas, all but one of them having been produced,^{17a} and most of them receiving the acclaim of critics and general public alike.

Today Buero Vallejo resides in a modest section of Madrid with his mother and his sister, and lives from his

¹⁷Manuel Benítez Sánchez-Cortés, Back cover of Hoy es fiesta, by A. Buero Vallejo, Colección Teatro No. 176 (Madrid: Ediciones Alfíl, 1960).

^{17a}A. Buero Vallejo, El terror inmóvil, referred to in Historia de una escalera (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955). p. xxv.

literary efforts. In a recent review he was asked if he had a Cadillac, and he laughed and stated that he didn't own a car.¹⁸ He added that in Madrid for him a car would be more of a liability than an asset, and he manifested his satisfaction with the public transportation facilities.

In good Spanish tradition, he likes to attend tertulias, and these weekly meetings sometimes provide the occasion for the first reading of his plays. He is not an early riser, stating that the Lord made the morning hours for sleep. He writes during the afternoon and at night. In response to a question about his favorite play he said that he has to admit a preference for his two works dealing with the blind, En la ardiente oscuridad and El concierto de San Ovidio.

Mr. Bernard Dulsey interviewing the author recently, asked him whether his work has been easy since the success of Historia de una escalera, and he made the following reply:

La carrera teatral en España es dura, sobretodo cuando se ha planteado objetivos como los que yo me planteé:—de una cierta ambición y de una cierta dificultad. Y ello quiere decir como aquí decimos, vulgarmente, que hay que examinarse constantemente. Es decir, que hay que pasar examen constantemente.¹⁹

¹⁸Bernard Dulsey, "Entrevista a Buero Vallejo," The Modern Language Journal, Vol. L, Number 3, March, 1966, p. 145.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 155.

The fact that Buero has extremely high standards of performance is obvious from the quality of the dramas he has written. His attention to all details, important or insignificant, is proof that he constantly evaluates his work and makes every effort to avoid mediocrity. He has written about the things he is familiar with, and has said that parts of Historia de una escalera are autobiographical.

La génesis de Historia de una escalera respondía a dos elementos vitales. Por un lado, el autor propúsose en ella reflejar las sensaciones de muchacho pobre e ignorado que por entonces era él mismo, viviendo en una casa-colmena de sesenta familias, quizás no tan modesta como la que llevó al escenario, pero con tipos reales trasladados fielmente a la ficción; incluso a alguno, como el personaje de la Paca, le conservó su nombre verdadero.²⁰

A study of Buero Vallejo's plays reveals that they encompass a wide range of variety in situation, location, scenery and plot, yet in each of them certain themes reappear and they manifest certain common characteristics. These will be discussed in this paper.

Buero's answer to the question regarding his inspiration for his works serves as a good description of this serious and sensitive man:

Mis ideas dramáticas? Pues, probablemente como todo escritor, mitad y mitad entre las preocupaciones personales y entre el panorama de la vida y de la problemática que me rodea como hombre de mi sociedad y de mi tiempo.²¹

²⁰Carlos Fernández Cuenca, op. cit.

²¹Bernard Dulsey, op. cit., p. 156.

CHAPTER III

THE DUAL CONCEPT IN BUERO'S THEATRE

The juxtaposition of the real and the ideal is a very important feature of Spanish literature, and this tendency is manifested in Buero Vallejo's works to a great degree. Close analysis of the author's plays reveals that the plots are developed on two levels; one is obvious, and the other more subtle and dealing with philosophical and metaphysical problems. This feature is one of the ways in which the author endeavors to communicate his concern about human responsibility and other abstract ideals, and is also the basic foundation of the structure of his dramas. The duality is expressed in two ways; the most obvious is the use of a physical object in the drama that symbolizes the abstract ideal that the author is trying to communicate. The other is the use of two characters who provide the personification of the two facets of man; both are endowed with freedom of will, but one uses his energies for the brother while the other can only concern himself with events that touch him personally. In other words, one man acts responsibly while the other does not, and this conflict provides an important feature of Buero Vallejo's plots. It is interesting to note that many of the characters in these roles have similar sounding names.

In this chapter Buero's plays will be discussed with the intention of identifying the physical object used in the individual works and the abstract ideal it represents in the primary plot, and identifying the secondary plot as well as the characters that provide the two-fold interplay where this device is used.

Historia de una escalera, for which Buero won the "Lope de Vega" prize, catapulted him to fame in 1949. He was one of the first playwrights after the Civil War to write a play demonstrating a thorough knowledge of the technique of dramatic staging coupled with an absorbing plot that illustrated universal values. One writer had this to say about the dramatist:

Vallejo es el primer dramaturgo después de la guerra civil que habría de distinguirse por la continuidad del estilo, por su inteligencia aguda, su don poético refinado, su viva intuición psicológica y una virtuosidad técnica que inspira confianza.²²

The title, Historia de una escalera, identifies the physical object that represents the hopeless struggle of people of a certain segment of society to triumph over their environment. The dual aspect of man's responsibility to his fellow man is depicted by the personalities of Fernando and Urbano.

²²J. Van Praag Chantraine, "Tendencias del teatro español de hoy: Antonio Buero Vallejo y 'El Buerismo' ", Cuadernos Americanos, Año xxii, CXXX, 1961, p. 255.

All the scenes in Historia de una escalera take place in the stairwell of an old tenement building in Madrid. There are four families living on the top floor of the building, and the events cover a period of 30 years, tracing the course of these lives in their despair and disillusionment. The staircase only leads down, and this has symbolic inferences. The opening scene shows a bill collector wearily climbing the steps to the four doors on the second landing. The doors are simply labeled I, II, III, and IV. He knocks on all four and then returns to the first one. Thus we are introduced to the four families in the play.

Valbuena Prat quotes Buero Vallejo in the following statement:

El autor se propuso "desarrollar el panorama humano que siempre ofrece una escalera de vecindad y abordar las tentadoras dificultades de construcción teatral que un escenario como éste posee", es decir, "la visión del fluir del tiempo en unas familias, que se hace angosta por la angostura del espacio donde ocurre."²³

The stairway provides an interesting stage setting. A number of comments have been made on this feature of the play. F. García Pavón said:

La escalera, en la obra de Buero, no es sólo un personaje como quiere Marquerie, es algo más: el símbolo de la inmovilidad de nuestra organización social que impide a la jerarquización existente evolucionar con mayor fluidez. La escalera que suben y bajan dos generaciones con la misma angustia,

²³Valbuena Prat, op. cit., p. 660.

estrechez y desilusión de progresar, es imagen simbólica de la gran barrera que divide a los hombres en una serie de estadios económicos y de oportunidad social, sin la menor conexión en treinta años.²⁴

These families living on the top floor of the tenement in Madrid over a 30-year period are a cross-section of contemporary society of the lower classes. José Sánchez in the Introduction to Historia de una escalera makes the following observation:

The stairway of this story is the core of the play because it is the inescapable place where the tenants of the building must meet sooner or later. It is a stairway with no exit, with no light or opening, with no horizon in view. It is a stairway which goes down, not up, and the lives of the tenants also descend gradually until they lose their will to fight, to move, or to live. This stairway becomes a person in the drama as the play develops. The stairs remind the tenants of their hopes and their failures. The characters of the Historia de una escalera will wither away as long as they remain living in this building, for this fateful stairway, like destiny, brings them only failure, disappointment, death. This continuous failure in living, symbolized by the fruitless struggle of three generations, finally breaks into a quarrel which offers no solution to their problem.²⁵

In the first act the action proceeds swiftly. Doña Asunción keeps up the pretense of having money, and yet she cannot pay the light bill, a fact noted and remarked upon by Trini and Generosa. Fernando and Urbano meet and have a cigarette in the little corner of the stage made by the curve in the stairway. In this dialogue a forecast is made

²⁴F. García Pavón, Teatro social en España (Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, S. A., 1962), p. 138.

²⁵José Sánchez, Introduction to Historia de una escalera, by Buero Vallejo, op. cit., p. xxiii.

of the whole play, and the first clue as to their individual response to the needs of their fellow men is given. Urbano tells of his hopes of improving his economic situation by means of the union at his job. Fernando has great plans for self-improvement on his own.

Buero's dialogue in this scene is outstanding. With a few words he paints a picture of each man. Urbano is realistic when he says: "Los pobres diablos como nosotros nunca lograremos mejorar de vida sin la ayuda mutua. Y eso es el sindicato."²⁶ Fernando responds by saying that he can become successful by himself, and that starting tomorrow he will begin to make his dreams come true. Urbano destroys this fantasy when he says: "Siempre es desde mañana. ¿Por qué no lo has hecho desde ayer, o desde hace un mes?"²⁷

Fernando replies by stating that in ten years they will see who has made the most progress, but he reveals his own anguish by this speech:

Y mañana, o dentro de diez años que pueden pasar como un día, como han pasado estos últimos ¡sería terrible seguir así! Subiendo y bajando la escalera, una escalera que no conduce a ningún sitio; haciendo trampas al contador, aborreciendo el trabajo , perdiendo día tras día Por eso es preciso cortar por lo sano.²⁸

This dialogue reveals each man's character. Urbano acknowledges his need for the assistance he can get from the union, at the same time he will contribute his strength to

²⁶Ibid., p. 25.

²⁷Ibid., p. 27.

²⁸Ibid., p. 28.

the common good, symbolized by the organization. Fernando is the selfish man who dreams fantastic dreams, yet refuses to recognize the reality of the concrete demands that are made upon him.

In the third act Fernando and Urbano again encounter each other on the stairs. Their dreams have not come true. Their economic situation has remained the same, and now they are middle-aged men. Urbano reminds Fernando of their youthful plans which have come to naught. He strikes the handrail and says: "¡Sigues amarrado a esta escalera, como yo, como todos!"²⁹

Historia de una escalera is a good example of Buero's ability to give major importance to an object which symbolizes an ideal. The staircase not only provides the environment within which the action takes place, it physically represents the futility of the struggle against destiny by the characters in the play. The secondary theme of human responsibility, represented by Fernando and Urbano, is not resolved in this work. The author seems to be saying that each man has acted as his own particular conscience dictated, and remains free to act responsibly or selfishly.

In the autocriticism of En la ardiente oscuridad, Buero Vallejo says:

No obstante la aparente paradoja del título, mi drama no propone al público ninguna paradoja, sino un par de horas de reflexión y de pasión. No trato

²⁹Ibid., p. 125.

con él de divertir, sino de interesar y--acaso--de distraer. La obra no posee una tesis terminante; ofrece más bien el problema de la tesis en sí mismo cuando trata de exponerse a través de humanos seres de ficción, y su sentido general podría concretarse, a lo sumo, en la diferencia que existe entre los motivos por los que creemos actuar y aquellos por los que realmente actuamos: la diferencia entre razón y vida, que busca su unidad bajo los ojos del misterio que nos envuelve.³⁰

The title is a paradox, yet serves succinctly to sum up the theme that man is blind to the reality of his existence. Blindness is the physical symbol of this abstract concept, and this play is a good example of the dual level present in many of Buero's works. On the surface the advent of a new student into a school for the blind, where a false air of happiness prevails, provides conflict due to his contentious personality. The students do not call themselves blind, rather "invidentes." They do not use canes, and the assumption is that their's is the only world, wherein they can play, laugh, eat, drink, fall in love, and live life on their own terms. The advent of Ignacio changes this. One critic describes Ignacio as follows:

Pero hace, de súbito, su aparición el rebelde, el descontento. En la obra de Buero Vallejo cumple este papel un nuevo alumno que llega al instituto con la conciencia de su ceguera muy viva, royéndole el alma. En el mundo real, el individuo ardiente y solitario: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche o Unamuno. Las

³⁰A. Buero Vallejo, Autocritica En la ardiente oscuridad, Teatro Español 1950-1951 (Madrid: Aguilar, S. A., 1952), p. 95.

convenciones se estrellan contra el suelo, como cántaros, y un viento grave y frío nos sopla en la cara.³¹

Ignacio has a burning desire for vision. The intensity of this desire for something which the other inmates will not recognize destroys their sheltered little world. The conflict is resolved when Carlos murders Ignacio.

On a deeper level Carlos is representative of the man who escapes from the reality of his life by living in a world of illusion. Ignacio is the man who yearns for a deeper understanding of life, expressed in this work by his longing for sight. The resolution of the conflict on the first level does not provide any answers to the disturbing questions posed by the philosophical problems on the secondary level. Carlos' killing of Ignacio removes this destructive influence, but cannot destroy the effects of his existence. The inmates will never be the same, and Carlos himself has inherited the burning desire for light and sight. This work reflects Unamuno's philosophy since Carlos and Ignacio are cast from the same molds as Abel Sánchez and Joaquín Monegro. The following quotation illustrates the dual level of symbolism in this drama:

"El anhelo por la luz física como símbolo de la insatisfacción humana ante nuestros límites, constituye la doble

³¹F. C. G., "En la ardiente oscuridad," Cuadernos Hispánicos, Núm. 20, (mar./abr. 1951), p. 331.

realidad--la concreta y la metafísica--, hábilmente entrelazadas y fundidas."³²

The theme of blindness provides an effective symbol to express the ideal Buero wished to convey. Valbuena Prat has made the following comment on this aspect of the work which confirms that the author has been successful in his intention to present serious entertainment for a few hours of reflection and passion.

El mismo autor reconoce el simbolismo que la obra envuelve, la anécdota es un pretexto; pero no un simbolismo determinado en una dirección, sino el permanentemente humano de la angustia, y la armonía, del dolor y el ensueño, y yo casi añadiría que del mal y el bien. Que no en vano el árbol de la ciencia no era el árbol de la vida.³³

An Aeolian harp is the physical symbol in La señal que se espera, representative of faith in the transcendent reality of human experience. There is suspense and tension created by the anticipation of hearing music produced of itself as a concrete sign of the mysterious reality of which every human is a part. In this work the dualistic feature is not as important as it is in some of the other dramas.

The action takes place at a country home where some friends are spending a vacation. The first line of dialogue

³²Isabel Magaña de Schevill, "Lo trágico en el teatro de Buero Vallejo," Hispanofila, sept., 1959, año 3ro, Primer Núm., p. 55.

³³Valbuena Prat, op. cit., p. 662.

starts the action. Luis, a composer who has lost his inspiration, is convinced that an Aeolian harp will of itself produce the notes of a forgotten song. His first words are: "¡Te digo que la señal sonará!"³⁴ The entire play is built around the suspense created by the characters waiting for the long-desired tones. Alfredo Marquerie makes the following comment: "La señal que todos esperan es una melodía que ha de transmitirse a las arpas eólicas y que significará la realización de sus deseos."³⁵

In the beginning of the play not all of the characters have faith in the reality of the awaited sound, but under Buero Vallejo's effective dramatic technique the suspense grows, and, in spite of themselves, Enrique and Julián believe that the notes will eventually be heard. The Aeolian harp is an effective instrument used by the author as the vehicle through which the supernatural manifestation can occur, inasmuch as it symbolizes the reality of the world. The final resolution of the plot depends upon the music which eventually is produced by the harp, although by human hands; thus the primary plot is resolved. However, the metaphysical questions posed are not answered, and the author seems to believe that humanity must wait and hope for maturity to understand the mysterious reality of life. José Luis Abellán had the following comment on this work:

³⁴A. Buero Vallejo, La señal que se espera (Madrid: Ediciones Alfíl, 1959), p. 8.

³⁵Alfredo Marquerie, op. cit., p. 185.

Toda la obra trata de enfocar el problema de las relaciones misteriosas en los acontecimientos humanos y el de las posibilidades activas de la fe. Sin embargo, al final todo parece reducirse a una serie de "coincidencias" y quedamos otra vez en tinieblas.³⁶

The first performance of Madrugada was given in 1953, and was very successful. The action takes place in the home of Mauricio, a rich painter who has just died. Dramatic interest and tension is produced by the knowledge that his body is in an adjoining room. Mauricio's relatives are called, but they are only told that he is dying, and their actions and feelings are revealed during the course of the play. Will the relatives discover that he is dead before Amalia can find out which one of them has made calumnious attacks on her? The physical symbol is the dead man, and he represents the crux of the conflict between the power of money and the power of love in the plot. He is probably the main character, and yet the part is a silent one. The body is never seen, but still Mauricio's relationship with each of the characters is the pivotal point around which the plot revolves and which makes the final outcome meaningful.

Madrugada is completely different from any of the author's previous efforts. Buero Vallejo himself states that he wanted to present a play which would increase the restrictions imposed by the limitations of theatrical

³⁶José Luis Abellán, "El tema del misterio en Buero Vallejo," Insula, Núm. 174, 15 de mayo 1961, p. 15.

production--namely the strict observation of the unities of time, location and action. Observance of the unity of time is an interesting feature; the time on both sides of the curtain is identical. Even the intermission period is accounted for. Two long acts make up the production, and, in order to maintain interest, the author confesses that he has written a play of intrigue.

Claro es que, para retener la atención del espectador durante dos largos actos carentes de mutaciones, no hay más remedio que recurrir a los procedimientos de la comedia de intriga. Pero el autor no se hubiese perdonado el ofrecer al público una simple comedia de intriga, y, por ello, aunque en esta suya de hoy maneja los recursos habituales en el género, ha procurado evitar los defectos que le son inherentes, dando a conocer desde las primeras escenas la clave del episodio. No toda la clave, sin embargo.³⁷

Observance of the theatrical unities is an interesting feature of Madrugada, and provoked the following comments:

El esquema de "Madrugada" exigía--su realización no fue un ejercicio gratuito--el mantenimiento de las tres unidades clásicas (acción, tiempo, lugar), y esta dificultad entrañaba un peligro que, si de orden técnico, era insoslayable. Sólo un verdadero escritor de teatro con privilegiado talento constructivo podía salir airoso de tal empeño sin verse obligado a forzar trama ni caracteres. Antonio Buero Vallejo, en este sentido, ha construido una pieza perfecta en donde hasta ese huido binomio "tiempo real = tiempo dramático" ha sido apresado. Una única situación--plantada en su arranque un tanto artificiosamente--es llevada a sus últimas consecuencias, y no llega en ningún momento a hacerse reiterativa, gracias a que la acción--única, también--es rica en peripecias y está sabiamente

³⁷A. Buero Vallejo, Autocrítica Madrugada, Teatro Español 1953-1954 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1955), p. 143.

dosificada con elementos de intriga que acentúan el interés en el desarrollo de la trama.³⁸

The dual character of Buero's drama is subtle in this unusual work. The primary conflict of discovering the identity of the person who has maligned Amalia is resolved, and the interior turmoil which prompted her to arrange the bizarre conditions of the play is also settled since she realizes that Mauricio had loved her and that their marriage had been a manifestation of that love. Buero's faith in the redeeming power of love is expressed in this work, and it is an extraordinary combination of the dramatic treatment of an abstract ideal, symbolized by the dead body of Mauricio, and a very good story.

In Casi un cuento de hadas the two-fold conflict between beauty and ugliness on one level, and between what a man appears to be and what he really is, on a secondary level, was portrayed by the use of two different actors in the role of Riquet. One of them is extremely handsome and the other is very ugly. The author made the following comment on this work:

Más que una cuestión sentimental en torno a la belleza y la fealdad, se trata en el fondo de la cuestión general, que engloba a aquélla, de la esencia de la personalidad humana. O, dicho de otro modo: la duda de lo que esencialmente podemos ser, a la vista de lo que circunstancialmente parecemos.³⁹

³⁸José María de Quinto, "Teatro," Correo Literario, January 1, 1954, p. 10.

³⁹A. Buero Vallejo, Casi un cuento de hadas (Madrid: Ediciones Alfíl, 1953), p. 76.

This work, based on a fairy story by Perrault entitled Riquet á la houppe, tells about the love of ugly Prince Riquet for beautiful Princess Leticia. The physical symbol the author uses is a doll with a red wig. Riquet himself puts the wig on the doll and gives it to the princess, thus it serves to symbolize him. The princess becomes intelligent under the transforming power of Riquet's love, and he becomes handsome because she loves him. There are obstacles on their road to happiness, and the two actors playing the part of Riquet come and go, depending on how he is seen through Leticia's eyes. The final resolution is accomplished by the realization that the beautiful Riquet is not the real one, and Leticia and the ugly Riquet recognize their love for one another, which will enable them to live together in the reality of the world. They wave good-bye to the actor playing the part of the beautiful Riquet at the end of the play. The use of the physical symbol in the form of a doll contributes to the development of the plot since playing with dolls is mentioned in the dialogue with a deeper meaning of controlling the lives of people. In the opening scene the princess Leticia is described as playing listlessly with her dolls and other toys. The inference is that as she matures she will leave the world of childish things and come to accept reality.

The author's interest in presenting works with a double level of understanding is confirmed by his comments on Casi un cuento de hadas:

Elegí este cuento, no sólo porque el tema de la personalidad presentaba en el plural desarrollo--pues la posible pregunta interior de Riquet, por la que se plantease cómo y qué era él en realidad, se relacionaba con idéntica pregunta interior de la princesa acerca de sí misma--; sino también por la evidente posibilidad de presentar en situaciones teatralmente claras las diferencias de apreciación de unos y otros mediante la repetida sustitución de los dos Riquets.⁴⁰

Irene o el tesoro can be classified as a play which enters into the world of fantasy. Nicolás González Ruiz made the following comment on the occasion of the opening night:

Ahondando en el símil, diríamos que estábamos esperando la tercera dimensión. Y ésta es la que ha llegado con Irene o el tesoro, fábula, en cuanto hay una intervención de lo maravilloso; pero comedia certera y ya no implacable, en la que un tierno duendillo es la personificación de un mundo espiritual y poético.⁴¹

The physical symbol here is a person--the little elf unseen by anyone except Irene. He represents the world of fantasy where this woman finds escape from the sordid reality of her life. The obvious plot is the trials Irene has to put up with in the home of an avaricious father-in-law, a selfish mother-in-law and a conceited sister-in-law, and her ultimate suicide. On the secondary level, the little elf represents the world of dreams that becomes more real for

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Nicolás González Ruiz, Review of Irene o el tesoro, by A. Buero Vallejo, Teatro Español 1954-1955 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1959), p. 182.

Irene than the real world, and suicide to her is not a negative and destructive act, rather an escape to a better life where men love one another. The following quotation by the author clearly defines the intention of this play:

La historia de la locura de una mujer buena en medio de la sinrazón de los llamados cuerdos. Un relato de miseria y de fatalidad; y, también, de riqueza y de liberación. Una comedia, en suma, perspectivista, equívoca, donde se insinúa que la realidad puede, acaso, poseer más de un plano, y que la fantasía puede esconder también una tremenda realidad.⁴²

Las cartas boca abajo has been called one of Buero Vallejo's best plays. It is a realistic work, without the flights of fancy that have been observed in some of his other dramas. The action is dominated by one of the characters, but one that never comes on stage, never speaks a line, yet exerts his influence over all the other personalities. Federico Carlos Sainz de Robles makes the following statement:

Si se me exigiera opinión acerca de quién me parece el protagonista de Las cartas boca abajo, afirmarí sin vacilar: Carlos Ferrer Díaz. ¡Qué magia la de Buero Vallejo logrando que un nombre logre corporeidad apremiante y caliente y determinante valiéndose sólo de referencias, de evocaciones y hasta de miradas ajenas, y que, ya encarnado, someta a su efectividad a quienes se nos presentan con una impresionante realidad! Porque pocos seres tan de carne y hueso, tan de cruzármolos por ahí, en cualquier momento, como Adela y Ana, como Juan, Juanito y Mauro. Y es que, desde que el mundo es mundo, el hombre que crea mitos acaba por depender de ellos, por transmitirles la vida que a él se le

⁴²A. Buero Vallejo, Autocrítica Irene o el tesoro, Teatro Español 1954-1955, p. 181.

va escapando. Y Carlos Ferrer Díaz es mito--de amor y soberbia y nostalgia--para Adela; y mito--de felicidad sencilla--para Ana; y mito--de ejemplaridad en un destino fausto--para Juanito; y mito--de aventura grande lograda--para Mauro.⁴³

The power that one man can unknowingly exert over the lives of five other people, the personality of this man and his relationship with each character in the play provides the symbol of the myth which has destroyed the reality of Adela's life. The obvious plot is the effort that Juan is exerting to pass qualifying examinations for a teaching position. The subject of reality and unreality is the subtle secondary theme, and further evidence of the dual feature of Buero's drama is his use of the two characters Adela and Ana. The latter refuses to speak and can almost be considered as Adela's conscience, which has haunted her all these years for her selfishness. The fact that Ana is mute further symbolizes the inability of the conscience to exert influence on a person so concerned with herself that she can never think of her fellow man. The primary plot is resolved when Juan fails to pass his examinations. He is forced to accept the reality of his life, and as a result he and his son reach a better understanding than they have ever had. The secondary plot is not resolved, rather the end of the play leaves Adela tormented by her guilt and

⁴³Federico Carlos Sainz de Robles, Review of Las cartas boca abajo, by A. Buero Vallejo, Teatro Español 1957-1958 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1959), p. xx.

condemned to live in the reality she has created.

In an article on Buero Vallejo the following comment was made about the play:

Aunque Carlos Ferrer no aparezca nunca en escena, su papel es importantísimo, pues él es la causa inocente de la desgracia de todos, el símbolo de la felicidad, el mito de un destino fausto.⁴⁴

"Las Meninas," that masterpiece of Spanish art, is also the title of one of Buero Vallejo's recent works. It deals with an incident in the life of the painter Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez. The author has called this play "fantasía velazqueña," and it is an imaginative treatment of an incident that could have happened in the life of the great artist, a protégé of Phillip IV. The following comment was made by a critic after the first performance:

¿Qué es esta "fantasía velazqueña llamada Las Meninas? Yo la llamaría "hipótesis dramática", por cuanto nada de lo que en ella sucede ha sucedido verdaderamente, pero pudo suceder. Sabemos que Velázquez fue hombre combatido (¿como no, si era español de genio?), y que el rey Felipe IV le protegió y defendió. Buero Vallejo ha imaginado una trama en la que Velázquez aparece combatido y acusado, y en que el Rey, quizá a pesar suyo, le defiende y protege. La trama tiene su origen en La Venus del espejo, y de su solución depende que Las Meninas se pinten o no.⁴⁵

The physical symbol in this work is composed of the two paintings "Venus in the Mirror" and "Las Meninas." These works of art represent the artistic heights which this great painter achieved, and also serve important functions in the

⁴⁴J. Van Praag Chantraine, op. cit., p. 259.

⁴⁵Torrente, Review of Las Meninas, by A. Buero Vallejo, Teatro Español 1960-1961 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1962), p. 73.

development of the plot since the artist was denounced to the Inquisition as a result of having painted "Venus in the Mirror." The events leading up to this denunciation and Velázquez' defense of his masterpiece coupled with his confrontation with his accusers and his ultimate pardon from the king, provide the primary plot. The permission to paint "Las Meninas" is gained as a sign of Velázquez' return to favor in the court. The secondary plot revolves around the relationship between Velázquez and the beggar Pedro. According to the story, Pedro has posed for Velázquez many years before, and he is now a guest in the house since he is old and in poor health. He is also a fugitive, and toward the end of the work news of his death reaches the painter. The author seems to be expressing his concern with a man's destiny in the relationship between the artist and his ex-model, and this provides the philosophical problem in this work. Velázquez was a man endowed with great talent, and through his position as painter in the court of Phillip IV, he was able to develop it to its fullest potential. The character of Pedro in this drama is symbolic of a man with perhaps as much talent as Velázquez, but because of the circumstances with which destiny confronted him, he was unable to use his gift. In this work Velázquez never demonstrates smugness for his position, rather he reveals the character of a man who humbly appreciated the advantages he had received, and was intensely aware of the

suffering of others who had not been as fortunate. He is a man to whom Unamuno's adjective, incitado would apply. Buero has indicated that the conflict between a man of genius and the people is also present in this work.

This play is a good example of the author's innate theatrical ability. He has used the two paintings as a physical symbol of the great heights a man can reach, and they also provide a foundation for the plot. The secondary theme is intricately woven through the work, and the final dramatic conclusion, a tableau of the great painting "Las Meninas," is a brilliant theatrical device that effectively ends the work. The following comment was made with regard to this finale:

El final de la obra contiene una especie de epílogo, en el que aparece reproducido el cuadro de "Las Meninas" comentado por un personaje de costumbres callejeras. Son tan justas las palabras y está tan oportunamente traído el cuadro célebre, que lo que teóricamente debería "enfriar" el desenlace, refuerza el todo y el carácter del drama.⁴⁶

Un soñador para un pueblo is one of Buero Vallejo's plays based on a historical incident. In this instance it adheres more closely to verified facts than in some cases. An account of the Esquilache Mutiny can be found in the Enciclopedia Ilustrada,⁴⁷ and the dates coincide with those of the plot.

⁴⁶ Adolfo Prego, "Las Meninas de Buero Vallejo, en el Español," Primer Acto, 19,10, Enero 1961, no page given.

⁴⁷ "Motín de Esquilache," Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada, Tomo LVII, p. 912.

The physical symbol in this play is the prediction of the future made by a blind beggar. He is selling almanacs, published by the Gran Piscator Salmantino, and this is an interesting detail which Buero Vallejo has included. The Spanish author Diego Torres Villarroel published an almanac under the pseudonym of Gran Piscator Salmantino. Chandler and Schwarz⁴⁸ state that he was an unusual man, who took an interest in astrology, and from this avocation published predictions in his almanacs, some of which came true, giving him the reputation of a magician.

The blind almanac seller in Un soñador para un pueblo is the symbol representing the tragic destiny of Esquilache's brilliant dreams of reform. The work depicts the conflicts between a man in a position of power and the people. The masses must be considered even when the projected reforms are for their own good. On another plane the relationship between Esquilache and the Marqués de Ensenada is interesting, and it is an example of the dual characteristic in Buero's drama. In this case a pair of men with similar names provide the secondary plot. Esquilache is sincerely interested in helping his fellow man, and eventually is forced to sacrifice his position in the government to avoid plunging the country into a bloody and costly revolution. Ensenada, on the other hand, because of his envy

⁴⁸Richard E. Chandler and Kessel Schwarz, A New History of Spanish Literature (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), p. 200.

and greed, has set in motion the intrigues that triggered the uprising. Buero seems to be using these two characters to depict the freedom of choice available to every man to work for the brother, or against him.

The two levels of the plot are resolved in the end by Esquilache's decision to be the scapegoat and leave the country, thus sparing the people from war. In this work the primary and secondary themes are closely united, demonstrating Buero's great ability in plot development.

Aventura en lo gris was produced in October of 1963, but it was written shortly before Buero's first play was produced. The revolutionary theme of the dictator had caused producers to be wary of it, and the author himself makes the following statement:

Como la obra posee ciertas rarezas de forma—el sueño inesperado, que se enquista premeditadamente y sin paliativos entre dos actos de apariencia realista—no lograba saber, y sigo sin saberlo, si el temor que suscitaba se debía primordialmente a su tema o al violento excorzo de su construcción.⁴⁹

Two acts and a dream sequence make up the work, and the surrealistic world of a dream is the symbol of the protest against brutality and oppression which the drama conveys. The primary plot details the actions and reactions of a group of refugees from an imaginary European state, fleeing after the overthrow of the government. One of the refugees is the ex-dictator. On the secondary level,

⁴⁹A. Buero Vallejo, "A propósito de Aventura en lo gris," Teatro, No. 9, sept.-dic., 1953, p. 37.

the author is expressing man's alienation from his fellow-man and from himself. Silvano and Ana represent the search for love as the defense against the isolation of the individual. The plot resolves itself when the dictator is killed, and the refugees must leave for the border since the enemy forces are coming. The secondary plot is terminated when Silvano and Ana recognize their responsibility to the future, and sacrifice themselves so that Isabel's baby may live. This work has messianic inferences, and hope for a better world of the future is conveyed.

In El concierto de San Ovidio the author again treats the subject of blindness, coupled with a historical incident. Here, as in En la ardiente oscuridad, blindness is an effective theatrical illustration of Buero Vallejo's intense concern with the problems of reality and unreality. Rafael Vázquez Zamora made the following comment:

Ha encontrado una excelente manera de expresar teatralmente angustiosos y muy elevados problemas de la humanidad vidente a través de los que están privados de la vista. Y ello posee una lógica interna, una razón muy sólida, indestructible, de modo que los ciegos de Buero Vallejo no sólo nos conmueven, emocionan e interesan como tales ciegos, sino porque el espectador—sin necesidad alguna de aplicar el sentido crítico sino como sencillo espectador sin ideas ni prejuicios literarios—intuye que en el escenario se está debatiendo algún otro conflicto más profundo.⁵⁰

The plot describes the exploitation of a group of blind musicians by a selfish, greedy man. The blind men

⁵⁰Rafael Vázquez Zamora, "En el Goya, los trágicos ciegos de Buero Vallejo," Insula, Núm. 193, 15 de diciembre 1962, p. 16.

are made ridiculous by outlandish costumes and caps with long pointed ears. They perform on a stage during the fair of San Ovidio. There is a wooden peacock in the center of the stage, which, as a symbol of the foolish and the proud, serves to accentuate the degradation of the blind men. In this play the physical symbol is the peacock, representing the struggle of man against his destiny and against the inhumanity of other men. The secondary plot again deals with the question of a man wrestling with his destiny, and the cruel tricks fate plays on individuals. David longs to develop his talent as a musician, and had he been born in a more enlightened age, he might have done so. Another philosophical question is raised in the contrast between the two men, Luis María Valindin and Valentín Hally. These men have similar names, and the author uses them to depict the freedom of the individual to work for good or for evil.

La tejedora de sueños is again a demonstration of Buero's ability to take a theme from the past and use it as a vehicle to express his ideals. The myth provides an exciting inspiration for a drama that exhibits the dualism so characteristic of this author, and it also makes use of a physical symbol representative of the ideal expressed. Penelope weaves a cloth on her loom by day, and destroys her work at night. In Buero's version, the article being woven is referred to as a sudario, or shroud. It is the physical object and represents the death of Penelope's and Ylysses'

love. Actually it is used as Anfino's shroud, symbolizing the burial of Penelope's dreams of youth and love. On the obvious level the plot tells the old story of Ulysses' return to Ithaca. On a deeper philosophical plane, the problem of men leaving their homes to fight is explored, as well as a woman's selfish desire to be loved and admired. The note of hope for a better world of the future is contained in the final lines of the work. The dual level of the plot is successfully resolved, and the use of the physical symbol has been intricately woven into the play, demonstrating this quality in Buero's theatre.

Las palabras en la arena, a one-act play which won the "Alvarez Quintero" prize in 1949, does not have a physical object that serves as a symbol of the ideal expressed. It does manifest the dual nature of Buero's drama in that the protagonists in the play act out their drama against the background of the biblical story of Jesus' defense of the woman taken in adultery. The theme of free will appears in the freedom which Asaf has to forgive or condemn his wife for her infidelity to him. Although he has just witnessed an example of forgiveness, Asaf kills his wife for her faithlessness. Man has the freedom to act responsibly or irresponsibly.

Buero Vallejo demonstrates great ability in creating dramatic works that are well constructed, built to a climax swiftly, with effective resolution of the plot. In many

plays the use of a physical symbol provides the core of the play, such as has been noted in Historia de una escalera, La señal que se espera, Madrugada, Irene o el tesoro, Hoy es fiesta, La tejedora de sueños and Las cartas boca abajo. In Casi un cuento de hadas, Un soñador para un pueblo, Aventura en lo gris, Las Meninas and El concierto de San Ovidio, the physical symbol is important, but rather than constituting the backbone or core of the play, it serves as an additional identifying note which contributes to the overall effect.

The dual quality in these plays is not obvious to the casual reader or spectator, however analysis demonstrates that there is a consistent trend of thought on a philosophical level that echoes the obvious action of the plot. This quality is one of the outstanding features of Buero's dramas and probably accounts for the universal appeal and acceptance his works have received.

CHAPTER IV

VIOLENT DEATH AS A CLIMAX

Many of Buero Vallejo's works climax with incidents of violent death. He acknowledges that he is a tragic writer, but insists that tragedy does not, of necessity, imply pessimism, and that his works are optimistic. In an interview he has stated:

Hay en mis dramas un conflicto reiterado entre individualidad y colectividad, entre necesidad y libertad, que los glosa de diversas maneras. O suele haberlo. Pero, al apuntar esto, debo repetir algo que a menudo defiendo: tragedia no significa negatividad o desesperación. La tragedia de más desesperada apariencia se basa en la esperanza y postula, explícita o implícitamente, ciertas "Euménides" finales que todo conflicto trágico, en su tensión, busca.⁵¹

The expression of a positive attitude of optimism by means of a tragic vehicle seems to be this author's predilection. His aim is not only to entertain, but to disturb and provoke thought, and, in this regard, he reveals a certain Unamuno-like quality. Isabel Magaña de Schevill cites his feelings on the effect of his tragedies:

Para este autor dramático, la tragedia, en su sentido más amplio y universal, es la forma de teatro más moral y positiva, porque es la forma más auténtica

⁵¹José R. Marra-López, "Conversación con Antonio Buero Vallejo," Cuadernos del Congreso para la libertad de la cultura, Núm. 42, mayo-junio 1960, p. 55.

"para conmover y remover al espectador" y para interesarle por "el insondable dolor humano . . . aunque no encontremos en ella moralejas ni fríos tópicos de discurso." La tragedia, pues, es para Buero el concepto total de la vida. Es lo moral, lo auténtico.⁵²

Regardless of his intentions, Buero's tragedies are exciting theatre experiences. His themes differ widely, but still are built on a strong foundation of suspense and conflict. This conflict is further defined by Isabel Magaña de Schevill as follows:

Hoy día define la tragedia como un conflicto entre la necesidad--la fuerza del ambiente sobre el hombre--y la libertad--el libre albedrío--, cuya solución, sin embargo, no resulta inexorablemente a favor de la necesidad.⁵³

The conflict waged by a man against his destiny or with the circumstances of his environment, given the freedom of his will, is the pattern this author uses to create his plots. The conflict sometimes results in death, and there is a high incidence of violent death in Buero's drama. He follows the Greek tradition in that the death scene usually occurs off-stage, and the dialogue reveals the details.

The tragedies Buero Vallejo has written will be discussed with regard to his use of violent death as a dramatic climax, and how this act contributes to the resolution of the plot.

⁵²Isabel Magaña de Schevill, op. cit., p. 52.

⁵³Ibid., p. 53.

The only one of Buero's plays in which a murder occurs on-stage is El concierto de San Ovidio, but the audience does not witness it inasmuch as the event takes place in total darkness, and only the blows of a blind man's stick are heard as David bludgeons Valindin to death. This is an outstanding example of dramatic action. In all probability the audience received this dramatic removal of the villain with morbid fascination at the brutality of the attack. This is an instance of death not being the only tragic part of the play, but rather action on the part of one of the characters which contributes to the real tragedy--that of David's imprisonment and eventual death.

The plot in El concierto de San Ovidio makes the eventual climax inevitable. David's extrasensitive ability to hear is a good example of the author's knowledge of his subject, namely the capacities and incapacities of the blind. The plot reveals his ability to use these capacities and incorporate them into the smooth flow of the total action. David's character is depicted throughout the play as a sensitive, talented musician, who yearns for the opportunity to develop his gift, denied to him because of his blindness. He is an idealist as he states in the following speech:

Os decía que yo antes soñaba para olvidar mi miedo. Soñaba con la música, y que amaba a una mujer a quien ni siquiera conozco Y también soñé que nadie me causaría ningún mal, ni yo a nadie . . .

¡Qué iluso! ¿Verdad? Atreverse a soñar tales cosas en un mundo donde nos pueden matar de hambre, o convertirnos en peleles de circo, o golpearnos
O encerrarnos para toda la vida con una secreta.⁵⁴

Valindín's brutal attack on both Donato and Adriana provokes David to murder him. He has to take this direct action as his defense against a hostile world. One of his last statements to Valindín is: "Ya no ultrajarás más a los ciegos."⁵⁵ The conflict with his environment has provoked a confrontation, and although he dies on the guillotine for the murder, he has struck a blow against the cruel treatment the blind were given.

Rafael Vázquez Zamora made the following statements about this murder:

Privado pues de la música, la amistad y la libertad física--o amenazado de perderla--David comete un impresionante crimen--otro formidable acierto teatral de Buero Vallejo--, puesto que encuentra a Valindín en la total oscuridad y ese es el elemento propio del ciego, no del vidente. Las tinieblas alteran al vidente y lo dejan indefenso. El bastón del ciego actúa en ellas como el bate de un jugador de base-ball a pleno sol. David, pues, lo ha perdido todo, pero por un acto de su voluntad que lo reivindica como hombre completo en un mundo cerrado al vidente.⁵⁶

⁵⁴A. Buero Vallejo, El concierto de San Ovidio (Madrid: Ediciones Alfíl, 1960), p. 101.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 102.

⁵⁶Rafael Vázquez Zamora, "En el goya, los trágicos ciegos de Buero Vallejo," Insula, Núm. 193, 15 de dic. 1962, p. 16.

David's eventual fate is revealed at the end of the play in the speech which Valentín Haüy makes before the final curtain. At this time Haüy states that the inspiration for his life's work, that of creating a method of reading for the blind, had come from his disgust at seeing the degradation of human beings as practiced by Valindín in the concert during the fair in honor of Saint Ovidio. Although this final speech detracts from the dramatic impact of the play, it does explain Valentín Haüy's appearance in Act 2, which otherwise would be meaningless, and furthermore it serves to emphasize the positive aspect Buero Vallejo wished to convey.

Another murder provides the climax in En la ardiente oscuridad. Here again the blind provide the vehicle used by the author to express his concern with the social and moral blindness of many people toward the compelling problems of humanity.

The previously noted critic, Rafael Vázquez Zamora, has commented on the relationship of these two plays of Buero Vallejo:

En ambas obras, el coro de ciegos, con la excepción de dos o tres de ellos con una individualidad muy definida, son más bien una representación plástica de la ceguera, que es el aire respirado en los dos dramas o tragedias, como sería mejor decir.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Ibid.

In El concierto de San Ovidio David kills the person who represents the obstacle to his personal fulfillment. Carlos, protagonist in En la ardiente oscuridad, kills Ignacio to protect his world of illusion which is being threatened. It is interesting to note that the parts played by David and Ignacio are similar in nature. Vázquez Zamora describes them in the following manner:

Tanto Ignacio como David son duros, hoscos, insumisos, negadores de las ilusiones confortables, y los dos poseen una fe inmensa. El primero, en la posibilidad, en la necesidad de que los ciegos recuperen la vista, pues para el adaptarse a la desgracia y someterse al destino equivale a perder lo más noble de la condición humana. El segundo, aspira con insensata grandeza a borrar con lo que le queda a su persona aparte de la ceguera--nada menos que el alma y el cuerpo menos los ojos--a borrar, digo, la injusta incapacidad que le ha tocado en desgracia. David e Ignacio son dos personajes de pura tragedia. Los dos son vencidos por el destino, pero su energía espiritual queda eternamente en el aire de los videntes y de los ciegos.⁵⁸

Although in each play the protagonist loses his struggle against his destiny, still the tragedies are not fatalistic in that both men have been true to their own highest ideals. They have died for their beliefs.

Violence and tragedy are the identifying characteristics of Las palabras en la arena, a one-act play which won the "Quintero Brother's" prize in 1949. This is a dramatic version of the biblical story of the woman taken in adultery, and the story is told from the viewpoint of eye-witnesses of Jesus' defense of the woman. The words written in the

⁵⁸Ibid.

sand indict all who had accused the adulteress. The plot is well-constructed with a man, Asaf, his wife Noemi, and their slave La fenicia, holding the principal roles. Asaf, a Jew, is a hot-tempered, vindictive man, who cannot understand Jesus' forgiveness of the woman. Noemi is guilty of a love affair with a Roman centurion. Asaf learns of his wife's infidelity, and the climax occurs when he kills her. Again the murder occurs off-stage, with La fenicia witnessing the event. Buero Vallejo's stage directions describe the scene:

Entran en la casa y él se precipita detrás. La fenicia recoge la bolsa, mete las monedas y se la guarda. Luego corre a la puerta de la casa, y con el rostro surcado por el sabroso escalofrío del horror, que ella degusta con solapada delectación, atisba el interior. Pausa larga. Noemi exhala dentro un grito agudísimo. La sierva se estremece y grita también. Después cruza corriendo el portillo y sale desalada por la derecha, gritando.⁵⁹

After the murder some of the townspeople come in and Asaf comes out of the house. The dialogue reveals that Jesus had accused Asaf of being a murderer, and the prediction has come true. Perhaps this play is less optimistic in that Asaf seems unable to overcome his destiny. He was defeated by his inability to forgive, and yielded to his baser nature when he resorted to murder.

It would be hard to imagine a more sanguinary scene than that occurring at the climax of La tejedora de sueños

⁵⁹A. Buero Vallejo, Las palabras en la arena (Madrid: Ediciones Alfíl, 1961), p. 89.

which is an interpretation of Ulysses' return to Ithaca. None of Penelope's suitors is able to bend the great bow of Ulysses, the latter, who, after watching in disguise, reveals his identity and kills each man with one arrow. The technique Buero uses in this scene is an ingenious one. The stage is set so that the actors are watching the feats of strength from the elevation of a gallery which commands an extensive view of the courtyard below. Ulysses aims his bow, lets the arrows fly downward, and there is a scream of anguish as each suitor dies. The last man, Anfino, is allowed to come up the steps to receive his death like a man.

The verbal exchange between Anfino and Ulysses is most dramatic as Anfino ascends the stairs. He remains unseen to the audience as Ulysses releases the fatal arrow, and Penelope reacts as if it had pierced her heart. The heavy falling of Anfino's body is heard.

Ulysses' terrible vengeance produces a forceful and dramatic climax to the play. Cristóbal de Castro comments on this scene as follows:

Toda la acción se halla constelada por la armonía ática y regida por una intención moderna. Los reyes, el hombre, no deben abandonar sus reinos, su hogar; a los hijos, como a las tierras, hay que marcarles el surco para que produzcan, feraces Esta idea es la que nos lleva a la magnífica escena del último acto entre Penélope y Ulises; escena que es la arteria tumultuosa que agita toda la obra en un sollozo y en una amenaza constante.⁶⁰

⁶⁰Cristóbal de Castro, Review of La tejedora de sueños, by A. Buero Vallejo, Teatro Español 1951-1952 (Madrid: Aguilar, S. A., 1953), p. 287.

A note of almost comic relief prevails when Ulysses instructs the slaves to go down and remove the bodies and wash up the blood. Ulysses assumes command. The master has returned, and order will now prevail in Ithaca. Ulysses, however, will not regain Penelope's love. Her love has died with Anfino, and she is resigned to her fate. The robe she has been weaving so long will be Anfino's shroud, and with him she will bury her dreams. Thus, the tragedy comes to an end in good Greek tradition, with Penelope envying the dead, and the women's chorus chanting in the background. The real tragedy is that Ulysses' and Penelope's marriage has died due to his prolonged absence. A note of hope in this work is found in Penelope's statement that one day men will have the sensitivity that Anfino had, that they will no longer fight each other or leave their wives. Mankind will eventually learn to really love.

A duel provides the means of death that effects the climax in Casi un cuento de hadas. The two antagonists are seen by the audience as they begin their fencing on the narrow gallery at the rear of the stage. The dialogue then describes the eventual death of Armando at Riquet's hands since the swordsmen go off-stage, and the fight takes place outside in the park near the palace. This climax is reached through the measured development of the plot, and Buero Vallejo makes good use of his dramatic talents. The vision of Riquet defending his honor makes him beautiful in Leticia's

eyes, and she realizes she loves him, thus producing the final resolution. In this play two actors interpret the part of Riquet. One of them is very handsome, while the other is quite homely. The handsome Riquet appears in the last scene, and Leticia and the ugly Riquet bid him a sad adieu. The ideal prince of her dreams and his has been replaced by the reality of the man beside her. They are both willing to live in this world, with the hope of a better one to come. In a comment on this play, Buero Vallejo has said:

La pareja central decide vivir en la esperanza, confirmando así el sentido trágico del desenlace; pues es una curiosa peculiaridad de la tragedia que la esperanza final pueda reforzar su sentido en lugar de aminorarlo.⁶¹

Two crimes of passion in Aventura en lo gris strengthen the impression of the brutality and senselessness of war which the play conveys. Isabel is strangled in pantomime in the dream sequence between the two acts of the drama. In this instance the audience sees the apparent murder, however it has a dreamlike unreality, since Carlos' hands are threatening, but do not actually touch Isabel's neck, and she sinks to the floor as if in a faint. When the second act opens, her body remains in the same position; however, instead of the long, white nightdress she wore in the dream, she is now wearing the same clothes she had on in Act 1.

⁶¹A. Buero Vallejo, Casi un cuento de hadas (Madrid: Ediciones Alfíl, 1952), p. 79.

Silvano is leaning over her; apparently he has just discovered the body, and the second act derives some of its impetus from this death. The identity of the murderer is finally revealed. The fleeing dictator, in a final act of self-indulgence, had tried to seduce Isabel, and when she refused him, he killed her. Buero Vallejo's dialogue is an indictment of totalitarianism:

Te has reído de todo y lo has manchado todo . . . en el nombre de la eficacia. Y esta noche has querido seguir tus costumbres. ¡Tomar, si es necesario, a la fuerza!⁶²

The dictator is eventually killed by Carlos, and this murder also occurs off-stage, with only the two shots of the revolver being heard. This second killing vindicates the first; the enemy is coming, and all the refugees will have to flee for their lives. But what will happen to Isabel's child? It is extremely weak and needs immediate nourishment. Silvano has appealed to the other characters to take the little orphan, but they have denied responsibility for the infant. After all, it is very hard to travel quickly with a baby, and the escape route is across a mountain trail and will take several days. The child would never survive the trip. Silvano realizes this and states that the only hope of salvation for the baby would be for the enemy forces to send it back of their lines to an emergency medical position. There it could receive immediate

⁶²A. Buero Vallejo, Aventura en lo gris, p. 92.

attention, and have a chance to live. He decides to remain in the hut and plead with the advancing forces for the life of the child, although he knows he will be executed. Ana cannot leave him. Buero's dialogue emphasizes the symbolism of the play:

Silvano.--Déjame intentarlo solo. Es . . . inútil que tú también te sacrifiques. Yo . . . no quiero que te atropellen. ¡No podría soportarlo!

Ana.-----Si es necesario para convencerlos, pagaré ese precio. Así habré servido para algo.

Silvano.--¡Es que también pueden matarte!

Ana.--(Se enardece.)--Pero, ¿no comprendes tú? Es que no comprendes . . . ¿que no podría dejarte solo?⁶³

The enemy soldiers come, and finally agree to take the infant back to an emergency post. Silvano and Ana are to be shot, and as the curtain falls the raised rifles point at them. They are unafraid. They have laid down their lives so that another might live--the hope of a better future is embodied in the saved baby. These two deaths are the climax of the play, and at the same time provide a dramatic restatement of Buero's faith in a better future.

The death of a stable boy in Un soñador para un pueblo lacks the dramatic intensity demonstrated by the works previously discussed. In the beginning of the second part Esquilache and Fernandita meet in front of his house after it has been taken over by the revolutionary forces. The

⁶³Ibid., p. 104.

stable boy was killed during the fracas, and Fernandita wants to take his body into the house and get it off the street, but it is urgent that Esquilache get away, and he persuades Fernandita to go with him. Again, the murder does not occur on the stage, but the audience does see the body. This death does not provide the climax for the play, but it does accentuate the seriousness of the rebellion, and the capacity for retaliation on the part of an aroused populace.

The play is not supposed to represent actual historical facts. The author himself has titled the play, "Versión libre de un episodio histórico." A number of critics have commented on the symbolism it contains:

Ya el propio autor ha tomado la precaución de advertir: "versión libre de un episodio histórico." Libertad que le lleva a crear el personaje de Fernandita, una síntesis del buen pueblo.

.....
Fernandita es un personaje que da a la obra ese "toque humano" que era imprescindible para equilibrar un drama intelectual, puesto que el choque de ideas es lo que constituye el poderoso motor de este drama, un motor que, desde luego, funciona soterrado, inaudible para el espectador sencillo y sin preocupaciones histórico-sociales, pero que a la larga hace que el espectador capte y digiera lo que de verdad se está debatiendo en el escenario. Y Fernandita, atraída por el grande hombre, simboliza al buen pueblo lleno de posibilidades.⁶⁴

The central idea of the drama is the conflict between a man's dreams for improvement and the obstacles which he

⁶⁴Rafael Vázquez Zamora, Review of Un soñador para un pueblo, by A. Buero Vallejo, Teatro Español 1958-1959 (Madrid: Aguilar, S. A., 1960), p. 199.

meets in trying to implement these dreams. The death serves, perhaps, to symbolize the death of Esquilache's hopes.

Hoy es fiesta is one of Buero Vallejo's most engaging productions. Although the author entitles it "Comedia en tres actos," it can more properly be termed a tragicomedy inasmuch as the climax comes when Pilar suffers a heart attack and dies at the end of the last act. This death does occur on the stage, and is most dramatic. The scene is a tranquil one: day is dying, the shadows are growing longer, and the excitement of the holiday is being replaced by the monotony of the workaday world. The anger of the residents due to Doña Balbina's fraud has died down, and Silverio has collected all the false lottery tickets and has obtained forgiveness from the people who had built so many hopes and dreams on them. The viewer fully expects the play to end on this tranquil note, when Pilar returns to the roof in the gathering dusk where Silverio waits. She suffers a heart attack, and he is devastated because he had planned to confess to her his guilt in the death of her child. Ironically, destiny has intervened and now his hopes of pardon die with Pilar.. His final words are a plea that she hear him even in death. In the background the voice of Doña Nieves is heard, proclaiming that hope never ends; it is infinite. With this note of dramatic irony the play ends. Alfredo Marquerie made the following comment on this work:

Cierto que en el diálogo de esta pieza no suena ni una vez la palabra Dios, ni tampoco sale a escena ningún sacerdote, pero, sin embargo, la obra es

absolutamente religiosa, y el misterioso destino del que nos habla al final el protagonista en su dolorido monólogo y la ilusión de ser oído desde el más allá, desde la otra orilla por su esposa muerta y de ser también perdonado por ella, y la lección de fervor esperanzado que da por encima de sus ingenuas supercherías una pobre echadora de cartas, y el ansia de los desheredados por hallar algo más que la fortuna material de un premio de la lotería, una luz alegre como la del día de fiesta que alumbra espiritualmente sus vidas, están pregonando la preocupación metafísica del autor y de su producción escénica.⁶⁵

In Madrugada, death provides all the atmosphere. In spite of this the body is never seen, but the dead man actually is given life through the eyes of his survivors. The action never swerves from the tight line of a well-constructed plot. The corpse never becomes an object of laughter, and the final resolution is unexpected, yet leaves the audience well satisfied. The unusual theme makes the play unique, and the following comment has been made:

Pero, sobre todo, hay que elogiar en Madrugada la valentía en el planteamiento y en la resolución de las situaciones; lo que tiene de ruptura con el tópico de que en el teatro moderno tiene que sonar en voz baja y que en su ámbito no puede sonar una voz más alta que otra; su virtud destructiva de totems y supersticiones teatrales (como aquélla por la que se afirma que una obra con muerto dentro es para el público español, irremediablemente, una obra cómica); la fuerza aleccionadora del drama, que es una pieza dura y purificadora, moralmente positiva frente a tanta bazofia dramática, rosa y desmoralizadora, como cultivan la mayoría de nuestros escenarios, que se han convertido en verdaderos centros de corrupción, y tantas cosas más que nos hacen reafirmar en Antonio Buero Vallejo a un dramaturgo de gran talla.⁶⁶

⁶⁵Alfredo Marquerie, op. cit., p. 181.

⁶⁶Alfonse Sastre, "España en su tiempo," Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos, Núm. 50, feb. 1950, p. 284.

Madrugada is a dramatic expression of Buero's intense feeling about the inability of men and women to communicate even in the marriage relationship. It also points up the mercenary desires of many people, and the power of money as conflicting with the power of love.

The climax of Irene o el tesoro is a suicide. The young widow, Irene, driven by fear of being placed in an insane asylum, sees a glittering highway leading to heaven from the balcony of the sordid apartment where she has been living with her in-laws. She is led to the balcony by the little elf that plays such an important part in the drama as the focus of the struggle between the real and the imaginary. A critic of the play asks the following question:

La pobre Irene--pobre loca en la visión de tejas abajo—, muere accidentalmente impulsada por su locura, o se va como nosotros sabemos por caminos de luz hacia un mundo en el que ha de encontrar a su hijo?⁶⁷

The tragedy in this work is the girl who, having lost her husband and child, has lost faith in the real world which at every turn treats her cruelly. In her isolation she creates the vision of the elf and believes in this apparition so implicitly that the escape he suggests is the solution to her dilemma. The affirmation the author implies in this work is that reality may actually have an aspect that many people are unable to see, and that the world of

⁶⁷Nicolás González Ruiz, Review of Irene o el tesoro, by A. Buero Vallejo, Teatro Español 1954-1955 (Madrid: Aguilar, S. A., 1959), p. 183.

fantasy may become real for some. Irene's suicide condemns the circumstances that made her life unbearable, such as Dimas' greed and Aurelia's and Justina's pettiness. The character of Irene may be a little exaggerated, but perhaps this is necessary in order to fully develop the plot. Her environment has defeated her, but her last act reveals her faith in her dreams, and the play is a good illustration of the following quotation from Unamuno which the author cites at the beginning of the work: "El secreto del alma redimida: vivir los sueños al soñar la vida."

As we review the way Buero Vallejo uses death in his plays, it is obvious that he does not limit himself to any one method or manner; rather the deaths come as a logical development of the specific character and situation. These tragedies tend to be a restatement of Buero Vallejo's ultimate belief that mankind has the power to ultimately reach a higher plane of understanding. In man's conflict with his destiny there is always present the freedom to exercise individual will, and the responsible man does this in order to be true to his beliefs.

CHAPTER V

STAGECRAFT AND SET ARRANGEMENT

An analysis of Buero Vallejo's dramatic output reveals that he uses a multiple set in most of his works which, in many instances, contains several different levels of elevation from the stage.

The multiple set is one which is not changed during the play, but allows the action to occur in more than one area, as, for example, several rooms, a whole house, or a street scene with several houses. The following quotation explains its development:

A new type of production--as old as the multiple set of the Middle Ages--began to appear in the late '40's. It went beyond O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms, of 1924, with a setting that showed an exterior and four rooms of a house, or Van Druten's The Voice of the Turtle, with Stewart Chaney's cut-away apartment, or Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie, with Jo Mielziner's setting that used gauze to provide an exterior as well as an interior In the early '50's the multiple set grew in popularity. . . . The reasons for it were obvious: the new set allowed the playwright to be as free as Shakespeare with short scenes in different places, and without the delays of scene shifting. It helped to cut down the high costs of construction and large crews of stagehands by giving the managers a one-set show.⁶⁸

⁶⁸Kenneth Macgowan and William Melnitz, The Living Stage (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1955), p. 493.

Aside from the practical advantages of the multiple set, many artistic effects were created by the sophisticated use of lighting. Buero Vallejo has stated his admiration for Eugene O'Neill, and it is possible that the innovations made by this American influenced the former in his choice of settings. Charles Brooks made the following comment on O'Neill's contribution to modern staging:

As with so many aspects of modern drama, Eugene O'Neill was an experimenter with settings, and "Desire Under the Elms" is almost a multiple set play. The essence is there: a whole house exposed to view, two bedrooms upstairs, a parlor and kitchen downstairs, a yard, wall, and road outside. O'Neill used removable panels to make one part or another of the set visible in a given scene, while playwrights today use lighting or scrims and have developed other devices such as cycloramic backdrops, images projected on parts of the set, and spotlighting.⁶⁹

In response to a question about the almost perpendicular quality of his staging, Buero stated that his use of varied level sets was in order to take advantage of the benefits of perspective which this method offers, as well as for symbolic reasons:

En mi teatro ese aspecto tiene, por supuesto, carácter de recurso escenográfico, pero subsidiariamente; primordialmente ha debido de surgir, creo, de mi preocupación dramática por la realidad de esas diferencias de nivel en la vida diaria, y también, acaso, de mi interés de ex-pintor por la plástica de esas disposiciones vitales.⁷⁰

⁶⁹Charles Brooks, "The Multiple Set in American Drama," Tulane Drama Review, Vol. 3, No. 2, December 1958, p. 32.

⁷⁰Letter from Antonio Buero Vallejo, January 24, 1966.

Buero Vallejo has not limited himself to one type of setting. In considering the staging of his works three broad classifications may be made. The first consists of those plays which utilize this perpendicular stage setting, that is, where the set itself provides varied levels from which the action proceeds. This group consists of: Historia de una escalera, Hoy es fiesta, Las meninas, Sonador para un pueblo, and Casi un cuento de hadas.

The second group consists of those works in which action is referred to, but is not seen by the audience, and supposedly occurs at a different level. The plays in this group are: En la ardiente oscuridad, La tejedora de sueños, La señal que se espera, and Irene o el tesoro.

The third group consists of the dramas which present the entire action on one level, in a conventional setting, which sometimes is changed but in some cases remains the same during the length of the production. In this group Madrugada, Las palabras en la arena, Las cartas boca abajo, El concierto de San Ovidio, and Aventura en lo gris are found. Each of these groups will be discussed in detail.

The detail that stands out most prominently in the first group of plays is the use of varied levels on the sets. In Historia de una escalera much of the action takes place on the stairway, with the characters going up or coming down. This aspect contributes to a feeling of movement. Time is passing rapidly, and yet for the inhabitants of this building

things remain the same. In the lower right hand corner of the stage the landing provides a small window seat. This is referred to as the "casinillo." (Plate 1.) The window with a small bench makes an ideal spot for intimate conversations which contribute to the measured development of the plot.

The first four steps of the flight of stairs leading up to the apartments end in a small platform, which again provides a different level from which action can emanate. A person sitting in the window seat cannot be seen by actors on the top landing in front of the apartment doors. This physical attribute of the setting enables a person to hear and see what others are saying without revealing his presence. All of the long dialogues take place in this corner of the set, and yet this is not an obvious feature, since the continuous action of the plot takes the attention of the viewer to all parts of the stage. The final scene is an excellent illustration of the dramatic possibilities of this particular set. Carmina's daughter and Fernando's son are in love and are making plans to improve their future lives. Fernando, the father, comes up the stairs, and Carmina, his old sweetheart, come out of her apartment and is on the top landing. Miguelín, Fernando's younger son, is in the window alcove, and only the two older people see each other. They exchange a glance that seems to say: "Things might have been different if . . . " The promise of future happiness now lies with their children.

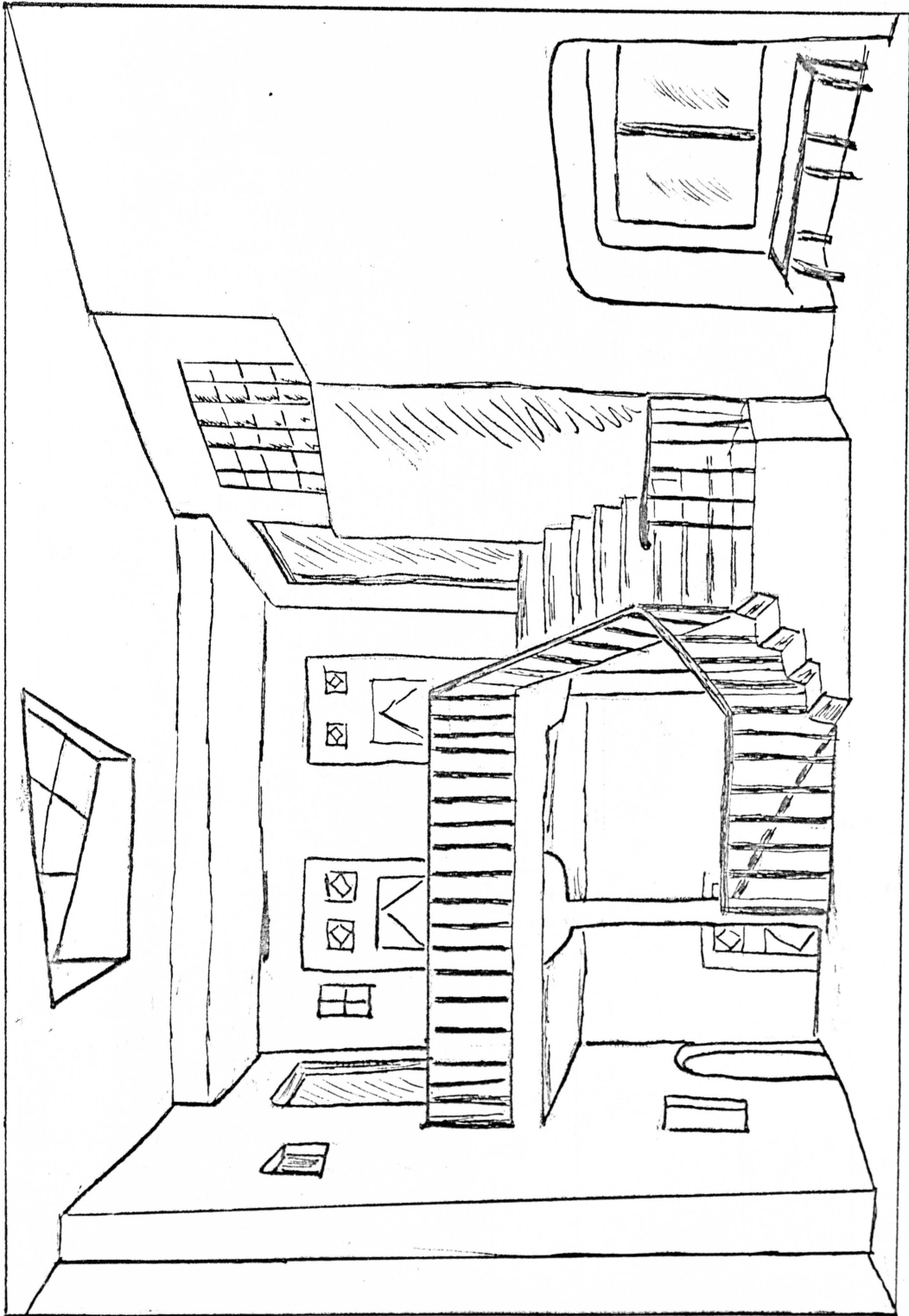


Plate I Setting for Historia de una escalera

In Hoy es fiesta the scene is the roof of a tenement building. (Plate 2.) There are living quarters for Doña Nieves in a small structure to the left of the stage. Stairs lead to a clothesline on the top of this part of the roof, and this provides a different level of action. The small area in front of Doña Nieves' dwelling is on still another level, and action taking place to the right of the stage would not be obvious to someone located to the far left. Over the low wall that encircles the roof the buildings of Madrid can be seen. The holiday spirit of the play is enhanced by the scene taking place on the roof, since many of the tenants of the building are not usually able to leave their work to come up and enjoy the weather. On a holiday they might, except the building manager is a bad-tempered woman who keeps the door locked to prevent the tenants from going on the roof. On this particular holiday the door is left open all day, and all the characters enjoy the unusual privilege. One critic has made the following comment:

Aquí, las intrigas, esbozadas por los inquilinos de una vivienda ruinosa, se tejen y anudan definitivamente en la azotea del caserón cuyo acceso les está oficialmente prohibida y adonde se precipitan para respirar "el buen aire", este aire madrileño, tan sutil que, según el proverbio, "mata a un hombre y no apaga un candil."⁷¹

⁷¹J. Van Praag Chantraine, op. cit., p. 256.

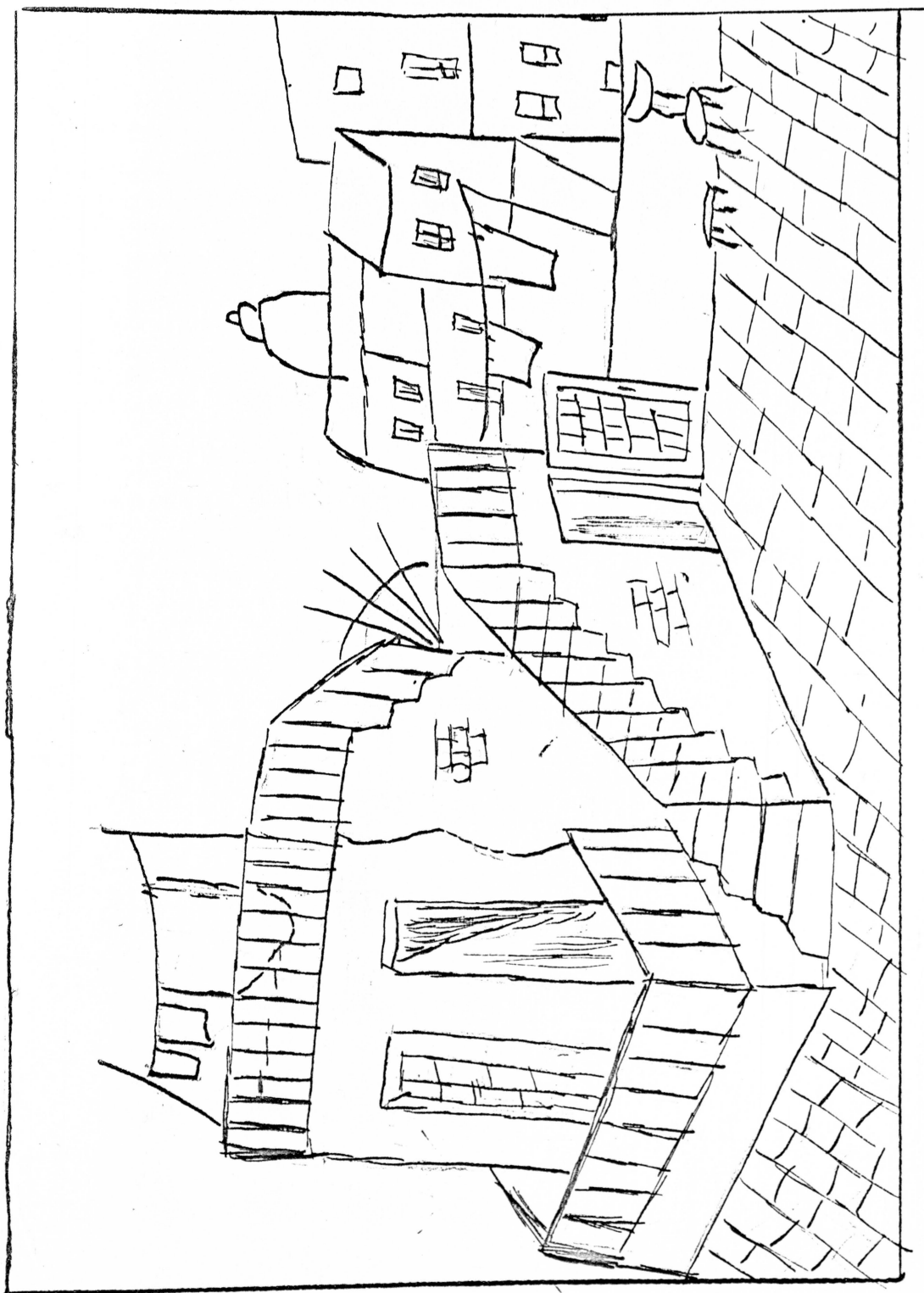


Plate 2 Setting for Hoy es fiesta.

The action of the play takes place on the lowest level of the stage; however, in the first act the boys taunt Nati and jump back and forth over the wall, theoretically passing from one rooftop to another. The use of an outdoor setting provides the opportunity for complicated lighting techniques that simulate different times of day. In the finale, dusk falls, and the scene takes on the dejected aspect typical to the aftermath of a holiday. The stage setting contributes to the action in that Doña Nieves cannot see Silverio holding Pilar's dead body in his arms, neither can she hear his pleas for forgiveness from the dead woman. Her words bear a note of dramatic irony as she says: "Hay que esperar . . . Esperar siempre . . . La esperanza nunca termina . . . La esperanza es infinita. . . ." ⁷²

In this play Buero Vallejo has integrated his plot and his setting so that each contributes to and enhances the outcome of the total production.

The stage setting for Las meninas as well as for Un soñador para un pueblo are similar in that they represent a street scene in Madrid. In addition, both of these settings make use of the revolving stage which permits the scenes to be changed easily and quickly by means of concentrating attention on one side or other while the stage shifts. In both settings there is a balcony several feet

⁷²A. Buero Vallejo, Hoy es fiesta (Madrid: Ediciones Alfíl, 1960), p. 96.

above the proscenium from which one or two actors can carry on a dialogue or make comments about action which is taking place. In Las meninas the scene described by the characters standing on the balcony takes place in the palace courtyard. In both of these plays the emphasis on the action is heightened by the use of lights. In Un soñador para un pueblo the action taking place on the street is spotlighted while the back part of the stage is in darkness, and as the action shifts to the interior of the house, light is increased on this area. The street light on the outside of the house in this work supplements the plot since improved lighting was one of the improvements that had been instituted by Esquilache, and it is referred to in the dialogue when he looks at the lamp outside his window and makes the statement that darkness will soon end and Madrid will have more light.

Buero Vallejo makes use of this sophisticated lighting technique in Las meninas. The initial scene in this play is described in great detail by the author. The street in front of the Casa del Tesoro with a portion of this structure and a part of the Alcázar is seen as the curtains open. The revolving stage is back of this facade, and the lighting focuses attention on different areas, depending on the action. These two examples of stagecraft illustrate the author's ability to combine his historical inspiration with his settings.

The following comment has been made:

En el arte teatral, el elemento literario y los que podríamos llamar elementos espectaculares--dentro de los que se incluyen, principalmente, la interpretación y la escenografía--se funden hasta hacer difícil su separación. De la relación entre el texto y los elementos espectaculares nacen el ritmo y el clima de la representación dramática, que por ello cambian con los diferentes montajes de la obra.⁷³

In Casi un cuento de hadas, the scene is an elaborate palace room, decorated in the rococo style of the 18th century. (Plate 3.) A short flight of stairs leads up to a balcony on a slightly higher level. The background is formed by several large windows through which the action taking place on the palace grounds can be viewed. The story takes place in the middle of the 19th century, in a small European country. The romantic atmosphere of the fairy tale is enhanced by the stage setting, and Buero Vallejo himself makes the following comment:

En el ambiente dieciochesco de donde me pareció adecuado situar la acción de mi comedia, Riquet es también una disonancia preromántica sobre la superficie perfecta del siglo; y la anécdota sentimental que protagoniza desborda asimismo la gracia un tanto yerta de éste para prefigurar el patetismo del siguiente, que se escondía ya en la dulzura de los minués y que los minués mismos desencadenaron.⁷⁴

The same scene is used in all three acts, and the raised balcony at the back of the stage permits the action

⁷³Julio Diamante, Review of Las meninas, by A. Buero Vallejo, Primer Acto, Vol. 25, No. 3, jul-ag. 1961, p. 3.

⁷⁴A. Buero Vallejo, Casi un cuento de hadas, p. 76.

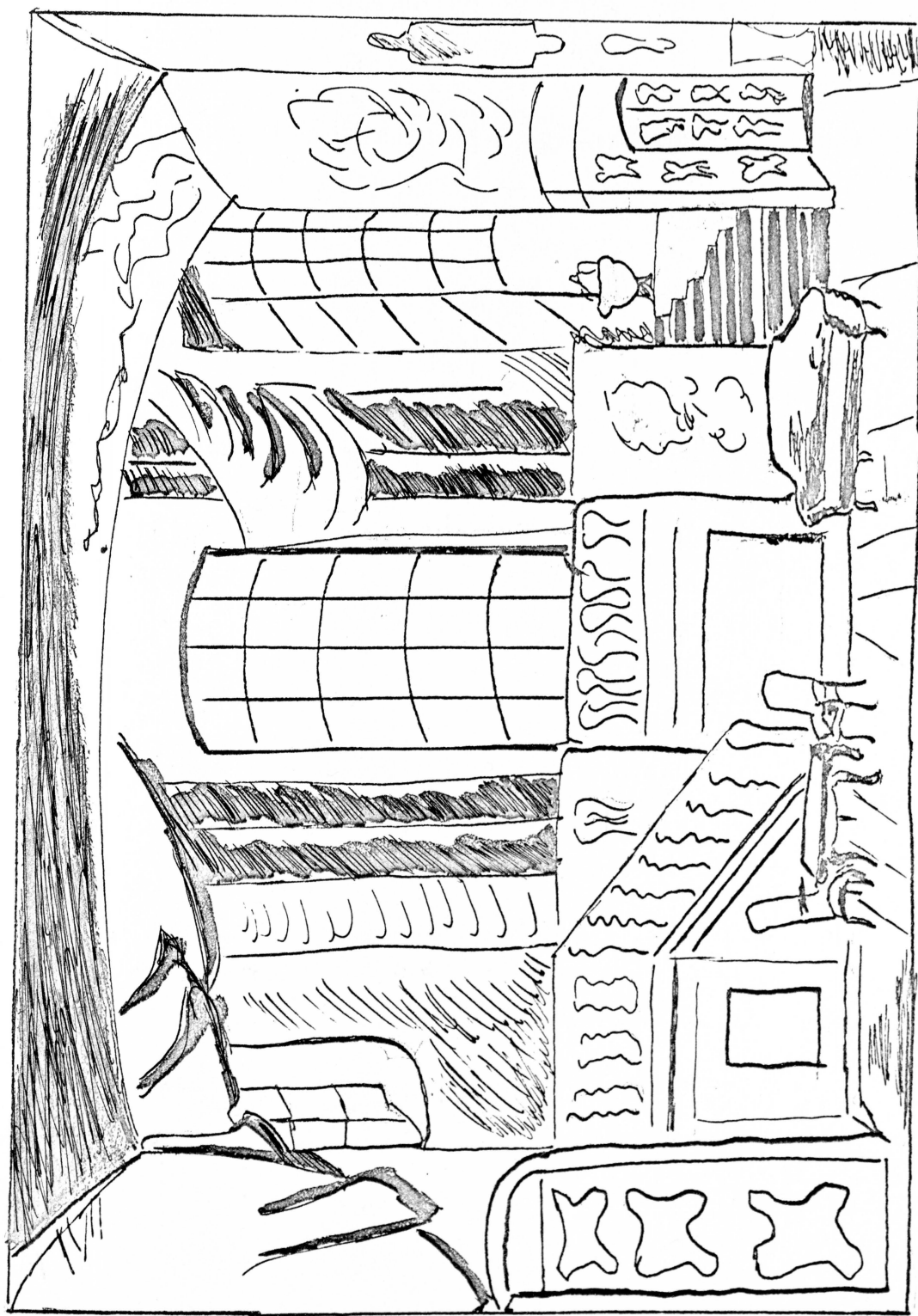


Plate 3 Setting for Casi un cuento de hadas.

to take place on different levels, while at the same time affording a dramatic entranceway for the characters.

In the second group of plays the stage settings are designed to enable the actors to report events which contribute to the plot taking place out of the audience's sight. For example, in En la ardiente oscuridad the first two acts take place in a sun-room which the students use during their leisure moments. A large glass door at the left of the stage opens out on a porch which overlooks the sports field. The trees outside can be seen, and the change from the lush, green foliage of summer to the stark, naked limbs of late fall are symbolic of the change in atmosphere which takes place in the school.

In the third act the scene is changed to a sitting room. This room also has a large glass window, and the great amount of light which covers the stage at all times emphasizes the blindness of the characters. This setting is important to the development of the plot. In the final scene Doña Pepita is talking to Carlos:

Porque, hace media hora, yo trabajaba aquí, y pudo ocurrírseme levantarme para mirar por el ventanal. No lo hice. Acaso, de hacerlo, habría visto a alguien que subía las escaleras del tobogán cargado con el cuerpo de Ignacio. ¡Ignacio, desvanecido, o quizá ya muerto! Luego, desde arriba, se precipita el cuerpo . . . sin tener la precaución de pensar en los ojos de los demás. Siempre olvidamos la vista ajena. Sólo Ignacio pensaba en ella.⁷⁵

⁷⁵A. Buero Vallejo, En la ardiente oscuridad (Madrid: Ediciones Alfíl, 1963), p. 78.

The stage setting has provided the physical layout for Doña Pepita to have witnessed the murder. The author has used his setting well.

In the other three plays in this group, La tejedora de sueños, La señal que se espera, and Irene o el tesoro, each setting demonstrates meticulous planning on the part of the author, as well as the ability to create interesting and artistic sets which intensify the mood of the work. In La tejedora de sueños, Ulysses carries out his vengeance from a balcony overlooking the courtyard. The death of Penelope's suitors, as previously discussed, is accomplished in a dramatic way due to the physical arrangement which this particular set provides.

In La señal que se espera the action takes place in the living room of a country home. At one side of the stage the stairway to the sunroom can be seen. The Aeolian harp which Luis built is located in this sunroom, and the undercurrent of the entire plot is the hope and suspense created by the individuals waiting for this harp to play a melody. Perhaps there is some symbolism in the location of the harp on a higher level, that is, the sound would come from above. A large window is located on the left side of the stage, and the trees of the garden can be seen through it. The window is extremely important to the plot development since at sundown everyone gathers in the garden with eyes raised to the sunroom to await the music of the harp. This action is

never seen, but is reported by Enrique at the end of Act 1. When the music is finally heard it comes in through the window to the room where Luis, Julián, Enrique and Rosenda are gathered. The physical arrangement of the set in this work contributes to the total effect that the author wanted to convey.

In Irene o el tesoro a balcony overlooking the street provides the place where Irene imagines the appearance of a beautiful moonlit highway stretching upwards, on which she eventually starts her journey away from the sordid reality of her life. This highway is an example of Buero's ability to use a feature of his stagecraft to further his plot as well as to heighten the effect he is attempting to create. The physical properties of the passageway no doubt presented some engineering problems, and expert lighting technique contributed to the total effect. Other uses of lights heighten the air of magic and fantasy contained in this work. In the scene where the little elf demonstrates his mystical power he waves his miner's pickax, and the room is bathed in different colored lights. The conflict between reality and imagination is the basis of the plot, and for Irene the lighted highway is real, yet when she leaves the apartment she dies. Thus a feature of the setting has provided the means for bringing the play to a dramatic climax, resulting in a professional production.

The plays making up the third group include all those which have conventional one-level settings. Madrugada, which observes all the classic theatrical unities, naturally confines itself to a single set. The room which appears when the curtains are opened reflects the artistic taste of the owner. This is the home of the painter Mauricio, and every detail of the set décor is calculated to emphasize the character of this man, who, although dead, is really the protagonist in the drama. The ticking of the grandfather clock can be heard, and the striking of the hours emphasizes the passing of time, adding to the suspense. The dining room is to the left of the stage, and during the fifteen minute break between the acts the entire cast adjourns there for coffee—an interlude included in the plot. The suspense in the play mounts, and it may be stated that the stage setting is a subtle contribution to the final outcome.

The set for Las cartas boca abajo is also a living room, however, this one is in an old apartment building, and the furnishings as well as the over-all appearance convey the impression of shabbiness. The curtains are described as being out of date, and the floor needs wax. There is a crack in the wall, and the plaster cornice is crumbling. This feature is referred to repeatedly in the dialogue. In the first act Juan remarks that the crack seems to have widened. He goes on to say that if he wins the coveted teaching position they will be able to have a brick mason come and

repair the walls, as well as paint. In the last act, after he has learned that he has not been awarded the teaching position, he bends down and picks up a small piece of the crumbling cornice and says: "Otro pedacito de la cornisa Habrá que llamar a los albañiles . . . , algún día."⁷⁶

This small detail demonstrates how Buero Vallejo integrates his plots with the settings. The deterioration of the room seems to reflect the falseness of the lives lived within it, and the crumbling away of Juan's hopes for a successful future.

The settings for El concierto de San Ovidio and Aventura en lo gris are both examples of the author's artistic ability to create sets that enhance as well as provide an interesting background for his dramatic expression. El concierto de San Ovidio has more changes of scenery and sets than any other of Buero Vallejo's plays. These changes are accomplished with relative ease inasmuch as the stage is divided by means of curtains, with the aid of lights, the attention is directed to one side or the other. At times the entire stage is used to present a scene, as for example, when the action takes place in Valindín's house or in the small theatre at the San Ovidio fair. At other times a decorated backdrop provides all the background

⁷⁶A. Buero Vallejo, Las cartas boca abajo (Madrid: Ediciones Alfíl, S. A., 1958), p. 89.

as in the scenes in the Hospicio de los Quince Veintes. The use of the peacock as a decoration on the small stage where the blind men perform serves to re-emphasize the ridicule that is made of them, and at the same time it is a colorful accessory.

In Aventura en lo gris, the bleak cabin that serves as a refuge for the fugitives from a war-torn country contributes to the tragic mood of the play. During the dream interlude the use of lights helps to create a surrealistic air. In the description of this setting Buero Vallejo gives detailed instructions for the dream sequence:

Por las dos ventanas, convertidas en amplios huecos ruinosos y sin forma, se divisa un indeciso panorama submarino donde se insinúan vagas formas de corales, algas y medusas que se mecen lentamente. . . Paredes muy simples, sin estructura, negras o de tonos oscuros y profundos como graves notas de órgano. Entre la mesa y el lateral derecho emerge ahora un raro montículo, de aristas unas veces geométricas y otras espermáticas, en el que destellan algunos irisados tonos minerales.⁷⁷

Expert lighting technique changes the appearance of the scene, and is an extremely important feature in creating the proper setting for the dream interlude. It can be said that the dream is a vital cog in the development of the plot, and all the factors making up the surrealistic impression contribute directly to the overall production.

The setting for Las palabras en la arena is the exterior of Asaf's house in a small garden surrounded by a

⁷⁷ A. Buero Vallejo, Aventura en lo gris (Madrid: Ediciones Alfíl, 1964), p. 60.

wall with the rooftops of Jerusalem in the distance.

(Plate 4.) The stage directions call for intense light which falls on the white-washed walls of the house conveying the impression of the heat of the summer sun. The author even gives instructions as to the deep blue color for the sky, which also contributes to the summer-like atmosphere. In this play the servant girl, La fenicia, reports what is happening down in the town, and in this respect, the setting is similar to those discussed previously. The outraged citizens are preparing to stone a woman, and La fenicia's interest is held by the action in the town. This scene is a good example of how the multiple set contributes a wide dimension to the action of the plot, and again demonstrates Buero Vallejo's ability to use his setting as an important element in the finished work.

All Buero Vallejo's plays are a combination of many elements of artistic creation, imagination, and effective technique. It may be stated that his natural artistic talent and training have stood him in good stead in the creation of his dramas. His settings demonstrate careful planning and artistic execution. Small details in stagecraft are a subtle supplement to the development of his plots, and add a great deal to the overall impression he has intended.

The following quotation is a concise summary of Buero's ability to integrate his inspiration with the physical setting for projecting it:

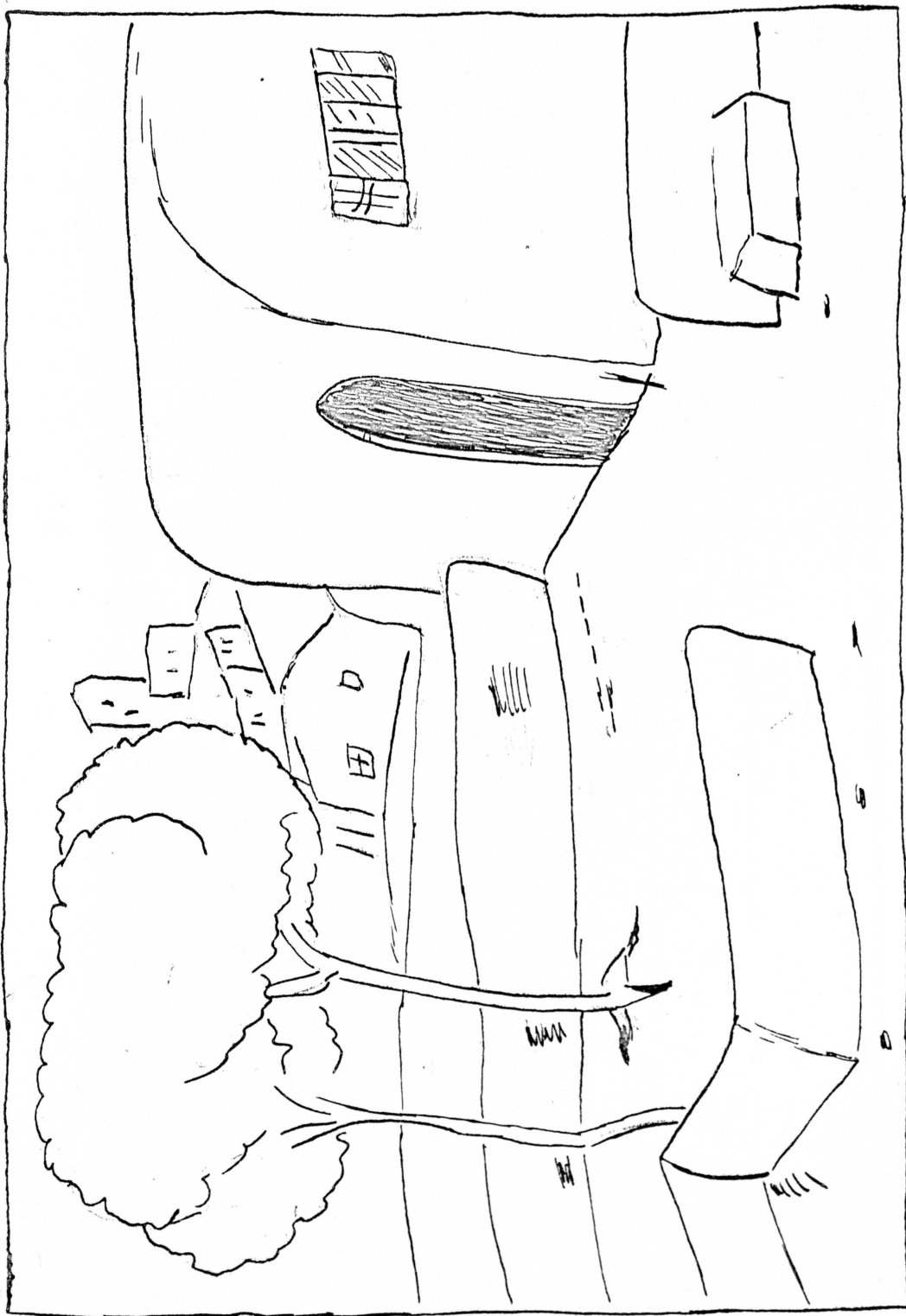


Plate 4 Setting for Las palabras en la arena.

Antonio Buero Vallejo posee como ningún otro dramaturgo español el instinto de lo teatral. Valora debidamente la palabra, sabe dotarla de una gran eficacia comunicadora, pero siempre en acorde con las exigencias de la acción dramática. Sus textos son concebidos y realizados en función del conjunto escénico a que se destinan, y así le es posible lograr efectos de tan impresionante teatralidad. . . .⁷⁸

⁷⁸Juan Emilio Aragonés, Review of El concierto de San Ovidio, by A. Buero Vallejo, Teatro Español 1962-1963 (Madrid: Aguilar, S. A., 1964), p. 77.

CHAPTER VI

USE OF MUSIC AND SOUND

The heritage of the theatre dates from the age of prehistoric man. In his development from a savage, beast-like creature to the complicated individual who endeavors to find meaning in the contemporary world, man has built his tradition and history and has kept it meaningful and vital through his ability to act, remember and record. The following quotation sums up the importance of this heritage:

Drama and theater are older than religion. They begin with the first man who thinks that by imitating animals around the camp fire he can increase the game and insure good hunting. Drama and theater grow and become more elaborate as man moves beyond imitative magic. He discovers how to use dance and music, as well as masks, in rituals that he hopes will bring rain and increase his crops. He invents initiation ceremonies that require dialogue. His ancestors become gods, and he worships them with dance and song. Worship breeds myths, and myths must be acted out if his race is to live. At last he is devising tragedy, and after that Baccic comedy, and then plays that are acted just for the fun of it.⁷⁹

The theater, then, is a composition of many creative efforts, and Buero Vallejo uses every means of artistic expression he can command to produce vehicles for his ideas

⁷⁹ Macgowan and Melnitz, op. cit., p. 2.

and beliefs that are worthy of being called dramas in the highest sense of the word.

This author does not confine himself to any one type of work, and his innate sense of the theater has enabled him to create a variety of plays containing many aspects of dramatic art.

The accompaniment that music provides in many of the following dramas is subtle. Buero's extensive knowledge and familiarity with classical composers is manifested in his choice of selections that contribute to the psychological and philosophical aspect of various works. The author's ability to write music as well as lyrics is demonstrated by original compositions that are part of several specific plays. The absence of music and the presence of discordant sounds also is a characteristic of several works. The dramas containing music and sounds will be discussed in chronological order.

En la ardiente oscuridad was the first play Buero published in which music contributes to the symbolic interpretation of the work. Beth W. Noble has made the following statement:

Music is introduced in the most strikingly dramatic and symbolic manner in En la ardiente oscuridad (1950). Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata is played over the loudspeaker of the school for the blind from the moment when the destructive influence of the new student, Ignacio, begins to be felt. The sonata, which creates a powerful mood of melancholy and despair, is an excellent musical accompaniment for the bitterness and loneliness of Ignacio, the growing uneasiness and unhappiness of the students, who sense

the breakdown of the intimate bond between them, and the weakening of their "moral de acero" as a result of Ignacio's attacks on their optimistic philosophy of life.⁸⁰

Beethoven's music is particularly appropriate for this drama since it conveys a note of urgency and agitation. It is written in a minor key, and this emphasizes the loneliness and anguish of a man wrestling with his destiny. Ignacio rebels at his fate. He is a realist in that he acknowledges his blindness with all its humiliating limitations, yet he cannot suppress his desire to see. This longing for vision has created in him a faith that sometime, somehow men will find the means to cure or prevent blindness. There is a subtle relationship in the use of music by a composer who has the reputation of dealing with themes of destiny in his works, and who also suffered the debilitating handicap of deafness. It is said that this sonata was partly inspired by a blind boy.

In Act III Doña Pepita is left alone in the small sitting room overlooking the sports field where Ignacio and Carlos have gone. She turns on the radio, and the music heard is Grieg's Death of Aase. The choice of this selection from the Peer Gynt Suite is subtle, yet reveals the author's intention to reinforce his work. Buero Vallejo admires Ibsen, and it is possible that Carlos and

⁸⁰Beth W. Noble, "Sound in the Plays of Buero Vallejo," Hispania, Vol. XLI, Number 1, March, 1958, p. 56.

Peer can be considered similar characters in that they both attempt to evade the reality of their lives. This music is played while Doña Pepita gazes out of the window, and, in horror, witnesses Carlos' murder of Ignacio.

Carlos has been impelled to kill to defend his world from the disturbing problems of reality. In this work Buero has intentionally selected compositions that harmonize with the mood and philosophical depths he is expressing.

A different type of music is used in La tejedora de sueños. In keeping with the Greek tradition as the curtains open a women's chorus chants an atonal poem. The words of the song praise Penelope as a happy wife, living in a fruitful land blessed by the gods, and faithfully awaiting the return of her husband. In the final scene the slaves again chant of the great love Penelope has had for her absent husband, and how she rejoices at his return. Both of these choruses are an example of dramatic irony, since the actual economic situation in Ithaca was deplorable. Furthermore, Penelope loathed Ulysses, and, in the course of the play, she reveals her selfishness and pride at having the suitors fight over her as well as her love for Anfino. In the second act the chant of the women's chorus is used to muffle the sound of Dione unlocking the door so that the suitors can enter and discover Penelope's secret act of un-doing her weaving. In addition the chant stops and starts erratically, and this contributes to the rising tension and suspense. The screams of anguish as the suitors

are killed in the last act is another use of sound to produce dramatic emphasis, and Anfino's body falling down the stairs is still another ingenious tactic this author uses.

The music of the spheres, an inspiration for the human heart, and a sign of a miracle are all embodied in the melody that is finally heard in La señal que se espera. Buero composed the music that is used in this work, demonstrating his musical talent. The melody is vaguely reminiscent of the Prelude to Lohengrin in that it uses stringed instruments and produces a sound like that of the wind coming through trees. Beth W. Noble makes the following observation on Buero's reference to Wagner's music:

The author's comparison of this music to Wagner's Prelude to Lohengrin is interesting because his concept is similar to that of Wagner. Wagner's stated aim was to describe the return of the Holy Grail in the midst of a band of angels, and he seems to be expressing in musical terms the spiritual harmony and rhythm of the soul at peace.⁸¹

The spiritual inference of the music is obvious. Luis falls on his knees and prays, and Rosenda crosses herself. The actuality of the music produces the resolution of the plot. Luis recovers his ability to compose, Julián receives news that his marriage is to be reconciled, Rosenda and Bernardo receive notification that their nephew is dead, and Enrique and Susana straighten out their misunderstandings and are able to establish a better basis for their marriage.

⁸¹Beth W. Noble, op. cit., p. 57.

The fact that the melody was executed by human hands does not destroy its miraculous value. Julián points out that faith can move mountains and produce signs, as well as help solve all human problems. In this play Buero has made music an integral part of the action, and it also expresses the mood of the setting in mysterious Galicia, with its superstitions, charms and supernatural happenings.

Handel's Water Music is used as a melodic background for Casi un cuento de hadas, or at least the author suggests that this selection be the one used. It is possible that other music typical of the baroque age could be used to give the impression of the courtly life during the 18th century. The fact that Buero suggests the music of Handel, a composer so intimately associated with European nobility, demonstrates his meticulous care in the choosing of even the smallest detail of his productions. Beth W. Noble states that the music is identified with the ugly Prince Riquet as a symbol of the beauty he assumes when seen through the eyes of love.⁸²

In lieu of music in Magrugada, silence broken by discordant sounds is used. The curtains open on an empty room, and only the ticking of the clock is heard. The stage directions clearly describe the importance of the timepiece: "En la casa reina un gran silencio, que el sordo latir del reloj subraya."⁸³ At the end of the play the clock strikes

⁸²Beth W. Noble, op. cit.

⁸³A. Buero Vallejo, Magrugada, p. 36.

six. An hour and forty-five minutes of actual time has provided the limits within which the drama takes place, and the striking of the clock signifies the end of Amalia's doubt as to Mauricio's love and the beginning of her new life as his widow. Buero uses other sounds in this work. In the scene where Leonor, Dámaso and Lorenzo are discussing Mauricio's possible death, Leonor states that she wishes Amalia and Mauricio were both dead. There is a pause after this terrible statement, and then the howling of a dog is heard. This is certainly a dramatic device to heighten the tension and suspense in the play. Leonor confesses she is afraid after the howl is heard, but she grows impatient and taps her feet during the long wait. She wears a number of bracelets that produce a harsh, jangling noise which serves to emphasize this woman's character. The unusual combination of the sounds described contributes to the total effect of Madrugada.

In Irene o el tesoro a musical composition is closely identified with Irene. She sings a lullaby at the end of Act 1 when she sees Juanito for the first time. The song's lyrics make reference to miners and the treasure of hidden ores. The little elf is a miner in search of treasure, and the song reinforces this detail. The fact that Irene lost her child lends a note of pathos to the lullaby, and since only Juanito hears the song, it preserves the mood of mystery that is characteristic of this work.

Another example of the use of discordant sound appears in Las cartas boca abajo. The room where the action takes place has a balcony, and in the evening the sound of birds twittering and chirping can be heard. Adela likes to watch them soar through the sky as they prepare to roost for the night. She confesses that these birds remind her of her childhood, in a way symbolic of her selfishness, which has caused her to sacrifice, for the myth of Carlos Ferrer, the happiness she could have had. At the end of the play Mauro tells her that the birds are not chirping for happiness, but rather that with the approach of night, they become afraid of darkness and death and their chirpings are really screams of terror and fear. Buero's dialogue is most descriptive:

Gritan de terror. Todo eso que a ti te parecía un delirio de felicidad, es un delirio de miedo. . . . Al cabo del día han tenido tiempo de recordar que están bajo la ley de miedo y de la muerte. Y el sol se va, y dudan de que vuelva. Y entonces se buscan, y giran enloquecidos, y tratan de aturdirse. . . . Pero ya no lo consiguen. Quieren cantar, y son gritos los que les salen.⁸⁴

As the final curtain falls the strident chirping of the birds grows louder. This dramatic conclusion can be interpreted as an anathema directed at Adela for her sin.

Music serves almost as a prologue and an epilogue in Un soñador para un pueblo. Before the curtain goes up Vivaldi's Concierto de Primavera is heard. The music is

⁸⁴A. Buero Vallejo, Las cartas boca abajo, p. 90.

not used again until the final curtain, when once again the same composition is heard. Buero's stage directions for this final scene are curious:

El "Concierto de Primavera" de Vivaldi, comienza al punto, mientras Fernandita sale y el telón va cayendo. Tal vez parece crearse una recatada armonía entre sus alegres notas y la melancólica figura de Esquilache, que no se ha movido.⁸⁵

There is the possibility that Buero uses Vivaldi's music in this work to symbolize the heights which Esquilache, also an Italian, had hoped to reach, since Vivaldi's violin music is considered very beautiful and requires great ability and technique to be played correctly. It can also be supposed that the perfection of the music serves as a contrast to Esquilache's hopes and plans for reform, which were not implemented. A drum-roll, which is heard at the beginning of the second act, intensifies the impression of war and the uprising of the people, and also is a dramatic introduction for the continuation of the action.

Music used a little differently serves to supplement the artistic tone of Las meninas. Doña Isabel, one of the Infanta's ladies in waiting, plays the guitar from one of the balconies on the set. The selections heard are Milán's Primera pavana and Fuenllana's Fantasia. Both of these composers were Spanish, and each of them a protégé of a king. Miguel de Fuenllana was a blind guitarist who lived in the

⁸⁵A. Buero Vallejo, Un soñador para un pueblo, Teatro Español 1958-1959, p. 283.

16th century and dedicated his Fantasia to Phillip II.⁸⁶

Luis Milán was an outstanding musician and poet of the same period, who was given a title by Juan III of Portugal.⁸⁷

The music chosen for this play was composed by artists who occupied a similar position in the court to the one held by Velázquez, and this is a subtle restatement of the central theme of the work. In addition the music provides an agreeable interlude to the action and dialogue in the scenes where it is used.

Aventura en lo gris is a play that Buero Vallejo wrote early in his career and then re-wrote for production. Although it did not enjoy an extended run, it is an interesting piece of dramatic art, and has much symbolic inference. The crux of the plot lies in the dream interlude, for this is where the characters all state that they are alone, alienated and searching in vain for some meaning for their lives. Silvano and Ana search for each other during this dream. The directions for action state that they keep trying to grasp each other's hands; they are successful only once towards the end of the interlude, and then Silvano drops Ana's hand as he contemplates Isabel's body lying on the floor. The music for this dream is Debussy's Sirenas, which provides a low

⁸⁶ "Miguel de Fuenllana," The International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians (New York: Dodd Mead & Co., 1943), p. 635.

⁸⁷ "Luis Milán," Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada, Tomo XXXV, p. 217.

background atmosphere until Isabel enters screaming in imagined childbirth. The choice of music by Debussy is significant in that he has been described as a solitary figure:

It is in his quality of expressiveness that Debussy remains a solitary figure, rather than as a worker in strange sonorities. As an artist, Debussy still merits the characterization of "très exceptionnel, très curieux, très solitaire."⁸⁸

Debussy's music conveys a surrealistic atmosphere, for his reputation is based on his ability to take some aspect of sea, sky or a dream and convert it into a feeling communicable in music.⁸⁹ Buero Vallejo in Aventura en lo gris has attempted to fuse his denial of brutality with his affirmation of hope for the future into a medium communicable in drama.

Implied sound appears at the end of this play. Ana and Silverio face a firing squad without fear. Their hands are now clasped together for all eternity, and the curtain falls. The sound of the firing squad is not heard, but the impression is conveyed, providing a subtle and dramatic finale.

Sound, both disordant and musical, is used to a great degree in El concierto de San Ovidio. When the curtain rises

⁸⁸"Claude Debussy," The World of Music (New York: Abradale Press, 1963), p. 345.

⁸⁹"Claude Debussy," International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians, 9th Edition (New York: Dodd Mead & Co., 1964), p. 504.

the murmur of a prayer group is heard. The dialogue in the first act is delayed until this service has ended. The clapping of hands to attract the attention of the blind men is another sound device used in Act 1, and the appearance of the musicians who will perform with Valindin is heralded by the tapping of their sticks as they come toward the stage. The second scene in Act 1 is preceded by the Allegro from Corelli's Concerto Grosso. The music ceases before the dialogue begins. Later in this act the Adagio from Corelli's Concerto is heard off-stage. In the scene where Donato lists the tasks that occupy the blind men, David picks his violin, emphasizing the limited life of the handicapped. The blind men's sticks make sounds that are heard all through this work, and the stick also becomes a weapon of defense for David, since he uses it to kill Valindin. This scene is probably one of the most dramatic uses of sound in all Buero's plays as it takes place in total darkness and only the blows of the staff are heard.

The monotonous noise produced by the blind musicians hardly deserves the name of music, since it is a deliberate effort to present the men in a ridiculous light, and surely the heavy persistence of the tones produced to accompany Gilberto's silly song accentuates the total impression of human degradation in the scene.

Corelli's Adagio is identified with David, and it can be surmised that Buero Vallejo intended this to represent

the heights to which David aspired in playing his instrument, because Corelli's music has been described as follows:

(It is) characterized by a conciseness and lucidity of thought and form and by a dignified almost aristocratic bearing. The slow movements show genuine pathos as well as bringing out in a striking manner the singing power of the violin.⁹⁰

David aspires to live on an equal plane with other men and to develop his musical gift to the highest possible degree. Thus the music of the master came to be symbolic of his highest ideal, demonstrating once again the lengths to which Buero Vallejo goes to strengthen and reinforce the personality of his characters and the ideals they represent.

The previous details of the way sounds and music are used in Buero's plays vividly illustrates the wide range of creative ability this author possesses, and his ingenious use of the whole spectrum of dramatic art to produce works which touch and stir his viewers.

⁹⁰ "Arcangelo Corelli," Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Co., 1916), p. 603.

CHAPTER VII

USE OF HISTORICAL INCIDENTS AND TIME

The Spanish people have always been fascinated by the past, and this characteristic has been evident in their choice of historical incidents as inspiration for many works of art, music, literature and drama. Buero Vallejo is no exception, and several of his plays are elaborations on incidents of past history.

Las palabras en la arena is a concise re-telling of the biblical story of the woman taken in adultery. The author demonstrates his wide cultural background in treating this tale with imagination and dramatic perception. The incident of the woman is not the central theme, rather it is an occurrence that provides a background against which another drama unfolds. This second drama also involves an adulterous woman who, however, does not receive forgiveness and dies for her sin in a dramatic finale.

La tejedora de sueños is a drama based on the myth of the Odyssey, and Jacqueline Van Praag Chantraine makes the following statement about it:

De hoy en adelante, esta refundición inteligente y poética de la vieja fábula se contará al lado de la Antígona, de Anouilh, de las evocaciones poéticas de Giraudoux y de La matrone d'Ephèse, de Georges Sion.⁹¹

⁹¹J. Van Praag Chantraine, op. cit., p. 257.

The drama is an outstanding example of Buero's ability to project his ideals through widely divergent vehicles. Instead of endowing Ulysses with the traditional Hellenic characteristics, he depicts him as a vengeful and cruel man, while Penelope is shown as a person who cherishes the dream of the good and the beautiful in the face of the bitter reality of the world. The inspiration of Homer's tale is treated imaginatively and vividly, and provides an interesting dramatic vehicle.

Juan Emilio Aragonés has classified the following three of Buero's works as a "trilogía historicista": Un soñador para un pueblo, Las meninas, and El concierto de San Ovidio. All three derive their inspiration from some facet of history. Un soñador para un pueblo is a dramatic treatment of the Motín de Esquilache which took place during the Easter season in 1766. Buero Vallejo has used the historical character of Leopoldo Gregorio, Marqués de

Esquilache as an illustration of how the dreams a man has for the betterment of a nation can fail to come true, and the frustrations of this defeat. It also can be interpreted as being symbolic of the problems of Spain. Rafael Vázquez Zamora indicates Buero's ability to convert this idea into theatrical material:

Todo está aquí convertido en sustancia dramática, de manera que, en un primer estrato, tenemos simplemente el drama de un poderoso que pierde el poder; en segundo estrato, un idealista que choca con la realidad grosera; y, por último, en la zona mucho más

elevada, encontramos el más profundo problema que se pueda plantear sobre los españoles y su historia: lo que se ha llamado las dos Españas.⁹²

The theme of this work is a man's sincere desire to improve the conditions of humanity, although perhaps in this case the methods were a trifle autocratic. Esquilache's failure to recognize that the people must be considered even in matters of their own best interests reflects the influence of Ibsen and Brecht, whose protagonists also attempted to open windows and let in light, and who in many cases were felled from the lofty heights of their ambition by the united force of opposition.

Las meninas, a play recounting an imaginary incident in the life of the great painter Diego Velázquez, reveals Buero's intense admiration for this artist and his work. The author has confessed that he abandoned the career of painter because he recognized that his talent would never be great enough to equal that of his illustrious countryman, and he could not settle for mediocrity in the field of art. The plot of Las meninas introduces many ideas: the dreadful economic situation of Spain during the reign of Phillip IV, the intricate details that were included in the preparation for and execution of the famous picture, and the submerged undercurrent of Velázquez personal isolation from those around him which was reflected in his art. He was not a

⁹²Rafael Vázquez Zamora, "La actualidad teatral, Un soñador para un pueblo de Buero Vallejo," Insula, Núm. 147, p. 12.

popular painter in his own time, since many of his contemporaries envied him, and evidently he did not indulge himself in the carnal excesses so prevalent in the court circles in that era. His loneliness is perhaps an invention of the author, and Julio Diamante has made the following remarks about Buero's treatment of this great historical character:

Buero Vallejo pone con frecuencia en boca de Velázquez palabras que sorprenden por su justeza, como cuando asegura al hablar de su soledad: "Es mi pintura la que se siente sola," o cuando da una réplica tocante a la cruz de la Orden de Calatrava: "Hay pechos que se honran llevando esa cruz, y pechos que la honran si la llevan." ⁹³

The drama describes Velázquez as a truly great man, who recognized that fate had endowed him with a great talent as well as the opportunity to develop it. This knowledge enabled him to be true to his own personal standards in an environment where he was misunderstood, and to some extent, maligned.

The third drama in this historical trilogy is El concierto de San Ovidio. Buero has taken an incident from history and interpreted it with all the drama possible to express the universal idea of a man's struggle against his destiny and against the inhumanity of others. One critic has this to say:

¿Obra histórica El concierto de San Ovidio?
¡Ah, no! Tendríamos que olvidar cómo se ha escrito

⁹³Julio Diamante, Review of Las meninas, op. cit., p. 3.

la historia durante todo el último siglo. Los temas claves de esta "parábola"--la personalidad y la libertad--son temas claves de la existencia humana en la vida y en el teatro.⁹⁴

The part of Valentín Haüy is a minor one in this work, yet this man did develop a system of reading for the blind, and this verified fact, in addition to the existence of the Hospicio de los Quince Veintes, is the basis for the play. Neither of these facts is too well known, yet by incorporating them into his work, Buero emphasizes them and makes them unforgettable as his inspiration for a drama that is moving, exciting, and all in all, very good theatre.

In the previous plays discussed Buero has used some aspect of history or literature to build on. He makes no attempt to present his plays as actual historical incidents, rather as imaginative treatments of things which might have happened. This technique has didactic value, which he feels is an important aspect of drama, but the informative value is not the primary object of the play, rather an inspirational point of departure for thought provoking examples of dramatic art.

The time element in Buero's plays.--Observance of the classical unity of time has perhaps been disregarded by the

⁹⁴Enrique Llovet, Review of El concierto de San Ovidio, by A. Buero Vallejo, Teatro Español 1962-1963 (Madrid: Aguilar, S. A., 1964), p. 71.

contemporary playwrights more than the other two unities of the drama. Time is important in several of Buero's plays, both for psychological emphasis and as a theatrical device to heighten tension. The following works that will be discussed are those in which time is an important factor in the plot, and in which it does more than merely serve as a boundary in which to contain action.

Historia de una escalera covers a thirty-year span. This extended period is important to the overall impression of the futility of the efforts of this particular level of society to better itself, in spite of individual hopes and dreams. The specific years are not identified, but the last act is supposed to occur in the present, and since the play first appeared in 1949, that date can be assumed to be the final one. The second act occurs twenty years earlier, and the first act ten years prior to that. Against this thirty-year background, the unchanged physical aspect of the staircase serves as a grim reminder of the immobility of the environment in which the characters find themselves. This aspect is emphasized by the brief dialogue between two minor characters in Act III. As the curtain rises Paca, now an old lady, is climbing the stairs with difficulty. Two men come out of apartments I and IV. The old tenants have been replaced by these newcomers, and they comment on the fact that they would like to take over the two remaining apartments on the floor so that they could use the space for

business purposes. The need for an elevator is discussed, and, as they disappear down the stairs, their talk is of the new automobiles on the market. This conversation stresses the fact that the world is making progress outside and others are taking advantage of the opportunities available. The fact that this dialogue takes place just as Paca laboriously climbs the stairs provides a vivid contrast between the old and the new, and further demonstrates Buero's meticulous attention to the details that combine to make a finished production.

The first scene in En la ardiente oscuridad takes place in a recreation room of the school for the blind. The large glass doors are open to the terrace, and the lush, green foliage of summer can be seen. In the second act the trees are bare, and the rustle of the wind blowing the dead leaves about is a vivid indication of the passage of time. The third act takes place in a small sitting room, and it is now winter. The dialogue makes repeated references to the clear, cold light of the stars shining in the winter sky. The author's use of time in this work contributes to its psychological implication. Beth W. Noble makes the following observation: "The change from a summer setting in Act 1 is clearly symbolic of the withering of love, illusion, and hope among the blind at the school."⁹⁵ The

⁹⁵Beth W. Noble, op. cit., p. 56.

use of the changing seasons contributes to the mood of the play, and is evidence of the discerning choice of time symbolism to reinforce the drama.

Madrugada, with its strict adherence to actual time, is perhaps the work in which the use of this unity is most important. The ticking of the clock is a constant and monotonous undertone, reminding the relatives that time is running out for them, for Amalia, or for Mauricio. The tension mounts slowly but intensely, and the measured tempo of the plot keeps pace with the clock so that the final speeches of clarification bring the drama to an end as the hour of six is chimed. The change from night to day is also a feature of this work. In the stage directions for the first act the curtains are parted, showing only the night sky. When the action is over and most of the relatives have left, Monica turns off the light, opens the curtains wider, and the clear light of dawn comes through. This has a symbolic inference that after the darkness of despair light brings hope and strength for a new day. The strict observance of the three classical unities of the drama in this work heightens its impact, and it can be said that the time element contributes much to the total development of the plot.

Time provides the limits within which Hoy es fiesta takes place. The setting is out-of-doors, and the three acts occur in the morning, at midday and in the evening.

The effects of the changes in time are accomplished by means of lights, as well as through the dialogue. The first person to come on-stage is Nati with a full load of clothes to hang up. This act, very characteristic of domestic chores, is reinforced by the dialogue when Doña Nieves comes out of her room rubbing her eyes. She and Nati exchange greetings and Nieves comments on the fact that Nati already has her washing done and it is only ten o'clock in the morning. This detail contributes to the realistic tone of the play, and also is a touch of costumbrismo. In the second act, the chairs are lined up to form a train, mute testimony to the children that have played there during the morning. The setting sun casts its rosy glow over the scene in the third act, and this soon changes into the dusk of evening. The death of Pilar coincides with the dying of the day, and Silverio's hopes seem to be dying also, but the note of hope on which the work ends seems to manifest the author's belief that even in the face of darkness and defeat, faith for the future still exists. The use of time has symbolic implications that tie in with the total intention of the drama, in addition to being the boundary within which the action takes place.

It can be said that Buero Vallejo takes advantage of time when it is necessary to enhance the overall effect

he desires to create. He intentionally converts it into an instrument for symbolic expression, heightening of suspense and tension as well as supplying the limits for the action of his dramas.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

Since his dramatic entrance into the world of the Spanish theatre in 1949 Buero Vallejo has consistently written disturbing and thought provoking plays. His chosen medium of the theatre is his means of expressing his beliefs, hopes and ideals, and although his works are very different in many respects there is a consistent thread of philosophic concern in all his dramas that gives them interest, poignancy and fascination for the viewer and reader. The plays he has written reveal a definite Spanish flavor in that some of them have features of costumbrismo, many of them are tragic, the dual concept of the real and the ideal prevails in most of them, and yet the values that are the basis for inspiration are universal ones. Buero has been influenced by many of his own countrymen as well as by other playwrights and philosophers. The following quotation is a good summary of the principal themes found in his dramas:

En la obra de Antonio Buero Vallejo se encuentran el tema calderoniano de la fusión del sueño y de la realidad, el refugio quijotesco en la locura y, también, la opción de un mundo infantil o legendario. El tema obsesionante de la responsabilidad humana ha preocupado mucho a este autor, por lo que ciertos

comentaristas, como Valbuena Prat, le adscriben a la escuela existencialista, aunque en Madrugada, Buero Vallejo admite la redención por el amor.⁹⁶

In this study the dual aspect in plot development with a specific object as a symbol of the ideal expressed, tragic death as a climax, stagecraft, music and sound, time and historical inspiration in Buero's dramas have been discussed. Some conclusions will now be presented on each of these aspects, as well as some general statements about this dramatist's works.

Buero's ability to combine two levels of plot development is his way of expressing certain philosophical questions in a subtle manner. The most important theme of his drama is responsibility for individual action in the struggle to live in a specific time and place in history. This theme is manifested in Historia de una escalera, En la ardiente oscuridad, Las palabras en la arena, Un soñador para un pueblo, Las meninas, Aventura en lo gris, and El concierto de San Ovidio. The second theme most often encountered is faith in the hope of a better life, better understanding, better communication between people, all as a result of a period of waiting. This theme is expressed in La señal que se espera, Hoy es fiesta, and La tejedora de sueños. The redeeming power of love is manifested in Madrugada and Casi un cuento de hadas. Las cartas boca abajo is a work in which

⁹⁶J. Van Praag Chantraine, op. cit., p. 263.

the selfish, inward desires of a woman are revealed and she is punished, and Irene o el tesoro is a combination of fantasy and realism on the theme of hope, and it is also a protest against man's inhumanity to man. This play demonstrates the Calderonian philosophy of La vida es sueño.

The philosophical concepts expressed are those of Unamuno, Kant, Kierkegaard and other existential philosophers, but in a recent interview Buero stated that he did not consider himself as an interpreter of any specific school of philosophical thought, and he described himself in the following words:

Yo soy un hombre, claro, de muy permanentes inquietudes filosóficas pero la palabra misma lo dice—inquietudes. Esto quiere decir que no me considero adicto a ninguna filosofía definida. Puede haber en mí tendencias a una cierta forma de existencialismo pero muy matizada, muy a mi manera. Puede haber también cierto kantismo, si . . . también muy modificado, y de Unamuno, también . . . pero, en fin, ésa podía ser una de las formas de existencialismo que yo considero mías, ¿no? ⁹⁷

Buero makes use of tragic death in several plays, but the occurrence of this event does not follow a definite trend. In a number of plays the death is the result of a murder, but the circumstances are completely different in each case. In Las palabras en la arena, En la ardiente oscuridad, Aventura en lo gris characters who have the sympathy of the viewer die, and the murderer is a man who has yielded to his baser impulses when provoked to the point

⁹⁷ Bernard Dulsey, op. cit., p. 152.

where killing seems to be the only solution to his dilemma. In El concierto de San Ovidio David's murder of Valindin is his reaction to the unsurmountable obstacles destiny has placed in his way. His own eventual death leaves the viewer feeling that fate is indeed cruel. In Hoy es fiesta death seems to be just one more manifestation of the irony of a man's destiny, and in Casi un cuento de hadas the duel in which Armando is killed is the symbol of a man protecting his honor. The suicide in Irene o el tesoro does not leave the impression that Irene is deliberately taking her own life, rather that she is so convinced of the reality of the golden stairway that leads to heaven that it becomes her salvation. In these cases death is a dramatic theatrical device, and in the particular instances, an injustice or cruel trick of fate on the victim. Buero seems to be repeating Unamuno's concept that if death and nothingness are a man's fate, let him live so that death will be an injustice.

Buero's stagecraft is a very important feature in his dramas, and demonstrates his artistic ability to conceive settings that provide interesting backgrounds and a wide area of action for the total impression the play conveys. His use of different levels of action, aside from being a scenographical device, symbolizes the author's concern with the different levels of social and economic life.

Music and different sounds contribute to every work this author has written, and the discriminating selection of

composers whose musical works contribute to the over-all concept of the play has been indicated. The musical talent of the author is demonstrated in original melodies and lyrics for La señal que se espera, La tejedora de sueños, Irene o el tesoro and El concierto de San Ovidio.

The use of time and historical inspiration in this author's dramas is significant. Time in various manifestations has been used as a contributing factor in the measured development of the plots, and an incident in history has provided inspiration from which Buero has proceeded to build his own unique creation.

All of these details are indications of the scope and quality of this author's theatre. He is a modern writer, concerned about the question of what it means to be a responsible man in this particular day and age. He confesses that he has been influenced by the great playwrights of the past, as well as the present. He has great admiration for Ibsen, Shakespeare and the traditional Spanish playwrights. On the contemporary scene he is familiar with the works of Eugene O'Neill, Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, as well as the European dramatists Beckett, Ionesco and Genet.

At a time when the plays of some of the European dramatists comprise the "Theatre of the Absurd," Buero Vallejo's works are presented in the traditional manner, in many instances observing the classic theatrical unities.

This author has a great desire to communicate his ideals and beliefs through the medium of the theatre, and he recognizes that in order to do so the dramatist must use words. If these words are expressed in an obscure and absurd way, the power to communicate is sacrificed. Here again, Unamuno's influence is revealed, since to him language was the only means of communication between humans, and therefore the ability to use it interestingly and effectively to convey ideas that were disturbing and thought-provoking was the highest calling available to man.

Although Buero's works are realistic in nature, fantastic elements such as fairy tales, the dead, superstitions, witchcraft, and the world of the blind are manifested in them. His power to create a plot which sustains interest from the first word to the final curtain is one of his greatest attributes. Violence usually occurs off-stage, and is described by means of exact and concise dialogues. The use of highly dramatic theatrical devices and effects demonstrate his innate talent and artistry.

Not all this author's plays have been box-office successes. Most of them, however, have been well received and almost all have been published. Historia de una escalera, En la ardiente oscuridad, and Las meninas are available in school editions, and are used as texts in advanced Spanish courses, all of which are indications of the permanent and

enduring character of Buero's theatre. It will be interesting to watch for new creations from this dedicated dramatist.

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