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MITCHELL, Caroline B., 1934-
THE CONCEPT OF REALITY AS SEEN IN SELECTED
PLAYS OF BUERO VALLEJO.

The University of Oklahoma, Ph.D., 1972
Language and Literature, modern

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE CONCEPT OF REALITY
AS SEEN IN SELECTED PLAYS OF BUERO VALLEJO

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By
Caroline B. Mitchell
Norman, Oklahoma
1972

THE CONCEPT OF REALITY
AS SEEN IN SELECTED PLAYS OF BUERO VALLEJO

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the central and constant themes in the dramatic works of Antonio Buero Vallejo is the problem of reality and its interplay with illusion. Perhaps the most comprehensive study of Buero Vallejo, in terms of his concept of reality, is that of R. E. Lott,¹ who discusses the phenomenon of functional flexibility in each of Buero's plays through El concierto de San Ovidio, concluding that this element represents:

. . . perspectivism and relativism, the ambiguities of victory and defeat as well as of life itself, the various levels of meaning, and the complexities of actions, concepts, and characteristics, which vary according to the viewpoints adopted.²

Martha Halsey has also attributed some importance to the question of reality in the production of Buero Vallejo, alluding only indirectly to this problem as a basic theme in his works: "His theater represents an authentically personal inquiry into the ultimate nature of reality."³ Neither critic, however, has explored all of the ramifications of this problem, and the topic has not been thoroughly investigated to date in terms of Buero's entire dramatic production.

¹R. E. Lott, "Functional Flexibility and Ambiguity in Buero Vallejo's Plays", Symposium, XX (1966), pp. 150-62.

²Ibid., p. 160.

³Martha Taliaferro Halsey, The Tragedies of Antonio Buero Vallejo, Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, 1964, p. 10.

A comprehensive analysis of the reality-illusion conflict is therefore necessary to a complete understanding of Buero's ideology and will establish the role of his concept of reality as a basic and essential aspect of his works.

At the conclusion of one of Buero Vallejo's plays the astute spectator generally leaves the theater in a pensive mood, questioning the despair and desolation to which twentieth-century man is condemned. More than any other contemporary Spanish dramatist, Buero has departed from the mundane paths of his country's trivial, bourgeois theater to explore the limited and pathetic condition of man. "Lo que Buero pretende es despertar, educar, en cada espectador una conciencia de la dignidad humana."⁴

Since the Civil War, Spanish drama has suffered from a lack of depth in both themes and authors. The state of the theater has not changed drastically since 1939. Economic and governmental pressures have made it difficult, if not impossible, for dramatists to survive financially and to create a truly national drama.⁵ The untimely murder of García Lorca and Alejandro Casona's exile created a void which remained unfilled until the appearance of Buero Vallejo's first play, Historia de una escalera in 1949.

⁴José Monleón, "El concierto de San Ovidio de Antonio Buero Vallejo", Primer Acto, 38 (1962), p. 59.

⁵Manuel Díez-Crespo, "Encuesta sobre la situación del teatro en España", Primer Acto, 100-101 (1968), p. 53.

In spite of the crisis in the Spanish drama of recent years, there has been a dramatist who has created plays worthy of international consideration. The importance of this author has long been recognized both in and out of Spain as the dominant force in the contemporary Spanish theater.⁶

Buero Vallejo has attempted to give the Spanish public a complete picture of human existence, from its pettiness and misery to the grandeur of man's eternal hope for the future.⁷ He paints the misery, the injustices, and the inability to communicate which causes modern man's isolation and loneliness. Man's insatisfaction when confronted with his own limitations and his blindness to the truth of his existence are seen as basic causes of the tragic dilemma facing modern society. No matter how gloomy a world he may depict, there is always hope for the eventual alleviation of human misery. Buero believes in positive action, for if present-day man cannot hope to attain happiness in this world, there must be hope for his descendents.

Manzanares de Cirre has referred to Buero's work as "una eterna e insatisfecha búsqueda."⁸ It is a search for

⁶Juan R. Castellano, "Un nuevo comediógrafo español, Antonio Buero Vallejo", Hispania, XXXVII (1954), p. 17.

⁷Carlos Muñiz, "Antonio Buero Vallejo: ese hombre comprometido", Primer Acto, 38 (1962), p. 9.

⁸M. Manzanares de Cirre, "El realismo social de Buero Vallejo", Revista hispánica moderna, XXVII (1961), p. 324.

truth which eludes man, but which is an absolute necessity for self-fulfillment. This eternal quest has led Buero to a variety of subject matter as he probes deeper into existential problems facing modern society. Virtually all critics agree on the theatrical perfection of his dramatic technique. Each play is a challenge to the author, who constantly strives to surpass himself.⁹

Buero's characters come from all walks of life and from every stratum of society. Blind beggars and kings face the same problems which plague all men. The deaf, blind, and mute who cannot communicate are both individual human beings and also the incarnation of Buero's basic thematic preoccupations. His characters are limited by their environment but are held responsible for their own actions. Many are victims of the Civil War, but Buero, like many of his contemporaries, avoids that conflict as a direct theme, preferring instead to deal with its effects.

Although Buero belongs to no definite literary generation or school of thought, certain aspects of his work represent ideas common to the Spanish literary tradition. The reality-illusion conflict has historically been a major thematic preoccupation of Spanish literature. The author's concern for man's anguish and his tragic existence were

⁹Wallace Woolsey, "Buero Vallejo: Versatile Spanish Dramatist", South Central Bulletin, XXVI (1966), p. 13.

themes explored by Cervantes and Calderón de la Barca in the Golden Age and more recently by such members of the generation of '98 as Unamuno and Valle Inclán. Many of Buero's early plays contain elements of the costumbrista-sainete tradition of Ramón de la Cruz, combined with a concern for social problems reminiscent of Benito Pérez Galdós.

Jean Paul Borel has called Buero the most Spanish of today's dramatists.¹⁰ However, there is also a universal tone to his work, for the anguish he depicts is common to all men. By identifying these problems as those confronting all humanity, he can then return to the Spanish scene.

In spite of Buero's varied subject matter, the essential basis of his work is focused on the eternal search for the truth. His main concern lies in the struggles and doubts plaguing mankind, and it is this element which gives cohesion and thematic unity to his entire production. In conflict with society and even with himself, man longs for a solution which may lead him out of this dilemma. Buero attempts to probe beneath the apparent tranquility of daily life to offer a message and to denounce certain aspects of social reality. His central thesis, like Unamuno's, is the enigma of this reality-illusion polarity as twentieth-century man's only solution for survival, as well as the tragic destiny which eventually faces all humanity.

¹⁰Jean Borel, "Buero Vallejo, más allá de los Pirineos", Cuadernos de agora, 79-82 (1963), p. 16.

Buero does not limit himself to presenting the problems of daily existence, for his search has led him increasingly deeper into the human personality. The gradual evolution of his theater from the traditional sainete which depicted Spanish life to include elements of epic and vanguard theater, has been marked by an increasing tension between these two poles of illusion and reality. At least eight of Buero's plays deal directly with this theme and appear to focus the conflict more sharply.

Buero has been accused of excessive ambiguity by critics such as Rafael Vázquez Zamora¹¹ and García Escudero¹², who obviously misunderstand the spirit of his dramatic conception. These writers have urged him to return to what they consider the realistic technique of his earlier plays. ". . . cuando Buero se ha salido de este camino y ha querido producir dramas de una orientación claramente intelectual, ha perdido vigor expresivo en lo teatral."¹³ Because of these misconceptions, the author has frequently included an autocrítica in editions of his

¹¹Rafael Vázquez Zamora, "Buero Vallejo: La señal que se espera", Insula, 78 (1952), p. 12.

¹²José García Escudero, "El teatro de Antonio Buero Vallejo", Punta Europa, 41 (1959), p. 69.

¹³Rafael Vázquez Zamora, Review of Las cartas boca abajo, Insula 134 (1958), p. 69.

plays. Buero obliges his characters to choose the best solutions to their problems, thus avoiding the hackneyed dramatic devices so common among his contemporaries. He also challenges his public to explore the realm of human tragedy by avoiding easy solutions. He is not being deliberately ambiguous, but is attempting to depict the tragic nature of a paradox which he feels is inherent in life.

In essi Buero Vallejo illustra la psicologia, il più delle volte contraddittoria, dei personaggi, tracciando i loro principali conflitti, ma termina quasi sempre dicendo che il lettore può scegliere la soluzione che più gli piaccia.¹⁴

Foreigners have a stereotyped concept of a backward, dormant Spain dominated by a dictatorship from which no significant literature can emerge. The international reception of Buero's works has generally been favorable, although in the United States it has been limited to university departments of Spanish literature.

. . . se nota lo difícil que es para el extranjero vencer el enorme prejuicio que reina en el mundo contra todo lo español de hoy: la idea, consciente o inconsciente, de que aquí no puede hacerse nada realmente bueno, osado y actual, porque el sistema lo impide.¹⁵

In spite of the generally unfavorable position which contemporary Spanish literature holds on the world literary scene, Buero's dramatic productions continue to arouse the

¹⁴Lucia Maria Cerutti, "Interpretazione del teatro di Antonio Buero Vallejo", *Aeuvum*, XL (1966), p. 351.

¹⁵Antonio Buero Vallejo, (Personal correspondence), 5/24/70.

interest of foreign and Spanish critics alike. His thematic search for the truth as it relates to modern man's existence has been the principal reason for his literary dominance of a theater long plagued by moralistic and political conformity as well as bureaucratic obstacles. Buero's preoccupation with the dual aspects of reality and illusion is his concept of the enigma facing present-day man. Although his plays contain a variety of subject matter, this conflict merits further investigation, for it is a principal theme of his entire theater.

Since the 1963 production of Aventura en lo gris, Buero's plays have appeared less frequently on the Madrid stage. The author attributes this to several reasons: notably his ever-increasing demand for artistic excellence and the difficulties which have traditionally hindered the efforts of Spanish artists.¹⁶ The theatrical season of 1970 marked the debut of El sueño de la razón. This play, which was most favorably received by Madrid's theater public, deals with the painter Goya.

¹⁶Ibid.

CHAPTER II

THEMES OF BUERO VALLEJO

Despite the definite locales of his settings, Buero Vallejo's themes transcend the boundaries of time and space with depth and mastery. His subject matter is as limitless as his dramatic inspiration. Each new play adds new dimensions of ideas and human situations. The settings range from the biblical past to those of the twentieth century and include the Greek legend of Penelope and Ulysses together with historical subjects, both foreign and national. In spite of this wide range of dramatic conception, there are certain themes which reappear in all his plays as he attempts to answer problems of man's tragic existence. "Si experimento la necesidad de repetir determinadas preocupaciones dramáticas, pues no vacilo; y escribo otras obras sobre las mismas."¹ Buero's doubts are common to those plaguing all twentieth-century writers and are implicit in life itself. Lack of communication, failure in love, the blindness of man to his own

¹Antonio Buero Vallejo quoted in "Entrevista a Buero Vallejo", Bernard Dulsey, Modern Language Journal, L (1966), p. 155.

needs together with those of his fellow beings, and man's inability to come to grips with his own reality as well as the moral and social significance of the historical past, are but a few examples of the problems with which Buero has concerned himself.

These themes are prominent in each of Buero's plays, beginning with his first, Historia de una escalera. The opening of this play on the night of October 14, 1949, was undoubtedly the most significant event of the Spanish stage since before the Civil War. It was obvious to both spectator and critic alike that they had witnessed the birth of a new and exciting voice to fill the void of the last ten years.

La escena española necesita valores jóvenes que se sumen a los legítimamente consagrados, y que colaboren al mantenimiento de un alto nivel dramático, con el cual todos saldremos ganando. Buero Vallejo es uno de esos valores jóvenes, y lo es, no sólo por el éxito que ha logrado con Historia de una escalera, sino también, y muy especialmente, por los enormes posibilidades de autor que hay en él . . .²

Historia de una escalera won the coveted Lope de Vega prize, the first play to be so honored since Alejandro Casona's La sirena varada in 1934. Its author, virtually unknown in the theatrical world, had been an art student in Madrid

²Alfredo Marquerie, review of Historia de una escalera, Teatro Español 1949-50 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1951), p. 94.

until the Civil War interrupted his studies. He joined the Republican army and at the war's conclusion was taken into custody, gaining release in 1945.

The traumatic experiences of the Civil War had re-focused the Spaniard's attention on the reality of his anguished existence and had created a philosophical and social awareness of man's desperate need to seek a relationship to himself, to all mankind, and to God. It is the tragic totality of this post-war existence which Buero has attempted to paint. His basic theme is a deeply personal one, for his subject is man. ". . . el hombre frente a sus posibilidades o el hombre frente a sus limitaciones."³ He explores spheres of doubt which have tormented man since his conception, and for which there are tragically no closed solutions. "Mi teatro es respuesta a esas permanentes preguntas acerca del mundo y de la vida que me acompañan."⁴ Buero's subjects are not limited to Spain, but encompass universal concepts.⁵

The historical implication of man's perplexing search for the truth is a basic concept of Buero's

³Ricardo Domenech, "Reflexiones sobre el teatro de Buero Vallejo", Primer Acto, 11 (1951), p. 5.

⁴Antonio Buero Vallejo quoted in "Talante trágico del teatro de Buero Vallejo", Rosendo Roig, Razón y fé, 156 (1957), p. 363.

⁵Antonio Buero Vallejo quoted in "Diálogo con Antonio Buero Vallejo", (Pt. II), Miguel Luis Rodríguez, Indice, 118 (1958), p. 19.

theater, which critics have judged ". . . una sostenida interrogación, una duda renovadora."⁶ The author himself has termed his work as "teatro de búsqueda más que de afirmación"⁷, thus creating a general tone of spiritual unrest, a current running throughout his work. ". . . la misión del arte está en una especie de investigación intuitiva."⁸ His style is devoid of the bombastic sentimentality so common to the contemporary Spanish stage. Haro Tecglen⁹ has said that before Buero the Spanish twentieth-century drama was primarily external, stressing violent, melodramatic situations with which the average spectator could not easily identify. Conversely, Buero emphasizes interior aspects in his continual inquiry into the enigma of man's existence and his eternal search for the truth. There are no easy solutions to the problems he explores, and the final judgment of his works is

⁶ José Monleón, "Un teatro abierto", Antonio Buero Vallejo: Hoy es fiesta, Las Meninas, El tragaluz (Madrid: Ediciones Taurus, 1968), p. 16.

⁷ Antonio Buero Vallejo quoted in "Charla con Antonio Buero Vallejo", Medardo Fraile, Cuadernos de Agora, 79-82 (1963), p. 5.

⁸ Antonio Buero Vallejo quoted in "Diálogo con Antonio Buero Vallejo", (Pt. III), Miguel Luis Rodríguez, Indice, 119 (1958), p. 19.

⁹ Eduardo Haro Tecglen, Review of En la ardiente oscuridad, Teatro Español 1950-51 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1952), p. 98.

always left open to individual interpretation. "Me interesan el comportamiento humano; el margen de libertad y de opción que, pese a los más fuertes condicionamientos sociales, hay en el hombre."¹⁰

Buero has consistently placed his standards of literary excellence above the immediate possibilities of monetary gain. Because of economic necessities, the Spanish theater is mainly patronized by the upper middle-class. In spite of the known tastes of this bourgeois audience, Buero has refused to compromise his artistic sensibility. Convinced that the Spanish theater needs new inspiration and conscious of literary trends and innovations in other countries, he has not confined his works to the superficial reality of boulevard theater. The unlimited possibilities of his theater exact a demanding price on the dramatist, who is constantly obliged to re-examine his artistic goals. "La carrera teatral en España es dura, sobretodo cuando uno se ha planteado objetivos como los que yo me planteé . . . hay que examinarse constantemente."¹¹

In assessing literary sources Buero has cited the generation of '98, especially Unamuno and Valle Inclán,

¹⁰ Antonio Buero Vallejo, (Personal correspondence), 5/24/70.

¹¹ Buero Vallejo, "Entrevista a Buero Vallejo, p. 155.

Cervantes, Calderón, and Galdós, as well as foreign writers such as Ibsen, Pirandello, and O'Neill,¹² but there is no one literary trend or school to which one can assign him.¹³ Although there is a trace of García Lorca, especially in Buero's concept of mystery, the author himself sees no relationship to the dead poet.¹⁴ On the other hand, certain dramatic critics such as Chantraine-Van Praag¹⁵ and Sergio Nerva¹⁶ maintain that Buero has created a school of buerismo which has influenced the general climate of Spanish drama since 1949. The importance of Historia de una escalera as a literary genesis to many young Spanish writers has been equally heralded by such critics as Ricardo Domenech.¹⁷ Although he is in general

¹²Bernard Dulsey, "Entrevista a Buero Vallejo", Modern Language Journal, I (1966), pp. 149-52.

¹³Buero Vallejo, "Entrevista a Buero Vallejo", p. 152.

¹⁴Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Introduction to Historia de una escalera", edited by Jose Sanchez, (New York: Charles Scribner, 1955), p. xiv-xv.

¹⁵Jacqueline Chantraine-Van Praag, "Tendencias del teatro español de hoy: Antonio Buero Vallejo y 'el buerismo'", Cuadernos Americanos, CXXX (1963), p. 263.

¹⁶Sergio Nerva, Review of Las cartas boca abajo, Teatro Español 1957-58 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1959), p. 3.

¹⁷Ricardo Domenech, "Cinco estrenos para la historia del teatro español: Historia de una escalera", Primer Acto, 100-1, p. 26.

agreement with this idea, Buero attaches more importance to later plays, especially En la ardiente oscuridad.¹⁸

Buero has opened new dimensions of dramatic possibilities to the Spanish stage in the wide range of subject matter which he has introduced to theatrical audiences. Although the development of his theater has been characterized by the re-enforcement of certain thematic concepts, each new play offers a fresh approach to these ideas. Three examples of Buero's varied subject matter are Madrugada (1953), Las palabras en la arena (1948), and Tejedora de sueños (1952). The first play, which has a modern setting, is primarily concerned with two basic human conflicts; love and material ambition. The plot centers around the necessity of the protagonist, Amalia, to discover the motives of her lover, a famous painter, in marrying her. Did Maurice really love her or did he marry Amalia prior to his death in order to mock his greedy, egotistical relatives? Buero has stated that one of his purposes in writing Madrugada was an exercise in the difficulties that the three classical unities offer the playwright.¹⁹ The action adheres to the three unities, taking place during the early morning hours at the artist's

¹⁸Buero Vallejo, (Personal correspondence), 5/24/70.

¹⁹Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Autocrítica de Madrugada", Teatro Español 1953-54 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1955), p. 143.

residence after his death. Amalia is able to dupe Mauricio's relatives into believing that the artist is still alive until she learns the truth. In the process each exchange between the characters unfolds layer upon layer of their greed and envy. The climax comes when they discover that Mauricio is already dead and that he has willed his entire inheritance to his wife. This creates an emotional catharsis, an element typical of Buero's plays, in which the characters repent their actions and reach an understanding of their situation.

External time is marked by the clock, which is a constant reminder of the intrigue and tension created by the author. Although the play has been judged as one of Buero's least successful,²⁰ Torrente Ballester has asserted that the moral motives of its characters elevate it from a simple comedia de intriga.²¹ Madrugada's truths are more explicit than those of other plays, and there is implied hope in Amalia's victory. While it is by no means one of Buero's most important plays, it is interesting for its treatment of time and the passions of the characters, who represent society.

²⁰José García Escudero, "El teatro de Antonio Buero Vallejo", Punta Europa, 41 (1959), p. 58.

²¹Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, Teatro español contemporáneo (Madrid: Guadarrama, 1957), p. 328.

In contrast, Las palabras en la arena, a one-act play, has a biblical setting, in which the dominant tone of the conclusion is gloomy and pessimistic. The play was first performed on December 12, 1949, in the Teatro Español by students of the Madrid Conservatory and won the prize of the Asociación de los Amigos de los Quintero. Its subject matter deals with adultery and is based on the Gospel of John, Chapter VII, where Jesus writes on the ground, "Let him who is without sin be the first to cast a stone." Noemi, the unfaithful wife, is murdered by her husband, Asaf, according to the word asesino written by Jesus. It is Asaf's spiritual blindness, his failure to face the problems of his relationship with his wife, and his weakness of character which cause him to commit the fatal act. However, he is not totally responsible for his downfall. He is a product of a hypocritical society which denies him the liberty of action according to his personal conscience. ". . . no es una pedrada contra nadie, sino el humilde intento que su autor hace de comprender y ayudar a comprender algunos de los laberintos donde se pierde la moral de los hombres."²² In essence, this is the tragedy of the situation, for Christ was the only one to see this homicidal tendency. All the others know that

²²Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Comentario a Las palabras en la arena", Colección teatro, 10 (Madrid: Alfíl, 1952), p. 104.

the truth has been written, but Asaf only acknowledges it at the end. In spite of the fatalistic tone, there is an implicit hope, for Buero does not expound a deterministic philosophy. Asaf should have realized the truth and tried to change it. Man can struggle against these brutal tendencies and is ultimately responsible for his own truth. ". . . los hombres no son necesariamente víctimas pasivas de la fatalidad, sino colectivos e individuales artífices de sus venturas y desgracias."²³

Like Asaf's defeat, Ulysses' downfall in Tejedora de sueños is brought about by his lack of moral courage and his inability to face the truth of his relationship with his wife. Buero has joined playwrights such as Giraudoux, Anouilh, and Cocteau in his re-interpretation of the Greek myth based on interpolations. One of Penelope's suitors, Prince Anfino, is a new character. Buero maintains that his re-interpretation did not destroy the fundamental theme of the myth which is the conflict of the inner truth of the characters versus the historical truth.²⁴ The ambiguity of Penelope's motives in allowing the kingdom to decline and in removing her weaving at night, as well

²³Antonio Buero Vallejo, "El teatro de Buero Vallejo visto por Buero Vallejo", Primer Acto, 1 (1957), p. 6.

²⁴Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Comentario a Tejedora de sueños", Colección teatro, 16 (Madrid: Alfíl, 1952), p. 90.

as Ulysses' reason for returning to Ithaca disguised as a beggar, remain unanswered, as do many questions in Buero's other works. The worst thoughts occur in the characters' minds, for Penelope's physical love for Anfino only happens in her dreams, and she has remained faithful to a Ulysses who is none the less implacable in his decision to execute the young prince.

The murder of Anfino and the other suitors is a brutal and cowardly act committed by an egotistical Ulysses for whom an exterior victory of marital fidelity is more important than an interior one of love. There is sharp contrast between the materialistic love of Ulysses for Penelope and the pure love that Anfino feels for the older queen. The prince sees her as young and beautiful, and, according to Penelope, she will always remain so in his heart.

Pero tu no habrás tenido en tu camino ninguna mujer
que te recuerde joven, porque tú naciste viejo.
Pero yo seré siempre joven, ¡joven y bella en el
recuerdo y en el sueño de Anfino!²⁵

There is implicit hope in the future that there will be more Anfinos who will not leave their wives behind to fight foolish wars, for today's world belongs to the powerful Ulysseses.

²⁵Antonio Buero Vallejo, Tejedora de sueños,
Colección teatro, 16 (Madrid: Alfíl, 1965), p. 71.

In spite of a variety of subject matters in these three plays, basic themes of Buero are common to all his works. The moral and spiritual blindness of Ulysses and Asaf brings about their downfall, as well as that of Mauricio's relatives.

(Ulysses) Todo está perdido. Así quieren los dioses labrar nuestra desgracia.

(Penelope) No culpes a los dioses. Somos nosotros quienes la labramos.²⁶

Lack of communication between the characters and the failure of love between husband and wife lead each protagonist to an existence based on a lie. Although Amalia is the only one whose search for the truth is completely successful, each protagonist struggles against overwhelming odds to attain this goal. The others, however, are unsuccessful because of flaws of character, such as egoism and envy, and because of the moral and social restrictions of their society. Ulysses is anxious to preserve the external appearances that his wife has been loyal to him, and Asaf cannot pardon Noemi for her sin of adultery, because he feels society will allow only one form of punishment. Lack of communication between Amalia and Mauricio has left the young widow doubting his love and has motivated her to seek the truth from his relatives in order to gain some degree of self-respect from those who have sought to humiliate and degrade her.

²⁶Ibid.

None of Buero's characters is perfect, for he is not a mechanical writer.²⁷ Ignacio of En la ardiente oscuridad engages in an absurd revolt, and the two brothers of El tragaluz are not personifications of good and evil but rather have traits of both. These men and women represent all levels of society from the most humble to the haughtiest and are held together by one common bond: a desire to learn the truth of their existential reality. Many have been scarred by the Civil War, which has affected every social stratum of Spanish society. Others are dreamers who rebel against their limitations, even though there is no rational possibility of achieving these dreams. The physical limitations which many suffer, such as blindness and deafness, symbolize man's limitations when confronted with his destiny, but, as the critic Francesco Vian²⁸ has stated, each character is an individual seeking to solve his problems on a human plane. Critics like Miguel Luis Rodríguez who encourage Buero to present more realistic characters representing "los dolores y las esperanzas de los españoles de nuestro tiempo"²⁹, have failed to

²⁷Jean Paul Borel, "Prologue to El concierto de San Ovidio (Barcelona: Ayma, 1962), p. 13.

²⁸Francesco Vian, "Il teatro di Buero Vallejo", Vita e Pensiero, XXXV (1952), p. 169.

²⁹Luis Rodríguez, "Diálogo con Antonio Buero Vallejo", 118, p. 19.

comprehend the moral and social intent of the author. Buero transposes his compassion for these weak and down-trodden to the audience, which can identify with their anxieties and problems. José Castellano's³⁰ assessment that Buero's characters are essentially nineteenth-century figures, uncomfortable and disoriented in a twentieth-century environment, has proved inconsistent with both the Spanish theater public and the vast majority of dramatic critics.

Jean Borel³¹ has stated that almost all of Buero's characters except Irene of Irene o el tesoro have contrasting qualities of egotism and altruism and continually suffer from this tension. Silverio of Aventura en lo gris keenly desires social reform in his country, but egotism has prevented him from taking positive action. In Un soñador para un pueblo Esquilache's personal motives threaten to overshadow his concern for the welfare of the people. Like many of the author's protagonists, his final realization of the truth comes almost too late for effective action.

Action and passivity are two poles of human conduct which have profound interest for Buero.³² These characteristics are frequently represented in two protagonists,

³⁰José Castellano, "Hacia una interpretación del teatro de Buero Vallejo", Punta Europa, 77 (1962), p. 36.

³¹Jean Paul Borel, "Buero Vallejo: Teatro y político", Revista de Occidente, VI (1964), 229.

³²Buero Vallejo, (Personal correspondence), 5/24/70.

such as Ignacio and Carlos of En la ardiente oscuridad and Fernando and Urbano of Historia de una escalera. In each of these plays the activist has a desire, although unrealized, to improve man's social awareness through action, while the pacifist withdraws into a dream world of contemplation. In other instances exemplified by Vicente of El tragaluz and Goldmann of Aventura en lo gris, the practical activist lacks human compassion and understanding. In still a third case, as shown by David of La doble historia del doctor Valmy and Velázquez of Las Meninas, the pacifist finally comes to the realization that only by action can man struggle to gain his goals.

Buero himself has refuted Rafael Benítez Claros³³ attempt to link his works to French existentialism. "Puede haber en mí tendencia a una cierta forma de existencialismo, pero muy matizada, muy a mi manera."³⁴ Rafael Vázquez Zamora has also denied any direct connection between Buero and existentialism. "Querer ver en él un existencialista, como se ha hecho, me parece un evidente error."³⁵ Others, such as José Castellano³⁶ have unjustly termed his

³³Rafael Benítez Claros, "Buero Vallejo y la condición humana", Nuestro Tiempo, 107 (1963), p. 582.

³⁴Buero Vallejo, "Entrevista a Buero Vallejo", p. 152.

³⁵Rafael Vázquez Zamora, Review of Las cartas boca abajo, Insula, 134 (1958), p. 15.

³⁶José Castellano, "Hacia una interpretación del teatro de Buero Vallejo", Punta Europa, 75-76 (1962), p. 12.

work superficial existentialism. Although many of his themes, such as lack of communication, inability for action, and man's existence when confronted with his destiny are common among existentialist writers, they are also questions which have concerned other twentieth-century authors. As the dominant philosophy of this century, existentialism has profoundly touched all intellectual thought and artistic endeavor. Buero maintains that every great dramatist who examines man's condition has existentialist tendencies.

. . . somos todos un poco existenciales . . . la mayor parte de las grandes obras dramáticas que se han dado en el mundo-pero no sólo en nuestros tiempos, sino también en el pasado-son en cierto modo obras existenciales de teatro.³⁷

The author's personal interpretation of existentialism signifies a need for self-realization and for man to shape his own potential.

Buero's basic philosophy differs from that of atheistic existentialism in that the Spaniard frequently looks to religion as a solution to man's problems, and consequently always clings to some degree of hope. The author's interest lies more in personal and social problems of the individual rather than in conflicting philosophical concepts. Buero shows a definite affinity with Unamuno,

³⁷Buero Vallejo, "Entrevista a Buero Vallejo", p. 155.

who described man's existence as a continual conflict between reason and faith.³⁸

The problems of human existence relating specifically to the limits which time and space exert on man are the general thematic concern of Buero's first play, Historia de una escalera (1949). The play, which contains all of the most important themes developed in later works, deals realistically with the lives of four families in a Madrid apartment house. The stairway of the building is the focal point for the plot, which centers around the gradual demoralization and tragic destiny of these pathetic people. The three acts correspond to three stages in their lives and take place in 1919, 1929, and 1949. For three generations the lives of these families are tragically inter-woven with all of their domestic problems and failures aired within earshot of the others. Fernando's weakness and the failure of his love for Carmina lead to two marriages based on a lie. At the play's conclusion the children of these two couples profess their undying love for each other, echoing the words of their parents.

In the Palabra final to the 1950 edition Buero gave two reasons for writing the play.

³⁸Ricardo Domenech, "El tragaluz: Una tragedia de nuestro tiempo", Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos, 217 (1968), p. 129.

. . . desarrollar el panorama humano que siempre ofrece una escalera de vecinos y abordar las tentadoras dificultades de construcción teatral que un escenario como ese poseía o . . . la visión del fluir del tiempo en unas familias que se hace angosta por la angostura del espacio donde ocurre.³⁹

The effect of time on these characters is one of gradual decline and decay. The action of the three acts and the unchanging scenery represent a monotonous repetition symbolic of life itself. The stairway is the core of the play, as it symbolizes the limitations of the characters by time and space on their dreams of self-realization. However, the environment is not totally to blame. Historia de una escalera does not expound a theory of social determinism, as stated by Van Praag.⁴⁰ The characters, although limited by time and space, could have overcome their difficulties if they had been able to face the reality of their situation. No one social class is to blame, for their blindness to this reality and their lack of positive action has brought about their downfall. Urbano is unhappy because Carmina hates him, and more money will not solve his problems. Fernando is a passive dreamer who fails in the smallest of his goals because he lacks the strength of character to realize his ambitions.

³⁹Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Palabra final", Historia de una escalera (Barcelona: Janés, 1950), p. 152.

⁴⁰Van Praag, "Tendencias del teatro español de Hoy", p. 255.

The social situation is merely the background for the individual problems of each character and the collective problems of the group. Failure of love, alienation, lack of communication and unwillingness to face reality are the principal causes for the characters' inability to break the crushing bonds of the stairway and the apartment house. These themes are repeated and developed in Buero's succeeding plays.

Valbuena Prat⁴¹ and Ignacio Soldevilla⁴² have labeled Historia de una escalera a sainete of the tradition of Ramón de la Cruz and Arniches, while Torrente Ballester⁴³ claims that it contains none of the basic characteristics of a sainete. Ricardo Domenech⁴⁴ has praised the play as representing the reappearance of an authentic Spanish reality which had been missing during the 1939-49 period. According to Domenech, the play is a combination of the sainete and the problem of man's tragic destiny inherited from Unamuno. The author himself seems to agree with Domenech's assessment. "Yo había intentado, bajo la superficie sainetesca y costumbrista

⁴¹Angel Valbuena Prat, Historia del teatro español (Barcelona: Noguer, 1956), p. 660.

⁴²Ignacio Soldevilla, "Sobre el teatro español de los últimos 25 años", Cuadernos Americanos, CXXVI (1962), p. 280.

⁴³Torrente Ballester, Teatro español contemporáneo, p. 102.

⁴⁴Domenech, "Cinco estrenos para la historia del teatro español", p. 26.

de mi obra, deslizar una tragedia auténtica."⁴⁵ Buero also states that Historia, although taking place in Madrid, was intended to be universal in scope.⁴⁶ Although Buero has referred to Historia as a drama, he maintains that it is essentially a tragedy. "En el fondo es una tragedia, porque la vida entera y verdadera es siempre a mi juicio, trágica."⁴⁷ It was his intention to write a new type of tragedy, different from that which had been universally accepted as traditionally Spanish in both painting and literature. Buero's classification of tragedy has caused critics such as Torrente Ballester⁴⁸ and Jorge de la Cueva⁴⁹ to label Historia as extremely pessimistic, offering no hope for future generations. Emilio Clocchiati has criticized Buero, saying that the background he portrays represents only a small segment of Spanish life. ". . . la más desagradable y sórdida."⁵⁰

⁴⁵Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Cuidado con la amargura", Correo Literario, 2 (1950), p. 8.

⁴⁶Buero Vallejo, "Palabra final", p. 152.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 153.

⁴⁸Torrente Ballester, Teatro español contemporáneo, p. 328.

⁴⁹Jorge de la Cueva, Review of Historia de una escalera, Teatro Español 1949-50 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1951), p. 96.

⁵⁰Emilio Clocchiatti, "España y su teatro contemporáneo", Insula, 206 (1961), p. 4.

The author refutes these critics by asserting that the classic concept of tragic destiny need not be incorporated into all tragedy.⁵¹

Buero maintains that Historia is positive in tone, implying hope for the future. Perhaps Fernando el hijo and Carmina la hija will be able to overcome the lack of character which made their parents and grandparents victims of their environment. The author defends himself against those who criticize Historia for being too ambiguous, stating that a play is neither a social treatise nor an essay and that its mission is to reflect life.⁵² While the possibility of hope is left open at the end, Historia is definitely one of Buero's most negative plays.

Buero offers no positive solutions, but there is implicit hope for future generations. This theme prevails throughout his dramatic production as one of his most important ideas, and he frequently finds it necessary to defend his concept of ambiguity and implicit hope.

The repetition of Fernando's speech at the end of Act I by his son in Act III is testimony of the

⁵¹Buero Vallejo, "Palabra final", p. 154.

⁵²Ibid., p. 155.

overwhelming odds which the young generation must overcome. Buero is saying that existence today is impossible for many, but the struggle to live must tragically continue. There can be no resignation to life.

For Buero Vallejo the most authentic dramatic vehicle in expressing this struggle is tragedy.⁵³ This theatrical form has not been popular in twentieth-century Spanish drama, and Buero has been criticized for cultivating the tragedy because his plays lack certain external characteristics traditionally regarded as essential to this classification.⁵⁴ However, many of his plays are tragic because of the problems he discusses rather than because of their form. The author has repeatedly insisted that the role of the theater is to depict these conflicts of man and that the most moral form of the drama is tragedy.

. . . se es moral y positivo cuando se busca y consigue conmover y remover al espectador; cuando se le enfrenta con su personal capacidad de interesarse cordialmente por el insondable dolor humano, y es la tragedia la forma de teatro más auténtica de provocar ese interés.⁵⁵

Buero views the tragic element of catharsis as a spiritual ennoblement more than just a discharging

⁵³ Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Buero Vallejo y José Tamayo hablan del teatro", Correo Literario, 33 (1951), p. 5.

⁵⁴ Castellano, "Hacia una interpretación del teatro de Buero Vallejo", p. 27.

⁵⁵ Buero Vallejo, "Talante trágico del teatro de Buero Vallejo", p. 367.

of passions. It is through suffering that the spectator can obtain hope. He utilizes this phenomenon in all his plays from the most negative to the most positive. The future may or may not hold a solution to man's dilemma, but Buero steadfastly adheres to the concept of tragedy as a flexible phenomenon expressing the conflict of necessity versus liberty or faith versus doubt: "Las tragedias son, en esencia, expresiones de 'la fe que duda'".⁵⁶

Buero argues that there are various works of classical Greek tragedy with conciliatory endings and that a work must not be pessimistic or fatalistic to be considered a tragedy. Tragedy should always be written with implied hope for it is the literary form which seeks optimistic solutions based on truth rather than illusion.⁵⁷

Hoy es fiesta (1956) is an example of one of Buero's most hopeful plays in which he reaffirms his belief that the problem of hope is encompassed in all tragedy. Like Historia, this play's setting is a shabby Madrid apartment house. The play's classical structure is similar to Madrugada, for the action is confined to

⁵⁶Antonio Buero Vallejo quoted in "La Tragedia", El teatro enciclopedia del arte escénica, by Guillermo Díaz Plaja, III (Barcelona: Noguer, 1955), 77.

⁵⁷Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Sobre la tragedia", Entretiens sur les lettres et les artes, 22 (1963), p. 57.

the roof on Sunday, the only día de fiesta which these humble people can ever enjoy. The roof, forbidden to the tenants of the building, is a symbol of light, air, and sun, or everything denied them. It is a silent witness to their frustrated dreams, their petty quarrels, their timid love affairs, and their hatreds. Silverio and Pilar are the two central figures, although the emphasis is placed on the collective problems of the group. Silverio suffers a serious guilt complex because he considers himself responsible for the death of Pilar's illegitimate child. He has renounced his ambition to be a painter in order to dedicate his life to Pilar, who is now deaf. Daniela attempts to share her problems concerning her mother, doña Balbina, with Fidel, but he is unresponsive. The other neighbors force access to the roof for the day to enjoy some sunlight and companionship. The climax comes late in the day when the neighbors, believing that they have won the grand prize in the lottery, discover that doña Balbina has given them last year's ticket and has spent their money for food. Silverio is able to persuade the others to forgive her and prevents Daniela from committing suicide. Pilar dies before Silverio can carry out his resolution to confess his guilt to her.

Egotism, passivity, lack of communication, and failure to face reality are once again Buero's basic

themes. As elsewhere, the central theme of this play is a search for the truth and for self-realization. Silverio has been unable to accomplish his youthful dreams, because he has allowed the passions of jealousy and egotism to overcome him. However, he is not entirely blind to his weaknesses as he struggles with himself to learn the truth. The affair of the lottery is the catalyst which enables him to face reality. This commitment is strengthened when he saves Daniela from death. He now understands that in order to reach a better understanding of his problems he must confess his guilt. His tragedy is that Pilar dies before he is able to accomplish this.

The central meaning of Hoy es fiesta lies somewhere between the complexities of hope and despair. The ambiguous ending illustrates once again the author's concept of the varying degrees of truth in drama. Buero himself has stated that the play represents the dual aspects of hope. Desperation is a part of hope, for the polarity of hope-desperation is man's tragedy.⁵⁸ Silverio and Pilar are happy externally, but internally unhappy. They represent this tension, for their very unhappiness suggests the possibility of happiness.

⁵⁸ Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Comentario a Hoy es fiesta, Colección teatro, 176 (Madrid: Alfíl, 1952), p. 100.

Critics like Torrente Ballester⁵⁹ and Nicolas González Ruíz⁶⁰ agree with Buero that hope is the prevailing spirit of the play. Doña Nieves' lines, which end the play, leave little doubt as to the author's intentions. "Hay que esperar . . . Esperar siempre . . . La esperanza nunca termina . . . La esperanza es infinita."⁶¹

García Escudero⁶² sees no hope in the play, for he regards Silverio's failure to confess his sins as a sign of despair and disillusionment. In spite of Buero's denial that there is no greater degree of hope in Hoy es fiesta than Historia or other previous plays, it is obvious that its implication is greater here than in his first play.

The tragic tone of Hoy es fiesta elevates the trivial problems of the tenants to the level of the symbolic. Buero has successfully combined the costumbrista

⁵⁹Torrente Ballester, Teatro español contemporáneo, p. 331.

⁶⁰Nicolas González Ruíz, Review of Hoy es fiesta, Teatro Español 1956-57 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1958), p. 39.

⁶¹Buero Vallejo, Hoy es fiesta, Colección Teatro, 176 (Madrid: Alfil), 1968, p. 91.

⁶²García Escudero, "El teatro de Antonio Buero Vallejo", pp. 61-62.

setting of the sainete with the tragic element to depict these human emotions inherent in life. The rays of sun on the terrace symbolize the tragic hopes of the neighbors. The wrath of the tenants when they realize they have been cheated by doña Balbina is a sign of their frustration to life itself. Pilar's deafness provides an air of mystery to the plot and also symbolizes the lack of communication between husband and wife. Her problem is physical, but Silverio's is more serious, for he is inhibited by psychological preoccupations. "En mayor grado que los demás vecinos, y de manera casi opuesta a ellos, esta pareja viene a representar un drama de incomunicación."⁶³

In this play Buero is advocating that the only solution to man's problems is through society. Silverio is able to face his situation only when he helps others. Although he has failed in his attempt to confess to Pilar, there is always the possibility of communication in the life beyond. Perhaps she already knew his secret before her death. Once again man can only look to the future for hope.

In contrast to Hoy es fiesta, Las cartas boca abajo (1957) is considered by many critics to be the most pessimistic of Buero's plays. Wallace Woolsey⁶⁴

⁶³Buero Vallejo, "La Tragedia", p. 103.

⁶⁴Wallace Woolsey, "Buero Vallejo: Versatile Spanish Dramatist", South Central Bulletin, XXVI (1966), p. 11.

states that there is no hope for any of these characters except perhaps Juanito, the son. Morreau-Arrabal is even more pessimistic, asserting that even though the author implies the possibility of hope for Juanito, "presentamos . . . la temible probabilidad de que sucumba a su vez."⁶⁵

The play's setting is a shabby Madrid apartment house, whose occupants are now the middle-class family of Juan and Adela. The central theme is once again the spiritual blindness of the characters to the truth and the defeat of the protagonists by their egotism and jealousy. The marriage of Juan and Adela, like that of Fernando and Elvira, is based on a lie, for Adela, rejected by Carlos, now a famous scholar and author, has married Juan because of her self-centered pride and envy. She sought to prove that she could even make the weak and mediocre Juan triumph. Juan's failure has caused Adela to detest him, and she has undermined his relationship with Juanito, who is ashamed of his father and hates him. Juan is trying one last time to win a professorship at the university, but Adela secretly desires his failure, for she could claim no credit for his success. Adela's younger sister, Anita, rejected by Carlos for Adela, is mute, either by choice or because of a physical disability. Adela's brother, Mario, a modern-day pícaro, is a failure, a

⁶⁵Luce Morreau-Arrabal, Prologue to Teatro selecto de Antonio Buero Vallejo (Madrid: Escelicer, 1966), p. 10.

victim of society and a figure for which Buero feels certain compassion. According to José Castellano,⁶⁶ he is considered by many to be one of Buero's best characters.

As the play develops, the characters' motives are gradually revealed, and the total destruction of the family by one of its members becomes more evident. Juan's egotism causes him to lose the competition for he refuses to read two books by Carlos which would have enabled him to win. Adela's exterior victory of Juan's defeat is offset by her husband's interior victory. He learns the truth regarding his relationship with his wife and gains the love and respect of his son. By turning over his cards he forces Adela to reveal the resentment she has harbored all these years.

The evolution of Buero's dramatic development in the sainete-costumbrista vein is readily apparent. The emphasis in Historia and Hoy es fiesta is on the exterior action, whereas in Las cartas boca abajo the author concentrates on the interior plane, stressing psychological aspects of the characters. Although the play is very realistic, there is a greater degree of symbolism in Las cartas boca abajo. Anita is mute testimony to the lack of communication plaguing the family. She is Adela's

⁶⁶ Castellano, "Hacia una interpretación del teatro de Buero Vallejo", p. 37.

conscience, a constant reminder to the older woman that her sister has been a victim of her jealousy and egotism. The birds which Adela hears have a double meaning. Early in the play they symbolize her longing for freedom from the four walls of the apartment. However, at the play's conclusion, the creatures sense the approaching darkness and their cries are perceived as those of terror by Adela who has now been deserted by her husband and son.

Rafael Benítez Claros⁶⁷ and Rafael Vázquez Zamora⁶⁸ are critical of this play, claiming that the characters are shallow and the atmosphere is excessively tragic. Although the tone is definitely one of bitter pessimism, the author again implies hope for the future through the promise of Juanito that he will return in an effort to bring joy to the house.

Buero's use of tragedy as the dramatic concept of all his plays has labeled him as extremely pessimistic for many critics, especially those of his earlier plays. Benítez Claros⁶⁹ has stated that Buero's basic philosophy is man's inherent condition of unhappiness and desperation. He regards the author as excessively pessimistic. This

⁶⁷Benítez Claros, "Buero Vallejo y la condición humana", p. 591.

⁶⁸Vázquez Zamora, Review of Las cartas boca abajo, p. 15.

⁶⁹Benítez Claros, "Buero Vallejo y la condición humana", p. 593.

assessment can at best be seen as only a half-truth, for this critic fails to consider the author's premise that although man's destiny is tragic, he must continue to hope and struggle for a better future. This struggle in itself lends a positive spirit to his plays. Other critics such as Carlos Muñiz,⁷⁰ José Abellán,⁷¹ and José Marra-Lopez⁷² deny that Buero's theater is pessimistic. The latter claims that it is normal for a society to attack a writer as pessimistic when society itself has been criticized. Miguel Luis Rodríguez⁷³ feels that Buero's settings are characteristically sordid and do not represent the typical Spanish life style. Buero has defended himself, stating that he is fully aware that these settings cannot portray the totality of Spanish reality. However, he feels that his plays in this vein deal with a considerable segment of Spanish society, and in many cases these people have been victims of the Civil War. Most critics of recent years, perhaps able to view his production in the perspective of nearly twenty years, have probed

⁷⁰Carlos Muñiz, "El simbolismo religioso en el teatro de Buero Vallejo", Proyección, 37 (1963), p. 102.

⁷¹José Abellán, "El tema del misterio en Buero Vallejo", Insula, 174 (1961), p. 15.

⁷²José Marra-Lopez, "Conversación con Antonio Buero Vallejo", Cuadernos, 42 (1960), p. 56.

⁷³Luis Rodríguez, "Diálogo con Antonio Buero Vallejo", (Pt. II), p. 20.

beneath external reality to find a deeper, although more hidden message of hope and optimism.

Man's physical limitations represent a significant thematic element for Buero. There are blind, deaf, or mute characters in many of his plays, and he deals specifically with the problems of blindness in En la ardiente oscuridad and El concierto de San Olvidio and with deafness in El sueño de la razón. The nurse in Tejedora de sueños is blind and Pedro in Las Meninas has practically lost his sight. El Ciego de los Romances introduces the action in Un soñador para un pueblo. Anita in Las cartas boca abajo is mute, and Pilar of Hoy es fiesta is deaf. Buero does not limit himself to the superficial aspects of organic disabilities, for this theme assumes a symbolic meaning prevalent throughout his dramatic production. Rafael Vázquez Zamora has referred to blindness as "La Gran Metáfora"⁷⁴ of Buero Vallejo, for many of his characters are blind to the social and historical reality of their existence. In this sense the blind are those who perceive only superficial reality and are content with easy solutions involving no personal commitment to the human dilemma. Ulysses in Tejedora de sueños is blind to the truth of his relationship with Penelope, while

⁷⁴Rafael Vázquez Zamora, "En el Goya, los trágicos ciegos de Buero Vallejo", Insula, 193 (1962), p. 16.

Vicente of El tragaluz fails to understand the causes of his father's mental illness.

Buero's preoccupation with blindness has both metaphysical and social application. In the metaphysical sense physical blindness represents the tragedy of man's condition of spiritual blindness, for he suffers from a visual inadequacy in all aspects of his existence. Able to perceive only a minute aspect of reality, often deformed and distorted, he struggles to free himself from the limitations which his blindness imposes upon him and to reach the light or the truth.

Representa por ello, de modo muy claro, el fondo de cualquier problema dramático o trágico que es siempre en definitiva, el de la lucha del hombre, con sus limitaciones, por su libertad.⁷⁵

These are the restraints which cause man to suffer, for he naturally wants to see.

For Buero spiritual blindness assumes a social significance, for it represents a certain segment of society which fails to comprehend the humiliation of the socially oppressed. The physically blind suffer because they are isolated from the reality of the normal and prevented from creating a meaningful social existence. They symbolize all the downtrodden victims of society for which Buero has profound sympathy. In turn, many of the normal are

⁷⁵Antonio Buero Vallejo, "La ceguera en mi teatro", La Carreta, 12 (1962), p. 5.

blind to the rebelliousness of the oppressed. According to Jean Borel,⁷⁶ Buero offers two possible solutions to this conflict: (1) a type of quixotic revolt with no positive goals (En la ardiente oscuridad) or (2) an attempt to educate society to understand and cure these problems (El concierto de San Ovidio).

En la ardiente oscuridad (1950) is the second three-act play of the author to appear on the Madrid stage, and, along with Historia, is his most significant work in terms of contributions to the twentieth-century Spanish drama. This play contains the principal thematic preoccupations which Buero develops throughout his entire dramatic production. His main thesis continues to be man's unwillingness to confront the reality of his situation, contrasted with his never-ending search for the truth. The arrival of Ignacio at a school for the blind and his tormented longing for sight shocks the students out of their delusion of normalcy which has been created by the director, don Pablo and his wife, doña Pepita. Ignacio is painfully conscious of his blindness, while the others, in this climate of security and optimism, have chosen to ignore their unfortunate state. Ignacio's desperate attempt to convince them to accept the truth

⁷⁶Borel, Prologue to El concierto de San Ovidio, p. 12.

leads to rivalries and conflicts among the students. Carlos, Ignacio's positivistic rival, kills him, thus hoping to end this threat to the serenity of the group. The murder is witnessed by doña Pepita, who is not blind, but she does not reveal the murderer's identity, and it is assumed that Ignacio died by accident. Carlos' victory, however, is short-lived, for when Ignacio's body is brought into the room, he realizes how much like the rebel he really is. Ignacio's death has not been in vain, for he has inspired the continuation of his visionary work by Carlos and the others.

In his comentario to the first edition Buero stresses the importance of blindness as one of his principal thematic preoccupations.⁷⁷ He emphasizes the fact that it was not his intention to create a realistic play concerning the anxieties of the blind, but an effort to depict the problems of all humanity.⁷⁸ Blindness in this sense represents the limitations of the human condition symbolized by the physical limitations of the blind. Ignacio is trying to instill in the others an awareness of the truth of the injustice which society inflicts upon them in attempting to minimize their physical reality. The students are

⁷⁷Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Comentario a En la ardiente oscuridad", Colección teatro, 3 (Madrid: Alfíl, 1951), p. 80.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 81.

symbolic of that segment of society which is guilty of self-deception. The Ignacio-Carlos conflict is one of ideology, for Ignacio represents the activist rebelling against his situation, whereas Carlos is the pacifist anxious to preserve the status quo.

The ambiguity surrounding the motives of the protagonists are characteristic of Buero's later plays. Did Carlos kill Ignacio because he was afraid that the young rebel would disrupt the serenity of the institute or because of the threat to his position of leadership? Perhaps it was because of a romantic rivalry over Carlos' sweetheart, Juana. Was Juana attracted to Ignacio or did she only feel pity for him? What were the motivating forces and goals of Ignacio's revolt? Would the ultimate well-being of the students be better served if they had been allowed to continue their illusory existence?

The answers to these questions lie somewhere in the ambiguities of faith and doubt. It is obvious that Ignacio cannot possibly realize his desire for sight, and maybe his only solution is death. The author's emphasis is not on Ignacio's senseless revolt, but upon his search for the metaphysical or ultimate truth.

Ignacio says:

Pero yo estoy ardiendo por dentro; ardiendo
con un fuego terrible, que no me deja vivir
y que puede haceros arder a todos . . .

ardiendo en este que los videntes llaman oscuridad.⁷⁹

It is in this sense that the play ends on a note of optimism. Perhaps Ignacio's death will awaken Carlos and the others to the agonizing truth of their human commitment. The closing remarks spoken by Carlos repeat an earlier sentiment expressed by Ignacio.

. . . Y ahora están brillando las estrellas con todo su esplendor, y los videntes gozan de su presencia maravillosa. Esos mundos lejanísimos están ahí tras los cristales . . . Al alcance de nuestra vista . . . ! si la tuviéramos . . .⁸⁰

Ignacio struggles to find the metaphysical and moral truth, whereas David, the protagonist of El concierto de San Ovidio (1962), is searching for knowledge that will lead to self-realization. The play, which has an accurate historical background with fictitious characters, represents a social treatment of Buero's preoccupation with the theme of blindness. The setting is the fair of Saint Ovid held in Paris in 1771 and the exploitation of a group of blind beggars from the Hospice des Quinze-Vingts by an unscrupulous merchant, Valindin. Unknown to the blind musicians, Valindin plans to present them as grotesque clowns at the air, enticing the group with the monetary possibilities of the venture. David, the only talented

⁷⁹Antonio Buero Vallejo, En la ardiente oscuridad, Colección Teatro, 3 (Madrid: Alfíl, 1963), pp. 30-31.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 79.

one, hopes to help his companions by teaching them to be real musicians. He becomes rebellious when he hears of Valindin's plans and is threatened by the merchant with imprisonment. One day Valindin surprises his mistress, Adriana, with David's adolescent protégé, Donato, and begins to beat them. When David intercedes, he is easily subdued by the merchant. That night David waits for Valindin in his café-theater and in the darkness, murders him. Jealous because Adriana loves David, Donato betrays him to the police. In the concluding scene Valentin Haüy, a historical figure who worked for the blind, tells the audience that he suspects one of the poor blind men he saw mistreated at the café twenty-nine years earlier is an old blind man (Donato) who always plays a piece by Corelli (as David had done). Who, he asks, will assume the responsibility for David's death?

This play develops and deepens some of the author's principal preoccupations concerning blindness as seen earlier in En la ardiente oscuridad. El concierto de San Ovidio contains many elements of the first play, as well as a new interpretation of the problem. The Ignacio-Carlos conflict is continued in El concierto de San Ovidio by the contrasting characteristics of David and Nazario. David, like Ignacio, is only an imperfect human being, neither a saint nor a martyr. At the beginning of the play he seems uncertain of his motives, but as the action progresses,

his ideas crystallize into definite action. David shares his problem with all of mankind, for his blindness represents the barriers which man must overcome to realize his goals of self-fulfillment. In contrast, the humiliations to which Nazario has been subjected have reduced him to a state of complete passivity, and he is resigned to the exploitation by Valindin and others like him. This attitude is, according to Fernández Santos,⁸¹ the natural result of the social degradation which he has suffered. As in En la ardiente oscuridad there is a romantic conflict, in this case the rivalry exists between David and both Valindin and Donato over Adriana. The similarity between Adriana and Juana, however, ends here for Valindin's mistress is but another example of the merchant's exploitation of others. There is no character like Valindin in En la ardiente oscuridad, but he can be compared to Goldmann of Aventura en lo gris and Vicente of El tragaluz, who were also unscrupulous in their dealings with others. As in the earlier play, the motives of the characters are uncertain. The audience questions whether it was David the lover rather than David the social revolutionist who murdered Valindin, but Valindin's death was probably motivated by both reasons.

⁸¹Angel Fernández Santos, Review of El concierto de San Ovidio, Indice, 168 (1963), p. 21.

The basic difference between the two plays can be observed in the social application of the later work. In the first the students were isolated from reality in the seclusion of the institute, but in El concierto de San Ovidio Buero has placed David and the others within the environment of the videntes. David does not rebel against his state of blindness as Ignacio did, but rather accepts it and tries to overcome the disadvantages which society has placed upon the blind. In an article titled "La ceguera en mi teatro" Buero compares the two plays stating that the earlier play leans more toward the metaphysical pole whereas El concierto de San Ovidio is more socially orientated.

Yo diría que de los dos polos de toda dramaturgia completa el que podríamos llamar polo filosófico, o acaso metafísico, y el que podríamos llamar polo social, mi primera obra de ciegos se inclina con preferencia hacia el primero y ésta última hacia el segundo. Ahora bien, esto no quiere decir que en la primera no se incluyan también resonancias de carácter social, y que en la segunda falten las de orden filosófico.⁸²

For David, becoming a violinist would be a means of conquering his blindness. This represents his social dream, but David also has an individual dream, symbolized by his ideal love for the blind noblewoman, Melanie de Salignac, and later by his love for Adriana. When he is denied

⁸²Buero Vallejo, "La ceguera en mi teatro", p. 5.

these two dreams by a blind society, he rebels against it. His murder of Valindin is a natural consequence of the social injustice to which he has been subjected.

El concierto de San Ovidio is considered superior to the earlier play by critics such as Jean Borel,⁸³ Enrique Llovet,⁸⁴ and José Luis Cano,⁸⁵ whereas Benítez Claros⁸⁶ states that the second play adds nothing thematically. The author has re-stated his initial opinion that the two plays complement each other.

. . . en cuanto a importancia dramática, no creo que "S Ovidio" sea superior a "Oscuridad". Aquella es más social, y ésta más metafísica (si bien cada una tiene algo de lo otro); pero yo siempre he creído que esas dos caras de lo real deben figurar en toda dramaturgia válida.⁸⁷

Those who have expressed a preference for the second play have indicated that, although the setting for El concierto de San Ovidio is eighteenth-century Paris, its problems are closer to those of the twentieth century than those of the earlier play. Buero has used the historical past as a vehicle for understanding the problems of the present. Although David is unable to realize his dreams,

⁸³Borel, "Buero Vallejo: Teatro y político", p. 233.

⁸⁴Enrique Llovet, Review of El concierto de San Ovidio, Teatro Español 1962-63 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1964), p. 71.

⁸⁵José Luis Cano, "Carta a España", Asomante, XIX (1963), p. 55.

⁸⁶Benítez Claros, "Buero Vallejo y la condición humana", p. 592.

⁸⁷Buero Vallejo, (Personal correspondence), 5/24/70.

history has proven his revolt to be the catalyst for the eventual education and social betterment of the blind. The atmosphere of hope at the end is clearly stated by Buero in the closing remarks of Valentín Hañy. David's descendents were able to accomplish what was an impossible dream for him. Twentieth-century society must continue its struggle against insurmountable obstacles in order to achieve its goals in the future.

Social concerns such as those expressed in El concierto de San Ovidio have formed a vital element in Buero's entire production. The social aspects of Spanish drama have historically been a characteristic of the popular vein of all forms of its literature. However, the term social must be used in a broad application when referring to Buero's theater, for his plays do not reflect the concept of class struggle and its political implications commonly considered as essential to social theater.

The most important voice in the social theater of Spain today, the dramatist Alfonso Sastre, has advocated a strict social application to the theater. ". . . creo que 'lo social' es, en nuestro tiempo, una categoría superior a 'lo artístico'."⁸⁸ Buero, however, has always insisted on the importance of esthetic qualities in art and has

⁸⁸ Alfonso Sastre, "Los autores españoles ante el teatro como 'arte social'", Correo Literario, 30 (1951), p. 5.

avoided social moralizing. He recognizes the importance of the social element in art, but denies that it should be all-inclusive, advocating a synthesis of the social-metaphysical phenomena.⁸⁹ Buero's principal preoccupations are ethical, and he stresses individual problems rather than those of a class struggle. The characters are held accountable for their deeds, and although their environment plays a role, human weaknesses are the principal reason for their defeat. Fernando and Urbano failed because of human error and not because they were victims of economic depravities. Although David's plight symbolizes the dilemma of all those who suffer social injustice, his struggle is an individual one.

The Italian critic, L. M. Cerutti,⁹⁰ has divided Buero's plays into two groups: those of the first period (1949-1957) ending with Hoy es fiesta in which the individual searches for the truth in himself, and those of the second period (1957 to the present) in which the individual turns to society to find an answer to his problems. While most critics agree that Buero shows more social and national awareness in his later plays, such a division of his works is arbitrary and fails to take into consideration

⁸⁹Buero Vallejo, "La ceguera en mi teatro", p. 5.

⁹⁰Lucia Maria Cerutti, "Interpretazion del teatro di Antonio Buero Vallejo", Aeuvum, XL (1966), p. 317.

the metaphysical-social polarity so characteristic of his works.

In his most recent works Buero has incorporated the dramatic techniques of the German playwright, Bertolt Brecht. The brechtarian element of alienation or distan-
ciamento, whereby the audience is separated from the main action of the play by a narrator or narrators, was used in Las Meninas, El concierto de San Ovidio, La doble historia del doctor Valmy, and El tragaluz. The use of historical themes, a device of Brecht's epic theater, has been prominent in Buero's works since Un soñador para un pueblo. In several articles Buero has expressed admiration for the German author.

Los dos (Buero and the dramatist and critic, Carlos Muñiz) admiramos a Brecht y a los dos nos preocupa, como a él, la responsabilidad social del teatro.⁹¹

However, Buero has frequently stated that some of Brecht's theater is excessively didactic and that the best works of the German author are those in which he does not strictly adhere to his theories of epic theater.⁹²

Torrente Ballester has criticized social theater which is politically inspired, stating that it displaces the esthetic quality of artistic creativity. According

⁹¹Antonio Buero Vallejo, "A propósito de Brecht", Insula, 200-201 (1963) p. 1.

⁹²Ibid., p. 14.

to this critic it is worthy of attention: "a condición de que abandone su talante exclusivo y excluyente."⁹³ While it is obvious that all artistic endeavor will necessarily contain social phenomena, Buero has presented these various aspects without falling victim to the temptation of excessive political moralizing.

In spite of Buero's detachment from Spanish politics, he has been subjected to governmental pressure, both official and unofficial. Although plays such as El tragaluz have passed the censors, it has been suggested to theatrical companies that they not produce them. Censorship is a way of life in Spain which is, according to Anthony Pasquarrillo: "so deeply rooted that complete spiritual liberation is impossible."⁹⁴ Restrictions are not limited to the political area of the government and General Franco, but extend to moral and religious questions involving the Catholic Church and its dogmas. Soldevilla Durante⁹⁵ has stated that the theater has suffered the most rigorous governmental controls of all literary genres. Like his contemporaries, Buero has been forced to delete certain words and phrases which would in any way cast aspersions upon the traditional Spanish social and moral

⁹³Torrente Ballester, Teatro español contemporáneo, p. 49.

⁹⁴Anthony M. Pasquarrillo, "Censorship in the Spanish Theater and Alfonso Sastre's The Condemned Squad", Theater Annual, XIX (1962), p. 20.

⁹⁵Soldevilla Durante, "Sobre el teatro español de los últimos 25 años", p. 289.

code. Censorship difficulties were encountered with Aventura en lo gris, Las Meninas, and La doble historia del Doctor Valmy. However, as Patricia O'Connor⁹⁶ has stated, when compared to other writers, Buero has had relatively few censorship problems because of the position of respect which he holds in Spain.

As a writer of the twentieth century Buero is painfully aware of these restrictions and has attempted to create dramatic art within their framework. "Me ha estorbado externamente y me ha estimulado hondamente. El dramaturgo trabaja en su ambiente, pero también contra su ambiente."⁹⁷ He has been criticized by Alfonso Sastre,⁹⁸ who feels that he has compromised himself artistically Buero has defended his attitude, stating that it is equally important that dramatists not only create drama but present it before the public.⁹⁹

Buero has also defended his use of historical themes in plays such as Un soñador para un pueblo (1958) by using Brecht's treatment of this theme as an example of

⁹⁶Patricia O'Connor, "Censorship in the Contemporary Spanish Theater and Buero Vallejo", Hispania, LII (1968), p. 283.

⁹⁷Buero Vallejo, (Personal correspondence), 5/24/70.

⁹⁸Alfonso Sastre, "Teatro imposible y pacto social", Primer Acto, 14 (1960), p. 1.

⁹⁹Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Obligado precisión acerca del 'imposibilismo'", Primer Acto, 15 (1960), p. 4.

dramatic excellence.¹⁰⁰ Buero's subtitle to Soñador, "Visión libre de un episodio histórico" is indicative of his purpose in writing it, for he is more interested in a personal treatment of Esquilache than in historical facts.

The eighteenth-century reign of Charles III represented the frustrated efforts of the Bourbon kings to transform Spain socially and politically and to bring it into the mainstream of European thought. The central reason for this failure of the despotismo ilustrado can be found in the political philosophy of "todo para el pueblo, pero sin el pueblo". This is also the reason for Esquilache's failure.

The historical background for the play is the "Motín de las capas y los sombreros", which took place in March of 1766 against the attempted reforms of the aging Italian minister, the marquis de Esquilache. This popular revolt was lead by conservative nobles, who were fearful of the innovations being instigated by the foreigner. Esquilache's personal family problems only serve to heighten his bitter disappointment at his failure. His only consolation is the family servant, Fernandita, who alone realizes his true motives. Faced with the choice of punishing the

¹⁰⁰ Luis Rodríguez, "Diálogo con Antonio Buero Vallejo", (Pt. I), p. 19.

rebels or yielding to their demands by resigning, Esquilache chooses the latter course, and self-imposed exile.

Soñador contains many of Buero's basic thematic preoccupations. The central thesis of the play lies in Esquilache's search for the truth and his clash with the blind society around him. The ultimate truth, as he comes to terms with himself, is the failure of the idealistic dreamer to educate the people he is trying to reform. One must not only be a soñador para el pueblo but also por el pueblo. For man's dreams to succeed, all men must have the same dream.

L. M. Cerutti¹⁰¹ termed Esquilache's dream as being both individual and social. The individual dream is his love for Fernandita and the social dream is his desire for the betterment of the people. Esquilache has lived outside reality and when forced to face the truth, he overcomes his egotism and renounces both dreams in hopes of preserving the peace. He is not alone, for Fernandita, who symbolizes the future of Spain, also wins a victory over his instincts in her ultimate rejection of Bernardo, symbol of stupidity and brutality.

Las Meninas (1960) is Buero's next play and is another example of his continued interest in historical

¹⁰¹Cerutti, "Interpretazion del teatro di Antonio Buero Vallejo", p. 343.

themes. It has been acknowledged by the author as his most popular play¹⁰² and the most favorably received by the Spanish public. The protagonist is the painter, Velázquez, and the author has again taken certain dramatic liberties in his interpretation of this historical figure. Velázquez loses his only true friend, the beggar Pedro, who earlier has posed for his painting of Aesop. However, Velázquez gains a personal victory over his family and associates, who seek to discredit him before the king, Philip IV, for certain paintings.

Like Esquilache, Velázquez's victory marks the culmination of his search for the truth of his personal commitment to himself and to society. In this case the truth is the state of moral and political decline into which Spain has fallen and the hypocrisy of the court, which refuses to accept this reality. The question planted by the author is to what point the artist should commit himself in face of the injustice and hypocrisy around him.

Little is known about Velázquez. Historians picture him as a typical courtier of the seventeenth century, one who was a personal friend of the king, who had bestowed numerous favors upon him. He was not involved politically in court intrigues and, as far as is known, led a rather

¹⁰²Dulsey, "Entrevista a Buero Vallejo", p. 151.

uneventful personal life. It is perhaps for this reason that critics such as Díaz-Plaja,¹⁰³ José Padilla,¹⁰⁴ and Gonzalo Fernández de la Mora¹⁰⁵ have criticized Buero for presenting an unauthentic Velázquez.

Buero's subtitle, "Fantasía Velazqueña en dos partes" is indicative of his purpose in writing the play. Critics such as Ricardo Domenech¹⁰⁶ and Alfonso Paso¹⁰⁷ have observed the difficulties of historical accuracy in depicting famous personalities. The picture which Buero paints represents a personal interpretation of Velázquez, whose acceptance or rejection by the audience has little bearing on the central moral issue of the play.

Velázquez and Esquilache have much in common, for the artist is also an idealist believing that it is possible for him to remain aloof from the moral and social problems around him. His trips to Italy, historically the center of artistic enlightenment, inspired him to create the nude Venus, symbolic of the truth. His painting of Las Meninas

¹⁰³Guillermo Díaz-Plaja, "The Artist Velázquez in the Theater", translated by Seymour Menton, Modern Drama, IV (1961), p. 180.

¹⁰⁴José Padilla, "De Yerma a Las Meninas", Arbor, 192 (1961), p. 89.

¹⁰⁵Gonzalo Fernández de la Mora, "Demasiada Fantasía", ABC, December 17, 1960.

¹⁰⁶Ricardo Domenech, "Notas sobre el teatro: Crítica de Las Meninas", Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos, 133 (1961), p. 121.

¹⁰⁷Alfonso Paso, "Las Meninas: Libre interpretación de la historia", Primer Acto, 19 (1961), p. 9.

depicts the tragic reality of court life as Velázquez interprets it. R. E. Lott¹⁰⁸ has stated that Velázquez showed by his paintings that he was at least an inward rebel.

News of Pedro's death is the personal catharsis which enables Velázquez to come to grips with his situation. Pedro is his alter-ego, for the beggar has been an active rebel against society's injustices and has seen his dream of becoming an artist thwarted by the blindness of his countrymen. His dream has been realized through Velázquez. Pedro is the only one to truly appreciate the artist's paintings. The princess María Teresa attempts to console him and may love him, but her youth is an obstacle to complete understanding.

The problems of Esquilache and Velázquez are the problems of modern-day Spain. Twentieth-century man is still engaged in a battle of truth versus lies and hypocrisy versus moral integrity. Once again the emphasis is on the individual problem as it symbolizes eternal questions which mankind must answer. In these two plays Buero has attempted to awaken the social conscience of his audience by using historical events as the point of departure for depicting modern problems. However, José Padilla's¹⁰⁹ division of Buero's

¹⁰⁸R. E. Lott, "Functional Flexibility and Ambiguity in Buero Vallejo's Plays", Symposium, XX (1966), p. 156.

¹⁰⁹Padilla, "De Yerma a Las Meninas", p. 88.

plays into dramatic-literary and historical is an attempt to over-simplify his production, for all of the dramatist's historical plays contain elements of literary inspiration. Buero's use of a historical frame of reference has been very effective in his ability to combine past and present to achieve artistic unity. This thematic element is continued and developed in later plays, culminating in El sueño de la razón.

Unlike many of his Spanish contemporaries, Buero has something to say to his audiences, for he is expressing a deep, personal commitment to himself and to twentieth-century society. This dramatist is not content with the status quo and continually strives to outdo himself in each new play. His themes are both Spanish and universal in application. In spite of limitless subject matter, Buero's central thematic preoccupation is his constant search for the truth. His characters strive for air to breathe and struggle against physical and psychological limitations which impede their quest for self-realization. Buero Vallejo seeks answers to existential questions plaguing all men, for a truly authentic life cannot be based on a lie.

CHAPTER III

BUERO VALLEJO AND THE CONCEPT OF REALITY

Buero Vallejo's search for the moral and poetic truth of human identity forms a vital link to his individual concept of reality, a major thematic preoccupation evident throughout his production. This concern has generally taken the form of a deep, personal inquiry into the labyrinth of reality and illusion, a question which has plagued generations of Spanish artists. His definition of reality includes not only the world of external appearances, but also the complex realm of man's individual conscience. Although present in his earliest works, Buero's concept of reality has gradually evolved and crystallized into a probe of the innermost psychological anxieties of both historical and modern man.

La realidad es un enigma. El hombre aspira a conocerla. El teatro, también. No es insólito mi interés por ella; a todo verdadero dramaturgo le ha interesado.¹

Buero's treatment of reality, evolving from the moralistic, bourgeois-orientated theater of Benavente, represents a synthesis of techniques used by older dramatists such as José M. Pemán, Joaquín Calvo Sotelo, and José López

¹Antonio Buero Vallejo, (Personal correspondence), 5/24/70.

Rubio and followers, combined with elements of the poetic, symbolic theater of Valle Inclán, and Unamuno. The cohesion of these two literary tendencies represented a new trend in the traditional Spanish concepts of reality and has proved to be the secret of Buero's dramatic success.

Modern man suffers untold anxiety, despair, and disillusionment in his search for the truth. He is forced to live with the tragic hope of a better future always beyond his reach. It is this tragedy, inherent in life, which Buero seeks to portray in his view of man's struggle for happiness.

This quest for the truth is unmistakably connected to the author's continual interest in the question of reality as a generic function of life and modern man. Buero is not concerned with photographic reality, and his treatment of reality should in no way be confused with the term realism, a word frequently used to identify a literary movement of the late nineteenth century.² "Realidad no es necesariamente 'realismo'; éste es un estilo, un método basado en la veraz exposición fenomenológica de la vida."³

According to Manzanares de Cirre,⁴ Buero's view of the problem involves two principal elements: (1) the every-

²José Castellano has assessed Buero's reality as essentially nineteenth century. José Castellano, "Hacia una interpretación del teatro de Buero Vallejo", Punta Europa, 76-77 (1962), p. 36.

³Antonio Buero Vallejo as quoted in "Diálogo con Antonio Buero Vallejo", Miguel Luis Rodríguez, Índice, 116-17 (1958), p. 21.

⁴Manzanares de Cirre, "El realismo social de Buero Vallejo", Revista Hispánica Moderna, XXVII (1961), p. 320.

day struggle of man in his continuous search for happiness in conflict with his own conscience and with society; and, (2) the deeper philosophical preoccupations which are not readily discernible in external appearances. These two tendencies, ascertainable in varying intensities throughout his theater, can generally be termed reality and symbolism. The two poles, however, are not independent but complement each other, expressing the author's fundamental concept of reality as it applies to literature and life.

. . . creo que en lo literario nada puede excluirse y que lo mismo cabe el realismo directo que el psicologismo, que lo imaginativo, que la mezcla de todas esas cosas.⁵

In an article entitled "Lo trágico en el teatro de Buero Vallejo"⁶ Isabel M. de Schevill has reiterated this idea in rejecting critics' ideas such as those expressed by J. E. Lyons⁷ and Rafael Zamora,⁸ which divide Buero's works into those essentially realistic and plays exhibiting symbolic qualities. Schevill's fundamental thesis involves the varying interpretations of external reality and the apparent defeat of Buero's character versus internal reality and symbolic victory. It is the exterior defeat of these

⁵Buero Vallejo, "Diálogo con Antonio Buero Vallejo", p. 118.

⁶Isabel Magaña de Schevill, "Lo trágico en el teatro de Buero Vallejo", Hispanofila, 7 (1959), p. 52.

⁷J. E. Lyons, Introduction, Hoy es fiesta (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1966), p. 17.

⁸Rafael Vázquez Zamora, Review of Las cartas boca abajo, Insula, 134 (1958), p. 15.

characters which has led writers like Rafael Benítez Claros⁹ and Miguel Luis Rodríguez¹⁰ to condemn Buero's work as excessively pessimistic.

In Un soñador para un pueblo Esquilache's ultimate exile and the victory of the uprising apparently signify both a personal and social defeat. However, an interior victory is evident in his personal sacrifice for the ultimate welfare of the people and in Fernanda's victory over Bernardo, symbol of a decadent Spain. History has proven that David's dream of a meaningful existence for the blind in El concierto de San Ovidio has been realized by future generations. Penelope's exterior defeat at the hands of an egoistic Ulysses who has killed her suitors is offset by Anfino's eternal vision of the aging queen as young and beautiful.

In a self-assessment of his theatrical production Buero has used the term "realismo-simbólico" to describe the polarity of these two tendencies. "En primer lugar la simple definición de realismo y simbolismo es asunto difícil; tan difícil que cabe perfectamente hablar de un realismo-simbólico."¹¹ It is his contention that all works of artistic

⁹Rafael Benítez Claros, "Buero Vallejo y la condición humana", Nuestro Tiempo, 107 (1963), p. 583.

¹⁰Miguel Luis Rodríguez, "Diálogo con Antonio Buero Vallejo", Índice, 119 (1958), p. 20.

¹¹Buero Vallejo, "Diálogo con Antonio Buero Vallejo", p. 116-17.

quality must contain these elements in varying degrees.

"... los más grandes creadores, sean o no realistas, contrabalancean en su obra ambos polos."¹² Buero has repeatedly insisted on this synthesis of reality and symbolism as a fundamental literary concept. "Una obra literaria debe ser simbólica como lo es la vida misma cuando la observamos con la atención bien abierta."¹³ "Opino que no hay tal tendencia doble, sino en realidad, una sola que a veces se disfraza de realismo y a veces de otras cosas."¹⁴

The term realidad-transcendente used by José Abellán¹⁵ best describes this duality as conceived by Buero. In such plays as La señal que se espera and Aventura en lo gris the author has combined daily reality with the transcendental possibility of faith in the world beyond as an ultimate solution for man. This quality of lo misterioso forms an essential basis for Buero's concept of art and life in general. In Hoy es fiesta and Madrugada he has utilized this element of mystery to elevate the seemingly trivial preoccupations of the characters to a symbolic level.

Buero presents reality as an all-encompassing function of life with its inevitable doubts and uncertainties as it

¹²Ibid.

¹³Antonio Buero Vallejo, Comentario a En la ardiente oscuridad, Colección teatro, 3 (Madrid: Alfíl, 1951), p. 82.

¹⁴Antonio Buero Vallejo, "El teatro de Buero Vallejo visto por Buero Vallejo", Primer Acto, 1 (1957), p. 6.

¹⁵José Abellán, "El tema del misterio en Buero Vallejo", Insula, 174 (1961), p. 15.

applies to individual man's existence.

El arte del escritor está en presentar esa realidad de tal modo que el lector o espectador se sienta¹⁶ encadenado a ella, a su inquietud, a su mensaje.

For Buero symbolism is inherent in life itself, and therefore an integral feature of reality. Las cartas boca abajo, one of his most costumbristic plays, contains numerous symbolic qualities, such as the screeching birds and the figure of the mute sister, Anita. Historia de una escalera, which has been classified by many as a sainete,¹⁷ contains the stairway, symbol of the environmental limitations plaguing the characters.

Buero's frequent references to this tendency of realismo-simbolismo has generally been motivated by statements of both Spanish and foreign critics that his works can be divided into realistic and symbolic theater. Critics such as the American J. E. Lyons¹⁸ in his edition of Hoy es fiesta have classified Buero's theater in this manner, using Historia de una escalera and En la ardiente oscuridad as examples of these two literary currents. Auz Castro¹⁹ has also indicated this division of his plays, referring to them as "teatro de ideas" (Las palabras en la arena, En la ardiente oscuridad, La tejedora de sueños, Casi un cuento de hadas) and realistic

¹⁶Carlos Muñiz, "El simbolismo religioso en el teatro de Buero Vallejo", Proyección, 37 (1963), p. 94.

¹⁷Above, Chapter II, footnotes 41 and 42.

¹⁸Lyons, Introduction, Hoy es fiesta, p. 17.

¹⁹Victor Auz Castro, "Panorama of the Spanish Theater Today", World Theater, XII (1963), p. 200.

drama (Historia de una escalera, Madrugada, Hoy es fiesta, Las cartas boca abajo). These two critics have also expressed their preference for Buero's so-called realistic plays, as have Rafael Vázquez Zamora²⁰ and Miguel Luis Rodríguez.²¹ Sainz de Robles²² reiterates this classification of Buero's earlier plays, asserting that his later plays (after Soñador) represent a synthesis of these two qualities.

Another group of critics, including Carlos Muñiz²³ and Isabel M. de Schevill,²⁴ has refuted this arbitrary division, asserting that the author's plays contain both elements in varying degrees. The author himself has repeatedly denied this classification.

Desafortado fué y es asimismo, aquella otra difundida hipótesis que reduce mis supuestos aciertos a dos o tres títulos, donde me limito--dicen--al ejercicio de un realismo directo, mientras considera errónea la otra presunta tendencia mía al simbolismo, el cerebralismo o la imaginación; tendencia en la que se situaría el resto de mis obras.²⁵

²⁰Vázquez Zamora, Review of Las cartas boca abajo, p. 15.

²¹Luis Rodríguez, "Diálogo con Antonio Buero Vallejo", Pt. 3, p. 19.

²²Federico Carlos Sainz de Robles, Críticas, Teatro Español, 1958-59, (Madrid: Aguilar, 1960), p. 200.

²³Muñiz, "El simbolismo religioso en el teatro de Buero Vallejo", p. 92.

²⁴Magaña de Schevill, "Lo trágico en el teatro de Buero Vallejo", p. 52.

²⁵Buero Vallejo, "El teatro de Buero Vallejo visto por Buero Vallejo", p. 6.

He insists on the reality-symbolic polarity as essential to all art.

Por ser todo arte condensación, el más realista de ellos es, también, símbolo. O sea signo: significado implícito, y no explícito, de cosas que la anécdota real y estricta no encierra.²⁶

Answering critics' preference for the realistic vein of his theater, Buero has rejected this division, using as an example the difficulties presented in attempting to classify En la ardiente oscuridad. He maintains that the spirit of Hoy es fiesta is as close to En la ardiente oscuridad as that of Historia de una escalera.²⁷

Robert E. Lott²⁸ has suggested that a study of the realistic-symbolic duality in Buero's theater is useful only as a point of departure for considering the dramatist's concept of reality. His preoccupation with this problem includes a deeper insight into the varying perspectives of reality as it affects daily existence. Buero is interested in the enigma of reality and appearance and the varying levels of doubt and certainty which are a natural consequence of this dichotomy. Like Ortega y Gasset, he questions the validity of external appearance as the sole criterion for

²⁶Buero Vallejo, "Diálogo con Antonio Buero Vallejo", Pt. I, p. 21.

²⁷Antonio Buero Vallejo, Comentario a Hoy es fiesta, Colección teatro, 176 (Madrid: Alfíl, 1952), p. 108.

²⁸R. E. Lott, "Functional Flexibility and Ambiguity in Buero Vallejo's Plays", Symposium, XX (1966), p. 150.

judging reality. In the autocrítica to Irene o el tesoro Buero has discussed some of these questions as they relate to the play.

Ficción y verdad. Las dos cosas a un tiempo.
Realidad, y también fantasía. El duende y la
Voz no existen, pero existen. Todo, todo depende
de la perspectiva con que lo miremos.²⁹

The evolution of Buero's theater can best be described in terms of his increasing concern for this problem culminating in El sueño de la razón, his most penetrating study to date of this question as it affects the human personality. However, earlier plays such as En la ardiente oscuridad explored various facets of this problem as it relates to the congenitally blind.

The enigma of reality in relationship to the blind as well as the physically and socially handicapped has plagued Buero throughout his literary career, as he continues to question the labels of normal and abnormal by which society has judged the crippled and the maimed. In En la ardiente oscuridad the dilemma facing the students at the institute is their inability to perceive the existence of sight.

"Nosotros no vemos. Bien, ¿Concebimos la vista? No. Luego la vista es inconcebible. Luego los videntes no ven tampoco."³⁰ This is further complicated by their knowledge

²⁹ Antonio Buero Vallejo, Comentario a Irene o el tesoro, Colección teatro, 121 (Madrid: Alfíl, 1955), p. 123.

³⁰ Antonio Buero Vallejo, En la ardiente oscuridad, Colección teatro, 3 (Madrid: Alfíl, 1963), p. 39.

that sight does indeed exist for the normal and by the injustice which society has perpetrated on those who have been deprived of it. Buero's purpose in exploring this problem is obvious in his explanation as to why he conceived Ignacio as blind from birth instead of portraying him as one who has lost his sight.

Haciéndole, por el contrario, tan ciego de nacimiento, como ellos; su ardor inapacable y proselitista postula una calidad dramática más honda y el problema humano que aborda, sin perder su vital entronque en la realidad física, se convierte en metafísica.³¹

The abnormal have created a reality of their own which is as equally valid for them as the reality of the normal. A theme common to Buero's plays is the problem of reality as it relates to these unfortunate victims. The hallucinations of Irene are as real to her as the other characters' view of her body on the street below. Can society condemn Irene because it cannot perceive the duende Juanito?

In some cases the author has implied that perhaps the handicapped's interpretation of reality may be more lucid than that of a normal person. This idea has been expressed by Valle Inclán³² in plays such as Divinas palabras

³¹Antonio Buero Vallejo, Comentario a En la ardiente oscuridad, p. 81.

³²Ramón del Valle Inclán, Divinas Palabras (Madrid: Imprenta Yagués, 1920), p. 113.

as well as by the critic Luce Moreau-Arrabal.³³ In Mito, although he personally discounts Eloy's quixotic vision of flying saucers and Martians, Buero affirms the possibility of the opera singer's reality as more meaningful than what society perceives. "Pero opino que tales creencias, incluso cuando son fuertes, han dejado de ser paralizadoras y pueden dinamizar útilmente a muchos hombres."³⁴

In another sense these handicapped represent the limitations of mankind in general and the agony of the individual as he struggles for the light or the truth. Man is doomed to perceive only a small fraction of reality. His insight is at best imperfect and distorted, and the tragedy which Buero has sought to portray depicts his hopeless quest for this unattainable reality.

The world of dreams, according to Buero, is a possible solution for man's agonizing terrestrial existence. Many of his characters such as Silverio of Aventura en lo gris and Mario of El tragaluz live in a dream world out of touch with reality. Dreams form an important element in many of Buero's plays including Aventura en lo gris, Mito, and El sueño de la razón. In Aventura en lo gris Buero advocates the world of common dreams for all mankind as a means of overcoming egotism

³³Luce Moreau-Arrabal, Prologue, Teatro selecto de Antonio Buero Vallejo (Madrid: Escelicer, 1966), p. 13.

³⁴Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Del Quijotismo al 'mito' de los platillos volantes", Primer Acto, 100-1 (1968), p. 74.

and confronting truth. In Mito and El sueño de la razón the author explores dreams as they relate to problems of the human personality.

In her lengthy study of Buero's plays, L. M. Cerutti³⁵ discusses the individual and social dreams of Buero's protagonists. She contends that in his later plays his heroes display both individual and social dreams. They are forced to renounce the individual dream, suffering external defeat. However, the social dream, although unrealized in their lifetime, has become reality today. The dreams of Esquilache in Un soñador para un pueblo and David in El concierto de San Ovidio are a part of twentieth-century life, thereby strengthening the author's conviction of the perplexing nature of reality and illusion.

According to Jean Paul Borel,³⁶ Buero is saying that twentieth-century society should not only tolerate this illusory existence, but should also be awakened to the active possibilities of the dream world. Borel links this concept with Ortega y Gasset's theories that dreams form an integral function of man's total vitality and are the point of departure for his will to perpetuate his existence.

³⁵Lucía María Cerutti, "Interpretazioni del teatro di Antonio Buero Vallejo", Aevum, XL (1966), p. 328.

³⁶Jean Paul Borel, Quelques aspects du songe dans la littérature espagnole (Neuchâtel: Les Editions de la Baconnière, 1965), p. 47.

The varying complexities of reality and illusion which form the central theme of Buero's total production have caused various critics to attack his work as excessively ambiguous. In concluding his analysis of Un soñador para un pueblo José Castellano³⁷ has judged Buero as an excellent dramatic technician who is either unwilling or unable to bring a clear message to his audiences. He has attacked Buero's alleged indecisiveness and has chastised him for not developing a definite dramatic solution to the problems he presents. García Escudero³⁸ refutes Buero's statements that ambiguity is a requisite for artistic creation, maintaining that this element of the author's theater indicates a personal preference and perhaps a reluctance to commit himself.

R. E. Lott³⁹ has analyzed these various degrees of ambiguity as they relate to Buero's general thematic preoccupations, as have Carlos Muñiz⁴⁰ and M. de Schevill.⁴¹

³⁷Castellano, "Hacia una interpretación del teatro de Buero Vallejo", p. 42.

³⁸José García Escudero, "El teatro de Antonio Buero Vallejo", Funta Europa, 41 (1959), p. 68.

³⁹Lott, "Functional Flexibility and Ambiguity in Buero Vallejo's Plays", p. 150.

⁴⁰Muñiz, "El simbolismo religioso en el teatro de Buero Vallejo", p. 94.

⁴¹Magaña de Schevill, "Lo trágico en el teatro de Buero Vallejo", p. 52.

These critics applaud this tendency as a new and vital trend in twentieth-century Spanish drama. However, most of the defense of this attitude comes from the author himself in various autocríticas of his earlier plays and in magazine articles.

Es para el autor esencial el mantenimiento en el ánimo del espectador de toda clase de preguntas. Adicto al teatro de problemas, pretende inquietar y hacer pensar a su público, además de entretenerlo. Las preguntas por las que se manifiestan los equívocos de la obra pueden multiplicarse.⁴²

Si una obra de teatro no sugiere mucho más de lo que explícitamente expresa está muerta. Lo implícito no es un error por defecto, sino una virtud por exceso.⁴³

Buero has expressed a preference for the indirect method in all plays, including those of social origin.

Como artista, no puedo exigir . . . que la influencia social de muchas obras de arte se ejerza por vía clara y directa; por el contrario, creo mucho más en el enorme influjo positivo, socialmente hablando, de ciertas obras oscuras en ese sentido, porque los caminos del hombre y de su psique son complejos.⁴⁴

The author continues, stating that often socially orientated works are forgotten twenty years after their appearance because of the dramatists' inability to transcend the bounds of existential reality. Buero avoids obvious solutions,

⁴² Antonio Buero Vallejo, Comentario a Irene o el tesoro, p. 122.

⁴³ Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Sobre teatro", Cuadernos de Agora, 79-82 (1963), p. 13.

⁴⁴ Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Diálogo con Antonio Buero Vallejo", Pt 3, p. 19.

challenging his audiences to discover for themselves the individual, basic truths behind his varying levels of doubt and ambiguity.

Since 1958 many of Buero's plays have been based on historical subjects, both foreign and Spanish. In recent plays he has attempted to awaken the social consciousness of his audiences by utilizing historical themes. For Buero past truths are clearly related to the realities of the present. In plays such as El concierto de San Ovidio, Un soñador para un pueblo, Las Meninas, and El sueño de la razón he attempts to present Unamuno's concept of intra-historia, an interpretation of history based on the individual personality rather than solely on facts. For Buero the dreams and illusions of these historical characters, outside the realm of reality for their contemporaries, have become a part of twentieth-century existence. In El tragaluz the author enlarges this theory to include the present as the historical past in a double perspective of a futuristic setting. None of these protagonists realize their dreams in their lifetime, because their free will clashes with the egotism of their society. This can only be accomplished when all men have acquired either a personal or a historical-social conscience.

Buero's recent productions of El tragaluz and El sueño de la razón, neither of which has been extensively analyzed, contain his deepest penetrations into the question of reality and the subconscious. For some of the author's protagonists, a solution lies in accepting reality while

clinging to an ideal. Leticia of Casi un cuento de hadas and Susana of La señal que se espera, although ultimately forced to face the reality of their situation, steadfastly adhere to the possibility of achieving their dreams in the más allá. Other characters like Irene and Penelope find their only solution in an illusory existence.

It is clearly evident that Buero's secret of success lies in this quality of realismo-simbólico which he has exhibited. ". . . el carácter 'indirecto' de cualquier obra no es sólo una consecuencia de limitaciones externas, sino un hecho estético positivo."⁴⁵ Attempts to divide his works by contrasting these two tendencies have proven futile because they are inherent qualities in each play. For Buero whatever is real to the individual must be explored. The world of his reality represents the totality of man's spiritual and physical condition. His concept of reality is much broader than any of his fellow dramatists in the contemporary Spanish theater. Buero offers no comfort or security to his heroes in the tragedy of human existence, for only pain and suffering await humanity in its search for happiness.

⁴⁵Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

AS ESCAPE TO THE WORLD BEYOND: BUERO VALLEJO AND THE CONCEPT OF REALITY IN EARLIER PLAYS

Buero's preoccupation with the various perspectives of reality represents a continuing theme throughout his dramatic production. At least eight of his plays focus upon this issue as a major preoccupation. In each of these plays the reality-illusion conflict is a central question, or a dream plays a vital role in the efforts of the protagonists to learn the truth of their existential reality.

The plays are divided into two groups representing Buero's earlier period and more recent plays. Those of the first group include La señal que se espera (1952), Casi un cuento de hadas (1953), Irene, o el tesoro (1954), and Aventura en lo gris (1963). All four of these earlier plays have been extensively treated by both foreign and Spanish critics. Those of the second group, La doble historia del doctor Valmy (1967), El tragaluz (1967), Mito (1968), and El sueño de la razón (1970), have received less literary criticism, primarily because they are more recent and because La doble historia and Mito have not been produced in Spain. However, these two plays form a vital link in the development of Buero's concept of reality.

The first group of plays did not receive the acclaim of En la ardiente oscuridad and Historia de una escalera.

They were generally viewed by the majority of Spanish critics as inferior to the two aforementioned works. Buero was attempting to develop major thematic preoccupations evident in his earlier works. Many of his dramatic concepts, especially his theories of tragedy as it involves the realities of twentieth-century man, were generally misunderstood by critics and theater-goers alike. In the second group of plays Buero has perfected his techniques, improving his basic dramatic structure, and thus clarifying many earlier uncertainties.

The interplay of reality-fantasy and doubt-faith forms the basis for the central thesis of La señal que se espera (1952). The word espera is the key to an essential idea of Buero's theater. Man's eternal quest for the truth in an absurd existence leads him to the ultimate realization that his only path to a final solution lies in his hope for a transcendental reality.

The province of Galicia with its green mountains and flowing rivers is the background for the poetic atmosphere of the play. Buero has used the ancient myths and superstitions of these people to restate in modern terms a universal problem of all men: the search for mutual understanding and self-realization.

Enrique and Susana, a wealthy Madrid couple, are spending the summer in their Galician country estate with their guest, the musician Luis Bertol. Luis, who had been in love with Susana, is recuperating from a mental breakdown caused by the termination of their relationship. He is trying to remember a melody which he was composing at the time and which he believes will enable him to resume his musical career. Luis has constructed an aeolian harp in the garden of the estate, which according to ancient myths, will play the melody. The servants, Bernardo and Rosenda, are confident that this señal will bring news of their long lost nephew, who in reality is a scoundrel. One evening the harp plays the melody and the following day a letter from America announces the death of the nephew. Julián, another house-guest, receives a reconciliatory letter from his wife. Enrique now reveals that a few days earlier he had received a letter announcing his financial ruin. Fearful that Susana would leave him, he had guarded the letter. Susana reaffirms her love, and for everyone the señal has brought about a miracle.

Buero has stated that the central problem of La señal que se espera is "una invitación a pensar y a sentir--el problema de las relaciones mágicas, los milagros y los providencialismos. El problema en sumo de las posibilidades

activas de la fé."¹ This faith leads the characters from a rationalistic approach to their problems towards the metaphysical possibility of the world beyond. Buero insinuates that Susana had played the harp in a moment of desperation. Thus the real miracle is not the harp but its effect on the characters. ". . . el milagro (si lo hay) está en el tercer acto y no puede estar en el arpa de manera tosca y ostentable."²

The ambiguities of the characters' motives and the mystery surrounding the harp and the cave are essential to the central issue of the play. In answer to criticism by Rafael Zamora³ of excessive ambiguity, Buero reiterates his firm belief in an indirect approach as the most logical one for an artist: "En el teatro y en todo arte las afirmaciones más rotundas sólo viven y duran si se efectúan por el camino de la alusión indirecta."⁴

Enrique, torn by jealousy, is uncertain as to why he invited his wife's former sweetheart to his home. Was it, as he suggests to Luis, motivated by a desire to discredit him in her eyes? Or was it an effort to bring Luis and Susan into close contact, thus enabling Enrique to learn the truth

¹Antonio Buero Vallejo, Comentario a La señal que se espera, Colección teatro, 21 (Madrid: Alfíl, 1952), p. 68.

²Ibid.

³Rafael Vázquez Zamora, "Buero Vallejo: La señal que se espera", Insula, 78 (1952), p. 12.

⁴Buero Vallejo, Comentario a La señal que se espera, p. 68.

of their feelings for one another? Probably the former, but Buero leaves the possibility open to both. Although the author implies that Enrique is responsible for Luis' presence, he also suggests that Susana, who has guilt feelings for Luis, is anxious for his recovery and may have been the motivating force bringing him to Galicia.

Her reasons for playing the harp remain unclear even to Susana herself. She and Enrique think they remember the forgotten melody, but Susana does not play it earlier for fear of destroying her marriage. Her return from the beach where she had gone to commit suicide, thus proving her love for Enrique, is as much a miracle as the playing of the harp.

The emotional catharsis of all six characters comes as a result of the few seconds when the melody is played. "The entire tragedy thus centers on this moment when all the characters listen, either consciously or subconsciously, for the melody."⁵ The señal, like the common dream of Aventura en lo gris, is the means by which each person overcomes his egotism and eventually gains the mutual respect and understanding of the others.

The arrival of the two letters and Susana's reaffirmation of her love is the emotional catharsis which finally

⁵Martha Halsey, "Buero Vallejo and the Significance of Hope", Hispania, LI (1966), p. 59.

enables Enrique to dispel the darkness surrounding him and to attempt an understanding with Susana and the others. Although he is now open to the possibility of a transcendental force ruling man, Enrique cannot completely overcome his doubts. (Enrique) "Pero si tu camino de mujer hacia mí es la fe, el mío hacia ti de hombre es la duda."⁶

Enrique is searching for the truth regarding his relationship with his wife, but fears and uncertainties motivated by the conviction that she has married him for his money make communication between the couple difficult, if not impossible. Enrique is so completely dominated by petty jealousy and vanity that he is unable to relate to the problems of the others. He is scornful of Luis' faith in the señal and sees Susana's conciliatory attitude toward the musician as a sign of love. He resents the confidence that the servants have placed in Susana by revealing their problems to her. Susana accuses him of being insensitive. "Porque tú no eres capaz de interesarte por los demás. Porque tú nunca comprendes."⁷

Unlike Ulysses of Tejedora de sueños who sought to hide the truth of his relationship with Penelope, Enrique searches for the light which will open his eyes to the

⁶Antonio Buero Vallejo, La señal que se espera, Colección teatro, 21 (Madrid: Alfíl, 1966), p. 69.

⁷Ibid., p. 43.

reality of his situation. He cannot be successful until he has reunited the other characters. This can only be accomplished by the realization of their faith in the harp. Unlike Ignacio's desire for the light which will only be rewarded after his death, Enrique's quest will be satisfied here on earth.

Susana's faith, according to L. M. Cerutti,⁸ is the most constant of all and unifies the faith of the others.

(Susana) Porque el prodigio puede continuar. Y entonces ya no cabría dudar de él. . . Porque yo espero, ¡espero!, también el correo. Y porque veo en tus ojos, a pesar de todo, la fe.⁹

She has also been disorientated and confused in her relationship with Enrique and frustrated in her maternal desires. Lack of mutual understanding between the couple has aggravated her already high-strung emotional state. She thinks that she remembers the melody but hesitates to play it for fear that Enrique will misinterpret this as a declaration of love for Luis. Tormented by Enrique's doubts of her love and by his decision to dismantle the harp, she threatens suicide as the one proof of her devotion. In one final act of desperation she decides to return from the beach and play the melody on the harp, thus hoping to bring about a final solution for everyone. The señal brings peace and tranquility to Susana, strengthened by the knowledge that Luis has begun to

⁸Lucia María Cerutti, "Interpretazioni del teatro di Antonio Buero Vallejo", Aeuvum, XL (1966), p. 332.

⁹Buero Vallejo, La señal que se espera, p. 64.

compose again. She is no longer blind to her mistakes.

(Susana) "Los dos somos culpables. Quisimos placeres sin dolor. Y el dolor vino de otro modo."¹⁰ Susana has found a lasting relationship with Enrique.

The emotional shock of the señal enables Luis to rediscover his musical inspiration and provides him with the means of final rehabilitation from his mental collapse. He is able to accept the truth of his break with Susana and to admit that it was she and not he who terminated the affair. Luis, like many of Buero's characters, realizes that he must overcome his passivity and accept Enrique's advice to take positive action towards a reevaluation of his situation. He knows that Susana has played the harp. (Luis) "No, Enrique. Estabas tú en lo cierto, y me has enseñado a abrir los ojos. Mi canción fue tocada por manos humanas."¹¹

The instinctive faith of the servants, especially Rosenda, that the señal will signal the arrival of the long awaited letter from America, brings a touch of costumbrismo to the play. Influenced by the curandero, tío Caramelo, and Luis, Rosenda is convinced that the myth of the harp will be realized. The quarrels between the couple are the only touch of humor in the otherwise tense situation. Rosenda's faith is strong enough to challenge Enrique. "Diréle yo que él es

¹⁰Ibid., p. 70.

¹¹Ibid.

muy dueño de no esperar nada, pero yo esperaré hasta que me muera. ¡Y la señal tocará antes!"¹² Although saddened by the news of their nephew's death, they have also found inner peace and tranquility.

Julián senses that Enrique's vanity has been deeply wounded by Susana's presence in the garden with Luis. He attempts to reunite the couple by suggesting that their relationship be based on mutual trust and understanding. They must rely on faith as the only way to save their marriage. (Julián) "Cuando ya no tenía nada, Luis tuvo fe, y la fe le ha salvado."¹³ The señal has renewed Julián's faith in the arrival of a letter from his wife, enabling him to better understand her motives and forgive her for leaving him.

Rafael Zamora¹⁴ has criticized what he believes to be Buero's "generalización forzada" in La señal que se espera and has suggested that the plot is too contrived. Other writers such as Torrente Ballester¹⁵ and J. E. Lyons¹⁶ have

¹²Ibid., p. 47.

¹³Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁴Vázquez Zamora, "Buero Vallejo: La señal que se espera", p. 12.

¹⁵Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, Teatro español contemporáneo (Madrid: Ediciones Guadarrama, 1957), p. 327.

¹⁶J. E. Lyons, Introduction to Hoy es fiesta (Boston: D. C. Heath), p. 25.

come to the same conclusion. Their main source of criticism lies in the second half of Act III where they believe Buero attempts to tie up the loose ends of the plot too quickly. In his comentario to the play Buero maintains that the motives of the characters, although seemingly trivial, are symbolic in their universal application.¹⁷ The music at the end which is heard by the audience removes the play from the limitations of a pièce bien faite and suggests that the problems of Enrique, Susana, and the others are merely symbolic of a dilemma faced by all men. Events in Act III such as the arrival of the letters and the reconciliation of Susana and Enrique were not intended to be coincidental, but rather are elements necessary to the spirit of the play's message.

Las aparentes casualidades--las "coincidencias" que culminan en la coincidencia final de las cartas--no son casuales, al menos en mi intención. Pertenecen a un tipo de justicia distributiva que confiere significado a los hechos triviales, y pienso por este motivo que acaso puede justificarse en ellas lo que en otra comedia de tipo netamente realista hubiese sido recurso inhábil e inverosímil que me hubiese guardado bien de emplear.¹⁸

While explaining his purpose in writing the play, Buero is the first to admit to the errors in Act III, but he chastizes writers for basing their criticism on the play's original version which was altered after the first presentation, and not recognizing the changes incorporated into subsequent

¹⁷Buero Vallejo, Comentario a La señal que se espera, p. 67.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 67-8.

versions. He gives as an example the deletion of the announcement of Susana's baby in favor of the subtle suggestion of this possibility.¹⁹

Torrente Ballester's criticism lies not in Buero's thematic material but in the theatrical form of the play. However, he fails to comprehend Buero's message when he says that ". . . la presencia de lo trascendental, sea teológico o folklórico . . . excluye siempre la casualidad y exige el sino."²⁰

Buero has called La señal que se espera a "comedia feérica" but also a tragedy. ". . . la obra pretende ser, disfrazada de comedia sentimental, un relato trágico."²¹ The miracles in Act III are not coincidental but stem from unwavering faith in the powers of the supernatural. Man's eternal quest for the truth can only be accomplished through his faith in a reality beyond his limitations.

In spite of Buero's defense of Act III it is obvious that J. E. Lyons²² is correct in his evaluation that the failure of the play was generally caused by Buero's inability to unite the two planes of the human conflict and the supernatural. Van Praag expresses the same idea. "La obra es

¹⁹Ibid., p. 66.

²⁰Torrente Ballester, Teatro español contemporáneo, p. 326.

²¹Buero Vallejo, Comentario a La señal que se espera, p. 66.

²²J. E. Lyons, Introduction to Hoy es fiesta, p. 26.

semirealista . . . y semi-fantástica. Pero aquí Vallejo no consigue siempre unir de una manera convincente el mito y lo cotidiano."²³ The accumulation of miracles in Act III, although intended by Buero to strengthen his thesis, serve merely to minimize its possibility of universal application. He relies too heavily on the deus-ex-machina of the letters and perhaps should have been even less specific (contrary to the opinion of the critics), suggesting the possibility of a solution in the future, as he does in later plays.

In spite of any faults, the central message remains clear. It can be linked to an idea common to Buero's other works. Man's only hope for survival lies in his ability to break the existential limits of time and space. He must continue to await the señal which will bring him even closer to his eternal quest for the truth.

Unlike Susana and Enrique, the characters in Casi un cuento de hadas (1953) must be content to await their señal in the oppressive reality of their daily existence. Their only consolation lies in the desperate hope for the realization of their ideal in the world beyond.

The central metaphysical question of Casi un cuento de hadas lies in the lines spoken by Riquet. "¡Oh, Dios, Dios! ¿Cómo somos? ¿Qué somos en realidad? Cada uno nos

²³Chantraine Van Praag, "Tendencias del teatro español de hoy: Antonio Buero Vallejo y el 'buerismo'", Cuadernos Americanos, CXXX, No. 5 (1963), p. 256.

ve a su manera. ¿Cómo nos ves tú? ¿Cómo me ves? ¿Qué soy para tí?"²⁴ The varying perspectives of reality and appearance are the nucleus of the enigma facing Riquet and Leticia. In his autocrítica Buero defines his theme.

. . . se trata en el fondo de la cuestión general que engloba a aquéllo de la esencia de la personalidad humana--la duda de lo que esencialmente podemos ser a la vista de lo que circunstancialmente parecemos.²⁵

The word casi sets the tone for the play, and according to Buero, is indicative of its success or failure.

Si mi pobre comedia tiene algo de positivo es ese "casi" que, en la intención al mismo, las une; si algo puede justificarla, dramática y poéticamente, será la medida en que el sentido de ese "casi" se haya logrado reflejar en los tres actos. Y su defecto mayor, por encima de los errores de construcción o de detalle que la afeen, estará en la torpeza con que se haya mostrado en ella la melancólica ternura de ese "casi".²⁶

In spite of the play's defects, which have been recognized by the author himself,²⁷ Buero's purpose was to achieve a synthesis of reality and poetry. The word casi de-emphasizes the fairy tale aspect and humanizes the dramatic possibilities of the play.

²⁴ Antonio Buero Vallejo, Casi un cuento de hadas, Colección teatro, 57 (Madrid: Alfíl, 1965), p. 60.

²⁵ Antonio Buero Vallejo, Comentario a Casi un cuento de hadas, Colección teatro, 57 (Madrid: Alfíl, 1953), p. 76.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 75.

²⁷ Ibid.

Buero's source is the seventeenth-century fairy tale by the French writer, Charles Perrault, Riquet à la houppe. Leticia, daughter of king Alberto and queen Juana, cannot find a suitable husband because she is totally lacking in intelligence. Her sister, Laura, known for her ingenuity, is extremely ugly. The equally grotesque prince Riquet del Copete is summoned to the palace by the sorceress, Oriana, who hopes to fulfill her promise to his mother that Riquet's sweetheart will transmit her beauty to him and that he will transform her ignorance into intelligence. The love of Riquet for Leticia dispels her timidity, awakening her ingenuity. She begins to see Riquet as handsome and elegant. This spell is broken by his departure from the court to the side of his dying mother and by the arrival of the handsome and vain prince Armando, who also seeks Leticia's hand. Armando, encouraged by Laura who hopes to marry Riquet herself, is successful in wooing Leticia away from Riquet in his absence. The reappearance of Riquet precipitates a duel between the two princes in which Riquet kills Armando. Although Leticia's illusions of a handsome Riquet have been destroyed, she accepts the grotesque prince as her husband in the hope that their mutual love will transform him once again into the handsome prince of her dreams.

Riquet's love for Leticia instills confidence in the princess, enabling her to overcome her handicaps. She is

transformed into a woman of wit and ingenuity who is no longer the object of jokes and ridicule by Laura and the courtiers. Riquet's problem is somewhat more difficult, because his success depends upon Leticia's ability to perceive him as handsome and elegant. This struggle is constant in her mind and is personified by the presence of two Riquets portrayed by two actors. The doubt and insecurity facing Riquet frustrate Leticia's efforts to see him as handsome.

Tú has hecho vivir en mí la inteligencia dormida . . . y el amor. Si dudas de tí, cómo tendré yo fe? Lo intento, pero no siempre lo consigo. Ayúdame! Tú serás para mí el hombre más gallardo, como lo eres ahora . . . , mientras quieras serlo."²⁸

Leticia is unable to envision the Riquet of her dreams when others are present and sees him as handsome when they are alone. Only once do the others see the elegant Riquet. This miracle can only be brought about by the emotion of love or by impending death. When Laura begins to feel love and compassion for others she sees the handsome Riquet, and when Armando is about to die, the miracle of Riquet's transformation suddenly appears before the haughty prince.

The eternal enigma of the human personality is thus linked to both Riquet and Leticia and is essential to the action of the play. The appearance of the two Riquets represented a dramatic challenge for Buero. Both Riquets were

²⁸Buero Vallejo, Casi un cuento de hadas, p. 35.

intended to be real, for each one was perceived at one time or another by one or several characters.

Pues, en efecto, aquí ya no se trataba de un solo actor para dos o más personajes físicamente parecidos, ni tampoco de un desdoblamiento en que una de las dos figuras fuese invisible para los demás--recursos ambos bastante empleados--, sino de que dos actores muy diferentes sirviese, con plena intervención en la acción y en el diálogo y de manera absolutamente justificada para los demás, a un solo personaje real.²⁹

The more subtle question of Leticia's intelligence and her psychological effect on the others is a direct reflection of her love for Riquet. The courtship of Armando, who regards her as incompetent, diminishes her ability to act intelligently.

The miracle of Riquet and Leticia is essentially a human factor and was conceived in this manner by both Perrault in his original story and by Buero Vallejo.

"Quelques-uns assurent que ce ne furent point les charmes de la fée qui opèrent, mais que l'amour seul fit cette métamorphose."³⁰ "Era la humanidad admirable del cuento y no su maravillosidad la que lo hacía posible."³¹

The human element is not restricted to the serious and there are several examples of humor, mostly provided by

²⁹Buero Vallejo, Comentario a Casi un cuento de hadas, p. 77.

³⁰L. Souveur (ed.), Contes merveilleux des Frères Grimm, Charles Perrault et Savier Saintine (Philadelphia: Wm. Fell and Co., 1881), p. 177.

³¹Buero Vallejo, Comentario a Casi un cuento de hadas, p. 77.

the Canciller Darío and the king and queen. During the opening lines Darío's continuous coughing prevents the king from concentrating on his chess game.

Es decir . . . Os ganaría si no fuese por ciertos ruidos que me impiden pensar! (El Canciller se mueve, turbado.) Veremos a ver si se aplacan . . . Sí. Parece que ya no se oye nada.³²

The king's hasty departure from the throne room is for a private necessity which he cannot reveal to the queen.

The fusion of the fantasy element and the reality of the characters' struggle is indicative of Buero's ability to interpret the dramatic possibilities of the story. The plot of the original work and the fairytale atmosphere of the royal court remain unchanged. ". . . pretendía yo acentuar en el relato sus aspectos trágicos sin romper en lo principal su tradicional versión."³³

Leticia's varying perspective concepts add to the ambiguity created by Buero as to the true identity of the lovers. The attitudes of those surrounding the princess influence the degree of her wit and ingenuity and also her ability to envision Riquet as the ideal prince of her dreams. Thus the two Riquets are equally real to her. When Laura and the courtiers are present Leticia cannot perceive Riquet as handsome. Armando's attitude that she is foolish and stupid diminishes her intellectual capacities.

³²Buero Vallejo, Casi un cuento de hadas, p. 9.

³³Buero Vallejo, Comentario a Casi un cuento de hadas, p. 77.

The constant fluctuation in Leticia's mind represents her struggle to choose between the interior beauty of Riquet and the exterior appearance of the elegant Armando. Riquet's untimely departure from the palace on the same day as Armando's arrival heightens this clash and causes her to momentarily forget her vows to the ugly prince. However, she still vacillates between the two. Riquet's return to the court and Armando's cold, practical view of their marriage cause grave doubts in Leticia's mind. Armando's provocation of Riquet and his reference to her as "necia" act as a catharsis to convince her that Riquet is the best husband for her. She is motivated by the sad example of her parents and Riquet's acceptance of her as a person. Like Ignacio, Leticia prefers to accept her tragic destiny and to live in a constant struggle with her limitations. However, the fairytale ending has been compromised. Hence the word casi in the title. Leticia rejects the possibility of Riquet as her ideal prince and chooses instead the sad reality of life with the ugly prince over a beautiful existence with Armando.

Riquet's search for existence is complicated not only by the attitude of others but also by his personality conflicts and his lack of self-confidence. He is plagued by doubts and insecurity and struggles with himself to believe that Oriana's prediction will come true.

Riquet--. . . Si perdiese a Leticia, me quedaría solo.
 Oriana--No la perderás. Estáis unidos por el mismo
 sortilegio.

Riquet--(Triste) Ya ves que no hay sortilegios,
Oriana.

Oriana--(Conmovida) Sí los hay! Ahora, que me
creo más madre tuya que nunca . . . , yo
también lo experimento. Y mis ojos te ven
como te ven los de Leticia!³⁴

Leticia's rejection of Riquet for Armando is partly motivated by his fears and insecurities regarding their relationship and by his belief in the transitory nature of woman's affection.

El corazón de la mujer es mudable . . . Ponéis
al cielo por testigo de vuestro cariño, lloráis . . .
Y sois tan impresionables, que vosotras mismas
creéis en la sinceridad de vuestras protestas. A
veces, no pasa un día sin que caigáis en los brazos
de otro.³⁵

The conversation in Act III between the two Riquets, in which Riquet el Hermoso attempts to convince the ugly Riquet of the positive powers of love, is symbolic of the prince's struggle for existence. The words "doy horror" of the handsome Riquet and his disappearance from the scene represent a temporary victory for Riquet el Feo.

The clash between Laura and Leticia for Riquet's affection is another manifestation of the reality-illusion conflict in Riquet's mind. He rejects the cold reality of life with the ugly Laura, "No puede haber amor sin ilusión. Nuestra vida sería un infierno."³⁶ but he also realizes that

³⁴Buero Vallejo, Casi un cuento de hadas, p. 44.

³⁵Ibid., p. 46.

³⁶Ibid., p. 57.

he cannot escape into a purely illusory existence with Leticia. "No hay conjuras, Leticia. La vida no es un cuento de hadas."³⁷

Armando's insulting remarks and the subsequent duel enable Riquet to find a solution to this conflict. The harsh reality of Armando's murder and the knowledge that Leticia can no longer visualize him as the handsome prince make his exterior victory at best a compromise, but Riquet has won an interior victory in his positive acceptance of his tragic destiny.

Laura's constant frustrations are motivated by her inability to accept the devastating reality of her ugliness. In her struggle to find a meaningful existence she lashes out in bitterness and hostility against those dear to her. She jealously resents her sister's beauty. "¡Dame la belleza que me has quitado! ¡A tí tampoco te sirve! ¡Dámela! ¡Es mía!"³⁸

Laura begs Oriana to bring her a handsome prince who will transform her into the beautiful princess she longs to be, but Oriana answers, "El hombre no puede dar belleza, ni la mujer talento."³⁹ According to the sorceress, Laura's quest for beauty will not be answered until her youth is

³⁷Ibid., p. 45.

³⁸Ibid., p. 17.

³⁹Ibid., p. 39.

spent. The only solution for the ugly princess lies in her destiny in the tower as Oriana's successor.

Laura cannot accept the words of Oriana. Since the fairytale ending is now an impossibility for her, she assails Oriana as a witch and discounts her ability to complete the sortilege of Leticia and Riquet. Laura's desire to marry Riquet is motivated by her jealousy of her sister. She readily admits to Oriana that she hates Riquet and encourages Armando to humiliate him. Armando senses her hostility.

" Sabéis que no tenéis más que desprecio para ese pobre hombre? Ninguna mujer que lo quisiese por esposo desearía verlo humillado."⁴⁰

Laura's tragedy as expressed earlier by Oriana is reiterated by Riquet. She cannot find the solution to her problems in the illusion of a man who will make her beautiful, because no man has this power.

(Laura)--. . .;Busca tú mi hermosura! ;Desea mi fealdad desde la tuya, y acaso el milagro se produzca! ¿O no tendrás coraje para eso?

(Riquet)--No, porque soy hombre.

(Laura)--Entonces, los hombres sois despreciables.

(Riquet)--Fuede ser. Quizá tu tragedia sea el saberlo.⁴¹

Rejected by Riquet after her proposal that they live together without illusion in the stark reality of their ugliness, Laura precipitates the confrontation between

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 62.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 57.

Armando and Riquet. Armando's death is the emotional crisis which enables Laura to realize the reality of her existence. In her new-found compassion and love for Riquet and Leticia she sees the ugly prince as handsome and elegant. Climbing to the tower with Oriana, she begs her sister's forgiveness. The ugly princess accepts her destiny in a positive manner in contrast to Ignacio's extreme rebellion or the passive resignation of the protagonists of Historia de una escalera.

There is more emphasis on the human aspect of Oriana's powers than on the supernatural. To Laura's suggestion that she might not fill the fairy-godmother image which many projected, her reply was: "Todo depende del punto de vista."⁴² According to the sorceress, the overwhelming desire of a woman for beauty can only be attained after many years of struggle. The fairy urges Laura to accept the only destiny possible for her.

It is Oriana's unwavering faith in the eventual realization of Leticia's and Riquet's marriage which encourages both to continue the struggle. To Riquet's remark in Act II that there is no more witchcraft she replies that she already sees him as handsome. Oriana begs the queen not to interfere with the marriage, for she knows it is an inevitability.

The clash between Oriana and Darío symbolizes the difference between the solution of supreme faith in the

⁴²Ibid., p. 38.

powers of human kindness and the cold and calculating reality of the Canciller. Darío, who is preoccupied with the superficial rules of protocol and the political powers of state, presents a rather shallow, pathetic image. He is bitterly jealous of Oriana and refers to her as a "vulgar charlatana",⁴³ yet she is capable of outwitting him at every turn. The following exchange provides a humorous touch and once again questions the powers of the supernatural.

(Oriana)--Sí, no hay duda. ¿No notáis un dolor en la cabeza, canciller?

(Darío)--;Señora, los dolores de cabeza no son protocolarios!

(Oriana)--Pero la notáis. Y en el cuello. Es el sortilegio, que empieza.

(Reina)---¿Y qué significa?

(Oriana)--Significa . . . (Sonríe y se aleja de Darío) . . . que el canciller es un necio, señora.⁴⁴

The vain and egotistical Armando can offer Leticia only physical beauty. He is blind to the basic philosophical question plaguing her and regards the princess as a silly, young girl. Armando is not in love with Leticia and regards the marriage as one of political convenience. He avoids answering her plea to declare his love and instead informs her that he will send word of the marriage to his country. Armando would like to change Leticia's spontaneous human qualities into those of a frivolous, empty princess concerned only with superficialities.

⁴³Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 41.

Si lográis, con el tiempo, haceros algo más amiga de las buenas formas . . . , me refiero a vuestras pintorescas costumbres de sentaros en cualquier lado y de suspirar en presencia de otros . . . , haréis una reina ideal. Yo os ayudaré. Los hombres estamos para evitar que las mujeres os trastornéis demasiado.⁴⁵

The king and queen represent the traditional concept of royal matrimony in which there is no love nor understanding. The queen, cold and manipulating, urges Leticia to follow her example. There can be no love when princes marry.

Yo pasé algo parecido, antes de casarme. De ningún modo, Leticia! Te lo prohibo. Eso sería horrible. No habrás cometido la tontería de enamorarte de Armando?⁴⁶

Queen Juliana is also blind to the desires and needs of both her daughters and is unable to communicate with them. At the play's conclusion she fails to grasp the significance of their actions. She prefers the superficial Armando, whom she feels can be easily manipulated as she has manipulated the king.

Leticia's doll symbolizes the ideal love for which she is longing. When Riquet leaves the court he gives her a piece of red cloth signifying the red of his hair. As Leticia is introduced to Armando she drops the doll and Laura later returns the piece of red cloth to Riquet. At the play's conclusion Leticia answers Laura's plea and gives her the doll to take with her to the tower.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 53.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 52.

As in other plays Buero's tragic ending is created by the catharsis which enables the characters to see the reality of their situation. Armando's death causes this revelation through which each is able to accept the only solution possible to live in this absurd, impossible world.

The fact that Casi un cuento de hadas survived only nineteen presentations indicates that both critics and audience misinterpreted Buero's fusion of reality and fantasy, and in this lies the essential failure of the play. Most critics were divided into two opposite camps: those like Rafael Benítez Claros,⁴⁷ who felt that Buero should have presented a more realistic version emphasizing the philosophical preoccupations of the characters, and a group represented by Carlos Fernández Cuenca,⁴⁸ who would have preferred a more poetical, fantasy treatment.

For Buero Vallejo the truth of our times lies somewhere between the concept of physical reality and the realm of fantasy. Like Leticia, man must accept what he sees as real and cling to the unattainable as a goal for the future. Man's existence is meaningless if he is blind to the possibilities that the metaphysical world offer him. Riquet and Leticia will live in anguish and suffering while the real

⁴⁷Rafael Benítez Claros, "Buero Vallejo y la condición humana", Nuestro tiempo, 107 (1963), p. 588.

⁴⁸Carlos Fernández Cuenca, "Casi un cuento de hadas", Teatro, 4 (1953), p. 6.

Riquet remains in the world beyond. "Que su recuerdo nos guíe y nos ayude . . . El nos espera siempre, inalcanzable, en el fondo de nuestros corazones."⁴⁹ Like Ignacio, Leticia and Riquet will always be reaching for something just beyond their grasp.

The theme of metaphysical reality as man's solution in an absurd existence is continued on a more subtle plane in Irene, o el tesoro (1954). In this play, which one critic has assessed as Buero's most perceptive in terms of character delineation up to 1966,⁵⁰ the author perfects his treatment of the dual role of reality and fantasy, a theme which will later culminate in two of his recent works, Mito and El sueño de la razón.

The author has termed the play's central purpose as "una comedia--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."⁵¹ The contrast of the child-duende, representing light, and the darkness of the gloomy apartment is the focal point of Buero's thesis. He explores the many facets of the reality-fantasy problem as he attempts to prove the essence of twentieth-century man's struggle to create a meaningful

⁴⁹Buero Vallejo, Casi un cuento de hadas, p. 74.

⁵⁰R. E. Lott, "Functional Flexibility and Ambiguity in Buero Vallejo's Plays", Symposium, XX (1966), p. 158.

⁵¹Antonio Buero Vallejo, Autocrítica a Irene o el tesoro, Teatro español 1954-55 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1956), p. 187.

existence. "El autor quiere mostrar que las cosas del mundo nunca tienen una sola perspectiva, sino varias."⁵²

As in other plays, implicit hope in the eventuality that man's dreams will be fulfilled is the dominant tone. The spectator participates in this hope, for he would like to imagine the protagonist Irene walking away on the rays of light beyond the balcony with the child-duende rather than the ugly view of her body on the pavement below.

The setting, typical of Buero's plays, is a shabby apartment in an older section of Madrid. The widow-orphan Irene has been living in the house of her miserly father-in-law Dimas, since the death of her husband. Reduced to the state of a servant, the once beautiful woman is deteriorating both mentally and physically, as a result of the abuses of Dimas, his wife Justina, and their daughter Aurelia. The memory of her son, dead at birth and constantly alluded to by her relatives, is but another cross she is forced to bear. Justina's sister Sofia and the family roomer, Daniel, who loves Irene and wants to marry her, are her only protectors. In the midst of her misery Irene sees a child-duende, Juanito, who appears with a little pick in the house searching for a hidden treasure. He is guided by a supernatural Voice which the audience can hear but which neither Irene nor the others can see or hear.

⁵²Buero Vallejo, Comentario a Irene o el tesoro, Colección teatro, 121 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1955), p. 123.

Irene's irrational behavior leads Daniel to consult an old friend, Dr. Campoy. Irene is driven to desperation by her fear that her father-in-law will send her away to a mental institution. Unknown to her, Justina and Mendez, Dimas' business partner, are plotting to intern the old miser himself. When Dr. Campoy arrives at the apartment the duende is told by the Voice that the real treasure is Irene and that they have come to take her away. Clasp hands Irene and Juanito leave the shabby apartment on the luminous road leading from the balcony, while the shouts of the others are heard as they view the widow's dead body on the pavement below.

The ambiguity of the play's ending and its possible interpretations are consistent with the spirit of Irene o el tesoro. In the comentario Buero defends this concept as essential to all art and explains the multiple meanings, both explicit and implicit, of the play. "Irene, o el tesoro es una obra basada en el equívoco, y de él se nutren todas sus aspectos."⁵³ The equívoco begins with the title itself. According to Buero, there are three possible interpretations. The double title could encompass the classical concept that either title expresses the play's message or that both titles are necessary to impart its full significance. Another possibility is that Irene, o el tesoro can also be

⁵³Ibid., p. 118.

called "el tesoro" as an appositive. A third interpretation would be the title's disjunctive construction and the implication that Juanito was forced to choose between Irene or the treasure.⁵⁴

The nature of reality and its various ramifications leaves open the widest of possible conclusions to the spectator. Is this duende a mere figmentation in the mind of the protagonist, the encarnation of her dead son, or does he represent the personification of a spiritual and poetic world signifying supreme reality? Has Irene been driven crazy in the oppressive atmosphere of the house or are the others living in darkness and symbolically blind to the light or the truth? Does she jump to her death on the pavement below or does she find a new world of light and happiness with Juanito? Although the facts indicate that Irene has probably committed suicide, a broader interpretation envisions a more hopeful conclusion.

Buero's labyrinth of reality-fantasy is created on still another plane when the duende questions the reality of his existence. The fact that the spectator can see and hear Juanito and hear the Voice seems to imply their existence, but this cannot be assumed. In Juanito's discussions with the Voice it is apparent that the latter is more confident.

⁵⁴Ibid.

(Juanito) ". . . lo peor es que, si yo no existo más que en los pensamientos de la pobre señora . . . , tú tampoco existes. ¿Qué me dices a eso? ¿Eh? ¡Oye! ¡Oye!"⁵⁵

The tragic struggle for existence of the Voice and the duende may be taking place in Irene's mind and according to Buero,⁵⁶ the more assured Voice could represent Irene's faith in the existence of the duende, whereas the duende itself could signify the doubt plaguing her. The Voice's comment to Juanito, who has been unable to find the treasure, seems to affirm this possibility. "Busca. Y si no encuentras, no culpes a otra cosa que a tu falta de fe."⁵⁷ Near the end of the play the Voice finally dispels Juanito's doubt, giving further credence to the implication of a hopeful ending. "Para la loca sabiduría de los hombres, tú y yo somos un engaño. Pero el mundo tiene dos caras . . . Y desde la nuestra, que engloba a la otra, ¡ésta es la realidad!"⁵⁸

Nicolas González Ruíz⁵⁹ attempts to link the Voice to God and interprets Irene's death as an act of God. Although the concept remains within the realm of possibility,

⁵⁵Antonio Buero Vallejo, Irene o el tesoro, Colección teatro, 121 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1965), p. 62.

⁵⁶Buero Vallejo, Comentario a Irene o el tesoro, p. 122.

⁵⁷Buero Vallejo, Irene o el tesoro, p. 77.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 91.

⁵⁹Nicolas González Ruíz, Review of Irene o el tesoro, Ya, Teatro español 1954-55 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1956), p. 189.

the following conversation between the Voice and Juanito seems to refute this idea.

(La Voz)--¿Por qué de rodillas?

(Juanito)-Yo creo que tú eres Dios.

(La Voz)--Levántate y no pronuncies esa palabra.
Es demasiado elevada para todos nosotros.⁶⁰

The ambiguity of this play has been criticized by critics such as Torrente Ballester⁶¹ who would have preferred that Buero be more specific as to whether the duende is real. Buero answers these critics, reaffirming his position that art should lean more heavily on the implicit rather than the explicit.⁶²

The question of sanity versus madness remains unanswered at the play's conclusion. The author does not state whether Irene or Dimas is mad, although he implies in these lines of the Voice that the protagonist is the only sane being. "Vuelven todos esos locos. Porque los locos son ellos; tú lo verás."⁶³ The dilemma is the most acute in the minds of Justina and Méndez when the latter attempts to justify his attitude toward the old miser.

¿Quién sabe, señora? Acaso todos estamos locos sin darnos cuenta. Ella enloquece por el niño que no tuvo; él por el dinero que desea a todas horas; Aurelia es capaz de enloquecer por un profesor sin cátedra o por un serial de radio . . .⁶⁴

⁶⁰Buero Vallejo, Irene o el tesoro, p. 90.

⁶¹Torrente Ballester, Teatro español contemporáneo, p. 330.

⁶²Buero Vallejo, Comentario a Irene o el tesoro, p. 124.

⁶³Buero Vallejo, Irene o el tesoro, p. 80.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 83.

There is a subtle criticism of mental institutions in the lines "la locura es contagiosa"⁶⁵ uttered by Dr. Campoy and Méndez which imply that if Dimas is not insane when he enters the institution, he will be driven mad in the oppressive atmosphere.

The problems of the existence or non-existence of the duende and the Voice and the madness or sanity of Irene and Dimas are questions for which Buero refuses to give a definite answer. The resolution of these problems remains secondary to the central metaphysical issue. Why, asks Buero, must we assume that the petty desires and economic struggles of Dimas and the others constitute a greater reality than the visions of Irene? The protagonist's dreams, inspired by her vivid memories and power of imagination, have their own logic and sense of being, nurtured by concepts completely foreign to the other characters.

Buero has successfully combined the sainete-costumbrista element of Dimas and his family with the illusory world of Irene. The fantasy-reality concept is maintained in the conflict between Irene's visionary world of light and happiness and the shabby apartment, symbolizing the darkness from which she longs to escape. There are numerous scenes depicting the miserly Dimas and his family. Aurelia must account for each céntimo that she spends on groceries. The following exchange between father and daughter is typical:

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 84.

(Aurelia)--. . . Pero, papá, el kilo y medio de
 acelgas son tres sesenta, y . . .
 (Dimas)--: Son tres pesetas! Porque tú habrás
 comprado de las de a peseta el medio.
 Y un kilo de naranjas no son cuatro,
 sino dos cincuenta, porque tú habrás
 comprado de las malas. Y me parece
 muy bien, porque hay que ahorrar!
 :Pero el que ahorra soy yo, no tú!
 Conque suelta los cuartos.⁶⁶

Justina is denied the most basic commodities.

(Justina)--Es que necesito unas medias, ¿sabes?
 Las de diario están imposibles y me
 tenido que poner éstas: mira.
 (Dimas)--Entonces, no las necesitas.
 (Justina)--No querrás que éstas se me rompan
 también. :Digo yo!
 (Dimas)--Ahora no están rotas.⁶⁷

Dimas submits both his wife and daughter to an embarrassing search in their purses to prevent them from spending money at a neighborhood carnival. The scene at the beginning of the play between Dimas, Méndez, and a young man borrowing money depicts the old miser's business dealings.

(Méndez)--¿Pagará a tiempo?
 (Dimas)--Seguro. Ha falsificado una firma.
 (Méndez)--Entonces pagará, no hay duda.
 (Dimas)--Claro. Oye, que no lo he dicho aposta . . .
 ¿Quién se acuerda ya de eso? Además, que
 debes alegrarte de aquello. :Je! Si no
 hubieras falsificado aquellas firmitas, no
 nos habríamos conocido.⁶⁸

In his comentario Buero justifies the subtitle fábula and defines a fábula as:

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 18-19.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 19.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 16.

. . . narración, suceso; mas también aquella narración o suceso ficticio en que intervienen seres maravillosos, así como aquella otra en lo que por medios simbólicos o alegóricos se expresa una enseñanza moral.⁶⁹

According to the author, the combination of the fantasy and the ethical lesson which the play imparts gives further credence to this classification. Critics such as Castán Palomar⁷⁰ reaffirm the idea that Irene is a fábula in spite of its realistic elements. Rafael Benítez Claros⁷¹ takes a contrary view stressing the costumbrista aspects. However, in emphasizing the realistic element of the play such writers overlook the author's message and the important part which fantasy plays in the production.

It is Irene's power of imagination and her faith in the reality of the duende which enable her to escape the limitations of her surroundings. She expresses her desire for this world of the marvelous early in the play when she longs for the realization of a childhood fairy tale to alleviate her dreary existence.

¿No te gusta a ti que las cosas sean maravillosas?
Yo sé que lo son. Y quisiera que a mí me ocurriese
algo maravilloso, algo increíble . . . como aquellas
historias de mi infancia . . . tan bonitas. Sería
un consuelo tan grande, tan grande . . .⁷²

⁶⁹Buero Vallejo, Comentario a Irene o el tesoro, p. 118.

⁷⁰Fernando Castán Palomar, Review of Irene o el tesoro, Dígame, Teatro español 1954-55 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1956), p. 191.

⁷¹Benítez Claros, "Buero Vallejo y la condición humana", p. 589.

⁷²Buero Vallejo, Irene o el tesoro, p. 24.

It is obvious from the opening lines that the abuse inflicted on Irene has gradually caused her to lose her mind.

"Imagino cosas, y le doy vueltas a todo, y me acuerdo de él . . . De ellos dos."⁷³ The constant threats of Dimas to evict her from the house and the references to her dead son have served to weaken the morale of a girl who was already disoriented after the tragic death of her husband and child. Unable to cope with a solitary existence and untrained for employment, she has chosen instead to remain in the house of her father-in-law. At Sofia's suggestion that she should have left the house when her husband died, she replies: "Estaba muerta, sabes? Era como se me hubiese muerto yo. Y sigo muerta."⁷⁴

Irene is struggling to find a light to lead her away from the darkness of her gloomy existence. She constantly refers to this symbolic search.

(Irene)--Lo peor es la oscuridad.

(Sofía)--Ven. Siéntate un poco conmigo.

(Irene)--Todo está oscuro . . .⁷⁵

(Irene)--¡Hijo de mi alma! ;Como un duendecito!

Pero la oscuridad me vence. ¿No lo ves?

Todo está oscuro.⁷⁶

Irene's tragedy is that her death comes at a time when the dangers for her have been alleviated. After years of psychological suffering the distraught Irene cannot

⁷³Ibid., p. 22.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 24.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 23.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 24.

believe Daniel's comforting words and interprets them as a mere ruse to confine her in an asylum.

(Daniel)--. . . Te juro que Aurelia ha mentido!
 (Irene)--Sí, es posible . . . Todos me mienten . . .
 Unos con insultos y otros con palabras
 bonitas . . . Pero todo es mentira.⁷⁷

The coins which Juanito and Irene see in the old wardrobe are symbolic of the hidden treasures of life which the others do not possess. (Voice) "Son pocos los que pueden ver el oro de la bondad, hijo mío."⁷⁸ The word bondad written on the coins symbolizes the human kindness in Irene's heart. Sofía also has these coins, but she lacks Irene's imaginative powers to see them. Dimas' family and Méndez neither see the coins nor possess them, because of their greed and pettiness.

No, hijo mío. Ahí no encontrarás nada. A cada uno de ellos sólo les queda una monedita de ésas; una monedita tan pequeña y gastada, y tan escondida . . . que ya es como si no la tuviesen.⁷⁹

Irene pleads with Dimas to allow her to remain in his home, offering him the entire treasure, but the old miser interprets his inability to see the coins as further proof of her madness. However, the real treasure is not the coins but Irene herself. This is not revealed to the duende until the end of the play, when the Voice tells Juanito that they

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 72.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 84.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 85.

have come to take Irene away to the world of mystery for which she has been longing. Her final destiny is this marvelous world of fairy tales and duendes which the others are incapable of perceiving.

(Voice)--Has venido a una casa bien triste, hijo mío. Y hay muchas así. En todas ellas viven, como aquí, pobres seres que sólo alientan para sus mezquindades, sin sospechar siquiera que el misterio los envuelve. No hay que dejárselo sospechar.⁸⁰

Irene's powers of imagination have carried her to a world apart from the mundane existence of concrete reality as perceived by the others. She is unable to communicate with Daniel and Sofía, the two people in the house who feel sincere compassion and pity for the distraught widow: "¡Si tú supieras, Daniel . . . ! Yo vivo en un mundo muy distinto del tuyo, donde pasan cosas extrañas . . ."⁸¹

Daniel is in love with Irene and wants to marry her. He longs to give her the joy in life which she so richly deserves, but like many of Buero's other characters, he is incapable of positive action and lacks the imagination to understand her new reality. He is painfully aware of his shortcomings.

Ya sé que no valgo nada. ¡Figúrate! Un pobre profesor sin cátedra ni recursos; uno más de infinito ejercito de licenciados en Filosofía que no tienen donde caerse muertos. "El estudiante tronado", como dice don Dimas.⁸²

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 38.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 71.

⁸²Ibid., p. 29.

Through his love for Irene Daniel struggles to understand her problems and anxieties, but his tragedy is that he will never be able to realize this love. His destiny does not lie with Irene, and he will have to continue his search for happiness alone. (Voice)--"Y Daniel tiene que aprender a salvarse . . . solo. Esa es la prueba que le está destinada."⁸³ Daniel cannot overcome the obstacle of his inability to communicate nor his fear that Irene is crazy. He attempts to convince her that he experiences her world but is unsuccessful. At the end he also sees Irene dead on the street below.

Sofía is blessed with the same quality of human compassion as Irene, but like Daniel, she is unable to communicate with Irene's marvelous world. For Sofía the solution for living in the grim reality of her existence is attempting to ignore it by escaping into the world of her kitchen pots and pans. Irene cannot accept this solution. "Anda . . . Vente conmigo a trajinar y verás cómo te distraes . . . Hija, quisiera ofrecerte otras diversiones, pero no tengo otras . . ."⁸⁴ Sofía's pockets are filled with the golden coins, but she will never be able to see them. Irene and Juanito would like to take her with them to their world of fantasy, but she is doomed to remain in this mundane existence.

The other characters feel no compassion for Irene, because their existence is dominated by egotism and

⁸³Ibid., p. 91.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 49-50.

materialistic preoccupations. Their horizons are limited to the confines of the shabby apartment. The personification of this world is the miser Dimas. Buero draws him with masterful strokes, depicting the various facets of his psychological peculiarities and his avariciousness which through the years has become a pathological illness affecting his relationship with his family.

Dimas is a virtual domestic tyrant, subjecting his family to a life of poverty and depravation from which there is seemingly no escape. His total existence has been consumed by his monetary greed. His son's death was caused by Dimas' refusal to obtain the necessary medicine, and he has denied Aurelia the opportunity for an education, condemning her to a life of ignorance and poverty. Justina lacks the most basic necessities or diversions, for Dimas refuses to purchase a radio. She is reduced to the state of a semi-criminal, cheating her husband of grocery change and using the money for cheap novels, her only source of recreation.

The old miser deprives himself of any pleasures or enjoyment and his life is a constant struggle to overcome all desires and appetites. He refuses to buy tobacco and smokes only when offered a cigarette.

Nuestra profesión requiere mucha sobriedad. Es como un sacerdocio. Hay que luchar contra las pasiones, que es por donde puede volar el dinero. El tabaco, por ejemplo. A mí me gusta a rabiar, no creas . . .⁸⁵

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 17.

The capriciousness of Juanito's nocturnal escapades are the eventual cause of Dimas' internment, for the noises heard by the old miser at night have been made by the duende and not Irene, as Dimas suspects. They provide the only note of humor in the play.

(Justina)--Pero, Dimas, nadie oye esas cosas que
tú oyes por las noches . . .

(Dimas)--Para que lo sepas: no he querido hablar
antes, porque era demasiado. Pero hay más.

(Justina)-- Más?

(Dimas)--Echo el pestillo desde anoche, porque . . .
anteanoche, y la noche anterior . . .
me despertaban tirándome de la nariz!⁸⁶

Dimas plans to commit Irene to a state mental institution, thereby saving the cost of her support. His tragedy is the irony that these plans culminate in his own destruction, leaving him the victim of his own plot.

The years of depravation at the hands of Dimas have made their mark upon Justina and Aurelia. Both women are vain and egotistical and are utterly consumed by materialism. There is constant friction between Dimas and Justina. Aurelia is in love with Daniel and is bitterly jealous of his relationship with Irene. Attempting to undermine their love, she accuses Daniel of trying to lure Irene away to the institution. Justina rationalizes that her scheme to intern Dimas stems from her desire to rid the family of his tyranny. She attempts to justify her motives to an unsympathetic Aurelia, who believes Irene to be mad. Although Buero

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 68.

does not attempt to clarify which of the two is crazy, he implies that Dimas has been unjustly confined. Whatever the case, Justina has doubts as to whether her husband is insane and these doubts will plague her the rest of her life.

In the comentario to the play Buero answers critics who questioned his reason for having Dimas committed. By this action the author gives unity to the motives of the other characters and imparts a tragic sense to Irene's death.⁸⁷ The tragedy of Justina and Aurelia is that they will be doomed to a new tyranny under Méndez, who will cheat them out of their money. Neither has the intelligence to manage family affairs or to understand Méndez's real motives in committing Dimas.

The old man's business partner is consumed by his greed and desire for revenge. As a result of a falsified signature Dimas had caused Méndez to lose his career as a lawyer. He and Dimas later became business associates. Méndez blames the miser for his personality faults, which would probably have lead to his downfall without the intervention of Dimas.

Unlike the protagonists of La señal que se espera and Jasi un cuento de hadas Irene cannot come to terms with herself by accepting the reality of her situation. She must retreat to the illusory world of her dreams. This world will

⁸⁷Buero Vallejo, Comentario a Irene o el tesoro, p. 120.

offer her the happiness which has been denied her in the grim reality of her daily existence. This solution may be the only alternative for man to survive in the twentieth century.

The concept of the common dream and its possibilities in the realm of illusion and reality forms the central message of Aventura en lo gris (1963).

. . . he tratado en mi obra de conseguir una unión orgánica entre realidad y fantasía, o, si lo entendemos de otro modo, entre dos planos muy diferentes de la realidad, sin aminorar lo definido de ambos.⁸⁸

The setting and theme of the play were undoubtedly responsible for many of the difficulties which have beset it. The earlier version, written in 1949, was rejected by various theatrical companies and was not authorized by the censors. Buero maintains that the theme of the play was reminiscent of the Civil War, and that the figures of Goldmann and Ana bore too striking a resemblance to Hitler or Mussolini and their mistresses. In those years both dictators enjoyed the official approval of the Spanish government.⁸⁹ The author decided to publish this earlier version after the French production of La maison de la nuit by Thierry Maulnier. The two plays were very similar in theme, and Buero wished to avoid later accusations of plagiarism.

⁸⁸ Antonio Buero Vallejo, "A propósito de Aventura en lo gris", Teatro, 9 (1953), p. 39.

⁸⁹ Antonio Buero Vallejo, (Personal correspondence), 5/24/70.

In spite of his misgivings concerning the theatrical possibilities of the play and its reception in Madrid, Buero rewrote Aventura and presented it during the 1963 theatrical season. In the introduction to this second version Buero states emphatically that his purpose was to improve the artistic quality of the play. In reading the two texts one notices the improved dramatic structure and the greater use of theatrical devices in the second play. However, the plot and setting of the second version, which encountered virtually no difficulties with the censors, were essentially unaltered from that of the 1949 play. Buero himself does not claim that Aventura is his best play, "Aventura en lo gris no me parece la mejor de mis obras, ni tampoco la peor"⁹⁰ but he felt that it was worthy of dramatic presentation.

Aventura en lo gris debía ser salvada: tiene aspectos que, incluso en su redacción definitiva, no me gustan, pero posee otras, a mi juicio, de cierta validez y claramente conectado, sobre todo,⁹¹ con mis preocupaciones dramáticas más permanentes.

The plot is concerned with the attempts of a group of refugees to flee Surelia, a small country at war with one of its neighbors. The setting is a government evacuation inn where the refugees have gathered to await the departure of a train bound for the frontier. Goldmann, the prime

⁹⁰Buero Vallejo, "A propósito de Aventura en lo gris," p. 39.

⁹¹Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Nota del autor", Colección teatro, 408 (extra) (Madrid: Alfil, 1964), p. 6.

minister, and his mistress, Ana, are attempting to flee the country incognito. During the night Isabel, a peasant girl, is murdered by Goldmann when she refuses his advances. The next day the identity of the murderer is revealed through the efforts of Professor Silvano. Carlos, a young soldier accompanying Isabel, kills Goldmann. The group is forced to flee on foot, leaving Ana and Silvano behind with Isabel's starving baby. The enemy soldiers are persuaded to seek help for the baby when they are told that its father is one of their countrymen. Ana and Silvano await their execution at the hands of the soldiers.

The basic theme, common to Buero's theater, is the conflicting interests of the dreamer and the man of action. Silvano considers the dream to be a form of ideal life which should be realized on earth, "Aprender a soñar sería aprender a vivir,"⁹² but his inability for action has condemned him to be a mere spectator to life. Silvano's philosophy of life stems from his attitude concerning dreams. Action is of no value unless accompanied by a total commitment to society. Man must learn to dream, if he is to realize his fundamental goals in life. He can never know himself if he does not dream. "Los sueños serían entonces como una prolongación de la vida, pero más desnuda más impresionante."⁹³

⁹²Antonio Buero Vallejo, Aventura en lo gris, Colección teatro, 408 (extra) (Madrid: Aguilar, 1964), p. 44.

⁹³Ibid., p. 45.

Goldmann scorns dreams and dreamers and aspires to be a participant in life's action, but his goals are motivated by egotism. Silvano, whose mind and body are now weakened by hunger, lives in a sort of psychological limbo in which it is often difficult for him to distinguish between reality and dreams.

Y estos días, con la debilidad, casi a todas horas . . . Incluso con los ojos abiertos, me traspongo y empiezo a ver cosas . . . Es curioso. Entonces se pregunta uno dónde termina exactamente la realidad. Los locos deben de sentir las mismas cosas.⁹⁴

During the night everyone except Goldmann has the same dream, in which they act out their secret drives and inhibitions. Buero realized the difficulties of attempting to stage this dream, but he regarded it as a basic component of the play. "Construída alrededor de un sueño sin el cual no se justifica, tiene en este sueño su peligro mayor y su mayor posibilidad."⁹⁵ This dream, symbolic of the innermost psychological conflicts which confront each character, aids the audience in better understanding each character's motives in Act II.

Silvano is seated on a mound above the others, and Ana tries to persuade him to descend from his world of dreams to the reality of the world below where the others are seated. Throughout the entire dream Silvano and Ana

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 43.

⁹⁵Buero Vallejo, "A propósito de Aventura en lo gris", p. 39.

attempt to join hands but are unable to do so until the end. This symbolizes their union at the end of the play. Ana's behavior during the dream contrasts sharply with her earlier scorn for Silvano and his dream world. Georgina, wealthy and insensitive to the physical needs of the others, reveals her jealousy towards Isabel and her lust for Carlos by suggesting that he kill the girl and run away with her. Carlos displays his insecurity and his latent hostility toward Isabel by attempting to kill her. The sergeant and Goldmann are merged into one figure which emphasizes the brutality of war and Goldmann's lasciviousness. Instead of demanding money and jewels for his food the campesino suggests his sexual desires for Georgina.

Buero emphatically affirms the necessity of the sueño to the theme of Aventura, discussing the concept of the common dream shared by all the characters and its relation to this play.

. . . pues no me avergüenzo de preguntarme muy en serio hasta que punto es imposible que dos personas sueñen al tiempo el mismo o parecido sueño, y hasta qué punto el psicólogo del porvenir no descubrirá que tales cosas sean, no sólo posibles, sino reales.⁹⁶

The dream is construed by the author as a final moment of truth which will reveal the destiny of each character. It is the means by which the characters perceive

⁹⁶Ibid.

their egotistical motives and eventually overcome them. Each character is unaware of his true motives until Isabel's death in Act II. Silvano's accusing words declare: "Todos la hemos matado. Con nuestro egoísmo, con nuestra torpeza."⁹⁷ Silvano is more interested in abstract theories of society than in the concrete problems of his fellow men. Ana is more concerned with her relationship with Goldmann than in finding a meaningful purpose to life. Goldmann, the most egotistical of all, is dominated by his unscrupulous desires for power and his total lack of regard for others. The campesino is embittered by a life of poverty and depravation at the hands of the wealthy class, as represented by Georgina. Carlos, mentally unbalanced, can see nothing beyond his physical desires for Isabel and his contempt for her violator.

This egotism displayed by all has been a result of the effects of the brutal war on the populace of Surelia. The senseless conflict is but another example of the absurdity of the twentieth century. J. Borel has termed the play a protest against war and life in general.⁹⁸ The cruelty and absurdity of the war and the unscrupulous political motives of the country's leaders as personified by Goldmann are obvious in the stage setting which includes a poster showing

⁹⁷Buero Vallejo, Aventura en lo gris, p. 80.

⁹⁸Jean Paul Borel, El teatro de lo imposible (Madrid: Ediciones Guadarrama, 1966), p. 274.

Goldmann saying "ni un paso atrás."⁹⁹ Ironically he himself is fleeing the country and has prudently sent his money abroad. When Carlos refers to the enemy as "Esos canallas (que) nos han destrozado así muchas mujeres"¹⁰⁰ Silvano reminds him that the enemy had accused Surelia of the same offense one hundred years earlier. The people have become so demoralized physically and emotionally that they have lost all human values of pity and compassion. The campesino personifies this attitude when he is asked by Silvano to save the baby. "Ya han muerto muchos niños en esta guerra. Total, uno más . . ."¹⁰¹

During the dream the cruelty of war and its debilitating effects upon the populace is depicted in the figures of the sergeant and the enemy soldiers. The soldiers ironically refer to themselves as , "Tus ángeles sin alas."¹⁰² The reality of the war is relative to the attitudes and allegiances of its participants. Silvano suggests that Surelia's neighbors, jealous of the riches of their enemies, convinced Goldmann to engage in combat. Although he maintains that Carlos and the others are unaware of the government's true motives, Silvano is uncertain if his efforts to unmask the hypocrisy of the government were wise. "Los pueblos necesitan

⁹⁹Buero Vallejo, Aventura en lo gris, p. 9.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 70.

a menudo de la mentira para seguir luchando."¹⁰³ The question as to whether Carlos, as Goldmann's murderer, is a hero or a traitor will never be answered. "Mañana se escribirá: 'Un héroe llamado Albín mató al tirano de Surelia'. O quizá: 'Un asesino mató a Goldmann, el héroe surelés'. ¿Quién sabe?"¹⁰⁴

The characters represent all segments of society, both politically and economically. Thrown into close contact in a desperate situation, they gradually reveal their psychological insecurities motivated by fear of hunger and the inevitable torture and death at the hands of the enemy. Egoism is the dominant personality trait of all and prevents communication and mutual understanding. Each character has created his own reality. "En réalité, chacun vivait son aventure, sa vie ou sa mort, son salut ou sa perte, sans voir réellement les autres . . ."¹⁰⁵ Although Medardo Fraile¹⁰⁶ is correct in judging that to a certain point each character is an arch-type, an individuality of character is maintained throughout the play.

The clash between the ideologies of Silvano and Goldmann is one of Buero's principal ethical preoccupations

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁰⁵Jean Paul Borel, Quelques aspects du songe dans la littérature espagnole (Neuchâtel: Les Éditions de la Baconnière, 1965), p. 60.

¹⁰⁶Medardo Fraile, Cuadernos de Agora, 79-82 (1963), p. 45.

throughout his theatrical production. Silvano's existence has been dominated by a dream world totally void of action. "Nunca he sabido vivir, ni luchar. Si supiese luchar, me habría ido a las montañas con las guerrillas . . ."¹⁰⁷ His objections to the war led him to be labeled a traitor by the government and cost him his professorship at the university. The experience at the inn causes him to undergo a catharsis or moment of truth in which he realizes that dreaming is futile unless accompanied by action. "No se puede soñar; no se debe soñar dejando las manos libres a quienes no lo hacen."¹⁰⁸ Silvano has proved to Ana that he is a better man than Goldmann by overcoming his habitual selfishness and cynicism and becoming a leader. Men of government must also be dreamers. ". . . de poco servirá actuar en comisiones, y gobiernillos, y congresos, si nuestros sueños reconciliados no nos conducen."¹⁰⁹ Silvano rejects Ana's suggestion that they tell the soldiers they have killed Goldmann in order to save themselves. They will allow Goldmann to retain his identity of Alejandro Fischer even in death. In the final moments of their lives both have realized a significance to their deaths, creating hope for a new society.

Goldmann is a man of action who does not dream and therefore has no ideas which govern his life. "Los sueños

¹⁰⁷Buero Vallejo, Aventura en lo gris, p. 106.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 97.

deforman la vida. Y a la vida hay que mirarla cara a cara. Soñar es faena de mujeres . . . o de contemplativos."¹¹⁰

He has used his strength and drive to further his political and economic goals rather than to create a meaningful contribution to society. Through his pettiness and egotism he has perpetuated the war and has brought his country to the brink of disaster. In his last hours he attempts to seduce Isabel, promising her food that she must have for the life of her baby. Silvano contemptuously accuses him of her murder.

Muerta por un hombre sin escrúpulos, acostumbrado a coger a su paso el dinero, el lujo y las mujeres; un engreído, muy seguro de sus dotes de seducción, a pesar del horror de la muchacha por los hombres; un aprovechado que muerde por última vez en la carne de la patria vencida antes de marcharse.¹¹¹

Ana undergoes an emotional catharsis which is perhaps the most meaningful of the play. In Act I, although contemptuous of Goldmann's actions in deserting Surelia and of his numerous sexual affairs, she is nevertheless firm in her judgment that men of action like Goldmann are superior to dreamers. In spite of Goldmann's influence, Ana has still managed to retain values of basic human kindness. She vainly attempts to persuade Goldmann to give the others something to eat. When he refuses, Ana later offers them food. The shocking revelation that Goldmann has murdered Isabel causes her to see both Silvano and Goldmann in their true perspective.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 43.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 91.

Loca me tienes desde hace años. ;Ah, cómo descanso! Tú la mataste: es tu estilo. ;La vida de los demás carece de valor para él! Y siempre consideró a las mujeres como objetos creados para su placer, que se toman y se abandonan. A todas las creía propiedad suya.¹¹²

Her encounter with Silvano has finally convinced her that Goldmann is not the man whom she had idealized. Like Ana in Madrugada she discovers that she can overcome her egotism by love. Ana finds a new meaning and reality to her existence when she realizes that she must remain with Silvano to attempt to save the baby's life.

Carlos represents the idealistic youth of the nation who have fought for their country. Goldmann is a hero to him, and he contemptuously calls Silvano a defeatist and a traitor. He is emotionally unbalanced and suffers frequent hallucinations. As a member of Goldmann's party he has taken a pledge of self-abnegation. Isabel, who was raped by an unknown enemy soldier, is afraid of all men except Carlos, whom she regards as a brother. Carlos is in love with the young girl, but suffers deep hostility and frustration against her and the baby which is not his. In the dream he attempts to kill Isabel and in Act II believes himself to be her murderer. His reality is destroyed when he discovers that Goldmann is her real murderer. He kills him and further reveals his insecurity by refusing to carry the baby to safety, choosing instead to escape with Georgina who offers him her wealth

¹¹²Ibid., p. 92.

in exchange for his companionship.

Georgina and the campesino represent two opposite levels of society and illustrate the effects of the war on the populace. Georgina's main preoccupation is the loss of her maid and her car. She is totally insensitive to the needs of the others. The campesino confronts her with the reality of her situation. "¡Si usted! ¡Hambre! Sin su coche, ni su doncella, ni sus perritos, ni sus anillos. ¡Usted, por quien nosotros aramos y sudamos de sol a sol, tiene ahora hambre! ¡Ja!"¹¹³

The campesino has lost his family and his land in the war. He is dominated by the desire for self-preservation, refusing to part with any of the provisions in his sack. These two characters clash in reality and in the dream, although their motivations are different. Although anxious to buy food from the campesino, Georgina is arrogant and hostile. The campesino's scorn for her is converted into physical lust in his demand for payment for his food.

Buero has stated that Aventura en lo gris is a modern tragedy, because it contains the two necessary ingredients of heroes and heroism. Guillermo de Torre¹¹⁴ has criticized Buero for being too abstract in the play. Although the author

¹¹³Ibid., p. 79.

¹¹⁴Guillermo de Torre, Dos dramas fronterizos, Indice 97 (1952), p. 23.

leaves a certain amount of liberty of interpretation to the audience, the central theme is clear to all, and its universal appeal is apparent. Ana and Silvano finally realize that their lives have been empty and that personal victory can only be gained by self-sacrifice and an individual commitment to humanity, as symbolized by the baby. The child is a blending of the two races and the only hope for the future. Like Silverio in Hoy es fiesta, Esquilache in Soñador para un pueblo, and Velázquez in Las meninas, Silvano realizes that he cannot stand apart from humanity. The dreamer must become involved with his society. He must create a reality for himself and his fellow man, if he is to be an effective member of that society. Ana and Silvano have achieved grandeur by finding new values and conquering their egotism, the egotism of twentieth-century society, through love. At the moment of their death the sun rises, dispersing the grey shadows of man's imperfections.

Aventura en lo gris, although written in 1949, did not appear in definitive form until its theatrical appearance in 1963. For this reason it is the last of the first group of plays and forms a link to the two groups. The dream, which plays a prominent role in Aventura, is a central issue to the metaphysical questions raised by Buero as to the complexities of truth and illusion. In the more recent plays of the second group, as in Aventura, the characters' dreams are acted out on the stage, adding a new dimension to Buero's concept of reality.

In each of the four plays of the first group the protagonists' solution lies in escape to a dream world or in hopes of finding such an existence in the future. In La señal que se espera Enrique and Susana are able to face the truth because of their faith in the señal, which symbolizes the mysteries of the world beyond. Riquet and Leticia of Casi un cuento de hadas accept the harsh realities of their limitations, still clinging to their belief in the supernatural. Irene's only happiness lies in a fantasy world. Ana and Silvano are able to face death through the revelations of the dream.

The failure of the protagonists of these early plays to accept the reality of everyday existence led numerous critics to unjustly label them as excessively ambiguous.¹¹⁵ Thus they were generally misunderstood by the Spanish public and were, for the most part, Buero's least successful productions. In Aventura en lo gris, the last play in this series, the protagonists come to grips with their existential reality in more positive terms. In his later plays Buero continues this vein as his characters seek a more active involvement in contemporary society.

¹¹⁵Above, Chapter I, footnotes 11 and 12; Chapter III, footnotes 36 and 37.

CHAPTER V
MAN AND THE ENIGMA OF HIS EXISTENCE:
RECENT PLAYS OF BUERO VALLEJO

The quest for a solution to the enigma of the human personality continues on a more sophisticated plane in the second group of plays, which include La doble historia del doctor Valmy (1964), El tragaluz (1967), and Kito (1968), and El sueño de la razón (1970). In these productions Buero has utilized the dream to depict the psychological preoccupations of his characters and to clarify their inner drives and motivations. These later works are thus generally regarded as less ambiguous by a Spanish public whose tastes have been cultivated to a greater understanding of the playwright's major thematic considerations.

After Irene Buero returned to the costumbrista-sainete vein of Historia de una escalera in Hoy es fiesta (1956) and Las cartas boca abajo (1957). His next three plays, Un soñador para un pueblo (1958), Las meninas (1961), and El concierto de San Ovidio (1962), represent his historical dramas, in which past events are reinterpreted in light of twentieth-century problems. Buero's personal and theatrical tastes were evolving as he demanded a greater degree of psychological penetration into the problems of modern man.

The second group of plays represents a greater preoccupation with the problems of reality as it affects the basic moral judgments of twentieth-century society. This in no way implies that Buero has changed his emphasis to one of social drama, for his vital concern remains with the individual. It does mean that in these plays the author has combined new concepts of reality with the costumbrista-sainete background of previous works. His most recent play as of 1970, El sueño de la razón, is a synthesis of Buero's dramatic ideas and his most thorough treatment to date of the concept of reality and man's condition.

Several theatrical devices common to Doctor Valmy and El tragaluz aid Buero in his psychological penetration of man's conscience. The multiple stage settings which had been utilized in Las meninas are now expanded to give the audience a true vision of suspended time and simultaneous action. The characters Dr. Valmy and the observers of the first play together with El and Ella of El tragaluz are an innovation in Buero's theater, as he attempts to study the past by using varying perspectives of time. In both plays one of the principal characters is killed by a loved one who finds it impossible to forgive him for a horrendous crime.

Although difficulties with the censors have prevented the production of La doble historia del doctor Valmy, it nevertheless forms a vital link in Buero's theatrical evolution. The question of man's quest for the truth remains a

principal theme. Completed in 1964, it was submitted by several theatrical companies to censorship but failed to gain approval. As usual, the office of censorship did not give concrete reasons for its rejection. However, the subject matter, which concerns the torture and maiming of political prisoners in a foreign country, leaves little doubt as to its objections. Buero has stated that the censors requested the deletion of several scenes and some expressions concerning the sexual organs of the baby, but, "Pienso que, aún suponiendo que hubiésemos aceptado eso, habrían invocado nuevos inconvenientes."¹ Furthermore, Buero was informed that the timing of the opening would be an important consideration for its approval or disapproval, because of the possibility that the Spanish public would connect an unforeseen event with the plot of the play. According to Patricia O'Connor,² the 1963 Asturian miners' strike and accusations by the workers that they had been tortured is also a possible reason for the government's objections to the play. Reluctance of theatrical companies to accept such a controversial play added to the difficulties plaguing Dr. Valmy, and to this date no further action has been taken. The play has been published in the United States in the September, 1967,

¹ Antonio Buero Vallejo, (Personal correspondence), 5/24/70.

² Patricia O'Connor, "Censorship in the Contemporary Spanish Theater and Buero Vallejo", Hispania, LII (1969), p. 256.

issue of Artes hispánicas in both English and Spanish.³

The central problem of La doble historia del doctor Valmy is one which vitally concerns twentieth-century man, for the torture of political prisoners remains a grim reality of the injustices which plague his existence. Daniel Barnes is an agent in the political section of the national police in a foreign country. Unknown to his family he has been required to physically torture prisoners refusing to cooperate with the authorities. Several weeks earlier Daniel had been ordered by his boss, Commissioner Paulus, to castrate the prisoner Hannibal Marty for refusing to disclose certain information. Daniel's guilt has caused him to be impotent, a fact which is brought out during a visit to the psychiatrist, Dr. Valmy. Daniel's wife, Mary, learns part of the truth from Hannibal's wife, Lucila, one of her former students. Mary attempts to persuade Daniel to resign his position, but he is unable to secure a release. When she discovers that Marty has died after repeated torture, Mary, in desperation, shoots Daniel, holding their baby in her arms. Daniel's mother calls the police, and Mary is taken away by her husband's former colleagues. Her search for the truth has ended tragically in the murder of her husband. Once more Buero has used this theme as the focal point for a play.

³Antonio Buero Vallejo, La doble historia del doctor Valmy, Artes Hispánicas, I (1967).

Buero's treatment of reality in this play represents a new dimension over that of the first group of plays. He introduces the two observers, señor and señora, a Brechtorian technique which will be perfected in El tragaluz, and the character of Dr. Valmy, who is the narrator of the action.

An important element in Buero's preoccupation with reality is observed in the multiple planes of action. After the initial appearance of the two observers, during which the audience is reminded that the story is probably not true, the figures of Dr. Valmy and his secretary appear on the stage. The psychologist is preparing a book of his most interesting cases and the narration begins just after the conclusion of the first case history. The audience has supposedly heard this first story. The patients of the first study live in the same apartment house as the Barnes. As he proceeds with his narration of the Barnes' account, Dr. Valmy occasionally refers to these individuals from the first case, giving only a few hints as to the details of their story. The word doble of the title represents an ironical contrast, as it is obvious that, although Dr. Valmy stresses the importance of the facts surrounding the first case, their only significance lies in the refusal of these people to accept the reality of the second case history. As the doctor indicates, some of the details surrounding the Barnes' case are irrelevant.

Premeditadamente me abstengo de comentar qué
lucha política, qué actos de sedición fueron aquellos.
El lector que lo ignore queda en libertad de imaginar

que la razón estaba de parte de los sediciosos, y también de suponer lo contrario.⁴

Buero successfully manipulates past and present as two planes of reality. The observers and Dr. Valmy form the first plane of the present, while the action takes place in the past. Dr. Valmy forms a part of both planes, as he not only relates the action, but is also a participant. This Brechtorian alienation technique removes the spectator to still another level of reality, in which he is able to observe the action. The multiple stage setting enables the author to convey the effect of both single and simultaneous action. At times the characters in one set remain rigid when the action shifts to the other. On several occasions time is mesmerized as Dr. Valmy steps in with a comment.

These multiple planes of action illustrate once again a basic preoccupation of the author and the central problem of this play, the failure of modern man to come to grips with himself and his circumstances. As in previous plays, the characters learn the truth about themselves after a long, painful search and as the result of an emotional catharsis, in this case the death of Daniel. Buero again shows the lack of man's concern for the sufferings of his fellow beings.

The setting of the play in a distant foreign country is ironical, for the two observers assure the audience that

⁴Ibid., p. 115.

this story is either not true or is exaggerated. If it did happen it was in some distant, uncivilized part of the world. At the play's conclusion these two are led away to a mental institution, because they refuse to accept the story as true. However, the two patients of the first case history, who also deny the truth of the story, are released. As Dr. Valmy points out, he cannot diagnose their illness as a mental disorder because they will not admit to the reality of a situation.

En nuestro extrañísimo mundo, todavía no se puede calificar a esa incredulidad de locura. Y hay millones como ellos. Millones de personas que deciden ignorar el mundo en que viven. Pero nadie les llama locos.⁵

Man's tragedy, according to Buero, is his inability to recognize and accept the truth when he is confronted with a reality which cannot be denied. Daniel's deaf mother is the personification of this failure, but she is a mere symbol of humanity's deafness to the cries of their fellow beings.

(Dr. Valmy) Tras la puerta del cuartito sonarían gritos durante toda la noche; y quizá en este momento, lector, algún otro desdichado grita allí dentro. Pero la inconsistencia nos vuelve tan sordos como a la madre de mi paciente.⁶

The moral question of the play lies in the dilemma facing the characters as to the justification for the torture

⁵Ibid., pp. 165-66.

⁶Ibid., pp. 126-27.

of prisoners. Are any means justifiable in the attainment of political goals, or is there a limit to the humiliation inflicted on the dignity of man?

(Paulus) Lo esencial es tener la razón a nuestro lado. Cuando eso ocurre, poco importan los medios a emplear.⁷

(Mary) Es el mal por el mal, la borrachera de la sangre, el cobarde y sucio deseo de martirizar a seres indefensos.⁸

Can the individual be held to account for his deeds, or should society be blamed for all the ills besetting the twentieth century?

(Daniel) Vivimos en una época terrible, Mary. Ellos no son más que . . . ejecutores . . . Si son culpables, toda la sociedad es culpable.⁹

(Mary) ¿Todos no? ¿Siempre hubo quienes lo condenaron? Y muchos, muchísimos que procuraron evitarlo.¹⁰

Fate has determined that certain men like Daniel are the torturers and that others like Hannibal Marty are the victims. The possibility that this situation could be reversed attests to the question of the injustices of twentieth-century society which has destined certain men to play out these roles.

(Paulus) Pero a menudo, un torturador es un mártir que ha sobrevivido; y un mártir, un torturador que no se murió a tiempo. Como

⁷Ibid., p. 157.

⁸Ibid., p. 131.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 132.

podría serlo mañana, por ejemplo,
cualquiera de nosotros.¹¹

In discussing the play, the author reiterates this theory.

No fui torturado, pero pude serlo. No torturé,
pero el azar habría tal vez podido determinar que
lo hiciese. Todo eso me angustiaba y me angustia,
pues el problema sigue vivo en el mundo.¹²

Although these questions remain unanswered, the implication
that society must find a cure to its illness is evident in
the words of Dr. Valmy.

Cuando me incliné para extender la vulgar receta
que tantas veces oculta nuestro embarazo, pensaba
que era el mundo quien estaba enfermo y que no podía
curar al mundo.¹³

The moral problems of La doble historia del doctor
Valmy does not overshadow Buero's emphasis on the individual
question over the social implications. Although Dr. Valmy's
book is meant to be a compilation of scientific data, he
stresses the importance of the human element in psychological
studies.

El psiquiatra y el sociólogo poseen ciencias más
complejas que la mía, pero también más frías. Ante
sus implecables análisis, el dolor mismo parece esfu-
marse . . . Yo no puedo olvidarlo. A mí me importa
sobre todo la persona concreta que llega a mi consulta
con los ojos húmedos y el corazón agitado.¹⁴

It is the forces of human conflict and feelings of guilt which
drive Mary to her desperate situation. Although motivated by

¹¹Ibid., p. 157.

¹²Buero Vallejo, (Personal correspondence),
5/24/70.

¹³Buero Vallejo, La doble historia del doctor Valmy,
p. 151.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 101.

a concern for her fellow being, Mary's dilemma lies in her personal anguish over Daniel's guilt.

La doble historia del Doctor Valmy is a psychological study of two human beings caught in an emotional conflict for which there can be only one tragic ending. Daniel has become a policeman because of the economic situation of his family. His interests lay elsewhere in a literary career. Forced to abandon his studies by the death of his father, he enters the police force at the suggestion of Commissioner Paulus, his mother's former sweetheart. When he reached a certain political maturity he was promoted to the political section. His strong desire for economic advancement has caused Daniel to deny the moral truth of his acts and those of his colleagues. He has carried the guilt of the torture and maiming of the prisoners as a secret burden, because he lacks the strength to confide in his wife. When he castrates Hannibal Marty, Daniel undergoes a traumatic emotional experience for which there can be no cure. His impotence represents his attempts to compensate for his guilt. "Por lo que ha hecho hay que pagar un precio muy caro, y lo está pagando."¹⁵ Daniel attempts to justify his actions by claiming that these men are despicable criminals for whom no punishment is too harsh, but his illness is proof that he has been unable to even convince himself.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 113.

(Dr. Valmy) Hay algo en su interior que le dice que lo que ha hecho no se puede hacer, aunque usted afirma que se debe hacer. Para curarse, tendría que admitir que ha cometido algo injustificable y espantoso.¹⁶

Daniel is seized by an overwhelming desire to lighten the burden of his guilt by confessing to his wife. However, he is unable to obtain the forgiveness which he so desperately needs. Mary can feel only a growing contempt for her husband whom she sees as an executioner. " Qué están haciendo ahora mismo en tu Jefatura? A qué dios espantoso estáis sacrificando?"¹⁷

Mary persuades Daniel that he must leave the police force immediately, but when his attempts to secure a leave of absence are thwarted by Commissioner Paulus, Daniel is unable to take any decisive action. He is weak and evasive in his responses to Mary's questions.

As he attempts to learn the truth about himself, Daniel slowly comes to the realization that all of his colleagues suffer from some form of psychological illness. "Lo que aquí sucede no sólo destroza a quienes lo padecen; destroza a quienes lo hacen."¹⁸ He also discovers that Paulus, whom he had previously regarded as infallible, has harboured a deep resentment against Daniel, as the son of the woman he had hoped to marry. Daniel finds the courage to denounce

¹⁶Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 159.

Paulus as a man living a lie and is the apparent winner in his attempt to leave the force, but it is only a temporary victory, for Paulus has no intention of releasing him.

Daniel's tragedy is that he is caught in a trap from which there can be no exit. He dies because he is not capable of decisive action. He is unable to free himself from the police force or to obtain his wife's forgiveness. Yet he cannot continue to exist without her pardon. He realizes that his entire relationship with Mary has been based on a lie.

Like Armando of Casi un cuento de hadas, Daniel's search for the truth ends just moments before his death with the realization that he cannot escape from his circumstances. He now knows that he will never be cured from his impotency and that death is the only solution. As Mary repeatedly fires at him there is a smile of gratitude on his lips.

The dilemma facing Mary is more complex, for it involves numerous guilt complexes and her love-hate relationship with her husband. Married at a late age, Mary felt that she had at last found the ideal man whose moral convictions matched her own. Shutting her eyes and ears to the rumors of the cruelties at headquarters, she has remained secure in her belief that they were malicious lies. It is Lucila's visit which finally shakes her confidence, forcing her to re-examine her situation.

Her search for the truth is beset by numerous emotional crises, in which the gruesome details of her husband's

activities are gradually revealed. At first she struggles with her conscience, for she would like to believe that Daniel is incapable of such acts. Mary attempts to bear the burden of Daniel's guilt, when she is no longer able to deny the grim reality confronting her. After Marty's death she begs Lucila to forgive her. The young girl refuses to accept her offer of friendship and compassion, plunging Mary deeper toward her tragic destiny. She now regards Daniel as a criminal who has committed such monstrous deeds that it is impossible for her to forgive him:

(Daniel) Hay un perdón en algún lado para mí. Tengo que buscarlo y merecerlo. ;Dame tú el tuyo, aunque todavía no lo merezca!

(Mary) ¿Cómo podría? ¿Cómo podría siquiera esa niña viuda? Y él ya no puede dártelo, porque lo matásteis.¹⁹

Mary's guilt complex now extends to her baby, for she chastizes herself for committing a sin by bringing an innocent child into a world of evil and cruelty. "¡Pobre hijo mío! ¡Ojalá él me perdone algún día el haberle traído a este mundo espantoso!"²⁰ She is unable to accept Dr. Valmy's suggestion that she dedicate her life to her son in the hopes that he will not grow up to be like his father. She sees Daniel's face in her baby, and it is the face of a murderer.

The nightmare enacted on the stage symbolizes the conflicts and guilt complexes which are besetting Mary as she

¹⁹Ibid., p. 153.

²⁰Ibid., p. 150.

struggles to find her identity. In Mary's dream Daniel cuts off her fingers to disengage them from the electrical current of the lamp and castrates the baby with a pair of scissors, while the grandmother looks on approvingly.

There is no longer faith nor hope for Mary, for she does not have the strength to struggle against her destiny. "No. Es como el que se vuelve a un padre y dice desde la orilla que nade, que debo nadar . . . y yo ya no tengo fuerzas."²¹ She realizes that Daniel lacks the capacity for decisive action to escape from the trap of police headquarters, and she cannot forgive him for the cruelties he has inflicted on the prisoners. Her hate for her husband becomes a pathological fear that he will harm her and their son. Unable to control her fear and hate for Daniel, Mary is finally driven to murder him.

Mary is led away by her husband's colleagues presumably to face the same fate as Daniel's victims. Her tormentors have chosen their own form of illness to compensate for the horrendous crimes they have committed. Superficially, Paulus appears to be the only one who has not been affected emotionally or physically and who is convinced that the torture of political prisoners is justifiable. "Porque yo he elegido el poder, ¿entiendes? Entre devorar y ser devorado, escojo lo primero. Y te llevo conmigo."²²

²¹Ibid., p. 151.

²²Ibid., p. 158.

The clash between Paulus and Daniel is the basic conflict of the activist versus the pacifist. Paulus has chosen positive action over passive contemplation, but his positive concepts have been dedicated to negative results, for he disregards the basic human rights of all men. In another age with different moral values he would perhaps have made a valuable contribution to society.

Paulus attempts to convince Daniel that they must use these methods to prevent the enemy from gaining control, for their opponents would resort to the same techniques. However, as Daniel probes deeper in his search for the truth, he realizes that Paulus' existence, like the others, has been a lie. "¿Qué fracaso, señor Paulus! Está usted falsificado. Es una mentira que anda con su condena a costas."²³

The insecurities and doubts plaguing Paulus are as great as any other man on the force.

(Paulus) En definitiva, el mundo es el mismo ahí fuera y aquí dentro. Por eso es un iluso el que crea que, para hacer nuestro trabajo, se pueden encontrar hombres diferentes o forzarlos aquí. Mírame: yo he sido ese iluso. Cada uno de tus compañeros ha sido para mí una desilusión y tú has sido la última . . . Porque en ti confiaba; tú eras distinto. Como yo.²⁴

Confronted by the truth concerning his feelings of vengeance against Daniel's father, Paulus is forced to come to grips

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 159-60.

with his true motives for encouraging Daniel to enter the police force.

The grandmother remains unconcerned, for she is symbolic of twentieth-century society which chooses to ignore the truth of its reality. Like society, she has a collection of pills which will supposedly cure any ill. Her physical deafness can be perceived as representative of her spiritual vacuum. She refuses to listen to Mary's pleas for help.

The Barnes' baby, like the baby of Aventura en lo gris and the two young people of Historia de una escalera, symbolizes a hope for mankind in the future. The concluding lines spoken by the grandmother, are a repetition of a story told by the same character in Act I. A parallel can be drawn with Historia de una escalera in which Fernando repeats the lines of an earlier scene. Although in both cases a negative conclusion might be assumed, the possibility of hope is left open to individual interpretation.

The tragedy of Daniel and Mary is the tragedy of twentieth-century man. Society can no longer be deaf to the screams of Paulus' victims. However, man, unlike Mary, cannot surrender in his struggle. He must cling to the hope that perhaps the solution will be found in his descendants.

After a five year silence Buero returned to the Spanish stage in 1967 with his production of El tragaluz. In the dramatic treatment of this play Buero drew heavily on previous experiences, utilizing many thematic elements of

earlier plays. However, the evolutionary process of Buero's treatment of multiple planes of reality can readily be seen in his increasing preoccupation with the problems of time and existence.

The futuristic setting of the play places the twentieth century as that of the historical present, thus linking El tragaluz with Buero's earlier historical plays, but adding a new dimension to the problems of human identity. The author has discarded the character of Dr. Valmy, who participated in the action of the previously discussed play, retaining the two observers as members of a futuristic society who attempt to interpret and analyze the thoughts and actions of the twentieth-century fantasmas.

The opening scene depicts these two characters. Man has now succeeded in recovering the total unity of the past in his actions, thoughts, and feelings. The two players, El and Ella, who periodically interrupt the main action, are conducting an experiment to uncover one small fragment of this totality, the story of a family living in one of Madrid's many basements and the efforts of two brothers to uncover the reality of their human situation.

The events of the Civil War exerted a tremendous impact at all levels of Spanish society. The family of Vicente and Mario represents but one of the many Spanish families traumatically affected by the war. They have lived in a basement apartment since their return to Madrid at the

close of the conflict. Vicente's younger brother, Mario, remained with the family, while he moved away, becoming the successful editor of a publishing house. The aged father, suffering from a mental disorder, spends most of his time cutting out figures from magazines and postcards. He is obsessed with the identity of the people depicted in the photos, continually asking, "¿Quien es éste?"

In the days following the conclusion of the Civil War the family had attempted to board a train bound for Madrid, but was unsuccessful. Around his neck Vicente carried the container of provisions for the family, including the small quantity of milk which they had managed to acquire for their two-year-old sister, Elvirita. Ignoring the orders of his father to disembark, Vicente remained on the train, which he alone had been able to board. Three days later Elvirita died of hunger.

The clash between Vicente and Mario on ideological grounds becomes increasingly acute, culminating in their rivalry over Encarna, Vicente's secretary and mistress. Mario accuses Vicente of causing his father's illness and in a moment of extreme anxiety the father kills Vicente. Although Encarna is pregnant with the older brother's baby, she and Mario decide to marry with the hope that their children will someday find the truth which has eluded their parents.

The subtitle "Experimento en dos partes", as well as the figures of El and Ella, are essential to the author's

purpose. Although the play could survive structurally with the action of the twentieth century, the ideological aspects would be lost. Buero rejects the theory that El and Ella are merely Brechtian figures out of the world of science fiction. The purpose of the experiment is for twentieth-century man to recognize and judge himself subjectively in his own century as well as objectively, as a member of a future society. Buero's basic theme of the search for the truth continues on a hitherto unexplored dimension.

Si no os habéis sentido en algún instante verdaderos seres del siglo veinte, pero observados y juzgados por una especie de conciencia futura; si no os habéis sentido en algún otro momento como seres de un futuro hecho ya presente que juzgan, con rigor y piedad, a gentes muy antiguas y acaso iguales a vosotros, el experimento ha fracasado.²⁵

The multiple planes of reality are combined with the themes of time and existence which Buero has used in previous plays, notably Historia de una escalera. The essential difference in El tragaluz is the use of the future as a point of departure for the central action of the present. This creates the dual aspect of the spectator who views himself both subjectively and objectively. The characters' view of reality is distorted by the basement skyline. They are seen by two observers through a type of second skyline. The observers are in turn viewed by the spectators who

²⁵Antonio Buero Vallejo, El tragaluz, Colección teatro, 572 (extra), (Madrid: Alfíl, 1968), p. 100.

simultaneously assume two roles: that of a member of the futuristic society and as a contemporary of the twentieth century.

Time and existence are presented as an endless flow, linking present and future. Future centuries, now able to probe the past, have realized its importance in the present and future. "Durante siglos tuvimos que olvidar, para que el pasado no nos paralizase: ahora debemos recordar incesantemente, para que el pasado no nos envenene."²⁶ As seen elsewhere in Buero's plays, man's existence can now be preserved in a total synthesis of time.

(Ella) Ese eres tú, y tú y tú. Yo soy tú, y tú eres Yo. Todos hemos vivido, y viviremos todas las vidas.

(Él) Si todos hubiesen pensado al herir, al atropellar, al torturar, que eran ellos mismos quienes lo padecían, no lo habrían hecho.²⁷

The emphasis is not on the totality of the past, but on the individuals which comprise this totality.

In spite of the great technological strides of future centuries, the observers acknowledge that they can never hope to capture the totality of the past. ". . . nunca recuperemos la totalidad de los tiempos y las vidas. Pero en esa tarea se esconde la respuesta a la gran pregunta, si es que la tiene."²⁸ Although now capable of recovering even the thoughts

²⁶Ibid., p. 83.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

of the past generations, the futuristic observers are still unable to distinguish between concepts and actual reality. This links these characters to Buero's essential question of the true nature of reality as expressed in previous plays.

"La gran pregunta" referred to by El and Ella is the focal point for the theme of time and existence. "¿Quién es ése?" repeated incessantly by the Padre is the anguished cry of mankind which longs to solve the enigma of its identity. This question has become a basic one in the distant future of El and Ella, because of the injustices and inhumanity of man in earlier centuries. It remains beyond the reality of the twentieth century and is a preoccupation of a select few.

The choice of the Padre, who obviously envisions twentieth-century reality from a distorted view, is significant to the central theme. It raises the question that perhaps this viewpoint represents a truer reality than that which is expressed by the so-called normal person. Although it is implied that the Padre is mad, the futuristic characters find his question perfectly logical, thus leaving this possibility as an alternative solution.

(Ella) La pregunta invadió al fin el planeta en el siglo veintidós . . .

(Él) Las personas que guardaban ya en su corazón la gran pregunta. Pero debieron de ser hombres oscuros, habitantes más o menos alucinados de semisótanos o de otros lugares parecidos.²⁹

²⁹Ibid., p. 82.

The thematic structure of El tragaluz is based upon dualities and contrasts which serve to expound Buero's basic ideological preoccupations as well as to heighten the dramatic tension. The clash between the practical activist Vicente and the contemplative pacifist Mario represents a duality focusing the nucleus of the play's actions. The two observers, El and Ella, are another example of Buero's dramatic dualities. The multiple stage settings of the basement, Vicente's office, and an outdoor cafe are indicative of the various planes of reality and simultaneous action. The characters remain frozen when the action shifts to another setting, thus creating the illusion of static time. The author has stated that he is interested in the totality of his country's problems. He sees El tragaluz as a combination of social-political theater as well as a study of individual human problems.³⁰

Symbols assume an important role in this duality, particularly in the contrasting aspects of the skylight, the basement, and the train. The basement is a way of life for many Spaniards, who, like Vicente's family, have remained in the gutter since the Civil War, unable to enter the main stream of life. Buero's idea for the basement setting came from that of a friend who lived near the author in the

³⁰Antonio Buero Vallejo, quoted by Angel F. Santos, "Una entrevista con Buero Vallejo", Primer Acto, 90 (1967) pp. 8-9.

post-war years.³¹ It symbolizes the limitations of this existence much as the stairway of Historia de una escalera. The view of reality presented to the family through the skylight is at best a distorted one, indicative of the psychological preoccupations of the Padre and Mario.

Angel Santos³² has used the term "historical tragedy" in referring to El tragaluz. There are many tragic elements as in other plays, but the concept of the historical present gives the spectator a more objective view of himself as an insignificant being in the history of time. Twentieth-century man is compared to a tree in the forest which is already dead but can be seen in his eternal struggle against his tragic fate of nonentity. Vicente's death is the catharsis which enables the characters to better understand each other's motives. Mario now realizes that his actions were the primary cause for his brother's death, and this realization will haunt him the remainder of his life. Encarna is finally made aware of her love for Mario.

To those who would accuse Buero of being unnecessarily pessimistic in his depiction of the basement setting, the author answers that, although it is a social actuality in Spain, one cannot assume that the country is composed exclusively of basements such as those in El tragaluz.³³

³¹Buero Vallejo, (Personal correspondence), 5/24/70.

³²Angel Fernández Santos, "Una entrevista con Buero Vallejo", Primer Acto, 90 (1967), p. 11.

³³Buero Vallejo, "Una entrevista con Buero Vallejo", p. 11.

The symbolic implication of the train contrasts sharply with the skylight. This train which Vicente boarded is not a political train but the train of life. It characterizes the activist Vicente in contrast to the pacifist Mario, who remains in the basement. "Se trata de seguir viviendo y actuando, de no quedarse en la cuneta, detenido en el tiempo y sin acceso a la vida y a los hechos."³⁴ However, there were many victims of the Civil War who were prevented from taking this train and were victims of history. It is this group of people, symbolized by Mario, who are the main preoccupation of the author. Buero has emphasized that to take this train is a duty of each individual, and he is not criticizing the fact that Vicente took the train, but the manner by which he succeeded in doing it. "Lo que ocurre es que hay muchas maneras de 'tomar el tren' y muchas maneras de 'viajar en él'."³⁵ The sound of a train is audible throughout the play, culminating in a deafening roar when the father kills Vicente.

As in other plays, the key to the action is the Vicente-Mario conflict. To critics such as Angel Fernández Santos,³⁶ who have assailed the play for being too melodramatic, Buero answers that there can be no simplification of his

³⁴Ibid., p. 12.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Angel Fernández Santos, "El enigma de El tragaluz", Primer Acto, 90 (1967), p. 6.

characters. The antithesis of Vicente and Mario does not imply that the elder brother can be personified as essentially evil and that the younger is the good brother. Although Buero has stated that if forced to choose he would pick Mario,³⁷ each brother has his good points, and the ideal would have to be somewhere in between the two.

The ideological differences between the activist Vicente versus the passive dreamer Mario are fundamental to Buero's theater. The two brothers can be compared to the Silvano-Goldmann conflict of Aventura en lo gris. Like Silvano, Mario has separated himself from society because of his repugnance toward the injustices of twentieth-century life.

Me repugna nuestro mundo. Todos piensan que en
él no cabe sino comerte a los demás o ser comido.
Y encima, todos te dicen: ;devora antes de que te
devoren!³⁸

Although he pretends to be indifferent, he lives a constant struggle, for like Ignacio, Mario longs to penetrate the limits of man's personality.

(Mario) Es como querer saber el comportamiento de
un electrón en una galaxia lejanísima.

(Vicente) ;El punto de vista de Dios!

(Mario) Que nunca tendremos, pero que anhelamos.³⁹

³⁷Buero Vallejo, "Una Entrevista con Buero Vallejo",
p. 12.

³⁸Buero Vallejo, El tragaluz, p. 51.

³⁹Ibid., p. 54.

Mario despises activists like his brother, for he feels that they have trampled the rights of others. He chooses poverty and inactiveness as the only alternative. To Vicente's plea that he ascend from the basement into the action of life he replies:

¡Veo a mi alrededor muchos activos, pero están dormidos! ¡Llegan a creerse tanto más irreprochables cuantos más se encanallan!⁴⁰

Mario is intrigued by the Padre's question and the possibility of discovering the identity of the figures in the old postcards which Vicente brings to the basement apartment. To activists like the older brother this seems the absurdity of a demented mind.

(Mario) ¿Nunca te lo has preguntado tú, ante una postal vieja? ¿Quién fue éste? Pasó en aquel momento por allí . . . ¿Quién era? A los activos como tú no les importa.⁴¹

The younger brother remembers vividly the scene at the railroad station as Vicente pretended that he was attempting to disembark from the train, when in reality he was struggling to remain on board. He does not blame his brother so much for his actions that day as for what has happened since.

No te culpo del todo; sólo eras un muchacho hambriento y asustado. Nos tocó crecer en años difíciles. . . ; Pero ahora, hombre ya, si eres culpable!⁴²

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 53.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., p. 96.

Mario's attitude toward Vicente is not entirely motivated by philosophical questions. He is bitterly jealous of Vicente's success. For Mario, Vicente has never left the train of life, and he himself is one of his older brother's victims. This resentment is heightened by the rivalry with his older brother for Encarna.

The struggle of the pacifist to find the truth is typical of Buero's characters. The author is attempting to persuade us, through Mario, of the necessity of facing the harsh reality that Vicente's actions have been the principal cause of their father's mental illness. The two brothers relive their youthful game of guessing the identity of passers-by, looking at their legs through the apartment skylight. Mario thus hopes to gain an insight into their own situation, but Vicente scornfully rejects his views.

¿Ves cómo son figuraciones, engaños? ;Si estos son los prodigios que se ven desde aquí, me río de tus prodigios! ;Si es ésta tu manera de conocer a la gente, estás aviado!⁴³

However, Buero agrees with Mario that perhaps this view of life, from the skylight of the basement, is true reality.⁴⁴

It is through Vicente's death that Mario gains true insight into the forces which have motivated his actions.

⁴³Ibid., p. 59.

⁴⁴Buero Vallejo, "Una entrevista con Buero Vallejo", p. 13.

He now realizes the tragedy of his situation, for his questions of reality and existence can never be answered.

Like Goldmann, Vicente is an opportunist willing to compromise at every turn for his economic gain and power. He is practical, accepting this philosophy of life in an effort to obtain some small degree of power, even though it may only be realized as the editor of a rather insignificant literary magazine. Vicente is a man of action and is scornful of Mario's contemplative attitude toward life. He is resentful of Mario's refusal of employment with the publishing house and with his younger brother's accusations. Vicente asserts that Mario cannot be content with his distorted view of reality. He will be unable to gain an insight into his fellow man without direct contact. "¡No harás nada útil si no actúas! Y no conocerás a los hombres sin tratarlos, ni a ti mismo, si no te mezclas con ellos."⁴⁵

The older brother's outward appearance of self-assuredness is a mask for an inner guilt and a tormented conscience. Although he assumes the external attitude that his father's illness is a result of his senility, Vicente is secretly fearful that he has been the cause. He scorns Mario's fascination for the game of the skylight and rebukes him for his accusations, but the basement now has a mysterious attraction for Vicente, and he finds himself increasingly drawn to the skylight.

⁴⁵Buero Vallejo, El tragaluz, p. 52.

The circumstances surrounding the author Beltrán and Encarna are two examples of Vicente's contemptuous attitude towards the rights of others. Although he had previously praised Beltrán's novels and secured various contracts through the publishing house, he suddenly withdraws support when the financial backing for the enterprise changes hands. Encarna is another of his victims, for it is through her fear of being without a job that she has become his mistress.

Vicente is also a victim of the society of his times. His tragedy lies in his inability to gain the pardon from his father for the affair of the train. Like Daniel, there can be no atonement, and he receives the punishment he deserves. Although Vicente is fully aware of the reality of his actions, he is certain, as was Commissioner Paulus in the previous play, that in the struggle for existence there is no alternative but to devour or be devoured. Although he begs his father's forgiveness, he knows that he will continue to commit atrocities on his victims.

Pero no está, y nadie es castigado, y la vida sigue. Míreme: estoy llorando. Dentro de un momento me iré, con la pequeña ilusión de que me ha escuchado, a seguir haciendo víctimas . . . De vez en cuando pensaré que hice cuanto pude confesándome a usted y que ya no había remedio, puesto que usted no entiende . . . El otro loco, mi hermano, me diría: hay remedio. Pero ¿quién puede terminar con las canalladas en un mundo canalla?⁴⁶

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 97-98.

Aided by Mario, Vicente is finally able to face the truth and admit his guilt for Elvirita's death. He is certain, however, that her death twenty-five years earlier has no significance for his aged father who is no longer able to remember the identity of the living members of his family.

The father is one of the play's most ambiguous characters. He is a passive witness to all the action. Although it is implied that Vicente is the cause of his illness, there is an air of mystery surrounding the exact circumstances. The spectator does learn that the father has always been irritable, and this quality, coupled with his inability to take positive action, has probably contributed to his insanity. Like the other members of the family, he has become paralyzed by the oppressive atmosphere of the basement.

The basic problem of the father is the enigma of his doubts. Like many of Buero's characters, he longs to penetrate the limits of human identity. He is unable to distinguish the members of his own family and recognizes neither his wife nor his two sons, but he does have some memory of Elvirita. This obsession is focused in the question, "¿Quién es ése?", which he repeats incessantly as he cuts out the unknown figures of the old postcards.

The possibility of the father as a sort of God judging Vicente has been suggested by Ricardo Domenech.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Ricardo Domenech, "El tragaluz: Una tragedia de nuestro tiempo", Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos, 217 (1968), p. 132.

There are numerous references to the father and God. When Vicente is attempting to persuade Mario to accept his offer of a job at the publishing company, he refers to the game of the skylight as a religious myth. "Estás en peligro: actúas como si fueses el profeta de un dios ridículo . . . De una religión que tiene ya sus ritos."⁴⁸ Near the end of the play Vicente also mentions his father and compares him to God. "Le hablo como quien habla a Dios sin creer en Dios, porque quisiera que Él estuviese ahí . . ."⁴⁹

The skylight is also a symbol of the father's existential problem and one of the questions which remain unanswered at the play's conclusion. In the perplexity of his disoriented mind, he often confuses the skylight with a train and attempts to guess the identity of those passing by. He enters into the imaginary games with the voices of the children in the street above.

The father, unlike Mario, finds the capacity for action, and in a supreme moment of vengeance for Elvirita's death, he kills his son. As with Mary in La doble historia del doctor Valmy the strain of his emotional state has provoked a complete mental breakdown.

In El tragaluz, as in many of Buero's other plays, there is a woman who is the object of rivalry between two

⁴⁸ Buero Vallejo, El tragaluz, p. 73.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 97.

men. Encarna has been victimized before the opening action because of her humble, rural origin. Immigration to the city has not altered her situation, as there are new and different problems awaiting her. The unscrupulous Vicente has made her a victim for she is afraid that he will discharge her if she does not become his mistress.

¿Tan loco te ha vuelto el tragaluz que ni siquiera te das cuenta de cómo es la chica con quien sales?
 ¿No la escuchabas, no le mirabas a la cara? ¿Le mirabas sólo a las piernas, como a los que pasan por ahí arriba?
 ¿No sabes que escribe "espontáneo" con equis? ¿Que confunde Belgrado con Bruselas? Y como no aprendió a guisar, ni a coser, no tiene otra perspectiva que la miseria . . . , salvo a mi lado. Y a mi lado seguirá,⁵⁰ si quiere, porque . . . , a pesar de todo, la aprecio.

The prostitute who appears occasionally on the stage and who could be a figmentation of Encarna's mind, is symbolic of her insecurity.

Completely dominated by fear, Encarna can neither confront Vicente with the truth of her new-found romance with Mario nor with his action against Beltrán. Although Mario first appears to be the good brother in his intentions toward Encarna, it is obvious that she has been used as a pawn in his rivalry with Vicente. When Encarna is rejected by Vicente and discharged from her job, the younger brother is no longer interested in her.

The link between El tragaluz and La doble historia del doctor Valmy is evident in the numerous themes and

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 78.

dramatic techniques which the author employs. Two additional analogies can be cited in Las cartas boca abajo and Irene o el tesoro. As in Las cartas boca abajo the members of this family live in a perpetual lie, trying to ignore the reality of their situation. It is only when they are able to face the truth that hope can be seen, not for them, but for future generations. As in Irene, o el tesoro, the question remains open as to the nature of reality and the possibility that a mind twisted by insanity can perceive a truer reality than that available to normal beings. Buero's ambiguity leaves many doubts and unanswered questions.

In El tragaluz the use of the historical present brings Buero one step further in his constant quest for the truth. It is a more sophisticated means for exploring the depths of reality in search of the ultimate truth which bewilders man.

The ideal solution is a compromise between the activist and the pacifist. Future societies have found the answers to some of the problems plaguing twentieth-century men and condemning him to his tragic fate. As in other plays, Buero sees hope in the distant future, but man, no matter how insignificant he may be, must continue the impossible search for the truth.

(Ella) Debemos, pues, continuar la tarea imposible; rescatar de la noche, árbol por árbol y rama por rama, el bosque infinito de nuestros hermanos. Es

un esfuerzo interminable y melancólico.⁵¹

As in Historia de una escalera and La doble historia del doctor Valmy, the answers to our present problems lie only in the future. Like the baby in Aventura en lo gris, the son which Encarna is carrying is symbolic of this hope. "Quizá ellos algún día, Encarna . . . Ellos sí, algún día . . . Ellos . . ."⁵²

As members of the twentieth-century society we must be willing to assume responsibility for both the past and the future. Man's inhumanity to man is now perceived in all its reciprocal ramifications. He can no longer live smugly in the assurance that he will be judged only by his descendants, for mankind will be held to account today for the acts it has committed against its fellow beings.

Nosotros, hombres del siglo veinte, con nuestros errores y miserias más ocultas, estamos siendo juzgados 'ya', aunque para ello utilicemos la convención de unos seres del futuro, por una conciencia histórica que ahora mismo está funcionando.⁵³

Buero's continuing search for artistic inspiration led to his next dramatic effort, an opera entitled Mito (1968), written in verse and originally intended for production outside Spain. The composer who presented the idea to Buero was unable to collaborate in the production, and at

⁵¹Ibid., p. 100.

⁵²Ibid., p. 103.

⁵³Buero Vallejo, "Una entrevista con Buero Vallejo", p. 10.

present, the future of the opera is uncertain. There is a possibility that a new collaborator will soon be found.⁵⁴ The opera has been published in Primer Acto, 100-101, and in Colección teatro, 580 (extra).

The dramatic possibilities of the operatic form is thus explored by Buero for the first time. The author has utilized music and verse to achieve a new synthesis of artistic superiority and thematic unity hitherto unknown in the Spanish opera. Despite these innovations, the themes of the search for the truth and the eternal enigma of reality and illusion are the author's major preoccupations.

In an article preceeding the Primer Acto edition of Mito,⁵⁵ Buero outlines briefly the genesis of the opera, explaining his artistic purpose in writing it. It had been suggested that one of Spain's traditional themes be the subject matter. Buero consequently chose Don Quixote as a source of inspiration, not only because of its universal appeal, but also because of Cervantes' subtle interplay of the reality-illusion question.

The setting is the backstage and wings of an operatic theater in a modern city. As the action commences, the company is concluding its performance of Don Quixote. Señor Palma, the director, and Rodolfo Kozas (Don Quixote) are

⁵⁴Buero Vallejo, (Personal correspondence), 5/24/70.

⁵⁵Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Del Quijotismo al mito de los platillos volantes", Primer acto, 100-101 (1968), pp. 73-74.

being decorated by the president of his country. Eloy (criado) is the only member of the company who does not express joy at the honor bestowed upon one of its members. A special dispensation has been granted by the president for the troupe to remain above ground during the nightly air-raids drills. Eloy does not join in the celebration, because he is awaiting a visit by Martians in flying saucers. He has convinced himself that the corrupt government is staging the air-raids to hide the truth from the people, and that the Martians are on the verge of invading the country to rescue it from self-destruction. The electrician maintains that the drills are the government's ruse to prevent the people from engaging in a revolutionary strike, while the remaining members of the troupe remain steadfast in their belief that they are intended as alerts to prepare the country in the event of a revolution.

Eloy persuades Simón (Sancho) that the barber's helmet used in the opera is a Martian detection device from which both Simón and Eloy hear musical sounds. Marta, the wardrobe clerk, is supposedly one of a group of Martians sent to spy on the earth dwellers. While the others are enjoying a sumptuous banquet, Eloy falls asleep and dreams that he is visited by six Martians in green suits. The visitors inform him that a peaceful Martian invasion is imminent. After he awakens Eloy discovers his revolutionary friend, Ismael, who arrives at the theater begging that the

singer harbour him from the police who are falsely accusing him of burning down the government palace. Rodolfo and Pedro (el Bachiller) dress up in astronaut suits, pretending to be invaders from Jupiter who have conquered the whole universe. Blindfolding Eloy and Sancho, they force them to ride in an imaginary flying saucer. With the help of Apolinar (el Cura) and the others they dupe the two into believing they are travelling in outer space. The perpetrators of the cruel joke are unmasked, thus shattering Simón's illusions of grandeur and humiliating Eloy.

The company is preparing for their nightly performance when the police arrive in search of Ismael. Eloy changes places with his friend and is chased through the theater until he is shot. Ismael is taken away and Eloy dies, professing his unshakable faith in the reality of the flying saucers.

The title Mito is linked to one of Buero's basic themes reiterated throughout his dramatic production. For modern man the myth may be the only solution for survival. This idea, expounded first in earlier plays such as Tejedora de sueños and La señal que se espera, has been expressed with increasing profundity in Buero's later works. The author gives three reasons for his choice of Mito as the title. The story of Don Quixote is one of the most famous myths of world literature. The myth of the flying saucers and Martians is the most consistent of the twentieth century. Buero has stated that a third reason was a protest against those who

seek to remove the myth from the modern theater.

Ante la insistencia, ya casi rutinaria, con que se viene invocando la actitud desmitificadora como la única plausible en un teatro que se pretenda acorde con las realidades del mundo de hoy, suelo reiterar, desde hace tiempo, el papel positivo de lo mítico.⁵⁶

The source of the Quixote goes beyond the musical production of the troupe, extending to characters and situations of the novel, as well as its philosophical implications.

Mi libreto es, ante todo, otra visión del mito quijotesco que no oculta ni niega su fuente, y abunda en transposiciones de personajes e incidentes fácilmente identificables por el lector atento.⁵⁷

One can draw immediately analogy with the roles of Don Quixote, Sancho, Dulcinea, the priest, the barber, and the bachelor. The author has incorporated episodes of the novel into the framework of his plot. The scene of the imaginary flight of Eloy and Sancho in the flying saucer is reminiscent of a similar incident in the Quijote when Don Quixote and Sancho are flying in space in the wooden horse Clavileño.

Mito is not a new interpretation of a traditional myth as was Buero's treatment of La tejedora de sueños. The author has reiterated a universal theme in terms of twentieth-century reality, retaining the essential spirit of the original story. Don Quixote, product of a decaying society, placed his blind faith in the knights of chivalry as the

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 73.

salvation for his times. In the chaos of this century certain men with a quixotic spirit have created the myth of flying saucers and men from other planets. The eternal question and the one which plagues the reader in Mito, is the validity of this myth as a solution to the problems of mankind. Are these visions a mere excuse for the pacifist to escape into a dream world, thus avoiding his obligations of positive action? The author's stand on this question is in keeping with his hitherto expressed attitudes concerning the human enigma of reality versus illusion. Once again he takes a middle-of-the-road position, recognizing the negative aspects of the illusory point of view, while affirming the positive possibilities of this attitude.⁵⁸ The term tragedia abierta is used here as earlier to express the philosophical implications which Buero expounds in Mito.

The passivity of the illusory dreamers of both our times and those of Cervantes is an escape from what seems at least to them a tragic world and their inability to affect a meaningful transformation of a decadent society.

(Eloy) Para evitar que lo peor suceda
hay que gritar que puede sucedernos.
Y el infalible modo de que ocurra
es confiar en que se arregle todo.⁵⁹

As in other plays the question of the reality of Eloy's visions is left open to individual interpretation.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Antonio Buero Vallejo, Mito, Colección teatro, 580 (extra), (Madrid: Alfíl), p. 94.

Buero again explores the validity of a corrupt society, as symbolized by the operatic troupe, contrasted with the dream world of Eloy's Martians.

(Eloy) Tal vez mi flaco juicio no distingue
lo real de lo soñado. Quizá nunca
descendieron platillos a la Tierra.
Acaso nos desprecien y permitan
nuestra extinción en el apocalipsis
que estamos entre todos acercando.
Pero tal vez jamás hubo marcianos
y entonces soy un viejo delirante.
Deliro frente a un mundo que delira
mientras ríe y se aturde sin saberlo.⁶⁰

The cruel joke played on Eloy and Sancho by the other members of the company illustrates the decadence of their society and the lascivious morals of its members. The six Martians in Eloy's dream represent his longing to escape from this grim reality of his society into the truer reality of his dream world.

(Eloy) ¡Curioso animal dios, listo y seguro!
Prepara guerra y cree que tendrá paz.
A la mentira llama cortesía.
Besuquea, fornicar y cree que ama.
Si está aterrado, bebe y se divierte.
Procrea sin freno por matar su angustia,
y aumenta así la angustia de la Tierra.⁶¹

Although Buero declares that he does not believe in the possibility of flying saucers and creatures from outer space, he does not deny the possibility of their existence.

As in the author's other plays, the many unanswered questions lead the reader to consider the reality of Eloy's

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 85.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 87.

visions. Are the air raids a drill or is the government attempting to perpetrate a lie on the populace? Are the explosions a part of the air raid alert, or do they represent the battle sounds of the Martians and the government forces? What is the true identity of Marta? According to Buero's stage directions, Marta's facial expression has altered considerably as she contemplates Eloy's body late in the play. Is she a Martian spy who is unable to reveal this secret, or is she in fact a simple country girl? Did the other cast members hear music from the helmet at the opera's conclusion? The author vaguely suggests that a seed of discontent has been planted, for the uneasy air of the company may not be solely the result of Eloy's death.

Buero has presented three conflicts in Mito which illustrate the clash between the idealistic world of Eloy and the rationalistic society in which he lives. The Eloy-Rodolfo conflict represents the clash between the illusory world of a passive dreamer and the decadence and lust of materialistic society. The electrician personifies the rationalistic approach of science in attempting to solve the enigma of human existence. Ismael is the revolutionist who advocates action and the use of whatever means necessary to achieve his ultimate goals.

(Ismael) La injusticia es necesaria
para alcanzar la justicia.
Serás sólo un soñador

si el escrúpulo no ahogas⁶²
y a actuar no te decides.

Ismael vainly attempts to arouse his friend to action and to awaken him from his dream world.

(Ismael) La juventud se ha pasado
y sólo somos dos parias;
un infeliz partiquino
y un hombre del sindicato.
Despierta, Eloy. No hay platillos
ni marcianos en la noche.
Hay disparos en las calles
y patrullas implacables.⁶³

The author's nebulous character delineation follows his premise that the answer to this passive-active conflict must be left to individual interpretation. There are no sharp lines drawn in any character, with the possible exception of Rodolfo.

Eloy's existence is one of constant frustration. On a material plane his musical career has been a failure and he is forced to play a minor, secondary role of the servant in the opera. Spiritually, he sees the decadent society as a symptom of the general illness of his times. The appalling apathy of its members necessitates, in Eloy's mind, the intervention of creatures from outer space to liberate society from self-destruction.

(Eloy) Si la guerra estalló sin avisarnos
y cayeran las bombas esta noche,

⁶²Ibid., p. 44.

⁶³Ibid., p. 41.

continuaremos tan despreocupados
como en el popular cuento del lobo.⁶⁴

Eloy's dream reaffirms his faith in the reality of the Martians and his love for Marta. It enables him to continue his struggle when he is deserted by everyone, including Simón, after the flight in space. Unlike the characters of Aventura en lo gris, Eloy's dream is not shared by the others, but he does not feel alone. He is not afraid even in the face of the alleged total annihilation at the hands of the planet Jupiter.

(Eloy) La dignidad de Marte se ha extinguido
bajo la quemazón de la vesania
Mas sólo es una chispa su tragedia
en la incendiada majestad nocturna.
En vano desde naves iracundas
extenderéis la muerte sobre un campo
de años y años de luz. Muchos más siglos
de rauda luz os cercan, se os escapan,
burlando vuestro afán enloquecido.
Yo canto a una galaxia muy lejana
llena de paz, honor e inteligencia!⁶⁵

In Don Quixote Mambrino's helmet symbolized the incarnation of the old hidalgo's dream world of chivalric knights. The helmet in Mito thus represents Eloy's illusions of the flying saucers. His faith in the reality of the helmet is unwavering and the music he hears represents the undeniable presence of the Martians.

Eloy's mind sees Marta as a Martian spy sent to live among the earth people. In his love for Marta he has

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 22.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 80-81.

transformed the meek wardrobe girl into the personification of the ideal woman, much as Don Quixote's lady Dulcinea. In his dream Marta professes her undying love for Eloy, but urges that their relationship remain secret.

(Marta) Aún es temprano para nuestra dicha.
 Recuerda que no debes conocerme.
 Piensa que fue tan sólo un bello sueño
 nuestro encuentro.⁶⁶

The disdain which Eloy expresses for Rodolfo is not without an element of jealousy. Eloy had sung the role of Don Quixote ten years earlier, but he had been forced to relinquish the role in favor of Rodolfo. Furthermore, Rodolfo has just won recognition from the president of the country with a special medal. Eloy cannot hide his envy.

The irony of Buero is apparent from the initial appearance of Rodolfo, for he is the antithesis of what Don Quixote represents. He is egotistic and self-centered with a complacent attitude toward the status of society. Rodolfo's immorality is best exemplified in his lasciviousness and pre-occupation with sex. Although he is supposedly the sweetheart of Teresina (Niece), he loses no opportunity to display his physical desires for the other young women in the company.

Rodolfo's egotistical motives are illustrated by the joke he plays on Eloy and Sancho. He does not seek to assist

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 38.

Eloy by attempting to show him the folly of his dream world, but rather wishes to humiliate and discredit him before the entire cast and force him to admit to the artistic superiority of the pompous Rodolfo. He is convinced that present-day society is the best of all worlds. "No exageres./ No van tal mal el mundo y nuestro tiempo/ mejor es que otros tiempos de la historia."⁶⁷

The conflict between Eloy and the electrician represents the traditional quarrel between the idealistic dreamer and the man of science. Like Eloy the electrician deplores the immorality of society, but unlike the singer he seeks a solution to its problems in the principles of electricity.

Hábil gobierno, y astuto;
nos vuelve a todos huelguistas
y así la huelga no existe.
No es mal gobierno. Discurre.
Mas si a fondo conociera
la electricidad social
dominaría sus leyes
y no estallarían huelgas.⁶⁸

The electrician will not participate in the trick which Rodolfo plays on Eloy. He is sincere in his efforts to persuade the singer that he is alone in his dream world.

Nadie nos mira, nadie nos vigila
y nunca hubo marcianos; sólo el campo
de la electricidad inagotable
que formó estrellas y hombres. Electrones.
Y nuestra mente, eléctrica asimismo,

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 85.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 24.

conociendo mejor a cada hora
 la energía que mueve al universo.
 No hay misterios, Eloy, y está usted solo.
 Acompañado de alucinaciones
 como buen solitario, pero solo.⁶⁹

Simón (Sancho), who has the same physical shape as Cervantes' character, also shows Sancho's ideological preoccupations. Like Sancho Simón is poor and humble with a family. He is overly fond of food and drink. Simón does not share Eloy's visionary world of the Martians, but for a time he allows himself to be persuaded that he will be made burgermeister of the city when the planetary creatures arrive. Simón is a coward and deserts Eloy at the slightest sign of danger. Rodolfo's trick has left him bitterly disillusioned.

Los sesos tiene hechos agua
 y yo soy un pobre asno.
 Ni seré burgomaestre
 ni chambelán de platillos.
 Seguiré soltando gallos,
 cobrando mi escaso sueldo,
 y renegando y bufando.
 Esta es la vida, Simplicio.
 A tus hijos nunca digas
 cuando te pidan zapatos
 que tendrán botitas de oro
 por marcianos regaladas.⁷⁰

The police symbolize the repressive government which is intent upon crushing the revolution with brutal force. Ismael is innocent of the charges against him, for the government forces have burned the palace themselves. Since the

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 64.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 92.

entire populace is underground, the government is able to accuse the revolutionists of the bombing, thus liquidating their foes. The cruel and repressive attitude of the police toward the six stage hands exemplifies their contempt for the rights of ordinary citizens. These six stage hands, whose silhouettes vaguely resemble those of the six Martians, plead in vain for the fugitive's life.

In a supreme moment the dreamer Eloy is inspired to action as he sacrifices his life for his old comrade. He has been humiliated by Rodolfo, and everyone has deserted him. The idealistic world of flying saucers lies in shambles around him, and he is unable to hear the music from the helmet. Yet the dying Eloy refuses to deny the reality of the Martians, reaffirming his faith in their existence. As the others saw only the horrible aspect of Irene's body in the street below, so the characters of Mito perceive Eloy's death as a vain gesture. Ismael has been taken prisoner and will undoubtedly share his friend's fate. On another plane of reality the reader will capture the significance of Eloy's death together with Buero's hope for the future which is present throughout his works. The dreams of Eloy are the mere beginnings of a new civilization which will someday rule the world. Like the father in El tragaluz Eloy's myth of the flying saucers may be a reality in the future.

(Eloy) No es todo inútil. . . . Aunque no lo entiendas. . . .

Los actos son semillas . . . que germinan . . .
Germinará tu acción. . . . También la mía.⁷¹

The uncertainty of man's agonizing existential frustrations, coupled with his dreams of a better future, are concepts which Buero has expounded in El sueño de la razón which had its debut on February 6, 1970. The play, although favorably received by critics and public alike, was closed after one hundred and fifty performances⁷² because of the prohibitive cost of production. El sueño de la razón, which takes place in December, 1823, deals with the painter Goya's later years when he was living in the famed Quinta del Sordo on the outskirts of Madrid. As in earlier plays Buero's basic thematic preoccupations are with man in conflict with his own problems. El sueño de la razón represents a synthesis of ideas developed throughout his dramatic production and his most penetrating study up to 1970 of existential doubts and ambiguities and their effect on the reality of twentieth-century man.

The play's title derives from an etching of Goya which was the most important painting of a series of eighty plates entitled Los Caprichos. As an eighteenth-century intellectual, Goya considered reason to be the guiding force of human behavior and political order. When reason sleeps

⁷¹Ibid., p. 109.

⁷²Buero Vallejo, (Personal correspondence), 5/24/70.

the monsters of injustice, greed, and human weakness emerge. United with reason, imagination is the mother of all art and the source of its beauty.

The deaf Goya in his waning years had sought all his life to placate the Spanish throne and yet maintain some degree of artistic integrity. He fears that the despot Fernando VII is thinking of destroying him in retaliation for an uncomplimentary letter sent by Goya to his life-long friend, Martín Zapater. The strong willed old artist resists the idea of exile in France, essentially because Goya had vilified the French army in his famous paintings. However, mobs outside his house sent by the king threaten him as a Freemason and a liberal thinker. His thirty-five year old mistress, Leocadia Weiss, the mother of his child, urges him to flee, and his two friends, Dr. Arrieta and Padre Duaso, admit their inability to protect him. On the evening before Christmas eve, 1823, a small group of militiamen enter and pillage the home. Leocadia is raped by the sergeant as Goya, tied and gagged, looks on helplessly. Goya is forced to flee Spain and to seek the king's pardon.

The historical background for the action once again forms a framework for Buero to dramatize fundamental questions characteristic of earlier plays. The painter Goya, confronted by deafness, isolation, inability to communicate, and problems of sexual virility, struggles to overcome his fears of annihilation. Buero's presentation of Goya is a personal interpretation of the old artist based on historical facts

which follow more closely the artist's life than Buero's previous historical characters. It is documented that Goya did leave his house and take refuge in the home of Padre Duaso. In 1824 he asked the king's permission to leave Spain, first seeking asylum in Bordeaux. Martín Zapater was a lifelong friend from Goya's native city of Zaragoza who frequently corresponded with the artist. However, their correspondence ceased around 1801,⁷³ long before the action of this play. Leocadia Weiss became Goya's mistress around 1819, entering his home as a housekeeper. Although it is uncertain as to why she left her husband and the father of her two children, she was purported to have been a tyrant with a sharp tongue and a shrill voice, neither of which obviously troubled the deaf Goya. The author's interpretation of Leocadia is somewhat softer, as she represents the helpless victim rather than the aggressor. Although Leocadia stated in France that she had been threatened, there is no proof that she was raped. The implication in the play that there was a break in their relationship is disproved by accounts of their residence in France until Goya's death in 1828. Buero has reiterated that certain facts presented in the play, although incompatible with available historical data, remain within the realm of possibility. He has stated that he is

⁷³Richard Schickel, The World of Goya (New York: Time-Life Books, 1968), p. 86.

dealing with a play rather than a historical treatise.⁷⁴

The fourteen paintings which comprise the Pinturas negras are huge oil murals painted directly on the plaster walls of the two larger rooms of his quinta. They were intended for Goya's eyes alone and must be understood as a recapitulation of the major themes of his life and art: the frivolities of women, of marriage, of poverty, and of war, and carnival aspects of religious ritual. Like the etchings of Caprichos, they contained figures of demons, witches, and other devilish characters which symbolized Goya's conception of the grotesque absurdities of life.

Like the painter Goya, Buero's play contains many themes previously developed as well as new ideas unique to the dramatist. Among the problems he discusses are the fears which dominate one's very existence and which threaten Goya's security on all sides: the sexual decadence of an old man, the question of deafness and how it affects man's feeling of isolation and inability to communicate, the fine line drawn between someone who is sane but on the verge of madness, the political oppression exercised over an artist with a free spirit, and the disillusionment and despair of Goya at what he regarded as Spain's decadence and ruin at the hands of the king.

The multiple complexities of thematic material are unified in the simplicity of plot construction of Buero's

74 Angel Laborda, "El estreño de hoy", ABC (1970),
p. 72.

principal theme, the position of the artist and the intellectual in society. Goya's fears form a nucleus which solidifies the play's action. "En El sueño de la razón el terror lo comprende todo y a todos concierne."⁷⁵ Politically motivated initially, the artist's fears grow into human terror as the old man sees his very freedom and artistic autonomy threatened on all sides. The overwhelming aspect of fear dominates the characters as they react to the tyranny exercised by the king of Spain on the populace and more particularly on the painter Goya. The old man feels the ever-tightening encirclement by a king who is determined to maintain a stranglehold on his countrymen: "¡No quiero gallos de pelea! ;Quiero vasallos sumisos, que tiemblen!"⁷⁶ The paintings which flash on the walls of the quinta are symbolic of his struggle against his fears of impending madness and physical harm at the hands of the militia. Leocadia, overcome by fears of personal harm to herself and her children, transmits this terror to Goya and the other characters.

Francho es un liberal, un "negro", y en España
no va a haber piedad para ellos en muchos años . . .⁷⁷
La cacería ha comenzado y a él también lo cazarán.⁷⁷

⁷⁵Antonio Buero Vallejo, quoted in "Sobre El sueño de la razón", Angel Fernández Santos, Primer Acto, 117 (1970), p. 20.

⁷⁶Antonio Buero Vallejo, "El sueño de la razón", Colección teatro, 655 (extra), (Madrid: Alfíl, 1970), p. 15.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 23.

Gumersinda's fear for the safety of her family motivates her to refuse asylum to Goya and to attempt to minimize the situation. Dr. Arrieta and Padre Duaso are finally convinced by Leocadia and the threats of the militiamen that Goya should flee Spain.

Fear of isolation and lack of communication as they affect the deaf are problems of the physically handicapped which have long held special interest for Buero. In El sueño de la razón this phenomenon is continued and amplified as the audience explores the world of Goya's conscience. The author again confronts the spectator on one hand with the tormented personality of a man whose physical handicap threatens his very existence and his ability to function in a normal society, and on the other with the question of the symbolic deafness of that same society. "A veces creo que los demás están más sordos que yo."⁷⁸ Goya's fears are partially motivated by his feelings of complete isolation and inability to communicate coupled with frustration at his inability to understand his fellow men.

Por eso quiero tanto a la gente; porque nunca logro entregarme del todo, ni que los demás se me entreguen. Los quiero porque no puedo quererlos. He olvidado la voz de mi Paco. No conozco la voz de mi Marianito, ni la de mi Mariquita. Nunca oí la voz de Leocadia. Moriré . . . imaginándolas.⁷⁹

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 57.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 77.

Goya's despair and loneliness are compounded further by his inner conflicts concerning his loyalty to Spain and his disillusionment at the apparent state of decadence into which she has fallen. The artist, a self-confessed liberal, cannot conceal his horror at established social institutions such as the Inquisition and the sufferings of the citizens under the iron-fisted control of the despotic Fernando VII. "¡Bendito país, predilecto del cielo! Hasta los malhechores son inquisidores!"⁸⁰ "Un buen médico. Un buen pintor. Cruces en sus puertas. Pobre España."⁸¹

Goya's tormented conscience is the subject of Buero's most penetrating study up to 1970 of the complexities surrounding existential reality as it affects the totality of man and society. El sueño de la razón represents the author's most sophisticated effort to present this reality from the viewpoint of the protagonist. Whenever the artist is on stage no audible sounds are heard. The exceptions are certain key phrases and Leocadia's scene after she has been raped in which she is audible to the audience but not to Goya. When Goya leaves the stage the other characters' voices are heard, thus aiding the audience in understanding the plot. However, spectators who do not understand Benet sign language will

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 53.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 79.

still encounter difficulties. This audience participation can be compared to similar scenes in En la ardiente oscuridad and El concierto de San Ovidio in which the lights are extinguished, thus giving the audience the ability to identify with the blind.

There are essentially three planes of reality: that which takes place outside the realm of Goya's consciousness, the sounds which he hears, and his hallucinatory dreams. The audience, like Goya, remains uncertain as to the motivating forces behind the characters' actions, because of its inability to hear all of the dialogue. Goya's visions of the hombres-voladores and the figure of Asmodea, who carried him away from human misery to a city in the sky, represent his tormented agony for self-expression and artistic fulfillment. Goya's dreams, in which he sees bat-like men and other grotesque demons, and the voices which he hears, symbolize his individual plane of reality. They are outside the realm of every-day existence. Although the audience is certain that these visions are hallucinatory, ". . . sabemos también que las formas de captación de la realidad son, en el hombre, a veces muy extrañas."⁸² Visions and hallucinations such as these and the voice of Mariquita, Goya's daughter, usually follow a serious reversal and precipitate a struggle in Goya's mind

⁸²Buero Vallejo, "Sobre El sueño de la razón", p. 21.

to remain lucid. "Estoy delirando. ;Pero lo sé! Aunque te hable, no existes. ¿Para qué sufrir?"⁸³

The ambiguities of victory and defeat are of vital consideration in this latest work of Buero Vallejo. In the final scene Goya appears to have surrendered to the encirclement of the king. He agrees to seek refuge in the home of Padre Duaso, requesting that the priest beg Fernando VII's pardon on his behalf. This external defeat, however, is offset by the voices which Goya hears repeating the words "Si amanece nos vamos". This phrase, the title of one of Goya's etchings in which demon-like figures are seated in a semi-circle, lends a positive note to an other-wise negative conclusion. The implication is clear. Although Goya will never live to see his dream of an enlightened Spain fulfilled, there is hope that in the future the forces of reason and justice will prevail over those of tyranny, symbolized by the figures of the etchings.

Although historical facts point to later masterpieces, the question of Goya's madness remains unanswered at the play's conclusion. It is clear, however, that Buero seeks to portray the artist Goya on the verge of insanity by depicting the agonizing struggle taking place within his tormented consciousness. "Fantasías. ;No escucharé! Basta un querer y se van

⁸³Buero Vallejo, El sueño de la razón, p. 68.

los ruidicos."⁸⁴

The problem of Goya's insanity is further complicated by artistic creation and the possibility that curing the artist might also destroy his talents. The Pinturas negras, considered grotesque and monstrous by many, could be, in Dr. Arrieta's words, artistic masterpieces. "¿Y si esos adefesios que pinta en los muros fueran grandes obras? ¿Y si la locura fuera su fuerza?"⁸⁵ Buero himself has reiterated his position, stated previously in commentary articles on El tragaluz,⁸⁶ and Irene o el tesoro⁸⁷ that the insane are frequently capable of greater lucidity in certain areas of reality than the normal.

Symbolic overtones are perhaps more important in this play than in any of Buero's previous works. The focal point for this phenomenon lies in the Pinturas negras as a link to Goya's entire creative process. In previous works Goya had been an external observer, attempting to record his concept of the times. In the Pinturas negras, however, he was attempting to materialize the world of his subconscious so that his images would form a total environment. This group of fourteen paintings represent a primitive attempt at self-analysis, having much the same effect as modern psychoanalysis in which

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 67.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 84.

⁸⁶Buero Vallejo, "Una entrevista con Buero Vallejo", p. 12.

⁸⁷Antonio Buero Vallejo, Comentario a Irene o el tesoro, Colección teatro, 121 (Madrid: Alfil, 1955), p. 123.

the patient is urged to act out his secrets openly rather than keeping them locked in his mind. This world of demons and monsters has been created by Goya to express his utter despair at the decadence of his country and the incapacity of its people for positive action. Throughout the play each of these pictures is periodically illuminated on screens at the rear of the stage, thus aiding the audience in interpreting Goya's thoughts and actions. The figure of Judith, who saved her people by murdering the wicked general Holofernes, is symbolic of his personification of Leocadia as a destructive force in the artist's life. Saturn, eternal symbol of cruelty, who swallowed his sons one by one because he feared a prophecy which claimed that one of them would overcome him, represents the forces of destruction. The pilgrimage of San Isidro, a yearly religious event, had been painted previously by Goya in clear miniature-like tones depicting a group seated in a meadow on the banks of the Manzanares River on the outskirts of Madrid. In the Pinturas negras the faces of these people, now painted on the walls of the quinta, have lost their contour and human quality.

In this gloomy world of demons and witches there is, however, an element of escape. In "Visión fantástica" Goya has created the figure of Asmodea. The devil Asmodeo has been converted into the feminine figure of Asmodea, here the positive hope of humanity for liberty. In the aforementioned picture the figure of Asmodea is carrying a man to a city

high in the mountains inhabited by the hombres-voladores which symbolizes the most ardent dreams of the painter. At times the incessant voice of Mariquita, heard only by Goya and the audience, is also linked to Asmodea.

The various conflicting elements of El sueño de la razón form a structural unity which dominates the action of the play. Goya's dreams and visions symbolize his fears of eventual defeat and contrast sharply with the hombres-voladores, symbol of his hopes for an enlightened Spain.

Hay en la obra un balanceo, una oscilación entre esas raras esperanzas elevadas por Goya a la categoría de mito y la rectificación que a estas esperanzas impone continuamente la realidad de su país.⁸⁸

The figures of the artist and Fernando VII represent the clashing forces of liberalism versus conservatism and those of the intellectual versus the despot. Like his counterpart Velázquez in Las meninas, Goya's artistic liberty is in jeopardy, but unlike the previous play, there is no debate between the king and the artist in this latest work, but rather the implacable forces of the monarchy exercised over the helpless artist. Goya struggles against these pressures, creating his paintings in spite of the king's tyranny. In the first scenes Fernando VII is embroidering and Goya is retouching his paintings. Both men use spy glasses to view each other and both are dominated by fear. It is this fear of annihilation which motivates the king's attempts to

⁸⁸Buero Vallejo, "Sobre El sueño de la razón", p. 20.

subjugate the populace and causes Goya to create the grotesque Pinturas negras. The king does not want to destroy Goya but merely to terrify him into submission.

Leocadia represents still another force in Goya's tormented mind, for she symbolizes his fear of sexual decline and decay and his love-hate relationship with women, the subject of many paintings. Leocadia, mother of his child, is fundamentally the motivating force which permits Mariquita to remain near Goya. However his suspicions of her infidelity and her attempts to lure him to France are a constant frustration to the painter, causing him to refer to her as "zorras asquerosa".⁸⁹ The question of her infidelity is unresolved and certain statements after the rape scene indicate at least a condescending attitude on Leocadia's part toward the sergeant who raped her.

Y he sentido aquí, ante tus ojos . . . , yo he recordado llena de horror y de gozo . . . nuestros primeros tiempos Estoy perdida. Pensaba en otros cuando me entregaba a ti, pensaré en ti cuando me entregue a otros.⁹⁰

Leocadia's fears are transmitted in the panic which she expresses at being abandoned by Goya and being excluded from his will. These same fears alienate her from the aged painter and more specifically from his artistic creations which she regards as the ravings of a madman.

⁸⁹Buero Vallejo, El sueño de la razón", p. 27.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 100.

The priest Duaso and Doctor Arrieta represent contrasting elements of the conservative versus the liberal but both are men of good will. Padre Duaso is sincere in his belief that he is serving a just cause. Through loyalty to the king he is forced into ambiguous action, but his intentions are honorable. It is uncertain to what degree he is aware of his role as the pawn of the king. The conservative priest feels drawn to those on the opposite pole politically because of moral and intellectual affinities. Dr. Arrieta will not involve himself politically and is a good example of how far fear will generate in a tyrannical society. He is hesitant as to Goya's mental state, vacillating between thoughts of Goya as suffering the effects of senility or as a genius creating masterpieces. The doctor is therefore reluctant to advise Goya to flee Spain for fear of destroying an artistic giant. Apprehension for Goya's safety finally arouses some communication between Duaso and Arrieta in their attempt to save him.

The entrance of the militiamen into Goya's house and the subsequent rape of Leocadia in the artist's presence represents the catharsis so typical of each of Buero's plays from which the characters emerge with a deeper insight into their problems of self-realization. Buero considers this scene essential to the play.⁹¹ In the final scene Leocadia

⁹¹Buero Vallejo, "Sobre El sueño de la razón", p. 27.

confesses her sins of lust and sexual desire. Her voice is audible to everyone except Goya, further complicating his sense of frustration and failure. Although unable to hear her, Goya seems to sense her motives by her actions and in turn confesses his love-hate relationship with his young mistress, which led in part to her own frustration. The artist is no longer the senile old man of the first act, for the humiliation which he and Leocadia have suffered has raised them both to the level of tragedy in the Buerean sense. Goya is now aware of his limitations and those of his people together with the futility of his struggle. He has not been defeated by the forces of tyranny but by his comprehension of the reality of the world in which he lives. "Un anciano al borde del sepulcro . . . Un país al borde del sepulcro . . . cuya razón sueña."⁹² When reason sleeps, a country can only expect the worse. The answers to Goya's struggle, as those of Buero's other characters, can only be found in future generations.

In the second group of plays the solutions to which the protagonists finally arrive are based on the acceptance of their existential reality. They do not attempt escape into the illusory world of the mysterious beyond, as did the characters in the first group of plays. In La doble historia del doctor Valmy Mary accepts the tragic conclusion of Daniel's

⁹²Buero Vallejo, El sueño de la razón, p. 103.

murder as the only possible solution, and he dies smiling, acknowledging that this is the only possible solution. It is only through the death of Vicente that his brother Mario discovers that the basis of many objections against his brother has been motivated through his jealousy and frustration over his own failures. Through his marriage to Encarna, the mother of Vicente's son, Mario hopes to develop a more meaningful commitment to society. In Mito the implication is that Eloy's death, like Ignacio's of En la ardiente oscuridad, has not been in vain. A seed of discontent has been planted in the minds of the opera company. The aging artist Goya ultimately comes to grips with his own limitations as well as those of his country, clinging to his dream of an enlightened Spain in future centuries.

In the plays of Antonio Buero Vallejo man's search for the existential and moral truth seems to lie in future societies, but this does not prevent him from relentlessly pursuing his quest during his lifetime. In the first group of plays the solutions of the protagonists lie in the mysteries of a dream world, while in the second group Buero's characters resolve their problems within the framework of everyday existence while dramatizing their dreams on the stage. While the author's interest in the nebulous concept of reality and truth can be perceived as more intense in these eight plays, Buero has explored the perplexing questions of

the reality-illusion conflict throughout his dramatic production.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The concept of reality in the theater of Buero Vallejo represents an evolutionary process present in his earliest works and continuing to his most recent productions. It found its genesis in the costumbrista Spanish tradition and more specifically in the social-moralistic theater of Benavente as well as Unamuno's theater of ideas. Buero's early plays such as Historia de una escalera and Hoy es fiesta have settings in Madrid's tenement houses. They are primarily concerned with man's struggle against the inexorable forces of a seemingly futile existence which appears to condemn him to poverty and social depravity. In a later period Buero uses historical settings to portray the individual's struggle for self-realization.

Appearing concurrently with the costumbrista element is Buero's concern with man's struggles against physical handicaps which prevent him from gaining insight into basic truths. This trend is exemplified in En la ardiente oscuridad. In later plays such as El tragaluz and El sueño de la razón Buero has combined these earlier tendencies with many aspects of epic-vanguard theater, turning his attention to psychological aspects of previous themes.

Buero's concern for reality has been a fundamental theme throughout his work.

La realidad es un enigma. El hombre aspira a conocerla. El teatro también. No es insólito mi interés por ella; a todo verdadero dramaturgo le ha interesado.¹

However, in more recent plays he does seem to focus this reality-illusion conflict more sharply.

No creo haber examinado más ese tema en mis últimas obras; en obras tan antiguas como, por ejemplo, En la ardiente oscuridad o Aventura en lo gris se trata a fondo. Aunque es posible que, en cuanto a la forma, algunas de mis obras recientes sean más modernas y convincentes.²

Because of this evolutionary process attempts to classify the author's theater have proved to be a difficult if not impossible task. Early critics³ seeking to divide it into realistic and symbolic theater, were refuted by later writers⁴ and the author himself.⁵ Buero has repeatedly insisted that all his works contain elements of both tendencies.

In attempting to divide his plays several points must be remembered. Numerous critics have judged Buero an extremely pessimistic writer.⁶ This is largely due to their inability

¹Above, Chapter III, footnote 1.

²Antonio Buero Vallejo, (Personal correspondence), 5/24/70.

³Above, Chapter III, footnotes 18-22.

⁴Above, Chapter III, footnotes 23-24.

⁵Above, Chapter III, footnotes 25-26.

⁶Above, Chapter I, footnotes 11-12.

to comprehend the earlier plays which were essentially ambiguous. In Buero's world man must find a solution to the truth, not only in himself, but in society. His plays present no solutions, because man has found no concrete answers to his problems. In Buero's theater the emphasis is not so much on the goals themselves, but on man's continuous struggle to realize them. "Pese a toda duda, creo y espero en el hombre como espero y creo en otras cosas."⁷ In earlier plays Buero's characters seem to cling to a dream world of the mysterious beyond as the ultimate solution, whereas in later plays his heroes accept solutions based on the world of everyday existence.

Although the author maintains that all his plays have an element of hope, a possible division of Buero's plays could be made between those of a more negative spirit, holding out little hope for man, and those of a more optimistic nature. In such a classification En la ardiente oscuridad, Historia de una escalera, Las cartas boca abajo, and Irene would be placed on the negative pole, whereas others such as La señal que se espera, Hoy es fiesta, El concierto de San Ovidio and El tragaluz could be considered as containing more hope. The difficulty in this type of division would naturally stem from the nebulous degrees of hope and pessimism in each play and

⁷Antonio Buero Vallejo, "El teatro de Buero Vallejo visto por Buero Vallejo", Primer Acto, 1 (1957), p. 6.

the problem of drawing a definitive line between the two poles.

Contrary to those who would label Buero's theater as predominantly social, the author is more interested in writing theatrical works than in creating plays which expound social ideologies. The essential aspect of Buero's theater is daily life with its tragic possibility of a future hope to which man must cling if he has any desire for survival. For the author the present world represents an existential impossibility which challenges man to conquer in much the same way as the heroes of Buero's historical plays. In later plays the positive element is stronger as Buero's message of a deeper and therefore more significant truth becomes more hopeful for Spain and for man.

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