

THE PROTAGONIST IN THE THEATRE OF ANTONIO BUERO VALLEJO

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to study the protagonists in the theatre of Antonio Buero Vallejo and the themes that are demonstrated by means of them.

In the first chapters the plays are grouped essentially chronologically and the protagonists of each are discussed.

The concluding chapter attempts to consolidate the findings of the preceding chapters and examines the general characteristics and the chronological evolution of Buero's protagonists.

WORKS BY ANTONIO BUERO VALLEJO

Historia de una escalera	1949
Las palabras en la arena	1949
En la ardiente oscuridad	1950
La tejedora de sueños	1952
La señal que se espera	1952
Casi un cuento de hadas	1953
Madrugada	1953
Irene o el tesoro	1954
Hoy es fiesta	1956
Las cartas boca abajo	1957
Un soñador para un pueblo	1958
Las Meninas	1960
Hamlet, Príncipe de Dinamarca (Shakespeare)	1961
El concierto de San Ovidio	1962
Aventura en lo gris (definitive version)	1963
La doble historia del doctor Valmy	1964
Madre Coraje y sus hijos (Bertolt Brecht)	1966
El tragaluz	1967

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## INTRODUCTION

Antonio Buero Vallejo is a humanist; his principal preoccupation is man. Thus, a study of his protagonists is relevant to an understanding of his theatre.

Existential, moral, and social problems are inseparable in Buero's theatre and these are the problems that his protagonists demonstrate. His characters may be viewed on three levels: on the superficial level of their immediate problem in the plot, on the level of the social condition in which they are situated, and on the universal level of their portrayal of man as a moral being faced with the problem of giving meaning to his existence.

However, Buero's protagonists are more than symbols of existential, moral, and social positions. He was greatly influenced by Unamuno's ideas on personality and free will and his characters come to life as individual personalities who are faced with a choice or have made a choice in the past. Frequently they end in failure and Buero's theatre is sometimes considered to be pessimistic.

José Monleón suggests that the meaning of Buero's tragedy is "Hay que tener esperanza y, al mismo tiempo..... es tonto tenerla"<sup>1</sup>. He sees the influence of Camus and the idea that:

1. José Monleón, El Mirlo Blanco 10: Antonio Buero Vallejo, Madrid, Taurus Ediciones, 1968, p.29.

"El absurdo existe porque el hombre está sometido a la contradicción entre su racionalidad y el caos de su entorno, entre su necesidad de entender y ordenar el mundo y el desorden y la arbitrariedad que lo envuelven".<sup>2</sup>

However, Buero, himself does not believe that tragedy is pessimistic. He states that:

"La tragedia no surge cuando se cree en la fuerza infalible del destino, sino cuando, consciente o inconscientemente, se empieza a poner en cuestión al destino. La tragedia intenta explorar de qué modo las torpezas humanas se disfrazan de destino".<sup>3</sup>

Much of the existing evil in the world results from man's own imperfection, egoism, and immorality. In the realm of social and moral evils there is much that man can do to improve existing conditions, even though changes may appear to be unattainable. Although complete solutions to the problems are impossible, one can satisfy his anguish to a certain extent by giving supreme value and importance to man and directing his attention to improving the quality of life as we know it.

However, the individual is limited in his efforts to do so both by society and by his own imperfection. His need for freedom conflicts with his need for responsibility towards his fellow man and he is tortured by his conscience when he has behaved irresponsibly. He needs love and understanding, but he feels isolated from others partly because of his lack of communication with them. In the face of these obstacles, the surrounding chaos, and the certainty of death, the desire to give meaning to life appears to be futile. Buero's characters demonstrate this dilemma.

2. loc. cit.

3. Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Sobre teatro", El mirlo blanco 10: Antonio Buero Vallejo, ed. José Monleón, Madrid, Taurus Ediciones, 1968, p.62.

## CHAPTER I

### Some Early Plays

En la ardiente oscuridad

Las palabras en la arena

La tejedora de sueños

With the exception of Historia de una escalera, which appeared in 1949, Buero's early plays are essentially existential in theme. The protagonists are confronted with the problem of how to live to give meaning to their life in the midst of so much suffering and frailty and in the face of death which awaits everyone. Of course, a perfect solution to this problem is impossible and the search causes them to be in continual conflict with others as well as within themselves.

En la ardiente oscuridad, Buero's first play, was written in one week in the summer of 1946<sup>4</sup>. It is set in an institution for the blind in which the residents are living happy, "normal" lives. They are blind not only physically, but also spiritually. They are blind to the intolerable, true nature of their existence. Like humanity in general, they have tried to forget the truth of their limitations and have searched for happiness by conforming to the standard goals of a happy life - love, marriage, and amusements, such as sports.

Ignacio, a new arrival at the institute, will not accept his fate (ie. his physical blindness which represents man's limitations

4. Antonio Buero Vallejo, En la ardiente oscuridad (comentario), Cádiz, Ediciones Alfíl, 1954, p.86.



and lack of understanding) and struggles against it ceaselessly. He disrupts the happy atmosphere of the institute and gradually succeeds in winning the majority of the inhabitants over to his way of thinking. He even gains the sympathy of Juana, the girlfriend of Carlos.

Carlos is the main advocator of the happy, carefree life of unquestioning conformity. He represents the majority of humanity in his choice of accepting life as it is and is the more sympathetic of the two protagonists.

Ignacio's personal appearance reflects his state of mind. He appears in the play dressed in black and rather unkempt in comparison to the others who are neat and gay. He insists on using his stick to walk with, while the others do not use one inside the institute.

His father is overly protective of him. For example, he does not want him to play sports because this would be too dangerous. Ignacio is indifferent to everyone's efforts to help him. He rejects the efforts of his blind companions to befriend him, saying that he wants real friends, not "ilusos" and threatens to leave the institute. After Juana persuades him to stay, he warns her that he is burning in the darkness and will make them burn also.

In his commentary on the play, Buero informs us that Ignacio's metaphysical anguish is

"tan inconcreta que, como ciego, llega a confundirla paradójicamente con el deseo de resolver su concreta desgracia física."

He explains his use of blindness as a symbol and the role of Ignacio in relationship to it.

"El símbolo de la ceguera - de las tinieblas - es doble. Su otra cara la constituyen la visión y la luz. Una luz que no es física sino cualquier suerte de iluminación superior, racional o irracional que pueda distender o suprimir nuestras limitaciones. El "Ignacio" de mi obra anhela la "luz" pero no la tiene, ni la tuvo. Con esto queda claro que no es un mesías aunque su actuación sea parcialmente mesiánica, no puede serlo porque es un pobre ser humano cargado de pasiones encontradas, que busca la luz..... sin ser, a veces, demasiado bueno. Y tal vez por ello la luz se le niegue. Pero se le ha dado el anhelo, y no es poco." <sup>6</sup>

Although Ignacio is the only character in the play who is spiritually awake in that he denies the "blind" life of conformity and will not resign himself to living without light (or enlightenment), he is unsympathetic because he is completely egoistic and is unnecessarily unkind to the others. It may be that he is actually helping them by trying to awaken them to the truth, but there is something negative about his approach. On the superficial level of physical blindness, he is trying to alter what is essentially unchangeable. It seems that it would be better to adjust to the existing conditions as well as working for improvement.

The fact that his struggle cannot possibly be successful in the world as we know it is recognized by Carlos, who tells Ignacio that what he really wants is to die. Complete enlightenment or perfection is impossible in life.

Ignacio succeeds in changing the atmosphere of the institute completely. The students no longer care about their work or their personal appearance, because he tells them that these things do not matter when they cannot see.

6. Ibid., p.86.

Only Carlos challenges Ignacio's views, maintaining that seeing people have other handicaps and everyone must make the best of his lot. Ignacio counters this reasoning cruelly, by silently moving a piece of furniture in order to trip him.

Everything Carlos believed in has been destroyed; even Juana has transferred her affection to Ignacio. Finally, after being unsuccessful in pleading with Ignacio to allow the others to return to the old life and later begging him to leave the institute, Carlos becomes overcome by hate and murders Ignacio.

The others seem to be relieved by Ignacio's death, believing that he committed suicide, since he was such an unhappy person. They will return to the old life.

Ignacio has had his victory, however. Carlos will now never again be able to live peacefully within himself. He is now the tormented, miserable soul that Ignacio was. He now begins to see that the problem of man's destiny is an unfathomable question. However, although he realizes that he was wrong, he will never admit it to anyone. Similarly, he will not admit that he murdered Ignacio, but will spend the rest of his life lonely and tormented by his conscience.

Carlos, Buero explains, is one of those who

"dudan en su interior de la solidez de su "ciega tranquilidad", pero que morirían antes de confesar que no están tan ciegos."<sup>7</sup>

If we identify with Carlos we are forced to wonder what we, or our society, are capable of doing to those who differ from us in their

7. Ibid., p.90.

way of thinking or who threaten to awaken us to the unbearable, true nature of our existence, which we try to forget or deny.

The play presents a difficult problem because the philosophies of both Carlos and Ignacio are partially correct, but are insufficient in themselves. It is wrong to live a false life, blind to the truth and isolating oneself from the doubt and suffering of reality, but in order to live, one must adjust oneself to the existing conditions to a certain extent. One must accept life as an end in itself, and being aware of its incomprehensible aspects and its imperfection, work towards greater understanding and improvements.

Buero explains that the conflict is

"la insoluble contradicción de dos posturas en el fondo análogas. Porque Ignacio es un soñador de las verdades que desconoce y por eso parece un radical e intrasigente realista; mientras Carlos y su colegio, tan realistas y positivos en su proyecto de vida como pocos amigos de inmateriales inquietudes, sueñan el sueño inconsistente y vago de sus ilusiones de normalidad.... Una agonía humana frente al destino se articula en la oposición de estas dos parciales verdades. Ignacio tiene su claroscuro. La Institución a quien combate posee el suyo. El antagonismo entre estas dos sombras parciales que no llegan a formar la luz completa, pero que lo pretenden es también, a su manera, edificante."<sup>8</sup>

Las palabras en la arena, written in 1948 and first performed in 1949,<sup>9</sup> is a one act play set in Biblical times.

At the scene of the attempted stoning of an adulteress, the protagonist, Asaf, is warned by Christ that he is a murderer. He will not tell his friends what Christ wrote in the sand for him, because he does not want to believe it and is afraid they will think it is true.

8. Ibid., p. 91.

9. Isabel Magaña Schewill, ed., Dos dramas de Buero Vallejo (Introducción), New York, Appleton - Century - Crofts, 1964, p.2.

Upon returning home he finds that his wife has been having an affair with a Roman soldier, becomes enraged, and kills her. He is then in complete misery over what he has done. What Christ wrote for him was true.

One is tempted to interpret the play as showing that man is predestined irrevocably to a certain, unchangeable fate. This was not Buero's intention, however. It should be interpreted as a warning that we are all capable of murder even though we may not suspect it and we must guard against it. Asaf was warned and should have recognized the possibility of the accusations being true and chosen to make it untrue.

Violence solves nothing. What does Asaf achieve by murdering his wife? By doing so he loses everything - his wife, whom he believed he loved, his happiness, and his freedom. He is "un hombre vencido". He will be punished by society and by remorse for the rest of his life.

On the other hand, everything would have been all right if he had forgiven her as Christ had taught. Nothing would have been lost. If he had really loved her and forgiven her, they could have lived happily in the true love that his forgiveness would have proven.

We are probably all capable of violence as a heritage from our cave ancestors, but it is time we changed our nature and our environment. Buero demonstrates, time and time again, that violence

solves nothing and leads only to misery and despair.

Love, kindness, and forgiveness, on the other hand, are positive feelings which give value to humanity and lead to hope and happiness.

La tejedora de sueños, Buero's version of the story of Ulysses and Penelope, was written in 1950 and first produced in 1952.<sup>10</sup> The plot follows the external events of the legend of Penelope exactly, but she is not pictured as the epitome of the chaste, faithful wife for which she has been famous. In Buero's play, she has been faithful to Ulysses outwardly, but has inwardly enjoyed having suitors court her and has dreamt of a possible true love with one of them - Anfino - who is different from the others because he really loves her and sees her as a beautiful queen, whereas the others are only interested in gaining her kingdom or amusing themselves with the palace slaves.

Penelope dreams of Anfino while she is weaving, although everyone believes that she is waiting for Ulysses to return. She wants to choose Anfino from among the suitors, but she is afraid that if she does, the others will kill him. She is a weaver of dreams, but does not dare act to fulfill them. At night she unweaves them to keep the suitors waiting and continue her dreaming.

Finally, she reveals her true feelings to Anfino, who offers to challenge the other suitors to combat in order to win her. He is sincere in his love for her, continually protects her and her son, and does not join in the revelry and selfish pleasures of the other suitors.

10. Antonio Buero Vallejo, La tejedora de sueños (comentario), Madrid, Ediciones Alfíl, 1952, p.77.

After the stranger (Ulysses disguised) has suggested a test for the suitors with Ulysses' bow and arrow, Penelope wants Anfino to try them out ahead of time, but he is too noble and honest to take an unfair advantage. After all the suitors have failed the test, Ulysses, who can still stretch the bow inspite of his age, kills them all with it from the balcony while they attempt to flee from him. Anfino, however, comes up to face him honourably.

Penelope is furious. She will always remain faithful to the memory of Anfino who was noble and good and loved her for herself.

Ulysses was petty and cowardly. He was a coward because he returned disguised, afraid of what he would find and because he killed the suitors from the balcony, dishonourably. He doubted her love and faithfulness and he doubted his own worth and that she could still love him. If he had not come in disguise she might have transferred her dreams to him, since she had not yet revealed her true feelings for Anfino before his return. She upbraids him:

"Ahora debo decirte que tu cobardía lo ha perdido todo. Porque nada, ¡entiéndelo bien! ¡nada! había ocurrido entre Anfino y yo antes de tu llegada....., salvo mis pobres sueños solitarios. Y si tu me hubieses ofrecido con sencillez y valor tus canas ennoblecidas por la guerra y los azares, ¡tal vez! yo habría reaccionado a tiempo. Hubiera sido, a pesar de todo, el hombre de corazón con quien toda mujer sueña... El Ulises con quien yo soñé, ahí, los primeros años... ¡Y no este astuto patán, hipócrita y temeroso, que se me presenta como un viejo, ruín para acabar de destruirme toda ilusión posible!" 11

11. Ibid., p. 69.

Ulysses does not really care whether she loves him or not, as long as their reputation is saved. His values are seen as artificial, since he values outward appearance more than inward feeling. A song he composed exalts her faithfulness and this is how history will remember her, even though, ironically, she is going to be faithful to Anfino and will just wait for death to be reunited with him.

Ulysses is shown as a man of action, without principles. The reason for his fame is his brutish, physical strength. He has wasted his life away at foreign wars, because destruction was what his physical prowess suited him for. For love, generosity, and peace he was unsuited, for life, in its true meaning, he was a loser.

He is contrasted to Anfino who was pure and noble and was thus out of place in a world which does not value this. Buero comments on Anfino:

"De todas las funestas realidades del hombre: crímenes, guerras, infidelidades, odios, despotismos, traiciones, mentiras; de todas esas cosas que poseen a Ulises y que reflejan la ausencia de amor entre los seres humanos, estaba libre Anfino. Claro es que de esas cosas se forma gran parte de la vida colectiva, y por eso Anfino era un ser poco apto para la vida."<sup>12</sup>

Penelope hopes for a day when all men will be like Anfino and war will not exist.

"Que tengan corazón para nosotras y bondad para todos, que no guerreen ni nos abandonen..... Pero para eso falta una palabra universal de amor que sólo las mujeres soñamos..... a veces."<sup>13</sup>

12. Ibid., p.83.

13. Ibid., p.72.



Penelope has lost outwardly, but won inwardly. Although the easy, compromising solution would be to pretend to transfer her affection to her renowned husband who has at last returned from battle, she chooses instead to remain faithful to her ideal love for Anfino.

CHAPTER II

Plays Written in 1952 and 1953

La señal que se espera

Casi un cuento de hadas

Madrugada

The three plays in this chapter are generally considered to be of lesser importance than Buero's other plays. Although they have tragic undercurrents and contain many of the themes that are found throughout Buero's works, the three may be considered as experiments or dramatic exercises which Buero tried once and then rejected. La señal que se espera, which is set in Galicia with its tradition of mysterious folklore, ends completely happily. Casi un cuento de hadas is a realistic adaptation of a fairy tale and uses two actors to portray one character. Madrugada is like a detective story and has unity of time, place and action. A large clock on stage ticks off the time of the action which is exactly the duration of the play itself.

La señal que se espera is the least typical of Buero's plays. The protagonists are rather conventional, wealthy characters with nothing unusual about them. Enrique does not believe that his wife, Susana, really loves him, but has the courage to invite her old lover, Luis, to spend the summer in the country with them in order to find out the truth. Luis comes to convalesce because he is recovering from a nervous breakdown and suffering from amnesia about the events which preceded his illness.

The plot revolves around an awaited miracle. Luis has had an Aeolian harp set up in the hope that it will play the song that he needs to remember in order to be able to continue his life as a composer. Susana, Luis and the servants all have faith that the miracle will occur. Anything is possible in the mysterious Gallician countryside.

Both Susana and her husband Enrique become miserable because of the other's apparent lack of love for them and both contemplate committing suicide. However, both decide to discover and face the truth instead. Susana plays the song on the harp, although she did not know that she knew it, and realizes that it is her love for her husband that enabled her to do it. Enrique decides to ask Susana to tell him the truth about her love for Luis and finds that she really loves him after all.

A series of happy coincidences occurs and the play ends in contentment for all the characters. They realize that happiness is momentary and fleeting, however. As the friends are united in a moment of peace at the end of the play, Enrique comments:

"El mundo es curioso. Es como una melodía de la que casi nunca percibimos otra cosa que los sonidos ingratos..... Pero, a veces, viene un minuto como este: un minuto perfecto de paz y comprensión. Por alguna misteriosa ley, se nos regala a los pobres seres humanos el prodigio de las coincidencias... y de los momentos venturosos...

La armonía de las esferas debiera hacerse audible ahora para nuestros pobres oídos..... En este minuto único, que tal vez no se repita en nuestra vida."<sup>14</sup>

Except for the themes of the importance of truth and love which appear throughout Buero's works, there is very little in this play which is similar to the others.

14. Antonio Buero Vallejo, La señal que se espera, Madrid, Ediciones Alfíl, 1952, p.61.

Casi un cuento de hadas is the charming story of an unintelligent, but beautiful princess and an ugly, but wise prince. Rejected by everyone else, they fall in love with each other and succeed in giving to each other the attribute that was previously lacking. Riquet sees Leticia as intelligent and beautiful and Leticia sees Riquet as a handsome, ideal prince.

The play is based on a story by Perrault, but Buero's version is not a fairy tale. Although Riquet and Leticia are brought together by a fairy or witch who lives in a tower, it is love, not witchcraft, that changes them.

By means of this story, Buero demonstrates that people can be what they want to be if they want it enough and have the inner strength and confidence to make it so. Instead of continuing to be what others thought she was, Leticia became intelligent and subsequently the attitude of the others towards her changed as well. What we can be and what we seem to be can be entirely different.

Leticia is contrasted to her sister Laura who is ugly and intelligent, but is also mean. This contrast emphasizes the fact that Leticia and Riquet are good and kind to others in spite of their own shortcomings, which makes them sympathetic protagonists.

Buero solved the problems of the change in Riquet by means of using two actors to portray one character. The handsome

Riquet appears when Leticia has faith in her love for him. He is also seen by Laura, Leticia's sister, who loves him also and by Armando, the handsome prince, when the latter is about to die. In one scene the two Riquets appear together when Riquet's disillusioned, miserable ugly side argues with his ideal, handsome side about whether to leave Leticia to Armando or whether to fight to win her back.

Physical beauty is shown to be unimportant in comparison to inner virtue. Riquet who is intelligent, kind and ugly is contrasted to the handsome Armando who is described as "brutal y frío"<sup>15</sup> "guapo y vacío".<sup>16</sup> Leticia recognizes the truth that he would make her vain and foolish again and that their marriage would be loveless like that of her mother and father.

Buero demonstrates again that the way we are seen by others is unimportant in comparison to our inner self-concept. Leticia accepts Riquet's hand in marriage although she knows that everyone will think that she is acting foolishly again. She knows that he really loves her and can give her truth and understanding. Since Riquet has killed Armando, he can no longer be seen as a handsome, ideal prince, even by Leticia. However, he resolves to live in such a way that she may someday be able to see him as handsome again. They will always remember and keep as a goal the beautiful, ideal, unattainable Riquet of their first days together.

15. Antonio Buero Vallejo, Casi un cuento de hadas, Madrid, Ediciones Alfíl, 1952, p. 71.

16. Ibid., p. 72.

Madrugada, written in 1953, is a masterpiece as a suspense thriller, and contains a meaningful theme, as well.

In spite of the fact that she is overcome with grief because of her husband's death, Amalia is driven by the desire to know the truth about whether or not he really loved her. She could easily have convinced herself that he did and lived a happy life of ease, since he had married her and had left her well provided for in his will. However, since she had previously been his mistress, she is afraid that this might have been only payment for past services. She must find the truth even if it means complete misery for her future. His love, even though he is dead, is the only thing that matters to her.

Therefore, immediately after his death, she puts herself through the agony of an interrogation of his relatives assembled in the early morning hours for only 1 3/4 hours, in an attempt to discover the truth. The relatives are shown to be completely selfish and uncharitable in comparison to Amalia, who is sincerely kind and generous, and is proceeding with her plan only with great difficulty. She almost gives up several times, but forces herself to continue.

Her husband had omitted two of the relatives from the will and had been distant from her for several months. Just before dying he had said, "Desde el otro lado de la muerte te recobraré".<sup>17</sup>

17. Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Madrugada", Teatro español, 1953-54, ed; F.C. Sainz de Robles, Madrid, Aguilar, 1955, p. 157.

When the play ends, she realizes that he had blamed his brother and nephew because they had tried to slander her. She feels reunited with him in spirit even though they have been separated by death.

Again we see that it is one's inner feelings that are of value; one's reputation or outer appearance are not essential to one's happiness and do not really belong to one as inner feelings do. Amalia triumphs over the others because she is motivated by love and searches for the truth. As one of the relatives marvels:

"Es de esos pocos que piensan que hay cosas más importantes que el dinero."<sup>18</sup>

18. Ibid., p. 202.

CHAPTER III

Works Depicting Contemporary Social Evils

Historia de una escalera

Hoy es fiesta

Las cartas boca abajo

Irene o el tesoro

The four plays to be discussed in this chapter depict contemporary social evils. They criticize conditions in Spain, specifically, but the characters and problems are completely universal, as well.

Although the protagonists are involved in a personal dilemma, their main function is to be an example of or a contrast to their environment.

Historia de una escalera was written earlier than the other three plays, but was definitely their forerunner since it is a realistic portrayal of the plight of the poor. It was first written in 1947<sup>19</sup> and was Buero's first play to be performed, in 1949. It was a tremendous success with the public and was the first play containing social criticism after years of superficial light comedies in Spanish theatre.

It shows the same stairway in the same tenement building three times over a thirty year period. Each generation presented leads the same life and makes the same mistakes as the preceding one.

There is no specific protagonist in this play. Each character has his own hopes and plans for improvement, but no one is successful in fulfilling them. One believes the answer is in the

19. Isabel Magaña Schevill, Dos dramas de Buero Vallejo, (Introduction), New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967, p. 2.



labour unions, another that it lies in studying, a third turns to crime.

Fernando and Carmina, the young lovers of the first act, marry other people whom they do not love for reasons of economic necessity. In the following twenty years, although the two families are neighbours, they have scarcely spoken to one another during all that time.

In act III their children, Carmina and Fernando, fall in love with each other in spite of the fact that their families have forbidden them to see each other. The play ends with Fernando, the son, making to Carmina, the daughter, the same promises, to study, work, and make a better life than his father had made to her mother twenty years before. His father and her mother watch this scene unnoticed by their children and exchange a look of infinite melancholy.

Of course, one hopes that they will in fact succeed in changing their lives, but somehow it is doubtful that they will. Sociological studies show that the same families are on the welfare lists for generations. It is apparently very difficult to break the hold of one's environment. If this is true in a rich, young country like Canada, the problem must be even more acute in a poorer, more traditional country like Spain.

What can be done to help the poor stop the treadmill of repeating the same life generation after generation? Society must

help them, because it is almost impossible for them to help themselves.

If any two characters might be considered to be the protagonists, they would be the parents, Fernando and Carmina. Perhaps, as Borel suggests, their fatal mistake was not being true to their love for each other which was the only good thing they had. It is doubtful, however, whether marrying each other would have given them enough mutual support and strength to change their environment. They would, of course, have been less miserable than they were. In any case, the responsibility for a deep-rooted change in the condition of the poor lies with society as a whole.

The neighbours, representative of humanity in general, are shown to be incapable of helping each other and are involved in petty rivalries and jealousies, gossiping, and the fear of what the others will think, which all prevents them from communicating with each other and sharing their burden.

Hoy es fiesta, written in 1956, contains many of the same elements as Historia de una escalera, but it has a definite protagonist. Silverio is an intelligent, skilful, kind person who has purposely relegated himself to living with and helping the poor as a partial atonement for a great guilt that he feels - the responsibility for the death of his wife's daughter.

He loves his wife, Pilar, who is deaf, very much, but in his heart, he knows that he was purposely careless with her daughter. He has never had the courage to confess this to his wife, although

he needs her forgiveness to relieve him from the suffering that he endures. He is afraid that she will be unable to forgive him and that he will lose her.

Twice during the play he tries unsuccessfully to tell Pilar the truth about the little girl's death. The first time he tells her, knowing that she will not understand because she is unable to make out what he is saying. She only knows that he is very upset and tormented about something. She begs him to make it clear to her, so that she can share his grief, but his courage fails him.

Later, he sees that the neighbours are able to forgive Doña Balbina, who has cheated them all by using their money for food when she was supposed to buy a lottery ticket with it, inspite of the fact that they have been hoping all day that they might win, discussing their humble plans for the money, and have been overjoyed when the false number she showed them won. Upon finding the truth they are enraged to the point of killing her, but they are persuaded by Silverio to forgive her. Silverio finds great hope in their forgiveness of Doña Balbina and thinks that perhaps Pilar would be able to forgive him after all.

Doña Balbina's daughter, Daniela, who told the truth about the ticket to the neighbours, attempts to commit suicide, but is stopped by Silverio. By saving her, Silverio hopes that he may have somehow paid for the death of the little girl killed by his carelessness. Daniela says that she thinks of him as a father, which is what he should have been to his wife's daughter.

The cause of Daniela's deep despair is that the true reason she told on her mother is that she hated her and she will never be free from remorse because of this. This is parallel to Silverio's own dilemma of feeling that the true reason for his carelessness with the little girl was his hate for her.

He sees that day as a day of hope and pardon, and resolves to tell Pilar the truth, to stop being a coward, and to remake his life. He addresses his conscience or God:

"¿Tiene algún sentido este extraño día de fiesta? ¿Debo entenderlo como un día de esperanza y de perdón? ¿Ha sido quizá rescatada la vida de aquella niña por la de Daniela? Pero sé muy bien que sólo puedes contestarme a través de unos labios. Lo sé y lo acepto. Por quererme sólo a mí mismo, deshice mi vida. Aunque tarde, he de rehacerla. He sido un malvado y después un cobarde. Ya no lo seré más. Sé bien que el día no ha terminado para mí, que aún me falta la prueba más terrible.... Ayúdame a afrontarla."<sup>20</sup>

However, his wife has not been well for some time and she dies before he is able to confess to her. She cannot forgive him now and he will have to carry the burden of his guilt forever. She was everything for him; now he has nothing. But, the card reader reminds us all as the play ends that:

"La esperanza nunca termina.  
La esperanza es infinita." <sup>21</sup>

Perhaps, Silverio will be able to continue hoping that Pilar had always understood the truth and had had compassion for him because of her love for him, or even that she can forgive him after death.

20. Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Hoy es fiesta", Teatro español 1956-57, ed. F.C. Sainz de Robles, Madrid, Aguilar, 1958, p. 108.

21. Ibid., p.110.

His suffering resulted from his lack of courage and the fact that he hid the truth. He also lacked hope and faith in Pilar's love for him. Therefore, his life was based on a lie and on despair. Hope is a positive force which can lead to action; despair does not admit that it is any use trying. Silverio's love for Pilar was selfish; he would rather hide the truth than risk losing her.

Except for this, he was a noble person who helped others continually and seemed to see life in perspective and with good judgment. He was an idealist, referred to as "ese Quijote" by the others.

One wonders how Silverio could have hated the little girl, when he had such great capacity for good and consideration for others. But all men are a combination of good and evil and must realize that this is so and must struggle to control their bad side, which may come to the surface when they least expect it. Silverio explains:

"Hay días..... en que a todos nos sale afuera lo peor, las cosas más brutales e inconfesables. Días en que nos convertimos en otra persona. Una persona odiosa, que llevábamos dentro sin saberlo..... Y esa persona somos nosotros mismos".<sup>22</sup>

Silverio had not blinded himself to the truth; he realized that he was capable of evil, that he was guilty of the little girl's death, and that he should tell Pilar the truth. He did not have the force of character to take immediate action, but postponed it until it was too late. Death had taken away his opportunity.

22. Ibid., p. 78.

Similarly all of us should guard against waiting too long and do what we should do before it is too late.

Las cartas boca abajo written in 1957, demonstrates the great difficulty of bettering one's position in Spanish society by depicting the life of a mediocre professor and his family. There are fewer positions than men available and positions are contested by means of rigorous examinations, the outcome of which may have been determined before they have begun, because of personal recommendations and prejudices.

Félix G. Ilárraz adds that:

"It deals with some of the most negative aspects of Spanish society today. The lack of confidence between husband and wife, the lack of understanding between parents and children, and the feeling of failure and disappointment of the youth are some of the important features that are destructive of the traditional unity and confidence of Spanish family life."<sup>23</sup>

Of course, these problems are not only Spanish but also universal.

The principal character, Adela, is one of Buero's most striking and well developed characters. She is probably his best example of a person who is spiritually blind and completely egoistic. She is referred to as "ciega" several times during the play. She is not an evil person; nor has she ruined everyone's life intentionally. She, herself, describes this aspect of her life:

"Nunca logré ver claro en mis impulsos, en mis deseos...<sup>24</sup>  
Todo lo hice a destiempo. De todo me dí cuenta tarde."

23. Félix G. Ilárraz, ed., Buero: Las cartas boca abajo, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall Inc., 1967, p. v.

24. Ibid., p. 140.

She is a passive person, not an active one. This is exemplified by the untidiness of their home. She has wasted her life on a stupid, idle dream - a dream that was negative because it was oriented to the past and was completely selfish. She has spent her whole life dreaming of Ferrer-Díaz, a man she had taken from her sister and then lost herself, when they were young. Because of this dream, she has not given her husband the support that he needed and has even taught his son to scorn him and to admire Ferrer-Díaz.

For example, she knows that her husband would not want to be recommended for the job he is seeking, but wants to win it by himself. However, because, subconsciously, she wants him to be inferior to Ferrer-Díaz, she asks her brother to ask Ferrer-Díaz to recommend her husband.

She is completely selfish in her outlook and only thinks of other people in terms of what they can do for her. She wants her mute sister, Anita, to talk, but only because this will ease her conscience and give her someone to talk to. She liked to have her brother, Mauro, visit as long as he told her the things she wanted to hear, but had no further use for him when she found that he had lied to her. She does not want to let her son go away to make a better life for himself, because she wants to keep him with her.

Symbolic of her selfish attitude is her preoccupation with the birds and her egoistic desire to fly<sup>25</sup>, to become someone rich

25. Ibid., p. 58.

and important. The error of these desires is revealed when her brother Mauro destroys her image of the birds,<sup>26</sup> saying that like her they may be joyful in the morning (youth), but they are screaming with fear at dusk.

Mauro, himself, is completely disillusioned and immoral and lives by stealing, lying, and begging.

Adela's husband, Juan, is basically an honest, moral person, but he has not had the strength of character to face the truth about their life until the pressure of making a final attempt at winning a higher position for himself makes him realize the truth. Their whole life has been based on a lie.

Adela married him and tried to urge him on to success, only as revenge on Ferrer-Díaz. During the play he begs her on several occasions to be frank with him, saying that honesty and communication between them would mean more to him than the position he is seeking, but she keeps silent. Finally, he decides to turn the cards over and reveal the truth. He admits that he too has wasted his life because he has always envied Ferrer-Díaz and lost the position he was seeking because he had not read Ferrer-Díaz's books. He realizes that there is no longer any way to remedy the situation except to see it clearly. He sees that their son, Juanito, deserves a chance at life away from the stifling atmosphere of their bad example. He throws the emptiness and futility of Adela's life before her:

26. Ibid., p. 151.



"Pero, ¿qué has ganado? Una vida ficticia, llena de mentira; un hogar que era también mentira; dolor y desengaño para tu vejez.... ¡Ah!..... No sé como puedes perdonarte a tí misma tanta locura." <sup>27</sup>

The first step to improving a situation is to face the truth. Perhaps if Adela had admitted the truth earlier, even to herself, she could have changed her feelings once she had recognized the stupidity of them. If this were impossible, she could have at least taken action by leaving Juan or by going to a psychiatrist.

Buero is careful to show that there was mental illness in her family background and, like mentally ill people, she takes none of the blame upon herself. She feels that she has been the victim of life:

"todo me va aplastando.... sin que yo pueda hacer nada, inada! , para evitarlo." <sup>28</sup>

There is even a scene in which she accuses the others of plotting against her.

However, Adela cannot escape from her guilty conscience over what she has done, since the results of her selfishness are ever present in a visible form as well as in the falseness of her marriage. Her guilty conscience can be said to be personified by her sister, Anita, who lives with them and who became mute as a result of Adela's treatment of her. Adela is becoming a nervous wreck because she is afraid of Anita. She does not know what Anita is thinking or planning and she cannot find peace. She admits her guilt to Anita and begs

27. Ibid., p. 140.

28. Ibid., p. 58.

her to forgive her, but Anita will not speak. Her brother, Mauro, tells Adela that she is afraid like the birds at dusk. The marten or kite that she fears is Anita or her own conscience.

At the end of the play, Adela realizes that she has lost her son and her husband and is alone with Anita. Once again she begs for her forgiveness, admitting that she had done a terrible thing to her, but still trying to excuse herself:

"Algo terrible te hice, es cierto. Y lo más espantoso es que entonces no parecía tan grave. Si yo hubiese sabido que te podía afectar tanto..... Si hubiese sabido lo caras que pueden costar todas nuestras ligerezas."<sup>29</sup>

She begs Anita to forgive her so that they can live in peace together, but Anita will not speak. Adela is filled with fear and horror at spending the rest of her life like that, as the birds shriek outside the balcony.

Las cartas boca abajo is probably the most pessimistic of Buero's works, except that there is, of course, the possibility that Juanito, the son, will make a better life for himself. Adela's example shows the misery that man can cause his fellows because of his selfishness and blindness. Her case is similar to that of most of humanity since she does not go as far as murdering for selfish reasons, like Carlos of En la ardiente oscuridad, but just gropes her way through life blindly and selfishly without bothering to look for true values or to think of what the results of her actions might be

29. Ibid., p. 154.

for someone else. She is really a very human character in many ways. She is very realistically portrayed; her faults are not too evil or exaggerated. She is also the most frightening of Buero's characters since her faults are the unpardonable ones of selfishness, thoughtlessness, passivity, and self-deception that most of us share with her.

Irene o el tesoro appeared in 1954, following the three plays discussed in Chapter II. It can be considered a work of social criticism since it depicts the wretched atmosphere of a miserly moneylender's apartment. It demonstrates the falseness and stupidity of overemphasizing the importance of money and the suffering that this causes is magnified because it is seen in an extreme situation.

The play also includes the fantastic element and the ontological question, in the form of the elf who helps Irene and wonders if he exists.

Irene is a complete contrast to the environment of her father-in-law, Dimas', apartment. She is a good, kind person who has worked for her in-laws like a slave, cleaning and sewing, since the death of her husband. She does not complain about her miserable life. On the contrary she feels guilty because she is not bringing any money into the house as her father-in-law would wish. She also deeply regrets the death of her baby, who died at birth, and longs to have a child to hold.

It is obvious that she cannot survive in the atmosphere of her father-in-law's house. She is too sweet a person to be able to face the reality of it and continue to live. Even her husband's death was a result of her father-in-law's miserliness. He allowed his son to die because he did not want to spend money on the necessary medicine.

Buero mentions in several works that there are two possible alternatives to facing reality - one is blindness; the other is madness. It seems that Irene has chosen the second of these two. She is depicted as a very sensitive person, who is prone to fantasy, and it is very believable that she would go crazy in such an unbearable atmosphere.

However, it is not completely clear whether or not she is really crazy, because although the other characters are unable to see the elf that Irene sees, he sometimes appears when Irene is not there.

It could be that Buero wanted to show us that we are all capable of a little madness, but it seems more probable that he wanted to reveal his belief that something marvelous and wonderful exists beyond the humdrum reality of our daily lives. This could be interpreted as God or as imagination or as something else. The voice, which directs the elf, denies being God:

"No pronuncies esta palabra. Es demasiado elevada para todos nosotros."<sup>30</sup>

30. Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Irene o el tesoro", Teatro español 1954-55, ed. F.C. Sainz de Robles, Madrid, Aguilar, 1959, p. 253.

But, it seems to represent some kind of harmony or source of wisdom.

The elf worries about whether he, himself, exists. The voice advises him, "esa preocupación se te irá trabajando. Busca."<sup>31</sup> His work, of course, is looking for the treasure, which turns out to be Irene's goodness. It is no use worrying about whether or not we exist. We should work to find the meaning of existence as we know it.

Once the elf has found Irene he takes her away to his country by means of the beautiful, illuminated road out the balcony. Although the other characters see her as dead on the street below, she is also seen going down the road, singing, carrying the elf. This could represent what Irene's own mind is thinking, which is reality for her. Her hallucinations may be interpreted as hallucinations or as reality since the elf appears when she is not there. No one knows what is real for someone else and sanity is relative to one's point of view.

Similarly, we must have a dream and faith that a miracle can be achieved in order to have a dream fulfilled and to see the fantastic. Most people are unaware of the marvels that imagination could bring them. The voice informs the elf:

"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."<sup>32</sup>

31. Ibid., p. 231.

32. Ibid., p. 213.

Irene's goodness and generosity are contrasted to the unbelievable miserliness of Dimas, her father-in-law; the hate and jealousy of his daughter, Aurelia; and the misery and despair of his wife, Justina.

Dimas has denied everything to his family. He fights with them over the change from the groceries and makes them keep the lights out to save on electricity. He constantly reminds Irene that she is a burden and that she could not even give them a grandson. Secretly he realizes that they could never find a maid who would work as hard as she does and that he would have to pay a maid, while Irene receives nothing.

Aurelia resents the love of Daniel, their boarder, for Irene and hates her for it. She is the most directly responsible for Irene's death. She tells Daniel that it is useless to try to help Irene when she overhears his proposal of marriage to her. Later, when Irene is locked in her room, afraid that they are going to take her to the insane asylum, Aurelia pounds on her door and screams that she can't escape.

Justina, driven to despair by her husband's miserliness, plots to have him committed to the insane asylum and tricks him into going there, by telling him he has to take the paper to have Irene committed. It is because of this trick on Dimas that Irene is made to think that she is the one who is being committed and thus she is willing to escape with the elf.

Dimas is a sick person and it is not unreasonable that he should be taken away to the asylum. What makes his committal shocking is the fact that he is betrayed by his wife and friend, and the realization that his type of illness is accepted by society as more normal than that of Irene. He is only an extreme case of what is socially acceptable.

Irene is always good and kind to all of them and wishes to stay with them. When the elf has found the treasure, she offers it to Dimas so that he will let her stay there. Of course, the others cannot see the treasure, since it represents her goodness, which they do not recognize as valuable.

Daniel loves Irene, but although she knows that he is good, she believes that he tricked her because he was the one who brought the doctor to see her. She cannot believe him, because she knows that he thought she was crazy, but she forgives him. She forgives them all. She cannot marry Daniel at the end of the play, because as the voice tells the elf, she can no longer live without "lo maravilloso".<sup>33</sup>

Irene remained true to her ideals of goodness, kindness, and love for others, even though the only way she was able to do so was by means of imagination. She overcame the others by refusing to be disillusioned by them. Her death, can be interpreted as a reward for her, since it was a release from the horrible environment she was in. However, one is tempted to believe that she was actually going

33. Ibid., p. 253.

to Heaven or to some happier existence, singing down the luminous road with the elf.

The one criticism that might be made of Irene is that she could have faced reality and found a job in another home. However, considering Irene's personality it is not really unrealistic that she would love her in-laws anyway and choose to stay in their house rather than risk hurting their feelings by leaving them.



CHAPTER IV

Social Criticism from an Historial Viewpoint

Un soñador para un pueblo

Las Meninas

El Concierto de San Ovidio

The three plays discussed in this chapter criticize contemporary social evils by depicting parallel or similar historial situations, which also point to the historical causes of contemporary problems.

This is the same technique that is employed by Arthur Miller in The Crucible in which he uses the seventeenth century Salem witch trials to show how the masses can be turned to hysterical violence against innocent people to parallel the situation of the McCarthy era in the United States.

Un soñador para un pueblo shows how the masses can be turned against a leader who is actually their benefactor; Las Meninas shows the immorality and hypocrisy of the wealthy, ruling class, and El Concierto de San Ovidio depicts the lack of morality and culture of the "nouveaux riches".

Un soñador para un pueblo, 1958, is based on an actual historical event -el motín de Esquilache, 1766-. It is subtitled by Buero "versión libre de un episodio histórico" and is his version of what the personal side of the affair could have been. The play can be enjoyed on this level as well as on a symbolic level.

Esquilache, the prime minister of Carlos III, is shown to be a man of high ideals, good, and heroic with the best interest of the common people at heart. He works zealously to accomplish reforms and make his dreams for the people a reality.

He tries to set a good example by leading exemplary private and public lives, but is thwarted in this attempt by his wife who accepts gifts and asks for favours behind his back and who is having an affair with a man from the Dutch Embassy. She has also obtained good positions for their sons who are useless and undeserving. She advises Esquilache:

"Hay que.... tomar lo que la vida pueda darnos aún.... Aunque no sea más que dinero..... o poder."<sup>34</sup>

Her attitude causes him great embarrassment, because he is trying to rule Spain according to his principles, but people are able to see that his own family is given special privileges. He is so sincere in his efforts to improve conditions that he asks the King to give him a separation from his wife and take his sons' positions away from them.

He is also opposed by many of the nobility who are content to keep things as they are or who are desirous of personal power and who incite the masses to revolt against him.

A direct contrast to Esquilache is the Marqués of Ensenada, who was the prime minister before him. Ensenada admits having lost all his illusions long before; he no longer has faith in the people and

34. Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Un soñador para un pueblo", Teatro español 1958-59, ed. F. C. Sainz de Robles, Madrid, Aguilar, 1960, p. 221.

says that he believes in "todo para el pueblo, pero sin el pueblo".<sup>35</sup> He is really most interested in power for himself, since it was he who instigated the revolt to remove Esquilache from power, although he knew that Esquilache truly worked for and loved the people.

Fernandita, the servant girl that Esquilache enjoys talking to, symbolizes the uneducated, but basically good and honest populace in which Esquilache always retained his faith. Esquilache sees himself as "un niño que todavía quisiera confiar en los demás"<sup>36</sup> and is "lleno de temores".<sup>37</sup> However, he never loses his faith in the people, although they revolt against him and in the end he asks Fernandita, as a representative of the people, to judge who is right, himself or Ensenada. Ensenada did not believe in the goodness of the common people and had planned to plunge the country into war to oust Esquilache and regain power for himself. Esquilache, given a free choice by the King, had sacrificed himself to save the country from war, because of his love of the people. He tells Ensenada that the populace condemns him.

Esquilache's concern for Fernandita symbolizes his concern for the populace. His interest is purely altruistic, although it is interpreted as otherwise by his wife and others. His extreme courage is demonstrated when he returns to his house when it is held by the

35. Ibid., p. 216.

36. Ibid., p. 224.

37. Loc. cit.

rebels, in order to rescue Fernandita and refuses to say "muera Esquilache" even when he is threatened with violence. He will not compromise himself. This foreshadows his later supreme sacrifice in renouncing his post as prime minister in order to save the country from war. He did not want the position for his own prestige or power, but he wanted it desperately because there was so much that he wanted to do for the people.

Although he is alone and miserable at the end of the play, his solitary figure harmonizes with the joyful music in the background because he has triumphed over Ensenada and over selfishness and still has faith in the people to create a better future.

He had admonished Fernandita that it was her choice whether she slipped back into the clutches of Bernardo, who had raped her, or struggled to be free of him and true to her ideals. At the end of the play she lives up to Esquilache's faith in her and has the strength and courage to refuse Bernardo.

Similarly, the destiny of the common people depends on us, ourselves. We are free to choose our future, if we do not blind ourselves to seeing the right choice or lack the force to work for it.

Esquilache and Fernandita were both born "plebeyos" and thus represent the common people. Although their future lives might appear to be miserable outwardly, they have triumphed inwardly over selfishness and weakness, making the difficult, but correct choice. As individuals we can identify with them and follow their examples.

One feels that Esquilache would have given his life if that had been the alternative choice to the civil war. If he had not been an historical character and thus had to continue to live to keep the definite historical facts in tact, Buero probably would have made him choose to die.

On the other other hand, life in exile with his unsympathetic family might be worse than death for him anyway.

According to H. A. Myers, the appeal that the tragic hero has for us results from his ability to do or die. We wish we could be like him and give everything uncompromisingly for our cause.<sup>38</sup> Esquilache is this type of hero. However, although he is stronger than humanity in general, he still has weaknesses and speaks of having doubts or fears which makes him a realistic, human character with whom we can identify even more readily.

At the end of Un soñador para un pueblo there is still no answer to the problem of what to do about the ignorant, easily-manipulated masses. If we have faith in the basic goodness of humanity, then the people must be educated to be fully aware in order to be able to understand the truth and support the government that is really best for them. As for those who govern, they must be dreamers and idealists as well as men of action. As Esquilache tells us:

38. H. A. Myers "Heroes and the Way of Compromise" in Robert W. Corrigan Tragedy: Vision and Form, Chandler Publishing Co., San Francisco, 1965, p. 135.

"Ahora sé una cosa: que ningún gobernante puede dejar de corromperse si no sueña ese sueño."<sup>39</sup>

Faith in humanity and the recognition of the value of the human being above all else are the most important things. War, as the supreme destroyer of humanity and cause of human suffering must be avoided at all costs.

Buero's next play, Las Meninas, 1960, is set in seventeenth century Spain at the court of Felipe IV. Subtitled by Buero "fantasía velazqueña", it depicts court life very realistically and, while keeping the historical facts intact, gives a very interesting portrayal of what Velázquez' character may possibly have been. According to Rodríguez-Castellano,<sup>40</sup> Velázquez' preoccupations and anxieties are those of a man of talent anywhere and anytime, and so it is not unlikely that Velázquez would have thought critically about the problems of society as Buero has him do.

Buero's Velázquez is a restless person, aware of the evils of society, but unable to do anything about them since his life is devoted to his painting and he is dependent on the King for patronage. At the same time, he is not afraid to confront the King with the truth, to defend himself, and to shelter Pedro in his home. He is a lonely character because he is superior to everyone else. Even the King has a nightmare in which he is a dwarf and Velázquez is a giant. He is

39. Antonio Buero Vallejo, Un soñador para un pueblo, p. 280.

40. Antonio Buero Vallejo, Las Meninas, ed. Juan Rodríguez Castellano, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963, p. 6.

not understood by anyone except Pedro and the Princess María Teresa. She says that everyone else at court is a child compared to him. Everyone else, including his wife, is involved in petty jealousies and selfishness.

When his wife accuses him of thinking of another woman, he says that he does need someone who can understand him:

"A alguien que me ayude a soportar el tormento de ver claro en este país de ciegos y de locos."<sup>41</sup>

The person who does understand his suffering and his painting is the blind beggar, Pedro. Rodríguez-Castellano suggests that Pedro and Martín represent the poor people in Spanish society.<sup>42</sup> However, Pedro might also be considered to have a special role as the other half of Velázquez' own personality. Pedro wanted to paint, but has spent his life working actively for reform instead. Velázquez is tormented by social evils, but has devoted himself to painting. Each complements the life of the other.

Pedro has returned because he needed Velázquez who is aware of reality as he is.

"Ya sólo sé que soy un poco de carne enferma, llena de miedo y en espera de la muerte. Un hombre fatigado en busca de cordura que le haga descansar de la locura ajena antes de morir."<sup>43</sup>

Velázquez finds pleasure and joy in his painting, but then feels guilty when he remembers the misery of the world:

41. Ibid., p. 44.

42. Ibid., p. 7.

43. Ibid., p. 80.

"No sé cómo he podido gozar de tanta belleza en medio de tanto dolor."<sup>44</sup>

Pedro believes that:

"Sólo quien ve la belleza en el mundo puede comprender lo intolerable de su dolor."<sup>45</sup>

Like Esquilache, Velázquez is not afraid to tell the truth and will not be intimidated even by the King. He is calm and logical and sees things in proper perspective. He defends himself superbly with his clear logic when he is tried before the King and a priest for having painted a nude (La Venus del espejo). As Velázquez defends himself, the hypocrisy and narrowness of society and the artificiality of its values are revealed and criticized and the accusations against him appear to be ridiculous and to have been brought against him by those who are jealous of him or who want to better their own position.

However, when he learns that Pedro has been killed, he loses all his composure and cries openly, unable to continue his defence. The only person whom he loved and who understood him is dead. Since Pedro has been killed as a result of his acting against the state, Velázquez feels that Pedro has died for him, since he has been painting instead of working to combat the evils of society. Pedro wanted to paint, but has worked against the evils of society and has paid the price of his life for doing so. Velázquez feels that his painting is worthless in comparison to this.

44. Ibid., p. 80.

45. Ibid., p. 102.



The King, however, realizes Velázquez's greatness and tells him that he will pardon him so that he can continue to paint, if he swears his love for and and loyalty to the King. Although Pedro had advised him to lie if necessary to save his painting, Velázquez refuses to do so. He remains true to his principles and also asks for punishment so that he can share Pedro's sacrifice.

The King pardons Velázquez in spite of the fact that he resents Velázquez' virtue and feels weak and miserable about absolving him. The King is also annoyed by the princess' love for Velázquez, but María Teresa assures him that it is not love:

"En esta Corte de galanteos y de pasiones desenfrenadas es un sentimiento..... sin nombre."<sup>46</sup>

It is the same sentiment of which Penelope speaks and which Esquilache feels for Fernandita. Velázquez, also, refers to a kind of love or harmony found in certain, simple moments of truth. Describing his painting, Las Meninas, he says:

"Yo creo que la verdad..... está en esos momentos sencillos más que en la etiqueta. Entonces, todo puede amarse."<sup>47</sup>

As the play ends Velázquez has continued to paint and is finishing Las Meninas. It is described by Martín as "una pintura que encerrará toda la tristeza de España"<sup>48</sup> As he works, Velázquez is murmuring, "Pedro, Pedro". He is miserable because Pedro, the one person who understood him has been killed by the State, because of

46. Ibid., p. 165.

47. Ibid., p. 95.

48. Ibid., p. 168.

doing what he himself believes he should have done - working actively against social abuses. Although he had not been afraid to reveal his true feelings to the King and accept his punishment, he knows that generally he has compromised by choosing to keep silent about the evil around him in order to be able to paint.

"Estamos viviendo de mentiras o de silencios. Yo he he vivido de silencios, pero me niego a mentir."<sup>49</sup>

Pedro had chosen the other road and had died for him. In order to paint Velázquez must continue to keep silent about the truth in a world of "ciegos" and "locos". He has won outwardly in his confrontation with the King and against his petty rivals, but inwardly he feels that he has compromised himself.

El concierto de San Ovidio, Buero's other play in which the majority of the characters are blind, was written in 1962, sixteen years later than En la ardiente oscuridad. Buero's inspiration was an eighteenth century picture of blind musicians in ridiculous costumes. The theme of this play is not spiritual blindness or existential anguish, but the timeless social problem of man's inhumanity to his fellow man. It is subtitled "parábola en tres actos"

El concierto de San Ovidio is set in Paris in 1771. The protagonist, David, is presented as an intelligent, sincere, kind, generous person who is convinced that, by means of hard work, the blind can be capable of doing what other men can do. Thus, although he is keenly aware of reality, he has faith that a better future is possible.

49. Ibid., p. 164.

When, at the beginning of the play, the prioress at the hostel for the blind asks six of the residents if they want to go to work for Valindín, who plans to have a blind beggars band at his restaurant at the fair of San Ovidio, David's reason for accepting the proposal is that it should be a means of proving themselves. He urges his companions:

"Hermanos, hay que poner en esto todo nuestro empeño. ¡Hay que convencer a los que ven de que somos hombres como ellos, no animales enfermos!" 50

If they all really try, they can learn to play well together.

"Hermanos, empeñémonos todos en que nuestros violines canten juntos y lo lograremos! ¡Todo es querer! Y si no lo queréis, resignaos como mujerzuelas a esta muerte en vida que nos aplasta." 51

Later, at Valindín's house he wants to leave and not take the job when he finds that they will not be allowed to try to take separate parts like an ordinary orchestra. But, he gives in when he learns that they have only eleven days in which to practise. He almost leaves one other time, but returns because he sees hope when the others will not practise without him.

We learn about David's childhood from Donato, a youth whom David has treated like a son at the hostel. He was blinded by fireworks as a young child but, by his own efforts learned to be a good musician and to be extremely skilful with his walking stick. He has also been very successful with women.

50. Antonio Buero Vallejo, El concierto de San Ovidio, Barcelona, Aymá, S.A. Editora, 1963, p. 36.

51. Ibid., p. 38.

The day the fair opens the blind musicians find that they are going to be dressed as clowns with dunce caps, donkey ears, and big cardboard glasses. The music they are supposedly reading will be backwards. They are to be laughed at and ridiculed as oddities by the stupid public.

David tells the others that they are leaving, but Valindín reminds them that they have a contract and that it is better to do this and eat than have pride and hunger. He uses physical force to make Donato stay, and David gives in again and stays as well.

The climax comes in the complete darkness of the barraca late at night when David murders Valindín because he has caused their disgrace and misery and also that of Adriana, his mistress, in order to fulfill his own selfish desires. The immediate cause of the murder is a scene in which Valindín beats Adriana and Donato for being unfaithful to him.

Valindín is really not pictured as a complete villain. He is a rather typical businessman, out to make a profit by any means, without any consideration of others' rights or feelings. He has convinced himself that he is helping people at the same time that he is getting rich. For example, he believes that the blind are better off with him than they were while begging on the street corners. He also believed that he really loved Adriana even though he did not ever pay any attention to her wishes and thought only of himself.

Similarly, the average businessman today probably convinces himself that the public is much better off with his product than without it or that he is helping the economy of the country.

David and Adriana love each other, but must face a tragic separation at the end when he is dragged away from her to be hanged. He was betrayed by his "son", Donato, who told the police about him because he was jealous of Adriana's love for him. David's last words to Adriana are "Dile al pequeño que le perdono"<sup>52</sup> which typifies the way in which he was always thoughtful of others' feelings.

Things could have been different if David had had the forcefulness to leave the group one of the times that he tried to. He compromised himself and drove himself to desperation by doing something that was against his principles. Although Valindín would have been able to replace him, perhaps if he had actually left the others would have understood and followed his example. At least Donato would probably have done so.

The play ends on an optimistic note, however. Valentín Haüy, a spectator who was disgusted by Valindín's show, resolved the day he saw it, thirty years before, that he would do something to help the blind. Through his efforts, one of David's most cherished dreams has been realized and the blind are now learning to read and write (brail). This proves, Haüy concludes, that:

52. Ibid., p. 130 .

"El hombre más oscuro puede mover montañas si lo quiere!"<sup>53</sup>

Donato is seen as an old blind beggar on the street corner. He is playing David's favorite song and obviously lives tormented by remorse because of his betrayal of David.

Although En la ardiente oscuridad is existential in theme and El concierto de San Ovidio is a play of social criticism, there are certain similarities between them besides the fact that their characters are blind. Both Carlos (En la ardiente oscuridad) and David are kind, well meaning people who end up murderers. This shows again that there is good and evil in all of us and that we have to guard against losing control of our baser passions. We should not let things go until we are desperate and turn to violence for immediate relief from the situation.

Both Ignacio and David are rebelling against their condition, but as Borel suggests, Ignacio is struggling for the impossible, whereas David wants an improvement that is possible, although very difficult, within the existing unalterable conditions (ie. learning to read, write, and play music well in spite of blindness)<sup>54</sup>. Ignacio is a spoiled child, scorning others' help, and behaving completely selfishly; David is a noble character, a self-made man, with a deep awareness of reality and with consideration for others.

53. Ibid., p. 131.

54. J.P. Borel, "Prólogo: Buero Vallejo ¿Vidente o ciego?", Antonio Buero Vallejo, El concierto de San Ovidio, Barcelona, Aymá S.A. Editora, 1963, p. 16.

It is sad that David has to die just when he would be able to begin a new life with Adriana and before seeing his dreams of reading and writing fulfilled. On the other hand, it is almost a relief to have that poor devil, Ignacio, released from his misery.

However, both Ignacio and David represent humanity, struggling against the difficulties of their environment and their limitations, physical and mental. Each is alone in his struggle, misunderstood by those around him. Both die without having achieved what they wanted.

CHAPTER V

Recent Plays

Aventura en lo gris

El tragaluz

The last two plays available for this study are Aventura en lo gris, 1963, and El tragaluz, 1967. They are similar in that they both contain political criticism and tend to be abstract rather than being essentially realistic like Buero's previous works. Both also combine thoughts and actions to give an added dimension to reality. Aventura en lo gris includes a dream which the characters have; El tragaluz is "una experiencia de realidad total: sucesos y pensamientos en mezcla inseparable"<sup>55</sup>. In El tragaluz the scene consists of several locations which are seen at the same time and a character's thoughts may be seen simultaneously with the main action of the plot.

Of all Buero's theatre, the play that is perhaps most explicit in its criticism of existing society as a whole is Aventura en lo gris. It was first written in 1949, but was not accepted by any theatre companies at that time. However, Buero, himself, states that he believed it too important a theme to be forgotten and thus he rewrote it in 1963 and it was produced in the same year.<sup>56</sup>

Aventura en lo gris takes place in a miserable grey inn in Surelia, a broken, war torn country. The characters represent the various components of society - the dictator, the rich, the soldier,

55. Antonio Buero Vallejo, "El tragaluz", Teatro Español 1967-68, ed., F.C. Sainz de Robles, Madrid, Aguilar, 1968, p. 181.

56. Isabel Magaña Schevill, ed., Dos dramas de Buero Vallejo (Aventura en lo gris, Las palabras en la arena), New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967, p. 2.



the intellectual, the peasant, the youth, the career woman, the poor, and the future generation. However, this is a study of the protagonists and will have to be limited mainly to an examination of Silvano (the intellectual), an ex-history professor who has lost his position as a result of criticizing the government for starting an unnecessary war.

Silvano is the most heroic of Buero's protagonists since he remains true to his principles at all costs - even to the point of starvation and death. For most of Buero's protagonists the pressure (of society and of their own weak human nature) is too great and they fail to achieve heroism.

Silvano is completely unselfish, constantly helps and thinks of others (although he is weak with starvation), giving up everything for them, and finally sacrifices his life in an attempt to save the future generations.

His complete generosity and candor is contrasted to the greed and hypocrisy of the other characters, but particularly to that of Goldmann, the dictator of the country. The one who is in power and is entrusted with the responsibility of caring for the others is the greatest egotist of them all. The conflict between Silvano and Goldmann represents the conflict between the intellectual idealist and the ambitious, unscrupulous politician, who is the one who has the power.

The characters all spend the night at the abandoned inn on their way to make a desperate attempt to leave the country. There is no

food and the trains are no longer running. Typical of society in general, everyone thinks only of himself, instead of uniting for the common good. The one who does all the work for the others - bringing firewood, making sugar water for the baby - is Silvano, although he is the weakest physically because of hunger.

Goldmann, on the other hand, has food, but hides it for himself and Ana, saying to her that he is the most important person for the country. Unknown to him, Ana gives a little food to Isabel, the poor girl, because she has to feed her baby, and a little to Silvano, because he is so weak. However, even though he is dying of starvation, Silvano gives his piece to Isabel as well.

Silvano tries to explain to Carlos, a young supporter of Goldmann, that the war was unnecessary and only started for economic reasons. Carlos supports the war because it is easier to be a follower and fight when told to, than to think critically for himself.

When they discuss dreams, they find that Goldmann never dreams. He scoffs:

"Los sueños deforman la vida. Y la vida hay que mirarla cara a cara. Soñar es faena de mujeres o de contemplativos." <sup>57</sup>

Silvano is a dreamer. He believes that if people learned how to dream, they would learn how to live. Without learning:

"Todos soñamos con nuestros inconfesables apetitos y soltamos durante la noche a la fiera que nos posee." <sup>58</sup>

57. Ibid., p. 64.

58. Ibid., p. 65.

He muses:

"Soñamos mal porque nos portamos mal durante el día o procedemos mal en la vida porque no sabemos soñar bien."<sup>59</sup>

He wonders if people could begin to have the same dream.

The truth would become apparent and they could no longer pretend when they were awake.

Later, when accusing Goldmann of the murder of Isabel, he concludes that it is the responsibility of the intellectual to act as well as dream:

"No se puede soñar, no se debe soñar dejando las manos libres a quienes no lo hacen. Aunque, al final, sea el soñador quien desenmascare al hombre de acción."<sup>60</sup>

Silvano admits that he is "un hombre de dudas, no de seguridades"<sup>61</sup> when he wonders whether he did the right thing in denouncing the government:

"¿Hice mal? ¿Hice bien? Eso lo aclararán acaso los historiadores: mis compañeros del futuro. Ahora nadie podría decirlo: ni Goldmann que me echó a las fieras, pero que tal vez mañana sea juzgado más duramente que yo."<sup>62</sup>

He sees the war in the perspective of history. In the previous century, they had attacked the country that is now attacking them.

Silvano is not afraid of death. He tells Carlos to go ahead and shoot him for being a defeatist. Later, he tells Goldmann that he has recognized him from the beginning and he is not afraid that he

59. Loc. cit.

60. Ibid., p. 121.

61. Ibid., p. 49.

62. Ibid., p. 50.

will kill him. He feels that now they are on equal terms, no longer a dictator and a professor. Which of them in reality has come closer to fulfilling the oath of abnegation of Goldmann's party, which Silvano has not even sworn to? He wants to stop doubting and prove to himself that he is worth more than Goldmann. When Ana advises him to leave if Goldmann knows that he knows their identity, he tells her:

"Hay una partida emprendida entre él y yo desde hace meses y quiero ganarla."<sup>63</sup>

The second part of the play is a dream in which the true feelings and thoughts of the characters are revealed. All the characters, except Goldmann, since he never dreams, appear in the dream and it is implied that all the characters are having the same dream.

Silvano appears on a mound, sitting above the others, which shows that he is above them morally in his selflessness, and he will not come down to their level. He and Ana are trying to reach each other (she is the only other person who has shared her food and thought of others), but they cannot quite reach (she has not attained his level of self-denial). No matter what the others do, Silvano does not come down (he does not compromise himself). Silvano asks enemy soldiers who appear in the windows to yell at the others that they will lose because they quarrel over bread (they are greedy and disunited). Finally he reaches Ana, and with the death of Isabel he comes down. Isabel is a victim of war and of man's appetites. Silvano asks himself,

63. Ibid., p. 79 .

"¿Soy yo quien te ha matado?"<sup>64</sup> All men should make it their responsibility to control animal passions and to end murder and war.

In the last act, after Isabel is found dead, everyone is sorry about it, but wants to forget it, saying that it is useless to do anything about it now and they must save themselves. Goldmann is most insistent that it should be forgotten so that it will not increase their difficulty at the border crossing. Silvano says that they are all responsible because of their egoism and stupidity. After Ana remarks that Carlos might have done it, Silvano suggests an analysis of the possible motives of all of them and finally accuses Goldmann:

"Un hombre sin escrúpulos, acostumbrado a coger a su paso el dinero, el lujo y las mujeres - un hombre de acción que nunca sueña..... y que obra durante el sueño de los demás."<sup>65</sup>

He convinces the others that Goldmann is the murderer. He wants to stop Carlos from killing Goldmann, but he does not blame him when he does and suggests that he find a new life fighting for the country with the guerrillas.

Knowing that he, himself, is too weak to carry the baby, he asks each of the others to take the baby with them:

"es un ser inocente de nuestras furias..... Salvemos el mañana."<sup>66</sup>

They all refuse.

Silvano decides to sacrifice his life by staying and trying to persuade the enemies to save the baby's life. Ana decides to stay

64. Ibid., p. 98.

65. Ibid. p. 119.

66. Ibid., p. 126.

with him. He begs her to go, but she cannot leave him. She did not know that such men existed and now that she has found him she will not leave him.

When Ana makes one last suggestion - that they try to save their lives by saying that it was they who killed Goldmann - we see that Silvano will not lie. He tells her:

"Mi pobre Ana, has empezado muy tarde a aprender. Aún no sabes lo que es vencer, ni lo que es vencerse...."<sup>67</sup>

Moments later they face the enemy soldiers unafraid, and succeed in persuading them to save the baby's life. They then face death unafraid, because they have overcome selfishness and achieved something for humanity, in sacrificing themselves to save the baby (the symbol of future peace and unity, since he is a product of both sides in the war). Hands clasped, they await death:

"Ana: ....¿Es así? ¿Es esto vencer?

Silvano: ¡Sí! ¡Esto es vencer!"<sup>68</sup>

Silvano won in the conflict between himself and Goldmann and also overcame all selfishness within himself. He became a man of action, refusing to compromise himself and putting his ideals into practice. He began as a man of doubt and a dreamer, but conquered doubt and put his dreams into action.

Ana strengthens Silvano's victory over Goldmann, because

67. Ibid., p. 134.

68. Ibid., p. 134.

she is won over to his way of thinking. She changes from being Goldmann's mistress to loving Silvano on a purely spiritual level.

In order to give meaning to one's life, one should face the task of doing all that is possible to make the world a better place for others and for the future generations, even if this entails the sacrifice of one's own selfish pleasures. Otherwise, there is no purpose to life - we are merely existing and propagating the species on an animal level.

Although this may seem an impossible task, Buero shows us again that the place to begin to improve the world is to improve humanity. Each individual can improve humanity by improving himself. No matter what his external circumstances may be, the individual is free to do what he wants within himself, if he can conquer the selfishness of his own nature.

El tragaluz, written in 1967, is the last play to be written by Buero at the time of this study. Its themes include all those found in the earlier works - social, moral, and existential. In this play the present is seen as the past since the events of the plot are viewed by two beings from a future century, who see their true significance and comment on them, from time to time. These beings appear to have achieved a better world and to control their own history.

The protagonists are two brothers, Mario and Vicente. Vicente is a typical modern businessman, whose prime purpose is to make a profit. As a boy, he climbed onto a train and deserted the family in

their time of worst need, immediately after the civil war. He took their only provisions with him and thus caused the death of his baby sister. He has continued to live this way ever since, taking advantage of others to gain what he can for himself.

During the play Mario is seen as a complete contrast to Vicente. He is determined not to hurt anyone and has thus chosen to live in poverty with their parents. He tries to live by his principles and is almost completely unselfish.

The two brothers confront each other several times during the play and each tries to convince the other to change his way of life. They are thus contrasted very distinctly. Vicente's beliefs must be shared by the majority of the people in Western society, since our way of life is based on his economic principles. However, Mario, without being self-righteous or unsympathetic, soon demonstrates the error of his brother's ways.

Vicente always puts business before sentiment. After his new deal has come through, he is happy; he does not care that it has meant ruining the career of Beltrán, a writer whose works his company was publishing. He offers Mario a job at which he would earn three times what he then earns, but because he does not agree with his brother's practises, Mario refuses it.

On another occasion, Vicente tries to convince Mario to change his mind. Mario explains his reasoning:



"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 que te devoren! Te daremos bellas teorías para tu tranquilidad. La lucha por la vida..... El mal inevitable para llegar al bien necesario.... La caridad bien entendida....." Pero yo en mi rincón, intento comprobar si puedo salvarme de ser devorado....., aunque no devore."69

"Me limito a defenderme. Y hasta me dejo pisotear un poco, por no discutir.... Pero, por ejemplo, no me enriquezco"70

Vicente asks Mario if he is accusing him and argues that he has to mix with other men to understand:

"Mario, toda acción es impura. Pero no todas son egoístas, como crees. ¡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."71

The two brothers demonstrate the familiar contrast between the dreamer and the man of action. After Mario shows Vicente how he opens the skylight to see the essential reality of humanity in the legs of the passersby, Vicente says scornfully, "Estás soñando! ¡Despierta!" Mario replies:

"¿Quién debe despertar? ¡Veo a mi alrededor muchos activos, pero están dormidos! ¡Llegan a creerse tanto más irremediables cuanto más se encanallan!"72

At the time of a later visit of Vicente, the same question arises. Vicente asks Mario to come to work for him and live with him, before he goes crazy living with their father. He tells Mario that he can continue to think his own way, but use the money from the company. Mario answers that he cannot become a part of the hypocrisy and deceit of the business world.

69. Antonio Buero Vallejo, El Tragaluz, p. 196.

71. Ibid., p. 197.

70. Loc. cit.

72. loc. cit.

"¡Claro que entiendo el juego! Se es un poco revolucionario, luego algo conservador.... No hay inconvenientes, pues para eso se siguen ostentando ideas avanzadas.... El nuevo grupo nos utiliza.... Nos dejamos utilizar, puesto que los utilizamos.... ¡Y a medrar todos! Porque ¿quién sabe ya hoy a lo que está jugando cada cual? Solo los pobres saben que son pobres."<sup>73</sup>

As an example of dirty business practises, Mario accuses Vicente of ruining Beltrán's career because his new associates wanted it so and are paying him for it. Beltrán is an exemplary person, who sees reality and is indifferent to material comforts and money. Vicente lies to try to hide the truth, as is customary in business, saying that he accidentally lost the letter that Encarna found in the wastebasket.

Even Mario realizes that it would be impossible to live if one were completely unselfish. He tells Encarna, "Esa es nuestra miseria: que hay que vivir",<sup>74</sup> but he chooses to live in poverty and pursue truth and honesty.

The difference between the two brothers is also exemplified by their attitude toward and treatment of Encarna, who represents the problem of a country girl in the city.

She is Vicente's secretary and sleeps with him because she is afraid to lose her job. The future beings describe their affair as "practicando rutinariamente el amor físico."<sup>75</sup>

73. Ibid., p. 213.

74. Ibid., p. 183.

75. Ibid., p. 206.

Mario, on the other hand, meets Encarna to talk to her and really know her. Later he asks her to marry him and takes her home to meet his parents.

Encarna will not go home with Vicente on Thursdays - the day she meets a girlfriend from her hometown (Mario), but she is afraid to break off her affair with him or to confront him with the Beltrán business as she had promised Mario. Later, however, she has the courage to tell Mario the truth about herself and Vicente, because she really loves and respects him and cannot deceive him.

However, both Mario and Vicente are selfish in their attitude toward her. When she does tell the truth about herself and Vicente, the latter fires her and Mario does not want to see her any more. Neither is thinking of her feelings, only of himself his pride, and the fact that his plans are ruined. Mario realizes this later and asks Encarna:

"¿Y qué hemos hecho los dos contigo?...

¿No te hemos usado los dos para herirnos con más violencia?"<sup>76</sup>

Mario finally decides that he does want to marry Encarna, not out of pity, but because they can find mutual support together in a simple way of life, trying not to hurt anyone, and they can raise Vicente's child as their own.

The attitude of the two brothers toward their father also reveals essential differences between them. Mario sees the truth; Vicente tries not to see it.

76. Ibid., p. 235.

Their father, (similarly to Irene of Irene o el tesoro) has gone mad rather than face the reality of the world and what Vicente has done. Mario views his madness as meaningful, with a definite cause and purpose to his actions; Vicente keeps insisting that he is senile. For example, after their father has wrecked the television set when a commercial interrupted a program, Mario believes that he was showing his disgust with advertising which makes people think that unnecessary material comforts are important. Vicente maintains that their father did not know what he was doing.

In another scene their father tries to cut his finger off. Vicente wants to grab him and stop him by force; Mario is patient and watchful, realizing that it is better not to use force if possible.

Their father denies that he ever knew or had a son named Vicente; he has repressed this memory completely. He remembers having a son Mario, but says that he has not seen him for a long time.

Their mother still treats Vicente like a spoiled child. For example, she runs out to buy his favourite goodies when he arrives. It is Mario whom she advises to marry Encarna, when she learns that Encarna has been Vicente's mistress. However, there is a scene in which her true respect for Mario is shown. Encarna is outside their house and Vicente says to let her in, but Mario does not want her to come in. The mother obeys Mario's wishes.

Vicente (like Valindín of El concierto de San Ovidio) seems to have convinced himself, in order to ease his conscience a little, that he is helping people. He brings an envelope of money to the

family each month, which they use to make payments on a washing machine. In spite of the way in which he has treated Encarna, he believes that he is helping her:

"no tiene otra perspectiva que la miseria...., salvo a mi lado. Y a mi lado seguirá, si quiere, porque...., a pesar de todo, la aprecio. Ella lo sabe.... y me gusta ayudar a la gente, si puedo hacerlo. (Eso también lo sabes tú.)"<sup>77</sup>

When he finds that she is pregnant, he thinks only of arranging things to suit his convenience.

"Estudiaremos la mejor solución, Encarna. Lo reconoceré..... Te ayudaré."<sup>78</sup>

The true, inner feelings of the two brothers are revealed in their reactions to the "tragaluz". In the legs and conversations of the passersby, Mario sees truth and beauty and has faith in the basic underlying goodness which is common to all humanity. Vicente is scornful of the whole idea at first, but when he sees his reality, he is filled with fear because he has no conception of Mario's view of life and can see only in terms of his own experience.

In spite of his apparent callousness and complete egoism, Vicente is tortured by his guilty conscience and by the way in which he knows Mario has judged him. He begins to visit his family more and more frequently. Finally he says that he is going to clear things up and convince Mario that he is wrong. As is his usual way, he tries to make excuses for himself and to rationalize his way out of guilt, by means of half truths.

77. Ibid., p. 216.

78. Ibid., p. 227.

Mario tells the true story of what happened years before. He does not blame Vicente completely for deserting them, because he was only a boy, but he does blame him for continuing to live that way now. He is still an unprincipled opportunist; he has never gotten off the train. It is no use saying that there are other bigger worse people, as we sometimes do to make our own misdemeanors appear insignificant:

"¡Pero ahora, hombre, ya sí eres culpable! Has hecho pocas víctimas, desde luego; hay innumerables canallas que las han hecho por miles, por millones. ¡Pero tú eres como ellos! Dale tiempo al tiempo y verás crecer el número de las tuyas.... Y tu botín."<sup>79</sup>

Vicente wants to be judged, punished, and pardoned. He asks to be alone with their father and confesses to him, although he is sure that his father does not understand. Vicente reveals his complete lack of faith in anything, his disillusionment with life, and the fact that he sees no point in struggling to improve conditions or even himself. He admits that he did not care when he found that he had caused his sister's death. Many children had died in the war. What did one more matter?

He reveals his desire for faith in something, but he is too weak to combat his disillusionment and egoism.

"Quisiera que me entendiese, aunque sé que no me entiende. Le hablo como quien habla a Dios sin creer en Dios, porque quisiera que El estuviera ahí. Pero no está, y nadie es castigado, y la vida sigue. Míreme: estoy llorando. Dentro de un momento me iré, con la pequeña ilusión que me ha escuchado, a seguir haciendo víctimas..... De cuando en cuando pensaré que

79. Ibid., p. 231.

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 canallas en un mundo canalla?

.....

Le aseguro que estoy cansado de ser hombre. Esta vida de temores y de mala fe fatiga mortalmente. Pero no se puede volver a la niñez."<sup>80</sup>

He wants to be punished; he wants to see order in the world. One could almost say that he wants to die and his father kills him for what he represents.

Mario, who has always tried to live according to his principles, believes himself responsible for his brother's death. Early in the play he had had a dream in which he attracted a man so close to a cliff edge that the man had fallen over. He now sees that this foreshadowed what he has done to his brother. He realizes that there is no clear answer to life; there is a two-sided nature to everything (good and evil);

"Yo no soy bueno; mi hermano no era malo."

....

"El quería engañarle.... y ver claro; yo quería salvarle... y matarle. ¿Qué queríamos en realidad? ¿Qué quería yo? ¿Cómo soy? ¿Quién soy? ¿Quién ha sido víctima de quién? Ya nunca lo sabré..... Nunca."<sup>81</sup>

Like Silverio of Hoy es fiesta, Mario questions what his true motivation was and will be tortured by guilt for the rest of his life.

80. Ibid., p. 232.

81. Antonio Buero Vallejo, El tragaluz, p. 235.

However, neither Mario nor Vicente is completely wrong or right in his way of life. The negative aspects of Mario are that his life is too inactive and that he hates his brother so deeply. Buero suggests that:

"El tipo ideal para una conducta equilibrada hubiera sido un hombre intermedio entre los dos hermanos, una simbiosis de ambos, un setenta por ciento del menor y un treinta del mayor. De este último, en resumen, no me gusta su forma de tomar y viajar en el tren, en ese tren que hay que tomar. Del hermano menor no me gusta su resentimiento fraternal."<sup>82</sup>

The play ends in an appeal to the audience to realize the truth and have the faith to do something to improve themselves and their way of life, no matter how difficult it might seem. Mario and Encarna hold hands, face the audience, and Mario says:

"Quizá ellos algún día, Encarna..... Ellos sí, algún día.... Ellos....."<sup>83</sup>

Then everything is darkness except the "tragaluz".

With El tragaluz, Buero again demonstrates man's inhumanity to his fellow man. Humanity is a family, just as Vicente and Mario's family was. We are united in a common struggle and yet we do not help each other, but torment each other instead, each thinking only of himself. Again Buero shows that greed and egoism are the prime cause of the evil and injustice in the world.

The play can also be considered an attack on capitalism which fosters cut-throat competition, over values material gain, and results in an extremely uneven distribution of the world's goods.

82. Angel Fernández-Santos, "Una entrevista con Buero Vallejo", El primer acto, No. 90, November 1967, p. 12.

83. Ibid., p. 236.



This theme is not new to Buero's work. The first play of Buero's to be performed, Historia de una escalera, was an attack on the poverty that exists in our world and this theme appeared in many of his later works. El concierto de San Ovidio, 1962, revealed the tyranny and inhumanity of the modern businessman, but was camouflaged somewhat by its eighteenth century setting. After writing El concierto de San Ovidio and before writing El tragaluz, 1967, Buero translated Mother Courage and her Sons by Bertolt Brecht, a German Marxist.

However, in spite of his interest in Brecht, and his discontent with Western society, Buero gives too much importance to the individual and freedom to be considered to have Communist leanings. For example, in El tragaluz the father searches after the identity of each individual in pictures and postcards; and the future beings are intent upon viewing the people of past centuries ("árbol por árbol"), person by person.

Everyone is important; everyone is different. Each human life must be valued above all else. Each human should be able to live with dignity and freedom.

El tragaluz again shows us that we must struggle to overcome our own selfishness, to love each other, and to have the welfare of others at heart. Greed and egoism are probably inherent characteristics of all mankind, a legacy from primitive man's animal-like existence, against which we all must fight within ourselves, no matter what our outer political or personal beliefs may be.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

Buero's protagonists represent the tragedy of contemporary man, who finds himself in a world of such a vast amount of incomprehensible confusion and immorality that he is devastated by the impossibility of combatting it and by his own insignificance.

Buero's best characters are the tragic ones of his later plays: Silverio, Juan, Esquilache, Velázquez, David, Silvano, and Mario. Although the setting is different, the situation in which they are found is essentially the same. They are all men of great moral conviction who find themselves in an unbearably immoral environment. They are in conflict within themselves and with others because of the pressure of society upon them to make them conform and forget their principles. It is impossible for them to find peace and happiness because they cannot accept the immorality and injustice that surrounds them and it is almost equally impossible for them to uphold their own moral convictions.

Often the characters who work actively to improve conditions are killed or outcasted by society. For example, Pedro in Las Meninas is hunted and killed because he has rebelled against injustice. After Pedro's death, Velázquez asks the king:

"Es que el poder sólo sabe acallar con sangre lo que él mismo incuba? Pues, si así lo hace con sangre cubre sus propios errores."<sup>84</sup>

84. Antonio Buero Vallejo, Las Meninas, ed. Juan Rodríguez Castellano, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963. p. 164.

The protagonists' own human nature also makes it difficult for them to be the moral persons that they wish to be. They are shown to be two-sided beings, capable of thought for and kindness to others and also capable of violence and murder.

As well as having weaknesses in character, Buero's creations also remind us that we are also physically weak and vulnerable. Some are blind, one is mute, another is deaf. These frailties are also symbolic of mental conditions. The blind are also spiritually blind, Pilar does not want to hear Silverio's confession, and Anita will never forgive Adela.

Their physical handicaps also illustrate the relativity of knowledge and the different view of reality that each individual has according to his own limitations. On the social level, they represent the impossibility of complete communication between men.

Buero's protagonists are tragic characters because they end in sadness and failure. They are generally unable to live up to the standard that they have set for themselves and are guilt-ridden because they have compromised themselves.

Velázquez might be taken as an example of the synthesis of Buero's protagonist. He suffers because he is aware of the great injustice in Spanish society, but is unable to do anything to combat it. He is tortured by guilt because of his silence about the wrongs that he sees. He also feels guilty because he, himself, is able to find pleasure in painting.

He is heroic because he is not afraid to confront the king and his accusers with the truth in order to defend himself and save his painting and he refuses to lie and say that he loves the king, even to save himself and his painting.

He lives a completely virtuous and moral private life, which increases the others' resentment of his success.

The purity of Velázquez is contrasted to the immorality and hypocrisy of court life and to the deceit and pettiness of his brother-in-law, Nieto, who brings him before the Inquisition in order to further his own position as an informer.

Buero's protagonists are almost always contrasted to a character who lacks moral principles and is extremely egoistic. For example: Anfino is contrasted to Ulysses, Irene to Dimas, Esquilache to Ensenada, David to Valindín, Silvano to Goldmann, and Mario to Vicente.

The protagonist has dreams and illusions, has sympathy and kindness for others, and searches for truth, within himself and around him. He suffers because of his conscience and because of his doubt.

The character to whom he is contrasted, on the other hand, has no dreams or illusions, but is active and powerful and controls others. He is an unthinking person who deludes himself that his actions are helping others when in fact he is acting only to benefit himself.

However, there is no completely clear division between the heroes and villains. Both are shown to be human, mixtures of good and evil. The later ones such as Valindín and Vicente who depict the ethic of the modern businessman represent a way of life that is shared by the majority of Western society today, in which material gain is given utmost importance. Dimas of Irene o el tesoro represented the same idea, but was one-sided and therefore less realistic than Valindín and Vicente.

No character is portrayed as being wholly right, since perfection is impossible in the world as we know it. However, the life of protagonist is shown to be far preferable to that of his less moral counterpart.

Velázquez is typical of Buero's protagonists also because of his loneliness and the great lack of communication and understanding, that he endures.

Love is also generally lacking in the lives of Buero's protagonists, particularly within marriage and the family. Marriage is usually pictured as having been entered into for reasons other than love. Velázquez's family is a hindrance and a burden rather than a support for him. His wife has no understanding of him, whatsoever.

Although one might expect the death of the protagonist in a tragedy, few of Buero's heroes die. They are left to continue their lives tormented by their conscience. This can be considered a worse fate than death, since death is a release from worldly cares.

Several of Buero's protagonists kill someone, but Velázquez does not commit murder, nor is he directly responsible for anyone's death. He does, however, consider himself partially to blame for the death of Pedro, who is the only person who understood him and without whom he feels completely alone.

In Buero's theatre the existence of a male counterpart to the protagonist who is in complete harmony with him occurs only in Las Meninas. In many of his other plays there is a woman who is between two men of conflicting ideologies. She reinforces the "victory" of the protagonist because she invariably chooses the one of greater morality and less egoism. For example, Ana rejects Goldmann for Silvano, Adriana loves David rather than Valindín, and Encarna chooses Mario over Vicente.

Frequently the conflict between the protagonist and the character who is opposed to him is heightened and filled with suspense because of secrecy about an object and danger to a third person. In Las Meninas the object is the nude painting and the person is Pedro.

Although the plays in this study were written during a period of over twenty years, their themes possess remarkable unity. There are three main areas of theme: existential, moral, and social. There are, of course, elements of all of these throughout the plays and subjects such as poverty, war, injustice, lack of love and communication, spiritual blindness, the need for freedom, truth and honesty, and the destructiveness of egoism reappear continually.

In spite of this unity, however, a certain degree of chronological evolution can be seen in Buero's theatre. As seen in the previous chapters, the first works are essentially existential in theme although there are traces of social criticism in them. The second group are in a more imaginative vein, but still include many of the same ideas as the others. Irene o el tesoro is a transition between the previous less realistic plays and those of realistic social criticism which were to follow. Of course, Buero had already employed the technique of realistic social criticism in Historia de una escalera in 1949. The rather more pessimistic realistic social works, (Hoy es fiesta and Las cartas boca abajo) were followed by three plays which were set in the historical past, but which were analogous to present social abuses, (Un soñador para un pueblo, Las Meninas, El concierto de San Ovidio). Aventura en lo gris is a more abstract work which symbolizes contemporary society and has political implications. El tragaluz can be viewed as Buero's culminating work since it incorporates almost all the preceding ideas and techniques. The present is viewed as the past. The characters symbolize conflicting ideologies and moral positions, but the environment is essentially realistic.

The evolution from existential to social to political is a logical one. There is no answer to the ontological question, which remains constant throughout Buero's works, except to give value to humanity and recognize each individual as unique and important. The most obvious action

man can take to help and to improve, humanity is to direct his efforts to combatting social evils which deprive man of his dignity. The most direct way to improve conditions is through political channels.

The staging of the plays reflects a pattern of evolution, which is similar to that of the technique and themes. The early plays take place in one simple setting. In the historical plays the staging becomes elaborate and consists of several locations. In El tragaluz different scenes are illuminated at different times and events can be happening simultaneously in more than one place.

Chronological development can be seen in the protagonists, as well. Those of the early plays, although they are realistic and moving, are stark sketches in comparison to those of the later ones. In Historia de una escalera the characters are merely outlined. They are true-to-life types but they are not outstanding characters. Las palabras en la arena is too short to allow for much character development; the characters are seen in only one situation. Ignacio of En la ardiente oscuridad is the greatest character of Buero's early works, in spite of the fact that he is unsympathetic. In these early plays the themes of existential anguish, poverty, revenge, and spiritual blindness take precedence over the inner struggle of the protagonists, which is suggested, but not fully revealed.

The next group of plays written in the early 1950's, all have woman protagonists. They are more completely developed than the



early protagonists, but are still subservient to the plot or the ideas.

In the next two plays, Hoy es fiesta and Las cartas boca abajo, the protagonists are on stage throughout almost the entire play and their personality constitutes a major part of the work. Silverio's story, however, is only part of the scene on the tenement roof-top; whereas Las cartas boca abajo is mainly a psychological study of Adela. The inner feelings of both of them are revealed and they are fully developed characters.

The heroes of the later plays are very sympathetic, well-rounded characters. They are not at all petty, but have deep understanding and seem to see things in perspective. They are great men, but they have humility, as well. They recognize their own shortcomings and struggle against them. They see the truth and act accordingly, even if the end result means a great sacrifice for them. Esquilache, Velázquez, Silvano, David and Mario are real people whose anguish and morality make them admirable human beings.

However, in spite of the fact that it is possible to trace their evolution, the tremendous unity of Buero's protagonists is really more striking. They all portray what Buero has observed as success or failure in life and what determines this. Almost all the plays contain the words "vencer" or "triunfar" in the last few pages and it is up to us to decide who has won and what was to be conquered.

Egoism is the major cause of man's inhumanity to his fellow man. Instead of being motivated by greed and selfishness, one should be governed by sympathy and love for others. One should search his heart to determine what the true motivation for his action is.

We all face the same problems of death and of giving meaning to our lives and should unite in a common struggle to improve the lot of mankind in general.

The innocent victims of the existing chaos are the future generations. They are our victims if we cannot improve conditions and end our carelessness and blindness. The theme of the plight of babies born as a result of violence or war appears in three of Buero's plays: Aventura en lo gris, Hoy es fiesta, and Un soñador para un pueblo. In El tragaluz, a baby is expected as a result of man's selfishness. Juanito of Las cartas boca abajo and Carmina and Fernando, hijo of Historia de una escalera represent the younger generation which appears to be incapable of making a better life for themselves without our help, although they still have hope, which their parents have lost. El tragaluz shows us how the future generations will judge us.

Hope for and faith in humanity are a major part of the solution to the problem. Where there is hope and faith, there is the possibility that improvement can be made. It must not be a passive hope, but must involve immediate action towards improvement before it is too late. Our life on Earth is very short. One has not lived in vain if

he can die knowing that the world has been a better place for others because of him and that he has done all he could to seek the truth within himself and fight against his limitations. One should not be "ciego" or "loco", but should be a dreamer and a man of action. Man's only real happiness and worthwhile action lies in the impossible struggle to make a better world. He should begin within himself, although the process may be a tortuous one and end in doubt and sadness as it does for many of Buero's protagonists.

We must not be weak and drift aimlessly or be easily led, but must decide for ourselves what is right and do it. If everyone conquered in life by making his good side triumph

"cette amélioration profonde et réelle de l'humanité dont tous les hommes conscients ont 'revé' depuis que le monde est monde."<sup>85</sup>

would have been achieved and so would a better world.\*

\*Two plays which Buero Vallejo wrote after the time at which this study was begun and which are, therefore, not discussed in it are: Mito (a libreto for an opera) and El sueño de la razón, which has as its protagonist, Goya, and which would have been included under the heading of historical works.

Mito: Colección teatro, Ediciones Alfil.

El sueño de la razón: Revista Primer Acto.

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85. Jean Paul Borel, "Buero Vallejo ou l'impossible concret et historique", Théâtre de l'Impossible, Neuchâtel, Editions de la Baconnière, 1963, p. 183.

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