



DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

V O L U M E

18





DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

Criticism of the Most Significant and Widely Studied
Dramatic Works from All the World's Literatures

VOLUME 18

Janet Witalec
Project Editor

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Preface

D*rama Criticism (DC)* is principally intended for beginning students of literature and theater as well as the average playgoer. The series is therefore designed to introduce readers to the most frequently studied playwrights of all time periods and nationalities and to present discerning commentary on dramatic works of enduring interest. Furthermore, *DC* seeks to acquaint the reader with the uses and functions of criticism itself. Selected from a diverse body of commentary, the essays in *DC* offer insights into the authors and their works but do not require that the reader possess a wide background in literary studies. Where appropriate, reviews of important productions of the plays discussed are also included to give students a heightened awareness of drama as a dynamic art form, one that many claim is fully realized only in performance.

DC was created in response to suggestions by the staffs of high school, college, and public libraries. These librarians observed a need for a series that assembles critical commentary on the world's most renowned dramatists in the same manner as Gale's *Short Story Criticism (SSC)* and *Poetry Criticism (PC)*, which present material on writers of short fiction and poetry. Although playwrights are covered in such Gale literary criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, *DC* directs more concentrated attention on individual dramatists than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries in these Gale series. Commentary on the works of William Shakespeare may be found in *Shakespearean Criticism (SC)*.

Scope of the Series

By collecting and organizing commentary on dramatists, *DC* assists students in their efforts to gain insight into literature, achieve better understanding of the texts, and formulate ideas for papers and assignments. A variety of interpretations and assessments is offered, allowing students to pursue their own interests and promoting awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Approximately five to ten authors are included in each volume, and each entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that playwright's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's literary criticism series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a *DC* volume.

Organization of the Book

A *DC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** consists of the playwright's most commonly used name, followed by birth and death dates. If an author consistently wrote under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction are any name variations under which the dramatist wrote, including transliterated forms of the names of authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.

- The list of **Principal Works** is divided into two sections. The first section contains the author's dramatic pieces and is organized chronologically by date of first performance. If this has not been conclusively determined, the composition or publication date is used. The second section provides information on the author's major works in other genres.
- Essays offering **overviews and general studies of the dramatist's entire literary career** give the student broad perspectives on the writer's artistic development, themes, and concerns that recur in several of his or her works, the author's place in literary history, and other wide-ranging topics.
- **Criticism** of individual plays offers the reader in-depth discussions of a select number of the author's most important works. In some cases, the criticism is divided into two sections, each arranged chronologically. When a significant performance of a play can be identified (typically, the premier of a twentieth-century work), the first section of criticism will feature **production reviews** of this staging. Most entries include sections devoted to **critical commentary** that assesses the literary merit of the selected plays. When necessary, essays are carefully excerpted to focus on the work under consideration; often, however, essays and reviews are reprinted in their entirety. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- A complete **Bibliographic Citation**, designed to help the interested reader locate the original essay or book, precedes each piece of criticism.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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Antonio Buero Vallejo

1916-2000

Spanish playwright, poet, essayist, and translator.

INTRODUCTION

One of Spain's leading dramatists, Buero Vallejo has contributed significantly to the revitalization of postwar Spanish theater. Eschewing the frivolous plots and comforting sentimentality of much early twentieth-century Spanish drama, Buero Vallejo wrote deeply serious, moralistic plays that frequently depicted characters consumed by despair and frustration. He is commonly regarded as a tragedian and advanced a conception of drama characterized by the redeeming presence of hope. Buero Vallejo suggested that by inviting people to confront reality without self-deception, the writer of tragedies raises issues fundamental to human existence and the improvement of society.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Buero Vallejo was born in Guadalajara, Spain, in 1916 to Francisco Buero, a military engineer, and Cruz Vallejo. From 1934 to 1936 he studied painting at the San Fernando School of Fine Arts in Madrid. Buero Vallejo was a medical assistant in the Loyalist army during the Spanish Civil War; for his involvement in the war he was imprisoned for six years by the regime of Generalissimo Francisco Franco. When he was released from prison in 1949, Buero Vallejo introduced his play *Historia de una escalera*, which presents a brutal picture of postwar Spain. The play won the Premio Lope de Vega prize and gained Buero Vallejo a position of prominence in Spanish drama. Many artists chose to flee the repressive censorship of Franco's government, but Buero Vallejo decided to stay and vent his frustrations in thinly veiled metaphorical and symbolic dramas criticizing government policies. In 1972 he was elected to the Real Academia Española. He was awarded both the Medalla de Oro al Merito en las Bellas Artes and the Medalla de Oro de la Sociedad General de Autores de España in 1994. He died on April 29, 2000, in Madrid, Spain.



Buero Vallejo uses a series of author surrogates to infuse his political ideology into his work. He commonly creates sensory experiences through music, art, and set design, termed "immersion effects" by critics, to cause the audience to feel the same sensations as the protagonist and thereby identify more closely with him. In *En la ardiente oscuridad* (1950; *In The Burning Darkness*) Buero Vallejo uses the mental and physical impairment of his protagonist to symbolize the condition of Spanish society. The play is about a conflict between two students at a blind school, one of whom refuses to accept his blindness. One of Buero Vallejo's stage effects in this play is the darkening of the theater to simulate for the audience the experience of blindness. The play is seen as a metaphor for the Spanish people's passive acceptance of totalitarian rule. *La doble historia del doctor Valmy* (1968) covers the themes of torture, guilt, cowardice, isolation, and loss of communication. While the drama is an indictment of police torture, it unfolds from the point of view of a security police officer

MAJOR WORKS

In his plays, Buero Vallejo presents many of the problems of Francoist and post-Francoist Spain, but the dramas always suggest the hope that problems can be overcome.

in the fictional nation of Surelia. *El sueño de la razón* (1970; *The Sleep of Reason*) is based upon Spanish artist Francisco de Goya's resistance to the tyranny of King Ferdinand VII. To dramatize Goya's deafness, Buero Vallejo's characters engage in incoherent dialogue and use sign language or notes to communicate with the protagonist. He projects Goya's infamous Black Paintings at the rear of the stage to reflect the cruelty and terror Goya experienced at this time. In *La fundación* (1974; *The Foundation*), Buero Vallejo's first drama about life in Spain as the Francoist regime is ending, he proposes that to achieve true freedom one must pass through a series of prisons, and that each small step toward freedom is important. In this work he employs an immersion effect that causes the audience to share the main character's hallucinations. *Jueces en la noche* (1979; *Judges in the Night*), *Caimán* (1981), and *Diálogo secreto* (1984) all delve into the problems of building a democracy after years of authoritarian rule.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Reviewers note Buero Vallejo's innovative dramatic techniques, including his use of immersion effects to fully involve the audience's senses and create a psychological bond with the protagonist. Some reviewers complain that, later in Buero Vallejo's career, his symbolism and imagery became overwhelming and too disparate. A few commentators, however, hold that his imagery is well-researched and demonstrates a calculated use of certain songs and artwork. Critical discussion of Buero Vallejo's work often centers on his relationship with censorship in Francoist Spain rather than his dramatic technique. Some critics disagree with his decision to continue to write under the restraints of censorship, but many praise what they consider his courageous attempt to voice his criticism of the political and social climate. In retrospect, many reviewers are surprised that Buero Vallejo was able to slip as much past the censors as he did. Many commentators praise Buero Vallejo for his insistence on facing the reality of political and social tragedies that many prefer to ignore. Reviewers generally agree that the overwhelming concern of Buero Vallejo's work is to inspire action to fight against political and social ills.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Plays

Historia de una escalera 1949
Las palabras en la arena 1949
En la ardiente oscuridad [*In the Burning Darkness*] 1950

La señal que se espera 1952
La tejedora de sueños [*The Dreamweaver*] 1952
Casi un cuento de hadas: Una glosa de Perrault 1953
Madrugada 1953
Aventura en lo gris 1954
Irene o el tesoro 1954
El terror inmovil: Fragmentos de una tragedia irrepresentable 1954
Hoy es fiesta 1956
Las cartas boca abajo 1957
Un soñador para un pueblo [*A Dreamer for the People*] 1958
Teatro. 2 vols. 1959-1962
Las meninas: Fantasia velazquena en dos partes [*Las meninas: A Fantasy*] 1960
El concierto de San Ovidio [*The Concert of Saint Ovide*] 1962
Buero Vallejo: Antología teatral 1966
Teatro selecto 1966
El tragaluz [*The Basement Window*] 1967
La doble historia del doctor Valmy 1968
El sueño de la razón [*The Sleep of Reason*] 1970
Llegada de los dioses 1971
La fundación [*The Foundation*] 1974
La detonación [*The Shot*] 1977
Jueces en la noche [*Judges in the Night*] 1979
Caimán 1981
Diálogo secreto 1984
Lázaro en la laberinto [*Lazarus in the Labyrinth*] 1986
Música cerana [*The Music Window*] 1989
Obra completa. 2 vols. 1994
Las trampas del azar 1994

GENERAL COMMENTARY

Robert E. Lott (essay date autumn 1965)

SOURCE: Lott, Robert E. "Scandinavian Reminiscences in Antonio Buero Vallejo's Theater." *Romance Notes* VII, no. 1 (autumn 1965): 113-16.

[In the following essay, Lott finds similarities between Buero Vallejo's and Henrik Ibsen's treatment of family tension and bickering in their work.]

When Antonio Buero Vallejo's *Las cartas boca abajo* was first performed in Madrid in 1957, Felipe Bernardos correctly pointed out that the most obvious precedent for the role of Anita, the supposedly mute sister of Adela, was Miss Y (Amelie) of Strindberg's *The Stronger*.¹ Both Miss Y and Anita are silent throughout, relying solely on action and gesture, and at dramatic moments both seem to be on the verge of breaking their silence. Miss Y chooses not to

talk, and thus conceals her spitefulness and viciousness behind the appearance of strength and disdain. Anita's case is ambiguous: one is never certain that she is truly mute, though it does become clear that she wishes her sister ill.²

It is no doubt true that reminiscences of Strindberg are seen here and in Buero Vallejo's frequent treatment of family bickerings and hatred.³ Buero, like Lorca, has been able to adapt Strindberg's "war between the sexes" to Spanish themes and situations. The struggle in *The Father* between the Captain and his wife Laura, and their disagreement about keeping their daughter Bertha at home have their parallels in *Las cartas boca abajo*. Also there is resemblance between the ending of *The Father* and the removal of Dimas to an insane asylum in Buero's *Irene, o el tesoro*. One might also compare the dream sequences in *The Dream Play* and in the Spaniard's *Aventura en lo gris*.

However, Buero's dramaturgy is particularly reminiscent of Ibsen's.⁴ Both often use a rebellious, visionary protagonist struggling through the obstacles imposed by society and self toward understanding and the hope of reconciliation. The vehicle for each is usually a carefully constructed play, with a slow-moving symbolic action and an artistic utilization of the dramatic values inherent in every scene, every speech, every gesture. In Ibsen, as well as in Strindberg (not to mention O'Neill, Williams, and Miller), Buero found ample treatment of the warring family and of the failure as protagonist. And his occasional use of symbolism and fantasy are more in keeping with Ibsen's.

Besides general similarities of theme and tone between the two writers, several specific affinities are recognizable, though frequently with shifts in meaning. In Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* suicide is a test of faith and love. In Buero's *La señal que se espera* a husband's weak faith and understanding are put to the test by an unsuccessful suicide attempt. In both *The Lady from the Sea* and *Irene, o el tesoro* the woman protagonist living in an unsatisfactory home environment is forced to make a momentous decision in the face of impending insanity. In *The Master Builder* as in *Irene, o el tesoro*, a final death-fall can be interpreted with equal validity as a victory in defeat. The end of *Irene* . . . is meant to suggest simultaneously her suicide and her supernatural ascent to Heaven. Solness of *The Master Builder* held himself morally responsible (because of his desire to use a fire as the first step up the ladder of success) for the death of his twin babies, even though the fire was not caused by the cracked chimney he refrained from repairing. Silverio of *Hoy es fiesta* feels responsible because he secretly wished the death of his wife's illegitimate daughter. In both these plays and *Irene* . . . dead children weigh heavily on the characters. There is considerable ambiguity about the insanity and suicide of Beata in *Rosmersholm* and of Irene in Buero's play. Rebec-

ca's unholy scheming and concealment of the past in *Rosmersholm* are echoed in Adela of *Las cartas boca abajo*. Both women's schemes backfire.

The closest parallel is probably seen between *Las cartas boca abajo* and Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman*.⁵ In *Las cartas* . . . two sisters, Anita and Adela, had first been rivals for their father's preference when their mother died, then for the love of Ferrer, who has since become a famous scholar, and now for the affection of Adela's and Juan's grown son. Adela had stolen Anita's sweetheart, Ferrer, and then had married Juan to spite Ferrer. This shock apparently brought on Anita's muteness. Adela's marriage has turned sour, and she actually conspires to have her husband, a would-be professor, fail in his efforts to win a professorship. Anita symbolically gives the sweater she had been knitting not to the son, but to the boy's father, thus again becoming a rival of her sister. At the end Juan wins his son over to his side and Adela loses her last illusions.

Though the two plays are quite different in many respects, the basic situation in *John Gabriel Borkman* is rather similar to that of *Las cartas* . . . Ella believed that her twin sister Gunhild had robbed her of Borkman, though he finally discloses that he had married Gunhild for her money. During the haughty swindler's long imprisonment and subsequent voluntary confinement, Ella has lived on her hatred of Gunhild and her desire to seek revenge by attaining the love of Borkman's and Gunhild's son Erhard. Borkman and Gunhild have lived in constant misunderstanding and hate, completely isolated from each other in the same house. The previous struggle over Borkman has continued unabated for the love of the selfish, unworthy son. In both works the characters' secret, selfish, and malevolent motives—the "cards turned face down," to use Buero's metaphor—have created a paralyzing atmosphere of malicious rancor. As the motives are gradually revealed the air is cleared and there is hope for love and understanding, but things have progressed too far to save Borkman, who dies, and Adela, who will be left to suffer her anguish in a solitude not unlike that endured by Borkman.

A close analysis of all the plays would reveal other similarities between Buero Vallejo and Ibsen, but these are the main ones. The most important thing is that the Spanish playwright has so successfully applied the Norwegian's symbolic-realistic dramatic method to the socio-moral problems of contemporary Spain.

Notes

1. "Sin remontarnos al *Hamlet*, sin recordar las estatuas mortuorias del *Convidado de piedra*, *Don Juan*, etc., quizá sea la amiga silenciosa que Strindberg colocó de oyente en *La más fuerte*, junto con el criado viejo de *El malentendido*, de Camus, los casos más característicos de personajes acusadores del teatro moderno." Quoted from *Teatro español 1957-1958*, ed. F. C. Sainz de Robles (Madrid, 1959), p. 8.

2. Cf. Pilar's equally ambiguous and crucial deafness in *Hoy es fiesta*.
3. Readers unfamiliar with Buero Vallejo will find additional information and bibliography in my article, "Functional Flexibility and Ambiguity in Buero Vallejo's Plays," *Symposium* (Summer, 1966).
4. That is, among the Scandinavians. I hope to show in a future study Buero's even closer affinities with Arthur Miller.
5. In both *John Gabriel Borkman* and Buero's *Madrugada* chronological and stage time are perfectly synchronized.

Robert E. Lott (essay date summer 1966)

SOURCE: Lott, Robert E. "Functional Flexibility and Ambiguity in Buero Vallejo's Plays." *Symposium XX*, no. 2 (summer 1966): 150-62.

[In the following essay, Lott defines Buero Vallejo's term "functional flexibility" in relation to his work and attempts to classify the playwright's dramatic oeuvre.]

Antonio Buero Vallejo has rightly decried attempts to classify his plays according to the direct and realistic method represented by *Historia de una escalera* and, presumably, *Hoy es fiesta*, or the speculative, symbolic, or imaginative manner of most of his other works.¹ He says that *En la ardiente oscuridad* is different from both tendencies, and that *Hoy es fiesta* is as close to it as to *Historia de una escalera*, despite the similarity of settings in these two plays. Yet, useful distinctions and parallels can be made, but only with full awareness of the complex interrelations and multiple functions of his diverse works, concepts, and characters. A serious classification should consider all fourteen of his plays, explain the titles and subtitles, include his own perceptive comments, and analyze his concept of tragedy. In this paper I shall treat briefly several of these matters, all of which deserve thorough study.

Buero Vallejo uses the term "flexibilización funcional" to cover the multiple and tragic aspects of victory and defeat in *La tejedora de sueños*.² These aspects, though only one manifestation of his very appropriately named "functional flexibility," also appear in other plays, as we shall see. *La tejedora de sueños* is an original treatment of the Penelope myth. In it the publicly triumphant Ulysses suffers the loss of Penelope's love and the destruction of normal family relations and his self-esteem. Penelope loses the idealistic Anfino as a possible husband, but is consoled by the idea that she will be a youthful, loved image of goodness and beauty, locked forever in his noble soul. This is more important to her than the false public opinion of her prudence and faithfulness which Ulysses will propagate.

She is flattered that because of her the suitors have waged a "little Trojan War" and have died. Rising above this meaner side of her nature, she applies the hollow words of the chorus to drive home the moral of the play and to express her greatest victory: the firm belief in future, better men, like the pre-Christian Anfino, who will neither be cold, crafty "reasoners" like Ulysses nor go away to needless wars, abandoning their homes and wives and thus ultimately causing the kind of crimes which befell Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.

Buero poses unanswered questions about the events and characters, especially Penelope. Is her vanity a form of tragic pride which leads to rebelliousness and errors in judgment and yet, through suffering, to unique insight into the condition of man and of the cosmos? Is her suffering just or unjust? Or does she fall short of truly tragic proportions because of her pettiness and the lateness of both her decision to bear her burden of private grief and her awareness of being a prototype of woman's suffering? As in all tragedy, the answers, however uncertain, must be searched for in the work itself. But Buero is not simply relativistic, for he definitely prefers Penelope's victories, even while recognizing her defects and Ulysses' understandable concern.

In *En la ardiente oscuridad* the concepts of victory and defeat vary, and not merely according to the literal and symbolic meanings, although in Buero these two meanings nearly always form part of the intricacy of functions and interpretations.³ The arrival of Ignacio at a school for the blind and his bitter, questioning attitudes shock the students out of their delusions of normalcy. Now cognizant of shadows and darkness, they join his search for acceptance of their sad plight and for the light of understanding. His positivistic rival, Carlos, kills him, apparently winning the struggle. But when the body is brought into the room, Carlos sees how short-lived Ignacio's influence was and realizes in his irremediable loneliness how much like Ignacio he really is. He will continue the prophetic, visionary work of Ignacio, who is victorious in death.

As one commentator says of this very profound play, in my opinion the best Spanish tragedy since Lorca:

En la ardiente oscuridad is symbolic of human nature. Human beings long continually to reach out, to see beyond the limits which their very physical nature and their society impose on them. The symbol of blindness represents the obscurity which surrounds man, his uncertainty, his continual fear of the unknown. Ignacio, the proud rebel, symbolizes the dreamer of things unknown, the iconoclast who rejects and yet longs passionately for something beyond his possession, who cannot be content existing with blindness in his heart.⁴

Neither a saint nor martyr nor Messiah, Ignacio is an imperfect human being, sometimes needlessly cruel to others.⁵ His higher ideals and metaphysical aspirations unfold

gradually and blend with his human desires for love, understanding, and companionship, in spite of his attempt to repress them. His seemingly destructive effect would eventually be constructive, since the blind students would probably come to reject the institution's superficial optimism and therapeutic pragmatism, and struggle for happiness within their limitations.⁶ Buero tells us that such a change would be significant but not definitive. After Carlos' work is accomplished, another Ignacio will appear; then perhaps the first Ignacio's vague dream of some remedy for their blindness could become a reality. Perhaps, too, as Ignacio suggests, death is the sole remedy and only death brings true vision.

The central meaning of *Hoy es fiesta* must be sought among the complexities of hope and despair, guilt and forgiveness, and lack of communication, especially in their relations to Silverio's quandary. On a paradoxical feast day the bickering inhabitants of a poor apartment building learn that, instead of winning considerable sums of money, they have been duped into buying from Doña Balbina the previous week's worthless lottery tickets. Their anger soon turns to violence. Against this background Silverio struggles to surmount his ingrained egoism and cowardice in order to confess his secret guilt to his deaf, ailing wife Pilar. He holds himself responsible for the death of her child, the fruit of a soldier's brutal attack on Pilar before their marriage.⁷ Silverio cannot help others until he overcomes his weaknesses, first by an act of bravery, and then by his altruistic assumption of leadership to hold off the vengeful mob. He achieves atonement by saving Daniela, Balbina's daughter, and with his recently acquired courage and moral strength plans to confess in writing to Pilar. The supreme irony of the play, one which gives it an open ending full of tragic ambiguities, is that Pilar dies before Silverio makes his confession. But the words of the fortuneteller point beyond their superficial banality and irony to a true spiritual message: "Hay que esperar . . . Esperar siempre . . . La esperanza nunca termina . . . La esperanza es infinita. . . ."⁸

Apparently condemned to eternal suffering without Pilar's pardon, Silverio may still hope for it to be disclosed in some way. Or a closer analysis of the day's events may persuade him that it was unnecessary or, as is hinted, that she already knew of his guilt and had tacitly forgiven him. As Silverio had assured Daniela, "Obras son amores," and he has discovered through compassion and altruism strange, new feelings of strength, peace, and oneness with his fellow creatures. Buero accepts neither hope nor despair as the unique meaning of the dénouement, saying that the two concepts complete each other, and adds: "Esto carece de lógica. Pero el arte, y la vida que refleja, están por encima del principio de contradicción. La vida y el arte ofrecen de hecho una simultánea multiplicidad de significados dispares" (page 101). Each spectator may interpret the final words as conveying irony or a profound spiritual truth, or both. The same applies to Silverio:

el autor *no sabe* si le conmueve la esperanza que pueda latir para él en esa invocación final o si le duele deses-
peradamente el sarcasmo que encierra. Es posible que
sienta ambas cosas a un tiempo. La obra se desen-
vuelve y se cierra en esa viva ambivalencia, para la
que sólo cabe una definición unitaria: la interrogante.

(p. 103)

Ambiguities of victory and defeat figure so prominently in the three plays discussed so far because they come the closest to tragedy. Tragic overtones and situations with several possible interpretations of victory and defeat and the concept of victory in defeat are found in other plays too. In *Aventura en lo gris* Silvano overcomes his habitual selfishness and cynicism and becomes the visionary leader of a group of refugees. Between the play's two acts is an "Intermedio," a symbolic, prophetic dream, common to all except the political leader Gólver, too much of an activist to dream. In this quasi-surrealistic dream—characterized by special effects of lighting, music, and costume, stylized dialogue, and panomime—the repressed desires of the characters, their lasciviousness, egoism, and hatred become manifest and unconscious urges and obsession are acted out. Isabel, mother of an infant sired by an enemy soldier, relives the bestial attack and Albo, the supposedly ascetic follower of Gólver's party and protector of Isabel, acts out his ill-controlled desire for her. Gólver's embittered mistress, Ana, is fascinated by Silvano's goodness and ecstatically exclaims: "Gracias, Silvano. ¡Tú me haces soñar la aventura de tus palabras de luz en el gris de mi vida!" Near the end of the dream Isabel is found dead. In the stark reality of dawn Isabel is in fact found strangled. Silvano proves that it could have been done only by Gólver, whom Albo then kills. The refugees, now more humane because of their common dream, escape, leaving the baby with Silvano and Ana. After Ana persuades the enemy soldiers to care for the child, she and Silvano calmly await their execution, having gained a moral victory. The nameless child for whom they sacrifice themselves is the hope for the future.

Silvano's and Ana's joint adventure of Light, achieved by means of charity and abnegation, dispels the depressing gray shadows of human imperfections at the moment the rising sun breaks through the shadows of night. Thus this drama, like the one-act play, *Las palabras en la arena*, aims to be what Buero has called "teatro evangélico."¹⁰ It is especially significant in Buero's dramatic development because its early date shows that the unreal, even fantastic elements seen in later works should not be considered regrettable aberrations from an earlier, superior dramatic method (of social realism), but rather another indication of the author's complexity, dramatic range, and exploratory spirit.

Juan, the weak protagonist of *Las cartas boca abajo*, gains self-esteem and a personal victory, while again failing to win a university chair, partly because of his obsessive

envy of Ferrer, a former friend and now famous intellectual, and the stubborn pride which prevents him from asking for two of Ferrer's books which might have enabled him to win the competition. A greater reason is that his shabby home is a nest of envy, frustration, and rancor. His wife Adela had married him only to spite Ferrer, after having maliciously taken Ferrer away from her older sister Anita. The latter act had supposedly caused Anita to become mute. Adela clings to childish illusions of becoming free and happy like the birds she hears singing, and of winning back Ferrer, with the help of her son Juanito. She has insisted on keeping all the "cards face down," and even sent her brother to seek Ferrer's intervention in Juan's behalf. Her wish was to negate Juan's own merits if he won, and to revile him still more if he lost. Juan, however, tricks her into betraying her design by letting her believe that he has won. After turning up his own "card" (the destructive envy of Ferrer for which he has paid the price of failure), Juan also discloses her other "cards" (concealed motives and attitudes), including her unholy reasons for marrying him and the deliberate alienation of his son's love and respect. Juanito overhears his father's insistence on sending him away to school where he will be free from the malignant influence of their home, and realizes his father's merits and his mother's selfish malice. Adela is told that the birds' singing at night actually reflects disillusionment and terror of death. Anita's inexorable silence and hatred are the only answers to her frantic pleas for forgiveness. Adela's pernicious victory has left her in utter desolation and despair, whereas Juan's reactions to his external defeat have ennobled him and earned his son's love and understanding.

The background of the historical drama, *Un soñador para un pueblo*, is this: the reforms of Carlos III's minister, the aging Marqués de Esquilache, lead conservative nobles to instigate a rebellion. At the same time, Esquilache's unhappy family life is brightened only by his virtuous servant, Fernandita. She is persecuted by the brutal coach driver, Bernardo, to whom she is unwillingly attracted. Later Esquilache, virtually imprisoned, is horrified to learn that Fernandita has submitted to Bernardo's attack. The king presents Esquilache the difficult choice of either yielding to the mob's demands, or punishing the rebels, thus risking more bloodshed. Tempted to save his pride and seek revenge, Esquilache decides to sacrifice himself. He will be exiled to his native Italy, but for him the greater loss is that of Fernandita's affection and companionship. In a confrontation with the cynical Marqués de Ensenada, Esquilache concedes that he has only followed Ensenada's earlier work, but replies that he, like Fernandita and unlike Ensenada, is of plebeian origin and believes in the people. Unless a ruler is a dreamer of and for a people, like himself, he can achieve nothing. Esquilache watches Fernandita, in whom he has placed his hopes for the future of the Spanish people, as she definitively rejects Bernardo, the symbol of stupidity and brutality. So notwithstanding his personal defeats, Esquilache gains an intimate victory

through self-denial, Fernandita's victory over her instincts, and the aid of some poor people during a moment of peril. These facts indicate to him the people's basic goodness and eventual acceptance of his and subsequent reforms.

The famous painter Velázquez is the protagonist of *Las Meninas*. He suffers no defeat, but loses his only friend, the beggar Pedro, who had earlier posed for his painting of Aesop. Velázquez' family and associates are led by envy and lack of understanding to have him brought before a hearing of the Inquisition, presided over by King Philip IV and witnessed by the Infanta María Teresa. Velázquez refutes the charge of having violated the law against lasciviousness in his nude Venus and proves that his current painting, "Las Meninas," is not trivial and inappropriate. He is also accused of giving refuge to Pedro, who had committed youthful acts of rebellion because of deplorable conditions. On learning of Pedro's death, Velázquez confesses his own profound rebelliousness and unwillingness to lie. María Teresa calls upon her father to open his eyes to the truth, and to correct the errors and injustices of his regime, beginning with his own moral waywardness. But the tired and ineffectual king absolves Velázquez and punishes no one. Velázquez is pathetically alone in his victory, having lost the opportunity to enjoy Pedro's and María Teresa's understanding friendship, incomprehensible in the corrupt court.

The main significance, however, is found in the central ambiguity of what the painting was about and its relations to Buero's play. Pedro interpreted the work as "un cuadro sereno: pero con toda la tristeza de España dentro. Quien vea a estos seres comprenderá lo irremediamente condenados al dolor que están. Son fantasmas vivos de personas cuya verdad es la muerte." Velázquez called it "un cuadro de pobres seres salvados por la luz . . .," and Pedro thus explained Velázquez' almost mystical feeling of peace at seeing and painting the truth: "Sólo quien ve la belleza del mundo puede comprender lo intolerable de su dolor."¹¹ Velázquez becomes aware that he had symbolized the beautiful but sad truth of Spain in his earlier painting of Pedro. Guillermo Díaz-Plaja has called Pedro "the key figure of the play" and has described the painting "Esopo" as follows: "He appears in the painting erect, enveloped in a large and wrinkled cloak and with a book in his hand. His head is noble, his hair grey with a strange mark of defeated dignity."¹² Pedro, who was born poor and wanted to be a painter in his youth, is Velázquez' alter ego, and what happened to him could have happened to Velázquez. Just as in the painting the ugliness and trivialities of the court are counterbalanced by the radiant beauty of the Infanta Margarita and by the insight into suffering and weakness, so in the play do the strength, compassionate understanding, and virtue of María Teresa, Pedro, and Velázquez stand out like beacons of light amidst the corruption, slander, and intrigue of the court. And in both the painting and the play there is the justifiable glorification of the individual, creative artist and the creative act. Buero,

who rightly gave his play the subtitle of "Fantasía velazqueña," has shifted the emphasis from the *meninas* back to the artist at work, as Velázquez perhaps originally intended.¹³

Whether or not Buero was guilty of misinterpreting Velázquez, as Díaz-Plaja has charged, he was artistically correct in making him somewhat visionary and inwardly rebellious. His Velázquez is not the ideal courtier of history, but a "conjunción única de arrogancia y sencillez" (page 18), a compound of noble sentiments (despite his humble origin) and ironic cleverness, a man impassioned by truth. Here and throughout his plays Buero shows his fondness for multi-faceted themes, and protagonists capable of suggesting various interpretations, with apparently contradictory traits joined in a strong character. This is true of Velázquez, Esquilache, Silverio, and others, but Velázquez is morally the greatest and noblest of his creations.

Buero's latest play, *El concierto de San Ovidio*,¹⁴ uses the historically accurate exploitation of blind beggars during the festival of St. Ovidio in 1771 as a vehicle for indignant protest. The only talented musician among them, David, becomes rebellious because their villainous impresario, Valindin, plans to present them as grotesque players. David had hoped to help his companions by teaching them to be real musicians. One day Valindin surprises his mistress Adriana with David's adolescent protégé, Donato, and begins to beat them. When David intervenes, Valindin easily subdues him. David follows Valindin to the closed café-theater, where, in his native element, darkness, he defeats and kills him. Jealous because Adriana loves David, Donato betrays him to the police. Valentín Haüy (a historical figure who worked to help the blind) tells the audience that he suspects that one of those poor men he saw abused in Valindin's café twenty-nine years before is an old blind man (Donato) who always plays a musical piece by Corelli (as David had done). But who, he asks, will assume the responsibility for David's unjust execution? Perhaps "music" is the only possible answer for some questions.

This play takes up some of the author's basic preoccupations and deepens his first treatment of the blind. The contrast between the *videntes* and *invidentes* ("seers" and "non-seers") and the symbolism are obvious: music, illusion, dreams of a better world versus the almost overwhelming odds of despotic exploitation and collective indifference. Not a tragedy in the strictest sense, it has qualities that are tragic and "evangelical"—it is rightly subtitled a parable. It opens with the paternoster (which contrasts ironically with Valindin's evil designs) and David's faith in a better life, and, because of Haüy's charitable commitment, ends on a strong note of hope. The blind characters' personal loss results in a long-range victory for all blind, oppressed people. It would be useful to compare David with Buero's other dreamer-protagonists,

as well as this play with *En la ardiente oscuridad*. Like Ignacio, David is a visionary nonconformist who serves as a catalyst to his lethargic companions, and the David-Donato relationship is similar to that of Ignacio and Carlos. But David's death is more pathetic and more gratuitous than Ignacio's, since Haüy's reforms occurred independently of it.

A second feature of Buero's functional flexibility is ambiguity, which occasionally results in perspectivism and relativism. *La señal que se espera* is a study of the ambiguities of faith and doubt or, as Buero says, of "el problema de las relaciones mágicas, los milagros y los providencialismos. El problema, en suma, de las posibilidades activas de la fe."¹⁵ Enrique has brought Luis, a young composer and former sweetheart of his wife Susana, to spend the summer with them in Galicia in order to clear up his doubts about his wife and Luis. Rejected by Susana for Enrique and his money, Luis had become so disturbed that the forgetting of one of his melodies had caused him to lose his musical talent. He has formed the illogical belief that the wind will play his lost melody on an aeolian harp, as a sign of God's grace. Other characters share this belief, but for each it will be a sign of something different. Susana feels guilty about Luis's infirmity and asserts that her and Enrique's great fault has been the selfishness of not wanting children. One evening Luis's melody is played on the harp, and he recovers his talent. The next morning letters arrive bringing solutions to the others' problems. One informs Enrique that he has lost his fortune. Susana tells him that she played the melody, but that it was not wrong to do so because through faith these people's lives were straightened out. Even for her there is a sign: she is at last going to have a child. The once skeptical Enrique now has faith and believes that the harmony of the spheres is audible in this moment of perfect love and understanding.

For Buero the miracle of this "comedia feérica" consists not of the playing of the melody, which has a natural explanation, nor of the apparent coincidences, which he ascribes to a sort of distributive justice, but of the marvelous moment of harmony that envelops his characters.¹⁶ Enrique, having overcome his selfishness and skepticism, will be happier with Susana in the future. Thus the play's theme, reminiscent of Pirandello, is that faith in some illusion, although it cannot resist rational analysis, can serve powerfully to sustain or transform human beings.

Casi un cuento de hadas is set in the eighteenth century. The older of twin princesses, Leticia, beautiful but stupid, is constantly ridiculed and belittled. An old prediction is fulfilled when the kindness and love of a grotesque suitor, Prince Riquet, awaken her latent intelligence and love. This makes her see him as the handsome, dashing Riquet *el hermoso*. After a three-months' absence, Riquet thinks that Leticia now loves the handsome but vain Prince Armando instead of him because she manages only momen-