THE SOCIAL-POLITICAL ETHIC
IN THE PLAYS OF ANTONIO BUERO VALLEJO
PRODUCED AND PUBLISHED
FROM OCTOBER 1949 TO OCTOBER 1963

by
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ABSTRACT

Antonio Buero Vallejo has stated that his aims as a dramatist are not only artistic but social. This social aim has manifested itself consistently in the content of his dramas produced and published from October 1949 to October 1965 in his didactic purpose of demonstrating that abnegation is the highest quality of man. He addresses himself to two different groups—to the man in the street and to the governing hierarchy. His hope is that these respective groups will perceive the positive results of abnegation in the lives of those protagonists who practice it or the negative consequences in the lives of those protagonists who ignore its efficacy, the sorrowful consequences in the lives of those people whose destiny is linked to those who have chosen the path of selfishness.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Not infrequently, one may hear that in the various art forms, the philosophy or spirit of a particular time and a particular people finds expression. As a generalization this assumption is acceptable and it may be said that the artist whom a particular people in a particular age chooses to honor can serve to reflect the philosophy or spirit of the age and the people. And if one accepts this further generalization and applies it to contemporary Spanish theater since the end of the Spanish Civil War, then two more generalizations can be made: Antonio Buero Vallejo has been to the date of this writing the most honored playwright; consequently, he can be considered as somewhat representative of the post-Civil War dramatists. Secondly, it must follow that his works mirror contemporary Spanish thought to some extent, at least until the year 1960.

The year 1960 is chosen not only because that was the last year in which Buero Vallejo won a major dramatic award; but because it seems to mark the end of an epoch during which he and other playwrights held the attention and respect of Spain's theatrical world.

In 1949, Aguilar, S.A. de Ediciones, Madrid, began the annual publication of Teatro español under the direction of
Federico Carlos Sainz de Hobles, one of Spain's noted theatre critics. Mr. Sainz de Hobles each year since then has selected the year's most popular and critically acclaimed plays. In each edition's prologue, he has set forth opinions on the theatrical season, appraising each play separately. He has included also each playwright's auto-criticism in addition to reviews about the individual plays, reviews published in Spain's leading publications. In the appendix of each edition he has listed all of the theatrical productions that were presented in Spain for the edition's particular year.

In the Aguilar series, the only one of its kind in Spain, between the years 1949-1950 and 1959-1960, several dozen playwrights have had their commercial successes published as the best theatrical offerings. The names of José López Rubio, Joaquín Calvo Sotelo, Edgar Neville, Miguel Mihura, Victor Ruiz Iriarte, José María Pemán, Alfonso Paso, José Ignacio Luca de Tena, in addition to Antonio Suero Vallejo are to be found listed repeatedly. It should be noted here that each edition of Teatro español at the most included six plays. And it may be further noted that of the nine aforementioned playwrights, at least four were included in each year's selection until the season of 1960-1961. In that year only one of them was listed, Antonio Suero Vallejo. A completely new crop of writers had swept the theatrical boards, bringing with them new attitudes, if not new techniques. And since that year, the above-named writers have ceased to dominate
the Spanish theatrical scene though they have not stopped their creative output.

Upon reading the plays published in the Aguilar series between the years 1949 and 1960, one can see a very definite social attitude in the serious works of Antonio Buero Vallejo, Victor Ruiz Iriarte, Juan Ignacio Luca de Tena and Joaquín Calvo Sotelo—serious works meaning all those other than the light situation comedies. This social attitude is clear in Dos mujeres a las nueve and El condor sin alas of Luca de Tena; in Historia de una escalera, En la ardiente oscuridad, La tejedora de sueños, Hoy es fiesta, Cartas boca abajo, Un soñador para un pueblo and Las Meninas of Antonio Buero Vallejo as well as in his other plays which are not included in the Aguilar series; and in El landó de seis caballos and El gran minué of Victor Ruiz Iriarte amongst others. Broadly speaking this social attitude seen through the plays' protagonists is an active one that throws into relief man struggling to survive his social environment with his integrity intact, if not simply man being overwhelmed by his social milieu or his inability to choose a positive course of action in a moral-ethical situation created by society. It is actually then man in conflict with society, not in conflict with himself; or man in conflict with society because of himself. In the year 1960-1961, as has been said, the new writers, Ricardo Rodríguez Buded, Eduardo Criado, Alfonso Sastre and Ricardo López Aranda emerged bringing with them a new social attitude.
If one were to do a depth study of the contemporary Spanish theatre, it must be one on the social themes, as they are the most persistent of the various themes to be found. The leading exponent of the social theatre is Antonio Buero Vallejo. He is the most insistent of all the dramatists during the 1949-1960 period.

It is therefore the proposal of this study to lay bare the raison d'être of the social theme in its different ramifications as manifested in the plays of Antonio Buero Vallejo. This will be done in an attempt to further the understanding of the playwright and the people and times that he represents. It may also be said then that this study is to embrace the content of Buero Vallejo's plays rather than the artistic forms generally employed by the playwright. It can further be said that all efforts to arrive at a value judgment of Antonio Buero Vallejo's literary merit will be foregone. This is properly so as the theatre, in the strictest sense, is not to be considered as literature, the proper artistic life of any given play being that of representation by actors in front of an audience with all of the accoutrement necessary to the production of the play.

In June of 1949, the Lope de Vega Prize, one of Spain's most prominent awards for the recognition of artistic excellence in the dramatic arts, was revived by the Ayuntamiento de Madrid. The political troubles of 1934 which presaged the Civil War of 1936 necessarily led to the abandoning of the giving of this
award. Because of the exigencies of rebuilding the country in the years immediately following the victory of Generalísimo Francisco Franco and his supporters in 1939, its bestowal had been foregone for a decade. When the award was announced in behalf of the author of Historia de una escalera, its author was not one whose name was to be found in Spain's dramatic world. He was an unknown: Antonio Buero Vallejo, a thirty-three year old playwright from Guadalajara who only four years earlier had been released from prison where he had been sent at war's end for having been a medical aide for the vanquished Republicans. If there had been a mixed reaction to a former Republican and political prisoner receiving the prestigious Lope de Vega Prize, Buero Vallejo's being named one of the winners of the Amigos de los Quinterno Prize for his one-act play Palabras en la arena in the winter of the same year could only have enhanced this reaction.

Attention was further focused on Buero Vallejo as in addition to the cash award, the Lope de Vega Prize also carried the honor that the prize-winning drama be staged in one of the two national theatres in Madrid, the Teatro español de Madrid or the Teatro María Guerrero.

Historia de una escalera opened in the Teatro español de


Madrid on October 14, 1949. This single event is signalled by critics as the most significant theatrical event in Spain since the Civil War, marking as it were the resurgence of the drama in post-war Spain. Domingo Pérez Minik calls the work "la semilla y hasta la flor de un gran drama español."\(^3\) Chandler and Schwartz in their history of Spanish literature credit Suero Vallejo with being an originator of one of the twentieth century's three principal attempts to renovate the drama, the other two being generated by Jacinto Benavente in the first quarter of the century and by Alejandro Casona and Federico García Lorca in the 1930's and 1940's.\(^4\) García Pavón, in his Teatro social en España, states that social theatre had its renascence "en España en 1949 con la aparición de Suero Vallejo."\(^5\) In a word, Historia de una escalera was received enthusiastically. And it was a reception marked by a high seriousness that has remained the tenor of subsequent considerations of this playwright.

At this writing, Suero Vallejo has written and has produced fourteen works since 1949, the last of which, Aventura en lo gris, was produced in the Teatro Recoletos de Madrid (now defunct), on October 1, 1963. As reported in two reviews, of the fourteen plays, five of them, La tejedora de sueños (1952), La

\(^3\) Domingo Pérez Minik, Debates sobre el teatro español contemporáneo (Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canarias: Goya Ediciones, 1953), p. 283.

\(^4\) Chandler and Schwartz, op. cit., p. 127.

serial que se espera (1952), Casi un cuento de hadas (1953), Irene o el tesoro (1954) and Aventura en lo gris (1963) are considered unqualified commercial and critical failures. Nevertheless, Buero Vallejo continued to oe and is still graced with the highest of pronouncements by the critics of contemporary Spanish theatre whose studies appear in those publications most widely circulated. Random samplings of the estimations of Buero Vallejo's work since his advent can only give a general idea of the esteem in which he is held, yet it is a valid one. As a starting point, one may take Alfonso López Gradoli's review which appeared in 1955. It more or less epitomizes the consensus of critical opinion up to that year. He declares:

Buero Vallejo es hoy el único autor que tiene algo que hacer y que decir en el teatro español actual, frente al más o menos abigarrado conjunto de incapaces que lo critican...ha triunfado en toda la noble y grande expresión de la palabra. Sin alharacas ni aplausos comprados. "Por punos" como dicen los castizos.

Alfredo Lafebvre of Chile in 1957 observed that if faced with the necessity of naming the authors whose works had been produced up to late spring of that year, only "el teatro de Buero Vallejo se distingue de todos ellos por el grado de consciencia espiritual y


Ricardo Domenech in one of his articles in Primer Acto, writes that Buero Vallejo brought to the Spanish theatre in 1949 "un soplar de vitalidad que se levantaba frente a la aridez mental y la noñería entonces vigentes." And it is that vitality, he maintained, that characterizes Buero's theatre still in 1957, the year his article was written. Luis Abellán, in an issue of the prestigious Insula in 1961, unequivocally states that "Antonio Buero Vallejo es, sin duda, entre los consagrados, el dramaturgo más honrado, que existe en España desde hace veinte años...," adding that his position has been dearly won at that. This viewpoint is buttressed by José R. Marra-López the following year when in the words prefatory to a published conversation of his with Buero Vallejo he wrote:

En el actual panorama español...el teatro se muestra retrasado en relación a dichas actividades literarias.... Dentro de esta no muy halagadora situación teatral apenas dos o tres nombres se salvan del ambiente de mediocridad y conformismo. Y por encima, indiscutida la figura de Buero Vallejo se muestra solitaria, como la única personalidad teatral aparecida en España después de la guerra civil.

José Castellano in his 1962 interpretation of Buero's theatre,


in essence, offers a simplified version of Marra-López’ estimation. He wrote that "Buero es actualmente el dramaturgo más importante de España." This declaration lends coherence to the opinion of Ignacio Soldevilla Durante that "el intelectual asiste muy rara vez al teatro, y sólo cuando se le presenta una obra reconocida por ser de un dramaturgo extranjero famoso, o de una de nuestras glorias del Siglo de Oro, o de nuestro solitario fenómeno Buero Vallejo." This critical acclaim has received the vigorous testimony of Spain’s theatrical prize system. Buero Vallejo has won no less than ten of the most celebrated as well as remunerative awards offered. After initiating his career as a playwright with the Premio Lope de Vega (1949) for Historia de una escalera and the Premio de los amigos de los quintero (1949) for Las palabras en la arena, he has won in addition the Premio María Rolland (1956), Premio nacional de teatro (1957) and the Premio March (1959) for his tragi-comedy Hoy es fiesta; the Premio nacional de teatro (1958) for Las cartas boca abajo. His play of 1958, Un soñador para un pueblo won not only the Premio María Rolland (1958), but also the Premio nacional de teatro (1959) and the Premio de la crítica de Barcelona (1960). At this writing, the last play honored with a prize is his play on Velázquez, Las


meninas which won the Premio María Rolland (1960). 15

Human nature being what it is, it is not surprising that Buero Vallejo's acceptance has not been unanimous. Though in the minority, there are critics who are severe with Buero Vallejo and his art. Published detractions are rare, yet in the theatrical circles critical opposition must be heavier than that evinced in the major publications. The well-known Spanish critic Gonzalo Torrente Ballester in his 1962 introduction to Buero Vallejo's theatre comments on this fact:

Buero es autor discutivo. Tiene secuaces y detractores. En medio de las grandes ovaciones que suelen acompañar a sus finales de acto, o a alguno de sus parlamentos, no dejan de oírse voces discordantes o de verse rostros descontentos. Estoy seguro de que la discordancia y el descontento obedecen no a la naturaleza dramática de las obras de Buero, sino al contenido de sus pensamientos. Excluyo naturalmente de esta afirmación el fracaso y el medio fracaso que recuerdo: La señál que se espera e Irene o el tesoro, donde se rechazaron las comedias en sí, en su forma teatral, en sus palabras, y no el pensamiento que encerraban. 16

It is to be noted that this critical opposition of which Torrente Ballester speaks is centered on the content of Buero's plays rather than on his aesthetic approach to the drama even though many structural defects have been brought to the critical bar in reviews that otherwise support him enthusiastically.

The bulk of this adverse criticism is of the nature of that seen in the commentary published by the magazine Acento


Cultural. The article heralded the 1959 awarding of the Premio March to Buero Vallejo:

Buero prefiere seguir en su ardiente, cogitauunda, lúcida oscuridad, reservándose sus certezas y anhelos, la trayectoria de sus búsquedas para sí mismo, amparada en la condición ambigua del arte que, por más que se empeñe, nunca prueba---como dice Ionesco---ideológicamente nada. Solo prueba el sufrimiento, el dolor, ---y puede que también la esperanza, aún la desesperanza---de los hombres.17

The tenor of the complaint is the supposed lack of ideology and pointless pessimism in his works. Similar comments can be found sprinkled throughout the years.

José Castellano in his 1962 study of the theatre of Buero Vallejo felt at that time that though Buero was "hoy día, uno de los pocos dramaturgos españoles que puede considerarse consciente de su obra,"18 he cannot be considered at any moment "como un autor de rica y fecunda problemática."19

He elaborates on this point, stating "Buero se retrae ante una posible tendencia intencionada o una solución decidida en ningún plano ideológico, social o ético."20 He amplifies his position by affirming that even when he treats of problems essentially traditional---that is, peculiar to man's condition, that he has nothing new to say. In the second part of his study,

19. Ibid., p. 22.
20. Ibid., p. 27.
Castellano states in different words the thesis propounded in the above-mentioned *Acento Cultural* regarding Buero:

Si al margen del virtuosismo técnico de Buero se quiera hablar de "mensaje" o de tesis, no creo que pueda hablar-se de otra cosa que la que hemos apuntado. Que no se trata de una tendencia moralizante, trascendente ni dogmática: simplemente un admitir las cosas tal y como suceden en la realidad, una realidad "dramática" en la que los personajes, como hombres y mujeres, mantienen y defienden su dignidad, sus pensamientos y sentimientos, sus intereses, sus afectos, sus rencores, sus hábitos, y sus mezquindades, viven, luchan, se apasionan, se ilusionan, se desenganan y chocan inevitable, fatalmente, los unos con los otros... unos quedan dignificados, otros desahuciados, unos mandan, los otros obedecen. Pero nada nos dice el autor sobre el porqué sean o deban ser así... si podrían ser de otro modo; ni tan siquiera emite su juicio personal acerca de esa realidad. Tan sólo la ilumina, la inunda de una entrañable y profunda humanidad dramática. 

It may be that the adverse criticism of Buero is due to his lack of ideology, yet the opposite seems more likely to be true. He has detractors because the content of his plays is ideologically, intellectually provocative to the Spanish theatre public, or at least to a section of that public. In his article on Buero Vallejo's theatre, José María García Escudero states "las razones de Buero frente a ellos (problemas concretos de... sociedad) no son tanto de índole artística como ideológica... problemas 'esenciales,' permanentes o casi permanentes." 

It can be assumed that a theatre dedicated to ideological plays in a country recovering slowly from the ravages of an

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21. Ibid., II, Nos. 76-77, p. 38.

ideological war will be irritating to at least one group. This can then bring into understandable focus the above-mentioned comment of Torrente Ballester. Ballester himself further elaborates on this point. He states that "el teatro de Buero expresa el modo de pensar sobre ciertas materias (y el de sentir, no lo echemos a olvido) del público español más moderno (tampoco del más radical). Si no fuera así, el teatro de Buero, que no halaga, que no divierte, hubiero dejado de representarse."\(^2^3\)

Many other critics could be cited here to lend support to Gonzalo Torrente Ballester's thesis that Buero Vallejo's theatre is ideologically rather than aesthetically oriented but it would serve only to prove the number of people who support the theory rather than advancing this pro-ideological view. But let us examine at least two noted critics who have already been quoted in this work, José Luis Abellán and Ricardo Domenech. Both reiterate Torrente Ballester's statement contesting José Castellano's position that there is no ideological content in Buero's plays. Abellán in his article "El tema del misterio en Buero Vallejo" claims that Buero

\[\text{no se deja fascinar por ninguno de los abismos que se ciernen a ambos lados de la cuerda: por uno la aceptación de un credo rígido y dogmático—sea el que fuere que nos libera de nuestra responsabilidad intelectual; por otro, un salto oportunista a cualquier conveniencia con el pretexto de que el hombre no tiene naturaleza, sino historia.}\(^2^4\)

\(^{23}\) Ballester, op. cit., p. 12.

\(^{24}\) Abellán, loc. cit.
Much can be read into Abellán's statement, but as he is reluctant to commit himself to defining precisely what he means by the acceptance of a rigid and dogmatic creed, it would be foolish to attempt to do so. One could suggest political, religious and/or social overtones and in doing so attempt to define his statement in those terms, but it is at best risky business and doing so belongs to the province of conjecture. But what is noteworthy is Abellán's speaking of Buero Vallejo's "responsabilidad intelectual." Buero's call to responsibility is seen in Ricardo Domenech's observation that the Italian playwright Marcel de Diego Fabri's most relevant merit has been the transporting of the Pirandellian problem of blame to the plane of responsibility. Domenech considers this same concrete ideological process at work in Buero Vallejo's plays—-at least in two of them, Las cartas boca abajo and Un soñador para un pueblo. 25

Buero Vallejo himself speaks of the social responsibility of the theatre in his article on the German Marxist playwright Bertol Brecht. He writes "Carlos Muñiz...(y yo) los dos admiramos a Brecht y a los dos nos preocupa, como a él, la responsabilidad social del teatro." 26

According to what Buero himself says, he has intended to spur to thought many of his countrymen with the content of his plays deliberately provoking detractors. He further states in


his article on Brecht that like that German playwright, he feels that the theatre should not put people to sleep, but should wake them up.\textsuperscript{27} And it is his fellow countrymen in post-war Spain that he is trying to awaken. Though his plays are ideologically transcendental, they are welded to the here and now of the contemporary Spaniard. But what stirs the curiosity in considering the implications of this social responsibility of which he and various critics speak is the tack that it takes. Social responsibility is a multi-faceted concept and to treat of all of its implications in the works of Buero Vallejo would be a monumental task. But that this social responsibility is meaningful to post-war Spain is little doubted in the minds of those critics or in the stated objectives of Buero Vallejo himself. Buero feels that because he is linked so significantly with the times, he is criticized adversely. The complaints about his plays' content constitute proof of the efficacy of his ideological goal, according to Buero. In his conversation with Miguel Luis Rodríguez in the October 1958 issue of \textit{Indice de artes y letras} he states:

\begin{quote}
\textit{que, ante mi teatro, reacciona una parte del público actual, como reacciona, lo estimo, precisamente, no como una insuficiencia, sino todo lo contrario: como señal de que, de algún modo, le estoy enfrentando con realidades tan de nuestra hora que le obligan a la defensa de la abstención; y eso, incluso, en aquellos que sólo tratan del dolor humano y no de ningún dolor de nuestro momento.}\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28} Rodríguez, \textit{op. cit.}, No. 118, p. 23.
A polemic can be made of the point as to whether or not Buero Vallejo's plays reflect the problems of post-war Spain, but for any valid generalization on this issue, one would first have to decide which problems are those that are peculiarly engendered by the Spanish condition since 1939. But be that as it may, critics, who may or may not have defined well post-war Spain's problems so that they can readily see them reflected in Buero's works, still insist that he is a playwright engaged deeply in contemporary Spanish problems.

Torrente Ballester in his already quoted introduction to Buero Vallejo's theatre remarks on Buero Vallejo's social timeliness, affirming the belief that Buero does reflect contemporary Spanish thought for those years during which he wrote the plays. But Torrente Ballester limits his statement,

...Buero acostumbra a dar forma teatral a un modo de pensar, quizá de sentir también, del público. Y como ser público, formar parte del público, es un modo de estar constuido en sociedad, comprobemos un acuerdo del pensamiento de Buero Vallejo con un sector, al menos de la sociedad española de su tiempo. Posiblemente nos veamos precisados a restringir el alcance de este sector a una parte del público madrileño, barcelonés, y de otras grandes ciudades. Pero actualmente el efecto de cualquiera pensamiento teatral sobre el público español debe tomarse siempre con idénticas restricciones. 29

But if Buero is not to be termed in any sense as a social playwright whose dramatic works find their nucleus in situations peculiarly Spanish, how can this view be reconciled with those of the critics already cited who opt to consider Buero's works as a

29. Ballester, loc. cit.
mirror held up to the problems of post-war Spain? The reconciliation of these two views is made in a statement by Buero himself in his conversation with Miguel Luis Rodríguez, a conversation recorded in 1958. He stated:

Para analizar si mis obras reflejan o no realmente los problemas—o el problema—de nuestra hora, hay que entrar en complejas cuestiones que se resumen en la pregunta de qué entendemos por el reflejo o comentario estético de un problema social...Defendiendo las mías... no se limitan al "problema" español desde hace unos lustros, sino que engloban el problema del hombre, con sus inquietudes y sus perplejidades en esta hora del mundo.\textsuperscript{30}

To clarify further Buero Vallejo's position, one must look to the continuation of this conversation with Miguel Luis Rodríguez published some months later. Buero then stated:

Reflejar el tiempo, para mí, no es exactamente lo que es para usted. Pues el tiempo y el hombre no son sólo el problema X o Z: guerra, salarios, miseria, etc. ...La mayoría de los grandes autores no son más transparentes ni menos indirectos; esto puede confirmar la suposición de que el carácter "indirecto" de cualquier obra no es sólo una consecuencia de limitaciones externas, sino un hecho estético positivo.\textsuperscript{31}

The foregoing statement of Buero Vallejo reveals two significant points: one, that the ideology presented in his plays is of a broad scope, and two, these problems are presented indirectly because of limitations placed upon the writer and because of aesthetic reasons which eschew direct presentation that would result in nothing more than propaganda. To delve a bit more into the scope of the problems and their oblique presentation

\textsuperscript{30} Rodríguez, loc. cit.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., No. 119, p. 19.
one must look to further comments of Buero's in the same conversation with Rodríguez. He continues his position by stating:

Estimo que, en general, mi teatro está justificado, como reflejo de ciertos problemas trágicos permanentes, que son siempre del tiempo, y también, porque refleja de hecho cuestiones palpitantes de nuestra sociedad. Usted [Rodríguez] señala cosas que no están en mi teatro. ¿Es que es necesario que lo estén? ¿Nuestra guerra, por ejemplo? Adelantaré que, para los jóvenes que nos han sucedido ya no suele ser ese problema suyo. Pero suponiendo que lo fuera, ¿Cómo hay que incluirlo en nuestra materia dramática? Usted Rodríguez señala rotundamente ese fallo y echa sobre nuestros hombros, como todo, una culpa que no es nuestra. Dice usted [Rodríguez] que bastaría con reflejar el que los protagonistas la vivieron y en ellos dejó la enorme huella. Pues bien, eso es, sin citarlo, lo que les ocurre a nuestros protagonistas. Usted dirá que no lo nota. Y yo le responderé que es una mala suerte para mí, pero que quizá otros lo notan.32

Again Buero insists that his problems are those of contemporary Spain, yet at the same time they are "ciertos problemas trágicos permanentes." This would then mean that his problems are transcendental in nature, problems that are those not peculiar to man in post-war Spain, but man for all time, man in his human condition. On the point of presenting the civil war theme in his works, he makes it very clear that it is due to a restriction for which he will accept no responsibility. It is common knowledge that literary censorship was rampant in the Spanish police state; hence, it is clear that Buero Vallejo refers to the censorship of the thematic problems in his plays. Regardless of the restrictions placed upon him and his art, Buero Vallejo's ideological themes must have to do with those themes that fall directly under

32. Ibid.
the censorship laws; consequently one of the reasons for present-
ing these problematic themes obliquely is explained. To lend
support to this view one must go back to a published conversation
that Buero Vallejo had in 1951 with José Tamayo.

When asked by Tamayo of his theatrical tendencies, Buero
replied: "Son muy pocas mis obras estrenadas y muy diferentes
entre sí, pero todas por aspirar a ser de nuestra hora, son trage-
días más o menos embozadas. Apenas podría decir más que esto y
que fueron escritos dentro de una firmísima tendencia hacia la
sinceridad." In 1958, in the first part of his published conver-
sation with Miguel Luis Rodríguez, he speaks again of his dis-
guised works which are absolute testimonies of his time. And
this reference to the works being tragic is seen time and again,
out more specifically in the already quoted reference in the
second part of the published conversation with Miguel Luis Rodrí-
guez. Buero Vallejo himself has not been the only one to make
references to his artistic censorship. Ignacio Soldevilla Durante
in his article on post-war Spanish theatre remarks: "Autor entero
y verdadero, Antonio Buero Vallejo en peligroso pero necesario
equilibrio, siempre entre su exigencia personal y la del tiempo,
en desafío continuo de las otras exigencias menos auténticas."
Many references to the theatrical censorship norms and their effect upon the plays have been made by critics inside and outside of Spain. The *Times Literary Supplement* says that the 1936 generation has not been able to prove its worth because it has lacked an essential condition, freedom of expression...; however, there has been an encouraging response to the relaxing of the censorship of plays in the last five or six years. And F. García Pavón states in his book that but for the peculiar Spanish circumstances a truly traditional social theatre with revolutionary and counter-revolutionary overtones would be extant. He affirms the existence of a "social problem" theatre in Spain regardless of "las circunstancias españoles que impiden la presencia en nuestros escenarios de un teatro social a la vieja usanza." 

But what interests here is not the effect of censorship on the contemporary Spanish theatre but rather on Antonio Buero Vallejo in particular and the significance of his limited remarks concerning his reaction to censorship. It is also noteworthy that in Buero Vallejo's eyes the censors have not impeded his presenting ideological themes. In the two published conversations he has had


with José R. Marra-López and Miguel Luis Rodríguez, and in his polemic with playwright Alfonso Sastre, Buero Vallejo has spoken at length on this subject, explaining most clearly his attitudes. In essence he claims not to have been bothered by the censorship norms, feeling that the true artist ultimately is not impeded in his art by such norms; the artist simply finds a different avenue for the expression of his prohibited ideas. In consequence, Buero Vallejo has produced "comedias embozadas." In answering Marra-López' questions concerning those themes with which he (Buero) has not dealt, but about which he would like to write, Buero answered:

La cuestión no está en "qué" tema se podría tocar, pues teóricamente pueden tocarse todos, sino en cómo tocarlo. Muchas más veces de las que se supone, las dificultades para desarrollar un tema cualquiera nos dan algo por añadidura, pero los inconvenientes son mayores. Me gustaría desarrollar, sin ninguna dificultad, cualquier tema español incluido alguno de los ya escritos. La dificultad puede ser a veces estimulante; la expresión indirecta es a menudo, en el arte, más viva que la directa: pero eso es cosa que compete al artista, señor de sus medios. Como artista, quiero ser señor de mis medios para desarrollar en profundidad y con las mayores garantías de acierto...cualquier tema...cualquier tema, por supuesto, cuya necesidad sentamos todos hondamente.38

In his conversation with Miguel Luis Rodríguez, Buero in speaking of censorship states that the greatest limitations that can be imposed upon a writer are imposed by the writer himself.39 Ignacio Soldevilla Durante underscores Buero Vallejo's position on censorship by recalling Buero's talk some years ago

39. Rodríguez, loc. cit.
in the Facultad de filosofía y letras de Madrid. He quotes Buero Vallejo as saying "en el fondo, ninguna limitación ha hecho sino espolear al verdadero creador" and Soldevilla himself adds the pedestrian observation that "hay muchas maneras de dar el queso." 40

Continuing in the metaphorical vein of Ignacio Soldevilla Durante, Buero Vallejo in his dialogue with Miguel Luis Rodríguez explains one of his "maneras de dar el queso," that being the technique of realism used to veil his ideological themes.

Por ser todo arte condensación, el más realista de ellos es, también, símbolo. O sea signo: significado implícito, y no explícito, de cosas que la anécdota real y estricta no encierra...Realidad no es necesariamente "realismo"; éste es un estilo...El realismo, tan difícilmente definible, podrá ser una postura combativa, un movimiento positivo de la historia literaria que reaparece de vez en cuando pero, de la misma manera que late oculto cuando la tendencia dominante no es realista, y, viceversa, el simbolismo y las significaciones laten ocultas cuando la tendencia dominante es realista, del mismo modo, repito, los más grandes creadores, sean o no realistas, contrabalancean en su obra ambos polos. 41

Rodríguez exhorts Buero Vallejo to be more explicit in his realism so that more of the public could be drawn to the theatre. Buero Vallejo answers him saying that only the select minority goes to the theatre in Spain and for this select minority things need not be spelled out. He adds that there is no apparent remedy for the situation at present and that for the critics the situation seems simple enough; however, Buero Vallejo adds: "No hay tales remedios...Creame, Rodríguez: desde la barrera los toros...

Alfonso Sastre, the playwright and critic, attacks Buero Vallejo for not being more explicit in his plays, accusing him amongst others, of maintaining postures "dolorosamente estériles." He refers to Buero Vallejo’s "tragedias embozadas"—that is, plays written under the restrictive circumstances of the censor as the "teatro imposibilitado" and he bids Buero Vallejo be more direct. He tells him that "todo teatro debe ser considerado posible hasta que sea imposibilitado; y toda imposibilitación debe ser acogida por nosotros como una sorpresa." He says that every writer, if he is an authentic writer, should worry only about the strong imperatives that guide him and his work, forgetting completely the external circumstances; that he should work only to get across his idea and to let the rest go by the by, admonishing that "es posible recordar que el progreso no se consigue por acomodación, sino dialécticamente por contradicción, por oposición de los contrarios." He emphasizes the point of forgetting the censorship factors, stating that "el aparato de control es contradictorio y su acción es imprevisible; además las empresas están evolucionando y hoy es normal que estrenen lo que hace años rechazaban."

Buero Vallejo answers Sastre's charges in a textual analysis of Sastre's statements coupled with a critical estimation of

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42. Ibid., p. 20.

Sastre's previously stated theatrical views. Buero maintains that his own position is perfectly defensible in the situation in which it has to exist. He chides Sastre for having taken him to task on charges of which Sastre himself is guilty, namely those of having written "tragedias embozadas" of a social nature. Much analysis can be made of Buero Vallejo's remark, yet for the purpose of this study, what interests is the insistence in all of Buero's remarks and those of Sastre that Buero Vallejo's works are of a disguised content. This must be construed---as stated before---to mean that ideological themes in Buero Vallejo's plays are presented obliquely so that they pass the censorship norms. These could well be then themes whose conceptual radius encompasses not only the problems of the contemporary Spaniard, but those of universal man. It is to be remembered here that Buero Vallejo refers to these problems as "problemas trágicos permanentes." Buero Vallejo refers time and again to this tragic quality in the problems he poses in his plays.

A discussion of the different concepts of tragedy, ranging from the Aristotelian to one as modern as that of Arthur Miller's, cannot be accomplished here nor is it the purpose of this paper to do so. But what is to be set forth here so that a better understanding of Buero Vallejo and his art is achieved is to define the sense of Buero Vallejo's use of the word tragic in relationship to his dramatic ideology. As will be seen, this definition serves as

a focal point for the themes of his social plays. If one but
studies the label that Buero Vallejo himself has attached to each
play, it will be seen that his use of the word \textit{tragedy} and the
related words such as \textit{tragic} is indeed restricted.

Below is a listing of all of Buero Vallejo's plays published
and performed to the date of this writing. Accompanying the
list are the theatrical descriptions that he has given to all but
one of them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date first produced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historia de una escalera</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>10-14-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palabras en la arena</td>
<td>Tragedia</td>
<td>12-19-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En la ardiente oscuridad</td>
<td></td>
<td>1-10-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La tejedora de sueños</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>1-11-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La señal que se espera</td>
<td>Comedia dramática</td>
<td>5-21-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casi un cuento de hadas</td>
<td>Una glosa</td>
<td>1-9-53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madrugada</td>
<td>Episodio dramático</td>
<td>12-9-53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irone o el tesoro</td>
<td>Fábula</td>
<td>12-14-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoy es fiesta</td>
<td>Comedia</td>
<td>9-20-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las cartas boca abajo</td>
<td>Tragedia española</td>
<td>11-5-57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un soñador para un pueblo</td>
<td>Versión libre de un episodio histórico</td>
<td>12-16-58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las meninas</td>
<td>Fantasía</td>
<td>12-9-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El concierto de San Ovidio</td>
<td>Parábola</td>
<td>11-16-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aventura en lo gris</td>
<td>Dos actos y un sueño</td>
<td>10-1-63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be easily seen that Buero Vallejo uses the term \textit{tragedy} only twice. In one instance he uses it for a one act play
and again he uses it with the modifying adjective Spanish. Buero Vallejo's use of the word tragedy is not traditional. It is, however, as with other terms he uses to label his plays—terms such as parábola, fantasía, glosa, fábula—all pregnant with special meaning.

In his conversation with Marra-López, Buero is asked about the vertebral column of his artistic life. He replies: "Una preocupación permanente por los perfiles trágicos del hombre," adding that these profiles were at once metaphysical and social. He stresses the point that in his dramas there is a repeated conflict between individuality and collectivity, between necessity and liberty. This remark helps to clarify the nature of his ideology, namely that in his plays there is a conflict between the fundamental instinct of every living being toward the unrestricted expression of his individual self and the responsibility of every social being toward the containment of his individual expression within those limitations imposed by that collective body, society—whatever those limitations may be. It is the decision of either having to bend to that social collectivity or if one does not do so by dint of choosing the path of fundamental individual liberty, then it is the decision to accept the consequences that the collectivity deems that one pay for having refused to act out of freedomless necessity.

45. Marra-López, op. cit., p. 56.
It is not difficult to divine the transcendental nature of the problem posed by Buero Vallejo, but what is knotty is the understanding of the meaning of the word tragic in relationship to this ideology that Buero Vallejo says is embozada.

Rosendo Roig, S.I., states that Buero Vallejo's theatre is "de tipo trágico" and in attempting to define the concept of tragedy in Buero Vallejo's plays begins by stating that "tragedia es la expresión escénica de una situación de conflicto agudo en la que todavía hay esperanza. Lo realmente cuestionado es la solución, que a su vez es la sustancia metafísica de la tragedia." 46

José Castellano in his already quoted study of Buero Vallejo's theatre denies the existence of tragedy in Buero Vallejo's plays. He claims that all of his works are very definitely dramatic, in fact, almost tragic; that they do aspire to a tragic sense of life, but that none "llega a ser plena, eficaz, ortodoxa y rigurosamente una tragedia." 47

The reconciliation of these opposing views can be found in Isabel Magaña de Schevill's article on "lo trágico" in the works of Buero Vallejo. She writes that Buero Vallejo had been refining his own view of tragedy since 1952 and that now he defines tragedy "como un conflicto entre la necesidad—la fuerza del ambiente sobre el hombre—y la libertad—el libre albedrío—


47. Castellano, op. cit., p. 18.
Buero Vallejo wrote in a letter to Mrs. Schevill in 1958 that in the tragedy there is no insuperable fatalism and that this concept of inexorable or adverse destiny should be tempered somewhat.

The year before his letter to Mrs. Schevill, Buero Vallejo in the Primer Acto article of his explaining his theatre also states that in the tragedy the leading character need not be brought to a catastrophe. His persistence and that of others in using the words tragedy and tragic so freely without qualifying the usage of the terms can only have led to the confusion regarding Buero Vallejo's theatre. This is probably why José Castellano writes in his article denying the existence of tragedy in Buero Vallejo's theatre. This then would mean that tragedy in Buero Vallejo's sense is limited to the conflict between "la fuerza del ambiente sobre el hombre...y el libre albedrío." And it also must be understood to mean that the resolution of the conflict need not be in favor of one or the other, nor need the outcome be a deterministic one resolved in favor of the inexorable force of circumstances working on man. Thus it is that all claims of José


49. Ibid., p. 54.

Maria Quinto and Ricardo Domenech that Buero Vallejo is a naturalist are negated by the playwright himself. Tragedy, in a word, to Buero Vallejo is dramatic conflict between man and the forces of his environment, a conflict in which man need not be subjected to an insuperable adverse fate.

Recalling here Buero Vallejo's words that his works are "tragedias embozadas," if his themes are tragic, that is having to do with man in conflict with environmental forces, then it must be inferred that the themes of Buero Vallejo's plays must be markedly of such a nature that, if presented directly, they would be censored. In consequence, it can be asserted that the themes are of a socio-political nature. Why else would he explain so often his masking of themes because of the censorship? Why else would he take such pains to disguise them? But one reading of each of his plays makes it most evident to the reader that any masked theme presented would most assuredly have nothing to do with themes perverse either sexually or religiously. The sexually and religiously perverse themes are mentioned here as along with the political; these are the other themes most rigidly controlled by the censors. It can then be inferred also that this


fuerza del ambiente is social in context, social in the sense that includes all of the attendant ramifications. It is to be remembered here that Buero Vallejo has stated that these social problems he poses are not only peculiar to the contemporary Spaniard, but to universal man. Thus it is that Buero Vallejo sees the problems presented in his plays as problems which reflect social conditions of contemporary Spain—no different than those problems that have always confronted man. As will be recalled, he has stated in his already quoted dialogue with Miguel Luis Rodríguez that reflecting the times was not simply limited to the problems of war, poverty or salary, and that since the problematic conflict is between necessity and liberty then the crux of the problem would be man's attitude in facing the necessary problems. And if it is taken into consideration that Buero Vallejo does not see man inevitably fated to concede to immutable circumstances because of the exercising of his free will, then it is that Buero Vallejo's problems are centered on the protagonists' choice of manner in confronting any given problem. That is to say, necessity can be resisted if man chooses to do so. This then renders any universal consideration of man's attitude before life's problems a matter of behaviour governed by a categorical imperative, that is, a transcendental attitude that serves man in the confrontation of a necessary problem. This attitude would be a conception by means of which universal man rises triumphant over the manifold miseries of life. In a word, Buero Vallejo sees the universal problem of man as resolving how to confront the eternal problems
such as war, poverty, salary. Even more simply stated, essentially the problem for Buero Vallejo would then be how man as a social being can accept and learn to live within the context of his limitations, either naturally or socially imposed. This in essence treats of a solution of the problem of existence, a reconciliation to live as a social being. Again here it must be remembered that Buero Vallejo insists that "viene a ser, pues, el mío un teatro de carácter trágico." It has been pointed out that he has arrived at his own modern definition of tragedy; yet this does not mean that he has forsaken totally the Aristotelian, classical concepts of the tragedy. Indeed, in the resolution of the problem of how to confront the problems posed by man's "necessary" limitations, Buero Vallejo has retained the very spirit of classical tragedy, that in calamity the human spirit reveals itself triumphant over the outward universe which fails to conquer it; the spirit which reveals the greatness of man whose passions and fortitude are revealed when calamity overtakes him. This human spirit germane to the tragedy is the spirit that acts nobly. This is so as the tragedy's essential nature is calamitous because it is only in calamity that the human spirit can demonstrate its nobility by triumphing. Thus can it also demonstrate its confidence in the value of human life. Buero Vallejo expresses his belief that however much things in the outward world may go awry, man has nevertheless splendors of his own to transcend nobly his

tragic circumstances, if he so chooses. For him the tragedy is not an expression of despair. He sees that when man refuses to exercise his free will to overcome necessity, then calamity overtakes man and crushes him. For Buero Vallejo, man's choosing to resist necessity is a profession of faith, a kind of religion, a way of looking at life by virtue of which it is somewhat robbed of its pain. He writes of this belief that man is equal to any human situation.

...la implícita convicción, por ejemplo, de que los hombres no son necesariamente víctimas pasivas de la fatalidad sino colectivos e individuales artífices de sus venturas y desgracias. Convicción que no se opone a la tragedia, sino que la confirma. Y que, si sabemos buscarla, advertimos en los mismos creadores del género. Mas, al tiempo, convicción que abre a las mejores posibilidades humanas una indefinida perspectiva. Pese a las reiteradas y desanimadas muestras de torpeza que nuestros semejantes nos brindan de continuo, la capacidad humana de sobrepoderse a los más aciagos reversos y de vencerlos incluso difícilmente puede ser negada y la tragedia misma nos ayuda a vislumbrarlo. Esa fe última late tras la dudas y los fracasos que en la escena se muestran; esa esperanza mueve a las plumas que describen las situaciones más desesperadas.55

It is clearly perceived that Buero Vallejo not only believes that man's actions can have that amplitude and importance which make them noble, but also when man does descend to meanness and succumbs to despair and calamity, it is because man collectively and individually is artificer "de sus venturas y desgracias." He has exercised his free will and has chosen not to battle necessity.

55. Ibid.
Jean Paul Borel in the preamble to his analysis of Buero Vallejo's theatre sees the human condition essentially as tragic; however he chooses to use the word imposible, referring to man as a "ser imposible."

El hombre es un ser "imposible," constituido por contradicciones que le desgarran y constituyen su grandeza. Es una dimensión fundamental de lo humano, pero agravada hoy por un conflicto más violento que nunca entre individuo y sociedad, entre el hombre y "sus" creaciones, entre la voluntad de cada una y la marcha anónima de los acontecimientos.  

Borel maintains that this impossible condition of man has led to the despair of the concept of the absurd found in the vanguard theatre of today. He sees Buero Vallejo as a contemporary of the theatre of the absurd who has rejected its despairing doctrine in favor of his optimistic belief that man in his nobility will see this impossible situation as one made to his measure. This impossible situation is for Buero Vallejo "la gran tarea a la que los hombres se ven provocados por la historia; desafío gigantesco del que saldrá el triunfo milagroso del hombre o su desaparición."  

There is this optimistic belief in Buero Vallejo, but it does not form the raison d'être of his social theme. It is not an integral part of all of his plays, but rather it is the culmination of an ethical pattern that may be traced through them. Indeed, this optimistic belief is not omnipresent in his works.

57. Ibid.
as the conflicts that face some of his protagonists result in despair, creative stagnation, frustration, embittered uselessness, madness and even death. In many of the tragic circumstances it would seem that the protagonists are confronted by inescapable calamity, but what makes Buero Vallejo's belief optimistic is that some protagonists escape these disastrous circumstances by an act of free will appropriate to the conflict. To Buero Vallejo this can be so as men are "colectivos e individuales artifices de sus venturas y desgracias." This problem of conflict between necessity and liberty is to him a permanent problem between man and his circumstances; hence, it is that its resolution is transcendental. Underlying this philosophical structure there is this ethic of universal proportions that ultimately supports the optimistic belief of which Borel speaks.

To understand Buero Vallejo's modus operandi for presenting his ethic, it would be well to summarize some of the statements made by critics and Buero Vallejo himself, concerning his artistic purposes.

It will be recalled that Buero Vallejo feels that playwrights have a very definite call to social responsibility, stating that it is the playwright's obligation to awaken the public and not to put it to sleep. As he is a social playwright, certainly the

easiest way to awaken a theatre-going public is to enraged them with sharp, critical attacks on that public and its social character. This Buero Vallejo does obliquely so that he avoids the censors. No matter the obliqueness of his attacks, they reach their mark, as evidenced by the critical opposition which the content of his plays have met with thus far in Spain, the opposition of which Torrente Ballester makes mention. But Buero Vallejo's attacks are not motivated by vulgar viciousness, but rather by the social responsibility he so admires in the theatre of Bertolt Brecht and whom he attempts to emulate in this respect.

This social responsibility bears strong resemblance to the Pirandellian manner mentioned by Ricardo Domenech. Domenech observes that in at least two plays he sees an attempt by Buero Vallejo to transport the problem of blame to the plane of responsibility. It is in this attempt that the protagonists reach the plane that Buero Vallejo's optimistic belief in man's nobility reaches full blown proportions.

This responsibility is guided by an ethic that is the nucleus of his social themes. Many critics remark on this ethical character of Buero Vallejo's plays, yet none attempts to see its role in his plays. It is this ethic, neglected, or dynamically employed by the protagonists which shall be explained and shown

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60. Ballester, op. cit., p. 11.
in all of its organic force in the dramatic action, thus giving definition to Buero Vallejo's ethical view in a context both social and political.
CHAPTER II

THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS IN BUERO VALLEJO'S VIEW OF TRAGEDY

Isabel Magaña de Schevill prefaces her study of the tragic in Buero Vallejo's plays with the remark that "podría afirmarse sin demasiada osadía que la fórmula artística de un escritor depende de su concepto metafísico, de su punto de vista total como hombre y como escritor." ¹ To Señora Schevill, the tragedy is for Buero Vallejo the total concept of life, his metaphysical springboard. She declares that his concept is moral, is authentic.² It is accepted that tragedy in its traditional meaning depends ultimately upon the assumption which man readily makes: something outside his own being, some spirit not himself—be it God, Nature or a moral order—is the original impetus to all existence.³ Mrs. Schevill makes no attempt to define the morality of the tragedy. She confines herself simply to the definition of tragedy as the conflict between necessity and liberty,⁴ leaving unexplained her proposition that in Buero Vallejo's plays there is a morality

². Ibid., p. 52.
⁴. Schevill, op. cit., p. 53.
linked directly to the tragedy. She does mention briefly the ethical concept of "love for one's neighbor," but does not develop it in relation to her thesis on the tragic in Buero Vallejo's plays.

Neither God, nor the total concept of life based on a Godhead ever enters into the dramatic purposes of Buero Vallejo's plays. To be sure, there are some religious characters, few as they may be, yet their moral implication is eschewed by Buero Vallejo as a dramatic force. Nor does Buero Vallejo make even a casual reference to a religiously defined morality though he does use a Christian parable to make an ethical point in his one act play *Palabras en la arena*. Medardo Fraile, when he speaks of Buero Vallejo's significance in the post-civil war Spain, declares that "hope and melancholy intertwine and unfold within an exemplary lay morality which does not exclude the tremendous possibility of God." 5

José Luis Abellán sees in Buero Vallejo's theatre a preoccupation with the mysterious and the wondrous in life as the nucleus of his dramatic art. From this, he believes that one can extract "notas suficientes para establecer una antropología." Abellán does not define the "antropología" that he thinks implicit in Buero Vallejo's works, but he does think that the plays "representan una aportación literaria al estudio del hombre" within the

framework of "un teatro de realismo social...hasta...un teatro nacional....."6

José Castellano in his study of Buero Vallejo's theatre steadfastly insists that though the characters are presented in problematical situations, nothing is ever concluded about this troubled existence. He states:

Buero refleja en sus obras una realidad cotidiana en la que quiere encontrar una dimensión "trágica" sin elevar-la o transcenderla...sus personajes están abocados a la tragedia, pero lo están antes de la obra, antes de que los veamos moverse en la obra...entran en la obra...convencidos que sólo pueden moverse entre fatalidades, pero nada hacen contra ellas, ni tratan de transcenderlas ni tampoco se conforman con auténtica resignación a soportarlas.7

He is adamant in his position that in Buero Vallejo's works one can find "la problemática del hombre actual: la reoel-día, la autenticidad, la libertad." But he states that in not one of Buero Vallejo's plays does the playwright present a plot in which "se llega a una completa y decidida expedición o penetración hacía fuera o hacia dentro de la cuestión." He maintains that Buero Vallejo places his characters in pathetic, dramatic and even tragic circumstances but he never does so in an attempt to seek the essential conditions of man.8

It is undoubtedly this very point of view that sustains R. Benítez Claros' lone opinion that Buero Vallejo's theatre is

8. Ibid., p. 54.
the standard bearer of existential theatre in Spain. The opposition's view is just as firm in its opinion that Buero Vallejo's message permeates his works. Alfredo Marquerie states that Buero Vallejo seeks "una solución espiritual a tantos y tantos problemas como la cosmogonía nos plantea." This solution of which Marquerie makes mention is an integral part of the dramatic question asked by Buero Vallejo according to M. Manzanares de Cirre. He opposes Castellano by stating: "El hecho de que no puede dar una respuesta a esa búsqueda no significa nada, ya que en el planteamiento del problema va implícita la respuesta."

The idea of presenting a theatre which has as its artistic platform a formula of a question and a direct answer is repugnant to Buero Vallejo. In his analysis of the Marxist theatre of the East German Bertol Brecht he states that all art has a social function, explaining that all art "refleja intereses, defiende opiniones, ideologías, critica situaciones" but that "de qué modo acierta o yerra en el desempeño de esa función es todavía cuestión movediza y oscura."

The idea of returning to the artistic concept of art for art's sake fills him with horror. He, as an artist, stresses the affirmation of aesthetic values in the theatre yet is steadfast in maintaining that the role of art is undeniably social.

Como artista no puedo exigir—ni entiendo positivo o conveniente que la influencia social de muchas obras de arte se ejerza por vía clara y directa; por el contrario, creo mucho en el enorme influjo positivo, socialmente hablando de ciertas obras oscuras en ese sentido porque los caminos del hombre y de su psique son comolejos...la misión del arte es una especie de investigación intuitiva de la realidad.13

Duero Vallejo's dramatic approach is then ontological: in his plays both question and answer are implicit; his aesthetic approach involves an assumption that the spectators will intuitively know what are the question and answer that he presents. In the above quoted dialogue with Miguel Luis Rodríguez, he states that this aesthetic purpose includes "la de escribir para aquí que es donde estamos y debemos laborar."14

In his earlier discussion with the playwright Alfonso Sastre about the role of Spanish authors in a theatre of social art, he states that his theatre "se encuentra gravido de los problemas del hombre de nuestros días los cuales, incluso cuando son de carácter metafísico, poseen una social transcendencia."15


14. Ibid., p. 19

It follows clearly that any problems of a metaphysical nature which are socially transcendental must necessarily be ethical, moral problems. And if his ethical intentions were not plain enough here, then his statement made in his conversation with José Tamayo the same year would leave no doubt. In this conversation he maintains that his dramatic purpose encompasses the "rehabilitación de un sentido trágico" adding that "la tragedia no tiene 'moraleja,' pero nunca hubo en el fondo, género más ético. Sólo que su lección ética llega al espectador por otros caminos que los superficialmente edificantes."16

It is no revelation then that critics see Buero Vallejo's theatre as a theatre "de naturaleza ética y no estética"17 as Gonzalo Torrente Ballester writes. The article published in Mundo Hispánico to note Buero Vallejo's being awarded the Premio March proposes that Buero Vallejo's theatre is one of middle-class people whose lives are depicted dramatically within a framework of conflict caused by reasons economic and also moral, that Buero Vallejo has chosen to show abnegation as the highest quality in man.18 Buero Vallejo has stated the same idea in different words in his dialogue with Miguel Luis Rodríguez in discussing his idea of the ends of art---the extra-artistic consideration of his art.

He sees his artistic goal as "elevar a un mayor grado la ascensión del espíritu en el hombre; segundo, la creencia de que para hacer a los hombres más espirituales es necesario, es ineludible, mejorar las condiciones de su existencia material." Whatever be Buero Vallejo's proclamation about his artistic goals, to most critics and to me, Buero Vallejo's theatre shows a preoccupation with the ethical almost to the exclusion of the economic considerations of man's conditions. However, it should be mentioned here that most of the protagonists feel that their progress is inhibited by economic reasons. This near exclusion of the economic consideration of man's problems is undoubtedly why those critics who have attempted to define Buero Vallejo's theatre, see it as ethically bound. This ethic, being defined further, in the majority of critical estimations, is rooted in love.

Chandler and Schwartz in their history of the Spanish literature say:

Buero Vallejo concentrates on the tragic aspects of modern man. He considers himself a realist who seeks the essential qualities of life and emphasizes the contrasts between light and darkness, good and evil. His work is not sentimental, but far from being pessimistic, it stresses the ever-present need of real love and understanding in this contemporary, and anguished, world.20

Isabel Magaña de Schevill carries her view of Buero Vallejo's preoccupation with human relationships into the following


explanation. "A Buero Vallejo parece ocuparle enormemente esta falta de comunicación del hombre, esta incapacidad de conocerse y de 'amarse a sí mismo' para lograr conocer y amar al prójimo."21 It is this very love of one's neighbor, the fundamental concept of the Christian ethic, that serves as a frame of reference for the other estimations of the moral considerations in Buero Vallejo's plays. Both José María García Escudero and Rosendo Hoig, S.I., see the ethical implications of Buero Vallejo's plays as profoundly Christian even though, as stated, Buero Vallejo skirts all direct religious deliberations in his plays. Escudero, in seeing that the answer to the problems posed by Buero Vallejo is obviously implicit, takes the "amar al prójimo" of which Mrs. Schevill makes mention and compounds its implications by coupling it with the "abnegación" to which the reviewer in Mundo Hispanico refers.

These ideas Escudero develops into the larger theme of Christian¬ity's noble concept of freedom based on love, social and personal, as the basis for Buero Vallejo's ethic. Escudero explains:

...es obvio, sobre todo si lo concebimos como darse a otros. Esto tiene su explicación. Si yo concibo mi vida como recibir muy pronto tocare el techo de unas posibilidades forzosamente limitadas, y tanto más cuanto de que dependen de que otros quieran dar. Pero si yo veo mi vida como darme a los demás, el único límite lo pondrán mi voluntad o debilidad y siempre estará más alejado del que los demás me ponen para lo que recibo.22


The Jesuit Rosendo Roig sees Christianity's view of life expressed by Buero Vallejo in his plays. Roig feels that Buero Vallejo presents the life sorrowfully; for those who see the sorrowful situations of man brought to life on the stage will immediately see the primary cause of the problem within the playgoer's own frame of reference of a hopeful solution.

Buero Vallejo ve en la vida un sentido doloroso y limitado. Dolor y limitación postulados por la solución que alcanzamos a darle. Solución de duda porque...¿Cuál sería el remedio adecuado? No sabemos. En tanto, quiere Buero plantear con total desnudez para que todos vean el fondo del problema y cada cual aporta su grano de arena. Nada de tesis, que cada aprenda lo que la realidad le grita, que oserve prometícamente, y obre en consecuencia. Esa será la lección moral de la tragedia: hacer vivir la vida y estudiárla...el concepto cristiano de la vida lleva implícita la lucha—dolor: mutilación, insuficiencia, mezquindad; pero lucha "Por El, Con El, y En El;" lucha sin el antipuesto concepto de tragedia. Antonio Buero Vallejo es correcto en su sentido de la realidad. Y si el espíritu de Dios con sus aguas en dramática tierra germinará en ésta la plenitud harto deseada. Nos dijo una vez: "Sin ángulo de esperanza no hay tragedia escrita; yo no escribiría."" 23

This ethic as discussed above by Roig and Abellán may be Christian; however, there is no evidence in Buero Vallejo's plays which points to the fact that this ethic is exclusively Christian. The ethical ramifications may be compatible with other established religions, but that is not the purpose of this study. What is to be affirmed is that it is an ethic based on an ideal, a categorical imperative, and if a religious claim is to be made, then it

can be stated that the ethic is Christian in nature as Buero Vallejo's ethical heritage is that of a civilization largely Judaeo-Christian.

Buero Vallejo has stated that in trying to solve social problems of today's Spain, he has sought to present in his plays the transcendental problems of man which necessarily encompass any contemporary difficulties. As Ricardo Domenech states, Buero Vallejo presents in his works "una misma problemática: el hombre frente a sus posibilidades. O la que es igual, el hombre a sus limitaciones son una misma cosa. De aquí han partido todas las 'exploraciones' dramáticas de Buero, y unas veces han sido estas afortunadas y otras no, pero---siempre---hay en ellas una pregunta constante, sincera." 24

Buero Vallejo sees the transcendental problem of man's existence not in knowing the nature of the trials and tribulations of human existence, but in knowing how to confront these problems; that man's transcendental problem lies in deciding upon a metaphysic, a philosophy that will serve to guide his actions, his decisions regarding the actions to be taken in solving these problems. What Buero Vallejo has set out to do is demonstrate how, by means of an ethic, contemporary man can transcend his environmental difficulties or how he can be overwhelmed if not armed with an ethical attitude that would have helped him to survive.

Abellán states Buero Vallejo's dramatic problem thus:

Cada obra de Buero es una investigación profunda y honrada para aclararnos el fondo íntimo de los hombres y las cosas. Buero se pregunta, se contesta, duda y vuelve otra vez a interrogarse. Su teatro es un ensayo, y una experimentación constante para abrirnos un camino hacia la luz, es un inquirir y un indagar perpetuo que trata de desentrañar el sentido del hombre y de la vida.\(^{25}\)

This "indagar perpetuo" of which he speaks is that same dramatic quality of Buero Vallejo's that Domenech declares is a "pregunta constante." Buero Vallejo's plays are questions which the playgoer, upon analysing the reason for the play's dramatic conflict, finds himself supplying the answer through the simple process of cause and effect. The answer, in one respect or another, is ethical in nature. Buero Vallejo uses this technique because some of the questions that he poses are so politically provocative that were the problem stated directly, he would have to answer up to the censors. But then, as has been stated, the direct didactic approach in drama is repugnant to Buero Vallejo. He prefers to think of art as "un modo propio de conocimiento intuitivo,"\(^{26}\) that is, that the spectator will intuitively know the answer to the problem if he concerns himself with the question that Buero Vallejo presents dramatically.

There is an ethical constancy inherent in the answers to Buero Vallejo's dramatic problems as the conflict of every play is vitally concerned with the principles at work in the behaviour

\(^{25}\) Abellán, loc. cit.

\(^{26}\) Buero Vallejo, loc. cit.
of his characters. In the dramatic conflict of every play there lies implicit a moral earnestness based on a thoughtful and dignified concept of man's nature which Buero Vallejo couples with aesthetic sensitivity. This ethic is not one idly chosen or conveniently read into the plays. Its force can be divined in two fundamental ways: its presence, or its absence in the lives of the characters. The efficacy of the protagonists' ethical sense which is brought into positive action in the dramatic situations of trial and tribulation is seen in the protagonists' serene confrontation or acceptance of those limitations which cannot be overcome. Those characters who fall are so overwhelmed because of their failure to prove themselves morally superior to their circumstances. It is Buero Vallejo's insistence that this ethical force belongs to the individual rather than to the social state that gives Buero Vallejo's ethic its transcendental quality.

José Vila Selma states it this way: "Buero ha intentado mirar, no a todas las clases sociales---su teatro no es social porque es un dramaturgo auténtico---sino a la misma condición humana, al pueblo, si se quiera a la sociedad." 27

It is interesting to note that not one of Buero Vallejo's plays published to this date has as its dramatic conflict the theme of social clashes. Nor in any of his plays does society per se, that is, the government, the establishment, the state, impede man. It is the character's own mode of action that impedes

him. The characters find themselves in situations well-nigh hopeless when instead of holding to genuine ethical standards, there is an inbreeding of temperament and idiosyncrasy. Even when an established, functioning political state, or governmental hierarchy is dramatically employed as in Las meninas, Un soñador para un pueblo and La tejedora de sueños, it is ultimately shown as enlightened, upright, and not an obstacle to man. Buero Vallejo makes no comment directly on society or social governing. Society to him is to be directed by the ethic which has its origin in the personal.

The key needed for the understanding of the function of the ethic in Buero Vallejo's plays is to be found in a statement he makes about one of his plays, Las cartas boca abajo.

Y un tema, o un problema, pueden---y deben!---intentar universalidad, y no sólo momentaneidad estricta. Para usted, por ejemplo, Las cartas no son lo bastante adecuadas al momento, pero esa obra plantea, para mí, algo tan permanente como muy típico de la "actual" familia española: la falta de lealtad y de sinceridad en las relaciones humanas; el fallo de una sociedad---la familia es una de las expresiones "normales" de una sociedad ---fundada en mentiras y mezquindades, que despierta el desvío, el "no" de los hijos... ¿Se puede decir más en una obra? Tal vez sí. ¿Se ha dicho poco? Creo que no.28

Man is a being who may be distinguished from the animal by his reason and his possession of ethical standards. He stands as a free being prone to animalistic urges or egocentric outbursts, but he is responsible to place these tendencies, in so far as he wishes to cultivate his peculiarly human nature, under the control

28. Rodríguez, loc. cit.
of reason in a social environment. Freedom is thus not liberation from circumstances, but subjection to inner law. The watchwords are order, restraint, discipline through abnegation.

The dramatic conflict in all of Buero Vallejo's plays is begotten by a character or by characters whose selfishness demonstrates temperament and idiosyncrasy. Those characters who survive the chaos of the conflict which results show their ability to function within the framework of social dependency and personal independence. Buero Vallejo does not show in his plays how his characters achieve their various attitudes. They simply possess these attitudes at the onset of the play. One could offer opinions of the many ethical circumstances and the ethical choices offered in the plays, but to understand these circumstances or choices, one must look to the characters of the plays and how Buero Vallejo moves them in the framework of free will. Buero Vallejo does not show how the circumstantial forces work on the characters, but how the characters act or react to the forces.

In his plays, Buero Vallejo has intended to represent a partial indictment of the Spanish people. In the selection of his characters, he has attempted to choose Spanish types which represent in turn the most persistent shortcomings of man. Juan R. Castellano sees Buero Vallejo working with archetypal patterns. He says: "A Buero le interesan los temas de gran amplitud y que en vez de dedicarse a un teatro de imitación de la vida real o imaginaria aspira a darle universalidad por medio de personajes
Castellano does not explain the nature of these "cualidades fundamentales de la vida humana" nor does he name them. If one takes Buero Vallejo at his word and seeks a consistency in the cause of problems such as "la falta de lealtad y de sinceridad en las relaciones humanas" then one can see the cause as a lack of right principles to govern man's actions; that is, right principles which can be brought into meaningful participation only in those situations over which man can exercise control. This must be as there are some circumstances to which man must concede power. These right principles then must consist of a categorically imperative ethic if it is to be transcendental—an ethic that frees man from the tyranny of his temperament in all relationships that he may have. It may be then an ethic that espouses selflessness—or "abnegación" as the reviewer in Mundo Hispanico states it. Then too it may be stated as "amar al prójimo" as others would have it, the ethic heart of Christianity. In those plays of Buero Vallejo in which the dramatic conflict is motivated by the selfishness of a character, then the consequences as visited upon either the selfish individual himself or upon the members of society with whom he comes into contact are dire consequences which border on the tragic.

This personal ethic, this assent to right principles, Buero has chosen to project dramatically in the basic social situations of man: the conjugal, the familial, the boy-girl, the social, the political. It is to be understood that the effect of the ethic, be it positive or negative, is not static. In Buero Vallejo's plays the personal ethic affects the conjugal or boy-girl relationships which in turn affect the familial and sometimes the social and political milieu of which the protagonist is a part.

It is in these terms that Buero Vallejo himself sees the consequences. It is this very point of view that he expresses when he states in his above-mentioned quote, "La familia es una de las expresiones 'normales' de una sociedad." At the basis of each play lies implicit the attitude of Buero Vallejo's metaphysic that man's real transcendental problem consists in deciding how to confront the problems of life, with the precise end of showing the contemporary Spaniard the true nature of his problems. This supports the second consideration of living positively within one's limitations, exploiting to the full one's possibilities.

The general technical approaches to presenting the basic situations can be limited to the following two: (1) The realistic treatment of a transcendental problem in a contemporary situation; (2) The treatment of a contemporary problem of a transcendental nature by historical and/or literary distancing. The plays that falls into the first category are Historia de una escalera, Las cartas boca abajo, Hoy es fiesta, Irene o el tesoro, La señal que se espera, Madrugada, En la ardiente oscuridad, Aventura en lo gris.
Those of the second category are **Soñador para un pueblo**, **Palabras en la arena**, **El concierto de San Ovidio**, **La tejedora de sueños**, **Las meninas**, and **Casi un cuento de hadas**.

The first dramatic approach is self-explanatory; and while there is nothing cryptic about the second, it would be well to explain just what this historical and/or literary distancing technique is. In those plays of an historical nature Buero Vallejo takes a point of fact in history and around it builds a dramatic problem, the implications of which are not inapplicable to a like contemporary Spanish situation. In **Un soñador para un pueblo** he has used the XVIII century uprising that led to the expulsion from Spain of the Spanish Minister of Italian background, Esquilache; in **El concierto de San Ovidio** he has situated his play, which takes place in the XVIII century, in the historical institution for the blind in France, **Les quinze-Vingts**, founded by Louis IX in the XIII century; and in **Las meninas** he has used the point in history when Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez was court painter for Felipe IV.

Those plays of literary and religious tradition in which Buero Vallejo has projected a contemporary problem are **Palabras en la arena**, a parable from the Bible; **La tejedora de sueños**, the part of The Odyssey in which Ulysses returns home to Penelope; and **Casi un cuento de hadas**, the XVII century French fairy tale "**Riquet à la houppe**" by Charles Perrault.

As for the classification of the plays according to types, two predominant classifications are here offered, those of Buero
Vallejo and José Castellano. Included are this author's classification of Buero Vallejo's plays according to the nature of the ethical problems in each play. If the play is classified as political it means that the major ethical problem (the dramatic conflict) is one of social-political consequences. Any ethic must first be personal. The force of this personal ethic ranges to those categories that shall be called, for simplicity's sake (1) Social, which includes the Boy-Girl (the term "Boy-Girl" is here employed for lack of a better term generally accepted), the Conjugal and the Familial; (2) Political. The force of this personal ethic can be likened to the dropping of a stone into the center of a pond of water, the ripples caused being extensions of the personal ethic's force in the protagonist's environment.

Buero Vallejo's classifications of his own plays are those he gave them upon publication. They have already been given in this study, but for comparison's sake they are being offered again. The partial classification of Castellano is taken from his lengthy, two-part study of Buero Vallejo's plays in numbers 74, 75 and 76 of Punta Europa. He issued the classification before the presentation of Concierto de San Ovidio and Aventura en lo gris in 1962 and 1963 respectively; hence they are not included. He did, however, neglect to classify some plays written, presented and published before he wrote his study. The classifications of Buero Vallejo, of Castellano and those arrived at in this study are as follows:
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<th>Play</th>
<th>Buero Vallejo</th>
<th>Castellano</th>
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<tr>
<td>Historia de una escalera</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>Dramatic-social</td>
<td>Social</td>
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<tr>
<td>Señal que se espera</td>
<td>Comedia</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Social</td>
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<tr>
<td>Madrugada</td>
<td>Episodio dramático</td>
<td>Problem play</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartas boca abajo</td>
<td>Tragedia española</td>
<td>Dramatic-social</td>
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<td>Soñador para un pueblo</td>
<td>Versión libre de un episodio histórico</td>
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<td>Political</td>
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<td>En la ardiente oscuridad</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>Problem play</td>
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<td>Palabras en la arena</td>
<td>Tragedia</td>
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<td>Aventura en lo gris</td>
<td>Dos actos y un sueño</td>
<td>Political</td>
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<td>Concierto de San Ovidio</td>
<td>Parábola</td>
<td>Political</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La tejedora de sueños</td>
<td>Drama</td>
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<td>Las meninas</td>
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<td>Irene o el tesoro</td>
<td>Fábula</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
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<td>Casi un cuento de hadas</td>
<td>Una glosa</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
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<td>Hoy es fiesta</td>
<td>Comedia</td>
<td>Dramatic-social</td>
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But so that all of the considerations of this ethic in Buero Vallejo's plays be considered, the above-offered classification is then divided into other groupings. Thus it is that the plays are divided according to dénouement; that is, a positive or a negative outcome, or if you will, a "happy" or "unhappy" ending. This is done in an effort to throw into relief the benefits of the positive ethical force in the protagonists' lives; and it must follow, the misfortunes in the lives without it.

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<th>POSITIVE OUTCOME</th>
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<tr>
<td>La señal que se espera</td>
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<td>Casi un cuento de hadas</td>
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<td>Madrugada</td>
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<td>Un soñador para un pueblo</td>
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<td>Las meninas</td>
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<td>Aventura en lo gris</td>
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<tr>
<th>NEGATIVE OUTCOME</th>
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<tr>
<td>Historia de una escalera</td>
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<td>Las palabras en la arena</td>
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<td>Las cartas boca abajo</td>
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<td>El concierto de San Ovidio</td>
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What is to follow now is a study of the various human relationships in Buero Vallejo's plays in an attempt to discover and define the essence of the personal ethic and its attendant social and political ramifications.
CHAPTER III

LAS CARTAS BOCA ABAJO: KEY TO ETHIC

It has been stated that the key needed for the understanding of the function of the social ethic in Buero Vallejo's plays is to be found in a remark he made about his play Las cartas boca abajo. This key unlocks the door for the understanding of the ethic presented in the play—an ethic that is at once universal and transcendental, an ethic whose ramifications are wedded to a problem of man in which the Spanish family of today is immersed. He extends his comment by declaring that since the family unit is a normal expression of a society, it is to be inferred that by grasping the nature of the difficulties to be found in the microcosm of the familial situation, one can then comprehend the problems inherent in present society that transcend time, becoming the eternal stumbling block of human condition.¹

But Buero Vallejo protracts his view, becoming more explicit, especially in regard to Las cartas boca abajo, as he defends his theatre to Miguel Luis Rodríguez.

Creo que hago, en general, un teatro justo y actual ...

que usted considera condición sine qua non...opino que
En la ardiente oscuridad es superior a Historia de una
escalera y a Hoy es fiesta. Y no ya en valores dramá-
ticos generales, sino en el reflejo de nuestro tiempo.
Que ello sucede mediante formas más o menos simbólicos
no es peyorativo: esa obra está viviendo más que las
otras al paso de los años, y el futuro cuenta también,
porque también, es presente cuando en él seguimos vi-
viendo. Las cartas boca abajo es asimismo, para mí,
más actual que aquellas dos: con las cartas boca abajo
vivimos y tras la anécdota de la obra hay una tragedia
que nos define bien.  

This explanation of the play's social intention serves
to compound Buero Vallejo's previous and more general remark
about Las cartas boca abajo. It is then easily seen that in the
play one can abstract a position of the playwright that will make
evident not only a transcendental problem, its causes and conse-
quences, but also an indictment of contemporary Spanish society
---rather, a statement concerning an urgent problem that defines
post-war Spain. A further assumption is to be made and that is
that in his theatre, which he considers "justo y actual," paral-
lel situations exist if Buero Vallejo be consistent in his ethic-
al point of view. And from these parallels, a comprehensive
statement concerning this social anthropology should and does
emerge. It is a definite point of view toward Spanish social
problems which have been characteristic of man.

Not all of Buero Vallejo's critics see his dramatic
themes as socially urgent, as contemporary, as universal as he
would wish; though there are those who see his metaphysical frame
of reference as pessimistically provincial. When the play Las

2. Ibid., p. 20.
cartas boca abajo made its first appearance in the Reina Victoria theatre in Madrid in the late autumn of 1957 two critics, Frederico Carlos Sainz de Robles and Francisco Fernández Santos saw it as a costumbrista play and only one critic interpreted it as another piece of Buero Vallejo's unmitigated pessimism. Writing under the initials of N.G.R., the reviewer complained of Buero Vallejo's dark view:

¿Habrá que suscitar de nuevo el tema, que ya resulta tópico del pesimismo y de la amargura de Buero Vallejo? De esto habría tanto que hablar que no cabe aquí. La vida no es, ciertamente un jardín florido, aunque haya flores en ella, ni mucho menos una mantequera. Contiene amarguras, desengaños y muchas mentiras. En la reacción frente a todo eso y en la manera de recibirlo está el secreto. No puedo estar conforme, por ejemplo, aunque no haya pleno derecho a considerarlo como tesis personal del autor, con que los pájaros cantan por la mañana y gritan de miedo al atardecer. Estoy seguro de que hay pájaros que cantan por la tarde y no me importa si se les considera como pájaros bobos, y porque de esos pobrecitos es el reino de los cielos. Buero Vallejo, sin embargo, casi no tiene más que esa generalización que yo le discuto, en su obra de ayer. Cuida, por otra parte, de decir que aquellas vidas son así, aunque es posible que otras sean de otra manera.3

It is curious that the reviewer sees the bitterness, deceit and lies in the olay, but fails to comprehend the very ethical point of view of the play that Buero Vallejo offers up through the mouths of the heroine and her picaresque brother. And this ethical point of view of the play has to do specifically with the handling of life's problems, of "amarguras y desengaños y muchas mentiras."

The reviewer thinks that the secret to the handling lies in "la

reacción frente a todo eso y en la manera de recibirlo," a point which he feels that Buero Vallejo does not include in the play.

Yet it is this very point---Buero Vallejo's presentation of the reason why everyone of the play's characters are beset by "amarguras y desengaños y muchas mentiras"---that Buero Vallejo offers his reaction, for to Buero Vallejo, in the prevention lies the cure, as shall be proven later on.

The other critic who also signs his review M.L.R., but who must be Miguel Luis Rodríguez of Indice seconds the accusation of relentless pessimism on the part of Buero Vallejo, and takes the playwright to task for making no comment about the Spain of here and now.

Este autor, por el que yo siento predilección, nos da siempre un ambiente angustioso, opresivo; todas sus obras tienen un clima común, y llega un momento, al cabo de diez o doce obras, que el público sabe lo que le espera, más o menos, y sólo acudimos los que estamos preparados para resistirlo. Naturalmente, cada autor tiene su peculiar talante, y no vamos a pedirle a Buero que se salga de su propia piel, ni que, al igual que algunos de sus colegas, nos presenten como originales ciertas alegres comedias calcadas de otras francesas o italianas; pero quizás podamos pedirle, en beneficio de todos, que nos presente, de cuando en cuando, escenarios menos sorprendentes. Esto es, aproximadamente, lo que se deduce de las varias opiniones que he tenido ocasión de escuchar, y no sólo en esta ocasión.

En cuanto a mi propia opinión---que es otra hipótesis, acaso más aventurada----, no deseo escamotearla, aún a riesgo de equivocarme y tener que rectificar más adelante. Me inclino a pensar que el defecto principal del teatro de Buero Vallejo, lo que consciente o inconscientemente, echamos de menos en sus dramas, es esto: que no son el testimonio más expresivo de nuestro tiempo...Quiero decir, que en los dramas de Buero Vallejo se elude, o no ocupa un lugar preeminente, el problema que desde hace muchos lustros pertumba la vida y los sueños de casi todos los españoles. Pues no basta pretender que en tal o cual drama, de reducida anécdota, se ha tratado de simbolizar
It may be that this reviewer is right in his thinking. Buero Vallejo may have written the play as a comment of the unhappy situation which is contemporary Spanish society, but if the audience does not see it, then Buero Vallejo has failed in his attempt. Buero Vallejo's purpose was to present a theatrical anecdote under which lies a tragedy that is at once universal and contemporaneously Spanish.

Most of the remaining critics do see the play in dimensions of social and moral importance, some divining transcendental qualities, others a dramatic tour de force in moral judgment, but not one sees the play as the philosophical whole that Buero Vallejo intended it to be.

Isabel Magaña de Schevill defines the play's problematic thesis in abstract terminology which lends itself to offering a possible transcendental meaning though by no means the correct one to be assigned to the play. She sees the conflict in terms of the protagonist being overwhelmed by his environment when actually at the play's end, the main character emerges with a show of strength, determined for the first time to set straight his house and the people who inhabit it with him.5

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In 1961, the critic José Luis Abellán published his study of the unanswered questions in Buero Vallejo's theatre and in his analysis he sees the play, Las cartas boca abajo, in terms of man's timeless problems, yet incorrectly sees Buero Vallejo's presentation of the play's conflict as one married to the naturalistic doctrine of the inescapable fatum.

Abellán's interpretation of the problems is unacceptable as Buero Vallejo does not point out to man, universal and contemporaneously Spanish, that he is a helpless victim of a cruel, irresistible world but that he can transcend the bitterness, the disillusionment, the deceit, the cruelty of life which man himself causes if he were to exercise his free will and prove himself morally superior to his calamitous circumstances. At the end of the play Las cartas boca abajo Buero Vallejo tells the present-day Spaniard and universal man the cause and the cure of his problems. The work is then didactic and the pessimistic point

of view that he presents in the play is ultimately affirmative; a positively, optimistically cathartic force. Federico Carlos Sainz de Robles, in speaking of Buero Vallejo's cataloguing of "las costumbres perniciosas de su época," maintains that the playwright does not do it for the sake of "anguishizar, sino por el deber de ejemplarizar." He feels that the efficacy of Buero Vallejo's intention is to dramatize what happens to members of a society, corrupt or impotent to avoid such catastrophes; that is, if they do not heed the advice offered in the play's dénouement.7

He continues by stating that the theme of the play is "realismo absoluto"—even pessimistic, and in defense and explanation of this realism of Buero Vallejo, he explains the playwright's artistic formula:

Por saberlo así, Buero Vallejo sólo busca temas para sus obras allí donde el hombre está en lucha consigo mismo o con sus semejantes allí donde el hombre pueda salir triunfante con esfuerzo titánico o vencido con rabia. Buero Vallejo no quiere diagnosticar sino dolencias graves y hondas heridas, pues sería perder el tiempo y exponerse a caer en el ridículo especializándose en enfermedades leves. Y las quiere diagnosticar no con la intención morbosa de contentarse con el diagnóstico, sino para intentar en seguida operar, curar si le es posible; y, si no le es, melificar lo irreparable con designos de ejemplaridad.8

By insinuation—never by direct comment, Sainz de Robles ties in this sad state of affairs to present day Spain. In discussing the fact that whenever the family suffers a disastrous


8. Ibid., pp. xx-xxi.
setback a piece falls off of a cornice which is in bad repair, he hints "como detalle muy significativo, una pared cuarteada, con una cornisa de yeso que se va, descascarillando, y que es urgente reparar...cuando posible...detalle curioso..."

Rafael Vázquez Zamora writing in *Insula* substantiates Sainz de Robles' opinion in that he too feels that Buero Vallejo writes his plays, and in particular *Las cartas boca abajo* with the end to instruct. He claims that in the play "late una voluntad de sentido, de imprimir al argumento y al diálogo una fuerza significativa en lo moral o en lo social." Zamora does not say whether he thinks the play's problem is one of transcendental breadth or if it is pertinent to contemporary Spain, but he does state that as for the ugly consequential chain of events in the play "la personalidad, la individualidad del protagonista podría quitarse de encima el peso aplastante" thus placing himself in direct opposition to the view of Abellán that Buero Vallejo presents a naturalistic view concerning man's suffering. Zamora also lends weight to the theory that Buero Vallejo's view is that man is not trapped; that man can prove himself superior to calamity if he but exercise his free will.

Other major critics are not as specific in analysing the play *Las cartas boca abajo*, but in each estimation the opinion is

9. Ibid., p. xvi.


11. Ibid.
that the play is shot through with a rigorous moral judgment and blame. Torrente Ballester observes that in *Las cartas boca abajo* "Buero Vallejo suele ser moralmente implacable con sus personajes (es de los que seguramente enviarían a don Juan al infierno)."\(^{12}\)

In another publication he writes that the play "es un juicio."\(^{13}\)

Adolfo Prego sees Buero Vallejo seized by the need to punish and protest morally. Speaking of the treatment of the heroine, he claims that "el autor la castiga casi con ferocidad y esto le sitúa en una posición de protesta moral contra la realidad que él mismo ha forjado."\(^{14}\)

Ricardo Domenech, airing his view that Buero Vallejo is concerned with Pirandello's problem of blame and responsibility, believes that "En *Las cartas boca abajo* se ventil un problema de culpabilidad."\(^{15}\) Chandler and Schwartz\(^{16}\) and Francisco Fernández-Santos\(^{17}\) understand the play as a psychological study of the

\[^{12}\text{Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, "El teatro," Papeles de son Armadans, Almanaque para el año 1959, p. 331.}\]

\[^{13}\text{Ballester, "Estreno de Las cartas boca abajo de Buero Vallejo en el Reina Victoria," Arriba, No. 7792 (1957), p. 23.}\]

\[^{14}\text{Adolfo Prego, "Crítica: Las cartas boca abajo de Buero Vallejo en el Reina Victoria," Informaciones (November 6, 1957), p. 9.}\]

\[^{15}\text{Ricardo Domenech, "Reflexiones sobre el teatro de Buero Vallejo," Primer Acto, No. 11 (1959), p. 2.}\]


\[^{17}\text{Francisco Fernández-Santos, "Tres estrenos," Índice de artes y letras, No. 108 (1957), p. 17.}\]
characters and their personal sufferings. Other listings of opinions could be included here but they would only serve to reinforce the samplings already offered.

What is significant is that the consensus of opinion substantiates the theory that _Las cartas boca abajo_ is a play the theme of which falls within the radius of moral-ethical considerations. The transcendental problem extracted from the play is at once elementary. It is the ageless observation that people themselves make themselves and other people suffer thus hindering their progress and the happiness of all concerned. The victims in turn make others suffer thus hindering their progress and happiness. And so goes the process _ad infinitum_. The crux of the play is that Juan's progress and happiness is hindered by what he is made to suffer at the hands of his family. But he is not the only one who suffers and whose advancement is impeded. Anita's muteness registers her torment; the son Juanito finds himself suffocating spiritually, emotionally; Mauro undergoes the trials of the picaresque, and the heroine, Adela, suffers damnably. But to know that man suffers and makes other suffer is patently obvious and bears no ethical significance. To fully understand Buero Vallejo's ethical message to post-war Spain, his idea of first causes in a social context must be determined. These first causes are found in _Las cartas boca abajo_ and once they are established a thematic correspondence with his other plays will be shown. So that they be more understandable, a résumé of the plot of the play is needed.
Juan, a professor, lives in a humble apartment with his wife, Adela, an arrogant, unkind, disrespectful woman; their son, Juanito, a dissatisfied, restless, disrespectful university student; Anita, his wife's sister, an embittered, aging spinster who hasn't uttered a word for eight years, except on one or two occasions and then only to her nephew; and Mauro, Adela's brother, a shiftless, boastful, deceitful, picaresque, middle-aged man who, though not officially in residence with the family, scavenges his drinks, his meals; sleeps and presumes a place in the apartment.

At the beginning of the action, Juan is deep in study in preparation for his fourth competitive try for the chair of his department of sociology at the university. A childhood friend of his, Carlos Ferrer Díaz, who incidentally had been a serious suitor of Juan's wife Adela, has achieved great success in the particular field of social theory to which Juan is dedicated. Carlos Ferrer Díaz' latest works are much in vogue, and in consequence Ferrer Díaz has a great deal of influence, all to the dismay of Juan. Mauro, Juan's brother-in-law, tells Adela that he has seen Carlos Ferrer Díaz of late and that it occurred to him that with her consent he might ask Ferrer Díaz to recommend Juan for the chair. He reasons that with Ferrer Díaz' word, the post would most definitely be secured for Juan. Adela at first vacillates, reminding Mauro that Juan wants to win the chair on his own merits. What she says is true. Juan studies assiduously, but finds it difficult as the environment at home is not a happy one and to further the domestic distractions, Juanito, the son, announces.
that he wants to try for a grant so that he can go abroad to study. The domestic tension increases when it is discovered that not only has a silver lighter disappeared from Juan's writing table, but also several books that Juan needs to study most urgently before the competition. The books are those of Carlos Ferrer Díaz, Juan's old rival in love and work; therefore he won't admit that he needs the books when he reports them missing to his family. He is also loathe to borrow his son's copies or those of the library's as his pride and envy prevent him. He accuses Mauro of having taken the books, but Mauro denies it. To heighten the need for the books, Juanito tells his father that Ferrer Díaz should be studied for the competition as talk at the university has it that his social theories are of great importance for the defense. Juanito also states that Ferrer Díaz has always been his hero since childhood and rudely tells his father that Ferrer Díaz is worth more than he. Meanwhile it is learned that Juan has passed all of the competition save the last and most important. Mauro, having obtained consent from Adela, tells her in secret that he has spoken to Ferrer Díaz and that Ferrer Díaz immediately telephoned to the chairman of the board of examiners recommending Juan for the post. Adela is exultant and later hints to her husband that she is playing a greater part in the competition than he suspects. Juan, distraught by the domestic troubles, tells his wife that he would give up the competition if he were able to establish a loving communication with her; but she is remote to his entreaty and the domestic situation worsens. In a squabble that takes place later
between Juanito and his uncle, Mauro, Juanito forces him to admit that he stole the books from Juan. But life goes on and the final competition arrives. It is a day in which Adela is ecstatic. She feels that after all the years, she is once again in touch with Ferrer Díaz as he has helped Juan with the competition for her sake. She tries to get Anita to phone Ferrer Díaz to thank him, but Anita refuses. She then asks Mauro to call, but he falls asleep. When Juan returns home from the last competition Adela treats him as the victor of the competition. Juan reminds her that she promised to tell him how she had helped in the competition, but she defers. Moments later, in a reaction of anger to a remark that Juan makes, she reveals to him that she asked Ferrer Díaz to help him as he, Juan, wouldn't have been able to succeed on his own. She adds that some day he'll thank her for having helped him to win. He tells her that she has presumed incorrectly, that he lost and that he lost because of his envy of Ferrer Díaz and ignorance of the man's social theories. He tells her that all is over for him, but that he is going to give their son his chance. He is going to allow Juanito to go abroad so that he can fulfill his dream. She rages at him, saying that he does so only to take his vengeance out on her. While they battle, Juanito enters. He tells his father that he is sincerely sorry about his having lost the competition and asks for his father to forgive him for having been such a bad son to him. Juan, defeated, tells Juanito that he was right in saying that Ferrer Díaz is worth more than he himself and that the competition was lost in spite of Ferrer Díaz'
recommendation the night before. Juanito reacts, startled, and declares that Ferrer Díaz could not have recommended him the night before as the man was not in town. Adela realizes then that Mauro has lied to her about Ferrer Díaz. She in a fury is about to throw her brother out of the apartment, especially after all of her efforts on his behalf, but Juan prevents her from doing so. Adela realizes that she too has lost every battle. Juan tells her that both he and she must work to save Juanito by letting him go abroad to study. Adela, angered more than ever by this ultimate defeat turns to her mute sister beseeching her for words of comfort, a request which Anita meets with her characteristic silence.

Simply stated, the plot of Las cartas boca abajo is built around the question: will Juan win the competition for the chair of his department? In the play's dénouement Juan loses the competition and the seeds of failure are to be found not only in Juan himself, but also, and more importantly, in his family. In fact, the fault that Juan must bear in losing the competition springs from his family. He fails because he cannot expound on nor answer questions about the social theories of Carlos Ferrer Díaz. Juan cannot do so because his brother-in-law has stolen the books. Juan could have borrowed his son's copies or those of the library but his lack of confidence and his envy of Carlos Ferrer Díaz prevent him. This lack of confidence and envy are products of the oppressive, unhappy environment in his home which finds its source in the person of Adela, his wife.
In attaching the "culpabilidad" of which Ricardo Domenech speaks—though some critics such as Rafael Vazques Zamora feel that "en aquella casa cada uno hace desgraciados a los demás" they all agree that it is the wife, Adela, who must bear the burden of the blame. And of what is she and the others guilty that causes such misery but selfishness, pure and simple. Of this Adela has more than her share. In fact, she it is who creates the character destroying environment that engenders the selfishness of others. Federico Carlos Sainz de Robles sees the play as "el problema de una familia deshecha, acobardada por el egoísmo feroz, de uno de sus miembros." Adolfo Prego sees Adela not only as the chief troublemaker, but as evil incarnate. V. Fernández Asis intensifies her condition and classifies her as a female psychopath who is the primary "desequilibrio del hogar y de la infelicidad." But whatever be the opinion concerning the personality of Adela, hers is a destructive will to be reckoned with. She, the wife, the mother, the sister is at the epicenter, the very heart of the family; therefore wielding more telling force with her actions, be they good or bad. Interestingly enough and quite correctly, Francisco Fernández-Santos sees her as the main character of the play.

20. Prego, loc. cit.
La obra gira esencialmente alrededor de la protagó-
nista Adela, seguramente el tipo feminina más lograda de
todos los de étero. Toda una mujer. Tan es así que la
intensidad de los demás personajes, todos giran en
derredor de esta mujer de apariencia suave pero en el
fondo cruel. Ella es la que, con su hipocresía, con
su despecho y su orgullo, su secreta gravitación en
torno a un pasado que un día despreció y su culpable
enternecimiento cuando cree que ese pasado puede volver,
con su egoísmo, en suma, que no vacila en sacrificar
primero a la hermana y al marido después, ella es,
digo, quien cataliza en torno suyo el drama.22

Adela's negative force in the lives of the people who
surround her is a constant in the action of the play. Hers is the
breath of pessimism, cruelty, selfishness which taints the domestic
air. Her conjugal relationship with Juan is one that diminishes
his life rather than increasing it with conjugal love. When she
speaks to him of his competition for the chair it is with insidious
pessimism: "Claro que te ayudaré en eso y en todo, pero me apena
verte así. Me pregunto si habrá verdadera necesidad de que hicies-
ras a estas alturas semejante esfuerzo."23 Her force could have
scarcely been more negative had she told him directly that his
competing was ridiculous. Later when Juan does survive the first
round of elimination her reaction is anything but enthusiastic.
It is an attitude that infects their son's reaction also.

Juan.——...Han eliminado a diecinueve. ¡Quedamos cinco.
Mauro.—-(risueño) Un resultado muy halagador...Para eso
hay que valer mucho... ¡Mi más sincera enhorabuena!
(Breve pausa. A Juan, pendiente de los suyos, se le va yendo
la sonrisa.)

22. Fernández-Santos, loc. cit.

23. Antonio Buero Vallejo, Las cartas boca abajo (Madrid:
Ediciones Alfil, 1957), p. 23. (All subsequent references and
quotations are from this edition of Las cartas boca abajo.)
Adela.—(Reacciona y le sonríe) Me alegra mucho.
Juan.—Gracias.
(Su fisonomía se ensombreció de nuevo. Mira a su hijo, pero éste no sabe mentir.)
Juanito.—(Seco) Te felicito. (p. 25)

And Adela's disheartening reaction to her husband's efforts does not stop there. After the second round of elimination, when Juan comes home before the winners have been announced, she upon greeting him, asks to know if he has been eliminated rather than if he has won. (p. 32) Previously when Mauro asks her how Juan is progressing in the competition, she replies that he has probably been eliminated. (p. 14) She continues telling her brother what she advised Juan as he set out to take the examination:

Adela.—Ya la aconsejé yo que no la hiciese pensar que pueda ganar un cátedra de esa importancia, y para la Facultad de aquí, es un puro disparate. (Se encoge de hombros con desprecio.) Está enloquecido. Allá él. (p. 36)

Her deprecatory attitude toward her husband is not the proper one of loving respect and encouragement that a wife should show toward a husband who is trying to progress, to improve their lot; but for however deprecatory it may be, it is not as actively negative as on the previous three attempts that Juan has made to win the chair.

Juan.— En mis dos primeras oposiciones, las seguiste como si fueran tuyas, me animabas frenéticamente.
Adela.—Ya ves como no había ninguna lucha.
Juan.— Si la hubo. Al perderlas no me ahorraste ni tu desdén ni tus reproches. Pero quizá era preferible eso a lo que ocurrió en la tercera que hice. Entonces ya no reclamabas noticias, ni me reprochaste nada. Era la indiferencia. (p. 35)
Adela's relationship with Juan, then, has always been one of desperate, vengeful anxiousness which bears no respect for Juan as a man, husband or human being deserving of love and appreciation for him in his times of trial which he endures for their sake. Her disrespect and lack of confidence in Juan are such that even when he tells her that he intends to win the competition on his own merits, she allows her brother Mauro to ask her husband's old rival and her childhood suitor Carlos Ferrer Díaz to recommend him for the post, believing fully that only with her help can he win. And she has the temerity to insinuate to her husband that he cannot win without her clandestine efforts. When he asks her how she proposes to help, she in reply promises to tell him after the competition. It is then when he arrives home after the final competition and she, sure in the knowledge that he has won with her help, cruelly hints of his indebtedness to her.

Adela.--(Se encrepa.) ¡Calla, es ridículo! ¿Tanto se ha subido el éxito a la cabeza? (Rie.) ¡Pero si no ha cambiado nada! Eres el mismo niño de siempre que se ensorbece porque algo le ha salido bien y piensa que ahora sí puede levantar el gallo... (Sonríe.) Te conozco y por eso no te guardo ren­cor. Te lo diré, ya que tú mismo lo provocas. Tienes que saber de una vez que no has vencido por tu solo esfuerzo. (p. 74)

When after having told him of his being recommended by Carlos Ferrer Díaz at her instigation and learning that he failed in spite of her effort, her cruelty and presumptuousness reach even greater heights. She screams at him with a condescension aimed at humiliating him completely:
Si es verdad que no vales, si he estado tratando de animar inútilmente durante años a un fracasado, hasta que, he tenido que recordar eso, que no vales... ¡No tienes derecho a reprocharte que te buscase una recomendación! ¡Cuando no se vale para nada hay que ser más humilde! Y aceptar las ayudas de donde puedan venir. (p. 76)

Adela spares Juan none of her poison and it is this hideous example given to Juanito by his mother that spawns the abusive treatment that he gives his father. It is abuse heaped mercilessly until for some unexplained reason, Juanito recents and begins to feel sorry for his father. At the beginning, when Juanito is reproached by his parents for having raised the problem of going abroad to study during the times of pressure for the father, Juanito reflects his mother's pessimism and disrespect. In speaking of his father's competition, he says: "La perderá. Es un adocenado...un triste encargado de curso. Y ahora casi en la vejez se empeña en ganar una cátedra. Es ridículo." (p. 23) Later he insults his father telling him that "Ferrer Díaz vale mucho más..." (p. 43) Juanito's disdain is so great that it reaches the point at which he dreams his father dead and Ferrer Díaz in his place. This loathing for his father disturbs him. He declares to his mute aunt: "No soy más que un niño malcriado. Pero ¿por qué soy así?" (p. 40) Why he would dream his father dead and Carlos Ferrer Díaz in his place is Adela's doing. She has made Ferrer Díaz' presence felt in the house since Juanito's childhood though she won't admit it when Juanito inadvertently reminds her that she it was who first spoke to him of Ferrer Díaz.
Juanito.—— Siempre he tenido la impresión de que la primera vez que oí hablar de él, fue a ti.

Adela.—— (Se yergue.) ¿A mí?

Juanito.—— Parece un recuerdo de niño. Sin duda es falso, pero lo veo con mucha nitidez.

Adela.—— Seguro que te equivocas.

Juanito.—— Claro. Pero te veo aquí mismo, frente al balcón, con aire triste...Yo entro y me llamas. Me besas. Y dices: ¿Verdad que sí? ¿Qué tú serás otro...?

Adela.—— (Nerviosa, le interrumpe riendo.) Y pronuncio su nombre, ¿no?

Juanito.—— Sí.

Adela.—— Lo has soñado.

Juanito.—— (Grave.) Es posible... un sueño posterior donde se muestra lo que yo creo que tú quieres... (pp. 58-39)

When Juan tells her why envy of Carlos Ferrer Díaz and pride prevented him from openly borrowing the books of Ferrer Díaz' social theories, he says that it is because Ferrer Díaz' presence in his house has overwhelmed him to the point of inanition. Referring to this Carlos Ferrer Díaz, he declares why he failed:

Le he envidiado toda mi vida... Le envidio aún. No he sabido sobreponerme a ese sentimiento destructor... no se me ayudaba nada en mi propia casa para conseguirlo; por eso cuento poco ahora. Yo era inteligente, pero la obcesión de sus éxitos me ha anulado. Y el pago es el fracaso... De una u otra manera, Ferrer Díaz ha estado siempre en esta casa. Sin nombrarlo apenas; pero con una presencia formidable que... a veces... llegaba a darme la sensación de que este hogar no era mío, sino suyo. (p. 76)

So formidable has Adela made Ferrer Díaz' presence felt in the house that Juan is convinced not only that the house belonged to Ferrer Díaz, but that Adela still dreams of him. Juan extends this accusation of Adela to the startling dimension of charging her of having dreams of Carlos Ferrer Díaz even at the moment when she conceived Juanito. (p. 78) Juan has known all along that he has been a millstone around his wife's neck; one she
could scarcely abide. He tells her that this animus toward him
became alarmingly etched when he realized that when she nursed him
during a severe illness she actually wanted him dead. As he turns
all of his cards face up on the table, he says:

Me di cuenta en aquella ocasión en que estuve tan
enfermo...tus suspiros de impacienca, tus friás pala-
bras de alivio, tu melancolía, tus distracciones, tu
resistencia al papel forzozo de enfermera...Yo te es-
toraba. Al lado mismo de mi cama te crecía dentro un
sueño espantantoso...de felicidad. (p. 78)

Even though Juan has been painfully aware of his wife's
attitude toward him, he has never been rancorous, vengeful or
filled with hate and self-pity. In fact he has tried on several
occasions to establish a working relationship with her—some
spiritual communion with this wife whom he truly loves. Any
little crumb of interest that she may let fall for him is not too
meager in his eyes. At the beginning of the play when she shows
just the slightest interest in him and the competition he is
undergoing, he seizes upon it and tries to push it to an advantage.
He tells her that they should communicate with each other; that if
they were to do so their conjugal situation would improve.

Juan.---Acabas de decirmee una cosa muy agradable...
quiza lo que pasa siempre es que nos sobra
suspicacia. Nos vamos hundiendo en el silencio
y acabamos por pasar mal los unos con los otros.
Estabas intranquila por mi suerte, y sin embar-
go...Ya vea: cada vez que voy a la facultad
desearía que me dijeses algo que se me antoja
muy natural...y que nunca me dijiste...

Adela.---¿El qué?
Juan.---Pues...pensaba que podías decirme: Telefóname
en cuanto termines, con tu impresión. (Ella le
mira, sonriente.) Lo pensaste ¿verdad? ¿pero
no lo decías?
Adela.---Tampoco tú eres muy locuaz.
Juan.---Tampoco. Los dos mantenemos nuestras cartas boca abajo, en vez de enseñarlas...y poco a poco se malea el juego. (p. 32)

His need to establish a communicating relationship with his wife is urgent with Juan. It is an exigency that takes such a high priority in his life that he would prefer it over winning the competition. But Adela remains silent, refusing to make an effort to communicate with him. (p. 33) It is a request that Juan makes of Adela again the night before the final competition for the chair. As he is about to retire to his room so that he can study for the final round he beseeches her:

Tengo toda la noche. Y aunque hubiese que sacrificar la oposición, si servía para lograr mi entendimiento mayor entre nosotros lo haría sin vacilar...Sé bien que no te he dado lo que querías. Pero yo no he dejado de quererte, y si trabajo ahora lo hago también por ti. Comprendo que es una oferta tardía, pero muy sincera. Quizá esta noche logremos lo que no hemos logrado durante años: poner las cartas boca abajo arriba, confiar el uno en el otro. (p. 63)

So great is the need for Juan to establish a working, happy conjugal relationship that he would sacrifice his entire career just to be able to do so. A very important point in the play. He urges her to put her cards face up; to confide in him so that they can "envejecer juntos"---their sure destiny which in wisdom they must accept. He adds that all throughout their married life the gruelling competition would have resulted in his favor if she had been at his side helping him fulfill his proper destiny. (p. 64) But Adela remains steadfast in her refusal to give of herself to Juan. She keeps her "cartas boca abajo," thus
preserving the impenetrable barrier between them. At the play's end Juan tells her bitterly:

"Guarda tu secreto, Adela. Ese no puedo yo revelarlo, puesto que lo ignoro. Quizá ha sido tu mayor error: que tu marido supiera tan pocas cosas de ti mientras que tú de él lo sabías todo. Pero al menos, sí sé una cosa. Una cosa tremenda de la que nunca hemos hablado y de la que quizá previene todo." (p. 78)

Juan also confronts her with his thinking concerning the primary cause of all the trouble. He tells her "la culpable tiene que ser tú! ¡Tú, que hieres a todos de muerte con tus torpezas!" (p. 77)

And then he tells her why she married him without loving him adding that from that betrayal perhaps were born their woes. He says that he has asked himself why she would do such a thing and then he offers her these answers:

"Una cobardía, ya que en el fondo, siempre lo supe. Era demasiado clara tu intención de utilizarme como un simple elemento de revancha o de despecho. Quisiste demostrar a otra persona que con tu ayuda un hombre podía llegar lejos...Me animaste a luchar solo por eso. Y porque no pudiste demostrarlo, has terminado por odiarme." (p. 78)

The result of all this treachery that began with Adela's loveless marriage to Juan is "una vida ficticia, llena de mentira, un hogar que era también mentira; dolor y desengaño para tu vejez..." (p. 79)

The critic Ricardo Domenech in his analysis of the play assigns to Adela the blame for all the misery in which the family is engulfed. He states, "la protagonista Adela es culpable de haber impedido la felicidad de los demás y, a la postre, la suya propia. Hay un escena de fuerte patetismo donde Adela reconoce
su culpa." That Adela has ruined her husband's life and poisoned the life of her son by causing the enmity between him and his father is known, but how she ruined Anita's life is linked securely to the ruin of her own.

Anita has lived with Juan and Adela for eight years and during that time she has not spoken a single word to anyone except to Juanito, whom she dearly loves. And when she did speak to him it was a rare occasion and but a few words. If one is to believe Adela's view, Anita is not insane. To her mind, Anita is simply "resentida." Anita's withdrawal into silence was a gradual process. It began and reached the stage of total silence while Adela was stealing the love of Carlos Ferrer Díaz away from Anita.

Adela recalling the past relates how it happened.

Cunado conocimos a Carlos y a Juan, las dos adversimios que Carlos se interesaba por ti y nadie lo supo, porque él era tan reservado como tú, pero tú y yo, sí... Tú y yo, sí. Yo vi como te ibas ilusionando en secreto día a día. Era tu oportunidad..., Habría tenido que hacer prematuramente de madre contigo desde que la nuestra murió y de pronto, te sentías mujer por primera vez.... Y con qué hondura, con qué ansia tan recatada y tan ardiente a un tiempo.... Pero la hermana más atractiva, la hermana más loca se metió por en medio! ¿Cómo iba a resistir Carlos? Sin duda pensó que se había equivocado: entonces era un muchacho y no era difícil hacerle perder la cabeza a fuerza de insinuaciones y coqueteos. Y fuimos novios. Y tú callaste, como tenías por costumbre. Callaste cada vez más...hasta caer en tu mutismo de años. (p. 47)

Adela continues her monologue of exposition relating how Ferrer Díaz regained emotional equanimity for her. She says that she is not certain why he gave her up at last, but she offers two

strong reasons: that he noticed that she really did not love him; that he thought that she was not the right sort of company for a man of studies. Adela admits that she took Carlos Ferrer Díaz away from Anita out of pure caprice, causing the suffering to her sister that led to her silent withdrawal. She also admits that she realized after he rejected her that she loved him; and that she still does love him. She adds that "despechada" she married Juan "dispuesta a hacerle triunfar para que Carlos viese la compañera que había perdido." (p. 50)

For the pleasure of a moment's triumphant spite and whim, Adela has to pay a terrible price, a price which her family is forced to pay also. She has betrayed her love for Carlos Ferrer Díaz and Juan's love for her and as a result winds up a frustrated, unhappy woman. And she knows it. In a conversation with her brother Mauro, she speaks of the emotional contrasts in her life.

Adela.—Yo era una muchacha llena de ímpetu, de alegría...Me he convertido en una mujer triste, cansada y temerosa.
Mauro.—¿Temerosa?
Adela.—Los años pasan y noto, que todo me va aplastando...si que yo pueda hacer nada, ¡Nada!, para evitarlo. Quizá sea una ley general y haya que aprender a resignarse. ¡Pero yo no sé resignarme!...Y me siento estafada, y tengo miedo.
Mauro.—¿A qué?
Adela.—A hundirme del todo. (p. 28)

There is only one brief scene in the play when Adela is happy and that is when she mistakenly thinks that Carlos Ferrer Díaz, the man she really loves, is thinking of her. She is happy in her vision of him occupied with thoughts of her, as her love for him is the "única belleza" of her wretched, desperate life. (p. 70)
Adela realizes the cruelty she has shown to Anita who assumed the thankless role of second mother after their mother died. Ironically enough Adela seeks from her sister the very relationship of "cartas boca arriba" that Juan seeks from her and which she denies him. Adela implores: "Espera todavía que alguna vez sea humana conmigo...que accedas a conversar y a franquearte." (p. 36) Later she again implores her: "Bien podemos tocar por primera vez las viejas espinas y hasta probar arrancarlas juntas. Estamos las dos tan necesitadas de paz." (p. 47) She asks her to turn her cards face up and forgive her in an attempt to salvage their lives: "Si podemos llorar juntas, es que podemos vivir juntas. ¡Por ti y no sólo por mí, Anita! ¡Por ti te pido que rompas tu silencio, que revivas! ¡Aquella mala acción mía no puede haberte trastornado irremediablemente, tus lágrimas me lo demuestran! ¡Mira las mías!...¿Me perdonas?" (p. 48) When Anita remains silent to Adela's beseeching, Adela heaps ugly abuse upon her and then true to her capricious nature implores her: "Dime una palabra, una sola palabra de perdón...¿No? ¿Es que no te lo he confesado todo, no lo he reconocido todo? ¿Pues, qué puedo decirte aún? ...Ayúdame tú."(p. 50)

Adela's selfish cruelty to her husband Juan reaches the ironic dimension when it becomes evident that she too lives in desperate need of the confession, the forgiveness, the communication with another that she denies the man she has married. With her, life is a one way street—that of taking. The other street—that of giving—is one that only those who surround her travel.
For her selfishness, Buero Vallejo punishes her. He makes her suffer not only the consequences for having betrayed herself in love, but also visits upon her the implacable remorse that comes in realizing that one has been wrong and that it is too late to make amends. A broken and defeated Adela feebly tries to explain her behaviour: "¿Qué podía hacer? ¿Qué puede hacer nadie? Nunca logré ver clara en mis impulsos, en mis deseos...Todo lo hice a distiempo. De todo me di cuenta tarde." (p. 79)

But again here Adela shows her disposition to self-pity, to excuse herself for any responsibility for her actions. But her brother Mauro, who shares as much blame as she for Juan's failure in the competition tells her why she acts as she does. He tells her that her mouth has always been filled with hatred. He adds that what they both lack is abnegation, selflessness—a polite way of saying that they are both wantonly selfish. He says this as he recognizes his guilt as easily as he recognizes hers. Mauro it was who stole the books that Juan needed for the examination and the silver cigarette lighter too. In addition to being a thief, he is a liar. He lied about having taken the books and he lied when he told Adela that he had spoken to Carlos Ferrer Díaz on Juan's behalf. Running the gamut of faults, he is also boastful, deceitful, vain and shiftless. He realizes that both he and Adela must pay the price of a guilty conscience and its accompanying personal anguish. He tells her: "Nos falta abnegación y eso se paga. Porque hay algo dentro de nosotros que no
Adela doesn't deny Mauro's charge that they are both selfish or that they lack abnegation. What she does do is retaliate with a counter-charge. She accuses him of pessimism, of defeatism, hopelessness: "Algo más queda que tú no puedes tener: la seguridad de que la vida es una cosa espléndida y bella, aunque la nuestra se haya manchado." (p. 85)

Adela and Mauro both suffer the anguish of a guilty conscience. Both are selfish and pessimistic, affecting unhappily the lives of those around them. Buero Vallejo sees them as victims of a character-damaging home. At the beginning of the play when Mauro and Adela are discussing their family life as children, it is made clear that the lack of true mother-love in their family (Anita's role of second mother wouldn't do) and their father's meanness led to Mauro's running away from home and brought on the willfulness of Adela. According to Buero Vallejo it has been a simple process of the perpetuation of one's kind: an unhappy home breeds unhappy children, who, when they marry, create an unhappy home that breeds unhappy children... Thus it is that Juan, in an attempt to change the process, decides that since their son wants to flee from the miserable, suffocating environment that they have created, he should escape their pernicious influence; and with their blessing. Adela, selfish to the last, does not want he son to leave her. She accuses Juan of taking out his revenge on her by urging Juanito to leave. He tries to
convince her that Juanito's going abroad is a good thing.

Adela.--¿Y ésta es la vida?
Juan.-- Al menos, la nuestra. Somos cosa vieja. Error de la cabeza a los pies. Sin arreglo ya...salvo el de verlo lo más claro posible. Esto no es ya la lucha, Adela. Yo lo he visto esta tarde, después de mi fracaso, y trato simplemente de que lo veas tú también.

Adela.--¿Para qué?
Juan.-- No para nosotros, desde luego. Pero si hemos llegado a comprender que...estamos demasiado mal hechos; es claro que ya de poco podemos valerle.

Adela.--(Sobresaltada) ¿Valerle? ¿A quién?
Juan.-- (Sereno) A nuestro hijo. (Adela se levanta lentamente alarmada. Anita también.) Un día comprenderá, y para un muchacho puede ser fatal, la vida junto a unos padres que le hayan defraudado...Es el mundo quien debe, ahora, educarlo y salvarlo. (p. 79)

Adela's only defense is to claim that the world will poison Juanito too. But Juan declares that the world will poison him no more than the bad example that they have given him as a guideline for his life.

And so Buero Vallejo ends his play with the new generation, Juanito, free to escape the noxious home environment. Juanito is to leave behind his wretched family who have put their cards face up on the table. They have plumbed the very depths of their sordid lives. They have exposed themselves to their immediate world. They have confessed to each other but they have not given each other the absolution, the final humanitarian act that would bring peace of some sort. The final scene is one in which the defeated Adela begs forgiveness of her sister who denies it to her:

Adela.--Mírame hermana: Ahora yo no soy más que una niña temerosa y cansada. Yo no sé nada, no estoy segura de nada y es tarde para aprender...Nuestros
An in-depth analysis of Las cartas boca abajo has been made so that the play's point of conflict and counter-point of causes could emerge, exposing the ethical-moral implications which in Buero Vallejo's words "definen bien" modern-day Spain. Reviewing the charges that he makes against the characters, we find two basic attitudes that he condemns: lack of abnegation and pessimism. But Buero Vallejo simply does not see this selfishness and pessimism operating on a broad social level, but rather in the context of the family unit which, according to him, is a "normal" expression of society. The sisters and brother, Adela, Anita and Mauro, all are products of a broken home—the mother dead and the father's outlook one of "disgusto!" Such an environment is not one that builds character in children that ordinarily would enhance society and its goals of peace and prosperous progress. Adela, the younger sister marries Juan and from that union gives birth to Juanito thus forming a family unit and environment. This environment that they create for their child, the new social generation, will be happy or unhappy depending on one factor: if they both marry for love. Adela does not do so. She marries out of revenge and from this forced union is born not only Juanito, but the frustration that comes from having betrayed oneself. But
Buero Vallejo does not leave it there. Once this is done, there is nothing one can do but make the most of a bad situation. So it is that the bitterness that comes from compounding error with error is relieved only by opening one's heart, relieving oneself of the resentments, the accusations that one has stored up; revealing the wrongs committed against and by those who share one's destiny. He feels that to live with one's "cartas boca abajo" is to stifle one's creative impulses. Creative energy is consumed to the point that progress and the modicum of happiness that is man's lot are rendered unattainable. Once the cards are face up on the table there is then no other recourse but to forgive so that one can build anew the better world of which man eternally dreams. Adela, Juan, Anita, Juanito, Mauro all live with their cards "boca abajo." One by one those cards are turned face up revealing the sordidness, the cruelty, the selfishness of their lives, especially that of Adela, the mother, the very center of the family. But for them, there is no surcease. And so their life of misery is perpetuated as Adela refuses to try to communicate with Juan and as Anita contains her forgiveness behind that wall of silence. But so that his son, the new generation, escape this character-destroying environment, Juan lets Juanito go out into the world where, though it be cruel, he still has the chance of finding the good example that his home cannot provide for him. Buero Vallejo declares "con las cartas boca abajo vivimos y tras la anécdota de la obra hay una tragedia que nos define bien." 

25. Rodríguez, loc. cit., p. 20
Thus it is that Buero Vallejo's view of his country is a Spain of people who hold back their grievances, of people who live with the suffocating guilt born of their past selfish acts. Spain is then a nation of people who, when they do find themselves communicating freely, unburdening themselves, putting their cards face up on the table, are a people unable to forgive one another. Thus Spain is a pessimistic people which lacks abnegation; a selfish people which finds its progress and happiness inhibited by this very selfishness which perpetuates itself. Since Buero Vallejo finds this problem of Spain transcendental, it is therefore universal man's Achilles heel. Man's happiness and progress depend upon the degree of selfishness that possesses him. The ethic that is to save man in his social situation; that is to save Spain, is built on abnegation, and forgiveness. It may be simplistic, yet this is Buero Vallejo's ethical view. Except for one aspect, and perhaps for a social anthropology the most important one, it is a theme that finds itself repeated in either a major or a minor key in all of Buero Vallejo's works. It is the preoccupation with these two qualities in the formation of the family, the very backbone of a modern society. Conjugal love, the preservation and the perpetuation of its sanctity and/or of the betrayal of this love and the consequential sorrows, Buero Vallejo sees the family as society in miniature. The ethic that generates and motivates the power of conjugal love is again abnegation, selflessness. To Buero Vallejo love manifested in terms of abnegation is the force of the personal ethic and if the metaphor employed
previously may be used again to demonstrate the efficacy of love made manifest through abnegation, this force is that of the stone dropped into the center of a pond of water, the ripples caused being the positive extensions of this ethic in the protagonist's life. It follows that if the generating force be one other than abnegation, the social expression of love, then the effect will be negative. This is then why José María García Escudero maintains in his article on Buero Vallejo's theatre that the basis of Buero Vallejo's ethic is Christianity's concept of freedom based on love, social and personal; that man frees himself only by abnegation, by giving to others. He explains the freedom concept by stating that if a person conceives his life in terms of receiving than all too soon he sees his possibilities limited. But if that same person sees his life in terms of giving to others, then the only limit that shall be imposed upon him is that of his strength or his weakness and the boundaries of these limitations will be of much greater latitude.  

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL PLAYS OF NEGATIVE OUTCOME

Though other themes are treated in his plays, it is the theme of Las cartas boca abajo that forms the kernel of Buero Vallejo's thematic interest. As revealed in that play, he is especially concerned with love in the boy-girl, conjugal situation and its resulting force in society.

Bearing in mind that Buero Vallejo feels that his thematic problems are not only contemporary, but also transcendental, it then results that he understands the solution of man's eternal social problem as one of loving selflessly. Actually he is saying that before man can solve the myriad problems that find their solution in the use of reason, he must solve the problem of love. He seeks the emotional equanimity that stems from a happy love match before he can achieve the goals that lie out of the emotional sphere. Buero Vallejo also affirms that if for some reason this love is thwarted, man must fight to regain it. He feels that if man betrays this love or is without it, he will then be so frustrated and unhappy that he can only cause unhappiness and frustration in others; the social implication here is that a nation composed of emotionally frustrated and unhappy people is incapable of progress and peace. And as in Las cartas boca abajo, once this love is betrayed, the only solution is confession and
the hope for forgiveness; to hear one's confession and to forgive
the transgressions. The confidence, the hope that issues from
the requited love permits man to transcend all problems. It helps
him to accept with resignation unalterable situations. Only when
one is secure in love dare he hope courageously to build a better
future. The power of this love can transform the world, can trans­
cend the physical limitations of the world. Buero Vallejo con­
siders this love a spiritual end in itself. Buero Vallejo thinks
that selfishness and lack of confidence in the efficacy of this
love bring about the miseries of man.

As one takes Buero Vallejo at his word and attempts to see
the social implications of this thinking in a greater scope, then
the implication of the play Las cartas boca abajo, a play that
"define bien" Spain, Buero Vallejo's message is that Spain, as
has been said, is a nation composed of Juans, Adelas, Anitas,
Mauros and Juanitos, a nation incapable of abnegation. As one
traces this doctrine of abnegation in the plays of Buero Vallejo,
it becomes clear that Buero Vallejo sees Spanish society and
society per se in terms of an elementary dichotomy: those governed
and those who govern. The backbone of society is, of course, con­
stituted of those governed and is formed primarily by the family
unit. The other half is, logically enough, composed of the power
elite. Both groups have responsibilities in helping to overcome
the problems of present-day Spain which to his understanding are
the problems inherent in the human condition. Buero Vallejo
delivers his message to the man in the street and admonishes him
to be ever selflessly watchful of preserving the emotional and mental well-being of himself and those whose lives converge upon his, by keeping faith with love. So must he who governs. But he who governs must not only keep faith with this love but also must keep faith with the political ideals that have come to man through his reason. Buero Vallejo's dramatic method is simple. His are "comedias ejemplares." When the protagonists from both social classes practice abnegation, the result is rewarding, salutary. When they don't, the consequences are ghastly. The good always win and the bad always lose and those whose lot it is to be on one team or the other share the consequences. The good, in their victory, make life better for those around them. The bad drag those involved with them down in defeat.

Buero Vallejo's simple division of society can be used to divide his plays into two groups; those of a social and those of a political nature, since Buero Vallejo feels there are two problems to be solved. The problem to be solved by finding security in love is aimed principally at the masses. This is particularly important in a social context as this love match which, upon marriage, forms the conjugal relationship is the very basis of a family, the family which goes to form society. And if the nucleus of the family, the conjugal pair be unhappy, then the effect on society will be adverse. Conjugal happiness can be achieved only by selflessness on the part of both mates (with the wife subjugating herself to total support of the husband in his efforts to make his way in the world.)
The second problem is the fulfillment of the ideals arrived at through reason which those in power over a social body must work for. The watchword here, too, is selflessness not only in the fulfillment of his social responsibility toward those over whose destiny he holds sway, but firstly in his conjugal life. These responsibilities fall to all members of the governing family for it is their duty to be exemplary in all respects.

Buero Vallejo, as the magazine Mundo Hispanico declares succinctly, extols selflessness as the highest quality in man and takes it to form the heart of his ethical imperative from which all other moral values spring. And in extolling this quality, Buero Vallejo uses a technique that is principally negative. His didactic approach is to show what happens when people are selfish rather than when they are selfless. Of his fourteen plays covered in this study, only two have main characters whose actions are constantly exemplary in their selflessness. They are Velázquez in Las meninas, and Esquilache in Un soñador para un pueblo.

A review of the plots of all the plays that Buero Vallejo has published and has had produced since his appearance in 1949 reveals that everyone of them has some reference to domestic unhappiness circumventing one's progress in society. This is so in the context of the child being the father of the man—the one problem being concerned with the personal ethic which in turn must necessarily govern one's political ethic. In Historia de una escalera all of the trouble and ineffectualness are born
from the selfishness that leads to the betrayal of love and to the resultant marital problems; in *Palabras en la arena*, the dramatic conflict is caused by the selfishness of the adulterous wife and the offended husband whose selfishness leads him to presume judgment over her and sentence her to death. In *En la ardiente oscuridad* the protagonist, a rebel who has known love little, is killed by a jealous rival because he willfully causes dissension and enmity between lovers; in *La tejedora de sueños* discord both political and marital are caused because Ulysses selfishly breaks faith in his conjugal relationship with Penelope. In *Irene o el tesoro, Hoy es fiesta, Las cartas boca abajo*, the principal cause of the conflict, unhappiness, disgrace is selfishness gone rampant in a love or a conjugal and familial relationship. In *La señal que se espera, Casi un cuento de hadas, Madrugada, Aventura en lo gris*, the conflict, the theme of each play has to do in one way or another with the efficacy, the transcendental power of love, conjugal or otherwise or when abnegation is exercised to preserve the love relationship. And in the only other plays of Buero Vallejo not yet mentioned, *Un soñador para un pueblo, El concierto de San Ovidio* and *Las meninas*, an "espejo de príncipe" in which Diego Velázquez is the conscience of the king, there are numerous references to the selflessness necessary to a marital relationship, but they go to form part of the play's exemplary intention aimed at the principle of abnegation in regard to those who govern political bodies and their families.
In *Historia de una escalera*, the play which first won recognition for Buero Vallejo in 1949, one finds the same familial circumstances as in *Las cartas boca abajo*, though in a less detailed presentation. The members of the several families trapped on that indifferent staircase lead lives of misery that perpetuate themselves in those children who find it their misfortune to be born in such oppressive circumstances. Buero Vallejo purposely sets his characters in desperately unhappy straits. And this purpose is not deterministic, as Juan K. Castellano¹ and Ricardo Domenech² so affirm. Buero Vallejo's very remark concerning the play voids such claims. He states that when he wrote the work back in 1947, he conceived the work with definite intentions that prescind any hopeless theory. His intention was of a veiled didactic nature. He speaks of the play's conception in this manner:

...quiere ocultar en su fondo una delicada piedad y fortalecer nuestra moral, sin necesidad de discursos y moralejas, por su solo impulso conmovedor o suspensivo. En una palabra: de acuerdo con las más viejas tradiciones del teatro, mi comedia intentaba poseer una virtud "catártica."³

And when Buero Vallejo refers to the charges that some critics make about the work being pessimistic, he reiterates:


4. Ibid., p. 9.
Mas yo no creo que la falta de soluciones en la comedia implique que éstas no existan; y creo, por el contrario, que en una obra de tendencia trágica es precisamente su amargura entera y sin aparente salida lo que nuede y debe provocar, más allá de lo que la letra expresa o se abstenga de decir, la purificación catártica del espectador.  

Buero Vallejo wants the spectator to draw a moral lesson from the play, a moral lesson that is implicit in the work, but which is not directly presented. Much has been written about the play's message, but only a few have seen it in ethical-moral dimensions as do the Jesuit Rosendo Roig, Gonzalo Torrente Ballester and F. García Pavón. Of the three, Roig presents the most succinct view. He writes in his article concerning Buero Vallejo's talent as a tragedian:

El drama vecinal Historia de una escalera expone la mezquindad de unas poore sgentes que no asuñalan la avasallante circunstancia que les rodea conductora del monótono fracaso. La tesis es negativa, "Hay que dejar de ser así." La obra acaba trágicamente como empezó; con la misma escena del principio; todo seguirá igual, siempre, en aquella escalera.

Roig's view includes little of the ethical perspective of the work. He recognizes that Buero Vallejo is saying "Hay que dejar de ser así," but he does not say what it is that must be stopped. García Pavón carries the social implications of the play a step further, yet never arrives at the first causes of the families' troubles which find themselves perpetuated in the successive generations.

4. Ibid., p. 9.

Pero la indudable intención del autor, y ella está bien claro en el repetido epílogo, es dar a entender que esta repetición de miseria y de angustia rinde algo en "la falta de carácter" cuando muchachos de Fernando, padre, y Fernando, hijo, pero sobre todo, en el ambiente familiar donde se han creado—sin variación durante treinta años—muy favorable a la transmisión del resentimiento de padres a hijos.6

The remaining critic Gonzalo Torrente Ballester also sees the characters beset by devitalizing problems which are due to themselves.7 He recognizes that suero Vallejo’s dramatic intention has been to write a social play, but not one in which the characters suffer because of society nor a play in which there is the struggle of classes; but rather one in which the characters are their own antagonists. He understands the play’s conflicts to arise from the conjugal situation, quoting a German poet in order to buttress his view: "Todo el drama encerrado en aquellos versos que cita Heine—'Ella era amable, y él la amaba; pero no era amable y ella no le amaba.’’8

Torrente Ballester feels that the moral lesson to be drawn from the play finds its origin in the problem of love. And so it is in the play. The conflicts that arise in the various families are conflicts caused by conjugal disequilibrium which, as in Las cartas boca abajo, is caused in each case by marrying not for love,


8. Ibid.
but for selfish reasons. This marital distress obstructs the progress of the family as the energy that should be used to improve their lot is spent on active vindictiveness. The children reared in this stifling atmosphere expend their energy rebelling against family authority instead of using that vitality to progress. They seek their emotional equanimity in a love match and dare to dream, but Buero Vallejo implies that they too will eventually marry out of selfish desperation, betraying their hope-filled love. In consequence they perpetuate misery. It may be claimed that the primary cause of the protagonists' suffering is of an economic nature, but this is not so. They carry with themselves the cause of their troubles—their lack of abnegation. In the play Buero Vallejo presents no forces of striction at work on the characters, forces that keep them tied to the bleak staircase. As Torrente Ballester declares, the characters "pueden tranquilamente mudar de piso, cambiar de barrio y aún emigrar al extranjero—llevarán sus dramas consigo...." 9

The principal cause of the frustration and the familial trouble is the selfish marriage of one of the partners to the other. Fernando selfishly marries Elvira for her money, betraying his love for Carmina. Carmina selfishly marries Urbano for economic reasons, betraying her love for Fernando. Pepe selfishly marries Rosa for economic reasons. All of the consummated marriages are in fact forced unions from which are born children who are

9. Ibid., p. 102
condemned to the character-deforming home situation. At the play's end, the love that the children have for one another gives them the hope that in turn gives them the courage to dream and hope to work for a better life. At the end of the play, the play-goer is forced to ask himself: Will they succeed? And Buero Vallejo forces that play-goer to supply the answer: They will succeed if they do not betray the love that allows them to hope in courageous terms; they will not succeed if they betray this love by marrying for selfish reasons. That the spectator supplies these answers is the cathartic effect that Buero Vallejo hopes the play has. In effect, what Buero Vallejo is implying is that man cannot progress unless he finds the emotional equanimity that comes from a secure love match or man must not marry for selfish reasons as only frustration and unhappiness can come of it. His ethic here then is the same as in Las cartas boca abajo: abnegation.

One need but examine a few of the play's scenes to support the theory: selfishness in marriage bears only bad results. That man needs a sustaining love in order to progress is all too evident. At the beginning of the play, Urbano and Fernando discuss their hopes for success. It is seen from the beginning that Fernando wants to get ahead, and does not care how he does it; Urbano strives with a humility that characterizes his every act throughout the play.

Urbano.---Fernando, eres un desgraciado. Y lo peor es que no lo sabes. Los pobres diablos como nosotros nunca lograremos mejorar de vida sin la ayuda mutua. Y eso en el sindicato. ¡Solidaridad! Esa es nuestra palabra. Y sería la tuya si te dieses
The conversation continues and Urbano tells Fernando that he cannot succeed alone and that what he really needs to be a success is a true love.

Fernando, ---No me creo nada. Sólo quiero subir. ¿Comprendes? ¡Subir! Y dejar toda esta sordidez en que vivimos.

Fernando, ---¿Qué tengo yo que ver con los demás? Nadie hace nada por nadie...Yo sé que puedo subir y subiré solo. 10

Fernando has his dream of being an important engineer but spends his time in bed dreaming about his projects instead of making them a reality. He dreams and writes poetry until he finds that love of which Urbano speaks. (p. 15) This love fills him with the courage to seize the incandescent day. And when Fernando rediscovers his love for Carmina that he first knew in early childhood, he realizes that their love has been the only marvelous thing that has given meaning to his life.

10. Antonio Buero Vallejo, Historia de una escalera, (Madrid: Ediciones AlfIl, 1964), p. 17. (All subsequent references and quotations are from the above edition of Historia de una escalera.)
Fernando, ---Cuando éramos niños nos tuteábamos...
Entonces me tuteabas y... me querías.
Carmina, ---Era una niña. Ya no me acuerdo.
Fernando, ---Eras una mujercita preciosa. Y sigues siéndole. Y no puedes haber olvidado. ¡Yo no he olvidado! Carmina aquel tiempo es el único recuerdo maravilloso que conservo en medio de la sordidez en que vivimos. Y quería decirte... que siempre... has sido para mí lo que eras antes....
Carmina, por favor, créeme. No puedo vivir sin ti. Estoy desesperado. Me ahoga la ordinaria que nos rodea. Necesito que me quieres y que me consuelas. Si no me ayudas, no podré salir adelante. (p. 29)

They both question each other about their respective romantic interests. Fernando tells Carmina that he detests Elvira because she is trying to win him with her money. Carmina makes fun of Urbano. Together they plan the brilliant, happy, prosperous future that they will work for together. This love for Carmina stimulates, exhilarates Fernando, and her love for him has her in a state of unspeakable joy as he tells her how hard he will work to build a better world for them. But as time passes, it is learned that Fernando betrays his love for Carmina and subsequently his dreams. Elvira and her money prove to be too great a temptation for the selfish Fernando. He marries her not for better but for worse, worse for all concerned.

Elvira, ---¿En qué quedamos? Esto es vergonzoso. ¿Les damos o no les damos el pésame?
Fernando, ---Ahora. No... En la calle lo decidiremos.
Elvira, ---¡Lo decidiremos! Tendré que decidir yo, como siempre. Cuando tú te pongas a decidir, nunca hacemos nada. (Fernando calla, con la expresión hosca. Inician la bajada.) ¡Decidir! ¿Cuando vas a decidirte a ganar más dinero? Ya ves que así no podemos vivir. ¡Claro, el señor contaba con el suegro! Pues el suegro se acabó, hijo. Y no se te acaba la mujer, no sé por qué.
Fernando, ---¡Elvira!
And so it is that Fernando betrays his love and in doing so betrays his dreams. He falls back into fruitless inanition, betraying Elvira's love too. The enmity that develops between them does not contain itself within the walls of their dingy apartment. It spreads to their relationship with all the others in the apartment house.

Carmina, forsaken by the selfish Fernando, sustains the life of the malevolent force of selfishness when she accepts the proposal of marriage from the humble, hardworking Urbano. The thought that he has achieved the love that he has so needed fills Urbano with the same limitless courage and enthusiasm to build a better future just as it filled Fernando. Urbano says to Carmina:

...yo subiré. ¡Subiré, sí! Porque cuando te tengo a mi lado me sentiré lleno de energías para trabajar. ¡Para trabajar para ti! Y me perfeccionaré en la mecánica y ganaré más...viviremos juntos: tu madre, tú y yo. Le daríamos a la vieja un poco de alegría en los años... y tú me harías feliz. Acéptame, te lo suolloco. (p. 42)

Time passes and it is learned that she does accept his proposal though she does not love him. And the result is the discord that destroys their happiness and progress. During one of their many quarrels Urbano asks Carmina when they will ever be in agreement. She replies bitterly that they will never see eye to eye. He continues to pursue the causes of their unhappiness.
Urbano. --- Cuando pienso lo que pudiste haber sido para mí... ¿Por qué casaste contigo si no te querías?
Carmina. --- (Seca.) No te engañé. Tú te empeñaste.
Urbano. --- Sí. Supuse que podría hacerte olvidar otras cosas... Y esperaba más correspondencia---más...
Carmina. --- Más agradecimiento.
Urbano. --- No es eso. (Suspira.) Con fin, paciencia. (p. 62)

Whatever may be offered to explain the unhappiness in Urbano's and Carmina's lives, as Buero Vallejo presents the conflict, it is because of the loveless marriage. As Torrente Ballester claims, a better salary would permit Urbano to live in a better apartment house, but it would not make him more loved by Carmina. He maintains that it is not social or economic injustice that makes for Urbano's unhappiness, but rather "el desamor de su esposa..."11

The third couple, Rosa and Pepe, is also a wreck because of the unmitigated selfishness of Pepe. His wife nearly starves and has to endure demeaning hardships as he refuses to give up his self-indulgent ways and accept his marital responsibilities. (p. 37) Fortunately, to this couple no child has been born.

But such is not the case with the others. To Fernando and Elvira is born a son, Fernando, hijo, and to Carmina and Urbano, a daughter, Carmina, hija. Significantly they are named after the two who married for selfish reasons. Buero Vallejo has used this duplication of names to show that they in their selfishness have perpetuated a social hydra. But the author does not leave it there. At the end of the play he shows that just as man perpetuates his own ills, just so it is that the path to save oneself,

redeem one's life through love, winds eternal through the human condition. Buero Vallejo's message is humanistic. Man can save himself if he remains selflessly true to the love—the miracle-worker of life—that man finds in one another. The play ends with a repetition of the joyously hopeful scene in which two lovers discover the confidence that helps them transcend all impediments to their happiness.

Carmina, hija.---¡Fernando! Ya ves... Ya ves que no puede ser.
Fernando, hijo.---¡Sí, puede ser! No te dejes vencer por su sordidez. ¿Qué puede haber de común entre ellos y nosotros? ¡Nada! Ellos son viejos y torpes. No comprenden... Yo lucharé para vencer. Lucharé por ti y por mí. Pero tienes que ayudarme, Carmina. Tienes que confiar en mí y en nuestro cariño.

Carmina, hija.---¡No podré!
Fernando, hijo.---¡Podrás! Podrás... porque yo te lo pido. Tenemos que ser más fuertes que nuestros padres. Ellos se han dejado vencer por la vida. Han pasado treinta años subiendo y bajando esta escalera... haciéndose cada día más mezquinos y más vulgares. Pero nosotros no nos dejaremos vencer por este ambiente. ¡No!... Nos apoyaremos el uno en el otro. Me ayudarás a sufrir... Me ayudarás, ¿Verdad? ¡Dime que sí, por favor! ¡Dímelo!

Carmina, hija.---¡Te necesito, Fernando! ¡No me dejes!
Fernando, hijo.---¡Pequeña!... Carmina, voy a empezar en seguida a trabajar por ti. Tengo muchos proyectos... Y te salvaré a ti. Vendrás contigo... Si tu cariño no me falta emprenderé muchas cosas. Primero, me haré aparejador. ¡No es difícil! En unos años me haré un buen aparejador. Ganaré mucho dinero y me solicitarán todas las empresas constructoras. Para entonces ya estaremos casados... Tendremos nuestro hogar alegre y limpio... lejos de aquí. Pero no dejaré de estudiar por eso... Entonces me haré ingeniero. Seré el mejor ingeniero del país y tú serás mi adorada mujercita.

Carmina, hija.---¡Fernando! ¡Qué felicidad! ¡Qué felicidad! (pp. 68-69)
The next play, the theme of which has to do specifically with the troubles caused by characters whose desequilibrio stems from an unfulfilled love is *En la ardiente oscuridad*. The conflict of this play arises from the dissension and enmity between lovers caused by the protagonist Ignacio. There are philosophical overtones that may be inferred from the work which easily take one's attention from the work's true theme. If one simply takes Buero Vallejo at his word and also understands the prefatory poetry as signifying something vital to the play's theme, then no other theme but that of love can be ascribed to the play. An examination of the points of conflict which propel the play's action to its dénouement will show that they center on the love interests.

*En la ardiente oscuridad*, Buero Vallejo's first work, which he wrote in just one week back in 1946, has been one of his most provocative pieces. When it was first produced in Barcelona, it closed after running only nine days because it was felt that Buero Vallejo's treatment of the blind was offensive. Juan R. Castellano reports that incident in *Hispania*:

> La misma prensa consideró ofensiva para los ciegos, su *En la ardiente oscuridad*, y cuando se estrenó en Barcelona armaron éstos tal escándalo que se quitó del cartel a los nueve días. De nada sirvió que Buero declarase "no es a ellos (los ciegos), en realidad, a quienes intenté retratar, sino a todos nosotros." La prensa de toda España—salvo dos o tres voces serenas—se puso de parte de los ciegos y en contra del autor.

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According to Alfredo Marquerie, the blind became angered with Buero Vallejo because he had written of the blind students enrolled in a special institute in such a way that they were depicted a bitter, pessimistic, unhappy people.  

Whatever be the play's history, it has been judged to be many things. Rosendo Roig, S.I., sees it as a study in moral blindness which projects the sacrifice of the individual who dares go counter-society, against the backdrop of an institution for the blind.  

M. Manzanares de Cirre interprets the play as a modern treatment of the simile found in book three of Plato's Republic which treats of man's attitude toward reality. He sees the protagonists as "unos hombres encerrados en la caverna de su cegura física---símbolo obvio de la cegura espiritual...."  

José Luis Abellan seconds this interpretation saying that "los ciegos seríamos todos nosotros, pobres seres humanos...la similitud de esta obra con el mito platónico de la caverna es claramente manifiesta...." This interpretation is unacceptable because of one fact of the play. Not all of the characters are blind. Doña  

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15. Roig, loc. cit.  


Pepita, the director of the school, is not blind, nor is Ignacio's father. Then too, not all of the students enrolled in the institution have been blind since birth. These people who can see do not display any occult powers that would signify any metaphysical meaning behind the fact that they can see and the others cannot—that is, as human beings, who transcending all of man's imperfections, perceive directly the absolute truth, the total light of reality instead of the flickering shadows cast upon the wall of the cave by that perfect light as in Plato's Republic.

Another critic, Juan A. Castellano, interprets the play as one of social rebellion in which the protagonist, Ignacio, "sueña cosas que desconoce y no se contenta con los límites que la sociedad le impone." There are many other theories as to the import of the play, but in order to support the theory that the play is one of man's need for love, an investigation of what the author himself has to say about the work's purport is in order. In his "autocritica" Buero Vallejo declares:

No obstante la aparente paradoja del título, mi drama no propone al público ninguna paradoja sino un par de horas de reflexión y de pasión. No trato con el divertir, sino de interesar y---acaso---de distraer. La obra no posee una tesis terminante; ofrece más bien el problema de la tesis en sí mismo cuando trate de exponerse a través de humanos seres de ficción, y su sentido general podría concretarse a lo sumo, en la diferencia que existe entre los motivos por los que creemos actuar y aquellos por los que realmente actuamos.

18. Juan R. Castellano, op. cit., p. 22.

As previously quoted, Buero Vallejo has stated that behind his dramatic method there is an ethical foundation. It is then reasonably concluded that when he says that the general meaning of *En la ardiente oscuridad* can be reduced to the difference between the reasons why we think we act and the true reasons behind our actions we must then interpret the play in terms of human behaviour. The play is not in any sense concerned with a metaphysical study of physical blindness. We are then left with a spiritual blindness, spiritual blindness meaning selfishness. As has been stated before, the prefatory poetry and points of conflict in the play prove that Buero Vallejo meant the play to be a study in the spiritual blindness, i.e. selfishness, caused by a need, a lack of love in the protagonist’s, Ignacio’s, life.

Buero Vallejo takes the lines of verse from Miguel Hernández’ work *Hijo de la sombra*:

La sombra es el nidal íntimo, incandescente,
La visible ceguera puesta sobre quien ama,
Provoca los abrazos íntima, ciegamente,
Y recoge en sus cuevas cuanto la luz derrama. (p. 5)

As seen in the poem, Hernández’ use of the word "luz" is synonymous with "amor." It is the meaning that Buero Vallejo gives the lines from Scripture that he includes with Hernández’ poem. The lines of Scripture are from the Gospel according to St. John, Chapter I, verse 5:

Y la luz en las tinieblas resplandece;
mas las tinieblas no la comprendieron. (p. 5)

Buero Vallejo is saying then that the force of love in man’s life is not understood. In the play, he sets out to make
man understand this force. The protagonist Ignacio causes all of the dissension and unhappiness in the Institute not because he is discontented with the limitations that his blindness impose on him, but because if he could love and be loved he could accept his limitations.

The plot of the play is as simple as Chandler and Schwartz' review of the action:

The setting is an Institute for the blind where the inmates lead a happy, optimistic life until Ignacio arrives. He is rebellious and discontented with his fate; refuses to call himself invidente (non-seer— an euphemism employed by the others), and destroys their illusion and peaceful relationships. Lovers break off their relationships and lightheadedness and joy disappear. The director fails to win Ignacio over, and the drama ends with the death of Ignacio under mysterious circumstances while he is outside with Carlos, one of the inmates and the moving spirit of the invidentes.20

Since Ignacio is the character whose actions propel the play to its unhappy dénouement and since Buero Vallejo has said that he intended to show in the play human actions which, though thought caused for one reason are really due to another, we must examine what Ignacio does and why he thinks that he does it. Then evidence in the play must be sought that points up the true reason for his deportment.

Ignacio, during a conversation with Juana about the discontent that he is causing in the Institute, says that he is miserable because he wants to see and cannot do so. He also tells her

of the disgust they cause in him because the other students are
too calm, too insincere, too cold though in the play Buero Vallejo
gives no evidence that Ignacio is right about them. He continues
by telling Juana of himself:

Ignacio.--Pero yo estoy ardiendo por dentro, ardiendo
con un fuego terrible, que no me deja vivir y
que puede haceros arder a todos....Ardiendo en
esto que los videntes llaman oscuridad, y que
es horrorosa...porque no sabemos lo que es. Yo
os voy a traer guerra y no paz...

Juana.--No, Ignacio. No debes traernos ninguna guerra.
¿No será posible que todos vivamos en paz? No
me comprendo bien. ¿Por qué sufres tanto? ¿Qué
te pasa? ¿Qué es lo que quieres?

Ignacio.--(Con tremenda energía contenida) ¡Ver!

Juana.--(Se separa de él y queda sobrecogida) ¡Qué?

Ignacio.--¡Sí! Ver. Aunque sé que es imposible. (pp. 50-51)

So it is that Ignacio says that he suffers because he
wants to see and cannot do so, adding that the others' acceptance
of their fate infuriates him and for this he will destroy their
world. And just so does he try to do. With his message of dis-
content he breaks up the love relationships of all who surround
him and with these love matches at odds, all the progress that the
students have made is halted. All of the self-confidence leaves
them and with it their acquired skills. Doña Pepita, the director's
wife, watching the students ice-skating on the lake calls out:

"¡Se ha caído usted ya doce veces, Miguelín! Eso está muy mal. Y
a Vd. Andrés, ¿qué le pasa? ¿Por qué no se lanza?...Vaya. Otro
que se cae. Están ustedes cada día más inseguros." (p. 49)

Later on she speaks with her husband Don Pablo. He remarks
that the situation in the Institute has reached a grave point and
that it seems incredible to him that one man such as Ignacio could
demoralize a hundred students. She adds that the students who used to take pride in their appearance before now go about in slovenly dress imitating Ignacio in some respects. (pp. 66-67)

The morale of the Institute declines to such a degree; the progress of the students has been impeded to such an extent, that Don Pablo, the director, remarks about Ignacio: "Tiene que irse. Es el enemigo más desconcertante que ha tenido nuestra obra hasta ahora. No podemos con él, no. Es refractorio a todo. (Impulsivo) Carlos, piense usted en algún remedio. Confío mucho en su talento." (p. 68)

It is to be inferred that Carlos takes Don Pablo too much at his word and kills Ignacio with whom he has been in bitter conflict for the love of Juana (pp. 56-57)—the real reason for his hatred of Ignacio. (p. 65)

All of this trouble which ultimately leads to his death, Ignacio believes is caused by the suffering he bears because of his limiting blindness. But others see the origin of his trouble in another light. Throughout the work there is much talk by the directors of the school and by Ignacio's father, when he first brings his son Ignacio to the school, of infusing in Ignacio the morality of steel for which the school is famous. The moral de acero is never really defined; however, there are several suggestions made for the solution of Ignacio's problems. Juana tells Elisa, who hates Ignacio, "Hay que ser caritativos con las flaquezas ajenas y aliviárlas con nuestra dulzura." (p. 52) But Juana
also sees Ignacio responsible for some action toward the solving
of his problem with the society at the Institute. She believes
that he must adapt himself to his circumstances. (p. 25) She
also feels that the most salutary solution lies in his making a
love match. The idea first strikes her when she meets Ignacio
for the first time and she speaks of it to Elisa, reminding her
of how they were before falling in love:

Juana.---(Con dulzura) La solución para Ignacio es...
una novia.... ¡Es una idea magnífica! ¿Ya no
te acuerdas de cuando paseábamos juntos, antes
de que Carlos y Miguelín se decidiesen? No
negarás que entonces estábamos bastante tris-
tes.... No habíamos llegado aún a la región
de la alegría, como dice Carlos. (p. 26)

She is so sure of this solution that she speaks to Carlos
of it. (p. 36) Doña Pepita and Don Pablo, though they intend to
help Ignacio by good example, thus infusing him with their moral
de acero feel that his problems are due to the lack of love in
his life. When Ignacio first arrives at the Institute, Don Pablo
says to Doña Pepita, referring to Ignacio: "Típico. Quizás un po-
quitín complicado esta vez. Un muchacho triste, malogrado por el
mal entendido amor de los padres." (p. 23) He extends this opin-
ion when he tells Juana that boys such as Ignacio are "hambrien-
tos de cariño y alegría y no suelen rechazarla cuando se saben
romper sus murallas interiores." (p. 24)

Early in the play, Juana tells Ignacio that he needs a
sweetheart. He reacts violently to the suggestion of hers and
selfishly tells her what he requires of his novia but not what
she can expect of him in return. He says that first of all he
does not need a sweetheart. What he needs is "un 'te quiero' dicho con toda el alma. 'Te quiero con tu tristeza y tu angustia; para sufrir contigo'.... No hay mujeres así." (p. 29) But Ignacio soon finds that he is wrong; there are women of which he speaks, and that woman for him is Juana. From this love Ignacio experiences the first truly happy moment in his life. (p. 54) He later tells her how she gave him this joyous love.

Ignacio.----Tú quieres aliviar mi pena con tu dulzura .... ¡Y vas a dármela! Tú me la darás, tú que me has comprendido y defendido. Te quiero, Juana.

Juana.---¡Calla!

Ignacio.---Te quiero a ti y no a ninguna de esas otras. ¡A ti y desde el primer día! Te quiero por tu bondad, por tu encanto, por la ternura de tu voz, por la suavidad de tus manos...te quiero y te necesito! Tú lo sabes. (p. 54)

Such is the buoyancy, the confidence that emanates from this love between Ignacio and Juana that Ignacio can move swiftly without the cane that he previously had found indispensable for his movements through the rooms of the Institute. (p. 55) Ignacio does have his day with Juana, however fleeting it may be, causing greater enmity than ever before between him and Carlos, Juana’s boyfriend before Ignacio’s arrival. He continues to be a disruptive force in the society of the center because he conceives of social intercourse only in his terms. Nor does this love for Juana bring surcease to the negative influence that Ignacio has upon the others. Thus it is that the alarmed director, fearful for the welfare of his charges, remarks that something must be done about Ignacio’s pernicious authority. Ignacio meets his
death outside in the presence of Carlos. Through Doña Pepita it is inferred that Carlos caused Ignacio's death, not because of the dissension caused in the school, but because of the love rivalry. (p. 77) There is no mention of the disquieting ideas about wanting to see "las estrellas con todo su esplendor." He is killed simply because he was a non-conformist who has made trouble not only in the affairs of the center, but also in Carlos' love life. Carlos who considers himself a rational, practical man sees only the positive effect of Ignacio's death. He tells Doña Pepita: "Miguelín y Elisa se reconcilian. Los demás resi­ran como si les hubiesen librado de un gran peso. ¡Vuelve la ale­gría a la casa! Todo se arregla." (pp. 75-76) Doña Pepita tells Carlos that though he thinks he has won the battle, the reverse is true. The play ends with Carlos suffering the afflicted conscience. Ignacio's disruptive character caused by a loveless home; Ignacio resentful of the love other students have achieved breaking up these love matches. The students' progress and morale come to a standstill. Ignacio steals away the girl of another. She makes him happy for the time, but he selfishly persists in disquieting the others. He is killed by his jealous rival. The points of conflict, the primary causes for his disappointed attitudes toward his social world; the cause of his happiness and his death are all forged in love showing again Buero Vallejo's insistence in presenting the need and power of love in the human condition.
In *La tejedora de sueños* Buero Vallejo, through literary distancing, introduces another variation on the love relationships. Little or no doubt has arisen regarding the theme as Buero Vallejo has been most definite in underscoring the play's purpose in the closing lines of the work. The Chorus chants:

Cual roca poderosa es la hembra fuerte.  
El esposo partió, pero la reina  
su palacio y su lecho ha defendido,  
cual nuevo Ulises, sin olvidar nunca.

Penelope fue sola, y circundada  
estuvo de peligros y deseos.  
Mas sólo para Ulises vive ella.  
Y no caerá cual otra Clitemnestra.

Tejía y destejía durante años  
para burlar así a los pretendientes.  
Ella bordó sus sueños en la tela.  
Sus deseos y sueños son: ¡Ulises!

Junto al telar, soñar con el ausente:  
ésta es la dulce ley de nuestras bodas.  
Sonríe la gloria a la prudente reina  
que nunca ha amado a otro hombre que su esposo.

Penelope nos dice desde Grecia:  
cinco, diez, veinte años no son nada.  
El amor no envejece y nuestra sangre  
sabe esperar la vuelta del amado.

Penelope el es nombre de la reina.  
Ejemplo es para siempre de la esposa.  
Ella teje sus sueños hogareños  
y en su modestia irradia lozania...21

Should one need further explanation of the play's theme then one only need read the commentary that Buero Vallejo has written regarding the play.

The above-quoted lines make evident that the literary distancing used by Buero Vallejo has been to take the story of Penelope and Ulysses, concentrating on the struggles of Penelope to maintain her fidelity and her home for Ulysses during the twenty years he has been away fighting in the Trojan War.

The author in his own criticism of the play states that the problem of Penelope "no podía ser distinto del de las demás mujeres cuyos esposos fueron a guerrear a Troya." To Buero Vallejo, the problem of the wife is how to maintain a home, assume the responsibilities of both father and mother; but more importantly, how to remain faithful to, and in love with, a man she has not seen for years. All of the conflicts in the play are caused by the "need for parental and conjugal love" as Chandler and Schwartz state it. The frustrations that Penelope suffers are due to the lack of emotional fulfillment that only a husband can give. The final disillusionment comes to her when she realizes that Ulysses does not believe in her, in her love, in her fidelity. So it is that Penelope unfulfilled in her conjugal life and unable to fulfill the responsibilities that belong to her husband Ulysses watches as the palace falls into economic ruin (p. 13) and their son Telémaco falls into the hands of an opportunistic slave girl. (p. 13)


During Ulysses' absence there is no end to the self-seeking pretenders to her hand. In the number of suitors there is one, Anfino, with whom she falls in love. Nevertheless, she withstands the powerful attraction of Anfino and remains true to Ulysses. Each night during Ulysses' absence Penelope retires into a temple (symbol of her soul, p. 91 of the play's "Commentary"), where she weaves her dreams of Ulysses thus maintaining her emotional stability and warding off the insistent pretenders. As she weaves each night she laughs and cries in anguish. When Euriclea, an old retainer, asks her why she laughs and weeps, Penelope answers that Ulysses "tarda.... Tarda, tarda mucho..." (pp. 31-32) Ulysses, however, does return but in disguise as a foreigner. When he is taken into the presence of Penelope to tell her of Ulysses' whereabouts, he says that Ulysses has not returned because "después de saber lo ocurrido con Agamenon al volver a su hogar..., tenía que pensararlo." (p. 17) Penelope refuses to believe that Ulysses could think her capable of murdering him for the sake of a lover as Clytemnestra murdered Agamemnon. Later Penelope is overwhelmed by disillusionment when she learns that the Extranjero is in reality her husband returned. That he would accuse her of being unfaithful after the long years of difficult self-sacrifice is too much for her to bear. (p. 78) She realizes that the love she thought that Ulysses had for her, love that had sustained her over those frustrating years, really did not exist. The belief in that love had inspired her to hope, to dream of the future. That belief gone, she says: "Ya no hay
figuras que tejer." (p. 87) What she means is that there are no more dreams to dream. Penelope then accuses Ulysses of destroying their marriage and of destroying for her "toda ilusión posible" because he in his cowardice disguised himself; because he doubted her. (pp. 82-84) The work ends with Penelope finding that the only illusion left to her is the love that Anfino declared for her, the love she rejected out of fidelity to Ulysses. She says to the dead Anfino:

Esperar... Esperar el día en que los homores sean como tú...y no como ése. ¡Que tengan corazón para nosotras y bondad para todas; que no guerreen ni nos abandonen. Sí, un día llegará en que eso sea cierto. (A Úlises,) ¡A ti te lo digo miserable! ¡Y sabes cuándo? ¡Cuando no haya más Helenas...ni Úlises en el mundo! Pero para eso hace falta una palabra universal de amor que sólo las mujeres soñamos...a veces. (p. 86)

A deeper analysis of La tejedora de sueños could be done here, but the play's theme is related directly to those of Historia de una escalera, Las cartas boca abajo, En la ardiente oscuridad, inasmuch as it is another variation of the theme that love, its need, power and preservation are man's eternal social problems which spring principally from the family. Socially and economically the palace is in ruin because Ulysses has neglected his conjugal duties in abandoning Penelope to fight at Troy. When he returns he further neglects Penelope by breaking the faith in their conjugal relationship. In his attitude toward Penelope he has lacked abnegation. When he speaks of the years of his absence he selfishly accuses her, tells her what he expected of her, but makes no mention of what she was to expect of him.
Ulises.---Fue Helena, una mujer, un ser loco, frívolo, peligroso..., como tú, como tú, que la has envi- diado y que te has dedicado a soñar y tejer estérilmente ahí dentro en vez de cuidar de los ganados y las viñas; en lugar de convertirte en la fiel esposa que guarda el regreso del mando y aumenta durante su ausencia las riquezas de los dos. (p. 79)

This is what has led Cristóbal de Castellejo to remark that the play underscores the thesis that progress in a society depends upon the assumption of paternal duties. "Los reyes, el hombre no deben abandonar sus reinos, su hogar; a los hijos, como a las tierras hay que marcarles el surco para que produzcan, feraces..."²⁴

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But whatever theme may be mentioned as being evident in the play, one must ultimately concede the point that the problem of love must be solved before the others. The frustration which renders Penelope useless to solve the palace's economic problem is born from her lack of conjugal fulfillment. Love for Ulysses and the belief that he loves her sustain her in the task of weaving every night in the temple (symbol of hopes for a fulfilled future that spring constant in her soul). The disillusionment results when it is learned that Ulysses lacks faith in their love. The will to continue the challenge of life comes to Penelope from the hope inspired by Anfino's love. Love it is then and love in a conjugal, familial situation. It is deliberately so. Buero Vallejo remarks that he chose the play's framework of the Trojan

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War as it was a family war. Upon stating that Penelope's problem was no different than that of the rest of the women whose husbands had gone off to fight in Troy, he adds:

Un acontecimiento tan importante y prolongado como el de aquella contienda debió de ser materia de constante comentario y lugar común de generales inquietudes. El magno problema hogareño suscitado—pues la guerra de Troya no fue otra cosa, en el campamento y en la retaguardia, que una sucia cuestión familiar... (p. 92 of the Commentary)

That the bitterest disillusionment to Penelope is the knowledge that Ulysses has no faith in her and their marriage and that this selfish lack of faith is the primary cause of their marriage's collapse and not his prolonged absence is not simply coincidental. Buero Vallejo has planned it this way, once more showing the extension of the lack of abnegation in a familial situation.

As for his next play, Irene o el tesoro, it takes little to show that it is an ethical indictment of selfishness in a familial situation. In his commentary on the play that accompanies the Alfil edition of the play, he states that because he has labelled the play "fábula" one finds in the work an "enseñanza moral" and "contenidos éticos." He also states that in his drama "cada personaje va a lo suyo, y por ese egoísmo general o casi general se dibuja precisamente la tragedia de la protagonista." (p. 120 of the Commentary)

25. Antonio Buero Vallejo, Irene o el tesoro (Madrid: Alfil Ediciones, 1955) p. 120. (All subsequent references are from the above edition of Irene o el tesoro.)
The play is essentially a study of how the vitality of the family is eaten away principally by the cancerous egoism of its members, more specifically by that of the tyrannically avaricious father, Dimas. The work ends with him committed to an insane asylum and his daughter-in-law Irene committing suicide in desperation. But in the drama there are so many other elements that most critics, attracted by their interesting nature, have not examined the very heart of the moral problem, dwelling as it were on those secondary aspects. The majority of critics, skirting any consideration of the label that Buero Vallejo has pasted on the work—*Fábula en tres actos*—have probed the play as one profound in the study of reality. They have done so because the heroine of the piece, in her escape from the ugly reality in which she is engulfed, sees, talks to, and embraces the little fairy, Juanito, who is for her the child that life has denied her. This *duendecito* is remarkably sage, philosophical and active physically. The main criticism of the play seems to come from Buero Vallejo's handling of this *duendecito*. If he belongs solely to the province of the poor, deluded Irene's imagination, then his definite activity in the concrete world needs some explaining. This is what most contend. It may be that they have overlooked the consideration of the work as a fable as Buero Vallejo's supernatural treatment of human trials and foibles has precluded the traditional use of animals. Because he conceives of the work

as a fable, then any extraordinary mixture of reality and fantasy
is perfectly acceptable—the choice being his artistic preroga­
tive; rendering any criticism of this mixture impertinent.

Buero Vallejo states that he intended his fable to be an
exploration of "tesoros falsos y tesoros verdaderos" and to reveal
"la crudeza del plano habitual donde vivimos." 27

The characters of the play bear a more than casual simi­
ilarity to those luckless individuals who people Historia de una
escalera and especially, Las cartas de boca abajo. 28 As in this
last play mentioned, at the head of the family rules a grotesque­ly selfish individual. In Las cartas boca abajo it is the wife
Adela. This time it is the husband, Dimas. The anecdote of the
play is essentially "la historia y circunstancias de un viejo
usurero y la de una familia deformada per ese caracter dominante." 29

This is what Buero Vallejo meant when he said that the work reveal­
ed "la crudeza del plano habitual donde vivimos." Again it is
the selfishness begetting selfishness. Dimas' selfish cruelty
deforms the character of his wife, Justina, and their daughter,
Aurelia. His young daughter-in-law, Irene, who has come to live
with them since the untimely death of her husband a month after
their marriage, bears the brunt of the family's selfishness.

27. Antonio Buero Vallejo, "Autocritica," Irene o el
tesoro, Teatro español (1954-1955), Ed. Federico Carlos Sainz de


29. A.V., loc. cit.
She is wretchedly unhappy, but her mistreatment at the hands of her deceased husband's family is not the sole cause of her torment. It is also caused by the fact that she is "deviada del amor conjugal y frustrada en el maternal." However, the greater weight of cause must be born by the hideous treatment she receives from the family. Irene herself recognizes the change wrought upon her by the force of the family environment. When she believes that the family is going to have her committed to an insane asylum, she cries in anguish: "No es posible que no me quieran ustedes nada, nada... Yo vine aquí queriéndolos a todos... del brazo de mi pobre marido. Yo vine a esta casa creyendo en la vida, en la bondad de la vida. No sé qué me ha pasado." (p. 253)

What has happened to her is that in order to escape the harsh, mean reality of her family life she has taken refuge in the kind reality of her mind where she can be with the child that she so desperately longs for. By the family she is adjudged to be mad because she has been found many times in conversation with this little boy whom no one else can see or hear. Camproy, a friendly doctor, however, says that she is not insane. He explains her difficulty in these terms: "Se trata de una persona sensible que se refugia en sus ensoñaciones para huir del ambiente hostil de sus propios recuerdos tristes. Sus rarezas tendrían importancia, eso sí, si fuesen el resultado de... otra cosa." (p. 251)

Irene suffers because her husband's family values and seeks "tesoros falsos." They seek these false treasures because in their selfishness they are unable to value the real treasures of life such as Irene, for she, as the title indicates, is a treasure. This true treasure, Irene, as the mysterious Voz in the play indicates to the little fairy, is kindness itself. La Voz says to Juanito that "son pocos los que pueden ver el oro de la bondad...." (p. 255)

Whether Irene is mad or not is a question that cannot be answered here. To this question and myriad others asked about the play, Buero Vallejo himself responds: "¿Quién sabe?" He maintains that the answer to all of the questions "depende de la perspectiva con que lo miremos. El autor quiere mostrar que las cosas del mundo nunca tienen una sola perspectiva, sino varias." (pp. 122-123 of the Commentary) Hence, to try to answer questions about the play which the author says cannot be answered would be foolish. Nor is it apposite to the ethical point that Buero Vallejo is to make. What is important here is that the cure for her condition lies in the love that exists between her and Daniel. The efficacy of love is underscored when Daniel first approaches Irene about marriage.

Daniel.—Soy un vencido...un inútil. Lo sé. Pero por eso mismo me atrevo a hablarte. Somos dos solitarios. No pretendo luchar contra tus recuerdos, pero quiero salvarte de la horrenda melancolía en que te veo vivir.... Y también, que me salves tú a mí. Tú me estás devolviendo la fe en la vida, que he perdido. Desde que te he conocido, quiero luchar de nuevo. Tú has hecho el milagro, mi dulce, mi triste Irene. ¡Sigue salvándome! Tú que puedes hacerlo, y salvate tú...Acéptame. (p. 213)
Love generated by kindness—for Irene is kindness—gives a happy meaning to Daniel's life. It saves him from defeat, giving him the courage to struggle optimistically against the obstacles of life. This same saving power of love is reiterated in the conversation that Daniel has with his friend, Dr. Campoy.

Daniel.---He deseado durante años un poco de esa felicidad que tantos hombres logran sin proponérselo: la de una mujer buena, unos hijos.... Tengo miedo Campoy...mucho miedo. No puedes imaginarte lo que es Irene para mí, Campoy.
Campoy.---Os salvaréis los dos. Confía. (p. 257)

Love does not get the proper chance to save Irene as she commits suicide mistakenly thinking that her cruel father-in-law is going to have her sent to the mad house. Of course, it is Dimas, the very head of the family who is tricked into the asylum by his wife Justina, who tells her daughter why she has done it: "Lo he hecho por ti, por todos. ¡Para poder respirar un poco después de tantos años de miseria y de ahogo! ¡Para que tú puedas lucir, y todos podamos descansar!... ¡Para vivir!.... Era necesario porque él era el loco, él. Loco por el ahorro, loco de tacañería." (p. 258)

Dimas' commitment is ironic as actually his wife Justina and their business friend Mendez have him put away because of their greed, their selfishness; not because they truly believe him insane. Mendez tells Justina that "todos los negocios estarán en mis manos, créame. El ya no los entiende.... Se ha quedado viejo. Ahora vivirán ustedes mejor. No me lo agradezca: ya sabe lo convenido. El tercero de todo es mío. Ya le daremos fórmula legal a la cosa." (p. 254)
Whether Irene's last desperate act is one of madness; whether Dimitri is mad for money; whether the fairy is real or not, are questions not pertinent to the ethical point of the play. What is pertinent is that the play carries the themes of the disastrous consequences of unmitigated selfishness and that of love being man's salvation, especially in a familial situation. Thus the view that Buero Vallejo's social message is didactically, ethically centered on the family situation finds added support.

In 1949 Buero Vallejo brought forth his second play, Palabras en la arena, and like his first play Historia de una escalera which appeared earlier in the same year, it was a prize winner. Palabras en la arena was chosen the best of the three prize-winning one act plays "en el concurso convocado por la Sociedad Amigos de Quintero."31 This of all of Buero Vallejo's plays is the most obviously ethically didactic, though the point is missed by many critics. Seizing upon the anecdotal aspect of the play, several critics see it as a "religious play dealing with adultery."32 José María García Escudero interprets the play as a study of free will, stating that "el autor cuida de subrayar que la más tremenda fatalidad es la que uno mismo se crea."33 Another critic, Alfredo Lafontre also sees the play as one that

"Implica acentos de grave patetismo en la situación del protagonista frente a su libre albedrío."\(^{34}\) Buero Vallejo has stated that the play is "en el más revelador y valeroso sentido de la palabra, un teatro evangélico."\(^{35}\)

Buero Vallejo indeed has a message to preach and it is the same found in the Gospel according to St. John (8, 3-11) of the woman caught in adultery upon which the work is based. Chandler and Schwartz perceive the message. They write that Palabras en la arena "deals with the theme of adultery based on Jesus' 'He that is without sin among you let him first cast a stone at her.'"\(^{36}\) Thus Buero Vallejo's ethical message is: one should not presume to judge one's neighbor.

The characters in the play are not a very attractive lot. There is Eliu, a "prevaricador; ladron de los dinero de los ro- fres;" Gadi, "corruptor de niños;" Matutias, "hipócrita y lujurioso;" and Joazar, the priest who is an atheist. Then there is the maid who steals shamelessly from her mistress, Neomi, who is the adulterous wife of Asaf. She is the lover of Marcio, the Roman centurion who is the oppressor of the Israeli people. All of the afore-mentioned people, with the exception of the Roman Neomi and her maid, have gone to stone a woman that they judge to be an adulteress. While in front of the temple, Jesus writes something

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35. Roig, loc. cit.

in the sand for each of them. Reading the "palabras en la arena" they all go off ashamed, leaving the woman unstoned. It is revealed what was written in the sand for all except the husband Asaf who won't say what Jesus wrote for him. He remains righteous about the adulteress and his friends. Later he discovers that his wife is an adulteress too and he kills her in a rage. Then he reveals what was written in the sand for him by Jesus: "Asesino."

In his Gospel, St. John does not say what Jesus wrote on the ground. Some authors like Buero Vallejo speculate that he probably wrote the sins of the accusers; another interpretation could be that he simply doodled to show that he was not concerned with judging her. The whole episode clearly shows the infinite mercy of Christ, his wisdom and even a sense of humor in the face of the Pharisees, forcing them to publicly acknowledge that they were not without sin. Buero Vallejo's ethical point is the same. He, in his play, is pleading for charity, asking that one not condemn in judgment his neighbor. Though it cannot be proven, it is a suggestion that Buero Vallejo wrote the play on his own behalf. Surely the opposition to his being awarded the sought-after Lope de Vega prize for Historia de una escalera was heavy especially since he had served on the side of the Republicans during the Civil War. The play is so obvious in its intent that one can only agree with Eduardo Haro Tegglen's estimation of the play. In his first night review, he remarks that the play "es una fábula pueril, donde la acción principal se nos relata y no se
It may be pressing a point but curiously enough Buero Vallejo in consonance with the majority of his other works chose to set the point of conflict in a conjugal situation. And though it is not the point of the play, it is selfishness on the part of the wife that leads her into adultery and lack of abnegation that leads the cuckold into murder. If the point may be pressed even further, it is lack of abnegation that leads one into presuming judgment on another. This point has been pressed so that an ethical parallel may be drawn with Buero Vallejo's other plays which end in disaster because the protagonists lacked abnegation.

The last of the social message plays that end negatively because the principals who acted selfishly made no reparation is Hoy es fiesta. This is another prize-winning work which first made an appearance in 1956. It won the Premio Nacional de Teatro (1957), the Premio María Rolland (1956) and most importantly it won the Premio March for being the best dramatic work produced between 1955 and 1959. This Premio March carried with it a financial award of 300,000 pesetas.  


This play is like Historia de una escalera as the story is that of the intertwining of the lives of different families in the same poor tenement in Madrid. The consensus of opinion is that this play is optimistic; that it has a positive outcome. The reviewer in Ya comparing the play with Historia de una escalera writes:

Podemos hablar de la línea de Historia de una escalera en cuanto se trata de reflejar un trozo de vida o un conjunto de vidas con un profundo anhelo de verdad. Pero en Hoy es fiesta el personaje principal es la esperanza. Y la esperanza que se sobrepone a todo, incluso a la muerte misma precisamente lo que faltaba en Historia de una escalera para que aquella fuese toda la verdad.39

This critic demonstrates the prevalence of belief that hope is the main theme. Ricardo Domenech and José María de Quinto represent a polarized view, thinking the work cast in naturalism, but fail to support their point of view. This hope of which so many speak is declared to be the point behind each anecdote contained in the play according to another, Elías Gómez Picazo. He writes that the play trata de dar una lección única y transcendente de esperanza, incluso sobreponiéndola al dolor: "Detrás de todas


40. Domenech, loc. cit.

Regardless if one of the characters says that behind everything there is a smile, Buero Vallejo’s point in the play is that there will be that smile only if there is forgiveness as forgiveness is the true theme of the play. The point of setting into conflict the main anecdote of the drama is to demonstrate that only when one’s selfish act is forgiven and forgotten; only when one forgives and forgets another’s selfish act can there be happiness and progress amongst men. The hope of which so many speak is actually resignation in the face of immutable circumstances—the acceptance of one’s lot. At the end of the play, though the voice of Doña Nieves is heard saying “Hay que esperar...Esperar siempre...La esperanza nunca termina...La esperanza es infinita...”,43 it is somewhat ironic as the hope which Silverio, the principal character of the play, holds is the hope of forgiveness from his beloved Pilar who has just died in his arms. If he is to continue his life with any degree of serenity, then it is to be a serenity that comes with resignation before inalterable


facts. Pilar is dead. She cannot forgive him his selfish act that caused her so much misery. The resolution seen in the other principal anecdote depends largely on the forgiveness which Silverio obtains for Doña Balbina from the neighbors whom she defrauded. It is this forgiveness which forms the theme of the work and it is for this very reason that Buero Vallejo denies it to Silverio. In withholding it from him, Buero Vallejo demonstrates with greater force the necessity for forgiveness in man's life. This forgiveness is a cardinal point in Buero Vallejo's ethic and is seen in its most dynamic light in those plays which end positively because the characters are able to put their "cartas boca arriba" and forgive, forget, and continue life with renewed hope. Briefly speaking of the play, Chandler and Schwartz declare that "the principal theme in the series of interwoven stories concerns the nature of forgiveness..."\(^44\)

This argument presented here is not to negate that the theme of hope exists in the play. There are too many exhortations, too many declarations of hope in the play; and perhaps if one is to ascribe a secondary theme to the play it is that hope comes because of resignation. Also to be found in the play in plentiful stock is the affirmative value that Buero Vallejo places in conjugal love.

The main story line of the play is hinged on the number of the grand lottery prize to be announced on the holiday during

\(^{44}\) Chandler and Schwartz, op. cit., p. 143.
which the action of the play transpires. The tenants of the
apartment house appear on the rooftop to spend the holiday in the
sun and fresh air. Each in turn tells of his longed for dream, a
dream that could become reality if only they were to win the lot-
ttery. Some dreams are noble, some ignoble, but regardless of the
quality of the dream, it is a human and vital one that each con-
tinually hopes for. When the afternoon edition of the newspaper
appears, they search eagerly for the lottery number they all
share. To their utter surprise, joy, disbelief they learn that
indeed their number has won the big lottery prize. Their dreams
can now come true as there is enough money for all of them. But
it is discovered that Doña Balbina, the widow who sold them the
lottery number has defrauded them by selling them parts of a
number from a past lottery. Doña Balbina's daughter Daniela is
the one who first reveals her mother's deception. When she sees
her neighbors' rage directed at her mother she begs their forgive-
ness, pleading for help instead of enmity. She tells them: "Por
lo que más quieran, ¡Ayúdenla! ¡Ayúdennos de alguna manera!
Dios mío...¡Perdónenla!" (p. 79) Her neighbors are so outraged,
so disappointed that only vengeance can placate them. They physi-
cally abuse Doña Balbina and are also on the point of having her
jailed when Silverio intercedes on her behalf beseeching her
neighbors to forgive her. When they confront Doña Balbina they
hurl their disappointment at her.

Manolo.—-(A Silverio) ¡No se puede jugar con el dinero
del pobre!
Doña Nieves.—-(Ni con sus ilusiones!...
Silverio.---(Dulce) Pero ella es también pobre. Mucho, muchísimo más que ustedes, porque ella...no tiene ya ni ilusiones. (Se acerca a Doña Balbi-na.) ¿Verdad? (Ella lo mira y rompe a llorar.) Vamos, defiéndase. Dígale a todos por qué la hizo. (p. 84)

Doña Balbina explains that in desperation she defrauded them because it was the only way she knew how to get money enough to buy food for herself and her daughter, Daniela. Silverio sets out to convince everyone that compassion and forgiveness are the only course of action. When Doña Nieves reminds him that Balbina has committed a crime, he says that he has not forgotten, telling her that "piedad" is preferable to punishment. He adds: "Todos ustedes son pobres. ¿Y no van a tener compasión de la más pobre de todas?" (p. 86)

He works with determination on the conscience of Balbina's neighbors and wins them all over to the side of compassion, all that is, except Mr. Nicasio. Silverio says that all of the neighbors have capitulated, declaring that "son de oro" and that Mr. Nicasio will capitulate also as "no podrá resistir este ejemplo." (p. 87) He is right as Mr. Nicasio drops his charges against Doña Balbina and forgives her. Silverio tells Doña Nieves that she would have had to pay the dismal price of a bad conscience if she and the others had not been "capaces de perdonar." (p. 87)

After all have reconciled themselves to the consequences of Doña Balbina's act, they have settled back into their days of reiteration. Silverio says to his deaf wife Pilar that life is able to go on for them as they have forgiven and are already
forgetting, adding that it makes more urgent his own need for laying his cards up on the table so that he can make his peace with her.

Silverio.——...Mira: las cosas se reanudan. Doña Nieves recibe ahora a otra cliente. Vuelve la esperanza... Hoy me siento como todos ellos, fundido, al fin, con ellos. Ahora bajaremos y, como un pobre hombre más, tomaré tu cuaderno y te confesaré mi maldad... Yo también me atrevo a esperar. (La mira.) Y si tus ojos me condenan... aceptaré mi dolor y procuraré recobrarte. (p. 95)

The "maldad" of which he speaks to his unhearing wife is the evil his earlier selfishness has wrought in her life. It is in this part of the play that one sees the greatest thematic similarity between Hoy es fiesta and Las cartas boca abajo. Throughout the play Silverio displays an anxiousness. He explains that for years he has wanted and hoped for "algo enorme, algo inalcanzable." (p. 66) When his deaf wife has her back to him, thus being unable to read his lips, he tells her that he desperately needs her forgiveness and that man needs to unburden himself with a confidente, for if one does not tell his secrets "nos anogarán."

Because he has had to live with his guilt, he has attempted to atone by abandoning his ambitions to become an artist and hiding out amongst simple people. But it has all been for naught. He tells his unhearing wife that he should never have married her as within him there dwells a sick beast "egoísta y sucia." He confesses having caused her life's suffering. He also tells her why he has done so. He says:

Ahora me confieso desesperadamente contigo, con la cobarde ilusión de que me oyes; pero estas confesiones
mías son como un mal sueño de sed, en el que se cree 
beber sin que la sed se aplique nunca... ¡Y necesito 
tu perdón, porque te quiero!... ¡Y estoy perdido! 
Porque sé que nunca, nunca podrías dármelo... sí lo 
supiese. (pp. 68-69)

Silverio is desperately unhappy with his "cartas ooca 
abajo" and without his wife he is nothing. The evil he has per­ 
petuated in Pilar's life caused the death of the daughter that 
had been born to her because of a raping. It was because of his 
selfishness that the little girl was fatally bitten by a poison­ 
ous insect. He tells the still unhearing Pilar now it happened:

La picadura inesperada mientras yo trabajaba... 
¡Fui yo, Pilar! ¡Yo escuché su voz a mis espaldas, pre­ 
guntándome si podía coger aquel bichito! ¡Y dije que sí 
sin mirar! (se aparta, ahogándose. Ella se levanta tam­ 
bién, espantada.) He tratado de convencerme de que esta­ 
ba distraído, de que no comprendí lo que me decía, de que 
no era culpable... ¡Pero es mentira! ¡Dije que sí porque 
la odiaba, porque no era mía, porque su presencia me 
hacía imaginar constantemente el horror de un soldado sin 
cara brutalizándote!... ¡Y aquel fue el momento de la 
tentación, del rencor que nos domina y que nos emborracha 
de pronto...y nos paraliza!... ¡Y dije que sí!... ¡Sin 
querer pensar!... ¡Como un miserable! (p. 68) 

But this confession remains ineffectual as Pilar cannot 
hear her husband and when she asks him to unburden himself, he 
refuses. This self-laceration is characteristic of Silverio 
throughout the entire play. At the beginning when he is speaking 
to Elías, his neighbor, of his youth, he tells him that he isn't 
worth too much. He explains that when he was a young man he 
tended to be an artist or a scientist. He travelled all over.
He says that he failed in his dreams because of his selfishness: 
"Era un imbécil; pero sobretodo, un completo egoísta. Lo que yo 
quería era divertirme sin trabajar." (p. 30)
He reaches the point where he realizes that he must put his cards upon the table and begin his life anew. He says to Pilar: "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." (p. 95)

Silverio screws up his courage to tell Pilar by asking himself if he shouldn't understand this "día de fiesta" as a "día de esperanza y de perdón." (pp. 94-95) Thus it is that Silverio, armed with a firm purpose of amendment is on the point of confessing to Pilar, begging her forgiveness so that he can live in peaceful renewal of his life when Pilar dies in his arms. And with her final breath dies the restorative words of forgiveness which he so sorely needs. Horrified he cries to Pilar's lifeless form: "...Sólo tu boca podía decírmelo, si tengo perdón. Sólo tu boca... ¡Pilar, Pilar!... ¡Si aun pudieras decírmelo!... Pero estoy solo. Tú lo eras todo para mí y ahora estoy solo." (p. 96)

The play ends with the fortune-telling Doña Nieves, who is off-stage telling one of her clients: "Hay que esperar... Esperar siempre... La esperanza nunca termina... La esperanza es infinita." Because one can hear these words many say that the play ends well, but as has been stated, the purpose of the words of hope are ironic as Silverio's only hope has just died and then too, the words come from the mouth of a fortune-teller. Without Pilar there is no pardon for Silverio. Without her his life is nothing and if he is to build his life anew, he must resign himself to his fate. The advice of resignation that he gives to
Daniela before would now stand him in good stead. When he speaks to her of being Fidel's wife he has her face the facts of life realistically:

Tendrás que cuidarlo toda la vida, porque ese será siempre un niño... Pero tú has dejado hoy de ser niña, Daniela. Te has convertido en mujer y tendrás que mirar a las cosas de cara sin flaquear. Y nunca, nunca, más volverás a desesperar... Te necesita más él a ti, créeme. Ya sé que no te pinto ningún porvenir brillante. ¿Qué quieres? Así es la vida. Y a ti hay que decirte la verdad. Tú trabajarás, él ganará sus oposiciones; él y tu madre te harán sufrir. Tendrás que conllevarlos a los dos con paciencia... Tú serás la más fuerte en un hogar donde no faltarán estrecheces, penas... Ni tampoco alegrías. Pero tú quieres a Fidel y eso basta. Yo sé que estás dispuesta a afrontarlo todo, ¿verdad? (pp. 93-94)

The moral lesson to be drawn from the play is not contained in the theme of hope nor is it in that of resignation, but rather, as has been stated, in forgiveness. Buero Vallejo hopes that the play has a cathartic effect on the play-goer. The spectator, after having seen this drama unfold, should recognize selfishness as the cause of all the troubles, and confession and forgiveness as the cure. And Buero Vallejo has placed the forces in conflict within a familial and/or conjugal situation, being consistent in the affirmation that these situations go to form the heart of the troubles in a society such as Spain's. He, by and large, has chosen ordinary people in everyday situations to show them that they are the "colectivos e individuales artífices de sus venturas y desgracias." 45

CHAPTER V

SOCIAL PLAYS OF POSITIVE OUTCOME

In all of the plays discussed up to this point, it is clearly seen how the protagonists cause their own suffering. They bring about their personal woes and in consequence the woes of those whose life is linked with their own because they have lacked abnegation. Then too the misery in their lives has been preserved because of their inability to make a clean breast of past misfortunes by owning up to one's mistakes. And if there has been a laying of the cards face up on the table, an airing of differences, then the misery caused by those differences is perpetuated as those persons involved have been unable to forgive and forget. But such is not the case in the three successive plays that Buero Vallejo produced after La tejedora de sueños.

During the years of 1952 and 1953 Buero Vallejo produced La señal que se espera (May 21, 1952); Casi un cuento de hadas (January 9, 1953); and Madrugada (December 9, 1953). In these plays Buero Vallejo changes his dramatic intention. Whereas in the plays produced prior to La señal que se espera his intention was to show the negative results of selfishness, he now is to show the efficacy of selflessness, of laying one's cards up on the table, of forgiveness; demonstrating his belief that man is indeed the "artífice de sus venturas..." by practicing abnegation.
As in the plays of negative result he has situated the conflict of the three plays in circumstances concerned with man and his love relationships. In La señal que se espera the essential problem to be solved is between man and wife; in Casi un cuento de hadas, an engaged couple; and in Madrugada, between man and wife, and wife and in-laws.

The unquestioned faith of a man in a woman and the preservation of their marriage through faith forms the theme in Buero Vallejo's play La señal que se espera. Once again, is found the problem of man progressing in society dependent upon man finding a solution to his love problems. And as in La tejedora de sueños, the dramatic situation is conjugal with the fidelity of the wife called into question; however, the theme in its totality cannot be restricted to faith in the conjugal as Buero Vallejo's message here is a restatement of his humanistic point of view: man is the maker of his own destiny and if he wants that destiny to be a rich, rewarding one, then man must love and have faith in his fellows for it is only in this way that he can find happiness and then progress. It must be appended that Buero Vallejo's love here is confined to the man-woman, the love-match relationship in which he introduces for the first time his "cartas boca abajo" and forgiveness theme with a happy ending. Buero Vallejo weaves the fabric of his theme in several ways. Luis, the musician's compositions are creations inspired directly by the faith and love that he found in Susana. Enrique, Susana's husband, ruined financially, is able to face the future, confident that he can
build anew a good life for himself, his wife and their expected baby only after he found emotional security in his once divorce-threatened marriage. When Enrique has shelved his selfish attitude and laid his cards face up on the table and trusted in his wife's love, he is happy and armed with the courage to face the difficulties that lie ahead.

Rafael Vásquez Zamora in his review of the play points up the powerful workings of love and faith within the plot.

Un grupo de personas desgraciadas se reúnen en un pazo gallego. El matrimonio Susana-Enrique está a punto de romperse. Son los inquilinos del pazo y han invitado al músico Luis, que había sido el novio de Susana, con él que ella terminó para casarse con Enrique. El compositor, a consecuencia de ese shock afectivo, había perdido la inspiración y le domina una obsesión: que suene el arpa eólica que Enrique ha hecho instalar en el jardín, un arpa que suena, como es sabido, con ciertos cambios de atmósfera. Esa informe música olumental le hará recordar, cree él, la melodía olvidada. Un amigo del matrimonio, Julián, que acaba de ser abandonado por su mujer, se presenta en la finca para olvidar en aquel refugio. Una pareja de viejos criados espena con paciencia conmovedora desde muchos años, una carta de un sobrino que marchó a América. Pues bien, la espera de la señal que emitirá el arpa acaba convirtiéndose en la obsesión de todos ellos. La obra entera gira en torno a esa señal de otro mundo, porque, cuando suene, cada uno de ellos logrará lo que desea. Y, efectivamente, suena. Pero ha sido Susana la que, recordando la melodía de Luis—que creó éste en los días en que rompieron Susana y él las relaciones—, la toca en el arpa eólica. Fue una trampa, pero sirve. Todos acababan siendo felices. Solamente la carta de los criados, recibida por fin, trae una mala noticia, pero la carta llega también por la señal que una misteriosa fuerza hizo emitir a Susana.1

Luis, a musician, is depending upon the aeolian harp to play so that he can continue to progress in his art. The melody in question is a most important one, inspired by his love for Susana, a melody forgotten because of the shock he suffered when Susana forsook him for Enrique. While Luis awaits, he is enjoying Susana and Enrique's hospitality. Enrique, fearful that Susana still loves Luis, scoffs at the idea of the harp playing Luis' music. Susana does not. She believes that the sign will come. To demonstrate her belief, she accompanies Luis each night to the field in anticipation of the melody. Later when the music does sound, it comes from Susana's playing. Enrique tells her that she is the aeolian harp: "Mi pobre Susana. Eras como un arpa eólica que anhelaba su melodia de mujer...Esa es la última, la verdadera razón de que subieses a tocar a la solana."²

The point of the play to be taken here is that the love and faith emanating from the Luis-Susana relationship inspired in Luis the melody at the beginning; the loss of the love of Susana meant the loss of the creation; the companionship and faith of Susana in Luis restore the music to its creator for completion. At the heart of the creation are love and faith, all of which Luis recognizes. In a heated discussion with Enrique over the love of Susana, Luis tells Enrique that she has sustained him by faith.

² Antonio Buero Vallejo, La señal que se espera (Madrid: Ediciones Alfil, 1959), p. 67. (All subsequent references are to the above edition of La señal que se espera.)
in a way that Enrique would not understand. He adds that without such a faith, man falls. He tells Enrique that Susana's and his faith fill the garden where the harp sits and that Enrique is powerless against that common faith. (pp. 48-49)

Later, after Susana has played the melody, she and Luis talk together. He tells her that all he shall do in the future will be dedicated to her; that she will continue to help him in his composing. When she tells him with finality that she truly loves only her husband Enrique, he adds that she is as much responsible as he for his music because of the inspiration through the faith and companionship she has given him.

Me has dado más de lo que crees. Quizás tengáis hijos; cuando crezcan, puede que mi música les guste.... No sabrán nunca que ellos y ella son hermanos.... Me lo has aceptado, Susana. Mis obras serán nuestros hijos. Otros hijos tuyos... Me acordaré siempre, del aliento que me dabas.... Ahora, es necesario no desesperar.... El golpe ha sido muy fuerte; pero la vida sigue. Y hay que vivirla. (p. 69)

Enrique's problems begin when he doubts the strength of the love between him and his wife. He keeps his "cartas boca abajo." He has lost all of his money, is ruined financially and won't tell Susana for fear that she will leave him now that he is poor. He accuses her of marrying him for money and of still being in love with the musician, Luis. Susana, not knowing what to do, asks Julián, the philosopher who is also a house guest of theirs, for advice.

Julián,---Si el amor termina, queda la vanidad. (Se oye la voz lejana de Enrique llamando a Bernardo.) ¿Oyes? Es su amor propio, su vanidad herida de amo...o de...esposo que se cree engañado....
Susana.---Esta situación no debe prolongarse. ¿Quieres ayudarnos a los dos?.... Aconsejarnos algo... aunque dudes de mí.

Julián.---Hablar a tiempo y con el corazón en la mano. No ocultar nada. Eso es lo que aún puede salvarlo todo. (p. 45)

He then tells her that he knows that Enrique has received a letter recently that has increased visibly the anguish that he has been experiencing of late. He adds that he doesn't know what news the letter contains, but that he does know that it is her duty as a wife to share her husband's tribulations. Susana tries to share Enrique's woes in an attempt to set straight their relationship, but Enrique chooses to remain the injured party and is definitely uncommunicative. He later accuses Susana of marrying him for money and of still being in love with Luis. Julián, the philosopher, in his role of catalyst gives Enrique some sharp words of advice telling him that Enrique cannot hope to save his marriage to Susana if he lacks faith. He tells him that faith in one another is the power that moves the world.

Julián.---(A Enrique) La fe nunca es inútil, y produce las señales. Por su poder vivimos...y por ella, cuando más desesperados nos encontramos, cuando nos parece que ya no nos queda otro recurso que... el de la pistola en el cajón de nuestra mesa de despacho.... Luis tuvo fe y la fe le ha salvado. Y, ahora, vosotros dos os encontráis frente a frente, mirándoos al fondo de los ojos..., cuando creíais no tener ya nada. Buscad, buscaos en el fondo de los ojos la fe del uno en el otro..., y tal vez os salvéis. (p. 57)

Enrique comes to his senses and follows Julián's advice. He trusts Susana's love for him and shows her the dreaded letter in which it is revealed that he is now a pauper. Susana reads it,
looks at Enrique and says sweetly, "Estamos arruinados.... Pero, juntos todo será fácil." (p. 66) And thus ends the marital anguish that could have been prevented had Enrique trusted in their love sooner and not kept his "cartas boca abajo."

It is important that the words "juntos todo será fácil" be repeated as it is the message that Buero Vallejo wants most urgently to communicate. This play, La señal que se espera ends positively as the marriage partners have faith in their love for one another; have communicated with one another freely, sharing their burdens thus tearing down those barriers that have kept them apart. Now secure in their love they face the future with optimism, eager to build a new life. Their courage springs from their love as does their optimism. This love to Buero Vallejo is the fountainhead of life and as has been seen, he believes that if it run dry then only disillusionment, sorrow, defeat, and frustration will befall man.

In his following play Casi un cuento de hadas Buero's message is still firmly married to this theme of love. It is a play that ends on a positive note also because the two protagonists involved in a marriage of convenience selflessly resolve to make the most of a bad situation. The framework that the playwright has used to hang the action of his play which is "almost a fairy tale" is indeed the fairy tale of Riquet el del copete by the Frenchman Perrault. Buero Vallejo substantially employs the tale for the purpose that Perrault intended; that is, in showing the power of love. In his tale, a beautiful but stupid princess falls
in love with an ugly but intelligent prince. They, because of their love for one another, are both transformed. Her love for him changes him into a handsome, intelligent prince and of course, his love for her transforms her into a princess at once beautiful and clever. The two marry and live happily ever after. The point that Perrault makes is that love transforms the loved into the ideal.

Buero Vallejo uses Perrault's story up to the point in which the two lovers are transformed. Riquete, the ugly has lost his hideous mane of hair, his hunchback; he has become comely. Letecia, the stupid, has become bright, clever, enhancing her natural beauty. For them the future looks glorious. But then quite suddenly, Riquete is called away to his kingdom. During his absence Letecia falls in love with a beautiful but innocuous prince who has needed no transformation. She forgets all about Riquete and gives her hand to Armando who requires nothing of her but that she be beautiful. Riquete returns, and discovers the disadvantageous turn of events for him. In a sarcastic exchange of words with Armando, Riquete finds himself involved in a duel which ends with Armando's death. In reluctance, Leticia's hand in marriage is given again, but this time to Riquete, though she no longer loves him. Faced by this inescapable marriage, they both discuss this wedded future vowing to make it a successful one.

This play was one of Buero Vallejo's least successful, having played only nine performances in Madrid's Teatro Español when it was first produced back in January of 1955. The critics
attacked Buero Vallejo for the work, angry mostly for his having destroyed "la belleza de un cuento y dándonos a cambio el espejo de una realidad ejemplar..." as the reviewer for the magazine Madrid has stated it. Few of the critics have tried to analyze the purpose behind Buero Vallejo's change. The above-quoted review did see Buero Vallejo's point as didactic and Torrente Ballester, true to his view of Buero Vallejo's dramatic purpose says that "la sensibilidad de Buero vierte más a lo moral que a lo poético." However, Torrente Ballester never states what this moral purpose is.

Buero Vallejo has set out to show the power of love as did Perrault, but he has also sought to teach that when the illusion of ideal love is gone, that is, when one discovers the deception behind beauty, then one is in touch with the sad truth of the world. One must then live with this sad truth in hope of recapturing the illusory ideal. Simply stated, Buero Vallejo's sad truth is that human love is not the fairy tale told by Perrault; when the illusion that beauty creates wears off, one maintains the hope of capturing that beautiful ideal again.

In the commentary that he wrote as a companion piece to the play published by Ediciones Alfil, Buero Vallejo explains the


dramatic purpose behind the work.

Insinué que Casi un cuento de hadas venía a significar lo contrario de un cuento de hadas. Si hubiese escrito "lo contrario de lo que se suele entender por un cuento de hadas" habría sido más exacto...Perrault sabía bastante más que todos nosotros del asunto. Sabía que un cuento infantil es perfecto cuando no es perfectamente rosado. Cuando, en pequeña o gran medida, incluye, junto al color de rosa, algo de negrura o escepticismo... La pareja central decide vivir en la esperanza.

Little more need be said as it is obvious that the point to be proven is that Buero Vallejo has concerned himself again with the problem that man has in loving. The work ends on a positive note because the characters prove to be superior to the circumstances by not indulging their selfish wants. It is the optimistic faith in one another that forms the basis of their relationship when love is not there. All throughout the work Buero Vallejo drives home the theme of love, its illusion and power.

When the ugly Riquete meets for the first time the beautiful Leticia, she is embittered. In an attempt to assure her that she need not fear him in spite of his grotesqueness, he tells her why she is so disconsolate, so unhappy. He says soothingly to Leticia: "Calmaos. No os ocurre nada. Sólo estáis...un poco acobardada por la falta de cariño. Pero tampoco es cierto que nadie os quiera. Os creéis sola y esa es vuestra amargura; no lo estáis." (p. 20)

5. Antonio Buero Vallejo, Casi un cuento de hadas (Madrid: Ediciones Alfil, 1953), p. 78 of the commentary. (All subsequent references are to the above edition of Casi un cuento de hadas.)
But Buero Vallejo chooses to dwell on the power of love, rather than on the unhappiness that the lack of love brings to man. Hiquete, during his first encounter with Leticia tells her that love is "un poder muy fuerte;" that her spirit has awakened because she is loved. He explains that "el amor aviva el espíritu del ser amado, y también hermosea sus facciones a los ojos de su pareja...." (p. 27)

Oriana, an old retainer in the palace, tells Leticia's ugly sister Laura that "ser amada...puede obrar milagros."

Hiquete's alter ego in a searching dialogue with Hiquete declares: "Tu verdad, Señor, es un amor infinito por todas las cosas. Y ella me tuvo amor, y por tenerlo, yo fui su ideal. ¿quién podría vencer al ideal?" (p. 60)

Other pertinent references to love exist in the play but they need not be cited to prove this point. The very plot which is hinged on love-matches and their making is permeated with the importance of love and its power to man. The view which Buero Vallejo wishes to present about mutual faith gets short shrift. He delivers the point in the last few lines of the play, but they have the impact needed to be driven home. Hiquete has just killed Armando, the man Leticia loves. It is to be expected that she will despise the man who has killed Armando, but she decides that she will marry Hiquete as he actually is the better of the two in her eyes. He finds it difficult to believe that she would want to marry him, the ugly prince, the man for whom she maintains no more illusion. He doubts her and she assures him that she prefers the
pain of marrying him.

Leticia.—¡Prefiero ese dolor!
Riquete.—¿A la alegría?
Leticia.—No. Al horror de otro Armando. A la vana
y fugaz ilusión de otro ser brutal y frío, como
él, que me hiciese necia y frívola, como él
quería que fuese. Al horror de convertirme en
otro ser agrio y dominante... (p. 72)

He says that now that she knows how deceiving love can be
she will no longer be able to see in him the ideal prince. She
says that they should then love one another basing their illusions
upon that ideal they once had. He tells her that the ideal, born
of human love, does not exist in the work-a-day world. It is the
deception created by love. However, the belief that this ideal
awaits each man gives hope to existence. Speaking about love's
ideal he says:

Riquete.—que su recuerdo nos guíe y nos ayude...El nos
espera siempre, en el fondo de nuestros corazones.
Leticia.—Sí. El nos espera, desde algún mundo sin
dolor. (p. 72)

Earlier in the play Leticia remarks to Riquete:

Yo no soy nada sin ti. Tú has hecho vivir en mí la
inteligencia dormida...y el amor. Si dudas de ti ¿Cómo
tendré yo fe?... Todos los prometidos se ven a veces
feos. O necios. Es el cansancio del amor, que así toma
fuerzas para querer más. Creamos el uno en el otro, y
nuestra verdad será una gran verdad. (p. 34)

At the play's end, Leticia and Riquete do believe in each
other and the relationship that emerges is greater than any rela-
tionship dependent solely on the illusory ideal of love.

In his succeeding play, Madrugada, it is almost as if
Buero Vallejo took Leticia's words "yo no soy nada sin ti...Crea-
mos el uno en el otro y nuestra verdad será una gran verdad," and
used them as a frame upon which to build his work, a technical tour de force in which he adheres to the three unities. The majority of critics see the play as a battle between the evil forces of selfishness and the good forces of love.

Nicolás González Ruiz states that the victory is a foregone conclusion.

La lucha del dinero contra el amor está desde el principio resuelta a favor del último...el conflicto se plantea cuando sabemos que aquella mujer que va a entablarr una lucha terrible es dueña del dinero ya, ya su marido—el hombre que la ha redimido y elevar—yace allí dentro muerto. Pero ella necesita el rescate del puro sentimiento que inspira y que quiere salvar para seguir viviendo y sólo este móvil anhela saber la verdad y emprende un pavoroso juego para descubrirlo.6

Torrente Ballester declares that the moral plane of Madrugada is to be found not in the actions of the characters but in the system of motivation found throughout the work, meaning that the protagonist whose actions have been judged to be immoral (she had been an artist's model of easy virtue who had sat for nude studies before marrying) is more moral than those personages whose actions are judged moral but actually are motivated by unethical reasons.7 José María Quinto sees in the play an "agudo sentido ético."8 The reviewer for Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos


states that Madrugada is "una pieza de dura y beneficiadora moral positiva." Yet neither Quinto nor this reviewer discusses the nature of this ethic that they both see.

The ethical considerations form another variation on Buero Vallejo's theme of selfishness versus love with selfless love triumphing—and again in a conjugal, familial situation.

The action is centered on Amalia's need to prove that her deceased husband Mauricio loved her. She speaks to Lorenzo, a relative, telling her motive: "Quise saber el significado de los seis meses horribles de silencio que nos hicisteis pasar a los dos. Quise saber si me despreciabas y me pagabas como a una mujer-zuela o si me probabas su fe y su cariño al casarse contigo."\(^9\)

Amalia's way of proving this love is unusual indeed. Her husband, who has been dead only minutes, has left all of his wealth to her. His body is still in one of the bedrooms. All of her husband's relatives have been called to the house under the pretense of keeping a death watch. Amalia plans to use this opportunity to find out what had gone wrong with their love and what her husband meant when he said to her on his death bed: "Ya es tarde para deciros muchas cosas, mi pobre Amalia.... Pero quizás desde el otro lado de la muerte te recobraré...no te he


10. Antonio Buero Vallejo, Madrugada (Madrid: ediciones Alfil, 1960), pp. 76-77. (All subsequent references will be to the above edition of Madrugada.)
Amalia knows that the last six months of stress in her relationship with Mauricio was caused somehow by the relatives. Before their arrival she gives strict instructions to the maid that no one be told that he has already died so that she can trick them into revealing to her exactly what was done and said to her husband, bringing about the change in their love relationship. The leverage she is to use is a fake will which she says she will have him sign leaving all of his wealth to her, cutting them off completely, if they do not tell her what she wants to know. The task she has set for herself is a difficult and trying one. She must conceal her grief until she has accomplished her purpose. During the period of trial her husband's niece tells her that all efforts are useless, adding that she is so alone. Amalia replies: "También yo lo estoy. Y él. Todos lo estaremos hasta que la noche termine. Quizá entonces volvamos a encontrar el cariño que necesitamos, o quizás lo perdamos para siempre.... Entre tanto suspicacia, mentira, y soledad. Es necesario." (p. 46)

During the ensuing scenes, the suffering that is caused by the selfishness and the envy of the characters of the play is shown against the efficacy and the power of the love between Amalia and Mauricio. The backdrop of her husband's relatives' selfishness throws into relief the selflessness and willingness of Amalia to suffer for the sake of love.

The shameless greed of the relatives is revealed as is their humiliating treatment of their daughter Monica in an attempt
to gain selfish ends. When Monica confides to Amalia her family life she says that she has never really had a family nor any affection. She tells her that what her mother and father are now enduring during the death watch, they do simply for the sake of inheriting money. She tells Amalia of the tyranny she has had to endure because of her parents' greed:

¡Todo esto es espantoso! ¡Qué me importa a mí el dinero! ¡Lo odio! Mi padre siempre habla de dignidad y de no deberle nada a nadie.... Pero cuando mi madre me obligaba a venir a pedirle al tío unos duros...mi padre se hacia el distraído. Y luego, por la noche, yo les oía disputar para repartirse los cuartos.... Y si me resistía a venir, era peor.... Entonces mi madre me pegaba y me amenazaba con ponerme a servir.... (p. 45)

Throughout the play, the parents display a vicious treatment of any and everyone unless it be to their advantage to be kind. They shout at each other, abuse one another with hideous accusations; they show a total lack of consideration for each other, but a superabundance of pride. In spite of the lowness of the husband's relatives and their utter disdain for Amalia and her relationship with the dead Mauricio, it is not they who caused the misunderstanding between Amalia and her husband. The troublemaker is Leandro, a friend of Mauricio who had also been a lover of Amalia before she met her husband. Leandro, a newspaperman, sent to Mauricio a malicious anonymous letter defaming Amalia with the most salacious of references. When Amalia confronts Leandro with this foul deed, he replies that he did not do it for money. She tells him: "No, luchaste por la envidia. Le envidiaste toda tu vida y acabaste por envidiar que me tuviese." (p. 78)
Amalia realizes that those months of anxiousness between her and Mauricio were caused not only by Leandro's mean act but by her misinterpretation of Mauricio's attitude toward her. She had assumed attitudes, presupposed without broaching the subject with her husband until he was on his death bed. She realizes now that he truly loved her at all times in spite of the malicious attack upon her by Leandro. And so it is that love triumphs over selfishness, greed, and envy. That Juero Vallejo intended to demonstrate love's effectiveness is clear throughout the play. At the beginning as Amalia prepares for the convenient deceit she is to exercise during the death watch, she tells her old servant Sabina what her life and love with Mauricio have been.

"Sí milagro de amor" and it is this miracle of love that she is out to recapture during the long hours of suffrance. She tells Sabina that she must know if Mauricio still loved her for if he did not when he died, she maintains, "me perderá del todo.... ¡Tengo que aclarar esas palabras!... ¡Me parece como si él me mandase hacerla!... ¡Y por ellos me recobrará!... ¡Me perderá"! (p. 15)

Maintaining the belief in that love is vital to her existence. She knows it and is willing to fight, to suffer for it. Being secure in his love is more important to her than the enormous
fortune that he has left her in his will. When the problem of learning who has attempted to destroy their love has been resolved and everyone is about to leave, Lorenzo tells her that she has won because she has had money to back her. But she disputes him, crediting love with her victory.

Lorenzo.---Bien... Supongo que debo marcharme. La madrugada ha sido dura y baldía. Usted nos ha vencido. No era difícil, con el dinero a sus espaldas. Amalia.---No era el dinero lo que estaba a mis espaldas. Lorenzo.---(Sardónico, ) ¡Ah! ¿No? ¿Qué era? Amalia.---(Muy dulce,) El amor.

Lorenzo, his face clouding up at the mention of the word love, then tells her that she is one of the few people in the world who think "que hay cosas más importantes que el dinero." (p. 78)

Buero Vallejo shows his final indication that emphasis should be placed on the efficacy of love when, as the final curtain falls, he gives stage directions to the actress, as Amalia once more secure in the knowledge that Mauricio still loved her when he died is to demonstrate the transformation that this knowledge works over her. The stage directions read: "Amalia no se mueve. Su expresión es ahora bellísima: muestra una calma soñehumana y un amor sin límites." (p. 79)

La Madriguada ends happily because Amalia has been willing to fight to maintain the love which has been at the very core of her existence. Love even from across the grave provides the vital impetus necessary to live effectively, to progress, to be happy. Buero Vallejo's point: selfishness, greed, and envy bring woe to the relatives and Leandro, the friend; abnegation, love and the belief, the faith in love work the happiness for Amalia. Love
helps Amalia as it helps man to transcend his difficulties, transporting him to that state in which life can be a joy—even in sorrow as it is with Amalia.

The highest test of the transcendental power of love, rather, the need for love in transcending the ultimate difficulty of man's condition—death—is seen in the last play that Buero Vallejo has had staged at this writing, *Aventura en lo gris*.

The play, properly, does not belong to this group which is oriented to instruct the masses, but rather to instruct the governing hierarchy. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to mention that security in love helps the protagonists to overcome man's greatest trial, that of dying for one's beliefs. At the end, Silvano asks Ana if she is able to bear what the invaders will bring. She replies: "A tu lado, sí." The invaders do arrive and when Silvano realizes that he and Ana are to be shot he tells her: "No valgo nada. Nunca ha sabido vivir; ni luchar. Si supiese luchar, me habría ido a las montañas con las guerrillas... con lo que, ya ves hubiera vencido a cumplir la consigna de Goldmann.... Pero hay otras maneras de vencer." (p. 106)

The soldiers line them up at the wall, examine their rifles in preparation for firing and then Silvano says to Ana: "Tú lo conseguiste, Ana mía." She tells him that only with his teaching has she managed to face the enemy. She asks Silvano:

"¿Es así? ¿Es esto vencer?" He replies: "Sí, esto es vencer," as they clasp each other's hand strongly and face their executioners. Buero Vallejo ends the play with these stage directions:

"Los soldados elevan despacio sus armas, a punto de disparar. Pero Silvano y Ana están ya por encima de todo temor: ellos han vencido. Erguidos y sonrientes contemplan ahora la boca de los fúrsiles. No alcanzamos a verlos caer. Antes cae el telón." (p. 111)

The point of the play is not to show the transcendental power of love, nor is the power of love the point of this final scene, but it is most evident and in keeping with Buero Vallejo's idea that from the love relationship such as that of Silvano and Ana is born a vital part of man's ability to overcome life's trials and tribulations, even the ultimate tribulation of an untimely and violent death.
Buero Vallejo initiated his period of political plays with *Un soñador para un pueblo* in 1958. The subsequent plays, *Las meninas* (1961), *El concierto de San Ovidio* (1962) and *Aventura en lo gris* (1963) all are didactically oriented to the political inasmuch as the themes of all are directly involved with people who occupy a position within a governing minority. In *Un soñador para un pueblo*, the title character is one taken from political history, the Italian Marquis de Esquilache, Don Leopoldo de Gregorio who served as Chancellor of the Exchequer in the court of Carlos III. And in the next play, *Las meninas*, though the protagonist Diego Velázquez is a painter, he serves as the conscience of the king, Felipe IV. In *Aventura en lo gris*, the dialogues between the corrupt, evil dictator Goldmann and the exiled professor Silvano, the play's two principal characters, are fused with political ethics. In *El concierto de San Ovidio*, the action is hinged on the rebellion against fascist rule even though not one of the characters who represent oppressive authority occupies a governmental position, nor can one of them be linked directly with a governmental agency. Nevertheless the play does concentrate on a governing morality. The ethic that Buero Vallejo prescribes to the political minority in these plays is not different from that
which he prescribes for the man in the street in all of the plays prior to Un soñador para un pueblo.

Abnegation and love again are the main tenets of his ethic. The only difference between the two groups of his plays is that those representative political characters whose behavior embodies this ethic are so ideal in their actions, so exemplary as to be unreal. Perhaps this is why Buero Vallejo has labelled Las meninas "una fantasía" and another, Un soñador para un pueblo, "una versión libre." The characterizations of Velázquez and Esquilache are not based on historical knowledge of the two men. Rather than dramatize history, he has taken fragments from history and built a dramatic fiction to serve the larger purpose of his message, a message which, if presented directly as one of present concern, would possibly meet with resistance from the board of censorship. At least that is what is to be inferred from the comments that Ricardo Domenech has made concerning the reason for Buero Vallejo's use of the literary-historical distancing of plot in these four plays. Domenech maintains that Buero Vallejo uses this literary-historical distancing in the manner of Jean Anouilh, Bertol Brecht and Arthur Miller. He uses the indirect way of attacking present-day, existing political conditions by situating them in the historical past. Domenech cites as parallel examples Anouilh's play Antigone which was written as an anti-Nazi piece; Arthur Miller's The Crucible, a study of the 17th Century witch hunt in New England, which was directed against the House Un-American
Activities Committee; and Galileo Galilei which Bertolt Brecht wrote attacking the Catholic Church for stifling intellectual freedom.¹

Whatever be the reason for Buero Vallejo's literary-historical distancing, the author uses the characters of Esquilache and Velázquez to exemplify politically this moral-ethical ideal. As with those exemplary characters of plays prior to 1958's Un soñador para un pueblo, characters who serve as examples for the man in the street, the principal quality which characterizes the exemplary protagonists on the political level is abnegation, abnegation in the sense that the character subjugates his personal interests to those of a scope of universal dimensions, be the interests moral, ethical, artistic, and/or political. Another parallel between the two groups of plays is Buero Vallejo's continued emphasis upon the need for a love relationship and the reputation for faithfulness in this regard that the exemplary characters enjoy. A third parallel struck between the two groups of plays is the effect of abnegation in the lives of those protagonists who practice it. Those who practice selflessness cause good by their example and reap rewards; those who act and live only to satisfy their own wants cause misery and unhappiness and are made to suffer for it.

It is clearly seen that Buero Vallejo feels that those who enjoy the prestige, the renown, the privileges of the ruling

class bear a greater burden of responsibility in being exemplary, in setting a good example for those people whose lives they control. For it is that the people, who keep a watchful and expectant eye on their leaders, look to the lives of the privileged minority as a guideline for their own actions. What Buero Vallejo calls for in his political leaders is a heroism that bids the chosen few be superior to any urge of selfish interest whether or not those interests be their own, even if it means taking a stand tantamount to rebellion against those who are superior even to them.

The negative criticism of the first of these plays, Un soñador para un pueblo, results from the failure to see that Buero Vallejo's ethical intention in the drama is bound up with Esquilache's behavior and not with the reasons for his expulsion from Spain. To be sure, the playwright sees the ignorance, the insularity, the selfishness, the vengefulness of the masses and some of his enemies in the court as the causes for Esquilache's downfall, but Buero Vallejo intended the work to be more than a dramatized version of an historical event. It is evident that the majority of critics expected an historical dramatization. One critic, and a representative one, V. Fernández Asís in his review of the play complains:

Buero Vallejo desvaloriza su drama por utilizar no más que la anécdota en estampas, en láminas iluminadas y candorosas de buenos y malos. La obra es poco menos que un discurso, un largo discurso, casi un informe forense de Esquilache sobre sí mismo y la incomprensión de su pueblo... El noble propósito de Buero Vallejo, mal expresado dramáticamente es la denuncia de la conspiración
del atraso, la mugre, las fuerzas feudales frente al poderoso hálito de modernización y europeización de los ilustrados de XVIII.  

Other critics seize upon the anecdotal aspects of the play; they cavil at the author for reasons that hint of dramatic insufficiency. But what preoccupied Buero Vallejo in the play's conception was the presentation of the admirable motives, character, and reaction of Esquilache in the face of the adverse events, not the events and their causes themselves. In a word, the playwright's superficial treatment of the conflict between Esquilache and the forces opposed to him was intentional. Esquilache serves then as a figurehead for Buero Vallejo's ideal political cant. Esquilache is larger than life as he expresses his ideal, his faithfulness, his selflessness, his honesty, his progressiveness. Buero Vallejo does make a token gesture to render Esquilache and his actions more human when, with all humility, the man declares that the setbacks that he endures are just. But it serves little purpose. The characterization of Esquilache is so idealized that it has been charged as a major defect of the play. To this criticism Buero Vallejo gives the reply in which his dramatic intention becomes obvious at once.

qué la figura de Esquilache resulte embellecida en la obra es muy posible. Yo he dicho que no intente historia estricta, sino drama. Pero también he apuntado


3. Antonio Buero Vallejo, Un soñador para un pueblo (Madrid: Alfil Ediciones, 1959), p. 102. (All subsequent references are to the above edition of Un soñador para un pueblo.)
como Esquilache reconoce al final de la obra que su actuación total distó de ser limpia. Todo ello quiere decir simplemente que, en uso de mis derechos de dramaturgo, he presentado al protagonista en una de esas etapas de la vida—posible tal vez en la suya real—en que un hombre es capaz de especial clarividencia y de especial abnegación.4

Once again it is abnegation. And the "clarividencia" of which Esquilache is capable is due to this abnegation that subordinates all personal interests to those which politically are those interests for which the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer was formed—the people. All the good that he accomplishes for the people, comes from his political sagacity and selflessness; all the bad, of course, from the ignorance and selfishness of those who bring about his downfall and the abrogation of his social reforms. In a self-effacing speech, Esquilache humbly accepts his defeat, telling Fernandita that his earlier selfishness has brought it all about. He explains:

Ahora es el momento de la verdad. Acaba de salir de aquí un egoísta a quien la ambición ha perdido, pero dentro queda otro... Esquilache.... He sido abnegado en mi vejez porque mi juventud fue ambiciosa.... Intrigué, adulé durante años.... No se puede intentar la reforma de un país cuando no se ha sabido conducir el hogar propio. (pp. 102-103 of the play)

Buero Vallejo omits any and all scenes in which an act of Esquilache could be deemed as unworthy of a great and good politician. There is not one attempt to delineate selfishness in his character. He is abnegation personified.

The plot of the play hinges on the revolt of the Spanish people during the reign of Carlos III in the eighteenth century—a revolt against Esquilache which ended with his exile to Italy. The uprising has come about because Esquilache has initiated social reforms which go against revered though pernicious customs. The people do not like it when, under a health improvement plan, he makes them clean up the city in an attempt to prevent a recurrence of the deadly fever which has taken so many lives. (p. 31) Esquilache himself realizes the dangers of circumventing a custom, when he issues the edict prohibiting the use of the long cape so dear to the Spanish heart—a prohibition effected in an attempt to prevent the crimes perpetrated by the ruffians garbed in the capes to avoid recognition—he knows that he may bring the roof down upon his head. Speaking of this edict curtailing the use of long capes, he says: "No es prudente violentar una costumbre aunque sea mala." (p. 22)

The ignorant masses and his enemies at court do frustrate his efforts, but this conflict, for however interesting it may be, serves no more than as the anecdotal aspect of the play. The importance of the work emerges in Esquilache's behaviour during these frustrations. It emerges in his ideals; his needs as a man; in the meaning of his life as a public servant. The emphasis is on the man in power rather than the man utilizing the power; the man's awareness that he holds political power not to benefit himself but the people, who may even misunderstand his motives.
Ricardo Domenech interprets the work as another of Buero Vallejo's cries for responsibility, a call to political responsibility in the same sense that *Las cartas boca abajo* was a call to domestic responsibility. Domenech declares:

El rey, Esquilache, Ensenada, Villasanta, el pueblo, todos, son responsables de algo más que de sí mismos, puesto que están comprometidos en una situación. Todos somos responsables de nuestro tiempo y nuestro contorno. He dicho antes que hay un salto del plano de la culpabilidad al de la responsabilidad. En definitiva, acaso fuera mejor decir que lo hay de la responsabilidad individual doméstica (*Las cartas*) a la responsabilidad pública, ciudadana: Un soñador.

Domenech is correct in assuming that the play represents a call to political responsibility but his assumption is too limited. It is true that Buero Vallejo does want his politician to be responsible, responsible to the people. Esquilache, quoting the Piscator de Villarroel provides ample proof of that. He tells Ensenada: "Sé una cosa: que ningún gobernante puede dejar de corromperse si no sueña ese sueño. 'Un personaje bien visto de la plebe no se rehusa de entrar en un negocio por el bien del público; pero le cuesta entrar en el significado del enigma.' Son palabras del Piscator de Villarroel." (p. 102)

But Buero Vallejo's ideal politician is not only responsible in his spirit of abnegation, but also a visionary because of his abnegation. It should not be forgotten that Buero Vallejo wants a soñador for the people. By this Buero Vallejo implies that in forgetting his own petty wants, the ideal politician is

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able to envision a better future for the people and the means to achieve that future. Esquilache is fortunate in having a king such as Carlos III who appreciates his virtues, thus allowing him to carry out the beneficial reforms of which he dreams. He is doubly fortunate inasmuch as the king gives voice to his appreciation and also remains loyal to him during the points of crisis. On an occasion, Carlos III tells Esquilache why he holds him in such high esteem. He says that he is his favorite because he is a visionary with a highly refined conscience. The others of his court disgust him because they speak with pedantry to hide their baseness and selfishness. He tells Esquilache that he and Spain need visionaries such as he and that they need them for that good example that must be set for the masses.

España necesita soñadores que sepan de números como tú.... Hace tiempo que yo sueño también con una reforma moral, y no sólo con reformas externas. Más adelante, si Dios nos sigue ayudando, te necesito para esa campaña, y si quiere iniciarla tú con un ejemplo de rectitud tan atrevido, te doy desde ahora en nombre de mi país, las gracias. Un minuto de retraso. Y al rey debe enseñar también a los españoles la virtud de la puntualidad. (p. 57)

Buero Vallejo's intention in his characterization of Esquilache becomes even more emphatic in that he wants him to serve as "un ejemplo de rectitud." This rectitude born of selflessness serves not only the country but also Esquilache in good stead as the self-respect born of it sustains him in defeat. As the king tells the people of his decision to exile his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Esquilache says: "Es que el rey sale al balcón... le aclaman.... Les acaba de decir que seré desterrado.... Pero no importa. Ahora sé que he vencido." (p. 97)
Later when his arch-enemy, Ensenada, confronts him, Esquilache tells him why he has won the moral victory, even though he has been exiled. He tells him why abnegation has helped him to transcend such setbacks as the imminent exile.

Esquilache.---Valgo menos que tú. Y sin embargo, soy más grande que tú. El hombre más insignificante es más grande que tú si vive para algo que no sea él mismo. Desde hace veinte años tú ya no crees en nada. Y estás perdido.

Ensenada.---¿Y en qué podemos creer nosotros los que trabajábamos para el pueblo? Ya ves que no hay pueblo. La tragedia del gobernante es descubrirlo.

Esquilache.---¡Buen pretexto para la mala política! Pero ellos podrían decir lo contrario: que su tragedia es, ver como al más grande político le pierde la ambición... (pp. 99-100)

Ensenada scoffs at Esquilache, telling him that there is nothing in which to believe. Esquilache faces him resolutely and tells him that the politician can and must believe in the greatest thing of all---in the people. (p. 101)

It is in this sense that the character of Esquilache represents the political ideal to Buero Vallejo. He is a true servant of the people as the good of the people is what motivates his political acts. The reforms for which Esquilache labors are for the benefit of the people and their future well-being. He paves streets, installs street lights, cleans the city, improves and provides educational opportunities always thinking of the improvement of the lot of the people. To Esquilache, the people come first, even when he has to make the momentous decision that ultimately brings about his political downfall. Esquilache could maintain by force his place in power, yet he eschews such a course
of action even though he believes that he can do much good by
continuing in power. But he abominates war and tells the king
why he chooses to give himself up to the forces of opposition ra-
ther than give into such petty personal motives as vengeance.

Así pues, he llegado al momento supremo de mi vida.
Debo elegir, y elegir bien.... De un lado, la fuerza.
O sea, mi continuidad personal, por lo pronto. La oca-
sión de devolver golpe por golpe, de atrapar y fusilar
a los traidores de vengar atropellos renuentes..., de
imponer, sí, de imponer lo bueno a quienes no quieren lo
bueno.... Y de seguir moldeando a esta bella España, y
de dar un poco de luz y de alegría...o algunos corazones
angustiados que la merecen.... La vida, de nuevo. Con
sus luchas, sus riesgos, su calor...y también, el fuego:
el infierno en la tierra, y ahora por mi mano. Cincuenta
muertos en Madrid no son nada. Caerán a miles por las
llanuras. Una mujer forzada es un gran dolor, pero la
guerra la multiplica.... España entera, roja de sangre.
Esa misma plaza, dentro de unos minutos, barrida por la
fusilería.... La política. Y ahora, desnuda, en su más
cruzo aspecto. El poder, pero cueste lo que cueste...
Sí. Sería una hermosa embriaguez. Mandar de nuevo.
Restituir, todavía la sonrisa a un rostro amado. (p. 94)

Esquilache's political selflessness has gone unappreciated
by the masses, the masses who come under Suero Vallejo's fairly
heavy fire. He levels almost every charge possible against them,
yet does not see them without redemption. This quality to be
eternally ungrateful is not simply a reaction to Esquilache, but
rather characteristic of the people reacting to their leader, at
least characteristic of the Spanish people. Such is the opinion
that comes from the play, as in the conversation that takes place
when another minister, Ensenada, discusses politics with Esqui-
lache.

¿Es que han dado nunca la menor muestra de compren-
der? ¿Te agradecen siquiera lo que haces por ellos? Le
ha engrandecida el país, les has dado instrucción, montepíos, les has quitado el hambre. Les has enseñado, en suma, que la vida puede ser dulce.... Pues bien: te odian. (p. 22)

Not only are they ungrateful, but also bigoted, insular, impious, narrow-minded, anti-intellectual, infantile, vengeful, overly proud and somewhat mad. Campos, another of the retinue of Carlos III makes this last observation to Ensenada.

Campos.--Es fabulosa la cantidad de locos que da este país.
En mi tiempo lo aprendí bien. También me llegaban montones de cosas como esa.... ¿qué se puede hacer con un pueblo así? (p. 18)

Indeed, what can be done with such a people? Esquilache answers this question: "El mes pasado he concedido quince becas más. Jóvenes estudiantes de matemáticas, de botánica... Si Dios nos ayuda, a la vuelta de unos años, el país tendrá gente apta para todo." (p. 20)

The blame for the Spaniard's baseness is then laid at the door of ignorance. He, the Spaniard, is redeemable insofar as he is educable. When earlier in the play Esquilache discusses political rule with Ensenada, he likens the Spanish public to children. Ensenada tells Esquilache that he should not forget the motto "todo para el pueblo, pero sin el pueblo," adding that "el pueblo siempre es menor de edad." Esquilache answers him saying that the correct meaning has not been given to the words "sin el pueblo." He agrees that the motto should end with the words "sin el pueblo" but "no porque sea siempre menor de edad, sino porque todavía es menor de edad." (p. 23)
Nor is Esquilache alone in his estimation of the people. The king, Carlos III, states the same idea only in different words, affirming that a bit of educating is in order also.

El Rey.---(A Esquilache.) Los españoles son como niños. Se quejan cuando se les lava la basura. Pero nosotros les adecentaremos aunque protesten un poco. Y, si podemos, les enseñaremos también un poco de lógica y un poco de piedad, cosas ambas de las que se encuentran bastante escasas, quizá preferirían a un tirano; pero nosotros hemos venido a reformar no a tiranizar. (p. 56)

And so it is that the people effect the exile of their soñador because of their inability to appreciate his attempts at reform. They cannot see that all he does, has done, or intends to do is for their good; that it has grown not only out of his sense of duty, out also out of love for Spain and all that she represents. Because of their ignorance they are unable to understand the wisdom of Esquilache's pleas for the winds of change that can only come from without Spain if they are to restore Spain to her greatness. Esquilache says:

He aprendido a amar a esta tierra y a sus cosas. Pero no es culpa nuestra si sus señorias, los que se creen genuinos representantes del alma español no son ya capaces de añadir nueva gloria a tantas glorias muertas.... No hay cosa peor que estar muerto y no advertirlo. Sus señoras lamentan que los principales ministros sean extranjeros, pero el rey nos trajo consigo de Italia porque el país nos necesitaba para levantarse. Las naciones tienen que cambiar si no quieren morir definitivamente. (pp. 42-43)

Esquilache is admirably selfless to the end. As stated before he chooses personal disgrace in exile rather than visit another war on the people. He tells Carlos III: "Vuestra majestad debe aceptar todas las peticiones de los rebeldes para evitar la
guerra." (p. 95) The petitions, of course, demand that Esquilache be exiled to Italy along with his wife and family. But if Esquilache does not deserve to be exiled, his wife and children do. It is in the affairs of the family that Esquilache makes his most colossal mistakes. Apropos of Buero Vallejo's social themes, Esquilache readily admits his failure in public life is attributed to his failure at home. He says to Fernandita: "No se puede intentar la reforma de un país cuando no se ha sabido conducir el hogar opropio. Nada se puede construir sobre fango si no es fango." (p. 103)

In an exchange of words with his wife, Doña Pastora, he lays the blame for his bad reputation squarely on her doorstep. Esquilache had sought favors for his children—one as a colonel in the army, another as a customs director and the third as an arch-deacon in the church—at her insistence. The favors had been granted much to his later regret. He says that he acceded to her requests because he thought that his sons would eventually become "buenos servidores de su país." But now he sees the error, the evil of nepotism, no matter how good the original intentions. Esquilache reminds his wife how their children have turned out in the various favored posts: "Unos petimetrís, unos zascandiles de tertulias es lo que han resultado. Ni siquiera decir que los tengo; nunca los veo. Catorce horas de trabajo al día me parecen pocas para compensar la gandulería de esos inútiles." (p. 25)

But if the children are bad, the wife is worse. She intrigues politically to advance herself materially; she has
adulterous affairs; she is the epitome of the oase user of power. So much is she a detriment to Esquilache's public life and political efforts that he tells her: "Tú eres la culpable...de mi mala fama. Entre tú y nuestros hijos...se destruye mi obra entera todos los días...y ya no hay solución. Ya sólo queda...un remedio.... He decidido pedir al rey la renovación de todos los cargos de nuestros hijos...y nuestra separación." (p. 47)

As Esquilache is the ideal politician, he is a man of his word and does exactly as he tells Doña Pastora he is going to do. He asks the king to revoke his children's posts and to separate him legally from his wife. But it is all too late. The damage has been done and his reputation sullied irrevocably. Doña Pastora has been the very antithesis of the ideal wife. It falls to a humble serving girl Fernandita to fulfill those needs that the man has for a wife. She is a confidente with an understanding ear. She takes care of those personal needs that fall within the radius of wifely devotion. She is his fearless defender. She fulfills these conjugal duties, save that of the sexual, so admirably that Esquilache tells her in gratitude, "Ya no estoy solo. Ya tengo una verdadera amiga." (p. 63) And as he is on the point of leaving for exile he thanks her for the great good she has been in these times of strife, pointing up that man's happiness lies in his fulfillment through a woman. "Dios te guarde, Fernandita. Y gracias por haberme hecho sentir, aunque sea tardivamente, ¡y con tanta tristeza!..., el sabor de la felicidad." (p. 104)
So it is that Esquilache, the selfless politician, suffers not only because of court intrigue, public ignorance and apathy, but also because of the demeaning selfishness of his wife and children. Though Esquilache is stripped of his power and exiled, the play ends positively because Esquilache in his role as an exemplary proves to be superior to the calamitous events which befall him. Buero Vallejo includes the wantonness of Esquilache's wife not only to throw into contrast Esquilache's superior character, but also to show the abuse of advantages by the power elite. At one point, all too aware of her corrupt ways, Esquilache tells his wife: "Hay mujeres en la galera por cosas así, pero con la diferencia de que han estafado menos." (p. 46)

The play is indeed a comedia ejemplar, an exemplary mirror for those in political power, stressing a political ethic of abnegation in vital conflict with personal interests and mass ignorance. Just as this play is a reflection of the way to rule the people, so is the next work of Buero Vallejo Las meninas, an "espejo de príncipe" reflecting the ideal ethical attitude of the power elite toward the select artistic minority.

Most critics realize that the play, through historical distancing, lays bare a moral-ethical problem vital to post-war Spain and that the attendant solution bespeaks rebellion against authority. This definition of the play's problem has become the object of critical speculation.

The reviewer for Estafeta Literaria sees a definite ethical relationship between Las meninas and Un soñador para un pueblo and
in his multi-faceted interpretation of the play, he sees it as the battle of love for truth versus low passion; of conformity versus rebellion, as a defense of the liberty of the artist. The contenders are the unique artist (Velázquez) against the hypocritical mediocre society (Felipe IV and his court). 6

Adolfo Prego, the reviewing critic for Primer Acto is largely in accord with Aragónés as he too sees the play's conflict as one which involves the defense of the intellectual against mediocre society. He adds that the battle that Velázquez fights is the battle of the artist in Spain today. To Prego, Velázquez is also the symbol of a people poorly governed. He maintains that Velázquez wins ultimately through his virtue. 7

Rafael Vázquez Zamora interprets the artist's characterization as vital in two principal ways: as "portavoz teatral de una España espiritualmente elevada que hace una noble crítica de un país" and as the symbol of those gifted Spaniards who need the air of freedom in order to develop their independent artistic impulses. 8 So again the theme of artistic liberty is reiterated. And when this theme is broached once more in the review of Elías Gómez Picazo in Madrid, he declares that the play is "una

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apasionada, pero bien argumentada defensa de la nureza de inten-
ción, tanto en arte como en política, frente a la hipocresía, la
debilidad, la envidia, las intrigas cortesanas, los juicios teme-
rarios...."9

The critic who has perhaps written the most on this play
is Ricardo Domenech. He has postulated that Buero Vallejo has
meant to portray the intellectual rebel fighting for his artistic
liberty. He equates the battle that Velázquez wages as one between
the immorality of the formalism of society and morality of the
spirit; of individual initiative. To him the example of Veláz-
quez represents a call to justice and authentic morality. Veláz-
quez is the synthesis of "solidad radical en un mundo cortesano
y decadente."10

Domenech thinks that the play is an expression of the mo-
ment of crisis in intellectual post-war Spain. The problems that
faced Velázquez are those that face the intellectuals, the artists
of present-day Spain. To them remains the task of choosing "entre
la verdad o la mentira, entre el compromiso o la evasión, entre
ser el hombre rebelde o ser el hombre domesticado; doble faz que
las horas de encrucijado, de crisis y de metamorfosis ofrecen a
quienes han tenido la suerte y la desdicha de vivirlas."11

de Las meninas de Buero Vallejo," Madrid, 10 de diciembre de 1960,
p. 23.

10. Domenech, loc. cit.

11. Ricardo Domenech, "Inciso sobre teatro," Insula,
He believes that in making Suero Vallejo insists that the artists, writers and intellectuals must accept their responsibility. Domenech does not state in his article what he thinks the acceptance of this responsibility entails, but in the work, rebellion against oppressive authority is tacitly comprised.

Domenech sees Suero Vallejo's Velázquez in great contrast to the Velázquez "acúlico, aristocrático y cortesano" who has come down through history. The Velázquez that Suero Vallejo has cast is "energico, consciente, rebelde...mucho más cerca de la problemática de la sensibilidad de la querencia, del sueño, de la esperanza de nuestro tiempo." Boiled down to essentials the play is a cry for "la plena libertad creadora del artista." Domenech insists that one has to be myopic not to see this, and not only myopic but also "hay que tener muchas ganas de no ir al oculista."12

It cannot be denied that any or all of the ideas projected by the critics are to be found in Las meninas, but it can be challenged that Suero Vallejo intended Velázquez, and what he in courage stood for intellectually and ethically, to be a model for the intellectuals, the artists and the writers of post-war Spain. Suero Vallejo intended Velázquez to be a model not for the artistic and intellectual elite, but rather for the power elite who in the course of their lives would arbitrarily impose form and ethical-moral standards upon the creative efforts of those who would come under their jurisdiction.

What is mistakenly thought to be preachments for rebellion against authority is actually an exhortation to steadfastness in one's moral-ethical position, as in his moral posture Velázquez most definitely includes loyalty to his king. Velázquez' intellectualizing permeates the play. One need but read the play once, and superficially at that, to see that his attitudes before life are presented as desired ones. The fact need not be proved that Velázquez is ideally exemplary in his assent to right principles which guide his conduct and his art. And that he is an "espejo de príncipe" and not a rebellious figurehead for the intellectual and artistic elite is almost as patent. To be sure, the conflict in which Velázquez finds himself involved does present opportunities for the defense of artistic liberty against the censorious governmental authority. It thereby gives rise to the belief that the play is a diatribe for artistic liberty, but Suero Vallejo pointedly contrasts the ethic of Velázquez with that of the king and his court. And most significantly the moral choice to be made in the play is not one that faces Velázquez. He is unequivocal in his moral beliefs. Rather it is the king who finds himself in a moral dilemma in which a decision has to be made. That Velázquez' example is timeless, transcendental is established early in the play and reinforced regularly until the dénouement when his didactic function is made clear. The foreshadowing of

what to expect in his character is introduced in the beginning when during a conversation with Doña Marcela, a lady of the court, Velázquez remarks: "Recordar viejas historias es lo que nos queda a los viejos, señora." When she replies that a man such as he never is old, Velázquez responds "Ni mozo." (p. 30) The implication here is that the court painter is a man without time. Later when he is deep in talk with the Princess María Teresa over the necessity of learning to forgive one another's trespasses, she strengthens this archetypal pattern for Velázquez' character when she says: "¡Sé que vivo en un mundo de pecadores! ¡Es la mentira lo que me cuesta perdonar! Cuando paso ante el retrato del rey Luis, suelo chascarme. 'Saludo a mi prometido' digo y mis damas ríen.... Pero yo pienso, ¿qué me esperas?... Ojalá el rey Luis... se os parezca." (p. 47)

The princess is a sensitive, intellectually oriented girl who is most aware of the transgressions of her fellow man, especially those of her father, the king, and his court. That she is informed of Velázquez' moral superiority is not unique. Felipe IV also believes that Velázquez is something special. In a dream that he retells to his confessor, Velázquez' moral stature is symbolically contrasted with his own which finds its equation in the dwarf Nicolasillo.

Anoche tuve un mal sueño, reverendo padre...sí: me veía en un salón lleno de pinturas y espejos...al fondo...estaba Velázquez tras una mesa. Tocó una campanilla y alguien me empujaba hacia él. Yo iba medio desnudo pero me veía al pasar ante las lunas ataviado con el manto real y la corona.... Cuando yo estaba cerca, vi que la
altura de mi pintor de cámara era enorme... semejaba un Goliat, y su gran cabeza me sonreía... Al fin levantó una mano de coloso y dijo: Nicolasillo y tú tenéis que crecer. (p. 63)

Nicolasillo, the physical dwarf; Felipe, the moral, intellectual, spiritual dwarf; Velázquez, the moral, intellectual, spiritual giant. When the conflict of the play reaches its climax, and it is clear that Velázquez' behavior has been the result of his decision to remain firm in his dedication to live and seek the truth, it is also beyond a doubt then that his function is that of an example to the king. Before the action of the play began, Velázquez had chosen to follow the path of truth regardless of what it might cost him. His every act in the play was then engendered by this noble decision. There was actually no moral conflict for him. The dilemma seemingly Velázquez' is actually the king's, and his daughter María Teresa reminds him of this fact. She also admonishes him to be wary of his decision regarding Velázquez' punishment before the offices of the Inquisition which Felipe IV represents. She boldly tells her father:

El ha elegido. Eligid ahora vos. Pensadlo bien: es un hombre muy grande el que os mira. Os ha hablado, como podría hacerlo hecho vuestra consciencia. ¿Destráis a vuestra consciencia del palacio?... Podéis castigar a Velázquez...y a vuestra hija por el delito de haberos hablado quizá por primera y última vez, como verdaderos amigos. Elegid ahora entre la verdad y la mentira. (p. 124)

Velázquez' example has been efficacious and the king, though grudgingly, does opt for the side of truth and pardon for Velázquez. But what are these acts of Velázquez that are so
exemplary and which bring about his accusation before the Holy Office of the Inquisition?

Actually in the play, Velázquez does not have to make any momentous moral decision except that of making up his mind whether or not he should harbor a decrepit fugitive from justice. And it does not represent a great moral decision for the painter as he does not debate with himself over the choice he must make. He simply takes the old man in out of humanitarian reasons.

Velázquez' virtues are catalogued in the expository talk there is about the moral decision he made prior to the play's action. His rectitude is also revealed in the opinions he himself expresses about certain circumstances of court life. Velázquez is truly a paragon. He is a discreet, modest, brave, honest, kind, charitable, forgiving and intellectually sensitive man who loves children, hates slavery, and believes in being faithful to one's wife. It is because of all these virtues that Velázquez finds himself standing in judgment before the king. The charges are brought against him for having painted inappropriate works. These paintings are deemed unworthy of a court painter not only because they are obscene, but also because he has been disrespectful in his portrayal of royalty and in his depiction of the country's historical glories. It actually comes out that these charges are trumped up by his jealous cousin. (pp. 103-104) Velázquez' painting of Venus is obscene as it is "una pintura de mujer tendida de estandadas y sin vestido o cendal que cubra la carne." (p. 101)
Outrage is also expressed over La rendición de Breda, a painting disrespectful of Spain's military glory. It is maintained that the work "más parece una escena de corte que una hazaña militar." He is also charged with having painted too few religious canvases. And as for his works on a religious theme, his accusers complain: "Son muy pocas y no creo que muevan a devoción ninguna, pues también parece que sólo ausca en ellas lo que tiene de mundano lo divino." (p. 112)

What constitutes the charge of his being disrespectful in his painting of royal personages is that "entre los perros o los bufones que él pinta y...sus majestades, no admite distancias." (p. 111) In the defense of his art, Velázquez engages his accuser in a battle of wits in which he proves to his adversaries that nothing is obscene but thinking makes it so. (p. 106) He also declares that in defense against the other charges that he simply paints "el ver." To explain what he means by his dedication to painting what he sees, he takes the instance of painting color. He declares: "Yo pinté la nubecilla verdosa porque me ha parecido advertir que las tintas carmesíes suscitan a su alrededor un velo verdoso." (p. 114)

To Velázquez a painter "es un ojo que ve la Creación en toda su gloria." Seeing creation in all of its glory means seeing nature in all of its ambivalence. He demonstrates his point by declaring that the flesh is sinful but then, on the other hand, it is "gloriosa." (p. 107) Earlier in the play Velázquez tells María Teresa that "la verdad es una carga terriole" (p. 46) and
in his judgment before the king he is made to feel the reality of those words. Felipe tells him that if he will declare himself repentant of the charge and recognize obedience to his royal person, he will forget the accusations. Velázquez decides to keep the awful burden of the truth and responds to the king's suggestion: "Es una elección, señor. De un lado, la mentira una vez más. Una mentira tentadora: sólo puede traerme beneficios. Del otro la verdad. Una verdad peligrosa que ya no remedia nada." (pp. 122-123) This choice he must make is so dangerous that it leads him into a rebellious position against the king. He tells Felipe IV: "Yo le ofrezco mi verdad estéril...la verdad, señor, de mi profunda, de mi irremediable rebeldía." (p. 123)

In this rebellion against the king's wishes, Velázquez makes reference to Pedro Briones, the fugitive whom he has harbored from justice. Briones, he tells the king, was a fugitive from the law for the very reason that he Velázquez now rebels—that is because of the force of royal authority. Referring to Briones, he says to Felipe IV: "¿Quién le forzó a la rebeldía? Mató porque su capitán se lucraba con el hambre de los soldados. Se alzó contra los impuestos porque los impuestos están hundiendo al país. ¿Es que el poder sólo sabe acallar con sangre lo que el mismo incuba? Pues, si así lo haces, con sangre cubre sus propios errores." (p. 123)

Velázquez finds that he too is being forced into his rebellion by the king and his court. The choice offered him has been unfair. He tells the king: "Estamos viviendo de mentiras o
Poor enough choice: silence or lies. Since he has broken with silence, he refuses to pervert his ethnic oy lying. The king warns him that he is overstepping his bounds, but Velázquez feels that since he has committed himself to the truth that he must fulfill its charge and face up to the king. He tells Felipe that in the country hunger and pain are on the increase; the very air is poisoned and truth has to hide its face as it is no longer tolerated. He ends up commanding the king to punish him. It is at this moment that the Princess María Teresa tells her father that it is he, the king—the judge, who must choose between the truth and lie, that he must be careful in punishing Velázquez, his conscience. The king vacillates and says that he should punish both Velázquez and the Princess María Teresa—the painter with death and his daughter with exile, but his fecklessness prevents him. Felipe only commands that since Velázquez will not destroy his Venus, then it must never be shown to anyone, nor is the painting to leave his house while he is still alive. He also bids everyone to be silent regarding the outcome of the inquisition into Velázquez' works. He tells them that they are to act as if nothing had happened.

It is probably because of this last scene and not because of the fictionalized account of Velázquez' life that Buero Vallejo has called the play a fantasy. The idea that a king, who enjoys the convenience of absolute authority, would concede his power before the demands of an impertinent daughter and an intransigent,
outspoken court painter is somewhat fantastic. But then too, Buero Vallejo could not go against the limitation imposed upon him by history and have Felipe mete out punishment commensurate with Velázquez' boldness.

As discussed previously, the majority of critics are in accord regarding the play's theme: Velázquez' rebellion. To them the play is one of a "spirit in rebellion against the State personified in his king and lord, Philip IV." But in interpreting the theme of the play, it must be remembered that if Velázquez is the spirit of rebellion he is a passive spirit. He takes no rebellious initiative. His choice is actually not to rebel but to remain steadfast in his position regarding the truth. Whatever rebellion there is, as he tells the king, is forced upon him.

María Teresa brings the point to bear that Velázquez' moral stance is the stand that the king, Felipe IV, should maintain. When she tells her father that Velázquez has acted as his conscience, she adds:

Podéis optar por seguir engendrando hijos con mujerzuelas...y castigar a quien tuvo la osadía de enseñaros que se puede ser fiel a la esposa; podéis seguir adormecido entre aduladores que le aborrecen porque es íntegro, mientras ellos, como el señor marqués, venden prebendos y se enriquecen a costa del hambre del país, podéis escandalizar ante una pintura para ocultar los pecados del palacio. (p. 124)

The point is whether or not Felipe IV will recognize Velázquez' exemplary assent to right principles, not how he is to decide the disposition of the charges made against the painter. Velázquez' life is shown in superior contrast to that of Felipe IV. This must be made clear. Velázquez' praiseworthy life is not presented as one artistically, intellectually, ethically exemplary in itself, but in contrast with the mendacious, bourgeois, formalistic ideas of the king and his court. This is the principal dramatic intention of the play. It cannot be denied that rebellion does enter into the play's thematic circumference. It does, but only as an unavoidable consequence of the force that a moral position wields in a corrupt society.

There are many other aspects of the social-political considerations in the play that could be discussed here but they need not be dealt with to prove that the play is an "espejo de príncipe" ---a play fused with a political ethic. In Las meninas Buero Vallejo takes the Spanish public to task for its shortcomings as he did in Un soñador para un pueblo; he also continues to pontificate about the necessity and good of a healthy conjugal relationship. But the emphasis is on Velázquez' dedication to seeking truth in the varied aspects of his life, the artistic, intellectual, conjugal. The modus operandi in this quest is, of course, the spirit of abnegation. The exigencies of his moral objective must be fulfilled before those of a personal nature. He knows that if he were to tell the facile lie, subvert the truth as he sees it in his painting he would be spared the molestations, the
humiliations, the disfavor of the court. But he refuses to com-
promise his art and his moral view for the convenience of court
favor. He, like Esquilache, sees himself dedicated to serving
this large moral purpose. Esquilache placed the interests of the
people over his own; Velázquez the quest for intellectual, artist-
ic truth over the pleasure of indulgence at court. Since Velázquez
is the conscience of the king, then it is that the royal view
toward art, toward the conjugal relationship, the spirit of ab-
negation which sparks the fire of the painter's life should find
its embodiment in the king, in him who rules the people. What it
is then that Buero Vallejo is saying is that the king should, like
Velázquez, place himself at the service of altruistic ideals rather
than his own narrow interests. His view toward artistic expression
should be of the ideal dimension that precludes the freedom to
seek the truth artistically. His royal demeanor should be that
mirrored in Velázquez; just, modest, discreet, brave, honest,
kind, charitable, forgiving, intellectually and artistically sen-
sitive; a man who loves children, hates slavery and believes in
being faithful to one's wife. All is engendered by the spirit of
abnegation. The ethical purpose does not represent the thematic
statement of the play in its totality; however, it is that which
finds concordance with Buero Vallejo's other plays. It is easy to
understand why Ricardo Domenech maintains that the playwright is
attacking present-day political conditions even though the author
has situated those conditions in the 17th century.
This defense of the artist's right to express truth as he sees it is a preoccupation that Buero Vallejo expands into full thematic development in his succeeding work, El concierto de San Ovidio. This ironically titled work which he has labelled "parábola" made its debut to review notices in November of 1962 in the Teatro Goya of Madrid. Since that opening night it has received more critical attention than all his other plays save historia de una escalera. The play does not properly belong in these deliberations concerning the ethic in Buero Vallejo's plays as the work is not a comedia ejemplar in the sense that the others are. To be sure it is a diatribe against the unethical fascist control over artistic expression, yet Buero Vallejo breaks with precedence and presents no positive ethical statement regarding the exploitation and humiliation that the blind musicians suffer at the hands of the scoundrel Valendín. The playwright does espouse rebellion against the forces that the unscrupulous entrepreneur represents, forces that would pervert man's artistic dignity. As in Un soñador para un pueblo and Las meninas, Buero has used an historical figure and situation as the nucleus around which he builds his drama. In El concierto de San Ovidio he uses the institution for the blind, the Hospice des quinze Vingts, founded in Paris by the king, St. Louis, in the 13th century. Buero Vallejo's most attentive critic Ricardo Domenech immediately sees the similarity of purpose in the historical distancing used in this play with that of the two preceding works.
Ante esta obra, lo primero que salta a la vista es que el autor prosigue la línea iniciada con Un soñador para un pueblo y continuada con Las meninas. Suero no remite a una situación histórica cuya problemática guarda una estrecha semejanza con la problemática de una situación presente.\textsuperscript{15}

Domenech also comments on an important difference between El concierto de San Ovidio and Un soñador para un pueblo and Las meninas. He states that "no había que sacar a ningún rey a escena ni tampoco figuras como Esquilache o Velázquez." He allows that this has permitted Suero Vallejo more imaginative latitude in his thematic development of man's exploitation of man and the subsequent struggle for freedom. He does not give a reason for this omission, yet once the play's intention emerges, the one important distinction between El concierto de San Ovidio and the other two is that this last play has no central figure to be held up as exemplary in his ethical-political viewpoint, that finds a parallel with the characters of Esquilache and Velázquez. There is, however, a likeness between Velázquez and David of El concierto de San Ovidio. They are both forced to rebel in defense of their particular art, against those who would limit their creative expression. Velázquez rebels by being steadfast in his ethical stance; David because of emotional frustration and outrage "contra la actividad pasiva de sus compañeros y contra la tiranía y los métodos inhumanos del negociante Valentin.\textsuperscript{16}


Myriad interpretations of the play exist as well as comparisons with *En la ardiente oscuridad*, an earlier work in which most of the characters are also blind. The majority of the analyses are in agreement that the play is a commentary on post-war Spain. Arriving at this posture is fairly easy as Buero Vallejo did label the work a parable. But those critics do not agree on the definition of the moral or spiritual truth to be found in this parable on post-war Spain.

Domenech thinks that ultimately the work is one depicting "la explotación del hombre por el hombre...y la lucha del hombre por la libertad."17 José Monleon agrees with Domenech and adds that Buero Vallejo's intention was "despertar, educar en cada espectador una conciencia de la dignidad humana."18

Jean Paul Borel in his lengthy prologue to an edition of the play says that the work embodies the transcendental significance of man faced by his eternal limitations, limitations symbolized by the physical blindness of the characters, that is, the principal character, David.19

The only article which mentions the play as the defense of rebellion against the authority that would constrict artistic

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expression is an unsigned review in the magazine Aulas. That anonymous author declares:

Lo que Suero se propone no es la narración de las desventuras de unos pobres ciegos, sino que se trata de un ejemplo, una parábola que pretende enseñar a los españoles y a todos los hombres del mundo que por muchas que sean las limitaciones que pesen sobre un hombre o un pueblo, éste siempre será capaz, si se lo propone seriamente de conseguir una verdadera obra de arte, cualquier cosa trascendente. Y si no llegara a lograrlo, tiene, al menos la obligación de intentarlo, ya que, en último término, el que le impone la coacción, colocada en determinadas circunstancias resulta estar tan limitado como él.  

The reviewer like most others concedes that exploitation of man by man and the fight for freedom are implicit, yet he gives importance to the fact that those exploited are clíni músicos, that is, blind artists, not simply blind men. However, he does not develop this idea. Many critics see similarity between El concierto de San Ovidio and Las meninas but only in the same manner as the already quoted Domenech: that the plays are set in the historical past and that the protagonists rebel against those who would restrict them. They do not attach importance to the protagonists being artists.

The ethical implications of the play are fused in the plot that begins when, one day, to the Hospice des quinze Vingts, the institute for the blind in Paris, comes a "negociante," Luis María Valendín. He has a plan that he cleverly presents to the prioress of the institution. He tells her that in September's

festival of San Ovidio, he is going to open a cafe with an orchestra. He proposes that it be made up of some of the blind musicians from the Hospice. He further explains that he will teach them by ear the songs that they are to play. By becoming members of this band, the blind musicians can help to maintain themselves in the world—a responsibility that has rested principally on the shoulders of the institute. After much discussion and explanation the group decides to accept Valendín's offer as it will assure them not only more to eat than they get in the Hospice, but also a chance to get more women. David, one of the blind and the only one with musical ability tells them that though they have agreed to play in the orchestra, it is for the wrong reasons. He tells them: "¡Haoéis creído decir sí, pero habéis dicho no! ¡Aceptarís por la comida, por las mozas! Pero si pensáis en vuestros violines os come el pánico. Tenéis que decir sí a vuestros violines.... ¡Puede hacerse hermanos! ¡Cada cual aprenderá su parte de oído, y habrá orquesta de ciegos!" 21

After the group goes off with the impresario Valendín and his common, morally-loose, woman Adriana, trouble begins to set in. Valendín meets opposition from David when he explains how the group is to learn the various tunes. Valendín explains that Lefranc, a violinist, is going to teach them the melody and adds that "los demás no tenéis más que seguir la melodía...todos la misma y con el mismo ritmo..." (p. 27) David asks why they don't learn the different parts of harmony for each song, but Valendín says that "la melodía es la misma para todos." (p. 27) David tells him that he and the group could easily learn the various parts, but Valendín replies that the parts have not been written down. David persists, allowing that they could be transcribed. When Valendín says that there would be too much work involved, David insists that he himself would do it. He beseeches Valendín: "¡Podríamos! Yo mismo, si vos lo permitís, me comprometo a aprenderlas y a enseñarlas a cada una...Yo..., si queréis...no me asusta el trabajo." (p. 28)

But Valendín puts him off with false words of placation.

Later when the violinist Lefranc arrives to teach them the various melodies, he clashes with David. Their conflict is brought before Valendín; David explains his position, a position little different from that which had him at odds with Valendín. "Cualquiera con oído puede seguir a un cantante con segunda voz. ¿Por qué no va a poder darla un violin? ¿y más aún un violoncello!" (p. 37)

David meets with Valendín's characteristic resistance to any artistic initiative. He says that though David may have an
ear for music, the others are just so many "rascarripas." David asks him why he wants them to play for him if they are so bad. Valindín hedges. He cannot tell the insurgent David of his plans to dress them in ridiculous costumes with hats fashioned like enormous donkey ears and out-sized glasses over their blind eyes. He, instead, begins to harangue. He tells David that he is lucky to know his charity. He says that another violinist, Bernier, father of six, had been forced to come to Paris every autumn to work as a "calderero y carpintero" until he, Valindín, helped him as he is now helping David's group. He tells David, who now does not want to return to the practice hall, to go through with the agreement: "Pero no todos quieren comprender la belleza de una sana filantropía." (p. 34) When David still persists that he and the others could learn the parts of harmony, Valindín tells him that they are losing time in contending. He reminds David: "Hijo, quiero dignificar vuestro trazo: que ganéis vuestra vida sin pedir limosna." (p. 35) After David has allowed himself to be led back into the practice hall, Adriana tells Valindín that he has been very hard on David. Valindín replies: "Soy duro porque soy eficaz." (p. 37) Later when it is learned that Lefranc, the musician, has thrown David and Donato out of the practice hall, Valindín cries: "No me digas que ese lunático se ha rebelado otra vez." Adriana explains: "Empezó a tocar a su manera y el muchacho lo siguió. Lefranc tuvo que echarlos." When Adriana sympathizes with them Valindín tells her: "Y Valindín los sacará de su
pobreza aunque sea a la fuerza." (pp. 45-46) Time passes and when the moment arrives for Valindín to outfit them in their ridiculous costumes, David begins to realize what is going on.

David. ---Queréis convertirnos en payasos.
Valindín. ---(Lento) Aunque así fuere. Los payasos ejercen un oficio honrado. A veces ganan tanto fama que el mismo rey los llama.
David. ---Nosotros no seremos payasos.
Valindín. ---¿Qué seréis entonces? ¿Muerto de hambre o de orgullo? (p. 62)

But David refuses to be treated in such a demeaning way; he starts to leave with his group but Valindín tells them that if they leave they will be jailed for having broken their contract with him. After the others in fear beseech David to stay and play, Valindín repeats his warning of jail. The overwhelmed David gives in, dons his degrading outfit and goes out with the others. The piteous spectacle that follows has the audience wild with delight. As time passes, Valindín takes the violins away from the blind musicians and Adriana, his woman, comes into intimate contact with David. She tells him that she used to be a singer and that she is what she is because of Valindín. He has ruined, trapped her as he has done David and the others. She incites David to rebellion when he tells her that he believes he will become accustomed to living under Valindín's oppression. She tells David:

¡Te vi llorar el primer día, cuando aquellos imbéciles se reían de vosotros! ¡Me daban ganas de gritar!... ¡Tú no debiste llorar! ¡Tú, no! Eso dejáselo a él, que también llora a veces...el muy cerdo. Tú debiste insultarlos a todos, sublevar a tus compañeros, volverle a él loco de rabia. ¡Yo lo esperaba! Me decía: ¡Ahora, ahora lo hace!... ¡Llevo años esperando ver...a un hombre! (p. 79)
David answers her saying that he and the other blind, the other blind artists, are not men. He adds: "Ese es nuestro más triste secreto. Somos como mujeres medrosas. Sonreímos sin ganas, adulamos a quien manda, nos convertimos en cayados... porque hasta un niño nos puede hacer daño." (p. 79) She listens in sympathy and says that she wants to help in any way that she can to improve their lot. He tells her that all that he does, the music he makes, is sustained by the thought of Melania de Salignac, a blind woman who has learned, amongst other things, to read, write and speak languages. Adriana tells him to forget about her as Melania is one of the rich—out of his class. As they talk, Donato, the youngest of the blind is mentioned. It seems that he is especially pitiful as he has never known love. Adriana vows to help him learn to love. Later Valindín approaches the band and says that since crowds are thinning out that they will have to learn new songs and move on to the fair of St. Germane. David refuses to go through the humiliating process again. He says that he will consent to learn the new songs only if one condition is granted to him. Referring to Valindín, he says:

¡Si él consiente en que yo, ¡Yo sólo! os vaya enseñando acompañamientos a todos. Cuando volvamos en febrero, ¡seremos una verdadera orquesta! ¡Seremos hombres, no los perros sabios en que nos ha convertido! ¡Aún es tiempo, hermanos! ¡Ayudadme! (un silencio) ¡Tú amaste la música, Lucas! ¡Di tú que sí! (p. 86)

When he is reminded that they do not have their violins, David tells them that Valindín will let them have the instruments back because they, united, will demand it of him, emphasizing the
fact that they can do so only if they are united. The others tell him that he is a dreamer; for him to leave them alone; that money is more important than learning new songs in harmony. David angry at their lack of courage, their lack of hope, tells them: "Tenéis la suerte que os merecéis." (p. 86)

David is rebellious because he and the others are not allowed to play "a su manera;" because they are deprived of their instruments; because they all can only learn one melody, not being able to play harmony. He is happy and hopeful when he dreams of demanding of Valindín not freedom from the contract, but freedom to play as his artistic need would have him play. He does not rail against the physical blindness, but against the limitations placed on his artistic expression by Valindín. The other blind musicians are poor in spirit. Because of their fatalistic view of life they resign themselves to their unhappy lot. Nazario, one of the more outspoken of the group says of Valindín's oppression: "Pero si no lo hace él, lo haría hecho otro." (p. 87)

Meanwhile out of compassion, Adriaxia has helped the young Donato to learn about love. The consequences are that he falls in love with her and becomes jealous of David whom, he learns, she really loves. David, in a talk that he has with two of Valindín's hired men, Lefranc and Bernier, asks them to help him. They agree when he asks if they believe that the band is an indignity. He tells them that he is an artist and begs them to get him a job playing last violin in the comic opera. They remind him that he is bound
by contractual arrangements. Bernier tells David to be very careful; that he has heard people talking about him, David, in the cafe. David asks whom had been overheard.

Bernier.---A él...y al señor comisario de policía.
David.---¿Sabéis lo qué es una carta secreta?
Bernier.---No.
David.---¿Las venden?
Bernier.---Ellos creen que no se sabe, pero venden demasiadas...y se sabe. El padre viejo que estorba, el marido celoso... ¡Hala! ¡A pudrirse a la carcel!
David.---¿Será posible?
Bernier.---Todo es posible para quien lleva espada. Y el señor Valindín la lleva aunque no es de sangre noble...Yo le oí que..., si le fastidiábas más de la cuenta..., os metía en chirona con una carta secreta. (p. 91)

David has become too much trouble and will be dealt with in a tyrannical way. David asks Valindín if he can talk to him. Valindín tries to put him off by mistreating him, but David follows him into his house. Valindín at first is not aware that Adriana is there with the young Donato. She has been giving herself physically to him in order to save him from the loveless, twisted view that he has of the world. But Valindín suspects something when he sees Adriana dishevelled and half-dressed. He discovers Donato in the bedroom, jumps to truthful conclusions and brutalizes Donato, Adriana and David. In a rage he tells David:

Tú has sido el componedor de todo esto y me estás estorбando desde el primer día. Yo no soy malo; podría aplastarte, pero no quiero hacerlo. Mejor será que te vayas. Si quieres, rescindo el contrato contigo; me bastará con cinco. Esta misma noche te daré una carta
After the talk that he has had with Lefranc and Sernier, David naturally has reasons to believe that the letter of which Valindin speaks is a letter which will lead to his imprisonment. He decides to kill Valindin. He goes to his house at night when he knows that Valindin will be alone. In the ensuing confrontation David tells him:

Os decía que yo antes soñaba para olvidar mi miedo. Soñaba con la música...y también soñé que nadie me causaría ningún mal, ni yo a nadie... ¿Qué iluso! ¿Verdad? Atrevéme a soñar tales cosas en un mundo donde nos pueden matar de hambre, o convertirnos en peleles de circo, o golpearos...o encerrarnos para toda la vida con una carta secreta. Era como dar palos de ciego. (p. 101)

David then plunges them both in darkness by knocking out the lamp with his cane which he also uses to kill Valindin in their struggle. The murder is made to look like a robbery. It looks as if David will get away with his crime, but he is betrayed to the police by the jealous Donato. He, before being taken away by the police, says to Adriana:

David.---Todo ha sido un sueño...una pesadilla. Y ya no comprendo nada. Sólo sé que no veo, que nunca veré...y que moriré.
Adriana.---Nuestros hijos verán.
David.---(Oprime, exaltado, la mano de ella sobre su hombro.) Pero lo que yo quería hacerse, Adriana. Yo sé que ¡Puede hacerse! Los ciegos leerán, los ciegos aprenderán a tocar los más bellos conciertos. (p. 108)

Suero Vallejo ends the play, quite possibly for reasons of censorship, with a speech from Valindín Haüy, a man who figures largely in the history of the Hospice des quinze Vingts. He
appears earlier, but has nothing to do with the plot. He is in no way organically involved in the action. Now at the end he ends the play explaining himself, more than likely to remind the spectator that the action has been set in historical circumstances, a fact which could be easily forgotten as none of the protagonists is based on an historical figure such as Velázquez or Esquilache. In this final speech, he brushes against the theme of rebellion as did Adriana previously. Valentín Hauy addresses the audience telling them that "el hombre más oscuro puede mover montañas si lo quiere," and then adds what history has since recorded—the work that he Hauy was to begin with the blind: "Yo haré leer a los ciegos; pondré en sus manos libros que ellos mismos habrán impreso. Trazarán los signos y leerán su propia escritura. Finalmente, les haré ejecutar conciertos armoniosos." (p. 112)

The interpretations of the play up to now understand David to symbolize transcendental man trapped by his eternal limitations rebelling against not only the limitation of blindness, but also against political oppression. However, if the statements that David makes regarding his circumstances and his rebellious actions be examined, it will be seen that they are motivated only by reasons steeped in his need to express himself artistically. He does not fight against his blindness, nor does he despair because of this physical limitation. He does not resist the regimentation of the orchestra. He is happy, hopeful when he joins the band. He revolts when he is not allowed individual interpretation—
that is, to play "a su manera." He revolts when his violin is confiscated; and finally when he feels that he will be unjustly imprisoned because of these acts. The theme of the play must be a statement against the censorship imposed upon the arts by an authoritarian government, especially since the work comes so hard on the heels of *Las meninas*, the play in which Velázquez shows himself rebellious when his art and ethics are challenged by the forces of compromise and oppression.

The last play that Buero Vallejo has had published and produced up to this writing is *Aventura en lo gris*. It bears a greater similarity to *Un soñador para un pueblo* and *Las meninas* than does *El concierto de San Ovidio*. This is because *Aventura en lo gris* has as one of its main characters a political figure, the decadent, corrupt dictator Goldmann and because a very definite ethical stand is presented in the play. In the author's note to the 1964 Alfil edition of the play, Buero Vallejo says that the play was written "entre el verano y el otoño de 1949, en los meses anteriores a mi primer estreno teatral," that is, before *Historia de una escalera* was staged in October of 1949. The play was not produced until October of 1963. According to the opinion of the critics, Buero Vallejo should not have delayed its presentation for fourteen years, but delayed it forever. In his

first night review F. García Pavón writes: "Con verdadero instinto, Buero Vallejo nunca quiso estrenar Aventura en lo gris... de pronto, movido por no sé qué duende otoñal ha vuelto de su acuerdo y previas reformas... la ha sacado a tablado..." 23

But Buero Vallejo makes clear that it was not his instinct that kept him from having the work produced, but the censor. In the same author's note quoted above, he continues, "Durante los años iniciales de mi vida profesional ofrecí el drama a varias compañías sin que ninguna se decidiese a estrenarlo. Aceptado al fin por una de ellas, no fue autorizado." (p. 5 of the introduction)

According to Juan R. Castellano however, Buero Vallejo not only had difficulty in finding a dramatic company to accept the work and a censor to approve it, but also a house to publish it. He maintains that the manuscript was rejected five times by the publishing houses because of the play's "tema atrevido." 24

When a revised edition of the play was finally passed by the censor and published in 1953, Buero decided to limit the play to its publication as in that year there was published and presented in Madrid a foreign play which bore too many similarities with his Aventura en lo gris. (p. 5 of the introduction) The play was La maison de nuit by the Frenchman Thierry Maulnier. 25 Both


plays center around an evil dictator who is fleeing from his war torn country as it is being invaded by the enemy. Buero's decision to not have the play produced was one he did not keep for long as he did have the play produced in the Recoletos in October of 1963. The reception to the play was the worst that any of his plays received. The morning after its debut, an admirer of the dramatist, Enrique Llovet, asked: "¿Por qué, por qué, por qué ha estrenado Antonio Buero Vallejo a estas alturas de su vida profesional esta obra gastada hace años, que es un complicado melodrama vacilante, superada por cualquiera de las posteriores y respetabilísimas obras del autor?"

To answer the hue and cry of similar questions put by other critics Buero Vallejo explains why he reversed his former decision and had the play produced.

Muchos años más tarde, empezó a inquietarme de nuevo la idea de ofrecer al público mi drama, que tal vez podía mejorarse mediante nueva redacción y cuyos contenidos seguían preocúpándome.... En la vida de todo escritor hay obras que, por insalvables, se olvidan para siempre en el cajón; pero junto a ellas puede haber alguna que el autor no se resiña a dar por perdida. En mi opinión Aventura en lo gris debía ser salvada: tiene aspectos que...no me gustan, pero posee otros, a mi juicio de cierta validez y claramente conectados, sobre todo, con mis preocupaciones dramáticas más permanentes. (pp. 5-6 of the author's note)

These positive aspects of the play which he considers valid and clearly connected with his dramatic pretensions are those that find consonance with his other plays; that is, his preoccupations with the ethic of abnegation and its positive force. He presents

his ethical theme through two fundamental choices: to serve one's selfish interests, or to selflessly serve those social interests which help man to survive and improve his lot. Buero sets forth his categorical imperative; and the point is not missed by the critics. The reviewer in Marca states that Buero Vallejo postulates that ideal man be "el intelectual capaz de un heroismo sui generis, capaz de todos los sacrificios y de todas las pesquisas por detectivescas que parezcan."27

Nicolas González Ruiz also sees the heroic sacrifice made by Silvano and states that the essential theme lies in the opposition between the professor and the dictator.28 Elías Gómez Picazo translates this opposition to be in fact the representation of the duality of man's nature, and places the responsibility for the moral choice in the hands of the secretary Ana. She is torn in her loyalties to the dictator and the professor.

La pluralidad de personajes no puede equivocarnos.
En realidad son dos facetas del mismo ser los que se enfrentan. En Aventura en lo gris, Silvano, el soñador y Alejandro, el positivista, el que nunca sueña, el que se atiene egoístamente a la realidad, representan la dualidad en que el hombre se mueve y por una de cuyas tentaciones ha de decidirse. La clave está en Ana que acabará eligiendo la compañía del soñador aún a sabiendas de que ello ha de costarle la vida.29


The action of the play takes place in a way station near the frontier of Surelia, a country in the last throes of defeat. To this derelict hovel come Alejandro and his secretary Ana. He is, in disguise, the dictator Goldmann who has ruled the defeated country up to now. He is trying to make his way across the border undiscovered before the invaders take over completely. To this same shelter come six others as they flee the enemy. Silvano, a history professor who has been terrorized and forced into exile by Goldmann because of his political views against the dictatorship; Isabel, a beautiful but tattered young girl with a small child which she conceived when raped by a gang of enemy troops; Carlos, who accompanies Isabel and who watches over her with great care; a Campesino, a Sargento, and Georgiana, a rich middle-class woman. When Carlos and Isabel arrive with her baby, it is learned that she has a deathly fear of all men, because of the raping, and is so under-nourished that she cannot provide milk for the baby. When the Campesino arrives, he has food in his rucksack. The only way that he will part with even a morsel of it is by selling it to Georgiana. She has to buy a crust of bread, not with money, but with an extremely valuable diamond ring. All of these people gather to wait out the night, cold and hungry. During the ensuing conversations, the viciousness, the depravity of Goldmann is brought to light. He is revealed as a selfish, greedy, unjust, lewd, lustful, dishonest, cruel dictator who believes first and foremost in taking care of his immediate needs. He engages Silvano in a
conversation which reveals their ethical views. Silvano is an idealist who though he has made mistakes believes that the politician should place the interests of the people first when determining any political action. Goldmann believes that since he is the dictator he must care for himself first of all so that he will be fit to care for those who come under his rule. These two opposing views are seen in application when it comes to taking care of the needs of those in the way station. All are concerned with keeping warm and staying the hunger that torments them. Silvano, Carlos, and Ana make it their prime aim to see to it that Isabel and her child are taken care of before anyone else. Goldmann makes sure that his appetite is satisfied first—and that appetite is not limited to hunger. When it grows late, all bed down for the night. In a collective dream, the characters of the protagonists are revealed in their dreams. This dream ends with the murder of Isabel. When all awaken it is learned that Isabel has been murdered. After much confusion, it is discovered that Goldmann raped and murdered her. The disillusioned Carlos, who previously had believed blindly in Goldmann, kills the dictator. Meanwhile it has also been learned that the train that they have all been expecting to take them over the frontier is not operating. This means that they will have to go by foot over the rugged mountain passes if they want to escape the invaders who are now approaching the vicinity of the way station. As they are on the point of leaving, Silvano says that he is not going as Isabel's baby will not survive if they take it along. He has thus decided to remain and
face the enemy troops so that the child might have a chance to live. Ana has meanwhile fallen in love with Silvano because of what he has revealed himself to be in the conversations he has had with Goldmann. She too decides to stay to care for the infant. She, as Silvano, feels that the child's life is more important than her own. The others leave and when the invaders arrive, they promise to care for the infant who, after all, had been fathered by one of their own troops. They, however, feel it necessary to shoot Ana and Silvano. The two, secure in the knowledge that they have done right in saving the baby's life, even if it means their death, bravely face the guns of the firing squad as the curtain falls.

As can be seen, the emphasis of the play is not on action. The plot serves principally as a framework on which Buero Vallejo can hang the conversations in which the characters reveal themselves in relation to Buero Vallejo's ethical message. To be sure, the playwright uses the play as a protest against war, but he is interested mainly in showing the evil of the dictator's selfishness and the transcendental power of abnegation in the life of the professor and, finally, in that of Ana. The dictator is the positivist, the professor is the visionary. There is no doubt that the two points of view represent the essential choices which man must make in his way to live life if altruism be considered at all. Nor is there doubt that the proving of this view constitutes the conflict between Goldmann and Silvano in the play.
Goldmann, the dictator, in his flight, has come disguised. He soon learns that his ruse has not fooled Silvano. Silvano tells him that now the two can confront each other on equal footing. He also tells him that the battle between the two is not simply a battle between a professor and a dictator, but between two metaphysical views in a political context.

Silvano.---Antes éramos el profesor y el dictador; dos personajes en la farsa del país. Y todavía no sabemos quién le fue más útil y quién más pernicioso; ya le he reconocido antes que yo dudo, y ahora le diré que esa auda no me dejará vivir tranquilo. ¡Pero aquí somos hombres, y nada más! Sin nombre siquiera, porque el mío está manchado y usted ha borrado el suyo. Hombres que pueden tender una mano, o negarla. Y aquí podré quizá demostrarle y demostrarme a mí mismo, que usted no vale nada a mi lado. Aquí se podrá ver quien cumple mejor ese juramento de abnegación de su partido...que yo no he prestado.... (p. 53)

Though Silvano says that he wants to prove to himself which of the two points of view fulfills best the vow of abnegation taken to carry out their political parties' aim, it is really a contest more vital to Ana, the person who is to choose to follow one of the views. When the play begins she is the loyal secretary of fifteen years to her boss, the selfish dictator. When the play ends, she is the brave protectress of the infant orphaned by her boss, facing death righteously, courageously on the arm of the dictator's enemy, the professor Silvano.

There is nothing new in the approach Buero Vallejo uses in his treatment of the person who is selfish. Buero spares no scorn in showing that the selfish acts of the dictator are pernicious. Nor does he present any new tack toward the character who
practices abnegation and serves the truth. The playwright does not define truth, but through the mouth of Silvano he does define the essence of abnegation as well as the dimensions of this ethic of selflessness.

At the very beginning Buero Vallejo sets out to show that the dictator lives only to satisfy his appetites, especially the sexual, and not to serve the interest of the people he has ruled. Buero puts the major emphasis on Goldmann's selfishness in the first scene and alludes to it until the dictator commits his final act of bestiality when he rapes and kills the deranged, half-starved Isabel. In that first scene Ana and Goldmann discuss the necessity of keeping their true names secret. Ana, however, reminds him of what he had promised his government if the revolutionaries were to topple his government. She says to Goldmann: "Si nos derrotasen, prometiste al Consejo ponerte al frente de las guerrillas." (p. 19) He replies that he didn't do so as there is much organizing to be done outside the country and that he is the only one who can do it; adding that he was at least the last one to flee. He tells her that it has been his duty to run, reminding her that abroad he shall work hard. She says that he won't forget to have fun either, the fun for which his own party had to advise him discretion. Ana, of course, is alluding to his sexual promiscuity. His sexual excesses have known no limits: "Joven-citas encontradas por la calle, mujeres de los amigos, prostitutas, y una secretaria de confianza." (p. 20) Goldman tells her
that these excesses were "minucias necesarias para un hombre que trabaja en medio de la tensión" and that he has needed these "expansiones...que no tienen la menor importancia." She replies that they are important, as they drain him of the energy he needs for his work: "Tus expansiones te han costado más de una advertencia del partido por retrasos y descuidos en tu trabajo. Si no las tuvieras, trabajariías mejor." (p. 20) He scoffs at his party members saying that they are stupid and, more importantly, that they don't understand his adventures because they don't have his sexual vigor. She tells him that it is not a question of vigor but of morality. They, the critical members of his party, are more moral. The two change the subject. She tells him that they should give some of their food to Silvano who is obviously starving. He refuses to share his food with anyone saying: "Si alguien tiene que salir del país con vida, soy yo." (p. 20) He needs to survive as he is necessary for the people even if the people who need him starve to death. But he does not survive because his lust, his selfishness lead him to raping and murdering the pitiful Isabel. And for this, Carlos kills him. Goldmann has been a man who has taken what he has wanted, when he has wanted it, by however means convenient, regardless of the cost it might have been to those involved. Even though at first it had not been established who murdered Isabel, Silvano, the professor, knows that Goldmann is the murderer. He sees Goldmann as a man of action, but a selfish man of action who is mentally sick. When Georgiana mentions
the dead Isabel in front of Goldmann, Silvano takes the opportunity to obliquely tell Goldmann what he thinks of him.

Muerta por un hombre sin escrúpulos, acostumbrado a coger a su paso el dinero, el lujo, y las mujeres; un engreído, muy seguro de sus dotes de sujeción, a pesar del horror de la muchacha por los hombres; un aprovechado que muere por última vez en la carne de la patria vencida antes de marcharse. Y en definitiva, otro enfermo: un esclavo de su creciente deilidad por las jovencitas; que quizá empieza a ser una obsesión senil. Pero, eso sí, ¡un enfermo muy vital! A un pobre soñador... un hombre... de acción, que nunca sueña... y que obra durante el sueño de los demás. (p. 91)

When Silvano speaks against the murderer, Ana realizes that it is Goldmann. She accuses him of the crime. He says that she is mad. She admits that she may be insane as it was madness that kept her with him for so many years. But she persists that in the crime she recognizes his hallmark:

Tú la mataste: es tu estilo. (A todos) ¡La vida de los demás carece de valor para él! Y siempre consideró a las mujeres como objetos creados para su placer, que se toman y se abandonan. A todas las creía propiedad suya. Y cuando se le antoja una, ya no mira nada... ¿Loca? Sí, loca de mí, que llegué a compartir tu vida y a creer todas esas razones con lo que la justificabas.... El bien de Sureia... La conveniencia de la situación.... Y así se va el corazón endureciendo y se acaba matando por cualquier cosa.... Y esta noche has querido seguir tus costumbres. Tomás, si es necesario, a la fuerza. (p. 92)

In these two speeches lie the two vital points that Buero Vallejo wants to make about his ethic: that Goldmann does not dream, and that when he acts, it is to take by force while others dream. What Goldmann does or does not do comprises the antithesis of that which forms Silvano's character. Goldmann is the man of action who takes; Silvano is the dreamer who gives.
Silvano, the "soñador," is the visionary who believes that he has to give—"dar"—even though it costs him his life. The polemic that he has with Goldmann constitutes the choices that Buero Vallejo believes are left to man: to dream or not to dream. All through the play references are made to the man who dreams. The second act of the play is not called a second act, but "El sueño" in which the soul of each character is revealed through the nature of the dream he has. That is, one's acts are the consequences of one's dreams.

At one point in the play, the Sargento remarks that he dreams of eating an entire chicken all by himself. Ana, embittered, tells him that no one should ever dream. Goldmann agrees with her, saying that "los sueños deforman la vida." He, being a man of action, says that one has to look life right in the eye, and that to dream "es faena de mujeres...de contemplativos." He says that he rarely dreams out that Silvano is an invererate dreamer. Silvano does not deny this. He maintains that everyone should learn how to dream; that "aprender a soñar sería aprender a vivir." He says that at night we dream our "inconfesables apetitos" and that we unleash the wild beast that possesses us. He feels that we have bad dreams at night because we behave badly during the day and that our lives go badly because "no sabemos soñar bien." To dream means to conceive of living life in an ethical sense as he speaks of dreams in terms of avoiding conflicts of ego and of becoming better people. The ethical dream is one that must be learned. He says to Ana:
Hay que aprender a soñar.... Sólo que...no anrendemos. Por eso pienso a veces una cosa...muy extraña. ¿Y si las personas que se tratan entre sí empezarán a soñar con frecuencia un mismo sueño?... No es imposible... Sonaríamos lo mismo, y el choque de nuestros egosimos nos haría irrealizables. Tendríamos que mejorar a la fuerza.... Porque en el sueño es donde tocamos nuestro fondo más verdadero. (pp. 43-44)

Such an ethic, such a dream, which would be applied to man, any man regardless of time or circumstances, then takes on the force of a categorical imperative. But Silvano does not include freedom to choose to dream the same dream. When he says "tendríamos que mejorar a la fuerza" he does not simply mean that one would necessarily improve. During a conversation with Goldmann, he says that the dictator has taught him a lesson: "No se debe soñar dejando las manos libres a quienes no lo hacen." (p. 94)

He does not go into further explanations, but the fascist implications are there. As for this ethical dream of abnegation, Suero Vallejo presents through Silvano's life, a life of giving, because he conceives of his life, that is, dreams of his life in acts of giving.

Silvano has been exiled because abnegation bade him serve the truth rather than his personal interests. When he speaks of the political imbroglio in which he had found himself, he explains its cause to Goldmann who maintains that Silvano, a pacifist, urged surrender to the enemy: "Yo no recomendé la capitulación aunque se haya dicho que sí. Me limité a desenmascarar la hipocresía del Gobierno, que ya la preparaba, y a denunciar las verdaderas causas de esta guerra." (p. 30)
All of his acts are characterized by his selflessness. Even when it comes to his enemies he is altruistic. He forgets his political beliefs when it has to do with the necessities of life and gives what little he can to make life better for the others. Even though he himself is starving, he gives to Isabel the food that Ana has stolen for him from Goldmann and he does it discreetly, attracting no attention to his charity. When Isabel explains that Ana has given her some too, he answers: "Así tendrá más." She hesitates and tells him: "Déme la mitad, nada más." He replies that only giving half is giving nothing: "Dar la mitad no es dar nada." (p. 58)

In the section of the play that Suero Vallejo calls "El sueño" to show that man is what he dreams, Ana shows that she has found Silvano’s good example irresistible. She wants to be like Silvano, to dream as Silvano dreams, to give.


Silvano.---El nunca sueña.

Ana wishes to leave Goldmann, the man who never dreams, who never gives. She wants to go with Silvano, the man who dreams,
who gives. She longs to be as he. She longs to dream. She longs
to give. She falls in love with Silvano. He teaches her the
spirit of abnegation and then puts it to a test, the most diffi-
cult test that faces man, the giving of one's life for another.
As the invaders approach, all except Silvano decide to flee, taking
the dead Isabel's baby with them. Ana, alarmed, asks him:

Ana.—¿Pero, ¿Por qué se queda? ¡Le digo que nos llevamos
al niño! Y usted no debe morir.
Silvano.—Es el niño el que no debe morir, Ana. Y si
nos lo llevamos es su muerte segura. Pero hay
una probabilidad de que ellos lo evacuen hacia
atrás y le den leche..., si yo acierto a pedir-
selo. (p. 102)

Realizing that the invading troops may rape her and shoot
her as they will almost certainly kill Silvano, Ana elects to
stay behind to help him care for the child. He tries to dissuade
her, but she is adamant in her decision. Then an idea occurs to
her. She tells Silvano that they could save themselves if they
were to tell the invaders that they had killed the fleeing dicta-
tor instead of Carlos. She says that they would live; they could
be happy and save the child at the same time. But Silvano refuses
to lie. He tells her that they cannot speculate with Goldmann's
body; that she does not yet know the difference between to over-
come and to overcome oneself. He says: "Mi pobre Ana, has empe-
zado muy tarde a aprender. Aún no sabes lo que es vencer, ni lo
que es vencerse...." She asks him to help her learn the differen-
ce. He accepts and tells her that they are going to try to save
the child at the cost of their lives. The enemy arrives and Ana
all during the capture has shown herself fearless, brave, intent
only on saving the child. After the child is taken away to safety, Silvano tells Ana, as the enemy prepares to shoot them:

Silvano.---Tú lo conseguiste, Ana mía.
Ana.---Pero tú me enseñaste a hacerlo. ¡Silvano! ¿Es así? ¿Es esto vencer?
Silvano.---¡Sí! ¡Esto es vencer! (p. 111)

Vencer is to learn how to give, the true spirit of abnegation. Ana gives the most that man can in giving her life.

Aventura en lo gris is a political play because its protagonists are men of governmental authority whose acts are examined ethically. However, in the play, as in the others of like nature, Buero Vallejo does not make use of the dialogue to promulgate a political doctrine. During a discussion with Goldmann, Silvano declares: "La política es un arte difícil. Y yo soy un hombre de dudas, no de seguridades. ¿Cree que no me he preguntado muchas veces si hice bien o hice mal? (p. 30)

From this comment of the professor can be extracted the framework behind Buero Vallejo's political springboard. To him politics is a difficult art. He is not sure of anything. He has questioned himself about the character of his acts. Has he done evil?---has he done good? He has not come up with an answer to his question and cannot come up with one. But he does know that one can be sure that more good will be done if he acts out of the spirit of abnegation.
In the future there will quite possibly be critics such as José Castellano who will hold the opinion that Buero Vallejo in no way reflects the problems of post-war Spain or that he, as in Castellano's words, "se retrea ante una posible tendencia intencionada o una solución decidida en ningún plano ideológico, social o ético." But the opposite, as has been demonstrated, is true. Buero Vallejo, the most honored playwright of post-war Spain, has dedicated his dramatic art intentionally to the end of promulgating his social and political ethic in an effort to aid his fellow Spaniards solve the myriad problems which have beset that country recovering from the civil war. It may be that his message, so welded to the here and now of Spain, is lost on many because Buero at times has chosen to present his dramatic problem in the matrix of literary and/or historical distancing. In Las meninas, the action takes place in Spain of the 17th century; in Un soñador para un pueblo, Spain of the 18th. In Palabras en la arena, the spectator is plunged into the life and times of Jesus Christ; in La tejedora de sueños, the ambience is that of ancient Troy and the characters Ulysses and Penelope. This situating of

contemporary problems in the past may be the cause for the claims that Suero Vallejo believes that the problems that confront the Spaniard of today are no different from those that have always beset man. He has projected these problems in the past for two reasons: to escape the censor, and to give the works an artistic force that they would not have otherwise.

Another explanation can be offered for the failure of critics to see his ideological intentions. Buero Vallejo has eschewed the dramatic formula of statement of problem and its ethical solution. Instead he has chosen to employ the catharsis technique of the classic tragedy, allowing the spectator to supply the answer to the problem after the emotions wrought by the drama have had their effect. This technique he has employed in almost all of his plays, but most significantly in *Las cartas boca abajo*. It is this play that provides the key to not only his ethical message but also his conception of tragedy and how it relates to today's Spaniard. Suero Vallejo himself has labelled the play "tragedia española" and stated that in this definition there lies great ethical significance. To this he has added that the Spaniards live with their cards face down and that in the anecdotal aspect of the play there is a tragedy that defines well the lot of the post-war Spaniard. Extracted from the work is the observation that people make themselves and others suffer because they lack abnegation and are too proud to air their differences.

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and forgive one another. The result is emotional cannibalism that
hinders their economic, social and cultural progress and that
prevents the happiness born from peace of mind. Since Buero
Vallejo feels that the play's thematic problem is not only con-
temporary but also transcendental, it then results that he under-
stands the solution of man's eternal social problem as one of ab-
egation. Buero Vallejo has taken this abnegation and has woven
it into the fabric of all his plays so that this dynamism is felt
in both the social and political spheres. Its force can be detect-
ed in two fundamental ways: its presence or its absence in the
lives of the characters. The efficacy of abnegation is seen in
the protagonist's victory over adversity and in his emotional
equanimity and/or acceptance of those limitations imposed upon
him which he cannot transcend. Tragedy results when the main
character of the play is grotesquely selfish, falling victim as
it were to the force of trial and tribulation because of his fail-
ure to prove himself superior to his circumstances. He consumes
himself as he tries to satisfy his personal demands. To Buero
Vallejo, the transcendental problem of man's existence is not
that he is faced with misery, lack of food, poor salary, etc.
The transcendental problem to him is knowing how to confront
these problems; is deciding upon a metaphysic, a philosophy that
will serve to guide one's actions, one's decisions regarding the
actions to be taken toward the solving of these problems. What
Buero Vallejo set out to do has been to demonstrate how, by means
of this ethic—abnegation—man can transcend his difficulties or
rise above them and/or how he can be overwhelmed if not armed with this altruistic attitude. Tragedy results when man, because he lacks abnegation, cannot accept and learn to live within the context of his limitations either naturally, socially or politically imposed. Simply stated, the fourteen plays of Buero Vallejo fall into two simple groupings: those that end negatively because the protagonists have lacked abnegation; those that end positively because they have been selfless. As one traces this doctrine of abnegation it becomes clear that he understands Spanish society and society per se in terms of an elementary dichotomy: those governed and those who govern; that is, the man in the street and the man in power. These two groups can be divided further into the following categories: (1) The social plays of negative result, Historia de una escalera; Palabras en la arena; En la ardiente oscuridad; La tejedora de sueños; Irene o el tesoro; Hoy es fiesta; Las cartas boca abajo. (2) The social plays of positive result, La señal que se espera; Casi un cuento de hadas; Madrugada. (3) The political plays, Un soñador para un pueblo; Las meninas; El concierto de San Ovidio; Aventura en lo gris. This last grouping of the political plays could also be divided into those of positive and of negative result, but as only one has a negative result, for the sake of expediency, they all have been grouped together.

In Aventura en lo gris, this ethical message of abnegation that has pervaded the plays reaches heroic proportions of a categorical imperative: to give even to the point of sacrificing one's life. Buero Vallejo in his aim to fulfill his responsibility to
society through his dramatic art has diagnosed the social and political ills of post-war Spain, ills to which man has always been susceptible. He has not only given a diagnosis but also a prescription for cure: selfishness, the illness; abnegation, the cure.

Not a few critics have attempted to identify this ethic of abnegation with an established religion, to label it conveniently as Christian, or else to hint of political ideology not sacrosanct in Spain. Buero Vallejo has not presented his moral preachments directly in his theatre; therefore, it has become difficult to categorize his metaphysical point of view. What he has done in his dramas is raise questions to which he hopes the spectator will supply the answer. Devotion to family, loyalty to country, the necessities of business, opportunities for advancement or for enjoyment, domestic crisis, marital problems confront his characters with a multitude of demands that bear an urgency that will not be held in abeyance. Which is the right decision, which is the wrong? Which leads to good, which to bad? Upon what basis can one decide? Are there enduring principles other than one's own immediate desires or interests by which conduct should be directed? What actually has been the cause of all the trouble? How can that cause be robbed of its power to create havoc? In the midst of so much conflict and unhappiness on every hand, what grounds are there for feeling that Spain is a country of purpose and order rather than one of misdirected energies and chaos? These questions Buero Vallejo asks. And these questions he answers. To every man: love one another first and if there be trouble, air
the grievances and forgive one another. To the politician: sub-
ordinate personal interests to those which best serve the people.

For a point of view to give them direction in life and to sustain them in the time of need, the Spaniards traditionally have looked to religion and the Church. Today many still turn to the faith of their fathers for an answer to universal questions concerning the meaning of human life, questions made increasingly urgent by the demands of daily living in Spain, a country still wounded deeply by a civil war. Buero Vallejo's ethical view is practical and inspirational. His ethic is not the faith of the fathers yet one cannot say that it is not. What he has done is comparable not to the building of a new house but to the reconstrucion of the home in which he is living and in which he must continue to live while the rebuilding is going on. He has channelled the high idealism inherent in abnegation along practical and constructive lines, much as in Christianity. He has in essence formulated a faith for living by critically examining the premises upon which one acts.

José María García Escudero and Rosendo Roig maintain that Buero Vallejo's ethical point of view is Christian. Though the ethic of abnegation does bear great similarity to Christianity's "amar al prójimo" and though it may have found its origin in the well-springs of Spain's Judaeo-Christian heritage, his metaphysical view is not Christian for the simple reason that it is agnostic. There is no mention of God, nor mention made of a religious solution to the problems found in Historia de una escalera,
Madrugada, Hoy es fiesta, Cartas boca abajo, Un soñador para un pueblo, El concierto de San Ovidio, Aventura en lo gris and En la ardiente oscuridad. Buero Vallejo's view is quite humanistic.

When he says that men are collectively and individually "artifices de sus venturas y desgracias," he means just that. Though he does not deny the existence of God, he nowhere indicates that he believes that Jesus Christ is God; and more importantly he will brook no divine intervention. Man bears all of the responsibility.

In La tejedora de sueños, when Ulysses laments his fate, he blames it all on the gods. He tells his estranged wife, Penelope: "Todo está perdido. Así quieren los dioses labrar nuestra desgracia." But she tells him that he cannot blame the gods retorting: "Somos nosotros quienes la labramos." (p. 84) In La señal que se espera, all of the characters await a miracle, divine intervention, to set their lives aright, but again Buero Vallejo insists upon his humanistic view. Enrique, the protagonist, tells his musician friend Luis, who is waiting for an aeolian harp to play by itself as a sign that he can return to composing music, that he is foolish to hope for such a miracle. He is right. The sign, when it comes, is because of a human act, not divine.

Enrique.---La señal que esperas no llegará. Habrá de sonar un día en tus oídos y no sería una señal... no puede hacer señales. Sería simplemente el recuerdo. Sólo tú la percibirás; la vieja melodía volverá a desenvolverse dentro de ti. Trabajarías de nuevo. Y todos nos alegraríamos.

Luis.---La señal tiene que sonar.

Enrique.---Pues bien, amigo mío, sonará. Pero en sueños. (p. 9)
The philosopher in the play, Julián, defines the miraculous as the simple things of existence: a plant that grows although it has ordinary flowers; the conception of a child that is born, grows and becomes a man. (p. 37) And at the end of the play as Luis and Susana discuss with him the curious events that have transpired, he tells them that "todo es humano en ese bajo mundo," (p. 131) thus negating the notion that man is not responsible for his acts.

Because Buero Vallejo feels that everything in man's social existence is human in nature does not mean that he disallows his characters a religious feeling or does not attempt a definitive statement about God. He does, but it is never Christian. Through the mouths of his characters such as Ignacio in En la ardiente oscuridad, Silverio in Hoy es fiesta and Juanito, the fairy in Irene o el tesoro, he attempts to clarify his view. In Irene, one of the characters who is heard but never seen is called La Voz. Near the climax when the duende Juanito believes that the heroine Irene is going to be sent to an insane asylum, Juanito falls on his knees and beseeches La Voz to save her. When La Voz asks him why he is on his knees, Juanito tells him that he thinks that he is God. La Voz responds: "Levántate y no pronuncies esa palabra. Es demasiada elevada para todos nosotros." (p. 260) La Voz is never explained, but one thing is certain: it is not God.

In Hoy es fiesta, the tormented Silverio has a scene in which he lacerates himself for having been so selfish all of his life. Through Silverio's soliloquy, Buero Vallejo furthers his
agnostic view. To what ordinarily would be called God, Silverio
addresses "misterioso testigo."

Silverio,--Solo. A ti te hablo. A ti misterioso tes­
tigo que a veces llamamos conciencia.... Y tú,
casi innombrable, a quien los hombres hablan
cuando están solos sin lograr comprender a quién
se dirigen. (p. 94)

Thus far the Supreme Being is unmentionable; then, a mys-

terious witness, or one's conscience. In Las meninas, Buero
Vallejo returns to the creche and through Velázquez he underscores
the idea that his religious viewpoint does not include an anthropo-
pomorphc God, ruling out any position that his ethic is based on
the God-head of Christ. Velázquez in the defense of his art speaks
of his usage of light and declares: "He llegado a sospechar que
la forma misma de Dios, si alguna tiene, sería la luz." (p. 72)
This concept of God, of light in Las meninas is actually found to
be a resonance of an earlier work, En la ardiente oscuridad, in
which the religiously oriented protagonist Ignacio "anhelaba la
luz." Ignacio never spoke of Christ, now has any other character
in the plays of Buero Vallejo except in Palabras en la arena, and
then the reference was historical in nature.

It is important to see, to understand Buero Vallejo's
evasion of God and any position espousing a personal relationship
with God, or any manifestation of God either through intervention
into the affairs of man, or by physical relations. He wants man
to see that his happiness, his progress, his destiny rest, now
in post-war Spain, as they have always rested, solely upon his
shoulders. Man's problem in Spain now is the problem that has
always beset man as a social animal. Buero Vallejo feels that since the family is a microcosm of society that this is where one must begin to labor for peace. The ethic that is to save man in his social and political situations, that is to save Spain, is built on abnegation, on giving even to the heroic, noble point of sacrificing one's life for fellow man.
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