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Staging History in Modern and Contemporary Spanish Drama

By

Andreea Iulia Sprinceana

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Romance Languages and Literatures

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Dru Dougherty, Chair
Professor Michael Iarocci
Professor Shannon Jackson

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Abstract

Staging History in Modern and Contemporary Spanish Drama

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Doctor of Philosophy in Romance Languages and Literatures

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This dissertation explores the manifestations, uses and appropriations of history in key Spanish plays from the 1950s to the present. The relationship between the stage and history casts new light on Spain's most critical phases in recent history. The authors studied were and are conscious of *making* history under the dictatorship, during the Transition and at the dawn of the 21st century. As instruments of civic action, their plays perform that awareness and invite spectators to recognize themselves as players in the process.

The dissertation opens with a comparative analysis of plays written by Antonio Buero Vallejo and Alfonso Sastre between the 1950s and the Transition (1977). While scholars have tended to contrast these two playwrights focusing on their responses to censorship, I propose that Buero and Sastre gravitated towards a poetics of forgiveness through the model of the failed tragic hero. The following chapter explores plays written by José Sanchis Sinisterra during the Transition and the outset of the new democracy (1977-1994), that problematize the tension between the new political order and the old, imperial rhetoric of the Franco regime. Turning to Juan Mayorga in Chapter 3, I consider how his dramas transmit a bitter image of humanity's decadence and loss of moral sensitivity. Largely influenced by a European perspective, Mayorga deploys cartoonish characters in real historical circumstances in order to cast a detached comic eye on the role of the bourgeoisie in the mapping of history during the past two centuries. My final chapter analyzes the topic of religion within the new Spanish democracy in three comic plays by Fermín Cabal, Concha Romero and Carmen Resino. This chapter proposes that the powerful role of religion has not waned since Franco's death and continues to shape Spanish culture, despite the nation's reconfiguration of its Catholic views. These authors dramatize the tensions between modern secularization and traditional Catholic faith, turning to comedy and satire to explore the complex presence of religion in the lives of Spaniards.

To my mother

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Introduction

> In the very term "historical drama"…the first word qualifies the fictiveness of the second, and the second questions the reality of the first.
> - Herbert Lindenberger, *Historical Drama. The Relation of Literature and Reality*

> Truth of passions, verisimilitude of feelings in imagined circumstances – that is what our mind demands of the dramatic writer.
> - Alexander Pushkin[1]

The notion of history and the "historical"

Historical plays provide a unique opportunity to engage with and examine the relations between fiction, imagination and the outside world. At first, "history" and "drama" ("play") may seem to be two antagonistic dimensions. While historicism is concerned with documenting the exact and accurate domain of the past, the dramatic is preoccupied with a fictional representation of past events. As the first quote above suggests, Herbert Lindenberger finds a sharp opposition between history and drama, a collision of two worlds: the real and the imaginary. German philosopher and dramatist G.E. Lessing attenuates this opposition, by asking, "How far may the poet stray from historical truth? In all that does not concern the characters, as far as he likes. He must hold only the characters sacred and may be allowed to add only what will strengthen them, show them in their best light…"[2] Thus, in the domain of historical drama, it would seem that the dramatic wins, as the poet/dramatist must "hold characters more sacred than facts."[3]

In "Acerca del drama histórico," Antonio Buero Vallejo echoes the same fact/fiction dialectic inherent to historical drama, specifying that theater performs an operation that historians don't allow:

> Por ser teatro y no historia, es además el teatro histórico labor estética y social de creación e invención, que debe […] ir por delante de la historia más o menos establecida, abrir nuevas vías de comprensión de la misma e inducir interpretaciones históricas más exactas. Que, para lograrlo, el autor no tiene por qué ceñirse a total fidelidad cronológica, espacial o biográfica respecto de los hechos

[1] Quot. in Lukács, *The Historical Novel,* p. 166.
[2] Ibid., p. 162.
[3] Ibid.

> comprobados […]. Un drama histórico es una obra de invención, y el rigor interpretativo a que aspira atañe a los significados básicos, no a los pormenores."[4]
>
> [Being drama and not history, historical drama is an esthetic and social work of creation and invention, which must … go beyond more or less established history, open new ways of understanding and induce more exact historical interpretations. In order to do this, the author does not have to cling to a totally chronological, spatial or biographical fidelity regarding confirmed facts… A historical drama is a work of invention, and the interpretative rigor to which it aspires applies to basic meanings, not to details.]

Simply put, the author does not have to "submit himself to a total chronological, spatial or biographical fidelity," which goes against the tenets of historiography. And here Aristotle's differentiation between historian and poet in his *Poetics* adds that the first "relates what has happened, the other what may happen."[5]

In general, literature seeks to imitate, attack or transcend the external or real world. Historical writings, however, as the above quotes demonstrate, set the grounds for a deeper engagement with reality and the exterior world than other traditional forms of fiction.[6] The particularity of (historical) drama – as opposed to historical novel – consists in taking this "engagement" from the fictitious level to the real level, to the audience seeing the live play. As Herbert Lindenberger noted, the difference between historical narrative and historical drama is precisely the sense of closeness that a play transmits to its audience: "Narrative works to create a distance, both temporal and physical, between us and the personages it depicts, while drama seeks an immediacy of effect which succeeds in giving its personages a direct power over us" (70).

The scope of this project is to illuminate the various understandings of history by dramatists and audiences, showing the close connection between the notions of drama and history (or the "historical") in works that exhibit these qualities, and to reflect on how the audiences at large experience these notions. The plays addressed in this project can be considered instruments of civic action that address the dictatorship, Transition, and the onset of democracy within some sort of historical trajectory. The plays are about history but they also aim to make history (i.e., to influence the course of Spain's trajectory from 1936 onward in the Ortegian sense). Simply put, the project shows what history is doing on the modern and contemporary Spanish stage, and what the stage is doing with history. An audience's first response to a history play involves a preoccupation

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[4] Buero Vallejo, *Obra Completa* II. P. 826.

[5] Aristotle, *Poetics* IX, p.68.

[6] Cf. Lindenberger, *Preface*: "[…] historical writings…make a greater pretense at engaging with reality than do writings whose fictiveness we accept from the start," x.

with its treatment of historical material, rather than considering the drama an "imaginative structure."[7] In other words, because it traces continuity between past and present, any historical drama – whether it has a higher or lesser degree of closeness to its sources – imposes a frame of thinking concerned with the relationship between the play, the exterior world, and our own position in that world. Calderón's *El gran teatro del mundo* (1633-1635) first recounts the history of the world (past), then enacts a play that symbolizes human trajectory in that history (present) and finally convokes a judgment day (future). This model is particularly appealing to spectators, because they see the past as impacting their present actions and also determining their future day of judgment.

In the December/January 1980-1981 issue of *Primer Acto,* playwright Domingo Miras wrote, apropos of historical theater, that "in all ages, of all dramatic theater, a great percentage, more than half, is historical theater," a gesture that necessarily situates "the dramatic action in past times."[8] In his article, Miras lists the major markers of historical theater, from the ancient Greeks, to Shakespeare, the Spanish Golden Age (*Fuenteovejuna, El caballero de Olmedo, El alcalde de Zalamea, Peribáñez y el comendador de Ocaña*), Racine and Corneille's tragedies and the more recent *Marat/Sade* (1963) by German writer Peter Weiss. Nowadays we can perhaps say that *almost all* if not *all* theater is historical, to some degree. How is all theater historical? By selecting themes that inevitably regress to a point in the past. Yet, in this ample specter of historical theater, some trends and categories can be identified.

That history plays present an aspect of the past as a means to comment on the present and reflect on the future is a known fact.[9] Moreover, all historical dramas tend to create an analogy between past and present. Literary critic Herbert Lindenberger and playwright Juan Mayorga, whose dramatic rendition of critical aspects of history occupies a significant part of this work,[10] often quote the example of Aeschylus' *The Persians,* the earliest history play, as a model of historical drama, because it exemplifies a usage of the past for the service of the present: "the author depicts the *hybris* of the invaders who had been defeated at Salamis only a few years before in order to warn his victorious fellow Greeks of their own *hybris*,"[11] and, respectively, that "Esquilo confrontaba a sus

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[7] Lindenberger, p. 3.

[8] Miras, *Primer Acto* 187, p. 21.

[9] "It has long been a commonplace that historical plays are at least as much a comment on the playwright's own times as on the periods about which they are ostensibly written." (Lindenberger, 5), and "El llamado teatro histórico siempre dice más acerca de la época que lo produce que acerca de la época que representa" (Mayorga, "El dramaturgo como historiador", *Primer Acto* 280, p. 9.)

[10] Chapter 3 addresses two major plays of Mayorga, *Himmelweg* (2003) and *La tortuga de Darwin* (2008) in the democratic context of the consolidation of Spain's position within Europe and Chapter 4 analyses Mayorga's *La lengua en pedazos* (2011) within the problematic of the religious question in Spain and the position of the Catholic church during the decades following Franco's death.

[11] "Historical Drama", p. 6.

espectadores con un acontecimiento del pasado…su tema es el castigo que sufren los seres humanos por una arrogancia que les lleva a desconocer sus límites […] aparece así el rasgo mayor del teatro histórico: el hallazgo de lo universal en lo particular" [Aeschylus confronted his audiences with a past event… its theme is the punishment brought upon people because of arrogance, which makes them disregard their limits… thus we have the major feature of historical theater: finding the universal within the particular].[12]

In this project I establish the ways in which history is represented on stage, during the various forms of political governance that Spain had between the 1950s and the present. (I do *not* intend to trace a chronological development of the historical drama in Spain in the second half of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty first century, nor do I seek to examine what constitutes historical drama as genre). In this analysis I understand the history play as a discourse or form of representation, which takes various shapes according to the time periods during which it is produced. For example, during the 1950s and 1960s a realist approach to history predominated, along with a commitment to use history as a means of socio-political critique. Antonio Buero Vallejo and Alfonso Sastre (examined in the first chapter) belong roughly to this categorization. Not long thereafter, new theatrical tendencies shaped historical drama's discourse according to postmodern and postdramatic tendencies (as the work of José Sanchis Sinisterra and Juan Mayorga demonstrate in Chapters 2 and 3). While these are the broad concepts that historical representation takes in the four authors just named, each of them understands history in a different way, which is explained in more detail in the section discussing the organization by chapters.

It has been argued that history plays are specific forms that proliferate around a major process of transformation, or a socio-political crisis.[13] The unpacking of history and the historical on stage provides a rich discussion. I analyze how the concept of history is understood and used by playwrights, and how their understanding affects the ways in which theater processes history. As noted above, it is a medium that allows for a unique, dynamic instantaneous relation with the audience. It absorbs history (roughly understood as events from the past) and submits it to an imaginative process of alterations, stylizations and deviations from a standard academic notion of what happened. The particularity of theater is that it allows history to be *acted out* or *re-presented* and thus integrating it into the present, into the moment of representation. This means that the stage permits the "performance" of history: "[…] se *actúa* historia con ingredientes estéticos-literarios… sucesos del pasado se nos presentan como auténticamente presentes, asistimos a una re-presentación en el sentido etimológico de la palabra, lo que presupone una 'resurrección' de los personajes históricos, es más, requiere además el 'conjuro' de un tiempo definitivamente pasado" […history is staged with literary and aesthetic ingredients… events

[12] Mayorga, "El dramaturgo como historiador", p. 2.
[13] Cf. Georg Lukács. For a different interpretation see Kurt Spang (1998, p.18).

from the past are presented as authentically present, we attend a re-presentation in the etymological sense of the word, which implies a "resurrection" of historical characters, and what's more, it also requires the "conjuring" of a definitely past time] (Spang 27). Historical drama approaches history either through a critical distance – such as Brecht's theater, or documentary theater, which documents facts with precision – or through a more aestheticized and literary form. Several categories of historical drama have also been formulated according to the time period and country of origin (Shakespeare's histories or chronicles, Baroque and Romantic tragedy, Golden Age tragicomedy, fantasy, epic drama, farce, etc.).[14] Trying to position themselves outside rigid frameworks, some playwrights have characterized their work with history as "antihistorical" or as mere historical reference.[15]

The choice of this time period (1955, corresponding to the publication of Sastre's *Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes,* the earliest play addressed – to 2008, when Mayorga's *La Tortuga de Darwin* premiered) reflects a unique transformation and rich process in theatrical and historical terms, both globally and locally (Spain), that reinforce each other. On one hand, theater undergoes several changes during this time period, from a strictly dramatic (textual) approach to a largely performative one (emphasizing the staging and representation aspect). In Spain, the Realist generation of the 1950s and the 1960s is gradually replaced in the following two decades by dramatists who rely on postmodern and deconstructive techniques, and later by the current dramatists of the new century, influenced by the global preoccupation with the concept of the real, as opposed to the virtual, the rehearsed, the fabricated, etc.[16] In terms of the historical transformation, we can distinguish two levels: first, there was the *historical event* of the Cold War, followed by the mass collapse of Communism, the lifting of the Iron Curtain separating East and West and the implementation of (or return to) democracies; second, there was the change in the perception of *historical reality,* which coincided with the shift in cultural and theoretical notions (postmodernity), and which shifted historical interpretation from a teleological progression to the experience of isolation and randomness, whose coherence, when found, lay in human interpretation. Thus, historical narrative replaced history. The case of Spain – first isolated during Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975), then acquiring a place in the European community, during the Transition to democracy (1975-1982), and finally consolidating it by being actively involved in Europe's economy, politics and culture (1982-present),[17] – adds a special local color to the larger picture of historical events and transformation, coupled with

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[14] For more reference, see Kurt Spang (*Apuntes para la definición y el comentario del drama histórico,* 1998) and Gonzalo Torrente Ballester (*Teatro histórico,* 1998).

[15] For example, Carmen Resino's (1995) *Bajo sospecha* includes the author's disclaimer, in which she states that her work is *not* a history play.

[16] For more information, see *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present,* ed. Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson, 2009.

[17] During the alternate rulings of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español, PSOE (1982-1996, 2004-2011) and the Partido Popular, PP (1996-2000).

theoretical and scenic developments in theater. Theater and history *share* the dramatic element of representing Spain's dynamic transformation in those years. Theater becomes a metaphor for the historical world, because its stage can "define, ennoble or disparage" characters, attitudes, figures from history: "as metaphor, theater provides an angle of vision which displays the historical world in all its complexity: it enlightens the very act of providing the 'entertainment' which we traditionally associate with it."[18]

History plays process past events through a variety of forms and methods. The breadth of their method (reversing history, creating alternative historical scenarios, inserting memory and flashbacks, creating fantastic temporal displacements, humanizing or caricaturing heroes, etc.) is the object of this study. An exhaustive generic or categorizing definition of historical drama is difficult to issue, as "specific forms" of history plays "prevailed at certain moments in history," and there can also be overlaps between various types of dramas, for example the tragedy and the history play.[19] The organization of the project addresses two different but related aspects: the chronological course in Spanish history according to the three main political and ideological periods, respectively Francoism, Transition and Democracy (1958[20] to present), on one hand, and the dramatists' perception of history (both Spanish and universal) throughout these time periods.

As Herbert Lindenberger wrote, historical plays "do not simply 'reflect' an external world but they interact in intricate and fundamental ways both with this world and with the intellectual systems of the readers and audiences who experience them" (xii). The history plays addressed in this project were written during critical periods from Spanish history, some under and accommodating censorship (Antonio Buero Vallejo), from exile (Alfonso Sastre), or in democracy (José Sanchis Sinisterra, Juan Mayorga, Carmen Resino, Fermín Cabral, Concha Romero). Each captures in a unique way a crucial aspect of the epoch, and transmits a sense of the social and political reality of the time. By organizing the project chronologically, I give a broad picture of the perceptions of history, the charging concept of "the historical" and its various facets and understandings (arts, politics, nation, identity, religion), and their use by popular dramatists.

Why history and why drama? It is important to think of history first in the parameters that connect it with the formative discourse of a nation. True, history commonly refers to the past, but it simultaneously frames a national portrait as well. Thus, history establishes a nation's continuity in time. Then, it is necessary to think about the various spaces that open up discourses congenial to historical representation. One of these spaces is theater. From the stage, a discourse about

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[18] Lindenberger, p. 107. The function of theater as metaphor for history becomes even more evident in the metatheatrical work of José Sanchis Sinisterra, because of the double stage world that he creates (the play within the play), allowing real time audiences to step back and see themselves as instruments in this process.

[19] Cf. Herbert Lindenberger, *Preface,* p. ix.

[20] Antonio Buero Vallejo's first historical drama, *Un soñador para un pueblo,* premiered in 1958.

an aspect of the past is represented in the present. Here, two different temporalities fuse: past and present deepen the national sentiment, while at the same time challenging its validity. Through various forms of historical drama, this project shows the construction of historical discourse from the stage, in a dialogic process that involves the playwright, but which ultimately relies on the audience's participation. Staging *history* in modern and contemporary Spanish *drama* reveals the complex mechanisms in thinking about history and imagining it from a popular vantage point. The intersection between the historical and the dramatic, far from being antagonistic, shows the powerful dynamic relation between the two, as they continue to shape each other on the Spanish stage. Ultimately, the project casts light on the vibrant dialogue between stage and history, underscoring how these fundamental categories negotiate meanings in relation to an audience. In order to have a more complete picture of the notion of historical drama, it is necessary to understand the various approaches to history and historical discourse throughout time, as well as situate the tradition of historical drama in Spain. Next I will outline some of the main characteristics of Spanish historical drama, and then I will give general remarks on the notion of history. Finally I will explain how I use the term "history" in this project.

Historical drama in Spain

Spain has a rich tradition of historical drama, mostly related to two time periods: the Golden Age and Romanticism. During the Golden Age, its major representatives were Lope de Vega (*Fuenteovejuna,* 1614, *Peribáñez,* 1619), Calderón de la Barca (*El sitio de Breda,* 1636, *La cisma de Inglaterra,* 1684), and Tirso de Molina. Their plays take up both national and foreign histories, and combine a sentiment of hostility towards feudalism with loyalty towards the Catholic monarchy.[21] During the nineteenth-century Romantic historical drama developed in parallel with the historical novel (Duque de Rivas' *Don Álvaro, o la fuerza del sino,* 1835). If in its origins, historical drama centered on conflicts arising among the monarchy, nobility and the people, it later evolved to advance modern concepts and ideas. Critic Francisco Ruiz Ramón gives a definition of historical theater that blurs the separation between the time of the plot and the time of representation:

> Todo relato histórico es, en principio, analéptico, y está construido sobre la separación de dos tiempos, el tiempo del objeto narrado y el tiempo del relato propiamente dicho. En el drama histórico, sin embargo, esa separación tiende a borrarse, e incluso a anularse, por virtud de las muy especiales relaciones dialécticas que el

[21] The appearance of the Catholic kings Isabel de Castilla and Fernando de Aragón at the end of *Fuenteovejuna* testify to this. The emergence of Spanish historical drama follows Lukács' theory that such work appeared to show the process of transformation from an old political order to a new one.

> dramaturgo -es decir, el constructor de la acción dramática y el constructor de la representación escénica- establece entre el pasado y el presente, entre el que llamamos "tiempo histórico", y el tiempo actual, que es el tiempo del dramaturgo y del espectador, es decir, el tiempo de la construcción del drama, el de su representación y el de su recepción.[22]
>
> [Every historical tale is analeptic in principle, and is built on the separation of two times, the time of the narrated object and the time of the tale proper. In historical drama, however, this separation tends to dim, and even to disappear, by virtue of the very special dialectic relations that the playwright – that is the architect of dramatic action and of stage representation – establishes between past and present, between what we call "historical time" and current time, which is the time of the playwright and the spectator, namely the time of the drama's construction, of its staging and of its reception.]

During the 1830s and the first decade of the twentieth century Spaniards were looking back at wars that challenged the nation's imperial status: the loss of the fleet at Trafalgar (1805) and then the Napoleonic invasion (1808); and later the 1898 war that led to the loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. History was turning in those events, leaving Spain behind. The flowering of history plays in those instances signaled an attempt to "process" those national events, just as later Buero, Sastre and Sinisterra addressed the Civil War. This pattern helps explain the two previous turns to historical drama, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Early twentieth-century historical drama is poetic, bearing few Modernist and Realist influences from the late nineteenth century, "forma brillante y crítica ausente; versificación rica y variada; entusiasmo patriótico y exaltación de las virtudes de la raza en el pasado español" [brilliant form and absent critique; rich and varied verse; patriotic enthusiasm and exaltation of the virtues of the race in the Spanish past].[23] A brief survey of major authors who cultivated this form includes: Ramón del Valle Inclán (*Farsa y licencia de la reina castiza)* and Eduardo Marquina *(Las hijas del Cid,* 1908, *En Flandes se ha puesto el sol,* 1910, *Teresa de Jesús,* 1933). From the *Generación del 27* we recall Alejandro Casona *(Corona de amor y muerte,* 1935, *El caballero de las espuelas de oro,* 1964), Federico García Lorca *(Mariana Pineda,* 1927) and Rafael Alberti *(Noche de guerra en el Museo del Prado,*

[22] Cf. Francisco Ruiz Ramón, "Apuntes para una dramaturgia del drama histórico español del siglo XX", pp. 363-4.

[23] Ángel-Raimundo Fernández, p. 216. Dougherty contests this supposed absence of critique in "Eduardo Marquina, disidente. 'En Flandes se ha puesto el sol." *Hecho teatral* 8 (2008): 33-49 and in "Deconstructing the Patriarch: Eduardo Marquina's 'Las hijas del Cid (1908)," *España Contemporánea* 17.1 (2004): 67-79.

1956). During the 1950s and 1960s two figures, Alfonso Paso *(El mejor mozo de España,* 1962) and Joaquín Calvo Sotelo *(El proceso del Arzobispo Carranza,* 1964) stand out. Modern Spanish historical drama followed the conservative realist model, until the 1950s, when the publication of Antonio Buero Vallejo's *Un soñador para un pueblo* (1958) marked a shift in this mimetic tendency. Critics position Buero Vallejo's historical dramas as revisionist interpretations of national history.[24] Buero Vallejo introduces a new mode of writing historical drama, combining renovation and critique in order to create symbols reflecting the state of Spain of his time.[25] His dramas introduce figures who symbolize progress and renovation (Esquilache in *Un soñador para un pueblo,* 1958*),* freedom of thought (Velázquez in *Las Meninas,* 1960*),* or who denounce social and political degradation (Larra in *La detonación,* 1977*).* The playwright does indeed revise the past from the perspective of the present, but, furthermore, he *engages* the audience to participate actively in these revisions as a form of endurance.

Engaging with a people's national history has a very powerful effect, because it plays with the audience's awareness that it is witnessing an enactment of its own past. Other authors who had a realist approach to historical drama are Francisco Nieva (*Sombra y quimera de Larra. Representación alucinada de "No más mostrador,"* 1976), Alfonso Sastre (*Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes,* 1955, *M.S.V. o La sangre y la ceniza,* 1965, *Crónicas romanas,* 1968) and Lauro Olmo (*Pablo Iglesias,* 1986). The work of Alfonso Sastre is more radical and expresses a feeling of urgency for social action. Authors who express a committed stance vis-à-vis history are José Rodríguez Méndez, Martín Recuerda, Carlos Muñiz, Domingo Miras and Antonio Gala, as well as María Manuela Reina, Concha Romero and Carmen Resino.[26]

Buero's model of historical drama became obsolete with the advancement of postmodernity, postdramatic theater and other new theatrical approaches to the notion of history. José Sanchis Sinisterra has a unique approach to history, from the "borders" (in line with his commitment to the *Teatro Fronterizo*), in which he unmakes critical historical episodes to offer an original commentary of both the socio-political situation of Spain *and* the condition of theatrical art during this time. Finally, the latest tendencies within historical drama situate it at the intersection of commitment and preoccupation for the affirmation of the individual in crisis, experimenting with various forms such as farce, modern fable, and tragicomedy within an episodic structure (Juan Mayorga).

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[24] See Ricardo Doménech, *El teatro de Buero Vallejo. Una meditación española* (1973), Luis Iglesias Feijoo, *La trayectoria dramática de Antonio Buero Vallejo* (1982), Catherine O'Leary, *The Theatre of Antonio Buero Vallejo: ideology, politics and censorship* (2005).

[25] Ángel-Raimundo Fernández, p. 220.

[26] According to Ángel-Raimundo Fernández, the historical plays of Reina, Romero and Resina do not show the same socio-political commitment as those of Buero, Sastre and others (226-227), but their approach to history does reflect a certain preoccupation with contemporary issues and their correspondence with the past.

Views of history – Lukács, Benjamin, Todorov, Ricoeur

Several thinkers have helped conceptualize and navigate through the different visions of history found in the plays explored in this project. These visions find echoes in some of the works examined and provide stimulating point of departures for this analysis. The concept of history and its understanding have acquired multiple meanings throughout time. Most commonly history is understood as the documentation of events from the past, the writing about those events from the past, and their relation to the present and future. From antiquity to the present, many thinkers, philosophers and historians have battled with the concept of history, trying to unpack its meaning(s), often times in correspondence with the dominant economic, social and cultural trends of their epoch: Aristotle (*The Poetics)*, G.W.F. Hegel *(The Philosophy of History,* published posthumously as a collection of lectures*)*, Nietzsche (*The Use and Abuse of History,* 1873), Martin Heidegger (*Being and Time,* 1927, translated into English in 1962*)*, Johan Huizinga (*The Concept of History and Other Essays,* 1946), Walter Benjamin *(Theses on the Philosophy of History,* late 1930s), Paul Ricoeur *(History and Truth,* 1955, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* 2004*)*, R.G. Collingwood (*The Idea of History,* 1956), E. H. Carr (*What is History?* 1967), Tzvetan Todorov (*The Morals of History,* 1991, translated into English in 1995, *Hope and Memory,* 2000, translated into English in 2003), Jacques Rancière (*The Names of History. On the Poetics of Knowledge,* 1992, translated into English in 1994), etc. Aristotle establishes a famous distinction between history and literature in *Poetics,* between what actually happened and what may happen, between what can be known because it had happened and what can only be imagined, between the historian who can present the truth of an experience and the poet who can present the truth of thought. In the following few pages I will trace what the theorists and scholars whom I engage with the most in this project have said or have to say about history, how they understand the past and what they mean when they speak of "memory."

The difficulty of establishing the truth of a past event lies in the impossibility of experiencing it again in the present. For Hayden White and other postmodern thinkers,[27] this temporal distance problematizes the understanding of history or of a specific historical event, which White interprets as a fictional (or imagined) account of the historian (*The Content of the Form* 147). Hayden White's major contribution in the field of historic discourse comes precisely from his reinvestigation of historiography in written form. He argues that in modern historical narrative the "historical" and the "literary" are bound together by the

[27] Postmodernity ushered in the doubt vis-à-vis the pretension of objectivity of historiography (Hayden White: *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe,* 1973, *Tropics of Discourse,* 1978) by challenging its scientific rigor, blurring the distinction between literature and history, and showing that the intent of both disciplines to understand reality has a subjective nature.

use of "emplotment," a stylistic discourse that closes the Aristotelian gap between history and literature.

In *The Discourse of History,* Roland Barthes follows suit by asking, "Does the narration of past events, which, in our culture from the time of the Greeks onwards, has generally been subject to the sanction of historical 'science', bound to the unbending standard of the 'real', and justified by the principles of 'rational' exposition – does this form of narration really differ, in some specific trait, in some indubitably distinctive feature, from imaginary narration, as we find it in the epic, the novel and the drama?"[28] Even if the modern understanding of history seems to blend into various forms of literary discourse, this does not annul the truth of the events that happened in the past. What is different is our way of approaching and understanding events.

Two supposedly divergent concepts, history and fiction found common ground in postmodern thinking. Linda Hutcheon claims that both history and fiction are forms of narrative that reveal meanings about the past and the present: "The meaning and shape are not in the events, but in the systems which make those past 'events' into historical 'facts'. This is not a 'dishonest refuge from the truth' but an acknowledgement of the meaning-making function of human construct" (*A Poetics of Postmodernism,* 89).[29] The network of "systems" mentioned by Hutcheon includes historical drama as well.

After Georg Lukács (*The Historical Novel,* 1962) linked the formation of modern historical consciousness to the struggle against absolutism in eighteenth-century Europe (France) and unveiled the intellectual process that led to the invention of the modern nation (Germany), it became clear that the emergence of modern nationalism and of historical consciousness were connected. A by-product of these complex processes was the historical novel. Based on the model of Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe,* Lukács understands the historical novel as a portrayal of the disintegration of archaic social forms in the face of capitalist transformation. Unlike earlier works that were set in the past and simply projected contemporary attitudes back in time, the real historical novel had true historical consciousness. Even if historical drama stood below the historical novel's capacity to penetrate "all the manifestations of life" (151), Lukács nonetheless characterizes it through the same formal rhetoric as the historical novel: historical drama emerged as a result of the important "collisions" between

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[28] Cf. Barthes, *The Discourse of History.*

[29] For a more critical perspective on Hutcheon's understanding of postmodernism, see the reference to "historiographic metafiction:" historiographic metafictions are "novels that are intensely self-reflective but that also both re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge" (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 285-286). Historiographic metafictions bridge the gap between historical and fictional works by recombining the two genres. They employ "a questioning stance through their common use of conventions of narrative, of reference, of the inscribing of subjectivity, of their identity as textuality, and even of their implication in ideology" (286).

the old nobility and feudalism (153). This transitional time, which led to the break up of the feudal system captured "magnificent confrontations in history" and represented the great "historical collision," the trademark of Lukács' historical discourse (154). Drawing from Pushkin's notion of the "public character of drama" (129), understood as both public source of inspiration (man's destiny) and public effect (popular entertainment), Lukács argues for a generalization proper of drama and its synthesizing force: "[…] individual destinies […] give *direct* expression to general destinies, destinies of whole nations, whole classes, indeed whole epochs" (130). To sum up, Lukács considered that at the center of historical drama (and novel) stood the fidelity between writer and historical reality, which he describes as a "faithful artistic reproduction of the great collisions, the great cries and turning-points of history" (166).

Walter Benjamin's *On the Concept of History (Theses on the Philosophy of History)* provides a pessimistic view of humanity, that ends on a hopeful-eschatological note, invoking the arrival of the Messiah. The seventh *Thesis* presents the dialectical view of its author on the subject of civilization and barbarism: "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism." This fragment is also the epitaph of the philosopher's tomb. In the *Theses,* Walter Benjamin explores humanity's responsibility to history and to the past in a marked allegorical structure. Throughout time, historians have used the concept of "history" as a justification for the present as "progress." Benjamin states that in order to overcome this misrepresentation, which hides the "rubble" and "debris" underneath that "progress," man needs to redeem the past from the alleged success of progress. In Thesis IX, he writes about the "angel of history," whose face is turned towards the past, "…one catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage hurling it before his feet."

For Tzvetan Todorov the discussion of the past includes notions of history, memory and evil. History is the "irreversible sequence of events" from the past, a "social context," that continues to live on in the present as memory (2003: 119, 135). Memory represents the individual's "mental traces" (132). The preservation of the past through memory is valid as long as memory is used to highlight the values of the past. He thus synthesizes a simple work formula for the historian, which consists in "establishing the facts, interpreting them and using the past" (127). The data (i.e. facts, testimonies) "must then be knitted together to support an argument and to show the lesson that can be drawn from the chosen fragment of history, even if the "moral of the tale" is not stated as "explicitly as it would be in a fable" (128). The purpose of history is on one hand to speak the truth about the past, and on the other to aim to create a better society.[30] Todorov argues that in order to make sense of the past, its present

[30] P. 128. According to Todorov, the superior aim of history is to establish the truth, "the equivalence or correspondence between an assertion and a thing that happened" (122).

memory should reflect a practical use, a purpose, other than singling out a *specific event* in order to decry its cruelty and urge for its eternal remembrance. Drawing from the Jewish Holocaust and Russian Stalinism, and analogies between later political figures and Hitler or Stalin respectively, Todorov suggests that when the past is reduced to an accumulation of evil, it is better if left unstirred: "Memory has to be a selection; only some features of an event are preserved, and others are dropped and forgotten, either straightaway or little by little" (127). These considerations follow from Todorov's observations of the negative uses of memory, through excessive acts of commemoration, inauguration of museums, etc., which have made the past "sacred" and isolated from the present, or which have made it "trivial," projecting it into the present (161).

In *Memory as a Remedy for Evil* Todorov further expands the question of memory and reaches the conclusion that it is not an efficient "remedy for evil" in the homonymous study, where "evil" stands for "various types of violence" (2010: 7). The discussion of memory within a legal frame through memory laws (in particular the Gayssot Law passed in France in 1990, establishing that denying the Holocaust was illegal, but also the *ley de memoria histórica* passed in Spain in 2007) secures a commemoration of the past and a continuous remembrance of its faults, however without managing to appease the violence of the *present.* Todorov applies the hero-victim dialectic to the issue of memory, recalling the past's good and evil narratives, and argues that this antagonistic relationship is similar to the *Us versus Them* distinction, which identifies two opposed groups, who continue the struggle in the present. For Todorov, the consideration of a criminal as "other" than us, a "monster" (perhaps not even worth being called a "human being") is the intrinsic cause for perpetuating violence, cruelty, thus evil, and only an erasure of this barrier can lead to a peaceful future (36). Todorov's position vis-à-vis the past and its relation to the present through history and memory is that they can serve a purpose for humanity, as long as their *interpretation* produces *values*, and not a deeper gap between human beings: "The historical past, like the natural order, has no intrinsic meaning, and by itself it produces no values at all. Meaning and value only come from human subjects questioning and judging the past, or the nature of things" (176). The answer can be found in a balanced questioning of the past, avoiding both its sanctification and its trivialization, in favor of using the past to a personal benefit or to teach others a lesson. The past is for the benefit of all, and all can learn from it:

> The work of the historian, like every work on the past, never consists solely in establishing the facts but also in choosing certain among them as being more salient and more significant than others, then placing them in relation to one another; now this work of

> selecting and combining is necessarily guided by the search, not for truth, but for the good.[31]

Critical to Paul Ricoeur's consideration of memory and history is the imperfect function of retrieving the past, because memory and history are subject to human fallibility and subjectivity in interpreting the past. *Memory, History, Forgetting* argues that the rationale for remembering (memories) is the very existence of history involving people. Paul Ricoeur's vision on history and memory is centered on his belief that the past (understood as past people, past events, etc.) loses its accessibility. However, this loss determines a current search for that past through its "traces." Memory and the writing and reading of history assist us in understanding and "retrieving" the past. At the center of the historian's work of representing the past are the testimonies of witnesses, which stand at the base of documents and archives: "[…] we have nothing better than our memory to assure ourselves of the reality of our memories – we have nothing better than testimony and criticism of testimony to accredit the historian's representation of the past" (2004: 278).

While dismissing the Hegelian view on history (converging of all histories into one intelligible history) and the positivistic view (existence of "bare" and "uninterpreted" facts waiting to be discovered), Ricoeur believes in the truth of objective historical knowledge. In *Truth and History,* he challenges the view of a unified flow of history, of a unity or continuity of history, arguing for the co-existence of multiple and simultaneous histories and, implicitly, truths, however, without advocating for a chaotic world. He compares the discontinuous trajectory of history to a chess player who carries on several games at the same time: "We carry on several histories simultaneously, in times whose periods, crises, and pauses do not coincide. We enchain, abandon, and resume several histories, much as a chess player who plays several games at once, renewing now with one, now with another." (186) This critique of the unity of history – a single, continuous flux of events in time – is valid or viable at the philosophical level, but fails if we think of the practical level of daily existence, which is today (and has been for about a century) inscribed or governed by the modern state.

The state, whose existence Ricoeur acknowledges and associates with a violence inflicted upon the understanding of history, has to regard its function as a unitary system, reflected in people's social activities and implicitly in their *historical* being. The State sees people and history as continuous and strives to give a unitary view to their existence, a meaning, a purpose, a goal. The very existence of the State would contradict the notion of a discontinuous history, at the philosophical and practical level. The meaning or direction (*sens)* that Ricoeur understands as pertaining to history only in an eschatological sense is in fact the basis of any contemporary political discourse. This is true of Spain's case during the Fascist rule, "the tyranny of fascisms was so grotesque because their man of

[31] Quot. in Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* p. 86.

history [social force] was restricted to one nation and one race" (183). Ricoeur links a nation's destiny to the exercise of political power, which manifests itself in the domain of work, leisure, welfare, education, technology, the arts, life and death. Is there a political force that does *not* regard its own governed geohistorical group as emerging from history, inhabiting one territory and continuing to gravitate in a direction that its political power sets? Spain's *destiny* in the twentieth century was dictated by the existence of political power.

As a starting point, I provide in Chapter 1 a critical examination of the polemic between Antonio Buero Vallejo (1916-2000) and Alfonso Sastre (b. 1926), challenging the classical *posibilista-imposibilista* antagonism between the two, and claiming that their history plays aim towards the common goal of using history as a platform for critique of the present. Buero and Sastre have an understanding of history as a chain of incidents whose succession leads to unfortunate events in the present. Georg Lukács' vision that historically inspired creation occurs around great social "collisions" situates Buero's and Sastre's drama in a similar context: great periods of tragedy coincide with world-historical changes in human society. Despite this teleological perception, both authors modify classical Aristotelian forms of drama, still employing the tragedy but opting for episodic structures and recurring to other disruptive formal techniques, such as the disturbance of sequential time. Through the tragic form, history acquires a "sense" that transcends chaotic events.[32] Buero and Sastre view tragedy as, respectively, "tragedia esperanzada" or 'hopeful tragedy' (searching for hope in the tragic of everyday life) and "tragedia compleja" or 'complex tragedy'. Both views feature the failed hero. In depicting failed artistic figures from the distant or recent Spanish past, such as Diego Velázquez, the Marquis of Esquilache and Mariano José de Larra, Buero Vallejo recurs to metaphor and allegory to create an ambient of resistance to the Franco dictatorship for his audience.[33] Sastre turns the legendary William Tell and the Spanish visionary theologian Miguel Servet into broken, imperfect versions of their corresponding mythical figure, creating, together with Buero, a poetics of forgiveness.

Via Charles Ganelin's analysis of the nineteenth-century strategic process of *refundición* of sixteenth-century *comedias,* I argue that Buero and Sastre created a palimpsestic history that "recasts" failed heroes from their respective historical contexts to the 1960s and 1970s Spain. These failed heroes offer a new way of filtering the historical process, overriding official academic discourse. Through their demystification of artistic or legendary figures, Buero and Sastre pose a challenge to official history, outlining their common mission of searching for potential alternatives to accepted views of history. They both kept alive the faith in the individual's historical agency, and its power to shape history.

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[32] Lindenberger, p. 73.

[33] For a similar approach, see Lindenberger's study of German tragedy. He claims that "Although Mother Courage and Galileo become the victims of history, the author's constant reminders that their failings were unnecessary is meant to goad the audience to do better in the face of history." (pp. 75-76).

Their common methods of dramatizing the individual's consciousness of his or her own situation within history are further developed in three sections. The first section studies how Sastre's *M.S.V. o La sangre y la ceniza* (1965) and Buero's *La detonación* (1977) explore alternative readings and meanings of history, empowering spectators to reexamine their "closed" lives under the dictatorship and find substitutes to despair and hopelessness. Through interludes of memory, time reversals and fantastic episodes that might have happened, both playwrights create fanciful "what if" scenarios that further their audiences' examination of their own lives and the imagination of alternative solutions to their particular problems. Using Baz Kershaw's definition of performance as "ideological transaction between spectators and audience," I argue that the "what if" episodes favor a transaction between the rigid sense of history and the fanciful imagination of the audience. Buero's and Sastre's methods of temporal alterations present a vision of history in progress, indefinite, in which the palimpsest metaphor transposes real, historical figures and events to imaginary contexts. This overlap between the historical and the imaginary releases the tension of a rigid and closed historical ending, and permits the audience to rejoice in the possibility of an alternative situation.

The second section of Chapter 1 analyzes how Sastre and Buero highlight human qualities in their respective protagonists, Guillermo Tell from *Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes* (1955) and Esquilache, from *Un soñador para un pueblo* (1958). This focus on human qualities in "failed" protagonists within the reality of Spain's strictly managed dictatorship brings to the stage a poetics of forgiveness, which underscores the universal and unifying errors, weaknesses and betrayal intrinsic to human nature. The acceptance of the failed hero – Tell falls asleep in his wife's arms, despite having accidentally killed his son, and Esquilache finds comfort in young Fernandita, a collective metaphor for the *pueblo español* – attempts to undo the *vencedores-vencidos* dialectic prevalent in Spain at the time. The third and last section looks at Buero's *Las Meninas,* offering a closure to the poetics of forgiveness approach from the previous sections. Addressing the issue of truth and vision through the metaphor of Velázquez's famous painting and the process of its being painted, Buero dramatizes the kinetic quality of history, whose totalizing truth is to be found in isolated, fortuitous moments.

The discussion moves to the examination of three key plays by José Sanchis Sinisterra (b. 1940), written and staged during the Transition and the new democracy: *¡Ay, Carmela!* (1986), *Naufragios de Álvar Núñez o La herida del otro* (1992) and *El cerco de Leningrado* (1994). Beginning at Franco's death in 1975, the Spanish transition is commonly divided in two periods – 1975-1982 and 1982-1996 –, which correspond to two successive political regimes.[34] In October 1977, a number of delegates from a wide range of political parties signed the Moncloa

[34] Kasten, p. 94. In the first period, between 1975 and 1982, Spain was ruled by Adolfo Suárez and his party, UCD. Between 1982 and 1996, Spain was governed by the Left under the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) and its leader, Prime Minister Felipe González.

Pacts in order to enact measures of economic and political stability, and to avoid a military intervention. The *pacto de olvido*[35] (pact of forgetting, pact of silence) symbolizes the governmental consensus to postpone dealing with burning issues of the past until democracy was secured.

I project Sanchis' concept of "marginality" onto this sociopolitical background and discuss his disrupted and fragmented vision of history in parallel with the Spanish socio-political climate. Franco's dictatorship had shaped the country and its people to believe in their nation's universal destiny, through the emphatic National-Catholicist discourse, the unifying thread of the two factions (Falangists and Catholics) that constituted the ruling political and ideological class. This legacy made it difficult to define the nation in terms of a "common past" during the first years of transition and democracy for fear it would evoke Franco's motto, *unidad de destino en lo universal*.[36] The political repression of the past and the Spaniards' disenchantment with the illusory nature of their country's greatness led to the shunning of any centralizing or unifying historical account. The tendency to fragment the country's past and weave alternative stories about it, mixing the imperialistic, messianic grandeur with the banality of the present is brilliantly echoed in Sanchis Sinisterra's poetics of marginal theatricality. His vision consists of experimentation at the level of form and content, by introducing various actor types in a blunt metatheatrical arrangement, often breaking the 'play' with instances of 'rehearsal' (but not necessarily with another 'play within'). The 'rehearsal' is part of the 'play' and communicates a sense of incompleteness and necessity for revision until a finite form is reached.

Citing Paul Ricoeur's vision of history, I situate Sanchis in a blurry context that reflects the state of the nation during Transition. His plays offer a structural and thematic deconstruction of the monolithic understanding of Spanish identity, at a crucial moment in its history. Jacques Lacan's understanding of fantasy as "screen" between subject and real existence is captured in *¡Ay, Carmela!* (1986) and *Naufragios de Álvar Núñez o La herida del otro* (1992). Both plays depict an illusory world of the past that invades the present at will and disrupts the flow of life. Drawing from Hans-Thies Lehmann's conceptualization

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[35] The *pacto de olvido* is considered a compromise by the Left, which "had to forget the atrocities committed against it by the Franco regime and forsake utopian projects imagined in resistance to Franco's oppression"(Kasten 94). Other studies interpret it as an opportune agreement that benefitted both the Left and the Right, and which guaranteed them a clear (free of Francoist associations) entrance in the new political arena. See Balfour and Quiroga, p. 85. And, finally, there are those who argue that the *pacto de olvido* was not a hindrance to cultural life, since works exploring the memory of the Civil War and its aftermath proliferated at the time. See Santos Juliá, quot. in Gies, p. 104-120.

[36] Balfour and Quiroga argue that the concept of the nation (*patria*) under Franco was defined in these (Falangist) terms, "unidad de destino en lo universal" (universal unity of destiny). This concept referred to Spain's alleged spiritual character forged over centuries through resistance to the Moorish invasions, Reconquest and unification (Catholic kings), and imperialism, which framed Spain's messianic destiny (p. 38).

of postdramatic theater in the early 1990s, I conclude that Sanchis Sinisterra's work matches in form and content the split between traditional dramatic (based on the text) and performative (based on the representation) aspects of a theatrical work. Free to examine its own past, Spanish society is paralyzed by the allure of the future (still a virtual performance) and also by the weight of its buried memories (a political text, such as the *pacto de olvido)*.

I understand Sanchis' original approach to history in the following terms: history as performance, exemplified by *¡Ay, Carmela!*, history as fragmentary mosaic, as seen in *Naufragios de Álvar Núñez o La herida del otro* and history as continuous transition, as it appears in *El cerco de Leningrado* (1994). This triptych of historical possibilities reflects an empty present, a space haunted by loss, confusion, and nostalgia. Characters from the present and the past meet on stage and participate in the audience's postmodern subjectivity. Like the country itself, they are *in transit,* between an uneasy past that cannot be demolished because it is being forgotten (the *pacto*) and a future that escapes imagination and gets out of control with its unimaginable proportions. The author questions the idea of Spanish identity in relation to the nation's imperial past (*Naufragios, ¡Ay, Carmela!*) and in relation to the European present and future (*El cerco*).

Following suit to the previous discussion of changing notions of history, Chapter 3 examines two key plays, *Himmelweg* (2003) and *La tortuga de Darwin* (2008) by Juan Mayorga (b. 1965), one of Spain's most celebrated contemporary playwrights. Mayorga fully engages the democratic period, which continues to posit several challenges to Spain's overall stability. Transition overcome, the country now has to face challenges both at the national and the continental level, since its integration into the European Union (1986, then European Community). No longer politically at the margin of Europe, Spain has also ceased to be *different* from modern western nations. It faces the same issues regarding ethnic identities, immigration and a constant discussion around the definition and delimitation of the nation. An exponent of the new democracy, Mayorga captures with humorous, satirical wit and philosophical insight central issues of the present. His structurally fragmented plays, with short and even interchangeable scenes reflect the altered Spanish narrative of the nation and its mutant identity within European and global contexts.

In tune with the emergence of performance studies, Mayorga's work eschews the proper "history play" categorization. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's allegorical discussion of history in the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, I address Mayorga's unique theatrical method of creating short, alternating or permutational scenes and unconventional revisiting of burning issues of the European past (i.e., the Jewish Holocaust, World Wars, Spanish Civil War, Cold War). Via Jean Baudrillard's "simulacrum," Slavoj Žižek's urgency to disqualify the present as "hyperreal" and notions about the classical fable, I argue that Mayorga employs human and non-human cartoonish characters in real, historical circumstances, as a means to transmit a personal sense of pessimism vis-à-vis humanity's decadence and loss of moral sensibility. He creates "modern

fables," mixing the human and the animal in mutant creatures (e.g. the tortoise-woman Harriet) that allegorize real historical figures and events.

Comparing the work of the playwright to that of the historian, Mayorga unites drama and history by attempting to create maps of the past, believing that a better understanding of the past is imperative to generate a better future. Thus, taking history as a not yet a completely exhausted terrain, he projects an un-orthodox view of the historical as incomplete and farcical, by incorporating absurd, two-dimensional (cartoonish) figures in his plays. Setting current situations in extreme scenarios from the past, Mayorga turns a historical-ethical gaze towards the audience, asking it to question the right of ownership over history and memory, and the moral limits of using these critical aspects for personal profit.

As a closing point, Chapter 4 undertakes an interrogation of the influence of religion in three works from the Transition and democracy, Fermín Cabal's *Vade retro* (1982), Concha Romero's *Un olor a ámbar* (1983) and Carmen Resino's *Bajo sospecha* (1995). These playwrights explore the intersection of religion and history on stage. Can Spain modernize (i.e. democratize) and remain Catholic? Can the history of Spain's mystics and inquisitors be accommodated within an evermore-secularized society? In the early 1990s there was an increase of secularization in Spain coupled with a pressure on Socialist governments to follow their Marxist ideology and disengage the state from religion. Spain's "modernization" and democratization pose a challenge to the relationship between Church and State.

While the move from dictatorship to democracy does not *require* a disengagement from religion, many authors regarded Spain's attitude vis-à-vis religion in the new democracy as an imperial or Francoist relic and as such engaged in highly satirical or comical treatments of this topic. These authors dramatize the tensions between modern secularization and traditional Catholic faith.

CHAPTER I

From Civil War to Transition: Antonio Buero Vallejo and Alfonso Sastre

Disrupting Linear History, Questioning Destiny and Honoring Human Failure

> Toda interpretación histórica es problemática,
> y en mayor medida de lo presumible,
> enigmática.
> - Antonio Buero Vallejo, *Acerca del drama histórico*

> [All historical interpretation is problematic,
> and, more than one would expect,
> enigmatic.]

> But history is extraordinarily rich; it allows for many other interpretations and it is necessary for us to keep in mind the *limiting action* of other possible schemata so as to shield ourselves against the fanaticism which springs up with all premature unity.
> - Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*
> -

In Buero Vallejo's *El tragaluz* (1967), He and She, two researchers from the future, coordinate an exercise of historical interpretation: they appear on stage at certain time intervals, while the action is paused, and make critical reflections on the previously viewed scenes, inviting the audience to reflect as well:

> Si no os habéis sentido en algún instante verdaderos seres del siglo veinte, pero observados y juzgados por una especie de consciencia futura; si no os habéis sentido en algún otro momento como seres de un futuro hecho ya presente que juzgan, con rigor y piedad, a gentes muy antiguas y acaso iguales a vosotros, el experimento ha fracasado. (309)
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> [If you haven't felt for a moment that you were true beings of the twentieth century, but observed and judged by a species of future consciousness; if you haven't felt at some other moment like beings

from a future already present, who judge, with rigor and pity, very ancient people who are the same as you, the experiment has failed.]

The significance of this passage lies in the idea that the present is the future of the past. What Buero Vallejo is saying is that without a critical knowledge of the past, in order to understand how and why things happened, it is not worthwhile to live in the present. In order to be able to live in *any* present, man should keep one eye on the past, the other on the future, and he should always be ready to judge those who came before him, as he will always be judged by those who follow.

Antonio Buero Vallejo (1916-2000) wrote history plays in response to a very personal quest. Having fought in the Civil War, spared at the last moment from a death sentence and imprisoned for a period of six years, Buero could no longer employ his artistic training as a painter at the *Real Academia de Bellas Artes* and looked for an alternative way to voice his experience.[37] Searching for hope in the tragic of everyday life, Buero wanted readers and spectators alike to imagine an alternative way of resolving conflictive situations. In his plays he extracts known episodes from history and reconstructs their premises, creating room for other possibilities of arriving at their particularity. In other words, he leaves open the door of history, because, "escribir teatro histórico es reinventar la historia sin destruirla" [writing historical theater is to reinvent history without destroying it"].[38] This may seem arbitrary, but as he stated, "esta invención o intuición mía, si no consta que sucediese, bien pudo suceder" [this invention or intuition of mine, if it did not happen, it could well have happened].[39] Indeed, Buero's history plays are based on possibility, which makes them more "philosophical than factual."[40] The recourse to history involves a choice of eras that are interesting from a political or artistic point of view, and of characters who had a lasting effect on the evolution of Spanish society.

In Buero's conception of theater, the audience must see itself as part of an active historical process, one in which the future is always affected by the past and determined by the present. "Desmitificamos", Buero said, "pero para volver a mitificar…No hay que destruir los mitos, sino estudiarlos. No hay que creer que esa palabra equivale a 'mentira' …en el arte, puede ser la expresión condensada de una gran verdad" [We demythologize, but in order to remythologize. We don't have to destroy myths, but study them. We don't have to believe that myth equals 'lie'…in art, it can be the condensed expression of a great truth].[41] Myth possesses legitimacy for the playwright because of its

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[37] At the end of the war Buero spent eight months waiting to be executed (August- November 1940), and then spent until February 8, 1946 in various prisons. For details see Carmen González Cobos Dávila, "Antonio Buero Vallejo: el hombre y su obra", pp. 13-14.
[38] "Acerca del drama histórico", p. 19. Buero Vallejo is paraphrasing Aristotle's *Poetics.*
[39] Buero quot. in O'Leary, p. 144.
[40] O'Leary, p. 144.
[41] Buero quot. in O'Leary, p. 141.

symbolic truth and universal value. The return to myth – as a counter force to official history – aligns with Buero's creed that present balance can be reached through the tranquil didacticism that myths possess, thanks to their temporal distance. The future is (still) open as long as we live in the present regardless of the devastating nature of the past, at a national or personal level. Is this utopianism? Maybe. For Buero it is plain social reality, in which history is not locked in textbooks, but continues to pulsate and be "written" by every individual. Hence, the vision of history as palimpsest: history plays are tragedies, *esperpentos*, philosophical oases or allegories, according to how their protagonists filter historical processes.

Two conventional meanings of history exist: past events and the writing of those events. There is a difference between history "written" by every individual and the writing of history in a fictional work, such as a novel or a play. Every individual writes history in the sense that he or she actively contributes to the progress of situations that affect the nation at a larger scale. The writing of history in a fictional work is by definition subjective and responds more to a tendency to create within a mechanism that allows either real or fictional characters to create history on the background of a real historical fact or event. In fictional work, characters work towards corroborating or exemplifying a particular moment in real history, whose existence is documented. Buero's work combines these two methods, by taking historical events and having real and fictional characters intervene in the story more than is historically necessary (i.e. explaining and expanding the working machinery behind a past event) to illustrate the face of an epoch or period. Thus, his characters "write" history in the sense that they face possible, imagined or fantastic situations that are not historically documented, to challenge the course of history.

Buero wrote five history plays (*Un soñador para un pueblo, Las Meninas, El concierto de San Ovidio, El sueño de la razón* and *La detonación*) in which artists and artistic activity are predominant. The protagonists, two painters (Diego Velázquez in *Las Meninas* and Francisco de Goya y Lucientes in *El sueño de la razón*), musicians (David in *El concierto de San Ovidio*), utopian politicians (Esquilache from *Un soñador para un pueblo*) and young writers (Mariano José de Larra from *La detonación*) pursue an aesthetic ideal which is manifest in their truth-seeking.

Born a decade later (1926), Alfonso Sastre was a playwright by profession[42] and believed, like Bertolt Brecht, that theater should work for society's greater good, and should consequently serve an immediate revolutionary purpose.[43] To this end he defended the social and ethical value of tragedy. The tragic is present in his history plays (*Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes, M.S.V. o La sangre y la ceniza, En la red, Crónicas romanas, El camarada*

[42] Excluding his two-week long experience as an aeronautical engineer, which he abandoned in favor of theater.
[43] O'Leary, p. 61.

oscuro), mixed with a comic element. Consequently, the figure of the hero is "complex" and gravitates toward the tragicomic:

> […] podríamos llamar, frente a la tragedia pura o 'simple', una forma neo-trágica que podría definirse como una 'tragedia compleja'. Para ello, sobre un material tradicionalmente trágico y 'serio' (un proceso 'histórico' que termina en la hoguera), trato hoy de reconstruir lo que llamo irónicamente una tragicomedia, y creo que es, en verdad, una tragedia verdadera.[44]
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> [we could propose, as an alternative to the pure or 'simple' tragedy, a neo-tragic form, defined as a 'complex tragedy'. My aim is to take a traditionally tragic and 'serious' material (an 'historical' situation that ends at the stake), and out of it try to reconstruct what I ironically call a tragicomedy, and what I think really is a true tragedy.]

Spiked with mocking ingredients, his theater reflects the belief that the origin of tragedy is man's tendency to wonder about the reasons for his condition. This questioning attitude distances the protagonist from the conventional prototype of pedestal hero. Instead, he swerves between obstacles, carries out internal battles – as his human nature dictates –, while at the same time having great aspirations. As an existentialist, Sastre held sympathy for the isolated, concrete individual on the edge of history and subject to the unavoidable conditions of being alive and human. But, his aesthetic ideal was a profound realism, a "literary mode that includes the tragic quality of individual human existence as well as the perspective of historical development, refusing to disintegrate into pessimism on the one hand, or to offer a naively optimistic outlook on the other."[45]

Contrary to Buero's practice of using artistic figures (Esquilache would fit this category given his creative-imitative approach to politics), Sastre's characters range from legendary figures (William Tell in *Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes*), intellectuals condemned for theological reasons (Michael Servetus – Miguel

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[44] Alfonso Sastre, "Notas del autor", *M.S.V. o La sangre y la ceniza,* p. 139. Sastre is inserting himslef in a very long, distinctively Spanish tradition when he uses the term "tragicomedia". A play with both tragic and comic elements, it is defined by the three criteria of the "tragicomic", namely character, action and style. Developed after the Renaissance in Italy, England and France, the tragicomic style is a "mixed genre," in which the characters "belong to both the popular and the aristocratic classes," "the action, though serious and even dramatic, does not lead up to a catastrophe, and the hero does not perish," and "the style combines the elevated and emphatic language of tragedy with the everyday vulgar language of comedy." Cf. Patrice Pavis. *Dictioary of the Theatre. Terms, Concepts and Analysis*. Pp. 418-419. Sastre moves away from some of these criteria, because his hero does perish at the end (Miguel Servet), but overall he abides to the tragicomic style.

[45] Alfonso Sastre, *Anatomía del Realismo*, p. 129.

Servet in the homonymous play *M.S.V. o La sangre y la ceniza*), Iberian rulers (Viriato in *Crónicas romanas)*, communist activists (Ruperto Solanas Más in *El camarada oscuro*), etc. Sastre's history plays fit in his larger horizon of overtly political *and* socially committed theater, a purpose he expressed openly in the 1950 manifesto *Teatro de agitación social* and later in *Anatomía del Realismo* (1965). Giving priority to the social over the artistic, political engagement played a visible part in his theoretical and theatrical work. A member of the Spanish Communist Party from 1963 to 1975, Sastre thought that social degradation could be stopped only through socialist subversion.

Unlike Buero, Sastre dramatized history for what he believed was its telos: to bring social justice to the people through immediate revolution. He explicitly expresses this principle in his 1968 play *Crónicas romanas,* where he asserts the value of militant spirit and direct action.[46] This is often obvious in the blunt anachronisms in his plays.[47] Inspired by myths (William Tell, the siege of Numantia) or figures from the past that had an ambivalent nature (both heroic and flawed, as is the case of Miguel Servet), Sastre poses a challenge to official history. His demystification of William Tell and Miguel Servet resembles Buero's search for potential alternatives in history, and the latter's belief that in the breaking and reconstruction of myths lays a truth-value.

Sastre's *M.S.V. o La sangre y la ceniza* (1960-1965) contains the enigmatic initials "M.S.V.". We can deduce that the abbreviation stands for Miguel Servet Villanueva, but it can as well signify the initials of an anonymous person from the course of history. *Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes* (1955) takes us to the Swiss folk legend of William Tell. Just like Servet, William acts not like a veritable hero, exempt of faults and errors, but like a human being subject to mistakes and slip-ups. Sastre thus raises the problematic of heroism while affirming the necessity for heroes in modern times.

Both Buero and Sastre wrote dramas in which history serves as a platform for critique of the present. They explore themes of repression and censorship limitations. Buero admitted that one of the reasons behind writing *Un soñador para un pueblo* was to focus attention on the eighteenth century. Being *el siglo de las luces,* the birth of liberalism, it clashed with the spirit and politics of National Catholicism. The fascist rule under Franco had declared the eighteenth century

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[46] In *Cuadro V* of the play, at the intellectuals' gathering, there are lines such as, "Yo pienso en un modelo puro y activo que saque al pueblo de su marasmo. Acciones ejemplares, debidas a unos pocos, si no hay más que las hagan" (333) or the aridity of so much thinking and speaking, "¡Todo eso son palabras![…] ¡Dadme una metralleta y moveré el mundo! ¡Dadme una metralleta!" (334).

[47] For instance, the presence of rifles during the Roman siege of Numantia in 150 B.C.; the presence of Nazi soldiers at the Inquisition trial of Miguel Servet in 1553; or the striking feature of the physical occupation of the theatre by armed students in the final act of *Crónicas romanas*, to mention a few.

corrupt, and the play came as reparation for the unjust depiction of those times.[48] Speaking about *La sangre y la ceniza* and *Guillermo Tell*, Sastre admitted that,

> Siempre que podíamos empleábamos la historia para tratar de situaciones actuales. La historia siempre era como una metáfora. Más que de Servet, la obra trataba de la censura fascista contra la vida intelectual…de modo que era una forma de enmascarar el ataque al sistema fascista en el que vivíamos, haciendo como que era un tema histórico. […] cuando hablaba de Tell y del gobernador Gessler, lo que hacía era hablar a través de ellos del fascismo nuestro.[49]
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> [We used history to talk about present situations whenever we could. History was always like a metaphor. More than Servet, the work dealt with Fascist censorship against intellectual life…so it was a way of masking the attack on the Fascist system in which we lived, pretending it was a historical theme. […] when I spoke of Tell and Governor Gessler, I was speaking through them about our own Fascism.]

Antonio Buero Vallejo and Alfonso Sastre have been considered the precursors of a type of theater that found fertile ground in later authors such as José Sanchis Sinisterra, Juan Mayorga, Fermín Cabral, María Manuela Reina, Carmen Resino, etc. What distinguishes Buero and Sastre from later playwrights is that their historical theater is a mode of dramatic exploration of abstract truths through the concrete presence of past figures. Before approaching their history plays in tandem and analyzing how each playwright uses and processes history, it is necessary to note a peculiar recurring aspect in most scholarship treating their work: the Buero-Sastre polemic.

Prompted by Buero's public statement that Sastre was writing an "impossible" theater,[50] the two playwrights carried out a polemic commonly

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[48] "El momento revivido es uno de esos puntos de nuestra historia cuyas derivaciones conservan actualidad: aquella etapa en que un grupo de hombres esclarecidos – los 'Ilustrados' – intentaron, pero no consiguieron finalmente, convertir a mi país en una nación moderna y ejemplar. Ese grupo, y el excepcional monarca que lo dirigió, han sufrido en estos tiempos "mala prensa". A mí me pareció necesario darles […] una reparación escénica. No a todos ha gustado eso, pues muchas de nuestras cosas se siguen pareciendo demasiado a aquellas otras contras las que el rey, Esquilache y los demás creyeron obligado luchar." "Buero Vallejo nos habla de *Hoy es fiesta* y *Un soñador para un pueblo*'", *Negro sobre blanco*, no. 12, April 1960.

[49] Quot. in Francisco Caudet, p. 104.

[50] Buero stated about *Imposibilismo* that: "las 'limitaciones' mayores se las impone uno mismo. ¿Es un error? … Hay escritores que juegan, al parecer, la papeleta del 'imposibilismo', unas veces de buena fe y otras acaso para conseguir patente de mártir en el extranjero. Mas yo no creo que se deba mantener esa actitud, sino la posibilista, la de escribir para aquí, que es donde estamos y debemos laborar." Quot. in Catherine O'Leary, p. 125.

referred to as the *posibilismo – imposibilismo* debate. Buero adopted an approach that made the staging of his plays *possible*, at a time when cultural production was strictly controlled by the Franco regime's censorship. In contrast, Alfonso Sastre, advocate of a revolutionary theatre, wrote plays that overtly provoked the regime and consequently could not be produced in the contemporary political climate. Therefore, at one end stood Buero, the *posibilista*, who enjoyed a rich theatrical life, crowned with prizes and public recognitions.[51] At the other end, we have Sastre, equally well known but unable to see his plays commercially produced: the *imposibilista*.[52]

Kessel Schwartz's study, "Posibilismo and Imposibilismo: the Buero-Sastre Polemic," appeared in 1968, eight years after the dispute, and aptly analyzed the controversy.[53] Even though further scrutiny of the polemic seems unnecessary, it is very surprising to discover that much of the scholarship in the past few decades, almost without exception, dwells on it.[54] Converted into a fetish, the Buero-Sastre polemic is hard to relinquish as critics pursue its dichotomies like frantic modern-day paparazzi.

This raises the question of the real proportions of their polemic. Do Buero's and Sastre's opposing theoretical views of theatrical praxis justify the perpetual dichotomy to which critics and theater historians have reduced them? Acknowledging the formal and conceptual particularities of their dramatic styles, a complete separation of their dramaturgy is not only unproductive but also scholarly restrictive. Despite differences, there are several points of convergence in their work. Their history plays deploy different historical figures (predominantly artists and idealists in Buero's theater, and social activists or revolutionaries in Sastre's) for similar artistic, social and political purposes.

This chapter explores selective history plays from both authors (*Un soñador para un pueblo, Las Meninas* and *La detonación* by Buero Vallejo, and

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[51] Three National Prizes, in 1957, 1958 and 1959 and a National Prize for his entire career in 1980, the National Literature Prize in 1996, the Miguel de Cervantes Prize in 1986.

[52] In "Ideology, Politics and Censorship," Catherine O'Leary notes about Sastre and censorship that it may have been overstated. According to the archives in Alcalá de Henares, of the fifty-seven applications to produce his plays, out of which forty-seven were under Franco, only five were prohibited. Moreover, occasionally, some texts were approved for *teatros de cámara.* (pp. 93-95).

[53] *Revista Hispánica Moderna.* Año 34, no. 1/2, Homenaje a Federico de Onís (1885-1966) Vol. I (Jan. - Apr., 1968), pp. 436-445.
http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/30207058?uid=3739560&uid=2129&uid=2134&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&uid=3739256&sid=21102610052557

[54] For example, Luis Iglesias Feijoo wrote: "La polémica del posibilismo teatral – supuestos y presupuestos" in 1987, reanalyzing the polemic. Followed suit Pilar de la Puente Samaniego in 1988 with "Antonio Buero Vallejo. Proceso a la historia de España", or more recently, Catherine O'Leary in 2005: "Antonio Buero Vallejo. Ideology, Politics, Censorship." Finally, even the most recent to date book on Sastre, Graciela Balestrino's 2008 "La escritura desatada. El teatro de Alfonso Sastre", reopens what was considered a closed file. However, it is important to note that Fernando Doménech's study on Buero's theater, "El teatro de Buero Vallejo: una meditación española"(1973, 1979) does not insist on the polemic at all, compared to other studies which reproduce previous criticism or go back to the *Primer Acto* issues to re-actualize it.

Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes and *M.S.V. o La sangre y la ceniza* by Alfonso Sastre) following common themes and problematics, thus aiming to transcend the neverending *posibilista-imposibilista* divide and to create a liaison with current explorations, manifestations and uses of history in drama. In light of some of their plays, the proximity between the two playwrights will hopefully become more apparent. This joint Buero-Sastre introductory study will also open the way for larger frames of analysis of the role of history in drama in subsequent chapters. Key issues to be discussed are the role of art in the process of history and the ways in which theater processes history. The process of history or throughout history refers to the events and facts that are collected in historical discourse and which stand, at times, at the influence of art (i.e. paintings, such as *Las Meninas* will show).

The playwrights' common objective was the dramatic expression of truth. For Buero truth was hope and the human being's capacity for change. Sastre expected his explicit political theater to start a revolution, equating truth to social change and immediate action. Even if the playwrights were opposed in their strategies, their theatrical values were not necessarily divergent. Operating under the desire of conveying truth, their historical protagonists leave a comparable trace.

Critics limit the contact points between Buero and Sastre to external influences (Bertolt Brecht's methods of alienation) or the normalizing censorship. These approaches make difficult, even unthinkable, a potential comparative study of their works. Considering the undeniable fact that Buero wrote history plays as a form of moral rebellion against the system (and in order to suggest that what may seem unrealizable in the present, in the now, can be accomplished one day in the future), and that Sastre wrote history plays as a form of political rebellion against that very same system, a connection can be drawn between them. Read against the polemic (external factor) and focused on the internal situations of the plays, the sense of their rebellion acquires unity, through the very rebellion that their heroes portray.

What I propose, then, is to leave behind the excessive focus on the playwrights' engagement with contemporaneous political measures —the pairing of immediate events with symbolic elements in their plays—, or their antagonism, and to foreground, instead, their common methods employed to dramatize the individual's consciousness of his or her situation within history. This will lead us to the core of the playwrights' shared ethical strategy, their staging of individual conscience faced with unavoidable choices that could spell disaster and despair, but which they don't necessarily have to. It is time, in sum, to turn the page, as Tzvetan Todorov would say.[55] Fifty-two years later, the

[55] In his 1992 speech in Brussels at the congress on "History and Memory of the Nazi genocide crimes" and in his subsequent writing, Todorov is consistent in his argument that memory is a selective process and that events from the past should be selectively forgotten, when they do not serve as "a remedy for evil." Considered from this point of view, Ricardo Doménech's 1973 book

polemic obscures two different means of attaining a similar goal. Their similar goal was to erase the *vencedores-vencidos* dialectic through a poetics of fogiveness and humanizing failure, as well as a commitment to alternate historical possibilities.

1.1. History – A Work in Progress: *(M.S.V.) o La sangre y la ceniza* (1965) by Alfonso Sastre and *La detonación (fantasía en dos partes)* (1977) by Antonio Buero Vallejo

> The two essential facts about a work of art, that it is contemporary with its own time and that it is contemporary with ours, are not opposed but complementary facts.
> - *Northrop Frye*[56]

Conventional history often presents itself as a closed book, but theater can reshape (and even temporarily override) history, opening it to alternate readings and meanings, one of which is that things didn't have to turn out as they did. Buero and Sastre explore these alternatives with an audience, because they can empower spectators to reexamine their "closed" lives under the dictatorship and find alternatives to despair and hopelessness. In order to stage the alternate possibilities, both playwrights construct a fanciful ambient that allows for "what if" episodes to accumulate and challenge the strict *chronology* (fate) of historical time. The means they employ are: interludes of memory, time reversals, and fantastic episodes that *could* have happened and might have changed history. The tragic endings (Larra's suicide and Servet's burning at the stake) of both stories notwithstanding, it can also be asserted that both individuals mattered even as they succumbed to history's corrosive forces.

Moreover, both Buero and Sastre follow a similar practice: they rewrite official history with their contemporary circumstances and audiences in mind. In Mariano José de Larra, Buero had seen a unique case of a writer, who during his ten-year literary career, "fue el único escritor que en todo momento buscó hablar claro, lo más claro posible"[was the only writer who at every moment sought to speak clearly, in the clearest way possible].[57] Larra proved to Buero, himself a

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on Buero's theater, suggestively titled "A Spanish Meditation," introduces us to an analysis of the plays, whose premise is that "historical inaccuracies are superfluous in a literary work"(p. 151).

[56] Quot. in Ganelin, p. 3.

[57] Buero quot. in "Buero Vallejo tras *La detonación:* Hay que ingeniárselas bajo las dictaduras." Miguel Bayón, *Diario 16*. 29 September 1977, p. 23.

writer forged under censorship, that "bajo las dictaduras hay que ingeniárselas, […] siempre hay mil caminos más fuertes que la pereza, que hay que atreverse a decir las cosas aunque sea por medio de rodeos, que eso vale más que el silencio" [under dictatorships one has to depend on one's wits, (…) there are always a thousand strategies preferable to lethargy, one must dare to say things even if in a roundabout way, because that is worth more than silence].[58] And, most importantly, Buero had seen a "coincidence" between Larra's time and the present situation in Spain, which allowed him "not to force" any analogies.[59]

Even if Miguel Servet was an anonymous sixteenth-century doctor, Sastre had seen in his figure an intellectual fighting against "the intolerance and fanaticism of history,"[60] and in his story, "a certain proximity with experiences lived in the years of Franco."[61]

Both playwrights stage fantastic episodes as significant means of historical interpretation. This is an example of how theater evades typical historical discourse and broadens the scope of historical representation. Throughout this section, theater's unique ways of making the past present and voicing the values in conflict are at the forefront. One such strategy is the character's fantasizing a "what if" situation, which becomes a significant part of historical interpretation. The lives of Mariano José de Larra (1809-1837), romantic writer, journalist, politician, and Miguel Servet Villanueva (1511-1553), physician, theologian, Humanist are separated by roughly three centuries. Their *dramatic* lives, however, are separated only by decades: Sastre's *La sangre y la ceniza* was written between 1960 and 1965,[62] and was performed for the first time in 1976, while Buero's *La detonación* was written and staged in 1977. Both protagonists met a violent death, the former committing suicide at the age of twenty-seven, and the latter being burnt at the stake at forty-two for his religious (non-Trinitarian and Anabaptist) beliefs.

Mariano José de Larra and Miguel Servet are two figures from the later historical theater of Buero and Sastre, who are faced with the problematic of death – the end of a human existence fraught with doubt. Both plays introduce flashback and other backward-forward lapses, which, together with the episodic structure, create a layered or stratified vision of history. Two events set history in motion at the beginning of each play: the destruction of Servet's statue in *La sangre y la ceniza* and the pistol pressed against Larra's temple in *La detonación*. The Prologue of Sastre's play creates an imaginary scenario of what could be the Second World War: "En el que algunas gentes de uniforme, sin muchas explicaciones, destruyen una estatua" [Where some men in uniform, without

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[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] *Blanco y Negro*, 9 May 1979, p. 57.
[61] Sastre quot. in *Blanco y Negro*, 18 September 1976, p. 6.
[62] The first edition of *La sangre y la ceniza* was in 1967 and appeared in Italy, because of the censorship. The Spanish edition appeared in 1976, the same year that the play was staged for the first time.

much explanation, destroy a statue] (145). The text of the Prologue informs that this act took place in order to melt the statue and build cannons for the maintenance of the public order, while Nazi hymns are heard in the background. The statue was of Miguel Servet. Thus, we have here the juxtaposition of an *impossible* fact (the existence of a bronze statue of Servet, who was practically lost in anonymity, which we know to be one of the main reasons that determined Sastre to write a tragicomedy about him) and a *real* past situation (an example of a war mechanism in action). Then, a series of twelve *Cuadros* present the story proper – set during the sixteenth century, in Lyon and Geneva. Finally, the Epilogue, recited by Sebastián de Castellión, a fictitious character, closes the play in an exclusive Brechtian (alienated) fashion. Yet, in the case of *La detonación*, while we know that the pistol pressed against Larra's temple is the catalyst of action, we only see this occur at the end of the play, when Larra presses the trigger, in the presence of all his memories and their protagonists, from his personal, literary and political ambient. Thus, his story takes place counterclockwise, with many forward jumps, prompted by Larra's servant, Pedro.

Pedro acts as a veritable director, or *refundidor*,[63] laying the scene for Larra to act in (or to remember in). The presence of Pedro is visible from the first to the last acts of the play, and is strongly marked in stage directions. In the first act, Pedro is a servant of forty years (his actual age at the time of the tragedy), while at the end, he has reached the age of seventy five and recounts the events that took place, in a temporally distanced (just like Sebastián de Castellión, in *M.S.V.*) manner, yet personally undetached. This is understandable because, unlike Sebastián, who meets and converses with his hero in a scene *imagined* by Servet, Pedro had known and served Larra.[64]

In addition to these temporality clashes in the texts, by placing the characters in *imaginary* situations, but projecting their existence in *real* exterior contexts (the Carlist wars, in the case of Larra, and the imaginary dialogue in prison, in the case of Servet, as will be shown later), both authors suggest that a "full" rendition of history is possible even within imagined contexts, despite the actual outcomes of certain events. Thus, Larra imagines that he fights in the Carlist Wars, and Servet imagines a debate with a man of letters – Sebastián –, episodes that will contribute emotionally to the final resolution of the plot. These episodes along with the collision of alternative temporalities, the irregular flow of time through memory, *imagination* and *fantasy*, present a vision of history in progress, under construction, and not definite. Can history claim that Larra did

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[63] This analogy is inspired by Charles Ganelin's *The* Comedia *and the Nineteenth-Century Refundición*.

[64] After the premiere of the play in 1977, Buero explained that he took some distance from the Brechtian conceptions, because, "a mi entender, no todo el teatro 'dramático' es enmascarador, ni la identificación emocional es siempre alienante" [in my view, not all dramatic theater is hiding behind a mask, and neither is emotional identification always alienating] (quot. in Bayón, *Diario 16*, 29 September 1977, p. 23).

not go to war or that Servet did not speak to Sebastián in prison? Physically they may not have, but psychologically they did, which in turn affected the progress of their later actions. There is tension and conflict between the characters' nature and their dramatic persona. Their dramas capture the problematic aspect of linear history because of their imagined episodes.

History happens through Larra and Servet who are, for the duration of each plot, lowered from their *historical, heroic* status to that of *present, fallible men*. The destruction of Servet's statue in the Prologue, as well as Sebastián's position vis-à-vis the abundance of statues, expressed in the Epilogue ("sobran las estatuas", "¿para qué tanta estatua?" [there are too many statues, why so many statues?] (294), marks the time of the man, opposed to that of the hero. Similarly, the purpose of Larra's existence and death is questioned through flashback from the moment when, pistol against his temple, he relives selectively and non-chronologically key moments from his past, prompted, assisted and directed by his servant Pedro.

Buero and Sastre are rewriting official history with *their* contemporary circumstances in mind, engaging in palimpsestic work. Etymologically the palimpsest refers to a parchment from which writing has been partially or completely erased to make room for another writing; the same happens with Miguel Servet and Mariano José de Larra. The moment audiences "see" that the historical personages are a way of talking about contemporary intellectuals, the palimpsestic structure is already there (i.e. Larra and Servet as historical personages, and "on top of that" as allegorical figures for undertaking the present). Another aspect is the presence of imagined/fictitious episodes interwoven with historical facts: their *real, historical* existence is transposed to *imaginary* contexts, thus creating an overlap between the historical and the imaginary setting. Just as new writing replaces old writing on paper or parchment, the fictional side of the characters replaces (part of) the men's historicity. Consequently, we are faced with a slippage of temporalities; real time, belonging to the historical men, overlaps with imaginary time, pertaining to the fictional characters.

In "Rewriting Theatre. The *Comedia* and the Nineteenth-Century *Refundición*," Charles Ganelin addresses the relevance of staging past, successful theatrical forms for a contemporary audience. The practice always entails narrowing a great temporal and spatial distance between the contemporary audiences and the original public. Such is the case with the transposition of Servet and Larra, from their sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively, to the twentieth. According to Ganelin, "The goal of the rewriting process was […] to create a work of art that [would] communicate to the public's artistic and conceivably political preoccupations […]" (5). Implied in the transposition was the idea that history is a continuous process open to reception and reevaluation.

Buero and Sastre thus "recast" Servet and Larra from the sixteenth and nineteenth century respectively to the 1960s and 1970s, a critical time period for Spanish history. The two men whose historical existence left a deep mark upon

Spanish society are brought to life as part historical, part fictional in texts that establish parallels between past problematic times and the Franco dictatorship. As we shall see, both playwrights retrieved from history men who were marked by their failures in order to examine and rewrite events that led to their death.

Memory and recollection are one of the subthemes employed by the playwrights to alter the chronological flow of history. Staging Larra's memories creates a (continuous) disruption in the audience's perception of a stable and fluid order. Subtitled "fantasía en dos partes", or "fantasia in two parts," *La detonación* is structured around a hypothetical series of recollections occurring moments before the fatal pistol shot, "el que va a morir lo recuerda todo en un momento" [he who dies recalls his entire life in one moment] (87) and has a circular structure, beginning and ending with the image of the writer's servant, Pedro. The chain of memories starts with the writer's adolescence, when, despite his father's will, he decided to abandon France and settle in Spain, pursuing a literary career: "debo conocerlo [el mundo, n.a.] y arrancar las caretas" [I must see the world and tear off the masks] (89). What his father calls "pasión por la verdad" [passion for truth] coupled with frustrated love and the impossibility (censorship) of writing satirically – "no seré títere, no escribiré futesas"[I won't be a marionette, I won't write trifles] (91)– as he wished, will culminate in his precipitated decision to end his life.

Memories follow. After returning from a meeting with his writer friend Mesonero Romanos at the Parnasillo café, Larra goes to his cabinet and notes the "illusory" presence of the servant. Pedro strikingly remarks that, "Tú evocas, pero también imaginas. Ahora dialogas tu último drama…" [You evoke, but you also imagine. Now you're conversing your final drama…] (106). Besides memory, this dialogue between Larra and Pedro is also a brilliant sample of imagination, time reversal and fantasy. As the play progresses, we witness, side by side with Larra, some of the political (appointing of ministers, Carlist wars) or personal events (premature marriage to Pepita Wetoret, love affair with Dolores Armijo, birth of his three children, Luisín, Adelita and Baldomerita, divorce, bitter separation from Dolores, frustrated career in journalism). For the most part it is the servant Pedro who assists Larra in his memories – coming and leaving from place to place, on his way to *relive* a past moment – by giving him his jacket, tailcoat or hat. Pedro's role is that of a guide through an ocean of memories that flood Larra and alter his emotional stability. Even before Larra reaches the moment of his *actual* hiring of Pedro (before him he had a different servant, whom he fired for theft and alcoholism), Pedro is the one and only who conducts the recollection symphony, establishing the tempo according to the intensity of the moment recalled and even forcing Larra to relive certain painful moments. But, when Larra reaches the time period of the actual hiring, there is a role reversal, as he takes the baton and starts to conduct the memory concert on his own: "Así te encontré una noche en que todo se había vuelto contra mí" [This is how I found you one night when everything had turned against me] (208). This moment echoes *La Nochebuena de 1836. Yo y mi criado. Delirio filosófico* [Christmas

Eve 1836. Mi Servant and I. Philosophical delirium], which describes Larra's surprise encounter with his inebriated servant. From this moment onward, even if Larra takes the lead and switches roles with the previous merciless Pedro, he is very close to the end, as he has only one year to recall, from 1836 to 1837, before he returns to his puppet position in Pedro's hands.

While talking to Pedro, Larra makes *him* relive some of the cruel memories of his life, his fighting in the Carlist war, at Maestrazgo, the loss of his wife, and of his adolescent son. Despite his cruel remembrance session, Pedro's words are full of hope, "Hay que apretar los dientes y vivir. Hay que vivir" [You have to grit your teeth and live. You must live] (215).

Buero's play presents a vision of the mechanized flow of memories of a moribund, making use of imaginary and fantastic episodes to communicate that until the very end, there are always other variants and ramifications that history can take. In *M.S.V. o La sangre y la ceniza* we continue to see some of these elements, with a more direct and radical commentary vis-à-vis the present.

Sastre elaborates a theory of memory in the third part of his play, connecting the act of commemoration with bodily sensations. As long as an act is inflicted on the body, the mind will record it as memory. This is exemplified by a brilliant analogy with the last supper, using Servet's trial for non-Trinitarian heresy. Interrogated by the Inquisitor General regarding his belief in transubstantiation, Servet responds, in the most ludicrous manner, by comparing the last supper to a theophagic rite, contrary to all human dignity.[65]
The striking vampiric analogy only serves as an introduction to a brief exposition of his views about the topic:

> […] yo creo que no se produce tampoco ninguna especie de tropo espiritual como se creen los calvinistas que sucede en sus cenas, sino que soy digamos, "*memorialista*", como el compañero Socín; quiere decirse que la cena, para un servidor, es un recuerdo o *memoria* de aquella noche lúgubre y que en ella la manducación de pan es éso, manducación de pan, aunque la celebración produzca – que sí los produce – saludables efectos espirituales, y Jesucristo, *al hacerse eso en su memoria*, revive y se presenta o representa en nuestro interior; y sentimos entonces su misericordiosa compañía, que tanto nos falta es este valle. (214, emphasis mine)

[65] "Pues verá, Miseñor, en qué consiste mi idea del asunto. Que yo creo, verá, y lo diré con las mejores palabras que me salgan, que yo creo que nuestro Señor y Divino Maestro, nunca tuvo intención de darse a comer y a beber a modo de aperitivo o postre de aquella Santa Cena, a los Apóstoles y ser devorado o ingerido por ellos (ni menos por nosotros, la posteridad), lo que sería un rito ya vampiresco, ya teofágico, y muy contrario, digo yo, a todas las dignidades, tanto divina como humana, y propio de falsas religiones primitivas y ritos antropofágicos, cuyo objeto es tomar la fuerza y el espíritu del enemigo o del dios y para ello se los comen", p. 214.

> [I think that no spiritual trope is produced as Calvinists believe happens at their dinners, but that I am, let's say, a "*memoire writer*" …; I mean that the last supper, for your humble servant, is a memory of that dark night, and that stuffing oneself with bread is just that, stuffing oneself with bread, even if the celebration produces – indeed it does – healthy spiritual effects, and Christ, *by our doing this in his memory*, relives and presents himself or represents himself inside us; and we feel then his merciful company, which we need so much in this valley]

Servet critiques Jean Calvin's dogma and suggests that the celebration of the last supper and the transubstantiation are just symbolic. Thus, *each* supper is a *memory* of *a* last supper, whose repetition is beneficial for the body as nourishment, and also for the spirit, as an act of commemoration.[66] Servet offers this interpretation to connect the past (the last supper) with the present (its annual repetition) and to underline the work of memory, which is between sanctification and trivialization. This permanent negotiation of the past that must take place, not isolating it completely from the present, nor making it the exclusive determinant of the present, is related to the study of history.

Historians seek out the past by selecting facts and constructing meaning from them. They are guided by truth, understood as an equivalence between a statement and an event that took place, and also the capacity to "unveil the underlying meaning" of an event, as Todorov writes (Hope and Memory 122). Conventional history consists of events whose occurrence cannot be challenged. Spaniards know that Servet died, that Larra committed suicide, they are aware of the circumstances of the Esquilache riot and the painting of *Las Meninas.* The novelty that Buero's and Sastre's dramas bring to the study of history is a different application of memory to recorded events. According to Todorov, "after establishing the facts and interpreting them, we can now use the past," but professional historians limit themselves to the first two stages in the work of history, the establishing of the facts and their interpretation (Hope and Memory 127). Buero and Sastre put the past to use by including the testimonies of real or fictitious witnesses and also by creating alternative time sequences (non-chronological) in their plays. By centering their plays on pivotal experiences in Spanish history, Buero and Sastre lead their audiences into the past. Time reversals and fantastic displacements allow for certain reversals and alternations in the characters' biography or events' chronology to make sense of it all. These schemes or instrumentalizations of history allow for powerful art and a more humane vision.

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[66] For Tzvetan Todorov, commemoration has a negative side to it, as it is a manifestation of a use of memory that makes the past sacred and isolates it from the present. *Hope and Memory*, pp. 159-161.

Time reversals and flashes of memory are the most elaborate method used by Buero to challenge scientific or linear history.[67] The date is 13 February 1837. Larra is going to commit suicide. But, before he does, in the space of *five* minutes, he recalls *ten* years of his life, assisted by his servant Pedro. Pedro can be Larra's alter ego, or his own conscience.[68] Yet, Pedro's role as *refundidor* (recaster) is more significant because of the brilliant mastery with which he directs Larra through the writer's chronology. Playing according to what his recaster commands, Larra loses standing. To paraphrase Ganelin, in this way the audience can better relate early nineteenth-century political events to contemporary (1977) ones, and can thus perceive an analogy. As Ángel Fernández Santos wrote in *Diario 16* at the time of the premiere,

> Tal es el juego. El suicida intelectual, civil y contemporáneo tiene su *otro* en escena y fuera de ella. El debate del personaje Larra y su criado se convierte […] en un monólogo colectivo, propio de una sociedad escindida, o si se quiere civilmente desgarrada, en guerra civil permanente.[69]
>
> [Such is the game. The intellectual, civil and contemporary suicide victim has his *other* on stage and beyond. Larra's debate with his servant becomes […] a collective monologue, typical of a divided society, or, more properly a society torn apart, in permanent civil war.]

13 February 1837. Determined to end his life, Larra demands of his servant, Pedro, "¿Qué quieres?" ["What do you want?"] (86). He says the first line of the play, communicating not only a marked discontent with the presence of the servant, but also the latter's omnipresence, always ready to hand his master a coat or hat, carry out an order, fulfill a desire, or indicate the time, with remarkable precision. Pedro's part is as important as Larra's, since he acts as his stage director.

The action of *La detonación* occurs with subtly marked changes of scene. The large number of characters – who are Larra's family, friends, acquaintances, etc. and appear progressively during his recollection – remain on stage regardless of whether they are recalled or not, and when they *are* recalled, their presence is technically indicated with a beam lighting their faces. They are omnipresent throughout the play, because they exist in Larra's memory and imagination all together; they coexist and co-inhabit the space of his memory. Their fast entrance and exit is signaled through the technical use of light, and the

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[67] Time reversals are more apparent in *La detonación*. Sastre's play makes more use of memory and fantastic displacement moments. But, apart from the prologue and the epilogue, his plot follows the linear history of Miguel Servet's life.

[68] Cf. Buero Vallejo quot. in "Introduction" to *La detonación*, by Virtudes Serrano, p. 43.

[69] Ángel Fernández Santos. *Diario 16*. 22 September 1977, p. 19.

timely appearance of Pedro. At the end, Larra wants to chase all these figures from his mind, but "mientras nos pienses" [as long as you think about us] (228), as one of them says, they will continue to haunt him.

The first instance of time reversal occurs subtly during a fast paced dialogue between Larra and his servant:

> PEDRO. ¿De frac?
> LARRA. […]De frac. *(Empieza a despojarse de la levita. Súbitamente irritado se vuelve.)* ¿Por qué tú?
> PEDRO. 1826. Usted está en Madrid.
> LARRA. *(Mientras abandona la levita y el criado se pone el frac.)* ¡Antes de casarme no tuve criado!
> PEDRO. *(Impasible.)* ¿La capa?
> LARRA. Sí. *(Se la deja poner.* PEDRO *le tiende el sombrero y lo toma.)*
> PEDRO. *(Va a coger la levita.)* ¿Bastón?
> LARRA. No. *(Lo mira.)* ¡Vete!
> PEDRO. Ya me fui con las señoras.
> LARRA. *(Colérico.)* ¿Pues qué haces aquí? (PEDRO *se encoge de hombros. Su señor deja de mirarlo y baja la voz.)* ¿He muerto ya?
> PEDRO. *(A media voz.)* Casi. (94)
>
> [PEDRO. ¿Tail coat?
> LARRA. […] Tail coat. *(He takes his frock coat off. Suddenly irritated he turns.)* Why you?
> PEDRO. 1826. You are in Madrid.
> LARRA. *(While taking off the frock coat and putting on his tail coat.)* Before I got married I didn't have a servant!
> PEDRO. *(Impassive).* Your cape?
> LARRA. Yes. *(He lets Pedro put it on.* PEDRO hands him the hat and he takes it.)
> PEDRO. (*Taking the frock coat.)* Cane?
> LARRA. No. (*Looks at him.)* Go away!
> PEDRO. I already left with the ladies.
> LARRA. *(Furious.)* Then what are you doing here? (PEDRO *shrugs his shoulders. His master stops looking at him and grows quiet.*) Am I dead yet?
> PEDRO. *(With half a voice.)* Almost.]

This impressive conversation marks the positions that Larra and Pedro have – Pedro will always mark the transition from one memory to the next, and will coldly indicate the date, "1826." Moreover, Pedro's presence is like that of a death figure, as if Death itself had come to take Larra, and, under the guise of the servant, assists the poor condemned writer during his final moments. Pathos enters their exchange when Pedro tells Larra that he is "almost" dead.

Later, Pedro's position as director is marked with more humor and emphasis than before, highlighting the histrionic qualities of the last drama to be written between writer and his consciousness. Pedro continues to act as Death, casting doubt, confusing and challenging Larra:

PEDRO. ¿No tenía ya un criado a fines del año 28?
LARRA. No. Y tú no estás aquí.
PEDRO. Estoy fuera. […]
LARRA. *(Se vuelve.)* ¿Me tuteas?
PEDRO. *(Con gesto de ignorancia.)* Tú sabrás. *(Cruza y recoge la capa y el sombrero.)*
LARRA. *(No ha dejado de observarlo.)* ¿Qué yo sabré?
PEDRO. […] ¿No es éste tu último drama?
LARRA. ¡Mi único drama fue el *Macías!*
PEDRO. *(Se detiene. Tono trivial.)* Pues éste será el segundo.
LARRA. ¿Cuál?
PEDRO. Tú evocas, pero también imaginas. Ahora dialogas tu último drama…muy aprisa. Se agota el tiempo.
LARRA. ¿Y tú eres un personaje?
PEDRO. Y tú otro. El principal, quizá.
LARRA. ¿Quizá?
PEDRO. ¿No me estás dando demasiado papel?
LARRA. Cierra esa boca.
PEDRO. No puedo.
LARRA. Nunca son tan vívidas las imaginaciones.
PEDRO. *(Retirándose.)* Excepto si hay una pistola cerca. (106)

[PEDRO. Didn't you have a servant at the end of 1828?
LARRA. No. And you are not here.
PEDRO. I'm outside. […]
LARRA. (*Turns back.)* You're addressing me as "tú"?
PEDRO. *(With a gesture of ignorance.)* You should know. *(Crosses and collects the cape and the hat.)*
LARRA. *(Didn't stop observing him.)* What should I know?
PEDRO. […] Isn't this your last drama?
LARRA. My only drama was the *Macías!*
PEDRO. *(Stops. Trivial tone.)* Well then, this will be the second.
LARRA. Which one?
PEDRO. You evoke, but you also imagine. Now you're dialoguing your last drama….very fast. Time is running out.
LARRA. And you are a character?
PEDRO. And you another. The main one, perhaps.
LARRA. Perhaps?
PEDRO. Aren't you giving me too much importance?

LARRA. Shut your mouth.
PEDRO. I can't.
LARRA. Imaginations are never so vivid.
PEDRO. *(Leaving.)* Except when there is a pistol nearby.]

Here Pedro speaks from a position of dominance over Larra, as if he clearly were the *refundidor* of his master's story, while continuing to challenge him ("Aren't you giving me too much importance?"), because, in the end, Pedro is a figment of Larra's imagination, and his role in this "final drama" is clearly controlled by Larra's mind, by his power of recollection. "Shut your mouth," he orders, trying to silence it. In defiance of history's factual limit, Buero constructs the dialogue in a way that allows the reader and viewer to consider Pedro more than a figment of Larra's imagination. He is too powerful a memory to be controlled ("I can't [shut up]", he says), and as such, assumes a position of control over his master. Clearly, Pedro is a figment of Larra's mind, but the nearby pistol (which Larra has yet to hold in his hand!) makes Pedro's ghostly appearance even *more* vivid. Besides, the servant already knows that Larra possesses a pistol, as if wanting to tell him, in addition to the previous warning ("very fast. Time is running out…"), that he should speed up the recollection process, or else he will run out of time for his own suicide. How can a man who already committed suicide (completed fact), and who is on the way to doing it through memory (in the dramatic time in the play), run out of time for his final act? Pedro's warning is, in fact, a subtle indication that *another* possibility exists. In other words, that during the process of recollecting, Larra will go over the time allotted to him by fate (or by a symbolic Death character embodied by Pedro), and that the temporal frame of the recollection will extend beyond it.

The dialogue just cited is cast against another background conversation between don Homobono and Calomarde, who discuss the political situation of the country (the enactment of the *Sanción Pragmática,* making void the Salic Law of Philip V). While they talk mentioning Larra's name – he has just got married –, Larra and Pedro have another parallel dialogue; Pedro's power and control are again manifest:

LARRA. Hay que vivir y escribir.
PEDRO. Adelita acaba de nacer. Otra boca.
LARRA. *(Molesto.)* ¡No escribo por eso! Mi sombrero.
PEDRO. Al instante. […] *El Pobrecito Hablador* está levantando ronchas. ¿Cómo lograste el permiso para esa revista?
LARRA. ¿De qué hablas?
PEDRO. Voy de prisa. Estamos en 1832. ¿Llegamos a la muerte de *El Pobrecito Hablador* o prefieres otros recuerdos? (123)

[LARRA. I must live and write.
PEDRO. Adelita was just born. Another mouth to feed.

LARRA. *(Upset.)* I am not writing because of that! My hat.
PEDRO. Right away. […] *El Pobrecito Hablador* is stirring up controversy. How did you get approval for that magazine?
LARRA. What are you talking about?
PEDRO. I'm going fast. We're in 1832. Shall we get to the death of *El Pobrecito Hablador* or do you prefer other memories?]

In all these dialogues, in which Pedro sets the time frame, Larra is always on the move, ready to leave, asking for a coat or hat. Pedro fulfills properly and respectfully his task as servant, in contrast to the arrogance with which he continues to jab at Larra. Not only is he speeding up ("I'm going fast"), but also he taunts Larra (now his puppet) with an apparent freedom of choice: "Shall we get to the death of *El Pobrecito Hablador* or do you prefer other memories?" At this point it is ambiguous who is performing the task of remembering. Naturally, it should be Larra, as the memories of his previous ten years of life belong to him alone, especially when facing death. Nevertheless, Pedro takes control and maneuvers Larra like a puppet. Even if he had said to his father that he would never become a "puppet" and would never write "trifles" ("[…] no escribiré futesas"), paradoxically Larra becomes a puppet of his own conscience. He cannot control the flow of memories, nor the chronology in which they occur, because Pedro, the master puppeteer, acting like Death itself, usurps his position. The uninterrupted teasing of Larra, the sarcastic references to his failed literary career, the duplicitous behavior as obedient servant and controlling recaster mark Pedro as a symbol for the death that awaits Larra at the end of the dialogue.

Later, when Pedro confronts Larra on the matter of locking his desk cabinet (where he kept the love letters from Dolores), Larra again tries to take control by forcefully demanding that his servant fulfill this task alone. The stage direction presents Pedro as a messenger between the two lovers, "le alarga el billete, que LARRA abre y lee. Su rostro resplandece" [he gives him the note, which LARRA opens and reads. His face lights up] (141). Despite its gravity for the denouement of the story proper, this inadequate intrusion of the servant in his master's love life is strikingly humorous:

LARRA. ¡Mi capa! *(El criado la tenía ya en el brazo y se la pone. Su señor va al bufete y guarda el billete en un cajón.)*
PEDRO. ¿No lo destruyes?
LARRA. Quiero conservarlo. *(Echa la llave.)*
PEDRO. Tú nunca cierras el bufete con llave.
LARRA. ¡Cállate! (141)

[LARRA. My cape! *(The servant already has it on his arm and puts in on Larra. Larra goes to the cabinet and puts the note in a drawer.)*
PEDRO. Aren't you going to tear it up?

LARRA. I want to keep it. *(Locks with a key.)*
PEDRO. You never lock the cabinet.
LARRA. Shut up!]

Pedro notes that Larra never locks his cabinet, and, as he will later conclude, he did so only to awake his wife's curiosity, and to determine her to force it open and discover the love note, thus precipitating the separation, her departure or "death" (since Larra calls her "difunta", "late"). Judging from the events' progression thus far, it can be inferred that *another* denouement could have existed, had Larra not locked the cabinet or *destroyed* the love note.

Pedro does not limit himself to private moments concerning Larra's romantic or journalistic life. He also sets the agenda for historical events. Larra is now divorced and his mistress, Dolores, was sent by her husband to a convent in Ávila. However, Larra disagrees about the time sequence:

LARRA. Eso es más tarde. En el 34.
PEDRO. ¿Todavía no entiendes?
LARRA. Estamos en 1833. (150-51)

[LARRA. That happens later. In 1834.
PEDRO. You still don't get it?
LARRA. We're in 1833.]

In these and other exchanges, fantastic displacements do away with the rigidity of history, open space for interpretation and reinforce the palimpsest metaphor. In this play, Larra participates in the Carlist wars, first on one side and then on the other, and faces a nightmarish situation when having to confront Brigadier Nogueras. In Sastre's *La sangre y la ceniza,* a similar fantastic displacement occurs in Cuadro V of the first part of the play, suggestively titled "Tertulia intelectual imaginaria, y que Miguel hizo las maletas" [Intellectual dialogue and when Miguel packed his bags]. Sebastián and Servet converse in the same space of the prison cell, yet their discourse proceeds from different times: the first speaks from the future (or the present moment of the performance), and the latter from the past, from his own time, the sixteenth century. Servet is tied up and is lying on the floor, a light falling on his face, and Sebastián enters, to wake him up and bring him the news of his liberation. However, Servet is asleep and fights to abandon the dream world: "Estaba soñando en estos mismos momentos, cuando me han despertado sus ásperas voces; y el sueño era que vivía en otro mundo. Figúrese mi gran disgusto por este despertar" [I was dreaming this very moment, when your rough voice woke me up; the dream was that I was living in a different world. Imagine my great discontent at waking up like this] (170). From the opening of the *Cuadro*, Sebastián de Castellión and Miguel Servet – whose identity remains unknown to

his liberator – talk about religious doctrine and Servet's book, always keeping the conversation light, humorous and somewhat distant, despite the gravity of the fact that Servet has been charged with heresy. While the most striking humorous attribute of this situation is the very fact that Sebastián ignores Servet's identity, which the latter keeps hidden with utter composure, language and rhetoric play a significant role in widening the gap between the two men, between reality and imagination, and also between the historical time of Servet and the performative time of Sebastián. Sebastián belongs to the realm of the imaginary (once *Cuadro* V ends), but he also establishes the present time of performance, as well as a present/future temporality of critical thinking about history. In contrast, Servet floats between future (the permanence of his ideas for posterity), present (the time of the action in the play, which can be considered that of the trial) and past (his historical existence). From the point of view of the dramatic action, Miguel Servet's trial is the climax of the play, and the one temporality with more significance for the action as a whole. Thus, it can be considered that what happens before and after the trial, whether imaginary or real, is temporally secondary to the moment of the trial, where Jean Calvin's presence contributes to this *coup de théâtre*.

Time displacements constitute a rhetorical device to keep Spaniards from falling into the deterministic trap of thinking that the Civil War was fated to happen and Franco's dictatorship was historically necessary. Keeping alive the faith in the individual's historical agency is the common cause that Buero and Sastre advanced in their theater. They wrote *creative* pieces that incited the reader's and the spectator's imagination to move freely, to modify and add to that which had already happened. As Ricardo Doménech writes in *El teatro de Buero Vallejo: una meditación española,* tragedy is not written because of the belief in the infallible force of destiny, but rather because consciously or unconsciously, destiny is subjected to scrutiny (27). When destiny begins to be doubted, tragedy is born, or, in other words, "tragedy tries to explore the ways in which human errors *disguise* themselves as destiny"(27). Furthermore, Buero's use of the immersion effect[70] allows the audience to penetrate the very realm of the characters and obliges it to become conscious of the tragic message transmitted in the play. Buero's understanding of tragedy was grounded in hope, as Doménech argues: "Tragedia equivale a esperanza, en tanto que sin ésta no hay aquella" [Tragedy equals hope, so that without the latter there is no first] (86). The final spectacle of the broken hero in Buero's and Sastre's tragedies invites the audience, in Luis Iglesias Feijoo's words to "meditate about the chain of circumstances that have led to the denouement" (8), circumstances that inevitably extend to the very historical reality of post Civil War Spain.

[70] A term coined by Ricardo Doménech, (opposed to the Brechtian alienation effect) and that refers to the technical staging procedures (such as having the lights dim or no lighting at all, presence or absence of sounds) in order to *immerse* the audience in a blind or deaf character's world, etc.

Personal fantasy is another strategy deployed by Buero and Sastre in their dramas to maintain the possibility that human agency can be instrumental in shaping history. In the famous story *El Aleph,* Borges states that language is "successive," while experience alone is "simultaneous": "Lo que vieron mis ojos fue simultáneo: lo que transcribiré, sucesivo, porque el lenguaje lo es" [What I saw with my eyes was simultaneous, what I will transcribe, successive, because that's how language is] (200). History transcribes events using language, while human experience and imagination superimpose them. The narrative structure of written history imposes a kind of illusory coherence on the representation of past events. In the preface to *The Content and the Form,* Hayden White writes that narrative discourse is not a neutral "medium for representation of historical events and processes" but the "very stuff of a mythical view of reality, a conceptual or pseudo conceptual 'content' which, when used to represent real events, endows them with an illusory coherence and charges them with the kinds of meanings more characteristic of oneiric than of waking thought" (ix). The same may be said of dramatic discourse in history plays, because it experiments with plot alternations. The temporal alter(n)ation in Sebastián and Servet's dialogue, as well as the frequent forward and backward jumps in Larra's recollection of his own life events follow this principle closely. The content of the "imagined" war participation gives form to Larra's life, in the same way that the flow of Servet's imagined dialogue gives form to his theological vision. For the former it is the projection of a fearful realization, a consciousness of his weaknesses, while for the latter it is a projection of a desire for posterior acceptance and scholarly recognition.

Written almost like a biblical sermon, Buero's play leaves no room for alternatives. The question "What if Larra didn't commit suicide?" cannot possibly be fathomed. Buero is showing us a less glorious or brilliant side of Larra than one would expect, the focus is entirely on the rapid change of scenes of amorous vanity, literary and collegial abandon (Mesonero Romanos' decision *not* to co-author a play with Larra) – with the implication that tragedy in Larra's case was an accumulation of domestic woes, and less of literary failures. But, for Larra, History – Buero implies in this play – occurs *inside* the private sphere only. The exterior is diminished, reduced. It is as if the *refundición*, the recasting, is an exclusive invasion of the private life, overly charged and dramatically exaggerated pettiness, completely diminishing the grandeur and intelligence of the journalist, and *almost* justifying his final suicide. For all his meandering through his amorous past, Larra's attempt to cling to a few instants of journalistic/literary hope proves futile, as the hollowness of the literary (professional) and the romantic (personal) halves of his life completely take over and lead him to despair. These past events are "interior" because the play stages them as figments (and fantasies) of Larra's imagination. Buero exaggerates this interior space to show the extreme weakness and human nature of Larra, a "failed" literary hero.

Nevertheless, imaginary situations *do* have the power to influence the final outcome in the case of Miguel Servet. Sebastián talks to Servet in prison being unaware of his identity, and speaking admirably of his work, as if to a third party: "le procuraría un ejemplar […], pero fue públicamente quemado […] y si alguien lo tiene no se atreve a decirlo por lo que pudiera suceder. Se titula 'De Trinitatis Erroribus' y es su autor Miguel Servet" [I would get you a copy… but it was publicly burned…and if someone has it they would not dare admit it for fear of what could happen. It's titled 'On the Errors of the Trinity' and its author is Miguel Servet] (180).[71]

Sebastián recounts the life of Miguel Servet, as if he were speaking of a late person, already converted into legend: "desapareció y no se sabe si ha muerto" [he disappeared and it is not known whether he died] (180). When Servet responds, completing the account, he advances the legend. That he speaks of himself in the third person is not a subconscious hindrance. (His double personality signals the possibility of a parallel history of Miguel Servet.) Despite hiding his identity, a precaution taken to avoid being arrested, it is a humorous moment that reminds one of modern stand-up comedy. We laugh at Servet, but then we feel ashamed, embarrassed. This feeling is right, as laughter operates, like the fear and pity of classic tragedies, in a cathartic way.[72] This humor is not cruel, nor wild, but helps to situate the tragic in the present. One looks at Servet and laughs with pity.

History defeats, beats down and defiles the rebels, speakers of the truth and innocents. The almost exclusive focus on Larra's private matters (a mad love affair set against the background of an already existing but deteriorating marriage) leaves the character throttled. Buero's play signals the extent to which history does chastise the rebels, Larra himself a nonconformist from this point of view, left completely defenseless in front of the punishing power of history. Sebastián warns Miguel to take care of himself *and of his fellow Spaniard also called Miguel,* "proteja en todo lo que pueda a su paisano Servet, y haga todo lo más que le sea posible por que ese hombre, que es hoy de sangre y hueso, no tenga terminación de fuego y ceniza" [protect as you can your compatriot, and do all within your power so that that man, who today is of flesh and blood, does not end up being fire and ashes] (184). This warning does not prefigure what is to happen, because we already know that it has come to be. Miguel Servet, who was flesh and blood, was turned into ashes. However, through this intermission in the story – it is after all, an *imaginary* conversation as the title of the episode announces – Sastre implies through the subtitle of the play (*La sangre y la ceniza)* that, though Servet's body *was* literally turned to ashes, historically his blood, his ideas, remain alive.

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[71] A similar moment appears in Juan Mayorga's *La tortuga de Darwin* (2008) when Harriet, the turtle that has evolved into a human, recalls and laments the public burning of books during Hitler's rise to power. Please refer to Chapter 3 for more reference.

[72] Sastre quot. in Caudet p. 106.

Sastre employs a technique of suspension of tension (the "complexity" of his tragedy) in various parts of the text, which contributes not only great humor, but also creates a fanciful "what if" ambient (Kershaw 15-31). The most striking one appears at the end of his protagonist's trial for heresy in Geneva, when Servet faces a cruel death sentence: he will be burned alive. However, he carries on a casual conversation with his executioner and with Jean Calvin (his accuser), talking *as if* it were not his death that hung in the balance, but an ordinary matter:

> MIGUEL. Tengo mal cuerpo. […] Espérenme un momento, por favor. […] ya me encuentro mejor. ¿Qué tengo que hacer? Díganlo porque estoy disponible.
> FAREL. Dejarte atar las manos.
> MIGUEL. ¿Está ya todo preparado allí, supongo?
> SARGENTO. Sí, sí señor; todo está previsto.
> MIGUEL. (*A* CALVINO) ¿Tú vienes?
> CALVINO. No, Miguel. Tengo mucho trabajo. Farel te acompanará espiritualmente en tus últimos momentos. Es hombre de toda confianza.
> MIGUEL. Era por despedirme aquí. Adiós, entonces.
> CALVINO. Adiós, y sabes que lo siento. (285)
>
> [MIGUEL. I'm feeling awful. […] Wait a minute, please […] I already feel better. What do I have to do? Tell me because I'm available.
> FAREL. Let your hands be tied up.
> MIGUEL. I assume everything's ready out there, right?
> SARGEANT. (*To* CALVIN). Are you coming?
> CALVIN. No, Miguel. I have a lot of work. Farel will accompany you spiritually in your last moments. He's a man of complete trust.
> MIGUEL. I wanted to say 'goodbye'.
> CALVIN. Goodbye, and you know how sorry I am.]

Servet's words and attitude do not match those of a man sentenced to die at the stake. Is this situation absurd? Incongruous? Taken out of context? Instead of an *expected* tense sequence of Servet's cries of pain and terror followed by Calvin's expressions of sadistic satisfaction, we have a dialogue decidedly more fit for a light chat at the end of a workday.

Another moment that plays with historical signification is the sarcastic account of society's transformation during the Reformation, undertaken in order to fulfill a political-religious order. In the second part of the play, Sastre intercalates a *Cuadro* titled "En la posada de la Rosa"[At Rosa's Inn], where Servet makes a stop on his way to Geneva. Rosa, the owner of the inn, is a former

prostitute who is now an honorable landlady.[73] Her nostalgia is a telling example of another type of emotional time displacement that makes room for testimony. However, instead of inserting the testimonial of a socially accepted witness, Sastre mocks history's selectivity of such conventional voices, and makes heard the least predictable one, that of a former prostitute. She speaks melancholically of a previous "dishonest" life, when the brothel – now inn – was a much happier place. A statement of the Reformation's speedy and fake discipline, her testimonial is cheerful, witty and sarcastic. In Rosa's case, history mocks the fast pace with which changes occur, literally overnight. Oftentimes, such rapid transformations are what *make* history, as we tend to remember what *was* by contrast to what *is*.

Servet accepts to die for the truth of his convictions. He goes through physical pain and shows a great fear of dying, thus becoming closer to the audience, which may share similar weaknesses and problems. This closeness is established in the case of Larra, too. Despite the emphasis on his sentimental weaknesses and extreme capacity for sarcasm, Buero makes him a believable character, who acts upon his natural desires.

Both dramas *do* allow for alternative endings while we witness the action on stage. As irreversible "historical events" the two stories have closed endings. The magic of the stage is that it asks us to suspend that knowledge and entertain a "what if" interlude that can strengthen the spectator's faith in alternatives to his or her present. Baz Kershaw defines performance as an "ideological transaction" between performers and audience: "performance is about the transaction of meaning, a continuous negotiation between stage and auditorium to establish the *significance of the signs and conventions* through which they interact" (17, emphasis mine). The ideological attribute of the transaction between stage and auditorium comes from what Kershaw describes as the collective ability of performers and audiences to make common sense of the *signs* used in performance (16, emphasis mine). One of the signs used exhaustively in *La detonación* is the dense, almost irritating chronology. Pedro is always pointing out a date, while Larra asks, perplexed, for clarification. In *La sangre y la ceniza,* Servet's use of anachronisms is also a sign, a tool to leave the audience disturbed, confused.

The episodic structure, the flashbacks – which make the chronological progression of events unclear – and the splashes of imaginary situations mixed

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[73] "[…] como un rayo, me vino la conversión, que coincidió curiosamente con el momento de la prohibición del oficio, en lo que yo, no sé, algo milagroso; y a todo esto el ama, que me quería mucho, porque yo era, no es porque yo lo diga, muy dispuesta y tenía mucha imaginación, y estaba, digamos, especializada (lo digo con sonrojo y me sirve así de penitencia); que tenía yo muchas habilidades, digo, para los caprichos y las rarezas de los clientes, viejos o jovenes (con la sobretasa que eso supone, y que era un pico que nos repartiamos a medias entre la dueña y yo), ¿por dónde iba? Ah, sí: que me quería mucho el ama y, bueno, pues que al morirse me nombró su heredera y yo, al hacerme decente del modo rápido que le he dicho, convertí el deshonesto inmueble en este precioso hotel, que ya no es, desde luego, ni sombra de lo que era en otros tiempos. (*Tiene una cara muy triste.)*", p. 228.

with factual events, point in this direction. Moreover, there are concrete attempts to dissuade Larra from shooting himself, and to organize a rescue operation for Servet. Perhaps in their respective milieu, other people could have made a difference. However, Mesonero Romanos, Larra's friend, refuses to co-sign a play based on Quevedo's life, for fear it would destroy his reputation as a *costumbrista* writer. The intellectuals who propose to write a letter to save Servet lack sufficient resolution. In the end, both Larra's and Servet's fate proves to have been irreversible. But, in the theatrical (space of representation and not of reality) dimension that overrides history, the endings could have been different, a way of thinking and feeling crucial to the audience's "reading" of their contemporary circumstances during the dictatorship. To override history means to allow for an alternative, fantastic scenario to happen, even if it is counter-historical. For that reason, the endings could have been different, which instills a similar way of thinking and feeling.

Both Buero and Sastre could have written endings that were entirely counter-factual (i.e. Larra doesn't commit suicide, and Servet is not executed.) The possibility of alternate history is central to both, but they only address the causes and not the outcome. Being realist authors both, the possibility of reinventing history entirely would not have yielded their common objective of making the population live with actual historical reality.

But, Mariano José de Larra shot himself on the 13th of February 1837 and Miguel Servet was burned at the stake on the 27th of October 1553. This is factual history. Buero's and Sastre's dramas challenge the necessity of this ending. At the end of *La detonación* Pedro addresses the audience in a discourse about endurance and above all, patience: "es menester un aguante inagotable. Murió por impaciente" [it is necessary to have an infinite endurance. He died because he was impatient] (230). Miguel Servet "dies" metaphorically in the play: first his statue is destroyed in the Prologue, and then, when his death sentence is pronounced in the public square, a soldier proceeds to the burning of his effigy, a life-size puppet. When the actual burning at the stake is about to take place in *Cuadro* IV of Part II, ("El matadero"), a Voice cuts the *representation* and orders the immediate proceeding to the Epilogue: "¡Corten! ¡Corten! ¡Ya es suficiente! ¡Corten! Retírense todos los actores de escena! Vamos al epílogo" [Cut! Cut! That's enough! Cut! All the actors leave the stage! Let's do the epilogue] (291). This metatheatrical interlude breaks brutally with the reality of Servet's execution, and transmits, at the same time, the necessity to leap forward to the end. As in the case of Pedro, who was constantly pushing Larra's recollections fast forward, the Voice acts as a person "outside of history," yet who knows it very well, and who, for that reason, feels the urge to show the audience not the cruelty of a death, but its avoidable consequences. Similarly, instead of dwelling on the suicide itself, Pedro draws attention to the preceding moments (the entire play), and then, to its aftermath.

Larra's servant (Pedro) and Servet's imaginary interlocutor (Sebastián) have the last lines in each play. Both playwrights introduce an external comment

by *someone* who witnessed the events, to *close* the story and *open* the alternatives for history. Both are *refundidores,* recasting the actions of their protagonists. The palimpsest metaphor, the temporal gap, and the imaginary situations, as well as the bodily interpretation of memory (through the analogy with the last supper) trace two modern patterns in historical interpretation. Thus, theater breaks with historical convention.

These performances are efficient in tracing parallels between past situations, remote, as is the case of Miguel Servet, or closer to the audience, as is the figure of Mariano José de Larra. Buero wants to show the "secret connections between existence and history," as critic Fernández Santos pointed out.[74] Furthermore, despite his tragic and closed end, Larra "alcanza a saber que hay *otras* opciones diferentes a la que él ha querido afrontar, y que en estas opciones está la materia de la libertad" [manages to discern *other* options, different from the one that he had wanted to take, and that in these options lies the matter of liberty].[75] Equally, Sastre's play is not just a simple critical look at the past, but also a reflection on the present. His text contains numerous overt allusions to the oppressive situation under Franco.[76] Kershaw speaks about performance and efficacy, stressing the importance of the real and not real aspects of a performance, which, through rhetorical conventions, actively determine an audience's reading of a performance. The rhetorical conventions or the "signs" function to authenticate a performative experience: "they are key to the audience's successful decoding of the event's significance to their lives." (Kershaw 26). *La detonación* and *La sangre y la ceniza* function according to this principle underlined by Kershaw as they create, through their performances, efficient ways of situating the audience in the present moment, by allowing them to question not only past examples of political and religious oppression (sixteenth- century Servet) or censorship (nineteenth-century Larra), but also to relate these two scenarios to the dictatorship, as well as the immediate years after its end.

The next two plays, *Un soñador para un pueblo* and *Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes* focus on the humanization of the hero and propose a poetics of forgiveness. Unlike the case with *La detonación* and *M.S.V.*, the authors change the outcome of the mythical story (William Tell kills his son) or of the historical facts (Esquilache in *Un soñador* has hope in Fernandita, who will carry on his reforms).

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[74] "Buero nos sitúa a sus espectadores en medio de los datos, imágenes y olvidos del interior de la conciencia de un hombre que alcanza a materializar en su cerebro tales secretas conexiones", Ángel Fernández Santos, "Redes secretas de una tragedia". *Diario 16.* 22 September 1977, p. 19.
[75] Ibid., emphasis mine.
[76] Madga Ruggeri Marchetti's Introduction to her edition of *La sangre y la ceniza* explains some parallelisms in more detail, pp. 59-95.

1.2. More than a Matter of Hats: *Un soñador para un pueblo (versión libre de un episodio histórico)* (1958) by Antonio Buero Vallejo & *Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes* (1955) by Alfonso Sastre

Legend has it that during the thirteenth century an order was issued to the inhabitants of the Swiss city of Altdorf by order of its Governor. The order applied to all citizens, regardless of class, age, sex or status and obliged them to respectfully salute the Governor's hat, placed on top of a pole in the central plaza, by bowing on one leg in the presence of a guard and saying, "Long live the Governor." The unfulfillment of this order was to be severely punished, as it was considered an act of rebellion. Those who resisted arrest were sentenced to death. The brave William Tell, a local archer, learns of this humiliating measure and shoots an arrow through the Governor's hat. Enraged, the Governor challenges Tell to shoot an apple placed on his son's head: if Tell hits the apple, his life and that of his son will be spared, otherwise they will both die. The archer successfully shoots the apple, escapes, ambushes the Governor, kills him and frees the Swiss from his tyranny.

During the great days of urban development in Madrid, ruled by the enlightened monarch Carlos III, the Marquis Esquilache, a foreign Minister of the Exterior took the liberty to forbid the Spaniards the use of their traditional head and body attire, because it was considered to foster crime (large-brimmed hats and long capes masked thieves and delinquents). Thus, a decree forbade the use of broad-brimmed hats (*chambergos)* and the long cape, followed by their confiscation from anyone who continued to wear them instead of the French style three-cornered hat and short cape. Annoyed by the passing of such a law, and already displeased with the rising prices of bread, olive oil and coal, the Spanish people rebelled against Esquilache's reforms and started an outbreak known as Esquilache's riot.

Un soñador para un pueblo (1958) is situated in eighteenth-century Madrid, during the enlightened rule of monarch Carlos III and presents the failed attempt of his External Affairs Ministers, the Italian Leopoldo de Esquilache to reform some of the ingrained dress habits of the Spaniards. Dissatisfied with a foreigner's modernizing intervention in national policy and unhappy about the measure that forbade the public use of *capas* and *chambergos,* Bernardo, a Spanish youth, leads the *motín de Esquilache* (Esquilache riots). Compromised by the nepotism manifested towards his own sons – which contributes to the country's general ruin and waste – and by his wife's betrayal, Esquilache counts with the sole support of his king and the young Fernandita, a servant in his suite. Defeated and faced with exile, he regards Fernandita as the young hope for the rejuvenation and enlightenment of the Spanish people, a person to carry on his legacy and dreams of reform.

Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes (1955) departs from the classical Swiss folk tale, maintaining the main characters – Guillermo (William Tell), his son, the Governor – but reversing the course of action. In a Swiss village people are oppressed by a cruel governor who keeps them in poverty and who tyrannizes them by forcing them to bow to his hat in the main square. When Tell's father-in-law and leader of an underground resistence movement against the governor refuses to pay such homage to the governor he is severely beaten. Unable to cope with the shame of this humilliation, he kills himself. Determined to take revenge and to put an end to this tyranny, Tell shoots an arrow through the hat, which infuriates the governor. He promises to spare Tell's life if he succeeds in shooting an arrow through an apple sitting on top of his own son's head. Faced with such a challenge, Tell is ready to die, but the encouragement from his son makes him change his mind - he will attempt to shoot the apple and prove his mastery but unfortunately it all ends tragically with the death of his son and. Raging with fury Tell captures the governor in an ensuing ambush and kills him, but he remains forever grieving for the loss of his only son.

A hat plays a central role in Sastre's drama, *Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes*, where it represents the power of the tyrant and induces a forced sense of reverence and fear. In Buero's *Un soñador para un pueblo,* a hat stands for tradition and old habits, which must be conserved against external, progressive interference. What is the connection between these two hats? What do they tell us about history? The symbolism of the hat is not gratuituous. It functions as a symbolic object in both plays, representing the power of the town Governor and the State respectively. In the first case it inspires fear and punishment, and in the latter it can hide the face of the bearer, thus enhancing street crime. Psychoanalytically, the hat is a symbol of manhood, and to deprive a man of his hat is equal to robbing him of his virility. The hat is present in both Tell's legend and Esquilache's riot, as a trite element of historical reality. In both plays, it becomes a trope whose symbolic value, when resisted, places a family in dissension with tyrannical power. Through the hat connection, William Tell and the Marquis of Esquilache present two mythical, dreamlike worlds, where the role of family is linked to the functioning and progress of a nation. Even if William Tell is traditionally regarded as myth and the *motín de Esquilache* is a historical event, clothing and attire play a significant part in these historical processes. What do families have to say in the making and writing of history? Family plays an important role in almost all of Buero's plays, but in none of them is the protagonist made aware of the role of family in the development of a nation as explicitly as in *Un soñador para un pueblo*.

William Tell inhabits a myth, and Esquilache a dream – through the utopian dimension of his reforms, and thanks to the attribute with which King Carlos III endows him, *dreamer*. By his self-identification, William Tell remains a simple "dreamer" at the end of *Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes.* A parallel can be drawn here with the two plays addressed in the first section of this chapter. Like Larra, Esquilache is an idealist, a dreamer, risking his professional (political)

future and personal life to realize a utopian reform. While opposing his obscurity, William Tell belongs to a distant, remote past, like Miguel Servet. Unlike Servet, who is a historical figure, Tell is a legendary mythical character; however, they share humanity and frailty.

Buero and Sastre highlight human qualities in their "failed" protagonists, valuing those qualities (however flawed) over "cold revolutionaries" and mechanical ideological systems. Focusing on human feelings within a strictly managed dictatorship, both playwrights brought to the stage a poetics of forgiveness, conscious of the universal (and unifying) fact that being human entails failure, frailties and betrayal.

Two different moments in Spanish history and Swiss legend are dramatized in these plays.[77] But both plays present an individual in the service of the people and his public quest for the triumph of good, while juxtaposing a private, conflictive situation in his family. After working assiduously for the people, Esquilache is defeated by his own idealism and can only hope that a young uncorrupted woman (Fernandita), "daughter" of the *pueblo*,[78] will realize his dreams of progress. William Tell has eliminated the threat of Governor Gessler but, in Sastre's revision of the story, he has tragically killed his son and must now rely on his wife's forgiveness and companionship. The plays end synchronically on a dreamlike, hopeful tone: in Switzerland, Hedwig tells a story to her husband William Tell, asleep in her loving arms, so he can forget it all, and in Spain, Fernandita frees herself from the brutal grip of the rough Bernardo.

The Marquis of Esquilache and William Tell are dramatically developed within the context of their respective families. For Esquilache, the family is a cluster of profit-seekers. The couple's three sons have obtained their positions through the mother's intervention with the king and other ministers, but also due to their father's vanity.[79] Their relationship is reduced to a dull information exchange, as the following marital dialogue captures:

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[77] *Un soñador para un pueblo* is subtitled "versión libre de un episodio histórico" [free version of an historical episode]. Buero decided to alter the figure of Esquilache, known primarily because of his nepotism. He presents an extremely moral man, whose sartorial edict was the typical naïve gesture of a "dreamer." Alfonso Sastre alters some elements in the story of William Tell, such as the age of the son, his subsequent maturity and the class consciousness manifest in the beggar. Naturally, he inserts several anachronisms and revolutionary messages too.

[78] Fernandita is a "hija del pueblo" (village girl, or, literally, 'daughter of the people'), symbolizing a Spanish people ready to accept Esquilache's devotion and reforms. Quot. in Alfredo Marquerie, "En el *Español* se estrenó 'Un soñador para un pueblo', de Buero Vallejo", *ABC* 19 diciembre 1958, p. 81.

[79] Esquilache confesses to his wife that: "nombré al primero coronel y al segundo director de la Aduana de Cádiz, eran casi unos niños. El tercero es ya hoy arcediano. Todo se lo pedí al rey porque tú me insististe; pero no sólo por complacerte, sino porque quería que se convirtiesen en buenos servidores de su país. Incurrí en esa costumbre, en esa mala costumbre de los poderosos, porque eran carne de mi carne y quería darles una buena ventaja inicial…que no han aprovechado", p. 114.

DOÑA PASTORA. Venía sólo a decirte que almuerzo fuera.
ESQUILACHE. (*Sardónico.*) ¡Qué novedad! Para el banquete de esta noche podré contar contigo, ¿no? Tenemos veinte invitados.
DOÑA PASTORA. (*Seca*). Sabes que nunca falto a mis deberes de anfitriona.
ESQUILACHE. A ésos no, *è chiaro.* Esos te gustan. ¿Puede saberse dónde almuerzas? (113)

[DOÑA PASTORA. I was only coming to let you know that I'm eating out.
ESQUILACHE. *(Sardonic.)* What news! For tonight's banquet I can count on you, right? We have twenty guests.
DOÑA PASTORA. *(Dry.)* You know I never shirk my duty as hostess.
ESQUILACHE. That one no, *of course*. You enjoy it. Can I know where you're having lunch?]

Esquilache feels alone. As a consequence, he shifts his entire energy from his own family to the people, for whom he wants to create an enlightened Spain and better living conditions, "Un poco más de higiene en los cuerpos y en las almas. Los madrileños parecerán al fin seres humanos, en lugar de fantasmones" [A little more hygiene in their bodies and souls. Madrileños will finally seem human beings, instead of ghosts] (110). More than a great politician, Esquilache was a reformer, a *reformador de costumbres,* and his imposition of the French dress code, however salutary, was rejected by traditional Spaniards.[80]

Even if Esquilache adores the Spanish people, he has failed with his own family. To make things worse, his progressive social reforms have attracted Spaniards' hatred. Despite Minister Ensenada's warning, "Les has engrandecido el país, les has dado instrucción […] les has quitado el hambre. Les has enseñado, en suma, que la vida puede ser dulce…Pues bien: te odian" [You enlarged their country, you gave them education…you freed them from hunger. You taught them, overall, that life can be sweet…Well, they hate you] (111), Esquilache is idealistic to the last moment. He keeps his faith in the Spanish people, considering that his reforms will make them understand the need for maturity, and that they will grow at the same pace as his reforms.

On the opposite end is the situation of William Tell: he has a harmonious family, a loving wife and a son who is mature enough to know what to do in a confrontational situation with the Governor. However, he lives in a corroded village, where, despite poverty and famine, the Governor orders the expensive

[80] A critic sarcastically remarked that, "Sospecho que en España siempre importó menos la pérdida de las provincias ultramarinas que la modificación del Reglamento de los Toros o la alternación del horario de las comidas." *Blanco y Negro,* 27 diciembre 1958, p. 79.

and unnecessary construction of a prison, which is followed because of economic necessity:

> CIEGO. Estás construyendo una cárcel para tus hijos.
> CAPATAZ. Es una casa. Este es mi oficio. [...] Construir casas. Yo no soy más que un técnico, ¿me entiendes? […] Me dan un jornal y así comen mis hijos y tienen ropa en el invierno.
> CIEGO. Haces sufrir a todos estos hombres. Los tratas con crueldad. Ayudas a que siga la tiranía.
> CAPATAZ. Tengo mujer, tengo hijos.
> CIEGO. ¡Qué se mueran tu mujer y tus hijos! ¡No hay que construir esa cárcel! ¡Son criminales los que construyen esa cárcel!
> CAPATAZ. Si no lo hiciera yo la haría otro. Hay muchos esperando. La cárcel se construiría. (20)
>
> [BLIND MAN. You're building a prison for your children.
> FOREMAN. It's a house. This is my job. […] Building houses. I am just a technician, don't you understand? […] They pay me daily wages and this is how my children eat and have clothes in winter.
> BLIND MAN. You make all these people suffer. You treat them cruelly. You help tyranny continue.
> FOREMAN. I have a wife, children.
> BLIND MAN. May they die! That prison must not be built! Those who build it are criminals.
> FOREMAN. If I did not do it, others would. There are many waiting. The prison would be built anyway.]

This passage shows the antithesis between the foreman's zeal, grounded in family duty, but going against the understanding of the interests of the patria. Yet having a family to provide for should not be an excuse for social blindness (as a beggar imputes later, "Parece que en estos tiempos tener mujer e hijos puede ser la disculpa de los crímenes" [It seems that having a wife and children is now an excuse for crimes] (31)). In other words, the real revolutionary *should not* put his family before society. Esquilache does, forgoing the sympathy of the Spaniards (his anti-traditional Spanisn measures contribute mostly to his fall, but his preferential treatment of his sons plays a part as well). William Tell is the counter-example: he has a lovely family, demonstrating that family and social initiative are not incompatible, and that, on the contrary, family should provide inspiration for social reform. What type of historical process do these plays expose through the peculiar situations of their protagonists and families?

Because of his extreme courage and skill, William Tell is revered as the founding father of Switzerland. Although Esquilache cannot be considered the founding father of Spain, the play presents him as an unusually respectable man, incapable of corruption. Both plays can be interpreted as political and male family dramas.

In the dramatization of Esquilache's riot, subtitled a "versión libre de un episodio histórico"[a free version of a historical episode] that occurred between the 23rd and the 26th of March 1766, a critical element is the legal proclamation against wearing long capes and broad-brimmed hats. Hated by both the conservative ministers, who opposed Carlos III's liberal reforms, and by the xenophobes who detested having an Italian minister, Esquilache ends up betrayed and exiled from Spain. His fall – like the tragic fall of the hero – is the loss of prestige and power. He does not end up blind like Oedipus, nor mad like King Lear, but, like Sastre's William Tell – who is forever to be sad – he is reduced to melancholy and immobility: "la *melancólica* figura de Esquilache que *no se ha movido*" [the melancholic figure of Esquilache who never moves] (208). Esquilache had admitted before that, "No se puede intentar la reforma de un país cuando no se ha sabido conducir el hogar propio" [You cannot attempt to reform a country when you cannot run your own home] (146). This remark, underscoring the importance of the home and its proper management, indicates the origin of the Marquis's fall and his failure in public administration. His observation is almost redundant, as it would seem obvious that a proper running of the family home is analogous to administering a harmonious public and political administration. As Jürgen Habermas states in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* "Status in the *polis* (the domain of the public space, n.a.) was based upon status as the unlimited master of an *oikos* (the sphere of the private home, n.a.)" (3). The eighteenth century was a time of transition of economic processes from the "shadowy realm of the household" to the public sphere of the market and society.[81]

Aspiring to lift Spanish society to the same standards found in France, Esquilache ignores the public impact of his private family situation. His house is in disorder, and, consequently, his public administration follows suit. Moreover, he does not have the courage to apply to himself the same strict rules he demands of society (he is not entirely an uncorrupt minister). Thus, he seems to be oscillating between dreaming and thinking, lacking political firmness and attitude, major flaws that will leave him exposed to the attacks and tricks of his adversaries. Buero, however, transmits here not the failure of Esquilache, the reformer, but that of the people, even if this not the historical reality of the eighteenth century (Esquilache did fail as a politician). Regardless of Esquilache's failed marriage and his sons' squandering, he is the dreamer whom the king adores:

[81] Seyla Benhabib, "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas," p. 73.

> ¿Sabes por qué eres mi predilecto, Leopoldo? *Porque eres un soñador*. Los demás se llenan la boca de las grandes palabras y, en el fondo, sólo esconden mezquindad y egoísmo. Tú estás hecho al revés: te ven por fuera como el más astuto y ambicioso, y eres un soñador ingenuo, capaz de los más finos escrúpulos de conciencia (150, emphasis mine).
>
> [Do you know why you are my favorite, Leopoldo? *Because you are a dreamer*. The others fill their mouths with grand words and, deep inside, they only hide meanness and egoism. You are made differently: they see you on the outside as the most astute and ambitious of men, and you are a naïve dreamer, capable of the finest scruples of conscience.]

With the Swiss village of Altdorf we regress from modernity to feudalism, where no clear distinction was made between the public and the private (Habermas 5), and where the lord (Gessler) ruled over all social and economic relations. William Tell manages to rise as a successful private household ruler. But the serenity in his *oikos* cannot spread to the *polis.* Gessler dominates the polis and his hat on the pole is a symbolic reminder of his power. How does Sastre position William Tell, given the grandeur of the myth? How does he understand history through this character and how does he elaborate his personality in order to serve the dialectical imagination that in his view theater had to produce?[82] A key element is William Tell's son, who suggests that his father shoot an arrow through the apple on his head. In answer to all these questions, Sastre gives yet another question, "what if":

> […] tuve la ocurrencia, estudiando la fábula y leyendo cuidadosamente a Schiller, de que en ese momento justamente en que Tell hace su proeza podría fallar, que ese podría ser el momento justamente en que el mito podía caer roto. Porque lo lógico es que no acertara, y que incluso podía matar a su hijo. Yo me dije: "¿Y si hubiera matado a su hijo?" Entonces, ese "y si" es el que me introdujo en una versión nueva, que sería la tragedia de Guillermo Tell.[83]
>
> [it occurred to me, studying the fable and carefully reading Schiller, that in the moment when Tell does his deed, he could fail, that that could be the moment when the myth could be broken. Because it is logical for him to miss, and even to kill his son. I said to myself: 'And what if he did kill his son?' Then, that 'what if' is what

[82] Sastre believed that "el teatro tenía que ser producto de la imaginación dialéctica", quot. in Francisco Caudet, p. 33.
[83] Ibid., p. 43.

introduced me to a new version, which would be the tragedy of William Tell]

Indeed, *what if* instead of hitting the apple on top of his son's head, Tell misses? We cannot know for sure if Tell's cold blood could have made him a flawless archer in that tense moment. His success or failure is a mathematic probability, depending on the intensity of the wind, the silence of the crowd gathered to watch, the stillness of the boy, the extension of Tell's arm, etc. A singular moment, yet grand enough to deserve an eternal legend!

By breaking the myth, Sastre reminds his audience of the multiplicity of imperfect moments, and the randomness of human life. The cruelest part is that Tell must bear the full guilt of having shot his son. Had Walty *not* encouraged his father to proceed with the shooting, he could have been alive. William Tell himself would have died, but Walty would live. The eyes of William Tell are sad because he realizes that his son's courage, maturity and resignation were greater than his own. Moments before the fatal shoot, with the Governor, guards and other curious watching their "tragic farewell," Tell and Walty talk:

TELL. No hay nadie que pueda ayudarnos en el mundo.
WALTY. Nadie. *(Un silencio.)* Así que hay que estar tranquilos. No hay esperanza. Aunque gritaríamos hasta rompernos la garganta, no vendría nadie. Así que, ¿para qué gritar? Da mucha tranquilidad no tener esperanza.
TELL. Perdóname.
WALTY. ¿Por qué?
TELL. Por haberte traído.
WALTY. Yo he querido venir.
TELL. Por haberte traído al mundo, hijo mío.
WALTY. Estoy contento de haber venido al mundo, padre. …¿Estás llorando, papá? Si lloras por mí, no tienes que llorar. Yo estoy contento de estar aquí. (76)

[TELL. No one can help us in the whole wide world.
WALTY. No one. *(Silence.)* So we have to be calm. There is no hope. Even if we yelled until our throats hurt, no one would come. So, why yell? It's very reassuring having no hope.
TELL. Forgive me.
WALTY. What for?
TELL. For bringing you.
WALTY. I wanted to come.
TELL. For bringing you into this world, son.
WALTY. I'm happy to have been born into this world, father… Are you crying, dad? If you're crying for me, you don't have to. I'm happy to be here.]

Had Tell set aside his paternal feelings – "Estoy nervioso. No voy a acertar" [I'm nervous. I'll miss] (74) or, sobbing and begging, "¡Walty, no me atrevo a tirar sobre ti!" [Walty, I don't dare shoot you!] (77) – for Walty, his feat would have come out perfect. Overall, Tell is sad because of his father-in-law's humiliation, the absurdity of saluting the Governor's hat – "Parece una cosa de risa, pero es lo más triste del mundo" [It seems funny, but it's the saddest thing in the world] (63) – and because some people pass though the square on purpose, to be seen bowing to the Governor's hat and acquire a certain fame before him. He defies the Governor himself and his propaganda apparatus, provoking his anger and eventually bringing about the death of his own son:

> GOBERNADOR. […] Hoy estoy de buen humor.
> TELL. Yo no estoy de buen humor.
> SECRETARIO Iº. ¿Cómo dices, imbécil?
> TELL. He dicho: Yo no estoy de buen humor.
> SECRETARIO Iº. ¡No es posible! ¡Cuando el señor Gobernador está contento, todo el mundo tiene que estarlo, perro! ¡*Estar triste es un acto de sabotaje!* (71, emphasis mine)
>
> [GOVERNOR….Today I'm in a good mood.
> TELL. I'm not in a good mood.
> 1st SECRETARY. What are you saying, you idiot?
> TELL. I said: I'm not in a good mood.
> 1st SECRETARY. It's not possible! When the Governor is happy, everyone must be happy, you scum! *Being sad is sabotage*!]

Tell's raging fury at having killed his son lead him to kill the Governor and start a popular revolt in the country. Nevertheless, he cannot partake in the people's happiness, and refuses to be called a hero, because he missed the one shot he had and killed Walty. He remains a failed, sad hero. He had imagined a rather different story, in which he would have hit the apple on his son's head and come out victorious, heroic: "Vuelvo a casa. Soy un héroe y estoy con mi hijo…Así hubiera podido ser. ¿Por qué no ha sido así? Perdónenme. A veces me gusta entornar los ojos y soñar. Por algo nunca me ha llamado nadie que por mi apellido. *Todo el mundo me ha llamado siempre 'Tell, soñador*." [I go back home. I'm a hero and I'm with my son…This is how it could have been. Why wasn't it like this? Forgive me. Sometimes I like to close my eyes and dream. For some reason no one has even called me by my first name. *Everyone has always called me 'Tell', dreamer]* (84). He failed in reality, but he likes to *dream* that he could be a hero.

The lack of calculation – and the full indulgence in human emotion – are the causes of perdition for Esquilache, too. Not only does he jeopardize his political credibility through nepotism, but he also succumbs to a platonic affaire with a young girl who works at the court, Fernandita. His monetary and

amorous indulgences do not necessarily work against him, but rather present him as a human being with common weaknesses. Doña Pastora, Esquilache's wife, manipulated him to obtain high positions for their underserving sons. Fernandita is only a servant, *serving* her master, and a kind word can be admitted between an elderly, lonely man and a lovely *hija del pueblo* (village girl). Has Esquilache done anything that *truly* requires forgiveness? His blind tolerance of the frivolous and spendthrift wife and his natural paternal protection of Fernandita denote his genuine human qualities however weak they may be.

Like Sastre, Buero highlights the unpredictability in human nature and the prevalence of emotion above reason, in the course of history. A world of human feelings and weaknesses is better than a world of cold revolutionaries and perfect, meticulously calculated attitudes and modes of behavior. An imperfect yet human world prevails in both texts, aiming to erase the *vencedores-vencidos* dialectic. These plays suggest that these wordls are better than the alternatives, because their protagonists lead a life harboring dreams (Esquilache) and hopes (William Tell).

Human weaknesses can arise from what are considered, in other circumstances, human virtues, such as affection for a son and loyalty to a family. Thus, Tell's physical strength at the moment of shooting the arrow and Esquilache's marriage become weakened. Legends want us to believe that a spotless world exists; however, every day we fail to encounter its perfect heroes. Buero did not portray Esquilache as one of them, but his figure acquired a certain mythical status due to the scope of the reforms proposed.

Similarly, William Tell loses his composure moments before aiming at his son. He has an emotional conversation with him and bursts into tears, lamenting his deplorable aspect ("Tengo barba de dos días" [I haven't shaved in two days], "No tengo raya en el pantalón. Tengo los zapatos sucios" [My pants are not ironed. My shoes are dirty]) and is fully aware of his condition: "Soy un personaje desagradable. Todo lo contrario del héroe que esta gente quisiera ver" [I am an unappealing man. The opposite of the hero these people would like to see] (77). He is a weak emotional father, like the Marquis Esquilache.

One would think that such emotional men couldn't be heroes. And yet, it is precisely through their emotions that they are true historical heroes. The symbols of masculinity – arrows and hats – are turned against them. A suggestive moment occurs when, riot in progress, Esquilache returns to the Palace with the corners of his own hat missing:

> EL REY. (*Le pone la mano en el hombro.)* Descansa. (ESQUILACHE *se precipita a abrirle la puerta. Antes de salir, EL* REY *repara en el sombrero de* ESQUILACHE *y lo levanta.)* ¿Cómo? ¿También te lo han despuntado?
>
> ESQUILACHE. *(Baja los ojos.*). Bajé un momento de la carroza, señor. (178)

[THE KING. (*Resting his arm on his shoulder.)* Don't trouble yourself. (ESQUILACHE *hurries to open the door for him. Before exiting,* THE KING *spots* ESQUILACHE's *hat and lifts it.)* What? Did they cut the corners off yours, too?
ESQUILACHE. *(Lowers his eyes.*) I stepped out of the carriage for a moment, Sir.]

Just like Gessler, whose hat had been shot down from the pole by Tell, Esquilache's hat suffers a mutilation: its three corners have been cut off. He has been forcefully "hispanized" by the people. In *Guillermo Tell* the hat is a symbol of tyranny, in *Un soñador* it is a site of struggle over reform. Esquilache was going to apply Kant's advice by setting the example and being the first to exhibit the French dress style. When he literally tries to apply Kant's advice, his symbolic virility is damaged. This represents Esquilache's first step towards a personal freedom of thought.

While the historicity of William Tell is dubious, his worth as a national symbol for the Swiss is unquestionable. Most historians agree that the myth of the brave archer traveled as oral history with the Aryan tribes who migrated from central Asia: "The conception of infallible skill in archery is originally derived from the inevitable victory of the sun over his enemies, the demons of night, winter and tempest…the identification of William Tell with the sun becomes thoroughly intelligible."[84] Thus, the archer is an incarnated god from solar mythology.

The Marquis of Esquilache is also a symbol of light – during the Enlightenment and the reign of Carlos III. Both fight not only against a hat, but also against its symbolic meaning of falsely heroic manhood, oppression and tyranny. For example, Tell incarnates the symbol of the fight against the cruelty, barbarity and corruption of Governor Gessler: "¡Muera el Gobernador!... ¡Mueran los tiranos!" [Death to the Governor!... Death to tyrants!] (79). And for both, the family unit is a miniature replica of the nation that is a key factor in their dramas. Tell and Esquilache are strong father figures who lead life within their families, and undergo transformations because of their families. Without the family unit, there would not have been any dramatic development, for either man.

The hat disappears upon Tell's shooting the arrow and a Spaniard's maneuvering the sword. This intervention suggests a break in a traditional, long-standing way of things. Vitality will no longer come from symbolic manhood, but from the sentiments and humanity of the heroes. Buero and Sastre suggest that in order for a society's progress to happen, the "cold" hero must be humanized, which means that his flaws and feelings must be accepted.

The vulnerabilty of the two men, exposed in their family dramas, opens a human side in history. On one hand, history allows them victory by taking the

[84] John Fiske (1902), quot. in Dundes, p. 55.

hat off their heads, but on the other it leaves them melancholic and still like statues. Finally, they are congealed in time – and in myths and legends – as men who were caught in between the duty to their family and the duty to their people. Buero and Sastre are humanizing the idea of failure, trying to address the hopelessness that a Civil War necessarily produced. "We all failed, Spanish history is a history of failure, we're doomed as a nation to repeat our civil wars…" they seem to be saying. Buero stands by Esquilache, pulling him out from darkness – as Sastre does with Tell – presenting him as a dreamer, a well-intentioned man, armed with ideas about changing the brutalized *pueblo.* William Tell speaks about freedom and peace, in his own thirteenth-century world, but also in the contemporary one, where people still oppress others, and the same war seems to be always going on. Flawed heroes, even failed heroes, such as Esquilache and William Tell, or Larra and Servet can still serve as heroes for a defeated or for a sickened victorious populace, if failure is presented as part of being human. Human frailties, being common to us all, can be a unifying reality. Taken to an extreme, this poetics of forgiveness extends to the Others, even the winners of the war, by the losers, and especially to oneself. This view is too idealistic for either Buero or Sastre to state openly, yet can be perceived in the background. Neither Buero nor Sastre wanted to forgive the victors; rather, their intention was to create a consensus among Spaniards, erasing the tense and divided atmosphere between the two factions in civil society.

These topics, alternative histories, humanizing failure, and poetics of forgiveness show that a vision of history is possible if we look at it through the eyes of the artist par excellence. Issues of heroism, humanity or forgiveness no longer appear in *Las Meninas.* What is at stake is the question of reality and representation. Having a predilection for painting (he himself a painter before being imprisoned during the civil war) and having written other works that address this topic – *El sueño de la razón,* "The Sleep of Reason" (1970), a play about the life of Francisco de Goya, *Diálogo secreto,* "Secret Dialogue" (1984), a family drama involving Velázquez' "Las hilanderas" or "The Fable of Arachne," whose plot centers on the conflict caused by a Daltonist man who is a successful art critic and fabricates descriptions of paintings aided by his father, and *Las Meninas.* In this play Buero shows the process through which art becomes history, which is visible in the painting itself. Moreover, he shows how art processes history, which is a metaphor to illustrate the unique artistic mechanisms of the chromatic palette, shades, etc., which become analogous to main and secondary historical events, and to the audience's perception of them.

1.3. *Seeing* History through the Eyes of the Artist: Antonio Buero Vallejo's *Las Meninas* (1960)

Yo pinto el ver y no las cosas.[85]

[I paint the seeing, not what's seen.]

Las Meninas premiered in 1960 at the three hundredth commemoration of the death of Diego Velázquez (1599-1660). Subtitled "A Velazquean fantasy" (*fantasía velazqueña)*, the play imagines *possible* moments from the painter's life, developed around the conflict of showing his erotic painting of the *Venus del espejo,* as well as the anxiety caused by his waiting for King Philip IV to authorize the painting of his famous *Las Meninas.*

The action takes place in 1656, a time of uprisings in Catalonia and Portugal, economic crisis, and the purging fire of the Inquisition. But the monarch is more concerned with his hunting trips in the *Pardo.* At the moment of the premiere, the international context is also very tense: Fidel Castro's uprising in Cuba in 1959, Russia's hostile foreign policy with the West, and the weak Spanish economy forcing many lower class families to emigrate to other countries. At the same time the Spanish press reported that the *Generalísimo* Franco had caught a thirty-eight-tone cachalot (de la Puente Samaniego 40). Thus, the reign of Philip IV acts as a mirror for the spectator of the time. Reflecting both these problematic time periods, the play is regarded as a detailed recreation of the Spain of Philip IV and a critical image of contemporary Spain (Doménech 149).

There is no concrete historical episode to back up this play; instead, Buero offers spectators hypotheses and pure fantasy. The action takes us to Velázquez's studio and moves us around the little *infanta*, her ladies in waiting, royal figures, dwarves, a dog and the painter himself. The painting known as "Las Meninas" exists not only as a work of art but also as a historical artifact, presenting a moment in the life of the court of Philip IV. Just like a visual chronicle, it looks directly at us, substituting words with colors and perspective and the chronicler's identity with the painter's lateral image. In light of the hypothetical nature of the events in the play, critics were disappointed by the play's emphasis on art rather than on coded political intrigue,[86] and wondered what was the historical truth of Velázquez (Doménech 157). Following their lead, we can ask how art and history are related. How does Velázquez, the artist, see history? Delineating the three orders of truth in relation to history,[87] Paul Ricoeur defines

[85] Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas* p. 112.
[86] Catherine O'Leary, Luis Iglesias Feijoo etc.
[87] Eschatological truth, scientific truth and moral truth, in "Truth and Falsehood", *History and Truth,* pp. 165-191.

the "true" artist as someone who "does not yield to any commands exterior to his art" and when in portraying the society of his time, he "does not plagiarize a sociological analysis which has *already* been done" (*History and Truth* 174). Diego Velázquez is, by Ricoeur's standards, a "true artist," who unifies in his painting a vision of an epoch while establishing an aesthetic truth. Even if Buero, as *posibilista,* yields to limitations exterior to his art, he does convey an essential truth in his work.

The play underscores from the beginning the painter's solitude. Suspected of infidelity by his wife Juana, Velázquez defends himself: "[Mis manos buscan] no a otra como tú piensas … a alguien que me ayude a soportar el tormento de ver claro en este país de ciegos y de locos […] estoy solo. […] Conocí hace años a alguien que hubiese podido ser como un hermano" [My hands don't search for another woman, as you imagine…but for someone who can help me stand the pain of seeing clearly in this country of blind and mad people…I am alone…Years ago I met someone who could have been like a brother] (27). He recalls Pedro Briones, his old model from the times when he painted *Menino* and *Esopo.* The loneliness to which Velázquez alludes is not that of an estranged visionary, but that of a wise artist, who can paint innovatively, and who must defend himself from the machinations and betrayals of those around him. Dramatically, the text presents Velázquez as an ordinary yet perceptive man from the seventeenth century. Estranged from his family, he nonetheless enjoys the understanding of Infanta María Teresa, aged eighteen, the King's daughter, future wife of Louis XIV and queen of France.

María Teresa approaches Velázquez with a bold and unconventional air: "Sabéis que ando sola a menudo por Palacio. Mi padre me riñe, pero algo me dice que debo hacerlo" [You know I often wander alone through the Palace. My father scolds me, but something tells me I have to do it] (46). Intuiting that his solitude and understanding of life match hers, she continues,

> La verdad de la vida no puede estar en el protocolo…A veces creo entreverla en la ternura sencilla de una lavandera o en el aire cansado de un centinela…Sorprendo unas palabras que hablan de que el niño está con calentura, o de que este año la cosecha vendrá buena, y se me abre un mundo…que no es el mío. Pero me ven y callan. (46)
>
> [The truth of life cannot be in protocol…sometimes I think I glimpse it in the simple kindness of a washerwoman or in the tired air of a guard…I overhear some words that say that the child has fever, or that this year the crop will be good, and a world opens for me…which is not my own. But they see me and become silent.]

Arduous to learn the truth, she questions Velázquez about the rumors of her father's affairs, in fact searching to gain his confidence. Through their conversations about truth and lies at the court, a pact is sealed between them:

> VELÁZQUEZ. Todo esto puede ser muy peligroso…para los dos.
> Ma TERESA. Yo soy valiente. ¿Y vos? […]
> VELÁZQUEZ. Tenéis dieciocho años. Yo, cincuenta y siete. Si se supiese que os decía la verdad, nadie comprendería …la verdad es una carga terrible: cuesta quedarse solo. Y en la Corte, nadie, ¿lo oís? Nadie pregunta para que le digan la verdad. (46)
>
> [VELÁZQUEZ. All this can be very dangerous…for both of us.
> Ma TERESA. I am brave. And you?
> VELÁZQUEZ. You are eighteen. I'm fifty-seven. If they learned I was telling you the truth, no one would understand…truth is a terrible burden: its price is loneliness. And at the court no one, do you hear me? No one asks to hear the truth.]

At the court, Velázquez says, nobody wants to hear the truth. Truth at the royal court sounds unfeasible and seems more suitable for the title of a satire or comedy. Not entirely characterized by lies, the royal court has a truth of its own, which responds to the rigors and life standards with an intrinsic performative nature. Why does the Infanta insist that Velázquez reveal the truth to her? Which truth does she want to learn? He tries to dissuade her: "Vuestro linaje no os permitirá encontrarla casi nunca aunque tengáis los ojos abiertos. Os los volverán a cerrar…" [Your lineage will never allow you to find it, even if your eyes are open. They'll close them again…](46). But the Infanta implores his help and admits to considering herself "ill" for seeing certain things clearly, unlike her *meninas* (girls from noble families, brought up to serve at court, n.a.), who are older than her (47). She says that she cannot tolerate lies, but what does she understand by "lie"? When they are interrupted by the court dwarves, Mari Bárbola and Nicolasillo, it seems that the performance of the court truth and lie show has begun. Nicolasillo ("Vista de Lince") troubles the dog and upsets Mari Bárbola with his cruel comments, "Mira, Mari Bárbola: ¡mira qué fea te ha pintado! Igual que eres" [Look, Mari Bárbola: look how ugly he painted you! Just as you are] (49). As his nickname indicates, Nicolasillo has very sharp eyes and like Mari Bárbola, is a notorious gossip.[88] Judging this scene by itself, it can be considered a *true* depiction of the life at the court. The artist lives this life at the

[88] Buero opposes here the sharpness of Nicolasillo's eyes to Velázquez's poor vision. Nicolasillo asks the painter what he sees in a corner, and when Velazquez answers "colors," Nicolasillo mocks him by saying: "No quereis reconocer que tenéis cansados los ojos. Por eso sois un pintor de nubecitas." Intrigued, Velazquez demands to know who said that, but Nicolasillo astutely replies, "Yo no lo sé. Lo he oído."P. 50.

palace, actively takes part in it daily, and incorporates all these aspects and facets of truth and history in his painting.

At that precise moment, another important figure returns in the life of Velázquez, his old model Pedro, now a beggar and fugitive whom he shelters and in whom he progressively takes confidence. Pedro recalls the old chats with the painter and in particular, one of his remarks about the appearance of objects, which, being protean by default, registers their relative truth: "las cosas cambian. Quizás su verdad esté en su apariencia, que también cambia" [things change. Perhaps their truth is in their appearance, which also changes] (55). This remark shows how Buero, on one hand, and Velázquez on the other perceive history: as a kinetic process, ever changing, made of isolated moments of erratic confession (María Teresa's licence), pretended spontaneity and joviality (the court dwarves' irruption and interruption), as well as philosophical insights, purely static and memorialistic (Pedro's *re*appearance in Velázquez's life and their chats on pictorial subjects). History is a constant process of passions, performances and recurring memories of a personal past. How better to present all these aspects of history than in a great painting, like a testimonial of history's mutability and eclecticism?

Velázquez was telling María Teresa that her lineage would never allow her to find truth, even if her eyes were open, because people around her would make sure that her eyes remained closed. The antithesis open/closed eyes suggests that the corrupted yet aspirationally puritan court environment allows Velázquez to *see*, with his artist's eyes, a potential solution to the lies and hypocrisy that abound. This clairvoyance is the foundation of his revolutionary and inclusive way of painting. Truth, which the Infanta ardently seeks, is found not in rehearsed etiquette, but in certain sudden, fortuitous moments. This is why Velázquez explains to the king that his sketch of *Las meninas* represents: "una de las verdades del Palacio" [one of the truths at the Palace] and "Yo creo que la verdad…está en esos momentos sencillos más que en la etiqueta… Entonces todo puede amarse…El perro, los enanos, la niña…" [I think that truth…is in those simple moments more than in etiquette…Then everything can be loved…the dog, the dwarves, the little girl] (67). The painter's insistence on the "truth" of the painting reflects the inclusiveness and momentary reality of history. The Queen and King are not the only protagonists of history, but they share it with other, less important people. Infanta Isabel, on whom the light rests, surely represents the future, but the presence of the dwarfs and the *meninas* is to say that there are *other possibilities* for history, not just the clear, delineated path of succession.

Las Meninas is a comprehensive representation of court history, revolutionary and encompassing all the different movements of its various actors, with photographic precision. Opposed to this stylized version of history, there is the conventional one, which Angelo Nardi, Velázquez's rival painter, embraces, complaining that the lack of solemnity in the *meninas*' gestures makes the servants and even the dog seem more important (61). The Marquis, a member

of the King's suite,[89] completes the conventionality image by discrediting Velázquez: "Lo más intolerable de esa pintura es que representa la glorificación de Velázquez pintada por el propio Velázquez" [the most intolerable aspect of that painting is that it represents the glorification of Velázquez, painted by the very Velázquez] (61), advising the king against its approval.

It is the same Marquis who belittles the painter continuously:

> Parece que el mismo ha dicho, señor, que sus majestades se reflejarían en el espejo. No ha encontrado lugar más mezquino para vuestras majestades en el cuadro, mientras él mismo se retrata en gran tamaño. No me sorprende: yo nunca oí de Velázquez y dudo que vuestra majestad los haya oído, aquellos justos elogios que el amor del vasallo debe a tan excelso monarca. (62)
>
> [It seems that he himself said, Sir, that your majesties would appear as reflections in the mirror. He could not find a more hideous place for your majesties in the painting, while he portrays himself in life-size. I'm not surprised: I never heard from Velázquez and I doubt that your majesty did either, those righteous praises that a vassal's love owes to such a sublime monarch]

The marquis performatively fulfills the court etiquette by defending the conventional historical representation of royalty against the obvious incongruities of the painting, of how it is inadequate in placing irrelevant details in the foreground, next to the painter himself, while the blurry reflections of the monarchs are pushed to the background.

Buero reconstructs the birth of the famous painting in a very pessimistic light. Pedro Briones says that the painting has the sadness and pain of Spain, its only truth being death:

> Un cuadro sereno: pero con toda la tristeza de España dentro. Quien *vea* a estos seres comprenderá lo irremediablemente condenados al dolor que están. Son fantasmas vivos cuya verdad es la muerte. Quien los mire mañana, lo advertirá con espanto…Sí, con espanto, pues llegará un momento, como a mí me sucede ahora, en que ya no sabrá si es él fantasma ante las miradas de estas figuras…y querrá salvarse con ellas, embarcarse en el navío inmóvil de esta sala, puesto que ellas lo miran, puesto que él está ya en el cuadro cuando lo miran…Y tal vez, mientras busca su propia cara en el espejo del fondo, se salve por un momento de

[89] He is identified as Baltasar Barroso de Ribera (Marqués de Malpica), *Mayordomo Mayor* in the palace. Cf. Juan Rodríguez-Castellano, ed. *Las Meninas.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963, p. 37.

> morir…Perdonad…Debería hablaros de los colores como un pintor, mas yo no puedo. Apenas *veo*. (72, emphasis mine)
>
> [A serene painting: but with all of Spain's sadness inside. He who *sees* these beings will understand how irremediably condemned to pain they are. They are live ghosts whose sole truth is death. He who looks at them tomorrow will realize it with fear…Yes, with fear, for there will be a moment, as it happens to me right now, when he will no longer know if he is not a ghost being contemplated by these beings…and will want to save himself with them, embark on the still ship of this room, because they look at him, because he is already in the painting when they look…And maybe, while he looks for his own face in the back mirror, he saves himself from death for a moment…Forgive me…I should speak of colors as a painter, but I cannot. I barely *see*.]

Strange enough, Pedro, who barely *sees*, can however perceive the inherent truth of the future painting. When Velázquez consults him, the painting is only a sketch, but he admits to suddenly seeing what his old model meant: "De pronto *veo*" [I suddenly see] (72). The verb "to see" appears five times in their dialogue, the most striking being the opposition between Pedro's "I barely see" and Velázquez's "I suddenly see." Velázquez *sees* history through the eyes of a painter. History is the spontaneity of the moment, the alternative possibility, either in the corner, or in the contour of a profile, in the absolving light. Despite the stillness emanating from the painting, its *life* shows a different view of history. To recall Ricoeur, who defends the possibility of a "purely" aesthetic experience through the very existence of artists, Velázquez, more than *seeing* history, *writes* truth with his brush on canvas, "by preserving color […] the artist, without willing it explicitly, revives the most primitive truth of the world of our life" (174). Buero suggests history is a purely aesthetic or artistic experience, symbolically represented by Velázquez. Upon reencountering Pedro, now on the run because of a crime he had committed in self-defense, the two engage in an intriguing conversation about art and its capacity to render reality:

> PEDRO. ¿Recordáis que me hablabais de vuestra pintura?
> VELÁZQUEZ. (*Sorprendido.)* Sí.
> PEDRO. Un día dijisteis: las cosas cambian…Quizá su verdad esté en su apariencia, que también cambia.
> VELÁZQUEZ. *(Cuyo asombro crece.)* ¿Os acordáis de eso?
> PEDRO. Creo que dijisteis: si acertáramos a mirarlas de otro modo que los antiguos, podríamos pintar hasta la sensación de hueco…
>
> [PEDRO. Do you recall talking to me about your paintings?

VELÁZQUEZ. *(Surprised.)* Yes.
PEDRO. One day you said: things change…Perhaps their truth is in their appearance, which also changes.
VELÁZQUEZ. *(Whose astonishment grows.)* You remember that?
PEDRO. I think you said: if we managed to see them in different ways than the people of old did, we could even paint the feeling of emptyness…] (78)

In this dialogue, through Pedro's recollective voice, Velázquez's vision about the interrelatedness of history, art and truth become apparent. He is configured as an artist *par excellence,* a visionary capable of transposing on canvas the mysteries of objects, people and events by conveying the spatial and temporal distances, and processes that intervene in their configuration and existence. In other words, by capturing the sensation of void, "the feeling of emtyness" between one person or event and another, his art is gifted to make history visible to the naked eye.

In the second part of the drama Velázquez has to account for his nude of Venus, which he painted despite the Inquisition's regulation against the painting of lascivious images. Angelo Nardi seizes the opportunity to accuse him bluntly of having gone "blind": "ha perdido la vista y ya no percibe los detalles" [he lost sight and no longer perceives details] (111). But Velázquez claims that he paints the very act of seeing, and not things: "yo pinto el ver y no las cosas" (112). He paints the image of the real, not reality itself, and in that image, human imagination, feeling and thought humanize the real. This is a statement about the perspective of history and its possibilitites: the painter does not paint objects, people, nor does he paint the manner in which *he* perceives things, but the manner in which these appear, in reality, if we were to abstract from them the meaning imposed by human gaze. The play links Velázquez's seeing to historical seeing. When forced to defend the painting of *Venus del espejo*, Velázquez argues that "Soy pintor…un pintor es un ojo que ve la Creación en toda su gloria. La carne es pecadora, mas también es gloriosa. Y antes de que nos sea confirmada su gloria en el fin de los tiempos, la pintura lo percibe…" [I am a painter…a painter is an eye that sees Creation in all its glory. Flesh is sinful, but it is also glorious. Painting perceives its glory before it is confirmed at the end of time…] (143). Restricted by the court to paint human flesh in what were considered lascivious poses, Velázquez finds himself in the position of presenting Venus, his subject, as a carrier of human beauty for eternity. By virtue of the painter's aesthetic enterprise, history takes another shape.

A reversed perspective shows that our own eyes contain the meaning of the image, and not the image itself. Thus, Velázquez defends himself by counteraccusing his cousin José Nieto – member of the *Tribunal de Inquisición*: "Vos habéis visto lascivia en mi pintura. Mas yo os pregunto: ¿dónde está la lascivia? […] ¡En vuestra mente […] vuestro ojo es el que peca y no mi Venus! […] Mi mirada está limpia, la vuestra todo lo ensucia" [You have seen lust in my

painting. But I ask you: where is it? In your mind! It is your eye that sins and not my Venus! My gaze is clean, yours soils everything] (106). The attack continues when Angelo Nardi is invited to judge, as a fellow painter, the quality of Velázquez's work, which he unsurprisingly deems unfit for a court chamberlain painter. He argues that "Ha pintado un solo cuadro de batallas, cuando nuestras gloriosas batallas han sido y son tan abundantes" [He only did one battle painting, when our glorious battles have been and are so many], rendering Velázquez a distorter of historical fact, especially when he continues by saying that "*La rendición de Breda* es una tela demasiado pacífica; más parece una escena de corte que una hazaña militar" [*The Surrender of Breda* is too peaceful a painting; it looks more like a court scene than a military deed] (110). And he also dismisses his atypical way of painting as irreverent: "Los mismos retratos de personas reales carecen de la majestad adecuada. Se diría que entre los perros o los bufones que él pinta y … sus majestades, no admite distancias" [Royal portraits lack adequate majesty. One could say that among dogs or dwarves and…your majesties, he does not admit distances] (111). Velázquez's reply attacks precisely the weaknesses and superficiality in Nardi's style, who copies Velázquez, secretly aspiring to be like him, but publicly denouncing him:

> VELÁZQUEZ. He advertido una tenue neblina verdosa que rodea el sayo de su *San Jerónimo.* El maestro sabe algo de los colores que yo ignoro: lo confieso.
> NARDI. Exageráis…sólo es un modo de dar blandura a las gradaciones…
> VELÁZQUEZ. ¿Con una neblina verdosa alrededor del sayo?
> NARDI. Vos mismo recurrís a esas dulzuras…
> VELÁZQUEZ. ¿Yo?
> NARDI. ¿Tendré que recordaros cierta nubecilla verdosa que rodea las calzas de vuestro *Don Juan de Austria*?
> VELÁZQUEZ. ¿Habéis pintado vuestra nubecilla por haber visto la mía? ¡Qué honor para mí!
> NARDI *(molesto*). Es una coincidencia casual.
> VELÁZQUEZ. ¿Coincidencia? Olvidáis que las calzas de mi bufón son carmesíes.
> NARDI. ¿Y qué con eso?
> VELÁZQUEZ. Yo pinté la nubecilla verdosa porque me ha parecido advertir que las tintas carmesíes suscitan a su alrededor un velo verdoso.
> EL REY. ¡Hola! Eso es curioso.
> VELÁZQUEZ. Es algo que ocurre en nuestros ojos, señor, y que aun no comprendo bien. El maestro Nardi lo comprende mejor…Yo creía que un paño verde suscitaba una nubecilla carmesí…y él la pinta verde. ¡No por haber visto la mía, no! Es una coincidencia casual. Y una distracción … Quizá no

tardemos en ver las veladuras de su *San Jerónimo* volverse carmesíes. O el sayo, pero esto requeriría más trabajo […] (113-14)

[VELÁZQUEZ. I have noticed, Sir, a faint greenish mist surrounding the green smock of your *Saint Jeronimous*. The Master knows something about colors which I confess I ignore.
NARDI. You exaggerate. It is only a way to confer softness to the gradations…
VELÁZQUEZ. With a greenish mist around the smock?
NARDI. You yourself resort to these smooth ways.
VELÁZQUEZ. Me?
NARDI. (*Laughs*) I will have to remind you a certain greenish mist around the pants of your *Don Juan de Austria*.
VELÁZQUEZ. Have you painted your mist for having seen mine? What an honor!
NARDI. (*Annoyed)* It is a casual coincidence.
VELÁZQUEZ. Coincidence? You forget that my buffoon's pants are crimson.
NARDI. So what?
VELÁZQUEZ. I painted the greenish mist because I thought that the crimson strokes provoke next to them a certain greenish veil.
THE KING. Aha! That is curious.
VELÁZQUEZ. It is something that happens in our eyes, sir, and which I still do not understand well. Master Nardi understands this better…I thought that a green cloth roused a crimson mist…and he paints it green. Not for seeing mine, no. It is a casual coincidence. And a divertissement. Perhaps it won't be long before we see the pants of his Saint Jeronimous turn crimson. Or the smock but this would require more work.]

It is hilarious to see Velázquez making such bitter comments regarding the chromatic palette of his rival painter. Yet his critique of colors hides a striking allusion to the way we perceive things. Are things what we directly see by looking at them? Or are they distorted (for better or worse) by that which lies in their immediate vicinity? What makes the totality of the object? Is there a possibility for a total picture of history? And if so, is *Las Meninas* a successful attempt? The greenish wispy film that softens the crimson tone of Don Juan de Austria's shoes is what Velázquez believes he sees. To make an analogy between the correct chromatic criterion to which Velázquez alludes, an object or event is perceived historically by our minds less directly, as it is mixed with those events

situated next to it, temporally or circumstantially. And Buero subtly casts a warning: just like Nardi's *copied* greenish puff which could (but never will) become crimson because of the juxtaposed green color, so may historical events become "colored," or more meaningful, when we take into account spatial and temporal circumstances. Buero is suggesting that theater, and art in general, performs the same dynamic coloring of history's truth as found in Velázquez's painting. Theater breaks with the conventional view of history, showing us alternate ways of viewing what happened or is happening.

Buero and Sastre explore historical incidents by plotting on a timeline details and events that did not occur, or which had a different outcome than in reality. Their alternative histories or counter histories are directed towards the closing of the burdensome gap between winners and losers in Spanish civil society. Attempting to answer a series of "what if" questions, both playwrights expose various readily available possibilities, which reveal the importance of certain individuals in history in shaping the course of events.

CHAPTER II

Transition and the Limits of History: José Sanchis Sinisterra

In 1975, following Franco's death, Spain entered a period of political change towards democracy, which culminated in 1978 with the adoption of the Constitution. This Transition period from dictatorship to democracy officially ended in 1982 when the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Labor Party) won the national elections. José Sanchis Sinisterra's work extends beyond this timeframe. He wrote his first play, *Tú, no importa quien* in 1962, staged *La leyenda de Gilgamesh* in 1978 with his own company, *El Teatro Fronterizo*, and has been an active playwright to the present. His work in general, and especially the plays written between 1978 and 1984[90] – analyzed here – mark a transition from the theater of the Realist Generation (Antonio Buero Vallejo and Alfonso Sastre, among others) to the postmodern theater of Juan Mayorga, Lluïsa Cunillé, Laila Ripoll, etc. The name of José Sanchis Sinisterra is synonymous with *teatro fronterizo* ("frontier" or "border" theater): an experimental theatrical company, which Sanchis created in 1977, resisting a growing tendency of theater production towards the spectacular. In the manifesto for *El Teatro Fronterizo* (ETF) Sanchis elaborated its program and explained the urgency of its foundation.[91]

The manifesto was published in 1980 in an issue of *Primer Acto* that paid homage to Sanchis' work in theater since the 1960s. It expresses the main concerns of a theater situated on the border (marginal with respect to mainstream, bourgeois theater), devoid of certain naturalistic stage elements, that were eliminated progressively in order to test the audiences' response and modify their reception mechanism. In this manifesto Sanchis makes explicit his challenge to all hegemonic and discursive constructs of history and historical representation:

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[90] During the 1970s and the 1980s there were two main theater movements in Spain that favored some authors while forcing others to the corner of exclusion: these are operation rescue, which resurrected forgotten authors of the pre-Franco era, predominantly Ramón del Valle-Inclán and Federico García Lorca. Then, "operation restitution" favored works by dramatists like Francisco Nieva and Fernando Arrabal, prohibited under Franco. Cf. Kasten, p. 95.

[91] Sanchis defines the coordinates for his theater as "un proceso de desnudamiento, de sustracción de los componentes de la teatralidad. Frente a un fenómeno general del teatro contemporáneo, que podríamos definir como una evolución acumulativa, aditiva, de los elementos de la teatralidad, creo que convendría investigar una tendencia sustractiva, que fuera despejando al teatro de pretendidos elementos indispensables hasta llegar a esos límites posibles de la teatralidad…" (*Primer Acto* 186, p. 94). A third manifesto was published in 1982, claiming that *El Teatro Fronterizo* was a "group dedicated to producing shows, as well as a workshop for theatrical research and creation, a laboratory for textual experimentation" (Sanchis quoted in Manuel Aznar Soler, Introducción, *Ñaque…* p. 35).

> Para crear una verdadera alternativa al "teatro burgués" no basta con llevarlo ante los públicos populares, ni tampoco con modificar el contenido ideológico de las obras representadas. La ideología se infiltra y se mantiene en los códigos mismos de la representación, en los lenguajes y convencionalismos estéticos que, desde el texto hasta la organización espacial, configuran la producción y la percepción del espectáculo.[92]
>
> [In order to create a true alternative to "bourgeois theater" it is not enough to stage it before the masses, nor to alter the ideological content of the plays. Ideology infiltrates and is maintained in the very codes of representation, in language and esthetic conventions, which, from text to spatial organization, configure the production and the perception of the show.]

In responding to the recently (1979) elected PSOE government's intention to create a national theater, which would reproduce bourgeois theater mechanisms, Sanchis proposes an erasure of such practices. He targets the two dominant discourses of western theater, the Aristotelian and the Brechtian, from which he retains some of the founding principles (existence of a plot, albeit non-linear, and "estrangement effect" making the audience aware that they're watching a play) but his protagonists are marginal beings, outcasts, people forgotten by official history. Characters never heard of before acquired a voice and revealed a different angle of reality. The explicit purpose of the *Teatro Fronterizo* was to submit the practice of theater to an open examination, revising traditional stage practices and challenging the audiences' reception:

> […] la naturaleza del texto dramático y el modo de escritura teatral, la noción de "personaje" y su relación con las funciones escénicas del actor, el imperialismo de la "fábula" y la estructura de la trama, los conceptos de Unidad y Coherencia estéticas, el pretendido carácter discursivo de la representación, las fronteras entre narración oral e interpretación, […] la teatralidad *diferente* del juego, del ritual, de la fiesta, de la juglaría…[93]
>
> [… the nature of the dramatic text and the way of writing, the notion of "character" and its relation to the stage functions of the actor, the imperialism of the plot's "story" and structure, the concepts of esthetic Unity and Coherence, the so called discursive aspect of the representation, the borders between oral narration and interpretation,… the *different* theatricality of the game, the ritual, the *fiesta,* of minstrelsy…]

[92] "El teatro fronterizo. Planteamientos." *Primer Acto* 186, Oct.-Nov. 1980, p. 89.
[93] Ibid.

Various dramatic and non-dramatic elements meet in Sanchis' experimental work in a sort of game, combining oral narrative and theatricality.[94] The non-linear plot reverses the natural order of events, and the play's structure includes elements that belong to the rehearsal part of the production. Most of his texts have a dual aspect, with the characters rehearsing the very show they're presenting, but the rehearsal is not an improvisation, it is consolidated in the text of the drama. This metatheatrical facet is easily achieved with the majority of the characters being small-time actors, making a living through improvisations or grotesque variety shows, and who consequently facilitate the structure of play-within-the-play.

Sanchis wrote several plays that tackle historical themes. He addresses major Spanish events from the twentieth century, such as the Civil War and its aftermath, in the famous *¡Ay, Carmela!* (1986) – which consecrated him on the Spanish stage and subsequently won him the *Premio Nacional de Teatro* in 1990 – and the collection of short pieces *Terror y miseria en el primer franquismo* (*Terror and Misery of the First Franco Period,* 2002).[95] He also raised questions about Spain's colonial past in *Trilogía americana* (*American Trilogy,* 1996), composed of *Naufragios de Álvar Núñez o La herida del otro* (*Shipwrecks of Álvar Núñez or The Other's Wound,* 1991), *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* (*Lope de Aguirre, Traitor,* 1986) and *El retablo de Eldorado* (*The Eldorado Puppet Show,* 1984). These last three plays were elaborated over a long period, starting roughly in 1977 and completed between 1984 and 1991. The author also explored in a parodic way the Fall of the Berlin Wall in *El cerco de Leningrado* (*The Siege of Leningrad,* 1994).

Reluctant to refer to them as "history plays" and opting for the "irreverent" term "memory plays,"[96] Sanchis organizes these works using metatheatricality, a non-linear structure and other elements of magic and fantasy (characters present on stage after their demise, or figures who acquire physical appearance after being first *remembered* or *thought of* by other characters). These approaches come very close to what German critic Hans-Thies Lehmann calls "postdramatic" theater, characterized by a tendency to emphasize the performance aspect rather than the textual aspect of a play.[97] By juxtaposing the rehearsing aspect and the finished show in the final format of the play, Sanchis puts forth the idea that Spain is departing from a teleological historical model, and is traversing a period of historical experimentation. By "historical experimentation" I refer to the historical process of political and economic

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[94] Sanchis quot. in *Primer Acto* 186, p. 95.

[95] This collection's title is a pun on Bertolt Brecht's 1938 anti-Nazi play *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich.*

[96] Sanchis quot. in Miranda, "El teatro histórico es impositivo, la memoria es más irreverente", 19 February 2004, on the occasion of the staging of *Terror y miseria en el primer franquismo*.

[97] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre.* Sanchis' own *Manifesto* for the *ETF* and the centrality of the idea of an empty stage as a space of encounter between different characters, figures, voices, realities and fantasies are much in line with postdramatic theater, which features "foreign voices, songs, memories, reference points" and "palimpsestuous intertextuality and intratextuality". (Karen Jürs-Munby, "Introduction" to *Postdramatic Theatre,* p. 8).

transition that the country is undergoing while Sanchis is writing these plays. The insertion of comical elements within a serious theme also disrupts familiar historical narratives.

Despite bearing a great sense of the tragic whether explicitly – *¡Ay, Carmela!* is an "elegy of a civil war in two acts and an epilogue," and in *Naufragios* traumatic memories and figures of the past come to torment the mind of a Spanish explorer –, the playwright recurs to humor and satire on numerous occasions. By not writing tragedies in the strict generic sense, but confronting a tragic subject from a comic perspective, Sanchis submits Spanish history to an important and original critical process.

This critique is achieved by accentuating the performative platform. One of the most salient features of Sanchis' work is the presentation of topics in a duality of show and rehearsal. This attribute is similar to a "now and then" or "before and after" temporal duality, and reflects a historical conflict between past and future. Characters often refer to a *previous* state of things, which disturbs their *present*, in which a new order has been installed, and that threatens to destroy them. This conflict runs its course: a drunk dreams of his dead companion (*¡Ay, Carmela!*), an explorer admires his naked body in the mirror while being haunted by the voice of his indigenous partner (*Naufragios*), and two older actresses engage in the nostalgic reminiscing of their youthful days, while searching for a lost manuscript in the abandoned theater that has been their home for more than two decades (*El cerco)*. These plays propose that the present is empty, a space haunted by loss, and is a spectral time that annuls healthy engagement with the future. Wandering in a wasteland, ghostly figures from the past invade the stage constantly and create disturbances. They are history's ghosts or angels, and like the angel in Paul Klee's painting, *Angelus Novus*, they are caught with wings wide open in front of the accumulating pile of debris from the past and are propelled, facing this destruction, right into the future by the winds of Paradise.[98]

Maintaining a strong connection with his present, Sanchis' dramas open up the past, allowing its "actors" to invade the present even after their demise (variety show star Carmela in *¡Ay, Carmela!* and Amerindian woman Shila in *Naufragios de Álvar Núñez)* so that they can re-write what happened, participate in the audience's present and shape the future. These characters, like the country itself, are *in transit*: their presence re-opens a closed archive for re-assessment. The fact that the characters "in transit" are a reflection of the Transition does not contradict the argument that Sanchis has a non-teleological approach to history in his plays. The Transition can be regarded as a teleological way of understanding this historical process (i.e. history is moving *from* dictatorship *to* the *telos* of democracy), but Sanchis' vision of this process does not match this purpose-driven path; rather, he suggests that the Transition is an aimless, confusing period, which instead of clarifying long-sought aspects of the past –

[98] Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History.* IX, p. 257.

such as the Civil War and the Franco dictatorship – pushes them even further into oblivion, and dwells in a static reminiscence of National Catholicism's dated imperial doctrine. The choice of protagonists for the *American Trilogy* altogether – Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, along with the mad Lope de Aguirre (in the homonymous play) or the quasi-anonymous *Don Rodrigo Díaz* de Contreras (in *El Retablo de Eldorado,* a decadent correspondent of *Don Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar,* or El Cid) – indicates that Sanchis draws a comparison between Spain during Transition and the miserable Imperial Spain: a nation in shambles, ruined, but which persists in dwelling in fabulous, fantastic imagery of itself.[99]

History and memory become the playwright's modus operandi in his portrayal of the political and ideological changes from dictatorship to democracy. The time period between 1975 and 1991, when Sanchis wrote these plays that explore history, is marked by three major political, economic and social events: the adoption of the Constitution in 1978, followed by Spain's entry to the European Community in 1986, and the quincentennial celebration of the "discovery" of America in 1992.[100] These events mark the Spanish Transition. During that time, another significant event took place: Spain's politicians agreed upon a *pacto de olvido,* a decision to willfully "forget" painful memories concerning the Civil War, and to put off dealing with the legacy of Franco until later.

Sanchis' theater shares the general approach to historic genres during postmodernity. Characterized by a view of the end of history, also known as "post-history," many authors writing in the 1970s and 1980s did not seek to reconstruct historical epochs, but rather built a fictitious elaboration of every-day problems, often private and existential. This tendency stems from the disbelief in mimetic or realist literature and from literature's quality of being self-referential, expressed by postmodern theorists.[101] Alongside Linda Hutcheon's "historiographic metafiction" Hayden White proposes the thesis of "metahistory" arguing that historians recur to tropes and emplotments to write an historical account. As such, postmodernism's disbelief in "metanarratives" fueled the challenging of historical objectivity and the advancement of theses advocating a blur between the literary and the historical. Therefore, from Lyotard's "*meta*narratives" we move to White's "*meta*history" and to Hutcheon's "historiographic *meta*fictions." All these terms connote art's foregrounding of its

[99] I owe these reflections to a fruitful dialogue with Professor Ivonne del Valle.
[100] 1992 was a very significant date for Spain, as Barcelona hosted the Summer Olympic Games, Seville organized the quincentenary of Columbus' voyage to America, and Madrid was designated as European Capital of Culture.
[101] Cf. Jean Lyotard's famous thesis of the "incredulity towards metanarratives" (7) or Linda Hutcheon's term "historiographic metafiction" (in this case, historiographic *metadramas*) referring to those works which are "intensely self-reflective but also both re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge" (285-286). See *Introduction.*

own fictionality, a condition that many theorists believed was shared by historical accounts of the past.[102]

Loss of faith in any historical teleology and the growing closeness between literature and historiography also influenced theater. Sanchis' work resonates with revisionist approaches to history at the moment when Spain was challenged to redesign the State, and move beyond the decades of censored theater, press and television. His plays deconstruct, both structurally and thematically, the monolithic understanding of the country's identity, at a crucial moment in its history.

History and memory occupy a central place in Sanchis' theater, by virtue of the original connections that he makes with Spain's context: history as performance in *¡Ay, Carmela!* (1986), history as a fragmentary mosaic, illustrated by *Naufragios de Álvar Núñez o La herida del otro* (1992), and history as a continuous transition in *El cerco de Leningrado* (1994) in which past and present clash in an artistically restorative way. History as performance and as fragmentary mosaic captures Sanchis' restless energy and unresolved anxiety regarding the role of theater in contemporary Spain. In these plays he examines closely the role of history and memory, the relationship of memory and testimony to history. The metatheatrical structure enriches the discussion of the relevance of the stage to current historical and political transformations by raising the question of whether theater is an influential force in history or a trivial profession on history's farthest margins.

Various critics argue that Sanchis' work deconstructs the concept of otherness by using an aesthetic of marginality.[103] While this aspect is reflected through the typology of his frequent actor-characters, mostly frivolous (Carmela and Paulino in *¡Ay, Carmela!*), wicked (Chirinos and Chanfalla in *El Retablo de Eldorado)* or old, ragged (Natalia and Priscila in *El cerco*) actors who seem to abandon a hiding place in order to appear on stage, Sanchis' historical theater creates an intimate connection with the time period during which it was written. This association stems from the aesthetic of marginality (as suggested by the playwright's commitment to the *teatro fronterizo)* but also from the structure and the content of the dramas. Through the postmodern and post-dramatic revision of major historical events (such as the encounter between colonizers and the

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[102] Hayden White's work examines the problems of meaning (its production, distribution and consumption) in history and suggests that the only meaning history can have is that supplied by narrative imagination. The "content of the form" is the way by which our consciousness invests history with meaning, and the way in which our narrative capacity transforms the present into a fulfillment of a past from which we wish we had descended.

[103] For more reference see Wilfried Floeck ("El teatro de José Sanchis Sinisterra" in *Estudios críticos sobre el teatro español del siglo XX,* 2003), Carlos Manuel Rivera ("Transgresión y transculturación/interculturación en el teatro fronterizo de José Sanchis Sinisterra" in *Gestos: teoría y práctica del teatro hispano,* 2003: 103-117), Marcela Beatriz Sosa (*Las fronteras de la ficción: el teatro de José Sanchis Sinisterra,* 2003). These authors draw a panoramic analysis of Sanchis' own "border theater" and typology of characters on the background of theoretical considerations of the dramatic genre and critical and cultural studies.

indigenous in *American Trilogy*, the Spanish Civil War in *¡Ay, Carmela!* or the end of the Cold War in *El cerco de Leningrado*), Sanchis' "in between" theatrical aesthetic is a response to and reflection of the transitional phase traversed by Spain. Questioning the idea of Spanish identity in relation to the nation's own past and imperial mission as well as in relation to the present and future, as part of a larger continental order, allows the author to pose unanticipated questions and to make bold connections between the history of a nation "in transit" and its reevaluation of the ties with a mythical Imperial past, a challenging present, and a capitalistic future. These plays constitute a symbolic unit and may be viewed as a direct response to the transition from the old Spain (empire, two failed Republics, civil wars and dictatorships) to the new Spain of restored democracy.[104] What makes these plays similar is that each focuses on major historical events from Spanish history, addressing the country's need for reevaluation of its status and politics: the silence imposed on the Civil War, the immanent reconsideration of imperialism, and the confusing Transition process. Therefore, the plays imply that Spain's "new" identity must engage with the country's colonialist past, the still divisive civil war and the emerging European identity. Their *dramatis personae*, featuring the common small-actor, brought to ruin by the passage of time, surprised by contingencies, but refusing to lie dormant or give up, and reappearing from the dark corners of the stage to carry through his or her mission/ performance can be interpreted as a metaphor for the country's past; like the trivial performer who entertains the crowd with natural talent, but who is chased off stage because of goofy mistakes and the state's intervention, the past and its failures (the Carlist wars, the absolute monarchy of Fernando VII, the dictatorships of Primo de Rivera and Franco) irrupt on the Spanish national "stage," invading it and requesting the nation to reconsider and learn from them before plunging into the new sociopolitical order. Like the ghosts who haunt Álvar Núñez and demand a serious revision of his expedition's account, as well as a reconsideration of his "imperial" attitude, the petty actors incarnate the past and its forgotten scraps. Ignored for too long, the past demands to be considered. Natalie's miraculous rejuvenation at the end of *The Siege,* the drama that builds a connecting bridge between the new *Spain* and the new *Europe*, seems to suggest that a fresh consideration of the nation's history is the *only* possible way to cross that bridge.[105]

After Franco's death, in addition to its own transition – which entailed the abandonment of propagandistic Fascism and relic Imperialism –, Spain witnessed the collapse of another long-standing political order (Communism), as it joined the European Community. The nation had to learn to be part of the European continent, and concomitantly assimilate its sociopolitical redesigning.

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[104] The plays from *Trilogía americana* (1992) and *El cerco de Leningrado* (1994) complete the picture of Spain during Transition: the first focus on the decadent imperial image of the Spanish nation and the latter transmits a state of confusion, anxiety and claustrophobia vis-à-vis the Transition and its political and economic implications.

[105] These plays stage national allegories, among other things.

Sanchis' plays echo this political challenge to critique the both past and present. His work approaches history in a revisionist way, in order to offer, from the stage, a critical view of his present: the Transition from dictatorship to democracy.

2.1. A Way Out of History through Performance: *¡Ay, Carmela!* (1986)

> History that repeats itself turns to farce.
> Farce that repeats itself turns to history.
> - Jean Baudrillard

¡Ay, Carmela! presents a unique approach to a tragic situation that is resolved in a metatheatrical way. Vulgarity, pathos and humor share grounds in a play whose characters search for an exit from a closed, unbearable historical situation. Subtitled "Elegy of a Civil War in Two Acts and an Epilogue," its protagonist, Carmela, becomes entangled in a tragic setup which puts an end to her life. The main question raised by this play is to what degree performing past events from one's life helps to create a way out of a tense and critical situation. Here, the term "performing" suggests a full yet imperfect rehearsal of a series of events that are personal and individually marginal, but over time, become nationally and universally crucial. Thus, performing one's life can be extended to signify a performance of history.

On a foggy March day in 1938, Carmela and Paulino, two vaudeville actors, inadvertently cross from the Republican war zone to the National rebels' zone and enter the village of Belchite in Aragón, occupied by Franco's armed forces. Held prisoners by the Nationals, they manage to arrange a liberation "deal" through their artistic profession. They agree to perform an improvised version of their show on the stage of the Goya theater, for the entertainment of National Army soldiers, Franco himself, and prisoners from the International Brigades, who were granted a last favor before being executed at dawn. At the end of the last act – a cheap and dirty parody of the Second Spanish Republic – a soldier shoots Carmela dead amid confusion and uproar.

This is the linear story of the drama. But in *¡Ay, Carmela!* things do not happen in this order. Act I opens with a drunk – Paulino - walking on stage and lamenting the untimely death of his partner. The stage is empty, except for a diskless gramophone and a Republican flag, half burnt. Paulino farts, creating a rupture with the solemnity of his gesture of placing the flag on top of the gramophone. After reciting a Fascist poem, he farts again. A light appears suddenly and thus enters Carmela: "Me he acordado de ti y aquí estoy" [I remembered you and here I am] (192). As the dialogue unfolds between the two, we learn that Carmela has arrived from the underworld. She is dead and aware

of her wandering between the world of the dead and that of the living, as she talks to Paulino, who is still alive.

The metatheatrical structure of the play is a key for Carmela's progression from "performing life" to "performing history." After the opening scene, which establishes many uncertainties for the audience, with regard to the nature of the characters and the context, the lights dim and a completely different panorama appears. Paulino and Carmela are now *rehearsing* an act from their show for the National rebels. An invisible Italian *teniente* is in charge of the lights an hour before the show. We catch Carmela and Paulino in a light conversation, about the poor state of her overnight-sewn costume, the role of art and the mission of the artists, and Paulino's gift for farting, which has been a successful number in their previous shows. Their dialogue takes place in a funny yet frightening register: they are observed by the lieutenant (an implicit character in the play) and have to adjust their discourse to the National war zone in which they find themselves.[106] Sanchis establishes a humor/terror dialectic that operates without interruption until the end of the play. Another sudden change of lights (compliments of the lieutenant) takes away the rehearsing scene and retrieves the opening empty stage: Paulino is asleep and Carmela is trying to wake him up. Abandoning his dreams, he discovers Carmela by his side. She confides that it tires her to return from the afterworld, as the weight of her memories gets harder to bear. Continuing the tale of the afterworld where she left off, Carmela says that she has met a number of people from Belchite, and also the poet Lorca. As Paulino tries to make sense of her presence – he is neither drunk, nor dreaming – Carmela comes up with original and witty explanations. One of them is that there are too many dead to go immediately to Hell because of the war, so some have to wait: "[…] como hay tantos muertos por la guerra y eso, pues no cabemos todos…y por eso nos tienen por aquí, esperando, mientras nos acomodan" (218). Then, the actor and actress suddenly reproach each other: he for her courage that cost her her life, and she for his cowardice, which couldn't save her in the end. Act I ends as Carmela abandons the stage and Paulino runs desperately after her, begging her to return.

The second act opens similarly to the first. Paulino is alone on the stage, next to the gramophone, the half burnt Republican flag, reciting the Fascist poem, intoning the chorus from the Republican song *El ejército del Ebro,* and trying to understand how his obviously dead partner continues to pop up on stage at will. Convinced that there is more to her reappearances than meets the eye, Paulino resolves to summon Carmela once more. She makes a grand entrance, wearing a popular Andalusian costume (sewn from a curtain) and

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[106] An example is the moment when Paulino boasts about his singing career: "yo tenía una brillante carrera de tenor lírico…Io, tenore lirico de…zarzuela, ¿comprende? ¿Capisce 'zarzuela', operetta spagnola?" (201) and then blames the war for his interrupted ascendance: "Tenore lirico, sí, pero la guerra…, quiero decir, la Cruzada, el Glorioso Alzamiento Nacional…, pues eso: carriera cagata, spezzata…" (202). Thus, Paulino adapts his language to the National rhetoric of "Crusade"and "Glorious National Uprising."

executing dance movements. Carmela doesn't realize what's going on. Clearly, from her perspective, she is *alive,* and they are *in the middle of the show's rehearsal.* After discussing some aspects of their show, Carmela broaches the topic of the poor soldiers from the International Brigades, to be executed by the Nationals the following day. Minutes before the show's beginning, Carmela warns Paulino that she will not do the "flag number," in other words, she will not appear naked on stage, covered only by the Republican flag as a scornful gesture. As artists they must do whatever is asked of them, regardless of the political implications. Paulino tries to convince her, believing he had spotted Franco himself in the audience.

Their show, *Carmela y Paulino, variedades a lo fino* [Carmela and Paulino, high quality vaudeville] begins. The change of lighting indicates that we are now immersed, through flashback, in the *time* of the show. The Paulino and Carmela we see here are the ones from their last performance together. Their show contains numerous hilarious moments and funny slips. Paulino is frightened that something will go wrong, which makes him act silly. After several entertainment numbers, Carmela performs awkwardly the "flag number," removing her overcoat to reveal her body wrapped in the Republican flag, which falls off, creating an embarrassing moment and a pathetic caricature of the Spanish Republic. Paulino is appalled and tries to save the act with a series of grotesque movements, and his notorious farts, but everything fails. The act closes with the sound of Carmela's execution.

As is evident from the above, the logical progression of the plot is disrupted. Temporally speaking and following the linear flow of events, the second act should open the play:[107] it presents events from an alleged past, events that have led to the situation in the first act. Alternatively, the events that take place in the second act – temporally preceding the ones in the first – can be interpreted as a performance of the past, by Paulino, who wishes to revive Carmela's memory, and to relive again the last vaudeville act with his now deceased partner. The Epilogue presents a defeated Paulino, symbolically wearing a blue National shirt, mopping the Belchite theater floor. He is upset, because Carmela's constant appearances from the afterworld disturb him. The play closes with Paulino's unfruitful attempts to kiss and hug Carmela, who, facing the audience, notices the soldiers from the International Brigades and addresses them in Spanish.

The play has a marked metathetrical texture. Carmela and Paulino are actors themselves, and more than half of the second act is a play within the play. The implications of this strategy would be minimal if the configuration of the implicit audience weren't so politically significant. Soldiers and lieutenants from the National side, foreign lieutenants (the Italian *teniente*), prisoners from the

[107] A linear reversal is also manifest in Juan Mayorga's *Himmelweg,* where we see that which happens *after* the tragic event in question. As in the case of *¡Ay, Carmela!,* Mayorga's play has a very cinematographic structure, with flashback, revealing the causes that led to an event *after* presenting its consequences.

International Brigades and Franco himself, the *generalísimo,* attend the variety show. Carmela's last performance takes place in a dangerous context, lacking props and set-ups, for an audience who expects to be entertained: despite their enjoyment, the National officers know that the show is cheap propaganda. The constitution of the implicit audience has a major dramatic impact on the reception of the play by its contemporary audience. To view a play with the sentiment that you are seated next to dreaded National soldiers, Francisco Franco and some poor prisoners sentenced to death is not an easy task. Sanchis plays with this infusion of fear among the audience: making late 1980s spectators feel uncomfortable with historical figures was crucial. The effect of juxtaposing a Transition audience to a sinister, albeit imaginary group of people from the Civil War is impressive.

In *¡Ay, Carmela!* Sanchis opens up a delicate chapter of Spanish history, and has it performed for the audience. The encounter with history takes place through the performance that Carmela and Paulino give (preceded by their rehearsal) in the second act of the play. This performance occurs, temporally speaking, *after* Carmela has been shot dead. Therefore, what happens during act II is a *rehearsal* of a past event, achieved by Paulino's will. He summons his dead companion, so that the *event* of her death can become a memory of her *life*. Seeing this happen on stage, the real audience experiences Carmela's *life*, ended decades before in the circumstances of the Civil War, as *history.* Thus, the performance of a human life becomes the performance of history, through the progressive implication of the real audience in the sequence of events from 1938. Fictional biography (i.e. Carmela's life) and history are *not* the same thing. However, this is a performance of history because of the active re-presentation of a past event for a present audience. The audience experiences Carmela's life both as individual, personal and as historical, through the time distance between her death during the Civil War and the present, Spain as a new democracy. Theater Critic Joan-Anton Benach spoke of the "phenomenon of seduction" that Carmela elicited, even two years after the play's 1987 premiere:

> *¡Ay, Carmela!* no es un simple y evanescente pasatiempo escénico; sus dos espléndidos intérpretes se instalan en la piel de unos personajes de antología surgidos de una escritura teatral que combina hábilmente el compromiso y la poesía, la necesaria memoria de la guerra y la crítica a sus tópicos históricos, la ética colectiva y el humor.[108]
>
> [*¡Ay, Carmela!* is not a simple and evanescent stage hobby; its two splendid performers enter the skin of some anthology characters, who emerge from a drama that skillfully combines compromise

[108] "Seductora, tierna 'Carmela'." *La Vanguardia.* Barcelona, 1 December 1989.

and poetry, the necessary memory of the war and the critique of its historical topics, collective ethics and humor.]

Critic Lorenzo López Sancho's less favorable review in *ABC,* which called the play a "tragicomic interlude," which "bores" and "tires at times," critiqued the irrelevance of a play evoking the Civil War in a highly popular but dramatically weak manner: "Es ya muy tarde para convocar las encendidas pasiones de los años treinta. Tan lejos de la guerra civil, la actitud maniquea es irrelevante y poco comprometida" [It's already too late to convoke the burning passions of the thirties. So far from the Civil War, the Manichean attitude is irrelevant and too little committed].[109] The Manichean attitude that López Sancho refers to - the antithesis between a politically committed Carmela, who dies for a cause, and an astute Paulino, willing to compromise in order to save his life - is nevertheless not the central issue in the play. Indeed, while this conflict exists, it does not outweigh the essential metatheatrical structure, nor the temporal alteration that prepares a rehearsal of the past for a real time audience. The humorous, popular *sainete* form (in part misunderstood by the critic) is exaggerated by Sanchis for the purpose of placing a terrible historical event – the civil war – within a familiar setting for the Spanish audience, and thus, through the performance aspect, to work towards the healing of the negative memory of the division between *vencedores* (victors) and *vencidos* (vanquished), which still prevailed.

Aside from the metatheatrical component, the alternation of temporalities dramatizes Paulino's difficulty to accept Carmela's death. While he is unable to explain her visits rationally, and suspending for a moment theater's possibility to alternate between life and death,[110] we must recognize in Paulino a subject who has suffered a loss and is undergoing recovery from a trauma. Thus, restaging or performing the past to change its outcome and improve the present, leads us to the problematic of history and memory.

¡Ay, Carmela! is, as the author said, "part of a memory that we all have," because, "even if the action takes place in March 1938, in Belchite, real symbol of the ferocious fratricidal battle" the play "is *not* a work about the Spanish Civil War." Rather, it is a "play about theater under Civil War, and a play about the dangers and powers of theater, of a minimal, border theater, in the midst of the most violent conflagration of our contemporary history" (emphasis mine).[111] By insisting that the play is *not* about the Civil War, but about *theater during the Civil War*, the author sets the ground for a metatheatrical approach to art and war. The temporal specification "La acción no ocurrió en Belchite en marzo de 1938" [The

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[109] "*¡Ay, Carmela!,* sainete tragicómico de Sanchis Sinisterra," *ABC,* 5 October 1988.

[110] Asked, in 1991, whether Carmela was Paulino's dream, Sanchis responded that such a question was prompted by a rationalist, realist view of theater, which disregarded its capacity to "break the audience's reception scheme and impose its own reality, its own logic." Quot. in "Introducción" to *¡Ay, Carmela!* p. 68.

[111] José Sanchis Sinisterra quot. in. "Texto introductorio en el programa de mano de *¡Ay, Carmela!*, *Ñaque, ¡Ay, Carmela!*, Appendix. pp. 295-297.

action did not occur in Belchite in March 1938] is intended to mark a lack of historical correspondence, to prevent the play from becoming encapsulated in a rigid historical reference. *¡Ay, Carmela!* is, in other words, a fake historical recreation. But, even if history did not record an event like the one Sanchis writes about, his purpose is to evoke the real historical stage (i.e. the historical conditions of theater artists during that period) on which his puppet-like figures move. Our attention falls on the protagonists and their power of adaptation, as they negotiate their vulnerable situation as marionettes in real historical danger. They are in real historical danger because, despite being fictional, they look at an audience composed of Nationalist soldiers and Franco himself, who will judge their performance at the end. Using humor as their best and most expressive tool, Carmela and Paulino manage to create a plausible performance as a way out, an exit of their current misery.

The play is not about the civil war but about theater's capacity to alter the Spanish public's memory of the war. Theater will seek its own ways of representing the conflict. It may take an episode of history, rehearse it, stage it, and even reverse it. On stage, an event or situation is *simulated* through the agency of *representation*. The paradox of a historical play being *and* not being about the Civil War opens the way for Paulino to be freed from the claws of memory. He can be liberated, at the end of the play, from the painful memory of Carmela, as she releases him with the help of performance and comedy.

Carmela mentions in the Epilogue the possible existence of a "memory club" in the afterworld:

> CARMELA. […] Pues decía Montse que podíamos ponernos a buscar a los que no se conforman con borrarse…y hacer así un club. […] para hacer memoria.
> PAULINO. ¿Qué quieres decir?
> CARMELA. Sí: para contarnos todo lo que pasó, y por qué, y quién hizo esto, y qué dijo aquel…
> PAULINO. ¿Y para qué?
> CARMELA. Para recordarlo todo.
> PAULINO. ¿A quién?
> CARMELA. A nosotros…y a los que vayáis llegando…
> PAULINO. *(Tras una pausa.)* Recordarlo todo…
> CARMELA. Sí, guardarlo…Porque los vivos, en cuanto tenéis la panza llena y os ponéis corbata, lo olvidáis todo. Y hay cosas que…
> PAULINO. ¿Lo dices por mí? ¿Crees que me he olvidado de algo?
> CARMELA. No, no lo digo por ti…Aunque, vete a saber…Tú deja que pase el tiempo, y ya hablaremos…(260-61)

[CARMELA. … Well, Montse was saying that we could start looking for those who aren't willing to erase themselves… and start a club… to do memory.
PAULINO. What do you mean?
CARMELA. Yes: to tell each other what happened, and why, and who did what, and who said what…
PAULINO. What for?
CARMELA. To remember it all.
PAULINO. Remember who?
CARMELA. Us… and those who keep arriving…
PAULINO. *(After a break)* Remember it all…
CARMELA. Yes, safekeeping it…because those of you who are alive, as soon as you stuff your belly and arrange your tie, you forget it all. And there are things that…
PAULINO. You say this because of me? You think that I forgot something?
CARMELA. No, I'm not saying this because of you…Although, God knows…Let time pass and we'll talk about it again…]

Carmela expresses her desire to join a "memory club" with other people from the afterworld. The comical dialogue between Carmela and Paulino, and Carmela's own lightheartedness, allude to memory in a very jocular and entertaining fashion. Sanchis is careful to lighten the serious topic and does so by reversing our common view that the living remember the dead. In the play, just the opposite happens; the dead remember the living:

PAULINO. No es posible…*(Por la garrafa.)* Si no he bebido casi…
CARMELA. No, no es por el vino. Soy yo, de verdad.
PAULINO. Carmela…
CARMELA. Sí, Carmela.
PAULINO. No puede ser… *(Mira la garrafa.)*
CARMELA. Sí que puede ser. Es que, de pronto, me he acordado de ti.
PAULINO. ¿Y ya está?
CARMELA. Ya está, sí. Me he acordado de ti, y aquí estoy. (192)

[PAULINO. It's not possible… *(Pointing to the wine.)* I've hardly had a drop…
CARMELA. No, it's not because of the wine. It's really me.
PAULINO. Carmela…
CARMELA. Yes, Carmela.
PAULINO. It can't be…*(Looks at the carafe.)*
CARMELA. Yes it can. Suddenly I remembered you.
PAULINO. And that's it?

CARMELA. Yes, that's it. I remembered you and here I am.]

However, Sanchis does not attempt to stir the memory of the war in order to strictly raise consciousness about the necessity of its immanent discussion. Rather, using the popular *sainete* form he explores the traumatic memory of the Civil War in an original attempt to repair a damaged popular consciousness. He understands history as a sum of memories or testimonies, which need to be heard in order for a nation (a sum of individual subjects) to be mature and progressive. Sanchis' vision of history and memory is similar to Ricoeur's notion that in the face of an irretrievable past, the "traces" of memories and testimonies (collected via "historiographical operation" as history) allow humanity to grasp the truth of what happened: "the historian's discourse…claims to represent the past *in truth*" (228), "history can expand, complete, correct, even refute the testimony of memory regarding the past" (498) and "we have nothing better than our memory to assure ourselves of the reality of our memories – we have nothing better than testimony and criticism of testimony to accredit the historian's representation of the past" (278). Thus, the faithfulness of memory and the truthfulness of history, essential qualities for Ricoeur, are bridged by the power of testimony, which demands to be heard. This is only one step in the project of the subject's recognition and acceptance of its past and its memories.

As Bruce Fink noted, the Lacanian psychoanalytical notion of traversing fantasy (*la traversée du fantasme*) is a crucial step towards the healing of the subject (61-63). By populating the *real* historical set (Belchite) with *fantasy* characters (Carmela and Paulino), Sanchis creates the space for the audience to "traverse" the fantasy of the civil war and alter its recollections of the event. As a fantastic and postmodern account of the war, *¡Ay, Carmela!* stands for and addresses a flawed collective memory of a nation. The play is healing the pain of divided collective memory: silence about the past, feelings of guilt, etc. by forcing the Transition-time audience to face once and for all the burning issues of the past. Too much recalling can become painful and destructive, as Paulino proves by reproaching Carmela her continuous "visits" from the afterworld: "Claro, para ti es muy fácil: desapareces y se acabó…El que tiene que seguir aquí, y aguantar toda la mierda, soy yo." [Of course, it's easy for you: you disappear and it's over…I'm the one who has to live here and put up with all this mess] (258). But, as Carmela suggests, remembering collectively, comparing memories, is the only way for the full truth to emerge.

The setting of the play is a real village in Aragón, but the characters are fictitious. Placing fantastic actors in the setting of a real and traumatic past event is also how human memory works. We imagine past, *fantasy* images of demised people in the definite time and space of an event and create recollections. While the place continues to exist, the people who inhabited it in a past time no longer do. Yet, our imagination places them there like phantasmal apparitions and creates a vivid, powerful memory. Sanchis' play shares similar premises. Some of

the entries for "fantasy" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* define it as a "spectral apparition, phantom," an "illusory appearance," a "delusive imagination, hallucination," "the fact or habit of deluding oneself by imaginary perceptions or reminiscences," or "the process or faculty of forming mental representations of things not actually present." Technically speaking, *both* setting and characters are representations. Belchite within the play is no more real than Carmela and Paulino. The difference is that Belchite has a historical referent in the real world, while the characters do not. In terms of memory, we generally remember the people who are gone *not* within actually existing places in the present, but within the places they occupied in the past. Both place and person are images within memory. Sanchis reworks this principle by creating a double audience: real time Transition Spaniards next to Civil War figures, such as soldiers and Franco. This bold method creates a double immersion and alienation process, making the Transition audience feel tense and uncomfortable precisely to underscore the awkwardness of the *vencedores-vencidos* dialectic during the mid- and late 1980s. Therefore, he creates a "fantasy" of remembrance (i.e. images of people, places and things that really existed) and a "fantasy" of fictional creation (i.e. images of people, places and things that did not exist). *¡Ay, Carmela!* is an elegy of the Civil War, but it is also a *fantasy* of the Civil War. By lifting the "inspired in a real story" burden, the play fulfills the duty to remember. Extrapolating from Sanchis' statement that his play was not about the Civil War, but about the conditions of theater under Civil War, it can be argued that *¡Ay, Carmela!* is a play about the traversing and overcoming of memory. Despite the tragic end, Sanchis attempts a jocular treatment of the theme of the Civil War, not to test the audience's endurance, but to *reverse* the sacredness of this event in national memory.

Drawing from Freud's idea of fantasy as a type of "screen memory, representing something of more importance with which it has in some ways connected," Jacques Lacan speaks of fantasy as a vital center in an individual's existence, which must be overcome and surpassed, almost like a transition. For Lacan, "the phantasy is never more than the screen that conceals something quite primary, something determinate in the function of repetition" (60). The fantasy is understood as a separating element, interposed between subject and real existence. By extension, the Civil War is the screen between past and present Spanish society. Past and present are, to paraphrase Lacan, situated on "either side of the split, in the resistance of the phantasy."[112] The Civil War is a tragic memory, which functions like a fantasy in the individual and collective unconscious. By placing fictitious, *fantastic* characters on the site of a *real* event, silenced by censorship and later turned into a phantasm at the turn of the 1980s

[112] Wahl cit. in Lacan, p. 89. I do not provide here a comprehensive explanation of Lacan's theory of the subject or his fantasy formula, $ ◊ a, reflecting the relationship of the subject ($) to the "objet petit a" (the object-cause of desire), which deserve a separate analysis altogether. Nevertheless, it is useful to think of Sanchis' play through Lacan's theories. This is only a starting point to which I hope to return in a future project.

with the *Pacto de olvido* (pact of silence), a landmark of the Transition, Sanchis reverses its tragic weight.[113]

We can consider that Carmela becomes Paulino's fantasy. Paulino is real, and Carmela is a fantasy. But this supposition already occurs within the fantastic realm of the characters, who are not real victims of the war, but imaginary vaudeville actors. What are we to make of this double fantastic setting? Sanchis creates the fantastic characters within an already fantastic situation, and boldly suggests that the Civil War imagery for Spanish consciousness is as fantastic as Carmela is for Paulino. Fantasy (in the everyday sense of the word) appears on two levels in *¡Ay, Carmela!*: the fantasy of Carmela appearing to Paulino and the tableau of the Civil War that Carmela and Paulino simulate for the play's real time audience (different than the implicit audience of the vaudeville that they put on). Postmodern theorists claim that in advanced capitalist societies there is a "loss of the real," or confusion between the real and the imagined, reality and fantasy. Jean Baudrillard argued that a sign is no longer an index of an underlying reality, but of another sign, thus becoming a "simulacrum." The Civil war functions in the play as such a "sign," which has lost power of reference and stands for an overall emptiness.

The empty stage of *¡Ay, Carmela!* responds to this postmodern tendency. Carmela and Paulino inhabit the empty stage of the Goya theater in Belchite. At the same time, the actors playing them inhabit the real time performance stage, looking at different audiences, as the play is staged during a particular season. In Act I Goya's stage is empty, since Carmela and Paulino meet after the variety show, at the end of which she had been shot dead. The stage is empty because they are outside the "representation," and even if they walk and talk on stage, the theater is empty. The stage comes to life when the actors are actively staging a performance for the audience. Given that Carmela and Paulino do not go on with their variety show, and they cannot see the Transition audience, it can be argued that the stage was empty. However, Goya's stage coincides with the Transition theater stage, which transforms Carmela and Paulino's exchanges from Act I into actual stage moments, for the real time audience of the Transition. Thus, the empty stage is a powerful symbol of a continuous transition in this play.

In Act II, Goya's stage comes to life through the actors' *Velada patriótica y recreativa* and fuses with the Transition stage. This encounter between a past, dead stage – the Act I stage, where Carmela and Paulino are reunited – and a present, live stage – the Act II stage, on which Carmela and Paulino *perform* their

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[113] Even if the *pacto de olvido,* an agreement among all political forces to postpone talking about the Second Republic, the Civil War and Francoism until after democracy had been consolidated in Spain for fear of a military coup in the wake of Franco's death, both the Right (UCD, and later the PP) and the Left (PSOE) benefitted from a prolongation of this pact. Cf. Balfour and Quiroga, pp. 85-86. Nevertheless, at least culturally speaking, the Transition waas not synonymous with a total silencing of the Civil War and its aftermath. For more reference, see Santos Juliá, "History, politics, and culture, 1975-1996" pp. 111-112 in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture,* ed. David Gies.

last show together, in 1938 *and also* in 1987 and ever since, with each staging, is an example of how history is rehearsed and performed for the real time audience in the present. The encounter between two stages takes place through the encounter of the audience. On the empty stage of the Goya theater, past and present coexist. The past (empty stage of Goya) coincides with the present (live stage of the late 1980s theaters). Sanchis creates a theatrical space *not* through the actors, the people, but by juxtaposing two different temporalities, which collide with one another but eventually come together. In this empty space history is rehearsed and memory is configured. Two different temporalities (1937, marked by the Civil War, and 1987, marked entirely by audience) collide because they meet on a dead, empty stage that comes to life through the presence of the contemporary audience.

The implicit character of the Italian lieutenant (we never see him, we only get to know him through Paulino's references) plays a symbolic role, as he turns out to be the invisible hand controlling the lights during the rehearsal of the vaudeville in Act II. We know he exists because Paulino addresses him, in a Hispanicized Italian, as he organizes the rehearsal with Carmela: "¡Perfetto, mio tenente!...Così, così!...", "¡Oiga usted, mi teniente! ¿Por qué no abre la ventanita de la cabina y así me oirá mejor? ¡La finestrina de la cabina, aprire, aprire…!" [Perfect, my lieutenant! ... Like this, like this… My lieutenant, do you hear? Why don't you open the little cabin window to hear me better? The little window, open, open!] (200). We can infer that the lieutenant is also the one who manipulates the theater lights, decreasing and then increasing their intensity various times during both acts, moments that coincide with Carmela's entrance or exit. More than a memory demiurge, the *teniente* stands for an oppression that presses on the shoulders of the characters, but also those of the audience:

> La presencia/ausencia del teniente italiano en el control de las luces escénicas refleja perfectamente el carácter de la ominosa opresión que pesa sobre los personajes, en forma de miedos, de fantasmas, de poderes desconocidos que obligan al hombre, hasta en sus momentos de soledad, a la sumisión de un poder que se pretende ubicuo, vigilante y todopoderoso.[114]
>
> [The presence/absence of the Italian lieutenant at the stage light control perfectly captures the nature of the ominous oppression weighing over the characters, in the form of fear, ghosts, unknown powers that force man, even in his moments of loneliness, to submit to an ubiquitous, vigilant and almighty power.]

This oppression is felt by Paulino in the flow of memories from the past that flood him with each flashback he has of the vaudeville's rehearsal and

[114] Pedro Ruiz Pérez, "¡Ay, España!, Carmela y Paulino, variedades a lo fino." *Servicios*. Córdoba, 17 April 1988, p. 31.

performance, when Carmela reappears. Thus, the lieutenant is the invisible hand of memory, a mechanism that operates beyond Paulino's control, making him a puppet on the empty stage of Goya theater.

Sanchis offers the Spanish audience an opportunity to reflect on their own history from a comical perspective. Humor functions in tandem with an induction of fear in the audience, and thus we have in this play a humor-fear dialectic. We watch the performance of *¡Ay, Carmela!* over the shoulders of audience from 1938, composed of the soldiers from the International brigades, sentenced to death, National generals, and with the presence of the Caudillo looming like a ghost among us. This implicit audience is simultaneously present and absent. They are absent because they have no lines, but they are, nonetheless, omnipresent with their intuited and feared presence, that horrifies Paulino. He is so terrified that he makes several comic mistakes. The most memorable slip is his solemn discourse pronounced in the presence of Franco, when he doesn't realize that among the pages of the written discourse is his shopping list, whose fragments end up in his speech: "[…] ese libro que inspira, dicta y encuaderna con pulso seguro y mano firme nuestro eguer…', no, 'nuestro egre…', sí, 'nuestro egregio', eso, 'egregio Caudillo Franco, a quien esta noche queremos ofrendar…' (*cambia de hoja*) '…cuatro kilos de morcillas, dos pares de ligas negras, dos docenas de…' (*Se interrumpe. Mira aterrado al público*.) No, perdón…" […that book that inspires, dictates and binds with a firm hand and solid pulse our regur…', no, 'our egre…', yes, 'our egregious Caudillo Franco, whom tonight we want to offer …' (flips the page) '…four kilos of blood sausage, two pairs of black garters, two dozen …' (*interrupts himself. Looks terrified at the audience.*) No, sorry…] (232). This both terrifying and humorous moment calls attention to the mix of terror, pathos and humor that are the effect of an imposed authoritarian power.

To a large extent, Act II, which reconstitutes the rehearsal and the performance of Carmela and Paulino's variety show, is very funny. The vaudeville show itself is a poor quality improvisation, yet hilarious from the point of view of the contrast that it elicits in the spectator. On one hand Carmela laments the terrible conditions in which they had to come up with a show, thus implicitly pointing to a previous, higher quality version; on the other, Paulino is content with what they have. While Carmela tries to save the act, Paulino rushes towards the finish line, thus creating a comic contrast. This disparity appears even in the first act:

> CARMELA. […] Anda, ayúdame a abrocharme, que este pingajo se me va a caer todo en medio de la fiesta.
> PAULINO. ¿Pingajo? No, mujer: si te queda muy bien…
> CARMELA. ¡Anda allá, muy bien…! Ni una hora he tenido para hacérmelo…Y de unas cortinas que, no veas… Mira que salir delante de toda esa hombrada hecha un adefesio…

[CARMELA. […] Come on, help me button up, this messy dress is going to fall off in the middle of the show.
PAULINO. Messy dress? No, it looks very good on you…
CARMELA. Very good! I had less than an hour to make it…and from some awful curtains…going out in front of all those men looking ridiculous…] (200)

Having to please the Italian lieutenant in charge of their show, Paulino relies on his knowledge of Italian language and culture, which he derives from Spanish, preparing a melting pot: "Usted lo sabe muy bien, como artista que es, italiano además, de la cuna del arte…Italia, ahí es nada: Miguel Ángel, Dante, Petrarca, Puccini, Rossini, Boccherini, *Mussolini*…"[You know very well, as an Italian artist that you are, from the cradle of art, Italy: Michelangelo, Dante, Petrarca, Puccini, Rossini, Boccherini, *Mussolini*] (202, emphasis mine). Paulino continues with other political slips, which he corrects on the spot, quite terrified of the result of his initial utterance. Speaking of his career, he says first that it has been interrupted by the "war," but he immediately retracts that (Republican) term and replaces it with the more appropriate (National) "crusade," "glorious national uprising": "Tenore lírico, sí, pero la guerra…, quiero decir, la Cruzada, el Glorioso Alzamiento Nacional…" (202). Then, during the performance of the vaudeville, when they announce a particular entertaining number, Paulino praises its success in many places that they had toured before, listing by mistake the name of the Russian capital: "A continuación, vamos a presentarles un número portentoso, que ha causado la admiración de todos los públicos en París, Londres, Moscú…(*Se asusta.*) No: quiero decir…en Berlín" [Next, we'll perform a marvelous number admired by audiences in Paris, London, Moscow…*(He is frightened).* No: I mean…in Berlin] (242). Fearing that by mentioning the word "Moscow" he can be considered a Communist, an enemy of the National cause, Paulino rapidly changes it to "Berlin," since Germany was a National ally.

During the vaudeville, as they prepare to close a grossly unsuccessful number – Paulino had been tied up to a chair and was supposed to magically release himself but failed –, Carmela is getting ready to resort to the scissors and she justifies the failure of the act on her excessive dress: "y encima con este vestido, hecha una 'facha'" (245). The double entendre of the noun "facha," both "dreadful appearance" and, pejoratively, "Fascist," illustrates the humor-fear dialectic. After this unfortunate comment, Paulino pulls Carmela off the stage, in the middle of the performance. She re-enters, arranging her dress and adjusting her chest after having removed her brassier, torn by Paulino during his brutal grasp. As they dance a zarzuela number together, Paulino becomes more nervous. He looks toward the (implicit) audience, where the militiamen were seated. Carmela ends the *zarzuela* abruptly, admitting that her period has come and she is unfit to perform: "Y con este bonito dúo, señores militares, se acabó la fiesta…Porque me ha venido la regla muy fuerte, y me estoy poniendo malísima…" [And with this pretty duo, Gentlemen Soldiers, the show is

over…because my period came and I'm feeling awful] (247). After such a blunt excuse, uttered during their live performance, Paulino pulls Carmela off the stage again. Their voices are heard in a silly backstage argument, Paulino persuading Carmela to act and she resisting childishly. They eventually return, to perform the hilarious semi-obscene sketch of Doctor Toquemetoda (Doctor Touchmeallover) concluding with the Republican flag skit. Their dialogue is a medical-political satire of the second Republic. Carmela can hardly act, prompting Paulino to take up more and more of her part. His remarks are increasingly obscene. Wrapped in a Republican flag, Carmela stands for the Second Republic and embodies a sickly woman, who came into being by mistake, "de un resbalón abrileño" [an April slip-up], with Red spots on her skin, an allusion to the Republican side's ideological tendency.

The metatheatrical structure of the play is a platform on which a postmodern pastiche of history, memory and fantasy are represented concomitantly. History is performed through a game of simulation, in which fantasy characters are placed in a real setting. The opening of Act I is musical and poetic: Paulino intones the chorus from the revolutionary song, *El ejército del Ebro* (The Ebro River Army), and then recites part of a fascist ballad. Together with a Republican flag that covers the gramophone, the song and the poem are synecdoches for the Civil War. Carmela's appearance is signaled through an intensification and reduction of the lights, marked by the stage directions ("se apaga la luz blanquecina", "tras una nueva pausa a oscuras", "las luces se apagan y vuelven a encenderse", "apagón total" ["the white light is turned off", "after a new pause in the darkness", "the lights are turned off and turned on again", "total blackout"]). Allusions to the presence of a *duende* or magical spirit who interferes in the temporal reversals and flashbacks reinforce the playful aspect of the entire situation. Politically, this translates into a frisky Transition, during which the major historical events from the past are regarded symbolically, becoming, by virtue of the cultural period in the background, hollow symbols, empty memories, simulations.

The performing aspect of the play is reinforced in the second act. Act I establishes that Carmela had died. However, through magical, fantastic interventions, she returns from the dead to visit Paulino. Act II begins similarly to Act I, underscoring the elementary separation between the protagonists, but allows for the vaudeville to take over. In this context, taking into account that Paulino summons Carmela for this artistic purpose, Act II offers a *second* rehearsal and representation of the Patriotic and Entertaining Artistic Night. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the play within the play in the second act can also constitute Paulino's own fantasy. This postmodern uncertainty shows that memory becomes fantasy, and that history is performed on stage through a symbolic act of simulation. The intention behind this montage is, paradoxically, *not* to turn back time and change the course of history. The *Velada* is re-staged and simulated in its blunt imperfection not for Carmela to have a second chance, but for Paulino to live free of her memory and fantasy. The way in which Sanchis

articulates this postmodern treatment of memory and history – by tackling the very popular theme of the Civil War, on the background of the Spanish transition to democracy and the disputes over the legitimacy of the *pacto de olvido* – is visible in a funny, incongruous dialogue between the protagonists at the beginning of Act II. While Paulino laments Carmela's continuous back and forth movements from the world of the dead to the world of the living, she blames his bad temper on his copious dinner from the previous night:

> PAULINO. […] Tú bastante haces, pobre… Ahora aquí, ahora allá…Que si viva, que si muerta…
> CARMELA. Mira que te lo tengo dicho: no abuses del conejo. (225-226)
>
> [PAULINO. You're doing enough, poor thing…Here, there…alive, dead…
> CARMELA. I've told you: don't eat too much rabbit]

This exchange illustrates perfectly the state of Spanish society, subjected to an excess of memory rhetoric, whose result is, Sanchis says, a complete nonsense, confusing the Transition period even more. Thus, the historical fact of the Civil War risks becoming an empty memory, whose excessive recollection will, in time, replace the reality of the event with the falsity of the simulacrum, as Jean Baudrillard had postulated. And, each person talking about it will run the risk of being branded as fantasizing, or dreaming, as after a heavy meal, as Sanchis acidly writes.

2.2. Fragments of History, Before and After: *Naufragios de Álvar Núñez o La herida del otro* (1992)

If in *¡Ay, Carmela!* we (as modern audiences) become for a moment the spectators of a forced variety show during the Civil War, and we feel on our own skin the tension of having to sit for the duration of the performance next to National soldiers and Franco himself, in the following play we witness the disturbing state of a Spanish explorer, returned to his *patria* upon the dreadful conclusion of his exploits, who is haunted by terrifying ghosts, shadows and voices. This unpacking of the *Conquista,* a critical event in Spanish history, is inspired by the autobiographical account of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, describing the disastrous New World expedition commissioned by Spanish governor Pánfilo de Narváez, which lasted nine years and left only four survivors upon its conclusion in 1536. Sanchis' play complicates the original account by creating a mysterious temporality and by adding fictional characters. The implied sixteenth-century temporal set is challenged by certain modern-day

items and references, which also situate the action in the present (late 1980s-early 1990s). Despite the protagonists' incursions into the details of the expedition, the action takes place around 1991-1992, when the play was published in the collection titled *American Trilogy*.[115]

Naufragios clearly responded to Spain's cultural and political context at the time, specifically to the approaching 1992 celebrations of the Quincentennial of Columbus' voyage to America. Through the disturbing state of the expedition's leader, Álvar Núñez, the play deconstructs the *Conquista* and poses challenging questions about the nation's understanding of its identity, in light of its completed Transition and its new democratic context in the early 1990s. Álvar Núñez is a protagonist who lives alternatively in the past and the present while his sense of self is divided between two identities: Spanish and Amerindian. Like Álvar, the Spanish people are negotiating their identity as they undergo a difficult process of transition from the previous imperialist mentality under Franco, to the democratic, post-colonial world. Elaborated between 1978 and 1991 and never staged – unlike the other two plays in the *Trilogy*, *El Retablo de Eldorado* and *Lope de Aguirre, traidor,* which premiered in 1985 and 1986, respectively – *Naufragios de Álvar Núñez* suggests that the Spanish people were in a confusing "in between" phase that afforded a rare opportunity to reassess the past and alter the nation's view of itself.

Naufragios opens with a powerful audiovisual moment: amid thunder and lightening a naked man runs across the stage. In the background of the thunderstorm, the voices of various characters are heard. Shila, a fictitious character imagined by Sanchis has the opening line and addresses Álvar. Meanwhile, Álvar, Narváez, Esteban, Castillo and Dorantes utter fragments from Cabeza de Vaca's chronicle. All of a sudden, the darkness disappears, the voices cease and the stage exposes a large bed. Álvar is tormented and unable to fall asleep, to the disappointment of his wife Mariana. We see Álvar in a moment of intimacy and follow his trajectory from dusk to dawn, as he is haunted by the presence of members of his expedition: Shila, Castillo, Dorantes and Esteban the Black. The presence of a bed on stage, as well as the action starting with the premise of memory and insomnia, has great implications for the perception of this drama. Lying in bed unable to sleep, Álvar recalls the events of the day and recounts them to himself, trying to understand them. This act leads to tension and restlessness. The entire play is structured like a shipwreck; bits and pieces of the expedition's story are now retrieved and re-cast together, mixing temporalities (sixteenth century and present 1990s), accounts from different sources, and creating metaphors in order to compose the larger picture. Primitively speaking, history is born in bed. Álvar bears resemblance to the

[115] *Naufragios de Álvar Núñez o La herida del otro* has not been staged to this day. It first appeared in the *Trilogía americana* as a contemporary Spanish theater anthology published by the *Centro de Documentación Teatral* in Madrid in 1991, pp. 1197-1294. The second edition dates to 1992, within the same collection, *Trilogía americana,* in *El Público,* Madrid, n. 21 (1992), pp. 21-114, a theatrical collection published by the same *Centro de Documentación Teatral.*

sixteenth-century explorer,[116] but the action takes place in a time that can be identified with Spain's transitional state, when an oppressive (Francoist) past is opened for analysis, in order for it to be traversed and overcome.

The play presents two versions of Álvar: the everyday man, in the privacy of his home two years upon his return from the New World expedition, and the chronicler, as he presented himself in the written accounts of "Naufragios," during the expedition. The man is exposed on stage, and we gain knowledge of the chronicler through the indirect discourse of other characters in the play. Castillo, Dorantes, Esteban and Shila reveal sides of Álvar that would otherwise remain hidden. Thus, we have a juxtaposition of direct and indirect accounts of the same person, which correspond to the levels of "character" and "chronicler." As character, Álvar has lost the grandeur of the chronicler: he admires himself in a mirror, naked, and then wearing period costumes. He contemplates his own reflection trying to put a stop to the voices he hears (the voices of Dorantes, Castillo, Shila, and his own, recounting the journey to the New World):

> ÁLVAR. – Esclavo…Mercader…Brujo…No estaría el abuelo muy orgulloso de ti. No supiste estar a la altura de los tuyos…*(Se mira en el espejo, acariciando su torso desnudo.)* ¿Los tuyos? ¿Quiénes son los tuyos? *(Pausa.)* ¿Quién eres tú? ¿Quién merodea bajo tu ropa? *(Toma de la percha una prenda de ropa del siglo XVI y se la pone.)* ¿Le conoces? ¿Le reconocerías si le vieras desnudo? *(Pausa.)* ¿Y bajo tu piel? ¿Quién susurra debajo de tu piel? (102)
>
> [ÁLVAR. – Slave…Merchant…Sorcerer….Grandfather wouldn't be very proud of you. You didn't know how to rise to the expectations of your people…*(Looks at himself in the mirror, caressing his naked torso.)* Your people? Who are your people? *(Pause.)* Who are you? Who prowls under your skin? *(He takes a 16th-century garment from the hanger and puts it on.)* Do you know him? Would you recognize him if you saw him naked? *(Pause.)* And under your skin? Who whispers under your skin?]

The self-interrogation in the mirror is very suggestive and symbolic of Álvar's divided state. He is a character split between two worlds, who has lost his original identity and is not capable of finding a new one. Distinguishing between the three dimensions of the human psyche (the symbolic, the imaginary and the real) important in the formation of subjectivity, Lacan argues that the imaginary dimension is connected to the human being's fascination with form:

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[116] Sanchis' character Álvar Núñez is inspired by the historical figure of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and the expedition he led in the New World, from Florida to Mexico. The expedition left Spain on the 17th of June 1527 and reached Florida on the 12th of April 1528. After eight years of hunger and many adversities only four survivors returned to Spain. The story of the expedition is told in Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's chronicle titled *Naufragios* ("Shipwrecks").

an infant's recognition of its image in the mirror is the founding moment of the imaginary. The image of the self that causes identification is a fiction "over there," in the mirror. The mirror makes the infant's fragmented body whole:

> The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality […] – and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity.[117]

Lacan also writes about the subject's "fragmented body," manifested in dreams. Álvar's gestures of looking in the mirror and dressing up in sixteenth-century attire are attempts to locate and secure an identity. He is troubled by the voices from the expedition that ended two years before, for they take possession of him and fragment his psyche into multiple parts. Álvar is the former conqueror, but he is also Shila, Dorantes and Castillo all in one. These *personas* constitute the Lacanian "alienating identity armor" when they reappear, as in a dream, and claim an identity of their own by way of inclusion in the discourse of the present. Álvar's portrayal as a child who is in the process of forming a subjectivity is symbolic for Sanchis' perception of the Spanish nation's infantilization during the period of Transition. This infantilization is necessary as it regresses the psychology of the mass to an initial stage, from which it can develop in a new direction.

Álvar's "split" operates in a double temporality. It sends us back to the sixteenth century expedition led by Pánfilo de Nárvaez and reflects the gap between the empire's grand projects and the conquerors' decadence and internal wounds, and it satirizes the current Transition, acidly commenting on the effects of the decades' long revived imperialism under Franco. He is caught in between two worlds, a world of the past and a world of the present. By virtue of the play, the present is extended well into the twentieth century, making Álvar confront ghosts of the past precisely because that past had been allowed to exist for too long. Writing about the historical constructions of past events, Ricoeur claims that "the historian's representation is indeed a present image of an absent thing; but the absent thing itself gets *split* into disappearance into and existence in the past…absence thus would be *split* between absence as intended by the present image and the absence of past things as past in relation to their "having been." (2004: 280, emphasis mine) Echoing Álvar's turmoil, of having to "be" in parallel with "having been" (living in a prolonged past), Ricoeur transmits the anxiety of the Francoist imperial legacy bestowed upon the Spaniards.

The unmaking of the Conquista is a suggestive exploit and an impressive achievement in the play. The author departs from the premise of a Spanish

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[117] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," p. 1288 in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*.

empire whose mission was accomplished through a lengthy expedition, yet he attacks the tenets of this empire by rendering its subjects (Álvar) tormented and haunted by ghosts (Dorantes, Castillo, Shila). The implication of this dramatic structure is that the empire achieved its glory at the cost of its subjects. The full title of the play is "Shipwrecks of Álvar Núñez or The Other's Wound." In common understanding, the "other" represents the conquered and colonized subjects, whose identity the Spanish explorer dismantled in an attempt to subdue them. However, in this play, it is Álvar who is the "wounded other." Within the context of 1992, Sanchis proposes the "discovery of America" as a misencounter between two cultures, the Spanish and the indigenous, seeing each side through a progressive altering of their respective *identities.* Thus, the imperial subject (Álvar) becomes suffused with the colonized subject (Shila), and must undergo a major reversal of beliefs in the mission of the empire in order to survive the expedition (Castillo, Dorantes).

Dorantes and Castillo recall how they found a shocking image in the new world: "el mundo al revés, la Historia universal patas arriba…Unos indios salvajes apiadándose de nosotros…¡De nosotros!" [the world upside down, universal History in a mess…Some savage Amerindians taking mercy on us…on us!] (159). The "mess" in universal History is created by the explorers' reversal of fortune. To their surprise, they had to endure severe penuries and become slaves of the Amerindians, contrary to what they had expected from History. Dorantes and Castillo speak about "History" with a capital "H," emphasizing the expected grandeur for Spain as a dominant imperial power of Europe at the time. The paradox of this "messy" situation comes from seeing their grand destiny promised by History unfulfilled, and having to acknowledge the other as equal if not superior to them.

A parallel can be drawn here with the situation that Spain underwent at the end of Francoism and the dawn of the transition to democracy. During the dictatorship, there was an exaltation of nationalism, which extended to the glorification of the military spirit and fervent Catholic virtues. As Raymond Carr and Juan Pablo Fusi write, "Catholicism constituted the essence of Spanish nationality and of national unity" and "the defense of Tridentine Catholicism *was the foundation of the imperial greatness of Spain in the sixteenth century. It was the splendours of this imperial past that the new regime wished to inherit and continue"* (107, emphasis mine). National Catholicism was regarded as a continuation of the imperial dream. This imperial dream is the one from which Dorantes and Castillo were brutally awakened, and the same which Spanish society had to forgo following the death of Franco in 1975. After almost four decades of National Catholicism promoting post civil-war Spain's vision of herself as "heir to the imperial tradition," which led to a "proliferation of works on the Catholic kings, the discovery of America and the soldier-saint Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order," the Transition was a period in which the nation had to progressively abandon the imperial dream (109). This contrast between a prolonged dream of past imperial grandeur and present reality is caught in the

opposition between the two discursive registers in the play. On one hand, Álvar speaks gloriously of the exploits, while on the other, Castillo, Dorantes and later Shila challenge the validity of that discourse.

Castillo and Dorantes' lines fit with the play's temporal setting in the sixteenth century. However, they also speak like Francoist partisans. Their rhetoric resembles Francoist historiography, when Spain's mission was considered crucial for universal history. As David Herzberger writes,

> Francoist historiography is […] shaped by a conception of truth and temporality in which history is viewed less as a complex web of diachronic and synchronic relationships, both formed and revealed through narration, than as an unfolding of time that is repetitive, deterministic and radically unchangeable. *Hence time (history) is perceived not as a progression or a becoming, but rather as a static entity anchored in all that is permanent and eternal*. (33, emphasis mine)

The clash of temporalities – sixteenth century versus the present – becomes fused with a clash of politics and ideology, as Álvar, Dorantes and Castillo carry on an argument about the meaning of the word "us," a symbol of national unity:

> ÁLVAR. Ya no la digan más…esa palabra.
> DORANTES. ¿Qué palabra? ¿Nosotros?
> ÁLVAR. Esa palabra, sí…Te llenas la boca con ella, te retumba en el pecho, la agitas en el aire como una bandera, pero…¿qué? ¿Dónde hay algo que pueda nombrarse con ella? […] Y basta ya de charla. No hay nada que contar, no hay nada que explicar. Se está acabando el tiempo, y yo no estoy aquí para perderlo…¡Fuera! (159)

> [ÁLVAR. Don't say that word anymore.
> DORANTES. What word? "Us"?
> ÁLVAR. Yes, that word…You fill your mouth with it, it resounds in your chest, you stir it in the air like a banner, but…what? Where is there anything that can be named with it? […] And enough chatting already. There is nothing to be said, there is nothing to be explained. Time is running out, and I am not here to waste it…Get out!]

This turnaround in history, in the story of the nation, and in the recollection of its History provokes much anxiety in Álvar, who is troubled by the word "nosotros" [we], an allusion to the Spanish nation in 1991. This pronoun has lost the power of reference for him after the return from his journey. Before, there were "they" and *they* were adding glory to the Spanish

empire. Now, "we" is an empty word with no physical referent. Metaphorically, Álvar is speaking as if hastening through the "transition" towards the "democratic" future, while Dorantes and Castillo retain him in the process. Rushed, Álvar indicates that he has already undergone his personal transition and is ready to step into the future. For him, scrutinizing the past no longer serves any purpose. He speaks from a defensive position with regard to the *Naufragios* and his omitting of certain accounts, while Dorantes and Castillo return with an aggressive attitude, lingering on the expedition's misfortunes. This situation shows that they are still caught up in the process of *transition* from believing in the legitimacy of a great Spanish empire, which is now subjected to the will of people whom, paradoxically, they had initially set out to subdue *for the same* empire. By creating this parallel in his play, Sanchis addresses the disillusionment of his contemporary (mid 1980s) audience: Castillo and Dorantes return to Álvar to claim inclusion in his account. They symbolize the haunting fantasy of the dream, now recognized as false and exaggerated. Like the Spanish people, they are surprised in the process of negotiating a passage, a transition from the puncturing of the balloon of chimerical imperial fantasies to the reality of post-colonialism and post Francoism. Castillo and Dorantes' disenchantment at their grand imperial nation is still happening, while for Álvar it is uncertain if it had ever existed. He has moved on and lives a very fast-paced life, like a prosperous entrepreneur, making profit on his book that "sold well," enabling him and his wife to own a great house and live a materially comfortable life.

The play's inclusion in the *American Trilogy,* first published in 1991, a year before the 1992 quincentenary celebration of the discovery of America, is a crucial element that invites a further connection with the claims posed by post-colonial criticism. In *Culture and Imperialism,* Edward Said argues that imperialism – "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory" – was bolstered by forms of ideological and cultural apparatuses, "beyond the level of economic laws and political decisions […] and by continuing consolidation within education, literature and the visual and musical arts" (12). This imperial mechanism is at work in Álvar's account of the expedition. Two years after its successful publication, the account is challenged by Dorantes and Castillo, who lead an intense debate about its veracity and validity. Sanchis thus creates a disturbance of what Said calls "national culture" (Said 3-15).

Castillo and Dorantes appear on stage and recreate the circumstances in which Álvar had written the story of the shipwrecks: "En un discreto segundo plano, sentado ante unos tableros a modo de mesa, Álvar Núñez, tesorero y alguacil mayor, se dispone a escribir." [In the discreet background, seated in front of some boards as a table, Álvar Núñez, treasurer and constable major, begins to write] (110). But they rebel against their much-diminished role:

DORANTES. O sea… que tú estás conforme…
CASTILLO. ¿Conforme?
DORANTES. Sí: con lo que cuenta, con cómo lo cuenta, con el papel que hacemos tú y yo, y los otros…
CASTILLO. ¿Quién está haciendo un papel? ¿Y dónde?
DORANTES. Es un modo de hablar…En ese libro que escribió…No te hagas el tonto…Por eso estamos aquí: nos dijeron que salíamos de comparsas, ¿no te acuerdas?
CASTILLO. El libro, sí…¿Tú lo has leído?
DORANTES. No…Pero dicen que se vende mucho….Y que tú y yo parecemos enanos a su lado, unos don nadie, un par de pobres tipos…¿Te imaginas? ¡Figurar en la historia de comparsas suyos! ¿No te importa? ¿De veras no te importa? (112)

[DORANTES. So…you're satisfied…
CASTILLO. Satisfied?
DORANTES. Yes: with what he tells, with how he tells it, with the role you and I, and the others play…
CASTILLO. Who's playing a role? And where?
DORANTES. It's a manner of speaking…In that book he wrote…Don't play stupid…That's why we're here: we were told we appear as extras, don't you remember?
CASTILLO. The book, yes… Have you read it?
DORANTES. No…But they say it's a bestseller…And that you and I look like dwarves next to him, nobodies, poor idiots…Can you imagine? Appear in history as extras! Doesn't that bother you? Doesn't it bother you at all?]

Not only do they lay out the particular moment in history corresponding to Álvar's writing of the chronicle, but they also negotiate a version of the past. Yet, we know that Castillo and Dorantes – alter egos of Álvar – speak from his imagination, as he suffers from insomnia and looks into the mirror, their lines being dictated (and distorted) by Álvar's consciousness, because he is troubled by guilt. He is both victorious, having conquered the New World, and defeated, as he is unable to rid himself of the haunting voices of his fellow companions. Moreover, he doubts his own writing, and begins to question the validity of a national imperial discourse. As José Vicente Peiró writes, "Sanchis alumbra los aspectos más recónditos del alma de los personajes 'famosos', situándolos entre criaturas marginales de la sociedad o marginadas por la historia," [Sanchis illuminates the most remote aspects of the soul of the 'famous' characters, placing them between the position of marginal creatures of society and creatures marginalized by history] (442), in this way establishing a dialogue between winners and losers. Thus, the playwright takes a stance on the Conquest. He is

asking the nation to review and decry certain chapters of Spain's history. At the textual level, this is seen when Álvar has to refute Castillo and Dorantes' masquerade of the expedition, as in a terrible nightmare:

> CASTILLO. Algún detalle no concuerda.
> DORANTES. No importa: la realidad también es inexacta. […]
> ÁLVAR. ¡Soltadme! ¡No quiero volver! Aquello ya ocurrió. Ya lo viví, lo conté, lo escribí! ¡No quiero soñarlo!
> DORANTES. Cálmate, Álvar. No te pongas así…No se trata de soñarlo…
> CASTILLO. Ni siquiera de vivirlo. Es otra cosa.
> DORANTES. Como un juego, más o menos… (120)
>
> [CASTILLO. Some details don't match up.
> DORANTES. It doesn't matter: reality is also inexact […]
> ÁLVAR. Let me go! I don't want to go back! That happened already. I already lived it, I told it, I wrote about it! I don't want to dream it!
> DORANTES. Calm down, Álvar. Don't get upset…It's not a matter of dreaming it…
> CASTILLO. Not even living it. This is different.
> DORANTES. Like a game, more or less…]

Dorantes and Castillo contest Álvar's official version ("Algún detalle no concuerda") and, by extension, they critique Spain's imperial history. Moreover, according to Esteban the black, Álvar has written this one-sided history in order to forget it.[118] Paradoxically, the marginalized people, who cannot write what happens to them, will always remember, unlike the literate, who can rejoice in the pleasures of forgetfulness, and move on with their lives. Álvar defends himself and his account by claiming that it was his best serving of the "truth":

> ¿Es así como algunos pretenden enmendar mi testimonio? Que no están conformes, que no se reconocen, que callo muchas cosas…¿Y piensan, de este modo, servir a la verdad? Nadie la sirvió con más tesón que yo. Podría demostrarlo paso a paso…*(mira el reloj.)* Si no tuviera que irme.
>
> [This is how some pretend to amend my account? They're not satisfied, they don't recognize themselves in it, because I keep silent about many things… and they believe, like this, to serve the truth? No one served it with more determination than I did. I could

[118] "Uno lo escribe y así ya no tiene por que recordarlo. Lo escribe como quiere, y a olvidar" (Esteban, *Naufragios*, p. 122).

demonstrate it step by step… *(looks at his watch.)* If I didn't have to go] (132).

His gesture of looking at his watch to check the time is a signal that he is in a rush, and has no time to explain nor clarify what aspects he left out, or for what purpose.

Notwithstanding his resistance to review the events from the expedition, Álvar shows a greater tolerance towards the acceptance of the presence of Shila, his former indigenous companion. Shila represents female devotion and is a very powerful character. Her voice opens the play – Voz de Shila – and her character – Shila - also closes it, suggesting that the entire drama had been her discourse or her dream. She is part of Álvar's plural consciousness, like Dorantes and Castillo, but she weights more in the construction of the conqueror. She is Álvar's *other half,* romantically, anatomically, ideologically:

SHILA. Mi gente está contenta de tenerte. Y yo también, de que durmamos juntos. […]
ÁLVAR. - ¡No te acerques! Ni se te ocurra tocarme … *He perdido la piel mil y una veces. En carne viva estoy…*
[…]
ÁLVAR. Estoy tranquilo, ¿ves? Todo está bien. Parece que *mi herida se ha cerrado. Sigue dentro, es verdad…pero cerrada*. Todo está bien. Y ya no hay Dios, seguro. Ya no hay Dios.
SHILA. En mitad de la noche, te busco y aprieto mi cuerpo contra el tuyo, para darte calor. […]
ÁLVAR. Sí, vamos a dormir. Mañana quiero que dibujes en mi piel todo eso. Todo eso. (165, emphasis mine)

[SHILA. My people are happy to have you. Me too, to sleep with you.
ÁLVAR. Don't come near me! Don't even think about touching me…*I've lost my skin more than a thousand times. I'm still festering…*
[…]
ÁLVAR. I'm OK, see? Everything is fine. It seems that *my wound has closed. It's still inside, that's true…but closed.* Everything is fine. And for certain God no longer exists. God no longer exists.
SHILA. In the middle of the night, I look for you and I push my body against yours, to give you heat.
ÁLVAR. Yes, let's go to sleep. Tomorrow I want you to draw all that on my skin. All that.]

It is Álvar who is constituted here as the "other" among the indigenous people; his physical and spiritual suffering through the lengthy journey is symbolically regarded as a flesh wound, starting with gradual skin exfoliation, and resulting in a complete disappearing of his epidermis, exposing the "live flesh" underneath. He undergoes a metamorphosis from colonizing subject to colonized other. Shila never appears wounded, it is Álvar, the bearer of the Spanish imperial mission who is the *wounded other.*

This reversal of roles makes the colonizer experience in his own flesh the wounds imposed on the colonized and speaks of the author's intention of opening a space for "the other" within "oneself." Shila is committed to following Álvar wherever he goes, and she even travels in his consciousness, if only to bring the bones of their dead daughter to him. God no longer exists, says Álvar, in a declaration that is equivalent to renouncing his previous beliefs, as well as his previous claims of power. He no longer serves the Spanish empire and its Catholic kings. His power over her is no longer the colonizer's over the colonized. However, Shila is *not* in a position of power over Álvar: they relate to each other in a special, tender and affectionate manner, with Shila's ever lamenting her exclusion from Álvar's "language." Despite their linguistic misencounters, a special bond is created between them.

In her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Gayatri Spivak claims that "knowledge of the other subject is theoretically impossible."[119] This play makes an argument for the contrary. The last line belongs to Shila, who claims that she had dreamt the entire drama: "Esas palabras …'final' …'historia' … no están en mi lengua. […] Todo esto… todo lo que ha ocurrido… lo estoy soñando yo." [These words…'end'…'story/history'… do not exist in my language. All this…all that has happened… it's me who's dreaming it] (176). Yet, Sanchis plays with Shila's subjectivity. She seems to be orchestrating Álvar's recollection, thus demonstrating great control. At the same time, she is still outside of language, and makes a disclaimer to the audience about her own manner of speech:

> SHILA. (*Al público, tras alguna vacilación.)* Esta no es mi lengua. Puedes desconfiar de todo lo que diga porque yo, en verdad, nunca lo diría así. Mi lengua es otra, muy otra. Tanto, que ya no queda nadie para hablarla. Sólo quedo yo de los míos. Solo yo. Puedes desconfiar también de mí, si quieres. Nadie me nombró nunca, nadie me dijo. *Estoy fuera de todas las palabras*. Hablo tu lengua, pero tu lengua no me habla. […] Aquel que pudo nombrarme, no lo hizo. Me dejó allí, en el silencio. […] Pudo ponerme en sus palabras, *hospedarme en su lengua*, como hice yo con él, en mi gente. Pero no lo hizo. (132, emphasis mine)

[119] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p. 2204 in *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*.

> [SHILA. *(To the audience, after some hesitation.)* This is not my language. You can distrust everything I say because I, in reality, would never say it this way. My language is another, very different. So much so, that there it no one left to speak it. I am the only one who remains of my kind. Just me. You can distrust me too, if you want. No one ever spoke about me, no one said me. *I am outside of all words*. I speak your tongue, but your tongue does not speak me. […] He who could name me didn't do it. He left me there, in the silence […] He could have put me in his words, *hosted me in his language*, as I did with him, in my people. But he didn't do it. I don't know why.]

This touches on Spivak's central question of whether the subaltern can speak, where the act of speaking is understood as a "transaction between speaker and listener."[120] Shila *does* speak, but we are not to trust her utterances, at her own advice. In fact, that we are able to read/hear her words in *Spanish* is itself a "fantastic" event, given her unintelligibility for Álvar and for the audience (her native language is nahuatl). Therefore, even when she says that she had dreamt the entire drama, we are still expected to doubt her. We doubt her because she speaks Spanish, a language that is not her own, because she was never "hosted" in the language of the other.

Here, the other is Álvar, not Shila. Neither is she a "subaltern," in Spivak's terms; in order for us to call her those names, she would need to appear in the play as such, with a profound consciousness of her own otherness, of her difference. Yet, she holds the reins of action, by initiating and closing the drama, at the same time making Álvar undergo a personal crisis. Spivak insisted that "subaltern" is not a fancy word for the oppressed, or for the another "who's not getting a piece of the pie."[121] In postcolonial terms, everyone who has limited or no access to cultural imperialism is "subaltern," which automatically creates a "space of difference."[122] When Spivak writes that "the subaltern cannot speak," she means that even when the subaltern "makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act."[123] We could perhaps replace the feminine personal pronoun "she" for "he." In *Naufragios,* it is Álvar who is the "subaltern," the "other," the "wounded other": despite writing his account, he cannot even hear himself speak, because his voice is overridden by the voices of Shila, Castillo and Dorantes.

Sanchis is writing historical theater while conscious of the problems of "reconstructing historical reality in theater" (Floeck 1999: 498).[124] The playwright

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[120] Spivak, quot. in Landry and MacLean interview, *Spivak Reader*, pp. 289.
[121] Spivak quot. in de Kock interview, *ARIEL,* 1992, 23 (3): 29-47.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Spivak quot. in Landry and MacLean interview, p. 292.
[124] Around the 1990s there was a tendency in historical theater to establish an intercultural dialogue with historical sources and accounts. In Spain it was further prompted by the

seeks to create a union between history and theater, to offer historical discourses from the stage, thus exposing directly, through performance, ardent issues for the country. History had constituted a source of dramatic argument during the Spanish Golden Age and Romantic theater. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, in light of literary postmodern advances, history no longer appears as a means to cast light on the present, but rather is confused and diffused because of challenges to historical science.[125] As José Vicente Peiró notes,

> […] en el drama tradicional, la historia sustentaba el texto, como fondo escénico de una situación real, y el autor quedaba sujeto al principio de veracidad histórica para no transgredir el de verosimilitud literaria. […] En el teatro actual… el autor pretende "mover" la historia, e inconforme con el presente, transforma el pasado para, enlazándolo con el mundo contemporáneo, ponerlo en entredicho y examinar la condición humana. (quot. in José Romera Castillo, p. 440.)
>
> […in traditional drama, history supported the text, as the stage background for a real situation, and the author was subject to the principle of historical veracity in order not to transgress the principle of literary verisimilitude… In current theater…the author pretends to 'move' history and, dissatisfied with the present, he transforms the past, by linking it with the contemporary world, and in order to put it into question and examine the human condition.]

Sanchis responds to this literary and dramatic trend of "moving" history to examine the human condition by resorting to what Peiró calls "deliberate anachronism," which involves a "falsification" of reality:

> [falsea, n.a.] la realidad de forma grotesca y exacerbada, introduce aspectos del mundo contemporáneo al pasado, resultando más llamativo cuando la acción adaptada al presente, o exagerada, se encuentra más lejana en el tiempo. (quot. in José Romera Castillo, p. 440).
>
> [falsifies, n.a. reality in a grotesque and exaggerated way, introduces contemporary world aspects into the past, being more

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celebration of the 500th anniversary of Columbus' journey and other topics related to the *Conquista*. Other plays exploring this topic are Ignacio Amestoy's *Doña Elvira, imagínate Euskadi,* and Sanchis' second play of the *American Trilogy, Lope de Aguirre, traidor*.

[125] José Vicente Peiró, "Visitas a la conquista de América: la *Trilogía americana* de José Sanchis Sinisterra," p. 439.

striking when the action adapted to the present, or exaggerated, is further away in time]

Although Sanchis' hybridization of past and present generates anachronisms, the playwright's technique is not intended as a counterfeit. Rather, Sanchis draws a parallel between the broken imperial actors and the wrecked condition of Spanish society, which is fast-forwarding through the chapters of its past to a luminous future, without properly assuming and traversing that past, by allowing all of its actors to speak in the present. This is precisely what Álvar does, as he had written and published successfully his *Shipwrecks*, rendering himself the main protagonist, and diminishing the importance of his companions (and that of his indigenous lover Shila). Sanchis creates a spatial and temporal mélange between past and present, esthetically subverting historical time and space. The "deliberate anachronism" challenges the logic of traditional historical discourse. Unlike the preceding so called Realist generation (Antonio Buero Vallejo, Alfonso Sastre, Antonio Gala, José Martín Recuerda, etc.), which broke the principle of historical veracity but maintained that of artistic verisimilitude in their history plays, Sanchis and the new generation of playwrights (José Luis Alonso de Santos, Fernando Fernán Gómez, Domingo Miras, Ignacio Amestoy etc.) are influenced by postmodern theatrical trends issuing from the absurd and avant-garde experimentalism. As a consequence, these authors use history as an instrument to build a world in which the real and the fantastic mix. This tendency seeks to keep the historical in theater, but to challenge its discursive dominance and its pretense of objectivity, continuity, chronology, teleology and other restrictive notions.

The rejection of the traditional spatial-temporal experience of the mimetic-realist theater model[126] allows Sanchis to juxtapose the past (time of the journey) and the present (time of the consequences for its four survivors) and establish a complex temporal model. This is the "before and after" format, reflected in the Álvar "before," a firm member of the imperial mission, and the Álvar "after," with a split consciousness, disturbed, haunted by his companions, and in the end by his own writing of the journey according to the empire's standards. Two years after his return, Álvar has not yet returned to his full self and is depicted not in conquistador attire, but in a petty domestic position.

When confronted about the details of History by Castillo and Dorantes, Álvar has no time to review what really happened, and, like a modern-day businessman, he moves on rapidly. Even though he dismisses Castillo and Dorantes brutally, "Para mí ya no estáis aquí" [For me you're no longer here] (161), he cannot rid himself of them, "¡Pues estamos, estamos, maldita sea! ¡Y tan de verdad o de mentiras como tú!" [Well we're here, we are, goddamnit! And as real or as fake as you] (161). He cannot omit the past, and must find a way to include it in his book. In other words, the Spanish people must face the

[126] Cf. Wilfried Floeck, *ALEC* 24 (1999), p. 525.

true side of the imperial past - not the exclusively glorious one propagated under Franco - and accept it as part of a present post-colonial world. A complete forgetting of the colonial past is not advisable, as its memories will return as haunting fantasies. When Álvar silences the less glorious aspects, and promotes the grandeur of the empire alone, he cannot escape the memory of the negative moments, for whose omission he is made accountable by Castillo, Dorantes and Shila.

We can perhaps dwell a little longer on Pánfilo de Narváez's words, uttered in the middle of the play, which have a deeper meaning than first appears. He addresses the audience from his horse, as if he were in the jungle of Florida, and launches a bold challenge:

> NARVÁEZ. *(Al público.)* Llego tarde, lo sé…Cuando ya nadie espera nada. Cuando cunde la sospecha de que son inútiles estos preparativos. Pero también ustedes han llegado tarde. Quizás llegar es siempre llegar tarde. O, simplemente, ocurre que ya es tarde. Es tarde, simplemente. Flota en el aire el gas letal de la desconfianza. Nadie cree en el *juego*. Todos conocen el truco, adivinan las trampas. Sólo veo miradas escépticas, gestos condescendientes, incluso alguna que otra sonrisa irónica. ¿Quién está aquí dispuesto a transigir, a poner algo de su parte, a dejarse llevar? Y llevar, ¿adónde? (109, emphasis mine)
>
> NARVÁEZ. *(To the audience.)* I arrive late, I know…When no one hopes for anything anymore. When the rumor grows that these preparations are useless. But you have also arrived late. Perhaps arriving is always arriving late. Or, it simply happens to be late. It is simply too late. The air carries the poisonous gas of distrust. No one believes in the *game*. Everyone knows the tricks, everyone predicts the traps. I only see skeptical glances, condescending gestures, even an ironic grin or two. Who of you here is willing to compromise, to make an individual effort, to let yourself be carried away? And carried away, to where?]

The play leaves us with a skeptical vision: Narváez, whose appearance is inconsequential for the development of the plot, appears on stage summoned by the power of recollection and storytelling. He exists in Álvar's imagination and comes to life because Castillo and Dorantes have begun to recount episodes from the expedition. Narváez' jocular presence agrees with Sanchis' vision of theatricality and his oblique words ask for a careful consideration. Even if he does not mention the Spanish transition, we can intuit that Narváez alludes to it indirectly and metaphorically. The "game" he speaks of is the play within the play: the reappearance of the historical-fictional characters Castillo, Dorantes,

Shila and himself on stage. He says, "Everyone knows the tricks, everyone predicts the traps"; these "tricks" and "traps" are the leaps that the imagination must make in order to pass from one level of fiction (or drama) to a second level. But the "game," in a political register, can also refer to the Transition. Consequently, the "tricks" and "traps" indicate that leaping from one state (dictatorship) to another (democracy) is no easy task, and the process of transit requires compromise. Addressing the audience directly, he encourages it to find resources for a new attempt, a new game, even if the outcome is still uncertain. By allowing themselves to be taken in a new, unpredictable direction ("carried away to where?"), Spaniards agree to take an active role in the shaping of their own country. As sociologist Víctor Pérez-Díaz notes in *The Emergence of Democratic Spain*, "In the process of *transition*, the basic rules of the *game* (and this is what a political regime is all about) are established, both within the political class and between the political class and society at large"(3, emphasis mine).

Sanchis confronts the audience with an "in between" historical dark room, where history is produced in front of their eyes. This play has not been staged to this day, which is a shocking surprise. Could it mean that the Spanish society is still caught "in between"? Spivak argued that within capitalist development there occurs an ever-expanding space of difference. For transitional Spain, this translates as a question of "openness" which leaves multiple avenues for the country and the nation's future direction.

2.3. History as Parable and Continuous Transition: *El cerco de Leningrado (historia sin final)* (1994)

Álvar Núñez leaves us with the challenge of an ongoing or unfinished transition. The Spanish are "in between," still undergoing, historically and personally, the transition from dictatorship to democracy. *El cerco de Leningrado* brings to the fore the tension between historical political continuity and default "democratic" transition. Sanchis uses the decadence of Communist political systems to tell a story about political *and* theatrical history from the point of view of the "vanquished," using female performers who function "on the bounds of legitimacy."[127] *El cerco de Leningrado* follows suit to *¡Ay, Carmela!* and represents the third play in the "empty stage" trilogy that the author began with *Ñaque o de piojos y actores* (1980).

Natalia and Priscila are two old women, former actresses who have lived for approximately twenty-three years in an abandoned theater called *Teatro del*

[127] María M. Delgado, "The Actress and the Playwright: Historiographical Modes of Collaboration." *ALEC* 32.2 (2007) p. 31.

Fantasma (Ghost Playhouse).[128] They are former radicals, who bravely believed they could change the world for the better with their left-leaning and socially committed drama. Before the staging of an anonymous tribute to their Russian comrades, titled "The Siege of Leningrad," the Playhouse's successful impresario, Néstor Coposo, Priscila's husband and Natalia's lover, mysteriously appears murdered. Why and by whom become the women's life questions, as they pass their time polishing and dusting old props, reorganizing the posters' and reviews' filing systems, and searching among the archives for the lost script of "El cerco de Leningrado," a play that was rehearsed intensely but never got to be performed before an audience, because of Néstor's disappearance. As years go by, Natalia and Priscila's ardent questions finally find answers in the discovery of the script. This moment imposes a separation between past and present. In the past, the theater functioned and plays were staged successfully. Today, "after the fall,"[129] consumerism flourishes and the crumbling Ghost Playhouse is threatened by demolition to make way for a parking garage. Upon locating the long sought manuscript, the two women arrive at the conclusion that the end of Communism had been anticipated, and, soon after this, one of them (Natalia) undergoes a process of physical rejuvenation. The play suggests that while outside the playhouse the Communist supremacy has ended, inside, the two women create a personal temporality, characterized by a conflicting state between a strong sense of nostalgia for the past[130] and a desire to start anew (by becoming young again). As such, the play can be read as a parable of history, as it engages history and its phases and movements between political regimes, and their effects on ordinary citizens such as the two protagonists, and, like Sanchis' play, history lacks a definite plot: events happen suddenly or over long periods of time, people come and go missing, facts and documents are unveiled by accident, etc. However, by using a non-specific Transition process, and only hinting to the time and location of the events with the reference "after the fall," interpreted, given the recent context of Central and Eastern Europe's political restructuring, it can be argued that Sanchis uses this ambiguity to reflect disappointment at promised political and ideological change from 1975 to 1994, showing history as a continuous transition. In this light, Natalia and Priscila's story is a parable that can be applied to Spain's transitional trajectory, in an allegorical reading that resists direct connections with historical events in Spain.

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[128] The exact time they have spent inside the theater is never revealed; a transition process can rarely and accurately be inscribed within a fixed time period.

[129] This is the temporal mark for the play, the fall understood as 1989, the fall of the Berlin wall and of Communism.

[130] An official Francoist discourse existed despite the ideological skirmishes between Falangists and Catholics: National-Catholicism, with common religious and anti-democratic principles applicable to politics. The coalition promoted the myth of the eternal struggle between Spain and anti-Spain, the ultimate justification of the Civil War and the source of legitimacy of Francoism. Until his last days, Franco insisted on the idea of a Spain divided into victors (*vencedores)* and vanquished (*vencidos),* Good and Evil, Christianity and Communism, Catholicism and secularism. Cf. Balfour and Quiroga, p. 39).

The author vaguely places the action "after the fall," which critics have interpreted as the fall of the Berlin Wall.[131] Central and Eastern European transitions – to which Sanchis alludes – happened by means of a violent rupture with previous regimes, in the form of coups or internal revolutions. The Spanish transition consisted of an agreement among the elites, reached through both direct and secret negotiations (Sastre García 37). Citing Juan José Linz's famous theory that Spain's political regime was authoritarian, but not totalitarian,[132] and in consequence created an exclusive scenario for the Transition, sociologist Cayo Sastre García writes:

> El franquismo no fue el fascismo italiano ni el nazismo alemán. No utilizó para la toma del poder un partido político de masas, como fue el caso de Hitler o Mussolini, sino que el ejército fue su instrumento (golpe de Estado y guerra civil) […] Ni la autoridad de Franco emanaba de su carisma como líder ni de su ideología (37-39).
>
> [Franco's regime wasn't Italian Fascism or German Nazism. It didn't use a mass political party to seize power, as was the case of Hitler or Mussolini, but rather the army as instrument (coup and civil war) […] Franco's authority didn't emanate from his charisma as leader, nor from his ideology.]

In other words, Franco acted as the leader of an authoritarian coalition, formed by different politically influential families. Within the framework of political pluralism – determined by these families – various groups of opposition and semi-opposition existed and appeased the tensions that occurred during the phases of the regime. Franco's death simply afforded the opportunity for change that some sectors of the authoritarian coalition had advocated earlier. Hence, 1975 did not suppose a moment of political crisis for the Spanish state. According to Sastre García,

> En 1975 el régimen no había quebrado; simplemente vivía una crisis de sucesión. […] A su vez, la transición nunca provocó en la sociedad una sensación de crisis o de vacío político, ni el

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[131] Marcela Beatriz Sosa, pp. 200-207. Sanchis creates this ambiguous context on purpose: if it is "after the fall," what "fall" is he thinking of exactly? Leaving aside the easy guess of the "fall of the Berlin Wall," within the same context it can suggest the dismembering of the Eastern European Communist bloc. Even if Sanchis retains a sense of ambiguity, in relation to Spain, the fall can be interpreted as the end of Franco's regime. The authoritarian regime gives way to a negotiated transition that culminates in the 1978 Constitution. Sanchis takes this reference further connecting it to the "fall" of the PSOE, which entered its last term in power in 1993, after an uninterrupted period of government since 1982.

[132] Linz, "Opposition In and Under an Authoritarian Regime: The Case of Spain," in Robert A. Dahl (ed.), *Regimes and Opposition.* New Haven, 1973.

> franquismo […] engendró en su larga existencia elementos para la descomposición y desorganización del Estado, al estilo de los países de Europa de Este.[133]
>
> [In 1975 the regime did not break; it simply underwent a crisis of succession…At the same time, the transition never caused a sensation of crisis or political vacuum for society, nor did Francoism… generate in its long existence elements for the decomposition and disruption of the State, in the manner of Eastern European countries.]

Unlike the experience of Eastern European countries, Spain's transition to democracy was generated and conducted from the particularities of a regime prone to self-reform, which manifested in some sectors a tendency towards democracy. Moreover, the leaders in charge of Spain's politics between 1977 and 1994 – King Juan Carlos, Adolfo Suárez and Felipe González – belonged to a young, new generation, whose ties with the previous regime and the war were weak and pointed toward an implicit rejuvenation.[134]

Nevertheless, there are certain elements in the play that suggest an analogy with the Spanish Transition, in particular with its metaphorical reading as "game" by the author.[135] The play's structure lends itself to at least two readings, as mentioned earlier: a critique of the Transition's false promises and/or the depiction of History as continuous transition. The dual pattern of history is visible in the antagonism between the two women, the fall/renewal and getting old/rejuvenating dialectic, and the illusion and disillusion with political promise. All these indicate a poetic state of perpetual transition. As Hayden White noted, transitions are periods that are very difficult to analyze historically: a "transition" is "precisely what *cannot* be represented in any medium (even cinema) because it is what happens 'between' two states considered to be (relatively) stable"(*Postmodernism* 305). Aware of this representation conundrum, Sanchis takes the Eastern European brutal phenomenon not as background for the Spanish *agreed upon* ("pactado") arrangement already concluded at the time of the writing and remote in the Spanish landscape, but rather as a fertile terrain to launch a question about history and its whims unfolded over people. The result is a bizarre, parodic and ambiguous image of a questionable political transition from a totalitarian regime to a democratic one – as we gather from the characters' talk –, that transmits a general sentiment of confusion and anxiety. Indeed, the Eastern European transitions, which had taken place in the recent past gave Sanchis a contextual frame into which to locate his two characters and his parable of history. For this he takes an event at considerable spatial distance and removed from specific

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[133] Ibid., p. 41.
[134] Juliá quot. in Gies, p. 111.
[135] See page 62. A detailed and contextual analysis follows on page 74.

historical constraints. The Eastern European transitions allowed his imagination to pose questions about time, change, memory, the role of documents and the individual caught in the throes of immense forces, such as war, revolution, and the dissolution of empires.

The decrepit and quasi-insane condition of the two protagonists and the lack of action and plot in the play convey a feeling of inconsistency, of being scattered, together with the loss of the sense of purpose; and reflect the state of uncertainty and mystification that exist during a process of political Transition and how they impact the common citizens. Natalie and Priscilla dwell in an abandoned playhouse and occupy their time with the obsessive search for a lost manuscript of a play that they hope to reveal secrets about Néstor's disappearance. They coexist in a transitional space by default – the stage is a space where plays are represented for the audiences and where multiple characters pass over the course of many years. However, they are stuck in that space, unable to move forward, as the changing times urge them to – the playhouse will be demolished and a garage will be built in its space – and through their activity of stirring the past, they indicate their resistance to abandon it and their incapacity to move according to history's rhythm.

While it is tempting to read this play as a setting for a renewed evaluation of the Spanish transition, given the author's history with the theme (*Trilogía americana*) and his political compromise, there are very few elements in it to support this approach. In fact, Sanchis purposely keeps the plot absurd, the characters ambiguous and the historical references vague, to engage the audience in a game typical of his view of theatricality.[136] Comparisons with the Spanish transition political setting seem futile, as no exact correspondence can be established. However, the larger scope of the play, which invites a critical reading of the disappointment at the political and ideological change promised immediately after 1975, calls for several political remarks.

The first years of the democratic establishment were marked by the inner political workings of the mandates of the conservative Adolfo Suárez (UCD, 1976-1981) and the socialist Felipe González (PSOE, 1982-1996). If the PSOE seemed to be the long-waited alternative to the paralysis of the conservatives, and gave Spaniards hope, they disillusioned them in the middle 1990s with corrupt behavior and stagnating electoral slogans. The disenchantment with the PSOE followed suit to the *desencanto* with the transition, a sentiment that prevailed between 1979 and 1982.[137] Rekindled in the mid 1990s by the two victories of the PSOE at the polls, this *desencanto* intensified as the dream of democratic and economic stability vanished. The vision of the Transition that

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[136] See Introduction to *Naque, ¡Ay, Carmela!,* ed. Manuel Aznar Soler, pp. 39-57.

[137] Graham and Labanyi, p. 396-397, 421, and Juliá quot. in Gies, p. 112. In fact, Santos Juliá makes a gripping statement about the feeling of *desencanto* that characterized society soon after the establishment of democracy, saying that it was also exaggerated by the media, "The end of Francoism was not followed by the best of all possible worlds, but by a political system under siege from many strong enemies." (p. 112)

Sanchis wanted the audience to take away was a complex, almost fantastic mosaic, whose pieces tell a "story without end" (which is also the subtitle of the play) a reminder that history blindly moves ahead leaving the relics of the past behind.

Writing in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Sanchis intuited that the Transition was a confused movement away from the stability of the dictatorship but with no compensating new stability in sight. More philosophically, he saw history as an incessant avalanche of events heedlessly on the move, and therefore the site of pure *instability.* Hence the bizarre, mysterious things that happen in the play. Thus, Sanchis reads history as a parable in *El cerco de Leningrado* Sanchis.[138] The parable was inspired *by* the Transition, but is not *about* the Transition, as that experience was too close to home, and Sanchis was too involved in it. The play engages history, its chaotic forward movement that leaves each successive present behind, its conflicts – between the two women and the two blocs during the Cold War –; its secrets discovered when lost documents surface; its reversibility (one character's rejuvenation toward the end of the play); its theatricality and non-theatricality (history is performed and one never knows what's coming in the next act; on the other hand, the play lacks a plot). Sanchis made the play fanciful in order to avoid comparisons with local scenarios, but in order to think about history in the abstract. The experience of change in Eastern Europe provided the necessary setting, because the magnitude was greater than the Spanish Transition, and the results were deeper and more enduring. Thus, addressing the extraordinary experience of Natalia and Priscila, Sanchis intends to paint an intimate picture of the dramatic unfolding of history for the ordinary people. At the European level, the term "transition" itself is generally associated with the countries from the former Eastern European bloc, which in the late 1980s and early 1990s underwent a change from totalitarian to (nominally) democratic regimes.[139] Sanchis draws on this experience, placing the characters in the former Eastern Bloc (1990 Berlin) and having them face a gradual retreat from Communist ideology.

One of the ways in which the play can be read is the disappointment at the political promise that the Transition brought, and with it the Socialist government, whose election in 1982 marked the successful beginning of the new democratic era. But, between 1989 and 1994, when the play was written, Spain

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[138] The etymology of the word "parable" is from Old French *parabole*, from an ecclesiastical Latin sense 'discourse, allegory' of Latin *parabola* 'comparison', from Greek *parabolē*, which means 'placing side by side, application', from *para-* 'beside' + *bolē* 'a throw' (from the verb *ballein*) in the Oxford English Dictionary.
http://oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/parable?q=parable [28 August 2013]

[139] The Eastern European transition process did not imply an *en masse* overnight assimilation of democratic values. At the individual country level, a move away from communism and towards democratic practices was gradually taken, without it supposing a universal adoption of a unitary democracy. I use the term "nominal democracy" to describe this progress from an old regime to a new one, having democracy as a political and governmental model.

traversed a particularly controversial phase of Socialist government under Felipe González' rule as Prime Minister.[140] During those years, several scandals involving Socialist politicians and officials came to light, including the GAL (*Grupos Anti-Terroristas de Liberación)* affair, in which the government recruited paid mercenaries to eliminate ETA members, matched by equally inept moves by the conservative side.[141] The Socialists' message in the run-up to the general election of 1982 was *el cambio* (change). If back then, the necessity for change was understood in the context of the conservative party's failure to conform to the new democratic landscape (Adolfo Suárez and the UCD's initial pace of reform dwindled progressively), in 1989 many voters wanted the PSOE to change its questionable governing practices.

El cerco de Leningrado is a story of absurd loyalties that become the motive for political satire of nostalgia for authoritarian values. Self-exiled in the building of the Playhouse in order to preserve Néstor's memory, Priscila and Natalia strive to find a lost manuscript in the hope of elucidating the mystery of his death. When Natalia comes across the text of *El cerco*, she and Priscila realize that it was not the nine hundred-day siege of Leningrad that the play addressed, but, rather subtly, the fall of Communism, almost inconceivable at the time of its composition. *El cerco de Leningrado* anticipated the fall of Communism, by making the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, Japan and their allies) the victors of World War II. Natalia reads bits from the script out loud and discovers that it announces the end of the Communist dream, which Priscila cannot believe:

> PRISCILA. No es posible…Yo tengo la cabeza en su sitio… No soy historiadora, pero tengo la cabeza en su sitio… Y sé que Leningrado no cayó… Ni Moscú, ni la Unión Soviética… Y que los nazis no ganaron la guerra, ¿verdad que no? […] ¿Verdad que los nazis no ganaron la guerra y que Leningrado no se rindió? (56)
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> [PRISCILLA. It isn't possible. My head is screwed on straight. I'm not a historian but my mind is sharp. I know that Leningrad didn't fall, nor did Moscow, nor the Soviet Union. The Nazis didn't win the war, did they? […] The Nazis didn't win the war and Leningrad didn't surrender, right?] (52)[142]

Trying to recollect the actual facts about that nine hundred-day siege, Natalia and Priscila continue to read the script hoping it could reveal facts about Nestor's disappearance. They come across an unexpected dialogue that presents the struggle of the siege in a very metaphorical tone, "[…] No defendemos una

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[140] For more reference, please see Víctor Pérez-Díaz, *Spain at the Crossroads. Civil Society, Politics, and the Rule of Law,* 1999.

[141] Cf. Hooper, pp. 56-68.

[142] All English translations correspond to Mary-Alice Lessing's adaptation of the play in Estreno Contemporary Spanish Plays.

ciudad sitiada, […] ni tampoco un país amenazado. Ni siquiera un sistema. Lo que está en juego es una esperanza: la esperanza de todos los condenados de la tierra…'"[…We are not defending a city under siege, … nor a country being threatened. Not even a system. What's at risk here is hope, the hope of all the doomed people on earth] (56, 53 English translation). They arrive at an unexpected conclusion:

> PRISCILA. Ahí está la cosa.
> NATALIA. ¿Qué cosa?
> PRISCILA. Que la obra no trata del cerco de Leningrado…
> NATALIA. Ah, ¿no?
> PRISCILA. Ni de la Segunda Guerra Mundial…Es una obra con mensaje.
> NATALIA. Sí: eso se le nota mucho.
> PRISCILA. Simbólica, pero de un modo raro…
> NATALIA. ¿Verdad? Es como si…
> PRISCILA. Como si, ¿qué?
> NATALIA. Como si…
> PRISCILA. No, no es posible. […] (56)
>
> [PRISCILLA: There's a problem.
> NATALIE: What problem?
> PRISCILLA: The play isn't about the siege of Leningrad.
> NATALIE: No?
> PRISCILLA: No, it's not about World War II. It's a play with a message.
> NATALIE: Yes, that's very obvious.
> PRISCILLA: It's symbolic, but in a strange way.
> NATALIE: Really? It's as if –
> PRISCILLA: As if, what?
> NATALIE: As if…
> PRISCILLA: No, it's not possible.] (53)

Manuscript in hand, they try to figure out who its author could have been, dismissing Nestor, who couldn't even write a postcard, let alone the script of a play. Priscila and Natalia tie together the pieces of this mysterious historical puzzle and compose the final picture, much to their surprise and amazement. The main reason for keeping secret the inevitable fall of Communism was as simple as the psychological wellbeing of the combative sides:

> PRISCILA. Una bomba, Natalia… ¿Te imaginas, decirles a los nuestros que iban a ganar los otros?
> NATALIA. Es verdad… Y viceversa.
> PRISCILA. ¿Qué viceversa?

NATALIA. Pues decirles a los otros que los nuestros iban a perder.
PRISCILA. Claro: se quedaban sin infierno…
NATALIA. Les arruinabas el negocio.
PRISCILA. *Hojeando la obra.* Una bomba, sí…Para los unos y para los otros… (59)

[PRISCILLA: It was like a bombshell, Natalie. Can you imagine telling our troops that the other side was going to win?
NATALIE: That's true…and vice versa.
PRISCILLA: What do you mean, vice versa?
NATALIE: Why, telling the other side that our troops were going to lose.
PRISCILLA: Of course. That left them with no burning conflict.
NATALIE: You ruined the whole business for them.
PRISCILLA (*Looking over the play*): It was a bombshell, all right…for both sides.] (55)

The two women realize that what kept both the East and the West going was the existence of an *infierno* [burning conflict], which, like a game, permitted the continuation of a tense co-existence. Their condition – debilitating old age – and long quest make them meet this sudden realization with astonishment. While they had been searching for the truth for over two decades, Communism had ended, but they had somehow intuited it *all along*:

PRISCILA. ¿Qué nos pasa? ¿Es que no lo sabíamos … *desde siempre*?
NATALIA. Pero no del todo…Como no sabíamos quienes…ni por qué…no lo sabíamos del todo. (59, emphasis mine)

[PRISCILLA. What's happening to us? Didn't we know this *all along*?
NATALIE. Not everything. We didn't know who, nor why. No, we didn't know everything.] (55, emphasis mine)

The two women's interpretation of the passages from the play and their reactions are foolish and absurd. Their hypothesis that Communism was allowed to exist in order for a conflict to be left ongoing seems irrational, but opens a historical paradox. In the course of history, events succeed one another, and what might appear unrelated, can in fact be the cause and effect in the larger order of things. Like in a miniature model, one event causes another, and so on, culminating in a final act whose appearance can cause surprise and whose initial determinant is too remote to recall. In this model, each piece plays a unique and strategic role for the final outcome. Natalia and Priscila are two such miniature

pieces in the work of history, caught inside the model, and performing their role, while outside, another model is taking place. The Ghost Playhouse is the allegorical structure of this miniature model, where the author focuses his lens to show the inside working of the cause and effect in history. The outside world has already begun another process of cause and effect, but a process to which Natalia and Priscila have too, contributed. By drawing attention to the absurdity of Natalia and Priscila's existence, but connecting their existence to the great historical process of transition, Sanchis underlines the chaotic and abstract sense of history. The play is also titled "historia sin final," or story without end. As the Spanish word "historia" means both "story" and "history," it is implied that the siege of Leningrad is a story *and* history without end. Of course, the play's title does not refer to the historical nine hundred-day siege, but to the homonymous long-lost play, which is a story without end, as is the Transition they must face. The case of the two women suggests that the Transition is a complex process that will never reach a conclusion, as the forces of history will make it segue into other subsequent events.

This is where the author's satire intervenes. This "historia sin final" offers fertile ground to elaborate on an absurd and prolonged Transition understood as a "game" of history. The game is a pleasurable remove from serious business and arrives as an interlude in major events, a crossroads of forces and interests that collide and must negotiate an exit from one stage to the next. To recall, in *Naufragios*, Pánfilo de Narváez's stage appearance at the very end invites audiences to join him in a "game" and leap from the past to the present (like Álvar, who needs to put an end to the haunting presence of the expedition's ghosts). The game is a metaphor for history and its large-scale processes, such as a political transition experienced by the Central and Eastern European area.[143] With *El cerco*, Sanchis picks up the same metaphorical expression – transition as a political and theatrical game – and twists it to an absurd form. He addresses this major historical, political, social and cultural process in a very fanciful manner, as if to take away from the event's impact. The causes and processes that lead to a transition are always exaggerated: "on any scientific account of this phenomenon, it must be said that such a moment is over-determined – *too* full of casual forces, too fraught with 'miracle' to be the subject of an *explanation*" as Hayden White writes (*Postmodernism* 305). Therefore, unable to offer a scientific explanation of the transition process, and given the context of the postmodern challenge to historical discourse as a viable means for telling the truth, Sanchis creates a palimpsest. This palimpsest of the history is built on top of the fresher coverage of the Eastern European dismembering. In this way, Sanchis takes advantage of the Spanish transition's promise of political renewal brought by the PSOE. Moreover, he accounts for the European political context at the time, also keeping the perspective of the game, typical of his poetics of marginality and metatheatricality in theater, in line with White's notion of "miracle." Creating the

[143] See page 62.

expectation of revealing truths but exposing nothing is also part of the game, of the satirical treatment of the transition.

Soon after locating the script, Natalia starts to undergo a biological process of age reversal. The first proof of her rejuvenation is her "beautiful period" (44). Looking at her in disbelief, Priscila assures her that, "la menopausia es irreversible. Lo mismo que la Historia." [menopause is irreversible. Just like History] (46). Natalia disagrees: "Pues la Historia no sé si será… ¿cómo dijiste?... Ah, sí: irreversible…Eso es: la Historia, no sé, pero la menopausia…¡Mira! *Y le enseña una compresa higiénica con sangre.* Mira que hermosura de regla" [I don't know whether History will be… how did you put it? Oh yes, irreversible…That's it: I don't know about History, but menopause… Look! *(She shows her a bloody sanitary napkin.)* Look how beautiful my period is.] (48, 44 English translation).[144] With this surprising age reversal Sanchis evokes the postmodern way of thinking about historical events and historical reality. Natalia's age reversal shows how historical processes sometimes take unexpected turns that seem unbelievable. As the transition from Communism advances, Natalia *also* changes ideologically, a process symbolized by her body's biological inversion. She is *no longer* a "trace" or "effect" of the past, to quote Hayden White:

> Although there is indubitable evidence – in the form of monuments, relics, remains, and documents – that the past once existed, these traces of the past can be said to be effects whose original causes have ceased to exist. These remains live on in the present as indices of the past but they no longer function as effects of the (past) causal forces that originally produced them (*Postmodernism* 308).

Natalia senses the force of a new political order, and wishes to partake in the change. She could be a Spaniard who wants to be part of the *cambio* that the PSOE had announced at the outset of the new democracy, in 1982, and again in 1989.

The conflict between the two women is symbolic of the political conflict between the East and the West, separated but also joined by the Cold War. Priscila and Natalia start as rivals, wife versus lover, but they finally get along very well, to the point of becoming indispensable to each other. During the numerous blackouts one woman screams in panic and calls the other to aid her in the darkness. An abandoned theater, built to house fictions, is their common abode. Similarly, with a metaphorical iron curtain between them, the East and the West have co-existed (as have the Spanish Left and Right during the dictatorship). Yet, only one woman gets younger: Natalia. Her rejuvenation reflects the effects of the Transition, the promise of a new political order.

[144] Natalia and Priscila speak of History as a universal, totalizing process, in Lukács' terminology.

Manuscript located and mystery solved, there is no need for them to continue living as before. Their conflictive duo has to collapse.

With the slogan "Hay que cambiar" (Change is imperative) the PSOE managed to fulfill an "historical role" for Spain – the transition to democracy – unattained by other political formations. From 1982 to 1996, the PSOE governed Spain with a full majority, except for the last term. If at the end of the first term in power, the socialist hegemony infused many Spaniards with hope,[145] by the end it had lost credibility due to corruption scandals. In 1993 the PSOE won the national elections for the fourth consecutive time; however, for the first time the party did not reach an absolute majority. Consequently, the PSOE had to form a governmental alliance with the Basque nationalist and the Catalan center right parties, despite the ideological discrepancy. This was the first in a series of mistakes that led to the party's defeat in the 1996 elections.

The fall of the PSOE in the 1996 elections came about through an almost hilarious blackmail case based on a *document* initially considered of vital importance for the state's security, yet which eventually proved to be irrelevant in itself.[146] In the play, Natalia and Priscila search for Néstor's lost text, which also proves to be other than what was expected. Yet the discovery of both documents ushered in a consciousness of disillusionment. The idealistic promises of Soviet Communism and Spanish Socialism were exposed as false. The existence of a *document* as a vital instrument in the orchestration of ideological disenchantment allows for a suggestive comparison of Spain's disappointment with the results of the Transition in the mid 1990s.

El cerco de Leningrado is a play about the inherent passage of time, and about the revelation of a world in which bizarre events and discoveries serve to bring about closure and provoke change. In Santos Juliá's understanding, "transition" refers to a period of time, not to a discrete event,

> […] cuando desde la oposición se iniciaban conversaciones con la disidencia, siempre se daba por supuesto que la operación de sustituir la dictadura por la democracia requería un periodo de transición: no se pensaba en un acontecimiento, sino en un tiempo, más o menos largo, en el que sería preciso tomar una serie de medidas que condujeran desde la dictadura a la democracia. (257)
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> […when the opposition initiated dialogues with the dissidents, it was always assumed that the process of replacing the dictatorship with democracy required a period of transition: it wasn't thought of

[145] "Los españoles asistimos en los 80 a un ejercicio permanente de publicidad política del producto gobierno realizado en regimen de monopolio", Elorza, pp. 457-487.
[146] PSOE's last term in power is marred by a blackmail story involving Felipe González and a former banker, who had several classified CESID (Superior Council of Information and Defense) reports. These reports turned out to be proof of the Government's implication in a GAL antiterrorist affair.

> as an event, rather as a time period, more or less long, during which it would be necessary to take a series of measures that would lead from dictatorship to democracy.]

This play places the Spanish Transition within the European context, showing its ineffability (hard if not impossible to document) and its overall political, economical and social instability. The ambiguity of time and place of action, as well as the identity of the characters transmits a similar sentiment to the one that the Transition left upon Spaniards. Influenced by what was going on in politics, Sanchis looked back at the Transition and found in the PSOE an agent of the "fall" from the idealistic promise of the Transition.

The confined theatrical space of *Ghost Playhouse* also transmits a sense of stagnation, alerting us to the fact that an invasion of the "future" is immanent and a new order is about to be established. The two women try to deny History's onward rush in their bunker but they discover its ineluctable force, in the shape of the document and Natalia's rejuvenation. Allegorically, History begins anew. At this point, the concrete disappointment at the promised change and the abstract sense of history as continuous transition, interpretations that the play puts forth, come across as linked by a causal relationship. History's contingent and changeable nature explains why there was so much disillusion (*desencanto*) regarding the pacted upon Transition and the corrupt PSOE regime. In other words, history is too fluid to allow hopes to materialize and too messy to bring idealized order into being.

Commenting in a 1998 interview in *El País* on the frail interest that this play had managed to elicit from Spanish audiences (opposed to its French reception), Sanchis makes its purpose even more urgent:

> […] he promovido muy pocos debates, al menos en España. Me parece que influye la desmovilización general que este sistema produce y, en el caso de España, también quizás por la manera como transcurrió la transición democrática. […] Paradójicamente, cuando llegó la democracia y, poco a poco, fue desapareciendo la censura, la gente de teatro dejó de plantear problemas éticos, filosóficos, como si ya estuvieran superados.[147]
>
> [with this play I] provoked very few debates, at least in Spain. I think that the general lack of incentive that this system produces is a factor, and, in the case of Spain, maybe also because of the way in which the democratic transition occurred… Paradoxically, when democracy was installed, and, little by little the censorship disappeared, the theater folk stopped posing ethical, philosophical problems, as if they were already overcome]

[147] Sanchis quot. in Elvira Huelbes, "Esta sociedad nos está haciendo una lobotomía." *El País.* 16 August 1998. Digital file.

The author calls for a reevaluation of present reality, which, according to him, "a veces tiene más que ver con la memoria, con la reelaboración de aquello que parece haber quedado atrás, justamente por la avalancha de actualidad" [sometimes has more to do with memory, with the re-elaboration of that which seems to have been left behind, because of the avalanche of present events]. [148] This critique of the media's "invention of reality" and its "dramatization" of the same lead us into the discussion of a major playwright established during the new democracy, Juan Mayorga.

[148] Ibid.

CHAPTER III

The History Puzzle of Democracy: Juan Mayorga

It overwhelms all opposition,
It needs to grow or else it dies.
What else is war but competition,
A profit-building enterprise?
- Mother Courage, *Mother Courage and her Children*

El pasado es imprevisible. Está ante nosotros
tan abierto como el futuro.
- Juan Mayorga, *El dramaturgo como historiador*

José Sanchis Sinisterra's work creates a historical panorama that reflects Spain's main challenges during Transition and the establishment of democracy, showing the country's progressive trajectory during this time period from a "border" nation caught up in the relics of its turbulent past (Civil War, Francoism) to a European state, negotiating its position within a new political, social and economic order. This negotiation is reflected in *The Siege of Leningrad* (1993), a play that can be considered a bridge to the full-fledged, inclusive and European vision of history of Juan Mayorga, one of Spain's most celebrated current playwrights.

The year 1982 was a significant date in the Spanish calendar, politically marking the Socialists' (PSOE) victory in national elections. Leaving behind Franco's death (1975), the adoption of the Constitution (1978), and the momentary alarm caused by Tejero's attempted coup (23rd of February 1981), there was the sensation that democracy had finally settled. For the theater, that period was particularly productive, with a surge of independent and alternative theaters, and with the birth of the *Centro Nacional de Nuevas Tendencias Escénicas* (CNNTE, National Center for New Theatrical Tendencies) in 1984, which, under the auspices of director Guillermo Heras paved the way for new, young dramatists to bring their work to the stage. Even if short-lived (disbanded in 1993), the CNNTE evolved into a new structure, *Teatro del Astillero,* created by playwrights including José Ramón Fernández, Luis Miguel González Cruz, Raúl Hernández Garrido and Juan Mayorga. This new formula, which shortly included Heras' presence, organized theater workshops, produced shows, staged readings of plays and published many books.

The existence of these theatrical platforms fomented the creation of several dramas, many of which deal directly or indirectly with history. Plays such as *Las manos* (looking at rural 1950s Spain) by José Ramón Fernández, Yolanda Pallín and Javier Yagüe, *Santiago de Cuba y cierra España* (dealing with the crisis of 1898) by Ernesto Caballero, *Violetas para un Borbón* (tetralogy about the royal family ruling the Spanish state) by Ignacio Amestoy, and *Las brujas de Barahona* (the Inquisition trials of Cuenca between 1527 and 1530) or *Las alumbradas de la Encarnación Benita* by Domingo Miras, to name just a few, reveal a strong inclination towards the exploration of the past and its representation on stage during this period.

From Shakespeare to Lope de Vega, Calderón, Corneille or Racine, dramas – unlike comedies –, have tended to situate the action in past times, with real or imaginary characters. As Domingo Miras noted, history has been a "generous provider of dramatic arguments."[149] Imagining the playwright as a historian, Juan Mayorga aligns theater with history and politics, claiming that theater has always opened the stage to a certain *past*, charged with political significance in the *present* with relevance for the *future*.[150]

Resisting the typical classification of "historical theater," Mayorga's work often exhibits a preference for European and global historical topics or events. His historical approach is more inclusive than Buero's, Sastre's and Sanchis Sinisterra's, reflecting current Spanish, European and world contexts. He does not focus directly on Spanish history, but creates a broad environment in which European and world history have a central role. From these global spaces, he alludes to Spain, creating parallels to local scenarios. The historical appears in Mayorga's theater with the nonchalance and joviality proper to fable. Commonly associated with Aesop or La Fontaine, the fable presents a short fictional story, featuring animals, plants, forces of nature, mythical creatures – which are often anthropomorphized –, and concludes with a moral lesson. As a genre, the fable has a non-mimetic, abstract and allegorical structure; it is by default open to satire and the grotesque, thus having a tendency to moralize if not balanced by humor, irony and skepticism.[151] Characterized by zoomorphic language and rhetorical misnomers, the fable of antiquity originated as coded language among

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[149] Domingo Miras, "La historia hace los dramas," *Primer Acto* 280, 1999: 30.

[150] Juan Mayorga, "El dramaturgo como historiador," *Primer Acto* 280, 1999: 8-10.

[151] Aesop's *The Crow and the Pitcher* or *The Tortoise and the Hare* draw attention to certain qualities of the crow – ingenuity, persistence – and of the tortoise – steadiness – while ridiculing the hare's foolish overconfidence. La Fontaine's *The Fox and the Grapes* mocks the fox's envious disparagement of the unattainable grapes, and ends with a moralizing, yet witty remark: "People who speak disparagingly of things that they cannot attain would do well to apply this story to themselves." The well-known story of *The Ant and the Grasshopper* paints a black-and-white reality of both assiduous work-driven individuals – the ant – and leisure-driven individuals – the grasshopper. Its allegorical interpretation shows the need for a balanced life, achieving both the satisfactions of hard work and those of leisure time; moreover, it reinforces the benefits of self-sufficiency and individualism. However, for the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Christian reader, the fable posed a serious moral debate, as it denied the spirit of charity.

slaves who used to circulate subversive messages.[152] Later, the connection between animal characters and human behaviors expanded to the satire. The fable of classical antiquity displays an ambiguous "proximity and symbiosis" to human contexts, because its short narratives feature animals in situations that are analogous to real human situations. The purpose of the traditional fable was to transmit a moral lesson through indirect, allegorical or exaggerated situations that revealed human foibles. Fables generated explicit morals, interpretations that turned the stories into "convincing home truths," advising how to "negotiate a ravenous and capricious world" (Lewis 8-9).

Like the fabulists, Mayorga launches an attack on current political and social mores through an historical perspective that evokes a chaotic relation between past and present. His plays pose the existence of a moral standard overlapped by means of an allegorical approach to real historical events and figures. His characters only retain from their real historical counterparts the exterior shell[153]: on the inside they are absurd and hollow. If in the traditional fable the animal stood for a socially caricaturized human (such as the fox who tricks the goat to jump into a well in order to save herself by jumping out on the back of the goat, and speaks of the ill advice of those in difficulties), in Mayorga's plays the past and its real, historical figures become the caricature, which in turn is a metaphor for damaged modern man.

Present day fabulists no longer write for moral instruction as during antiquity: rather, since the Renaissance, animal characters in fable have been used allegorically as a means for social and political satire.[154] Twentieth-century fable characters range from Kafka's Gregor Samsa transformed into a giant insect, T.S. Eliot's cats, Mr. Mistoffelees and Macavity, in the "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats," Rudyard Kipling's "Jungle Book" menagerie to George Orwell's "animal farm."[155] The fable has great adaptability for the contemporary scene, facilitating writers' use of non-human animals as satirical characters in their work. Mayorga's *Himmelweg* (2003) and *La tortuga de Darwin* (2008) are two fine examples of what I refer to as modern fable: a fable mixing human and animal elements, creating absurd caricatures of its characters, but excluding the moral lesson.

Mayorga's approach to the historical within theater resembles the classical fable: he departs from real historical episodes, which support the dramatic action (the Holocaust, the World Wars, etc.), but explores a range of possibilities and consequences of those historical events in a marked allegorical and satirical

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[152] Marchesi, "Traces of a Freed Language: Horace, Petronius, and the Rhetoric of Fable," p. 308.
[153] The shell is a perfect double metaphor for historical baggage and historical hollowness as the tortoise Harriet reveals in *La tortuga de Darwin*. Her shell is heavy with memories but also hollow on the inside.
[154] Fernandes, "Introduction," p.1.
[155] Ibid. pp. 1-5.

way.[156] Thus, his work can be construed as "modern fable." Set in real historical grounds, the characters promise to be realistic human figures, with faults, a moral conscience, feelings of guilt, etc. However, as the action progresses the characters reveal a tin box personality. They are completely non-mimetic, and almost cartoon-like. Devoid of real human qualities and reduced to marionettes, they are nevertheless endowed with the capacity to experience ethical problems and impact the course of history with their actions. Mayorga creates a unique set of part-historical, part-fantastic characters and deforms an existing historical drama by turning its perpetrators into caricatures.

The playwright recurs to placing cardboard figurines into a realistic, historical situation. He designs an absurdist plot: on a three-dimensional historical background, there are two-dimensional figures that deal with serious issues such as human rights, mercy and justice. With this approach, the playwright turns historical characters into anything he wants, aiming a lampoonist's weapon at the modern and contemporary Spanish and European context.

In the 1960s, the Francoist propaganda wanted to promote the exoticism of Spain's Otherness in contrast to Europe through the touristic slogan "Spain is different."[157] This *difference* came to an end with Spain's integration into the European Union. From the extreme position of *Us versus Them*, the situation was reversed to *We are Them.* However, this transformation of national identity did not come easily. Franco had created a uniform Spanish nation with forced assimilations of peripheral nationalistic movements such as the Basque, the Catalan or the Galician. Since the approval of the new Constitution in 1978, which is the touchstone of Spanish democracy, these nationalisms have functioned within a legal frame and have been "alive and kicking."[158] Together with the dramatic increase in the number of immigrants over the last decade[159], this has led to a crisis in Spanish national identity, with fears of "national disintegration" and "loss of social cohesion."[160] European integration and its by-product, immigration, imply a redesigning of national identity by mixing two ingredients: local and traditional culture on one hand, and new, global trends, on the other: "Reinventing national identity thus means trying to reconcile traditional narratives based on myths of common origin and continuity with a

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[156] Unlike Buero Vallejo and Sastre, Mayorga does not write tragedies in the classical understanding of the term. His preferred form is the short scene, organized in a fast paced sequence. The ending is either absurd (e.g. *La tortuga*) or inconclusive (e.g. *Himmelweg*).
[157] Balfour and Quiroga, p. 40.
[158] Ibid., p. 1.
[159] According to Balfour and Quiroga, "Excluding illegal immigration, the number of immigrants rose eightfold between 1996 and 2006 to almost 4,000,000" (3). This trend has been consistent in the years immediately following. This period is critical as it corresponds to the time period when Mayorga staged *Himmelweg* and *La tortuga de Darwin,* respectively 2003-2008.
[160] Ibid., p. 3.

rapidly changing social, economic, and political environment where they have less and less meaning."[161]

Mayorga's work with the historical reflects the discussion of national identity in Spain within the new democratic, European and global context. His cosmopolitan and global view of history it includes the country within a global framework, erasing the "Spain is different" slogan once and for all. The Europeanization of Spain is the only way forward, even if it generates further debates around the validity of regional nationalisms and creates the sensation of a nation in a constant process of division, where globalization fosters "new layers of identity, as people seek out identities ever closer to them, such as town, village, even neighborhood."[162] This progressive disintegration of a common space is mirrored by the fragmented structure of Mayorga's plays that approach history, creating a correspondence both at the level of form and the level of content. Short successive or interchangeable scenes transmit an historical and existential angst resulting from the global erosion of the notion of humanity. Moreover, the cosmopolitan situations in Mayorga's plays have a clear resonance with the Spanish audience.[163]

Inspired by Harriet, the tortoise-woman from *La tortuga de Darwin*, Mayorga adds a new perspective on history: "Mi Harriet […] se ha fijado en cosas que los historiadores no vieron, y lo ha visto desde abajo. Es un programa posible para el teatro histórico: contar lo que los historiadores no han visto, y contarlo desde abajo" [My Harriet … has noticed things that historians have missed, and she has seen it from below. It's a potential agenda for historical theater: tell what historians have missed from below].[164] Telling history "from below"[165] takes us immediately to Brecht's epic and testimonial theater, such as *Mother Courage and her Children* (1939), a play showing the survival mode that war imposes on people. Like Mother Courage, who inhabits a bellic universe and

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[161] Ibid., pp. 6-11.

[162] Ibid., p. 12.

[163] *Himmelweg* premiered in 2003, a time when Spain confronted the spread of a series of neo-Nazi movements. According to Phyllis Zatlin, the most popular non-fiction book sold in the winter of that year was *Diario de un skin* [A Skinhead's Diary], whose author's identity remained hidden under the pseudonym of Antonio Salas – an undercover journalist infiltrated in the skinheads' movement in an attempt to identify its leaders and thus slowly debilitate it. Decrying xenophobe ideology, hinting at Spanish immigration policies, *Himmelweg* surpasses the context of the Jewish Holocaust to paint a world in which not even the intellectuals can distance themselves from the appeal of violence. Moreover, the historical events he evokes are part of general public consciousness.

[164] Mayorga, *Mi teatro histórico*, p. 3. This remark draws a connection to Buero Vallejo, Sastre and Sanchis Sinisterra. In their history plays, Buero and Sastre present history in ways that traditional historians wouldn't allow, opening history to an analytical process. Sanchis decomposes history according to postmodern tendencies, while keeping an ethical commitment reflected in the pertinent analogies that his history plays make with present times.

[165] For more reference to this concept, see Herbert Lindenberger's section "History from below" in the chapter "Historical Drama as Historical Thought", pp. 146-153. Nevertheless, Lindenberger's understanding of the term has to do with the involvement of the masses and the crowd as a collective hero in a history play.

hesitates between protecting her children from the war and making profit from it, Harriet – Darwin's tortoise – must soldier on and survive in a calamitous world.

This Brechtian (anti-Aristotelian) resonance notwithstanding, Mayorga's work also exhibits a sensitive amendment of Aristotle's famous distinction between the historian, who writes about what did happen or the particular, and the poet, who writes about what could happen, or the universal. Moving away from this dichotomy, Mayorga believes that historical theater combines the work of the universal *poet* with that of the particular *historian*. Thus, he sees the "playwright as historian." His general dramatic approach seeks the universal in the particular.[166] This approach helps to explain the presence of the fable structure in the plays examined here. By remaining in the background of the plays, this structure allows history to become *universal*, while the playwright brings to the fore the floating cartoonish characters and their *particular* situations, derived from history but sliding into the grotesque and the absurd.

Recalling the example of Aeschylus' *The Persians* (472 BC, the earliest history play), which offers an image of the past to comment on the present,[167] he uses certain past episodes in order to bring a new focus on the present: "la pieza de teatro histórico se convierte en nudo de tres tiempos: el pasado representado, el presente que produce esa representación y cada futuro que actualiza esa representación" [the history play becomes a knot of three temporalities: the past it represents, the present that produces that representation, and each future that will update it].[168]

This triptych of temporalities situates the history play in an ethical and political context. Mayorga admits to the responsibility implicit in his dramatic use of the past: "El pasado se me aparece como un espacio imprevisible del que quisiera hacer – por la dicotomía propuesta por Deleuze y Guattari en 'Rizoma' – no calcos sino mapas" [The past appears to me as an unpredictable space of which I would like to make – mindful of Deleuze and Guattari's dichotomy in 'Rhizome' – maps rather than copies].[169] The present, always in progress, is unpredictable. But so, Mayorga claims, is the past! He proposes an investigation of this unpredictable past, which can be (metaphorically) mapped. These maps are not an epitome of authority (Mayorga does not want to become an "authorized" user of the past), but aspire to become a guide into the past, and, gradually, to shape a new present: "mapas que destaquen puntos, líneas, accidentes relevantes para el hombre contemporáneo y quizá para el hombre futuro" [maps that highlight points, lines, accidents relevant to the contemporary

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[166] Mayorga, *El dramaturgo como historiador*, p. 2.

[167] Cf. Herbert Lindenberger, Aeschylus "depicts the *hybris* of the invaders who had been defeated at Salamis only a few years before in order to warn his victorious fellow Greeks of their own *hybris*", p. 6.

[168] *El dramaturgo como historiador,* p. 2.

[169] Mayorga, *Mi teatro histórico*, p.1.

men and women, to the future].[170] "Mappable" history indicates a change in the point of reference from *time* to *space*, which leads to another horizon of interpretation. Symbolically, history (an atlas of past events) is transplanted to a *visual* level, losing its abstract sense.

In his plays, Mayorga addresses themes of oppression from Spanish and European history. The Spanish civil war, the exile and repression that ensued anchor the action of *Siete hombres buenos* (1989), *Más ceniza* (1992), and *El jardín quemado* ("The Scorched Garden," 1996). The Holocaust features in *El traductor de Blumemberg* (1993), *Himmelweg (*Way to Heaven, 2003*),* and *El cartógrafo. Varsovia, 1: 400.000.* (2010).[171] The playwright satirizes the obsession with the past and its factual distortion, in *La tortuga de Darwin* (2007). *Cartas de amor a Stalin* ("Love Letters to Stalin," 1999) addresses the dangerous relationship between the artist and power, and raises the question of modern censorship. His recent plays *La lengua en pedazos* (2011), inspired by the life of Saint Teresa de Jesús, as well as *El arte de la entrevista* (2012) explore the limits of language as a means of communication in present society, where the narcissistic yearning for public exposure of private life prevails.

In *The Memory of the Present: Essay on Historical Time,* Italian philosopher Paolo Virno claims that history is the fulfillment of a previously determined script, as an act of repetition – but he remains unsure about the object of the repetition: "a repetition of what?"[172] Critic Oscar Cornago Bernal views this question from the perspective of the end of history. His vision implies that history is written *not* as a repetition of a past that is ever-returning, but as a way of "making a present viable, of accounting for a past that gives purpose to the present moment, to the here and now from which it is written."[173] This idea had circulated since the early 1940s when Walter Benjamin critiqued historicism and the viewing of the past as a continuum of progress in the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. Thesis IX employs Paul Klee's 1920 painting *Angelus Novus*, which depicts an abstract and stylized human figure, whose big head and arms are raised up in a gesture of wonder, fear or madness: "Where *we* see the appearance of a chain of events, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. […] That which we call progress, is *this* storm."[174] History for Benjamin is not only a "catastrophe in the past, but a permanent catastrophe, taking place here and now, in the present tense" (Cornago 273).

This highly pessimistic and overwhelming view of history is reflected in theater, by means of a radical transformation of character types and the abolition

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[170] Ibid.

[171] The oppression of the Jews and the Holocaust appear with frequency in Mayorga's theater. The playwright is part of the research group "Philosophy After the Holocaust" at the *Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas* (CSIC) in Madrid.

[172] Paolo Virno, *Il ricordo del presente. Saggio sul tempo storico.* Quot. in Cornago Bernal, p. 269.

[173] Cornago Bernal, "Dramaturgias para después de la historia", p. 269.

[174] Benjamin, Thesis IX. *Illuminations,* p. 258.

of a sense of completeness or even meaning in the plot itself. Stories without end replace the rich, dense, *dramatic* plays from the period between the 1960s to the 1980s. The sense of dialogue itself is challenged, with predominantly long monologues and numerous short scenes resembling excerpts from private diaries or internet blogs. We can easily situate Mayorga on this new horizon. The repetition of the past in the present and the multiple possibilities of "mapping" the past are visible in the multi-episodic structure of his work. A matrix of short scenes whose order can be easily swapped – *Himmelweg* –, or that advance almost farcically and absurdly to the denouement – *La tortuga de Darwin* –, or repeat endlessly, with small variations – *Cartas de amor a Stalin* –, or jump from present to past and vice versa like a boomerang – *El cartógrafo* – etc., show Mayorga's grasp of these theatrical trends.

Himmelweg (Camino del cielo, 2003*)* and *La tortuga de Darwin* (2008) are two of Mayorga's most critically acclaimed plays. Both describe his view(s) of history and display his unorthodox theatrical method. They are two radically different plays: the first is composed of five acts whose order can be *permutated* from the beginning, middle or end sections. This loose structure metaphorically calls for a free shuffle of the cards of history (by history I understand a sum of significant events from the past). The second play has a fluid structure – the action takes place over one long act – and a linear chronology. This contrast in form and organization does not preclude their overt reference to history. A historical background is present as a starting point for philosophical examination of ardent issues of the present. Thus, *Himmelweg* presents the 1944 Red Cross official visit to the Theresienstadt concentration camp and *La tortuga de Darwin* offers a survey of prominent events, dating from the publication of Marx' *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The structure of *Himmelweg* is a succession of short scenes, laden with repetitions, inversions, and permutations[175] of a single major situation: a Red Cross delegate visits a Nazi camp and is duped by a performance of normality into writing a favorable assessment of that camp's conditions. This amorphous scaffolding (the lack of a definite form) is visible in the multiple perspectives and rehearsals (*ensayos*) present in the play. The permutational frame and the absence of a satisfactory conflict resolution leave the audience puzzled, as these elements reposition the stage as a new place for looking at history, "ahí se crea una dramaturgia que permite revisar el pasado como forma de presente, o al menos como interrogante sobre ese presente atravesado de historias" [a dramaturgy is born there that allows the review of the past as a form of the present, or at least as a query about our present, which is traversed by histories] (Cornago 275).

Mayorga writes about current situations by surveying and reviving extreme scenarios from the past. He creates parallels with critical historical moments (Holocaust, Stalinist censorship, wars), to warn about the current state of democracy and to signal the factors (economic, military) that threaten to turn

[175] I thank professor and friend Julio Checa for this suggestion, easily understood given the playwright's former career as high school math teacher.

it into a corporatist system, whose rule over the citizen is maintained by a methodical "shock" therapy. This system exposes fragments of culture removed from context and delivers them in a format that is easily assimilated by a vulnerable and culturally indoctrinated consumer: a recipe for disaster.[176]

3.1. Kaleidoscopic History: *Himmelweg (Camino del cielo)* (2003)

> Is there anyone who's truly good? Maybe goodness is just make-believe. Man just wants to forget the bad stuff and believe in the made-up good stuff.
> - "Rashomon", dir. Akira Kurosawa, 1950

> Needing to have reality confirmed and experience enhanced by photographs is an aesthetic consumerism to which everyone is now addicted.
> - Susan Sontag, *On Photography*

On the merrily sensuous rhythms of Can-can from Jacques Offenbach's "Orpheus in the Underworld," two workers strike their hammers against an anvil, upper body naked, their diligence matching the beats of the music, while other workers appear keenly engaged in the manufacture of tools. A mask covers a welding worker's face from the hot sparks that his machine produces, in a modern rendition of Velázquez' *La fragua de Vulcano* [Apollo in the Forge of Vulcan]. Men in busy workshops toil away at their machines. Everyone is at work: women mold clay vases at the potter's wheel, men sculpt toy horses or jovial children riding dolphins. A world of fantasy, creativity and efficiency emerges. As the Can-can fades away, new takes show the manufacturing process of ladies' purses, the sewing of delicate embroidery, the mending of shoes, the tailoring of jackets, etc., on the strings of Mendelssohn's violin concerto. When the workday is over, the men rush away from the barracks to the football court. A great coliseum harbors hundreds of cheering faces as the teams enter the arena. Let the game begin. Despite its joyful note, associated with the French music hall, the Can-can, also known as "Infernal Gallop," gives an ominous verdict.

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[176] Juan Mayorga's article *Shock* describes modern man's daily life rhythm through the systematic exposure to constant violent collisions with the exterior world: "Como trabajador, como transeúnte de la metropolis mecanizada, como consumidor de la industria del tiempo libre, el hombre moderno se adhiere al ritmo de la máquina: al tempo del shock." *Primer Acto,* 273, 1998: 124.

These striking images are from the 1944 propaganda documentary filmed by the Nazis in the Jewish Ghetto Town of Theresienstadt, titled "The Führer Donates a Town to the Jews," or "Terezin: A Documentary Film from the Jewish Settlement Area."[177] Fearing a further deportation to the East (a destination whose specificity and terror the Jews were not aware of), many *volunteered* for the shooting of the documentary. Its purpose was to delude a Red Cross delegation that visited the camp. Decorated with gardens, a synagogue, and even a theater, Theresienstadt was portrayed as a thriving community, home to privileged Jews, among them many artists and intellectuals.[178]

Himmelweg or "Way to Heaven" departs from this *real* historical fact and presents a *mutant* or *kaleidoscopic* history centered on the issues of truth and representation, guilt and redemption. Divided into five short acts, "El relojero de Nuremberg" [The Nuremberg Clockmaster], "Humo" [Smoke], "Así será el silencio de la paz" [Thus Will be the Silence of Peace], "El corazón de Europa" [The Heart of Europe], and "Una canción para acabar" [An Ending Song], it proposes an original approach to the theme of the Holocaust, raising moral and ethical questions about humanitarian gestures in the present. Confronted with

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[177] See also Tzvetan Todorov's discussion of documentary camp along with other totalitarian (Stalinist and Nazi) strategies of fabricating false village sets for the persuasion of foreign (or local) visitors. *Hope and Memory,* pp. 115-117.

[178] The documentary "Ghetto Theresienstadt: Deception and Reality," directed by Irmgard von Zur Mühlen (2005) tells the complete story of the Theresienstadt ghetto. After the complete German takeover of June 27, 1942, the Czech were forced to abandon Theresienstadt and the Jews were moved there, in what became a genuine ghetto town, with certain areas such as the town park and the market square remaining off limits. Initially "advertised" as a "place of residence" for Jews over 65 years of age, who held decorations from World War I or who had contributed to the German political, economic, scientific or cultural life, a "camp for prominent Jews," Theresienstadt revealed its true face and purpose once the residents arrived there. The "Reich home for the aged", for which some Jews even signed home purchase contracts, deceived by the "semblance of legality," showed its real face when people were crowded in barracks and were scarcely fed. Theresienstadt was a special Jewish ghetto, and it functioned as a "real town," with a Jewish council appointed by the SS. There were cultural events, lectures, and there even existed a production process, whose products however were destined to the war economy. In their leisure time, a survivor recalls, most of the elite members attended lectures and performances, in order to kill time and to overcome the deceit of having been condemned to a life of seclusion. The prisoners in Theresienstadt did *not* know about Auschwitz, nor where other Jews were being taken. When someone escaped from Auschwitz and informed the Jewish Council about the situation, no one believed him. A Red Cross visit of 1943 left the delegates appalled; yet their report was kept confidential. When Danish Jews insisted on knowing more about the camp conditions, a period of six months of embellishment followed, culminating in clean streets, the building of a café, a theater, a music pavilion and flowerbeds in the market square. Mayorga's play is based on the second Red Cross visit of June 23, 1944. The delegation was composed of Danish and Swiss representatives, who were accompanied on the visit by representatives of the German Government and SS from Prague, as well as the Jewish elder Paul Epstein (the leader of the Jewish council). The tour followed a precisely prescribed route, with stages on foot and stretches by car. Epstein was only allowed to speak with the SS present. Everything was photographed by Maurice Rossel, the Swiss Red Cross delegate, who, naïve and credulous, wrote a favorable report at the end of the visit.

limitations raised by the ethical dimension of the topic, which many forms of representation pervert through an "obscene exhibition of violence" or a "sentimental manipulation of the viewer," Mayorga rejects these avenues in favor of approaching the frailty of human condition from a vantage point that leaves little room for optimism or hope for a better future.[179]

Himmelweg presents three versions of the Red Cross delegation visit to Theresienstadt, told from the point of view of the respective protagonists: a Red Cross delegate who visits the camp, the camp commander, whose goal is to conceal the true living conditions through a master performance, and Gershom Gottfried, a Jewish man selected to train the people for the performance of a normal life in the camp. Act I ("El relojero de Nuremberg") presents the Red Cross delegate's version, in retrospect after the end of the war. He describes the visit through Theresienstadt, in the company of the commander and Gershom, constantly referring to the photos taken during the visit and highlighting his humanitarian purpose. In Act II ("Humo") we see the rehearsal of the various roles that will be part of the performance. Act III ("Así será el silencio de la paz") presents the commander's rehearsal of his discourse. Both act I and act III have an extensive monologue form. Act IV ("El corazón de Europa") is the most complex. It juxtaposes the encounter of Gottfried and the commander and their elaboration of the structure of the performance, with the tragic denouement of the performance (the Jews are killed: "Cae el telón y la vida tiene que continuar. La vida tiene que continuar" [The curtain falls and life must go on. Life must go on] (35). The superposition of the *simulacrum* of the camp with the *real* conditions reveals the play's internal mechanism. The last act ("Una canción para acabar") shows Gottfried directing the rehearsal of the performance, unaware of its outcome.

Three major themes appear interwoven in the play, representation (simulacrum), truth (reality) and guilt. Seduced by the glamorous simulacrum of the camp, the delegate cannot see its real face and is troubled by guilt. My discussion of the play is organized around four major topics, respectively representation, truth, guilt and simulacrum. These facets compose the mutant or kaleidoscopic history that this play proposes. Dismantling the chronological sequence of events, *Himmelweg* combines the historical background with personal memory and testimony to show how an incursion into the past can prove to be both unsettling and cathartic.

Representation

In the opening act, the Red Cross delegate explains that providing medicine to the prisoners was just an excuse in order to gain entrance to the camp: "Ustedes me entienden: es solo un pretexto, lo de las medicinas es la excusa menos mala que se me ocurre […] Se trata de darle confianza, de hacer

[179] Quot. in Fermín Cabal, *Dramaturgia española de hoy*, p. 444.

teatro: 'Nos gustaría ayudar. Estamos en condiciones de suministrarles medicamentos" [You understand me: it's only a pretext, the medicine is the least worse excuse that occurs to me…It's a matter of making him trust me, of playacting: 'We'd like to help. We can send you medicine] (4). Playacting is the modus operandi of the visit, marking the communication between the commander and the delegate, as well as between Gershom and the delegate.

The second act, "Humo" ("Smoke"), which takes place *before* the actual arrival of the delegate, presents the rehearsals of several anonymous characters – "Boy 1", "Boy 2", "He", "She", "Girl" – who will be paraded on the day of the visit. Some boys try out for the scene with the *peonza* (spinning top):

> CHICO 4. Lo difícil es dar el tirón. Yo te puedo enseñar. Déjamela.
> CHICO 3. Métete en tus cosas.
> CHICO 4. Es muy bonita. Negra con la cabeza roja, me ha parecido. ¿Me la dejas ver?
> CHICO 3. Quítame las manos de encima.
> CHICO 4. Otra vez.
> CHICO 3. ¿Otra vez?
> CHICO 4. Aun no te había tocado. Has dicho "Quítame las manos de encima" antes de que te tocase.
> CHICO 3. ¿Desde el principio?
> CHICO 4. Desde "Métete en tus cosas". (13-14)
>
> [BOY 4. The first throw is the hard one. I can show you. Give it to me.
> BOY 3. Mind your own business.
> BOY 4. It's very pretty. Black with red tip, I think. Can I see it?
> BOY 3. Take your hands off me.
> BOY 4. Again.
> BOY 3. Again?
> BOY 4. It wasn't your turn yet. You said "Take your hands off me" before the cue.
> BOY 3. From the beginning?
> BOY 4. From "Mind your own business."]

They guide each other in order to produce a spotless performance on the day of the announced Red Cross visit, practicing until the lines come out right and their gestures are impeccable. A couple – She and He – is at their second rehearsal, which is marked by awkwardness and tension, "[…] las réplicas tropiezan o se encabalgan. EL le da a ELLA, envuelto como regalo, un paquete más pequeño que el anterior"[… their lines cross. HE gives HER a gift-wrapped package, smaller than before] (14). Instead of responding with her own script, the woman wonders how he can block out the sound of the trains, and the sight of the smoke. She makes a bold proposal of escape: "¿Y si corremos hacia el bosque? Podemos cruzar el bosque y llegar al río" [What if we ran to the woods?

We can cross the woods and reach the river] (15). A little girl rehearses half immersed in a pond, playing with her doll:

> NIÑA: Sé amable, Rebeca, saluda a este señor. No tengas miedo. Yo te enseño. Yo te voy a sostener. No tengas miedo. *Tenemos que estar aquí hasta que nos digan.* No tengas miedo. Yo te enseño. Uno dos. Uno dos. No tengas miedo. Mueve las piernas. Uno dos. Los brazos. La cabeza. La boca. Hasta que nos digan. No tengas miedo. Uno dos. Sé amable Rebeca saluda a este señor. No tengas miedo. Uno dos. Sé amable Rebeca. Saluda. A este señor. No tengas. Miedo. (17, emphasis mine)
>
> [LITTLE GIRL: Be nice, Rebeca, say Hi to this man. Don't be afraid. I'll show you. I'll hold you. Don't be afraid. *We have to be here until they say so.* Don't be afraid. I'll show you. One two. One two. Don't be afraid. Move your legs. One two. Your arms. Your head. Your mouth. Until they say so. Don't be afraid. One two. Be nice Rebeca say Hi to this man. Don't be afraid. One two. Be nice Rebeca. Say Hi. To this man. Don't be. Afraid.]

The word "fear" – *miedo* – appears seven times, showing both the girl's fear and her innocent rebellion vis-à-vis the representation. Instead of rehearsing a part, she repeats real words. These three examples show how the "performance" of normality and the design of the simulacrum are woven together by the commander.[180]

The play's title, the compound noun "Himmelweg," German for "Way to Heaven," is a euphemism used to refer to the gas chamber in the extermination camps. The use of euphemisms –Tzvetan Todorov writes – was an effective means of "hiding reality and erasing all traces of memory" during the Second World War (*Hope and Memory* 115). The last stop during the visit is the train station, from which a cement path leads to the hangar, presented as infirmary, or the way to heaven, in reality a gas chamber. It offers the best view of the town, but walking towards it, everything appears like clockwork:

> […] desde lo alto de la rampa se ve la ciudad entera. En la plaza, todo vuelve a moverse como un juguete al que se ha dado cuerda: los niños de los columpios, los viejos paseando al sol, el vendedor de globos… (9)

[180] Gershom, Rebecca and her doll Walter are the only named characters. Refusing to name other characters, and introducing them solely through their respective function in the mechanism (the performance), such as "Boy", "He", "She," etc., Mayorga seeks an illusion of mechanization (all have lost their identities). Herbert Lindenberger suggests that such a method of anonymous characters creates an illusion of timelessness (p. 117).

> […from the top of the ramp you can see the entire town. In the square, everything starts to move like a rewound toy: the children in the swings, the elderly strolling in the sun, the balloon seller…]

This is a very tense moment. The delegate touches the hangar door, but he does not push it open. Unaware that his decision automatically cancels the possibility of seeing the real face of the camp, he cannot fulfill his humanitarian and heroic aspirations with which he had arrived.

In *Hope and Memory,* Tzvetan Todorov describes the master narratives that dominate history writing (heroic and victimizing) and distinguishes the four roles in historical narratives that have an ethical dimension (those narratives viewed as lessons for posterity, such as the Jewish Holocaust): benefactor, beneficiary, malefactor and victim (142). The delegate aspires to be the "benefactor," but ironically becomes a "malefactor," increasing the victim's anguish. Instead of opening the hangar door and discovering it is a gas chamber, he believes it is the infirmary: "Todavía recuerdo el frío en los dedos al tocarla. Y los ojos de Gottfried, que se vuelve para mirarme. ¿Cree que voy a abrir esa puerta? También yo creo que voy a abrirla"[I still recall the cold in my fingers when I touched it. And Gottfried's eyes, when he turned to look at me. Does he think I'm going to open that door? Even I think I'm going to open it] (9).

Heroism is a key issue in the play. According to Mayorga, in our moral attempt to provide help to those in need, we may do more damage than good because we fail to see the truth or we stop midway:

> Maurice Rossel[181] me interesa porque se parece a mucha gente que yo conozco. O porque me reconozco en él. Maurice Rossel quiere ser bueno, y sabe que para serlo necesita la verdad, pero prefiere creer lo que le dicen. No abre puertas. […] Si hubiera abierto alguna de esas puertas, habría descubierto que se hallaba envuelto por un gran decorado; decorado en que los seres humanos representaban la vida que les estaba siendo negada. […] Maurice Rossel estaba viajando por el infierno sin saberlo. O sin querer saberlo.[182]
>
> [I'm interested in Maurice Rossel because he is like many people I know. Or because I recognize myself in him. Maurice Rossel wants to be good, and he knows that in order to be good he needs the truth, but he prefers to believe what he's being told. He doesn't open doors… If he had opened one of those doors, he would have discovered that he was surrounded by a great décor; a décor in which human beings were staging the life that was being denied to

[181] Maurice Rossel is one of the Red Cross delegates who visited the Theresienstandt camp in 1944.
[182] Mayorga, *Teatro y verdad,* pp. 1-2.

> them…Maurice Rossel was traveling through hell without knowing it. Or without wanting to know.]

Perhaps after seeing the mechanism, the delegate didn't want to disturb it. Perhaps he knew instantly that the hangar was not really the infirmary. The plot proposes a victim-villain-hero triangle in which it is hard to be a hero ("benefactor") when the "victim" (Gottfried) withholds his cooperation and the villain ("malefactor", the commander) is cultured and welcoming. The hero is weak and vain: "Pero, ¿y si estoy equivocado, después de todo? No me estaré dejando llevar por mis prejuicios? O por la arrogancia. Por la vanidad de quien cree ver más allá de lo que la vista ve" [But, what if I'm wrong, after all? Aren't I letting myself be driven by prejudice? Or by arrogance. By the vanity of he who believes seeing more than meets the eye] (9). He is not wrong to assume that he is carried away by vanity, but, ironically, he *misinterprets* his "vanity."

After returning to Berlin, the delegate stood by the reality of what he had seen and photographed: "La gente me pregunta: ¿No viste los hornos?" "¿No viste los trenes?" No, yo no vi nada de eso. "¿El humo?" "¿La ceniza?" No. Todo aquello que dicen que había aquí, yo no pude verlo" [People ask me: didn't you see the furnaces? The trains? No, I didn't see any of that. The smoke? The ashes? No. All that everyone says was here, I failed to see] (10). Crematoriums, trains, smoke, ashes, all were missing from the picture put together for him by the commander. He failed to see them because he expected others to point them out, he expected to see Gottfried or the children ask for help, make signs, and allude to the abnormality of the town. Instead, his report indicated that the hygiene and the living conditions were satisfactory: "Mi memoria vuelve a escribirlo todas las noches" [My memory writes it over and over every night] admits the delegate, insisting that "yo hubiera escrito la verdad si ellos me hubieran ayudado" [I would have written the truth, had they helped me] (10), implying that the victim – Gottfried – was passive, and thus indirectly *blaming* him.

Unable to obtain the "sign" he needs to give help, the delegate fulfills a final act of morality, by sending boxes of medicine to those who were destined to die before receiving them. Thus, carrying his self-assumed role of "benefactor" to fulfillment, the delegate indulged in what Todorov calls "reflex compassion," a moral response to those in suffering, nevertheless done superficially and automatically (Todorov, *Hope and Memory* 140). This Good Samaritan gesture matches his inborn vanity and justice-driven self. The medicine serves to fix a malfunction in the mechanism. Thus, the delegate did *nothing* to aid the prisoners; instead, he assisted in the functioning of the murder machine. Todorov draws attention to the falsity with which a simple donation is conducted nowadays in the name of morality:

> Wars, massacres, famines, and natural disasters now unleash ubiquitous images of corpses, of wounded dying without medical assistance, of weeping adults and skeletal children, which make us

> shout 'This must stop!' at our television screens. So we donate a bag of rice or a handful of dollars to the cause of good. Compassion is better than indifference to be sure, but it also has secondary effects […] it turns evil into a mere misfortune, […] and in so doing it gives us all a good conscience by making us valiant victims by adoption. (140)

Like the bag of rice or the handful of dollars, the boxes of medicine symbolize an act of modern morality, conducted in the name of guilt annihilation and conscience liberation. Slavoj Žižek also denounces such acts as "postmodern racism at its most essential":

> When we are shown scenes of starving children in Africa, with a call for us to do something to help them, the underlying *ideological* message is something like: "Don't think, don't politicize, forget about the true causes of their poverty, just act, contribute money, so that you will never have to think![183]

After all, the delegate does repeat that he would write the same report "palabra por palabra. Lo firmaría otra vez" [word for word. I would sign it again] (10).

Truth

In high culture or mass media, the depiction of or references to violence in stylistically excessive and sustained ways, is defined as estheticization of violence.[184] Films, television shows and daily news reports presenting violence in this manner create for the audience an *analogy* with images, signs, artworks, cultural symbols or concepts, Margaret Bruder argues.

The third act, titled "Así será el silencio de la paz" consists of the commander's monologue. Here it is he who uninterruptedly rehearses the lines that he will pronounce in the presence of the delegate. His speech is marked by numerous references to literature, culture, theater, travel, peace, unity, and progress. He includes philosophical adages, such as Baruch Spinoza's meditations on love and hatred, and mentions the classics – Shakespeare, Corneille, Calderón. He is a pseudo-intellectual, maneuvering a sophisticated rhetoric in order to appear as a paradigm of culture and enlightenment. In reality, he is a product of global barbarism. In *Cultura global y barbarie global,* Mayorga describes global culture as a particular experience that appears as the

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[183] *Living in the End Times,* p. 4.

[184] Margaret Bruder, "Aestheticizing Violence, or How To Do Things with Style". http://www.gradnet.de/papers/pomo98.papers/mtbruder98.htm [1 March 2013]. Bruder argues that the seduction of violence in film and media functions according to the same method that Nietzsche suggested for Wagner's opera: it was "decadent" because it was promoting "style" and "effect," and diminished the "truth."

sum of all experiences, and able to be transformed into merchandise and interchangeable with the "globalization of a single culture" (60). Mayorga uses Walter Benjamin's classification of culture to the extreme. Benjamin considered that culture was not threatened by barbarism, but that barbarism was part of it, as he wrote in Thesis VII, "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (256). Mayorga links the production and consumption of culture to a market that functions according to the laws of nature, with alternative moments of crisis and evolution,

> […] el hombre ha de vivir en el mercado como en una segunda naturaleza. Y ante la naturaleza no caben valoraciones morales. "Bien" o "mal" son palabras "demasiado humanas" en el mundo de lo natural. A la naturaleza no se le puede pedir responsabilidad, justicia o compasión (61).
>
> [man has to live in the market society as if in a natural environment. And in nature there are no moral assessments. "Good" or "Evil" are "too human" words in the natural world. You can't ask nature for responsibility, justice or compassion]

This is why the delegate is both seduced by the desire to help, and paralyzed by the unexpected compliance of his victims.

When he speaks to the delegate, the commander mentions his collection of the "best" one hundred books. With an air of nonchalance, he asks him to say "peace" in his native language, and mentions history, culture, and literature. But, obsessed with mathematical precision, the commander harbors a diabolical plan: select one hundred *people* for the performance, just like the one hundred *books* from his personal library. He justifies the numerical selection of participants with the coldness of the butcher, while parading the philosophy of Aristotle: "Si un nudo es demasiado complejo, el ojo se desinteresa de él. Si una melodía es demasiado complicada, el oído la desecha como ruido. Por eso sale tan mal esta escena" [If a knot is too complex, the eye will lose interest. If a melody is too complicated, the ear rejects is as noise. That's why this scene comes out so badly] (32). He removes people from the performance with shocking ease:

> *EL COMANDANTE comprueba que quedan cien expedientes.* ¿Dónde estás tú? Te habíamos olvidado, Gershom. *Va a añadir el expediente de GOTTFRIED. Vacila.* Pero, si te añado a ti, sobra uno. *Aparta un expediente del grupo.* Ahora sí. (34)
>
> [*THE COMMANDER verifies that there are one hundred files left*. Where are you? We had forgotten you, Gershom. *He is going to add Gottfried's file. He hesitates.* But, if I add you, we have an extra one. *Removes a file from the pile.* Now it's OK.]

The number one hundred is a synecdoche for civility and "global" culture. The one hundred people chosen to appear in the public square as the delegate walks by during the visit are a token of the remainder who are sent to die: "la mejor solución para ellos: la enfermería" [the best solution for them: the infirmary] (32). The infirmary and the way to heaven, both euphemisms to conceal the harsh reality of the crimes, are mechanisms to divert the visitor's attention.

The commander distinguishes between "them" and "us," a terrible and dangerous separation which, according to Todorov, causes the prolongation of evil (understood as an accumulation of violence, wars, crimes, etc.) in the present world: "[…] the underlying premise of totalitarianism is the simplified division of the world into good people and bad people, people to be promoted and those to be eliminated" (*Hope and Memory* 141). In "El teatro es un arte político", a manifesto on the occasion of the World Theater Day in March 2003, Mayorga decries the bipolar split in our society: "Nos están educando para la barbarie. Nos están educando para dominar o ser dominados; para dominar a otros o para resignarnos al dominio de otros. Nos están educando para matar o para morir" [We're being educated for brutality. We're being educated to rule or be ruled; to rule others or to resign under others' rule. We're being educated to kill or to die].[185]

The scene in act IV that presents the commander's apparent dialogue with Gershom is a critique of globalized culture. The stage direction indicates that he is the only one present ("El comandante con la peonza") but he speaks in the second person, as if addressing Gottfried: "¿Habías oído hablar de la melancolía del actor? Ahora sabes de que se trata. Cae el telón y de pronto, todo ese mundo de palabras y gestos, todo ese mundo se desvanece." [Have you heard of the actor's melancholy? Now you know what it's about. The curtain falls and suddenly that world of words and gestures dissipates]. (35) The world of words and gestures, the world of acting and actors disappears once the curtain falls. The magic spell is broken and life must go on as before. The commander repeats (to an imaginary Gottfried) the same line, "Cae el telón y la vida tiene que continuar", making excuses for the final solution, "Cae el telón y el actor vuelve a la vida. Y no siempre la vida es agradable. Tú lo sabes tan bien como yo, no siempre la vida es dulce. No vivimos en el paraíso, Gerhard." [The curtain falls and the actor returns to his life. And life is not always pleasant. You know this as well as I do, life is not always sweet. We don't live in a paradise, Gerhard] (35).

Guilt

Upon concluding his visit to Theresienstadt, the delegate wrote a favorable report on the conditions of prisoner detainment. The play opens with

[185] *Primer Acto* 297, 2003: interior cover.

his recollective discourse; he speaks directly to the (real time) audience, after the war, when the reality of the concentration camps became known. The delegate describes the positive image of the camp during the visit, and defends his report despite the contrary reality. It is uncertain if he had an idea of what was *really* going on in the camp at the time of and during the actual visit. Stressing the extent of his humanitarian spirit, he reveals the motivation for his visit: "Una mañana, en una de esas conversaciones en que se mezclan el trabajo y la vida, acabamos hablando del hombre que había sido dueño de la casa: un judío […] acabamos decidiendo que uno de nosotros tenía que visitar los campos de internamiento civil" [One morning, in one of those conversations in which one mingles work and personal matters, we ended up speaking about the man who had owned the house: a Jew… we ended up deciding that one of us had to visit the civil internment camps] (4). Despite his humane motivation, this decision is fulfilled with distance, coldness and vanity.

During the visit, the delegate is welcomed by "Mayor" Gershom Gottfried, who introduces himself as "guide." Seeing the delegate's camera, he gives him permission to take photos. The commander also accompanies them. Judging from the motivation for the visit and the small bribes he gave to gain access to the camp[186], the delegate appears as a man of moral integrity and practical intelligence. Expecting to see terrible things, he came prepared with the camera, to document the reality of the camp. But, to his shock, he finds a neatly organized and functional little town, with casual people strolling through the flowers of the main plaza. He does not know that the little town is put together on purpose for his visit. He still takes photos, but as a means to *disprove* general (bad) opinion about the camps. His photos thus validate a non-cruel (yet fake) reality.

The symbolism of the camera as a means to document reality is twisted.[187] The delegate's camera becomes hostile, in agreement with Susan Sontag's belief that "There is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera" (*On Photography* 7). Finding the *opposite* of what he had expected, something changes inside the delegate. The scope of the visit was to report the living conditions of camp prisoners, from the premise that a terrible reality waited to be uncovered. Faced with a different reality, the delegate changes his assumed knowledge (and superiority) – the man with the camera, uncovering ugly truths for the world to the shame of the Nazis –, to a position of humble inferiority: the man with the camera bowing to the Nazi for their permission to photograph. The constant interpellation of the audience, "Ustedes quizá las hayan visto, esas fotos" [You

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[186] He lists the "schemes" that allowed his access to the camp: "[…] cartones de tabaco, medias de nylon, transistores americanos que resultaban convincentes a la hora de conseguir un papel. Un papel y se abría una barrera ante mi coche" [cartons of cigarettes, nylon stockings, American transistor radios, which were convincing when needing to get a piece of paper. A piece of paper and a barrier would lift in front of my car] (4).

[187] Paraphrasing Roland Barthes, his camera is *not* lucid. *Camera lucida.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

may have seen those photos] (6), is a defensive act, sustained by solid proof – photographs furnish evidence – in a refusal to admit guilt. Unaware that, like drawings and paintings, "photographs are an *interpretation* of the world" (*On Photography* 7, emphasis mine), the delegate thought he was documenting reality. Instead, he was documenting the false appearance of normality projected by the commander and bolstered by his own subconscious desire to help. Throughout his visit, he sees children playing and couples courting, everything bearing a normal appearance.

To further bolster the image of normality, the commander cynically asks, "¿Qué esperaba? […] ¿Hombres flacos con pijamas de rayas? También yo he oído esas *fantasías*. También usted las ha oído, ¿verdad Gottfried?" [What did you expect? … Skinny men in striped pajamas? I, too, heard of those *fantasies*. You heard them too, right Gottfried?] (6, emphasis mine). This provocative question conceals the truth by paradoxically uttering it. Thus, reality is turned into fantasy. The very people he meets during the visit are the *live* proof that he's being deceived. But the Representative *cannot* decode their behavior, taking it *ad literam.* The encounter with a little girl who plays with her doll is emblematic: "En el río, una niña juega con un muñeco. Yo me detengo a fotografiar a esa niña" [In the river, a girl plays with a doll. I stop to photograph that girl] (6). When Gottfried describes the mechanism of the station's clock, the delegate feels that he is being addressed by a robot, "No solo ahora, cuando me explica el movimiento del reloj, también al conversar sobre el tiempo o al ofrecerme pan. Gottfried habla como un autómata" [Not only now, when he explains the clock's movement, but also when talking about the weather or when offering me bread. Gottfried speaks like a machine] (7).

When does the delegate reach this conclusion? *Now,* in the present, when narrating his version of the story for the audience? Or does he recall this impression from memory? His conflict is between intuition and posterior guilt. He tries to convince both the audience and himself of the undeniable realistic quality of what he had seen: "Un joven corteja a una muchacha en un banco de la estación. Un viejo lee un periódico. Dos niños juegan a la peonza. Quizás ustedes hayan visto esas fotografías" [A young man courts a girl on a bench in the station. An elderly man reads a newspaper. Two boys play with a spinning top. You may have seen those photos] (7).

The simple description of the images, along with the insistence on the fact that the audience *may have seen the photos* of the places and people described, emphasize the false reality of the camp, paradoxically supported by the material document, the photos. This indicates the delegate's gullibility and inability to recognize the simulacrum. The peculiarity of the camp becomes evident when, during the game of *peonza*, he sees the boys' reaction when the toy falls at the feet of the commander: "Los niños se miran sin saber qué hacer, como si ese momento no estuviese previsto" [The boys look at each other not knowing what to do, as if that moment hadn't been foreseen] (7). By inviting the audience to confirm his doubts about the spuriousness of the people, "La pareja, el viejo, los

niños, ¿no hay algo artificial en ellos?" [The couple, the elderly man, the boys, isn't there something artificial in them?] (7), the delegate voices a concern regarding the reality of the camp during the visit. Wandering through the camp, he admits to feeling that he, too, is part of the game: "Empiezo a sentir que también yo soy una pieza del juguete" [I start to feel that I am, too, part of a toy] (8), but continues to document the tableau of falsity and deceit.

Frozen by the "glamour" of the performance and the commander's erudition, he kept on taking photos instead of *seeing* the full picture of the camp. The camera's interposition between the photographer and the subject photographed is a symbol of passivity or non-intervention: "The person who intervenes cannot record; the person who is recording cannot intervene" (Sontag 12). The act of photographing prevents him from taking an extra step and helping the prisoners, like his original intention was.

The Red Cross delegate embodies the modern mentality that help must be given at any cost, and those who offer it receive praise. However, the Jews did *not* ask for help: "necesito que alguno de ellos, el viejo, la pareja, los niños, que alguno me haga una señal. En ningún momento nadie ha dicho: 'necesito ayuda' [I need one of them, the elderly man, the couple, the boys, someone, to make a sign. No one ever said 'I need help'] (7). As a form of self-justification, these words show the delegate's commitment to the *idea* of justice, not to justice itself. Content with having performed his duty, he leaves the camp, photos in hand, and writes a report matching their unreality.

Simulacrum

Postmodern sociologist Jean Baudrillard denounced the "signs" that have become referents not for objects, but for other "signs": "Simulation… is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal."[188] Baudrillard's example of the map – the symbol or sign – that replaces the territory – the real, physical object – resonates with the image of moral desolation that Mayorga creates in the play and with his own map metaphor. Baudrillard wrote that the shreds of the (real) territory are "slowly rotting across the map" (the sign), spreading into our existence and replacing the referent (the territory) with signs and symbols whose network will result confusing and alienating: "The desert of the real itself."[189] Two decades later he is echoed by Žižek, whose *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* (2002), published closer to *Himmelweg,* captures the tension and anguish of present times. Žižek identifies a common element for twentieth-century philosophy, culture and life: "the passion for the Real."[190] The pursuit of the "Real" has macro and micro effects: mass violence, massacres,

[188] Cf. Baudrillard, "Precession of the Simulacra", p. 1732, *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.*
[189] Ibid. p. 1733.
[190] By "Real", Žižek refers to an extreme desire to perceive the surrounding reality, people, and ourselves as alive, vibrant and active, which leads to an intensification of violent practices such as surveillance, behavior imitating that of TV shows, extreme body tattooing, etc.

terrorist attacks, wars broadcasted live, and, respectively, damages done to the body, such as cuts, tattoos, etc. (10) Ironically, the outcome of this human desire to grasp "Real reality" is a further separation from it, and an increasing immersion in virtual reality, which paradoxically forces us to perceive even "Real reality" as virtual (11). The expansion of hyperreality – from Baudrillard to Žižek – is associated with late-capitalist consumerist societies and the progressive degradation they impose on the *human* being.

This is the climate that Mayorga's play critiques when it confronts the Red Cross delegate with a simulacrum of a Nazi concentration camp. He is the human being (caring, philanthropic, compassionate) who faces a virtual reality diabolically disguised as a "real reality." He is forced by the concreteness of the evidence – which he photographs – to abandon the original idea of the camp that he had in mind, and believe in the virtual one. In other words, he is made to behave in real reality by the rules of virtual reality: he touches the hangar door and does not open it, because by that time he is already *convinced* that it is the infirmary. His behavior of constantly taking photos becomes, by these tokens, precisely that of a soul-less, virtual avatar of himself, who mistakes the extermination camp for a "virtual Jewish community." The excess of signs and virtual realities results in the dehumanization of the individual.

Contemporary social life slides into a "staged fake," and the result of being taken in by the signs that disguise "real reality" is a terrible, lifelong anguish of returning to the past and confronting self-guilt. Hence, the delegate's constant reference to the photos he took. Despite having heard about the "real reality" of the camp, he stands by his experience of the "virtual reality," when he claims that he would sign the *same* favorable report again. The seduction of the simulacrum offsets any ulterior correction of its "virtual reality." This situation warns that even if the virtual (the simulacrum) is detracted, its effects are lasting and pernicious for the individual and for human society.

Mayorga stages consciousness and conscience at play in reflecting on the past, which alludes to the present state of Spain. The delegate's discourse voices his doubts and also those of the audience. The method of putting the good-hearted delegate on trial (self-trial) and involving the audience as jury is an original way of framing this concern. Through the lesson of the Nazi extermination camp Mayorga sets the scene for a corresponding interrogation of the Spanish context. Even if the Civil War is over, its residual material still looms in people's consciousness and can erupt in the most unsuspected forms.[191] The consequences of guilt, leading to anguish and, worst of all, moral decay (the

[191] In *Diario de un skin,* the author, an infiltrated journalist in the neo Nazi movement, inserts the lyrics of one of the songs popular among the youth members: "¡Al arma, al arma, al arma!, soy fascista, terror del comunista./ Somos del fascismo componentes./ Luchando por la causa hasta la muerte. / Y golpearemos fuerte fuerte" (28), as well as other songs replete with anti-Semitic lyrics: "Seis millones de judíos a la cámara de gas, / seis millones más, seis millones más"[Six million Jews to the gas chamber/ Six million more, six million more], which resemble the commander's rhetoric.

delegate's chilling affirmation that he would not hesitate to sign a favorable Nazi report *again*, despite of the evidence against it) can occur on *any* terrain laden with hyperreality – which can be identified in Mayorga's unique master design of cartoonish characters deployed in "mappable" situations. The delegate's ethical drive is annihilated by the simulacrum whose devastating effects convert him, over time, into a cartoon, a two-dimensional element in a virtual world. What's at stake in Mayorga's parable is well put by Žižek when he writes that, "When I miss a crucial ethical opportunity, and fail to make a move that would 'change everything', the very nonexistence of what *I should have done* will haunt me for ever: although what I did not do does not exist, its spectre continues to insist" (22).

This play presents the performance of a façade of history. The Jewish prisoners of the Theresienstadt concentration camp become impromptu actors. Gottfried's and the ninety-nine unnamed prisoners' fate is sealed by an order sent from Berlin. Instead of being killed upon their arrival, their life is extended so they may stage the performance. The hope that their lives will be spared is the only reason why they go along with the show, revealing a cruel matrix of life. Their destiny is sealed: nothing can change it no matter how they act. Other people could replace them, since they have no identity. The prisoners whom the delegate sees during his visit are already dead. "El colegio, el teatro, la sinagoga', le dicen, y él acepta que detrás de las puertas están realmente el colegio, el teatro y la sinagoga," [He's told 'The school, the theater, the synagogue', and he accepts that behind the doors there really are the school, the theater and the synagogue] Mayorga comments, arguing that: "Si hubiera abierto alguna de esas puertas, habría descubierto que se hallaba envuelto por un gran decorado; decorado en que los seres humanos representaban la vida que les estaba siendo negada" [If he had opened one of those doors, he would have discovered that he was surrounded by a great décor; a décor in which human beings were staging the life that was denied to them].[192]

Mayorga does not blame the delegate; rather, he suggests that he "represents" how life works where truth is involved. Without a mental frame, no one sees it. This is why he involves the audience in the process: "[…] la verdad no es natural; la verdad es una construcción. Es necesario un artificio que muestre lo que el ojo no ve" [… truth is not natural; truth is a construction. It's necessary to have a device that shows what the eye doesn't see].[193]

As a political art, the mission of theater is, like that of philosophy, to show the truth.[194] However, the Red Cross delegate leaves the performance set misinformed and unable to decode the simulacrum. He is the embodiment of a human prototype who, instead of being proactive, plays the game set up by the higher order bureaucrats, who lead him to believe that he is independent, supportive and free. As a result he condemns the ones he is supposed to help.

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[192] *Teatro y verdad*, p. 2.

[193] Ibid.

[194] Mayorga, "El teatro es un arte político", *Primer Acto* 297, March 2003, interior cover.

This type of society is produced by a political system whose "genius lies in wielding total power without appearing to, without establishing concentration camps, or enforcing ideological uniformity, or forcibly suppressing dissident elements so long as they remain ineffectual" (Wolin 57).

José Sanchis Sinisterra had argued that *¡Ay, Carmela!* was *not* a play about the Spanish Civil War. By the same token, it can be argued that *Himmelweg* is not a play about the Holocaust.[195] The text departs from a specific historical event and transposes it to a contemporary political and cultural context, with cartoonish, superficial characters, in a fable-like manner. The structure of the play is deliberately non-chronological and emphasizes the performance aspect of "historical reality." *Himmelweg* lacks a definite denouement: each act can be shifted around to the beginning, middle or ending sections, creating a kaleidoscopic game of plot variations. The built-in metatheatrical plot together with the flexible arrangement of the scenes, suggests an unstable world, dominated by simulacra at every level.

Mayorga's play argues that certain ways of understanding history are no longer "true." He suggests that history is staged – constructed by powerful interests –, but also conveys a sense of despair at the possibility that the truth of history is a mere chimera. To communicate these concerns, he invites the audience to reflect on the ethical responsibility present in such a world. Viewers are challenged to fit the fragments of the story together, and to come out with their own conclusion of the play: assign blame and respond to the question "what actually happened?"

The testimony of the Red Cross delegate presents a disquieting map of the past, with sets of images rearranged at will by memory. This knowledge, albeit fragmented, creates a totalizing image of a European past that is meant to give the Spanish audience a sense of instability and unease. *La tortuga de Darwin* (2008) presents a gloomy survey of world historical catastrophes (wars, conflicts, deaths). However, the presence of an absurd human-tortoise (Harriet) as main character and witness of these events, and who manages to survive in this cruel world, attempts to lift the weight of the present with methods proper to comedy, fable and farce.

[195] In *Teatro y verdad,* the author explains that the purpose of the play is to express an idea of truth, and to increase the audience's level of critique with the exterior world. At the end, the audience "debería salir más pobre en ideas, más inseguro, más dispuesto a abrir todas las puertas." [should emerge poorer in ideas, more insecure, more willing to open all doors].

3.2. *La tortuga de Darwin* (2008) or the Absurd Game of History

Ninguna fábula es dañina, excepto cuando alcanza a verse en ella alguna enseñanza. Esto es malo. Si no fuera malo, el mundo se regiría por las fábulas de Esopo; pero en tal caso desaparecería todo lo que hace interesante el mundo […] lo mejor es acercarse a las fábulas buscando de qué reír.[196]
- Augusto Monterroso, *Cómo acercarse a las fábulas*

[No fable is harmful, unless a certain lesson is visible in it. This is bad. If it wasn't bad, the world would govern itself by Aesop's fables; but in this case, everything that makes the world interesting would disappear…the best is to approach fables looking for something to laugh at.]

Nos adaptamos para sobrevivir.
- Harriet

[We adapt to survive]

Having reached the venerable age of one hundred and ninety-nine years, Harriet, Darwin's tortoise,[197] now transformed into an old woman according to Darwin's law of exponential evolution, arrives from an extensive and debilitating journey through war-torn Europe at the home of the History Professor. She hopes to find a passage to her native Galapagos Islands in exchange for her memories of critical historical events.

Harriet has traveled the world since the mid-nineteenth century and has been an exceptional witness to major episodes from European and world history: the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*, the Dreyfus Affaire, two World Wars, the bombing of Guernica, the Jewish Holocaust, the Cold War, and the Fall of the

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[196] Monterroso, *Cómo acercarse a las fábulas,* http://www.ciudadseva.com/textos/cuentos/esp/monte/como_acercarse_a_las_fabulas.htm . 21 July 2013.

[197] Harriet entered the Guinness Book of Records for her longevity and in recognition of her life saga from Darwin's arms to a Zoo in the Australian state of Queensland, where she died in 2006: "Muere la tortuga 'Harriet', el animal más viejo del mundo", http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2006/06/23/ciencia/1151063626.html [12 February 2013]

Berlin Wall. As a witness to history and representing the past, she has come to speak of humanity's failure and warn about the future.

Greedy, vain and extremely ambitious, the Professor, Beti,[198] his wife, and the Doctor – who gets hold of Harriet once she is brought to a hospital – are determined to exploit Harriet as a source of knowledge and personal profit. The Professor interrogates Harriet, the Doctor runs tests on her, and Beti designs an entertainment show, entitled "Darwin's Tortoise," for which she makes Harriet sign a life contract.

Harriet recounts a series of extravagant events to the Professor: Marx's elaboration of a "second" version of the *Communist Manifesto*, her swimming across the English Channel, Henri Toulouse Lautrec's dedication of a painting to her, being present at Red Square in Moscow next to Stalin, Lenin, Trotsky *and* the "Demidovich twins." Clearly invented, these preposterous recollections seduce the Professor, Doctor and Beti, and trigger a series of funny events.

Through Harriet's recollections, Mayorga surveys Nazism, the Jewish Holocaust, the Stalinist regime, the Spanish Civil War, the Cold War, and other calamities in world history to warn about their end result, transmitting a pessimistic view about the faults of current political and social systems. At the same time, he creates a distanced and comic effect through Harriet's character and her encounters with the three greedy humans. Harriet is the epitome of civilization and barbarity, a sublimation of compassion and cruelty, a fantastic creature who laughs at humanity's frailty and decadence. The play shows the clash between two visions of history: the Historian's linear and scholarly organization, which testifies to the progress of humanity, and Harriet's testimonial and chaotic experience, bearing the nightmarish traces of a mad jungle from which only those who learn to adapt escape.

La tortuga de Darwin follows suit to other Mayorga "fables" that feature a mixed human and animal cast: *Coloquio de los perros*, *Últimas palabras de Copito de Nieve*, *El elefante ha ocupado la catedral,* and *La paz perpetua. Coloquio de los perros* was inspired by Cervantes' homonymous *novela ejemplar* featuring two dogs talking about the state of their lives and the cause of their misfortunes. *Últimas palabras de Copito de nieve* is drawn from Kafka's *A Report for an Academy* and features the albino gorilla "Copito de nieve" (Snowball). Kept in isolation for the final days of her life, Copito delivers a philosophical speech in the style of Descartes and Voltaire, with people lining up to see her. The protagonists of *La paz perpetua* are dogs from a special anti-terrorist canine force. Because they feature animals in human situations and appear to have a moral outreach, it is tempting to place Mayorga's "fables" next to the fables of Aesop or La Fontaine. The latter are sources of wisdom, laying down guidelines, and reinforcing moral values. Mayorga's fables depart from this standard and, rather than settling on a moral verdict, present absurd cases of fully evolved, gifted and philosophical

[198] Beti, a former student, married the Doctor only to become his maidservant, a jealous, intellectually limited but very astute woman.

animals living next to obtuse humans.[199] These "modern fables" announce several anxieties and malfunctions in current society: social maladjustment, greed (Professor, Doctor, Beti), paradoxical exclusion (confinement) of the learned (Copito), obliteration of ethics (the humans' experimentation on and exploitation of Harriet), and paranoid human obsessions (the obsession with personal protection, justified by paranoid fear in *La paz perpetua*[200]).

This section is organized in three sub-sections, which address the topics of pessimism (as a continuation from the discussion of *Himmelweg*), ethics and humor. Given the play's resemblance to fable, the gravity of these topics is lightened by Harriet's part-human, part-tortoise attributes. Pessimism, ethics and humor are thus seen through the eyes of a tortoise, and her interactions with humans.

Pessimism at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century

The Professor is interested in Harriet's account because she "ha visto mucho. Pero lo más importante es la perspectiva. Ella ha visto la Historia desde abajo. A ras de la tierra"[she has seen a lot. But what's most important is her perspective. She has seen History from below. At ground level] (19). Looking for a way to fit her testimonials into his volumes of history, he is a stickler for chronology, catching her in a few "lies":

> HARRIET. No, no estuve en lo del Titanic, pero se lo oí contar a uno que sí estuvo.
> PROFESOR. Me ha mentido.
> HARRIET. Pero poco.
> PROFESOR. ¿Cuántas veces?
> HARRIET. Tampoco subí a lo alto de la Torre Eiffel, la inauguración la vi desde abajo. Como se entusiasmaba usted tanto, me fui animando…

[199] Also see Francisco Gutiérrez Carbajo's article "El animal no humano en algunas obras teatrales actuales" in *ALEC* 34.2 (2009): 67-92.

[200] The three dogs competing for a position in the canine special forces – Odín (Impure Rotweiller), Emmanuel (German Shepherd), and John-John (mutt) – are led by another dog, Casius (Labrador), and a Human. They don't know the criteria for selection, the fate of the chosen dog and that of the rejected ones. The Human and Casius take each of the three dogs for a test and leave the other two in a separate room with a recording camera on, revealing their competitive spirit and their limitations. In times governed by fear and suspicion, even man's best friends (dogs) can turn against him, because their natural instinct is to please the master (Human). The Human lacks a voice, his only role being that of facilitating the dogs' training. When one of the dogs voices Kant's motto, "Sapere aude!" (*Dare to know!*), the plot suggests that it has become too late for knowledge: the obsession for protection has alienated the freedom of thinking.

PROFESOR. De todo lo que me ha contado, ¿qué es verdad y qué es mentira? La segunda versión del Manifiesto Comunista…
HARRIET. Lo de las barbas es exacto. Mentira mentira, solo lo del Titanic. Los viejos fantaseamos un poco, pero eso no es mentir mentir. (22)

[HARRIET. No, I wasn't aboard the Titanic, but I heard about it from someone who was.
PROFESSOR. You lied to me.
HARRIET. Only a little.
PROFESSOR. How many times?
HARRIET. I didn't go up the Eiffel Tower, I saw the inauguration from below. As you were so excited, I warmed up to the idea…
PROFESSOR. Of all you've told me, what's true and what's not? The second version of the Communist Manifesto…
HARRIET. The detail of Marx's beard is true. A lie, only the Titanic. Old folks like me fantasize a little, but it's not like lying.]

Opposing the "objective" historical science to Harriet's "literature," the Professor dismisses the tortoise's testimonies. The classical opposition between history and literature, and between the historicist and materialist (progressive) perspectives on history are ridiculed in this bizarre encounter between a Human Professor of History and a mutant human-tortoise witness. Paradoxically, the historian loses objectivity and the witness gains creativity as they compare versions of historical accounts. Harriet's personal testimony challenges the Professor's objective science from the two volumes of "Contemporary History" – his life work. She rejects, for example, the conclusion of "The Dreyfus Affaire" section, based on her *direct* experience of the event, where she claims to have been physically present. If at first the Professor is reluctant to accept Harriet's objection, he changes his mind when he realizes that her testimony coincides with historical facts, and becomes absorbed in her extravagant account.[201]

Therefore, the Professor gives Harriet a second chance. She pledges to say the truth, "Le prometo que no volveré a mentir, ni a exagerar. ¡Objetividad! Solo lo que vi con mis propios ojos, lo juro. La verdad y nada más que la verdad" [I promise that I won't lie or exaggerate again. Objectivity! Only what I saw with my own eyes, I swear. The truth and nothing but the truth] (23), and their dialogue goes on. The issue of objectivity appears again when Harriet zooms in on the "insignificant details" of several soldiers from the front: "La cara del

[201] The Professor's view of history and historical representation comes to resemble Ricoeur's, who claims that testimony is the "founding act of historical discourse" (*Memory, History, Forgetting* 497), and the "very heart of documentary proof" (278), because of the witness' declaration: "(1) I was there; (2) believe me; (3) if you don't believe me, ask someone else" (278).

recluta cuando leyó la carta de su novia", "Las manos temblorosas del capitán Müller cuando perdonó la vida de un desertor", "el brillo en los ojos del partisano Mazzola cuando colgó a Mussolini cabeza abajo de un gancho de carnicero" [The face of the recruit when he read his fiancée's letter, the trembling hands of Captain Müller when he spared the life of a deserter, the spark of partisan Mazzola's eyes when he hanged Mussolini head down from a butcher's hook…] (23). The Professor demands objectivity for a second time, arguing that emotional details belong to literature and not to the annals of scientific history. But Harriet insists that, from her point of view, history is *precisely* a sum of human emotions.

These testimonials connect with Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. As noted previously,[202] Benjamin explores people's responsibility to history and the past through an allegorical analysis of Paul Klee's painting *Angelus novus,* who becomes the "angel of history." Harriet is the equivalent of the angel that, burdened by the weight of the terrible past, is pushed into the future by the "wind of Progress," which leaves a pile of "rubble" and suffering behind:[203]

> Todas esas catástrofes, todos esos muertos, yo los llevo dentro. Para vivir hay que olvidar, y cuando se ha vivido mucho hay que olvidar mucho. Mi memoria es dura como una segunda concha, y muy pesada, el pasado me pesa como una joroba. De golpe, siento el peso de tantos muertos. Y al mismo tiempo he descubierto que tenía una deuda con ellos, que olvidarlos sería como darles una segunda muerte. Hay que recordarlos, por mucho que duela. (42)
>
> [I carry inside of me all those catastrophes, all those dead. In order to live, you have to forget, and when one has lived much, one has to forget much. My memory is hard like a second shell, and very heavy, the past weighs like a hump. Suddenly, I feel the weight of so many dead. And at the same time I realized I owed them a debt, that forgetting them would be the equivalent of killing them again. We must remember them, however much it hurts.]

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[202] See Chapter 2 for more reference.

[203] Also see note 9 on page 6 of Chapter II. Due to the major relevance of this work to Mayorga's play, I reproduce here Benjamin's text entirely: "A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress." (Thesis IX) pp. 257-58.

Harriet's discourse is ripe with Benjamin's philosophy, for example the tensions between historicism and historical materialism, which have shaped historical discourse and our understanding of history ("history" versus "literature"). Harriet illustrates how historians have misconstrued "history" in order to legitimate the present as "progress," which in reality is pain and destruction (Harriet claims that "progress" has led man to wear a gas mask for protection against the nuclear bomb). The solution is the "redemption" of the past, of what was crushed by the march of progress ("olvidarlos sería como darles una segunda muerte"), fighting back in the name of a more humane mankind, "hay que recordarlos, por mucho que duela." However, redemption can become as painful and destructive as progress, because it adds the double burden of the dead, and thus increases suffering, "el pasado me pesa como una joroba."

Benjamin suggests that by recognizing and recovering the past, humanity must to redefine the meaning of experience, in order to reach the "state of emergency," that will allow it to be alert to false "historical forms" deemed as "progress." Human behavior is determined by clashing forces, but can still recover through agency (Benjamin's notion of "Messianic power"). The class struggle can succeed if we fight for *our own* generation, and not for future ones: "history is the subject of a structure whose site is… the *presence of the now*" (Thesis XIV).[204] Benjamin did not think of history as a dialectic enterprise between past and present. This led him to adopt a unique position at the intersection of Marxism and mysticism, hoping to posit a new discourse that allows the inclusion of a notion of the divine.[205] In the play, man fails Benjamin's test, because of selfishness and greed, which ground him in an eternal "empty time," pursuing "a spiral course."[206] Harriet's narration of her journey through Europe reaches a climactic moment, during the First World War:

> ¡Progreso! Con sus máscaras antigás, arrastrándose bajo nubes de insecticida, muriendo como chinches, los europeos evolucionaban hacia el insecto. ¡Progreso! Tanta evolución para acabar enloquecidos alrededor de sus horribles himnos y sus ridículas banderas. Que cosa más idiota, matar por la patria. Aquella guerra la pasé en una trinchera, contando los muertos: uno, dos, trescientos, cuarenta y cinco mil doscientos veinticinco…(23)
>
> [Progress! With their gas masks, crawling under clouds of insecticide, dying like bugs, the Europeans were evolving towards the insect. Progress! So much evolution to end up berserk, singing horrible hymns and carrying ridiculous flags. What an idiotic thing,

[204] *Illuminations,* p. 261.
[205] *Illuminations,* Theses II, IV, IX, X, XI and XIV present (albeit in highly allegorical terms) the relation among man, nature, and a spiritual force that should create within the present generation a sense of agency (power) to end the violence of culture and of history (pp. 253-261).
[206] *Illuminations,* Thesis XIII, pp. 260-261.

to kill for the homeland. I spent that war in a trench, adding up the dead: one, two, three hundred, forty-five thousand two hundred and twenty five…]

Harriet has seen too much cumulative damage. This damage induced her "exponential evolution" into a mutant human-tortoise, who stores in her shell the residue of the *terror* provoked by human *error.* Her reaction reflects Walter Benjamin's maxim that every document of civilization is a document of barbarity, or, as Žižek paraphrases it, that every *monument* of civilization is a *monument* of barbarity (*End Times* 6). Her insistence on tallying the victims drives the Professor to depression:

PROFESOR. Basta, Harriet. Tanto muerto me deprime.
HARRIET. ¿Y qué quiere que yo le haga, si la Historia es un matadero?
PROFESOR. No me sea pesimista. Piense que, a pesar de todo, la Humanidad marcha hacia algo mejor. ¡La Humanidad progresa!
HARRIET. ¿Usted cree?
PROFESOR. Claro que sí, la Historia es la Gran Maestra. Todos esos desastres son lecciones que nos hacen más sabios.
HARRIET. Si usted lo dice…Yo no he visto que la humanidad aprenda nunca nada…(24)

[PROFESSOR. Enough, Harriet. So many dead, it's depressing.
HARRIET. And what would you have me do, if History is a slaughterhouse?
PROFESSOR. Don't be pessimistic. Think that despite everything, Humanity progresses to something better. Humanity is progressing!
HARRIET. You think so?
PROFESSOR. Of course, History is the Great Teacher. All those disasters are lessons that make us wiser.
HARRIET. If you say so… I never saw humanity learn anything…]

For the Professor, "History" and "Humanity" are *broad* concepts that reflect a teleological development, with a definite, optimistic target. He claims that "History" represents for him a reservoir of practical lessons, but he shows no hesitation in contributing to the invention and falsification of History. Upon discovering Harriet's mutant state, Beti exclaims in horror: "Hemos pasado la noche con un monstruo. Un monstruo en nuestra casa. ¡Animales que hablan! ¡Es el fin del mundo!" [We spent the night with a monster. A monster in our house.

Animals who speak! It's the end of the world!] (32).[207] Like Harriet's increasingly gloomy account, Beti's distress echoes Mayorga's skeptical conception of history as destructive.

A Tortoise's Ethics in a Human World

Harriet's visit to the Professor is not entirely innocent. She has researched Historians before settling on this particular Professor, and has sought him out to "sell" her lavish version of history in exchange for a "pittance":

> HARRIET. He visto la inauguración de la Torre Eiffel y el incendio del Reichstag; he visto a los alemanes entrando en París y a los americanos desembarcando en Normandía; ¡he visto la revolución de Octubre y la Perestroika! Nunca pensé sacar provecho de todo eso, pero últimamente me he dado cuenta de que *mi memoria es un capital*. La gente se mata por el pasado, y de eso yo tengo más que nadie. ¿Por qué no ofrecérselo a un profesional en cambio de una pequeña ayuda? […] Yo puedo revelarle lo que no encontrará en ningún documento. ¿Qué dijo Lenin en su lecho mortal? ¿De qué murió Juan Pablo Primero? Yo puedo decírselo. A cambio de casi nada. (15-16, emphasis mine)
>
> [HARRIET. I have seen the building of the Eiffel Tower and the Reichstag fire; I have seen the Germans entering Paris and the Americans disembarking in Normandy; I have seen the October Revolution and the Perestroika! I have never thought to benefit from all this but lately I have realized that *my memory is capital.* People kill for the past, and that's what I have more than anyone. Why not offer it to a professional in exchange for a small favor? […] I can reveal what you cannot find in any document. What did Lenin say on his deathbed? What killed John Paul I? I can tell you. In exchange for a pittance.]

History and the past were instruments for the alleviation of difficult present conditions (Buero, Sastre), or for critical revisions of nationalism and imperialism (Sanchis) during the Transition. Here history appears as commodity.[208] This commodification calls into question the scientific claims of history. Harriet exceeds the limits of a testimonial, blatantly trivializing history:

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[207] Slavoj Žižek's *Living in the End Times* echoes a similar concern. However, the "end of the world" and the "end times" have little to do with a purely eschatological approach. Žižek urges for a critique of political economy, in the context of the expansion of superpower politics after the fall of communism and the surge of capitalistic democracies.

[208] Sanchis' *El Retablo de Eldorado* from *Trilogía americana* presents a similar view of history as merchandise.

"What did Lenin say on his deathbed? What killed John Paul I? I can tell you." These petty aspects of history paradoxically catch the Professor's attention.

The progressive degradation of the History Professor is a way for Mayorga to express despair over the loss of the (sacred) sense of history and truth for humanity. Demanding the scientific objectivity of History, and proclaiming its supreme goal as universal pedagogue, the History Professor suddenly succumbs to marginal and trivial "subjective" details. It is not strange that Harriet offers her witness account in exchange for a return trip to Galapagos. What shocks is that a world renowned historian (the Professor travels to conferences, gives lectures, etc.) is willing to do major revisions of his life work, after being in the presence of a practically unknown witness for a brief period of time. His facility of conviction speaks of the researcher's superficiality and derides the validity of scientific investigation. If a renowned Professor can so easily *believe* and *trust* a witness, then it means that the writing of history has become trapped under the lure of the sensational and the appearance of truth. The Professor is not eager to listen to Harriet because she is an "archive of truth," (March 134) but rather because he is seduced by the possibility of personal gain that her "additions" to history can so easily grant him. When Harriet mentions the Demidovich twins, who supposedly were Lenin's confidents, but whom Stalin had erased from all photos and documents of the time, and consequently have never been spoken of, the Professor becomes infatuated with his success, "¡Qué hallazgo para el congreso de Tokio!" [What a discovery for the Tokyo congress!] (13), and "Ningún historiador ha hablado nunca de ese encuentro. ¡Seré la estrella en Tokio!" [No historian has ever mentioned that reunion. I'll be the star in Tokyo!] (14). The Professor's wants to use Harriet in order to advance professionally, regardless of the accuracy of her testimonials. When she is taken to hospital, he longs to find her because "Los historiadores del mundo se rendirán a mis pies" [All historians will bow to me] (32).

When Harriet recounts the meeting with the leaders of the October Revolution, she also admits that, due to her physical condition (not yet bipedal), she could only catch a glimpse of their feet: "en aquella época, yo a la gente la conocía por los pies" [in those days I knew people by their feet] (24). A hilarious and ironic remark, pointing to an utter contradiction: if Harriet was only able to see the ground, does this mean that she recognized Lenin and Trotsky by simply looking at their shoes? With this wry move, Mayorga laughs at the historian's objectivity in general and the Professor's envy in particular. Already dreaming of his future success, the Professor completely ignores this ludicrous and absurd identification of historical characters.

But, just like her voyage on the Titanic or the ascent of the Eiffel Tower, the Demidovich twins are a figment of her imagination. Once Harriet discerns the Professor's unscrupulous ambition, she serves him many "hot" details. She knows that the only way to reach home is by strategically appearing to possess the *original* and *complete* facts of history. Harriet markets herself as a live

encyclopedia, pretending to possess what no one else knows. And she knows how valuable this knowledge is, even if it is *invented*.

Harriet is a very ambivalent character. A witness of atrocious historical events and herself a collateral victim, she speaks against human violence and calls for a radical change in the writing of history, allowing each individual to have a voice. Like Brecht's Mother Courage, who drags her wagon after armies through a Europe ravaged by the thirty years' war, selling boots, bear and black market bullets in order to make a living, Harriet trails her shell through an equally war-torn twentieth-century Europe. In his play, Brecht intended to expose the "transactional" and "economic" nature of war, having a mother engage in the business of war, and because of that, make disastrous choices that kill all her children.[209] In her own words, Mother Courage has no choice: "They called me Courage because I was scared of financial ruin,… so I drove my wagon straight through the cannon fire… – I didn't see that I had a choice."[210] In her journey through a Europe destroyed by the World Wars and their aftermath, Harriet, too, had to adapt in order to survive. She is led by the same conservation instinct driving Mother Courage. Witness to a dismaying spectacle, she becomes mutant – a human tortoise – mirroring modern disfigurement.

In *The Death of Character,* Elinor Fuchs traces the progressive radical transformations undergone by the theatrical character from the turn of the twentieth century through postmodernism. Through allegorical (Strindberg), critical (Brecht) and theatricalist (Pirandello) directions, the dissolution of autonomous character is a feature of postmodern times. Under the dominion of commodity-driven capitalism, theatrical character has been fundamentally transformed to mirror the "shopping" drive, as Fuchs calls it.[211] Drawing from Debord's notion that spectacle is the "main *production* of present-day society," Fuchs claims that theater is nearing its "apocalyptic finale" because of banalization or personalization of character – anyone can be character in a play.[212]

Harriet's trajectory through her two hundred years of life has brought her to become an avenging force of history, a foe of the alienated, commodity-driven bourgeoisie. The doctor, professor and housewife live in Debord's dehistoricized universe, ruled by spectacle and exhibitionism. Thus, Beti devises an entertainment show for Harriet, the professor dreams of applauding crowds at his overseas lectures, and the doctor envisions universal praise at his unveiling of the elixir of life. Harriet is an agent of repression (like Mother Courage), an agent of resistance (her first word is "no")[213] and an agent of *order.* She holds the

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[209] Cf. Tony Kushner, "Introduction." *Mother Courage and her Children*: v-viii.
[210] *Mother Courage and her Children,* p. 9.
[211] Fuchs, pp. 31-32, 144.
[212] For example, see Fuchs' notes on two interactive plays staged in New York, franchised, and rented for staging worldwide, *Tamara* and *Tony 'n Tina's Wedding,* pp. 128-143.
[213] Robert March's article, "*La resistencia de Harriet,*" provides more background for this notion.

bourgeoisie accountable for centuries of destruction that continues into the present, reflected into the three humans' drive for personal profit.

As character, Harriet is conceived like a super-bourgeois figure, which encompasses within the positive and the negative traits that the "mirror dramaturgy" exhibited.[214] In parallel with the rising of the bourgeoisie, theater posited itself as a reflecting mirror of this powerful class, representing psychologies that they longed to see, further away from the classical Aristotelian mimesis.[215] According to Abirached, the theatrical character of the eighteenth century onward,

> devient porte-parole ou le repoussoir d'une telle philosophie du spectacle : ou bien il est constitué en figure emblématique de l'innocence et de la légitimité, et tout ce qui lui arrive le met en violente opposition avec des situations injustes qui menacent son bonheur ou des forces mauvaises qui contredisent son désir ; ou bien il est désigné comme déviant, fauteur de désordre et machiniste du malheur d'autrui, et à ce titre promis à l'élimination s'il est vraiment rétif à se plier à la morale du groupe. (116)
>
> [becomes spokesperson or repository of the following philosophy of spectacle: he is either constituted in an emblematic figure of innocence and legitimacy, and all that happens to him puts him in a violent opposition with unjust situations that threaten his contentment, or with evil forces that are at odds with his desire; or he is designated a deviant, maker of disorder and engineer of the misfortune of others, and in this role destined for elimination if he is truly reluctant to bend himself to the group's morals]

Nevertheless, Harriet is not simply an avenging angel. She is also a deviant carrier or chaos and disorder, who has her share of complicity with the audience. We witness her small lies and historical embellishments, as the professor, doctor and Beti increasingly display personal interest in her person. Overall, Harriet offers a grotesque picture of what the bourgeoisie has done to history, namely transform it into an arena of war, destruction, and turmoil. As a human-tortoise, Harriet is a residual mutant of two centuries of bourgeois wreckage. Her character resembles a science fiction nuclear waste product, a consequence of human intervention and interference with nature and history. Her gentle, innocent side is heavily contrasted by her inclination to distort facts, provoke and murder. She pursues this direction because she knows that the Professor, the Doctor and Beti are vain and driven by a brutal sense of egotism typical of the commodity marketplace. Like Mother Courage, she allows herself to become contaminated by a lack of scruples, because it is her only ticket out of

[214] For more reference, see Robert Abirached, *La crise du personnage dans le théâtre moderne* (1978).
[215] Abirached, pp. 101-110, "La nouvelle mimesis" and pp. 111-122, "Une dramaturgie du miroir:"

this maddening spectacle. She manipulates history and sells beautified narratives to a market avid for the sensational, which is the present's living force. As Mother Courage claims, "you have to learn to make deals with people, one hand washes the other one."[216]

On one occasion, Harriet asks Beti if she believes in God, to which the latter responds affirmatively: "Tiene que haber un ser supremo. Una inteligencia. Alguien que gobierne todo esto y el más allá…*Y si no hay Dios, todo está permitido*." [There has to be a supreme being. An intelligence. Someone who governs all this and the afterworld…*If there is no God, everything is permitted*] (16, emphasis mine). According to Beti, God's existence instills fear and prevents man from committing vile deeds. She claims to believe in God, but does not follow these guidelines. The play completely reverses the meaning of this axiom,[217] annulling the sense of ethical values (companionship, trust, honesty, honor, etc.). All the characters are corrupt, ambitious, and unscrupulous. They mirror the current world, in which people are in a constant survival race, and where only the fittest and the ones who adapt make it.

The Humor of Harriet's Encounter with the Humans

In the Professor's absence, jealous of the attention he gives to Harriet, Beti asks her to contribute to the household tasks. The work exhausts her and she enters a profound sleep. Ignoring Harriet's physiology, Beti calls for an ambulance to take her to a hospital. There, the Doctor, an equally unscrupulous man, realizes that she is a valuable asset, on which he can conduct unethical experiments. The distressed Professor (who had renounced overnight his plans of traveling to Tokyo in order to extract more information from Harriet) tries to take her home, but the Doctor blocks him. Each of them claims professional superiority over the other, in a very humorous dispute:

> PROFESOR. Usted no sabe con quién está hablando. Soy catedrático de la Facultad de Historia, miembro de la Academia de Historia y profesor invitado en la Universidad de Pittsburg. Harriet es mi colaboradora en un proyecto de enorme trascendencia. Le ruego que la haga volver a mi casa.
>
> DOCTOR. Es usted el que no sabe con quien habla. Además de director de este hospital, soy catedrático de Medicina

[216] Brecht, p. 56.

[217] This maxim ("If there is no God, everything is permitted") is attributed to Dostoyevsky, although its origin is unknown. In his essay *Christianity Against the Sacred* from the 2012 *God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse,* Žižek quotes Jacques Lacan's reversal, "If there is no God, everything is *forbidden*" (43-45). This interpretation comes from the premise that human fantasies, secrets and vices stem *precisely* from the perceived existence of a Supreme Being. In Its absence, "atheist, liberal, hedonist" humanity becomes increasingly self-oppressive and self-regulated. (p. 44)

Interna, miembro de la Academia de Ciencias y profesor invitado en la Universidad de Michigan. La paciente se quedara aquí el tiempo que yo considere necesario. (34)

[PROFESSOR. You don't know whom you're talking to. I'm a History Professor, member of the Academy of History and visiting professor at the University of Pittsburgh. Harriet is my collaborator on a Project of great transcendence. I ask you nicely to give her back to me.
DOCTOR. It's you who doesn't know whom you're talking to. Besides being the Director of this hospital, I'm a professor of Internal Medicine, member of the Academy of Science and visiting professor at the University of Michigan. The patient will remain here for as long as I deem necessary.]

Disputing over the "biological" and "historical" archive respectively, the Professor and the Doctor engage in a puerile fight over Harriet, each trying to grab her: "Es mío, mío" [She's mine, mine] (34). Like corrupt politicians eager to obtain benefits from a "secret resource," they reach a mutually advantageous agreement. Both medicine and history, the Professor argues, can benefit from Harriet – "a la Medicina y a la Historia les conviene que usted y yo lleguemos a un acuerdo" – and he suggests that Harriet be divided between the two: "Los días pares, Harriet es suya; nones para mí" [On even days, she's yours; on odd days, she's mine] (35).

When the Doctor takes a break from one of his experiments, Harriet comes across his recorder and learns, in shock, about his plans:

GRABADORA: ¿Por qué unos seres viven más que otros? Yo descubriré el secreto de la longevidad y la venderé en tarritos. No puedo ofrecerles la eternidad, pero si una prorroga, y ellos pagarán lo que les pida, la gente es así, la gente no sabe vivir pero no quiere morirse…Uf, creí que se me quedaba. Si se me muere antes del domingo, todo se va al carajo. Luego, que la palme cundo guste. Solo en las islas Seychelles hay 152.000 tortugas… (54)

[RECORDER: Why do some beings live longer than others? I will discover the secret of longevity and I will sell it in jars. I can't offer them eternity, but I can give them an extension, and they will pay whatever I ask them, that's how people are, people don't know how to live but they don't want to die…Phew! I thought I lost her. If she dies before Sunday, everything goes to hell. Afterwards, let her die when she wants. In the Seychelles islands alone there are 152,000 tortoises…]

The bestial intent to take advantage of Harriet continues. Counting on her husband's absence (he is out giving lectures at University), Beti devises a plan to get Harriet's signature on a life-contract for her show ("Darwin's Tortoise"). To ensure the signing, she badmouths the Professor: he plagiarized his dissertation from a student and wouldn't hesitate to have Harriet turned into croquette rolls once he finishes collecting her memories. Surprised by the Professor's sudden return, Beti defends her project, its promising revenue and pretends to have included him as well:

> Teatro científico. Didáctico […] He pensado que tú salgas al principio y hagas una introducción. Y si Harriet se transpone, también ahí sales tú. 'Ahora vamos a darles algunas informaciones útiles'. Y les recomiendas algún librito tuyo, que a la gente le gusta comprar libros. (51)
>
> [Scientific, didactic theater…I was thinking that you could come out at the beginning and make an introduction. And should Harriet break down, you come on stage again. 'Now we're going to give you some useful information'. And you recommend some of your books, people love to buy books]

Sensing an imminent danger, Harriet pretends to have regressed to her tortoise state. In these conditions, the Professor and the Doctor no longer need her:

> PROFESOR. […] Ella, su bienestar, es para nosotros lo único importante. Mi esposa y yo creemos que Harriet debe irse a vivir con usted.
> DOCTOR. Si está involucionando, ¿para qué la quiero yo? Si está involucionando, por mí pueden quedársela enterita. (37)
>
> [PROFESSOR…She and her wellbeing are our only concern. My wife and I think that Harriet should go live with you.
> DOCTOR. If she's regressing, what do I need her for? If she's regressing, you can keep her all to yourselves.]

Having to renounce the prospects of material gain, the Professor and the Doctor blame each other for this failure, "tanto electroshock, tanto escáner" [so many electric shocks, too much scanning], "traumáticas sesiones de memoria histórica" [traumatic historical memory sessions], and debate over the most "humane" way of disposing of Harriet, either gunshot, lethal injection and even cooking:

> BETI. […] En el mercado negro de exóticos todavía podemos sacarle unas perras.

PROFESOR. A mí verla así me da mucha pena, con lo que era. Para que no sufra.¿Y si le pegamos un tiro?
BETI. De tiros nada, que se chamusca. Aún podemos venderla a un taxidermista.
DOCTOR. Tiene razón, nada de disparos. Un final digno: un inyectable.
PROFESOR. Para los cuatro duros que van a darnos…¿Y si nos hacemos un arroz? (38)

[BETI. On the exotic animal black market we could still raise a few pennies.
PROFESSOR. I feel sorry seeing her like this, knowing what she was before. She shouldn't suffer. What if we shoot her?
BETI. No gunshots, she'll be scorched. We could still sell her to a taxidermist.
DOCTOR. You're right, no gunshots. A dignified end: a lethal injection.
PROFESSOR. For the small change we'll get… what if we made some rice?]

Takes advantage of this silly debate, Harriet concocts *their* death instead, by doping her two hundred birthday cake with Beti's "Sunday anxiety attack" and her "Wednesday crisis" pills. As they are duped into eating the cake, she issues her own regression theory: "llegado a un punto, el hombre retrocede hasta la bestia" [having reached a certain point, man goes back to being a beast] (39). Left alone after the Professor, the Doctor and Beti fall dead, she concludes: "¿Y ahora, Harriet, una vez más. ¿Qué hacer? ¿Qué hacer, Harriet? Pues lo de siempre, Harriet: adaptarse" [And now, Harriet, once again. What to do? What to do, Harriet? The usual, Harriet: adapt] (40).

The play parodies the encounter between the history and economic and social progress. Through an exchange among the world of science (Professor, Doctor), entertainment (Beti), and personal historical memories (Harriet), the play mocks humanity's failure to build a better world.[218] Harriet applies humans' mechanisms and completes her evolutionary cycle at the end of the play: able to kill, she has become fully human.[219] During this process all she does is adapt, resist and survive.

The play communicates allegorically that human interaction is solely based on self-interested transaction. The dramatic action takes place in closed spaces, such as the Professor's office and the Doctor's exam room, reserved for cold research, testing, and analysis. In this closed environment, nothing seems striking anymore. If we expect (to some degree) the Professor and the Doctor to recur to unethical means to push their projects, then Beti's idea of displaying

[218] Personal email to author. 16 July 2013.
[219] Juan Mayorga, personal interview. 15 June 2012.

Harriet on *National Geographic Channel*, and Harriet's vengeance seem natural consequences, deriving from the initial set-up of the play. Mayorga engages the audience to follow through with each of these unusual situations, which appear both denaturalized and entirely coherent. In the end, each character imposes, through their absurd behavior, a critical and comic distance. Harriet's punitive intervention and the poetic justice served in the end with the poisoning of the bourgeois figures and the liberation of Herodotus (the Professor's hamster) indicates that she is instrumental in releasing a prophetic message about the consequences of overlooking history and its interrelatedness to humanity.

Mayorga's work is deeply informed by Benjamin's philosophy.[220] However, he does not dramatize philosophical ideas, nor does he present a dialectical view of history (historicist and materialistic). Rather, through Benjamin, he reveals further anxieties about Spain's democratic present. The Red Cross delegate could have made a difference, but he is too weak to fight the injustice around him. Harriet must use her adversaries' weapons in order to survive in this world. Instead of devouring Herodotus, she releases him from the cage, and resolves to continue to adapt and survive. Ultimately, she is a survivor, shaped by overcoming crises (years of violent history, betrayal by so-called friends, death threats, etc.) and a constant process of adaptation. The cynical side of this route is that in order to survive, one must resort to violence and greed. The poisoning of the Professor, the Doctor and Beti in self-defense is a metaphor for the existential anxiety of the present.

Harriet's embodiment of humanity's evolution is key to understanding the criticism that Mayorga is leveling at contemporary Spain and Europe, similar to Sanchis' parody of communism in *El cerco de Leningrado.* The play satirizes the notion of "progress" in history near the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Mayorga is no longer targeting Spain's political uncertainty during the Transition years and the experience of the new socialist government, like Sanchis. His critique is directed at the general human condition.

In *Memory as a Remedy for Evil,* Tzvetan Todorov quotes François Bizot (former prisoner of the Khmer Rouge): "I'd like us to have the audacity to humanize the torturers – without trying to forgive them or minimize their crimes – to see in them what human beings are capable of being, what we are capable of being" (38-39). Realizing that the capacity for evil (violence, cruelty, crimes) exists in every one of us, Todorov argues that the only way to close the gap between a violent past and an even more violent present is to annul the distance between the criminal and ourselves, in other words by removing their "monster" label and *remembering* that they are *just like* us. The commander in *Himmelweg* is a human being, like *us:* he reads books, he played ball as a child. Harriet, Darwin's tortoise is also like *us:* she is forced to adapt by a cruel and exploiting environment. These are the critical "lessons" of history that Mayorga's "modern fables" transmit.

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[220] A close connection can be determined between *La tortuga* and the *Theses on the Philosophy of History.* Cf. Gabriela Cordone, *Estreno* 37.2, Fall 2011, pp. 101-114.

CHAPTER IV

New Democracy and Old Traditions: Old Souls in New Bodies

Religion in Three Comic Plays by Fermín Cabal (*Vade retro*, 1982), Concha Romero (*Un olor a ámbar*, 1983) and Carmen Resino (*Bajo sospecha*, 1995)

In June 2012, the *Corral de Comedias* of Alcalá de Henares hosted the performance of Juan Mayorga's *La lengua en pedazos,* based on the *Libro de vida* of Teresa of Ávila or Saint Teresa de Jesús. The play then traveled to Madrid's *Teatro Fernán Gómez (Centro de Arte)* between January and March 2013, to return in June of the same year, by popular demand, for a two-week run. An unusual play by its atheist author,[221] it transposes the Saint's autobiography into a dialectical combat between her and an inquisitor.

The presence of Saint Teresa on the democratic and *secular* stage establishes a critical link between history and religion. It is known that Francisco Franco kept on his deathbed the incorrupt arm of Saint Teresa.[222] Franco's death marked the end of almost forty years of national Catholicism, a governing agreement that "sanctified" his rule and recognized the Catholic Church's support during the Civil War, deemed one of the "last European religious wars" (Carr and Fusi 4). Historically speaking, Franco managed to forge a modern industrial state, with a consumer society, in which tourism and services led to the so-called "Spanish miracle". But, also, he forged a state in which traditional Catholicism dominated secondary education and imposed a life-style: being a successful, socially integrated Spaniard from the 1940s to the 1970s meant that one observed Catholic rituals whether "sincerely" or "superficially" (Carr and Fusi 82).

The presence of religion in state politics as late as the 1970s was possible due to a long, common past that Spain shared with the Catholic Church. Spain's history was steeped in religion from the foundation of its Empire under the Catholic Monarchs (*Reyes Católicos*) Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragón to the very death of its last Catholic ruler, Francisco Franco. Having been so deeply ingrained in political and social life, the Church and Catholic religion continued to permeate Spaniards' everyday life well into the last decades of the twentieth century. The figure of Saint Teresa (1515-1582), successfully revived in Mayorga's 2012 premiere of *La lengua en pedazos*, takes us back to the sixteenth

[221] The author admitted that the first reactions to this project were risibly skeptical, "Como no te lo produzca la Conferencia Episcopal…". "La incombustible Teresa de Jesús". *Madrid Teatro.* José R. Díaz Sande, 16 February 2013. A declared atheist, Mayorga's interest in the topic comes from the controversy around the figure of the Saint.

[222] Raymond Carr, "Introduction." P. 1.

century, suggesting that in the twenty-first century Spain's history remains engulfed in religion.

Several plays that address the topic of religion were written between the 1980s and the present, a time period that marked Spain's historical process of transition and establishment of democracy. Significant titles include *Vade retro* (1982) by Fermín Cabal, *Un olor a ámbar* (1983) by Concha Romero, *La libertad esclava* (1988) by María Manuela Reina, *Las alumbradas de la Encarnación Benita* (1979) and *La monja alférez* (1986) by Domingo Miras, *Bajo sospecha* (1993) by Carmen Resino, and *Santa Perpetua* (2011) by Laila Ripoll. Addressing topics such as the purpose of religious education, the defense of Catholic dogma during the Counter-Reformation, sainthood and its symbolism in the present, and the conflicts between the Inquisition and convents, these plays center on the subject of religion and its role in history, its influence on politics and its impact on civil society.[223]

If a play with religious overtones such as José Martín Recuerda's *Las arrecogías del beaterio de Santa María Egipciaca* (1970), which tells the story of Mariana Pineda and her fight against the absolutist monarch Fernando VII, could be interpreted during the 1970s as a form of social protest and a sign of civic engagement,[224] the necessity to confront the country with its repressive and religious past seemed less crucial at the turn of the democratic socialist period. Therefore, the reasons that motivate playwrights to engage religion in the new democracy must be sought elsewhere. Their enterprises seek to expose, through comical and satirical means, the tension that exists in Spanish society between traditional faith and modern secularization, brought forth by the doctrine of the PSOE governments. At the same time the plays analyzed in this chapter seek to "make history" by addressing an ancestral notion at a time when society underwent a radical political transformation. A turn to deeply engrained traditions and values is more likely during times of uncertainty, like the Transition, than during periods of consensus. In order to grasp the dramatic revival of figures such as Santa Teresa and the presence of other religious topics in these plays, it is imperative to consider the history of the Spanish Catholic Church, and the degree of its intervention in the governance of the Spanish state.

By virtue of the Catholic nationalist project of the Franco regime, the Church was involved in state affairs. The nation was understood as a living organism, sustained by the forces of Spaniards who were forging together a *patria* of Catholic virtue (Quiroga and Balfour 38-39).[225] During the Francoist

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[223] The twentieth-century revival of the Baroque *auto sacramental* before, during and after Francoism is discussed in Carey Kasten's 2012 *The Cultural Politics of Twentieth-Century Spanish Theater. Representing the Auto Sacramental*.

[224] The play expresses social despise for the established power (19th century absolutist monarchy) and could not be staged until 1977 due to censorship. Cf. Ragué-Arias, *El teatro de fin de milenio en España (de 1975 hasta hoy),* p. 33.

[225] Cf. Quiroga and Balfour, a second nationalist project was formulated by the former members of Acción Española. It was a more reactionary program, tending to emphasize the Catholic

regime, Spain's political life unfolded under the patronage of National Catholicism. As an essential ingredient of Francoism, Catholicism sought to continue the spirit of the fifteenth-century Christian crusade (Carr and Fusi 107-110). The Nationalists perceived their project as a holy war waged on behalf of the Christian civilization, inspired in the *Reconquista* and the Inquisition (Behar 87). Franco's glorification of Catholicism meant not only that religion was synonymous with the nation (*patria*) but also allied with power.

Of course, the origins of the involvement of the Church in state affairs go further back than Franco's project of National Catholicism. Spain's Catholic foundations date back to the establishment of the early modern empire under the *Reyes Católicos* in 1492, a symbolic date that also marks the end of the *Reconquista* and the expulsion of the Moors from Spain. Isabella and Ferdinand defended Catholic orthodoxy to the point that they ordered the first expulsion of the Jews, administered the foundation of the Inquisition and consecrated their empire, at home and abroad, to the salvation of souls (Behar 86). The only interruption of religious supremacy in state power came with the *Cortes* of Cádiz (1810-1812), which proclaimed anticlericalism and which marked, together with the end period of Francoism, initiated a constant religious-secular conflict in Spain.[226] Francoist religiosity returned to the spirit of crusade launched during the *Reconquista*, focused not against Jews or Moors but targeting the impure modern European thought that entered Spain, from the Renaissance to Marxism: "The Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, Progress, Democracy, Marxism – had poisoned Spain," which "saved itself" through the Civil War, as well as "Christian Europe, the Christian World, the universe."[227]

Historically, Spain's continental and intercontinental trajectory is marked by major religious endeavors, such as the almost eight centuries long *Reconquista* (718 – 1492), the New World expeditions, carried out in the name of the Catholic Crown, and the Counter-Reformation (1545-1648),[228] as well as the creation of an institution that would safeguard and guarantee the proper observance of Catholic rites and fight against heresy: the Inquisition. Backed by the *Reyes Católicos,* the institution of the Spanish Inquisition acquired full shape as a result of the Protestant Reformation and concomitantly with the Catholic Counter-

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'nature' of the patria and sided with the Church in its "struggle for power with the official party." P. 39.

[226] The *Cortes de Cádiz* were the first modern and liberal break from the Church's autonomy; they declared national sovereignty, eliminated seigniorial rights and abolished the Inquisition. However, they reconfirmed Spain as a confessional state, by stating in the 12th article that, "La religión de la Nación española es y será perpetuamente la Católica, Apostólica, Románica, única verdadera". This allowed anticlericalism to grow silently under the reign of Fernando VII. The 1820-1823 liberal triennium brought the issue to the surface, as did the two Carlist Wars. The Second Republic's banishment of the Jesuit Order in the 1930s signaled yet another confrontation.

[227] Cf. a journalist's affirmations from 1939, cited by Ruth Behar, p. 87.

[228] One of the most familiar names associated with the Counter-Reformation is that of Ignatius of Loyola, *Ignacio de Loyola,* founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits).

Reformation.[229] Even if it was briefly abolished in 1813 during the War of Independence, it was immediately reconstituted in 1814 by the absolute monarch Fernando VII, and was finally suppressed in 1834 (Hooper 91). Throughout much of Spanish history, Roman Catholicism was the only religion recognized by the state, and this was particularly the case during Franco's politics of National Catholicism. In 1966, the Second Vatican Council eventually obliged Spain to recognize other religious denominations, but the Catholic Church still retained a privileged status (Hooper 92).

For a nation that forged its extensive overseas territory in the name of and with the aid of Christianity, it is easy to understand why Catholic faith represents a major mark of identity. Catholicism has played a central role in the formation of the Spanish state and national consciousness. For Spaniards, to say that they are "Christian" (*cristiano*) is not so much a profession of religious belief, but a claim of national identity: "if being a Spaniard meant being a Christian, in Spain being a Christian meant being a Catholic" (Hooper 91). Yet, even if the vast majority of Spaniards (more than 90%) are baptized Roman Catholics, it does not mean that they consider themselves Catholics or if they do, that they fulfill the requirements of their faith. According to a 2004 *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* survey, less than three quarters of the people interviewed described themselves as Roman Catholics. Even if the religious sentiment is waning, however this does not mean that Spaniards disregard their deep religious background.

Given the indelible mark that the Catholic religion left upon Spanish history, making it a default constituent of the Spanish identity and national consciousness, in the following pages I seek to develop a discussion framework that incorporates religion within the trajectory of historical theater. For centuries, the Church has been an active power in Spain and has asserted this power through the practice of Catholicism, which has affected the course of its history. Consequently, any discussion centered on the relationship between drama and history must consider the scope and influence of religious discourse in the making of history. Numerous plays written on and after 1982, the date that marks the end of the Transition, display frequent references to religious figures and themes, and often approach them from a comical distance. My aim in what follows is to consider the ways in which contemporary history has influenced religion, but I also want to take into consideration the ways in which religion destabilizes history through its resistance to modernity and secularization. This allows me to consider the particular ways in which history plays with religious overtones participate in a process of historical-religious negotiation of power and influence in the post-Franco years.

With Franco's demise came an increase in secularization, which was coupled with a pressure on Socialist governments through the 1990s to follow their political ideology and disengage the State from religion. The post-1975

[229] Cf. Helen Rawlings, pp. 91-112.

socio-historical and political milieu is characterized by disenchantment with the Catholic Church (Pérez-Díaz 1993: 108-183), which affected the public's reception of thematically religious works. Even if the plays mentioned earlier maintain a comical, satirical distance or address pertinent religious issues through metaphors, their production and publication speak of an existent spiritual anxiety.

In Spain's modern secularization, the separation of Church and State is not the sole issue; the greater question is whether the move from the dictatorship to democracy requires a disengagement from religion. Does this process imply severing the new nation from a major component of its tradition? The authors whose plays I discuss here felt the need to dramatize the tension between secularization and religious belief during, and after, the transition from dictatorship to democracy. They approached this tension with humor and satire, projecting the outmoded yet critical role of faith and religion in the reshaping of Spain from Franco to contemporary Spain. In *Vade retro* (1982), Fermín Cabal depicts a confrontation between a young priest with his older superior, a blatant generational and ideological dispute that escalates to the initiate's abandonment of the habit to start a small retail business. The play leaves the audience wondering about the nature of confession – the young priest seeks absolution from his superior for his doubts, which he does not receive – as well as the purpose of religious education in a secular world. Concha Romero's *Un olor a ámbar* (1983) reflects, through the posthumous figure of Saint Teresa, on the superficiality of Church doctrine and its processes of sanctification, which are performed not out of high spiritual sentiment but out of a desire for power and authority in ecclesiastical hierarchies. Lastly, in *Bajo sospecha* (1995), Carmen Resino casts a fiercely comic eye on the corrupted nature of the Inquisition and the equally degraded and promiscuous nature of the convents, in a shockingly perverted depiction of holy life.

These three plays reflect on the dual religious nature of Spain immediately after transition, which retained a fascination with the old tradition, while longing for change and embracing anticlericalism. But, not only do these texts reflect the tension between the civil and the ecclesiastic sectors, they also attest to the complex relationship between a Church in transition in a rapidly modernizing state. Thus, religion does not figure as a static influence over history, overshadowing its course like a demiurge, but rather inserts itself actively into history, claiming an active role. Given Spain's extensive shared history of joint state politics and religion, a sudden and complete separation from this governance vision would not have been easily achieved under Adolfo Suárez' Transition UCD government (1977-1982), especially under the aura of King Juan Carlos I as mediator between the old Franco regime and the new democracy. The presence of the monarchy in the denomination of the Spanish government (unitary parliamentary constitutional monarchy) keeps a strong bond with tradition, and, as such, it would make ~~a~~ complete secularization – despite PSOE's Marxist politics – difficult, and even undesirable. Moreover, in 1996, by then

former Prime Minister, Adolfo Suárez gave public recognition of the role of the Catholic Church during the crucial Transition years, at the 7th Symposium of the History of the Church in Spain and America held in Seville. In his address, Suárez placed *both* the sociopolitical *and* the religious goals of transitional Spain within European trends, stressing the prevalence of religious observance over political conviction – first a "católico practicante" [practicing Catholic] and only then a "demócrata convencido" [convinced democrat] (273-285). While Suárez asserted a politics of inclusion from a secular European perspective, he constantly referred to the significance of the Catholic Church for the Spanish state and its people. He expressed the complex reality of a modern, non-confessional state, in which the Catholic Church retains a privileged position.

Catholicism had not only been organically linked with Spain for centuries until 1975, it had been a de facto form of government for most of Spanish history, excluding the brief stints of liberalism in the nineteenth (1873-1874, the First Republic) and twentieth centuries (1931-1939, the Second Republic). In 1977, at the crossroads between dictatorship and liberal democracy, civil society looked forward to political change, but it also looked back to the religious factor that had had a considerable and consistent presence in the country's past. The generations that had emerged from the Civil War were characterized by a mentality that was both militant and progressive, but that was also accustomed to delusional, unrealistic or "magical" thinking, and that prevailed after 1975 (Pérez-Díaz 1999: 54-55). In this social climate of both liberal craving and religious yearning, a blend of the new and old ways was bound to emerge. At the outset of democracy, marked by the Socialists' victory at the 1982 elections, it was assumed that in its new path, Spain would continue to affirm its Catholic heritage, remaining faithful to the discourse that established its national identity throughout time.

Moreover, even if the Constitution of 1978 defined Spain as a "social and democratic state ruled by law" ("Estado social y democrático de Derecho", Article 1), recognizing the freedom of religious practice as a fundamental right, it also stressed the role of the Catholic Church in the nation: "Los poderes públicos tendrán en cuenta las creencias religiosas de la sociedad española y mantendrán las consiguientes *relaciones de cooperación con la Iglesia Católica* y las demás confesiones" [Public authorities will account for the religious beliefs of Spanish society and will maintain appropriate collaborative relationships with the Catholic Church and the other confessions] (emphasis mine).[230]

[230] Cf. Constitución Española, *http://www.senado.es/web/conocersenado/normas/constitucion/detalleconstitucioncompleta/index.html#titprelim* [2 March 2014]

4.1. The Clergy and the Nation in Fermín Cabal's *Vade retro* (1982): A Crisis of Identity

The staging of Fermín Cabal's *Vade retro* came in a symbolic year for Spanish political, civil and religious life: 1982, which marked the Socialist electoral triumph on October 28. This implied the beginning of a period of confrontation and accommodation between the Church hierarchy and the State. During the previous tenure in power of the UCD, the balance between commitment to democracy and historic inclinations to defend and include the Church in political power favored the Church's continued engagement in State affairs. In spite of the conflicts occasioned by the legalization of divorce and the push for Basque nationalism (defended by Basque bishops), Suárez's cabinet yielded to most of the Church's demands with regard to education and clerical finances (Callahan 574). Even the newly appointed PSOE continued to recognize the Church's historic rights to several sectors of Spanish life, by accepting the 1978 Constitution (which recognizes the Church's role in the Spanish state). Thus, after the Transition, through its political concessions to the ecclesiastical body, Spain demonstrated that it allowed the Church to retain the role of the nation's moral guide. However, at the same time, Spanish society underwent structural transformations by gravitating towards a consumer culture and secular values. As Callahan notes when surveying the civil-ecclesiastical relations between 1979 and 1998,

> The advance of sexual permissiveness often lamented by the clergy … was long underway by the time the Socialists assumed power in 1982. An opinion survey conducted in 1977, when the UCD controlled the government, showed that Spanish youths were no different from their European counterparts in their views on abortion, divorce, and birth control (588).

Despite these apparent facts, it was not easy to remove the Church from power or dismiss its historic control over education. It is with these trends in mind that we must approach a text such as *Vade retro,* that stages a generational and ideological conflict to reflect the tension existent not only between civil and ecclesiastical authorities, but also between the older and the younger generations of Spaniards, and also of priests.

Moreover, the Transition years also brought a consistent decay in the number of seminarians and priests. This was a paradoxical result of the reorganization of the parochial structure after the Second Vatican Council. While there was an expansion of the number of parishes in order to match the urban tendency of Spanish society, this led to an unprecedented decay in the number of rural parishes, which also corresponded to the historical centers of Spanish

Catholicism (Callahan 613). The numbers speak for themselves, as sociological analysis of Catholicism in Spain reveals: the number of seminarians declined from 6,995 to 1,684 between 1968 and 1982,[231] and the number of priests also fell from 25,105 to 22,592,[232] a less statistically significant decrease, but still an indication of the structural transformations of the Church. As Callahan writes, "new ordinations were insufficient to replace priests who either died or abandoned the priesthood" (613). As the secularization got underway, fewer Spaniards became priests, monks and nuns. The drop in the number of priestly vocations began in the 1960s and accelerated at the end of the 1970s. According to COSARESE (Colectivo de Sacerdotes y Religiosos/as Secularizados), a body representing the secularized clergy, almost 3,000 parish priests, more than 6,000 monks and nearly 10,000 nuns opted to leave the Holy Orders in Spain between 1960 and 1990 (Hooper 94).

The statistics and economics of the clergy also concern the funding allocated to the Church. The provenance of the Church's funding has been the most crucial aspect in the relations between the Church and the State. Since the signing of the 1851 Concordat with the Vatican, the government covered it almost intermittently.[233] In 1979, in parallel with the transition to democracy, a financial transition period of six years was designed to attain a fiscal separation between the Church and state. The government agreed to pay the subsidies until a taxation system asking the Spaniards to indicate on their returns how much they wanted to give to the Church and other charitable organizations was properly implemented: "the state undertook to ensure that during the second phase of the transition to a self-financing, the Church would get 'resources of similar quantity' to those it was already receiving" (Hooper 98). Judging by the fact that the first stage alone lasted longer (eight years) than the period initially set for the process as a whole (six years), it shouldn't come as a surprise that the mechanism of the Church's self-financing never came to life. As Hooper ironically points out, "every year Spaniards go through the same ritual, marking funds for the Church, often unaware that it makes no difference to how much the Church will receive" (99). It can be easily understood why becoming a priest had certain appeal, as it meant to live free from financial concerns since earnings were ensured by the state, and also to enjoy the privilege of a politically validated and esteemed profession.

Religious education and the decrease in clergy numbers are inextricably linked with the political atmosphere in the first half of the 1980s and are critical to the historical relevance of this play. If during Franco's time, Catholic religious instruction was compulsory in both public and private education establishments, after 1975, the Church still managed to oversee religious education in all of

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[231] González-Anleo, quot in Azcona, p. 93.

[232] Cendan, quot. in Azcona et al., p. 294 (Table 1).

[233] The clergy's salaries and the costs of administering the sacraments were met by way of indemnity by the government. The only break in the agreement until 1975 occurred during 1931-1933, during the Second Republic. Cf. Hooper, p.96.

Spain's schools (Hooper 95-96). While Spaniards remain predominantly Catholic (more than 50% of the entire population), most of them are non-practicing. But the declining numbers of those in religious professions are also explained by a rather unusual circumstance.

Civil society's dissatisfaction with the Church and the Church's disengagement with Franco's regime had been building up since the 1950s, when the Church began an ample process of proselytism among the working class, a typical anti-clerical sector. Through the activity of three societies targeting the youth (*Hermandades Obreras de Acción Católica,* HOAC, *Juventud Obrera Católica,* JOC and *Vanguardias Obreras Juveniles,* VOJ), both the laity and the clergy became aware of the malfunctions within the regime and voiced critiques against it: "…*curas rojos* (red priests)…allowed strike meetings in the vestry and sit-ins in the nave" (Hooper 102). The nostalgia for the "estado confesional" of the Franco years that still prevailed among Spaniards in the late 1970s and early 1980s can be attributed to this unusual association of the Church and the man in the street for a common cause.

The effort to reconcile the average Spaniard with a historical institution such as the Catholic Church was favored by the appointment of Cardinal Vicente Enrique y Tarancón as Archbishop of Madrid (1971-1983). A friend and admirer of Pope Paul VI, whose "cautious but realistic approach to the modern world" he shared, Tarancón rose to the important task of leading the Spanish Church during Transition (Hooper 102). Referred to as the "cardinal of reconciliation," the "cardinal of transition" or the "cardinal of dialogue," Vicente Tarancón was a key figure in the political process begun at Franco's death. He managed in ten years in office (1972-1982) to lead the Catholic Church on a path of modernization, in tune with the new religious, cultural, social and political reality in Spain. A militant for the unity of all Spaniards, whose separation in the *vencedores-vencidos* division he dreaded, and which he addressed in his famous homily at the coronation of King Juan Carlos on November 27, 1975, "pido que seáis el Rey de todos los españoles" [I ask you to be King of all Spaniards], Tarancón envisioned a renovated Church, aligned with society, and whose main task was that of the reconciliation of its people.[234] Characterized by a spirit of tolerance, openness and humanity, Tarancón played a crucial role in separating the Church from the Francoist legacy, and then mitigating in favor of a clear separation between Church and politics, "con Gobiernos menos católicos la iglesia vive mejor" [the Church lives better with less Catholic governments].[235]

Even if the Church was not aligned to any political party, the religious youth organizations of the 1950s had brewed many of the emerging politicians of the post-Franco era. Over 50% of Spain's practicing Catholics had voted for the

[234] Carlos Seco Serrano. "El cardenal de la transición española." *El País.* 6 December 1996. http://elpais.com/diario/1996/12/06/opinion/849826808_850215.html [26 September 2013]
[235] "No pasará nada en la Iglesia si el PSOE llega al poder." *El País.* 22 August 1981. http://elpais.com/diario/1981/08/22/sociedad/367279203_850215.html [26 September 2013]

PSOE in the 1982 general elections.[236] After Tarancón's forced retirement in 1983, the relation between the Church, society and politics took a downward turn under Archbishop Ángel Suquía, who had constant frictions with the Socialists and went so far as calling the Spanish society "sick," questioning even the merits of democracy, on grounds that the "dialectic of majorities and the power of the vote" had supplanted ethical criteria.[237] The discord between Church and state that began during the Suquía era continued after his retirement in 1994.[238]

These facts situate the ecclesiastical reality of the 1980s and 1990s, and in particular the crucial moments of 1982-1983, when Tarancón was practically forced to retire,[239] in a contentious light. Tarancón had made an indisputable contribution to the progressive dissociation of the Catholic Church from its previous political role under the national Catholicism doctrine, and brought the promise of a renewed and progressive Church, aligned with the life and the needs of the common Spaniard. His abrupt removal showed that the more conservative ecclesiastical sectors had a decisive influence when it came to the Catholic Church in Spain. Fermín Cabal's *Vade retro* (1982), written and staged at the confluence of these two significant periods of Spanish ecclesiastical history, presents an entertaining approach to the church's position between the reformist and the traditional paths, through the fierce and witty encounter of two priests, one of whom continues as ever in his consecrated profession, and the other who abandons the Church for good. As César Oliva observes, even without blatant references to the Transition, the play presents a "dialectical exercise between the conservative position of Father Abilio and the progressive one of Father Lucas" (translation mine, 101). The play also exposes the nature of the conflict between two opposing sections within the Catholic Church – the category of older generational priests and the younger ones, formed after the Second Vatican Council of 1966. While Oliva points to a general ideological rupture brought about by the Transition, the particular fissure that Cabal exposes also has to do with Church-related matters.

One summer night, the young and troubled Father Lucas visits old Father Abilio to confront him, express his doubts about remaining in the Church and finally voice the decision to leave. The two men do not have a cordial relationship; indeed, they can barely stand each other. The old priest despises the

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[236] Over 45% of the PSOE members described themselves as Catholics, and 2 ministers who had served in Felipe González' government had been seminarians. Cf. Hooper, p. 103.
[237] For more reference, see: "El PSOE juzga aberrante y antidemocrático el documento del episcopado sobre la moral." *El País*. 24 November 1990. http://elpais.com/diario/1990/11/24/sociedad/659401214_850215.html [26 September 2013]
[238] Tarancón's efforts to establish and maintain a relatively stable democratic environment by keeping the Church out of politics were thwarted by a series of favors granted to the Church by the *Populares* after their victory in the 1994 elections, and other controversies. For example, the Opus Dei, a "controversial product of Spanish spirituality," returned to politics under José María Aznar, and its founder was canonized in 2002. Cf. Hooper, pp. 104-105.
[239] Juan Cruz. "La rabia de Tarancón." *El País*. 22 January 2012. http://elpais.com/diario/2012/01/22/domingo/1327207955_850215.html [26 September 2013]

young one for his boldness. Father Lucas is annoyed by what he takes as an old man's improper indulgence in the comforts of life. The two priests embark on a tense dialogue, however masked by civility. Bordering on the heights of conflicting masculinities – they go so far as to punch each other –, the two priests confess ~~to~~ their faults, discuss the relevance of religious education, which they both exercise, and part on amiable terms. Father Lucas will enjoy his winnings in the soccer lottery and open a boutique in Benidorm, while Father Abilio will return to his domestic comfort and confessions by phone.

This is one interpretation: a humorous play about two priests, set in the domestic décor of the elder's bedroom, brings to the surface a conflict between an old traditional clergyman and a young and progressive one. Theater critics have interpreted it as a play about the *desencanto* (disenchantment) of the early 1980s, and, dismissing the satirical intention of the author, have read the priests' heated encounter as a lapse of social morality brought on by the transition to democracy (Haro Tecglen 12). Another interpretation is facilitated by the final stage direction, "Y así termina una noche de insomnio" [And this is how a sleepless night ends] (173), and by the elder priest's dismissal of the visitor with the admonishment "¡Vade retro, Satanás!" [Go back, Satan!] (171), a reference to the Book of Job, from which Father Abilio quotes throughout the play. This reading positions Father Lucas as the Devil who comes to taunt the older priest with his boldness, aggressiveness and self-assurance. Father Abilio lives comfortably, surrounded by a select sample of household appliances. The *infernillo,* the little gas jet used to warm up water for tea and coffee, would be an indication of the allegorical dimension of the setting and the characters.

The play sets out to criticize religious education by exhibiting the contradiction between the traditional, disciplinary religious instruction *and* the reformed secular methods (film clubs, liberties granted to teachers). By juxtaposing the critique of religious education with the critique of the older generations' adoption of the reformed ways, without concern for internal reform, the play exposes the dynamic and dramatic relation between new religion and old clericalism.

Let us return to the interpretation that underscores the socio-political dimension. Following a stormy confession by Father Lucas, Father Abilio asks him what he wants from life. Like everyone else, Father Lucas admits to wanting to *feel good.* In response, Father Abilio makes a cliché commentary about the evils of hedonism, not condemning it, but steering the youth to the *rightful* way of attaining happiness:

> ¿Y crees que esto te va a venir de fuera? *(Señalándose la cabeza)* Aquí, aquí está la felicidad! No la busques en otro sitio. ¿Crees que ese bienestar te lo van a dar las cosas? Materialismo barato que ya está desacreditado. Mira los países más ricos: Suecia, Inglaterra, los americanos…plagados de drogadictos y suicidas…¡El hombre necesita la espiritualidad! …¡El hombre es espíritu! (165)

> [And do you think that you'll get this from the outside? *(Pointing to his head)* This is where happiness resides! Don't look for it elsewhere. Do you think that material things will give you well being? That is cheap materialism, already disreputable. Look at the most wealthy nations: Switzerland, England, the Americans… plagued by drug addicts and suicides… Man needs spirituality! … Man is spirit!]

Father Abilio denounces the social ills stemming from the false promise of "cheap materialism," underscoring the lack of understanding in Father Lucas' ideals. From the start Abilio and Lucas seem to embody two different approaches to clericalism: Abilio, an older priest, is traditional and conservative, while Lucas is a young initiate. Judging by age criterion, the latter has been formed after the reform of the ecclesiastical institution, proposed by the Second Vatican Council, and thus he embraces a new form of clericalism. Father Abilio criticizes the influence of the new clericalism on the ways of the Church, while he himself makes full use of objects like the jet stove. His lack of understanding of the new clericalism limits him to a hypocritical condemnation of the same.

Father Abilio complains that materialism supplants spirituality. We have to bear in mind the context of the time when the play was staged. If in terms of politics 1982 marked the consolidation of democracy, in the religious arena the appointment of the conservative Archbishop Suquía meant a return to the Church's authoritarianism. Thus, Father Abilio's comments decrying the loss of spirituality due to materialism, echo this change operated within the Spanish ecclesiastical institution, and the beginning of its battle against the Socialists, viewed as antagonists of the Church.

In the name of the *same* fear or hatred of "cheap materialism" with which he associates society's decay, Father Abilio champions the emergence of new religions, "¿No ves cómo por todas partes proliferan nuevas religiones? ¡Volvemos al espíritu a pesar de las predicciones materialistas!" [Can't you see that new religions proliferate everywhere? We return to the spirit in spite of materialistic predictions!] (165), and scolds Father Lucas for adhering to the pleasure principle, "Ese es el problema de los jóvenes: que no tenéis sangre en las venas y os vendéis por treinta denarios a la sociedad de consumo" [That's the problem of the youth: you don't have any life in you and sell yourselves for thirty dinars to the consumer society] (165).

A veteran teacher of Sacred History at the *Colegio San Eulogio Mártir*, Father Abilio leads an austere life in his room, but enjoys the pleasure of reading books while listening to "vulgar" pop music. He is bothered when late night calls from alleged parishioners interrupt this habit. Appearing as a solitary figure, prone to compulsive behavior and uninterested by the professional obligations that he has to perform, Father Abilio is the embodiment of discontent. When Father Lucas knocks on his door asking for permission to be received despite the

late hour, Father Abilio interrupts his reading but, before answering the door, he messes up the bed in order to give the impression that he had been resting there already: "Se pone los pantalones y va a abrir la puerta. Se detiene, vuelve sobre sus pasos y *levanta el embozo de la cama, rebullendo las sábanas.* Abre ahora la puerta" [He puts on his pants and goes to open the door. He stops, goes back a few steps and *lifts the bedspread, stirring the sheets*. Then he opens the door] (127, emphasis mine). Visibly bothered by his young colleague's brazenness – the thirty-one-year-old invites himself in for a chat *and* a smoke – father Abilio reacts with a mix of tedium and disgust, "*(Mirando el reloj con descaro sutil)* ¿Va para largo?" [(*Looking at the watch with subtle nerve)* Are you going to need much of my time?] (128), suggesting that they postpone the meeting for the following day (134). Moreover, Abilio tells a banal lie about not having any tea to offer his interlocutor, hoping to shorten his visit and encourage him to leave. But Lucas has noticed the *infernillo*, Abilio's portable stove, and questions him about its purpose:

> ABILIO. *(Con deliberada calma)* Me hago cafés y cosas así…¿No querrá también una tacita?
> LUCAS. ¿Café? No, no, gracias. Me quita el sueño *(silencio)* Tila no tendrá, ¿verdad?
> ABILIO. *(Grosero)* Por suerte, no.
> LUCAS. ¿Y poleo?
> ABILIO. Dejémoslo en fuego *(enciende el pitillo que LUCAS tiene todavía intacto)* No nos va a dar tiempo a más. (131)
>
> [ABILIO. *(With measured calm)* I make coffee and things like this… Would you like a cup?
> LUCAS. Coffee? No, no, thank you. I can't sleep afterwards. *(Silence)* You wouldn't happen to have tea?
> ABILIO. *(Rude)* Luckily, I don't.
> LUCAS. What about pennyroyal?
> ABILIO. Let's settle on the smoke. *(He lights LUCAS' intact cigarette)* We won't have time for anything else.]

While it is easy to understand Abilio's irritation – he was enjoying his evening routine of reading and listening to pop music, summarily dressed, smoking a cigarette – it is his minimal effort in concealing this annoyed attitude that strikes us as bizarre, yet simultaneously creating a comical effect. Unexpectedly, it is easy to *feel sorry for* poor father Abilio, who is constantly bothered and cannot withdraw from his everyday work stress even in the late hours. Configured as a workingman, for whom the priesthood is a job like any other, entitled not only to retirement benefits but also to free time, father Abilio is forced to take his mission *beyond* regular norms. As Ruth Behar writes, "priests … are viewed as functionaries of the church and of the state, a product of the

long historical connection between the two in Spain. They are men with a career, whose *business* is *religion*" (90, emphasis mine). Indeed, while listening to Lucas, they are interrupted by a parishioner who phones for spiritual advice, and whom Abilio rejects outright: "Mire, de todas formas no puedo. […] No, no, lo siento, compréndalo, en este momento estoy con otro feligrés…en el confesionario…sí, a estas horas…" [Look, I just can't…No, no, I'm sorry, please understand, right now I am with another parishioner… in the confessional… yes, *this late*…] (136, emphasis mine). Abilio's irritation and his blasé attitude to his profession strikes Lucas, who is more enthusiastic and passionate, as inappropriate. Lucas understands priesthood as reserved to the administration of sacraments and the celebration of rites, and it is for a rite that he seeks Abilio: confession. But, Abilio shows through his behavior that he perceives his clerical position as a mere external job, not one that requires any *interior* sacrifice. He presents himself as the embodiment of an ethical workingman: "Para un sacerdote no hay horarios, somos como médicos de urgencia… siempre de guardia…" [For a priest there is no such thing as schedule, we're like emergency doctors… always on call…] (136). Abilio does express intent to listen to a man's confession by phone, even if in reality he does not really want to.

A man of the Lord by profession and also – we assume or expect – by calling, Abilio embraces a few secular pleasures: he owns several objects in his room, appropriate for the comfort of a regular wage earner, yet semi-scandalous for a priest. The opening stage direction indicates the modesty of the *priest*'s room: "Mobiliario estoico. Una cama, un pequeño armario, un baúl, mesa camilla, una estantería con libros y papeles" [Stoic furnishings. A bed, a small chest of drawers, a trunk, night table, shelves with books and papers] (127); at the same time, it makes a commercial inventory of the *man*'s possessions, "Despertador. Ventilador. Transistor. Teléfono. En algún lugar, un infernillo. Una mesa de trabajo con un flexo. Un par de sillones y unas sillas de pino" [Alarm clock. Fan. Radio. Telephone. In some place, a portable stove. A desk with a reading lamp] (127). The epitome of indulgence and idolatry is the exotic presence of "una especie de icono africano y dos colmillos de elefante de los que penden perchas con camisas puestas a secar" [a sort of African icon and two elephant tusks onto which there are hangers with shirts hung out to dry] (127). The exoticism of the elephant tusks is played down by their practical use for hanging clothes. Father Abilio himself inventories the "abundance" of his room, sarcastically putting himself at Father Lucas' service:

> Cerillas, mechero. Un chisquero, regalo de mi padre…Y si es preciso tengo un infernillo…Como ve, no me privo de nada […] También tengo un calendario, un reloj despertador, unas zapatillas…En fin, que nado en la abundancia. (129)
>
> [Matches, lighter. A pocket lighter, a gift form my father…And if it's necessary I have a portable stove… As you can see, I don't

deprive myself of anything…I also have a calendar, an alarm clock, a pair of slippers…In short, I swim in abundance.]

Father Lucas seeks Father Abilio's advice as he would from a superior, or a counselor: "podría ayudarme…es la persona más indicada […] Hay algo que ya no está conmigo…Como si fuera otro que me veo actuar desde fuera, y me juzgo…no, no me juzgo…ni siquiera, solo me pregunto por qué…Por qué hago esto, por qué hago lo otro" [you could help me, you're the right person…there is something that's wrong with me…As if I were someone else and see myself act from outside, and I judge myself…no, I don't judge myself…not even, I just wonder why…why I do this, why I do that] (131) yet he is met with the moral and professional levelness or indifference of a peer: "Yo también me lo pregunto. Si puedo decirle, desde hace tiempo le encuentro insoportable" [I also wonder. If I can tell you, for some time I find you insufferable] (131). The dramatic tension rises as Father Abilio refuses to counsel Father Lucas *from a superior position,* as the latter is seeking.

A tense dialogue starts from Lucas' banal request for a means to light a cigarette and then intensifies when he asks about the possibility of having a cup of coffee. This dialogue reveals in full spectrum the opposition between entitlement and expectation: young Lucas thinks that he is *entitled* to receive advice from an older colleague, whom he approaches as superior but whom he regards as equal. This contradiction appears when Lucas reveals that he had, in fact, a way of lighting his cigarette, but led Abilio on, testing his irritation:

LUCAS. ¿Puedo coger otro cigarrillo?

(Lo coge. Busca las cerillas por sus bolsillos. ABILIO le mira cansado y acercándose a la mesa coge el mechero que está a la vista, lo enciende y le da fuego. Pero LUCAS ha sacado cerillas y prende el pitillo. ABILIO mantiene unos segundos la llama).

ABILIO. Creí que no tenía cerillas…
LUCAS. ¿Sí? Qué extraño… ¿Qué le llevó a pensarlo?
ABILIO. Usted lo dijo.
LUCAS. Me habrá entendido mal.
ABILIO. Le he entendido perfectamente. (132-133)

[LUCAS. May I take another cigarette?

(He takes it. He looks for matches in his pockets. ABILIO looks at him, tired, and going to the table picks up the lighter, lights it and gives it to LUCAS. But LUCAS has taken out matches and lights the cigarette. ABILIO holds the flame for a few seconds.)

ABILIO. I thought you didn't have matches…
LUCAS. Really? How strange… What made you think that?
ABILIO. You said so yourself.
LUCAS. Perhaps you misunderstood me.

ABILIO. I understood you very well.]

That Lucas has come to defy Abilio is now evident. Playing a game of apparent misunderstandings, like the amusement about the origin and nature of the tusks (Lucas disputing their elephant provenance and claiming they belong to a wild boar), the two men lay their cards on the table:

> LUCAS. *(Pausa. Mirándole fijamente)* Me pregunto cómo lo hace.
> ABILIO. ¿Cómo hago qué?
> LUCAS. Esa seguridad. Tiene que haber un truco.
> ABILIO. Padre Lucas, recuerdo perfectamente que antes me pidió fuego. Hasta podría repetir sus palabras *(Señala las cerillas, mechero y chisquero que quedaron sobre la mesa)* Y yo saqué todo esto…¡si le ofrecí hasta el infernillo!
> LUCAS. Es cierto. También me ofreció una taza de café.
> ABILIO. No fue así exactamente…
> LUCAS. ¿No? ¿No me preguntó si quería café?
> ABILIO. Lo dije con segundas y usted creyó que se lo ofrecía. (133)
> [LUCAS. *(Pause. Staring at the other.)* I wonder how you do it.
> ABILIO. How I do what?
> LUCAS. That security. There must be a trick.
> ABILIO. Father Lucas, I remember perfectly that you asked for a light. I could even reproduce your words. (*Points to the matches, oil lamp and pocket lighter on the table.)* And I took all these out… I even offered you the portable stove!
> LUCAS. That's right. You also offered me a cup of coffee.
> ABILIO. That's not exactly how it happened…
> LUCAS. Oh, no? Didn't you ask me if I wanted coffee?
> ABILIO. I said that with other intentions and you believed that I was really offering it.]

Clinging to his right to refuse a "customer" after "business hours," and especially one whom he considers annoying, Father Abilio speaks openly and calmly. The main reason why Lucas has decided to ask for Abilio's advice is the constant tension between them: "Le extrañará que me presente aquí a estas horas…No me resulta fácil hablar con usted…Ya sabe, estamos siempre discutiendo…nunca de acuerdo…¿por qué será? […] Tal vez por eso le haya elegido. Somos tan opuestos…justo lo que necesito…" [Perhaps you're surprised to see me here at this hour … It's not easy for me to talk to you…You know, we're always arguing…we never agree…why is it?... maybe that's why I chose you. We're so different…just what I need] (133). Lucas begs to be received in confession despite the late hour, pleading insanity and threatening to do something stupid otherwise, "No puede negarse administrar un sacramento. Si

no me escucha soy capaz de…de cualquier locura. Y usted será responsable ante Dios" [You can't deny administering a sacrament. If you don't listen to me, I'm capable of…anything. And you'll be responsible before God] (134). Lucas' provocation however manages to peak Father Abilio's vanity, who agrees to hear the youngster's confession in spite of warning him that such "mystical blackmail" leaves him cold. The irony is that neither did Lucas intend to confess, nor did Abilio agree to hear him out from an excess of spiritual zeal. He wants to teach the rude Lucas a lesson, while Lucas lures the older priest with the possibility to increase his income with an alleged sport bets winning strategy. Teaching the recalcitrant Lucas a lesson clashes with his disrespectful attempt to seduce Abilio with an indecent secular proposal.

Even if they don't have a paternal-filial relation, they both seek to reproduce it through their false, forced behavior. On one hand, Lucas is tempting Abilio like a silly son, reproaching him the inability of paternal sacrifice: "Se tiene por un hombre piadoso…¿Sabe qué le digo? ¡Qué es un reaccionario! Usted es incapaz de hacer nada por un semejante…" [You think you're a pious man… You know what? You're a reactionary! You're incapable of doing anything for anyone…] (135). On the other, Abilio tries to reprimand and punish young Lucas as a father would. He has the same attitude vis à vis the person ("deranged nutcase") who called him in the middle of the night: "En fin, amigo Navarro, ya hablaremos con más…Pues quizá, no sé…No digo que no. Para un profesor es difícil no tener preferencias. *Sucede igual que a los padres con los hijos…*" [Well, friend Navarro, we'll keep in touch…. Maybe, I don't know… I'm not saying no. It's hard for a teacher not to have preferences. *It's the same for a father and his children…*] (136, emphasis mine).

However, the vicarious filial association is superficial. Abilio claims to have a "father" role but dismisses early dawn phone-calls from "drunk, miserable" souls who should see a "good psychiatrist" rather than bother him, on grounds of being already busy with disciplining his other "son," Lucas. As soon as Lucas gives signs of wanting to exit the room, Abilio changes the strategy, revealing that he, too, was playing with Lucas:

> ABILIO. Es tila. Le vendrá bien para los nervios.
> LUCAS. *(Le mira. Abre la boca. Levanta el dedo índice y apunta al padre ABILIO)* Pero usted dijo que no tenía tila…
> ABILIO. *(Burlón)* ¿Eso dije? *(LUCAS asiente)* Mentía *(Se cree muy duro)* ¿Sabrá usted perdonarme?
> […]
> ABILIO. No me lo tome a mal. También yo estoy un poco excitado. No sé, trabajamos demasiado…Le oiré en confesión, faltaría más…¡Mmmm! Ya va calentándose… (138)

[ABILIO. It's linden. It'll help you steady your nerves.

LUCAS. *(Looks at him. Opens his mouth. Raises his index finger and points at father ABILIO.)* But you said that you didn't have linden.

ABILIO. *(Mocking)* Did I say that? *(LUCAS assents.)* I lied. *(He thinks he's tough.)* Will you be able to forgive me?

…

ABILIO. Don't take it personally. I'm also a bit agitated. I don't know, we work too much… I'll hear you in confession, naturally…Mmmm! It's starting to warm up…]

Asserting paternal authority over Lucas, Abilio pretends to recognize the urgency of the situation and, realizing that his "son" did not come to bother him with "silly things," agrees to hear his confession: "Creí que se trataba de una de sus estupideces…Pero, tratándose de una cosa así, me hago cargo de su urgencia. Le escucho" [I thought it was one of your silly things… But, being something like this, I'll attend to your emergency. I'm listening] (138). This duplicitous attitude annoys Lucas, given that earlier Abilio was eager to get rid of him: "Se cree por encima del mundo. Usted decide lo que es urgente y lo que no lo es. ¡Y a quien hay que darle tila y a quien no!" [You think you're above everyone. You decide what's urgent and what's not. And who gets linden and who doesn't!] (138). The two characters carry on a dialogue in which they change positions, negotiate, argue, make accusations and fight to reach an agreement over what they see as the right attitude towards the role of the clergyman. They begin from a position of confrontation and their spirits only get tenser as the night advances. The situation escalates, and their dialogue reaches moments of brutal confrontation, only to recede and revert to an original peace. This happens when Lucas claims that he'll abandon the Church for good. The match between Lucas and Abilio echoes the roller-coaster ride that the Church and the State took between 1977 and 1982. Abilio uses his suddenly acquired power through the setting of priorities – Lucas comes first, the rest of the problems can wait – and Lucas challenges him like a rebellious adolescent reproaching his father the delay with which he finally takes interest in his problems. "¡No soy hijo suyo!" [I'm not your son!] Lucas argues, while Abilio reassures him, "Por la edad podrías serlo" [Judging by your age, you could be] (145). By asserting a paternal role over Lucas, Abilio clings to an historic entitlement – which translates allegorically into the Church's historic role in the moral guidance of Spain.

Fighting his sleepiness, Abilio begins the confession hesitantly, while preparing and serving the tea. The confession acquires a funny and also serious tone. Father Lucas reveals his boredom during confessing others, and his profound disillusion with the banality of vices or scruples that people share,

> Pensé que sería divertido enterarse de lo que cada uno cuece por dentro, oculto…Para poder ayudar, por supuesto. Pero enseguida me desilusioné. Los pecadores son tan monótonos! Tan faltos de

> originalidad! … ¿Sabe? Sospecho que los verdaderos pecadores, los auténticos, esos no vienen por el confesionario…Solo nos llega la morralla… (143)
>
> [I thought it would be entertaining to find out what each person cooks inside, hidden… In order to help, of course. But soon I became disillusioned. Sinners are so monotonous! So void of originality! … You know? I think that the true sinners, the authentic ones, don't come through the confessional… We only get rubbish]

The gossipy nature of some priests is the subject of much literature (the example of Clarín's 1884-1885 novel *La Regenta* alone suffices) and testimony (as Ruth Behar indicates in a study about anticlericalism and religiosity in post-Franco Spain[240]). Faced with such confessionary "rubbish," even Father Lucas admits that he loses his patience easily: "[…] si alguno se demora y empieza con los escrúpulos, me desespero. Me entran ganas de agarrarle por las solapas y agitarlo…" […if someone is late and starts with the scruples, I lose patience. I feel like grabbing him by the lapels and shake him up…] (143). Once started with his complaints, Lucas touches on the delicate matter of religious education.

Once victorious, the PSOE sought to reform Spain's educational policy by replacing the UCD's educational law of 1980, LOECE (*Ley Orgánica del Estatuto de Centros Escolares*). The LOECE did not differ significantly from Franco's 1970 law of education, as it just regulated the right to education and changed the organization of the schools to include the parents more. In 1982, when the action of the play takes place, the LOECE was still active, but it was expected that it would be changed. The new law was passed in December 1983, LODE (*Ley Orgánica del Derecho a la Educación*). This law regulated the administrative, financial and ideological autonomy of private and Church education; since Church schools had been heavily subsidized since the 1970 education law, LODE created frictions between the Church and the State (Callahan 589-591).[241]

In a secular, democratic Spain, the existence of a Church school is anachronistic. However, the traditional objective of continuing to spread the faith remained strong. Father Lucas and Father Abilio discuss the validity of religious education at their *Colegio,* the first being in favor and the latter against it. The Colegio San Eulogio Mártir, the institution at which Abilio is "prefecto de estudios" and professor of Sacred History, is private and, according to the Educational Law of 1980 (LOECE), still retained most of its financial and funding privileges. Father Lucas perceives the school as an antiquated and exploitative institution, which causes suffering to its poor students, "esos pobres niños" (144), in disagreement with the modern European trends that Spain was politically and economically trying to emulate. It is from this point forward that the ideological

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[240] Behar, pp. 93-94.

[241] For more information, see the full text of the law, http://noticias.juridicas.com/base_datos/Admin/lo8-1985.html

gap between the two priests is made obvious, as they address each other according to the hierarchical denominations, with distance: "Father" Lucas from the simple "Lucas," before, at the beginning of the confession), and "Father" Abilio, who lacks the patience to listen to him and who does not share the same opinion:

> ABILIO. ¿Qué nosotros explotamos al alumnado?
> LUCAS. Así de claro. ¿No se les sangra bastante con las matrículas?
> ABILIO. ¿Dónde está el abuso? Pagan por su educación un precio justo y razonable.
> LUCAS. ¡Un precio desorbitado! ¿Y a cambio de qué? De una educación castradora y represiva que les prepara para ser alimañas sociales sin entrañas.
> ABILIO. Padre Lucas, usted desvaría. A decir verdad, lo he intuido desde hace tiempo. No está en sus cabales. […] En lo que a mí respecta, está perdonado. (145)
>
> [ABILIO. We exploit the students?
> LUCAS. Exactly. Aren't they extorted enough with the fees?
> ABILIO. Where's the abuse? They pay a just and reasonable price for their education.
> LUCAS. An exorbitant price! In exchange for what? A castrating and repressive education that teaches them to be heartless social vermin.
> ABILIO. Father Lucas, you're delirious. To be honest, I've sensed it a while ago. You're not in your right mind… As far as I'm concerned, you're forgiven.]

Father Abilio's defense of religious education, implicit in his sudden and unconventional forgiveness of Lucas, indicates him as a bigoted man, advocating for the Church's effective control over morality, even within a democratic State. He enjoys the consumerist benefits guaranteed by his position within the system, while at the same time showing discontent with that very same system, which he understands as an oligarchic cycle in which he is a simple cog. Father Abilio hates and loves the hierarchical institution to which he belongs because it guarantees trivial consumerist whims (*infernillo,* coffee, tea) and allows him the simulacrum of freedom to believe that he can oppose it (his refusal to confess by phone, his dismissing attitude of Father Lucas, etc.). Father Abilio showcases his "democratic inclinations," by enumerating two basic human liberties, the freedom to choose that which is more convenient for oneself and the freedom to make mistakes. His apologetic discourse vis à vis democracy and the calm, paternal and pious attitude with which he dismisses the raging Lucas only manage to increase the latter's fury: "ora paternal, ora apologético, ora místico,

ora realista, ¡San Abilio, masoquista y mártir!" [now paternal, now apologetic, now mystic, now realistic, Saint Abilio, masochist and martyr!] (146). Abilio agrees only on the surface with democratic governance, keeping a strong advocacy for long-established tradition. He is an adept of modernity and progress – after all he confesses by phone – but he also holds on to a position of power that ecclesiastical hierarchy has granted him. A brief but violent fight between the two leaves Lucas defeated and, oedipally disturbed, calling for his mother the minute he wakes up from a faint.

While religious education is the issue at heart that prompts Lucas' resignation and Abilio's fierce defense of Church schools, their conversation easily slips into irrelevant and indecent confessions. These deviations signal that both priests are too preoccupied with personal issues to pay attention to the larger problem. While out at a pizzeria, Lucas ran into a former student and recalls the incident that ensued:

> […] me dio por ponerme en plan nostálgico, evocador, y empecé a hablar del tiempo que coincidimos en este lugar. De pronto, me cortó bruscamente y me dijo lo que pensaba de verdad de San Eulogio, de la Congregación, de los profesores y de mí particularmente. (156)
>
> […I don't know what got me to get nostalgic, dreamy, and I began to talk about the times when we coincided in this place. All of a sudden, he interrupted me abruptly and told me what he really thought of San Eulogio, of the Congregation, of the faculty and me, in particular.]

Not penitence but manliness drives these two men to tally indecent adventures. Strangely enough, Lucas' experience prompts Abilio to share an anecdote too. He reveals that during his missionary days he had voluntarily – in fact, intentionally – taken the virginity of an African woman, under the pretext of fulfilling a ritual on which his life depended. The presence of the elephant tusks in Abilio's room testifies to this exotic adventure. Does Abilio reveal an act of rape in order to gain Lucas' confidence? Or does he do that as a male-to-male challenge?

If for Michel Foucault confession was the epitome of state control over the publicly repressed yet privately hedonistic subject, inextricably linked to the conversion of sexuality into discourse,[242] for Lucas and Abilio confession

[242] In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault compares confession to "ars erotica" and traces its use for the purpose of the "production of truth" (58-61). Moreover, through the power relationship that existed between confessor and subject, confession is viewed as pure "ritual of power": "The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the

becomes a tool for asserting dominance and virility. Each pretends to be listening to the other for the sake of truth – "¡Necesito decir la verdad aunque sea solo una vez!" [I need to speak the truth for once!] – Lucas shouts, while Abilio admits that, "También yo he sufrido pruebas terribles" [I have suffered terrible tests, too] (159), while deep inside they (masochistically) long for absolution. When Abilio recounts his African defloration adventure, it is Lucas who acts as confessor. This confession soon acquires the familiarity of a friendly chat, confirmed by the two men's relaxed snacking over a "chorizo que no está nada mal" [quite good sausage] and an "auténtico caldo bierzano, cosecha propia" [authentic Bierzo wine, my own harvest] (162).

The scene in which Abilio and Lucas argue about the righteousness of the biblical Job, whom they defend and accuse, respectively, lends itself to an allegorical interpretation. As in the story, where Job is tempted by the Devil, Abilio is tempted by the Lucas. Father Abilio imagines – like Job – that God abandoned him and left him to deal with many unjust sufferings. He speaks of Job as the "most patient man in history," a "spotless" individual, but father Lucas disagrees, calling Job names, "menudo elemento" [a petty character], "punto filipino" [unscrupulous person], "prepotente"[conceited], stressing his hypocrisy, and his arrogant incapacity to admit his faults:

> LUCAS. – […] está convencido que tiene la verdad absoluta.
> ABILIO. – Es que la tiene. ¿O no lo cree así?
> LUCAS. – No digo que no, pero eso es lo de menos.
> ABILIO. - ¿Cómo lo de menos? ¡Se tiene razón o no se tiene!
> LUCAS. - ¡Ahí le duele, padre Abilio, ahí les duele a todos ustedes. El tal Job tenía sus razones, nadie lo niega, pero también tendrían las suyas sus enemigos.
> ABILIO. – ¿Qué enemigos podía tener ese hombre intachable? … Solo Satanás … y sus tentaciones… (152)
>
> [LUCAS. […] you are convinced that he possesses the absolute truth.
> ABILIO. […] He does. Don't you think so?
> LUCAS. […] I'm not saying you're wrong, but that's not the point.
> ABILIO. […] What do you mean not the point? I'm right or I'm not right!
> LUCAS. […] That's your weak spot, Father Abilio, that's everyone's weak spot. That Job had his reasons, nobody denies that, but so did his enemies.
> ABILIO. […] What enemies could that flawless man have? … Only Satan … and his temptations.]

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authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile" (61-62).

Father Abilio frequently reads from the Book of Job ("lo leo a menudo. Me hace bien", 151) and strongly defends the biblical patriarch in the dispute with Father Lucas. When he finally cannot take Lucas' assaults, he explodes, "¿Qué tiene contra mí?"[What do you have against me?] (153). By analogy Abilio compares himself to Job, a moral man, taunted by a lesser element, Lucas, or the Devil.

The story of Job recounts the terrible affliction imposed on a pious man, whose sufferings and their reactions grow exponentially. Informed about the loss of his livestock and the death of all his children, Job reacts with resignation. Having tested Job's faith, God returns Job's family and possessions to him. In *Vade retro* Abilio endures stoically Lucas' intrusion, disturbance and accusations with equal poise and tranquility. When he is asked to leave the Church and join Lucas in a secular endeavor, Abilio resists the temptation and remains faithful to his ecclesiastical and educational function.

This interpretation is strictly symbolic. The overall political context of the early 1980s, which challenged the hierarchy of the Church, is reflected in this exchange. Father Lucas and Father Abilio represent the young church and the Francoist church that preceded it. Father Lucas speaks in the play as a post-Vatican II priest, one who favors popular religion and rejects monolithic clericalism. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) introduced significant changes for the Catholic Church, one of the most remarkable being the switch from the Latin to the vernacular mass. While other reforms targeted the duration of the pre-Communion fast or eliminated the tonsure, the shaved spot on the back of the head, the greater purpose of the Council was to make religion more "relevant to a modern, urban world, turned critical of the faith by the advances of science, technology and industrialism" (Behar 80). In 1967 Spain proclaimed the law of religious freedom (*Ley de libertad religiosa*), in agreement with the decrees of the Council. This was a radical change, considering the largely denominational structure of the state during Franco's rule. The role and position of the Catholic Church were further reexamined during the Transition, when a "political reconversion" took place (Pérez-Díaz 1987: 454). The Church had begun to distance itself from the Franco regime and supported the transition to democracy. A series of Agreements *(acuerdos*) regulated the relations between the Church and the State. On the 9th of July 1976, the day after the forming of the new Government and six days after Adolfo Suárez was named Prime Minister, King Juan Carlos I renounced his historic right of appointment of bishops. On the 28th of July 1976 the ecclesiastic privileges (*fueros eclesiásticos*) were abolished. These dates marked important changes for the Spanish Catholic Church.

In this context, Lucas and Abilio symbolize the historic confrontation between the sectors of the Church that were displeased with the reforms proclaimed by Vatican II and those who embraced them. Lucas' rejection of the habit comes from a deep sentiment of anticlericalism that is fueled by what he considers to be the older generation's hypocritical and selective adherence to the Vatican II rules. He sees Abilio's comfortable and carefree living and dispensation of confessions as a form of idolatry. Lucas, in sum, is part of a

"youthful church, a church full of optimism, energy and courage; a church that is opening up its shutters and letting in the fresh and revitalizing air of change,"[243] and he attempts to expose Abilio as a fraud, who indulges in a secular spirit while maintaining the obsolete orthodoxy of the traditional Church and National Catholicism. The initial frame of Cabal's play sets out to discredit old Catholicism by juxtaposing it to the new, modern version. However, the action ultimately discloses that new Catholicism – symbolized by Father Lucas – is as tainted as the old patriarchal doctrine, embodied by the stubborn and aloof Father Abilio. In the next section we will see how the new spirit of Catholicism is further satirized. Concha Romero's 1983 *Un olor a ámbar* illustrates the interior combat carried on by officials of the Church in order to secure popular veneration through opportunistic uses of devout figures, like Saint Teresa. This attack on the instrumentalization of Santa Teresa by the Catholic Church and the Dictatorship fits the liberating mode set in motion by the Transition to democracy, which also meant an openness professed by the Spanish Church. Given the secularization seen in Spain during this period, Romero's irreverence can be seen as a means of liberating Teresa, the woman, from her Catholic and Francoist cage so that her complex humanity could be appreciated, especially within Spanish feminism.

4.2. Concha Romero's *Un olor a ámbar* (1983) and the Derision of Historical Sanctification

The figure of Saint Teresa stands at the center of Concha Romero's satirical comedy *Un olor a ámbar*. Considered a reflection of the "ideological process that transforms a human being into a historical subject" and thus a reflection on how history is configured through the "emergence of great individuals," the play offers an unusual perspective on Teresa's times (DiPuccio 225-227). When the curtain rises, Teresa has been dead for a year, and we witness the proceedings of her eccentric canonization. The spectacle unfolds through a discourse of appropriation by institutional voices who appear to embody and abide by a strict code of ethics – a head priest and a prioress – but who ultimately resort to petty schemes and display attitudes proper to farce.

The year is 1583. The congregations of Alba and Ávila dispute her uncorrupted body, sensing that the saint's canonization will stimulate the order's financial growth and secular transcendence. Saint Teresa becomes the involuntary protagonist of a grotesque joke. The *Carmelitas Descalzas* convent of nuns in Alba has her body, but the region's ecclesiastic hierarch claims it for the

[243] Ángel quot. in Behar p. 82.

town of Ávila. The conditions in which Teresa leaves Alba en route to the new site of eternal glory in Ávila are egregiously at odds with her newly acquired status of future saint. She is lacking several body parts, dismembered by priests, friars or nuns for protection or as bribes (to close the deal, the Alba Prioress kept Teresa's right arm). En route her body is stuffed in a sack and carried on the back of a mule to arouse the least amount of suspicion.

The play has two acts: the first one presents the discovery of the incorrupt body of Teresa, and the second describes the beginning of the sanctification process. Act one opens with a simple, domestic situation: two lay sisters are cleaning the convent and are talking about a strange smell in the convent: "a mí esta casa me huele raro por no decir mal" [this house smells strange, not to say bad] (19). By speaking at all, the sisters are breaking a vow of silence, and what they go on to talk about —a pagan myth (Arachne's story)— further sets a tone of transgression. This beginning shows a practical side of convent life, drawing attention to the comical and completely profane nature of the sanctification of Saint Teresa de Jesús.

Since the smell had been persisting for a while, the prioress has decided to call the head priest, father Gracián, who had been Teresa's friend and confessor. Before his arrival, several nuns complain about the smell. One nun says that it distracts her from praying: "A mí me distrae de tal forma, que cuando estoy en la capilla, me impide hasta rezar. Se me va metiendo poco a poco por la pituitaria y me produce un picor tan grande que hasta no estornudo no se me pasa la molestia" [It distracts me so that when I'm in the chapel, it prevents me even from praying. It slowly goes up through my pituitary and causes me a such a great stinging that until I sneeze it doesn't go away] (24). Another is visibly disturbed by it: "A mí … me da mucho miedo. A veces cuando entro en mi celda por la noche, a oscuras, y el olor está allí impregnándolo todo, las sábanas, el colchón, las paredes, la almohada…me dan ganas de llorar y de salir corriendo. ¡No puedo soportarlo!" [I'm frightened by it. Sometimes when I go to my cell at night, the smell is everywhere, in the sheets and the mattress, on the walls and my pillow…I feel like crying and running away. I can't stand it!] (24). The saint's presence is thus perversely announced to the audience**.**

The arrival of Father Gracián and his companion, friar Cristóbal, is received with great joy; the nuns express an uncontrollable desire to be confessed by him: "Yo he confesado una sola vez con él y dejó mi alma tan consolada que parecía una balsa de aceite" [I confessed with him just once and he left my soul consoled and peaceful](23). The competition for father's Gracián's time is so great that the nuns will draw lots: "Lo echaremos a suerte. En asuntos de alma no debe contar la antigüedad ni nada" [We'll draw lots. In matters of the soul nothing should matter, not even age] (23). The prioress has not informed Gracián about the smell beforehand, but expects that it would come up naturally in their conversation about Teresa's death.

All the nuns share their experience with Teresa before she died, and the information they provide attests to their naiveté. For example, one says at the

moment of her death Teresa had masculine traits: "tenía el aspecto de varón venerable más que de una mujer. Tal vez por la serenidad de su rostro o por un débil vellito que poblaba su barbilla" [she had the aspect of a venerable man more than that of a woman. Maybe because of the serenity of her face or the gentle fuzz growing on her chin] (29), an irreverent observation immediately cancelled by a pious detail: "los pies se le pusieron como de nácar, casi transparentes" [her feet became like nacre, almost transparent] (29). The nuns get ~~too~~ nostalgic and reveal that the smell that was sensed in her room after her death is the same smell that emanates from her grave.

Hearing the nuns explain the circumstances, and reassuring that the burial has taken place in regular conditions, no special treatment being granted to Teresa's body, the prioress suggests that she be disinterred. Father Gracián agrees, but wants to proceed in secret. The priests will up the coffin and the nuns will carry it to the sacristy and take the body out. This seems bizarre, especially given the nuns' fear of death and their impressionable character. Upon opening the coffin, they are horrified at seeing Teresa's feet, hands, legs, and arms unspoiled. Convinced that this is a miracle, the nuns proceed to wash her body. Friar Cristobal remains skeptical, but Father Gracián decides to use this as a powerful instrument for the survival of Teresa's reformation of the religious order:

> FRAY CRISTÓBAL. Esta incorrupción no puede ser natural, principalmente siendo mujer y de suyo alto gruesa, porque las mujeres son muy húmedas y suculentas, con una humedad muy apta 'Ad corruptionem'.
>
> PADRE GRACIÁN. Demos gracias a Dios por haber conservado su cuerpo. Ya sea milagro o capricho de la naturaleza las consecuencias serán las mismas para el futuro de la Reforma y para que el prestigio de nuestra Madre, tan discutido en vida, quede restablecido después de muerta. (36)
>
> [FRIAR CRISTÓBAL. This lack of decay cannot be natural, especially since she was a woman and naturally quite thick, because women are very moist and succulent, with a humidity very subject to decay.
>
> FATHER GRACIÁN. Let's give thanks to God for having preserved her body. Whether miracle or caprice of nature the consequences will be the same for the future of the Reformation (of the monastic order, n.a.) and so that the prestige of our Mother, so debated during her lifetime, will be restored after her death.]

Despite Friar Cristóbal's outright misogyny and disbelief of female sanctity, Father Gracián recognizes the practical side of Teresa's body remaining incorrupt, in spite of her crushed nose: "Está perfecta, a no ser por la nariz" [She's perfect, if it weren't for the nose] (39). (The Prioress informs the audience that a board from the coffin fell and broke Teresa's nose while she was inside.) With this detail, which calls into question the saint's doll-like beauty ("es como una muñeca" [she's like a doll] 37), Romero irreverently undercuts the sacred stature of Saint Teresa in the midst of a grotesque scene. Pretending piety and asking to remain alone with the incorrupt Teresa, Father Gracián cuts off her hand, which he argues will help and protect him during the trials that he must stand: "te lo diré sin rodeos. Me he quedado aquí solo para llevarme tu mano y que me acompañe en los sufrimientos, que sin duda me esperan" [I'll tell you straight. I stayed here only to take your hand so that it may accompany me in the sufferings that are undoubtedly awaiting me] (30). Spying on his companion and seeing his boldness, friar Cristobal proceeds to do the same: "Si el Provincial se llevó la mano, yo que soy su ayudante, tendré derecho a llevarme algo. Le cortaré un dedito, un dedito del pie, el meñique para no pecar de ambicioso" [If the head priest took the hand, I, as his assistant, have the right to take something. I'll cut a toe, the pinkie one so I don't succumb to the sin of ambition] (41).

The second act presents the arrival of Church superiors to Alba, in order to oversee the process of sanctification. But this is not so simple, as egos collide and make the entire process ridiculous and quite irreverent. Similar to the previous act, the opening presents two women gossiping and bragging about the importance of their convent: "Alba se convertirá en la capital de España. ¡Qué digo de España! Del mundo entero llegarán peregrinos y hasta el mismísimo Papa saldrá del Vaticano para admirarla" [Alba will become Spain's capital. Not just of Spain! Pilgrims will come from the whole world and the Pope himself will travel from Vatican to admire her] (44). Waiting for the visit of a high Church official, the nuns take body parts, and rehearse what they will say should the Bishop question them: "¡Atención, atención! ¡Silencio! ¡Ensayo general! ¡Imaginaos! Yo soy el obispo de Salamanca que he venido a interrogaros" [Pay attention! Silence! General rehearsal! Imagine! I'm the bishop of Salamanca who has come to interrogate you] (44). As the Prioress is approaching they stop their "rehearsal"; since it's her birthday, the nuns have even prepared a surprise theatrical moment to entertain her. They perform the story of a young virgin who proclaims her faith in Jesus Christ before the Romans and is miraculously saved. The same night another ecclesiastic official arrives. Father Gracián has been demoted and Friar Gregorio Nacianceno, who is accompanied by friar Antonio de Jesús, has replaced him. From the start, he imposes distance and insists that the new norms of the religious order be followed:

> Uno de los principios que vamos a introducir en nuestro mandato es que las monjas no agasajen a su provincial… ¡austeridad, hambre y ayuno! ¡Hay que acabar con el lujo y el despilfarro!

¡Recogerse, recogerse y orar! ¡Castigar el cuerpo para que el alma se eleve! Muy mal acostumbrados os tenían vuestros superiores con tanta suavidad. (59)

[One of the principles that we'll introduce in our term is that nuns will no longer lavish attention on their head priest… austerity, hunger and fasting! We must end the luxury and the extravagance! Retire to your cells, retire to your cells, and pray! Punish the body so that the soul may ascend! Your superiors spoiled you with so much gentleness.]

Professing ignorance of whose body is to be punished, the Prioress asks for clarification:

PRIORA. (*Haciéndose la tonta.)* ¿Del cuerpo de la Santa Madre Iglesia?
NACIANCENO. No disimule, madre. Sabe muy bien a qué cuerpo me refiero. He venido a llevármelo.
PRIORA. ¿A llevárselo? ¿A donde?
NACIANCENO. A San José de Ávila.
PRIORA. Pero eso no es posible! Teresa murió aquí, en Alba.
NACIANCENO. Es evidente que así fue. Pero murió aquí por casualidad. (80)

[PRIORESS. (*Playing dumb*) The body of the Holy Church?
NACIANCENO. Don't evade, sister. You know full well what body I mean. I came to take it.
PRIORESS. To take it? Where?
NACIANCENO. To San José of Ávila.
PRIORESS. But that's not possible! Teresa died here, in Alba.
NACIANCENO. It's obvious that it happened like that. But she died here by chance.]

The head priest's commanding tone continues when he asks friar Antonio to enumerate the reasons justifying the removal of Teresa's body from the Alba convent and its relocation to San José de Ávila. They are very simple: in the company of fray Antonio, Teresa had gone to Alba – where she died – against God's will. She was on her way to Ávila but detoured to Alba in response to an urgent plea from a Duchess. This argumentation is hilarious because it is forced and delivered in an uproarious manner. Not only does friar Antonio stammer – a verbal defect probably exacerbated by his servile attitude vis-à-vis the head priest and his fear of the prioress – but his rendering is mediocre: his cliché rhetoric is suspiciously organized (and undoubtedly rehearsed) to confuse the prioress. However, her cool and aloof manner infuriates the head priest:

PRIORA. Como argumento está bien. Pero no me convence. Nadie puede elegir lugar y fecha de muerte. Es Dios quien las elige. Siempre hay, qué duda cabe, circunstancias que justifican que se produzca en un lugar y no en otro, pero al final, es Dios y solo Dios quien los determina. Digamos que el padre fray Antonio actuó en aquella ocasión como mera circunstancia.

NACIANCENO. Razona bien para ser mujer, pero no me parece respetuoso que una monja, por muy priora que sea, se atreva a llamarle a un fraile "circunstancia". (61)

[PRIORESS. It's a good argument. But I'm not convinced. No one can choose the time and place of their death. It's God who decides that. Undoubtedly, there always are circumstances that justify that death occurs in one place rather than another, but in the end, it's God and only God who determines them. Let's say that fray Antonio was a mere circumstance in that occasion.

NACIANCENO. For a woman you reason well, but I don't think that it's respectful that a nun, even if she's the prioress, dare to call a monk a "circumstance."]

To the argument that Teresa belongs to her birth place, the convent of San José of Ávila, where she longed to be buried, the Prioress objects, observing that the Saint's modesty, expressed in her belief that even a "muladar" [dung heap] (62) sufficed for her resting place. Determined to prevent the head priest from removing Teresa from the Alba convent, the Prioress offers resistance: "Tengo influencias importantes. Mi marido fue contador del duque de Alba y estoy dispuesta a utilizarlas. Moveré cielo y tierra si es preciso" [I know important people. My husband was the accountant of the duke of Alba and I'm determined to use his influence. I'll move heaven and earth if necessary] (63). Misogyny is manifest again (as in the first act) by the assistant friar, who whispers in his superior's ear that, "Tenga cuidado. Las viudas son más peligrosas. Vienen maleadas del mundo" [Be careful. Widows are the most dangerous. They are damaged by the world] (63).

Upset and bothered by the so called papers found and secret desires of Teresa uncovered, the Prioress is decided to fight the bureaucracy: "¿Por qué no la reclamaron hace dos años, cuando murió, cuando aún no se sabía de su incorrupción?" [Why didn't you claim her two years ago, when she died, when her non-decay was still unknown?] (64). Denouncing the outrageous abuse and

robbery, Nacianceno threatens to excommunicate her. This ultimate situation makes the Prioress yield to the priests' desires: "¡No, eso no! […] Usted gana. Aquí tiene la llave del sepulcro" [No, not that! … You win. Here is the key to the grave] (64).

The news of Teresa's departure saddens the nuns. But when the means of transporting her body become known, "en un saco, como si fuera patatas, bellotas o algarrobas" [in a sack, as if she were potatoes, acorns or carob beans] (65), "a lomos de una mula como si fuera una alforja" [on the back of a mule, like a saddlebag] (66), the situation becomes farcical. Revolted by the nuns' obstinacy, Nacianceno swears to reform their order and impose harsh rules, "mano dura" [heavy hand] y "autoridad" [authority], because not even Teresa could have intuited how liberal and disobedient her nuns would become because of such permissiveness. As the Prioress continues to protest against Nacianceno's abuse of power, the absurd dimension of the circumstance is revealed. Her argument could not be more logical: "¡Qué contradicción! Quiere llevarse el cuerpo para ensalzarlo y en cambio tira a degüello contra su doctrina y hasta pretende cambiar la constitución. ¡Con el trabajo que le costó que la aceptaran, que hasta de los puntos y comas se cuidó!" [What a contradiction! You want to take the body to praise it and in turn you slaughter her doctrine and you even pretend to change the reforms she introduced in the order's constitution. And how hard it was for her to have it accepted! She slaved over every period and comma!] (67). Notwithstanding this moment of lucid (and realist) reasoning, the return to the comical, cartoonish aspect follows immediately. The prioress furtively runs to toll the bells, which are used to call the people of the village. Waiting for the mob to arrive and prevent the looting of Teresa's uncorrupt body, the Prioress and Nacianceno ineffectively take alternate "harming" measures against each other. Like cartoon characters they inflict harm on each other, yet emerge from this exchange intact. Nacianceno continues to threaten the prioress and the nuns with excommunication, holding a cross against them as if they were all possessed. To the dismay of Nacianceno, the Prioress keeps tolling the bells, knowing that "contra una multitud enfurecida, no valen órdenes, excomunión, autoridad, papeles ni nada" [against an angry mob no order, excommunication, authority or papers are worth anything] (68). The people arrive, equally determined to defend the saintly body. The Prioress seizes the opportunity to make a deal. She will allow the priests to take Teresa's body in a sack, riding on a mule, and remain for the night in an ignominious inn so long as the nuns can retain a part of it, of their choice. The Prioress swears not to rest until she unites the missing right arm with the rest of the body, in the style of a cartoon series, whose continuation will follow.

The vividly comical style of the play, and the symmetry of the two acts, which end in an act of defacement and sacrilege – the severing of the body's left hand, pinkie toe, and right arm – reveal an ignorant and materially driven community in matters of religion. The very details of the removal of the Saint's body from the *Carmelitas Descalzas* convent in Alba are grotesque. Through its

materially driven clergy, the Church is presented in a ridiculous light, as an institution serving interests of those above, not of those below. Neither the Prioress nor Nacianceno fight over the right to retain Teresa in Alba because of devotion to her figure, but rather because of their selfish interest in attaining privileges for their respective convents.

Romero's derisive burlesque shows an extreme violence that must have been shocking to the Catholic right.[244] Still lurking in the air (1983), the political ambient of the Transition is visible in the intense focus on the theme of ecclesiastical hypocrisy. A similar preoccupation can be detected in the next play to be examined here, Carmen Resino's (1995) *Bajo sospecha,* a virulent parody of ecclesiastical conduct. Reminiscent of the wild aesthetics of the early 1980s *Movida*, associated with political and sexual euphoria, this play proposes a time travel from the mid 1990s to the seventeenth century, to an unusual convent where a valle-inclanesque tableau of avarice and lust takes place. The experience of religion as orgy makes Resino's play a celebration of secularization (as we have seen in Cabal's play) and also a subversion of traditional religion (evident in Romero's liberation of the female saint figure). Fusing the religious and the secular, and the traditional and the modern, *Bajo sospecha* critiques Catholicism understood as an out-of-date form of mass culture.

4.3. Anticlerical Satire in *Bajo sospecha* (1995) by Carmen Resino

Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition!
- Monty Python's Flying Circus

Carmen Resino's *Bajo sospecha* (1995) follows suit in that it also depicts convent life. While it does not address a specific topic or make a particular historical reference, it creates an eccentric religious universe in a highly hyperbolic and grotesque way. The play also poses philosophical paradoxes – characters utter Enlightenment aphorisms such as "Solo la verdad parece mentira" [Only truth seems to lie], "Nada tiene que temer el que nada esconde" [He who hides nothing has nothing to fear] (84) –, which give it a curiously moralizing, eighteenth-century air at the end. A fascinating pastiche of contemporary and classic styles, *Bajo sospecha*'s postmodern didacticism targets the anachronistic teaching mode of the Church in light of the secular transformations proposed during the Transition.

[244] The play was staged at Madrid's I.N.B. Eijo y Garay (currently I.E.S. Eijo y Garay) in 1984. Cf. Ragué-Arias, p. 324. No other data about the staging of this play is available.

Carmen Resino published several works that evince an historical inspiration: *El presidente* (1968), *Héroes* (1970), *Diecinueve* (1983), *Nueva historia de la princesa y el dragón* (1989), *El oculto enemigo del profesor Schneider* (1990), *Los eróticos sueños de Isabel Tudor* (1992) and *Bajo sospecha* (1995). As she herself claims, history is only the frame that holds the story together: "utilizo la historia como pretexto, como mero escenario, como un 'a partir de…', pero en realidad la eludo para sentirme más libre, más plenamente autónoma en el ámbito creativo, renunciando a hacer, al menos de manera consciente, teatro de la historia" [I use history as a pretext, as a simple setting, as a 'starting point', but in reality I elude it to feel more free, more autonomous in the collective sphere, giving up the conscious making of theater out of history] (Resino 166). Mariano de Paco has also noted that history does not constitute a solid reference in Resino's drama, but rather it operates as a platform from which to question human existence, human failure and frustration vis-à-vis society:

> La historia, y esto será común en el teatro histórico de Carmen Resino, es un "telón de fondo" sobre el que se *reinventa* la realidad con muy definidos propósitos: los de mostrar la inexorable fuerza del destino y la irónica reiteración de los sucesos, analizar los mecanismos del poder y evidenciar la *inutilidad* que acecha al ser humano en sus actuaciones y en sus anhelos. (1995: 305)
>
> [History, and this will be a constant in Carmen Resino's history plays, is a backdrop onto which reality is *reinvented* with very clear purposes: to show the inexorable force of destiny and the ironic repetition of events, to analyze the power mechanisms and to show the *uselessness* that lies in wait for the individual in his actions and longings.]

Several of Resino's dramas include a "nota preliminar" [preliminary note] or "aclaración previa" [prior clarification] or "advertencia" [warning] that seek to explain, clarify or justify the drama's plot and characters in relation to a certain historical pattern. For instance, at the beginning of her play *Bajo sospecha,* subtitled "grace period" (*tiempo de gracia*), she places a warning (*advertencia*) against those who may seek in the play "precisiones de tiempo, lugar o vestimenta" [precisions of time, place or clothing] (29). In fact, she explicitly says that the drama "puede ser cualquier cosa, menos una obra histórica" [it can be anything, but a history play]:

> Que nadie busque en mi obra precisiones de tiempo, lugar o vestimenta. Tampoco exactitudes en los tratamientos o usos del lenguaje. Si la investigación histórica o la adecuación a un momento determinado hubieran prevalecido en mí, habría hecho posiblemente otra cosa de la que he pretendido. Me he remitido a

> unos datos y referencias, eso sí, y he jugado con un tiempo pasado, pero mi obra puede ser cualquier cosa, menos una obra histórica. (29)
>
> [Let no one look for temporal, spatial or wardrobe reminiscences in my work. Nor for accuracies in the treatment or use of language. If historical research or adaptation to a determinate moment had prevailed in me, I would have possibly done a different thing than what I have intended. I have used some data and references, yes, and I have played with a past time, but my work can be anything but historical.]

Resino's disclaimer of the "historicity" of her drama creates a state of suspension for the reader. It can't help but invite her audience to seek a correlation between contemporary history and the events on stage. In *Bajo sospecha* not only the holiness of the priests and the righteousness of the sanctuary are under suspicion, but also the plot itself, all that is being said and done in the play. From the beginning, a sacred-profane duality emerges. The first stage direction indicates the location:

> Pequeño refectorio de aspecto desmantelado, como si el convento hubiera sido abandonado o transformado en algo que ni es religioso ni claramente laico. Un cuadro de *Venus y Adonis* con fuerte influencia veneciana romperá con la simplicidad monástica, revistiéndola de un sensualismo que evidenciará lo ambivalente del conjunto. (31)
>
> [Small, bare dining hall, as if the convent had been abandoned or transformed into something that is neither religious nor clearly secular. A painting of *Venus and Adonis* with a strong Venetian influence contrasts violently with the monastic simplicity, endowing it with a sensuality that will expose the ambivalence of the whole]

To match the sensuality of Venus and Adonis, lascivious concubines, gourmand dukes and sodomite priests live at the convent. When the arrival of two Inquisitors is announced, they all become worried about not being able to hide their decadent nature. However, the debauchery continues and degenerates into a viciously carnivalesque feast. The Inquisitors partake of this depravity – serious acts of blasphemy, gluttony and sodomy happen before their eyes – because they are solely interested in locating the convent's treasure, which is hidden behind the painting. The audience is warned *not* to treat this as history, but as a game. The game is to find what pieces of the puzzle are historic, and which not. In this game, history itself is put *under suspicion.* Despite the warning,

it is difficult not to think about a determinate historical period, especially when the Inquisition visits the convent. Just like *Vade retro* (1982) and *Un olor a ámbar* (1983), *Bajo sospecha* responds to the particular climate of the period.

The warning also functions as a teaser, because the text plays with the audience's understanding of "history." Setting the plot in a time when the Inquisition was still operational, and when convents hosted people in search of refuge or salvation, the temporal frame is vaguely identifiable. The Spanish Inquisition was established in 1478 by Queen Isabella I and was dissolved in 1834 during the rule of Queen Isabella II (Rawlings 1). Abolished briefly in 1813 during the War of Independence, it was reconstituted a year later by Fernando VII (Hooper 91). Clearly an institution that responded to the monarchy (as opposed to the Vatican), the Spanish Inquisition was a repressive apparatus that displayed religious intolerance, cruel punishments through torture and hindered intellectual development. As Rawlings indicates, the Inquisition was predominantly considered a "tool" of the authoritarian monarchy and an emblem of "corruption," which characterized its activities (2).

To this day, there still are convents in Spain where the faithful (or not) can seek refuge. Thus, two distinct temporal spaces frame the action: past and present, authoritarian tradition and democracy. As such, this play can be regarded as an elaborate game engaging a religious past that resonates in contemporary Spain. What past and present have in common is the hypocrisy present in Spanish political and religious hierarchies. If the Church is supposed to watch over the morality of society, guiding its proper functioning, according to its historic role in Spain, then how does it reconcile the overt corrosion of some of its sectors? Carmen Resino's satire exposes this duplicity with humor.

Structured in two acts, like the previous two plays discussed, *Bajo sospecha* presents the decadent life at a semi-abandoned convent (only six people live there), which will be visited by an Inquisition tribunal. The first act displays the situation of the convent. Its six inhabitants are the epitome of sin and depravity: despite living and even professing at the convent, they contravene the rules of piety and prayer. They form three couples who maintain a grotesque ménage à *six*. The first couple is formed by Maria, the cook, and don Álvaro, a retired nobleman. The actress Anunziatta and Friar Bartolomé, who is the head priest, form the second couple, and Friar Filippo and Angelillo, the altar boy, the third. The characters and their unconventional living situation are gradually introduced. What appears to be a convent on the outside, is a decadent and hybrid world, "algo que ni es religioso ni claramente laico" [something that is neither religious not clearly secular] (31). The décor includes a Venetian school painting of Venus and Adonis, and the music played alternates between festive Baroque rhythms and forgotten Gregorian chants. The characters gather round the dining hall table facing the prospects of a frugal meal. They accuse Don Álvaro, blaming his excessive appetite for this annoyance. Little by little, every character reveals sordid details about everyone else. For example, Anunziatta is a witch and a whore, Fray Bartolomé is a "borracho perdido" [hopeless drunk] (33)

who sleeps with her and because of that "ya no celebra ninguna misa … ni se arrodilla ante un altar" [doesn't say mass … nor kneels before the altar] (33). Don Álvaro reminisces about the old times' banquets they use to have at the convent, but Fray Filippo denies that such events ever took place there. However, Maria scolds him for this hypocrisy, revealing that, "Érais el primero en gustar de todos los manjares, los permitidos y los prohibidos, pero es bueno presumir de santo cuando está flaca la bolsa" [You were the first to savor all the tasty dishes, those allowed and those forbidden, but it's useful to pose as a saint now that you're broke] (37).

As if gluttony weren't his only fault, it turns out that Fray Filippo is in love with Angelillo, and, to make matters worse, he is not the only one. Fray Bartolomé has love feelings for the altar boy, too. Anunziatta announces that her clothing and jewelry have disappeared, and defends her innate talent before Maria and others who accuse her of being a cheap actress, "desde que me destetaron ya estuve en las tablas, que mi madre era cómica" [I've been on the stage since I was weaned, because my mother was an actress] (39). But Maria suggests that Anunziatta has inherited libertinage besides stage talents "y puta como tú"[and a whore like you] (39). Fray Bartolomé's physique, "alto, guapo, fornido y airoso…tiene aire mundano y no monacal y, aunque ya ha entrado en la madurez, podría con su fortaleza vencer a cualquier joven" [tall, handsome, robust and graceful…he has a worldly air, not monastic and, even though he's entered middle age, he could defeat any youth with his strength] (40) makes his appearance seem that of a movie star. His exaggerated masculinity, combined with his position of power (head priest), completes a clearly hyperbolic picture of the convent. This parade culminates with Angelillo's appearance, wearing Anunziatta's clothing and jewelry, "un jovenzuelo mórbido a mitad de camino entre dos naturalezas" [a morbid stripling midway between two natures] (52). With everyone present, and the mystery of Anunziatta's possessions solved, they engage in a highly obscene conversation, with explicit sexual content, insults and accusations. However, all is said with a semi-serious tone, as if their daily verbal encounters were like this. They seem to have several problems, but none takes any step to address them. Instead, they catalogue and display their deficiencies as a *natural* form of social interaction. Maria is lazy and gossipy, Don Álvaro indulges in gluttony and fritters away the convent's resources, and Anunziatta and the two friars are lustful. Of course, a convent with such an extreme degree of moral decay and a total inversion of the expected reverence and piety seems absurd.

By virtue of her "warning," Resino removes historical context and locates the action in an indefinite time. But the action must take place in a *determinate* time period, and this is suggested by the arrival of the Inquisitors. In the second act of the play, two more characters join the depraved couples. When Angelillo makes his ceremonious entrance in Anunziatta's garments, he is forced by circumstance to announce that two lay representatives of the Inquisition will

soon arrive.[245] The six decide to have the feast they have been speaking about from the beginning, and even invite the two extra guests, as a form of bribery. Moreover, Friar Bartolomé's permission to carry on with their usual selves is justified by a wise plan of salvation: "los que están bajo sospecha, intentan disimular, disculparse, mentir…hasta los inocentes actúan así movidos por el miedo" [those who are under suspicion try to dissimulate, to exculpate themselves, to lie… even the innocent act like this out of fear] (60). Specifically, Bartolomé wants to air all their sins: Filippo's sodomy and embezzlement, Maria's prostitution, Álvaro's dilapidation and lasciviousness, and Anunziatta's obscene acting, even if, in her opinion she only performed "autos sacramentales" (64). Bartolomé himself will admit to all the sins, because he is "el más lascivo, el más corrupto, el más demagogo, engañador, blasfemo, hereje y el más grande cabrón de todos los presentes" [the most lascivious, the most corrupt, the most demagogic, deceitful, blasphemous, heretic and the biggest bastard of all present] (64-65). This list of mutual accusations and their willful acknowledgment surpass~~es~~ the excess of the sins themselves. By attracting the Inquisitors' complicity, they think they will be saved. Ironically, their fear vis-à-vis the Inquisitors and their potential punishments is very easily masked by their continued performance of reality. Angelillo's transvestite entrance, wearing Anunziatta's clothes and jewelry match the depravity of the visit that he is designated to announce. Rather than offer a moral critique of degenerate Spain, by sanctioning the aberrant convent residents as the audience would expect, the visit announced by Angelillo continues and prolongs the depravity of the first act.

The Inquisitors visit the convent under the pretext of carrying out a detailed investigation of the members' conduct, the transparency of the books, the state of the altar, etc. However, the investigators try to squeeze out any of the fortune that remains: Anunziatta's jewelry, Don Álvaro's gold heirlooms, and, even the case hidden in the wall behind the painting of Venus and Adonis. Now that the Holy Office is present, frugality displayed during the first act disappears, "hemos pasado del ascetismo zurbaranesco a una explosión operística y casi rococó" [we exchanged the asceticism proper to Zurbarán for an opera-like, almost rococo explosion] (67). Following Friar Bartolomé's plan to display opulence in order to bribe the Inquisitors to leave them alone, "música de salón" [chamber music] (67) replaces Baroque sarabands and Gregorian chants to accompany the "deliciosa sala de banquetes" [delicious banquet salon] into which the "sencillo refectorio claustral" [simple cloistral dining hall] has been transformed (67). Dressed in their Sunday best, the three couples welcome the representatives who notice immediately the splendor of the convent's salons, the exquisiteness of the Sevres porcelain, the Talavera ceramics and the Bohemia crystal glasses. Exhibited on purpose, these luxury objects represent an

[245] The Spanish term "familiar de la Inquisición" is equivalent to "lay representative of the Inquisition who acted as an intermediary between the tribunal and the prisoner and whose role was to provide denunciations." Cf. Helen Rawlings, "Glossary," *The Spanish Inquisition,* p. 158.

idolatrous fetishism. The representatives seem very pleased with their hosts, "este convento vale más que un Perú, que desde estos pastelillos hasta las camas (*mirando a María y a Anunziatta*) que no probamos otras más cómodas" [this convent is worth more than the gold brought back from Peru, from the tarts to the beds (*looking at Maria and Anunziatta)* we haven't had better] (77).

From the action recounted thus far, it is clear that the play presents religious figures and religion itself as depraved. This portrayal of religion is in line with the social and political context of Spain, and also resonates with the contemporaneous campy esthetic of the *Movida* that appears, for example, in Almodovar's film *Entre tinieblas* [Dark Habits] (1983). The film shares some striking similarities with Resino's play, especially in tone. A black comedy, *Dark Habits* tells the story of a drug addict cabaret singer, who, runs away from justice to find refuge in a convent of eccentric nuns, who have similarly gone astray. Sister Damned is obsessed with cleanliness and takes care of a large pet tiger; Sister Manure takes corporal self-penitence to an extreme; Sister Sewer Rat is the secret author of some very successful trash novels; and Sister Snake designs shocking outfits for the statues of the Virgin Mary. To cap it all, the Mother Superior is a lesbian drug addict, who falls in love with the cabaret singer, while the chaplain is in love with Sister Snake. A witty satire of Spain's religious institutions, the film portrays spiritual anguish and moral desolation. *Dark Habits* explores the force of desire in the same stylistic registers that *Bajo sospecha* parodies spiritual piety and religious commitment.

The Inquisitors are pleased with Angelillo's modest presence, "un monje debe ser ambiguo para que ni siquiera se noten sus carnalidades" [a monk should be ambiguous, so that his flesh isn't even noticed] (78). Friar Bartolomé politely excuses the boy's excessive reserve and reticence to make a demonstration of his musical talents for the visitors on grounds of being "conturbado" [disturbed] (78) by their presence. However, Anunziatta understands a completely different meaning: "¿Qué dice, que lo *masturba*?" [What is he saying, he *masturbates* him?] (78, emphasis mine). Maria corrects her: "No dice semejante, pero también" [Not exactly, but that also] (78). The "conturbado – masturbado" comical confusion is well suited for this soirée at the convent with the Inquisition.

In this and other "Inquisitorial" sequences, one hears echoes of the "Spanish Inquisition" sketch from *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1970). In the sketch, three Inquisitors surprise unsuspecting "heretics" and submit them to "acts of torture". In order to extract a confession from their prisoners, the Inquisitors diabolically proceed with the torture mechanisms. However, the stark contradiction between the gruesome and sadistic manner in which these acts are carried out and the obviously absurd torture instruments ("soft cushions," "comfy chair" or "dish rack") renders the attempt comically futile, enhancing the highly effective caricature. A similar outcome is visible in Resino's play, which uses the fear inspired by the Inquisition as a parodical catalyst for the exaggerated confession of the convent's inhabitants, who *pretend* to be horrible

sinners. Little do they know that the Inquisition they fear is itself *pretending* to be questioning them.

The characters' improvisation follows the script of the Inquisitors' visit: they must behave and "act" properly, in order to avoid punishments or fines. Nevertheless, they do not put on the mask of morality, because it wouldn't suit them and they fear it would betray their true nature. Thus, their strategy is to continue with their regular decadent life and then confess to their sins. With honesty they hope to achieve the pardon of the Inquisition.

Friar Bartolomé openly admits how they spent all the gold from the altar, as well as sold other objects of art from the convent in order to reform the rooms and install bathrooms, defending what the Inquisition would deem as excessive hedonism. He justifies this "Moorish" indulgence – "los baños son cosa de moros" [bathrooms are Moorish] (82) – with the argument that the body is the haven of the Holy Ghost and should therefore receive the best treatment: "¿No es nuestro cuerpo morada del Espíritu Santo?" [Isn't our body the abode of the Holy Spirit?] (84). He openly admits the truth, exposing his creed:

> FAMILIAR 2. Quizás tengáis razón en eso, pero expoliar el arte santo en virtud de unos pequeños gastos…
> FRAY FILIPPO. No tan pequeños: la mano de obra después de la expulsión morisca ha subido mucho.
> FAMILIAR 1. (*Viendo a FRAY BARTOLOMÉ.)* Permitidme, pero no acabo de creérmelo: eso de que hayáis empleado el oro de los altares…
> FRAY BARTOLOMÉ. La verdad choca, excelencia: solo la verdad parece mentira. (84)
>
> [REPRESENTATIVE 2. Perhaps you're right, but to pillage sacred art for some small expenses…
> FRIAR FILIPPO. Not that small: after the expulsion of the Moors the cost of labor has increased a lot.
> REPRESENTATIVE 1. (*Seeing FRIAR BARTOLOMÉ.*) Allow me, but I can't believe it: that you spent the altar gold…
> FRIAR BARTOLOMÉ. Truth is shocking, your excellence: only truth seems to lie.]

As Fray Bartolomé continues with calm self-denunciation, Angelillo is becoming more and more mortified, behaving in a disturbed manner. In line with Bartolomé's open admission of improper conduct, but with a very serious tone, Angelillo explodes: "¡Mea culpa! ¡Me acuso de lascivia y sodomía! ... ¡Me acuso de todos los pecados capitales, los que hice y los que me quedan por hacer!" [Mea culpa! I confess to lust and sodomy…I confess to all sins, the ones I did and the ones I have yet to do!] (91). The irony and humor of the situation is that instead of questioning him further, the representatives pretend not to hear.

Angelillo's outburst of confession is out of place given the differing tone and direction of Bartolomé's declarations. Despite his effort to abstain, Angelillo's voice returns and allows him to perform an exit song. He sings a sad melody, which paves the way for Anunziatta's performance; she will represent a scene from "The Venice Courtesan" to the delight of the representatives, who hope to see "some obscenity" before the courtesan's repentance. She involves one of the representatives in the act, whom she embraces and kisses. The other man, hearing of the courtesan's "terrible suffering" as a prisoner of the Ottoman Turks, encourages her to dance as a way to hasten her forgiveness, "¡Danzad, danzad, que así apreciaré más vuestro sacrificio!" [Dance, dance, so I may appreciate your sacrifice even more!] (94).

To everyone's surprise, Fray Bartolomé's confession of embezzlement and other sinful acts is of no consequence. The lay representatives have not come as confessors, but as fiscal investigators; they are interested in the only work of art that the convent still has, the painting of *Venus and Adonis*. Guided by the information in the convent's inventory and sketches, they discover a hole in the wall, with a chest hidden inside. Filippo and Bartolomé try to divert their attention from the chest, but cannot fool the representatives. They discover a small fortune inside, and complete it with Anunziatta's jewelry and Álvaro's heirlooms. Satisfied with the loot, they leave. With the shock of the discovery of the chest (about which only Bartolomé and Filippo knew), everyone is upset. They imagine that the Holy Office will return to capture them all and take them to the stake for the sins that they have willingly confessed. However, Friar Bartolomé remains calm and reassures them that "La santidad, por mucho que se empeñe la Iglesia y los tribunales eclesiásticos, no es moneda de uso en los tiempos que corren. ¡Pagar en oro, y olvidaros de la santidad!" [No matter how much the Church and its institutions insist, holiness is not a currency used in these times. Pay in gold and forget about holiness!] (108). He alludes to the Church's marked disobedience of its own rules and morals.

This remark repositions his entire "performance" during the Inquisition's questioning: Bartolomé intuited the *real* preoccupation of the representatives and their monetary interest, and tried to avoid the final looting through the strategy of professing guilt, imagining that blatant violation of religious doctrine would attract punishment by default, and thus detract from the discovery of the chest behind the painting. But a time when everyone ignores the truth – "hemos dicho la verdad y no se la ha escuchado" [we have spoken the truth and no one listened] (109) – is also a time when truth alone shocks: "solo la verdad parece mentira" [only truth seems to lie] (85). Resino builds a rhetorical game, reversing the common perceptions of truth. The six depraved couples living at the convent not only live in sin, but also openly admit to it, without fearing any consequences. Truth doesn't keep anyone interested as money does. Depravity doesn't need to operate beneath appearances since no one cares to uncover it. The idea that everything is the opposite of what it appears, at once philosophical

and political, is the satirist's whip. This concept justifies the charade that Fray Bartolomé and company put together.

One question remains: knowing that they will have to surrender all their fortune, and that the presence of their only painting will no doubt arouse suspicion, why don't they all hide what they still possess, and conceal the chest with a less significant artifact, detracting the Inquisition's gaze away from it? The obvious answer, if we are to follow Bartolomé's logic, is that the best way to *hide* something is by keeping it in *plain view*: "la verdad es menos sospechosa que la mentira: nadie la cree" [the truth is less suspicious than any lie: no one believes it] (107). This is why he thinks that his exposure of depravity is not taken seriously. But, judging from the play's denouement, this strategy worked only in part. A fortune has been lost, but to everyone's surprise, Filippo pulls out another key to a fortune that *still* remains hidden. Victorious, they will celebrate this happy end with a proper feast. Their verbal and physical performance has succeeded.

Language has lost its meaning *not* because of the postmodernist attempts to destabilize it, but because as human beings we are confronted with a sense of finitude. Our existence is finite, and we must make the most or it, taking advantage of every situation we encounter. As Žižek writes, "against the big metaphysical constructs, we should humbly accept our finitude as our ultimate horizon: there is no absolute Truth, all we can do is accept the contingency of our existence, the unsurpassable character of our being thrown into a situation, the basic lack of any point of reference, the playfulness of our predicament" (2012: 181-182). This "playful" character of our human predicament is at work in Resino's play – she constructs an absurd and doomed reality, in which nothing that is considered moral or proper is respected. The extreme humor and the explicit sexual references denote the "Christian comedy": "Is there anything more comical than the incarnation, this ridiculous overlapping of the Highest and the Lowest, the coincidence of God, creator of the universe, with a miserable man?"[246] The comical view of Christianity, Žižek explains, relies on the *happy ending*: "a transcendent God guarantees a happy final outcome," but also refers to the situation when the horror exceeds the domain of the tragic (2012: 183). The end of *Bajo sospecha* confirms this view: safe from the Inquisition's investigation, the six couples will enjoy their celebration, and will resume their indulgent activities. Filippo's "other" key to *another* pantry guarantees this: "Siempre hay una última llave para los más afines…para nuestros hermanos en caridad. (*Todos ríen*)" [There is always one last key for the kindred…for our brothers in charity. *All laugh.*] (109). This second act and the conclusion situate the play in the genre of farce, one of the key forms of satire in the writer's bag of tricks.

The extreme hedonism and disbelief in the power of language to convey any truthful message depict a dangerous yet comical society. The morals that guide this corrupt society reflect the same duality: enjoyment of life and pursuit

[246] Cf. Kierkegaard quoted in Žižek, p. 178.

of pleasures under an atheist, liberal hedonism,"(Žižek 2012: 44-45), which is revered by Bartolomé: "¡Alzo mi copa por los hermosos tiempos que nos ha tocado vivir!"[I raise my glass for the beautiful times in which we are meant to live] (110).

Vade retro, *Bajo sospecha*, and *Un olor a ámbar* share a good sense of humor. The treatment of serious themes such as God, Catholicism, and sanctity with hilarity and absurdity indicates the dual nature with which Spanish society regards this matter. Spain's transition is viewed through religious lenses in these dramas in order to reflect on the country's negotiation with religion and the Catholic Church during the consolidation of democracy. The presence of religion in dramas written during the onset of the democratic period testifies to a tension between traditional faith and modern secularization in Spanish society; it also reflects the ways in which society engages with religion and the Church, and how the perception of religious life has been changing during the last few decades. The central argument for bringing "religion back into the story," to quote Noël Valis, is to better understand the impact of secularization on contemporary Spain and its role in the nation's modernization.[247] Like the monarchy, Catholicism has often been considered an essential ingredient for Spanish national identity, an assumption increasingly challenged as Muslims, Protestants, Jews and peoples of other faiths immigrate and take up citizenship in the country.

[247] Noël Valis is the author of an important study concerning the influence of religion in Spanish prose during the late nineteenth century. For more reference, see her *Sacred Realism: Religion and the Imagination in Modern Spanish Narrative.*

CONCLUSION

The Collective Necessity of History

In his essay *The Discourse of History,* Roland Barthes asks:

> Does the narration of past events, which, in our culture from the Time of the Greeks onwards, has generally been subject to the sanction of historical "science,"[…] really differ, in some specific trait, in some indubitably distinctive feature, from imaginary narration, as we find it in the epic, the novel, and the drama? (7)

His question invites the contemplation of the possibility that both history and fiction are narratives, or simply put stories, that we create and experience in order to assign meaning to the world around us. Whether history is just a text, or if it is only through a text that history's meaning is deciphered, this text need not be confined solely to a script. For Fredric Jameson history was inextricably bound to the realm of experience, where it manifested itself as a human necessity (102). Thus, history is that which causes pain, suffering, desire, love, and which ultimately entails a collective experience.

The scope of this project was to draw a trajectory of how history and the historical in general have been manifested in Spanish drama from the late 1950s to the present, as a means to explore the ways in which the nation has engaged with the successive political and social changes in the theatrical space where dialogue, satire and critique bring audiences together. The playwrights addressed in this study understood theater to be a civic act and a tool for social transformation. Their dramas partake of history while creating a collective platform for the audiences. History is not understood in moralizing terms, nor is it used as a lesson. The playwrights address historical topics in a fashion that renders them collective, creating a site of reunion for several generations within a nation, throughout the second half of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century. While not directly thinking about history in Lukácsian terms (history as a tool in the formative discourse of the modern nation) all these playwrights, from Antonio Buero Vallejo to Juan Mayorga imagine history as a space for community.

Cultural anthropologist Victor Turner defined community - "communitas" – as a concept that keeps people together, linked to various rituals and rites of passage, at the individual, social and political levels. About the power of such moments, Turner writes that "We are presented, in such rites, with a 'moment in and out of time,' and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition […] of a generalized social bond" (360). Even if they are reflecting on the specific nature of a ritual observed in a Zambian tribe, Tuner's observations lend themselves to metaphorical

appropriations whenever individuals and collectivities manage rituals or transitions. In this regard, the work of Antonio Buero Vallejo, Alfonso Sastre, José Sanchis Sinisterra, Fermín Cabal, Concha Romero, Carmen Resino and Juan Mayorga can be regarded as a collective enterprise through various phases of recent Spanish history, from Francoism through the Transition and finally to democracy.

Throughout their particular career path – which included, besides strictly playwriting, additional occupational directions (Buero began as a painter, Sastre was involved in politics and was a social activist, Sanchis Sinisterra approached the stage from university and independent theater venues, and Mayorga, like Cabral, combined theatrical activity with other academic functions), the playwrights who address historical topics in their dramas create a similar community, which unites the Spaniards of the present through the symbolism of past acts, past figures and past references.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the confluence of the historical and the dramatic yields diverse and puzzling results. The stage is the place where history has been relived, redeemed and represented. The stage is a physical and symbolic space where the spectacle of historical – and by extension political, social and cultural – representations is achieved in a dialogic configuration: the present audience receives and analyzes moments of the past. Both concrete, through its determinate events and figures from the past, and abstract, by virtue of its temporal coordinate which renders it an entity without a physical position, history is forging its place onto the stage.

The scripts of the past materialize into dramatic-historical performances on the Spanish stage creating a blend of temporalities, symbols and messages for the audiences of the present. The two terms "staging" and "history" are ineludible references to the process of the reconstruction of past times, spaces and concepts in the present. The "staging" of these critical concepts in theatrical form makes them undergo a change from a mass, objective discourse to a subjective, individual, intimate and also collective dialogue.

This dialogue entails the understanding of manifestations, uses and appropriations of history in Spanish dramas. The choice of dramas written between 1958 – date corresponding to the staging of Buero Vallejo's *Un soñador para un pueblo* – and 2008 – which marks the staging of Mayorga's *La tortuga de Darwin* – by a host of authors (Antonio Buero Vallejo, Alfonso Sastre, José Sanchis Sinisterra, Fermín Cabal, Concha Romero, Carmen Resino and Juan Mayorga) reflects the intention to address a larger time frame that comprises the Dictatorship, the Transition years and the new Democracy, and also includes a variety of perspectives and approaches to the notion of the historical on stage. Their plays dramatize historical events that range from the New World expeditions to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in Madrid, and from the First World War to the fall of the Berlin Wall. These texts reflect on a unique relationship between history and the stage, given that drama processes history and history shapes the stage, creating a chart of important shifts within Spanish

dramaturgy's approach to history and casting new light on the role that the theater has played in shaping the collective understanding of Spain's past, from the post-Civil War years to the present. As instruments of civic action, the historical dramas participate in a performative process of historical configuration, and thereby contribute in important ways to the much-debated issue of national identity. These plays have largely influenced the ways in which writers and society at large perceive their identity. History plays have considerably shaped the entity of "Spaniard."

The process of configuration of national identity is visible in the works of Buero and Sastre who attempted to open conventional history for the audiences and to create counter histories. Through interludes of memory, time reversals and fantastic episodes they create fanciful "what if" situations. These methods present a history that is still in progress; while their texts address past events of whose exactitude and precision we can be certain, it is the symbolic and mutant understanding of history that they address with the counter-historical episodes. For this reason, their protagonists are not portrayed as *heroes* but rather as *fallible men.* In doing away with the rigidity of history, Buero Vallejo and Sastre open spaces for interpretation, empowering their audiences to keep faith in the historical agency of the individual. Focusing on human frailties during the time of Franco's dictatorship, these two playwrights brought to the stage a poetics of forgiveness.

Under the same logic of constructing alternative histories and exposing other historical possibilities, the work of José Sanchis Sinisterra during the Transition and the onset of the new democracy matches the experimental nature of this time period and combines metatheatricality with a game-like perspective ~~over~~ **on** history. The non-linear structure of the texts, and other elements of magic and fantasy question the frontier between the real and the fictional, between history and its ghosts. Sanchis' plays propose that the present is an empty space, haunted by loss, and a spectral time that forbids any engagement with the future. Onto this space, Sanchis places ghostly figures from the past who constantly invade the stage and create disturbances of the present and complicate the current understanding of the past. Postulating a postmodern approach to history and drama, Sanchis creates a fictitious elaboration of every-day problems, often private and existential, of individuals for whom the past is a burden, and who are consequently striving to achieve a rupture from this past. Involving reverie and the fantastic, Sanchis' plays constitute a symbolic unit and give a metatheatrical response to the transition from the old Spain (empire, two failed Republics, Civil Wars and dictatorships) to the new Spain of restored democracy. *¡Ay, Carmela!, Naufragios de Álvar Núñez* and *El cerco de Leningrado* present characters caught in between these two worlds, undergoing both a personal and historical transition. To suggest this state, they appear on an empty stage, where they unite past and present, and eventually overcome this dichotomy through a painful purge of the destructive memories from the past. On Sanchis' stage, history is performed through a game of simulation, in which

fantastic characters are placed in a real setting. Through a hybridization of the past, the author subverts historical time and space. On this stage, conceived as a border zone between mainstream and marginal theater, between past and present, between reality and fantasy (*teatro fronterizo*), he challenges the logic of historical discourse.

Buero Vallejo and Sastre broke the principle of historical veracity but maintained that of artistic verisimilitude in their historical dramas, Sanchis gravitated towards a postmodern and experimental theatrical poetics, using history as an instrument through which to facilitate the encounter between past and the present.

Moving away from these dialectical tendencies in the works of Buero Vallejo, Sastre and Sanchis Sinisterra, Juan Mayorga's dramatic approach to the historical is markedly European, global and pessimistic. While his plays resist the typical classification of historical drama (in the strict Shakespearean sense), the historical appears in Mayorga's theater with the absurdity and humor proper to fable, however without a moralizing intent. Departing from real historical episodes, which support the dramatic action, Mayorga explores a range of possibilities and consequences of those historical events in a markedly satirical and allegorical way. The non-mimetic, cartoon-like characters are paradoxically endowed with the capacity to affect the course of history with their decisions. Moreover, the short and sometimes interchangeable scenes of his plays transmit a sense of historical angst resulting from the global erosion of the notion of humanity. The dramatic use of the past is thus understood as a responsibility that entails the creation of maps with which to metaphorically chart history. The stories without end that Mayorga's plays present, and which are also ripe with a highly pessimistic and overwhelming view of history, embrace the theatrical trends of the first decade of the twenty-first century. The repetition of the past in the present and the multiple possibilities of "mapping" the past are visible in the multi-episodic structure of his work. The short scenes of *Himmelweg,* that can easily be swapped or permutated, and the farcical and absurd denouement of *La tortuga de Darwin* speak of this tendency. Mayorga is interested in finding a new way to look at history from the stage and, implicitly, to enable this refined vision to permeate social structures and affect politics. Considering that society is exposed on a daily basis to a systematic "shock" therapy, Mayorga writes from the standpoint of a philosopher casting a critical eye on society. Whether his purpose is to "shock" the audiences with the implausible "histories" present in his dramas, or to awaken them from the burden of forgetting the past, it is certain that his preoccupations are the same as those of the rest of the playwrights: to move the audience to think historically and be able to detach itself from and even laugh at history. To abandon history, but to know that history is always that which we allow it to be. This is why history appears to be mutant in his drama: *Himmelweg* dismantles the chronological sequence of events and combines historical background with personal testimony and performance to draw attention to the multiple levels through which history is filtered before

becoming experience. By subjecting a single story to the variation of four radically different points of view, Mayorga shows how history becomes experience and discourse. Through purely abstract concepts such as truth, guilt, representation, simulacrum and fable, Mayorga renders the encounter between history and drama fruitful and rewarding.

The confrontation of three stylized humans with the personification of history as a tortoise serves to illustrate a vengeful past and also exposes the clash between the objective, factual and subjective, testimonial approaches to history. In Buero Vallejo's and Sastre's theater, history and the past were instruments used to alleviate the difficulty of the present through staged failures of legendary and significant men. On Sanchis' marginal stage history served as a revision for nationalistic and imperialist discourses. For these three authors, fantasy contributed to a dialectical approach to the past and permitted a gradual, progressive engagement with ardent issues that still divided the nation in the wake of Franco's death. Mayorga appropriates the historical as a complex puzzle whose pieces can be arranged and rearranged freely. While this approach could seem more haphazard than the previous ones, it permits the audience to develop a detached and comical perspective on history.

Humor is the staple feature of the last works addressed in this project. Given the Catholic Church's historic presence and influence in Spanish state affairs over the last four centuries, it has a quasi-institutional affiliation with history. The treatment of the serious topic of religion through the prism of humor and satire may appear paradoxical; however, it justly records the tensions between traditional faith and modern secularization within Spanish society.

The presence of religion within historical drama during the onset of the new democracy (1982-1996) gives testimony to the Catholic legacy in Spanish civil and political life, and documents the impact that the Transition had on these traditional values with which it had come into contact. As a consequence of the establishment of the democratic rule, the role and the influence of Catholic religion in Spanish society underwent significant challenges and transformations, entering a period of tensions with the country's commitment to modernity and secularization under consecutive Socialist governments. The plays analyzed here address, in varying degrees, the dual aspect of Spanish society: the contradictory coexistence of religion as *rite* and *apathy*. This contradiction between a growing reticence to religious practice and continued fascination with religious ceremony is visible in Spanish society to this day, attesting to the unspoken fidelity of Spaniards to the character and distinction that Catholicism had bred in them for centuries, on one had, but also to the fascination with modernity, secularization and progress. By recurring to religious belief and practice, traditions and institutions, the plays reflect and comment on the necessity of religion in our present times while also exposing the paradoxical duality and contradiction that religion poses for contemporary Spanish society.

In *Un olor a ámbar,* Concha Romero satirizes the process of sanctification and the clergy's superficial interests and discrimination. Carmen Resino's *Bajo sospecha* performs an even more virulent attack of the corruption of convent life, the depravity of the clergy and the greed of the religious institutions (i.e. the Inquisition). Fermín Cabal departs from the same degradation of religious life in *Vade retro* to make an acid socio-political commentary on the influence of the Catholic Church in Spaniards' life, and in particular to comment on the validity of religious education.

By addressing religious belief, playwrights were able to access the pressure existent within a nation submitted to a process of social democratization that intrinsically opposed the interference of the Church. That religion remained a sought after source of inspiration at a time when all political ships sailed toward secularization, is proof that during Spain's historical trajectory from dictatorship to democracy, Catholicism was a major factor of influence and could not be easily cast aside.

For the playwrights and the Spanish populace, the pressing question is how to translate the anxiety of successive turbulent historical phases (from the Dictatorship, through the Transition and to the Democracy) into action. From a larger perspective, the dramatic works that involve history from 1958 to 2008 provide a venue in which to debate collectively a complex pattern of political, economical and social shifts. These shifts in national affairs found ample cultural response in the dramatic appropriation of themes from Spanish and world history, such as the *Conquista,* the elevation to sainthood of Saint Teresa of Ávila, the Esquilache Riots, the Civil War, the role of the Catholic Church at the dawn of modern secularization, as well as the folk legend of William Tell, the Holocaust or the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Communist bloc. At the crossroads of drama and history, Spain's complex landscape offers a dynamic performance of characters, types, and stories that constitute a powerful discursive and civic force.

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