



Víctor Dixon

Antonio Buero Vallejo

2003 - Reservados todos los derechos

Permitido el uso sin fines comerciales

Víctor Dixon

Antonio Buero Vallejo

The most significant Spanish dramatist of the 20th century, Antonio Buero Vallejo wrote thirty plays between 1946 and 1999. Like his whole nation, he had been scarred by its savage Civil War. His father, an army captain, who had inspired his early love of music, literature and drama, was shot at its outset on suspicion of disloyalty to the Republic. He himself was to serve the Republic's cause until it ended, when he was arrested and sentenced to death by the Falangists. Though spared, he spent the next six years in several of Franco's prisons.

It was soon after his release that he found his vocation as a playwright. Originally he had intended to make a career in art, for which from the age of four he had shown remarkable talent. But the war had interrupted his studies in Madrid at the Escuela de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, and he now abandoned that ambition. In many ways, however, he remained a graphic artist. In 1993 he would publish an impressive volume of Estampas, among them a famous drawing of the poet Miguel Hernández.

His voluminous writings include a number of perceptive essays on art. Painters and paintings are central to many of his dramas, including his last. Above all, the precise directions that all of them contain reveal that he visualised clearly every detail of their staging. He agreed with a critic who said that he wrote «spectacles, nor texts»; he believed it was a dramatist's duty to do so.

En la ardiente oscuridad (In the Burning Darkness), drafted in August 1946, was shortlisted three years later for the Lope de Vega Prize, together with his *Historia de una escalera* (Story of a Staircase). The latter, though not so fine a play, was chosen for production, and astonished both critics and public by its mastery of stagecraft and unprecedentedly realistic portrayal of life in a tenement. Its performance is rightly seen as having marked the rebirth of theatre in Spain. None of the seven plays that followed was quite so enthusiastically received, but in 1954 *Hoy es fiesta* (Today's a Holiday) confirmed his status as his country's leading writer for the stage.

Everything he wrote before the death of Franco in 1975 can be seen as an indirect critique of the dictator's regime. Many Spanish writers who opposed it had gone into exile; others rejected anything that could be seen as a compromise. Buero opted instead for «posibilismo»: promoting dissent by slipping past the censors as much as their insensitivity and his deviousness allowed, which was often quite a lot. Some plays were set in fictional countries, and others in Spain's past. But the heroes of most, like his *Velázquez* (Las Meninas) or his *Goya* (The Sleep of Reason) -both taking their titles from pictures by the artists- were visionaries holding fast to ideals in eras of repression, and audiences came to

savour his covert allusions to their own. At times, however, the censors jibbed: *La doble historia del Dr. Valmy* (The Double Case History of Dr. Valmy), an attack on political torture, could not be performed in Spain until 1976, having had its world premiere, in English, at Chester eight years before.

The transition to democracy allowed him to comment more freely on the socio-political scene. But in seeking to «open eyes» and dispel naive illusions he had always posed basic questions, not offered specific answers. His plays transcend their context by addressing more universal concerns, as much existential as social.

Very many of his characters are blind or deaf or insane, but their handicaps, though often accompanied by «vision», always symbolise limitations, not only political but ontological, that all mankind should aspire to overcome. «Spain as tragedy», he once said, was his fundamental theme, but this was «also, of course, the theme of man and of society as tragedy». Tragedy, however, was characterised for him by a tension between despair and hope: the gloomiest writers, he argued, were driven by faith no less than by doubt.

His dramatic technique was characterised by incessant experimentation, aimed always at involving his spectators. Though an admirer of Brecht (whose *Mother Courage* he translated, along with Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*), he insisted that they must be emotionally moved as well as intellectually distanced. The device he most consistently and innovatively employed was the so-called «immersion effect». By making his audiences share the sensory and imaginary perceptions of individual characters, he induced them to enter those characters' psyches, and so created «first-person theatre». We share, for instance, throughout *La Fundación* (The Foundation), the hero's schizophrenic delusion and slow return to sanity, and throughout *La Detonación* (The Shot) the protagonist's stream of consciousness before he takes his own life.

Only five of Buero's plays have been performed in Britain, but 17 have been produced, in 20 languages, worldwide. In Spain he received countless honours, including in 1971 election to the Academy, and in 1986 the Cervantes Prize, never before awarded to a playwright. When *La Fundación* was revived to celebrate his 80th birthday, the King and Queen were present at the first night in the María Guerrero theatre. Appropriately, Buero's coffin was displayed on April 30 in the pit of that same theatre, and 6,000 of his compatriots filed past to pay him homage.

An unassuming man, intensely committed to his convictions and his art, he could be stung by unfair attacks, but his generous spirit endeared him to all who knew him well. The sudden death of his son Enrique in 1994 was a blow he found hard to sustain, but he is survived by another son, Carlos, and by his deeply loved wife, the actress Victoria Rodríguez. Before their marriage in 1959, he told a friend he was troubled by her ignorance of Ibsen. Hearing this, she read Ibsen's plays, but then told him «I prefer yours».

Facilitado por la Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes

Súmese como **voluntario** o **donante** , para promover el crecimiento y la difusión de la **Biblioteca Virtual Universal**.

Si se advierte algún tipo de error, o desea realizar alguna sugerencia le solicitamos visite el siguiente **enlace**.

