ABSTRACT

The Family Myth and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Early Post-War Theater of Spain: Jardiel Poncela, Buero Vallejo, and Sastre

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This thesis studies how playwrights in the first two decades of Francisco Franco's dictatorship in Spain created an alternative discourse to counteract the repressive Nationalist narrative. Focusing on three plays, Enrique Jardiel Poncela's *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro* (1940), Antonio Buero Vallejo's *Historia de una escalera* (1949), and Alfonso Sastre's *La mordaza* (1954), this investigation examines two techniques: the dismantling of Franco's family rhetoric and traditional gender roles and the construction of a rhetoric of silence. Through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of hidden polemic and the rhetoric of silence as studied by Janet Pérez and others, the innovative ways these playwrights used the fascist discourse and strict censorship laws to their advantage stands out clearly. These playwrights respond to tyranny and undercut the Francoist Regime by producing rich, multi-layered literary works with multi-layered meanings, creating a "silent" space for dialogue.

The Family Myth and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Early Post-War Theater of Spain: Jardiel Poncela, Buero Vallejo, and Sastre

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS v

DEDICATION vi

EPIGRAPH vii

CHAPTER ONE 1
Introduction 1

CHAPTER TWO 25
Burying the Body and the Truth: Jardiel Poncela's *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro* 25

CHAPTER THREE 53
The Escape from the "infinita melancolía" of Family Feuds and Silencing Poverty: Buero Vallejo's *Historia de una escalera* 53

CHAPTER FOUR 80
The Little Krappo Dictator and His Muzzle on the Truth: Alfonso Sastre's *La mordaza* 80

CHAPTER FIVE 110
Conclusion 110

WORKS CITED 120

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To all of you

Hay una vieja historia que me roe por dentro; necesito desahogarme con alguien.
—Enrique Jardiel Poncela, *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro*

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Leo Tolstoy begins his novel *Anna Karenina* with this commentary: "All happy families resemble each other; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (3). This famous quote, although set in a novel about nineteenth century Russia, echoes many truths about mid-twentieth century Spain. In the 1940s and 1950s, the dictator Francisco Franco tried to create an image of Spain as one happy family, united under him as a father figure. The Regime's monologic myth of the family required all families to look "alike," leaving no room for dialogue or a divergence of opinions. Families had to comply with traditional gender roles and work ceaselessly for a Spain that had purportedly suffered from the contamination of foreign influences and modernity, all the while repressing horrific memories from the Civil War and abiding by strict censorship laws. Despite the Francoist symbol of a united, Catholic, and happy Spanish family, the literature of these two decades of greatest repression continuously undercuts the Regime's ideals by presenting dysfunctional, unhappy, divided families and by paradoxically using the imposed silence on crucial issues as their most powerful voice.

In the plays *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro*, by Enrique Jardiel Poncela (1940); *Historia de una escalera*, by Antonio Buero Vallejo (1949); and *La mordaza*, by Alfonso Sastre (1954), the families portrayed demonstrate the second half of Tolstoy's quote: unable to achieve the homogeneous, happy family ideal, they are miserable in their own, horribly unique way. In order to show that the Nationalist discourse is flawed and cannot act as the foundation for Spanish society, these playwrights creates their own

rhetorics that reveals the truth about real Spanish families. They create this counter-discourse in their plays by delineating the characters' inability to function as a unit like Franco mandated and through a unique use of the rhetoric of silence. These two strategies allowed Jardiel, Buero, and Sastre to bypass the censors' inspection while providing a counter-narrative for their audiences and criticizing the Regime through the "silences."

After a violent Civil War, lasting from 1936-1939 and leaving the country divided between the "vencidos" and the "vencedores," the victors and the defeated, Franco became the wounded country's dictator for almost forty years. When he and his Nationalist Regime took control of the country in 1939, they had to "reconcile" the two divided pieces of the nation, thus "reassembling" the national family. The official Spain, the Nationalist side that had won the war, accepted Franco as their authentic leader. The new dictator needed to shift society's perception of the Republicans, legitimately elected in 1936, and their allies and redefine what it meant to be Spanish. Franco began to create a new rhetoric, "the authorized fascist narrative," to convince the public of his authentic and legitimate power (Munson 139).[1] To carry out this goal, he first needed to construct a space for his rhetoric to be created: a monological space, free from differing opinions and dialogue. Franco had to construct a space of silence.

To begin this process, the dictator called upon the conservative, traditional Spanish identity, a project that had roots stretching back centuries to the traditionalists who rejected the Enlightenment and the Carlists who rejected Isabel II's liberal reforms. He appealed to the desire for "the good old days," as Iberian Christians crusading against

[1] Marsha Kinder also says, "According to neo-Marxist theorist Ernesto Laclau, fascism is characterized precisely by . . . [a] highly unified discourse, which glosses over all logical inconsistencies and uses one organizing principle, *such as the family*, [emphasis mine] to organize and become symbolic of all others (e.g., politics, religion, and economics)" (17).

the infidel Muslims or as the Empire in all its glory. He mixed both history and myth, invoking the images of Los Reyes Católicos, El Cid, and other important cultural figures.[2] The use of these mystified personas provided a justification for the Regime's actions.[3] In a speech to Asturian coal miners in 1946, Franco proclaimed that to improve the nation as a whole, some had to make large sacrifices, emphasizing, "No hay redención sin sangre, y bendita mil veces la sangre que nos ha traído nuestra redención" (*Franco ha dicho* 21). According to the Nationalists, Spain needed to weed out the Republicans, the Communists, foreign influences, and anyone that disagreed with the Regime so that the country could rebuild and regain its old identity and former glory.

A common way of eliminating dialogue is by forcing potential interlocutors into eternal silence. The death tolls continued to rise even after the war ended due to executions, suicides, and hunger. The purging of the country's so-called foreign influences and moral contamination often took on terms of an exorcism or "expiation of sin" (Richards 35). However, as a German Nazi Press stated In *Essener National-Zeitung* in 1936, "A horrible end is better than endless horrors" (cited in Richards 35). The Nationalist Regime justified its crimes and the terrors it brought to Spanish soil as a necessary evil to prevent future evils. The Nationalists could quietly bury the bodies of political enemies in "fosas comunes," or common graves, and the rest of the country would watch in silence. According to the fascist narrative, violence and its consequences were a necessary sacrifice for the sake of Spain's future.

[2] The Francoist Regime based much of its rhetoric on history and national heroes. However, especially concerning women like Isabel la Católica and Santa Teresa de Ávila, the Regime first had to sanitize the historical figures before picturing them in children's books as role models to follow (Graham 185).

[3] In the early twentieth century, Miguel Primo de Rivera, the dictator from 1923-1930, also set the stage for Franco's unified family myth by promoting the idea that all Spaniards belonged to a single group working toward one goal dictated by a single will, encouraging the loss of individualization (Thomas 2).

The Regime coupled this violent, bloody repression with intellectual repression. Strict censorship laws helped to stifle any ideology that did not align with the authorized narrative. Under the Press Law of 1938, the Francoist Regime had already taken control of mass media, and most journalists acted as state functionaries (Richards 10). A memorandum from the Provincial Delegation of Huesca, instituted by law on May 20, 1941, demarcating the regulations for propaganda, states, “Nuestras actividades derivadas de las funciones a desarrollar deben estar encaminadas como decía el Caudillo en el preámbulo del Decreto de Creación del Servicio de Propaganda” (Abellán 249). Censors’ duties involved spreading only the culture that Franco wanted them to spread, and, in the case of theater, withholding the certificate of censorship when the plays had “motivos inadmisibles, escenas perniciosas para la moral o el buen gusto, etc.” and attending the plays themselves to ensure the actors did not deviate from the pre-approved script (Abellán 255).[4] Authors and playwrights took great care when writing to make sure the morals and values encouraged in their works did not vary conspicuously from those of the Regime and that they did not condemn the Regime’s governing strategies in a way noticeable to censors.

Another way the Nationalists constructed and enforced their rhetoric was through control of the Spanish education system. Spending on education in general was very low and attendance very poor, especially in rural areas, and Franco’s Nuevo Estado created a new curriculum with required textbooks, such as *España nuestra*, to institutionalize a specific set of values in public and private schools. Many of these programs focused on

[4] The Department of Theater could issue the following qualifications under the censorship laws: Approved; Approved with corrections/omissions; Approved subject to the performance of the dress rehearsal, attended by inspectors or the Provincial Delegate himself; Approved for a limited number of performances, for certain cities, or for late evening performances only; Authorized for minors under 14 years of age or for youth between the ages of 14-16; and Prohibited (Abellán 261-262).

creating an image of the ideal, traditional family. The Francoist government was very concerned with indoctrinating the Spanish youth, forming their opinions and worldviews from an early age by manipulating children's literature and utilizing other forms of propaganda, as we will discuss later.

Regarding the country as a whole, Franco also reinforced his silent space of monological discourse through a policy of autarky, or self-sufficiency. It isolated Spain from the outside world, mandating low imports and enacting an "imposed quarantine or silencing" on Spanish society, and as Franco gained more power, he forcibly silenced justice in the courts and in state institutions (Richards 2).[5] Creating a closed and isolated space, Franco found it easier to repress and negate the lives of the "vencidos." In addition, although most of Franco's supporters came from the upper classes, the Regime focused on the agrarian sector as the symbol of true Spanish values, lauding poverty as holiness. Ironically, the burden of autarky policies and other laws fell mainly on the lower classes,[6] which further strengthened the Regime's authority. Such poverty-stricken families were too preoccupied with survival to worry about political protests. They had to "retreat into the private domestic sphere" and lived in an almost dream-like state (Richards 29). In this way, Franco used poverty and hunger to isolate individuals and families from the rest of their social unit, effectively "silencing" them. The Regime's goal was to create a structure of dependency on the Regime, and starving the lower classes was one effective way to do this. By giving disproportionate importance to the

[5] Thanks to the Law of Political Responsibility, passed in 1939, Franco was able to "purify" various state institutions to get rid of any ideas and influences related to the Republican ideology. To pass the public-entrance exam for a position in the Spanish judicial system, an applicant had to show his loyalty to the Nationalist Movement (Richards 13). Many judges went into hiding or were killed, and those who remained catered to the Regime's interests.

[6] Cazorla reports that, in 1953, many families were living off of one third of the food and money they needed (72).

family as the ideal "image" for the nation, while simultaneously keeping the average family dependent, poor, and hungry, Franco could continue to force his citizens to retreat into their domestic sphere where they focused on survival alone, too busy to concern themselves with the rest of society or uniting for political change.

Traditionally, the family has been the center of society. Familial relationships form an integral part of one's personal identity and provide support, care, and love. As we have seen, Franco used the family as a tool. Graham explains, "The family, as envisaged by the regime, was unthreatening because it connected vertically with the state rather than horizontally within society" (184). Franco's strategy involved making each family completely dependent on these vertical ties with the government and isolating them from horizontal ties with society. With the goal of indoctrinating, reconstructing, and changing the ideology of the defeated, the dictator constructed the new myth of the Spanish family that functioned as a metonymy of Spain the nation.

Gender roles were critical to the function of Franco's family rhetoric because he needed to establish an example that every Spaniard could follow. He gave particular attention to female gender roles because of the mother's influence on the rest of the family. The Nationalist Regime had blamed a large part of Spanish society's ills on women's changing identity and roles and the rights they had gained under the Second Republic.[7] They thought that strict, conservative gender roles would provide social stability for the rest of the country. As young girls reached working age, they entered the Servicio Social program of the Sección Femenina, the female branch of the Falange Español that enforced the traditional Catholic role of women. For example, the Sección

[7] Graham notes that this changing identity was "perceived by those sectors of society adversely affected as the cause of their personal problems and of 'falling standards/degenerating values'" (184).

Femenina lauded Isabel la Católica as a model of self-abnegation and sacrifice and encouraged every young girl to be "futura madre y esposa, digna descendiente de Isabel la Católica" (Martín Gaite 42). The Francoist Regime promoted pronatalism and imposed harsh punishments on abortions to ensure families continued to grow.

Because the government needed socialization to occur not only at school but also in the home, the Nationalists established many laws and regulations that provided for the "excedencia forzosa por matrimonio" which required employers to dismiss all married women employees automatically (Graham 184). The Regime wanted to discourage women from working to supplement their husband's wages. In March of 1938, Franco promulgated the Fuero de trabajo, or Labor Charter, which "freed [married women] from the workplace and the factory" and prohibited them from working at night (Graham 184, Linhard 38). The Ley de bases of July 18, 1938 guaranteed a subsidy or allowance to families with more than two children only if the woman in the family stayed at home (Linhard 38). Although contingent upon the woman's actions, the government then paid this allowance directly to the male head of the family.[8]

The overwhelming message of the Regime decreed that a woman's place was in the home. Victoria Lorée Enders explains,

> Woman was to complement her husband; her sacred duty was to be a mother. The rhetoric of Pilar Primo de Rivera reiterated that woman was by nature submissive; that she realized herself most fully through self-abnegation. Never was woman to compete with man, or to attempt to replace him; she was to act in a well-defined and restricted world appropriate to her "natural" qualities. (376)

[8] The Ley de ayuda familiar, or the Family Subsidy Law of March 26, 1946 also pertained to government handouts to families, denying the "plus familiar," or family bonus, to households in which the wife was employed (Graham 184).

Pilar Primo de Rivera, sister of the founder of the Falange party José Antonio Primo de Rivera and the leader of the Sección Femenina, said, “Las mujeres nunca descubren nada; les falta el talento creador, reservado por Dios a las inteligencias masculinas” (cited in Morcillo Gómez, note 1). Women had no need to be independent or work outside the home, as their more intelligent, more creative, and more talented husbands and fathers could take care of them.[9] Keeping women from working and instilling in young girls the ideal attributes of being pious, pure, submissive, and passive would “obliterate women as independent social beings” (Graham 184).[10] The Regime gave women the responsibility of ensuring their husbands and sons did not challenge the status quo, as the Republican “vencidos” had done (Richards 16).

The Spanish society typically held a double standard regarding female and male behavior. Cazorla notes, “Contrary to Catholic teachings, male dalliance was by and large tolerated while female promiscuity resulted in the label of ‘slut’ with all the stigma this tag implied. . . . A woman was not supposed to go to marriage ‘already started,’ while a man ‘once washed’ was ‘like new’” (145). Although the Nationalist government wanted its citizens to fit the picture-perfect family model, many of the laws and regulations it enforced against women unintentionally unraveled the healthy family unit and encouraged activities, such as prostitution, that undermined traditional family values.

One important example of how Franco wove his official discourse and the family myth into much of the propaganda of the period is the novel *Raza* (1942), which the

[9] Even if women decided to work and forfeited the opportunity to receive the “plus familiar,” the Nationalist government restricted their options. Women could work as maids, cooks, seamstresses, or prostitutes, as Spain did not criminalize prostitution until 1956 (Graham 189).

[10] Republican women were at an even greater disadvantage, as the Law of Political Responsibilities allowed the government to deny pension rights, raid, and levy penalties on the women left behind after the death or incarceration of a Republican father or husband, further silencing their voices and experiences (Graham 188).

dictator published under the pseudonym Jaime de Andrade. Director Antonio Román y de Sáenz de Heredia adapted it into a popular patriotic-historical movie the same year (Munson 138). In *Raza*, the Churruca family symbolizes Spain. Franco starts his book stating, "Vais a vivir escenas de la vida de una generación; episodios inéditos de la Cruzada española, presididos por la nobleza y espiritualidad características de nuestra raza" (Andrade 21). Franco peppers these opening lines with religious language, equating the Civil War with a crusade, and transmits his idea that the Spanish people function as a collective unit characterized by specific values. The novel demonstrates that Spain cannot be an individualistic society. It has to function as a whole, but also separate and isolated from foreign influences. María José Bordera-Amérigo proposes that, in Franco's Spain "la familia como núcleo colectivo se erige en protagonista" (78). The united and loyal family of *Raza* suggests that, in parallel fashion, a united Spain would be the protagonist of its own history in an era of uncertainty and fragmentation. The characters serve as a model for the entire nation and represent the values or morals that Franco wanted to inculcate into the public psychology.

The father Pedro Churruca represents the father figure who cares for the extended community, the "family" of Spain as a nation. The audience of the time period would not miss the importance of the name Pedro, as Peter was the founder and first Pope of the Christian church according to Catholic theology. Isabel the mother and Isabel the daughter, whose namesake is of course Isabel la Católica, demonstrate the attributes of religion, piety, loyalty, and sacrifice. The second son José symbolizes the chosen one, the new Santiago, who saves Spain from foreign invaders, like Franco himself. Alejandro Yarza notes that in many scenes, José repeatedly sits at the right hand of his father, while

Pedro, the rebellious son who later fights for the Republicans, sits to his left. Just as Peter realized the sin of his denial of Jesus, Pedro Churruca Jr. realizes his error and returns to the correct path in the end. When he affiliates himself with the Nationalists, he can reconcile with the rest of his family (Munson 144). With the help of *Raza* and other cultural productions, Franco provided a powerful backdrop for his rhetoric. He represented himself as the benevolent father figure of all of Spain. The Nationalists were the obedient, submissive, and contented children who carried out their duties to their neighbors, while the Republicans were the children that had strayed from the good path.

Franco's propaganda represented the official view and voice of Spain, and any literature, art, or films that challenged his ideas were harshly censored. Writers did their best to obviate censorship, but communicating their criticism to the public while avoiding problems with censors was often difficult. This essay examines three playwrights, Enrique Jardiel Poncela (1901-1952), Antonio Buero Vallejo (1916-2000), and Alfonso Sastre (1926-), and a drama by each, two from the 1940s and the other one from the 1950s, to reveal how their plays, critical of the Regime, passed strict censorship.

Understanding Mikhail Bakhtin's theory on discourse will help us to analyze better how dramatists Jardiel, Buero, and Sastre created an alternative discourse for Spain during the 1940s and 1950s. Franco and his Nationalist Regime had a "monopolization of public memory and the public voice," making their views and opinions the norm (Richards 4). A word is monological if "there is no possibility of interruption from another point of view," which Franco ensured by the methods discussed previously (Doraiswamy 69). In *Raza*, one can see this monological world in which "the author's interpretations and evaluations must dominate all others and must comprise a compact

and unambiguous whole" (Bakhtin *Problems* 168). Franco wrote about the Churruca family in this way: "Every struggle between two voices within a single discourse for possession and dominance in that discourse is decided in advance and only appears to be a struggle" (Bakhtin *Problems* 168). The author plays a game, pretends to pit brother against brother, Nationalist against Republican, without truly allowing for dialectical space so that his monological rhetoric stands out more clearly.

Regarding literature's response to this type of oppression, Bakhtin states, "When there is no adequate form for an unmediated expression of an author's intentions, it becomes necessary to refract them through another's speech" ("Discourse" 292). Jardiel, Buero, and Sastre, unable to publish any play with direct and overt criticism, expressed their opinions in a "refracted," fragmented way through their characters. Never explicitly stating their opinion, the playwrights use different strategies to confuse their message enough to pass unnoticed by censors. Each character figuratively casts pieces of the message through their verbal and nonverbal communication to another character, who then casts the pieces elsewhere. Audience members must pay attention to the conflicts and the interactions rather than the dialogue, perceiving the meaning between the lines and behind the spoken words. The message, difficult to reassemble in full, still manages to pervade the work in tone and style, giving the audience the feeling that something is amiss or left unsaid.

Although Bakhtin focused mainly on novels and prose, much of what he postulated applies to the plays studied in this thesis. The Russian philosopher believed that in stylized literature, dialogue, parody and other literary forms, "discourse remains a double focus, aimed at the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and

simultaneously at a second context of discourse, a second speech act by another addresser," in this case the playwright (Bakhtin "Discourse" 285). He states that in a narrative, the utterances are categorized as "doubly oriented word usage" ("Discourse" 286). Because plays have no narrator, unlike a short story or novel, the dramatists studied here use their stage directions to accomplish much of their doubly oriented goals.

Of course, the counter discourse one finds in these three plays lies not only in the stage directions, but also in the characters' verbal and nonverbal communication. Bakhtin notes that the direct speech of characters "is meant not only to be understood in terms of its own referential object, but, by virtue of its character-defining capacity, or its typicality, or its colorfulness, it also appears as the object of another (the author's) intention" ("Discourse" 286). Bakhtin delineates several different categories of literary verbal devices, including skaz, or the oral speech of a narrator, parody, and hidden polemic. Parody gives the speech act at hand a new intention "directly opposed to the original one," in which the playwright's speech "lays claim to someone else's speech as its own" (Bakhtin "Discourse" 293, 295). In hidden polemic, however, the character's speech only "obliquely . . . strike[s] at the other speech act" and the other intention is not voiced directly, but reflected, subtly determining the tone and meaning of the passage (Bakhtin "Discourse" 296). Jardiel, Buero, and Sastre would find this strategy useful given their social circumstances. The internal speech of the work "is constantly addressing itself to the possible or potential other, who is reacting to this speech," creating a dialogue between the characters, between the author and the characters, and finally, between the author and his audience (Doraiswamy 60). In theater, a playwright's

audience includes both present and future viewers, creating a constantly changing and fluctuating interaction.

The Carnival aspect of discourse will also help in analyzing these playwrights' strategies, especially those of Jardiel. Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque comes from the Carnival celebration that boasts the opposites of all the values usually held by a society's official institutions. Carnival manifests itself in Bakhtin's theory of discourse in the following way: "Carnival is best conceived dialogically: i.e. as the interaction of differences in a simultaneity. Carnival can be understood only in relation to a set of differences which both oppose it and, *at the same time*, enable it. A major simultaneity, then, must be the difference between official and unofficial worlds" (Holquist 222). Although none of these plays have men dressed as women or scenes glorifying bodily functions, the playwrights try to destabilize society's established norms and values in other ways to provoke their audiences to generate a new interpretation. J. Michael Holquist explains, "If the state's symbol is the uniform that turns the whole body of its wearer into an unambiguous sign of rank, then carnival's symbol is the mask and the costume that decertify identity and enable transformation" (222). These plays, like Carnival, allow the playwright and the actors to put on a mask and costume to enable transformation, and each individual character also acts in a way that destabilizes his or her identity according to the rules and ideals of the Regime.

Franco's monological rhetoric delineated what was and was not permissible regarding personal and sexual relations, politics, and, most importantly for this study, the family. Jardiel, Buero, and Sastre take the familial values promoted by Franco's Regime and turn them inside out, showing their inner distortions and contradictions, to

demonstrate that another way of thinking and a counter-discourse exist outside Franco's rhetorical walls. According to Voloshinov: "This *inner dialectic quality* of the [living ideological] sign comes out fully in the open only in times of social crises or revolutionary changes" (23). These two decades after the Civil War represent a dire social crisis in Spanish society, and despite Franco's desire to control the nation's rhetoric, these playwrights prove that there are two faces to every ideological sign.

The theory of the rhetoric of silence offers another useful tool for analyzing these works of the 1940s and 1950s. Janet Pérez, Cheryl Glenn, and Krista Ratcliffe discuss why the rhetoric of silence has not traditionally been considered as important as that of normal speech. In past centuries, societies considered language as a gift of the gods because it was unique to human beings. Thus, "Speech became the authorized medium of culture and power" (Glenn and Ratcliffe 1). However, Pérez believes in the "eloquence of silence" and cites Plutarch, who is believed to have said, "We learn silence from the gods, speech from man" (110).[11] Silence has no defined limitations and is not bound by the rules of language. It has become increasingly important and worthy of study as an instrument of communicating about topics restricted in normal speech.[12]

Regarding literature, authors must partake in the rigorous and selective process of writing as they choose which details to include in their works and which to omit for practicality. Authors use silence to connote negative feelings, such as a loss of words, utter embarrassment, or disbelief (Pérez 111). Silence can allow for a moment of

[11] Glenn and Ratcliffe also note the importance of silence to the ancient Egyptian and Pythagorean societies, and Pérez notes the Greeks' use of aposiopesis.

[12] Lately, many scholars have applied the theory and rhetoric of silence to analyze marginalized voices in literature, history, or current events: women or minorities. *La Revista Monográfica* (2000) published a collection of thirty essays that investigate the use of silence in Hispanic literature, ranging from Miguel de Cervantes to Elena Poniatowska and across all genres.

reflection, meditation, or concentration. However, in this study, we must distinguish between silences used for these traditional purposes and the "deliberate, perceptible [and] conspicuous" silences that obfuscate an audience's interpretation of the scene and cause confusion or mystery (Pérez 117). These silences provoke the audience to react in a certain way, "actively enlisting these as co-creator or interpreter" (Pérez 117). Glenn comments, "Silence is too often read as simple passivity in a situation where it has actually taken on an expressive power: when it denotes alertness and sensitivity, when it signifies attentiveness or stoicism, and particularly when it allows new voices to be heard" (18). The audience members must take silences seriously if they are to capture the criticism of certain social situations latent in the text.

The movement back and forth between silence and dialogue helps structure the play, aids in "refracting" the message, and creates a tempo that the action of the play will follow. The "polarity of the spoken and unspoken word" creates dramatic tension and builds the work around the conflicts that arise between the internal and external worlds of the characters (Gabrielle 217). Often in the theater, actors convey meaning through silence by using facial expressions, body language, and other gestures "capable of modifying, subverting or contradicting the utterance they accompany" (Pérez 112). In a performance, the objectified utterances of Bakhtin can take on a new meaning if accompanied by moments of silence, perhaps clarifying the author's intention. Silence in the theater has both literary as well as physical dimensions because one can read the silences in the script but can also see and hear them during a performance.

A few of the techniques that an author or playwright can use to create a meaningful rhetoric of silence are: a lapsed or discontinuous narrative, red herring

plotlines or abrupt storyline switches, reiteration, parallelism, excessive verbosity, circumlocution, euphemisms, indirectness, syntactic complexity, omission, incomplete or truncated versions of the story, temporal or spatial evasion, and the false overture or protagonist (Pérez 129). Spanish playwrights publishing under the strict Nationalist censorship refined these techniques in their works. As Pérez notes, "The rhetoric of silence did not too often detract from artistic merit, but contributed a subtlety and aesthetic refinement frequently lacking in the first wave of publications not employing silence, those works appearing after abolition of censorship" (Pérez 129). The three playwrights studied in this essay, Jardiel, Buero, and Sastre, take advantage of several of these methods of silence to express opinions prohibited by the Francoist Regime.

Enrique Jardiel Poncela (1901-1952), the eldest of the group, gained fame thanks to his participation in the comedic magazines of the 1920s, *Buen Humor* and *Gutiérrez*. These publications exposed him to other writers like José López Rubio, Miguel y Jerónimo Mihura, Antonio Robles, and others (Conde 81). For their endeavors to overhaul Spain's comedic theater, these dramatists came to be known as "the Other Generation of 1927." They worked unceasingly to renovate the stagnant Spanish theater that they believed had deteriorated after World War I and during "la crisis teatral de los años veinte" (Paco 101). Jardiel had been arrested, interrogated, and exiled during the Civil War by the Republicans and their allies. When he returned to Spain after the triumph of the Alzamiento Nacional, he felt "seguro y muy a su gusto, poniéndose a trabajar para estrenar de inmediato sus nuevas obras teatrales," officially supporting the Francoist Regime (Gómez Yebra 286). Jardiel wished for the turmoil to end so that he could continue writing his plays and renovating the Spanish theater, but some

hypothesize that the post-War period in Spain and the changes in liberties quickly began to affect Jardiel's political opinion. Antonio Gómez Yebra defends Jardiel, explaining that the serious problems and repression in Spain forced everyone, especially those in the public view, to tread "con pies de plomo para no suscitar la acción de la censura" (287). Jardiel lived and wrote in a dangerous time that did not allow him to write of the ills of Spain as freely and directly as some of his successors like Buero Vallejo and Sastre.

The writers of the Other Generation of 1927 "marcaron la apertura del teatro precisamente en el momento en que se partió España," according to Eduardo Haro Tecglen (133). For some playwrights, like Azorín, the new theater was supposed to be one of superrealism, fantasy, and unreality (Paco 103). Jardiel, however, channeled his surrealism through the absurd and focused more on humor. He saw no value in writing and performing a play that conformed to the normal ways in which his audience thought. He asked, "¿Y qué valor puede tener para decirse o para representarse en un escenario *lo que piensan todos*, lo que *les ha ocurrido a todos*? ¿Pues no estaría más de acuerdo con la propia esencia del teatro que lo que sucediese en el escenario no fuera lo vulgar, sino lo extraordinario, lo que a ninguno le ha ocurrido ni podrá ocurrirle nunca?" (cited in Conde 84). He hungered for something new, "[una] ruptura con lo anterior" (Conde 80). His search for a new way of expression led him to write his "teatro de lo inverosímil." His absurd and comical plays show a distorted view of reality as a type of rebellion used to bring the actual circumstances of his society into question. Luis Araquistain explains, "El humorista . . . trastrueca todos los valores . . . para dudar de todos" (36-37). Jardiel believed fantasy, "lo inverosímil," and comedy could transcend ideological barriers.

Jardiel's *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro* centers on two families, the Briones and the Ojedas, as their youngest members, Mariana and Fernando, respectively, seek to solve a mystery that has gnawed at them for years. Mariana and Fernando are in love, but the mystery they sense between them is almost palpable and acts as the main attraction that brings them together. Both families, from the upper aristocratic class, are totally dysfunctional. The father figures are absent, the mother figures passed away years ago, and certain family members either are mentally ill or feign insanity, unable to discuss the problems at hand. Jardiel opens the play with a prologue in a movie theater in a lower class neighborhood, a costumbrista scene, which reveals the state of the lower class after Franco's takeover. Conde believes that Edgardo, Mariana's father, is the "personaje paradigmático del mundo de Jardiel. Él representa el desdén frente a la realidad y el logro de la evasión por lo inverosímil" (90). This play is particularly important to our discussion because most critics, both at the time of its debut and in the years that followed, saw it purely as a superficial way to escape reality, a play full of humor meant only to distract. This paper argues that Jardiel said much more than meets the eye, analyzing the nonconventional silence techniques Jardiel uses to make insinuations about the state of affairs in Spain. For Jardiel, humor had the power of subversion and the ability to show "el doble de toda cosa," reminding us of Bakhtin's double voicing (Paco 106). By inverting society's norms and having characters who act in a ridiculous, almost carnivalesque way, *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro* creates a counter-discourse to Franco's family myth.

Writing almost a decade after the opening of Jardiel's *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro*, Antonio Buero Vallejo also questioned the Regime's values in his dramas.

During the Civil War, Buero, in his early twenties, joined the Republican cause by using his artistic talents to write articles and draw posters and illustrations (Halsey *Antonio Buero Vallejo* 10). The Nationalists sent him to a concentration camp, and in 1939 they sentenced him to death (Halsey *Antonio Buero Vallejo* 10). Fortunately, they never carried out this sentence. In 1946, the government released Buero from jail, and, inspired by the harsh post-war economic conditions, he started to write extensively. Under intense scrutiny from the beginning for his Republican affiliation during the war, Buero had to take great care when choosing what to include in his scripts. He also dutifully made changes when his plays came back from the censors with corrections.

Buero deviated from Jardiel's absurd comedies, primarily writing plays that fit into a newer movement called "Realismo Social" that offered audiences "a slice of life." Each scene in these plays depicts the true struggles and suffering of families in Spain in a realistic, believable manner. Buero believed in "la esperanza trágica," or "tragic hope," in which his plays could end with an open situation that, although dark, was also strangely optimistic. He proclaimed, "Esa fe última late tras las dudas y los fracasos que en la escena se muestran; esa esperanza mueve a las plumas que describen las situaciones más desesperadas. Se escribe porque se espera, pese a toda duda. Pese a toda duda, creo y espero en el hombre, como espero y creo en todas cosas" ("El teatro de Buero Vallejo" 6). Both faith and doubt coexist in Buero's moral and ethical theater (Schwartz 440). "La esperanza trágica" showed the potential of human nature and incited the audience to act in order to achieve that potential.

Buero Vallejo's *Historia de una escalera* won the Lope de Vega Award in 1949 and premiered at the Español Theater in Madrid that same year (O'Connor 17). When the

Nationalist government realized that Buero had been affiliated with the opposition during the war, they postponed the play as long as possible and abbreviated the length of its tour (Pennington 40). Due to the stipulations of the Lope de Vega Award, they could not cancel it outright, but they required Buero to change and omit several lines of dialogue. *Historia de una escalera* is the story of several families living together in a cramped apartment building over the course of thirty years. In the first act, Buero introduces his audience to the dreamer Fernando, his love interest Carmina, his more responsible best friend Urbano, and their families and neighbors. In the second act, ten years after the first, Carmina's father has died, and the audience finds out, much to their shock, that Fernando has married Elvira instead, leaving a scorned Carmina to marry Urbano. In the third act, this time skipping twenty years, including the Civil War, all families have consolidated into two apartments, as wealthier newcomers are slowly buying out the other units. The relationships between the families have deteriorated, and the hatred and bitterness of the parents cause them to reject the desire of their children, Fernandito and Carminita, to be together. *Historia de una escalera* is one of Buero's typical open tragedies, "for there exists the possibility of another chance born from the very heart of the impossible situation" (Schwartz 436). As Fernandito and Carminita make promises to each other that echo those of their parents years before, the hopeful uncertainty calls the audience to action and inspires them to initiate the change.

Alfonso Sastre (1926-), the youngest of the group, grew up in the heat of the Civil War. Only ten at the time, his family struggled to eat during these years, and the bombings in Madrid provided a terrifying backdrop to his dismal childhood (Anderson "Introducción" 12). In 1945, Sastre helped found an experimental theater group called

Arte Nuevo that, like Jardiel Poncela and the Other Generation of 1927, called for reforms of Spanish theater. He also wrote for several periodicals, his articles focusing on the relationship between art and social and political concerns (Anderson *Alfonso Sastre* 14). Five years later, he worked with his friend José María de Quinto to start another group, el Teatro de Agitación Social (T.A.S.) with the goal of introducing Spanish society to playwrights like Arthur Miller and Jean-Paul Sartre who could "stimulate the social awareness of the Spanish public" (Anderson *Alfonso Sastre* 15). This group unnerved the censors, who kept a close eye on the plays T.A.S. sought to introduce to Spain and the works its members themselves wrote. Sastre began to write *Escuadra hacia la muerte* for a performance in London, and, unfettered by the Spanish theater's rules and conventions, produced a play that was unconventional, violent, and shocking (Anderson *Alfonso Sastre* 15). The London project fell through, and the play debuted in the María Guerrero Theater in Madrid.[13] With this play, Sastre proved his worth as a dramaturge and gained immediate recognition.

While both Buero and Sastre began producing plays in the Realismo Social movement, they would later disagree on their techniques, and the latter would criticize the former for subscribing to the idea of "posibilismo." Sastre thought many authors were too passive, writing only what they knew could be published and performed instead of writing acerbic criticism of the harsh realities that the Spanish people faced every day. For Buero, however, "'teatro posible' does not imply a theater of accommodation" (Schwartz 442). He could write his criticism between the lines with the ultimate goal of

[13] Johnson notes, "[Sastre] irrumpió en la mediocre escena española de 1953 con el deslumbrante estreno de *Escuadra hacia la muerte*" (195).

finishing and performing his play so it could in turn have an impact on the audience. A playwright, according to Buero, should be risky but not reckless.

Sastre sees Buero's plays devoid of any sort of social criticism (Schwartz 438). For him, playwrights should never write tragedies with hope but with anguish, ending in a closed situation. His plays are often "dramas de frustración," and he inherited many of the themes of the Generation of 1898, especially considering their existentialism (Johnson 198). Schwartz explains Sastre's definition of tragedy: "Tragedy deals with existing beings who, living in a closed situation, seek a happiness which is denied to them and die or end badly" (436). Writing and performing plays is a social act in which the playwright influences the feelings of his audience (Pronko 111). However, due to strict censorship, many of his plays were published but never performed, performed but never published, or neither. For example, censors forced the groundbreaking *Escuadra hacia la muerte* to close after only three performances (Anderson *Alfonso Sastre* 9).

Sastre did not write with the intention of having an audience, nor did he believe in catering to their desires of fleeing from the harsh reality of human existence by writing "el teatro de la evasión." Instead of entertaining the middle class, he wrote his plays according to a "realismo profundizado" that focused on the human condition in all its real and tragic nature (Pronko 112). His conviction of "imposibilismo" would not let him compromise. One can study his successful plays that reached the stage like *La mordaza* to examine how he manipulated the fascist narrative to get his message through censorship and across to the public.

La mordaza, under the direction of José María de Quinto, debuted at the Reina Victoria Theater in Madrid in 1954, enjoying a great deal of success before the writer was

imprisoned for political activities in 1956 (Anderson *Alfonso Sastre* 16). Sastre was a good example of an author suffering the "mordaza," or "gag," of Franco's Spain, "víctima de la represión cultural de un régimen reaccionario y la sociedad producida por él" (Johnson 195). Pronko notes that a silent tension characterizes many of his plays, including *La mordaza* (112). Isaías Krappo, the dictator-like father, resembles the chief Goban in *Escuadra hacia la muerte*. They both represent harsh, impersonal, "tyrannical God-image[s]" who inculcate fear instead of love into those around them (Pronko 115). Isaías commits a murder early in the first act and forces his family members into silence for the rest of the play. He maintains power over his family members through fear and hatred. In the end, Luisa, the daughter-in-law, an "outsider" to the family, confesses to the Comisario that she witnessed the crime committed by Isaías that night. Isaías, as one last act of psychological violence against his family, tries to escape jail, knowing the officers will shoot and kill him. The image of his dead and mangled body will haunt his family members' memories as they try to enjoy life free from the repression of their tyrannical father.

This thesis examines these three plays written in the 1940s and 1950s, during some of the strictest censorship laws, and how each dramatist takes a different approach to arrive at a similar critique. Chapter Two discusses *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro* and how Jardiel uses the lower class characters in the Prologue and the twisted relationships between the Briones and Ojeda family members to demystify Franco's family rhetoric. He also utilizes the rhetoric of silence in a unique way, as instead of employing obvious pauses and tense moments of quiet, Jardiel uses unwarranted verbosity, abruptly changes between plotlines, and excessively complicates the dialogue

to bring to the audience's attention all that he leaves unsaid. Chapter Three examines the dysfunctional and embittered families in Buero's *Historia de una escalera* and the ways in which the characters distort traditional gender roles. Buero develops his rhetoric of silence through temporal evasion in his lapsed narrative and a parallelism among his three acts. While this play instills a sense of hope in its viewers to provoke them to break the cycle of poverty and injustice, Sastre's *La mordaza*, examined in Chapter Four, represents a much more tragic and bleak ending. The Krappo family functions on fear rather than love, and Isaías psychologically tortures his wife, sons, and daughter-in-law, even in death. Sastre writes explicit pauses into his stage directions, as does Buero, and uses the silence of the family regarding Isaías's crime as a metaphor for the silence of the Spanish people regarding the crimes committed during the Civil War and afterward by the Regime. Jardiel, Buero, and Sastre officially held different political opinions, but especially due to the restriction on written expression, all three experienced conflict with the fascist Regime. Utilizing the techniques appropriate to both their personalities and the years in which they wrote their plays, these playwrights constructed a clever critique of Franco's rhetoric that would bypass the censors of the time period and transmit their message to the Spanish public.

CHAPTER TWO

Burying the Body and the Truth: Jardiel Poncela's *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro*

In a neighborhood movie theater, setting of the Prologue of *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro* by Enrique Jardiel Poncela, one of the characters, el Marido, declares, "Por el humo se sabe dónde está el fuego" (Jardiel 58). Although a common saying, or "refrán," this quote applies well to Jardiel's techniques for critiquing Franco's rhetoric about family and repression seen in this work. Jardiel, writing under the censorship laws enforced under the Press Law of 1938, knew he needed to play it safe. After the Regime prohibited his novel *Amor se escribe sin hache* in 1939, and after *Pero…¿hubo alguna vez once mil vírgenes?* (1931) suffered many modifications due to "political and moral limitations" imposed by the censorship office, Jardiel was well aware of what the Regime would and would not permit (Hernández 24).Throughout *Eloísa*, he leaves no moment for silent reflection, and any action or character that the censors could construe as "immoral" gets lost amidst the frenetic scenes onstage. Every minute is full of excitement, laughter, and movement, and even the set provides visual distractions. The characters speak constantly, often interrupting each other, and the storylines cross and become entangled. These techniques are Jardiel's "smoke." The commotion and the distractions hide the truth of the situation, just as the characters' feigned insanity hides the real root of their family problems. The audience must connect the dots and see behind the smoke to interpret the hidden message.

Authors and playwrights like Jardiel needed this "smoke" because the Regime did not allow them to address certain topics that could question Franco's authority.[1] Writers found it impossible to discuss their concerns about the dictatorship directly, so they needed to create a more indirect counter discourse. According to Bakhtin's theory of discourse, "An author may utilize the speech act of another in pursuit of his own aims and in such a way as to impose a new intention on the utterance, which nevertheless retains its own proper referential intention," making the utterance double-voiced ("Discourse" 289). Examining the utterances of the characters of Jardiel's play takes careful consideration, as their referential intentions often seem absurd due to the playwright's affinity for "el teatro de lo inverosímil." The characters' distracting and over-the-top utterances function as a way of bypassing the censors. This technique would have allowed Jardiel to succeed in publishing and performing a play that entertained audience members, taking them out of the harsh reality of their post-war lives, while also carrying with it a concealed message that commented on Spain's national tragedy.

Eloísa relays this critique through its distortion of traditional family values and warped familial relationships, as well as through the rhetoric of silence. One can see the corruption of ideal gender roles in the lower class characters' interactions during the Prologue and in the communication between the Briones and Ojeda families. The characters in the Prologue function as an almost carnivalesque portrayal of the family values disseminated by the Nationalist Regime, flouting traditions of decency, honesty, and the patriarchal family unit. Furthermore, in both the Briones and Ojeda families, the fathers are absent for different reasons, and the younger generation, Mariana and

[1] Abellán explains the environment for authors in post-War Spain in this way: "En estos años [1940] nadie osaba abordar en un manuscrito original un tema que lindara con la política, excepción hecha de quienes defendían o trataban de consolidar la historiografía del franquismo o de la Falange" (158).

Fernando, have no acceptable role models to follow. A violent past haunts the two families, and when the truth finally surfaces, the characters react to the tragedy in shocking ways.

Because Jardiel debuted this play in a period of the strictest censorship rules and guidelines right after the Civil War, he does not employ the more traditional silence techniques seen in the other two plays studied in this thesis. He needed to find less obvious ways to utilize silence to his advantage that, if the government officials ever accused him of writing subversive material, would allow him to deny such charges. Jardiel's most powerful silence techniques include the use of a false overture, circumlocution and excessive verbosity, and many abrupt changes in the dialogue and overarching storyline. These strategies lead up to the discovery of the most powerful silence: one family member has murdered another, but no one will talk about it. This silence has eaten away at their reason and has driven many of them to crazy behavior. One can see these techniques primarily in the Prologue, the written stage directions, the family interactions, and the ending of the work.

Although performed two years before the publication and filming of *Raza*, *Eloísa* still undermines traditional gender roles promulgated by the Falange and its feminine counterpart, la Sección Femenina. *Raza* only represents the culmination of a careful rhetoric, a product of the Nationalists' inculcation of certain values and traditions in the Spanish population after the overthrow of the Second Republic. The characters in *Eloísa* dismantle and subvert the Regime's discourse on patriarchal family values by portraying the stark contrast between the family operations of lower and upper classes, the absence of the mother and father figures throughout the play, two protagonists who lack the

proper education and socialization needed to become model citizens, and the deterioration of family ties caused by the family members' insane behaviors.

The Prologue sets the tone for how the audience should interpret the rest of the play. Traditionally, critics have argued that the Prologue is trivial and superfluous, meant only to entertain.[2] Many have interpreted the Prologue, and the rest of the play, as just another one of Jardiel's ridiculous games with the goal of distracting his audience from the harsh realities they faced. Jardiel himself stood by his belief that he was not obligated to be an "artista comprometido" and had no duty to his society to write a play that carried a critical message (Gómez-Yebra 289). However, Antonio Gómez-Yebra notes, "La activa censura del momento no le hubiera permitido la crítica del régimen o la delación de las lacras sociales" (290). As previously mentioned, Jardiel ran into problems with the censorship office early. The playwright learned quickly what he needed to do to pass under the radar. The ability to be flexible and make changes when requested does not necessarily mean that Jardiel failed to choose a side or to advocate for the Spanish people. Gómez-Yebra explains, "Y pretendía—¿por qué no?—con sus palabras, dirigirse indirectamente a los censores del momento para que no se sintiesen inquietos con sus obras, para que le permitieran escribir sin trabas de ningún tipo" (291). Pretending to be a comedic playwright was sometimes easier than critiquing the government outright. In *Eloísa*'s Prologue, Jardiel speaks with his audience in their own words, allowing them to laugh and to forget their daily problems.

[2] Douglas McKay describes it as "a long delightful prologue that has nothing whatever to do with the two acts which follow" (50). For him, the light-hearted jokes and empty conversation prepare the audience for the empty absurdities in the following acts. Juan Emilio Aragonés also sees the Prologue "as a simple diversion," irrelevant but for the sake of entertainment (cited in McKay 51).

The critique of gender roles and family relationships in the Prologue is evident. The actors portray a slice of life from the perspective of the lower class. The audience sees poverty, misogyny, and an obvious lack of education. The reality seen in the Prologue is difficult, and only the humor of the dialogue and the ability to laugh at one's own situation distract the audience from the tragedy of this broken-down Madrid movie theater.

From the very beginning, Jardiel invites his audience to take part in the action through the stage set-up. Jardiel describes the Prologue's set in the stage directions: "El pasillo central del 'cine' avanza hacia la concha del apuntador y hacia el verdadero pasillo del teatro donde la comedia se representa" (52). The neighborhood movie theater becomes an extension of Jardiel's audience's theater, inviting them into the characters' lives and intimate conversations onstage. This involvement in the play's action will later motivate them to engage more in the interpretation of events and to draw their own conclusions based on active reflection.[3]

Although Jardiel's style aligns with "el teatro de lo inverosímil" rather than the later Realismo Social examined in the next two chapters, this Prologue does in fact show its audience a "slice of life" of the lower classes in post-war Spain. This neighborhood theater hosts a motley array of modest characters from the lower middle class. One of the young men is only watching the movies here because, as he says, "No tengo dinero pa ir cuando las echan en el centro" (Jardiel 54-55). The patrons of this theater do not have the money to attend the nicer theaters downtown or to buy candy from the Botones.

[3] Lacosta links the tendency of reader or audience involvement in Jardiel's novels to "pirandellismo," and explains, "Toda la obra jardielesca, en especial sus novelas largas, está saturada de ese afán de estrecha correlación con el lector. . . . [El pirandellismo] lleva al lector como de la mano a través de toda la obra . . . el lector se convierte en un personaje más" (504-505).

These characters often speak with a distinct accent common for lower class, uneducated people. Illiteracy had always been high in Spain, and the Nationalists did nothing to reduce it. The Regime offered pitiful salaries to teachers, and, due to the autarky policies, many children had to stay home and work instead of attend school (Cazorla 90). If poor children stayed home, too busy, too hungry, and not educated enough to protest against the Regime's policies or values, they were of little concern. Furthermore, the gap in education between the rich and poor would only widen throughout Franco's rule, as upper class families could enroll their children in rich, better-funded privates schools (Cazorla 91).[4] The moviegoers in *Eloísa* remind the audience of the poor state of education. Many of the characters use words like "rizao," "el encargao," "pa," "untao," "usté," "tos" etc. (Jardiel 55). Their dialogue demarcates linguistically these lower class characters from the aristocratic protagonists that will appear shortly. In this way, Jardiel infuses his Prologue with verisimilar characters and realistic speech habits.

As mentioned, the Prologue represents the difficult reality many Spaniards endured. After the Civil War, Richards explains the economic burden of autarky on the lower classes:

> The authority of the Franco regime was imposed through the manipulation of the supply of the material necessities of the population. This both guaranteed the overriding preoccupation of most of society with personal survival rather than political protest, and ensured that the sacrifices to be made during the long period of economic crisis in Spain during the 1940s would be overwhelmingly made by the working class. (24)

[4] During the Second Republic, the government had spent more on education, paying educators more and creating programs to build schools and train teachers (Cazorla 89). Franco's Regime reversed most of the Republicans' educational reforms and instead spent 8.4 times more on defense in 1941 (Cazorla 88).

These lower class citizens, too exhausted to think about challenging the status quo, could avoid their harsh existences by going to the movies. Even in their escape, however, one can see the quiet suffering of the people. After the Civil War, the citizens were rebuilding Madrid and cleaning up the damage from the frequent bombings. Buildings were unsound, and as Clotilde engages the Acomodador in witty banter about the "ozoponillo," or air freshener, Jardiel reminds his audience of the smells of the lower class and the buildings to which their economic status relegated them.

When two of the women of the aristocratic Briones family, Mariana and Clotilde, enter the theater, everything else stops abruptly. These two women differ greatly from the poverty and suffering that fill the theater. The contrast is almost palpable. The Acomodador, doing his best to please the newcomers, treats the women with more care than he treats any other patron. He says, "Aguarde a que la limpie, que si no se va a poner usté tibia (Saca un pañuelito y limpia el asiento)" (Jardiel 64). He also suddenly becomes aware of the state of disrepair of the theater, though it did not bother him moments before. He jumps in front of Mariana and tells her, "Y espere a ver si se hunde, porque las hay que fallan… (Se sube con un pie en la butaca y salta un poco sobre ella; la fila se mueve y el Dormido se cae al suelo)" (Jardiel 64). When Clotilde enters, he asks with concern, "Les olerá a ustés el local un poco raro, ¿verdá?" and Clotilde sharply responds, "Pues mire usted: sí. Al entrar se nota un olor algo chocante; pero luego, cuando se ve al público, ya no le choca a nada" (Jardiel 68-69). The differences between their accents, their appearances, and even their smells set them worlds apart. Fernando and Ezequiel Ojeda arrive at the theater in search of the women, causing a similar reaction by the lower class patrons. Jardiel's stage directions describe Fernando in this way: "no parece

preocupar ninguna cosa exterior . . . adopta un aire trivial, ligero y forzadamente natural" (77). Unlike the working class families under Franco's Regime, too preoccupied trying not to starve, the Ojedas and Briones do not worry about survival. They can participate in other activities and think about other topics. The modest theater patrons can feel the air of freedom from grinding poverty that emanates from them. The interaction between the aristocratic families, so out of place in a theater in this part of town, underscores the economic inequities that the Regime fostered.

Apart from the poverty displayed in this first scene, *Eloísa*'s Prologue also begins to deconstruct the ideal model of the Spanish family and the gender roles desired to promote peace and stability. The stage directions before the Prologue introduce the reader to a married couple and their friend, a boyfriend and his girlfriend and his girlfriend's mother, a sleeping man, two young women, and two young men described as "obreros endomingados" (Jardiel 52-53). Another group of moviegoers file in and they, along with the other men already mentioned, look with "ojos de hambre" at the young women in the room, and the first twelve lines are a variation of "¡Vaya mujeres! ¿Has visto?" (Jardiel 53). This interaction promptly introduces the machista theme of the man as a "mujeriego" and the woman as something to admire for her appearance, a behavioral norm that thrived under the Francoist Regime.

Not everyone falls into line with these gender roles, however. The young women receiving these compliments or "piropos," Muchacha 1 and Muchacha 2, destabilize the ideals of what a woman should be under the Francoist society. Flattered by the inarticulate accolades of all the men in the theater, these young women then discuss the affairs they maintain with older, wealthier, married men:

> MUCHACHA 2: Oye: ¿Y es hombre de mucha edá?
> MUCHACHA 1: Cincuenta años.
> MUCHACHA 2: ¿Casao?
> MUCHACHA 1: Sí; pero no se habla con la mujer.
> MUCHACH 2: ¿Están regañados?
> MUCHACHA 1: No. Que ella se quedó afónica de una gripe.
> MUCHACHA 2: ¿Y es rico?
> MUCHACHA 1: De lo más.
> MUCHACHA 2: ¿Te da mucha lata?
> MUCHACHA 1: Mujer… pues lo corriente. (Jardiel 56)

With few options to make a living, these girls have looked for support outside the nuclear family unit and the household. In the face of Franco's laws limiting where women can work, they have had to stoop to a kind of prostitution to support themselves. They also see nothing particularly immoral or repulsive in the behavior of the older men who act unfaithfully toward their wives. The wives have been left symbolically "afónicas," condemned to silence, by the double standard of the Spanish society. The Nationalist Regime abolished divorce in 1939, leaving these women without an option but to observe silently as their husbands found mistresses (Richards 54).

Additionally, Jardiel foreshadows the dysfunctional relationships between the Briones and Ojeda families and their father figures even in this first scene. The father of Joven 1 sleeps through the entire Prologue. Although his body is physically present, he is absent from the Joven's life. Totally unconscious, he offers no model for the Joven to follow and does not supervise his son's actions. No matter what happens, even when the Acomodador shakes the seats, causing him to fall to the floor, the father is determined not to awaken. He plays no other role onstage. The Dormido is an empty character who uses sleep as his method of escape, to avoid the reality he experiences, just as Fernando's father uses death to escape and Mariana's father uses a false insanity. The audience finds

no functional patriarchal figure throughout the work, and the Prologue immediately introduces this critique of the Franco family model.

The Prologue seems like "el teatro de lo inverosímil" because of its humor and its distracting, often ridiculous dialogues. However, this scene represents a mirror of reality for the working class under Franco. These lower class individuals attend a cheap movie theater, unable to afford tickets to the nicer ones downtown. Their paternal figures are absent, and they hint at illicit sexual behavior and prostitution. The room smells, the seats are falling apart, and even the way they speak contrasts sharply with the eloquence of the Briones and Ojedas. This mirror suggests to Jardiel's audience that the main action to follow will also be "realistic," even though at first glance it appears absurd.

Jardiel begins Act One in the disorganized and strange Briones household. The house is in disarray, and the excessive, random assortment of furniture creates a labyrinthine arrangement that acts as a visual representation of the convoluted family relationships portrayed in the scenes to follow. According to traditional gender roles encouraged by the Francoist Regime, the mother represented the moral and spiritual leader responsible for the socialization of her children and the father acted as the patriarchal leader of the family. However, both the Briones and Ojeda family lack these household figureheads. Mariana and Fernando's mothers passed away so long ago that this younger generation scarcely remembers or mentions them throughout the first half of the play. Fernando's mother died in childbirth before she could serve as any sort of role model for her son, and the unclear circumstances of Mariana's mother's death do not seem to faze the Briones family. Over the course of more than twenty years, no one has asked questions about the mystery that shrouds her death, almost as if the tragedy were a

nonissue. Mariana and Fernando have not received the maternal socialization necessary to instill in them the traditional values desired by Spain's leaders. The self-sacrificing mother figure is missing.

The patriarchal family leaders do not appear either. Fernando's father committed suicide years ago, and no one knows much of his motive apart from being related to heartbreak. Mariana's father, Edgardo, proves a much more interesting character, but still is completely absent as a father and role model for his daughter. Edgardo has not gotten out of his bed in twenty-one years. Instead, feigning insanity, he has spent his time "listening to the radio, shooting his gun to test the nervous disposition of new maids, and pretending to travel every evening on a locomotive" (McKay 51). Every night he makes his manservant orchestrate a make-believe trip to cities around Spain, complete with pictures of the landscape on a projector screen and regional meals served by the kitchen. This determination to evade his problems by mentally leaving and traveling about the country leaves him unable to attend to the problems of his daughter or those of the rest of the family. For example, when Mariana arrives home after her outing to the movie theater, the stage directions reveal that, while listening to her music box, "Mariana estalla en sollozos y llora, con la cara oculta entre los brazos doblados sobre el sillón" (Jardiel 104). Her aunt Micaela continues to eat despite her niece's sudden outburst of emotion, Clotilde responds by a mere shake of the head, and Edgardo lies in bed with his eyes closed, effectively removing himself from the obligation of responding to his distressed daughter.

Earlier in the act, Micaela comes to Edgardo for help and to ask him not to take his imaginary trip that night. Unconcerned with her belief that robbers will soon arrive, as

she believes they do every Saturday, Edgardo has Fermín touch the button that will lower "la especie de persiana de madera que aísla una habitación de otra" (Jardiel 96). Micaela yells at him, "¡Aislándote no evitarás que los ladrones vengan, Edgardo!" (Jardiel 96). Edgardo's self-isolation is futile, as the problems that surround him continue to worsen. He cannot escape the anxieties that smother him; he can only delay them. Micaela's next outburst is even more condemning, as she shrieks, "¡Aíslate! ¡Aíslate, como dice que hace el avestruz cuando tiene miedo!... ¡Siempre hiciste igual en los trances graves!" (Jardiel 105). His cowardice is a direct affront to the bravery, courage, and heroism of the Francoist masculine ideal, as seen in the father of the Churruca family or in other war propaganda promoting masculine courage.

Unable to find effective role models in their parents, Fernando and Mariana would normally turn to other family members to fill the void. However, the rest of their family is just as dysfunctional, if not more so. Jardiel's stage directions describe Micaela, Edgardo's sister, in a way contrary to the Francoist model: "Micaela viste totalmente de negro, es rígida y altiva; se expresa siempre de un modo dominante . . . . Sus ojos negros y enormes tienen una mirada dura e impresionante" (95). Mariana's aunt not only thinks that robbers come to the house every Saturday, but she also refuses to leave her room in the daylight and collects owl. Her two dogs, Caín and Abel, help her "protect" the house from thieves, but their names give the act a darker tone, echoing the actions of Adam and Eve's sons and insinuating fratricide. The audience discovers at the end of the play that Micaela has committed fratricide and killed her sister-in-law. Paralleling this family tragedy, Caín and Abel represent the "brothers" of Spain, the Nationalists and the Republicans, who destroyed each other during three years of war.

If Micaela's obsessions and hobbies are only eccentricities, her insanity fully reveals itself when the Ojedas appear at the Briones household unannounced and she bites Ezequiel. Everyone assumes Micaela's dogs have bitten him, but Ezequiel, surprised and in pain, exclaims, "¿Los perros? No. Aquella señora. (Señala a Micaela.) Los perros no hacían más que ladrar los animalitos. Pero aquella señora… Sujetadla bien, que no vuelva" (Jardiel 114). When Fernando decides to walk over and calm Micaela down, she begins to scream at him, defending her home and telling him he had promised to never return. Totally hysterical, she sobs, "¡Infame! Haber vuelto… Haber vuelto…" (Jardiel 117). Fernando has never met her before, but just his appearance, which reminds her of his father, is poignant enough to trigger some deeply buried emotional damage. Micaela, the only truthfully insane person in the play, cannot serve as any sort of model for the younger generation.

Mariana seems to have adopted Clotilde as her mother-figure, but the relationship strays far from the ideal. Rather than acting as a disciplinary figure, exemplifying all the feminine traits and traditional values promoted by the Sección Femenina, Clotilde acts more like an older sister or a friend. She gives Mariana advice, but neither of them takes it seriously. As Fernando's mystery attracts Mariana, Ezequiel's suspicious behavior draws in Clotilde. She takes pleasure in imagining Ezequiel's sadistic criminal activity, killing "Juanita y Felisa, y sabe Dios cuántas más," representing a very twisted view on love and romantic relationships (Jardiel 154). Clotilde also fails to serve as the sacrificial Isabel-like mother, as she does what is in her own best interest. In the Prologue, Mariana flees the movie theater to escape Fernando and his uncle, but Clotilde, desiring to be alone with her suitor, informs Ezequiel where they will be and invites him to the house.

This invitation leads to a series of confusions and distractions, ending in Mariana's kidnapping.

Ezequiel, on the other hand, is not only an animal abuser, but also foolish. His whole experiment centers on finding the cure for pellagra. In 1937, Conrad Elvehjem discovered pellagra's cure, a vitamin containing nicotinic acid, after performing experiments on dogs (*Biographical Memoirs* 142). People could best recover from pellagra by including this vitamin in a well-balanced diet.[5] Ezequiel is researching a problem that already has an answer but no solution; the Spanish people need better nutrition but cannot get it. He sees himself as a professional and craves fame, proclaiming, "Lo declaro con orgullo. Y el día en que lo sepa todo el mundo, la Humanidad no olvidará fácilmente mi nombre," but his experiment is a total sham (168).

More shocking is the implicit association between women and the animals Ezequiel casually kills. McKay notes, "In recording the details of each assassination, he makes it appear as if his victims were women" (52). For Clotilde immediately to assume the worst suggests that women expected to be mistreated. The strong link between cats and women suggests an extreme misogyny, only strengthened by the end scene in which the two dogs, with masculine names Caín and Abel, enter Ezequiel's laboratory and start fighting and killing the cats with feminine names like Pepita and Antonia. The audience

[5] This reference to pellagra is another subtle critique of the nation's social and economic circumstances. Spaniards found it increasingly difficult to maintain a healthy diet. In 1941, Falange officials were already reporting low supplies of food in the market and exorbitant prices, and the situation only worsened due to Franco's autarky policies, leading to a society in which "people could see that the shelves of grocery stores were full of items that they could not afford" (Cazorla 59). The US Red Cross reported feeding upward of 20,000 residents of Madrid alone in the summer of 1941 (Richards 143). *Life* magazine, in an article written four years after the end of the Civil War, explains, "The cattle are largely gone, the fields are seeded with grenades, the railroads are so broken down that Spain's own wheat and olive oil cannot be distributed inside Spain. A whole generation has been ruined by malnutrition and pellagra, and some 80 foods are rationed" ("Spain Shows the Fascist Post-War World"). Starvation, especially in rural areas, was one of the country's main concerns, and good nutrition was not an option for many Spanish citizens.

sees Fernando's uncle as an ignorant, uneducated, and imprudent individual, unworthy of serving as a role model for his nephew. Unfortunately, with an incompetent, misogynistic uncle, no memories of his mother, and an absent father, Fernando has no one in his family to guide him or impart to him true masculine values.

The problems we see in the older generation of these families have a great impact on Fernando and Mariana, twenty-year-olds with little guidance. The consequences of the Regime's monopoly on the family and strict gender roles caused serious problems for Spain's youth. Thomas notes that in many of the novels of the Franco and early post-Franco period, "younger members of Spanish society . . . search for a distinctive, genuine identity with little help from negative role models and dysfunctional family and social units" (113). *Eloísa* demonstrates a similar theme; Fernando should be a strong, resolute, hardworking individual, the future savior of Spain, the new Cid. However, he is instead one of the weakest characters onstage, meek and subservient to those around him.

Fernando recognizes that he falls short of the patriarchal male ideal. He laments, "Debí salir, viajar, divertirme, como corresponde a un hombre joven; pero dejé la carrera, perdí el contacto con amigos y compañeros y salir de aquí me significaba un esfuerzo invencible" (Jardiel 139). Depressed, lonely, and isolated, the "hero" of this play is unable to finish his studies and support a family, has no community that can aid him in the socialization process, and involves himself in activities not considered masculine. He describes himself and his father in this way: "Los dos, inclinados a la melancolía, apasionados, románticos, amando una sola vez y para toda la vida. Los dos, impresionables y con los nervios a flor de piel" (Jardiel 138). The use of "los nervios" and "flor" are reminiscent of vocabulary usually used in reference to women. He is a

weak, delicate, often morose character who leaves the role of *Raza's* José Churruca unfulfilled.

Perhaps the only example of strong "male" behavior in which Fernando participates is his "don Juan Tenorio" scene. He has chased after Mariana for too long. In the Prologue he announces, "La necesito en casa. Tengo que llevarla hoy, sea como sea" (Jardiel 82). He takes it upon himself to achieve what he desires, uses a vial of chloroform to knock Mariana unconscious, and kidnaps her, carrying her off to his country home. The only typically masculine and aggressive action he takes, this scene should horrify the audience with its duplicity and forceful abduction.

While Fernando seems to fill a more feminine role instead of acting as the future patriarch, Mariana fails to achieve any semblance of a sacrificial future mother. Pilar Primo de Rivera opened the Sección Femenina's Second National Conference on January 15, 1938 stating, "El verdadero deber de las mujeres para con la Patria es formar familias con una base exacta de austeridad y de alegría en donde se fomente todo lo tradicional… y en donde, al mismo tiempo, haya una alegre generosidad de las acciones" (5). According to *La guía de la buena esposa*, thought to be a work by Pilar, a woman must be sweet and interesting, fulfilling her duty to distract her stressed husband, and must fix and clean the house so that her husband will feel peace as he enters his "paraíso de descanso y orden" ("Rescatan 'Guía de la Buena Esposa' escrita en 1943"). The only character that could bring to life these traits decreed by the Sección Femenina, Mariana, instead spends her time with poor influences like Clotilde. Rather than sweet and obedient, she is capricious, rejecting Fernando at the drop of a hat and falling back in love with him on a whim. An example of these fickle outbursts is: "(Levantándose

iracunda) ¡Déjame! ¡No me hables, no me toques, no me miras! (A Clotilde) ¡Vámonos!" (81). With little interest in domestic tasks or obsequious service to Fernando, she makes her own decisions and has no real supervision. Mariana controls much of the action of the play, and even after her kidnap she regains her power by going behind Fernando's back, finding all the missing pieces to the crime scene in the hidden pantry, and putting on the bloody dress. Refusing to demurely cook and sew at home, Mariana acts as an investigator working toward the murder's resolution.

Although she has lived during the last three years as an only child, enjoying the lack of consequences and misused independence associated with this status, Mariana does have a sister, Julia. Only her father seems to remember Julia's disappearance and must remind Clotilde of the event. Julia vanished three years ago, which is conspicuously the same number of years as the Civil War. When she suddenly appears in the Ojeda household in Act Two, she admits that she ran away and has purposefully not given any sign of life to her family because she did not want anyone to look for her. She eloped with Luisote, the police officer, and has lived contentedly in isolation from her family. At the prospect of a reunion, however, she seems happy and excited. Julia feels no concern about the way Fernando carried her kidnapped, unconscious sister into the house, "como en el *Tenorio*," and the scene even prompts "la sorpresa y la alegría" on her part (Jardiel 160-161). Because her husband is investigating a crime at the Ojedas', she knows about the violent mystery of the household, but she has no qualms about having a joyous reunion with her loved ones after not speaking to them for three years.

When her aunt Micaela arrives, Julia shouts, "¡Y la tía Micaela! ¡Qué risa! Reunión en Viena. Ya está completa toda la familia…" (Jardiel 175-176). Her excitement

is totally perverted, as the family has only gathered here because of murders and miscommunications. The reunion darkens as the family discovers that Micaela killed Julia and Mariana's mother, and Julia's reaction to this discovery is even more disturbing. Luisote promises to keep silent and erase Eloísa's death from history, and Julia exclaims, "Luisote: eres el hombre más guapo del mundo" (Jardiel 178). She unabashedly thanks him for lying and hiding the truth behind her mother's murder. Like Mariana, Julia lacks the necessary socialization. Neither loyal nor dependable, she is incapable of fulfilling her role in the ideal Spanish family.

Luisote's promise of silence regarding the murder of Eloísa, although the most striking example of silence in the play, is not the only one. At first glance, Jardiel's characters seem to avoid silence altogether, as if silence were something negative and as if no conversation should ever be filled with pauses or moments of reflection. The characters talk incessantly, moving from one topic of conversation to the next often in an abrupt manner with irrational transitions. In reality, however, Jardiel skillfully employs inconspicuous silence strategies, allowing him "technically" to follow the censorship laws that so stifled his literary creativity, while also allowing glimpses of a critique to shine through the dialogue.

The different tone, setting, characters, and language used in the Prologue classify it as a false overture. On the surface, the Prologue does not seem to introduce the rest of the play in an efficient or clear manner. As previously mentioned, many critics believe its purpose is to distract the audience. From the moment the curtain rises, however, the Prologue plays an intricate part in the audience's understanding of the play. It is an example of metatheater, a show within a show. The lower class characters, as they

prepare to watch a movie, are watching the Briones and Ojedas, and the audience watches them all. This technique forces the audience members to become involved in the series of events that follow and invites them to make judgments.

Part of the reason this Prologue is a false overture is that most of the action is not pertinent to the rest of the play. In fact, little action or development takes place at all. The characters' conversations overlap and interrupt each other, and many of the characters say little more besides repeating what one of their friends has already uttered. In the first twelve lines of dialogue, as previously noted, the men onstage say "¡Vaya mujeres!" and variations of this phrase. Unable to comment on anything else out of fear of the Regime and its censorship, the characters must resort to a common, superficial, sexist banter.

The Marido, his wife, and his friend encounter the same problem. They all speak only in "refranes," or expressions, such as "Claro que agua pasá no mueve molino," "más ven cuatro ojos que dos," and "Y que antes se pilla a un embustero que a un cojo" (Jardiel 58). The set expressions are each examples of non sequitur, and at the end of the conversation they have said nothing but nonsense. Annie Abbot, referring to this scene, explains, "Los chistes someten el lenguaje a un proceso de extrañamiento en escena, cuestionando así la capacidad comunicativa del sistema lingüístico, mostrando la ilógica y la incomunicación producidas en los diálogos" (367). Unable to have meaningful conversations due to the repression that has silenced individual ideas, they can only speak in hackneyed clichés about trivialities.

The exchange between the Novios further portrays this theme. The Novio, in an attempt to distract his girlfriend's mother so he can converse with his Novia unsupervised, passes the latter a Mexican newspaper. This newspaper, unlike Spanish

ones, “trae crimen” (Jardiel 54). The Novia offers it to her mother, who longingly reaches for it and can barely contain her excitement as she reads about the murder of a woman. Richards notes, “In April 1938 a Press Law was announced to control the dissemination of information and freedom of expression” (77). Spanish newspapers were not “entero y con tos los detalles,” but only reported on topics approved by the Regime (Jardiel 55).

The audience can see a final example of this silencing repression in the dialogue between the Botones and the Acomodador. Frustrated that none of the theater’s patrons will buy the candies he is selling, the Botones grumbles, “Si en estos cines de barrio trabajar el bombón es inútil. Aquí to lo que no sea trabajar el cacahué, el altramuz, la pilonga y la pipa de girasol, que cuando la guerra entró muy bien en el mercao…” (Jardiel 57). Following this ellipses, the Acomodador immediately interrupts him, asking, “Y por qué no trabajas el cacahué, la pipa, el altramuz y la pilonga?” (Jardiel 57). Selling these items, the Botones informs him, is strictly prohibited, just as broaching the topic of the Civil War was prohibited in this post-war society.

Jardiel places a noticeable rupture between the Prologue and the first Act, including a change in tone, characters, setting, and plot. However, many of his rhetoric of silence techniques remain constant. Before Act One, Jardiel includes almost five pages of intricate stage directions that set up the scene that follows. These paragraphs serve as distractions for the reader, and the sets they describe serve as visual distractions for audience members. They illustrate in detail the Briones home as if it were a complex maze, meant to confuse those that enter it. Jardiel admits,

> Se trata, en suma, como ya se habrá comprendido, al llegar aquí, de una habitación inverosímil, tan extraña e incongruente como sus propios dueños, y entrar en la cual no deja de producir algún mareo y se le hace difícil, por entre las barreras de muebles, a todo aquel que no esté

> acostumbrado a vivir en campos atrincherados o que no posea condiciones personales para encontrar fácilmente la salida en los laberintos de las verbenas. (87-88)

The dramaturge seems to communicate directly with the reader about his "teatro de lo inverosímil," as if he has written the stage directions for the purpose of being read and enjoyed. Kaatz echoes this idea, saying, "The stage directions are so detailed that at times they appear to be meant for a reader rather than an audience" (Kaatz 38). A reader would also notice his use of the phrase "campos atrincherados," suggesting World War I imagery. This room looks like a war-scene, utter chaos, symbolizing Edgardo's psychological state, who has been at war with himself for twenty-one years. Even in these unspoken lines, Jardiel incorporates his humor. When Micaela enters the scene, he writes, "Esta Micaela merece párrafo aparte también y no hay más remedio que dedicárselo" (95). The stage directions provide a conversation between the author and the reader, establishing a relationship that allows another venue for Bakhtin's counter-discourse to develop.

As the stage directions signal to the reader that Act One will be confusing and convoluted, the stage directions for Act Two warn the reader that the scenes to follow occur in low light. In three pages, Jardiel introduces the act that eerily symbolizes the 1940s as "los años oscuros" (Richards 10). He describes, "En la estancia no existe ninguna lámpara de techo, y la iluminación corre a cargo de dos apliques . . . que con sus bombillas esmeriladas y sus pantallitas oscuras lo alumbran todo, pero de un modo muy suave y discreto" (130). The atmosphere in general is mysterious and almost sinister: "Al entrar el visitante no puede menos de sentirse impresionado por un confuso sentimiento, mezcla de curiosidad, de melancolía y de indefinible inquietud" (Jardiel 130). The lack of

light implies the lack of clarity. Everything occurs in the dark, physically and metaphorically, as the protagonists attempt to decipher the mystery that involves both their families.

Apart from the stage directions, Jardiel litters his characters' dialogue with unconventional silence techniques. As noted, the action of this play creates a lot of smoke that disguises the fire, or Jardiel's burning criticism of Spanish society. One of the ways to create this figurative fog, besides the excessive amount of furniture and props onstage, is the unnecessary verbosity of the characters. Práxedes the maid is the most exaggerated example of this technique. She recites her lines in rapid fire, "sin dejar un instante de hablar" (Jardiel 97). Asking and answering her own questions, her lines are not dialogical at all, representing the monological discourse enforced by Franco's Regime. No one could ask questions and expect real answers. Práxedes builds no relationships with anyone else because she can have no meaningful conversation with those around her. She only responds and reacts to herself. By saying a lot of words that carry no meaning, engaging in the discourse of nonsense, she is absent even in her presence, filling up space with more emptiness.

The maid is not the only household servant to participate in the discourse of nonsense. Another exchange in Act One that follows this pattern is that in which Fermín has trained his replacement Leoncio to pass Edgardo's absurd interview process. The fast-paced interrogation consists of one ridiculous question after the other. After starting the interview with the normal "Where are you from?" the questions get more and more illogical. Edgardo asks the prospective manservant his favorite color, how to clean oil-based paintings, and about the diets of owls. They then enter a phase of total nonsense:

EGARDO: ¿Le molestan las personas nerviosas, de genio destemplado y desigual, excitadas y un poco desequilibradas?
LEONCIO: Esa clase de personas me encanta, señor.
EDGARDO: Qué reloj usa usted?
LEONCIO: Longines.
EDGARDO: Le extraña a usted que yo lleve apostado, sin levantarme, veintiún años?
LEONCIO: No, señor. Eso le pasa a casi todo el mundo. (Jardiel 93)

By the end of their conversation, Edgardo has discovered nothing of value about his future employee. Conde describes this interaction: "El *non sense* se emplea lejos de una profunda subversión intelectual, buscando el impacto humorístico por la quiebra entre la sustancia de contenido lógica y su forma de expresión lógica" (97). All of the words and phrases make sense by themselves, but in context they become ridiculous. Contrary to Conde's opinion, however, the humorous lines of Edgardo and his maid and menservants provide a subtle commentary on the censorship laws under Franco and the inability to discuss what was really happening behind the facade of the Nationalist rhetoric.[6]

The family members also respond to questions that require no answer while avoiding those that do. They employ euphemisms or periphrasis instead of explaining their ideas clearly, causing misunderstandings. Ezequiel and Clotilde provide an excellent example of how two people speaking in circles can miss the true meaning of the conversation. Fernando's uncle speaks ambiguously about his experiments, leading Clotilde to believe that he murders women instead of cats. The dialogue follows:

CLOTILDE: Así pues, Ezequiel Ojeda, lo de Juanita y lo de Felisa y lo de tantas otras, ¿es verdad? . . .
EZEQUIEL: Pues bien, ¡sí! Es verdad.

[6] We should also note Jardiel's inclusion of so many unneeded household workers. Escudero notes, "Lo abundante de la servidumbre . . . nos habla bien a las claras de una sociedad en crisis, en la que, familias de tipo medio, disfrutan del trabajo de un buen número de personas que pertenecen a lo que hoy se llama sector terciario que, si en una sociedad llega a elevado número, resulta pernicioso pues está constituido por gentes que, aunque trabajan, no producen" (98). They work without producing anything of value, just as they speak without saying anything of value.

> CLOTILDE: ¡Es verdad! Y se diría que lo declara usted con satisfacción…
> EZEQIEL: Lo declaro con orgullo. Y el día que lo sepa todo el mundo, la Humanidad no olvidará fácilmente de mi nombre. (Jardiel 168)

The conversation continues in this fashion, with each character only hearing what he or she has already determined is true. Jardiel continues to make use of unclear language throughout the entire play. Mariana, close to discovering another piece of the mystery, tries to explain the strange behavior of Dimas to Clotilde. However, Fermín and Leoncio interrupt the flow of dialogue with their often sarcastic or humorous commentary. Conde notes, "Los apartes de los criados siguen ofreciendo una acción descategorizada frente a la trama central" (cited in *Eloísa*, note 17). Although creating a comical effect, these examples of absurdity and confusion show the weak state of communication in a country whose government restricts speech.

While some of the characters resort to nonsense or circumlocution due to their inability to say anything meaningful, others repeatedly repress their emotions about the tragedies they have endured. Refusing to show emotional pain inhibits genuine conversation about the causes behind grief, and *Eloísa* criticizes this stigma. After a disappointing interaction with Fernando, Mariana defends her right to cry by saying that sometimes tears are necessary to keep from going crazy. Her aunt Clotilde responds in exasperation, "¡Si en esta casa se hubiese llorado un poquito!" insinuating that if the members of the Briones family had grieved and used their tears as a release from the stress of their familial tragedies, perhaps they would not have all succumbed to insanity (Jardiel 106). Likewise, the Nationalists prohibited those who had lost Republican family members from grieving, causing continuous emotional and physical pain to the

"vencidos." The Regime's rhetoric repressed the suffering of millions of Spaniards, literally and metaphorically driving them to madness with this silence.

Mariana's father and sister demonstrate the harmful effects of this repression. To avoid his emotions concerning his sister's murder of his wife, Edgardo feigns insanity for twenty-one years. José Monleón describes Edgardo as follows: "ahistórico, apolítico, atemporal, ajeno a toda solicitación de la realidad" (cited in Gomez Yebra 292). He sustains the façade of a totally silent character, avoiding the reality of his family and refusing to live a meaningful life for fear of confronting the dark issues in his family's past. Julia, rather than feigning insanity, "pretends" to be kidnapped. She disappeared three years ago and has made no effort to communicate with her loved ones. Justifying her actions, Julia states, "Pero, chica, lo he hecho a intento el no dejarme ver. Porque ¿quieres saber por qué me marché de casa? Pues porque yo no podía aguantar tanto perturbado" (Jardiel 159). Although using a different strategy from her father, Julia likewise has avoided her family's problems through literally escaping. *Eloísa* and the family tragedies it represents parallel the Spanish society that experienced the dictatorship "as a continuous repetition of loss, entrapment, fear and lack of control" (Richards 13). To regain control, the characters act out in strange and irrational ways.

Jardiel primarily uses the unconventional silence techniques noted above, but the play's most dramatic and powerful moment occurs during one of the few explicit pauses in dialogue. Clotilde announces the arrival of Mariana with the bloody dress found in the hidden cupboard, and the stage directions denote, "Por el tercero derecha aparece Mariana, vestida con el traje Imperio y avanza lentamente por la gallería. Todos miran hacia allí y hay un silencio" (Jardiel 176). This silence, surrounded by verbosity, action,

and insanity, stands out distinctly, heightening the dramatic tension of the play. The characters try to process what this shocking image means. All of a sudden, the family's institutionalized silence breaks down. Micaela confesses, throwing herself in contrition at Mariana's feet, believing she is Eloísa, and Edgardo finally explains the details of the crime that occurred over twenty years ago.

The silence breaks down, however, only to be reimposed. Edgardo anxiously asks Luisote, "¿Y qué dirá usted?" and Luis responds, "Que no hubo tal mujer asesinada" (Jardiel 178). Luisote's job as a police investigator is to seek justice, but he promises to maintain silence. He chooses to ignore the murder of his own mother-in-law. The law-enforcers will change history and substitute a false story to fit their needs. Eloísa's fate will remain in obscurity, and no one will remember her or honor her death, placing her in a figurative "fosa común," or mass grave, just like the many Republican soldiers and supporters who were ignored and forgotten.

Jardiel leaves the family no time to process or reflect on the secret just revealed. As soon as they find out about Micaela's crime, the play ends on a comical note as Micaela's dogs begin to fight with Ezequiel's cats. The wild action and noise that follows is unrelated to the rest of the plotline and allows neither the characters nor the audience members to react fully to the tragedy. In their laughter, they forget their shock and the sadness. This scene reduces the Civil War to a dog- and catfight, further diminishing the profound losses suffered by this family and Spain as a whole.

Edgardo has imposed an almost "institutionalized" silence on the facts concerning Micaela's life and mental stability and does not allow her to speak or repent of her crime. This silence breaks her and forces the "the internalization or evasion of the past" which

robs her of her identity and dignity as it robs Eloísa of her recognition and tombstone (Richards 28). These effects ripple out to the rest of the family and exacerbate the dysfunctional relationships, and the real tragedy of the play lies in the lack of reconciliation between the family members as they all promise to continue to ignore the difficult truth.

In *Eloísa*, Jardiel mixes innovative aesthetic techniques with a subtle political critique masquerading as frivolity. Abbott explains that Jardiel broke with the realist techniques he inherited from his predecessors because these works, as she says, "no comunicaba[n] la realidad caótica que percibían los vanguardistas" (368). To express this chaos, Jardiel found it necessary to partake in the chaos. Like his character Edgardo's "deliberate and successful effort to appear insane in the eyes of the world," Jardiel feigns his own type of madness, pretending to concern himself only with frivolity, absurdity, and humor to evade suspicion (Kaatz 33). Jardiel believed that laughter was reason, as only humankind laughs (Lacosta 501). If he could make his audience laugh, he could bring out the most essentially human trait they possessed and share with them a unique perspective on the turmoil they were experiencing. In *Eloísa,* "se hace crecer el deseo narrativo y curiosidad del espectador" (Abbott 366). The audience members, their curiosity peaked and their participation required in the unfolding of the plotline, seek the truth. In the interplay between the distorted and perverted family interactions and the unconventional rhetoric of silence, Jardiel creates Bakhtin's counter discourse, offering a damning indictment of Franco's Regime that was driving families crazy with its repression.

At first glance, Jardiel's *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro* and Antonio Buero Vallejo's *Historia de una escalera* have little in common. Jardiel's protagonists come from the upper class, and the lighthearted tone of the play allows the audience to escape into a new, ridiculous world for the play's duration, whereas Buero's play is strikingly realistic and his lower class characters represent the daily struggle to survive. José Monleón helps draw the connection: "Sólo Jardiel, en un angustioso 'inverosimilismo', se negaba a endulzar la realidad. Quedaba así como un puente tendido entre su generación y la siguiente. Desde su mundo, vocacionalmente inverosímil, podía saltarse, sin contradicción ética, a la realidad" (259). The plays of the 1950s, embarking upon the theater of Social Realism, remind us of *Eloísa*'s Prologue. The distractions, the wordplay, the humor, and the labyrinthine flow of conversation disappear, but the themes remain constant. Both Buero and Alfonso Sastre after him use their characters to scrutinize the family myth, and they employ the rhetoric of silence in more obvious and conventional ways. The rest of this thesis will analyze how the representation of a bleak "slice of life" continues to critique the Regime while imparting varying degrees of hope. Jardiel finds his hope in humor, Buero finds hope in open endings, and Sastre paradoxically finds hope for the future only by destroying any semblance of hope in his plays. The next chapter will examine Buero's "posibilismo" and hopeful ambiguity in the face of impossible circumstances.

CHAPTER THREE

The Escape from the "infinita melancolía" of Family Feuds and Silencing Poverty: Buero Vallejo's *Historia de una escalera*

In *Historia de una escalera* by Antonio Buero Vallejo, one of the characters, Rosa says, "Siempre lo recordamos y nunca hablamos de ello" (74). In context, Rosa is referring to a scandal in which she participated that caused friction in her family. However, one can apply this quote to Spain's Civil War, as well. The strict censorship laws under Franco and the Nationalist government strictly prohibited writing about topics like the Civil War and anything that could be construed as a criticism of the government. One way to get critique past censors was to take the monological discourse used by Franco and distort it to reveal its glaring fallacies, all the while avoiding the use of rhetoric that overtly contradicted that of the Regime. In *Historia de una escalera*, Buero uses two techniques to tell the story of the "other" Spain. First, he demystifies the family model by destroying precious familial values and perverting patriarchal gender norms desired by the Nationalist government. The playwright also creates his own rhetoric of silence, using explicit pauses in dialogue, parallel scenes, temporal evasion, and omission to send messages to his audience. With these strategies, Buero leaves the dénouement open, and the ambiguous ending engages the audience members, inspiring in them hope and the will to act.

Regarding the family, we have already discussed how propaganda of the time period, such as *Raza*, provided a stereotype for each member of the family to follow. Another example of this propaganda is the Sección Femenina's use of a sanitized version

of Santa Teresa de Ávila (1515-1582) as a paragon of female behavior. Santa Teresa was a powerful, intelligent woman capable of independent thought and beautiful poetry and known for her involvement in the reform of the Carmelite Order (Hatzfeld 18). Rather than depicting these characteristics, in the 1940s the Nationalist Regime portrayed Santa Teresa in the book *Accessible Biographies of Great Figures: II* as a weakened, fragile, but faithful woman who "demurely sews indoors" (Graham 185).

Understanding Franco's ideals for the family, seen clearly in *Raza*, one can see how Buero corrupts and parodies this concept. In his play *Historia de una escalera*, the home is no refuge. Buero converts the characters' apartments into jail cells, even going so far as giving them numbered doorways (Ortega-Sierra 73-74). In fact, Buero starts the drama with an ominous epigraph, from Micah 7:6 which says, "Porque el hijo deshonra al padre, la hija se levanta contra la madre, la nuera contra su suegra: y los enemigos del hombre son los de su casa" (Buero, *Historia* 3). This violent Bible verse suggests a dysfunctional family in which all of the members fight against one another. This undoubtedly resonated with a Spain divided between "los vencedores y los vencidos" after the Civil War. Although quoting a Bible verse at the beginning of his play could invoke the Catholic tradition, this verse in particular presages families very different from the ideal family of the Churrucas.[1] Contrary to the belief that foreign influences were the cause of much of the corruption in Spanish society, "los enemigos del hombre son los de su casa" implies that Spain's enemies came from within its own borders.

[1] Ana María Matute uses Jeremiah 28:15 as the epigraph for her novel *Primera memoria*: "A ti el Señor no te ha enviado, y, sin embargo, tomando Su nombre has hecho que este pueblo confiase en la mentira" (9). Thomas comments, "By invoking scripture, Matute makes a scathing attack on Franco's 'Catholic' Spain" (115).

As the play continues, Buero helps the audience realize that the families and their stories function as a counter discourse that rewrites the history of the reality and the suffering of the "other" Spain. The counter discourse in *Historia de una escalera*, as Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque illuminates, is a "toppling inversion of all hierarchic orders, rules and prohibitions" (Doraiswamy 71). Although it is not ridiculous, absurd, or like Jardiel's "teatro de lo inverosímil," Buero's message lies outside of the Regime's social norms as it inverts the family myth to demonstrate its inherent problems.

The failed, bitter, and dysfunctional familial relationships in *Historia de una escalera* clearly underscore the tragedy of this counternarrative. Specifically, Buero corrupts the value of loyalty and distorts gender roles to undermine the Francoist family ideal and emphasize this alternate history. Carmina and Fernando, a couple very much in love in the first act, represent the most obvious failure of familial loyalty. Carmina is, at first, the perfect Spanish woman. She is pure, innocent, submissive, and caring. In many ways she mirrors Isabel Churruca of Franco's work *Raza*. When she comes out of her apartment to help her mother with the domestic chores, the stage directions describe her as follows: "una preciosa muchacha de aire sencilla y pobremente vestida" (Buero, *Historia* 16). She is modest and sincere. Her mother, la señora Generosa, describes her daughter as "la única alegría" of the family (Buero, *Historia* 30). She carries out all her duties and responsibilities according to the family model in Franco's Spain.

Fernando, on the other hand, reveals the glaring contradiction of the male archetype in Francoist society. The ideal Francoist man should be like José Churruca: the chosen one, a savior figure who will bring a lost paradise back to the nation. He should not be controlled by greed or malice. Due to the moral double standard prevalent in

Francoist society, however, men were often womanizers, and because of their superior place in society, they were able to treat others with contempt. In Act One, Fernando answers his mother, doña Asunción, in a surly manner and does not give her any of the information for which she asks, responding brusquely and repeatedly with "no" (Buero, *Historia* 17). His answers are short and abrupt before he becomes angry, yells at her, and pushes her into the apartment, behaviors one would not readily associate with the kind Churruca father or his sons in *Raza*. Fernando reveals that he feels frustrated by the sordid environment in which he lives, which would normally inspire sympathy in the audience. He could be forgiven for his behavior if he were not an inactive and lazy person. He dreams passively, does not go to the paper factory to work, and afterward makes excuses. Furthermore, instead of being loving toward his mother and his community, like the father in the Churruca family, Fernando exclaims "¿Qué tengo yo que ver con los demás? Nadie hace nada por nadie" (Buero, *Historia* 19). The collective good does not matter to Fernando, a key deviation from the familial model of Franco. He is individualistic and wants to succeed alone. One supposes he could have saved himself by marrying the mild and virtuous Carmina, but due to his desire for material wealth, he sacrifices this opportunity and instead marries Elvira, a spoiled, pampered, rich woman whom he proclaimed to detest in the first act (Buero, *Historia* 39). Because of his treason and lack of good faith, Carmina has to marry Urbano to survive economically. Their future families suffer because of these selfish and disloyal decisions. Although Fernando represents the reality of men in Francoist society, he acts as the anti-model for Franco's family myth.

The ways in which patriarchal gender roles fail also reveal the flaws in the Francoist family. First, viewers note that all of the men, in one way or another, do not carry out their patriarchal assigned gender role of maintaining and supporting a family and being a good leader. As previously mentioned, Fernando does not treat his mother with respect, does not make a living because he frequently skips work, and in the last two acts, he mistreats his wife.

The fathers of the older generation, although perhaps good fathers, reveal the fallacy of the Francoist ideal in their deaths. After Spain's Civil War, the widows of Republican soldiers found supporting a fatherless family increasingly difficult. Graham explains that in post-war Spain,

> Very often the male family members were dead, or in work battalions, labour service, or prison. Moreover, the wives and mothers of those executed or imprisoned were frequently reduced to destitution—denied pension rights, subjected to economic penalties by Francoist courts or to the repeated raids of Falangist squads—all of which was permitted by the sweeping Law of Political Responsibilities. (188)

The Fuero de trabajo of 1938 also disbarred married women from working outside the home (Graham 184). In *Historia de una escalera*, the family disintegrates time and time again without the aid of the father's income. The female family members have no way of rectifying their destitute situation. The once-wealthy Elvira loses everything she has after the death of her father. Carmina and her mother lament their desolate futures after the death of Gregorio, and their friend Trini comments, "Y ahora, ¿qué van a hacer? Matarse a coser, ¿verdad?" (Buero, *Historia* 49). Women had few financial resources apart from marriage, and even fewer respectable ones. Widowers were second to their husbands even after their husbands died, and it was not socially acceptable to remarry (Cazorla 143). As noted in the Introduction, Enders explains that the Regime demanded that a

woman "never . . . compete with man, or . . . attempt to replace him," and that she remain inside her "well-defined and restricted world appropriate to her 'natural' qualities" (376). Within these parameters, what could a woman do after the death of the head of the house, the man she was supposed to complement and obey? While the father lived, the ideal family survived. When the women were left to fend for themselves, upholding traditional gender roles and providing for a family that follows the Nationalist directives became nearly impossible.

Even worse than Fernando, Pepe incarnates the worst distortion of the ideal man. Buero describes him in his stage directions in this way: "El hermano de Carmina ronda ya los treinta años y es un granuja achulado y presuntuoso" (*Historia* 25). Trini scolds him in the second act when she says, "¿No te da vergüenza haber estado haciendo el golfo mientras tu padre se moría? ¿No te has dado cuenta de que tu madre y tu hermana están ahí, llorando todavía porque hoy le dan tierra? . . . A ti no te importa nada. ¡Puah! Me das asco" (Buero, *Historia* 49). When Gregorio dies, societal norms dictate that Pepe become the head of the family. He should be the person who steps up to take control of the family and dedicate himself to supporting it. However, as Sara Ortega-Sierra notes, "durante el decenio transcurrido bajo silencio, ese 'chulo indecente y vago'–como lo apodan los demás personajes—consiguió seducir y convivir con su vecina Rosita en otro piso de rellano" (76). Instead of working hard and providing for his mother and sister, Pepe brings shame to his and Rosa's families and shows no sign of responsibility or industry. Carmina has to marry Urbano, a man whom she does not love, while her brother abuses Rosa, gets drunk, and seduces other women.

In the third act, Pepe is totally absent, just like almost all of the other paternal figures of these families. Now the year 1949, the characters have lived through the Second Republic, the Civil War, and Franco's rise to power. Cazorla sheds light on Pepe and Rosa's marital situation by describing what happened to civil matrimony after Franco took over:

> The Church and the state worked quickly and closely to impose their common moral values on those who exhibited 'anti-Catholic lives.' … Living as faithful but unmarried partners (compañeros) was eradicated…. The Francoists declared republican civil marriages and divorces void, a policy that created thousands of illegitimate children overnight (143-5).

The Nationalist Regime, continuing their Catholic Crusade to set the moral values of the country straight, negates Rosa's matrimonial experience. Not married in the church, Pepe's and Rosa's status as "compañeros" effectively dissolves, and the former disappears. Rosa, unable to be washed clean or to marry again, must live the rest of her life without the options available to married women. The conspicuous absence of Pepe and many of the father figures totally undercuts the patriarchal family idealized in Francoist propaganda.

Trini perfectly represents the ideal daughter and future mother of the Franco model. However, she never achieves the happiness that the Francoist Regime promises. Carmina ends unhappy as well, but the reader grows to accept her fate because, although she represents the ideal woman in the first act, by the third act she has fallen. She does not love Urbano and never has. Her love for Fernando has rotted into bitter hatred, and because of this hatred, Carmina and Urbano start to beat their daughter, Carminita (Buero, *Historia* 80). Carmina no longer represents the idealized caring and pious mother. Conversely, Trini has never done anything to contradict the ideal Franco woman.

She always considers others before herself. She is an obedient daughter and does everything for her family and her neighbor. She is the peacemaker and comforter. Paca tells her, “Ve con tu padre, que tú sabes consolarle” (Buero, *Historia* 57). She has sympathy for everyone. All of her characteristics align with those of the perfect mother. Although she has carried out every obligation of the women of the ideal Spanish family, she never becomes a mother herself. The disillusion and disappointment caused by the unfulfilled promise surprise the audience. At the end of the drama, she has nothing left. Trini hoped for a family and happiness, but she laments with her sister Rosa, “Tú quisiste vivir tu vida y yo me dediqué a la de los demás. Te juntaste con un hombre y yo sólo conozco el olor de los de la casa…Ya ves: al final hemos venido a fracasar de igual manera” (Buero, *Historia* 87). According to Eric W. Pennington, “the archetypal symbol of hope [is] the infant child” (46). This desired child, the symbol of hope, is absent in the life of the woman who proves to be the most dedicated to the family. By extension, the failure to bear this symbol of hope of the ideal mother figure predicts the failure of the hope of a reunited Spain. Trini’s disappointment suggests that the promises of the dictatorship will be left unfulfilled, as well.

In these three acts, Buero skillfully dismantles Franco’s family myth. *Historia de una escalera* challenged the legitimacy of the Francoist family model because it “expose[d] the lie of the happy family in Franco’s Spain” (Pennington 45). Trini did everything for her family, but she will never have the opportunity to raise her own children. Pepe and Fernando do not support their families, and the system proves to be defective when the women suffer and cannot make a living after their husbands and fathers die. The expected marriage between Fernando and Carmina will never come to

fruition. The relationships between the spouses, friends, and neighbors become embittered, and the rancor and violence intensify throughout the play. In this drama, unlike in *Raza*, the family is the anti-protagonist, and could even be considered the antagonist.

Another innovative technique employed by Buero is the use of silence to dismantle Franco's rhetoric. Buero had his own rhetoric opposed to that of Franco, the rhetoric of silence, incorporated through that which is not said, that which is implied, and gaps in information. Authors can use silences as hidden polemic, which only "obliquely… strike[s] at the other speech act," or the author's true message (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 296). The authorial intention is not voiced directly and clearly, but rather "reflected," or refracted, in this case through omission of key information and silent insinuations (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 296). These reflections of what the author is actually trying to say, although not voiced explicitly, can determine the tone and meaning of a passage.

Pérez mentions Buero's play as an example of a silent message portrayed through parallel scenes, representing in the third act a series of events that echoes the first act. This cyclical oppression is one the characters cannot escape. Pérez postulates,

> In *Historia de una escalera*, Buero communicates a silent critique of the regime's economic policies and the lack of upward social mobility resulting from the conservative forces in the country by having essentially the same scene enacted by members of three generations, in different times but similar circumstances, thereby endowing with visible form the silent futility of his characters' hope for change or progress. (128)

Buero begins Act One with a description of the set: "Un tramo de escalera con dos rellanos, en una casa modesta de vecindad. . . . La barandilla que los bordea es muy pobre . . . En el borde de éste, una polvorienta bombilla enrejada pende hacia el hueco de la

escalera" (*Historia* 7). By the end of the play, like the dusty light bulb hanging over the empty vastness beneath the stairs, the characters, dirty, poor, and disillusioned, metaphorically hang over the emptiness and uselessness of their lives. The playwright captures this feeling by repeatedly describing the set in the same terms; at the beginning of Act Two, he says, "Han transcurrido diez años que no se notan en nada; la escalera sigue sucia y pobre, las puertas sin timbre, los cristales de la ventana sin lavar" (Buero, *Historia* 41). In the third act, although the landlord has used superficial fixes like new paint on the walls, new doorbells, and new windows to make the apartments appear nicer, "La escalera sigue siendo una humilde escalera de vecinos" (Buero, *Historia* 69). According to Ortega-Sierra, Buero's choice of setting for this play was intentional: "The 'escalera que no conduce a ningún sitio' lends scenic strength to the pointless coming and going, and the cruel cycle of illusion an disillusionment, which form the substance of the characters' lives" (224). Thirty years have passed since the first act, and all of the families are still poor and still living in the same dirty, rundown apartment complex with the same, dirty staircase, unable to break free.

The audience most poignantly experiences the cyclical nature of these characters' lives during the conversation between Fernandito and Carminita. In Act One, Buero reveals to the audience that the scene between Fernando and Carmina is already a repetition of past events. Fernando coyly whispers, "Cuando éramos chicos . . . ¿Ya no te acuerdas de aquel tiempo? Yo era tu novio y tú eras mi novia… Mi novia… Y nos sentábamos aquí . . . en ese escalón, cansados de jugar" (Buero, *Historia* 37). He shouts that he loved her back then, and he continues to love her now. His profession of love ends

with him swearing he will work hard every day and further his studies so that they can both leave the squalor in which they live. He promises:

> Carmina, desde mañana voy a trabajar de firme por ti. Quiero salir de esta pobreza, de este sucio ambiente. Salir y sacarte a ti. Dejar para siempre los chismorreos, las broncas entre vecinos… Acabar con la angustia del dinero escaso . . . ¡Ayúdame tú! Escucha: voy a estudiar mucho, ¿sabes? Mucho. Primero me haré delineante. ¡Eso es fácil! En un año… Como para entonces yo ganaré bastante, estudiaré para aparejador. Tres años. Dentro de cuatro años seré un aparejador solicitado por todos los arquitectos. Ganaré mucho dinero. Por entonces tú serás ya mi mujercita, y viviremos en otro barrio, en un pisito limpio y tranquilo. Yo seguiré estudiando. ¿Quién sabe? Puede que para entonces me haga ingeniero. (Buero, *Historia* 39-40)

In response to this moving speech, Carmina cries "¡Qué felices seremos!" and Fernando sighs, "¡Carmina!" (Buero, *Historia* 40). Pereda observes, however, "Son hombres y mujeres que esperan y no planean; la lucha es difícil pero falta voluntad" (204). Flashing forward, the final scene between the members of the next generation greatly unnerves the audience because it is almost exactly identical. Fernandito also mentions the "broncas" amongst the neighbors and the "estrecheces" of money (Buero, *Historia* 98). All of his ideas and projects line up with his father's: he wants to be an "aparejador. ¡No es difícil!" (Buero, *Historia* 99). He remarks, "Ganaré mucho dinero y me solicitarán todas las empresas constructoras. Para entonces ya estaremos casados… Tendremos nuestro hogar, alegre y limpio…, lejos de aquí. Pero no dejaré de estudiar por eso. . . . Entonces me haré ingeniero. Seré el mejor ingeniero del país y tú serás mi adorada mujercita" (Buero, *Historia* 99). Fernandito's words reflect his father's almost word-for-word, agonizingly recognized by the parents who eavesdrop on the conversation and remember their own from years before. Carminita even sighs, "¡Fernando! ¡Qué felicidad!... ¡Qué felicidad!" ending with Fernandito's exclamation of "¡Carmina!" a mirror image of the first act

(Buero, *Historia* 99). These parallel scenes imply a cyclical poverty that these characters may never escape and, on a more universal scale, a set of human errors that members from generation to generation are destined to repeat.

Buero utilizes silence in two other significant ways throughout the plot: the conversational pauses and the scenes that are omitted by temporal evasion. The playwright overtly emphasizes the pauses when he wants the actors to stop speaking. Many times, these moments of silence provoke a reflection on death or a lamentation of broken relationships. In the longer moments of silence, in the years that happen between acts, various events have occurred that have ruined these familial relationships, but the audience is left to decipher what these events were. These silences impact the audience in a profound and unique way, distinct from the effect that the spoken words have.

Many playwrights allow actors interpretative freedom regarding the script, so they may choose the tempo, the speed of the dialogue, and when to pause. In this case, Buero has written in many explicit pauses in the stage directions. *Historia de una escalera*'s script often indicates when exactly the actors should stop speaking and remain in silence for a few seconds or more. Buero wants the actors to pause in these very specific moments, allowing the spectator to experience the silences and the reader to study the written silences to discover their purpose. These recurring silences have two unique functions: to provide a moment to contemplate death or to foreshadow that a particular relationship is going to fail.

Instead of distracting his audience with the complicated plotlines and nonsensical conversations seen in *Eloísa*, symbolizing the paradoxical empty fullness of the daily life of Spaniards, Buero discovered the inherent weakness of the Regime's censorship policy.

If the people were not allowed to speak, they must be silent: allowing ample time for reflection. This idea in itself diverges from the reality of lower-class Spaniards at the time. The nation's working class families were so concerned with mere survival that they had neither the time nor the energy to ponder life's existential questions, so Buero did it for them. He showed the theatrical audiences of the late 1940s an almost oxymoronic situation: poor, starving, struggling families who spend hours thinking about death instead of their next paycheck or meal. Similar to the absurdity of Jardiel's "teatro de lo inverosímil," this picture should seem ridiculous to the audience. These individuals living in squalor and depression ponder philosophical questions, spending their free hours in the "casinillo" contemplating their past mistakes, current regrets, and future aspirations.

At the start of the second act, the appearance of the stairway and the poor circumstances of the families' lives have not changed much. However, the characters begin to contemplate death more frequently because some of their friends have started to die. Señor Juan is obsessed with death after the burial of his friend Gregorio, who died just before the curtain rises on Act Two. Buero has placed many explicit pauses in Señor Juan's dialogue. He repeats a variation of the following a couple of times: "¡A todos nos llegará la hora!" (Buero, *Historia* 43). In fact, Señor Juan's hour does arrive at some point in the twenty years that pass between Acts Two and Three.

Another example of these morbid pauses appears in the first minutes of the third act. Paca pauses nine times in her monologue. Each time, she contemplates the passage of time, the death of her friends, and her own imminent death. She wonders, "¿Yo quiero o no quiero morirme?" and verbalizes her thoughts about her loneliness, her old age, and

Señor Juan and Generosa (Buero, *Historia* 69). These silences are painful and suggest these characters lead lives of solitude and futility.

Beyond providing time for meditation on his characters' dark futures, the silences that Buero writes into his play serve as omens that signal to audience members the relationships that will suffer betrayal and deceit. The audience can sense early on that the friendship between Urbano and Fernando is already faltering. In the first conversation between these two men, Fernando pauses six times in his tirades on time and the desperation he feels. More significant are the pauses he takes before responding to Urbano's questions. These two best friends are discussing Fernando's desire to climb the social ladder alone. Urbano asks him, "¿Completamente?" and there is a moment of silence before Fernando responds with "Claro" (Buero, *Historia* 22). This silence causes the viewer and reader to question the veracity of this assertion. It reflects the uncertainty that Fernando feels toward his plan and the loneliness he feels because he is isolating himself from his family and community. He has tried to break his connections with everyone. Later in the conversation, Fernando pauses again when Urbano asks him to tell him the name of the girl that he likes. Urbano says, "Porque la hija de la señora Generosa no creo que te haya llamado la atención…" and pauses (Buero, *Historia* 24). The omission of the girl's name, who the audiences discovers is Carmina, and the anxious pause before asking again more directly imply that she is important to the speaker, Urbano. Fernando remains silent for a moment before responding, implying that Carmina has in fact attracted his attention. The pause contains a hint of vacillation and then deliberation as Fernando decides between the truth and the lie, opting for the latter. Buero

utilizes these pauses to forebode a broken relationship, so Fernando's precarious lie is a dark premonition of the failure of his relationship with Carmina.

Other moments of silence that foretell the future occur in the conversations between Urbano and Carmina. Carmina, unable to forget about Fernando, knows she does not love Urbano and would prefer to remain single. Urbano tries to convince her to marry him. Carmina, even though she does not feel any romantic affection toward him, knows that it would be better for her and for her mother if she married. Her family is left without their male breadwinner and their options for making a living are limited. The stage directions say, "Ella asiente tristemente, en silencio, traspasado por el recuerdo de un momento semejante" (Buero, *Historia* 55-6). This conversation reminds her of the unfulfilled promises of Fernando, and her silent acquiescence of Urbano's proposal portends an unhappy ending. This moment parallels the scene between Carmina and Fernando in the first act on the stair landing. In this scene, "[Fernando] se inclina para besarla y da un golpe con el pie a la lechera, que se derrama estrepitosamente. Temblorosos, se levantan los dos y miran, asombrados, la gran mancha blanca en el suelo" (Buero, *Historia* 40). The spilled milk omen is substituted in Act Two by Carmina's reluctant, gloomy consent. She never verbally accepts Urbano's proposal, but rather uses circumlocution to agree to his offer without having the courage to form the words. She responds with, "¡Eres muy bueno!" "¡Gracias, gracias!" and many tears, but never with a "Sí, te quiero" or the enthusiasm she had when listening to Fernando's proposal (Buero, *Historia* 56). With this questionable start, the audience knows Carmina's marriage with Urbano will continue in the cycle of failed relationships.

The final influential moment of silence occurs between the children of Fernando and Elvira and Urabano and Carmina, Fernandito and Carminita. Their names also denote this cyclical, parallel phenomenon, as if they cannot escape their fate. After the violent, climactic argument between the families, the young lovers get together to speak of their future. The stage directions reveal, "Fernando [padre] baja tembloroso la escalera, con la lentitud de un vencido. Su hijo, Fernando, lo ve cruzar y desaparecer con una mirada de espanto. La escalera queda en silencio. . . . Pausa larga. Carmina, hija, sale con mucho sigilo de su casa y cierra la puerta sin ruido. Su cara no está menos descompuesta que la de Fernando [hijo]" (Buero, *Historia* 97). This moment starts with Buero's use of the word "vencido," a word used by Franco to reference his enemies, to describe the defeated quality and the helpless state of Fernando. Unlike Pedro Churrruca Jr., he has been unable to reconcile with family and friends. When he exits the stage, there is a long pause full of tension. During this silence, the audience can reflect on the unwise decisions, the sins, and the prejudices of the parents. Like Fernandito and Carminita, the audience members lament this "civil war" between families that were once friends, and they fear the bitterness, stubbornness, and resentment of all of the characters. Over the years, these negative feelings have brewed and impeded the development of a healthy community. Fortunately, after these silent and melancholic moments, Fernandito and Carminita reappear. The silence before their entrance provokes uncertainty and ambiguity so that the audience guesses what is going to happen in the future, and Buero writes this last scene with the purpose of inspiring hope.

The "silences" between acts also provoke this hopeful uncertainty. The reader only sees the characters for a few minutes in each act before they disappear for many

years. Farris Anderson proposes, “[T]he humanity of this play has about it a tenuous air, produced by the brevity and infrequency of each character’s presence on stage” (“The Ironic Structure” 227). The audience members must fill in the gaps and guess what happens in the decades not portrayed onstage. They are responsible for discerning the subtleties of the characters’ personalities and the reasons behind their actions. Anderson continues, “Their presence in the world…leads only to disappearance from the world, or to a prolonged presence which is static” (“The Ironic Structure” 234). Buero forces the audience to participate in this exercise of asking questions and seeking out the information not readily available to them. They ponder what has happened in the intervening years to create the situations in which the characters find themselves now, or which action, or the lack of action, has brought them to this state of permanent stagnation.

Between the first and second act much has occurred. The principal characters have betrayed their true desires. Some have died. The families have changed apartments. The last time that we saw Fernando, he hated Elvira and could not stand even speaking to her. He claimed her father’s money and social status did not matter to him and committed himself to Carmina, promising her the world. All of a sudden, we find ourselves in a situation that we did not anticipate. Fernando has married Elvira, but the audience does not know how this happened. Buero does not reveal when Elvira’s father died or why Fernando was incapable of maintaining his father-in-law’s success. He has omitted the interactions between Carmina and Fernando and everyone’s reactions to the birth of the first child of Fernando and Elvira. The audience must deduce the steps that Fernando took to reach this point. Buero has also jumped over the climax of confrontation between

Rosa and her family regarding her scandalous relationship with Pepe. The silence of the intervening years erase these key events in the lives of the protagonists. The coincidental meetings on the stairway have much more of an emotional impact because they are so fleeting and brief. Ten years have gone flying.

Furthermore, the first jump in time after the first act is only ten years. Between the second and third act, we jump twenty years. This difference is noticeable, and the audience starts to wonder what Buero has left unsaid. We know by the stage directions that the third act occurs in the year this play was published and performed: "Es ya nuestra época" (Buero, *Historia* 69). If the audience members do the calculations, they realize that the first act occurs in 1919 and the second in 1929. Which year has been erased? The elision of 1939 insinuates the following: "The potentially inflammable, silent allusion was insulated by the long interruption—twenty years—of the story line. The absence of the date, of course, articulates what was silenced, doubly condemning the regime for its actions in the war and for its continuing repression" (Pennington 44). Through this clever use of temporal evasion, Buero captures his audience's attention to make his point.

After twenty hard years, the audience sees the characters in an almost hopeless state. Buero describes his characters with adjectives like "consumida y arrugada . . . fatigada" and with "huellas de la edad" (Buero, *Historia* 69, 71). The families have squeezed into two apartments for financial necessity, and two new tenants with more power and more economic stability want to throw out the rest. These new tenants represent those that have climbed the social ladder, but Urbano and Fernando and their families remain in penury. Fernando accuses Urbano, "También tú ibas a llegar muy lejos con el sindicato y la solidaridad. Ibas a arreglar las cosas para todos…Hasta para mí"

(Buero, *Historia* 92). More than ten years earlier in Spain, Franco had eliminated labor unions and made everyone join his own government-controlled union. In 1936, the Nationalists declared the organizations supporting the Popular Front as illegal and started a state-union system, and in 1937 they created the Centrales Nacional Sindicalistas, a vertical union structure, that, "closing off any opportunity for representation or the articulation of dissent, provided an essential framework for ensuring that the main burden of the economic crisis fell squarely upon the shoulders of the economically most humble in society" (Richards 85). The Fuero del Trabajo (1938) made strikes criminal acts against the state, and authorities could execute perpetrators as traitors, completing the process of creating a Nationalist Syndicalist State (Richards 86). The labor union, individual dreams, and familial and national unity have all failed.

The families in this apartment complex continue divided after their civil war, like Spain continued to be divided after its Civil War. Buero uses the audience members' sympathy as a way to make them draw near to his characters while also using the passage of time as a technique to distance them. Jiménez-Vera describes the result this way: "reaccionamos con compasión ante sus tragedias, pero a la misma vez objetivamente los criticamos" (Jiménez-Vera 158). The years of silence give the audience time for critical reflection. The family's tragedy captivate us and our compassion, but the in-between times and lost years provide us with an opportunity to judge in an objective manner.

These periods of silence tell us an alternative story. Buero has not complied with the traditional expectations of a playwright. Pennington proposes that Buero rejects the accepted and traditional role of the dramaturge; in this case, the dramaturge does not do anything, does not say anything, does not voice an opinion about anything (50-51). The

audience confronts this lack of a clear message and occupies the traditional role of the playwright. Buero has presented a counternarrative that offsets Franco's monological discourse, but has couched it in silences. The audience has the responsibility of deciphering the message, which turns out to be hopeful due to the way Buero structures this play.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Buero believed in the tragedy of hope. For him, the feeling of hope or faith at the end of a work transcends all fears, failures, and struggles of the characters' desperate situations. The phenomenon of the tragic literary work was of the greatest importance for him as a playwright: "un fenómeno en el fondo radicalmente esperanzado. Incluso cuando la obra parece que solamente describe desesperanzas" (cited in Schwartz 438). *Historia de una escalera* is discouraging at every turn. Family relationships deteriorate, feuds worsen, and the children at the end of the play are on the cusp of making the same mistakes their parents made thirty years before. However, Buero leaves the ending open, and the audience views the potential escape from this cyclical oppression. Schwartz explains, "Buero's *Historia de una escalera* may be an open tragedy, for there exists the possibility of another chance born from the very heart of the impossible situation" (436). This potential provides the spark of hope upon which Buero bases his theater.

When each act finishes, the audience naturally feels a touch of hope due to the empty, ambiguous spaces: first, Carmina and Fernando are going to get married and escape poverty; second, Carmina is going to get married with Urbano, the man worthy of her love and affection who will take care of her; and finally, the children of these two families are going to blaze their own trail and make different decisions. According to

Laín Entralgo, there are various types of hope. One can feel hope and possibility, hope and anguish, hope and love, hope and desperation, etc. (i). The reader can see a variety of hope in this work, but the most important is the distinction between active hope that makes a plan and passive and desperate hope. Tina Pereda suggests that each protagonists fails for the following reason: "aunque crea que tiene esperanza, en realidad, permanece en una espera laxa e inerme" (204). She continues, "Los dos [Fernando y Urbano] fracasan porque no han sido fieles a sus ideales. . . . Fracasan porque confunden la esperanza con la espera" (204). Hope has to be active. Fernando and Urbano hoped for years without commitment, without a fight, without sacrifice, and now they remain stagnant. The children seem to reject this stagnant state, recognizing their parents' failures, and the audience hopes this will be enough to help them avoid the same mistakes.

Many critics have said that *Historia de una escalera* has a cyclical structure that destroys this desired hope. From many points of view, the drama seems to be a "tríptico de espejos," where the play ends mirroring the first act's desperation and defeat (Ortega-Sierra 81). However, critics like Martha Halsey disagree. Halsey notes that the omen of rebellion in the epigraph, in reality, is not fulfilled. She says, "The epigraph from Micah 7:6 thus seems ironic for we are led to expect that the characters will rise up or rebel against their progenitors, but this does not happen" (Halsey 90). The characters fight and hate each other, but each character has remained inside of the expectations of their family and their working class. They have not tried to revolt against the older generations. The rebellion against the penury and injustice does not occur in the performed scenes, but the

suggestion of the epigraph is that this newer generation with new aspirations could bring it to fruition after the curtain falls.

Fernando and Carmina's children repeat the patterns of their parents in many ways and are almost their doubles, or doppelgangers, but Buero gives the audience some subtle hints that suggest that they could be different. In the final act, the other characters do not mention all of Fernandito's girlfriends or his laziness, as they had done in the first act regarding his father. More powerful still is the scene in which Fernandito does not stay quiet about his relationship with Carminita. Here, Buero breaks with the pattern of silence. As discussed, in the first act, Urbano asks Fernando if he is in love with Carmina. After a pause—a silence that implies more than he reveals verbally—Fernando denies the possibility of said relationship (Buero, *Historia* 24). Fernandito, on the other hand, although confronted by the ire of his parents and the prejudices of Carminita's parents, tells the truth and defends himself. Manolín, his younger brother discloses to his parents Fernandito's interaction with Carminita on the stairway, but Fernandito refuses to deny his relationship with her before his father. Instead of deviating his father's attention by denouncing Manolín, who had been smoking in the casinillo on the staircase, he has the courage and the resolution to admit what happened. He recognizes the injustice of the ancient prejudices of the older generations and rebels. Fernandito exclaims, "¡Cada vez lo entiendo menos! Os empeñáis en no comprender que yo…¡no puedo vivir sin Carmina!" (Buero, *Historia* 85). He is not afraid to tell the truth and he is not a coward like his father was.

Carminita differs from her mother even more so than Fernandito differs from his father. She does not follow the model of the perfect, sacrificial woman as her mother did

in the first act. The daughter is much more rebellious. She bangs on the banister, hums loudly, and makes fun of her elders for their age. She tells her grandmother, "¡Boba! ¡Vieja guapa!" nicknames not typically used for a person that should be respected and esteemed (Buero, *Historia* 78). Ortega-Sierra notes, "Carminita no se asemeja a su madre en lo que atañe a su carácter domesticado y sumiso" (81). In Carminita, the values and rhetoric of Franco and of the ideal Spanish woman break down. She is more passionate than her mother was and she is mischievous. Her deviation from the norms makes Carminita stand apart. She rejects societal expectations that try to confine her. Carminita's defiance suggests that she will not give up like Carmina, but rather she will have the hope and perseverance to escape the cyclical tragedy of her ancestors. Fernandito's father, Carminita's mother, and the older generation represent the fossilized myth of the Nationalist Regime. Franco's myth stays still, stagnant, and monological, unwilling to change, as the parents are unwilling to open their minds to new possibilities. Their opinions are embedded in old prejudices from thirty years ago and each individual has refused to move forward. How we view history should be flexible and elastic. It moves and changes as time passes. The younger generation represents what happens when one tries to impose a strict, outdated view of history on a society that is constantly changing. This attempt at complete control ruins lives.

In the last scene, Fernandito admits that he needs help from Carminita in climbing the social ladder; unlike his father, he does not want to do everything by himself, independent of support from others. Fernandito declares with determination, "Tenemos que ser más fuertes que nuestros padres. Ellos se han dejado vencer por la vida" (Buero, *Historia* 98). Again Buero uses the Francoist Regime's verb: vencer. He repeats the

promises that his father gave to Carmina thirty years ago, but from a different perspective. Instead of dreaming, he resolves to fight and work immediately. The parents, in a moment in which many critics believe mirrors the spilled milk of the first act, look at each other with "infinita melancolía," but these emotions charged with disappointment and disillusion "se cruzan sobre el hueco de la escalera sin rozar al grupo ilusionado de los hijos" (Buero, *Historia* 99). Their ignorance of their parents' presence protects them, and even though the scene echoes the scene from 1919, the ambiguous conclusion implies that Carminita and Fernandito have an opportunity to renew and reformulate the family model and heal the broken relationships. William Shelnutt adds, "They are young, love each other, and are living in the present. There is no Elvira to corrupt young Fernando, nor is there a milk pitcher at hand which could be easily knocked over" (64). The infinite melancholy of their parents is a strong and foreboding image, but the stage directions describe it as an act that occurs without touching the young couple. Thus, from another perspective, this scene could represent the possibility of escaping the influence of the errors of the past.

The two first acts occur in 1919 and 1929, two years that, at the time of the premiere, were in the past. The readers and spectators knew what was going to happen in the twenty years between the second and third act because they had already lived these challenging years. They knew nothing would change except that the economic situation would get much worse for the lower class. At the time of its premiere, the third act of *Historia de una escalera* took place in the current day. No one knew what was going to happen after 1949. No one knew if the Spanish people were condemned to failure or not. Buero wrote *Historia de una escalera* with an open ending to suggest that it is the

audience's duty to decide what is going to happen in the future and what they can do to fight against the unjust system.

Buero's purpose for his theater did not conform to the escapism of the previous decade and diverged from Jardiel's "teatro de lo inverosímil" to provide a much more realistic portrayal of the difficult life of Spanish citizens in the twentieth century. As he described it, his mission was: "reflejar la vida para hacernos meditar y sentir sobre ella positivamente" (Buero cited in McSorley 70). Fernando and Urbano represent the failure to meditate, reflect, and act: "Much of the disharmony . . . results from a common cause; the gap that separates the man of action from the man of thought, the active from the passive. For Buero, these differences must be resolved so that thoughts may be translated into action and action carried out rationally and responsibly" (McSorley 73). Shelnutt argues that this implication of the children's possible success symbolizes Spain's potential to become a great nation once again (62). Nevertheless, the play's ending still reminds the reader of a pending danger from the past. Success is not easy to achieve.

Buero rejected the idea of "el arte por el arte," so popular with the Generation of 1927 and embraced the theater that challenged the public and contradicted the principle narrative of the time period. He wanted to transform the reality of Spain after the Civil War and the censorship of the dictatorship. Anderson claims, "Buero era el único dramaturgo de esta época [de los 50] que ha conseguido cierto éxito de público con un teatro que hace pensar y que tiene dignidad artística" ("Introducción" 8-9). Ernst Fischer sums up this idea of artistic dignity that proposes a challenge to the audience in this way: "Art must show the world as changeable. And help to change it" (48). At the end of *Historia de una escalera*, our hope is based on the nuclear family, and even though it

seems broken and dysfunctional in various ways, the family has another opportunity with Fernandito and Carminita. After painful silences, misery and penury suffered by the characters, and destructive and heartrending fights, the play ends with a touch of optimism because it offers some hope of renewing the sense of family and reestablishing relationships.

Although Sastre praised *Historia de una escalera*, he often was very critical of Buero's optimistic, hopeful technique. For Sastre, theater's goal was the following: "recoger la angustia social de esta hora y denunciarla. El dramaturgo es dramaturgo porque le ha sido concedido hallar el 'drama' que hay en su mundo y formularlo" (cited in Schwartz 439). Because Buero did not use silence so much to provoke angst, anxiety, or frustration, building up to a culmination of social justice and action, Sastre's criticism is partly correct. Buero's silences are used more for contemplation, reflection, and hope. Sastre did not believe that theater should show the past pain and hurt and imply that it is over or that it will pass. It must focus on the present moment and its pain and call for change. The social intent behind the work must be deliberate and cannot be implicit. We will see the different techniques that Sastre uses to accomplish a similar goal as Buero in the next chapter.

The playwrights of the 1940s and 50s could not talk of the civil war, the dictatorship, nor the poor economic state of the lower class and Republicans, so Buero decided to use silence to call the attention of the Spanish people to the reality of the situation. He also reworked the idealized, but distorted family myth, that functioned as the metonymy of the nation under the Nationalists, to show the fallacy of Franco's rhetoric and bring to light the reality of the situation of a divided Spain. He wanted to tell

the counter narrative, the true history, of the unofficial “other” Spain with aspirations of encouraging other playwrights and authors to do so as well. This work is a call to action for the audience and reveals the ways in which a society can promote an ideology, using a monological rhetoric and supporting it through censorship and threats. One must read in between the lines and find the truth in the silence.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Little Krappo Dictator and His Muzzle on the Truth: Alfonso Sastre's *La mordaza*

"Esa mordaza nos ahoga y algún día va a ser preciso hablar, gritar…" mutters Luisa, daughter-in-law of the tyrannical Isaías Krappo, in Alfonso Sastre's 1954 drama *La mordaza* (173). This play centers around a murder, like *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro*, but unlike the Briones and Ojeda families, the Krappos' relationships are based entirely on hatred and fear. Sastre has filled every scene with a suffocating tension instead of the humor seen in Jardiel's *Eloísa*, and has made the "slice of life," seen in *Historia de una escalera*, even darker and gloomier. *La mordaza* painfully represents the mundane activities of a family sentenced to silence. Unlike Buero, Sastre did not believe in "posibilismo" theater, and the Regime prohibited the publication or performance of many of his plays precisely because he refused to play by their rules. For him, theater needed to have an explicit social purpose and message. Yet, like his fellow playwrights, previously examined, he used a dysfunctional family and the rhetoric of silence, symbolized by "la mordaza" of the title, to create a counter discourse that critiqued the Franco Regime.

Rather than inspiring hope through an open ending, Sastre's works shows that man's existence is "by nature tragic," and many of his plays are devoid of any hopeful sentiment (Gies 94). His goal was twofold: "por un lado, de denunciar la situación social y por otro, de continuar sus indagaciones filosóficas y artísticas sobre la complicada condición humana" (Johnson 201). This playwright wanted to change the world with what he wrote, showing his audience the destitute reality of their situation and inciting

them to take revolutionary action, as he believed that "mere cerebral intellectualism [was] not enough" (Gies 99). Although, as mentioned, Sastre uses the same techniques as Jardiel and Buero, Sastre criticizes the Regime in a darker, less hopeful, and less subtle way. The plot of *La mordaza* focuses on a corrupt and despotic patriarch, Isaías Krappo, highlighting the fallacies of the Franco Regime's family myth, as only the woman from outside the family bloodline rebels against the injustice perpetrated by the father. Sastre develops the rhetoric of silence through the use of the image of the "mordaza," explicit pauses written in stage directions, euphemisms and avoidance in speech, and the setting of the play's action.

La mordaza is part of Sastre's "realismo profundizado." Realistic works are a "faithful reproduction of the language, emotions, and thinking of human beings" (Pronko 112). In the case of this play, the emotions and thought processes are real to the point that they represent the most tragic and most troubled parts of us. However, *La mordaza* and most of Sastre's other plays were always subject to "la mordaza" of the Nationalist government because of the truths they portrayed. According to Article 17 of the Normas de censura of the Fuero de los Españoles of 1945, writers could publish no critical statements against the Jefe de Estado, or Franco (Gies 98-99). Due to this article and other censorship laws, Sastre could not criticize the Regime directly, but many of his plays operated on what Gies calls the "if-the-shoe-fits" premise: in the case of *La mordaza*, the play condemns the actions of Isaías, which could then be extended to Franco (99). This technique was not as "subtle" as the techniques of Sastre's predecessors and contemporaries, and he suffered the consequences. Censors closed down Sastre's previous play *Escuadra hacia la muerte* after only three performances and never

permitted the performance of *Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes*, a later piece (Gies 99). From one perspective, this lack of performance proves Buero's point about being reckless. From another perspective, Anita Johnson suggests that every time the censors refused to approve his dramas, the absence or conspicuous silence spoke more strongly than his presence in the theater of the twentieth century (196). She explains, "Este nuevo escritor también fue convertido en un caso histórico de mordaza institucional, víctima de la represión cultural de un régimen reaccionario y la sociedad producida por él" (195). In reality, Sastre felt disappointed that the censors approved *La mordaza* so easily, convinced that he had not achieved a sufficiently acerbic critique.

Although Sastre's message seems clear to audiences today, perhaps the Nationalist censors at the time saw only the play in its isolated, fictional context. Sieburth provides a theory on how this drama passed censorship unnoticed, commenting, "The characters in *La mordaza* are people, not symbols; the discourse is natural; no one is a mouthpiece for the author and the drama unfolds on its own terms" (479). Pronko expands on this idea saying, "It is sometimes with surprise or pain, Sastre tells us, that the dramatist hears certain words coming from his characters, but they are the character's words, and not the author's, and it would be dishonest to ignore them" (113). The text can stand alone, and the characters' dialogues have their own meaning in the context of the drama. Sastre is able to refract part of his meaning through each of their utterances. The author's intention takes the objectified utterance "as a whole" and "subordinates it to its own purposes," and "does not penetrate the character's speech but observes it from without" (Bakhtin "Discourse" 289-90). By following these techniques, Sastre's counter discourse comes across clearly without his saying anything directly against the Regime.

In fact, Sastre never mentions Spain in *La mordaza*. Its setting is completely and intentionally ambiguous. He bases the play on the events of an actual crime in France. Gastón Dominici from Lurs, in the south of France, killed three foreigners from England, and his family, under the influence of the “muralla de silencio” of the tyrannical patriarch, refused to reveal the truth for months (Dowling and Hanson 15). Sastre wrote, “La ‘realidad’ de este drama hay que buscarla por otros caminos” (“Noticia” 31). Using the technique of displacement by suggesting the setting of France, Sastre could distract censors (Dowling and Hanson 14). The characters are not French at all, and Sastre clearly critiques Franco with his use of a cold, dictatorial father figure who enforces silence on his family members by repressing them through fear and guilt. The family does not look like the Churruca family, nor like any ideal the audience would want to attain. In this play, Sastre takes gender roles to dangerous extremes, the oppressive heat muffles the words and actions of the family, and the children complain of different types of “gags” that keep them from speaking out against the murderous father Isaías.

Family functions as a microcosm of society. Natalie Davis states that this parallel between the wife’s relationship to the husband and the family’s relationship to society goes back to the Middle Ages and “was especially useful for expressing the relation of all subordinates to their superiors” because it emphasized a tension between intimacy and power (127). In *La mordaza*, the Krappo family lives under the dictator of the house, Isaías, just as Spain lived under Franco. Cazorla further supports this analogy by explaining that in Spanish society at the time, “Their fathers and their own politicized husbands were like little dictators at home” (142). Immediately this theme comes into play because “by giving him a biblical first name, Sastre provokes consideration of the

themes of patriarchy and authority" (Sieburth 476). Isaías rules over his household with an iron fist, exercising "an almost hypnotic hold" over his family (Pronko 115). In the first scene when Teo arrives late to dinner and faces Isaías' harsh admonishment, Luisa tries to defend her brother-in-law. Isaías responds, "Eso es cosa mía," letting her know that he rules and decides here (Sastre, *La mordaza* 134). In a later scene he commands Teo, "No grites en la mesa. ¿Qué te has creído? ¿Es esa la educación que te he dado?" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 166). Isaías, as the father figure, asserts his authority and forces his family to obey his rules.

These rules include a strict set of traditional values that Isaías wishes to instill into his children, much as the Nationalist Regime enforced these same values in post-war Spain. The family values Isaías requires mirror those in Franco's novel *Raza*: loyalty, respect, sacrifice, and unity. "These values clearly had rural roots," and the Krappo family lives in an isolated home far from the bustle of urban life (Cazorla 142). Isaías feels a duty to "educar a los hijos," who are all, according to their father, "débiles y enfermos" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 136). Sastre perverts all of the model virtues, of course, to illustrate the unattainable nature of the Churruca ideal. The Krappo family lacks any of the abovementioned values precisely because of the destructive influence of the tyrannical father. Isaías has "educated" the children into a dysfunctional, splintered family.

Jandro is the most loyal to his father. He is the youngest and most naïve and still looks up to his father as if he were a good example of a moral Christian patriarch. Because of Jandro's blind loyalty, Isaías speaks to him with compassion, commenting, "Eres muy joven y el trabajo resulta todavía muy fuerte para ti, pero tienes que ir

acostumbrándote. Cuando seas mayor me lo agradecerás. Ahora ve a acostarte si quieres" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 137). He seems understanding and caring in this exchange, even though moments before he called his children a "pandilla de inservibles" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 136). When Jandro exits, as his father has ordered, Isaías turns to his wife and asks, "¿Qué te parece el chico, Antonia? Estoy contento con él" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 137). He takes pride in this son because, according to Isaías, Jandro shows promise.

Even after finding out the horrifying truth of Isaías' crime, Jandro desperately clings to this loyalty. A few scenes earlier, he had called for justice and refused to forgive the culprit, but he then discovered the criminal was his role model. In Scene Five, Isaías, sick and weak, begins to fall, calling out to his children. Jandro is the only son that comes to his aid. He meekly mumbles, "Perdóneme por aquello, padre," seeking forgiveness for the judgments he had made earlier (Sastre, *La mordaza* 175). In the epilogue, Jandro's whole view on justice changes just for the benefit of his father, and he rebukes his older brother for enjoying the freedom Isaías' arrest has permitted them. He boldly claims, "Pero pienso que nuestro padre, por muchas cosas terribles que haya hecho, se merece nuestro respeto de hijos" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 187). Through the use of this qualifying phrase—"por muchas cosas terribles que haya hecho"—Jandro effectively gives his father blanket absolution and attempts to justify his actions solely because he has been taught that a father deserves his children's unconditional respect just for being their father. Sastre twists Jandro's sense of loyalty until it becomes so distorted and carnivalesque that his audience begins to question their own loyalties.

Closely tied to loyalty is a sense of respect for the patriarch. Although some of the sons do not share Jandro's loyalty, they all attempt to fulfill their father's expectations

regarding respect. Cazorla notes, “Most families were very authoritarian, with the father expected to be at the top of the pecking order . . . Fathers were most often feared and distant. The formal *usted* for ‘you’ instead of the familiar form, *tú*, was frequently employed by children when addressing their parents” (142). With the exception of his wife, all of Isaías’ family addresses him this way. When his children disrespect him, Isaías threatens and shames them. He accuses them of plotting to turn him in to the police, saying they are taking advantage of a poor, sick, old man. In his delirium, he yells, “¿Queréis luchar conmigo? Os venzo a todos y os tiro al suelo si me lo propongo” (Sastre, *La mordaza* 174). Utilizing the verb “vencer” that, as discussed, was part of the Regime’s lexicon, Isaías associates himself with the dictator and the oppressive power and authority he holds. Regardless of the situation, Isaías’ children should respect and revere him. He promises to use violence to ensure that no one continues to whisper and plot against him while he lies in bed with a fever.

Sacrifice, another virtue extolled by the Churruca family in *Raza*, is usually incarnated in female characters, specifically Isabel and Isabelita. The mother figure in the Krappo family, although physically present, does not play a significant role in the children’s lives, so Isaías takes credit for being the sacrificial figure. Juan, embarrassed by the insults rained down on him by his father, asks him to stop. Isaías defends his actions, explaining, “Si te hablo de esto es para que no te olvides nunca de lo que en esta casa se ha hecho por ti…; de que a fuerza de sacrificios y de preocupaciones hemos conseguido sacarte adelante” (Sastre, *La mordaza* 135). After murdering the Forastero, he justifies his crime to Luisa, claiming that he murdered him out of love for his family. He commands her to stay quiet and growls, “No soy un monstruo; soy un pobre viejo que os

quiere… y que se sacrifica por vosotros…" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 153). The children should never forget all the sacrifices their parents made, and thus should be willing to make sacrifices for the good of the family. In post-war Spain, "Redemption, through sacrifice, labour and suffering, meant 'eternal life,' according to the regime, in place of contentment and personal fulfillment in the material world" (Richards 88). Perhaps the Krappo children feel uncomfortable with the crime, but their highest duty is to their family, and subsequently their "patria," that demands sacrifices.

As in the Churruca family, unity is very important for the Krappo patriarch. However, the Krappos are only unified in a purely physical way; emotionally they could not be any more divided. Isaías demands that all his children be at the dinner table at the same time. In the first scene, Teo returns home late, and although his mother and sister-in-law try to excuse him, Isaías furiously spits, "Me repugna que todavía trates de disculparlo. Lo que hace con nosotros no tiene perdón. Estamos aquí todos reunidos a la mesa. Es un desprecio que hace a su familia" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 134). His judgmental language is ironic, as Jandro uses similar diction during his tirade in Scene Four against the still-unknown murderer. Physical unity around the table, although incredibly trivial, proves crucial to Isaías who tries to organize his family according to strict guidelines. Upon Teo's arrival, his father reproaches him, saying, "Estábamos todos sentados a la mesa; la familia reunida para la cena, como debe ser. . . . Queríamos estar todos juntos, como siempre… Sabes la importancia que tiene para nosotros esto. . . . Pero tú, a esa hora que es sagrada para nosotros, estabas en la taberna emborrachándote" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 139). Invoking religious language, Isaías makes his son feel like a pariah and almost a criminal for not joining the family for their evening meal.

The family can never truly unite, however, as their bitterness, fear and pain separate them. Their father, who should act as their role model, is manipulative and cruel, and his children view him as a satanic figure. Teo hisses, “Pues ése es nuestro padre; una especie de demonio que nos atormenta” (Sastre, *La mordaza* 159). He also feels no surprise upon discovering the truth of Isaías’ culpability, knowing that the town is full of his accomplices (Sastre, *La mordaza* 159). Sastre shows us in Teo’s outbursts the deep emotional damage the dictator of the Krappo household has caused: “Tengo mucho miedo a nuestro padre, Juan. (Amargamente) Y no debería ser así, ¿verdad? No debería ser así” (Sastre, *La mordaza* 160). His relationship with his father has rotted and now only inspires fear and hatred.

Not only are the family values severely deteriorated, but also none of the characters comply with traditional gender roles. Teo’s hatred never brings him to rebellion because in every interaction with his despotic father, he cowers in obedience. He never acts, passively accepting the role of the disappointing son. He attempts to take control of his own life and break his father’s rules by staying late in the tavern with his friends but immediately begs for forgiveness at home. Teo grovels:

> Yo quería venirme ya, pero me decían que me quedara. Me gastaban bromas. ‘¿Tienes miedo de que te riña tu padre?’, me decían. Y yo me he quedado con ellos para que vieran. . . . Para que vieran que yo soy un hombre y que no me asusto por cualquier cosa. Así que me he quedado y hemos estado divirtiéndonos un poco. Pero yo estaba deseando venirme, padre. (Sastre, *La mordaza* 139)

Martínez notes, “Isaías responds to Teo’s perceived dilatory behavior like a father talking to a boy rather than to a man” (71). The father belittles his adult sons in a way that strengthens and legitimizes his dictatorial power. Teo’s act of cynicism, sarcasm, and disdain is just a show. He quickly acquiesces like a fearful child at the feet of his father.

Juan, the eldest, is even more cowardly. Isaías characterizes him as the weak, effeminate son. He discusses Juan's "nervios," a word used also with the effeminate Fernando in *Eloísa*, and describes him as weak and infirm. Their first child, Juan disappointed Isaías: "No sabes la tristeza que nos dio tener un hijo así . . . Nuestro primer hijo. Nos dio mucha tristeza" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 135). In a later scene, Isaías also speaks to his eldest son as if he were child: "(Con una tranquila ironía) Pobre Juan, ya veo que ha sido demasiado para ti" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 166). Traditional gender roles mandated that men be strong and steady. Characterizing Juan as fragile as a flower indicates that he has failed to reach societal standards for Spanish masculinity.

The audience witnesses Juan's weakness firsthand. Compared to Luisa, his wife, Juan is much more delicate. His wife has witnessed a gruesome crime, and instead of supporting and comforting her, Juan wants to run to his brother because he cannot bear the secret himself. In the fourth scene, Luisa announces the truth to the whole family, and Isaías hits her violently across the face. Juan does not protect his wife as he should, and even discredits her belief that Isaías is capable of killing her on the spot (Sastre, *La mordaza* 168). After Luisa's confession to the Comisario, or police captain, he assures her, "Queda usted con su marido. Si ocurriera algo, no tiene nada que temer. Hay varios hombres en la casa" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 180). Luisa, however, knows her husband and knows his limited capabilities. She responds fearfully, "Usted no conoce a esos hombres, señor comisario. No se atreverían a defenderme. Tienen horror al viejo. Le tienen horror" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 181). She is aware that she is not safe even in her own home because her husband and brothers-in-law will not or cannot defend her against their father. Juan's wife admits in the epilogue that Isaías has raped her, but the other men in the family stand

by complacently, refusing to believe that their own father committed such a heinous offense.

The sons of the Krappo household are timid. Teo fears his father so much that he acknowledges, "estoy temblando como una mujer" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 160). Sastre later uses the verb "chillar," usually associated with animals or women in distress, to characterize Teo's "timidez" and "miedo" throughout his confession of hatred toward his father (*La mordaza* 168). When he does so, the stage directions note, "Se ha visto un débil relámpago. Suena un trueno lejano" (Sastre 168). The storm has passed, signaling the end of the highest moment of dramatic tension, but the description matches the anticlimactic, cowardly actions of Juan and Teo. The lightning is weak, as are the men, and rain has chilled any potential sign of ardent masculinity. Isaías repeats the word "chillar" later in defense of his own masculinity: "¿Qué esperabas? ¿Que chillara como una mujerzuela?" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 174). This comment tacitly compares his sons to timorous, frail women while using a pejorative term to belittle women in the process.

Like her sons, Antonia remains without a voice as she submits wholeheartedly to the repressive reign of her husband. Martínez explains, "The subordination of wife and children to the domineering husband reflects societal power structures in which the masses are subordinating to the sovereign," further drawing the parallels between the Krappo family and Spanish society under Franco (68). As Franco mistreated the citizens of Spain, mainly the "vencidos," so Isaías maltreats his wife. Teo reveals to the audience, "Trata mal a nuestra madre. . . . La humilla delante de todos nosotros. No la quiere" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 159). Antonia, however, does not rebel against this treatment. She speaks with "voz débil y temblorosa," afraid to say anything polemical to the dictator

(Sastre, *La mordaza* 134). Martínez notes that neither Antonia nor Luisa ever leaves the house (70). Woman's place is "in the home to 'keep watch' over the morality of the family" (Richards 54). This necessity for moral vigilance is especially ironic considering this family's mother is almost blind. Isaías mentions, "Ni siquiera puedes vernos claramente… Te mueves entre sombras… No ves más que unos cuerpos que se mueven" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 136). She is incapable of keeping watch or policing her family because physically she cannot see and figuratively chooses not to see.

Suffering the cruelty of her husband and the debilitating effects of this blindness, Antonia retreats into her corner to pray. Martínez states that because of her obsession with Catholicism, Antonia aggravates "the uncomfortable relationship between the children and their fathers" (73). She does nothing to challenge the immorality of Isaías' actions, and only passively preaches, "No hay otra justicia que la de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo. No deberías olvidarte nunca de ello, hijo mío" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 164). When Isaías snarls at Teo, "Vete, vete a dormir. Déjame en paz. No quiero ni verte. Me da asco que seáis así," Antonia does not reprimand her husband for uttering such cruel words (Sastre, *La mordaza 139)*. Instead, she reprimands Teo for saying "Hasta mañana" and quips, "Hasta mañana si Dios quiere, hijo mío" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 139). As Jardiel's Edgardo finds his only escape from the haunting memories of his sister's crime in feigned insanity and the confines of his bedroom, Antonia's "only defense [is] a retreat into religious litanies to endure the violent behavior of her husband" (Martínez 74). Her Catholicism is just for show and her faith lacks good works. Sastre uses Antonia to suggest that Spain's Catholic Church is also "blind" to Franco's abuse.

Unlike her weak mother-in-law, Luisa breaks with every traditional value that Isaías tries to impose on the Krappos and flouts the feminine gender role modeled by Isabel Churruca. She feels no loyalty to her father-in-law, and his despicable behavior inhibits her from respecting him. Insolent and quick-tempered, Luisa threatens the stability of the family, just as the "women who transgressed attempts to control behaviour, ideas, markets, were considered a threat" to the Francoist Regime (Richards 167). She sarcastically retorts, "Yo me casé con Juan, y no tengo más familia que Juan. En mí, por si usted quiere saberlo, no manda nadie más que él" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 134). This personal affront to the household patriarch and his rules causes him to call her "endemoniada" as if she had "cien gatos dentro del cuerpo" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 135). Richards explains the precarious but key position of women: "Females were potentially the carriers of purity, but also associated with possible impurity" (Richards 52). Thus, Isaías laments his son's choice in wife, and notes, "El mundo está lleno de mujeres honestas, limpias y obedientes" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 135). A woman's purity was directly related to her willingness to obey. The Sección Femenina delineated the necessary characteristics of a good wife and mother: "complacent, longsuffering, resigned, self-sacrificing, obedient, submissive" (Thomas 114). Luisa does not suffer long at all, however, and speaks out about the crime that threatens to suffocate the Krappo family.

Luisa is able to denounce Isaías because she comes from the outside. The Nationalists created their autarky policies precisely because they knew that foreign influences would loosen their ideological hold over the Spanish people. Richards defines autarky as "'purification' [that] required isolation and was part of the construction of a Spanishness 'renovated' from inside" (30). Isaías has not raised Luisa, so his sway over

her is weak. Regarding Isaías' children, Gies tells us that the fear and guilt, poignantly felt by Teo and Juan, comes from "alienation" and solitude (97). Isaías has spent a lifetime carefully crafting this environment of familial self-sufficiency and isolation from their neighbors.

Geographically, the Krappo family lives 600 meters from the nearest town. The father admits to the Comisario that, as he says, "Estamos un poco aislados" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 149). He has also succeeded in emotionally isolating Teo from his romantic interest. Teo was in love with Julia, but laments, "[Nuestro padre] Me puso en ridículo delante de ella. Si divirtió conmigo. Cuando quise replicarle, me pegó… No me atreví a verla nunca más" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 160). Despite all the hatred and bitterness the sons feel for their father, they stay silent. Others in the town know of Isaías' war crimes, such as when he killed the Forastero's wife and daughter after sexually abusing them, and could inform the police, but Teo says, "Nadie está dispuesto a decírselo" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 158). He is also unwilling to denounce his father. Juan asks, "Tú querrías hablar, delatar a nuestro padre, ¿verdad, Teo? . . . . ¿Y por qué no hablas?" and Teo responds, "Por miedo… Siento como una mordaza en la boca… Es el miedo" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 172-3).

This "mordaza," or gag, that also appears in the title of the drama, is symbolic of the imposed silence suffered both by the Krappo family and Spain under the Franco Regime. The gag implies a threat: if you speak, you will suffer the consequences. Sastre believed, "Si toda Revolución es un hecho trágico, todo orden social injusto es una tragedia sorda inaceptable" (Sastre "El teatro de Alfonso Sastre" 7). The system in charge forcibly keeps others quiet about the injustices suffered, creating this silent, muffled

tragedy. In the case of this play, each character feels a different kind of gag that keeps him or her from denouncing Isaías and simultaneously silencing and erasing the murder, creating a destructive cycle. Teo is cowardly, and in his fear he bows to the will of his father, voluntarily placing the gag in his mouth for his own protection. Luisa claims that her gag is her love for Juan. She feels torn between doing what is right and doing what protects her delicate husband. Juan claims to feel compassion for his father. Antonia and Jandro, forever loyal to their tyrant, stay silent to save his life, and Andrea the servant is faithful to her masters. Luisa comments, "Parece como si no ocurriera nada por dentro, como si todos estuviéramos tranquilos y fuéramos felices. Esta es una casa sin disgustos, sin voces de desesperación, sin gritos de angustia o de furia" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 173). Their suffering, quiet and hidden, raises a façade of tranquility and happiness while suppressing the screams of anguish and anger. Isaías has threatened them with death: "¡Calla! Yo no he hecho nada. Tú no has visto nada. ¡O te mato!" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 146). People in Spain also chose to live with "la mordaza" concerning the Civil War and the atrocities committed in its wake. Ignoring these tragedies and suppressing everything seemed the best option for many. Condemned to either death or silence, many Spanish citizens chose silence.

Sastre incorporates this image and the theme of silence in general throughout his work as the foundation for his rhetoric of silence. Rather than deliberately placing pauses in occasional but precise moments of conversation, as Buero did, Sastre sprinkles them liberally throughout the dialogue of the drama. The word "silencio" appears more than thirty times in the playwright's stage directions. Like the characters in *Historia de una escalera*, the Krappo family members sometimes communicate meanings contrary to the

words they speak through pauses. For example, Juan, now privy to the information of his father's crime, attempts to justify his heinous actions, looking for verbal support from his wife. Twice, the stage directions reveal, "Luisa guarda silencio" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 157). She does not want to answer because she knows her answer is not the one her husband wants to hear, reminding us of the interactions between Fernando and Urbano, each denying his true feelings for Carmina, and the scene in which Carmina reluctantly agrees to marry Urbano despite her lack of romantic feelings toward him.

Sastre primarily uses the gaps in conversation to create the dramatic tension that drives the plotline. A silence follows and precedes most entrances and exits, illustrating the awkwardness of the family's interactions. In the first scene, the Forastero exits the Krappo home after a thrilling conversation with his old enemy. Sastre has masterfully crafted the stage directions to guide the actors to create the tensest scene possible:

> Se va. En cuanta ha salido, Isaías se levanta y va a un armarito, del que saca una pistola. La monta y sale rápidamente. Un silencio. Llega Luisa, en bata. Busca un tubo de comprimidos en un mueble, y se toma uno con un vaso de agua. Se asoma distraídamente a un ventanal. Suena, fuera, un disparo. Luisa, inquieta, trata de ver qué ha ocurrido. De pronto grita hacia fuera. (*La mordaza* 146)

The audience members are left in anxious suspense as the scene transitions from sinister and stressful dialogue, to the deliberate and speedy actions of Isaías, to an empty and silent stage, and then to Luisa's simple, quotidian activities, waiting to hear the gunshot they know is on its way.

In Scene Four, the frequency of silences increases in the dialogue between Isaías and his children. They have banded together and know his secret, but they are afraid to reveal accidentally their knowledge of it. Everyone is gathered together again for dinner, the daily "union" of the family to which Isaías gives so much importance. No one speaks.

In silence, they pull up their chairs to the table and listen as the sounds of thunder approach. Isaías asks, "¿Qué se dice del crimen?" and all refuse to respond, lowering their gaze in fear and shame (Sastre, *La mordaza* 165). Angrily, Isaías yells at them to get their attention, and Juan unhelpfully replies with, "Yo no he oído nada. No. Nada. He estado en el pueblo, pero no he oído nada," saying several sentences without offering any meaningful information (Sastre, *La mordaza* 165). The stage directions denote another silence, and the rebellious Luisa adds, "Yo he oído que el comisario Roch tiene una pista" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 165). Building up her courage in the preceding moments of silence, Luisa is able to utter this threatening comment to the dictator that leads to the emotional outburst coinciding with the breaking of the storm. For the rest of the play, the family members will struggle to speak and will often communicate better through silences. In the tense pauses, the audience will see the unraveling of family ties.

Apart from his stage directions, Sastre employs other techniques of the rhetoric of silence. Pérez comments, "Another rhetorical device employed to express silent rejection of official ideology and values involved placing the official party line in the mouths of the worst possible advocates," referring in this case to Isaías, whose despicable nature repulses the audience members and makes all of his ideologies less amenable to them (126). As mentioned, Sastre also employs spatial evasion through the ambiguous setting of his play, as the content of the introductory comments that links Isaías' crime to that of Lurs suggests that the action takes place in France rather than post-Civil War Spain but never really clarifies the location.

One of his most powerful methods of silence is the demonstration of the limitations of language. *La mordaza* is full of dialogue but characters spend much of their

time completely evading meaning. They refuse to discuss at length the murder of the Forastero, as Jardiel's Briones and Ojeda families avoided the discussion of Eloísa's murder. They often use euphemisms, repeat themselves, let the conversation go in circles, and have inappropriate responses when language breaks down completely. Richards remarks that Francoist Spain also used euphemisms to refer to the deaths of Republicans, sometimes telling the widows of Republican prisoners their husbands were "given their freedom" (53). In Sastre's work, when Comisario Roch initially comes to the Krappo home to investigate, even Isaías refuses to refer directly to the murder. Ellipses litter the conversation, usually placed before the euphemisms Isaías employs to avoid admitting a man has died. Isaías explains to the Comisario, "Ha sido una criada nuestra la que ha descubierto el…el cuerpo," and the Comisario immediately responds, "El cadáver quiere usted decir" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 148). The father warns Jandro, "Pero que no se te ocurra acercarte a…a 'eso'" and also mentions to the Comisario, "Cuando esta mañana me he despertado, he tenido la primera noticia del…del extraño suceso" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 148-9). These ellipses indicate the true meaning of the euphemisms and grab the audience members' attention. They notice with horror the irony of Isaías' desire to avoid the acknowledgement that he has murdered someone.

Luisa enters the scene, and the faculty of language fails her, as well. Comisario Roch asks her if she heard a gunshot during the night. She does not immediately respond, only muttering, "¿Si oí…?" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 152). Then, when she confesses she did in fact hear a gunshot, Isaías bombards her with questions to divert the trajectory of the conversation. When Luisa begins to speak again, she seems unsure of her words. The stage directions describe her as nervous as she gets defensive, responding to the

Comisario's interrogation, "No lo sé. ¿Cómo voy a saberlo? No miré el reloj" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 153). Isaías threatens her, knowing she could have ruined everything in those moments, but then contradictorily comforts her: "Verás cómo dentro de un mes nos reímos de estas preocupaciones. Ánimo, Luisa" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 153). The scene ends with Luisa standing alone, bursting into tears.

The family outsider continues to struggle with communication in the following acts. Juan, still unaware of the truth in Scene Three, is thinking out loud about the motives behind such a crime, and Luisa nervously murmurs, "No. No se sabe nada. Verdaderamente, no se sabe nada," her nerves shining through her repetitive, untruthful words (Sastre, *La mordaza* 155). When she finally condemns Isaías to his fate in Scene Six, informing the Comisario that she witnessed the murder, the audiences witnesses an altercation. Isaías grabs her, she begins to scream, and the police agents have to separate them. Sastre adds, "Isaías queda inmóvil. Luisa entonces se echa a reír nerviosamente. Se ríe de Isaías. Lo mira y se ríe" (*La mordaza* 185). Keeping quiet failed her, so she spoke out against the injustice. Now words have failed her, as well, and all she can do is laugh uncontrollably, ironically fulfilling Isaías' prediction from Scene Two.

Luisa's inability to use her words here and Isaías' extreme shame caused by the nervous laughter of his daughter-in-law both result from serious, underlying issues. Isaías not only physically and verbally abuses Luisa, but he has also sexually abused her. This crime is further proof of the rotten family relationships and the distortion of traditional values. In Leviticus 18:15, the Lord forbids this type of sexual relation.[1] Two chapters later, the Lord asks Moses to announce this decree to the Israelites: "If a man sleeps with

[1] "Do not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law. She is your son's wife; do not have relations with her" (NIV, Levit. 18.15).

his daughter-in-law, both of them must be put to death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be on their own heads" (*NIV*, Leviticus 20.12). In an ideal family, a father should never lie with his son's wife, especially in a nonconsensual situation as this one.

However, Sastre's characters treat this crime much like Jardiel's characters treated Eloísa's murder. They blurt out the truth and then promptly move to another topic. The playwright does not reveal this sin in the main action of the play, and waits until the Epilogue to address it, as if it were an afterthought. In these last moments, Jandro vows never to forgive Luisa for denouncing his father. To justify her actions, she tries to explain to Jandro the type of man Isaías really was. Juan is not home, and Lusia wishes to keep this a secret from him, as her sensitive, fragile husband would suffer too much if he knew (Sastre, *La mordaza* 188). Echoing the inappropriate laughter that concluded the last scene, Luisa comments, "Da risa. Es una cosa que da risa" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 188). Jandro finally succeeds in forcing her to divulge the information, and she exclaims, "Tu padre, Jandro, me hacía el amor. ¿No te diviertes pensándolo?" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 188). Jandro accuses her of lying, she defends the veracity of her accusation, and suddenly Juan interrupts the conversation with his arrival. He bears the news that the police shot their father as he was attempting to escape. The report of his violent demise overshadows Luisa's rape confession completely, and her story is left in darkness once more. As the commotion caused by the outbreak of fighting between the cats and dogs in *Eloísa* eclipses the tragedy at hand, so Sastre distracts his audience and characters from one tragedy with the news of a more shocking and pressing tragedy. By the end of the play, the audience barely remembers this momentary outburst by the family outsider. Luisa

feels the need to excuse her actions of seeking justice and admitting the truth to the Comisario, actions that should not need an excuse at all, whereas Isaías' sons continue to justify his atrocities committed in cold blood. This paradox parallels Jardiel's carnivalesque techniques, bringing the horrifying reality to light through an inversion of how things should be. Even after having the courage to overthrow the tyrant, this woman remains powerless and voiceless.

The last technique Sastre uses to formulate his rhetoric of silence has nothing to do with verbal communication at all. The setting, especially the weather, reveals to the audience much of the hidden critique. Before Act Two of *Eloísa*, Jardiel describes the set of the Ojeda country home in low light, creating a tone of mystery or danger. *La mordaza* begins in a similar way, and the stage directions describe the following: "una casa rural de grandes proporciones, de sombría y pesada arquitectura. Hay una gran lámpara encendida: una lámpara que no consigue iluminar todos los rincones de la habitación" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 133). The audience cannot see clearly, and the setting is dark and sinister. This house "is tantamount to a prison in which family exists, confined within the walls" (Martínez 70). As seen when Teo returns from the tavern in the first scene, although the men are permitted a little bit of freedom, able to leave to go to work during the day, they must always come back and submit themselves to the iron-fisted rule of their father. The system locks each family member into a specific role.

Sastre gives unusual emphasis to the weather in this drama. Martínez notes, "The characters react to the heat as something almost tangible that represents their desire to escape the oppression, the violence, and for Luisa, the unwanted sexual advances provoked by Isaías" (71-72). The heat acts as a metaphor both for the suffocating, stifling

silence imposed on the household by Isaías and for the dictator himself. Even before he commits his crime, the patriarch roughly dominates his family. Antonia sighs, “Me ahogo,” and the heat weighs on her as heavily as Isaías’ repression (Sastre, *La mordaza* 137*)*. In the fourth scene, she repeats hopefully, “Nos quedaremos más tranquilos, ya verás, en cuanto estalle la tormenta y llueva en los campos” (Sastre, *La mordaza* 162). In the fall, the heat breaks, and the police detain Isaías, leaving the rest of the family with “una gran paz, una gran tranquilidad” (Sastre, *La mordaza* 187). The reign of silence ends, and they are finally free to live their lives. Unfortunately, Isaías has made his family so emotionally dependent on him that they cannot function after his arrest.

The heat also comes to symbolize the silencing of Isaías’ crime by acting as his scapegoat. Repeatedly, the characters cast blame from the true antagonist to this straw-man antagonist. Due to the drought and the heat of the summer, the land is dry, and police can find no footprints to use as evidence or clues (Sastre, *La mordaza* 154). The weather helps to silence the crime and erase the murder. Antonia blames the heat for social problems. She laments, “Es malo el verano. Es cuando se cometen los crímenes . . . La sangre de los hombres arde y no pueden pensar. El calor los ciega y no les importa matar a un hombre” (Sastre, *La mordaza* 137). The blood of men burns, but only because of the exterior heat and the intolerable summer weather. She continues: “Y todos saben lo que ocurrió en el pueblo el último año de la guerra, las muertes que hubo y cómo se ensañaron los hombres unos contra otros” (Sastre, *La mordaza* 138). At the mention of a war, Isaías quickly and sternly responds, “(Sombrío) Aquel verano fue preciso hacer muchas cosas. No había otro remedio” (Sastre, *La mordaza* 138). Sastre’s word choice in the stage directions is interesting, as “sombrío” can mean both somber and shaded. The

shade, although helpful to cool oneself down when the sun's rays heat up the earth, also covers things in darkness and blocks out the light. Isaías also uses the word "remedio," echoing the terminology often used in the Nationalist rhetoric. The Regime needed to cleanse and purge Spain. Foreign influences had contaminated the country, and there was no other remedy. Isaías excuses the violent actions of these men because "no había otro remedio," just as Franco excused the violence his country suffered because he claimed it was necessary for redemption.

The longer the characters endure the summer heat and the repression that goes with it, the more their daily interactions begin to break down. Similar to Jardiel's *Eloísa*, the suppression of all discussion surrounding the murder of the Forastero slowly drives all the family members crazy. Instead of portraying this consequence of enforced silence through humor and the characters' ridiculous idiosyncrasies, Sastre depicts it in a manner true to his Social Realistic tendencies. The Krappos' daily life is not funny; it is hot and uncomfortable. Before he has even committed his crime, Isaías snaps at Luisa for listening to the rumors that the townspeople spread about him. In a tirade echoing the sentiments of the "vencedores" of the Spanish Civil War, he snarls:

> ¿Qué más te han dicho? Que durante la guerra fui cruel y que hicimos barbaridades en los pueblos de la comarca… Que asaltamos trenes y pusimos bombas… Que matamos a mucha gente… ¿Y quién te ha dicho eso? Algún cobarde que se estaba en su casa mientras ocurrían todas estas cosas…, mientras los demás luchábamos por su libertad y por la dignidad que él no tenía. (Sastre, *La mordaza* 141)

These words help associate the dictator of the Krappo household even more closely with the dictator of Spain, and set up the scene for the transgression that will follow and the continued process of justifying his wrongdoing.

Upon hearing the truth behind the Forastero's murder, Juan becomes extremely nervous and starts talking incessantly. He tries to find a good reason to forgive his father, but has to keep talking because he cannot think of one. His wife's silence unnerves him, and he argues, "Mi padre no es un asesino, Luisa. Durante la guerra luchó como todos; pero no es un asesino. . . . Tiene mal carácter; todo lo que tú quieras. Pero no es un criminal" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 157). He also dismisses his father's guilt, parroting Antonia's claim that the heat forces men to do things they would not normally do. Isaías' children are so accustomed to excusing their father's actions that, out of habit, they continue to do so even though he has shot the Forastero in the back for personal reasons, outside of wartime. The audience can sense the intense cognitive dissonance Juan undergoes as he tries to rationalize his father's behavior.

The weather also reveals to the audience many nuances of the characters' feelings and personalities without the playwright's having to state them explicitly. Right before the storm hits, Jandro notes, "Esta noche hace más calor que nunca, ¿verdad, madre?" which his mother affirms, hoping the heat will finally break (Sastre, *La mordaza* 162). As the storm continues to build in the background, Jandro calls for justice and harsh punishment for the murderer with no forgiveness. He wants to hang him in the town square and bury his body in the street where people will walk over his bones for the rest of eternity. Isaías prompts him to expand on his opinion, and the ironic tension this creates is mirrored by the brewing storm. Antonia becomes nervous and asks them to stop discussing the topic, as if she senses her husband's guilt, and Sastre adds in the stage directions, "Suena a lo lejos un trueno" (*La mordaza* 163). The storm has begun.

The family gathers for dinner, and as Isaías continues to provoke his children, Luisa starts to threaten him. She comments that perhaps a witness will reveal his or her knowledge to the police. Isaías threatens her right back, saying that the police would accuse anyone who has remained silent this long as an accomplice. Although Isaías does not yet know that Luisa has confided in his two older sons, he finds joy in provoking them and making them uncomfortable by asking their opinions and indirectly testing their loyalty. The cowardly Teo drops his glass of water in his anxiety: "Se le cae el vaso y se rompe. Suena un trueno" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 166). With the ever-increasing tension, Teo breaks down. "(Nervioso) A mí no me pregunte, padre. A mí no me pregunte. (Un relámpago.) Yo no tengo gana de hablar. Estoy malo. (Suena un trueno.) ¡Esta condenada tormenta! ¡Me va a romper los nervios!" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 166). He is convinced that the storm is a symbol of God's judgment.

Teo's panic attack reveals to Isaías that he knows something he should not know. Why else would he believe so fervently that God was going to punish them? Suddenly the patriarch realizes Luisa has betrayed him. In this moment, "Se ve a través del ventanal un relámpago vivísimo que ilumina todas las caras" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 166-7). This lightning bolt illuminates the room, bathing it in light and allowing everyone to see more clearly. It occurs right before Luisa illuminates the truth of the crime. She admits that she told Teo and Juan what their father did, also effectively revealing Isaías' crime to Antonia and Jandro. The trauma characters suffer in this conversation causes the audience members to forget all about the physical storm; they are preoccupied with the emotional storm developing in front of them.

When Teo's anticlimactic outburst ends, the audience sees a weak lightning bolt through the window, visually representing the feebleness of his cowardly hatred toward his father and this pathetic attempt at standing up to him. However, it also represents the end of Isaías' emotional storm, and his hold on the family. Sastre notes in his stage directions, "Isaías se remueve. Está, de pronto, como más envejecido, como triste y desamparado" (*La mordaza* 168). It signals a change in weather and in leadership. For the first time, someone has tried to overthrow Isaías. He has lost significant power because Luisa and Teo have broken their silence and defied him in front of the rest of the family.

The next scene brings with it a stark change in weather and scenery. Sastre introduces the fifth scene with this description: "Es una tarde de otoño. A través del ventanal vemos árboles desnudos" (*La mordaza* 170). Like the trees, Isaías is now metaphorically naked before his family. Everyone knows his secret. The heat has moved from the outside to inside: Isaías has a fever. The storm now brews inside of him, and he makes himself sick due to his intense fear of death. At times the audience almost believes he feels remorse. His strength, the heat of his passion and anger, has disappeared, and he admits, "Tengo mucho frío" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 175). The coldness of death creeps onto the stage.

After Luisa turns Isaías into the police, the temperature continues to drop. In the epilogue, the family has lit the fireplace and the scene takes place in the cool of the night. After months of suffering, fall has finally arrived, and winter approaches. Juan arrives after receiving the news of his father's death, and for several minutes the characters are unsure of what emotions they should feel. Finally, upon realizing that Isaías' reign of terror has ended with his death, Juan hopefully exclaims:

> Esta noche, ¡qué paz…, qué paz tan grande! No lloramos, a fin de cuentas. Estamos tranquilos. Puede que nos cueste trabajo confesarlo, pero nos encontramos bien. Hace buen tiempo. Parece que se prepara un buen año. Si todo sigue así, el pueblo volverá a resurgir, a pesar de todas las calamidades. Habrá fiestas como antes. . . . Creo que podemos mirar tranquilos al porvenir. (Sastre, *La mordaza* 190)

He predicts that happiness will reenter their town and their home. Tyrannicide does not always liberate the oppressed, but Gies notes, "The immediate failure does create circumstances in which hope for a better future is not completely absent" (98). Although Sastre's tragedy projects a bleak outlook for the Krappo family, they are free from dictatorial oppression.

However, Sastre, a firm believer in "realismo profundizado" and closed dénouements full of human angst, does not leave his audience contentedly waiting for a happy ending. Each character demonstrates a small failure that cumulatively make hope for the future unlikely. Instead of realizing the consequences of her empty faith and making a decision to renew her faith, Antonia is going to live an empty life, dedicating herself to pray in the corner. "No os importe dejarme sola rezando. Si ya no sirvo para otra cosa, hijos… No os apenéis si me encontráis callada y como triste en un rinconcito de la casa" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 191). Unlike Edgardo, who finally stopped running from his reality and admitted his insanity was never authentic, Antonia will resign herself to a lifetime of faking piety.

Antonia's children follow her example. In the last several lines, the characters return to the theme of weather and only manage to discuss the temperature. They have experienced a complicated mix of tragedy and blessing due to the death of their father. Instead of addressing their feelings, they, like the Ojedas and Briones, sweep the tragedy

under the rug and converse about trivial matters. Jandro shivers slightly, from the cold and from feeling emotionally overwhelmed. The following conversation ends the play:

> JANDRO: (Con un leve estremecimiento.) Hace un poco de frío, pero no me encuentro mal del todo.
> TEO: Este otoño no ha hecho todavía mucho frío.
> LUISA: (Con una voz humilde y triste.) Otros años, por este tiempo, ya hacía más frío, verdad?
> JUAN: (Asiente, soñador, sin mirarla.) Oh, sí… Otros años, por este tiempo… Otros años, por este tiempo, recuerdo que… (Sastre, *La mordaza* 191-192)

This empty dialogue reminds us of the empty conversation of "¡Vaya mujeres!" that began the Prologue of *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro*. Bringing us full circle, we can see the effects of repression and censorship that forbid citizens to discuss their opinions or feelings and actively cover up themes that reflect poorly on the government. *La mordaza* differs from the other plays studied here in that the consequences seem longer lasting. Even after they recognize the tragedy, break the silence, and banish Isaías' evil presence, the characters cannot function as a family unit. The guilt swallows them whole and casts a dark shadow over their future. Teo claims, "Hay que vivir, vivir, por encima de todo" because that is all they can do (Sastre, *La mordaza* 190). A typical "drama de frustración," *La mordaza* offers no solution and little hope, wishing to incite the audience to take action in their anguish and use their frustration to start a revolution.

Sastre criticized his contemporaries for not speaking out against Franco's Regime as vehemently as he did. He often felt disappointed when a play passed easily through censorship, knowing that this approval meant his counter discourse was not strong or obvious enough. To him, Buero's "posibilismo" and hopeful, ambiguous conclusions were insufficient. Schwartz explains, "The theater, in its social function, must not merely provoke esthetic emotions . . . It must take a role in the struggle of our time" (439).

Interestingly, Isaías remarks that the people in the town who criticize and disagree with him are "reptiles blandos y pegajosos, una raza de cobardes" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 141). These citizens attack him from the dark instead of confronting him directly. Sastre took it upon himself to bring these whispers of disapproval and condemnation out of the darkness and into the light, thereby rejecting the role of the coward.

A realist playwright, Sastre knows that nothing is black and white. Isaías seems almost pure evil. However, Sastre incorporates scenes including those in which Isaías fears for his life to humanize the patriarch. The audience members see him in moments of weakness when he becomes ill, begs Luisa to stop laughing at him during his arrest, and even screams to his family, "Entonces, ¿vais a dejar a un pobre viejo solo? ¿Vais a dejarme solo?" (Sastre, *La mordaza* 169). The family members themselves are not all good, either, idly sitting by for months as the police beat innocent homeless people in order to extract information they do not have about a crime they did not commit (Sastre, *La mordaza* 157). Juan does not protect his wife, Antonia has allowed her husband to abuse her family emotionally, verbally, and physically for years while she prays, and even Luisa's motives are unclear. Gies notes that "the idea of a collective tragic hero-victim is consistent with Sastre's principle that those heroes should be . . . neither saints nor monsters" (97). They are just everyday people, living their everyday lives, with the defects and strengths common to us all.

The use of realistic protagonists who are neither all good nor all bad helps create and simultaneously disguise what Bakhtin would term Sastre's counter discourse. The audience members can relate to these morally ambiguous characters and must make their own judgments about their motives, struggling to connect the dots in an engaging way

that would be unnecessary in a play with obvious heroes and villains. The Krappo family members struggle against their tyrannical father, between the desire to be obedient and loyal or to denounce him for his crimes, and they struggle to find normalcy and true peace after the tyrant's demise. In the end, all these struggles point to a unifying message: "la mordaza." The characters and the citizens of Spain under the Nationalist Regime suffered the influence of a gag that kept them from saying or doing anything out of line with their family or gender role, caused them to cover up the truth and impede justice, and inhibited them from truly discussing their problems and grieving over their tragedies in a way that would have allowed them to move on in a healthy manner and to become a truly unified family or nation.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

In 1978, three years after Franco's death, Carmen Martín Gaite began her novel *El cuarto de atrás* with this epigraph by Georges Bataille: "La experiencia no puede ser comunicada sin lazos de silencio, de ocultamiento, de distancia" (8). This quote echoes the ideas presented in this thesis, as the families in Jardiel's *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro*, Buero's *Historia de una escalera*, and Sastre's *La mordaza* best communicate their experience through various techniques of silence. Paradoxically, their silence creates a subversive and surreptitious dialogue to counteract the monological discourse of the Nationalist Regime, based on reactions to that which is said and that which is not said. As Bakhtin suggested, "In the hidden polemic . . . the other speech act is reacted to, and this reaction, no less than the topic of discussion, determines the author's speech" ("Discourse" 295). The playwrights refract the message through the reactions among characters and between cast and audience.

Furthermore, by inverting and distorting the typical Spanish family values, these playwrights participate in a variation of carnivalesque writing: "Carnival is a means by which whole societies can represent themselves (can collectively see) the folly of their own pretensions to unite and make final. Carnival, in other words, is a way cultural systems come to know themselves by playing at being different" (Holquist 230). In these dramas, the actors play at being different onstage, and their characters pretend to be crazy, pretend to forget about past relationships, or pretend to know nothing of a murder.

The audience members hopefully come to know themselves by watching these various instances of "playing at being different."

Each play, like any literary text, is an "ensemble of utterances" and speaks as a subject in and of itself (Doraiswamy 67). It is able to stand alone without serving solely as a vehicle for the playwright's words. Especially in theater, we see so many different speakers, different utterances, not easily connected with the author's intention, unlike a novel's narrator or a poem's lyrical voice. Each character in a play speaks for him or herself, and the stage directions, the author's most direct form of communication, are only indirectly revealed to the audience through set design, costumes, characters' personalities and attitudes, sound, and lighting. In a time of strict censorship that quelled any effort by the Spanish people to criticize the government or to discuss the devastating war, Jardiel, Buero, and Sastre discovered that sometimes silence communicates with great eloquence. Sometimes too, these playwrights reveal the inherent flaws in fascist propaganda by inverting repressive narratives, such as the Francoist ideal family rhetoric, through a use of dysfunctional families at variance with official stances. Over the course of the first twenty years of Franco's rule, authors used many different techniques to address similar issues.

Many critics have considered Jardiel Poncela's work as frivolous comedy, bereft of a deeper meaning, and have cited evidence that Jardiel was in favor of the Nationalist government. However, he was one of the first to encounter his new government's censorship laws, unable to publish some of his work and having to make innumerable changes. He would have quickly become aware of the injustices occurring after the war's end. Perhaps he agreed initially with those in power after his unpleasant encounters with

the Republic, but the ways the Nationalists came to power and maintained their position surely worried him.

Jardiel's critique of the Franco family myth is clear: the parental figures and role models are absent or inadequate, a family member has murdered Eloisa, and the whole family chooses to be complicit in obscuring the truth forever even after it drives all of them crazy. The Prologue, although still comical, portrays a "slice of life" that later playwrights echo with Social Realism a decade later. The theater patrons are hungry, dirty, smelly, and uncouth, in contrast to the refined elegance of the upper class protagonists. The Prologue keeps the audience laughing but provides them a mirror: this is life as it is right now. Jardiel cleverly refracts the majority of his criticism through countless funny and constantly interrupted interactions among a cavalcade of characters who fail to reappear in the other two acts. The subtle commentary comes from so many different directions, taking different shape before bouncing off to new interlocutors. These first scenes set up the framework for the rest of the play. Although blessed with more resources, the Ojeda and Briones families are even more tragic, failing to nurture loving relationships and allowing self-centeredness to flourish.

Regarding the rhetoric of silence, Jardiel's techniques are not as common or traditional as Buero's or Sastre's. He takes an unexpected approach, and fills the stage with so much laughter and nonsense that the audience can hardly realize how "silent" the dialogue truly is. Unable to speak their minds, characters obsess over superficial topics—for example, repeating variations of "¡Vaya mujeres!" in the first twelve lines—and unable to engage with others in meaningful conversation, they answer their own questions or speak so vaguely and indirectly that mass confusion results. The rupture

between the Prologue, or false overture, and the first act helps divert attention away from the realistic elements of the rundown theater setting, and the copious amount of stage directions provides labyrinthine descriptions of labyrinthine sets meant to confuse both the reader and the audience visually even as the dialogue confuses them verbally. Much of the laughter in the two main acts results from the discourse of nonsense, seen best in Leoncio's interview for the position of manservant with Edgardo, discussed at length in Chapter Two. Additionally, Mariana's sister Julia from *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro* was missing for three years, calling the audience's attention to the recent Civil War of the same duration. With a simple, "Que no hubo tal mujer asesinada," the family members agree in the final moments of the play to cover up the murder of Eloísa, and they do not waste even an instant to grieve or process the truth.

In *Historia de una escalera*, Buero also undermines the Nationalists' family ideal and traditional gender roles by portraying dysfunctional and disillusioned family units across three generations. The characters resemble in no way the unified, loving, and forgiving Churruca family of Franco's *Raza*. Their apartments are like jail cells rather than places of refuge. The sordid conditions corrupt the values of loyalty between best friends and lovers. Carmina falls from grace and allows her bitterness to corrupt her heart, causing her to hate her husband and beat her daughter. Urbano never succeeds in joining a union and has not achieved the life for which he dreamed. Fernando cannot overcome his misogyny and greed, leading him to unhappiness. The play ends also with the disappointment of Trini, the perfect mother figure, who has given so sacrificially of herself that she has not had the opportunity to start her own family. The father figures slowly disappear as the acts progress, leaving the women helpless, unable to support

themselves financially. Buero casts the family narrative of the Francoist Regime into a critical light, showing its ugly sides and inherent contradictions, and then distorts traditional gender roles with the new generation of Fernandito and Carminita. These techniques help him undermine the Nationalist rhetoric and emphasize an alternative discourse, while maintaining a glimmer of hope for audience members

Like Jardiel's strategy of alluding to the Civil War by noting Julia's three-year absence, Buero conspicuously skips over the year 1939, the year the war ended. Along with this temporal evasion, the playwright of *Historia de una escalera* creates a rhetoric of silence using more traditional techniques such as the use of explicit and carefully placed pauses in dialogue and parallel scenes that imply an inescapable, cyclical passage of time. Furthermore, the families portrayed are atypical because, unlike the poor, poverty-stricken and starving families of the Franco era, all three generations find the time to contemplate their past actions and future possibilities, unlike realistic poverty-stricken and starving families during the Franco era. They partake in the one activity that is most dangerous for a government trying to impose a monological discourse: reflection. Buero allows these silences as time for meditation on death as well as to presage broken relationships, further emphasizing the broken family.

Although *Historia de una escalera* lacked the intrigue or dramatic tension of a crime, Sastre's *La mordaza* again utilizes a murder around which to center the plotline, like Jardiel's *Eloísa*. The characters in this play, however, cannot conveniently forget the consequences and emotional trauma surrounding their father's crime. Sastre uses the Krappo family to symbolize Spain as a nation, and every family member in some way undercuts the traditional values espoused by the Nationalist Regime. Isaías diverges from

the example set by *Raza*'s Pedro Sr. in every way: he cares not for the rest of the community, he treats his wife and children with disdain and cruelty, he murders someone during a time of peace, he is manipulative and vindictive, and he has raped his daughter-in-law. Antonia, the mother, is almost completely blind physically and is metaphorically blind to the injustice of her husband's actions. Characterized by a nominal, almost empty faith, she sits idle as Isaías abuses their children verbally, emotionally, and physically, representing the tacit complicity of the Catholic Church in the crimes of the Regime. All three sons are weak and cowardly, lacking the confidence and self-assuredness of most machista male role models. Although no hero, Luisa is the closest to it, speaking out against her oppressor. Of course, her behavior in no way aligns with the precepts of the Sección Femenina, as she is neither longsuffering nor obedient. The entire family functions only on fear, and Isaías uses this fear to ensure silence regarding the crime he has committed.

Sastre employs the rhetoric of silence in similar ways as Buero, as the characters often leave important conversations unsaid, and the playwright adds pauses to stage directions to build dramatic tension. Characters use more euphemisms in *La mordaza*, and the symbolism of censorship is more obvious in the form of the "gag" that keeps every family member from telling the Comisario the truth. The most unique way Sastre employs the rhetoric of silence is through the weather, revealed through lighting, set designs, characters' behavior, or direct references to heat, cold, and thunderstorms. The weather requires no words to suggest Sastre's counter discourse, but manages to set the tone of each act and each conversation, helping to convey the message to the audience. It

is a verbally silent force that manages to reveal characters' motives, their feelings, possible danger, and more.

The techniques of silence and the counter discourse of family values are not strategies unique to the works and authors analyzed in this thesis, as the aforementioned quote by Bataille reveals. Writers perfected the rhetoric of silence in order to publish under the Nationalist censorship laws. Jardiel wrote *Madre el drama padre* (1941) and *Los ladrones somos gente honrada* (1941), using similar techniques to flout the fascist government's claim to authority. In the former play, the plot centers on two sets of quadruplets as they prepare for their wedding and the absurd revelations that occur as deceitful family members finally come forward about the truth of their bloodlines. The latter play delights in confusing identities, also involving greedy, murderous family members, but more importantly, like in *Eloísa*, the particulars surrounding the play's dénouement "undermine the happy ending and leave the reader or spectator with a vaguely unsettled feeling that all wrongs have still not been set right" (Blackwell 226). Buero Vallejo's *En la ardiente oscuridad* (1950) focuses on a community, or "family," of blind citizens—adding a silence of sight to the mix—as one boy strays from the group ideal and rejects complacency. He refuses to embrace his blindness, a rebellion that later leads to his death. Sastre's infamous *Escuadra hacia la muerte* (1953) has strong ties to *La mordaza*, as well, but here the family is a military family, a squadron of men in World War III sent to the front lines as punishment for previous crimes. Although eventually rebelling against their dictator, Gobán, each soldier is unable to endure the torturous silence as they wait for certain death, either by line of fire or by the judicial system. Other dramatists such as Fernando Arrabal deal with censorship in similar ways, and in his play

Picnic en el campo de batalla (1952), family members absurdly ignore the signs of battle that threaten them and choose instead to have a picnic, pretending that everything is fine. Because theater is the most public form of literature, these examples are important for understanding Spanish society at the time and the ways citizens, spectators and playwrights alike, reacted to tyranny. Plays have access to a wider range of audience members and the ability to speak to them where they are. Regarding the rhetoric of silence, audience members can visually experience the nonverbal communication—the gestures, facial expressions, and pauses—allowing for more implicit communication between dramaturge and spectator and making the rhetoric of silence that much more effective.

Because of these aspects, theater can give us clues to read other genres: if we examine the most public genre and the plays that were widely attended, we can apply these findings to short stories, novels, and poetry. The strategies to create a counter discourse against the Francoist narrative studied here were emblematic of techniques across the board. In prose, the techniques studied here continued to be important to authors including Camilo José Cela. His novel *La familia de Pascual Duarte*, published in 1942, represents a totally corrupt and dysfunctional family and alludes to the censorship of the time period. Carmen Laforet's *Nada*, published in 1945, is full of decaying family relationships, as well, and Laforet even symbolically silences herself by titling her novel "Nada," or nothing, as if her message were not important. Other examples of novels include Ana María Matute's *Primera memoria* (1959) and Luis Martín-Santos' *Tiempo de silencio* (1961). Gabriel Celaya, in his poem "Aviso" (1947), wrote, "Escribiría un poema perfecto/ si no fuera indecente hacerlo en estos tiempos"

(20). Celaya saw his poetry as a tool, “poesía-herramienta” (“La poesía” 99). When all else failed, Blas de Otero noted, “me queda la palabra” (“En el principio” 104). Blas de Otero’s poem “Pato,” published in 1955, describes a duck who lives “para nadar, nadar por todo el mundo,/ pato para viajar sin pasaporte/ y repasar, pasar, pasar fronteras” (“Pato” 90). Below the surface of his words lies the anguish the poet felt at knowing he could not travel freely in and out of his country, how his words and actions were constantly scrutinized. All of these authors adapted and used censorship to their advantage, creating rich, multi-layered literature of all genres that spoke to a higher purpose, a voice against tyranny, oppression, and injustice.[1]

While only Sastre uses the obvious metaphor of “la mordaza,” all these dramatists felt their speech “gagged” or limited in some way. We have seen this “mordaza” in *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro* in the poverty of the lower class at the theater, the vapid or repetitive conversations due to the inability to have meaningful conversation, and the families’ evasion and silencing of Eloísa’s murder. The “mordaza” in *Historia de una escalera* takes form in the cyclical poverty the characters cannot escape, ensuring that they are too concerned with survival ever to protest or disagree with the government’s policies, and silencing their life experience. Through this obvious rhetoric of silence, coupled with the dismantling of the family structure and perversion of Franco’s traditional values, these playwrights prevailed with silence when words could only fail them. They condemned tyranny and suffering, hoping their plays would change their audience members and open their eyes to the truth of Spain’s predicament. As

[1] When Franco died in 1975, literary production exploded in new directions. Two possible routes authors took included the recovery of lost memories, of the “buried bodies” of the past, or the final release of repressed sexual feelings and frustration against gender roles. See Brady, Izurieta, and Medina’s *Collapse, Catastrophe, and Rediscovery: Spain’s Cultural Panorama in the Twenty-First Century*.

Fischer believes, “Art enables man to comprehend reality, and not only helps him to bear it but increases his determination to make it more human and more worthy of mankind,” and we can apply this belief to literature and the dramas studied here (46). Unfortunately, despite this anticipated outcome, neither the humanizing laughter of Jardiel, nor the open-ended hope of Buero, nor the stark, bleak realism of Sastre, nor the efforts of their contemporaries in poetry or prose managed to bring about a revolution. Spaniards buried their memories, thoughts, and feelings for over twenty years more until Francisco Franco died in 1975.

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