
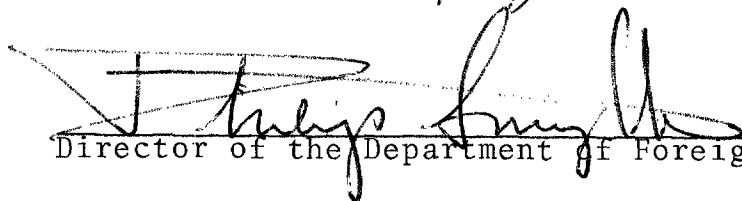


CARLOS MUÑIZ AND SOCIAL DRAMA

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288

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The problem with which this investigation is concerned is that of determining the merit of the works of the contemporary Spanish playwright Carlos Muñiz in the area of social drama. The three methods used to make this evaluation are an objective presentation of the contents of five plays chosen as representative of Mr. Muñiz' works in this literary field; the comments of numerous critics concerning these five plays; and various remarks made by the author about his own esthetic and social aims.

In the introductory chapter a brief summary is made of the history of the theater in Spain. A prevalent sense of guilt is considered as one motivation for dramatists who have chosen to bring social ills to the attention of the public. It is assumed that certain general characteristics of modern Spanish audiences hinder these plays from having the effectiveness their authors might wish. The evolution of social drama in Spain is traced from the late nineteenth century up to the present. The role of the Spanish government's censorship board in script difficulties is also described. The remainder of this

chapter is a biographical summary of Muñiz' life and his various literary achievements.

The first play discussed is Telarañas, an experiment in forms. Critical reviews reflect the fact that Muñiz was an inexperienced playwright, yet his particular combination of fantasy and reality, centering around man's isolation, are shown to justify the encouragement he received from respected theatrical sources.

This study combines the next two plays, El grillo and El precio de los sueños, into one chapter because together they represent Muñiz' efforts to project social aims through naturalism. In El grillo, a lower-income family struggles to survive in the atmosphere of failure which is embodied in the protagonist himself. El precio de los sueños is the story of a middle-class provincial family, whose problems stem from the main character's insistence that the family should appear better off financially than it is.

Expressionism is presented as Muñiz' chosen form for his next play, El tintero. His ability to transform the world of bureaucracy into a frantic nightmare is discussed and compared to similar artistic efforts in Spain and elsewhere. A grotesque futility haunts the protagonist of the play, driving him from one tragic loss to another. The popularity of this play shows it

to be the fortunate combination of subject and form that Muñiz had sought for his aims.

The last play discussed, Las viejas difíciles, presents an unusual number of difficulties. The theme of dehumanization is projected through a chaotic atmosphere of tyranny and desperation. The intervention of several well-written scenes of black humor are credited with off-setting the otherwise unconvincing combination of characters, dialogue, and action.

The conclusion of a concentrated study of these five plays seems to support the assumption that Carlos Muñiz is assured of a place in the ranks of the social dramatists of his era. The value of social drama itself as a lasting contribution to art and culture is accepted with reservations.

CARLOS MUÑIZ AND SOCIAL DRAMA

THESIS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. THE SPANISH THEATER AND CARLOS MUÑIZ.	1
II. AN EXPERIMENT IN FORMS: <u>TELARANAS</u>	19
III. NATURALISM AND SOCIAL DRAMA: <u>EL GRILLO</u> AND <u>EL PRECIO DE LOS SUEÑOS</u>	29
IV. EXPRESSIONISM AND SOCIAL DRAMA: <u>EL TINTERO</u>	47
V. A STUDY IN DEHUMANIZATION: <u>LAS VIEJAS DIFICILES</u>	63
VI. CONCLUSION.	79
BIBLIOGRAPHY	87

CHAPTER I

THE SPANISH THEATER AND CARLOS MUÑIZ

For more than three thousand years the experience of theater has invited man to journey into a world of pretense where for a little while he can live a glorious lie. Such a medium, capably employed, can be a powerful force in any society which honors it. Although a spectator may recover his own identity with the fall of the last curtain, drama is still considered to be that form of art which leaves the most profound impression on its public (3, p. 34). Inasmuch as the show inevitably goes on, much thought has been dedicated to the question of what should be its aim. Opinions range from simple entertainment--a pleasant escape from reality--, to the grimmest sort of indoctrination. The history of Spanish drama is filled with examples from both ends of the spectrum and from all the shadings in between. The early religious dramas centered around spiritual instruction; those of the Golden Age were entertaining, moralizing, sometimes philosophical; the género chico, enjoyed by Spaniards for centuries, still provides humor in the form of modern sainetes and zarzuelas; and social drama continues to evolve in its determination to inspire, if not to flagellate, its audiences into a deeper sense of guilt for the world's ills.

The massive guilt complex, which Freud himself might well have found overwhelming, has become the sword and banner of sensitive young playwrights throughout the civilized world. By the standards of many modern cognoscenti of theater, a play without a message concerning social injustice is not worthy of the boards. This contagion of empathetic paranoia has infected many Spanish playwrights as well, including the author under consideration here, Carlos Muñiz. Unfortunately for Muñiz and his like-minded colleagues, Spanish audiences continue to patronize plays that do not demand self-incrimination. In fact, it is difficult to find an encouraging word from informed literary sources about the present-day state of affairs in Spanish theaters. Countless productions fill the billboards yearly, but the lack of their vigor is reflected in a low pay scale for actors (sometimes as little as two dollars a day), and the closing down of some commercial theaters due to poor attendance and prohibitive taxation. Often the remaining theaters seek to "conform to popular and sometimes vulgar taste instead of encouraging the creation of an artistic, living drama" (6, p. 129). Whether it be in classic works or in the shallow variety of some modern authors, Spanish audiences are accused of burying their heads to avoid facing problems of everyday reality by paying to see plays which are empty of relevant content. Antonio Buero Vallejo blames this seeming indifference on environmental determinism:

La falta de desarrollo económico y social de nuestro país, que viene de siglos, determinaría un inmovilismo, una paralización de la sociedad española, que segregaría en sus momentos más inertes artificiales formas coercitivas de las actividades creadoras, orientadas a la conservación de esa parálisis (4, p. 58).

It must be conceded, too, that the deep scars of world wars and a devastating civil war might encourage the Spanish public to seek out plays that entertain rather than disturb.

Actually, the reasons for a serious play's failure can be complex, including not only the aforementioned possibilities, but also those of bad taste, poor style, mediocre staging, inadequacies in the casting, and bad reviews in the newspapers. However, the most popular object of analysts' resentment seems to be a Philistine monster called the middle class. It is ironical that the two groups that are close to the heart of the social dramatist do not constitute a significant part of his audience: the intellectuals, who rarely attend plays, and the laboring class, that cannot afford to do so. These authors are forced to write plays for the very middle class which they in fact repudiate. Dramatists like Muñoz, Olmo, and Buded, however, tend to base their integrity as writers on stripping an audience of all its hypocrisies and false values in order to "enriquecer el sentido y pureza de la aventura humana (11, p. 16).

Meanwhile, their middle-class audiences prefer to applaud more superficial works which require a minimum of intellectual effort, and which reinforce their basic conservatism,

traditional immobility, blind patriotism, tendency to criticize form rather than substance, and suspicion of any suggestions for change.

Regardless of the defensive attitude of many spectators, new Spanish dramatists are determined to be heard. As García Pavón states, "Cada momento literario requiere una instrumentación específica y oportuna" (7, p. 38). He lists Muñiz with such notable company as Kafka, Chaplin, Brecht, and Ionesco, in that the symbolism and expressionism of their artistry clearly reflected the social problems of their time. Now Muñiz and his generación contra tedio aspire to project their own image of reality and to contribute to a profound renovation of Spanish society. The desire to refine social drama for this purpose is traced by some critics to the performance of Miller's Death of a Salesman in Spain, an event that stimulated a wider reading knowledge of foreign theater and a keener sense of the need for change. Earlier efforts at social drama in Spain, such as Dicenta's Juan José (1895), contained political bombast, blame easily fixed on the well-to-do, and the reiteration of the already threadbare pundonor theme. The new social drama contains an approach that is no less anguished, but is presented in a manner that is restrained. Settings are most often limited to the gris paz del hogar of a low-income family; economic contrasts are avoided. Political opinions are not only absent, but the play's very theme--far from being obvious--must

gradually dawn upon the mind of the viewer. The predominant mood is one of resignation, and the ending most often bears out the futility of trying to solve problems under the present conditions of society. The most notable refinement, perhaps, is the author's failure to fix the blame for social ills on any one person, class, or institution; instead he makes his protest "refiriendo sus acusaciones a una maldición colectiva y casi fatal" (8, p. 142). Thus the new social drama is more subtle, enjoys a greater esthetic quality, and therefore calls for a finer degree of literary artistry. The struggle for economic survival, however, continues to be a major theme, and is certainly dominant in most of Muñiz' dramatic works.

The sensitive minds of every age must be counted on to see through its trappings and warn the less aware of its pitfalls. Our own civilized world of smiling advertisements and forced cheer based on material comforts is a source of deep irritation to angry young dramatists. Jean Paul Borel, in reviewing the plays of Buero Vallejo, paints a vivid picture of the sham of modern life which artists are trying to expose in their works:

Igualmente, el hombre occidental de hoy--para sólo hablar de él--también es desgraciado; pasa regularmente por la prueba de la guerra; para permitir a los diferentes países tener un ejército suficiente, acepta trabajar mucho más de lo que sería necesario; se contenta con un salario que no corresponde a su trabajo; vive en ciudades llenas de ruido y de humo; ni puede decir todo lo que piensa ni hacer todo lo que quiere; la publicidad le obliga solapadamente a divertirse de determinada manera artificial

o a privarse de lo esencial para comprar tal producto declarado "indispensable", etc. Pero es necesario que este hombre no se dé cuenta de la situación, porque se rebelaría. Entonces se propaga el mito de la felicidad y de la superioridad de nuestra civilización, se multiplican las estadísticas sobre la mejora del nivel de vida, se aumentan regularmente los salarios y sobre todo se da a cada uno su ración semanal de cine, de televisión, de fútbol, de canciones (3, p. 241).

Dramatists attempting to convey the dangers of this deluded existence are using narrative objectivism, making themselves absent from their works, and letting the message be absorbed by the spectator through observance of average people in average situations. The audience thus becomes aware of the effects of false values, poverty, hollow lives based on selfishness, and the necessity for the human situation to improve in order to make life endurable. Borel states: "El teatro debe ser hoy uno de los grandes instrumentos de esta transformación, grito de alarma al mismo tiempo que indicador de soluciones o, al menos, de cambios" (3, p. 229). Writers want their public to think about what they perceive, but even more, to feel themselves part of it. This is an echo of the old Aristotelian catharsis concept of drama, and perhaps the ultimate justification of all drama.

Muñiz personally considers "de urgencia lo social en la creación literaria" (9, p. 24). He warns, in the same context, against authors who declare themselves committed, but actually refer more to being committed to the status quo than to salutary change. He also disparages writers who begin their careers in rebellion, but eventually become

subjected to the preferences of a frivolous society. One problem involved here is the need for writers to make a living. (Muñiz himself, unable to survive by his art alone, finds it necessary to hold a government position). Other obstacles to the survival of this cheerless brand of theater are pointed out by various critics: oppressive dialectic criticism is of dubious theatricality; the ruthless search for truth is often bolstered by boring and redundant speeches; these authors, verbally committed to the down-trodden, may reveal instead a passionate need to be divorced from the masses. Torrente Ballester, in his introduction to El teatro de lo imposible, suggests that the problem of present-day authors is not the message but the method, that they have not discovered as yet "el secreto de sujetar al público en su asiento por medio de una acción y unas palabras" (3, pp. 14-15). The formal subtlety of anti-middle class drama often precludes its own success, and may cause an author to declare defensively, as does Muñiz, that even if his dramas are not accepted on the stage, he had the pleasure of writing them honestly (9, p. 26). Yet no dramatist writes plays strictly for the satisfaction of seeing his thoughts on paper. His is, of all the arts, the most direct in its desire to communicate.

A political situation peculiar to Spain also figures in the difficulties of Spanish theater today. When the government of Franco came to power a press law was passed. Any disrespectful reference to the Catholic Church, the State,

or to Franco himself, in printed material or in public spectacles, became subject to government censorship (13, p. 282). Plays had to be approved by a committee, composed mostly of priests, which lacked specific norms for censorship. After 1963 the reins were relaxed somewhat in that norms were established and the committee came to consist predominantly of laymen. In 1966 more freedom of expression was given to newspapers, magazines, and books, but prior censorship of public entertainment continues. Scripts are reviewed by this committee and are either approved or marked for cuts and changes. If the author accepts the suggested changes, his play may be produced. Still a second censorship right prevails at dress rehearsal, at which time additional demands for change may be made. Understandably, much time is spent by the director trying to effect agreement between author and committee. Without this accord, the play will be rejected. The attitude of government censorship to date seems to reflect a Victorian morality and a defensiveness toward the improvements for workers which social drama propounds. The fact that writers, publishers, producers, and artists of all kinds risk fines if certain boundaries are overstepped has hampered creativity and repressed style. Material censored from various plays includes: a joking reference to a religious order; a derogatory term for the idle rich; reference to a labor union; allusions to the Civil War; and political themes, particularly totalitarianism. Specific

references to Spain as a sad and difficult country, for example, were censored from Buero Vallejo's Las meninas. (This latter objection seems particularly narrow-minded, since the statements were made by the character Velázquez about the Spain of his own time). Patricia W. O'Conner, whose detailed study on this subject has provided the above information, reflects:

Because of censorship, some of Spain's finest minds have been either manacled or silenced. Others, rather than show a passive acceptance of a situation they deplore, prefer to live and produce abroad. The real heroes, perhaps, are those who stoically remain in Spain, feeling it their duty not to abandon ship in times of stress, and who stubbornly refuse to write facile situation comedy. Some burn many a candle, certainly, trying to put their ideas into an acceptable framework that will pass censorship and at the same time satisfy their own standards of esthetic expression (13, p. 282).

Some writers claim to ignore censorship, declaring they must write honestly, but often these have been conspicuous in their absence from theater productions. Some writers mask their ideas behind acceptable subtlety; this is quite possibly the case in El tintero, for Muñiz complains to J. Monleón:

Mientras no estemos libres de limitaciones expresivas y el diálogo entre el autor y el público no se dé, sin cortapisas, permitiendo una aceptación o una desestimación libre sobre lo que el dramaturgo propone, la solución estará siempre en el aire Ten en cuenta que El tintero no es, exactamente, la obra que yo hubiera querido escribir (9, p. 28).

Muñiz is affected by the same persistent fever of denunciatory euphoria that has afflicted many young European

and American writers. His particular manifestation of it is described by Francisco Alvaro as a timid sort of drama, the very hesitancy of which suggests the playwright's frustrations (1, p. 118). Yet, while much of the breast-beating among dramatists over "what man has done to man" appears to be little more than riding the wave of a popular guilt movement in literature, Muñiz' commitment seems extremely personal. The violence of his reaction to a subject as humdrum as bureaucracy, for example, implies his condemnation of "what man has done to me."

Muñiz' anarchistic approach to drama does resist pat formulas for audience acceptance, and can be very irritating, but he usually keeps his antagonisms within a disciplined framework of good dramatic form. José Monleón resents critics who demand more conformity of an author, "como si 'el teatro' fuese una manía particular, un mundo cerrado de artesanos, y no una forma más de expresar los problemas" (11, p. 16). In his judgment, Muñiz' abilities transcend the limitations of social drama. He feels Muñiz' work can be considered "social" only "hasta donde no arriesga su profundo anarquismo sentimental" (10, p. 47), and that the playwright is immersed precisely in investigating the causes of his own anarchism. The autobiographical notes on Muñiz' life (12, pp. 73-79) bear this out. He was born in 1927 in Madrid, the son of a dedicated doctor. The only other child was a younger sister, María del Carmen, to whom he later dedicated

his play, El grillo. He says wryly that the advent of the Republic in 1931 gave him the measles, and that thanks to the Civil War, he learned to throw rocks and steal eggs in a mountain village. Injuries and illnesses, including an ankle broken while running for a bomb shelter, seem to figure large in his memories. As his interest in books developed, he admired such authors as Dickens, Verne, Voltaire, Dostoyevski, Baroja, and Unamuno. Muñiz' attraction to the latter two is also a reflection of the deep affection he came to feel for the Basque people while living in Bilbao. He showed an early detestation for persons who profit from the limitations of other humans, and felt that millionaires are no better than sodomites (12, p. 75). He also came to believe that modern society should provide financial security for all those born into it. The preoccupation of his fellow students in law school with shallow pursuits--such as soccer games--was annoying to him, and, under financial pressures, he took a post with the Ministry of Public Finance, finishing his degree in his spare time.

Muñiz' interest in writing drama began with his disgust at attending an old play in the Lara Theater in Madrid. His first effort, Telarañas, was performed in that theater the following year, 1955. The reviews were predominantly bad, but only five months later he had recovered enough to write another play, El grillo, which prompted Buero Vallejo to say, "No es mucho tiempo. Muñiz es hombre más animoso de lo que

él mismo cree" (4, p. 60). El grillo was performed in 1957 and won a prize from the Teatro Nacional de Cámara y Ensayo. Two plays written in the late fifties, En silencio and Villa Denaria, failed to find a publisher, but Ruinas (1957) was performed for the Círculo Catalán, having won the Juegos Florales award in 1958. His next play, El precio de los sueños (1958), won the Carlos Arniches award, but was not performed until eight years later. Muñiz is most widely known for El tintero (1960), performed first by the Grupo de Teatro Realista in 1961. Since then it has been performed on many Spanish and Latin American stages, and translated into French, Portuguese, German, and Dutch. This expressionistic outburst of bitterness against the world of the white-collar worker was an overt change of emotional pace for Muñiz, perhaps influenced by his having become a family man with job troubles during the time it was written. In 1958 he accepted a position with Televisión Española, but lost it, an experience which left him disgusted with his superiors and television. He mentions that the reason he was dismissed was his insistence on wearing a beard, and that, as a result of his unemployment, his wife almost miscarried their first child. His next attempt was with radio, where again he was urged by his director to leave, this time because of quarrels over program content. The next year, 1961, he wrote an even more violent drama, Las viejas difíciles, decrying the extremes of human injustice and hypocrisy. Its premiere five years later

was perhaps thanks to revisions he made in 1962 and the aforementioned relaxation of censorship beginning in 1963. The audience, however, was less than responsive, and Muñiz' attitude was defiant (1, p. 123). Un solo de saxofón, a harsh one-act indictment of racism and unemployment, was also written in 1961. There is no indication that it was performed, nor that Muñiz authored another play until the brief announcement of Miserere por un medio fraile on March 21, 1969, by the Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático (2, p. 289). Meanwhile speculation arose as to whether he had allowed the discouragement caused by audience response, demands of government censors, or even by the intricacies of his own personality, to make him forget his promise: "Seguiré mientras mis manos puedan escribir" (12, p. 79).

Recently Muñiz has turned his talents back to television, writing scripts for special programs and for series. In his Spanish version of American television's Ironside, named Visto para sentencia, Muñiz says he tried to "mostrar la eficacia de la ley frente al individuo" (14, p. 57). A series he completed in 1972 for summer viewing was inspired by the tragic loss of his father in a highway crash. In this series, called "Stop", Muñiz confronts each individual with the necessity for orderly driving. While three of his earlier works--El tintero, Las viejas difíciles, and Un solo de saxofón--portray law enforcement officers as moronic monsters, the heroes of "Stop" are a lieutenant and two aides from the

Guardia Civil. Author Muñiz, referred to a decade ago as a sentimental anarchist, would seem an unlikely champion of law and order, much less for a medium he once designated as "un invento para idiotizar" (12, p. 77). Now Muñiz, smooth-shaven (no longer wearing the offending goatee), and better adjusted to his society, hopes this series may reach the consciences of even as few as twenty automobile drivers in order to reduce the number of highway fatalities. He feels the potential of the car itself encourages irresponsibility: "los artefactos son cada día más perfectos; pero se utilizan como juguete para desahogar a veces esa agresividad que el hombre moderno lleva dentro" (14, p. 59). He takes care to insert spots of humor into scenes of death and violence, a tendency present also in his earlier expressionist dramas. He claims, "No pretendo abrumar, sino sólo llevar a la conciencia de todos las trágicas consecuencias de la más leve imprudencia" (14, p. 59). Muñiz' subject matter also shows a growing interest in Spain's history. A taxi driver, having surprised him by evincing knowledge of Madrid under Carlos III, admitted he learned it from a television program. Since the script had been written by Muñiz, the incident gave him a sense of accomplishing his aim in the field of television: "hacer un espacio didáctico" (14, p. 61). His concern for social drama and an honest approach to life find expression in his television scripts, although his main interest still lies with stage productions. He regrets being

better known now for television than for theater, although, as he remarks, "los estudiantes americanos hagan sus tesinas sobre mi teatro" (14, p. 57). Another change in the mature Muñiz is his awareness of himself as a writer with proven ability. He is adding a novel, La tragicomedia del serenísimo Príncipe don Carlos, to his list of literary accomplishments, although he realizes that getting it published as it is will present problems (14, p. 61). Looking back over the difficult times in his life, including hunger and the lack of funds for needed medicines, he denies that he is bitter: "No. Valoro todo con justicia" (14, p. 61). He is proud of the fact that his grasp of real values has kept him honest and humble. He remembers remarking to his wife, while walking home from an occasion on which he received an award: "Has visto todo de esta noche? . . . Pues no te creas nada . . . La única verdad es esto: la noche, el paseo, la luna allá arriba, el cielo, tú y yo" (14, p. 61). Self-assured in the role he now fills, he is still writing works for which he knows the public is not yet ready. Meanwhile he enjoys the reputation of being "un autor formado por nuestra historia contemporánea y por un actitud creadora de origen antiguo" (5, inside cover).

Although Carlos Muñiz is relatively new to the theatrical scene in Spain, his writings for the stage are already of sufficient volume and importance to merit a serious study. Of course, it seems reasonable to assume that the trajectory

of his dramatic orientation remains in a state of dynamic evolution and, therefore, it would be difficult to speculate with regard to the playwright's future artistic direction. To a degree, even his works to date resist categorization according to theme, technique, structure, character portrayal and other related elements. Nevertheless, certain trends or currents in Muñiz' theater are already quite discernible; at times, these overlap and fuse, while at others, they are manifest in a relatively pure state. In any case, an attempt to define a series of stages in the development of his art will facilitate an understanding of each play--individually and as an integral part of an artistic totality--and, in addition, permit an evaluation of Muñiz' contribution to the Spanish theater.

Decidedly representative of the phases involved in the process of Muñiz' artistic maturation are five plays: Telarañas, El grillo and El precio de los sueños (two aspects of one approach to drama), El tintero, and Las viejas difíciles. Telarañas, as might be expected of an initial effort, constitutes a somewhat nebulous composite of techniques and themes. By the same token, it contains, in pristine form, all the elements which will evolve to form the nucleus of the playwright's subsequent dramatic perspective. The later plays indicate, in general, an intensification of Muñiz' commitment to the social aspect of theater. At the same time, they testify to his growing awareness of the existential problem

which confronts and envelops man; in a kind of conspiracy with unjust society, Muñiz seems to feel, it threatens to determine for man the most deplorable destiny of all: the very loss of his own humanity.

In harmony with this thematic evolution and corresponding to the abyss which separates Telarañas from Las viejas difíciles, is a process of change in technique. Muñiz proceeds from the orderly and predictable naturalism of El grillo and El precio de los sueños (already patent in Telarañas), to the controlled expressionism of El tintero, and finally explodes in the orgiastic exaggeration of Las viejas difíciles.

Apparently, Muñiz, as a man, has mellowed considerably and, in his personal life, has achieved a degree of harmony between sincere commitment to social goals and the need to survive within his society. Muñiz as a dramatist, on the other hand, has become progressively more extreme and feverish in his attempt to expose the dangers inherent in that society. Perhaps it is only because of the latter that he has been able to achieve the former.

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CHAPTER II

AN EXPERIMENT IN FORMS: TELARAÑAS

Carlos Muñiz' first play was relegated rather ingloriously to one performance on a Sunday morning in May, 1955. Its director, Manuel Ruiz-Castillo, had met Muñiz through a mutual friend who knew that the director was looking for new plays. Ruiz-Castillo read Telarañas and liked it. Muñiz' remarks during rehearsals were so pessimistic that the director had him sit in the back and be silent, rather than infect the cast with his fears. Even moments before the curtain went up, Muñiz, sure of rejection, was trying to call off the play. Alfredo Marqueríe, critic for ABC, says the drama was warmly applauded but was not mature enough to be considered a success (4, p. 93). Poor character development and action that seemed forced and uneven were attributed to the author's youth and inexperience. The critic for Pueblo struck a note that was to be sounded again many times concerning Muñiz' works: "Telarañas está en ese catálogo del teatro moderno, oscilante entre realismo y evasión, cuya nota principal es la disociación del individuo y la sociedad" (4, p. 94). Several critics complimented parts of the dialogue that showed lyric qualities. Gómez Picazo, as quoted by José Monleón, judged that Muñiz showed better

mastery of the sentimental than of the intellectual, and a greater aptitude for the poetic than for the philosophical (6, p. 47). All agreed that Muñiz should not lose heart, but should "enter the bull ring" again. His most enthusiastic supporter, Antonio Buero Vallejo, found in Telarañas surprising sureness in much of the dialogue, deep truth in the life situation of the protagonists, and an honest, Chekovian undertone to the play, which caused him to evaluate it as superior to that of a novice (2, p. 60). In reply to Muñiz' dejection, he says that Buero Vallejo advised him: "Debes seguir. Tú eres autor" (7, p. 76). It is very likely Muñiz would have tried again in any case, for that one morning in the Lara Theater seems to have been exposure enough to the creative demon that possesses all artists.

A giant cobweb covers the front of the stage through most of this play. El Hombre appears in clothing that is elegant but shabby, and tells the audience that his job is to clear away whatever hides the truth. He tries to tear down the huge web with his umbrella, but gives up and leaves. Behind it the scene is a dusty garret, the home of Avelino, an artist of thirty-five, and his cat. Avelino's friend, Damián, a successful businessman, rather envies the former's style of life, and is also envious of his tutoring a rich, pretty girl named Susi. She, too, is fascinated by Avelino and his simple existence, and decides to marry him. Her father tries to dissuade them with money. El Hombre appears,

offering to clean the room, but instead he intrigues Susi's father with his market predictions. Avelino worries about Susi's living without luxuries, but will not assert his will either to break the engagement or to support her better. Damián says Avelino has cobwebs in his head. The couple's only wedding guests are Damián, Susi's friend Luciana, and the coarse landlady Engracia. El Hombre again offers to clean, and is invited to join them instead. After the guests leave, Susi sheds tears over the alienation of her parents. When winter comes she is miserable with her chores and the cold, and is encouraged to feel sorry for herself by Luciana, who is interested in Avelino for herself, and by Damián, who has designs on Susi. Susi is loyal, but sad, realizing that Avelino's life is made up of illusions. El Hombre comes to clear the cobwebs again, and this time Avelino permits him to do so. Simultaneously Avelino becomes aware of Luciana's desire for him, Damián's coolness toward him, and Susi's plans to go to Italy with her parents. Engracia tells him his cat is dead, and as the play ends, Avelino is more alone than ever, wondering if the cobwebs will grow back again.

Muñiz' affinity for an expressionistic touch of the supernatural emerges at this early point in his career in El Hombre. His presence overshadows the facts of the story with a certain subjectivity, a process which Borel calls the first phase of poetic transposition (1, p. 178). This

unimpressive-looking character with his worn top hat and self-effacing ways knows the secrets of the present and can foretell the future. His identification with the world of dreams and the subconscious also serves as a surrealist manifestation of the basic interactions and meaning of the play. Despite his persistence in clearing away the cobwebs to reveal the truth, he knows the truth will hurt, and sheds tears of sympathy after doing his job. Even though such a revelation can be postponed, eventually it must be faced, so he is accustomed to waiting. The fact that the denouement may contain an ironic twist causes El Hombre to voice a philosophy which will reappear in the theater of Muñiz:

" . . . como si lo grotesco no fuera dramático y lo dramático grotesco, como si no existiera algo misterioso que mezcla ambos conceptos en una aleación cuyo nombre es para todos el mismo . . .: Vida" (8, p. 8). The alienation or distanciación effect achieved by El Hombre's prologue to the audience is reminiscent of Brecht. El Hombre himself is a character outside time and place, a redeeming touch of fantasy injected into the old plot of a May-December marriage. The cobwebs, his main interest and the symbolic center of the plot, also constitute a creative element, especially in the expressionist impact of a huge one draped across the front of the stage.

Muñiz also uses the expressionist medium of sounds to intensify the dramatic significance of the action. An

example is his inclusion of the tune Marea baja to indicate Susi's presence and to emphasize audibly the invasion of her freshness into an accumulation of dust and disrepair. In marking the passage of time, the sound of church bells serves as an esthetic contrast to the watch which Susi's father insists is mechanically perfect, and therefore right. Another effect of the bells is to bestow a spirit of consecration upon Avelino's monastic existence. The last action of the play in which Avelino sprinkles his room and the dead cat with milk reinforces the religious significance, and adds a sense of irrevocability.

A contrast between dreams and reality is embodied in the protagonist and his friend. Avelino is the son of a successful engineer and a lady of distinguished family. While his Bohemian existence seems ideal for his natural introversion and resignation to fate, he still feels at times that he has betrayed his heritage. This lack of harmony between a man and his society recurs often in Muñiz' works, although here the limitations seem to lie more in the character of Avelino himself than in his circumstances. Damián insists that his friend is what he has made of himself, more at home with cobwebs, books, and his cat than with people. This is not so undesirable within itself, but seems to preclude the possibility of a happy marriage. Avelino is dedicated to understanding human nature, but is convinced that introspection alone is the key to it. Susi's headstrong

impulse to marry him presents certain threats to the happiness of both, but Avelino's willingness to be led by fate causes him to ignore the danger. In addition, he considers sadness a natural state of mind, and believes that "la alegría es un mal producto . . . ciega, tapa más que estas telarañas" (8, p. 42). Damián, his pragmatic counterpart, feels it is thoughtless of Avelino to risk destroying Susi's happiness, too, and gradually falls in love with her himself. He is a fighter, completely realistic about the odds in any battle, and convinced that the only defeat to be considered final is death itself. His sincere affection for Avelino softens their sharp differences in personality, but this is a character contrast Muñiz will use in most of his later plays. The two friends are well described by José Monleón in García Pavón's article: "Uno montado sobre la necesidad de escapar de la realidad social, económica, política, moral, y otro sobre la perentoria necesidad de afrontarla" (5, p. 36).

The women in the play also suggest a similar contrast. Susi is not really interested in Avelino's musty life of books, but it represents a change from the lap of luxury in which she has grown up. In this temporary state of enchantment, Avelino seems a hero to her. She is not malicious, but inevitably needs comforts to be content. It is an indication of her basically innocent nature that she deserts Avelino for her parents rather than for Damián.

Luciana, on the other hand, is more worldly-wise, and is eager to experience life in Avelino's garret as simply an adventuresome interlude. She insists she knows what she wants, whereas Susi has always been a capricious dreamer. Avelino, however, out of his hard-won knowledge of the psyche of all pampered women, tells her, "Sois dos mujercitas caprichosas deseáis y os cansáis es una realidad, ni buena ni mala, sino natural" (8, p. 71). The dramas of Muñiz since Telarañas tend toward an even sharper Schopenhauerian view of women, one that emphasizes their endemic capacity for destroying men, even unconsciously.

Already evident in this early play is Muñiz' pre-occupation with the adverse effects of materialism. At this point he gives it a comic touch verging on slapstick in the scene in which Susi's father offers Avelino a stack of bills to renounce his affection for Susi; Avelino and Damián, laughing and dancing around him, stuff the bills into his pockets, top hat, and finally into his mouth. However, the playwright, in his obvious "disdain for creature comfort and a lack of desire for material possessions," regarded by Chandler and Schwartz as a Spanish characteristic (3, p. 8), exposes Susi as shallow and her influence as actually demoralizing. The characters of her father and Damián further crystallize the effects of materialism. One aspect of it in the father is manifest in his insistence that money solves all personal problems. Conversely,

Damián's materialism has a positive value: his practical outlook enables him to face reality better than Avelino.

José Monleón feels Muñiz simply used the story of love between a tutor and his student in order to "tratar el tema único del drama y quizá de toda su producción posterior: la soledad humana" (6, p. 46). The introverted hero has spun himself into a cobweb of solipsism; his love for a girl penetrates and transcends it briefly, but the frustrations involved in having to accept her view of life, as well as his own, cause the effort to fail. The psychology of such a personality is handled with an understanding rather remarkable for a playwright of only twenty-two. His apparent insistence on the futility of the human search for happiness is pronounced here in his first dramatic effort, and will become even more so in his following works. As a solution he will continue to offer resignation, a reflection again of Schopenhauer, in the view that the highest level of existence is a total lack of will. As Avelino says, "En definitiva todo es como tiene que ser" (8, p. 11).

There are several syntheses of contrasting approaches to drama in Telarañas. Immediately obvious is a controlled experiment in fusing realist drama with the aggressive symbolism of expressionism. Also present is the dual plane of subjectivity and concrete reality, oriented "hacia la indagación del sentimiento de soledad" (6, p. 47). The

stark contrast of dreams versus reality seems to intrigue Muñiz, and will constitute an integral part of his approach to social drama. The social theme is already present to a certain degree in Telarañas; regardless of the author's dramatic technique--naturalism, expressionism, experimental theater--, it will prove to be Muñiz' main purpose in writing.

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CHAPTER III

NATURALISM AND SOCIAL DRAMA: EL GRILLO AND EL PRECIO DE LOS SUEÑOS

El grillo

Perhaps because critics insisted so that imaginative departures in Telarañas were the play's undoing, Muñiz concentrated in El grillo on pure naturalist drama. This play has been compared to the works of Carlos Arniches, and also described as "el mundo de Buero visto por Carlos Muñiz con absoluta independencia" (7, p. 33). Buero Vallejo himself was one of the first to read the play, and reacted enthusiastically. It was received by the public on January 31, 1957, in the María Guerrero Theater with "'¡bravos!', gritos, verdadero entusiasmo" (11, p. 82). Torrente Ballester (6, p. 94) mentions the fact that critics found in its pequeño héroe, Mariano, a strong resemblance to Miller's Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman. However, Domingo Pérez Minick (6, p. 98) notes an interesting difference: Mariano reflects Spain in the growing pains of a retarded capitalism, while Loman reflects the United States at a point of ultra-developed capitalism. Muñiz states his own aim as quoted by García Pavón: "Al tomar un tema de la calle para hacer un drama, no pensé hacer obra

social, sino simplemente humana" (7, p. 33). Nonetheless critics discerned in the play all the earmarks of social drama, praising it on this basis for its truth, realism, and human qualities, authentic characters and dialogue. Pérez Minick goes so far as to call it "uno de los primeros dramas sociales, incluso nos atreveríamos a decir socialistas, que haya sido representado en nuestro país" (6, p. 98). He considers it an important document of our time with few precedents anywhere in the world, showing social man situated in a distinct economic dilemma. Surmising that Pérez Minick subscribes to the current consensus that morose drama is authentic drama, one may also construe as praise his observation that El grillo is "una de las obras más pesimistas que conocemos de esta generación amargada y subversiva" (6, p. 97). The play's exposition of unvarnished reality did not guarantee dramatic excellence in the opinion of José Monleón, however, who considered it "una obra que se encerraba en exceso en una monotonía naturalista, en una renuncia a la interversión de los personajes, en un esquematismo de acta notorial" (8, p. 49). He feels that Muñiz' works in general tend to moralize too much, maintaining an undesirable oversimplification such as is found in the sainete. Yet, however desolate the mood of El grillo, Muñiz' talent for lyric expression and dramatic form cannot be denied; as a result, many agree with Torrente Ballester: "Quien lo ha concebido y lo ha escrito así es, sin duda, un dramaturgo" (6, p. 96).

The action is set in a dismal neighborhood typical of social drama. The stage is divided in such a way that the scene does not need to be altered, showing both the inside of Mariano's house and the street outside it. The opening conversation between the protagonist and his wife, Victoria, reveals her disgruntlement over his lack of financial success, a failure she attributes to the fact that he is a dreamer. Mariano covers up his own dejection by being loud and opinionated, insisting that a promotion in his office job is imminent. He feels his brother Lorenzo has done well financially by being hypocritical, while he himself is too proud to flatter others. Mariano's grown son, José Luis, a mechanic, lives with his parents, and his involvement with Encarna, a woman of bad reputation in the neighborhood, is a source of contention in his family. Mariano also rages at him for accepting too small a pay raise. Later he secretly borrows from his son to buy tobacco. Mariano's daughter, Pilar, plans to marry Jacinto, a young office clerk. The couple discusses their engagement plans in the street outside the house. Her father is to buy them bedroom furniture as a dowry. A drunkard passes by singing, and the incident causes Pilar to elicit Jacinto's promise that he will never get drunk. Inside the house later she remarks to her mother that her Uncle Lorenzo has been coming by to see her at work. A pianist is heard, trying to compose a sonata, as Mariano and his friend Martínez stumble out of

a tavern door. Mariano boasts that he always demands his rights; Martínez compares him to a cricket--noisy but ineffectual--and urges him to accept things as they are. Mariano has just lost money at dominoes, and later, at home, he sends Pilar to the tavern to buy wine on credit. José Luis returns home to find his father drunk. They argue, and Mariano strikes him.

On the evening Jacinto is to ask for Pilar's hand formally, she is surprised while alone by a visit from her Uncle Lorenzo. He tries to embrace her, suggesting she should be his mistress. Victoria enters, and Pilar accuses him to her. Lorenzo shrugs it off as unimportant and leaves. Mariano comes home and begins drinking the sherry Pilar has bought for the occasion. The women do not tell him of Lorenzo's behavior. Jacinto arrives, Mariano likes him, and agrees to buy the furniture they need. He still hopes to get his promotion, but Martínez comes by soon to tell him it has been given to another. During this scene the pianist is heard from time to time in a hopeless endeavor to finish his sonata. Mariano, finding all other avenues of getting the money for Pilar closed, decides to humble himself and ask his brother for it. Meanwhile, José Luis, lying to his family about a new job across town, leaves home to live with Encarna. Mariano, in a street vignette, talks two men out of repossessing the pianist's piano, assuring them that the composition will be finished by the next day. The pianist,

less optimistic, goes into the tavern. Mariano proudly presents Lorenzo's check for a large amount to the stunned Victoria and Pilar, and declares Lorenzo a fine brother after all. Mariano plans to spend a little of the money to buy some fine tobacco with which to impress his boss at the office.

Characteristics of naturalist drama are painfully apparent in El grillo. On a superficial plane they reside in the coarse sensuality of Encarna, the bestiality of Lorenzo, and in the physical affliction of José Luis, who walks with a noticeable limp. Alcoholism, already a frequent allusion, finds its epitome in the character of the drunkard, who reels through the street at various moments singing a sad song. In a curious conversation he shares with José Luis he warns that the song he sings is as obscure as both of them are, and that the idea that singing drives your cares away is a fallacy. It is not so difficult to relate the presence of the drunkard to the dramatic framework as it is that of the pianist, whom Torrente Ballester considers to be the useless romantic detour of a young author (6, p. 96). On the other hand, his contribution to the play, usually revealed through the sound of the piano as he struggles with his composition, is correlated to the course of the action, and functions as a relief from the general tedium. As in Telarañas, Muñiz again uses sound as an important dramatic prop, experimenting as well with combinations of

sounds. For example, at the end of the first act the audience hears simultaneously the pianist whistling a tune at his window, Encarna's raucous laughter in the street, the song of the drunkard, and the noise of a cricket. As the second act begins, a sense of chaotic pressure is again symbolized by the simultaneous sounds of an automobile horn, the doorbell, and the pianist's sonata. The play ends to the tune of the loud chirping of a cricket, reminding the viewer subtly that, although all seems resolved, Mariano has been deceived by everyone, and in García Pavón's words, "la triste verdad continúa Todo seguirá, igual, sin remedio" (7, p. 35). This inescapable cycle of despair handed down from one generation to another is a naturalist strongpoint. It is even considered by Gerald Brenan, as quoted by Chandler and Schwartz, as endemic to Spanish life:

The Spaniard is vitally alive when young, but the few opportunities offered him by his country and the boredom resulting from petty employments leave him a disillusioned man, and he spends many of his days in the years after thirty in passivity and disillusionment (5, p. 20).

The pervasive presence of financial straits moves the entire action of the work, and is sadly echoed by the pianist who, after being told that money is not everything, replies, "Pero hace falta siempre" (9, p. 74). This is a problem close to the heart of most artists, including Muffiz himself. Pérez Minick insists that "si Mariano tuviera un mejor salario, toda la dureza, la irritabilidad y la sordidez de El grillo

desaparecerían" (6, p. 98). The archfiend in this case is capitalism in general and bureaucracy in particular. Mariano's whole existence becomes an immense inhuman office where no one defies the current, and where the days drag by with monotonous sameness. According to José Monleón, Muñiz seems to consider bureaucracy a "símbolo masivo de la destrucción del hombre" (8, p. 48). These office clerks become depersonalized objects along with their desks, schedules, graphs, and pens. Monleón feels Muñiz transforms bureaucracy into Bureaucracy, an allegorical figure in a modern auto sacramental, towering over its acolytes and casting its shadow into every corner of the characters' lives (8, p. 48). Mariano voices his scorn for material progress several times, even complaining that it is no longer possible to enjoy a stroll because of the polluted air.

Mariano, "este pequeño burgués fracasado" (6, p. 97), is the central character of the play and actual subject of the title itself. He suffers from inadequacies in both pocketbook and spirit, becoming garrulous and meddlesome as he grows older, his whole life consumed with the hope for a promotion that never comes. His impotent rage over the nothingness of his life causes him to shout to force others to notice him. With sound and fury he seeks to drown out the voice of his own mediocrity. As Borel sees this type of character, "entonces sólo le queda la desesperación y el grito de protesta" (2, p. 44). He also articulates his

desperation by loudly insisting that his illusions are real, while he becomes progressively more bitter because he does not really believe in them himself. He is, indeed, a "fracaso, en definitiva, porque la pasión de lo imposible no tiene otra salida: su único triunfo es el fracaso, grandioso y trágico" (2, p. 221).

Mariano's friend, Martínez, "otro viejo chupatintas . . . un pobre diablo" (3, p. 62), as described by Buero Vallejo, projects in his good-natured resignation not so much a philosophy of life as a melancholy deformation of spirit. This is a contrast to Mariano's native aggression and frank desire to be respected, reminiscent of the two friends in Telarañas. García Pavón feels that this dichotomy is explained by José Monleón: "Hay un arte de inhibición y un arte de compromiso. Uno que reconcilia al hombre con su destino; otro que lo rebela contra él y le dice que puede ser mejorado" (7, p. 36). Mariano's character is the more believable, even the more palatable, of the two. His personality, despite its irritating qualities, is also more appealing than that of his brother Lorenzo, "el hombre de los negocios sucios y del alma prostituida" (6, p. 99). Even Mariano's carping wife has to admit that her husband has a good heart. His daughter's choice for a husband, Jacinto, appears to be a young copy of Mariano. Mariano likes him, but both he and Victoria are disappointed that Pilar did not choose a suitor with better prospects. They fear the makings

of another failure, and Pilar herself senses Jacinto's possible surrender to alcohol some day.

The characters of El grillo are presented in their weaknesses with tenderness by Muñiz, even humor at times, "un humor suave que les quita a los personajes su dignidad, pero no les quita su humanidad" (4, p. 231). The naturalistic realism of the play and its corresponding despair evoke a vision of helpless creatures in a treadmill, and heighten its appeal to younger minds already impregnated with social injustice. More conservative thinkers find in Mariano qualities which would brand him a failure at any social level. In any event, the audience may well deduce from the drama that the only people who can succeed in life as it is now structured are the immoral or the super-endowed. The main characters in El grillo are neither, making the point clear, but the play colorless and severe.

El precio de los sueños

Carlos Muñiz wrote this tragicomedy about a provincial middle-class family as an entry for the Premio Carlos Arniches in 1958. Both the subject and naturalist approach to it had been used by Spanish authors before, as in Bardem's Calle Mayor, but Muñiz' work won. The play was not performed until eight years later, on May 22, 1966, in Madrid's Arniches Theater. By that time Muñiz had decided to devote himself to expressionist esperpentos for small, select

audiences. He gives his reason to Francisco Alvaro for allowing this conception of his early creative years to be presented to the public: "Otro escritor, en estas circunstancias, tal vez se hubiera negado el estreno. Pero yo creo que un drama sólo lo es después de haber sido estrenado" (1, p. 49). José Monleón sees in the play's family, which struggles to appear better off than it is, a symbol of Spain itself, particularly of the Spanish middle class:

Parece determinada desde siglos, y por profundas causas históricas--somos un país que fue rico, venido a menos--, por la apariencia, por la dolorosa necesidad de apuntalar la fachada, por un serie de trasnochados principios, que tantas veces "no han dejado a los españoles ver el bosque" (8, p. 51).

When written, El precio de los sueños was unmistakably a sincere criticism against determined social structures, but by the time it was performed some critics considered its theme already worn-out, reminiscent of nineteenth-century naturalist dramas, and its technique debilitated. One critic called it "peligrosamente ingenuo," the threadbare story of the downfall of the middle class and the "subsiguiente creación de sus mecanismos idealógicos de defensa" (1, p. 50). Others accused Muñiz of poor usage of "quiero pero no puedo" elements borrowed from Benavente, resulting in a naturalism that was anachronistic. In a kinder vein, Francisco Alvaro insists that literary works should not be criticized as "new" or "old," but simply as "good" or "bad," and that El precio de los sueños should be given more time to prove its intrinsic worth (1, p. 49). The audience received it very well,

joining the cast in a special round of applause at the end for Muñiz. The critic for Pueblo, as Alvaro recalls, was favorably impressed, praising "los tipos, perfectamente vistos, sentidos y expresados . . . y el juego de diálogo que a veces es suelto y natural y otras se impregna de frenada y poética ternura" (1, p. 51).

The play is staged in a middle-class living room which has been made to look like something better, and is therefore simply uncomfortable. Elisa mends while her daughter Amalia plays a nocturne on the piano. Elisa laments the girl's going out with a salesman, and Amalia complains about the cold house and never having the funds to go out any other way. She has been jilted once already, and is now around thirty years old. Elisa worries that the townspeople might find out how little money they have, while her youngest son, Pablo, already has dreams of how to "get rich quick." Her husband, Ricardo, is being honored with a gathering of bank officials marking his retirement as a director. Elisa's single sister, Matilde, envies the former's family life, partly because Elisa's illusions make it sound better than it is. Matilde remembers Elisa's wild imagination as a child, and suspects she is lying at times, especially in regard to the prosperous farms Elisa claims Ricardo owns. Elisa's fondest dreams have been for her eldest son, Manolo, now married and presumably settled down with a job in the bank. Ricardo returns from the ceremony, wearing his badge of merit, but

resentful of the rules that force him to retire while still able to do his job. Manolo appears, extremely agitated, with the bad news that he is accused of forging a check at the bank. Elisa believes him innocent and noble, and blames his problems on the vicious talk of the townspeople. His poor reputation is due to his wild youth, which he claims was an effort to escape the pressures and pretensions of his family life. Ricardo senses that Manolo is guilty, and blames Elisa for filling him with illusions of grandeur. Due to Ricardo's retirement and Manolo's suspension from the bank, family resources are so strained that Gregorio, the second son, must come home from the University. Ricardo is bitter that no money has been set aside because Elisa has refused to live simply through the years, determined to put up a prosperous front to the town. She defends her right to her illusions, and refuses to see their disastrous fruition in the lives of her children. Gregorio is especially upset because Manolo's rashness has thrown him out of the University and back into the family atmosphere he hates. Elisa's main worry is how she will explain Gregorio's return to other people without revealing the truth. The scandal of Manolo's accusation causes Amalia's new suitor to refuse to see her again. The police come for Manolo, and Elisa is forced to realize his guilt. She is panic-stricken that people will now laugh at him and look down on the family. Ricardo hires a good criminal lawyer to defend Manolo.

The day of the trial Elisa sits at home, lifeless and vengeful. Matilde comes to offer comfort, but Elisa insults her to such a degree that Matilde threatens to tell everyone the truth about Ricardo's "farms." Ricardo has written a cousin in another town, asking him to take Gregorio and Amalia into his home, and to find jobs for them. Elisa is horrified, but relents. Gregorio brings the news that Manolo could have been exonerated due to slender evidence against him, but his own testimony convicted him. The stage darkens, and a single spotlight shows Manolo making his speech at court. In it, he admits his guilt, and says he prefers to live in the reality of a prison than in a world that pressures him to steal in order to keep up appearances. The spotlight fades, and the play ends with Elisa telling lies to a friend on the telephone, blaming Manolo's crime on his wife and chattering on about Ricardo's prosperous olive groves. She hangs up, weeping.

The characters of El precio de los sueños struggle to survive in the half-life that has engendered them and that shackles them to a heritage of patterned behavior. Amalia whiles away the hours playing the piano and re-reading the love letters of an ex-beau as she feels spinsterhood creeping up on her. When her present suitor rejects her, she swallows all pride and begs the man in vain to see her again. Her Aunt Matilde, tormented by loneliness and a shy crush on Ricardo, seems to prefigure Amalia's eventual fate. Pablo

neglects his studies while dreaming of the wealth that awaits him somewhere in South America. The viewer senses in him a destructive tendency to illusions like his mother's, which recalls the naturalist theory of inherited weakness. Ricardo, the father, is another of Muñiz' examples of resignation to a fate determined by social pressure. Seeking to save Manolo from impulsive behavior, he pleads: "No eligimos la vida, nos elige ella y se ceba a placer en nosotros . . . y hay que dejarla porque es más fuerte" (10, p. 27). But Manolo, in bitterness and self-pity, sees himself as condemned as a victim of shipwreck, constantly swimming towards shore and getting nowhere. His ultimate act of declaring himself guilty when he could have been cleared is an unexpected injection of existentialism. Muñiz' use of the flash-back here is out of keeping with dramatic realism, but Manolo's speech blaming society's obsession with material success for his crime is moralization at its most redundant. He fixes all the blame for his downfall exactly where both naturalism and social drama would have it: "Teníamos que aparentar que nos sobraba el dinero para que no nos diera de lado esa sociedad pueblerina, sucia, hipócrita y deslenguada" (10, p. 67). The one character whose reactions seem perfectly natural is Gregorio. He resents Manolo's shadow stretching out to darken his own life, "como una mano que me fuera marcando con su fracaso el mío" (10, p. 38). Yet he is inescapably drawn by a sense of family

loyalty to stand by Manolo at his trial, and seems for the moment inextricably enmeshed in a prefabricated cycle of despair.

Every character's dilemma can be traced back to the protagonist Elisa. It is she who embodies a weakness described by Chandler and Schwartz as a national tendency:

Dignity and honor are strong, often exaggerated, concepts in the Spaniard, and his sense of personal worth has been felt in his literature . . . The loss of it, or rather the frustration arising from his inability to maintain this noble concept in a highly competitive world, has been portrayed by the writers of the modern generation (5, p. 21).

Like Muñiz' frustrated dreamer, Mariano, of El grillo, Elisa defends her fantasies: "Son magníficas. Y cuestan tan poco . . . La realidad es tan fea" (10, p. 34-35). She has an unalterable conviction that she and her family are too exceptional for the simple life of a provincial town, and has a prodigious capacity for abstracting her problems, and reconstructing an imaginary world in which it is possible for her to live. Therefore she spends the money Ricardo makes on vacations and beautiful clothes, while there is not enough heat in the house nor enough food on the table. This determination to impress the town with wealth that does not exist has driven her children to detest their home life and to fail in their other personal relationships. The lies she tells herself and others to maintain her social position separate her children from their true selves. It is painfully obvious that what people will say of them is far more important to Elisa than her family's actual well-being.

She is the prime example in Muñiz' works of a woman's capacity to destroy while fulfilling at the same time her role as wife and mother. In short, it is she who condemns her family to what Monleón calls "todo lo que desde antiguo ha configurado a una clase y a un medio social españoles" (8, p. 51).

Certain observers have praised El precio de los sueños for its controversial approach to accepted Spanish social structures and its author for being able to "romper la tiranía del sainete" (8, p. 52). According to Alvaro, however, the critic for Marca feels that the situation in the play, limited to the individuals of a family, is not broad enough to qualify for such a topic as "society is to blame" (1, pp. 51-52). Manolo's explanation of his desire to remain in prison rather than return to a hypocritical society that obliges him to rob borders on bathos. It is somewhat counteracted by Ricardo's practical decision to send Gregorio and Amalia away from home, thus opening the door for their flight into possibly normal lives. However, this questions the inescapable doom of all the characters to the fate of their ancestors, a bastion of naturalist projection. Hence, the claims of El precio de los sueños to either pure social drama and/or pure naturalist drama are somewhat weakened. Ironically, in the years that had passed between the writing of this play (1957) and the reviews of these critics (1966), Muñiz had given up naturalist

drama altogether, and had been widely acclaimed for his expressionist farce El tintero, first performed in 1961. This deliberate change of pace on the part of Muñiz may have been the decisive one which will determine his future success or failure as a dramatist. Nonetheless, a modern viewer could see in this early work "el buen pulso teatral de Carlos Muñiz" (1, p. 51), and yet comment wryly with Francisco Alvaro, "Animo, amigo Muñiz. No es caro El precio de los sueños, aunque nos cueste el dolor de verlos destruidos por una triste realidad" (1, p. 53).

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CHAPTER IV

EXPRESSIONISM AND SOCIAL DRAMA: EL TINTERO

This play, considered by Buero Vallejo to be the best Carlos Muñiz has written to date, has been praised for its fluidity of dialogue, dramatic tension, humor, and lyric qualities. Unfavorable reviews have criticized it for excessive violence, redundancy, and an unsuccessful mixture of "lo sarcástico, lo macabro y lo lírico" (5, p. 100). It was first performed at the Recoletos Theater in Madrid on February 15, 1961, by the Grupo de Teatro Realista. The latter had just been formed, and its acceptance of the script is explained by Muñiz:

Los mismos argumentos que habían esgrimido otras empresas respecto a la obra para no aceptarla, son los que han animado a G.T.R. a incluirla con todo entusiasmo en la programación de su primera temporada. Los argumentos en cuestión eran: el contenido dramático, acaso excesivo; la forma expresionista, de dudosa aceptación por nuestro público, y la amargura del tema A mí, ambas posturas me parecen lícitas, dignas y respetables (9, p. 5).

The premiere of El tintero in Madrid was not a success in the commercial sense, although it was received enthusiastically by a liberal minority and some critics. Soon thereafter it found a wide and more appreciative audience in various European and Spanish American capitals. Parisian critic Marcelle Capron feels that El tintero has universal appeal,

and that the same work could have been written in Russia, America, or Germany, "que el mismo estado de cosas provoca acá y allá las mismas reacciones, la misma sátira social, que se expresa según procedimientos similares" (6, p. 106). A more cautious critic, also from Paris, says that the hero Crock, "un generoso chupatintas, chaplinesco y kafkiano," is obviously condemned to anonymity, misery, and eventually to suicide by the capitalist system, but that from the point of view of new ideas or scenic art the play has nothing to offer (6, p. 105). Buero Vallejo predicted that serious theatrical defects in the play would provoke a certain amount of disdain from foreign critics, but he felt that it was certainly a better play than most of the offerings which surfeited the Spanish stage in the sixties. He found it a mature work, "porque no sustituye el drama por la didáctica ni la expresión poética de lo real por su racionalización empobrecedora" (2, pp. 61-62). A majority of critics considers it a meaningful penetration into a society that is strictly Spanish, thus detracting from its universal quality, but adding to its prestige as social drama. Francisco García Pavón, author of El teatro social en España, elaborates on this point of view:

No tengo inconveniente en aceptar El tintero como teatro social de muchísima eficacia, según las miras del autor, no obstante sus elementos extrarrealistas y caricaturescos Esos elementos no documentales, sino simbólicos, no están extraídos de la vieja tradición literaria; . . . responden a una novísima sensibilidad, y al ser utilizados ahora para

estos fines sociales, responden con gran eficacia. Resultan nuevos (7, pp. 37-38).

The stage for El tintero is furnished with just enough simple objects to suggest the specified locale. Crock first appears at his desk, working mechanically. The custodian catches him smelling a bouquet of flowers and threatens to report him. Later Frank, the Personnel Supervisor, scolds him for singing and throws his flowers into the wastebasket. Amigo comes to see Crock, but Frank tells him to leave. Crock does not understand the need for so many senseless rules. He lives alone in a miserable flat during the week, and rides his bicycle to a village every week-end to see his wife and sons. The constant drain on his resources is breaking him down physically and financially. His refusal to join the other employees, such as Pim, Pam, and Pum, in fawning servitude to the despotic Director causes him to be unpopular and to lose his bonus. He has a cough and often runs a fever (also against the rules), but is not allowed time off to get well. The Director and Frank plot to dismiss him from his job. A businessman who is an acquaintance of Amigo offers Crock after-hours employment if his references are good. Crock goes home from the interview feeling very ill, and his landlady tells him the office sent an investigator to find out why he was not at work. He and Amigo wish life could be like a calm ocean. Crock's wife, Frida, brings him the bad news that his sons are becoming delinquents and that she is being wooed by the village schoolmaster. She

demands that Crock come home at once and take control of his family, but he knows the office will not give him any time off. She needs money; he has none. He and Frida go to the office to see if he has been fired. She demands an advance on Crock's salary, so they give her his dismissal pay. Pim, Pam, and Pum carry Crock out as he shouts hysterically, and leave their superiors proposing toasts which are drunk from inkwells. The next day Frank forces Crock to sign his dismissal papers by having him beaten with huge fountain pens. The landlady says he must get another job or move out. Crock leaves in haste, still in pajamas that resemble prison garb, to seek Amigo. Together they go to see the businessman about employing Crock, but he has received bad references about him from Frank, and refuses to hire him. Crock wants to kill Frank with a penknife, but cannot do it. To prove that only cowards commit murder, he deliberately gives Amigo the knife as they sit in the park, and tries unsuccessfully to goad his friend into stabbing him. The demonstration is observed by a policeman who arrests Amigo for attempted murder, and Crock's pleas that he is innocent are in vain. Just before being led away, Amigo whispers to Crock about one avenue left for him to get money.

The locale changes to Crock's home in the village. He gives Frida money. She accuses him of stealing it, forcing him to admit he got it by selling his body [after death] to a medical school. She is sorry for Crock, but when the

schoolmaster appears she admits they are romantically involved. The schoolmaster offers to sever the relationship, but Frida badgers him about his promises until he hits her. Crock decides that the teacher is the kind of man Frida needs, and he bows out, admonishing them to make his sons study hard and expressing the hope that they may become doctors. He has a plan that will keep his body from being the one they might dissect someday. The midnight train is heard soon after his exit, and Frida, watching in growing panic from the window, screams for him to come back. In the fantasy that follows, all the characters gather around Crock's corpse, each offering a reason for his death, but never blaming themselves. Amigo appears and tells them they must board the train. All exit, and the train is heard leaving. Amigo helps Crock up, and they stroll happily into the night as the audience hears the sound of ocean waves.

Critics have discerned in Crock's character such qualities as the reforming spirit of Don Quixote and the mechanical expressiveness of Charlie Chaplin. Hazel Cazorla even sees in him the symbolism of Segismundo, "un hombre que vive intensamente la esencia de su ser con toda su angustia y dolor" (4, p. 232). On a more obvious plane Crock, while not a rebel by nature, is a man driven to revolt against ludicrous rules which threaten to make him less than human. His feeble attempts to escape the sordidness of office life pitch him into a battle against the incomprehensible

phenomenon of forced conformity. He is labeled as dangerous by the world of bureaucracy because he sometimes smokes in the lounge, he occasionally laughs, and because he reads books. Unlike his fellow employees, who seem happily reconciled to a machine-like existence, Crock retains a sensitivity to such simple things as fresh air, friendship, and springtime. It is his very humanity in the dehumanized world of bureaucracy that makes him different, and therefore an object of persecution. The asphyxiating life situation to which he is chained impels him to dash himself to pieces against its harshness. Muñiz' preoccupation with the deadening effects of capitalism can be seen in all his plays: Crock could, for example, be considered a younger version of Mariano in El grillo. (Even Crock's name is peculiar, but following Muñiz' method of simile in comparing Mariano to a cricket, perhaps the verb croar, to croak, is a clue here: the sad, grating noise made by a frog, over and over in a minor key).

In order to present bureaucracy as the arch-fiend of his drama, Muñiz instills in los jefes a super-human, unyielding strength. Frank, with his North American name, reflects a tendency popular with European dramatists in the fifties and also Muñiz' resentment of American-inspired capitalism. Frank is depicted as constantly rubbing his hands together, a visual reinforcement of his false affability and obsession with efficiency. The clerk Livi,

once considered a friend by Crock, now turns on him and sides with the executives. The three "ideal employees," Pim, Pam, and Pum, are mindless robots reminiscent of Dürrenmatt's retinue of moronic sycophants in Der Besuch der alten Dame. Muñiz pictures the Director as neurotic and tyrannical, the petulant god to whom the human life of the office is sacrificed. The office routine is glorified out of all proportion as if it were a mystical religious rite. The "all-seeing eye" of the vast grotesque organization makes it possible for the system to perpetuate itself through fear. The other employees, submitted to the debasement of this power, become inured to their sad social plight, and even imagine themselves happy as they chant: "Viva la vida, alegre y divertida!" Jean Paul Borel feels that this illusion of cheerfulness is necessary for the functioning of certain institutions and types of economic and commercial organizations in modern civilization (1, p. 240). Crock is martyred by his companions in toil, simply because he is "el detector más expresivo por sus especiales condiciones sensibles" (7, p. 39). However, the real victims are the attackers themselves. The process of dehumanization has reduced El Negociante, for example, to a level at which he must ask his secretary to look up the definition for spring. Muñiz seems to feel that if real spiritual or esthetic richness is to be found anywhere, it will be among the oppressed, as exemplified by Crock and

Amigo. He uses expressionist symbols, automatism, and flights into unreality to fortify his criticism of the world of business. Borel does not feel the dangers implied have been exaggerated:

Nuestra sociedad mezquina, egoísta, utilitarista, no está hecha de hombres, sino de funcionarios. Aceptar las leyes de esta sociedad es renunciar a ser hombres. Es imposible conciliar la humanidad y la vida tal como nos es propuesta; ser "todo un hombre," como decía Unamuno, y vivir en el interior de nuestra organización social y cultural (1, p. 21).

It is possible, of course, that El tintero might encompass a more universal complaint: a protest against all oppressive authority that is dedicated to form and titles without substance. A Lisbon critic states that he appreciates the unrestrained dramatic inventiveness of the play all the more because it was written in a country which "no respira libremente los aromas del teatro moderno" (6, p. 106). If Muñiz' work appears to be a diatribe brought on by his dismissal from two jobs in less than two years, rather than by his preoccupation with actual social problems, perhaps it is because he sensed that he would have little hope of satisfying the censorship board with a drama that openly attacked such obvious threats to personal liberty as church and state. Indeed, in keeping with the aim of social drama--protest against certain conditions considered unjust at a given moment in history--El tintero qualifies as a long, sustained, intense cry against human abuse. Worthy characters lack the strength to survive, while the selfish live and

prosper. It is a running sketch of injustice at its most intense and best organized. A moderate point of view, reacting negatively to extremes, could well maintain that injustices will exist in all epochs because of man's permanent imperfection. Yet the atmosphere of Muñiz' farce is so heavy with hopelessness that Crock's doom is evident from the opening scenes, and the other characters with their one-dimensional personalities are clearly created to hasten it along. As one misfortune piles upon another in quick succession, the state of affairs at the end of Act II, scene three, seems to have exhausted all the possibilities for one man's suffering. However, the curtain rises again with new assaults on his will to live, leaving him no exit but suicide. The fact is that no amount of social reform could ever alleviate all the tragedy in El tintero. It conveys the existential anguish of Segismundo's lines, "el delito mayor del hombre es haber nacido" (3, p. 614).

Alfredo Marqueríe sees similarities in the play to works by the French playwright Anouilh and to those of the Swiss dramatist Dürrenmatt (5, p. 100). Several observers perceive elements of Quevedo and other picaresque novelists in El tintero, for example, in the humiliating hunger Crock exhibits when he tries to make a sandwich out of dry bread and a piece of paper. While Muñiz, intending to stir the conscience of the viewer, continues to pursue realism in El tintero, he deserts naturalism, his earlier vehicle, in

order to reach the more profound realism offered by expressionist formulas. As he says of himself to J. Monleón, "Había que demostrar que sabía hacer naturalismo. Lo demostré, creo con suficiencia, y volví a lo mío: el expresionismo" (8, p. 26). Indeed, tendencies toward abstraction, the absurd, and the desire to shock could be detected even in his naturalist dramas. He manifests through his character depiction his preference for the esperpento, a form crystallized by Valle-Inclán. A view of the world that recalls figures seen in the distorted mirrors of an amusement park, "el esperpento traduce una visión caricatural de las cosas, en la que lo trágico y la crítica social están íntimamente ligados" (1, pp. 212-213). The main characters carry doom or fatal determination implicit in their existence. The only free will in the play is the artistic liberty exercised by the author as he forms the personalities and gives the plot direction. Alfonso Sastre feels that El tintero does not qualify as expressionism in the historical sense, but presents the possibility of "un neo-expresionismo, de un expresionismo crítico, satírico y español" (11, p. 88). Carlos Wilson, on the other hand, criticizes the type of expressionism in El tintero as a throwback to the period between the world wars, "sin tamiz, sin evolución alguna, y por ello el mundo de su obra carece de libertad en absoluto" (13, p. 15). Muñoz defends his fusion of the real and the absurd in his personal brand of

expressionism; he describes El tintero as "una trágica farsa en la que lo disparatado y lo real se mezclan no tan caprichosamente como pudiera parecer La realidad tiene mucho de disparate; tanto como el disparate de realidad" (9, p. 56).

Hazel Cazorla compares the satire of the play to "el humor grotesco de Goya, el humor 'negro' de Quevedo" (4, p. 231) and remarks that in such an atmosphere of exaggerated reality it is not surprising to see characters drink from inkwells or wield fountain pens as weapons, as all is "una realidad interior, una visión de la verdad no aparente." Muñiz has utilized several elements of staging to create the expressionist mood of hollow desperation that soon envelops the protagonist's innermost being. Background music accompanies several important scenes: a strong North American march for the entrance of El Director; a sad, expressive, even discordant melody for dramatic moments; and a funeral march for the final scene. The inane choruses of Pim, Pam, and Pum glorifying Bureaucracy are an innovation Muñiz will use again in Las viejas difíciles. The sets are too stark to be realistic, but are designed instead to emphasize Crock's isolation. The office is a parody of an office, "que sirve de fondo a la soledad y a la angustia del hombre" (4, p. 231). Muñiz' stage instructions specify the importance of lighting, especially the use of the single spotlight to convey a sense of aloneness. The

development of the action is abnormally rapid, which intensifies the spectator's awareness of a frantically mounting interior need, a reality of the soul.

The character Amigo has stirred the interest of critics. In earlier works Muñiz utilized the theme of close friendship, beginning with Damián and Avelino and including Martínez and Mariano; with such characters as El Hombre and El Pianista, he revealed his tendency toward the expressionist formula for abstractions. Anonymity in this case, however, has a meaningfulness that suggests an entire personality. Amigo lives in the park, gets his food with unemployment coupons, and has achieved peace of mind through a total lack of passion that borders on a Schopenhauerian nirvana. Amigo's ability to adjust to joys or adversities alike also finds him facing death serenely. Crock's anguished cry as Amigo is led away to be condemned to death is even suggestive of a Christ figure: "¡se lo han llevado sin tener ninguna culpa! . . . ¡El inocente más inocente del mundo! . . . ¡Qué barbaridad! . . ." (10, pp. 64-65). This aura of mysticism causes some critics to feel that Amigo's presence in the play precludes its dealing rationally with social problems. Buero Vallejo takes the opposite view:

Si el "amigo" de El tintero no hubiera representado otra cosa que la manifestación escénica de la solidaridad en la desgracia, la desvalidez y la indigencia sin remedio, por su sola presencia y sin otro género de explícitas consideraciones habría reforzado lo que la farsa tiene de denuncia de unas condiciones

Possibly Amigo's deepest significance lies simply in his name: the embodiment of a longing for loyalty and affection that survives death itself.

Carlos Wilson, who finds fault with Muñiz' brand of expressionism, complains that the character of Frida is not consistent with the anguished "flatness" apparent in the others, and is therefore a flaw in the play (13, p. 15). It is true that her personality is not one-dimensional, although its most conspicuous trait is a stridency which borders on coarse cruelty. When Crock tells her that he, feeling happy one day, smoked a forbidden cigarette at the office, she retorts, "Cuando se tiene una familia a la espalda, no se puede estar contento ni un solo día" (10, p. 166). At the end she is Crock's only reason left for living, but she says she is not made of stone, and betrays him. Yet there are flashes of compassion and tenderness that make her seem very real, and less of a caricature. Muñiz could have made a stronger case against a society that creates brutality in women had he not preferred to concentrate on Frida's capacity for destroying Crock. A critic from Montevideo comments on the poignancy of their last scene together:

. . . una de las páginas más bellas del teatro español y que refleja todo el drama, toda la angustia, con que puede estar lleno un corazón humano, dejando resbalar las palabras con suavidad, como con temor de que si caen de golpe podrían romperse (6, p. 107).

The sensation of emptiness, so characteristic of the theater of the absurd as well as of the existential dilemma, centers around Crock's growing isolation: at the beginning of the play, he works alone at his desk; later, in his desolate little room he appears to live almost as a recluse; and the final blow comes in the park (for which the stage supplies nothing but one bench and one tree) when his only friend is taken away by the policeman. Cazorla feels that in El grillo Muñiz dealt with a very human problem, but in El tintero the problem becomes cosmic, "el de la libertad del hombre y su soledad frente a las fuerzas del universo" (4, p. 231). For Crock, more rebel than revolutionary, and Amigo, a symbol of the increasing sense of namelessness and loss of identity in modern life, even hope turns out to be an inaccessible luxury. Neither the frantic protests of the one nor the abnegation and kindness of the other have any immediate efficacy except to assure their defeat. The inexorable persecution of Crock and its wrenching climax are reminiscent of Schopenhauer's idea that just as a planet must keep revolving or else fall into its sun, so a man who cannot stay constantly in motion will fall backward (12, p. 133). Several critics have called Crock too existential for the purposes of social drama in that he is faced with decisive situations in his relationship to others, and then deliberately chooses death. Muñiz' addition of the after-death fantasy at the end of the play is a total surprise,

a fanciful departure that both relieves the onerous effect of morbid reality and brings hope into despair when it is least expected. The characters who gather around Crock's body are still unwitting prisoners of their passions and fears, but Crock has been set free to enjoy the company of his loyal friend and the beauty of the ocean, both of which make up his own special Heaven. A critic from Montevideo laments that this ending is indicative of agnosticism, resorting more to indefinite symbolism than to the eternal truths proposed by Christian doctrine (6, p. 107). Other critics resent its intrusion into the panorama of reality and dramatic truth which they feel precede it. Buero Vallejo defends Muñiz' right to express artistic truth without rationalization, declaring that any aspect of reality can reach zones where fantasy acts and creates in liberty (2, pp. 63-64). He also feels that "difícilmente habría encontrado el autor nada más adecuado a la transmisión del emotivo y amargo sentido final del destino de los dos protagonistas." The candle which Pim, Pam, and Pum have placed at Crock's head is unceremoniously kicked over by Amigo. Crock was failed in life by its mainstays: job, family, and standards of right and wrong. The implications of his ultimate escape illustrate the philosophy of Ramón y Cajal with which Muñiz prefaced his script for El tintero:

Pero esta vida pachonuda, comodona, y egoísta, enemiga de la acción viril y atenta a la observación del ritmo cardíaco y a prevenir incidentes digestivos y pasionales, ¿merece la pena de ser vivida (10, p. 117)?

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CHAPTER V

A STUDY IN DEHUMANIZATION: LAS VIEJAS DIFICILES

Described in the script as "una tragedia caótica," Las viejas difíciles is Muñiz' most bitter attack on false standards, hypocrisy, and the innate destructiveness of the female psyche. Religion, family life, and mob reactions are also subjected to sharp ridicule, always in relation to the idea that absolute power corrupts absolutely. The play was written in 1961, revised in 1962, but not performed until October 7, 1966, in the Teatro Beatriz of Madrid. The interaction of actor, author, and spectator that makes good theater seems to have met with frustration from the start. Buero Vallejo admitted in 1963 that he, in reading the play, could understand why no one wanted to present it on the stage, for in it Muñiz' "arrojo para la sátira y su talento para poner en solfa las más siniestras mixtificaciones se hacen aún más aristados e implacables" (3, p. 67). Some aspects of the sinister mixtures alluded to include the humor of a comedy, the plebeian setting of a sainete, the bathos of a melodrama, the distortion of an esperpento, and the matter-of-fact horror of tremendismo. Apparently the chaos of combinations was too much for a premiere audience to accept, for its reception of the play was discouraging

enough to cause Muñiz to react with "un gesto poco cortés" (1, p. 123). In addition to the disconcerting stylistic confusion, several objects of Muñiz' harsh satire in Las viejas difíciles, such as motherhood and soccer, are close to many a Spaniard's heart. At the same time, the central subject matter itself--meddlesome beatas--is considered by many to be unrelated to modern social problems. The caricatures depicted by some of the roles are, nevertheless, too painfully close to the possibility of a repugnant reality for the satire to be enjoyed, and the absence of fantasy, the author's frequent saving grace, leaves the viewer with an impression of senseless horror reminiscent of the tremendista movement. Chandler and Schwartz (4, p. 40) have noted an existential feeling of abandonment and hopelessness similar to the atmosphere of Las viejas in the tremendismo school of writers born after 1925, who seem to find it impossible to expunge their grim memories except through the incessant anguish of their works. Even when blood-thirsty elements are missing (and they are present in Las viejas difíciles), the constant conflicts and clashes of will create a frustration that makes existence seem a living hell. Buero Vallejo describes the drama as a "versión desafortada de graves realidades negativas, . . . más desequilibradas, más guiñolescas que los 'esperpentos' de Valle-Inclán" (3, p. 68).

The action of the play is ruptured so frequently by sarcasm that the personalities lose their forcefulness and verosimilitude. Alvaro compliments the general construction of the play, sections of the dialogue, and certain ingenious strokes of satire, but laments that it all bursts apart "con la violencia y furia de un ejército enloquecido, contra un raquíptico enemigo que apenas acusa su existencia" (1, p. 119). This brings up the question of the play's value as social drama, since several critics do not feel that even under the wings of religion would one find bigoted beatas sufficient to constitute a valid threat to the well-being of today's Spain. It is possible that Muñiz has reached into Spain's past to portray unjust oppression through the inquisitorial and hypocritical Puritanism of these modern versions of Doña Perfecta in order to attack modern oppressors whom he cannot name openly. The drama shows clearly that healthy, spontaneous love cannot find its way when society is based on false moral values, but past that, "la caricatura resulta exagerada en exceso y ello hace que se resista la lógica . . . que siempre es necesaria hasta en las obras más ilógicas" (1, p. 122). The last scene of the play understandably causes much of the unfavorable criticism, a possibility Muñiz apparently foresaw and tried to avoid by rewriting it at least once. It is regrettable that a poorly written ending overshadows a masterful exhibition of black humor throughout the two scenes preceding it. Yet this

admirable spurt of genius couched in a work that is, at best, mediocre, is nothing new for Spanish authors, who have often had a tendency to improvise rather than refine, but along with this impetuous, uncalculating verbosity, sometimes produce shining segments of genuine skill. Nonetheless, the critic for Marca, a publication for which Muñiz has expressed disdain in the past (7, p. 75), apparently found no redeeming features in the play, and in a discussion with Francisco Alvaro, assumed that the Teatro Nacional de Cámara y Ensayo must consider as its mission in life the liberating of authors from complexes and repressions since it produced a work so inconceivably out-of-date as this (1, p. 122).

The drama takes place in a city where slander reigns, and the epoch is any time. Muñiz' stage decorations specify that each set should be "esquemático y triste, sugestivo y feo, viejo como el mundo, actual como la primavera" (6, p. 207). The opening scene takes place on a park bench in the snow, under the claw-like branches of a single leafless tree. Antonio and Julita lament the fact that since he never gets a promotion to provide them with a home, their romance of seventeen years will never end in marriage. The city in which they live is ruled by an association of elderly women called the Damas, inexorable in their persecution of those whom they consider immoral. When Antonio and Julita impulsively decide, despite all, to marry,

they kiss, and are arrested by a park guard for immoral behavior. Antonio's aunts, Joaquina and Leonor, both members of the Association, are horrified when they hear he has been arrested and has married Julita while in prison. The aunts live in a large house and enjoy an honored family name, but, although they have raised Antonio, they refuse to let him bring a wife to live with them. When Antonio and Julita are released from jail and seek their understanding, the aunts disinherit him for fear of losing their position with the Damas. The scandal causes Antonio to lose his job, and the couple has no choice but to ask for shelter in the crowded little house of Julita's sister, Concha, and her large family. Concha dotes on her simple-minded, disrespectful grown sons and her daughter Conchita. Concha's husband, Elías, cares only about his senile mother, who has reverted to infantile behavior. Elías has lost his bonus at work because of Julita's arrest. The director of the prison, Don Teófanés, also comes begging for refuge; he has been dismissed for allowing Julita and Antonio to get married while under his authority. Julita is expecting a child. As time goes by, the Damas have Elías' salary cut further, so that stray cats are all the family finally has to eat. When Conchita announces she is pregnant, her mother decides to tell the Damas that Antonio seduced Conchita and fathered the child. The Damas come marching with weapons to arrest him and to reward the family for turning him in. Julita

now expecting her own baby at any moment, is injured defending Antonio. Leonor grasps a machine gun and unexpectedly tells Julita and Antonio to escape. After they leave, she and Don Teófanés are overpowered and thrown to the roaring mob for execution. Julita, hurt and exhausted by labor pains, dies on the same park bench seen in the first scene. Antonio, embracing her body in anguish, is arrested by the same guard for immoral behavior. Antonio fights him, shoots him with his own gun, and stands with it shouting defiance to the Damas whose battle hymn has been heard gradually growing closer.

These weapon-wielding harridans, whom Muñiz ironically chose to describe in his title as merely difíciles, could more aptly be called grotesque, if not monstrous. Several critics feel that the author's concern with dehumanization has culminated in the creation of characters who are not people at all, but puppets. Wooden, painted faces are brought to mind by Muñiz' instructions to the actors:

Es imprescindible que esta obra, a pesar de su aire, en ciertos momentos, divertido, se represente por parte de los actores con una seriedad absoluta, sin marcar de ninguna forma aquellas frases que pueden parecer graciosas. La interpretación debe ser exagerada, en todos los sentidos (6, p. 204).

The hollow anguish of expressionism is obvious in these directions, as well as in the violence of the plot. The marionette-like jerkiness of action, as Joaquina raises the sword above her head to salute the picture of her dead

husband, and as the Damas march Nazi-style with their stiff joints, is part of the expressionist picture. Buero Vallejo remarks that, whereas the characters of El tintero were still pathetically human, those of Las viejas difíciles are not; "son marionetas que ríen, lloran o gritan grotescamente. . ." (3, p. 68).

Antonio is a one-dimensional anti-hero during most of the play. The stoicism of his resigned personality is accentuated by what Chandler and Schwartz describe as "the Spaniard's grave, serious, dry, sometimes harsh, bitter and sententious manner" (4, p. 21). Along the familiar lines of Muñiz' dramas, Antonio is a frustrated writer who never gets the long-awaited promotion at his office job. Deeper still than his frustration is the bitterness he feels toward all of life, as he states his determination to rid his unborn child of all illusions from the beginning, so that "no se sienta defraudado al encontrar el odio, la venganza, la hipocresía, la envidia, la ambición, las viejas . . ." (6, p. 235). The culmination of injustice in his life comes when he is accused of defiling his niece and thus siring the child which she, in fact, knows to be the off-spring of her novio. This reversal of the pundonor ethic--Antonio is punished for nothing, Conchita is blessed for her guilt--suggests Muñiz' desire to punish the concept itself with the harshest sort of perversity. Orphaned from infancy, Antonio symbolizes man as a stranger in the

world, existential in his isolation and beset by danger on all sides. Finally, face to face with nothingness, he finds the courage precisely within his very state of despair to be redeemed by a resolve heretofore undetected in him.

Thus in the last scene he throws off his marionette vapidty and becomes the classic hero challenging a fearful destiny. This sudden shouldering of a responsible decision that means sure doom has been seen before in Manolo of El precio de los sueños and in Crock of El tintero. The works of Valle-Inclán, as Borel points out, reflect the same type of solution:

La única solución válida es aceptar ese destino en su totalidad, en su aplastante grandeza, en su dureza. Ya no hay arreglo posible, ni con los otros, ni con la condición con que nos encontramos en esta tierra. El hombre se convierte en lobo, y el universo, en un conjunto de fuerzas ciegas y amenazas. Solamente puede triunfar quien sea más lobo que los lobos y con talla para desafiar a Dios y al diablo (2, p. 195).

Julita, an exception to this parade of puppets, exhibits all the normal characteristics of a woman: she yearns for a home and family of her own, and resents having to wait so long to have them; she is spurred to courageous action when her husband and unborn child are endangered; and, when all her efforts have been exhausted, she dies quietly. In her defeat man's prejudices and atrocities are reduced to a pure state, fare that is concocted with utter scorn for the mediocre spectator. Especially tragic are the last words exchanged by Antonio and Julita as he tries desperately to make her want to live and to have their child,

In Julita's sister Concha, however, intelligence and refinement are replaced by cunning and by an inconstancy subject to her baser instincts and conducive to both humor and tragedy. Humor, grim though it is, gives Las viejas difíciles its greatest redeeming feature. The two small rooms that house Concha's family contain all the resentments, sentimentalities, and in-fighting that Muñiz can tastefully crowd into two full scenes of quick-paced dialogue. In detestation of her senile mother-in-law, Concha feeds her soup against the doctor's orders, explaining to her husband, "Tu madre siempre anda comiéndose nuestra escasa comida. Tu madre es una lata" (6, p. 223). When he protests that soup could kill her, Concha compliments him on his understanding. "Even in the most adverse circumstances," as Chandler and Schwartz have remarked, "the Spaniard has his joke" (4, p. 21). As Concha's monstrous betrayal emerges, however, the smile quickly turns into horror. Her decision to incriminate Antonio is a supreme example of the human capacity for covering up one evil with another, especially when society is ruled by impossible standards. The subsequent emotional confusion of the spectator must be like one's reactions to a surrealist painting by Dalí, "algo comparable a esas desnudeces terriblemente incómodas que a veces nos avergüenzan durante el sueño" (3, p. 68).

Concha's two moronic sons are like robots depicting the shallowness of popular pursuits as they march around

the room waving pennants and chanting soccer cheers, oblivious to the disaster all around them. The critic for Marca, according to Alvaro, took literal exception to this satire on fútbol fans, calling it "la radical incomprensión de lo que es el deporte en la sociedad moderna en todos los países y en todos los regímenes" (1, p. 120). Alvaro defended Muñiz' criticism of this mindless conformity of the masses as valid, remarking that such an obsession for sports has brought civilization to a "delirio colectivo que amenaza convertir a los hombres en 'rinocerontes' y a los pueblos en circos romanos sin otra diferencia que la indumentaria de los 'gladiadores'" (1, p. 120). Muñiz portrays dehumanization through the idiotic repetition of words again in the vacant personality of the old grandmother, who has lost all ability to communicate except to croon a nursery rhyme over and over. Although it is especially obvious that she, too, is a wooden doll pulled by strings, Elías continues to apologize to her in detail for their situation, and to affirm his devotion to her. He is overwhelmed by the fact that his world is ruled by females, and prays that Conchita's baby will be a girl. Buero Vallejo's comments on the one-dimensional characters in Las viejas difíciles summarize them well:

Quien quiera saber algunas cosas de los hombres puede encontrarlas en estos muñecos paradójicamente inhumanos; aquel a quien le interesen algunas de las brutalidades de nuestro mundo en este inventado mundo de títeres puede rastrearlas (3, p. 68).

A hint as to why Muñiz chose beatas as the villains in this play might be glimpsed in a bitter speech by Manolo in El precio de los sueños, as he expresses scorn for "las viejas que se pasan todo el día en la iglesia porque la vida ya no les deja otra solución que mirar a la otra vida. Quítales a todos las razones por las que son buenos y dime si en otras circunstancias lo serían" (5, p. 26). Muñiz resolves the question with a merciless conclusion in this later drama: it is within the instinct of little old ladies, seemingly the most frail and gentle of human creatures, to become vengeful monsters if circumstances allow it. It is indeed dubious that Spain, even in the farthest provincial corner, could be peopled with the type of tyrannical mummies who murder with machine guns as do the Damas. Yet Muñiz was within the bounds of Spanish literary history when he chose to multiply into legion a familiar, vengeful female figure from the past who did not hesitate to perpetrate murder: Galdós' Doña Perfecta.

Borel's description of times of oppression is well suited to the tenor of this drama: "La vida es una muerte lenta, y no por consideraciones generales sobre el tiempo, sino porque los hombres han olvidado el amor y han caído en el egoísmo" (2, p. 212). Leonor's final rebellion against Joaquina and the Association is in the name of love. When Joaquina warns Leonor that Heaven will punish her, she replies that the Damas' heaven is dirty, black, and malevolent,

a description that reinforces the quotation from Dostoevsky with which Muñiz prefaced his script: "Pienso que si el diablo no existe, y, por tanto, es creación del hombre, éste lo ha creado a su imagen y semejanza" (6, p. 205). The ill-disguised criticism of hypocritical standards perpetrated in the name of religion is further evident as Antonio and Julita are stoned by choir boys. The fact that they must sign a "Yo me acuso" list after their arrest seems to be aimed at the practice of the confessional. At first glance Don Teófanés, by his act of mercy in marrying the couple and by his declarations of faith in love and brotherhood, seems to be a Christ figure. However, in the end he is revealed as simply another parody on human nature, a coward who hopes his lofty phrases will save his life.

Borel discusses the problem of establishing a moral code which would satisfy popular aspirations without leading automatically to the disintegration of the nation; a code by which a free Spaniard could continue to be both free and Spanish (2, p. 287). Sexual conduct is the invariable source of the Damas' indignation, yet Joaquina's youthful indiscretion with a mailcoach official is absolved in her mind by her consuming passion for the aims of the Association, as she looks forward to the day when she is told that "el rayo ha caído sobre el canalla" (6, p. 215). Perhaps Muñiz' message here is that types of humanity considered to be above temptation, and of whom much virtue

and patience are expected, might be harboring more hatred and pent-up aggressiveness than those whose lack of control is more readily tolerated by society. At any rate, the end result is hypocrisy at best, and, [as this play points out] a reign of tyrannical harpies at worst. Apropos are the final words of Galdós' novel: "Es cuanto por ahora podemos decir de las personas que parecen buenas y no lo son" (8, p. 136).

The fearful irony of this tragicomedy is typical of centuries of Spanish authors whose minds have been stirred to bitterness over the class system, the debilitating poverty, and the lies and cowardice that perpetuate such conditions. It is apparent that Muñiz' warning here is not really concerned with little old ladies; it is concerned with the inhuman ends that power may reach when combined with public support or even apathy. The original version of the play ended with Joaquina shooting Antonio and Julita just as their baby was about to be born. The utter futility of life projected by such an ending was the most uncompromising conclusion offered by Muñiz up to that point of his career as a dramatist, and it probably had much to do with the lack of enthusiasm in theatrical circles for performing the play. In the later version which ultimately reached the stage, the relentless Damas are challenged, no doubt in vain, by an Antonio suddenly brought to furious life in the last scene. Perhaps the protagonist of this version is inspired, after

years of weakness or neglect, to assert his true personality in one final burst of glory. The more interesting possibility is that Julita's death marks a new plane of development in his personal evolution: it not only brings him a step closer to his own death, but is a type of interior aging, real and profound, produced by the shock it thrusts into his own consciousness. Alvaro feels that Muñiz has unwisely chosen for the ending "un conflicto planteado en extremis, cuya solución echa por tierra toda posibilidad de verosimilitud y, lo que es peor, evidencia . . . cierta intransigencia y ferocidad en cualquier caso inadmisibles" (1, p. 123). The critic for Pueblo expresses to Alvaro the opinion that, even allowing for the element of the absurd, the drama does not hold together well, and the last scene especially "resultó un gran guiñol demagógico y ni venció la repulsión del público ni--lo que es más grave--le convenció" (1, p. 123). The final failure converts the preceding battle into failure as well, and the whole of human existence becomes ridiculous in the extreme. Perhaps what cannot be justified, even theatrically, is that human life should arrive at such an impasse. In the twentieth century alone, mankind has been presented with breathing examples of incredible oppression at its most powerful and brutal. If indeed further substantiation from the world of imagination was needed or desired, Las viejas difíciles could have been a prime vehicle; but distortion to this extreme

removes the viewer so totally from reality that such a crushing defeat makes no impact. The resulting numbness is contrary to the aim of social drama, which, according to Muñiz, necessarily involves touching the conscience of the spectator. Perhaps Muñiz' fears of the dehumanization of mankind as revealed in the drama do not relate so much to the present as to the future. Until time reveals the validity of his fears, however, the play, "en su condición esperpéntica, en sus resabios quevedescos, en su mezcla de crueldad y ternura," must be viewed as an experimental piece (1, p. 122).

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The trajectory of Muñiz' works from Telarañas to Las viejas difíciles reflects a varied exploration from naturalism, with modern dramatic shadings, to an expressionism so oppressive that one is reminded of Orwell's 1984. Tedium is as endemic a trap to naturalism as hysteria is to expressionism, but Muñiz' departures from the norms of each school usually help to rescue his works from either fate. His best naturalist play, El grillo, won him acclaim, but his propensity for the macabre and strident propelled him into expressionism and culminated in the play he is best known for to date, El tintero. Manuel Ruiz-Castillo describes Muñiz' type of expressionism as an exercise in exasperation: lyric and mocking at the same time, grotesque in form, and possessing, behind the cynical smile, a certain inquietude (9, p. 83). His symbolism is often jarring, but elusive in its meaning, and Spanish critics do not always agree on the impressions Muñiz is trying to convey. It is possible that the erudite in years to come will know the true significance of his symbols; one might also speculate that Muñiz himself does not always know. Meanwhile his symbolism enjoys such praise from García Pavón as being "de origen muy moderno

. . . aséptico, universal . . . en una sensibilidad nueva" (5, p. 37). In contrast to an often uncontrolled subjectivity, Muñiz' works also project an objective sense of reality. This can perhaps be illustrated by his use of a subject that has recurred in Spanish literature since Lazarillo de Tormes: hunger. In the farces of Muñiz it is not so much an obvious reality as a poignant allusion: in El tintero, Crock has cheerfully given up meat so his children can have it; in Las viejas difíciles, the question of the day is who will hunt the stray cats to cook for dinner, and how many will be needed to feed ten people.

Economic problems are a constant theme in Muñiz' works. He tells García Pavón that the particular social goal he claims is to awaken the public's awareness of "estos hombres de hoy que carecen de los medios económicos imprescindibles" (5, p. 34). He blames the desperate lack of satisfactory employment for the injustices of life and for certain ignoble decisions. Superimposed on this general background of economic dilemma are various moral lessons. Chandler and Schwartz have remarked appropriately, "As a whole, Spanish literature has tended to moralize, perhaps as a substitute for its lack of philosophical content" (4, p. 20). One area, however, in which Muñiz has shown refreshing contrariness to centuries of revered Spanish morality and to earlier social drama in particular, is in that of the pundonor theme. Not only does he refuse to support the notion, he contradicts it.

The innocent victims of attempted seduction or compromised honor in his plays accept their suffering with resignation, and allow the perpetrators to "live happily ever after." His approach, in its direct reversal of traditional solutions, illustrates his defiance of Spanish moral laws which, in their excessive rigidity, have done more harm than good.

Many critics have felt that Muñiz' portrayal of human suffering breaks through at times into a vein of lyricism which sets him apart from his colleagues. One example is the anguished soliloquy of Crock in Act II, Scene 4, of El tintero. In it he imagines his cadaver, which he has just sold to a medical school, being dissected some day by his own son, who he hopes will become a doctor. Yet, as is obvious in this scene, even such poetic outbursts are heavy with satire. Muñiz has said himself, "El escritor comprometido critica de frente, con dureza, con crueldad si es preciso" (7, p. 25).

Muñiz seems to deliberately prevent any of his characters from seeming exceptional. They are pressed into a perspective so general as to make one feel that the real protagonist is Spain itself. Consequently, the fact that he consistently presents an anti-hero makes it more comprehensible that Spanish critics sometimes find Muñiz unnecessarily harsh. Yet despite the monotonous features of his main characters, the urgent message of each play is

the recovery of the individual. Present-day literary trends which decry human regimentation carry an added impact in a country as tightly ruled as Spain, and are stimulated there by an undercurrent of anti-Fascist liberalism. The frustrations of the movement for more individual freedom become embodied in Muñiz' characters themselves, causing them to appear belittled and ridiculed, but also evoking sympathy because the very center of their being is laid bare.

Borel reminds us that a sensitive dramatist does not see the world as others see it--simple and without mystery, pressing on to a new golden era. Instead he senses all that is extraordinary about existence; he perceives its unlikely mixture of wonder and horror. He feels the urge to destroy by any means the artificial tranquillity, rooted in unawareness, with which man and his world delude themselves. Lastly, he has the will to find the true relationship between man and the elements--a terrible, adventuresome, frightful relationship. But the quest for it is the only way for him to live honestly (2, p. 180). Particularly in the case of Carlos Muñiz, and despite the tendency to compare him to illustrious literary ancestors, we find an author who is very much a product of his own times. His works may recall the picaresque vein of Quevedo, the caricatures of Goya, the philosophical struggle of Calderón, and the esperpentos of Valle-Inclán. But in his

works these artistic aspects combine with his concern for the immediate realities of modern Spain. General Spanish characteristics such as stoicism, a sense of dignity and personal worth, humor, mysticism, and an attitude of self-criticism are woven throughout his dramas. Foreign influences such as Kafka, Schopenhauer, Kaiser, and Brecht have also been noted. Muñiz, like Brecht, has expressed the idea that the purpose of theater is to give the viewer a sharper focus of man in all his dimensions, and, as García Pavón states, "a través de sus enseñanzas, ponerle en el camino de pensar" (5, p. 34).

Muñiz' personal evaluation of his own worth as a dramatist vacillates from the zenith of a high calling to the nadir of self-contempt. As for public appeal, he tells Francisco Alvaro: "Hago un teatro, al parecer, poco apto para los gustos, los modos y las modas de nuestro público habitual" (1, p. 48). Actually, only El grillo and El tintero have been viewed by a wide audience. Muñiz tends to be popular with young people, especially students, caught up in their preoccupation with social injustice. His fate in the theater hinges perhaps too much on the eventual success or failure of the new social drama, yet he is determined to contribute what he calls his "granito de arena en esta evolución constante de la Humanidad" (8, p. 79). Hope for him and similar new authors lies in a number of quarters, one of which is the formation of small theater groups like

the Grupo de Teatro Realista, dedicated to producing plays that are intellectually challenging. Another source of hope is that audience taste will mature with time, that the self-doubts already shaking Spain's middle class will cause a delayed appreciation for these works. It is significant that typical audiences have often applauded anti-bourgeoisie drama, such as the plays of Sartre, Brecht, and Hauptmann, suggesting that the term "middle-class" might more justly refer to financial position than to a state of mind. While Muñiz pictures himself, according to Hazel Cazorla, as risking everything in order to "implantar algo nuevo, necesario, vital" (3, p. 233), his dramas seem to stop short after shattering the laws or customs he finds objectionable. This matter of writers leaving the public without replacements for the gods they have smashed is typical of many, especially of an author much admired by Muñiz, Unamuno. It is difficult for modern dramatists to maintain their serenity while examining and exposing the foibles of today's civilization. This is partly because every social objective is ramified by complexities, and as the frustrations grow, the point becomes less clear. This may explain why Muñiz' plays have evolved from the cohesiveness of El grillo into something as arbitrary and dissonant as Las viejas difíciles. Some authors--Sartre, Miller, Dürrenmatt, and Buero Vallejo, for example--have been able to maintain a certain degree of calmness in their

works. Muñiz' failure to do this could be due to a certain lack of perspective. The fact that the Carlos Muñiz of today writes shows for television proves that the perspective of the average mind is within his grasp. Therefore it must be assumed that his approach becomes less rational as the subject matter becomes more alarming. If the trend of Western culture towards a dehumanized society is the most salient point made by Muñiz in the five plays examined here, then the overpowering presentiment of such a future for mankind could well engender an artistic frenzy such as Las viejas difíciles. Perhaps Muñiz is fighting passionately for a better society; a more apt statement may be that his dedicated battle is aimed at a Spanish theater free of all restraints. Hazel Cazorla quotes him as saying, "El teatro es esto: verdad, pasión, vitalidad auténtica. Lo otro no dejan de ser tonterías" (3, p. 233). García Pavón considers him the most outstanding writer in social drama after Buero Vallejo, but the same critic serves a practical warning to both Carlos Muñiz and civilization as we know it:

Si un día, por cualquier medio, se alcanzase esa justicia social deseable, el teatro social dejará de existir, quedará como testimonio histórico literario de una época desasosegada; como servidor de algo que no era arte puro . . . literatura, en fin, concebida para servicio de algo mucho más corto que la verdadera cultura; como algo expresivo de una civilización tal vez en trance de periclitarse (6, p. 189).

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