

HERMENEUTICS OF *LÁZARO IN THE LABYRINTH* BY BUERO VALLEJO

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Abstract. This play contributes to a better understanding of the psychological mechanism of behavior with respect to recurrent auditory hallucinations and the traumatic origin that can cause it, such as experiencing a violent event. This causes an emotional blockage of fear in the actor, due to the defense mechanism of denial, with repercussions on memory and negative feelings of guilt and shame. The author proposes an adequate emotional management for the protagonist, *Lázaro*. The solution is aimed at making him dare to know the truth and accept it following current clinical psychological praxis, without taking refuge in the protection of others. In this way, he will improve and may even reduce the emotional state and the hallucination. In the analysis of the work, various contents are decoded. First, the planes of reality: the physical world, the fantasy world and the inner world of the characters. Second, the trauma lodged in the subconscious and auditory hallucination. Third, relationship of defense mechanisms, emotional intelligence and memory. Fourth, plot about love relationships. Fifth, the psychological mechanisms in favor of justice and truth. It is proposed how this drama could have contributed to the social imaginary to raise awareness about the emotional management of individuals. The results indicate that this symbolic and complex work of form and content also contributes to solving other human dilemmas such as the limitation to know reality, in addition to the feelings and emotions in the subconscious, as well as to accept them. It is discovered how to cope with an ethical sense of justice in a society in democratic transition, with still open wounds that derive from a war. Also, there is the aspiration to a humane society on the part of the author.

Keywords: *Buero Vallejo, drama, Lázaro in the Labyrinth, trauma, emotional intelligence, acceptance.*

Пенья-Акунья Беатрис. Герменевтика твору Буеро Вальєхо «Лазар у лабіринті».

Анотація. Ця п'єса сприяє кращому розумінню психологічного механізму поведінки в ситуації рекурентних слухових галюцинацій та їхнього травматичного походження, наприклад, переживання сцен насильства. У актора це викликає емоційне блокування страхом через захисний механізм заперечення, що впливає на пам'ять та негативне почуття провини та сорому. Автор пропонує адекватне керування емоціями головного героя Лазаря. Рішення спрямоване на те, щоб змусити його наважитися дізнатися правду і прийняти її, дотримуючись сучасної клінічної психологічної практики, не ховаючись від допомоги з боку інших. Таким чином він покращить і навіть нормалізує свій емоційний стан і зменшить галюцинації. Різні шари змісту одержують інтерпретацію під час аналізу тексту твору. По-перше, це плани реальності: фізичний світ, світ фантазії та внутрішній світ героїв. По-друге,

це травма, що засіла в підсвідомості та слухових галюцинаціях. По-третє, це взаємозв'язок захисних механізмів, емоційного інтелекту та пам'яті. По-четверте, це сюжет про любовні стосунки. По-п'яте, це психологічні механізми задля досягнення справедливості та правди. Авторка розмірковує, як ця драма могла б сприяти соціальним уявленням щодо підвищення обізнаності про керування емоціями індивідами. Результати засвідчили, що ця символічна і складна робота форми та змісту також сприяє вирішенню інших людських дилем, таких як обмеження пізнання реальності та прихованих у підсвідомому почуттів та емоцій, а також їхнє прийняття. Розглянуто питання того, як чинити з етичним почуттям справедливості в суспільстві з перехідною демократією, в якому ще не загоїлися рани від війни. Також у автора твору простежено прагнення до гуманного суспільства.

Ключові слова: *Буєро Вальєхо, драма, Лазар у лабіринті, травма, емоційний інтелект, прийняття.*

Introduction

Aristotle approaches catharsis (in the treatise of Poetic), the liberation of repressed emotions, through the genre of drama. Catharsis occurs when the audience identifies with the profound emotions evoked by the characters, producing an effect of purification. This purification is insufficient to psychologically cure a trauma, but it serves as a reminder and to make the audience realise that some event they have experienced is negative, painful and has serious emotional effects on them when they relive it.

At an emotional level, the phase of identification (Goleman, 1995; Bisquerra & Mateo, 2019) is especially acute in the protagonist, in whom fear, shame, low self-esteem and guilt are reflected, in both their words and their body language. In the case of individual with low self-esteem is characterized by having feelings of self-underestimation (Lancelle, 2002). The feeling of guilt is linked to religious parameters (Freud, 1975, p. 430).

These emotions have been studied according to the roles and the drama represented in the play, and have been deliberately rehearsed previously by the actors interpreting the work, under the orders of a director. The audience's ability to decode the emotion has a physiological basis known as mirror neurons (Rizollati et al, 2007), by which the individual can imitate, learn and understand the intentions of others.

On the moral plane, an emotional identification is also established. If we consider the approach of Piaget (1932; 1933), he establishes that the asymmetric interactions that parents establish with their children it is the context where the child assumes a heteronomous morality. Later, it is within the framework of symmetrical interactions with their peers that it is possible for young people to develop rational, consensual rules.

So, the mechanism of emotional identification with a character in a drama also occurs on the moral plane, embodied by the actions represented by the protagonist, given that moral values are transmitted both (López, 1997) aesthetically and ethically in the drama.

According to Freud (1920), the concept of trauma consists of the association of a dramatic event with an emotion in the mind of an individual. The individual has been

confronted by a stressful event which exceeds their capacity to face up to it. However, these two factors are dissociated from the subject's consciousness, so that the trauma becomes part of the repressed thoughts which populate their subconscious (Freud). According to Castiel et al (2012), the concept of trauma and defence contributes to the understanding of hysteria. In addition, Sletvold (2016) notes that Freud's first theory of trauma based on emotional events contributed to the understanding of neurosis (*non-neurological mental disorders*). Trauma can manifest itself in various ways in the individual: nightmares, insomnia, irritability, anxiety and nerves.

As a result of this trauma, the protagonist has persistent auditory hallucinations in the form of a telephone ringing which the others do not hear. These subjective hallucinations, which can produce anguish, do not correspond to physical reality, and are not necessarily related to schizophrenia or other mental pathology (Longdem, 2013). This state can be overcome through the use of cognitive treatment (López-Luengo, 2017). The treatment phase can also be reinforced with the application of emotional intelligence, through the identification, regulation and management of the emotions (Goleman, 1995).

Among the defence mechanisms by which the psyche avoids recognising traumatic events, expounded by Anna Freud (1936), can be found denial, isolation and undoing. In negation, the subject refuses to recognise the reality overwhelming them because the emotion is too intense.

The therapeutic response to traumatic experiences recommended by clinical psychology today is that of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Hayes, 1984; Hayes et al, 1999; Ferro, 2000; Luciano & Valdivia, 2006). Hayes first defined of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) in a paper on spirituality, starting with the observation that suffering is intimately bound up with verbal knowledge. Part of the process of ACT is to encourage individuals to find a transcendent sense of self known as self-as-context. By developing self-awareness and perspective, people can cease following behavioural norms learned from childhood.

This trauma has also produced in the protagonist the affective blockade to bet on finding a partner and projecting a family of his own. He has preferred to operate in a familiar context, operating on infantile attachment, in a context in which they have a secure bond, this entails feelings of stability and increased self-esteem (Branden, 2008), favouring empathy and emotional communication (Rodriguez, 2017). Paradoxically the main character maintains a childlike attachment being compatible with assuming an adult role (Goffman, 1997) protecting his sister Fina and his nephews with housing and sustenance.

Why this play: background to the author and his work

The early adulthood of Spanish playwright Antonio Buero Vallejo (1916-2000) was interrupted by the Spanish Civil War. He served with the Republicans, and at the end of the war was sentenced to death for his part in the 'rebellion', a sentence which some months later was commuted, and which ultimately saw him serve six years in

prison (Del Castillo, 1998). Monleón (Alvar, 2000, p. 5-6) regards him as an author with a background in the Fine Arts, whose works draw a portrait of human behaviour with realism and symbolism. Several of his works were censored by the state for their progressive undercurrents which failed to explicitly align with the dictatorship. In 1986, the year that *Lázaro in the Labyrinth* was first performed, he was awarded the prestigious Miguel de Cervantes Prize, having already been made a member of the Spanish Royal Academy in 1972, and he would go on to win the National Prize for Spanish Literature in 1996. The play was chosen for its titular character, a victim of trauma, and for the phenomenon of persistent auditory hallucination by which his trauma is manifested. The play also suggests how such trauma can be managed by strategies which foreshadow Goleman's (1995) emotional intelligence, and current clinical psychological practice embodied in Acceptance and Commitment Theory (Hayes, 1984; Ferro, 2000; Luciano & Valdivia, 2006).

Method

A baseline bibliographic review was carried out, and the work was hermeneutically analysed according to various paradigms in chronological order for its richness in terms of register, content and construct: Plato's gnosological conception (*Republic, VII*), Aristotle's catharsis (*Poetics*), Saussure's semiotics (1945), Sigmund Freud's concept of trauma (1920), negation (one of the defence mechanisms) described by Anna Freud (1936), ACT therapy (Hayes, 1984; Hayes et al, 1999), and the management of emotions using Goleman's (1995) model of emotional intelligence.

According to Plato, cognitive knowledge allows us to access a reflection, an image of what reality is (in the myth of the Cave, *Republic, VII*), but not reality itself. It is an opposite gnosological paradigm to the Aristotelian (*Metaphysics*) one that affirms that it is possible to know the reality as it is.

Aristotle approaches catharsis (in the treatise of *Poetics*) as the liberation of repressed emotions (or endure purification) through perceiving and reliving the deep emotions of the characters in the drama. The viewer recognizes the passions in a vicarious way when seeing them projected in the characters of the work. In addition, sometimes it allows to consider the consequences or punishment deserved for these emotions. However, he does not directly experience such consequences or punishment.

Semiotics was formulated by de Saussure (1945) as the science that studies the life of signs within social life. Semiosis is the creation of a meaning from the use of a sign that can be interpreted in the mind of the individual who receives it. According to Saussure, symbol serves to designate the linguistic sign, or more exactly what we call the signifier. The characteristic of the symbol is that it provokes a natural link between signifier and signified.

Freud in (1920) develops the concept of trauma as association of a dramatic event with an emotion in the mind of an individual within the paradigm of unconscious phenomena. In fact, the Freudian definition of trauma is "any

excitations from the outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield there is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus which have broken in and binding of them”.

Anna Freud (1936) conceives negation as a mechanism of the immature mind because it conflicts with the ability to learn from and adapt to reality. When denial occurs in mature minds, it is most often associated with death, the state of impending death, and rape. Currently the concept has been extended (Kübler-Ross, 1969) to five phases of knowledge of near death and to death notices among survivors.

ACT therapy consist on the theory of relational frames that incorporates scientific advances in the study of language. This theory formulates that we are capable of establishing arbitrary relationships between different stimuli. Consequently, when a word is conditioned to an object, the reactions that had been conditioned to the object are given to the word. Therefore, just as an object evokes the word that names it socially, the same term evokes internal reactions similar to those provoked by the original object (Hayes et al, 2001).

According to Goleman (1995), the management of emotions refers to consciously identifying the emotions that are felt. At a later stage, they are accepted and regulated to better fit the context.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the play

The play, set in a contemporary provincial town, follows the story of Lázaro, owner of a bookshop called *The Labyrinth*. Lázaro, middle-aged, lives with his sister Fina, who has been abandoned by her husband, and her two children, Mariano, a lawyer, and Coral, a musician. The two children have two friends in common, Germán, a lawyer, and Amparo, a writer, who had previously been in a relationship with Mariano. In his youth, Lázaro had attended a student demonstration with Silvia, the girl with whom he was in love, but on their way back Silvia had been viciously attacked by extremists and left disfigured. Despite the passing of twenty years, Lázaro remains tormented by the events, and hears a persistent auditory hallucination in the form of the ringing of a telephone. When he meets Amparo, the friend of his sister’s children, in his daily life, he projects the feelings of love he felt for Silvia onto this other young woman.

The play is divided into two acts. The first is the longer, establishing the scene, and setting the plot in motion; the second is shorter and moves things along to the denouement. Scenes are played out in parallel, with dual dialogues dynamically interacting across a twin set as characters take turns to speak. The criss-crossing dialogue weaves increasing layers of meaning as the six characters interact. *Lázaro in the Labyrinth*, among Buero’s last plays, was first performed in 1986 during the early years of the reestablishment of democracy in Spain following the death in 1975 of Franco. It was considered by critics as a passionate parable about love and fear (García Carzón, 1986).

Platonic dualism, semiotics and the interior world: reality, fantasy and introspection

Three different levels of reality operate in the play, symbolically suggested through a taught, economic style with highly suggestive touches, making use of a variety of effects suggestive of poetic, polysemous images, as noted below.

First, the drama presents elements and actions which are scatological and mysterious in themselves, especially in the character of Lázaro's sister, Fina. There are also on stage two phantasmagorical masked figures, giving form to the anguish deriving from the attack on Silvia. Fina is submissive "as behoves married women" (Aguilar & Miguel, 2021, p. 52) and overprotective of her brother. She practises cartomancy – fortune telling with cards – in order to divine what the future holds for Lázaro and Coral, and attempts to prevent what she foresees with warnings about how they should refashion their lives. She also foresees in her dreams what will soon befall Lázaro – "dreams tell us a lot of things" (Buero, 1986, p.43) – that he will meet a woman who reminds him of Silvia. As Freud brought to our attention, the world of dreams is the location where the subconscious mind projects its images.

Secondly, the name of the play, *Lázaro in the Labyrinth*, is in itself allusive, referring not only to the actual bookshop, but also to the emotional state of fear and anguish inhabited by the protagonist. As Amparo tells him, "you condemned yourself on that awful occasion to the shadows. To the labyrinth" (Buero, 1986, p.122).

Third, there is the visual plane of the imagery, which owes much to the writer's training in the visual arts. The characters avoid facing up to reality through the construction of fantasies, the contemplation of beauty and introspection into an inner world in another dimension. Such is the case of the park bench by the pond, sparkling in the reflected light. Besides being a physical place of contemplation, it is for Lázaro and Coral a spiritual retreat, and it around this bench that much of the drama occurs: escape, discovery of visual and musical beauty, emotional peace, and the search, in part, for equilibrium. It is where they piece together a coherent account of the events in their lives: "The discovery was not mine, but Silvia's. She was the great discoverer. She said that if we know how to look and listen to things, they wink at us. The light reflecting off the water was for her its way of winking at us" (Buero, 1986, p.14). The specialness of the locale is defined further in the second act: "It is the place where the truth is revealed" (Buero, 1986, p. 86). The influence of Plato's gnosological aesthetic can be seen here, in terms of the allegory of the Cave (the Republic), pointing to another level of reality which is difficult to approach and comprehend. In the allegory a group of people chained to a wall inside a cave are unable to perceive the outside world, which represents the world of ideas, intelligible and consistent, but must instead attempt to fathom it from the shadows projected onto the wall of the cave (the visible world). According to Angarita (2011), the allegory reminds us of the importance of analytical evidence, as in a case study, when it comes to understanding all the contradictions involved in the primitive mechanisms of an individual's learning baggage.

Spirituality and beauty are also foregrounded against a common background of music. In conversation with Lázaro, Coral exclaims, "Do these notes really sound alike? Yes! The water sparkles over our bodies and these notes over us" (Buero,

1986, p. 15). Coral plays the lute, an unconventional instrument on which she is unable to express how she feels because her lack of understanding of her inner life prevents her from achieving mastery. Many of the scenes feature background music, and accomplished compositions are mentioned, such as the baroque composition, Gavotte, based on a French folk dance, and referring here to the Suite in E-flat major (Buero, 1986, p.73, 85), by the composer Johann Christian Bach for lute.

This fantasy is counterpointed by the social reality which the author puts in the world-weary mouth of Germán, “two fighters who are at odds with this rotten society”. We are reminded of this reality in the account of their political activism – “They went to a student protest together and on the way home two strangers set on them on a corner” (Buero, 1986, p.36) – and by the general tone of censure for the acts of repression of the period. The portrait of society is one of a society divided, in conflict, with the fratricidal war (1936-1939) still relatively recent. On the one hand, there is the comfortable middle-class represented by Lázaro and his family, on the other, the less well-off embodied by Germán and Amparo, progressive in political outlook, and lacking all privilege with respect to the job market. To overcome his disadvantages Germán behaves unscrupulously in competition with Mariano, so that he manages to be contracted by a law firm, while Mariano is left unemployed. Lázaro is unimpeachable in all his actions, with the grave exception of the events with Silvia. Amparo is guided more by the need to maintain herself on her own merits while preserving her ethical standards.

Trauma in the subconscious and persistent auditory hallucinations

Lázaro suffers episodes of persistent auditory hallucinations when he is told that Sylvia, the young woman who was brutally attacked after attending a political demonstration with him many years previously, has been seen again. As López Luengo (2017, p. 8) says, this is the triggering event: “when one’s attention is self-directed towards internal information of great emotional charge, the conditions are favourable for the appearance of hallucinations”. Lázaro’s trauma, tinged with culpability and shame, follow the pattern of remembering, repeating and working through described by Freud (cited in Etxeverry, 1986, p.151-152): “in general the person under analysis remembers nothing of what has been forgotten and repressed, and instead acts it out. They do not reproduce it as a memory, but as an action. They repeat without knowing, of course, what they are doing.” This kind of trauma signifies a loss, according to LaCapra (2009, p. 65-103).

Defence mechanisms, emotional intelligence and memory

The writer draws a deep emotional portrait of the six characters, sketching in each’s conflicting feelings towards the family, work and love, and how they manage the emotions arising as a result.

According to the different mechanisms of defence described by Anna Freud (1936), Lázaro has repressed his memory of the event perhaps because he felt close to his death or as a survivor of the brutal beating who does not want to acknowledge the

death of his friend Silvia. In the play these facts are blurred as in the mind of the protagonist. With an attitude of denial, he refuses to admit to his family how much it unceasingly overwhelms him, causing them to worry about him. It is only to Amparo that he reveals that he has in his memory two different versions of what happened the night Silvia was attacked:

Amparo: "In one, he ran to help when she called out, and then they attacked him"

Mariano: "¿And in the other?"

Amparo: "He heard her call out, but he froze on the spot out of panic, and watched them beat her up at a distance. Only after they'd fled the scene did he go to help her" (Buero, 1986, p.114).

Nevertheless, Amparo suspects that Lázaro cannot face up to the version in which he was a coward. Lázaro becomes blocked and cannot apply the emotional intelligence required to dare identify, regulate and manage his emotions (Goleman, 1995) precisely because of the profound fear he feels. He has no wish to discover which way he acted, of which, at heart, he feels guilty. Because of this emotional blockage, he has lost his memory of the event and cannot face up to it: "You have forgotten because you feel nothing but fear. A fear so great, so constant that to make it go away, you have engineered things to make it a nice and quiet blip in your memory" (Buero, 1986, p.121).

His sister Fina reinforces this denial with her overprotective posture towards him. She even withholds from him her belief that Silvia actually died from her injuries – "I think that Silvia died ... a long time ago" (Buero, 1986, p.87) – which she learnt when Silvia's parents called her to ask that Lázaro no longer call their daughter. She thus takes an active part in prolonging Lázaro's suffering over the years, and, in not wanting to face up to the truth, also behaves in a cowardly manner.

Affective relationships and the plot

The topic of affective relationships is central to the play, such that the characters emanate tensions that are not overtly expressed, but are felt beneath the surface. Fina has been abandoned by her husband, and is cared for by her brother Lázaro. So protective of him is she that she even contemplates her daughter committing incest with him, the man who has acted as a father figure for her (evoking Freud's famed Oedipal Complex), and hints that the two get married: "Mum, don't you realise that you're talking to me about him as if he was engaged to me?" (Buero, 1986, p. 93).

Amparo recommends that Lázaro send Coral abroad because she suspects that Coral is in love with her uncle. (Amparo): "I suspect...that it is you she has always been in love with" (Buero, 1986, p.188).

Male rivalry is reflected in the struggle for Amparo's affections between Lázaro, his nephew Mariano, and Germán. Amparo is portrayed as a strong woman, with no interest in making a good match, or finding a good man to marry. That kind of consideration reflected conventional mores, according to which women did not go to

university or study a trade, and so lacked economic independence. If Amparo is to have any kind of relationship with a man, it is to be on an equal footing, with no economic dependence on her part. For the period in which she is represented, she is advanced in her attitudes.

The process of catharsis and identification of the two protagonists takes place in the penultimate scene of Act II. Lázaro declares his feelings of love for Amparo. She reciprocates, but is set on leaving because she wants Lázaro to face up to the truth of what happened with Silvia, and begin a healing process and acceptance therapy (Ferro, 2000, Luciano & Valdivia, 2006), beyond cathartic purification (Aristotle). She wants him to emotionally overcome for himself the trauma caused by his fear, and not to take sanctuary in her protection alone like a child: “At your side, I would only keep you stuck in your helpless child’s fear, I would never drag you out of it ... If you are going to be reborn, if you can manage it, you need to be far away from me” (Buero, 1986, p. 124). She has a fuller conception of love: “I don’t want just another lover; I have long understood that desire and the fascination of the other’s presence are not enough” (Buero, 1986, p.123). Amparo would like a reciprocal relationship built on strength and generosity, not based on weakness and selfishness.

Lázaro: “I don’t understand. ¿Why are you leaving?”

Amparo: “For love”. (Buero, 1986, p.125)

Psychological mechanisms promoting justice and truth

Germán suspects that Fina knows more than she lets on about Silvia. In front of everybody, he cross-examines her, and using psychological questioning, he backs her into a corner and finally makes her reveal what she knows about Lázaro and Silvia, which she has been keeping secret all this time. The episode reflects Buero’s own experiences at the end of the war, when he was tried and imprisoned for six years for his political affiliation (Del Castillo, 1998).

The author draws a careful portrait of Amparo, who can be considered the fairest-minded character for several reasons. First, she is frank about people’s feelings. Secondly, in the professional sphere, she reports the unethical practices of her former employers, but at no time does she seek to take advantage of the working conditions offered to her by Lázaro. Thirdly, acting on moral grounds, she reveals that Germán has been dishonest with Mariano. And finally, most importantly, she resists the convenience of marrying Lázaro and the economic security that entails.

Another recurrent theme in the play is the irrationality of aggression rooted in the fear of not being able to survive. It surfaces in the words of Amparo: “Fear, in sum, for his dear life. This fear gives rise to selfishness and aggression, which then gives rise to fear... And this is the hell where we find ourselves” (Buero, 1986, p.108). The issue is interwoven with another scene in which the phantasms reappear, this time with a speaking role which gives them greater importance. It is they that

bring to close the play. The two masks taking the role of the chorus in a Greek tragedy, and representing the irrationality of hate and aggression in general:

2nd Mask: “Of course. Because now others must be attacked”.

1st Mask: “Or shot”

2nd Mask: “Or remotely controlled explosives”.

1st Mask: “Or targeted missiles. The last word”. (Buero, 1986, p. 126)

Conclusions

The style of the play is sombre, but layered with complexities. With respect to form, it draws on various art-forms: the dramatic, with elements of the poetic, the visual, the dialogic, the symbolic and the musical.

The interplay of three levels of reality suggested by the characters – the inner world, the world of fantasy, and physical reality – enable the writer to draw on symbolic and poetic elements, and hint at the scatological and the mysterious, so as to reproduce the complexity of human behaviour. The overall effect is to foreground the disorientation and limitations of people to really know what is happening around the in society and to understand themselves (Hayes, 1984; Ferro, 2000; Luciano & Valdivia, 2006). In short, Buero’s aspiration in his conception of reality is articulated by Lázaro in dialogue with Amparo:

Lázaro: ¡How you remind me of someone I knew well! ...Yes. And her vision, which became mine. A humane world, which we must fight for and which hasn’t arrived. ¿Will it arrive?” (Buero, 1986, p.53).

On the moral level, the author portrays a social reality that is still deep in political conflict, despite the many years since the internecine war. Nevertheless, when it comes to moral judgements, it is even-handed. Although the play has a clear progressive slant, it manages to avoid simplistic schemes by which characters are painted in the same political and moral brush-strokes. Buero recognises the good attitudes and actions of comfortably off progressives (Amparo, Lázaro, Mariano and Coral), but deplores that of the middle-class character (Fina’s withholding of information about Silvia from Lázaro), and the outwardly progressive, but dissembling character (Germán’s unscrupulous treatment of Mariano).

With regard to content, it sets up through the characters great human dilemmas, such as the limitations of access to cognitive knowledge of reality. Likewise, the paradoxical psychological mechanisms of the subconscious emerge in favour of justice and the truth. Another significant element of the play is the unhappiness caused by unresolved trauma and the mechanisms of defence against it. Nevertheless, the play does offer some solutions, such as acceptance of emotional states, and learning to self-regulate one’s emotions, alongside unlearning acquired attitudes so as to reduce the negative emotions associated with fear and hallucinations. One

recurrent theme is that of creating lasting bonds through love and the need to progress from infantile to adult attachment. A sense of justice and ethical behaviour in one's civic life are also considered, as are the difficulties facing a society in transition towards democracy, weighed down with the baggage of a recent political-social conflict.

The play can be classified as a drama with considerable emotional impact as it follows the affective arcs of the characters. It opens with an emotional crisis suffered by the leading male character, Lázaro, which leaves him with a persistent auditory hallucination. Not only is this unresolved, but in fact the situation becomes worse, as he loses the company and the love of the two women he has been in love with, Silvia and Amparo.

Despite Lázaro's titular significance, the young Amparo has an important part to play. The two are the most rounded characters: Lázaro is vulnerable, diminished by fear and guilt; Amparo, by contrast, is an intelligent, strong and fair-minded woman, ahead of her time. She behaves most exemplarily of all the characters, the most idealise, and the character the audience is most likely to identify with on an emotional and moral plane.

In short, the psychological portrait of the characters' emotions is drawn with understanding and depth. Above all, the work is successful in its treatment of love in conflict with the emotion of fear. It is this depth of understanding of human nature which has caused Buero to be considered a classic author, resonating with writers of the stature of Calderón de la Barca and Shakespeare.

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