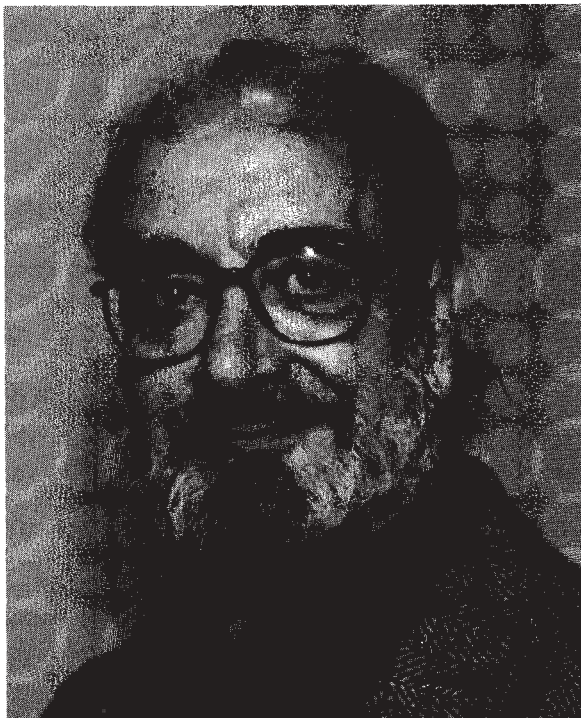


ENCUENTROS



The Future of Drama

Lecture by

Alfonso Sastre

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THE FUTURE OF DRAMA

Alfonso Sastre

I have thought about the title of today's lecture, *The Future of Drama*, and maybe it is just a coincidence that the phrasing of the title suggests that those of us who dedicate ourselves to writing plays are a little worried about the subject. Those who simply enjoy going to the theater or reading plays may also be concerned about the future of drama, insofar as the crisis in theater is said to be more profound today than in the past. Indeed, among dramatic authors in Spain, it has been remarked more than once that we playwrights are an "endangered species." Nevertheless, looking at our past somewhat objectively, let us say during this century which is about to end, we remember that there were times when we thought rather pessimistically that we were witnessing the end of drama, the end of this ancient art form, this ancient profession.

Those of us who are now writing plays are following the same format and structure that was established roughly twenty-five centuries ago in Classical Greece. From the few plays that have survived from that time by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and a few others, we have learned that the history of drama has been enormously complex. When speaking of dramatic theory in our university courses, we cite Aristotle who, in his *Poetics*, wrote that tragedy reached its definitive structure and essence at that time.

It is not known if Aristotle ever wrote the second part of this essay, "On Comedy," or if it was lost, but *Poetics* is brief and inconclusive. One theory is that it was a series of notes that Aristotle used when he spoke on the subject. In any case, tragedy certainly acquired its definitive

form, and we might now say that the evolution of tragedy essentially ended at that time, because nothing new has evolved since.

Drama has evolved within the context of tragedy. When we write a play today, we tell a story in which certain characters appear, have ideas and express them. They do so in a certain language, and all this occurs in a physical space with an element of sound. That is a play, both then and now. This structure is very flexible, and that is why it has endured for so long.

The history of drama has had chapters when the characters were the most important elements on stage, and it was called "psychological theater." At other times, the ideas expressed by the characters were paramount, and people spoke of the "theater of ideas." The sonorous accompaniment of instrumental music has been extremely important at times, and less important at others. In ancient Greece, the harmonious role of music balanced with the importance of the text. The actors expressed themselves in three ways: by speaking, as I am doing now; by chanting, possibly in a style similar to the Gregorian chants; and by singing, as in our modern opera.

Conversely, in realistic theater the role of instrumental music is diminished. In some productions, the only music one might hear is when a character puts a record on the phonograph. Nevertheless, a whole branch of drama expresses itself in an intense relationship with music. The history of opera, the musical form of drama still alive today, is nothing more than the history of one branch of drama known as

melodrama. Opera provides an excellent format for the reenactment of historical events. From a historical perspective, however, the most important thing to keep in mind is that the evolution of this dramatic form from religious to secular has resulted in the secularization of drama as a whole. When it first emerged, drama was very much part of religious ritual, and the process of secularization eventually led to the other extreme, a complete absence of religious themes, and even to the idea that theater could be a tool of revolutionary political intervention in society. In Berlin, at the end of World War I, the concept of political theater was born in the shadow and smoke of the Soviet Revolution. A whole succession of political theater has evolved, such as documentary theater, where occasionally plays have ceased to be playful, and have become highly political. The structure of the play defined centuries ago is still visible today; the dramatic format, however, is at the service of history and maintains its own structure.

At certain times it was thought that the theater as a profession was coming to an end. There was a serious crisis when talking movies were invented that had major repercussions for some theater people. Since film with soundtracks could communicate in much the same way that drama had until that time, there were playwrights from those years who concluded that theater was dead. I recall H.R. Lenormand, for example—a great author, forgotten today—who was more or less in the group of psychological playwrights that sprang up with the publication of Freud's scientific research,

which also had huge repercussions in the theater. Many European authors drew on Freudian theory when analyzing their characters, and Lenormand was one of them. (In the United States, it was Eugene O'Neill.) Lenormand felt the situation was catastrophic. He wrote a play entitled *Crépusculo du théâtre* (Twilight of the Theater), about a theater that was converted into a movie house; the conversion was a metaphor for the end of drama. At stake was not only the future of playwrights, but also of the stage actors who considered themselves inappropriate for film projects. I remember, for example, in one play a character tells another, "Well, now that movies are coming in, we will make movies because we are actors." The character continues reflectively, "but what will we do with ourselves once our ghosts are projected on the movie screen?" They could not visualize it very clearly because stage actors are present during the performance; they were wondering where they would go once the actors on the screen took over.

This struggle, however, did not result in tragedy; blood did not reach the river. The theater was retooled, sets were mechanized, revolving stages appeared along with endless platforms, and lighting techniques were enhanced. All this was done in an effort to bolster the chances of drama's survival against film. It was like saying, "We in the theater can also do what you do in film." But such a race was not necessary, nor did it lead anywhere. It left the stages in better shape, of course, and the technology more advanced, but the theater has one great, irreplaceable

virtue—live actors on stage. Movies can never do that, yet drama delivers it every time. The actual presence of actors, more than any other innovation, guarantees the continuity of theater.

In any case, things were going rather poorly in the theater even before movies came on the scene. I remember citing, more than once, a phrase written by Galdós in the late nineteenth century that underscores what I am saying: "Speaking about the crisis in the theater reeks of a sick man's stew." This is an old expression that means that talk of a crisis in theater is a long-standing matter. We have always spoken of the crisis in theater, and often we do not realize that this crisis is part of the essence of drama. Anyone who knows the history of theater knows that it has never had a buoyant life, it has always been troubled and uncertain.

We began to do theater in late 1945 when World War II came to an end. I was nineteen years old at the time, and a group of us formed the Arte Nuevo experimental theater group in Madrid. In my many years of experience, I have noticed that things often go poorly in theater. Nevertheless, theater has been enriched by this, and often important results have been forged through a course of small failures whose general product has been a triumph.

When things go badly in theater, our responses are often quite comical. If we are putting on a show and few people show up, which is a very common occurrence, someone will always say, "It is not that the play is not interesting, it is the rain. How can we expect people to leave their homes with all the heavy rain we have had

recently?" And that is how we console ourselves. But on other occasions, when few people show up on a gorgeous day, the explanation goes something like, "How can we expect people to come to the theater on such a beautiful day, when they could be enjoying themselves outside?" And we find such peace of mind by telling ourselves, "People are interested in our theater, but the weather is too nice." This is the normal pattern for theater people—perpetual crisis, and moving forward through the crises.

I have said that our trade is ancient and difficult, and I believe this is so, but there is another situation amidst the successive crises even more serious than that brought on by the movies. This was what could be called the crisis of the 1960s. In some notes I have brought with me, I say, "Drama was rejected by the theater and disdained by literature." This refers to a problem that almost exclusively affects playwrights—I am referring to the fact that we do not have a very precise or well determined place in society. A playwright, in the theatrical milieu, is a writer, someone who belongs to the world of literature. From personal experience, I can say that relations between playwrights, actors and directors are not very good. That distance is created by the fact that we are people from the literary realm who earmark a part of our work to be enacted on stage. In the theater we are considered *literati*, while in the field of literature, we are considered theater people, and therefore we do not often get much attention in discussions of literature.

There was an event that occurred a

few years ago at the book fair in Frankfurt, Germany. They dedicated a year (I do not remember which) specifically to Spanish books. I did not go, but the newspapers wrote that a protest was mounted because the Spanish Ministry of Culture, which chose a representative selection of Spanish books, had not taken samples of drama. It was either excluded or forgotten. Did the Ministry not consider drama part of literary culture? Perhaps it was an oversight. If so, it was an oversight highly demonstrative of the prevailing philosophy. It apparently was not a hard line position against drama because, in a way, the error was rectified, not by bringing Spanish drama to Frankfurt, there was no time for that, but by correcting a longstanding lack of representation in the literary prizes of Spain.

For most of this century, national literature awards have been awarded annually in Spain. These prizes used to be divided into three sections: prose, poetry, and essays. After the Frankfurt fiasco, a drama prize was instituted. This prize rectified what I considered to have been an oversight, rather than stiff opposition to dramatic literature.

In the 1960s things were particularly tough for playwrights, as the problems we already faced were compounded by new ones. Censorship during the Franco dictatorship was especially difficult for dramatic literature. All theatrical productions suffered compulsory text censorship prior to performance—that was how we worked under Franco. It should also be noted that the censors reviewed the performances too, but performance was subject to much less rigid censorship.

From the viewpoint of drama, this was a liveable situation. Censors were tougher on musicals and variety shows than on other forms of drama. They found many problems with the costumes, the skirts might be too short, the necklines too low, etcetera, so musical theater suffered terribly during this time.

In preproduction, there was a general rehearsal for the censors, who had already read the text and cut out much of it. The notice board announced: "Tomorrow at 8:00—rehearsal for the censors." These performances were somewhat special. The censors were two very sinister men, or so they seemed to us, who would sit in the second or third row where they set up a small table with little lamps. One came with the censored script and checked to make sure that the script we performed included the cuts they had made. The other man did not read anything; he eagerly watched the stage to see if he could spot any immoral acts. He would take notes and then tell us that a certain actor had made an ill-advised gesture, or that a certain actress was wearing ill-advised attire, things of that sort. On opening night the censors' suggestions were respected, but as the show continued, they were followed less and less. We always ran the risk of discovery; an official might catch us violating the orders, which could be a very serious matter and which, on occasion, resulted in a total ban of the play.

Those were the circumstances under which we worked, and we often argued about how to conduct ourselves. My colleague, Antonio Buero Vallejo, and I squared off in a polemic called "Sobre el

posibilismo" (On *Possibilism*). It was published in the magazine *Primer acto*.

Buero Vallejo's thesis was a critique of those authors who were more radical, and it was very much directed towards me as an author. He said that there are authors who produce an "impossibilist" text; in other words, they write things believing that they will be banned. He said this publicly in a meeting of university theater directors at which I was present. Certain authors did this to call attention to certain issues, or to themselves. These authors were sacrificing the viability of their text for the purpose of highlighting the existence of censorship. It was this "sacrifice" of the text that he called "impossibilism." In opposition to that position, which I think he caricatured, he put forth the "possibilist" position, in which the writer had to take into account the existence of censorship. In this case, the writer was expected to use his ingenuity to pass through the grizzly screen of censorship by sacrificing material and expressions he knew the censors would find objectionable.

I answered his thesis with my own. Since censorship did not have a written code, it was arbitrary and up to the discretion of the censors. The fact that there was no written code of censorship had two aspects to it: (1) everything could be prohibited, and (2) anything might be authorized. That was the *possibility* that always caused us greatest distress, because it opened the door to wild possibilities. Sometimes things that were extraordinarily risky, seemingly impossible, would be authorized.

I had the experience of having a play authorized and performed that would never have been written had I followed the "possibilist" approach. That experience was important to me. The play was entitled *Escuadra hacia la muerte* (Death Squad). I wrote it in 1952, in the middle of the Franco years. It was anti-military and anti-war, and therefore an "impossible" play—a play that could not be performed, that the censors would have to prohibit. Perhaps it was because I had already internalized the censorship, as abhorrent as it was to me, that I probably would never have written the play. But I was asked to write it by an experimental theater in London. The impresario said, "Write with total freedom because in England we do not have censorship problems. Of course there is censorship in England, but it is for very specific things only, so practically anything you write will be authorized and performed."

So I wrote the play without taking Spanish censorship into consideration. The London project did not work out for various reasons, and I kept the manuscript without knowing what to do with it. Soon there was a possibility of presenting it in a university theater, and we thought we would go ahead and present it to the censors to see what would happen; it would not hurt us to show it to them. To our surprise they authorized the play without changes.

One change I had made before presenting the play to the censors was to change the Spanish last names of the squad of soldiers who, in the original version, had been Corporal Pérez or López. I gave them

conventionally foreign last names. The corporal, as I recall, was named Goban, which sounded like a Czech name.

Perhaps the foreign names facilitated things somewhat with the censors, but of course it was a fleeting freedom. At the third performance, a general in Franco's army was present, General Moscardó, who had defended the Alcázar of Toledo. He got up in a rage saying, "How can a play against the Army be performed in Madrid?" The play was immediately banned, but we had already had our moment of freedom. And afterwards we continued on, despite everything. The play was put on clandestinely, illegally, hundreds of times by university groups, high schools, churches, seminarians, amateur groups, and theater students. Throughout my life I have encountered people who put on *Death Squad* when it was banned, which proves that *possibilities* do exist.

In the late 1960s, a new idea was widely embraced in vanguard theaters. This idea came about because of a backward reading of the *Theater of Cruelty* by Antonin Artaud. Some brilliant performances of avant-garde theater were being produced at the time, such as the "Living Theater" which toured Europe. Information came to us from Poland about a small group directed by Jerzy Grotowski, who later became a famous director. We often discussed his idea that one had to fight against the dictatorship of the playwrights. Some of the avant-garde theater groups with whom we sought to work, or at least to work toward democratic objectives, adopted the idea

that they did not need to use written texts. This produced a brief crisis, but I got around it since I worked in such a way that they accepted my literary contributions. But it did not work out so well for some of my colleagues.

I have spoken with my Latin American contemporaries from the generation which, in Chile for example, is generally known as the '50s Generation. (I have also seen this term used a few times in Spain.) I have heard some of them—Egon Wolf, for example—say that those were bad years to be a playwright. In Spain this actually turned out to be a healthy development, since the actors had become accustomed to some very archaic theatrical formulas. Their rejection of drama included a rejection of those old formulas, but did not affect those of us who had already unchained ourselves and moved on. The actors learned a lot from experimental theater—body language, for example—and all of the new methods incorporated into drama were beneficial.

The debate, however, was not clearly defined. It was a moment of great passion in which there was talk of a “theater of the text” versus “theater without text.” I did not agree with the positions taken by most of my colleagues who defended the use of texts. In defense of text in the theater, they said that theater, like reality, is the word. Even the Bible was cited, where it was given that the Word was the origin of all things. I did not agree for one reason: I knew that when I set out to write a play, I did not begin by imagining words. I began by imagining a dramatic situation, which would then usually generate words. I also

might decide not to include words at all since there are often dramatic situations in which the characters do not speak. Samuel Beckett, as we know, includes whole portions in his works entitled “acts without words.” It was clear that there was a need to elaborate further on this point, since the theater of the text may or may not generate words, and words are generally not the source of a play, but rather a consequence of the situation. None of this was very precise since words certainly can produce dramatic situations, but I welcomed this experimental movement as necessary, and thought we all stood to benefit.

In 1967, when all these things were happening, I went to the opening night of a play entitled *Oficio de tinieblas* (Dark Profession) at the Teatro de la Comedia in Madrid. It was a work in the classical style of three acts with a single set, and it held challenges for the actors. At the end of the play, a terrible sword fight took place between two characters. It was a fight that had to be very convincing since one of the characters dies on stage. The fight could not be done in just any old way, it required actors who knew what was involved in staging a fight, who knew about physical expression in extreme situations, but these actors did not know how to fight on stage. Then I recalled that actors are no longer trained in fencing. There is a scene in the play *Don Juan Tenorio*, which is usually performed every year, in which Don Juan and Don Luis fight with swords. I recalled having seen a performance of it in which, during the sword fight scene, the actors pulled out their swords and softly hit one another a few times, tip-tap-tip-tap. Then

one dropped dead without there ever having been a convincing battle. This is exactly what happened with the actors in *Dark Profession* who tried to convince us they were fighting.

I thought to myself, of course, this is just what the experimental groups say is lacking, the strong physical expression that should be a fundamental part of any actor's training. Ultimately, we had to turn to fight trainers from the movies to teach the theater actors how to fight. When the script said that one character beats the other to death with his sword, their response was, "Ah, this is easy!" The trainers climbed up on the stage, and the way they fought scared us, yet they did not hurt one another; of course, they were experts.

This is the kind of knowledge that Spanish actors picked up during those years. The crisis we were going through seemed more serious in those days, but it had positive effects. Despite everything, even in Spanish theater today, there is talk of an impending return to the theater of text, and it is true that relations between writers and directors are still not very good. At times we still stand a great distance apart.

The idea that the playwright is a dying breed is based on the fact that no great new author has yet emerged from the younger generations. I do not know if I am misreading the situation, but I get the impression that the time of the great dramatic writers is coming to an end. It may be a mistake, as I say, but we do not see authors of the caliber of Bertolt Brecht or Samuel Beckett emerging today. The other day Eugene Ionesco died, and we had

the feeling that we had lost one of the last great playwrights. In the United States, Arthur Miller is almost eighty years old, and we cannot expect many more years of artistic production from him. (A recent play of his has just premiered.) Still, it is true that the image of great authors has given way over the last twenty years, not to small authors, but great small authors. In other words, they are at a somewhat lower level.

Yet, to say that there are no great playwrights today is to be superficial from our perspective. What makes an author great? When does he or she become great? Perhaps you can call someone a great writer whose work has been widely appreciated, independent of his or her talent as a writer. At the same time, playwrights with great talent cannot be labeled great writers if their work has not been widely disseminated. For example, a great author may surface in a culturally depressed area like Poland, for example, or in some obscure region. I ask myself, *Are there great authors in these places?* I think it is impossible to determine the magnitude of an author, and most writers working today are unknown. When we speak of playwrights, we refer to only a few dozen names, but the phenomenon of drama is profoundly extensive.

Hundreds of people write for the theater, most of them unknown. I have thought at times about which authors have influenced me, and often they have not been the great authors of supreme magnitude, but rather those considered minor. I owe much to the "minor" playwrights who have played key roles:

Ernst Toller, for example, a German expressionist writer; Lenormand, whom I have cited before, and J. B. Priestley, whom I have not yet mentioned. I would emphasize the great importance of the excellent minor authors or the great small authors, I should say. For me, some of the best have been the two Swiss writers, Dürrenmat and Max Frisch; also Peter Handke in Germany, and Tankred Dorst. One may ask who are the playwrights who have emerged in Europe over the last two decades. Heiner Müller comes to mind; he worked in the German Democratic Republic before the fall of the Berlin Wall, and his works are performed in Europe today. Botto Strauss is another German writer, and I could mention David Mamet in the United States, who I believe is a great small author. Great authors—in the sense of the great classic authors of recent years—are Peter Weiss, the author of *Marat/Sade*, whom I hold in high regard and the Austrian Thomas Bernhard, who is no longer living.

I believe that I have covered more or less the situation of drama as I see it today. Since there is time for your questions, perhaps some of you would like me to address points I have not yet mentioned.

Is the crisis in theater due to a lack of good actors or a lack of good playwrights?

Perhaps today there is no important group of actors capable of exciting public interest in the theater. After all, the actor is the one who has the greatest presence in the theater. There is a saying among

actors, “With good players there is no bad play.” The importance of the actors is well stated in this aphorism. We playwrights say amongst ourselves that the situation today is analogous to what happened when talking movies first came along. Today we are bombarded by entertainment options that lead us away from the theaters. In this respect, video continues to be important competition. The small turnout in our theaters is blamed on the fact that spectators have too many choices of things to see and it is a bit more expensive to take in a play than some of the other options.

At one point I studied the situation of the theater in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War. When the war broke out, I was ten years old and living in Madrid, which was still a small city. The city was practically surrounded by the fascists, with just one route in and out of the city—the highway to Valencia. The city was constantly bombarded by artillery and scoured by airplanes. Madrid had every type of problem you can imagine—hunger, the impossibility of clothing oneself, etcetera. At that moment, there were—and I am not exaggerating—at least twenty-five theaters open and running. There are not that many now, though the city has grown enormously. So you can see how important theater was when we had only film and theater to choose from. Today it is very easy to get distracted from your instinct to see a show. There are many places to go and many things to do at home. I see this as a sociological problem. The other problem, and the one that seems more worthy of analysis, is what might be the shortcomings of a show that fails to

draw a crowd. At least superficially, I believe the answer is that there are not many actors who can draw people to the theater.

Have you seen the play El Nacional?

I have not seen it yet, but I am familiar with the theme of the work. I know that there is another group, one working in Andalusia—one of the most interesting in Europe today—called La Zaranda, that is putting on a work with a very similar theme. This group is from the town of Jerez de la Frontera, and they are putting on a play with the same theme as *El Nacional*, the play by the Catalan theater troupe Els Joglars. I have only heard it discussed in passing.

It is the story of a theater that no longer operates as such. In the play by La Zaranda, the theater is covered with dust. The posters depicting glorious events are still there, crumpled and decaying. There are just a few employees taking inventory of the shipwreck, as it were. They carry feather dusters and move about clumsily. They themselves are very old. They look at the posters and see their own transience. It is about the twilight of the theater. If there is a thesis in that play, which is similar to *El Nacional*, it would be what I have said today—we playwrights are a dying breed. This very pessimistic viewpoint can be extended to include the theater in general. The fact that a Catalan group and an Andalusian group are simultaneously addressing the same idea may indicate that this pessimistic spirit is flourishing lately.

However—and I do not say this just for the sake of ending on an optimistic note—I am sure, based on my experience, that theater cannot be replaced by any other form of artistic expression. In addition, one hears of the large number of young people in their twenties writing plays and writing very well. I have read several magnificent plays that were completed just a few days ago. People with a vocation for stage acting are cropping up in the drama schools. It is an intense and very powerful phenomenon.

Is the decline in theater attendance happening just in Spain?

I was just in Colombia, at the IberoAmerican Theater Festival in Bogota, and the shows were always full. Also in Spain, when the acting and the writing fall into place, success follows. Success is not all that common, but when it happens, it is big. We live in the Basque region, in Fuenterrabia, a small town next to Irun where, until recently, there were three movie houses. Two continue to operate, and the third was converted into a theater. This is the opposite of what happened in “Twilight in the Theater,” the work I mentioned earlier.

The theater in Irun seats about seven hundred people, and it is always packed, but this is extremely rare. In San Sebastian, which is nineteen kilometers away, an intelligent new theater manager is in charge of the grand and beautiful Victoria Eugenia Theater, yet things are going very poorly there. When the extraordinary La Zaranda troupe performed

there, there were only forty people in the audience, which is really terrible. At times like that, you get the impression that theater is coming to an end. But when you go to Irun, you see that theater filled with young, enthusiastic people and you say theater is doing great. So in a very small area, contradictory trends unfold. These are the mysteries of the theater.

How does a playwright position his product in such a sophisticated market to compete with other forms of cultural production?

Most playwrights set out to work in various media, but even those with a great vocation for the theater generally accept work in television or other sectors for the economic benefits. It is not our favorite place, but since you have to make a living, you end up making a television series. Sometimes in these flirtations with other media, playwrights are lost. Last week I was at a writers conference in New York, and I was asking Jorge Díaz, a Chilean writer, about Sergio Vodanovich, a very interesting playwright whom I knew, one of the writers of the '50s Generation. Díaz told me that Vodanovich is still talented, but no longer writes for the theater; he only writes television series. So, here I see a writer who has spun off. One of the last works he premiered in Santiago, Chile (I think it was during the government of the Unidad Popular) was *Nos tomamos la universidad* (We Are Taking Over the University) and that was his swan song. He never wrote for the theater again.

I have worked a little in film, and on

occasion for television, and I see that writers are worse off in those media. In the theater we do not get along well with the directors. Some of them prefer to direct plays by writers who cannot be present at rehearsals, which explains why so many classics and works in translation are produced. But at the end of the day, the playwright still retains some strength; ultimately, one can take back the play. On occasion I have had such great discrepancies with the director that I have said, "No, it is not going to be that way," and have walked out with the play. At least, you can still do that.

In film, the writer is totally dependent. I have had unfortunate experiences as a scriptwriter in film. For example, Merimée's *Carmen* was a film that was going to be made with Sarita Montiel as Carmen. Sarita Montiel was in America, and I was writing the script in Madrid. Our producer, Benito Perojo, one of the great producers of the time, was terribly frightened by the first text I showed him. "Sarita is not going to like this. She will not want to die!" He went on, "Listen, Sastre, do me the favor of coming up with a couple of different endings. That way if Sarita does not like one, we can offer her another." Of course I had to do it because they still owed me money.

I came up with an ending in which both Sarita and Don José die, as it should be; but I also wrote another in which only José dies in the catastrophe, and then Sarita goes back out into the street. I ended that script with a scene identical to the film's opening scene in which Carmen meets José on a street in Seville, and through a

conversation, she gradually seduces him. In the “administrative” version, the movie ends with her going back out into the street and running into another male character, with whom she begins to talk, using the same seductive dialogue. It is insinuated that the story of Carmen will be repeated eternally. When entrusted with a task of this sort, you try to avoid creating trash, and you try to comply in a somewhat dignified fashion.

The censor’s problem in this case was that José was a Spanish soldier and Spanish soldiers do not desert. Of course, José went with Carmen; still it could not be permitted because he was a Spanish soldier. As a result, the script was banned. Then Perojo, the producer, told me, “Listen, Sastre, they have banned the script.” I was still thinking that if they did not authorize the script, I would not collect my fee.

Seldom have I done anything brilliant, but this time I did. Since José could not be Spanish, I made him a French soldier during Napoleon’s occupation of Spain. He came to Spain and fell in love with a gypsy girl who was part of the anti-Napoleon guerrilla resistance. With these

changes the script was authorized. (I ended up writing three entire scripts to resolve all these problems.) Then, the director and the producer had a falling out over working conditions, and the director who was going to do it, José María Forqué, did not make the film. Finally, Perojo contracted an Argentine director, Tulio de Michelli, who read the script and the only thing he found useful was that the action occurred during the war of independence. That was the only part of my script they used. They entrusted the new script to other writers—Arozamena and another I do not remember—and they included scenes with *cuplés* (popular songs) because, of course, Sarita had to sing *cuplés*. In my script I had included the songs that García Lorca had discovered in Spanish folklore like “Los cuatro muleros,” “El zorongo gitano,” and others, but they were not included in the final version. The new writers included the most popular *cuplés* of the day, and that is the film they ended up with.

Clearly, these experiences show that film is not a comfortable medium for playwrights. Things are better in the theater, although for writers, it is still not our home.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Alfonso Sastre', with a horizontal line underneath.

Alfonso Sastre was born in Madrid in 1926, and has lived in the Basque region since 1977. He studied philosophy and letters and, in 1945, participated in the creation of the avant-garde theater group Arte Nuevo, with which he premiered his first experimental plays, *Uranio 235* and *Cargamento de sueños*. He has spent his career working in the theater and forming groups such as Teatro de Agitación Social (Social Agitation Theater) and the Grupo de Teatro Realista (Realist Theater Group), which premiered works such as *Escuadra hacia la muerte*, *La mordaza*, *El cuervo*, and others. Among his many works yet to be performed are *El camarada oscuro* and *¿Dónde estás, Ulalume, dónde estás?* His most recently premiered work is *El viaje infinito de Sancho Panza*.

Sastre's output extends to poetry, essays, narratives, and works that are difficult to classify. He has written and had performed Spanish language versions of the works of Euripides, Strindberg, O'Casey, Peter Weiss, Jean Paul Sartre, Langston Hughes, and others.

His highest awards have been the National Theater Award (1985) and the National Literature Award (1993), and his works have been translated into several languages.

Works by Alfonso Sastre

Plays

Comedia sonámbula (1945), *Uranio 235* (1946), *Cargamento de sueños* (1946), *Prólogo patético* (1950), *El cubo de la basura* (1951), *Escuadra hacia la muerte* (1952), *El pan de todos* (1953), *La mordaza* (1954), *Tierra roja* (1954), *Ana Kleiber* (1955), *La sangre de Dios* (1955), *Muerte en el barrio* (1955), *Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes* (1955), *El cuervo* (1956), *Asalto nocturno* (1959), *En la red* (1959), *La cornada* (1959), *Oficio de tinieblas* (1962), *El circulito de tiza o Historia de una muñeca abandonada* (1962), *M.S.V. o La sangre y la ceniza* (1965), *El banquete* (1965), *La taberna fantástica* (1966), *Crónicas romanas* (1968), *Melodrama* (1969), *Ejercicios de terror* (1970), *Askatasuna* (1971), *Las cintas magnéticas* (1971), *El camarada oscuro* (1972), *Ahola no es de leil* (1975), *Tragedia fantástica de la gitana Celestina* (1978), *Análisis de un comando* (1978), *El hijo único de Guillermo Tell* (1980), *Aventura en Euskadi* (1982), *Los hombres y sus sombras* (1983), *Jenofa Juncal* (1983), *El viaje infinito de Sancho Panza* (1984), *El cuento de la reforma* (1984), *Los últimos días de Emmanuel Kant* (1985), *La columna infame* (1986), *Revelaciones inesperadas sobre Moisés* (1988), *Demasiado tarde para Filoctetes* (1989), *Drama titulado A* (1990), *¿Dónde estás, Ulalume, dónde estás?* (1990), *Lluvia de ángeles sobre París* (1994).

Translations

El cobarde, 1950 (Lenormand; text lost), *El tiempo es un sueño*, 1951 (Lenormand; text lost), *A puerta cerrada*, 1967 (Sartre), *La puta respetuosa*, 1967 (Sartre), *Las moscas*, 1968 (Sartre), *Los secuestrados de Altona*, 1968 (Sartre), *Muertos sin sepultura*, 1968 (Sartre), *Las troyanas*, 1968 (Sartre), *Trotsky en el exilio*, 1969 (Weiss-Sorozábal), *El seguro*, 1970 (Weiss-Sorozábal), *Holderlin*, 1972 (Weiss-Sorozábal).

Dramatic Adaptations

Medea, 1958 (Euripides), *La dama del mar*, 1960 (Ibsen), *Los acreedores*, 1962 (Strindberg), *Mulato*, 1963 (Langston Hughes), *Marat/Sade*, 1966 (Peter Weiss), *Rosas rojas para mí*, 1969 (O'Casey), *El señor Mockinpott*, 1970 (Weiss-Sorozábal), *Noche de huéspedes*, 1970 (Weiss-Sorozábal), *Asalto a una ciudad*, 1971 (Lope de Vega), *Historia de Woyzeck*, 1972 (Buchner-Sorozábal), *¡Irlanda, Irlanda!* 1973 (O'Casey), *Las guitarras de la vieja Izaskun*, 1979 (Brecht), *Búnbury*, 1983 (Wilde). Unpublished: "Liola," 1970 (Pirandello-Calamai)

Theoretical Works (First edition dates)

Drama y sociedad (1956), *Anatomía del realismo* (1965), *La revolución y la crítica de la cultura* (1970), *Crítica de la imaginación* (1978), *Lumpen, marginación y jerigonza* (1980), *Escrito en Euskadi* (1982), *Prolegómenos a un teatro del porvenir* (1992). Unpublished: "Luces y sombras del teatro," "Nombres propios," "Los artículos determinados," "Las dudas claras," "Artículos al por menor," "La escoba literaria," and "Saldos." Work in progress: "Las dialécticas de lo imaginario."

Historical and Narrative Works

Cartas a Eva Forest (De prisión a prisión), *Epistolarios*, *El paralelo 38* (1965; written in 1958), *Las noches lúgubres* (1963), *Flores rojas para Miguel Servet* (1967), *El lugar del crimen* (1982), *Crónica de una marginación: conversaciones con Francisco Caudet* (1984), *Necrópolis* (1994). Unpublished: "Historias de California."

Poetry (First edition dates)

El español al alcance de todos (1978), *Balada de Carabanchel y otros poemas celulares* (1976), *Evangelio de Drácula* (1976), *T.B.O.* (1978), *Residuos urbanos* (1942–1994). Unpublished: "Vida del hombre invisible contada por él mismo" (1980).

Film and Television

With J.M. Forqué: *Amanecer en puerta oscura*, *La noche y el alba* and *Un hecho violento*. With Bardem: *Nunca pasa nada* and *A las cinco de la tarde*. With H. Sainz and J.M. Forqué: *Miguel Servet o La sangre y la ceniza*, an eight-part television series. *En el cuarto oscuro*, seven stories for a series of horror films.

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Dialogue with José Donoso, Chilean novelist.
No. 1, March 1993.
- *How the History of America Began*
Lecture by Germán Arciniegas, Colombian historian.
No. 2, April 1993.
- *The International Year of Indigenous Peoples*
Lecture by Rigoberta Menchú, Guatemalan indigenous leader and 1992 Nobel Peace Prize laureate. No. 3, October 1993.
- *Contemporary Paraguayan Narrative: Two Currents*
Lecture by Renée Ferrer, Paraguayan novelist and poet.
No. 4, March 1994.
- *Paraguay and Its Plastic Arts*
Lecture by Annick Sanjurjo Casciero, Paraguayan historian.
No. 5, March 1994.
- *The Future of Drama*
Lecture by Alfonso Sastre, Spanish playwright.
No. 6, April 1994.
- *Dance: from Folk to Classical*
Lecture by Edward Villella, North American dancer and Artistic Director of the Miami City Ballet. No. 7, August 1994.
- *Belize: A Literary Perspective*
Lecture by Zee Edgell, Belizean novelist and author of *Beka Lamb*.
No. 8, September 1994.
- *The Development of Sculpture in the Quito School*
Lecture by Magdalena Gallegos de Donoso, Ecuadorian anthropologist.
No. 9, October 1994.
- *Art in Context: Aesthetics, Environment, and Function in the Arts of Japan*
Lecture by Ann Yonemura, North American curator of Japanese Art at the Freer and Sackler Galleries, Smithsonian Institution. No. 10, March 1995.

- *Approaching the End of the Millennium*
Lecture by Homero Aridjis, Mexican poet and winner of the United Nations Global 500 Award. No. 11, September 1995.
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- *De vuelta del silencio*
Conferencia de Albalucía Angel, novelista colombiana y pionera del posmodernismo latinoamericano. No. 24, abril de 1998.
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Lecture by Roberto Suro, North American reporter for *The Washington Post*, and former Bureau Chief for *The New York Times*. No. 25, May, 1998.
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Lecture by Fred D'Aguiar, Guyanese novelist and winner of the Whitbread First Novel Award, and the Guyana Prize for Fiction, and Poetry. No. 30, November, 1998.

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