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Speaking Franco:

Francisco Franco and the Evolution of Spanish Artistic Voice

Joseph Goebbels, Nazi propaganda minister and staunch supporter of government

imposed creative censorship, once said, “It is the absolute right of the state to supervise the formation of public opinion” (Goebbels N.P.). Throughout history and across the globe examples of political regimes’ ability to control and shape the artistic canon of their peoples abound. Fascist regimes across the world have demonstrated the power of the state to influence and manipulate the public consciousness through art, and perhaps nowhere was this phenomenon more profoundly felt than in twentieth century Europe as Spain struggled under the dictatorial oppression of Francisco Franco. In 1939 following the Spanish Civil War, Francisco Franco and the Nationalist Party seized control of Spain, creating an administration that would endure the next four decades and forever alter the progression of Spanish culture. Steeped in nationalist idealism and Catholic fervor, the despotic reign of Francisco Franco was marked by exigent censorship and creative oppression. The stringent, moralistic regime known as *el Franquismo* controlled Spain not only politically and socially, but artistically as well, ironically producing a subversive counterculture which flourished after his death. The post-Franco artistic community, newly freed of the burden of censorship and the fascist political agenda, experienced a boom in all types of creative expression. Political strife exercised influence over artistic expression to such an extent that, stylistically, Spain’s contemporary theatrical heritage can be divided into three separate phases: prior to the Spanish Civil War, the forty year span under Franco’s rule, and the period from his death to the present. Partisan struggle and a growing sense of nationhood played a pivotal role in the evolution of theatre throughout the twentieth century. These convergent periods represent the evolution of Spain’s creative identity from Golden Age imperial

splendor and baroque decadence to fascism and national Catholicism and back again, bringing them to the contemporary period: uniquely modern, marked by its freedom and lack of cohesion.

El Franquismo refers to the ideological and political control which helped to support and sustain Francisco Franco's rule for nearly half a century. Prior to the Spanish civil war, Spain's political atmosphere was tumultuous at best. Bureaucratic turmoil after the abdication of King Alfonso XIII led to the dissolution of a centuries old monarchy and the formation of the Second Spanish Republic in 1931. This controversial and short-lived political structure caused a divide between its liberal members and the growing nationalist party. In 1936, war broke out between the opposing factions and continued for the next three years, ultimately ending with the installation of Francisco Franco as the authoritarian head of the new Spanish state. Franco's dictatorial rule would last for nearly 39 years, marked by its systematic suppression of allegedly iconoclastic ideologies and dissident artistic expression.

Prior to the Civil War, the prevailing neoclassic style of Spanish theatre continually hearkened the artistic glory of the Golden Age (approximately 1590 to 1681), the period during which the works of iconic playwrights like Lope de Vega (*Fuenteovejuna*), Tirso de Molina (*El burlador de Sevilla*) and Pedro Calderón de la Barca (*La vida es sueño*) demarcated the Spanish baroque and continued to define Spain's theatrical heritage even centuries later. In his article "Ideological Uses of Romantic Theory in Spain," Derek W. Flitter suggests that Spanish theatre in the late 18th and early 19th centuries represented a "return to national traditions, to a literature reflecting popular ideals... heroic, monarchical and Christian. The expression of a discernibly Spanish worldview embodied in Golden Age drama" (Flitter 345). Theatre during this time can be separated into two distinct movements: the neoclassical and the popular. Many popular works attempted to challenge the conventions of Baroque and Romantic theatre. Joaquín Álvarez

Barrientos describes these conventions as “unities”: Neoclassic comedy takes the form of either a comedy of manners or of realistic character-based comedy conforming to certain prescribed conventions, including subject matter taken from real life, verisimilitude and conformity to the unities of time, place and action (Barrientos 339). During the twentieth century these archetypal recourses were challenged by popular authors such as Ramón de la Cruz (*La civilización*) and Fernández de Moratín (*La comedia nueva*) who caricatured Baroque style to make a political statement. Though many artists who advocated an evolution from neoclassicism gained notoriety, the contemporary theatrical canon remained largely unaffected prior to Franco’s ascension to power in 1939 at which point politics and partisan upheaval began to color popular theatre. According to David T. Gies, in *The Cambridge History of Spanish Literature*, “theatre in the second half of the [twentieth] century was built upon the middle class’s anxiety about its political and economic stability.” Gies goes on to say that “Spanish society analyzed itself through the discourse of theatre” in his description of the way in which post-neoclassical dramatists used the stage as an arena to advocate social reform and criticize the materialistic values and rampant classism endemic of society during the Second Republic (Gies 438). Not surprisingly, this populist theatrical movement, intended to evolve the conventions of neoclassic literature, fueled the flames of social unrest which eventually led to a coup d’état by the Nationalist party and the fall of the republic.

The struggle between the old and the new describes the climate of the early twentieth century Spanish theatre as “a field of political power... a site of struggle between forces of continuity and renewal” (Dougherty 585). Theatrical reforms intent upon modernizing the Spanish stage expanded the thematic range to include themes of “sexuality, social justice and institutional oppression” (586). Technological advancements in lighting and stagecraft also

contributed to the growing commercialization of theatre by creating increasingly spectacular production values. While many patrons enjoyed this growing economic stability, a schism between the proletariat authors who advocated works of sociopolitical import and the growing leftist aristocracy began to develop. In his critical revue, *Teatro de masas*, essayist Ramón José Sender describes the proletarian theatre as “la única modalidad que responde a las íntimas características de nuestra época” [the only modality that captures the intimate features of our time] (Sender 103). Sender and other proletarian authors saw the masses as the principal focus of theatre, and sought to address the actual conditions under which the common man struggled. In contrast, the liberal bourgeois writers who dominated public attention explored more philosophical and grandiose motifs and attempted to render what Sender describes as, “una interpretación dinámica y dialéctica de la realidad contemporaria” [a dynamic and dialectic interpretation of contemporary reality] (370).

Despite these antagonistic movements, Spanish theatre under the Second Republic continued to gain importance as a political tool. Funded directly by the government, the Universidad Teatral de la Barraca and groups such as the Misiones Pedagógicas worked in parallel initiatives to educate the public, specifically the rural poor, in classic and contemporary theatre. “Both projects were ostensibly educational,” notes Dougherty, “but they were also part of a larger movement, the creation of a National Theatre that sought to identify the Republican state with Spain’s long and glorious theatrical tradition... The official decree stated that the genuine expression of Spain’s soul lay in its popular theatre” (591). This growing coalescence between artistic expression and nationalist zeal would only intensify with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

Beginning in 1936, the conflict which became known as the Spanish Civil War divided Spain militaristically and politically. The rebel coup which began the uprising by issuing a declaration of opposition against the Republic was largely made up of supporters of the fascist political movement known as the *Falange*, whose most notable member was an influential general named Francisco Franco, the youngest commanding officer in Europe since Napoleon Bonaparte (Ramón 22). Once Franco gained the support of fellow totalitarian leaders in Portugal, Italy, and Germany, he quickly emerged as the head of the Nationalist Party and dissolved the Spanish Parliament, declaring himself de facto regent of Spain in 1939, and thus beginning one of the longest despotic regimes in modern European history. His was a nearly forty-year dictatorship marked by political and artistic oppression.

Franco's political philosophy, like his military style, was characterized by swift and comprehensive eradication of any real or perceived dissidence. He viewed art as both a powerful tool of social control and a legitimate threat to the Catholic and anti-separatist ideals he held as central to his power. Raymond Carr and Juan Pablo Fusi, authors of *Spain: Dictatorship to Democracy*, summarize Franco's nationalistic dogma thusly: "Spain must never be allowed to relapse into the political system and social *mores* which forced [the Nationalist Party] to rise... in order to save the country from disintegration at the hands of a government inspired by foreign ideologies, and run by a gang of incompetent politicians who would put party over *patria* (Carr and Fusi 2). Franco's rule brought with it an ideology of pragmatism and prudence: *El Caudillo* (the Commander), as he became known, was the central figure of the nominally restored Kingdom of Spain, and he was intent on exercising complete control both socially and economically. His all-encompassing autocratic authority became known as *Francoism* and, according to Carr and Fusi, "rather than seeking 'enthusiasm and support', expected 'passive

acceptance' to complete cultural control" (47). The main sources of *el Caudillo's* power lay in the army, the Catholic Church and the mechanism of ideological control known as the *Falange*.

As Francoism began to assume more definitive control over Spanish culture, many of the prominent names in art and literature went into exile, refusing to bend to the strident censorship and religious vehemence imposed by the regime. Cultural and intellectual institutions not adhering to the core values of Franco's administration were purged, leaving Spain with a decided gap in scholarly and creative production. The style and content of Spanish culture under Franco attempted to emulate "the splendors of an imperial past, that the new regime wished to inherit and continue: the artistic achievements of the Golden Age... the neoclassical tradition of the renaissance and the passionate Spirituality of the Spanish mystics" (107). National Catholicism and the imperial dream upheld by Franco became the principal elements of literature and theatre and any subversive artistic action was quickly squelched.

El Teatro Nacional de la Falange, Spain's national theatre under Franco, ostensibly endeavored to achieve the same goal for which the Second Republic had striven: the reinvigoration of Spanish Theatre and the revival of Golden Age artistic achievements. The principal artistic focus of the *Falange* was toward that of *los auto-sacramentales*, a genre of allegorical religious plays endemic of classical Spanish theatre. Günter Berghaus, author of *Fascism and Theatre*, highlights the main difficulty which Franco's cultural reform encountered within the genre:

This type of drama did not offer enough opportunities for the proposed reform of the theatre. In fact, in the Golden Age, religious theatre represented the most conservative and anti-theatrical tendency, as it was more concerned with propagating religious dogmas than depicting individual characters. The problem was not that the Falange had any lack of regard for the theatre of the Middle Ages, but that the theatre-going public demanded more action-oriented drama (Berghaus 216).

Like the *auto-sacramentales* that predate them, plays based on morality, historical struggle and the defense of a holy and existential “truth” were the central focus of Falangist theatre. These dense and moralistic dramas were augmented by light, unobtrusive comedies intended to lift national moral in the wake of the destruction of the Civil War. According to Berghaus, “theatre in the mold of the *Siglo de Oro* (especially the so called Spanish comedy) was employed by the Falange to unite the masses and give an epic dimension to contemporary events” (220). Despite its ostensibly benevolent mission, dramaturges and historians refer to the Falangist theatre as promoting a culture of evasion, in which the immediate reality of corruption, poverty and political repression under Franco’s Spain was equivocated in favor of political passivity and intellectual indifference. Carr and Fusi indicate that “the growing alienation of intellectuals and artists from the ideology of the regime was increasingly evident... intellectuals have never known a time where their social influence has been more restricted” (Carr and Fusi 118). Many of the most significant authors of the era emerged from a group of writers, poets, and dramatists known as the Generation of 1936. This artistic collective arose during the Spanish Civil War and gained notoriety even after the fall of the Republic for its existentialist philosophy and bold critiques of Francoism. Organized artistic dissention produced by these clandestine gatherings began to circulate fueling the political disquiet.

Prodigious playwrights such as Antonio Buero Vallejo and Alfonso Sastre were harshly persecuted for their criticisms of the political chaos and social injustice brought on by Franco and his “cultural renewal.” In 1949, after a six year incarceration as a political prisoner, Vallejo wrote *La historia de una escalera* (*History of a Staircase*), which painted an exceptionally dark and seething portrait of *El Caudillo* and his followers. Unlike many of his counterparts who fled Spain to escape censorship, Vallejo refused and instead employed heavy symbolism and rhetoric

to obscure his criticisms within the larger plot structure, earning him great notoriety and establishing him as one of the foremost authors of the epoch. According to Erik Ladner, in his essay “The Limits of Posibilismo: The Censors and Antonio Buero Vallejo,” part of the enduring success of Vallejo’s work was his ability to evade censure by mingling “the text and staging of his plays... in a way that the combination of the two produced an effect on its audience that allowed them to interpret messages of social criticism while still adhering to the constraints of the censors.” (N.P.) Ladner adds that “this was the product of his philosophy of *posibilismo*, or writing within the limitations of what is possible under censorship.” Vallejo is described as “experimenting with social themes in a way that he seemed to be testing the waters of what would be accepted by the censors.” (N.P.) Another vital member of the Generation of ‘36 movement, Alfonso Sastre, adopted a very different attitude in the face of censorship, publishing several existentialist works openly exploring themes of tyranny and repression and facing a much higher degree of expurgation. In 1953, his first play *Escuadra hacia la muerte* (*Death Squad*) opened to great critical and commercial attention but was quickly marked as profane and banned by the censors after just three performances, not to be staged again until 1989. That same year, Sastre’s revolutionary drama *Tierra Roja* (*Red Earth*) was prohibited from performance for its examination of exploitation within the government and clear antimilitaristic sentiments. In 1950 Sastre, in collaboration with Jose M. de Quinto, co-signed the “Manifiesto del teatro de agitación social” (Theatre as Social Annotation Manifesto or TAS), a 20-point declaration in which the dissenting authors outlined their belief in theatre as a means of inciting societal reform. Ladner outlines the main points of the manifesto in his essay:

The intent of the TAS was to create social agitation, to provoke critical thought by addressing social and political concerns in its themes. Besides supporting the creation of new scripts written by Spanish authors, the manifesto also outlined a list of various foreign works it intended to produce, citing a list of works covering

a wide range of topics by authors including Upton Sinclair, Bertolt Brecht, John Steinbeck, Arthur Miller, and Jean-Paul Sartre, all of which were prohibited in Spain at the time (13).

Although Sastre's open challenge of censorship and theatrical oppression proved unsuccessful in its aim of staging prohibited works, it did represent the beginning of a dialogue, the first in a series of dissenting movements intended to challenge the Falange and its control. Spanish historian and dramaturge Francisco Ruiz Ramón describes the significance of the manifesto as "una importante toma de posición, un grito de protesta y de alerta que no cayó en el vacío ni se perdió en el silencio" ["an important stance, a cry of protest and warning that fell on deaf ears or was lost in silence"] (Ramón 387). In the period immediately following Franco's installation, the theatrical community was obliged to conform to the aforementioned culture of evasion and create "official" works advocating Catholic ideals and a new nationalistic culture. The publication of the TAS nearly fifteen years later attempted to reveal a reality that had, up until that point, been absent from the stage. Vallejo and Sastre's works follow this emerging culture of dissidence and represent the beginning of the end of censorship in Franco's Spain.

For nearly three decades the Falange sought to ingrain in its subjects a new "pro-Spanish" nationalism by restricting creative production to those works which conformed to strict religious and anti-separatist motifs. Franco encouraged the invigoration of the economy through theatrical patronage and even went so far as to nationalize various companies in an attempt to facilitate the dissemination of his propaganda. Although many works gained popularity amongst this audience, the absolute control of the censure essentially stifled the production of any work of enduring value. All cultural activities were subject to censorship in order to promote a unified national identity by mollifying Spain's existing cultural diversity. Starting with the first censorship legislation under *el Franquismo* known as the Press Law of 1938, *juntas de censura*,

committees made up of representatives of the Catholic Church, government officials and loyalist scholars, were given absolute control over abridging artistic production. Proposed works of any form required signed authorization from the *junta*. Raquel Merino and Rosa Rabadán, authors of “Censored Translations in Franco’s Spain,” describe the process by which “everything new or old, produced in translation or in the original Spanish had to be assessed and, likely expurgated, before it could be consumed... If a play was written in Spanish for the Spanish stage, it had to undergo a censoring process that would ensure that no immoral or politically dangerous content would reach the audience” (132). Any information or ideas considered by the Church or government to be dangerous or subversive were immediately redacted or rejected altogether in order to prevent “corruption” or “contamination” of the populace.

This policy of swift and comprehensive excision of offensive material in all avenues of media would continue in various forms until the Press Law of 1966—commonly referred to as the *Ley Fraga*—which eliminated prior censorship standards and relaxed control of publication rights. However, the *Ley Fraga* retained the right of the censure to enact sanctions on a publication, and any work incurring three or more of these injunctions was shut down. Many historians refer to this law as a “partial liberalization” because while somewhat expanding artistic freedom, it created a form of self-censorship amongst publications that feared injunctions and could not follow the ill-defined constraints of this new censorship standard. Nonetheless, in *The Media And Politics In Spain: From Dictatorship to Democracy*, Richard Gunther describes the *Ley Fraga* as “playing a significant role in undermining *el Franquismo*. While it did not establish freedom of the press, it did increase freedom of expression which, in turn, expanded the audience of the print media, and stimulated greater popular interest” (7).

While the control of *el Franquismo* would die with its namesake, the authoritarian control of Spain did not end with it and censorship was still commonly practiced by the newly democratized government until as late as 1985 when it was formally abolished. After Franco's death on November 20th, 1975, the nation spun into a period of political turmoil equivocal to that of the early days of the civil war. A series of unsuccessful new governances left Spaniards without concrete leadership until the rise of the Socialist Workers Party, known as *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE), which gained control in the general election of 1982.

Spanish historians generally agree that by the time of his death, Franco's regime was but a shadow of its former authority. The period known as *el transición* officially began in 1969 with the designation of Prince Juan Carlos de Borbón as Franco's heir-apparent. By 1973 the declining dictator had surrendered his position as Prime Minister and only nominally retained the title of Head of State. After a long battle with Parkinson's disease and various other health conditions, *el Caudillo* succumbed to death in 1975 at the age of 82. José Carlos Mainer refers to the significance of Franco's death as being "called discreetly 'the inevitable biological fact'... something politicians had been expecting for some time" (687). Mainer goes on to state that "beginning in the 1960s the 'culture of Francoism' was little more than a phantom, sustained by second rate writers, by valetudinarian academics... By 1975, opposition to the Franco regime was expressed almost openly" (687). Though censorship laws still stymied artistic freedom, the once dominant culture of evasion and oppression had been declining for some time. This artistic skirmish between the censors and the increasingly recalcitrant public created "an anxious, claustrophobic atmosphere and helped promote a subjective, anti-Franco consciousness of a markedly cultural nature... independent theatrical productions all acquired much additional

significance both as meeting places and sources of solidarity” (Mainer 689). This cultural backlash would come to define the artistic production of the next decade.

The death of Franco was followed by the subsequent stabilization of Spain’s political climate with the Spanish Constitution of 1978, which established Spain as a parliamentary monarchy. The transition from dictatorship left the newly democratized nation with a freedom of expression and creative power not seen for 38 years. This newfound liberty saw a surge in artistic production of all types, but lacked a clearly definable voice. Shanon Fieldman states that “since the transition to democracy, the theatre of Spain has evolved into a cacophonous state of aesthetic heterogeneity, cultural diversity and linguistic plurality that is truly unprecedented in modern times” (725). In short, contemporary Spanish theatre has come to be characterized by its *lack* of definitive characteristics.

Fieldman goes on to integrate the principals espoused by Polish acting theorist Jerzy Gritowski, who pioneered the vision of theatre as a vehicle to reflect contemporary culture, stating that:

Imbedded in Gritowski’s theory of acting is the implicit paradox that only after having cast aside all masks and relinquished all pretense can the actor ‘unveil’ and then embrace, ‘in a state of complete defenselessness,’ the process of self-discovery and transcendence that is the spirit of performance. It is a process that may be painful, shocking and polemical, and that, when superimposed onto the broader context of the Spanish stage, would seem to be the very same process that underpins the arduous evolution of theatre history subsequent to the death of Francisco Franco (725).

Fieldman advocates that the discordant nature of Spanish theatrical movements during the last several decades is a product of the equally discordant political history of the nation. Spain’s contemporary artistic voice is defined by its lack of harmony.

In the late seventies, the newly designated constitutional monarchy of Spain under Rey Juan Carlos and its first Prime Minister, Adolfo Suárez, drafted a new constitution and initiated a

series of legal restructurings known as *Real Decreto 262 sobre libertad de representación de espectáculos teatrales* which began the process of redressing the grievous artistic oppression experienced under Franco. In his article “The Order of the Visible and the Sayable: Theatre Censorship in Twentieth-Century Spain,” Michael Thompson posits that Suárez’s administration represents a “new spirit of liberalization [which] had an immediate impact on cultural activity... the emergence of a modernizing, social-democratic conception of cultural policy” (95). Under Suárez, censorship laws were lifted and many banned productions were reinstated. The *Real Decreto 262* states that ““la libre expresión del pensamiento a través del teatro y demás espectáculos artísticos, como manifestación de un derecho fundamental de la persona, no puede tener otros límites que los que resulten del ordenamiento penal vigente, así como del respeto debido a los derechos e intereses generales” [“the free expression of thought through theater and other performing arts, as a manifestation of a fundamental human right, cannot have limits other than those resulting from current criminal law and the respect for the rights and public interests”] (96). This aperture of artistic expression solidified Spain’s status as a liberal parliamentary democracy, a process widely considered complete with the election of PSOE leader Felipe González Márquez as Prime Minister in 1982. In an attempt to augment the faltering economy González introduced broad infrastructure reforms which included the creation of new theatres and artistic centers. Thompson believes that this increased interaction between politics and art ““viene a colmar una laguna en la acción administrativa, dando a la política una cultura” [“fills a gap in the administrative action, giving politics a culture”] (96). This transitional period of artistic exploration, while polemic, still retained vestiges of Francoist ideologies. Many members of the *juntas de censura* remained active within the theatrical world, releasing reviews of previously banned works while José Martínez, leader of the *Ministerio de Cultura* since the mid-

forties, remained an active participant in cultural policies. Attempts to develop a system of graded age restrictions of theatrical productions persisted until all such theatrical sanctions were abolished with the ministry's restructuring in 1985, solidifying Spain's transition into democracy.

Concurrent to this political transition, an artistic and social phenomenon known as *la movida madrileña* began to appear in urban centers. Encompassing all artistic forms, *la movida* reflected the newfound freedom of expression. Acclaimed film director and proponent of the movement Pedro Almodóvar reflects that "it's difficult to speak of La Movida and explain it to those who didn't live those years. We weren't a generation; we weren't an artistic movement; we weren't a group with a concrete ideology. We were simply a bunch of people that coincided in one of the most explosive moments in the country" (N.P.). This countercultural movement represents just one aspect of the coalescing social phenomena competing for dominance in contemporary Spain.

The entirety of Spanish literary history is steeped in conflict, both political and cultural. From Moorish control of Spain during early modern times to the grand imperial dreams of the Catholic Kings and centuries later to totalitarian control and emergent democracy, the nation's rich and multidimensional past has given way to an even more varied contemporary culture. Linguistic pluralism and contrary beliefs coexist in a continually evolving artistic world and leave Spanish theatre uniquely poised for experimentation and change. Multiple fringe theatres, referred to as *salas alternativas*, began to appear across Spain during the early post-Franco period. These small theatres acted as microcosms of a larger national trend towards experimental, antirealist works and technical innovation. Sharon Fieldman describes the *salas alternativas* as "pioneering cadres [...] These generally small hives of creativity are today

dynamic spaces of Avant-Garde energy, where banality and reckless expenditure are replaced with risk, commitment, experimentation, research and pedagogy” (730). Modernism and avant-garde theatre found refuge in Spain among these dynamic artistic currents and government subsidized groups such as *La Cubana* continue to experiment with new creative forms.

Founded during the early eighties, *La Cubana* has become one of Spain’s most well recognized and commercially successful acting troupes. Celebrated for their controversial and spectacular integration of politics, culture, and movement known as “street theatre,” one of *La Cubana*’s founders Jordi Milán describes this unique aesthetic as “interested that spectators not really know what is true and what is a lie. The street is the largest stage in the world. Shops, window displays or a construction work are converted into shows. You have to be there to experience them” (Delgado 228). Experimental theatre, like that practiced by *La Cubana* and similar groups, challenges the importance of verisimilitude and the “unities” of time, space, and action espoused by neoclassic and romantic authors prior to the Spanish Civil War. This visceral and dynamic interpretation of theatrical production relates directly to its tumultuous political past. In her article “Government Censorship in the Contemporary Spanish Theatre,” Patricia W. O’Connor summarizes Spain’s theatrical heritage in relation to its arduous political journey, stating, “the control of ideas has a long and well documented tradition in Spain. When an idea is expressed in artistic, persuasive or emotional way, as often happens in the theatre, and when the theatre caters, as it has for centuries, to the largely uncultured and frequently emotional masses, the situation is potentially dangerous” (443). The idea of theatre as a vehicle of the social conscience is well documented in Spanish history. As O’Connor suggests, this can sometimes lead to an unstable artistic environment in which political unrest is only amplified by artistic expression. It is this ability of theatre to inspire dissension and discord that Franco intended to

squelch during his regime. Spain's democratic transition also saw theatre used as a tool to intensify partisan strife as conflicting aesthetics compete for dominance in an ever-changing landscape.

Spain's modern theatrical canon has continually evolved to cater to the endemic political atmosphere or risen to challenge it. The last century has seen the dissolution of a centuries-old monarchy, civil war, and authoritarian rule. As a stable, democratic country Spain is still considered to be relatively young and therefore lacking in some respects the marked artistic voice seen in countries with more traditionally stable political atmospheres. Many historians argue that Spanish theatre developed in this way both because of and in spite of the Franciscan dictatorship. The stringent censorship and rigid social control experienced under Franco restricted artistic production of all forms but did not expressly forbid it, allowing an undercurrent of civil unrest to proliferate and eventually undermine *el Caudillo's* strident authority. Franco's death and Spain's subsequent democratic conversion led to a cacophony of divergent movements and countercultures which prevent theatre from establishing a clear stylistic identity, but perhaps that in itself can describe the contemporary stage.

The 40-year dictatorial rule of Francisco Franco is one of the longest in modern European history. Marked by nationalist idealism and catholic fervor, the effect of Franco's regime on artistic production in Spain was profound and far-reaching. Prior to the Civil War, Spain's artistic landscape, much like its political climate, was defined by a struggle between the traditional, conservative elite and proletarian populist innovators. This ideological conflict eventually resulted in violent armed conflict and the installation of Franco as authoritarian head of state. Franco's political and religious zeal brought with it strident censorship against any perceived profanity or dissention within his ranks. Struggling under the asphyxiating control of

the state, artists such as Buerro Vallejo and Sastre attempted to disseminate political messages through their work, fanning the flames of civil unrest felt by many during *el Franquismo*. Even prior to Franco's death, a gradual proliferation of foreign influence brought an aperture of artistic expression culminating in the abolition of censorship and the transition of Spain to a parliamentary democracy in 1978. Nearly four decades of artistic suppression left Spanish theatre without a clearly definable voice or aesthetic, paving the way for a flourishing counter culture. The diverse and cacophonous state of Spanish theatre post-Franco acts as a reminder of the resilience, not only of the Spanish People, but also of its profound artistic heritage. As time passes and new generations with only distant memories of *el Caudillo* and his rule take to the stage, new movements will evolve, but the question of how to integrate Spain's varied and tumultuous past into a clear vision of the artistic future will remain.

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