

## **Guilt, Innocence, and Power in *La sonrisa inacabada* and *Las falenas* by Àngels Aymar**

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Àngels Aymar i Ragolta (born 1958) received her degree in Dramatic Art from the Institut del Teatre de la Diputació de Barcelona in 1983. In addition to studying in Barcelona with John Strasberg, Albert Boadella, Lluís Pasqual, Antonio Fava, Joan Font, Pere Planella, Carol Rosenfeld, Dominic de Faccio and Stephen Chun-Tao, Aymar also completed courses in acting in Paris (Ecole de l'Acteur Florent), New York (HB Studio), and Madrid (Odín Theatre with Eugenio Barba). An accomplished actress on stage and screen, her credits include more than eighteen plays, nineteen television shows or series, and eleven films. In a published interview, Aymar concedes that in 1994 during a period between acting jobs she first began writing for the theatre to create more potential roles for her acting career (Buedel 20). Nevertheless, her first endeavor, "La podrida," was a finalist for the Ignasi Iglesias Prize sponsored by the Institut del Teatre. Since that initial piece, Aymar has authored more than twenty works, several of which comprise theatrical productions that she calls "montages multidisciplinarios" because they combine music, dance, visual imagery, and drama.<sup>1</sup> The degree of experimentation that characterizes her work varies from play to play although all require an engaged spectator or reader. Writing in both Catalan and Spanish, Aymar has seen a number of her plays translated into other languages (English, French, German, Italian, and Rumanian) and presented as dramatized readings in Andorra, the Dominican Republic, France, Italy, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and the United States.<sup>2</sup>

In Spain, Barcelona remains the center of her professional life although her works have been staged or presented throughout Catalonia, as well as in Madrid, Alicante, Extremadura, and Valencia. Beginning in 2001, her theatrical career evolved to include directing. The following year Elisa Silió identified Aymar as "una polifacética mujer de teatro de reconocida trayectoria" (par. 1), and in 2003 Diana Raznovich

designated her among eight Spanish women writers of significant merit.<sup>3</sup> In late 2005, the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya named Aymar dramatist-in-residence for three years and commissioned her to write two plays for staging at this prestigious theatre. The first work, "La indiana," premiered on January 11, 2007. It deals with Catalan immigrants to Cuba and takes place in nineteenth-century Havana and present-day Catalonia. Prior to the recent honor bestowed by the Teatre Nacional, three of Aymar's plays garnered noteworthy awards that included publication benefits. In 1995 *La furgoneta* received the Cassandra Prize, an award honoring women dramatists and sponsored by the Dona-Teatre Association. More recently, *La sonrisa inacabada* was awarded a special Honorable Mention in 2002 for the María Teresa León Prize, a competition jointly sponsored by the Instituto de la Mujer and the Asociación de Directores de Escena de España. The following year *Las falenas* was one of the finalists for the International Theatre Prize sponsored by the Dominican Republic.

*La sonrisa inacabada* (2002) is presented within a neo-realist framework, a characteristic it shares with other works by Aymar, such as "Esquerdes," *Magnòlia Café*, "Todas somos islas," and "El petó de las 7:30." Along with *La furgoneta* and "Tres homes esperen," *Las falenas* (2003) represents a group of plays that are decidedly more enigmatic. My reading of *La sonrisa inacabada* and *Las falenas*, both of which pivot on the complex notion of power, will illustrate some of the diversity of Aymar's dramatic endeavors as well as signal some common themes or traits that tend to reappear in her theatre: self-realization and the search for identity, separation and exile, gender roles and strong female characters, and guilt and innocence. In addition, it will be shown that both plays display a similar experimentation with language: lyrical passages and monologues are regularly interspersed in the principal dialogue.

*La sonrisa inacabada* explores the consequences of powerful events on a family, specifically family rupture, exile, and loss. Amanda, the protagonist, travels to Mexico to visit Roberto, a university professor and writer whose father left Barcelona and emigrated to Mexico during the Spanish Civil War. The real purpose of her visit, however, is to reunite with her cousin, Marta. The cousins have not seen each other since childhood when Marta's family left Spain for Mexico. Their hurried departure stemmed from the failure of the family business and the personal enmity that ensued between their mothers. As children, Amanda and Marta were innocent victims of family strife and division,

and as adults they continue to feel victimized by their loss of family history.<sup>4</sup> The war that directly affected Roberto's father also threatened the cousins' family: Amanda recalls that their grandmother often repeated the story about how at the last minute she retrieved Marta's mother from a Russian ship that was going to evacuate children from war-torn Barcelona.<sup>5</sup> That remembrance elicits the following comment from Marta: "No són les guerres les que destrossen les famílies, són les persones que provoquen les guerres" [No son las guerras las que destruyen las familias, son las personas que provocan las guerras] (206).<sup>6</sup> Profoundly dramatic, in context this statement underscores that civil wars are devastating precisely because they pivot brother against brother, sister against sister. This image in turn frames the personal conflicts that fractured the cousins' family.

The work portrays Amanda's and Marta's efforts to recover their past through memory, a journey characterized by tremendous nostalgia. According to Claudio Guillén, Michael Ugarte, and Michael Seidel, nostalgia is a common trait of exile literature, and both Guillén and Seidel tend to portray exile as either a creative or liberating state or one that is profoundly nostalgic or sorrowful.<sup>7</sup> In her recent book entitled *The Dialectics of Exile*, Sophia McClennen focuses on the "complexity and inherent contradictions" (2) of exile writing. Rather than adhering strictly to the traditional binary logic of either creative freedom or intense nostalgia, McClennen argues convincingly that the literature of exile contains a series of dialectical tensions. And while it is true that Aymar is not an exile as are Juan Goytisolo, Ariel Dorfman, and Cristina Peri Rossi whom McClennen studies, *La sonrisa inacabada* portrays the tremendous consequences of exile on the individual and the family.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Aymar's text displays a series of dialectical tensions that are commonly found in exile literature.

The sorrow Amanda and Marta experience as they confront their past and their lost family history contrasts sharply with a number of positive images. For example, the cousins display an overall sense of optimism as they reestablish family ties. Their reunion closes the physical distance that separated their mothers, and the personal enmity that divided their mothers is replaced by the cousins' mutual regard. Because Amanda clearly wants to foster this new relationship, she deliberately shelters Marta from a painful detail in their family history: Marta's mother was responsible for the failure of the family business. Amanda hopes that her aunt will eventually share this information with Marta. Another sign of optimism is the beginning of mutual friendships

that the two young women explore with Roberto and Joe. Furthermore, writing is portrayed as a creative, productive activity, and this positive image is reinforced by the fact that three of the four characters who appear on stage are writers: Roberto authors scholarly manuscripts; Joe produces legal contracts and documents (including defense papers in an unfounded lawsuit accusing Roberto of plagiarism); and Amanda, a budding prose writer and secret poet, gradually gains the confidence to share her creative endeavors with her new friends. Finally, reconciliation also occurs at the close of the play when Amanda learns that the unidentified woman who attends her poetry reading and gives her a necklace is her aunt, Marta's mother.

The dialectic between past and present that is typical of exile writing (Ugarte 20-21) is portrayed in *La sonrisa inacabada* as a conflict between the younger and older generations, specifically between children and parents. Marta, for example, has always had a strained relationship with her domineering mother, but at the end of the play she vows to confront her mother with questions about their past. That future confrontation symbolizes Marta's desire to underscore her independence and adulthood. Unlike Marta, Roberto and Amanda have enjoyed positive relationships with their respective parents; nevertheless, both have experienced, in differing ways, the challenge of being adult children of famous parents. Roberto already enjoys some public recognition for his writing, yet his support of women writers has led to controversy with some of the powerful elite in the publishing world. His nonconformity challenges the status quo in ways that his respected father's traditionalism did not. Amanda still lives in the shadow of her famous parent, reciting her mother's poetry at public readings. Many of her mother's devoted readers recognize that Amanda transcribed her mother's poetry before the latter died. Some know also that Amanda writes fiction, but few are aware that she secretly composes poetry. Essentially, all three young characters seek authority, a form of power that "presupposes *vertical relationships*" (Bell 102) such as one between a parent and child. Their growing independence signals their claim to the authority that will allow them to test fully their own voices.

Similarly, the play's title underscores the tensions between past and present, between loss and recuperation. Family ties, romance, friendships, and creative enterprises are images of hope, but these optimistic new beginnings cannot be totally divorced from the sorrow experienced by Amanda and Marta as they confront their loss. María José Ragué-Arias explains the play's title in this way: "Es una sonrisa que une el

amor con semillas del dolor, y por eso, inacabada. [. . .] Es el viaje, la amistad y sus límites, ventanas de esperanza cargadas de un dolor que impide que la sonrisa sea plena" (14).

In a recent interview, Aymar states that the characters in her plays "live in the contemporary world and face contemporary challenges." She writes for an engaged audience because for her "theatre is not merely a form of entertainment. It is also a platform from which you ask spectators to consider content and to react to important themes confronted in everyday life." She also confirms her endeavors to create strong women characters because "[h]istorically, women have been forbidden power and this practice has to disappear" (Buedel 21). These statements by Aymar support our observation that the characters, themes, and action of *La sonrisa inacabada* reflect the mimetic goals of neo-realist dramaturgy. Several stylistic features throughout the work, however, mark it as deliberately unconventional: the sparse use of stage directions, the inclusion of fragments of contemporary songs and poems, and the combination of two languages—Catalan and Spanish.

The play begins with Amanda's voice off-stage; an untitled poem in Catalan by Nies Jaume comprises her monologue.<sup>9</sup>

Un lloc. Ser d'un lloc  
Ser d'un poble. Pertànyer a una comunitat  
Tenir una família i un llibre de família  
Parlar un idioma. Tenir un accent.

Aquest lloc. Ser d'aquest lloc  
Tenir un carnet amb una foto de carnet  
Tenir una feina i tenir uns companys de feina  
Tenir una nòmina.

Tenir una casa i tenir un marit  
Tenir fills i un gos.

Buscar el teu lloc. Buscar un espai  
Buscar respostes i solucions. Buscar raons  
Buscar ajuda. Buscar una boca per donar-li el crit,  
El meu crit  
Buscar-se la vida i cercar la mort.

Ser d'enlloc  
Tenir molts accents.

I tenir un color a la pell i una música als llavis. (165)

[Un lugar. Ser de un lugar  
Ser de un pueblo. Pertener a una comunidad  
Tener una familia y un libro de familia  
Hablar un idioma. Tener un acento.

Este lugar. Ser de este lugar  
Tener un carné con una foto  
Tener un trabajo y tener una compañía de trabajo  
Tener un sueldo.

Tener una casa y tener un marido  
Tener hijos y un perro.

Buscar tu lugar. Buscar un espacio  
Buscar respuestas y soluciones. Buscar razones  
Buscar ayuda. Buscar una boca para formar un grito,  
El grito mío  
Buscar la vida y aproximarse a la muerte.

Ser de un lugar  
Tener muchos acentos.

Y tener un color en la piel y una música en los labios.]

This poem introduces the theme of exile as well as those social institutions—work and family—on which some base their identity. It is followed by lines from a song in Spanish whose purpose is to identify the geographic setting as the Americas while reinforcing the notion of exile: “Un poncho al hombro y un velís / Una noche cualquiera / [. . .] de la América gris / [. . .] donde sólo hay dos sendas / el exilio o el fusil” (165). Whereas traditional stage directions are designed for directors, actors, and other readers, these lyrical introductions are performance based; they prepare the spectator (and the reader in the act of reading) for the principal dialogue that begins as Amanda and Marta discuss their past while pouring over a photograph album. Structurally, the play ends as it begins—with a poem voiced off-stage by Amanda—and on eight other occasions, the main dialogue is interrupted by lyrical passages that portray poetically either a theme or an emotion of one of the characters.

Just as the lyrical passages oscillate between poems in Catalan and songs in Spanish, the primary dialogue displays a similar juxtaposition of the two languages. Amanda, Marta, and Roberto usually speak Catalan with each other except for those times when Joe, Roberto’s friend and attorney, is present. Ragué-Arias signals the intensely experimental nature of the combination of both languages, naming only two other Catalan dramatists—Roger Justafre and Albert Mestres—who have experimented with the same technique (14). In Aymar’s play, the structural tension between the two languages mirrors thematically the conflict experienced by most exiled persons between mother tongue and adopted language.

Turning to the second play, *Las falenas* takes place in the sun porch and garden of a mountain hotel. Small tables are positioned in a way that suggests a type of self-service bar is located on the porch. Three characters (Ana, Amelia, and Augusto) are soon joined by two others (Amadeo and Armando), all of whom know one another and have agreed to meet for the first time in twenty years. Interspersed seven times throughout their conversation are monologues delivered by three additional characters identified in the dramatic text as La Mujer, La Vieja, and El Hombre. The opening stage directions explain their voices as follows: “*También escucharemos el relato de otras personas que no están en el invernadero ni en el jardín. Podrían estar hablando en aquel mismo instante en cualquier otro lugar y nos llegan el eco de sus voces y su presencia como un espejismo.*” The stage directions also signal that all of the characters “*forman parte de una misma historia*” (149), a fact that will become apparent to the engaged spectator.

Gradually we learn that the five named characters, along with two former colleagues now deceased (Arturo and Anselmo), share a traumatic past which has devastated their lives. Twenty years ago all were co-workers for a powerful figure in the business world. The performance text identifies him as the male character who voices two monologues toward the end of the play whereas the dramatic text identifies him with the generic name of El Hombre. In the past, this man successfully manipulated the named characters to advance his goals through illegal, unethical, or immoral means. What they actually did is never explained, but the repercussions of their actions have been tremendous. It is suggested that at least one of the two deceased companions committed suicide, and an aura of mystery also clouds the death of the other. Guilt and remorse have ravaged the psyche of the others, as Armando explains:

Nosotros pusimos a su servicio nuestros conocimientos, para que él y los suyos pudieran llevar a cabo sus propósitos. Nosotros nos hemos enterrado como los gusanos; nos hemos apartado del mundo y hemos renunciado a volver a vernos, porque sabíamos nuestra parte de culpa y nos avergonzábamos. El trato y las humillaciones que recibimos no son la raíz del odio intenso del que no hemos podido desprendernos. Es el remordimiento el que no nos deja vivir, el que nos ha marcado para siempre. (173)

Remorse, writes Austin Sarat, “involves more than sorrow. It is a type of self-punishment” because it expresses itself as a painful remembering (169). Amatai Etzioni contends that wrongdoers “who are not remorseful are viewed as if they have offended the community twice: once in whatever offense they have committed and, second, in their refusal to acknowledge that mores were violated” (9). Both the named characters and El Hombre are guilty of heinous crimes, but remorse distinguishes the employees from their employer and cultivates the spectator’s empathy for them.

In an ironic confession to Augusto, Armando assumes responsibility for the deaths of Arturo and Anselmo, admitting that he complied with El Hombre’s wishes in order to guard his sexual orientation, a secret that El Hombre threatened to expose. Armando never explains what he did, but he believes his actions resulted in the death of his colleagues. The others are equally haunted by their past actions. Seeking isolation, Amadeo has retreated to the countryside where he occupies his time with long hours of hard, physical labor. Ana copes with life by attending group therapy sessions, and Amelia, who once loved Augusto, admits that in the last two decades she has never achieved a stable amorous relationship. Augusto, who once aspired to be an actor, has become a priest who seeks expiation from his sins through charitable works and social causes. Ana signals an irony in Augusto’s new career—“¡así también actúa y no tiene que sufrir por si el público ha pagado la entrada!” (151)—and Augusto underscores the notion of costume when he admits that he donned the cleric’s robes in his search for a new identity: “no lo hice por vocación” (174). Amelia sums up their present as follows: “Todos somos unos desconocidos ahora mismo, salimos vivos, pero morimos allí” (160).

The names of the seven co-workers all begin with the letter A, as does that of a man (Adán) addressed by El Hombre in his first mono-

logue. El Hombre has hired Adán to facilitate his impending political appointment. According to Amelia, the common feature of their names may be understood as a hiring eccentricity of El Hombre: “Es una cabeza pensante, con un cerebro hecho a medida, lleno de pliegues oscuros que él ilumina con sus ideas, con sus obsesiones incomprensibles... nos eligió porque éramos ‘altamente cualificados’ y porque teníamos el nombre que comenzaba por la misma letra. ¡No es eso ser imbécil!” (176). In addition, the name *Adán* connotes two essential themes—innocence and guilt—dramatized in the conflict between El Hombre and the seven co-workers.<sup>10</sup>

The ambiguity of the characters’ past actions is a narrative device that elicits reader and audience participation. By witnessing the brokenness of the characters’ present, the spectator or reader glimpses the horrors of their past and assigns meaning to the characters’ situations. However, the ambiguity of the past also functions as a dramatic device that increases the emotional response. In this context, a passage from John Fraser’s *Violence in the Arts* is insightful. In considering the esthetic choices available to the artist who seeks to portray violence, Fraser writes: “it is often the horrors that *aren’t* shown that are the most disturbing. . . . The fascination of the unspeakable or indescribable or unprintable is that [one] always assumes that, whatever it is, it must be worse than the worst that [one] can imagine” (118-19; cited in Albuquerque 25). In Aymar’s *Las falenas*, the characters’ present sufferings are consequences of their ambiguous past actions; this deliberate ambiguity triggers the imagination to magnify the illegal, immoral, or unethical nature of those events.

The monologues of La Mujer, La Vieja, and El Hombre also serve to confirm the horrors committed in the past, because they portray El Hombre as an individual of power who cunningly abuses and manipulates others and is capable of violence, of using weapons as a means to force others to act in a certain way. For example, the first two monologues are voiced by La Mujer, his estranged wife. Through her speeches, we learn that after two years of marriage and in spite of being pregnant, she literally runs away from her husband the day she finds an arsenal of weapons hidden in their house. She recalls that she intended to go far away, to change her name, and to raise her child but implies that the child was never born: “El hijo que nunca arribó a puerto, el hijo que nunca he podido tener después de aquél” (159). Her story portrays El Hombre as a powerful and violent man, thus confirming the illicit nature of the unnamed acts committed by the other characters in

order to please him. Her account depicts her as a woman of courage and sacrifice who resists victimization. In the presence of resistance, "power only exists when the resistance of others is overcome" (Barbalet 534). La Mujer eradicates her husband's power by abandoning him, an action that deprives him of the opportunity to overcome her resistance.

La Vieja's monologues also testify to the violent nature of El Hombre. Her speeches first illustrate her as the submissive spouse of a despot; unlike her future daughter-in-law, La Vieja quickly learns to be a willing victim of domestic abuse. Speaking of her husband, she says: "Cuando me vio me propinó una bofetada que me hizo perder el conocimiento. No conseguí recuperar la voz hasta una semana más tarde. Pero, a pesar de que su manera de explicarse había sido un poco rudimentaria, yo [. . .] comprendí que jamás debía volver a dejar a mis hijos solos, bajo ningún concepto" (166). La Vieja defends her son and boasts of his success and generous financial support, but ironically her words ultimately condemn him for being just like his father: "cuando se enfadaba, ¡tenía los mismos arranques que su padre!" (168). The animosity between La Vieja and La Mujer also reflects the conflicting gender roles of two different generations of women: the former is the traditional dependent spouse of an abusive patriarch whereas the latter is an independent woman who accepts responsibility for her happiness and well-being. In fact, La Mujer celebrates the contentment she found once she left her husband: "He vivido mucho años fuera. Mi pareja es una buena persona. Siempre me ha apoyado, aun sabiendo que nunca más podría tener hijos" (161).

The main reason that the named characters agree to meet is to discuss whether or not they will testify at a future judicial hearing involving El Hombre, presumably a hearing that will confirm or reject his nomination to an unnamed public position. El Hombre hopes to eliminate the need for any public hearing that would place him under more intense scrutiny by journalists:

Estoy harto de tanta especulación narrativa. De esa gentuza sin escrúpulos que repasan tu vida con lupa, subrayando los detalles más ínfimos y pasando por alto lo que realmente importa. Yo ocuparé el cargo que me corresponde por mi valía profesional, en lo demás, en mi estricta intimidad, nadie tiene que meterse. Me repugna y no estoy dispuesto a permitirlo. (178)

He also seeks to prevent individuals motivated by revenge from creating difficulties for him in the present: "Esos son peligrosos, porque suelen ser individuos insatisfechos y rencorosos, incapaces de gobernar sus propias vidas y dispuestos a vengarse a cualquier precio. Conviene recordarles sus debilidades y sus fracasos, que les convierten en seres sobornables capaces de traicionar a su mejor amigo" (179). These lines expose El Hombre for the villain he is and underscore his unscrupulous abuse of power and manipulation of others. Ultimately, *Las falenas* converts the audience into a kind of jury and asks the engaged spectator (or reader) to condemn El Hombre both for his crimes and his lack of remorse.

The opening stage directions comprise a metaphor that explains the play's title and portrays symbolically the action:

*Una pared blanca con un farolillo encendido. Una falena revolotea alrededor. Aparece una salamanquesa que baja reptando por la pared; de repente, se detiene y la observa desde arriba. La mariposa deja de batir las alas. Quedan inmóviles, durante un instante dramático de silencio. Cuando la tensión se hace casi insostenible, la salamanquesa se lanza sobre la víctima y detiene su aleteo para siempre. (149)*

The named characters are the moths, *las falenas*, who are both attracted to and victimized by the power of El Hombre which is represented by the lamp. The lizard symbolizes El Hombre, whom Amelia subsequently describes as "un depravado asqueroso, un reptil venenoso" (171). Like the lizard that waits for the opportune moment to strike, El Hombre cleverly recognizes the weakness that makes each of his employees vulnerable. Augusto explains their relationship as follows: "Todos teníamos un precio y 'él' lo conocía" (174). Ultimately, the seven co-workers are victims of El Hombre's power, but they are not innocent victims. Greed or self-interest motivated their actions, and they willingly surrendered their resistance to his power. In the end, they agree not to testify against El Hombre for two reasons. First, they recognize their individual culpability. Second, their lack of hope cripples them from opposing him, an action they hold to be futile.

In differing ways, both of these award-winning plays focus on the complex notion of power. In *La sonrisa inacabada*, it is powerful events—a failed family business and the assignment of blame for that failure—that divide a family and result in exile and loss. Amanda and

Marta are innocent victims of the past, and in the present, loss is tempered by recuperation. Their attitudes reflect an optimism that is almost totally absent in *Las falenas*. In this second play, only a secondary character—La Mujer—escapes abuse and despair. The seven named co-workers (Ana, Amelia, Augusto, Amadeo, Armando, Arturo and Anselmo) fall victim to the power and influence of El Hombre who manipulates them to commit unethical, immoral, or illicit acts. However, these victims are not innocent, and although the remaining five admit their culpability and remorse, there is no indication that their sufferings might somehow end. Unlike Amanda and Marta who share the promise of family ties in the future, the characters in *Las falenas* lack hope. Even Augusto, who seeks a new identity in the cleric's robes and a degree of peace in community service, is deeply troubled at the end of the play when he admits he naively hoped and mistakenly believed that El Hombre might have changed. Amelia's dramatic declaration of their spiritual death—"salimos vivos, pero morimos allí"—poignantly portrays their despair. In addition, a monologue by El Hombre suggests that Adán may be his future victim.

A similarity between the two plays involves gender roles and the portrayal of strong female characters. Amanda is the protagonist of *La sonrisa inacabada*. The family history that she and Marta attempt to reconstruct through memory focuses on their mothers and grandmother and portrays an intensely matriarchal family.<sup>11</sup> This feminist perspective is less obvious in *Las falenas*, but it is dramatized in the explicit conflict between La Vieja and her daughter-in-law, La Mujer. These two characters represent, respectively, the traditional submissive wife, who in this case is a victim of domestic violence, and the modern independent woman, who refuses to remain a victim.

Both works portray dilemmas confronted in the contemporary world. In *La sonrisa inacabada*, family rupture and exile are geographically contextualized in Catalonia and Mexico and linguistically portrayed in the combined use of Catalan and Spanish. Allusions to the Spanish Civil War further ground the work in twentieth-century Spanish history. Nevertheless, exile and displacement are universal themes held to be emblematic of the modern age, "the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration" (Said, "Mind of Winter" 50). In *Las falenas*, power and crime devastate the lives of seven co-workers who willingly commit horrific acts due to their own self-interest. The work is almost devoid of any reference to a specific time and place although twice La Vieja refers to herself as a woman of "la guerra" (162) who

was pregnant "durante los bombardeos" (168). These details are probable allusions to the Spanish Civil War since elsewhere La Vieja says she is almost 100 years old. Nevertheless, the lack of geographic specificity prompts us to consider a horrible truth: the unnamed crimes that take place in this work could happen anywhere in the contemporary world where corporate corruption exists. This scathing view of contemporary society becomes even more ominous with El Hombre's impending appointment to a public position: the private world of business is about to merge with politics.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, both plays display an unconventional use of language and an esthetic desire to experiment with dramatic form. In *La sonrisa inacabada* the principal dialogue is juxtaposed with lyrical passages of poems and songs recited off-stage in order to dramatize poetically a theme or an emotion. Similarly, in *Las falenas* the principal dialogue among the named characters operates according to a realist mode that alternates with the somewhat enigmatic speeches delivered by three generic characters. In both plays, the lyrical insertions and the monologues preclude the need for elaborate stage directions and display the playwright's commitment to theatre as performance, as the encounter between text and audience.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Aymar's plays are: "La podrida"; "Esquerdes" ["Grietas," "Rifts"]; *La furgoneta*; "Tres homes esperen" ["Tres hombres esperan"]; "Aurora"; *La riella inacabada* [*La sonrisa inacabada*]; *Magnòlia Cafè* [*Magnolia Cafè*]; "Totes som illes" ["Todas somos islas"]; "Entre el dubte i el matís" ["Entre la duda y el matiz"]; *El tapís humà* ["El tapiz humano"]; "La Flor y Anatol"; "Les falenes" [*Las falenas*]; "El petó de les 7:30" ["El beso de las 7:30"]; "La llegenda Nijuno de l'hora blava" ["La leyenda Nijuno de la hora azul"]; "Cut & Paste"; "La indiana"; "Fleurs"; and "Maldavas." Her "montages multidisciplinaires" are "Brossa para tus ojos," "Brainstorm," "Dalírium," and "Nulla Dies" ["Ningún día"]. Six of these works are published: *La furgoneta* (Catalan and French), *Trois hommes attendant* (French), *Magnòlia Cafè* (Catalan and English), *La sonrisa inacabada* (published text includes passages in Catalan and Spanish), *El tapís humà* (Catalan), and *Las falenas* (Spanish).

<sup>2</sup> The following works have been translated: "Esquerdes" (Rumanian and English), *La furgoneta* (French and English), "Tres homes esperen" (French and German); *Magnòlia Café* (English); and "Les falenes" (Spanish and currently being translated into French). Several of Aymar's one-act plays were translated into Italian and read at the Biennale Internazionale di drammaturgia femminile III held in Naples, Italy, April 7-9, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Silió signals Aymar's energy and diverse talents as actor, dramatist, and director by highlighting that during the week of April 22, 2002, she combined all facets of her career and appeared in Madrid in four different venues. As actor, Aymar performed all three male roles in a dramatized reading of her own "Tres hombres esperan" and executed a leading role in two staged performances of "Las flores del yodo," a work by contemporary Spanish playwright, Margarita Borja. Aymar also acted in and directed two of her works, "Entre la duda y el matiz" and "Brossa para tus ojos." The context of Raznovich's praise of Aymar stems from the I Encuentro Internacional de Dramaturgia held January 23-26, 2003, in Alicante, Spain. Raznovich, an Argentinian dramatist, poet and journalist, was an invited guest to the conference. She subsequently wrote of her dismay over the absence of women as conference speakers, noting that of the thirty-four scheduled presentations only one was represented by a woman, and she did not appear.

<sup>4</sup> In "Reflections on Exile," Edward Said stresses that "exile is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible: at most the literature about exile objectifies an anguish and a predicament most people rarely experience first hand [. . .]." Said maintains that the views of exile in literature and in religion tend to obscure the horrors of exile, one of which is that "like death but without death's ultimate mercy, it [exile] has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography" (174).

<sup>5</sup> In 1937, shortly after the bombing of Guernica, 33,000 Basque children were dispersed throughout Europe. France took 17,000 child refugees and 4,000 went to Britain. A similar situation occurred in Barcelona where many families sent their children to live with relatives in the countryside or in other parts of Spain; Ana María Matute is one famous example. Some of the evacuated children eventually traveled by boat to Russia. See Colin Kirby's "Children Who Lost Their Youth to War."

<sup>6</sup> This and subsequent translations from Catalan to Spanish are mine.

<sup>7</sup> For the role of nostalgia, see Guillén ("Exile and Counter-Exile" 271-72; "El sol" 36-37), Ugarte (23) and Seidel (ix-x). In his early essay, "On the Literature of Exile and Counter Exile" (1976), Guillén distinguishes between exile writing as sorrowful and counter exile writing as creative. In the later "El sol de los desterrados: literatura y exilio" (1998), the scholar describes the nostalgic experience as one in which the writer looks within and focuses on loss (Ovid) and the creative experience as one in which the writer, like Plu-

tarch, looks to the sun and stars and focuses on the positive. Seidel acknowledges the personal and political traumas of exile but tends to emphasize the "imaginative sustenance" (x) that many writers have gained from the exilic experience.

<sup>8</sup> Ugarte raises a number of important questions such as whether it is the author or the text that determines exile and whether a person can be "in exile" from his or her native land without ever crossing national boundaries (6-7).

<sup>9</sup> Each of the eleven lyrical insertions is numbered, and an index at the end of the text identifies the poet or songwriter and title of the poem or song. All of the poems are written by women and appear in the collection, Montserrat Abelló, Neus Aguado, Lluïsa Julià and María-Mercè Marçal, eds., *Paisatge emergent: Trenta poetes catalanes del segle XX* (Barcelona: Edicions de la Magrana, 1999). The songs are composed by Pancho Madrigal, a singer-songwriter from Jalisco, Mexico.

<sup>10</sup> The name *Adán* is also mentioned by La Mujer in a monologue in which she narrates that every June for ten years after she abandoned her husband, he sent his mother-in-law a toy along with a note that read, "Le encontraré" (161). His mother-in-law finally sent word to him that his estranged wife, her daughter, had lost the child. That communication prompted a one-line response from El Hombre: "Mi hijo se llama Adán, como el primer hombre." The child's death is ambiguous. La Mujer implies it and her mother declares it, but both statements may be ruses to hide the child from the father. The fact that El Hombre hires a man named Adán to handle the delicate matter of his political appointment may be understood as an eerie coincidence or a cynical nod to the saying, "like father, like son."

<sup>11</sup> Their fathers and maternal grandfather are each mentioned once. Amanda's father died when she was a girl; Marta's father is remembered as fainthearted when compared to her mother; and their grandfather preferred not to recognize the culpability of Marta's mother in the failure of the family business. Ragué-Arias observes that the play's strong feminist perspective is underscored by the fact that all the poems inserted as lyrical passages are written by women (15).

<sup>12</sup> See Randy Martin's and Ella Shohat's "Corruption in Corporate Culture." The authors argue that the root of corporate corruption is the inability of those in power to keep separate their public and private interests, a global phenomenon that "is not confined to national soil" (6).



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