

Multiple Lenses of Aesthetic Response:
José Sanchis Sinisterra's El lector por horas

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ABSTRACT

LAURA HIGBIE YORK: Multiple Lenses of Aesthetic Response: José Sanchis Sinisterra's
El lector por horas
(Under the direction of José M. Polo de Bernabé)

José Sanchis Sinisterra's play El lector por horas takes the traditional concept of the reader-text relationship within a drama beyond its conventional boundaries through the use of fragmentation and escritura del hueco, or the practice of incorporating only small fragments of another author's text within his own play in order to mold the other text to fit his own devices. By doing so he is refracting the customarily accepted notion that the reader-text relationship is one-on-one. Instead, he filters his borrowed texts through a series of lenses, thereby redirecting them and assigning new meaning. Thus he allows them to appropriately work within his drama. The result is to endow his audience with multiple refractions of the original texts used within the play, thereby redefining the relationship between a text and its receptor. Sanchis has created a fresh perception of the conventional process of reading.

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Chapter I.

José Sanchis Sinisterra

and the Teatro Fronterizo

Twentieth-century Spanish playwright José Sanchis Sinisterra is known for his creation of teatro fronterizo, and his aversion towards most forms of commercial theater.¹ The term teatro fronterizo refers to a school of theater that focuses attention on the marginalized members of society, those social misfits who have been somehow whisked towards the periphery of social acceptance, and are therefore habitually excluded from commercial theater. Sanchis has dedicated a vast portion of his later career as a playwright to providing theatrical representation for these otherwise overlooked members of the social order. Furthermore, the teatro fronterizo created and experimented with by Sanchis constructs a brand of theater which itself is a borderline between the realm of theatricality and textuality. The intensely narrative nature of his theater contrasts sharply with traditionally dramatic forms of theater, and the members of his audience often find themselves observing a theater balanced on the brink of conventionality. Many of the works that he has directed, both his own and those of other playwrights, are ones which were not

¹ In an interview with José Sanchis Sinisterra by Yolanda Pallín in Primer Acto, Sanchis plainly states that commercial theater has been overcome by a mercantile greed “[que] ha producido una distorsión absoluta de lo que es el trabajo creativo, la vida teatral, la dedicación al arte, [etc.]...” (31).

originally intended to be represented on the stage, and rather than adapting them to the established conventions of the theater, he maneuvers them to fulfill his own devices, stripping them of virtually all theatrical elements, as we shall later explore in more detail. By doing so he is stretching the limits of the theatrical genre, introducing a new frontera. He is best categorized as standing a middle ground between the two extremes of consumerist and the ultra-vanguard theater, which has made his plays more accessible to a broader audience, though certainly a well-educated one (Eduardo Pérez-Rasilla 17). Perhaps the aspect of his work that most successfully fulfills the wishes of his public is his experimentation with the escritura del hueco, or the use of fragmentary structures within his theatrical works.

Generally the use of escritura del hueco is introduced as a manner of leaving portions of a play's script up to the imagination of individual members of the audience, thereby allowing each spectator to walk away with a personalized interpretation of the work. José Sanchis Sinisterra takes the idea a step further in his 1996 play El lector por horas, in which excerpts from several different novels are read aloud on stage, as Celso contracts Ismael, a flailing writer, to read aloud to his blind daughter Lorena. This play has been fragmented not only by Sanchis as the author, but also by each of his three characters, thereby leaving his audience with multiple refractions of the original texts used within the body of the play. Using German critic Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response as a starting point, I intend to argue that Sanchis has surpassed his previous work, and has created a play that redefines the reader-text relationship within the realm of performance. To look at the series of lenses through which the novels are filtered within the play shines an entirely new light on each text, and assigns new meaning to them as functionary within the confines of the play. The author's choice of texts included in his play represents the first level of filtration. Secondly,

the fragments of each chosen text give meaning to each scene. Thirdly, each character's reactions to each text filter them yet again, lending the audience a better, but still enigmatic understanding of the characters' lives. The final filter, naturally, is the receptor himself, whether reader or spectator, who then passes what he receives through his own series of experiential filters in order to create his own understanding of the play.

Although El lector por horas is often included in compilations of plays that focus on the act of reading and the relationship between a text and its reader, there is very little written specifically and at length about this play, and certainly nothing that studies the multiple lenses through which a text may pass before arriving at its final destination. In fact, the two most in-depth studies I found on this play were the introductions written in two different published editions, one by Carles Batlle i Jordà in the Proa edition, and the other by Eduardo Pérez-Rasilla in the Austral edition. Although both of these authors write about the modification of the audience's experience or perception, these are primarily ideas that have come from Bertold Brecht, who does not write about the idea of multiple refractive lenses either. Christina Jensen writes about the task of the spectator to put in order the fragmented pieces of text that reaches him, though again, does not mention the multiplicity of lenses by whose means these fragments are created. In short, comparatively little has been written about this play, which is surprising, given the depth of its intrigue.

José Sanchis Sinisterra's ambition is, and seems to have always been, to alter the world's perception of theater, and by doing so alter its perception of reality itself (Pérez-Rasilla 34). Born in Valencia on June 28th, 1940, Sanchis has had a passion for writing and theater from an early age. Since the age of seventeen he has been directing performances of both small independent and university theater troupes in Valencia. With the success of these

productions, he becomes director of the University of Valencia theater department. In 1960 he creates the Aula de Teatro, and the following year the Seminario de Teatro, both of which survive for the following five years, during which time he also works as an assistant professor of literature in the Liberal Arts department of the same university (Pérez-Rasilla 9-10).

In 1960, Sanchis is awarded a scholarship to study in Paris by the Instituto Francés de Valencia, which he considers as a rite of passage into the real world of the theater. While in Paris he studies the work of many great theatrical theorists, though the one who impresses him most profoundly is undoubtedly Bertold Brecht. Brecht's famous concept of the alienation effect² has influenced much of Sanchis's work, above all the idea that by nominally estranging or distancing his spectator from the theater by means of a surprising or unconventional approach, he is able to provide him with a new perspective, through which he may recognize new aspects of his own reality. This is also the intended purpose of the fragmentation used in El lector por horas, which, by breaking up the included texts into brief segments, prevents the spectator or reader from becoming too involved in each work. Instead, Sanchis uses each fragment for the sole purpose of unveiling details about the lives of the characters, using the words of other authors to assist in the unraveling of his story.

During the years following his year in Paris, Sanchis devotes himself whole-heartedly to the theater. He directs numerous productions, writes articles for such publications as Cuadernos para el Diálogo, Estudios Escénicos, Cuadernos de Pedagogía, El Público, and Pausa, among others, and becomes Valencia's correspondent to the periodical Primer Acto.

² Also called A-effect or distancing effect, in German Verfremdungseffekt or V-effekt, it involves using various methods designed to distance the audience from emotional involvement in the play by creating reminders of the artificiality of theatrical performance.

Sanchis's first full-length play, Tú, no importa quién, is written in 1962, and in 1968 wins the Carlos Arniches award in Alicante.³ From this point on there is little slowing of his prolific writing career, and indeed of his directing career as well. In addition to the fact that many of the plays he directs are masterpieces by the canonical authors such as Cervantes, Lope de Vega and Shakespeare, many are plays that Sanchis himself is writing during this time. Taking a Brechtian approach to the classics, our playwright creates works such as Algo así como Hamlet (1970), Tendenciosa manipulación del texto de La Celestina de Fernando de Rojas (1974), and La leyenda de Gilgamesh (1977), among countless other historically-intertwined and inspired dramas. His conversion factor is to rework some of the world's theatrical masterpieces from the fronterizo point of view. In doing so, he is shifting the spotlight to the characters that in the originals serve primarily to support the actions of the protagonists, who are, as a general rule, of the aristocratic classes, and who use these marginalized members of their society to unravel their often somewhat ridiculous intrigues. Sanchis makes them the primary characters, which usually results in a more humorous outcome of the plot. To give an example, in his reworking of Fernando de Rojas' La Celestina, rather than having Rojas' Calisto and Melibea as the protagonists of the play, he gives the leading roles to their servants, Parmeno and Sempronio, and their prostitute girlfriends. This is a prime example of his use of marginalized people in centralized circumstances.

Throughout the years Sanchis has created, presided over, shaped and influenced numerous theatrical projects and organizations, from the Asociación Escena Alternativa

³ The Carlos Arniche award was instituted in 1955 by the Ayuntamiento de Alicante, as a means of recognizing exceptional theatrical works written in Spanish. It was disbanded in 1978, but was reinstated in 1998, and remains active today.

(1981-1984) to the famous Sala Beckett in Barcelona, of which he becomes director in 1988. Under his direction the Sala Beckett becomes the center of teatro fronterizo, and a new era of alternative theater is born. Many up-and-coming Spanish playwrights such as Sergei Belbel and Lluís Cunillé have passed through the Sala Beckett, which consists of, in addition to a theater on which to stage various works, a multiplicity of workshops and classes, many of which have been under the guidance of Sanchis.

As his work becomes more widely known and appreciated, Sanchis is awarded numerous awards, such as the Premio Nacional de Teatro in 1990, which he shares with director José Estruch, and a year later the coveted Premio Lorca. In 1993 he becomes the director of the Iberoamericano Theater Festival in Barcelona, which he continues overseeing even after moving to Madrid in 1997. In Madrid he continues his prolific writing as well as coming into the circles of other playwrights, such as Juan Mayorga and Yolanda Dorado, through his involvement with the Sala Mirador.

Most recently, Sanchis is working on a dramatic trilogy about an assortment of afflictions associated with the human mind: autism, amnesia and multiple personality disorder. As demonstrated by this clear departure from the themes of popular theater, Sanchis continues to preserve the teatro fronterizo years after its creation.

One of Sanchis's contemporaries, Ignacio Amestoy (1947), has referred to the escalation of the number of Spanish playwrights during this time period as sufficient basis for the naming of a generation, which is the Generation of 1982 (Amestoy 10). This title does not define its members in anything but chronological proximity, and the fact that with the transition to a democracy in Spain after the death of Franco there was an eruption of theatrical works into the public arena. On the contrary, there are few shared characteristics

among their collective works other than a strong intellectual rigor with regard to their theater, and a shared appreciation for technical precision. In addition to Sanchis and Amestoy, among those included in this category are playwrights José Luis Alonso de Santos (1942), Miguel Medina (1946), Fermín Cabal (1948) and Rodolf Sirera (1948) (Pérez-Rasilla 15-16).

Despite the numerous other playwrights writing at the same time, it is José Sanchis Sinisterra who is known for the creation of and coining the term teatro fronterizo. As mentioned earlier, this genre of theater spotlights those members of society who are habitually neglected, whether deliberately or unintentionally, both on the stage and off. Sanchis recognizes the fact that societies are composed of borderlines, and that there are those members of the population who are compelled toward the center, and those who are pushed to the outer rim, the borders, the periphery, the margins. As he writes in his Manifiesto on teatro fronterizo, “hay territorios en la vida que no gozan del privilegio de la centralidad” (Sanchis 267). He goes on to explain how these people are the ones upon which the contrasting centralized territories are supported. These are people who do not prosper by their hard work and are rarely exalted or applauded; whose names are rarely sung in praise. Theirs is often the most unpleasant work, which is rarely appreciated. Society dismisses them, yet if they were to disappear one day the gears of our world would screech to a standstill, as their labor is the impetus behind the mechanisms that keep everything else running smoothly.

José Sanchis Sinisterra believes that these people should not go unsung, and since he recognizes the fact that they are largely overlooked by all forms of popular media, he has undertaken the responsibility to represent those whose voices have been buried in the hubbub of conventional theater. Sanchis openly criticizes mainstream theater as having sold itself

short of its capabilities and influence within modern-day society, saying that it has become mercenary and corrupt:

Esta política consiste en dotar cantidades astronómicas para los directores estrella, para los teatros institucionales, para el teatro de fachada, para esta cultura de escaparate que caracteriza la posmodernidad, y ofrecer unas migajas absolutas para lo que pueden ser nuevos caminos, nuevas vías de creación.... Hay que decir ya, públicamente, que ha habido una serie de directores en este país...que [han planteado] un concepto absolutamente mercantilista del teatro con la complicidad y la connivencia de los políticos, que piensan que así se ponen las medallas. (Pallín 30-31)

It has become somewhat of a mission of Sanchis's therefore to counteract in every possible way what he regards to be the downfall of the performing arts due to commercialization and popular culture. For this reason his focus on those marginalized members of society has become so important in his work. Take, for example, his play Los figurantes (1986), in which the extras of a play within the play realize that the lead actors have disappeared, leaving them the stage. After a trepid start, during which some of these sideline characters timidly remind the others that they need to maintain their positions in case the lead actors should suddenly appear, and the more audacious ones decide that the stage is theirs and they are going to take it over, they all decide to carry out the performance by themselves. In the end, however, they find that they are under-prepared, and cannot make the choices that will fulfill their respective destinies. Sanchis's intentions go beyond the façade of including those usually excluded, as his stage directions on the first page of the play, on which the list of personajes appears, can attest: "Sería muy del agrado del autor que los personajes de esta obra fueran interpretados por auténticos figurantes" (Sanchis 7). Here we may see his genuine sensitivity towards otherwise overlooked individuals, simply by recognizing the importance of their role within society.

Above all, Sanchis utilizes the teatro fronterizo as an instrument for distancing his marginalized characters from the political powers that be, by creating a clear separation that facilitates the emergence of the aforementioned boundaries, and by doing so creates an alteration in his audience's perception. This route also leads Sanchis towards a series of politically-charged, often revolutionary, plays, such as Escenas de terror y miseria en el primer franquismo (1979)⁴, ¡Ay, Carmela! (1986), or El cerco de Leningrado (1993), whose methods of perception-alteration are inspired by Brecht. As the focus of each play pans away from what is habitually expected on stage, and turns instead to characters such as drug addicts, AIDS victims, prisoners and orphans, Sanchis implements the distancing techniques so famously used by Brecht to coerce his audience, by means of the unexpected, towards an enlightened perception of the reality in which such characters live.

As mentioned earlier, teatro fronterizo is not solely a means of spotlighting those characters traditionally left in the shadows; the term refers also to a theater that is itself a frontera, or borderline, between the realm of theater and that of narrative. By doing away with the spectacular and pointedly dramatic elements of the works he directs and writes himself, he is veering away from the norms of a more centrally accepted class of theater. As Carlos Espinosa Domínguez writes, Sanchis provides “[u]na exploración consciente del grado cero de la teatralidad, que no pasa por los medios técnicos ni las producciones millonarias, sino por una concepción casi artesanal del teatro, que reserva para el actor un rol fundamental” (1190). Doing this allows him a certain freedom to experiment and to pursue his artistic curiosity, which often leads to a uniquely non-theatrical experience for the spectators of his plays.

⁴ Escenas de terror y miseria en el primer franquismo is a clear paraphrased derivative of Brecht's own Fear and Misery in the Third Reich.

El lector por horas is practically defined by its use of fragmentation, as previously mentioned, which is very closely linked with Sanchis's ideas of escritura del hueco, both of which are also considered to be on the outskirts of conventional or commercial theater. The playwright's methods in this play are to find a passage in another author's text that serves to develop his own plot, at which point he introduces it, and, once it is introduced, Sanchis as the author has the power to manipulate his characters' reactions and interpretations of said text. By creating the desired reactions in his characters, he is also able to manipulate the reactions of his audience. However, it must not be forgotten that the impetus behind this method is the desire to leave holes in the play's structure which the members of the audience may fill with their own analyses, whether by the use of ellipses, silences or partially contained texts. Sanchis explained this thought clearly in a 1999 interview with Juan Manuel Joya, in which he said, "... la actividad del ser humano es una permanente interpretación. . . y el teatro debe devolver al individuo... la capacidad interpretativa, deductiva, analítica, sensitiva y emocional" (150).

Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response proposes that every text is an open one, from which any number of interpretations may be extracted, given the reader's personal readiness and willingness to interact with the text. Iser writes that a text "represents a potential effect that is realized during the reading process" (ix), which, coupled with the escritura del hueco creates a highly personalized relationship between the receptor and the text, or in our case, play. Iser's speculations regarding the holes or huecos left in literature are interesting as well. He writes that as a text is read an equilibrium is striven for between the text and the reader, in the sense that as the text is mentally absorbed by the reader, any deficiencies or holes that may exist in the text require the reader's mind to fill them in.

However, as a text is a static object and is incapable of modification or transformation, it is up to the reader, who is dynamic, to adjust his perceptions in order to restore the equilibrium with the text (Iser 167). This prescribed task of filling in the gaps in a text is remarkably similar to Sanchis's method of literal fragmentation within his play. Not only are the borrowed texts fragmented, but also the dialogues in between the readings from other authors are riveted with ellipses and unfinished sentences. This technique both allows and forces the receptor to meet the text half-way, so to say, at which point the above-mentioned equilibrium is achieved. As I will explore in more detail later, this is crucial in Sanchis's filtration system, in which the final filter is the reader or spectator himself.

By fragmenting the pieces of other authors' texts within his play Sanchis is able to mold them to his own devices, creating holes in his text where none existed in the originals of what has been introduced. Sanchis's abundant use of ellipsis in El lector por horas, combined with inserted pauses and scene breaks, produce in the spectator or reader the sensation that nothing is ever entirely finished. Numerous are the conversations in which virtually every phrase is left unfinished, leaving dubious insinuations dangling in the mind of the audience. After the unsatisfying end of Heart of Darkness, one of the novels read aloud in the play, leaves Lorena upset and in a state of depression, Celso and Ismael have the following conversation, if it can be called as such:

CELSO. No, no: usted no tiene ninguna culpa. El error fue mío por...

ISMAEL. Sí, pero yo debí...

CELSO. De veras. Asumo toda la responsabilidad. Usted no...

ISMAEL. Algo noté ya los primeros días. Debí decirle que...

CELSO. Toda la responsabilidad. Ni siquiera me di cuenta de que ya el título...

ISMAEL. Yo lo pensé un momento, pero...

CELSO. No se puede estar en todo.

ISMAEL. Mi opinión, al fin y al cabo...

CELSO. No se puede.

ISMAEL. No. (*pausa*) Pero, ¿está ya mejor? (196)

The lack of communication between the two characters is almost infuriating, above all the fact that it seems obvious that Ismael has something important to say, but that Celso takes his role as father and protector of his blind daughter so seriously that he refuses to listen to anyone else's possible diagnosis. However, aside from being verbally unsatisfying on the surface, it fulfills its intended purpose, which is to leave this "gozosa tarea...de interpretar libremente sus enigmas" up to the receptor of the work.

Chapter II.

Reading El lector por horas Through the Multiple Refractions of the Author's Applied Lenses

El lector por horas opens with a passage being read from Lawrence Durrell's novel Justine.⁵ The passage is a description of a period in the narrator's past when life seemed insignificant, a mere passage of time, symbolic perhaps of that which preceded the beginning of the play. The aforementioned Ismael is reading aloud to Celso in the latter's library, and the spectator soon realizes that Ismael is in the process of being interviewed for the job of lector por horas for Celso's daughter. His first reading of the paragraph from Justine meets with Celso's approval. However, when he is asked to repeat a part of the paragraph, Celso is displeased, saying that Ismael has put too much of his own interpretation into the reading. "No es lo mismo. Estaba usted ahí, interponiéndose entre el texto y yo" (Sinisterra 180). The exchange that follows reveals to the spectator the nature of the work involved; that Celso is looking for "...una simple herramienta que convertía las letras en sonidos, las palabras en formas acústicas.... Un órgano puramente fisiológico, sin más pensamiento que el necesario para convertir la cadena de signos gráficos...en unidades melódicas y rítmicas de significación" (Lector 181). Celso makes it very clear that what he wants is a transparent

⁵Justine is the first book of the tetralogy The Quartet of Alexandria by British author Laurence Durrell (1912-1990).

reader, someone who will act as a simple transmitter through which Lorena, his blind daughter, can enjoy literature.

Normally it is the reader who is the receptor of a read work. As Eduardo Pérez-Rasilla writes, “El lector es un ser interpuesto entre la obra literaria y su recepción, un intérprete, un descodificador de signos, un traductor de un lenguaje escrito a un lenguaje oral, mucho más complejo y heteróclito de lo que pudiera parecer, como bien advierte Celso ya en su primera entrevista con Ismael” (Lector 61). Yet in the case of this play, Ismael, who is the reader chosen for his transparency, is merely a lens by which means Lorena may act as receptor of the written word. However, Sanchis is also a lens, as he has chosen which parts of the other authors’ texts to include in his play.

The more lenses that are introduced into the equation, the more room for refracting there is. Rather than a simple reader-text relationship there are a series of perception-altering lenses that detract from the simple absorption and interpretation by the reader. As Ismael reads the various texts, which include Giuseppe di Lampedusa’s Il gattopardo (1958), Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness (1902), Gustave Flaubert’s Madame Bovary (1857), Schnitzler’s Dream Story (1926), and Juan Rulfo’s Pedro Páramo (1955), all of which have already been filtered through Sanchis’s lens upon his choosing which passages to include in the play, he conveys to Lorena tidbits about his personal life and experiences, despite his efforts to be entirely neutral. Her blindness has heightened her other senses, and her ability to pick up on voice nuances, breathing rapidity, faltering, excitement, etc. make Ismael’s seemingly neutral voice a prism of his life: “Cada sesión de lectura es una confesión, en cada página me descubre un pliego de su alma, un miedo, un rencor, el trazo de un recuerdo o de un deseo. Esos miles y miles de palabras leídas... Lo sé todo de usted. Los adjetivos, sobre todo, le

traicionan. Y también algunos verbos” (Lector 213). Lorena has acquired a wisdom beyond her years. This gives her a role as yet another interpreter, using that which has been filtered through Ismael’s lens to fill in the huecos in his reading. She seems to have uncovered Ismael’s entire life story simply by listening to, or being the receptor of, a series of books read aloud to her.

The reader/spectator of the play is also a receptor, receiving each text through a series of lenses. Each time Lorena asks Ismael to repeat a sentence or a passage, the audience deduces something about her. When she gets upset at the ending of Heart of Darkness it becomes evident that she possesses some sort of secret in her past, as Celso hurries to placate and assuage her ruffled nerves. Through both Ismael and the audience are left to question what sort of secret it might be, Lorena’s reaction, and the way in which her father reacts to it, imply something dark and unspoken that has taken place in the household. The cause of her blindness is hinted at through her reactions to things Ismael reads, though he is told that it was caused by an accident. Details of said accident are left up to the imagination of the spectator, though it seems likely that it is related somehow to the abusive relationship between Celso and Lorena’s mother, and the fact that the latter abandoned her family at some point in the not-so-distant past.

Each of the books that Ismael reads aloud to Lorena comes from Celso’s extensive library, of which he is very proud, though which, according to him, contains only those canonical volumes that he considers worthwhile reading material. It is also fitting to mention here the importance of the fact that the entire play takes place within this library, whose description comprises virtually the only stage directions that consist of more than one word

(either pausa, silencio or oscuro). These instruct the director to provide the following for the stage:

Amplio salón biblioteca de una casa acomodada.
Altas estanterías repletas de libros.
Muebles de sobre elegancia.
Una puerta.
Un ventanal. (Lector 178)

Further instructions are included for the lighting, which is never to be too intense, and the sound, which consists primarily of silence, broken occasionally by faint sounds from the house's exterior. The significance of the library as the setting for this play lies in the relationship that develops between the texts and their receptors, and the confined environment of the library provides the perfect location for Sanchis to unravel his play. Though the existence of an exterior world is apparent, Ismael represents the only true penetration into Celso's household from the outside world, and he has only succeeded in doing so because of his transparent reading capabilities. As this lector por horas becomes a part of the enigmatic life of father and daughter, he is absorbed by this library and its vast collection of volumes. This collection, incidentally, includes nothing from the past twenty years, as Celso claims that nothing worthwhile has been written during this time (Lector 184). As we will learn later, this is a direct affront to Ismael, who is a writer, if not an exceedingly successful one. However, as a sort of contradiction to her father's choices of reading material, the one choice that Lorena does make is to have Ismael read aloud from a book that he has written. Ironically perhaps, it seems to fit nicely with the texts previously chosen by her father, in that it too deals with death.

Of the numerous texts chosen by Sanchis to include in his play, perhaps the one that can be most closely analyzed is Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. From its very title it is

deeply symbolic in El lector por horas due to Lorena's blindness, and the resulting darkness which surrounds her life. As previously mentioned, darkness and silence are virtually the only stage directions given by Sanchis, and both of these vacancies play a significant role in Conrad's novel as well. Everything seems to be somehow cloaked in darkness, even on days when the sun is shining. This leads to the understanding that the darkness is highly metaphorical rather than literal. It refers more to the ignorance and brutality with which the supposedly civilized men from England and Belgium treat the native Africans. The idea of being blind to another human being's condition is a much more serious accusation than simply experiencing an absence of light.

Of the three passages read aloud by Ismael to Lorena, two are from the beginning of the book and the third is from the very end. I think that it is the third one that most aptly supports my argument. As Ismael finishes reading the last two paragraphs of Heart of Darkness, in which Marlow deceptively tells the late Kurtz's fiancée that his dying words were her name (when in reality they were "The horror! The horror!"), Lorena, after a pause, asks him to repeat the last paragraph. He does so, and she tells him to continue reading. He informs her that what he just read was the end of the book, and she is upset by this: "No puede ser... Es absurdo... Ese final. Un escritor no puede... (*Pausa.*) Y esa mentira piadosa: su nombre... ¿Por qué no le dice la verdad? Su última palabra: el horror... Es absurdo, no es un final..." (194).

Here we see the meaning of Conrad's passage which has been refracted through both Sanchis's and Lorena's lenses. Rather than assuming the meaning intended by Conrad upon writing, it takes up residence on Sanchis's stage, molding to the plight of the characters, and generating an entirely new perspective. Rather than providing an understanding of the

horrible life led by Conrad's Kurtz, suddenly the text exists only as it applies to Ismael and Lorena, and to a lesser extent Celso. We feel the poignancy of Lorena's discomfort upon hearing the mention of darkness and shadow, which is enforced moments later when she asks Ismael if it is still light outside.

In an attempt to placate her, Ismael offers a possible explanation; that perhaps Conrad's decision to have Kurtz's fiancée appear at the end of the novel is a means of holding up a translucent mirror in front of Marlow for him to see himself reflected back through the image of the fiancée. Ismael proposes the interpretation that in order for Marlow to look at himself and realize what it is that he has experienced, he must see himself reflected in the face of Kurtz's fiancée, in this espejo traslúcido that allows him a point of reference from which to reflect back upon the events of the past couple of years. Ismael is introducing the idea of one person enabling another to see himself more clearly, which applies directly to El lector por horas in the sense that Ismael ultimately opens Lorena up to the idea of confronting her fears and seeing herself more clearly because of her reception of these written works, which reach her through Ismael's not-so-transparent, though somewhat translucent, lens.

The next novel read aloud to Lorena is Madame Bovary, which elicits probably the most discussion from the play's characters. During the reading of Gustave Flaubert's novel, a discussion ensues between Celso and Ismael about the appropriateness of reading it aloud to Lorena, given the fact that her mother abandoned her, and Emma Bovary commits suicide, leaving her own daughter motherless. There is also a momentary insinuation by Ismael that a danger exists that Lorena might be capable of suicide, though Celso quickly dismisses it, saying that she is far too proud to do such a thing. The discussion does recall, however, an

earlier conversation in which Celso confides in Ismael the fact that Lorena's blindness has given new meaning to his life as a father. He says that more often than not as a child grows up she no longer needs her parents, and they become dispensable. But, thanks to Lorena's accident, "ya somos otra vez imprescindibles. Nos necesita absolutamente" (Lector 182). Yet despite the fact that Celso dismisses the possibility that Lorena could conceive of suicide, every book he chooses to be read aloud to her ends in death and darkness. It is almost as if he is purposely perpetuating her blindness, and therefore her dependence on him.

Of the six primary novels read to Lorena over the course of the play, probably the one that deals most intensely with the theme of death is Mexican writer Juan Rulfo's 1955 novel Pedro Páramo. This is the story of a young man, Juan Preciado, who goes looking for his father, Pedro Páramo, after promising his mother on her deathbed that he would do so. He arrives in the town of Comala, where his father had lived, only to find that it has become a ghost town—literally—full of the voices of phantoms of those who used to live there, all of whom appear real to Juan. The novel is itself very fragmented, with changes in narrator and chronology, flash-backs and dreams, visions and supernatural occurrences. For those familiar with the work, it is clear why Sanchis and Celso chose it to be read to Lorena. It is Sanchis's usage of Rulfo's novel within El lector por horas that I find most interesting. Although only one scene is devoted to its reading, it is the most interactive reading of all the novels read, and by far the most fragmented. As Ismael reads, after every couple of sentences he stops, and after a pause Lorena, in an almost trance-like manner, repeats word for word what he has just read. She seems to get tired as he reads, and as she repeats the words she fumbles them, forgetting the ends of passages, then sentences, until Ismael is prompting her, repeating several times the same few words. The last paragraph read by

Ismael becomes a disintegrated confusion of repetitions, until the text dissolves and all that is left is Lorena's confusion and apparent bewilderment: "Y lo peor de todo...como si salieran...las voces como si...como si...de alguna hendidura...tan...las reconoces, las reconoces y sin embargo...como si las voces...oyes a la gente...lo peor...lo peor de todo..." (Lector 225). This extreme fragmentation is like filtering Rulfo's words through a shattered glass, and the refracting is almost too splintered to decipher. However, Sanchis is well aware of what he is doing, and carefully chooses which words are to be repeated (after carefully choosing which portions of the novel to use in the first place) as a means of shedding light on this anxiety or confusion that exists within Lorena's mind. In the novel, the town of Comala is described as being full of echoes, as if the echoes were hiding in the walls and underneath the stones on the empty streets. The echoes are of tired laughter, festivities from years ago that no longer have the happy ring that a festival ought to have. And now, as even the echoes become tired, all that is left is the barking of the dogs (Rulfo 103-104). As Rulfo writes of the echoes that haunt the town of Comala, Lorena similarly echoes the words of Ismael, until she, like Comala's phantom voices, grows tired and becomes silent.

Although the interaction between Ismael and Lorena in this scene is impersonal, it creates a very strong lens through which the audience receives Rulfo's text. As Polish theorist Roman Ingarden wrote in his famous Cognition of a Literary Work of Art, while reading, the reader naturally, having finished one sentence, thinks about what the next sentence will be, and so on, in a cognitive continuation throughout the process of reading. As each consecutive sentence is read, the reader naturally links it with the previous sentences in order to make sense of what he is reading. But, he writes, "when it happens that the second sentence has no perceptible connection whatever with the first, the flow of thought is

checked,” (Ingarden 34). Applying this idea to Sanchis’s use of Rulfo’s text, we see that Lorena’s fragmentation of the sentences is Sanchis’s way of preventing the intended meaning of Rulfo’s text from reaching his spectators. Instead he aims to place desired emphasis on certain words or images in order that his audience may gain insight into the shadows and echoes of Lorena’s mind. As the scene ends, there is a long silence, and Ismael suggests that they stop for the day, at which point the lights dim and there is darkness. These stage directions, silencio and oscuro are in every way intentional, as Sanchis unites what is said on stage with what is done on stage.

The opening of the scene that directly follows the reading of Pedro Páramo is perhaps the most enigmatic of the entire play. In it Lorena is speaking into the phone, having a one-sided (from the audience’s perspective) conversation with someone who is obviously making her very agitated. The first impression is that it is the strange man whom she has mentioned to Ismael earlier in the play, who calls her from time to time and speaks obscenities and filthy things into the phone. Ismael asks her why she listens to this disgraceful man instead of hanging up on him as soon as he begins to speak. Lorena doesn’t have an answer for him, and in the scene following the reading of Pedro Páramo the ambiguity heightens. As she speaks into the receiver her words are broken, interrupted, fragmented to the point of desperation. “Me hace daño...cállese, por favor...no sé cómo se atreve...podría haber colgado...lo voy a hacer si continúa de ese...” (Lector 226) and so forth, over and over again, seemingly agonizingly humiliated, and yet she remains on the line. Yet to intensify the mystery, when her father comes into the room and asks her with whom she is speaking, she replies nadie. Then Celso asks her “¿Qué hace aquí este espejo?” (Lector 227), which throws everything into ambiguous uncertainty. Was she simply talking to herself in the

mirror? Have all these conversations been imagined? Is she able to see herself in the mirror? Does imagining a man who wants her in humiliatingly erotic ways somehow hold up a mirror, as in Heart of Darkness, for her to face a part of herself that she has hitherto kept hidden? All of these questions are left up to the personal interpretation of individual receptors, who act as the final lenses through which all the ambiguities are filtered, and who create a myriad of possibilities to the play.

Ismael's own novel, titled Perdóname el futuro, which is the last one he reads aloud to Lorena, serves as the culmination of all the books read in the play. In it, the narrator is being shot at by someone whom, though at first he doesn't recognize, as the bullet approaches his forehead, he realizes he has seen many times before, begging in the streets. It is said that in the moments before someone dies his entire life flashes before his eyes. In Perdóname el futuro however, it is the life of the assassin, imagined by the victim, which flashes in the mind of the victim before the bullet penetrates his forehead. This bullet, the only thing linking the two characters, acts similarly to the translucent mirror alluded to by Ismael after reading Heart of Darkness. It provides a means, or lens, by which both the self and the Other may be observed, and it is the Other which facilitates a clearer perspective of the Self. Similar are Wolfgang Iser's ideas about the effect a text has on its reader. He writes that a literary work's "structures must be of a complex nature, for although they are contained in the text, they do not fulfill their function until they have affected the reader" (Iser 21). He goes on to argue that what a reader absorbs from a text, though mingled with his personal experience, must be parallel to the text's intentions. Once the reader tries to extract pieces of the text and define them in terms of what he already knows, the aesthetic

effect is destroyed, because what is written within a text “cannot possibly be identical to anything already existing in the world” (Iser 21).

The image of the translucent mirror cannot help but conjure thoughts of Jacques Lacan and his famous mirror stage of adolescence. His theory states the idea that a child must learn how to view itself from the outside and in relation to others before it can develop an internal identity, and “we become ourselves by way of other perspectives and other views of who we are” (Bertens 161). In the case of Lorena, Ismael must act as her auditory mirror, through which she must confront her fear, the fear that ultimately led to her blindness⁶, before she can hope to regain her sight. She asks Ismael if he will return her sight to her: “¿Me devolverás la vista?” His answer, and the final words of the play: “Yo sólo soy la bala” (Lector 247). Ismael is telling Lorena that he can only act as the medium through which she, if willing, may acquire a level of consciousness that will liberate her from the fear that blinded her. Ismael’s self-imposed position as Lorena’s mirror places him as a distorting lens, as is any mirror, that leads to what Lacan calls a “misrecognition” of one’s identity. Still, in the search for identity this misrecognition, or distorted likeness, is the only image available, and thus the identity is recognized in terms of others’ perception of the original. Ismael, the lens that Celso hires for his transparency in an attempt to maintain his daughter’s dependence on him, though which Lorena recognizes more as a translucent refractor, serves as the medium through which Lorena’s sense of identity is shaped. In the same way that Marlowe gains self-consciousness through Kurtz’s fiancée, and Ismael’s victim gains the

⁶ Lorena tells Ismael that her mother used to tell her to close her eyes tightly whenever she was scared, and when she opened them, the object of her fear would be gone. Lorena continues to tell how one time she waited too long before opening her eyes (247). This circumstance is presumably intended to explain in part the mysterious “accident” which led to Lorena’s blindness, though whether she is speaking literally of an accident that happened to her because she waited too long to open her eyes, or whether it refers to a psychological blindness that still cripples her because she has yet to “open her eyes” remains ambiguous.

same consciousness by means of staring at the advancing bullet of his assassin, so Lorena may have been given the possibility of sight by her lector por horas, though, naturally, the ambiguity of the ending leaves that interpretation up to the notion of the spectator. The refraction of meaning through Ismael's lens allows Lorena insight into both reader and self.

At one point in his life Sanchís reread some texts by Kafka that he had previously read some twenty years earlier, and realized that he had interpreted them entirely differently than he had upon his first reading (Pérez-Rasilla 39). This led him to realize what an important role the reader or receptor of a literary work is in its interpretation,

...que esa escritura era un espacio de indeterminación sobre el cual el lector proyectaba sus propias obsesiones, sus incertidumbres, sus preguntas [...] Descubrí que, quizá, una de las funciones del teatro podía ser crear estructuras indeterminadas de contenido que el espectador tuviera que completar con su participación. (Joya 146)

Sanchis's play El lector por horas is a projection of this relationship between text and reader as the determining factor in the reception of the written word. Reflecting Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response, Sanchis works with the concept that every text is open, and only upon reception by a reader or spectator may a text reach its full and intended potential. The reading process is an interactive one, and it is only when reader and text come together within this interaction that true meaning may be reached. As every text must invariably be extracted from its original context, it is up to the reader to restore some sort of frame of reference in which the text's words and images may rest in the mind. What Sanchis's play does is to explore several of the many possibilities of the process of reading.

The play, as its title suggests, deals summarily with the act of reading. Sanchis, like many writers, is fascinated with the act of reading, and he is very open about his partiality for intertextual references. As he clearly states in his author's note at the beginning of the play,

reading the words of others has always fed his writing, and his reasoning behind the writing of El lector por horas is an attempt to pay a sort of homage to all the writers who have influenced and inspired his writing: "...[H]e intentado asomarme al continente misterioso de los libros, de la ficción literaria, de la novela, en suma. De ese perenne flujo de palabras que nos hace vivir lo que otros vivieron o soñaron" (Lector 175). Sanchis continues to question what it is about reading literature written by others that reworks the mental landscape of the reader, that provides fodder for the hungry imagination, and how the written word mingles unwittingly with the already existing material in the mind of the receptor to create an entirely personal interpretation of the text. It is here also that he bestows upon each member of his audience the responsibility of finding his own interpretation to the text, thereby intertwining Sanchis's world with that of his audience.

Sanchis then goes on to create a play which links his spectators to his characters, as both find themselves listening to a series of readings. The difference, of course, is that the audience hears only chosen excerpts, whereas the characters are presumed to have heard the entirety of the books read aloud by el lector por horas. The audience, therefore, accepts the task to rellenar los huecos, or fill in the holes in the story, giving each spectator a decidedly different theatrical experience.

The actions of the play's three characters are all based upon the act of reading and the reactions produced thereby. Celso wants to hire someone who can vocally reproduce the written words in the books he chooses to be read to his daughter without compromising their interpretation with personal emotion or analysis. Ismael's ability to do so is what gets him the job.

Before continuing further it must be pointed out that a dramatic text which focuses on the act of reading is a peculiar situation in itself. It must be looked at differently depending on whether it is being viewed in a theater or read in text form. In the former, the spectator is more dependent upon the actors' interpretations, whereas in the latter the reader himself acts as the medium through which the interpretation takes place. In the case of El lector por horas, a series of texts are read within the body of the play's text. However, the reader/viewer is subject to only certain excerpts of each book read within the play, chosen meticulously by the author to abet in the creation of his theatrical work.

Looking at the play as a written work, the reader finds himself in the process of reading about someone in the process of reading. Ten of the seventeen scenes from the play involve Ismael reading directly from an assortment of books chosen by Celso for Lorena's entertainment. Three of these scenes are exclusively reading, and contain no other conversation or dialogue. In the other scenes the reader realizes that the reading, though apparently one-sided, is what contains the majority of the communication that takes place between the characters in the play. Celso in particular is incapable of meaningful communication with either Ismael or Lorena, as he neither hears nor listens, and Ismael has been hired on the firm condition that he not bring any aspects of his personal life across the threshold of the house. It may also be pointed out here that Celso's name is never actually uttered onstage, and therefore remains anonymous to the spectator, which adds to his mystery and inaccessibility on stage. Lorena, on the other hand, is obviously desirous of having conversations with people, to the point of the possibly imagined series of telephone calls from the anonymous man, but her blindness confines her for the most part within the house, thereby limiting her contact with anyone but her father and Ismael. The majority of the

communication between the characters, however, is contained within the literary works read aloud by Ismael. Although it is Celso who chooses the books to be read to his daughter, it is Sanchis who chooses the excerpts to be shared with the reader and spectator. It is he, therefore, who molds the public's perspective of these works, not the authors of the books read aloud.

Ismael's supposed role in the play is to serve as a transparent lens which makes it possible for a blind girl to enjoy literature. As Wolfgang Iser points out, however, the immediate reception of a text by a reader does in itself modify the text, as all texts are created for an audience. He writes that "...each sentence [in a text] can achieve its end only by aiming at something beyond itself" (110). He goes on to write about the necessary fulfillment toward which all texts are aimed, which is to "...‘activate’ [in the reader] the interplay of the correlates prestructured in the sequence of sentences" (110). In short, Iser is suggesting that every text must be opened by the reader, and only through the reader can it achieve its intended purpose. Therefore, I propose that in Sanchis's play it is Ismael who opens the texts he reads aloud to Lorena, despite the fact that he has been hired to act as solely a medium of semantic transportation.

The last book which Ismael reads aloud to Lorena, Perdóname el futuro, is one which, in the play, he has written and published himself, whereas in reality it is a book that Sanchis has written and is hoping to have published. This blurring of the lines between the author and his fictional characters correlates directly with the recurring topic of intertextuality. Sanchis, by means of a conversation between Celso and Ismael, considers the difference between intertextuality and plagiarism, and explains that by incorporating a text within another text it thereby generates a new meaning, and therefore is not plagiarism.

As Celso and Ismael discuss his book Celso points out the numerous parallels with the writings of William Faulkner, claiming these similarities as plagiarism. Ismael, for the first time in the play, stands up for himself and his work. He adamantly insists that there is a grand difference between plagiarism and other forms of influence one author might bestow unwittingly upon another. Every writer begins as an avid reader, as both Ismael and Sanchis agree, and to think that every work read by a writer does not in some way influence or seep into the work of the reader-turned-writer is naive. Every writer who is read by another writer leaves a lasting footprint on the writings of the reader.

El lector por horas presents a particularly tricky dilemma for Ismael, who has been hired for his ability to read with utmost transparency, yet the fact that he is also a writer makes him particularly susceptible to the nuances of the written word. As a writer, he wants to be penetrated by what he reads, as everything acts in some way as an inspiration (not material to plagiarize). Yet as a hired reader he is not allowed to demonstrate that there has been the least amount of penetration of what he reads. He must not substantiate any suspicion that there is a personal interaction between himself and what he reads, whether it is the text penetrating him or vice versa. Instead he is impelled to restrain his natural impulses, which he does successfully enough so that no one but Lorena is able to see through his front.

As each fragment of foreign text is woven into the fabric of Sanchis's own text, it passes through his filter, or lens. However, by mingling excerpts of other authors' novels with his own, he strengthens his work, as the authors he includes are all members of the international canon, and are therefore indisputably skilled in their art. Furthermore, by including his own work as one of the texts read aloud to Lorena, under the pretense that it is Ismael's published book, he is discreetly placing himself among a collection of highly-

esteemed authors, despite the fact that Celso claims that nothing worthwhile has been written within the past twenty years.

By incorporating the works of other writers into his own work Sanchis is not pretending that he has created what others have written, he is simply implying that by placing them within a new context they, along with their surrounding text, generate a new meaning. As Harold Bloom writes in his book The Anxiety of Influence, all authors feel anxiety when presented with the task of writing something completely original, because it is impossible to come up with something that is not in some way influenced by all the writers previously read by the author. However, the most any author can hope to do is to create an innovative landscape in which a text may appear, and through which its receptor may gather fresh perspectives. Sanchis, by providing the aforementioned lenses through which all the texts must pass in order to reach his public, is providing this innovative landscape, and allowing his play to be an interactive experience.

As Sanchis eloquently writes in his Author's Note at the beginning of his play, he feels that he owes a great deal to the numerous writers who have served as his inspiration over the years. Not only have they created the world in which he lives and breathes, but they have revealed to him what he always knew without knowing he knew (175-6). However, he admits that the questions he raises in El lector por horas are not ones which he intends to answer. Instead, he is using this wonderful world of literature to cast doubt into his audience, and with doubt comes thought, and with thought comes realization. By incorporating the words of other writers into his own text, he not only pays a sort of homage to each author, he also broadens the scope of his audience's aesthetic response. As he invites his spectators to "[aceptar] la gozosa tarea de 'rellenar los huecos' de la obra, a interpretar libremente sus

enigmas, de implicarse a fondo en la aventura de ‘leer’” (Lector 176), he is simultaneously telling them that there will be parts of his play that they may not understand entirely, but that with a little bit of personal involvement each and every receptor of his work should be capable of arriving at an individualized interpretation of his text.

The act of reading has been studied extensively, as a means of absorption and communication, and the relationship between text and reader is the key to the understanding of the meaning arrived at by the reader. Because the act of reading cannot help but involve the personal experiences and expressions of the reader, the interpretation of any given text will vary based on what each individual reader brings to the process of reading. The literature being read serves as a provocation within the reader, which in turn produces any number of reactions, many of which are in turn reflected back upon the text. As Wolfgang Iser writes in his book The Act of Reading:

...[the] success [of communication] will depend on the degree in which the text establishes itself as a correlative in the reader’s consciousness. This ‘transfer’ of text to reader is often regarded as being brought about solely by the text. Any successful transfer however -- though initiated by the text -- depends on the extent to which this text can activate the individual reader’s faculties of perceiving and processing.... [The text’s] function is not merely to *present* such data, but, in fact, to use them in order to secure its uptake. In other words, it offers guidance as to what is to be produced, and therefore cannot itself be the product. (107)

This relates to Sanchis’s play in that the holes left in the text serve to allow the audience an activation of its faculties, thereby ensuring a more satisfactory uptake of the trail of enigmatic crumbs left behind as the story winds its way around its series of texts. This is the playwright’s means of guiding his audience through the play, though it cannot be the play alone that feeds the audience, rather its members’ own mental fulfillment that provides sustenance.

The very enigmatic nature of the play creates a work that is open to multiple possible interpretations. This idea is closely linked with the idea of rellenar el hueco, or the necessity to leave parts of the text up to the personal analysis of the spectator or receptor. The more mysteries that are left unsolved and the more details of each character's past that are merely hinted at without further embellishments, the harder the receptor's own imagination must work to complete the entirety of the play within the mental arena.

Each time Lorena draws an assumption about his past from a nuance in Ismael's voice, it is met with ambiguity by its recipient. Silence also plays an important role in this extended enigma. Each time Ismael is asked a direct question by either Lorena or Celso, whether it be about his past profession, when Lorena calls him profesor, his family life, when Celso asks him if he has children, or his present situation, it is met with either a silence or a retraction of the question: "¿Tiene usted hijos? No, no me conteste, si no quiere. Además, en realidad no me importa. Era una pregunta retórica, una manera de decirle, y de decirme, que los hijos son los mensajeros de la muerte..." (Lector 182). This manner of raising a question that is then not answered serves to raise the question in the mind of the receptor, which can then not be dismissed as easily as it is in the play. Therefore, each individual member of the audience will create his own idea of what the life of Ismael is like, or what really happened to Lorena's mother, or what sort of accident Lorena had that caused her blindness, none of which are answered, though all of which are alluded to enigmatically. As Sanchis himself wrote,

Quizás la inconsistencia de esa matriz del espectador empírico que es el *público* lleva a ciertos autores a construir textos que cuentan con un receptor implícito igualmente anómalo, fluctuante, díscolo, dinámico, susceptible de erigirse como cómplice más o menos perverso de la rarificada praxis dramatúrgica. (Receptor 50)

Sanchis's consciousness of this relationship leads to other questions about the content of the play. For example, who is it that chooses the novels that Ismael reads aloud to Lorena? And what are the implications of these choices within the play?

If it is Celso who chooses the books, is it because, as Carles Battlé i Jordá speculates, he wants to maintain his position of control and dominance over Lorena? He claims that he has her best interests in mind when he chooses the included works from among his extensive collection of canonical volumes, yet if he truly knows her as well as he claims to, should he not be aware that an ending such as that of Conrad's Heart of Darkness would upset her as it does? Or that Emma Bovary's suicide at the end of Flaubert's novel would lead to an unsettling conversation about madness and destruction? Or that Celso enters into an alcohol-induced monologue about the emptiness of the life of anyone who chooses to dedicate his life to reading, saying,

las novelas abren...sí, y también las comedias y dramas...incluso los poemas, sí... Todo eso por donde se despeña... ¿qué? ¿La razón, quizás? ¿El sentido común?... Hay muchas maneras de leer, usted lo ha dicho... Aunque, en el fondo, podrían reducirse a dos. Sí: hay sólo dos, en el fondo. (*Pausa.*) Pero en la literatura, todas las obras de ficción, novelas, poesías, dramas... sólo tienen un propósito: crear insatisfacción, volver insoportable la realidad. Y fíjese que lo dice un gran lector, como yo. Un amante de la literatura... (Lector 208)

Here Sanchis is pitting Celso against the grain of his own play, using Celso as a lens through which his audience's self-awareness may be heightened, with the intent of making each of his receptors think specifically about his own personal relationship with what he reads, and whether or not he finds what Celso says to be true. It is Celso's role to do this, as he is certainly the most antagonistic of the three characters, as well as the fact that he has already made it clear that he has little interest in anything written within the past twenty years,

although anyone seeing or reading El lector por horas, written in 1996, would undoubtedly have a different opinion.

Sanchis's purpose is broader than his stage. As Carles Battlé i Jordà writes, "...la selección última de los fragmentos la ha realizado Sanchis, que esta selección promueve la activación de múltiples *horizontes de expectativas* personales y que esta activación, que responde a un bagaje literario individualizado, genera insospechadas e inéditas lecturas que escapen al control del autor" (15). Sanchis aims to connect to his audience in such a way as to bring about provocative thought processes which will, ideally, bring about a degree of social awareness or change. By initiating a series of thought sequences that are interactive with their surroundings he provides a heightened responsiveness and a willingness to fill in the gaps in life with thought rather than submissive complacency. Sanchis's usage of escritura del hueco allows his audience a certain degree of liberty with respect to interpretation, though the provocative nature of the text that exists around the holes, or huecos, is substantial enough to serve the playwright's purpose.

Much of the work that Sanchis has done with theater, both writing and directing, has driven him towards a desire to experiment with the borders between textuality and theatricality (Domínguez 1189). He has taken it upon himself to direct several plays which were not written with intent to be staged. Sanchis, however, has adapted and manipulated them to make them stage-worthy, despite, or perhaps because of the fact that they are not particularly theatrical (in the sense of being spectacles). This absence of theatricality is what Sanchis seems to be interested in: the ability to work with a play that is at the basic foundation of the concept of theater. Though he wrote El lector por horas himself, a parallel can certainly be drawn here about the lack of theatricality of this play. The drama is

contained entirely within the reading aloud and the subsequent conversations, with the aid of darkness and silence for emphasis. The fact that the text has minimal stage directions allows Sanchis to open it up to the receptor's interpretations, allowing a reader to imagine the scene in his mind's eye, and a director and actors to interpret as they see fit.

In conclusion, José Sanchis Sinisterra has created a deeply complex play. Though seemingly straightforward, it takes its readers and spectators through a maze of refracted and redirected meanings. By taking portions of other authors' works and blending them into his own play, Sanchis reroutes their intended significance within their original works, and instead allows his play's characters to bend and play with them, discuss and argue about them, until the final products are mere shells of their initial intentions. Each step of this refraction process filters the meaning yet again, from author to page, from page to reader, from reader through the lens of a blind girl's intuition. From here it is tossed about among three very different characters, until it is finally spilled out upon the anticipatory audience, artistically distorted from its first breath to its last.

Sanchis is conscious of this process, and of the fact that his audience is composed of thinking individuals whose minds will fill in any holes that he might leave in his script. For him that is the beauty of the aesthetics of response: that one text may generate countless interpretations. In El lector por horas room is made for even more analyses, as it contains not just one text but several, each of which may be opened to multiple refractions and multiple absorptions. This is Sanchis's way of recognizing all the authors who have inspired him throughout the years, and to illustrate the strength of the written word.

In El lector por horas Sanchis has created a work that surpasses all precedent in the field of fragmentation of texts through multiple lenses. Teetering on the brink between

theater and text, Sanchis has honed his art of script-writing from a fronterizo perspective, leaving his audience with the sensation that it has witnessed a novel, or read a drama. Driven by his desire to provide for each member of his audience a unique theatrical performance, he has allowed for as many interpretations of his play as there are eyes to view it. By fragmenting the flow of dialogue and text that reaches his spectators he forces a subconscious mental completion by each of them, as the mind's natural instinct is to insert what it thinks is missing based on previous knowledge or deduction. Though Sanchis happily uses the theories of writers such as Iser and Lacan upon which to model his work, the final result is distinctly his own. As he intertwines the words of other authors into his text, he opens each of these works to a myriad of possible interpretations, through which his drama may be timeless and enduring. Each fragment created by each pause, ellipsis, silence or scene ending allows fractures in the play's structure, which in turn allow the spectator's mind to leap to the occasion, filling in the holes and creating an equilibrium between the text and its receptor.

Sanchis's play takes the traditional concept of the reader-text relationship beyond its conventional boundaries through this use of fragmentation and escritura del hueco, and by doing so refracts the customarily accepted notion that the reader-text relationship is one-on-one. Instead, he filters his borrowed texts through a series of lenses, thereby redirecting them and assigning new meaning. Thus he allows them to appropriately work within his drama, the end result being to endow his audience with multiple refractions of the original texts used within the play, thereby redefining the relationship between a text and its receptor. Sanchis has created a fresh perception of the conventional process of reading, which aptly characterizes the teatro fronterizo.

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