

## Matias Montes Huidobro

Matias Montes Huidobro was born in Sagua la Grande, a small town in the central province of Las Villas, Cuba, in 1931. Only at considerable personal sacrifice did he finish his university studies, earning a degree in Education from the University of Havana. For several years he worked as a high school teacher. Between 1959 and 1961 he served as a theater critic for the newspaper *Revolución* and for CMBF Television in Havana. ■ *Las cuatro brujas*, awarded honorable mention in 1950 in the National Dramatic Contest sponsored by the theater group Prometeo, marked his debut as a playwright. The following year Montes Huidobro took First Prize in the same contest with his *Sobre las mismas rocas*. In 1959 he wrote an impressive one-act play, *Los acosados*, which not only enjoyed a long run on the stage, but was also published the same year in *Lunes de Revolución*—then the leading organ of young literary talent. ■ In the years immediately preceding his exile in 1961, Montes Huidobro wrote extensively. These works include *La botija* (1960), *Las vacas* (1960), which won first prize in a national contest, and *El tiro por la culata* (1961). Two one-act plays, *Las correas* and *La puerca perdida*, and a full-length one, *El verano está cerca*, to our knowledge, remain unpublished and unperformed to date. *Gas en los poros* and *La sal de los muertos*, both written in 1961, share with *Los acosados* in a penetrating view, so lucid that it seems a sort of madness, of a reality whose abject, incomprehensible events and values generate a sense of oppression and uselessness. ■ *Guillotina* (*La madre y la guillotina*), written in 1961, discloses, by an elaborate play-within-play technique, the contradictory passions usually unchained at the outset of a revolution. The hatred, the shameless hypocrisy, and the morbid egotism of the daughters—both guilty and therefore doomed—form a sharp contrast to the suffering of the mother, symbol of the Mater Dolorosa, eternally mourning for the victims of that insanity that makes man the indifferent executioner of his fellow. ■ Montes Huidobro is also a writer of fiction as well as a poet. *La anunciación*, a collection of short stories, appeared in 1967. He recently completed a novel and a new play, *Funerál en Jerusalén*. At present he resides in Honolulu where he is an associate professor of Spanish at the University of Hawaii.

## The Guillotine

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### Characters

MOTHER

ILEANA

SILVIA

HAIRDRESSER

**Time and Place:** 1959 in Cuba

**Setting:** The back of the stage will be dominated by a large, overwhelming impressive mural, on which a guillotine appears. Stage front, two folding chairs. On a slightly elevated platform, two other folding chairs and a small table. The front of the stage, where the two chairs are, is lighted.

(The MOTHER, crestfallen and worried, is seated. ILEANA stands, facing the audience. She then turns toward the MOTHER.)

ILEANA: What part do you have in this play?

MOTHER (always worried): I'm the mother.

ILEANA: Whose mother?

MOTHER: Yours and the manicurist's.

ILEANA: Of the two of us?

MOTHER: Yes, of the two of you.

ILEANA: I suppose it must be a difficult part.

MOTHER: Not really; it's the same character all along.

ILEANA: A bit complicated, huh? The same thing happens to me. Authors always complicate things. In real life everything's simpler.

MOTHER (distressed): Are you sure?

my daughter also, don't you realize it? I can't speak of her with you. I could harm her.

ILEANA (*violently*): But you don't hesitate to harm me. Now yes, now everyone turns his back on me because I'm down. . . . But when I was on top. . . . Even my mother, of course. . . . You side with the other one. . . . who feels safe, I don't know why. . . . Because she's stupid. . . . that must be why. . . . Because there's nothing safe here, nothing that can't fall. . . . As if she didn't have any sins, that snake in the grass. . . .

MOTHER: Quiet, daughter, quiet.

ILEANA: Would you be so cowardly? Would you allow them to take me as far as the scaffold without saying a word?

MOTHER: Why the scaffold? What reason would there be, my daughter? You've done nothing. Don't frighten me so.

ILEANA: The slanders, the lies. It never rains but it pours.

MOTHER: No, your death, no, Ileana. I couldn't bear it.

ILEANA: Will you let me know? Will you advise me of the least danger?

MOTHER: I'll do it. . . . I swear it. . . .

(SILVIA, the manicurist, enters along the platform with the two chairs and the small table. She brings a tray with nail polish, scissors, etc. She places it on the small table. This corner of the stage is illuminated.)

SILVIA: Good afternoon, have I arrived late for the rehearsal?

ILEANA: Who are you?

SILVIA: I'm the manicurist. (*Drawing nearer, looking at ILEANA from head to toe*.) And you, you're Ileana, no doubt.

ILEANA: Yes.

Camacho to me and to her the one about that certain Caesar, that means. . . . well, she'll have to keep her mouth shut. . . .

MOTHER: If it were only that way! And nevertheless. . . . the fact is that she has a. . . . such a temper. . . .

ILEANA: I can't stand her. . . . They've already told me that she speaks ill of me. . . . And you must know something else. . . . What do you know?

MOTHER (*evasively*): I can't say. Don't involve me.

ILEANA (*saccharine sweetly*): Of necessity, you must know it, mama. . . .

MOTHER (*evasively*): It's better not to talk about the matter.

ILEANA: It's about me, mama. Don't you realize it? I'm terrified, mama. And now that the executions are increasing. . . .

MOTHER: Daughter. . . .

ILEANA: In these times all of us are in danger. . . . The dictatorship has fallen. The revolution triumphs. . . . And the revolution is white and red, immaculate and bloody, isn't it?

MOTHER: My daughter, I know nothing of politics.

ILEANA: And everyone wants to profit from it also. . . . It's a disgusting thing. . . . The idle gossip of the manicurist can go far. You must know that they're trying to involve me because I slept with him. . . . As if that were a sin! I had to survive, isn't that true? And Camacho was good to me, in some ways. I'm not going to deny it. But there's been nothing else. You know it well. I've never harmed anyone. But there are people who delight in bearing false witness.

MOTHER: I'm afraid. I find myself in a difficult situation.

ILEANA: Aren't you on my side?

MOTHER (*imploringly*): How could I not be? (*Desperately*.) But she's

SILVIA (without appearing upset, speaking to herself and in a way to the audience): It'll be necessary to alter this dialogue a little. There are people who don't understand, like this woman, misled and tormented by her conscience. And the worst thing that can happen is that the audience won't understand unless this mix-up is cleared up. She wants to implicate me for no reason at all, and I won't be able to get out of it. People allow themselves to be misled so easily! I'll have to clear up this mix-up over who I really am. Caesar? But which Caesar? Brutus? Caesar? Cleopatra? Elizabeth Taylor? That's nothing more than theater, fantasy. (*Grandiloquently, partly to ILEANA, but partly to the audience:*) Look, ignore her. I am who I am. In real life I am a woman who loves the revolution and hates crime. Everyone hates crime, but not as I do! Therefore, I'm in disagreement with certain things—nothing more—about my role and I'm not going to accept them as she does, because she, by God, she doesn't have a reasonable explanation for her behavior. Because she . . .

ILEANA (*throwing herself at SILVIA*): You're lying, you're lying!

SILVIA (*scandalized*): Don't touch me! Don't interrupt me! (*At the top of her voice:*) Because in real life, I'm different and I don't want the audience to boo me and to shout "Informer" whenever I come out on the stage . . .

(*She leaves indignantly, abruptly, arranging her clothes. ILEANA is stretched out on the floor. The area of the platform is darkened.*)

ILEANA (*to the MOTHER*): Didn't you hear her? She hates me. She detests me. She's my greatest enemy.

MOTHER: You must calm down. Don't despair. Everything will soon change.

ILEANA: She wants to destroy me. She'll speak with the director in order to harm me. And I have no doubt that she'll do it in my private life too. You already know it. This revolution has reached everywhere, and the opportunists and the hypocrites are mixed up in it too, camouflaged so that no one recognizes them in the under-

brush. But I have my plans. I'm not going to let them cut off my head.

MOTHER: Ileana dear, please, this isn't the moment to make enemies. We've enough with what has happened to him.

ILEANA: To him? To him! I've enough trouble on account of him. Now everyone points a finger at me as Camacho's mistress. For all that he's given me! I always wanted a banker, an old banker with loads of money, but I have had very bad luck. Oh, well, why think of that now?

MOTHER: You must calm down. After all, you're not to blame for everything. You don't have a reason to be afraid. She won't be able to do anything against you.

ILEANA: What do you know?

MOTHER: My dear, I don't understand you. Is there anything else? Maybe . . . perhaps you did things that I don't know . . . ?

ILEANA: Are you on her side? Could you? (*Transition.*) But I speak too much. After all you're her mother too.

MOTHER (*hurt*): How can you think that of me?

ILEANA (*energetically, upset*): Swear to me that you won't speak of this, mama, of all that you know!

MOTHER: How could I hurt you?

ILEANA: I don't know. I don't know. At times I'm a little afraid, it's true.

MOTHER: Rest.

ILEANA: Do you think that she'll speak with the director in order to take the part away from me? that she'll accuse me in public?

MOTHER: Sleep.

ILEANA: She's capable of everything. She is more holy than the Church as they say. Although she's far from being holy.

ILEANA: But have you gone mad? Do you work for free? This is a theater.

(SILVIA and the HAIRDRESSER enter. The platform is lighted.)

HAIRDRESSER: They are difficult situations, it's true.

SILVIA: I hope that you can do something.

ILEANA (approaching): Good afternoon. Are you the hairdresser?

HAIRDRESSER (continuing her conversation with SILVIA): It's a disagreeable situation, but we must face it. It's for the good of the theater. We must continue sacrificing ourselves. (Turning violently to

ILEANA:) You must have guts to play your part. I understand that it's only a play, but there has to be something rotten in you to be able to play your part as well as you're doing. We've observed it in rehearsals.

ILEANA: You're mean, cruel, unjust. There's no word to define you.

HAIRDRESSER: Weren't you all those things when you collaborated in such a fashion with the criminals?

ILEANA: Don't you realize? Don't you know what theater is? You're confused! I'm an actress! It's a question of a part!

HAIRDRESSER: Your private life mustn't be very clean.

ILEANA: And what did you do? Did you set bombs?

HAIRDRESSER: I gave all for the fatherland. I have a red and black automobile, symbol of the revolution. Do you want a more upright position?

ILEANA: Well, on that, you aren't ahead of me. I have a red blouse and a black skirt that are symbolic too. I'll put them on and nobody will be able to deny that I'm a great revolutionary.

HAIRDRESSER: But I read my poem "The Beheaded Dove" the first day, at eight in the morning when the rebels entered the city.

ILEANA: I intend to read a similar one.

SILVIA: Would you dare?

HAIRDRESSER: Could you?

ILEANA: I interpret the parts they give me.

SILVIA: It's necessary for them to make changes in the play. It's not possible for everything to continue like this, so mixed up. Life isn't like this. Life is as clear as a bell.

ILEANA: It's better for you to shut up. Why don't you leave things as they are? Would you like your character explained? Perhaps you won't come out so well. You're playing a dangerous game. I warn you!

SILVIA: Why? I'm clean. I'm not afraid.

ILEANA: At best you have the soul of a traitor. After all, to be a traitor in thought is to be one in fact. You can be one at any moment. It's only necessary for circumstances to favor it.

SILVIA: You deserve capital punishment.

ILEANA: And don't you tremble when you say that? Don't you realize?

SILVIA: Are you trying to frighten me, to bribe my conscience?

ILEANA: It's a trap and you don't realize it. But I also can play games. I'll speak with the director and he'll clear up all of this. There's nothing sure in what you say.

SILVIA (to the MOTHER): Didn't you hear her? She hates me. She de- tests me. She's my greatest enemy.

MOTHER: You must calm down. Don't despair. Everything will soon change.

SILVIA: She wants to destroy me. She'll speak with the director in order to harm me. And I have no doubt that she'll do it in my private

MOTHER (*with surprise*): A son? Did you say a son?

ILEANA: Don't pay attention to her. Mama's very old and she scarcely realizes what she says.

MOTHER: A son? A son?

ILEANA: Rest. You take the theater too much to heart.

SILVIA (*hysterically*): What are you afraid of? Let her speak. Why do you try to coerce her?

MOTHER: A son? My son, yes, my son! I've suffered so much. . . . I've suffered so much. . . . At times I didn't even want to remember him . . . his love of the . . . of the . . . it's a word that doesn't find a way out . . . his love of the . . . his death . . . his death. . . . No . . . no!

ILEANA (*passing her hand over the mother's head*): Wake up, mama. It's a nightmare.

HAIRDRESSER: Did you have a son?

MOTHER: Sometimes, just to have him alive at my side, I'd prefer anything, anything at all, rather than his death. We mothers only have children, children, nothing else. It's difficult to think of anything else. It's hard to make our hearts see the reasons. It's so difficult. God! Children, dead children. . . .

HAIRDRESSER: And revenge? Justice . . . revenge . . .

MOTHER: Is it possible?

HAIRDRESSER: Justice will console your heart . . .

MOTHER: How? How?

ILEANA (*interrupting the sequence from the platform*): My nails . . . could you fix my nails for me? I've been waiting a while for you.

SILVIA: Customers! Always annoying and in the way!

ILEANA: And my hair? Dear, I can't go on with my hair like this.

HAIRDRESSER (*getting up*): Excuse me. We have no other recourse but to take care of her.

MOTHER (*withdrawn*): Justice . . . Revenge . . .

(*The mother remains crestfallen. The area where she is grows dirt. The action is concentrated on the platform.*)

HAIRDRESSER: I'm sorry that you have had to wait so long, but these last weeks we have had a lot of work.

ILEANA: I've decided to cut my hair.

HAIRDRESSER: Why? You have very beautiful long hair, some lovely waves . . . and these golden streaks . . .

ILEANA: They make me look like a foreigner.

HAIRDRESSER: But it looks good on you.

ILEANA: I don't want it.

HAIRDRESSER: It's a pity to cut it off. Wouldn't you prefer to have it gathered in curls at the back of your neck?

ILEANA: Please, don't insist! Oh, you hairdressers, always the same!

HAIRDRESSER: It's a shame.

ILEANA: I want to look attractive.

HAIRDRESSER (*combing Ileana's hair*): Are you going to a party?

SILVIA (*maliciously*): A trial perhaps . . .

ILEANA: How do you know?

HAIRDRESSER: Have they accused you of something?

SILVIA: I understand that she had relations with Commander Camacho.

ILEANA (*upset*): That has nothing to do . . . I'm not responsible for what he did or didn't do when he wasn't with me . . .

MOTHER: The servant? What's special about her? I called an agency and . . .

SILVIA: It's she, Ileana, that woman who detests me. . . . That snake . . .

ILEANA (*sarcastically*): Are you accusing me . . . ?

MOTHER: I don't understand . . .

ILEANA: She's lying, madam. I assure you. Everything has been a mistake.

SILVIA (*beginning to doubt*): Aren't you . . . ?

ILEANA: No, I'm not. (*Taking out her identification card.*) Here's my I.D. card. You've confused me with someone else.

SILVIA (*rejecting it*): It's you, it's you! I can't stand it! You've trapped me in a circle. And you're on her side. The two of you have agreed to destroy me, to annihilate me . . .

MOTHER: My dear, how can you? . . . My tears, Lord, my tears! . . . What is this? I don't understand this world. . . . It's too complicated . . .

SILVIA: Mama, mama, but don't you realize?

MOTHER: I don't know her, Silvia; I swear it to you. I don't know who that woman is.

SILVIA (*to ILEANA*): Go away from here! Leave me! Your intrigues . . . your schemes. . . . Damned woman! Aren't the crimes you have committed enough for you? Don't involve me in your dirty tricks! I'm innocent, innocent! Go away! Go away!

ILEANA (*moves away, laughing*): Caesar phoned you, Caesar. Do you remember him? Caesar, the one from the previous regime. (*She leaves.*) Caesar! Caesar!

MOTHER: What will you do with him? What have you decided?

SILVIA: Disown him.

MOTHER: But . . .

SILVIA: As if he didn't exist.

MOTHER: But he calls you . . .

SILVIA: Do you want to ruin me, harm me? I can do nothing for him. Let him leave me alone!

MOTHER: He insists. He hasn't stopped calling you.

SILVIA: Tell him that I'm not in, that I don't want to know anything. If I had what he has! But when he was in the cabinet, he gave me only the crumbs. Let him go to hell! Let him leave me in peace!

ILEANA (*crosses the stage, laughing*): Caesar. Caesar.

SILVIA: He only harms me. Let them send him to a concentration camp. It doesn't matter to me. My career, mama, my career! My honor and my career! Does he want to tear me to pieces? Does he want to drown me because he is a boat that is sinking?

MOTHER: Don't get upset, daughter. It's not so bad. (*With a certain anguish.*) After all, you don't have anything to fear, do you?

SILVIA: Of course not! I'm not going to allow him to destroy me. I'm not going to allow it. Everyone will see my upright position.

ILEANA (*crosses again, smiling*): In bed all of us are in a supine position. The bed. The toilet. We all need them. (*She leaves.*)

SILVIA: You were crazy to hire that woman. Now she knows many things, many secrets. She'll invent things. She'll go to the courts. She'll reveal all of the business of this house. She'll try to harm me, but I'll defend myself. I have connections . . .

ILEANA (*shouting from off stage*): Caesar, Caesar!

SILVIA (*shouting*): Go away! Beat it once and for all.

SILVIA (*surprised, frightened*): You're confused and complicate things. That role doesn't suit you.

ILEANA (*appears hotheaded and wrathful*): There's your work! There's the result of your efforts! Keep on stirring things up. . . . We'll smother in the stench. . . .

MOTHER: Will you both dare to deny me? Is it that I, who have suffered so much, am not going to be sure of having carried him in my womb, of having loved him, of having seen him dead, of having heard my own voice choked in my throat?

SILVIA (*uncertain, worried, trying to be persuasive*): It's a farce. It's a farce.

MOTHER (*firmly*): My son is dead. That's not a farce.

ILEANA: We must give her a sedative. Don't you love your mother? You have driven her to the verge of madness. (*Solicitously, to the mother*.) Sleep, mama. Rest. Forget. . . .

MOTHER: I can neither sleep nor forget. He was my son, wasn't he? His young body mutilated, covered with wounds and blood. . . .

ILEANA: It's a nightmare, mama. Sleep, rest. . . .

MOTHER: Don't try to intimidate me. The guilty ones must pay. Only that way, perhaps, I'll rest. It was she, no doubt, who denounced him. He confided too much in that woman. He revealed to her all of his plans. That woman! That woman!

SILVIA: That woman?

MOTHER: Yes, a woman. It was a woman who tore him from my side. I remember her voice. She used to call him on the telephone.

SILVIA: If you heard her voice, would you be able to recognize her?

ILEANA (*to SILVIA*): Don't be stupid.

MOTHER: Yes, I remember her voice. I'll never be able to forget it.

SILVIA (*to ILEANA*): I'll know how to defend myself from all this. You'll see. You won't be able to escape.

MOTHER: It was realized only too late who she was.

SILVIA (*enthusiastically*): You. . . you're much more than Camacho's mistress. We'll see how the guilty will come to the light. (*To the mother*.) Don't worry, mama. Everything will clear up. I'll help you. (*Referring to ILEANA*.) I always disliked her.

ILEANA (*angered*): You have no evidence against me. No one has. They can prove nothing against me.

SILVIA: Confess! Confess!

ILEANA: I've nothing to confess. I've nothing to repent.

MOTHER: The voice. . . that voice. . . .

SILVIA: Do you recognize it?

ILEANA (*kneeling*): Mama, don't you realize?

MOTHER: He too was my child.

SILVIA: Then you can recognize her voice, can't you?

MOTHER: How could I forget it?

ILEANA (*laughing hysterically, maddened*): Caesar! Caesar!

MOTHER: That voice. . . I remember it. . . .

SILVIA (*with annoyance*): Why are you bringing up that gossip about Caesar now?

MOTHER (*referring to SILVIA*): Yes, it's she. Mr. Commissioner, I'm sure. I haven't the slightest doubt.

SILVIA (*to ILEANA*): I'm not involved in any crookedness. No one knows anything about me.

MOTHER: Justice! It's necessary that justice be done for my dead son.

the sun. . . (She laughs.) You're an imaginative one! It would be an impressive ending. . . .

(The sound of the drums becomes louder. The stage front becomes dark. Silhouettes of the two characters are seen among the shadows. They stand out against the back of the stage, together with the dazzling presence of the guillotine. The mother appears.)

ILEANA: Caesar! Caesar!

MOTHER (accusingly): She's the one, Mr. Commissioner. She's the one.

SILVIA: You mean Commander Camacho! Commander Camacho!

MOTHER (accusingly): It's she, Mr. Commissioner. It's she.

ILEANA AND SILVIA: No, no! Help! I'm innocent!

MOTHER (falling on her knees): My son, my poor dead son! Finally, Finally!

(The stage goes dim. Suddenly, a scream after a quiet pause. The lights now fall on stage front, where the mother still is. ILEANA and SILVIA are not there. The HAIRDRESSER enters.)

HAIRDRESSER: Help! Help! The blood! My God! What is this? It can't be! They're mistaken!

MOTHER: Silvia! Ileana! My daughters! It has been a trap. It wasn't a nightmare.

HAIRDRESSER: A doctor, a doctor! Isn't there a doctor who can save them?

MOTHER: My daughters! Speak! Where are they?

HAIRDRESSER: Blood! They're dying! They're losing blood!

MOTHER: The guillotine!

HAIRDRESSER: Yes, it is true. The guillotine! They've fooled us!

Everything was true. Blood runs again as before, much more than before. It wasn't a comedy.

MOTHER: But you told me, you swore to me that it was made of paper. My poor, my poor and adored son dead! And now them, my daughters, my poor, poor daughters dead. . . . There's no pity, there's no pity, there's no mercy. . . .

HAIRDRESSER: It was a trap. It was a paper trap prepared by those damned gods. . . .

MOTHER: Can I no longer save them. . . ?

HAIRDRESSER: It's too late. . . . They're dead. . . .

MOTHER (her voice suffocated): The guillotine. . . . the guillotine. . . .

CURTAIN

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