

## Roberto Arlt's *La isla desierta*: A Structural Analysis

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Roberto Arlt may well be the critical discovery of the mid-twentieth century in Argentine literature. All but forgotten during his short lifespan (1900-1942), he was rediscovered in the sixties, and there is now quite a respectable bibliography of critical monographs and articles available on his work. As a consequence, it is now easy to see him as perhaps the most important Argentine writer of his period, and it is possible that, in time, his reputation will eclipse that of Ricardo Güiraldes, if it has not already done so. Only Borges' early writings from that period seem as important as *Los siete locos* (1929) and Arlt's other fiction. Nevertheless, one is surprised to find that Arlt's theatre continues to be virtually ignored. With the exception of Castagnino's rather general monographic treatment<sup>1</sup> and Troiano's article on Pirandellian elements in the plays,<sup>2</sup> there is a paucity of studies; as far as I know, there exist no close analyses of any of the plays, Mirta Arlt's introduction in the *Teatro completo* being the closest thing to individual textual discussion outside Castagnino's monograph.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, Arlt's theatre is every bit as important as his fiction, although this fact may be obscured by the relatively weak nature of Latin American drama in the 1920-1940 period. Where Mexico had at least Villaurrutia and Usigli, Argentine drama of the period was dominated by figures like Armando Moock (a Chilean) or Conrado Nalé Roxlo, who seem, by today's standards, to be quite mediocre playwrights. Naomi Lindstrom has demonstrated how Arlt's fiction is central to a discussion of the reflexes of European expressionism in Latin America during this period.<sup>4</sup> She discusses Discépolo's plays (David Viñas, in his introduction to Discépolo's theatre, had already recognized the importance of seeing them within the expressionistic frame of reference), but does not treat Arlt's dramatic texts. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the plays reveals the extent to which the author employed, consciously or otherwise, the principles of expressionism, and, in retrospect, we can see how his plays, unlike the dross of Moock and Nalé Roxlo, belong to the vanguard of the international theatre of his day. In view of the

experimental, postexpressionistic, Brechtian nature of contemporary Latin American drama—particularly in the strain of social protest that ties Arlt's theatre to contemporary works—it is natural that more attention be paid to the Argentine's dramatic production. This paper will examine one of his plays, the one-act *La isla desierta* (1938), in terms of prominent structural features that serve to identify its "specificity" as an important example of dramatic art.

*La isla desierta* concerns a group of office workers: in expressionistic terms we see their enslavement to an oppressive, stifling work routine in which they are cogs in a bureaucratic machine. However, when the office manager steps out of the office for a moment to make a complaint to the company director against one of the workers, the flamboyant *ordenanza*, Cipriano (also identified as Mulato) steps in and completely disrupts the activities of the workers by urging them to flee their plight on one of the boats that they can see docked outside the office window, to travel the world and seek adventure as he had in his youth. When the frenzy created among the office workers by the suggestions of the tattooed Mulato is at its height, the office manager and the company director enter. The latter, quickly apprising the situation, orders that all of the employees be fired and that the office window be sealed off so there will be no contact with the outside world to tempt the workers with daydreaming and flight. With the commands of the company director, the act ends.

The stark lines of the set, as it is described in the dramatist's directions, the use of emphatic symbols like the mechanistic office routine, the window, the boat, the exaggeratedly flamboyant and tattooed *ordenanza*—a veritable Pied Piper of escapist adventure—the abruptness of the transitions in the text and the obvious antitheses of the groups of characters are all features of *La isla desierta* that evoke the best of expressionistic literature. There is little in the way of "character" development and the action is presented in a schematic fashion that requires us to accept it as immediately metaphoric, without any pretense at an apparent "natural" or realistic theatrical action. As a result, the structure of the work and any meaning it suggests are "oblique" in terms of everyday experience, demanding decipherment and symbolic application to experience as we claim to know it in "normal" terms. It is this obliqueness that makes *La isla desierta* typically expressionistic; at the same time, it also constitutes the basis for its particular specificity as a dramatic text. In other words, this obliqueness is the very basis of the texture of the work that identifies its status as dramatic literature. The following comments are an attempt to identify the features of this texture in terms of the overall structural unity—the *escritura*—of the text.

*La isla desierta* is based on one major principle that can be defined in semantic terms: the instability of reality from the perspective of the characters, who are seen caught up in a web of routine that blinds them to life in its larger terms. The stark closeness of the office in which they work—the stage directions refer to "una extremada luminosidad [que] pesa sobre estos desdichados simultáneamente encorvados y recortados en el espacio por la desolada simetría de este salón de un décimo piso" (p. 17)—defines the extent to which they are cut off from life. This is made even more evident when Mulato paints for them vivid scenes of the world that they are missing, a world that they can barely guess at from what they

see and hear outside the window of their eleventh-floor office, a world symbolized by the docked boats and the sounds associated with them.

In the concrete terms of the verbal texture of the drama, this unstable reality is marked by a number of specific linguistic procedures that characterize the dialogues. *Rupture* is the most obvious of these procedures. In the first place, rupture occurs to mark the transition from one segment of the play to another; in the second place it occurs as a specific verbal feature of the level of style or register in which the characters speak. Although *La isla desierta* is a one-act play, there are in reality four "movements" or segments that are clearly defined: 1) The short opening scene, in which the workers are seen symbolically "chained" to their desks, under the stern verbal whip of El Jefe, who drives them mercilessly and criticizes them implacably; 2) Manuel's rebellion when he hears the whistle of the boats docking outside the office window. When the office manager is unsuccessful in cajoling Manuel and leaves to seek the assistance of the company director, the *ordenanza* Mulato enters: his provocative words, which take the passing boats as a point of departure to elaborate an entire world of fantasy and adventure beyond the confines of the office, basically serve to verbalize Manuel's repressed need for release from a deadening routine; 3) Manuel's realization, in the midst of Mulato's call to escape to a Wonderland adventure and *otium*, that the desire for a more satisfying reality is only a dream that cannot be fulfilled, that one is, to a great extent, one's own slavemaster, an accomplice in his own spiritual death—Manuel frames this in the confession that he has, for twenty years, been the accomplice of the office manager by being the bearer of gossip against his fellow workers (p. 25); 4) Finally, the sudden intrusion of the office manager and the company director, who quickly put an end to the rebellion that Mulato has sought to incite.

It should be noted that these ruptures do not necessarily correspond to what can be called discrete, numbered scenes in the play. For example, there is a major transition when the office manager leaves to consult with the company director concerning Manuel's refusal to work after he has heard the boat whistles. However, the rupture referred to above occurs before this exit (i.e., scene change) and, indeed, there is an exchange between Manuel and El Jefe prior to the latter's exit. The last rupture, however, does correspond to a shift in scene, as it is marked by the return of the office manager with the director. The third rupture occurs in the middle, so to speak, of Mulato's fantasizing. There is no shift in scene, as the action and characters remain essentially the same. The rupture occurs in Manuel's self-examination (his earlier rebellion vs. his realization, at this point, of its futility)—and, of course, in the audience's perception of what Manuel signifies—but the scene goes on as such. In fact, Mulato, undaunted by Manuel's change of attitude, seeks to exploit it (he refers to Manuel's nobility and self-abnegation) to further his call to adventure. These ruptures signal abrupt changes in attitude that, in turn, call our attention to the instability of reality in the minds of the characters: they pass from deadening routine to impulsive revolt and euphoric dreams of escape—the latter identified by an exaggerated image of a work-free and carefree Never-never Land put forth by an eccentric, tattooed *ordenanza*—to a partial realization of the futility and absurdity of their dreams of release, to the very concrete reality of their dismissal from their jobs and the order for the office

to be altered to prevent any further employee revolts. Throughout, there is little indication that the characters have any real self-reflection (except for Manuel's reaction to Mulato's fantasy), and the impulsiveness of their behavior and the exaggerated context of the play's action (the stark office, with first the mechanized work routine and then Mulato's enthusiastic fantasy) point to an isolation from a coherently defined "reality"; they are individuals who simply float along on the surface of circumstantial events, whether daily routine or spontaneous fantasy.

This instability of reality, which so far we have characterized in terms of the abrupt ruptures in the text and the behavior of the characters in the separate movements created by the ruptures, is given specific verbal texture by a series of linguistic features of the text. Although the level of style in the text is normal, colloquial Argentine Spanish, these features add to that base a register that is noncolloquial: in one sense, "real" people talk the way the characters of *La isla desierta* talk; but in another sense, there are a series of features that break with a normal colloquialism and foreground specific segments of the dialogue. This blending of the colloquial and the noncolloquial (let us call it "foregrounded rhetoric" for lack of a better term) is both a feature of expressionism and of Arlt's writing as a whole. In *La isla desierta* these foregrounded rhetorical markers are ritualized speech, interrogatives, exclamations, certain types of verbal exaggeration, and anaphora. In general, we can say that these markers serve two basic, interrelated functions vis-à-vis the *escritura* of the work: 1) to whatever extent these markers deviate from the structural features of colloquial expression—and it must be noted that although interrogatives or anaphora are integral parts of everyday speech patterns in any case, it is a question of the *degree* to which they are present statistically, rather than whether or not they are present at all—the verbal texture of the work is foregrounded: that is, we are made directly aware of the verbal texture and the extent to which it does deviate (in whichever of a number of possible ways) from colloquial speech patterns; 2) to the extent that its verbal structure is foregrounded, we are made aware of the special status of the literary work, to the extent that it sets itself off from or places itself in opposition to colloquial non-foregrounded language. The extent of this opposition is of particular importance in dramatic works, since the convention of the stage—the world in miniature, with "real" flesh-and-blood people moving around, talking and behaving as though they belonged to the world that we, the spectators, inhabit outside the theatre—places the nature of the opposition between non-literary colloquial language and the literary non-colloquial language of the dramatic text in even more vivid relief than is the case in non-dramatic literature, where the visual, real-life convention of the theatre is not at issue. Needless to say, the tension between the "real" world and its language patterns and those of the world put forth by the theatrical microcosm is all the greater in the sort of expressionistic, allegorical-symbolic drama of which Arlt is such an exemplary representative. (It should also be noted that the foregrounded, non-colloquial language that calls explicit attention to its own verbal texture does not, by definition, serve to identify the literary work. However, foregrounded non-colloquial language that may be *sui generis* in its patterns and conventions is a feature of the general *escritura* of all literature; it is emphatically so in most twentieth-century anti-realist literature, expressionism in particular).

Let us now turn to specific examples of foregrounded verbal texture in *La isla desierta*:

### 1. Ritualized speech

Since Arlt's play deals with the "oppression" of bureaucratic workers by the implacable routine to which they are subjected, it is not surprising to find ritualized language functioning as a hallmark of a ritualized routine. Moreover, to the extent that routine is sterile, the language patterns that it evokes tend toward an equal meaninglessness. For example, the opening scene of the play establishes such a correlation from the outset:

EL JEFE.—Otra equivocación, Manuel.

MANUEL.—¿Señor?

EL JEFE.—Ha vuelto a equivocarse, Manuel.

MANUEL.—Lo siento, señor.

EL JEFE.—Yo también. (*Alcanzándole la planilla.*) Corríjala. (*Un minuto de silencio.*)

EL JEFE.—María.

MARÍA.—¿Señor?

EL JEFE.—Ha vuelto a equivocarse, María.

MARÍA.—(*acercándose al escritorio del JEFE.*)—Lo siento, señor.

EL JEFE.—También yo lo voy a sentir cuando tenga que hacerlos echar. Corrija. (p. 17)

Or, when Manuel evinces the first signs of revolt, he has the following exchange with El Jefe, an exchange that verges on vacuousness because of echoic repetition and because it demonstrates eloquently (!) that communication, in fact, is not taking place between the employee and his supervisor, between the oppressed and the agent of oppression:

MANUEL.—Cómo no equivocarnos. Estamos aquí suma que te suma, y por la ventana no hacen nada más que pasar barcos que van a otras tierras. (*Pausa.*) A otras tierras que no vimos nunca. Y que cuando fuimos jóvenes pensamos visitar.

EL JEFE.—(*irritado.*)—¡Basta de charlar! ¡Trabajen!

MANUEL.—No puedo trabajar.

EL JEFE.—¿No puede? ¿Y por qué no puede, don Manuel?

MANUEL.—No. No puedo. El puerto me produce melancolía.

EL JEFE.—Le produce melancolía. (*Sardónico.*) Así que le produce melancolía. (*Conteniendo su furor.*) Siga, siga su trabajo.

MANUEL.—No puedo.

EL JEFE.—Veremos lo que dice el director general (*Sale violentamente.*) (pp. 19-20)

### 2. Interrogatives

Questions, especially those we call "rhetorical," become, when they occur insistently, a special form of ritualized speech. On numerous occasions, the *escritura* of *La isla desierta* calls for clusters of questions that seem to signify the

lack of awareness of what is happening—a symptom of what has already been called an “unstable” reality on the part of the enslaved employees—and that, in turn, signify the attempt at mutual understanding, which apparently is doomed to failure: the questions asked do not lead to meaningful dialogue but rather they underline how dialogue and comprehension cannot, in fact, take place. This is indeed the case with the exchange already quoted between Manuel and El Jefe. Such clustering of questions also is present in the interaction between Mulato and the employees, and once again they signal not the normal exchange of information—the satisfaction of the interrogative imperative: *Tell me why . . .*—but instead the degree to which Mulato is unable in the final analysis to penetrate the employees’ shell of ignorance:

EMPLEADA 1ª—¿A las mujeres también les hacen tatuajes. . . .

MULATO.—Claro. ¡Y qué tatuajes! Como para resucitar a un muerto.

EMPLEADA 2ª—¿Y es doloroso tatuarse?

MULATO.—No mucho . . . Lo primero que hace el brujo tatuador es ponerlo a uno bajo un árbol . . .

EMPLEADA 2ª—Uy, qué miedo.

MULATO.—Ningún miedo. El brujo acaricia la piel hasta dormirla. Y uno acaba por no sentir nada.

EMPLEADO 1º—Claro . . .

MULATO.—Siempre bajo los árboles hay hombres y mujeres haciéndose tatuar. Y uno termina por no saber si es un hombre, un tigre, una nube o un dragón.

TODOS.—¡Oh, quién lo iba a decir. ¡Si parece mentira! (pp. 23-24)

Questions assume another form in the opening segment of the work, as El Jefe falls back on a series of incredulous eroteses that betray, presumably, the threat he senses in the slightest gesture of non-conformity on the part of his charges:

EMPLEADO 1º (*con un apagado grito de angustia*).—¡Oh! no; no es posible.

*Todos se vuelven hacia él*

EL JEFE (*con venenosa suavidad*).—¿Qué no es posible, señor?

MANUEL.—No es posible trabajar aquí.

EL JEFE.—¿No es posible trabajar aquí? ¿Y por qué no es posible trabajar aquí? (*Con lentitud.*) ¿Hay pulgas en las sillas? ¿Cucarachas en la tinta?

MANUEL (*poniéndose de pie y gritando*).—¡Cómo no equivocarse! ¿Es posible no equivocarse aquí? Contésteme. ¿Es posible trabajar sin equivocarse aquí?

EL JEFE.—No me falte, Manuel. Su antigüedad en la casa no lo autoriza a tanto. ¿Por qué se arrebató?

MANUEL.—Yo no me arrebató, señor. (*Señalando la ventana.*) Los culpables de que nos equivoquemos son esos malditos buques.

EL JEFE (*extrañado*).—¿Los buques? (*Pausa.*) ¿Qué tienen los buques?

MANUEL.—Sí, los buques. Los buques que entran y salen, chillándonos en las orejas, metiéndonos por los ojos, pasándonos las chimeneas por las narices. (*Se deja caer en la silla.*) No puedo más.

[. . .]

TENEDOR DE LIBROS.—Yo creo, jefe, que estos buques, yendo y viniendo, son perjudiciales para la contabilidad.

EL JEFE.—¿Lo creen?

MANUEL.—Todos lo creemos. ¿No es cierto que todos lo creemos?

MARÍA.—Yo nunca he subido a un buque, pero lo creo.

TODOS.—Nosotros también lo creemos.

EMPLEADA 2ª.—Jefe, ¿ha subido a un buque alguna vez?

EL JEFE.—¿Y para qué un jefe de oficina necesita subir a un buque?

MARÍA.—¿Se da cuenta? Ninguno de los que trabajan aquí ha subido a un buque. (pp. 18-19)

This series of questions culminates in the exchange between Manuel and El Jefe, whereupon the latter leaves the room to seek the support of the Company Director: since the interrogatives—the structured interrogation—have led nowhere, authority will now be marshalled to quell the incipient revolt.

Throughout *La isla desierta*, interrogatives, as a special form of ritualized (and therefore vacuous, non-meaningful, non-communicational) language, serve to mark the drift in meaning and the lack of awareness that characterize the individuals caught in the prison of their “island.” If language is the projection of the inner man, it is clear in *La isla desierta* that the inner man, whether employee or employer’s agent, is lacking in notable meaning. Only Manuel is allowed to recognize this circumstance, when he rebels against the meaninglessness of Mulato’s fantasies as he had rebelled against the meaninglessness of his deadening occupation:

MANUEL (*tirando violentamente un libro al suelo*).—¡Basta!

MULATO.—¿Basta qué?

MANUEL.—Basta de noria. Se acabó. Me voy.

EMPLEADA 2ª.—¿A dónde va, don Manuel?

MANUEL.—A correr mundo. A vivir la vida. Basta de oficina. Basta de malacate. Basta de números. Basta de reloj. Basta de aguantarlo a este otro canalla. (*Señala la mesa del jefe.*)

*Pausa. Perplejidad.*

EMPLEADO 1º.—¿Quién es el otro?

TODOS.—¿Quién es?

MANUEL (*perplejo*).—El otro . . . el otro . . . el otro . . . soy yo.

EMPLEADA 3ª.—¿Usted, don Manuel!

MANUEL.—Sí, yo; que desde hace veinte años le llevo los chismes al jefe.

Mucho tiempo hacía que me amargaba este secreto. Pero trabajábamos en el subsuelo. Y en el subsuelo las cosas no se sienten.

TODOS.—¡Oh! . . .

EMPLEADO 1º.—¿Qué tiene que ver el subsuelo?

MANUEL.—No sé. La vida no se siente. Uno es como una lombriz soli-

taria en un intestino de cemento. Pasan los días y no se sabe cuándo es de día, cuándo es de noche. Misterio. (*Con desesperación.*) Pero un día nos traen a este décimo piso. Y el cielo, las nubes, las chimeneas de los transatlánticos se nos entran en los ojos. Pero entonces, ¿existía el cielo? Pero entonces, ¿existían los buques? ¿Y las nubes existían? ¿Y uno, por qué no viajó? Por miedo. Por cobardía. Mírenme. Viejo. Acha-coso. ¿Para qué sirven mis cuarenta años de contabilidad y de chismerío? (p. 25)

### 3. Exclamations

Inflated expression, whether marked graphically by the exclamation point or not, characterizes the representation of the countervailing meaninglessness, Mulato's fantasies of escape. The *escritura* of unstable or elusive reality demands that these fantasies be spoken by Mulato almost exclusively in strident exclamations, thereby marking them as vacuous as the stultifying routine of the office, characterized by the ritualized exchange between El Jefe and his subalterns. Note, for example, the following passage, clearly an exercise in delusion:

MULATO.—Y los arroyuelos cantan entre las breñas. Y también hay negros. Negros que por la noche baten el tambor. Así.

*El MULATO toma la tapa de la máquina de escribir y comienza a batir el tam tam ancestral, al mismo tiempo que oscila simiesco sobre sí mismo. Sugestionados por el ritmo, van entrando todos en la danza.*

MULATO (*a tiempo que bate el tambor*).—Y también hay hermosas mujeres desnudas. Desnudas de los pies a la cabeza. Con collares de flores. Que se alimentan de ensaladas de magnolias. Y hermosos hombres desnudos. Que bailan los árboles, como ahora nosotros bailamos aquí . . .

La hoja de la bananera  
De verde ya se madura  
Quien toma prenda de joven  
Tiene la vida segura.

*La danza se ha ido generalizando a medida que habla el MULATO, y los viejos, los empleados y las empleadas giran en torno de la mesa, donde como un demonio gesticula, toca el tambor y habla el condenado negro.*

Y bailan, bailan, bajo los árboles cargados de frutas.

De aromas . . .

*Histéricamente todos los hombres se van quitando los sacos, los chalecos, las corbatas; las muchachas se recogen las faldas y arrojan los zapatos. EL MULATO bate frenéticamente la tapa de la máquina de escribir. Y cantan un ritmo de rumba.*

La hoja de la bananera . . . (pp. 27-28)

In reality, it is the speech of Mulato's audience that is marked overtly by exclamation points in the text. Nevertheless, that speech (see, for example, pp. 22-24) in effect faithfully reflects back the inflated speech of Mulato: "EMPLEADA 2ª.—¡Eh! Cipriano, que no nacimos ayer" (p. 24).

#### 4. *Anaphora*

Anaphora is also a form of ritualized speech; it is also noncolloquial to the extent that it involves a rigid patterning of language that is not found in everyday expression. The two best examples are the speech of Manuel when he rebels against Mulato's charade (the anaphora of the key phrase *basta*), and Mulato's own reaction involving an anaphora of *ved* (note also the artificial *vosotros* imperative) as he attempts to capitalize on Manuel's outburst (pp. 25-26). The many examples of questions beginning with *Qué* represent a unifying anaphora based on the central importance of these questions in marking short-circuited communication.

An example of tangential anaphora closes the play and signals the re-establishment of blind, obscurant uncertainty. Furthermore, the unstable reality marked by ritualized speech, interrogatives and vacuous exclamations is annulled and, in its place, an *escritura* based on the imperative is imposed. Although textually this imposition is brief (the curtain falls after the two imperatives are enunciated), it is all-pervasive in the manner in which it categorically cancels out the previous *escritura* of uncertainty and instability. Note how El Jefe returns with a question but how the Director cuts off all dialogue with his curt, anaphoric commands, preceded by the repeated "comprendo":

EL JEFE (*entrando bruscamente con el DIRECTOR, con voz de trueno*).

—¿Qué pasa aquí?

MARÍA (*después de alguna vacilación*).—Señor . . . esta ventana maldita y el puerto. . . Y los buques . . . esos buques malditos. . .

EMPLEADA 2ª.—Y este negro.

DIRECTOR.—Oh . . . comprendo . . . comprendo. (*Al JEFE.*) Despida a todo el personal. Haga poner vidrios opacos en la ventana.

TELON (p. 28)

This is not the place to discuss the use of symbols in the play, since our main point of interest is the description of the textual *escritura* of *La isla desierta*. Nevertheless, the window that dominates the stage is clearly a theatrical correlative of that textual *escritura*. Its presence is what "opens up" the perspective of the employees. It permits Manuel's rebellion, which is joined haltingly by the other employees and which is exploited by a fantasizing Mulato. In short, it is the window that stimulates a behavior embodied in the *escritura* of uncertainty and instability: a closed, dead reality has found a vague and confused point of rupture, an opening out into a vast realm of experience and meaning. The rupture of the closing scene and the authoritative commands of the Director that bespeak a totally new *escritura* at the final moment necessitate the abolition of the theatrical sign of opening out to the world at large: when the *escritura* of a reaching out to the unknown, no matter how halting and ultimately vacuous it may be (that is, Mulato's characterization of what lies beyond the office, of what

the boats that the enslaved employees can see and hear through its window, is ultimately a meaningless chimera), is abolished by the *escritura* of the Director's imperative, the nonverbal theatrical sign, the open window is correlatively abolished as well.

Although a one-act play, the foregoing analysis has attempted to show that *La isla desierta* is indeed a complex work. A faithful example of Arlt's expressionistic drama, this play demonstrates well how his concern for certain sociologically and existentially definable aspects of the human experience can be given form via a quite distinctively non-mimetic dramatic *escritura*.<sup>5</sup>

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## Notes

1. Raúl H. Castagnino, *El teatro de Roberto Arlt* (La Plata, Arg.: Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación, 1964). *La isla desierta* is discussed only in passing, pp. 61-63.

2. James J. Troiano, "Pirandellism in the Theatre of Roberto Arlt," *Latin American Theatre Review*, 8/1 (Fall 1974), 37-44.

3. Roberto Arlt, *Teatro completo*; presentación por Mirta Arlt (Buenos Aires: Editorial Schapire, 1968), II, 15-28. All quotes are from this edition.

4. Naomi Eva Lindstrom, "Expressionism in Spanish: the Representation of Incoherence." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Arizona State University, 1974. To be published in 1977 by the Center for Latin American Studies, Arizona State University.

5. Mirta Arlt insists on an existential rather than a sociological interpretation of the pre-occupations to be found in her father's works. Cf. her following comments on *La isla desierta* (from her "presentación" in the *Teatro completo*):

La luz, una ventana y Cipriano son los ingredientes que hacen saltar el resorte de la imaginación. Cuando queremos acordar el hombre se ha desmandado y se encuentra ante un dilema: lo posible o lo real. Por qué no abrazar la rutina. . . .

Como de costumbre llegados a esta coyuntura los personajes de R. Arlt se ven vulnerados por una concepción negativa del universo. Al actuar por reacción han sido despedidos al sueño imposible o descabellado. Paradójicamente la vitalidad y el optimismo transmitido a los personajes produce el pesimismo último. Al afirmar la voluntad como todopoderosa se está alimentando el desvarío y, de contrarrebote, la concepción fatalista del universo. Aquel decir "el futuro es nuestro por prepotencia del trabajo" llevado a nivel de absoluto es fuente de mecanismos de desubicación constante. Sus personajes habitan por un momento el mundo del delirio y se despeñan totalmente destruidos. La conclusión calderoniana-shakespeareana es aquella según la cual "el delito mayor del hombre es haber nacido" y "los humanos somos para los dioses como las moscas para los niños juguetones: nos matan para su recreo." Por excesiva capacidad de sueño aquel mundo se torna descomunal. O sea que la grandeza humana, que para el autor reside en la capacidad de soñar, decreta también su catástrofe.

Cipriano aparece como fuerza propulsora. Es la intemporal tentación al desacato que tienta con una felicidad en la aventura.

Aquí toma cuerpo una constante entre los temas de R. Arlt que es la denodada búsqueda de la felicidad. Y en la medida en que la felicidad no existe sus personajes sienten la vida como estafa, como la gran defraudación de Dios al hombre. Para R. Arlt "Dios es la alegría de vivir" y todo lo que atente contra la alegría de vivir es enfermedad, peste, impureza que ataca a los humanos. (pp. 11-12)