

## The Colombian Theatre Before 1800

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In his study of two eighteenth-century Peruvian plays, Anthony M. Pasquariello asserts that:

The theatre played a role in the religious, cultural, and social life of colonial Spanish America no less important than in Spain. Documentary evidence of early private and public religious performances, the subsequent formation of theatrical companies and construction of theatres, the constant litigations between church and stage, and regular shipments of printed plays from the Peninsula offer sufficient proof that colonial America was never at any time far behind Madrid in the type or number of dramatic functions.<sup>1</sup>

While scholarly studies have demonstrated the validity of this statement for Mexico, Peru, and to a lesser extent for several other countries, there has been no real attempt to begin to bring together and evaluate the existing materials relating to the early Colombian theatre and, thereby, to arrive at any serious conclusions about its stature. Such is the intent of this essay.

With its earliest recorded play dating from the early 1580's, Colombia has had a lengthy, albeit sporadic and uneven theatrical tradition. Only one substantial history of this theatre has been written, and the information it provides is almost exclusively of a historical nature and is not completely reliable. The book, *Historia crítica del teatro en Bogotá*, was written by José Vicente Ortega Ricaurte and, despite its many inadequacies, much of what has been said about Colombian theatre is drawn from it.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to Ortega Ricaurte's volume, there are various essays on early Colombian theatre which, although they do not approach comprehensiveness, do provide valuable insights. Included among these studies are sec-

tions pertaining to Colombia in José Juan Arrom's *Historia del teatro hispanoamericano, Epoca colonial*,<sup>3</sup> and in Agustín del Saz Sánchez' *Historia del teatro hispanoamericano*<sup>4</sup>; accounts of this theatre in José Caicedo Rojas' *Recuerdos y apuntamientos*<sup>5</sup>; and the chapter "Drama in New Granada" in Willis Knapp Jones' *Behind Spanish American Footlights*.<sup>6</sup> A particularly useful bibliography providing additional studies which in some way relate to the theatre of this period can be found in Héctor Orjuela's *Fuentes para el estudio de la literatura colombiana*.<sup>7</sup>

The present study focuses on the four extant plays written in Colombia before 1800. References and allusions to plays which have not survived and to theatrical activity in general are included, nonetheless, and there is also a discussion of a fifth extant play which, although it treats the conquest of Bogotá, was apparently not written by a Colombian. All of these materials are dealt with in chronological order, and the essay thus represents something of a history of the theatre in Colombia for that period.

The first play on record as having been performed in Colombia was *Los Alarcos*, a piece which apparently treated the Conde Alarcos theme.<sup>8</sup> Presented about 1580 in honor of the arrival of two bishops to Bogotá, this anonymous work has not survived.<sup>9</sup>

During the last two decades of the sixteenth century and the first quarter of the seventeenth there are scattered allusions to plays being performed to celebrate particular occasions, and to the founding of several theatrical groups.<sup>10</sup> Only three titles have survived from this period, however, in addition to the above-mentioned *Los Alarcos*, and on only one of the theatrical companies is there more than allusive information—there remains a contract which was drawn up in 1618 between an impresario and the actors who made up his company. This document, which has been published along with a brief introduction by Harvey L. Johnson, offers valuable insights into theatrical activity in Colombia at the time.<sup>11</sup> The contract stipulates, for example, that the company was to remain in Bogotá from the day it was signed (November 3, 1618) until Corpus Christi Day of 1619, and then depart for Peru and Nueva España. Assuming that the portion of the contract relating to Colombia was fulfilled,<sup>12</sup> the document provides almost certain evidence of a functioning professional theatre in Bogotá for the eight months indicated. Its presence could also be taken to suggest that similar theatrical activity was not uncommon during the period.

One of the three titles referred to above is *Comedia de la guerra de los Pijaos*, which José María Vergara y Vergara lists as a lost work, allegedly written between 1610 and 1620 by one Hernando de Ospina. The other two titles, *Vida de hidalgos* and *En Dios está la vida*, are attributed to one Bruno de Valenzuela by Ortega Ricaurte, who states that *Vida de hidalgos* was written in 1618 and presented in 1619, and that the work could be found "en pergamino" in the library of the Colegio de San Bartolomé in Bogotá.

José Manuel Rivas Sacconi points out, however, that the manuscript is not in that library, and that the only known Bruno de Valenzuela was born Fernando Fernández de Valenzuela in Bogotá in 1616, and then adopted the religious name Bruno in 1640.<sup>14</sup> This is apparently the Bruno de Valenzuela referred to by Ortega Ricaurte as the author of *Vida de hidalgos* and *En Dios está la vida*, and while there is no real evidence that these two plays ever existed, if they were actually written it was certainly not as early as 1618. One play by this author has come down, nonetheless. Entitled *Laurea crítica* and written about 1629, it is the earliest extant theatrical work from Nueva Granada by a native American.<sup>15</sup> The piece was written when the author was only thirteen years old, and during that same year he completed a surprisingly mature manual of Latin grammar entitled *Thesaurus linguae latinae*.

In one act and in verse, *Laurea crítica* constitutes a satirical sketch of five stock types of the period: a mock Cavallero, a Necio, a Preguntador, an Acatarrado, and a literary critic. The format employed by the author to carry off this satire is simple: each of the characters appears before one Don Miser Protasio to seek a title from him. The Cavallero, for example, requests the official title of "cavallero"; and Don Miser asks several questions pertaining to his qualifications. One of these is: "¿tenéys cauallerisa?,"<sup>16</sup> to which the Cavallero responds: "Pajar tengo a lo menos." (1. 64) Don Miser's reply, which is as follows, constitutes a humorous attack on pretentiousness very much in the spirit of the picaresque:

¿Coméis paja?

Que en este tiempo, que ay falta de dineros,  
paja comen, no más, los caualleros;  
que ya no ay quien presuma  
leuantar testimonio a la pluma;  
ni son oy diferentes  
los suciadientes de los mondadientes;  
como va de balona asse doblado. (1. 65-72)

Similar passages are found in the interviews between Don Miser and each of the other characters, with special emphasis being afforded the scene involving the literary critic, appropriately named Don Velialís de Lúbris. The opening lines of this scene effectively indicate that the prime target of satire in the portrayal of the critic is his abuse of language:

Don Velialís: En éste de las scientias fiel prototipo  
la pas anide, la salud sea cúmulo,  
qual uno y otros orbes bélicos.

Miser: ¿Qué dice este borracho?

Secretario: Este es un crítico,

Miser: el qual, con sus acciones y figuras,  
 hasse, habla y significa mil locuras.  
 No traygo comisión para esa gente,  
 que hombre tan infundido en disparates  
 pertenesce al rector de los orates.  
 Con todo, emos de olgarnos  
 y darle el grado, insignia, borla y título;  
 porque no ay mejor rato  
 que darle cordelego a un mentecato. (1. 277-89)

When Don Miser later asks Don Velialís: “¿Cómo llamáis el buho?,” the latter responds: “El fiscal grave,/de Proserpina la funesta aue,/pavo real, no harpía,/que en dos topasios restituye el día.” (1. 328-31) Such description stirs Don Miser to rejoinder:

Miser: ¡Basta! No digáys más;  
 no me llaméys alguna llamadura  
 que no aya quien entienda  
 mi nombre, tan sabido en qualquier tienda;  
 que aquestas llamerías  
 bastantes fueran a acabar mis días,  
 que ¡viue Dios! parese vuestra lengua,  
 con esse tris tras con que chispea,  
 el madroño que arde o la xedrea.  
 Desid lo que pedís ligeramente,  
 que en las tripas me bulle una corriente,  
 que, si me tardo, en estas ocasiones  
 relleno ¡viue Cristo! los calsones. (1. 332-44)

In these two passages Don Velialís shows himself to be an adherent of Gongorism, and the extensive use of hyperbaton in both provides a good example of this affinity. The opening line of the first passage is “En éste de las scientias fiel protótipo,”<sup>17</sup> and in the second passage one finds “de Proserpina la funesta aue.” Both Don Miser and his secretary (and hence the playwright) ridicule Don Velialís’ manner of speaking. Passages such as these, combined with the following statement by Don Miser, make clear that the intent of the scene is to satirize the many untalented followers of the Góngora school of poetry:

Miser: No ví culto jamás tan obediente,  
 ni obediencia de culto tan gallarda.  
 El me prometerá ponerse albarda.  
 Y a un ingenio que no para  
 de inuentar nuevas frases y vocablos,  
 hablar pueden con él todos los diablos. (1. 415-20)

Arrom and Rivas Sacconi, in their introductory study, allude to this satire of the Góngora school (p. 168). Arrom also comments on it in his *Historia del teatro hispanoamericano, Epoca colonial*, and then observes: "Es evidente, pues, que el joven seminarista no se contaba entre los entusiastas admiradores de Góngora y sí entre los aventajados discípulos de Quevedo."<sup>18</sup> While the dramatist's satire of Gongorism does, indeed, suggest an affinity for Quevedo, an even clearer indication of this allegiance is manifest in the numerous *conceptista* passages scattered throughout the play and in the frequent allusions to distasteful or vulgar objects such as *uñas* and *mocos*. And, as mentioned above, it may well be that Fernández de Valenzuela, like Lope de Vega in his poem "A don Luys de Góngora," is not really attacking Góngora but rather the untalented poets who attempted to imitate him.

In their evaluation of *Laurea crítica*, Arrom and Rivas Sacconi state: "El entremés no es, ni con mucho, una obra maestra. Así y todo es un valioso testimonio de la densidad cultural y artística que en tan temprana fecha existía en una apartada ciudad indiana, de los fuertes nexos espirituales que unían a los habitantes del mundo hispánico, y de la importancia que se concedía, a ambos lados del Atlántico, a las cuestiones literarias." (p. 169) While this evaluation seems a completely satisfactory one, it is difficult not to wonder at a thirteen-year old's possession of the broad literary and cultural background implicit in the work.<sup>19</sup>

The next dramatist whose works survive is Juan de Cueto y Mena, who was born in Spain in 1604 but spent most of his adult life in Cartagena de Indias.<sup>20</sup> He is the author of two known *coloquios*, *La competencia en los nobles y discordia concordada* (1659?), and *Paráphrasis panegírica* (1660), both of which were performed during festival days in Cartagena. Rivas Sacconi considers these two works the nucleus of a rather rich theatrical literature, most of which has been lost.<sup>21</sup>

In the play *La competencia en los nobles y discordia concordada*, the nobles are personifications of the four elements. In addition to these four nobles—Pireo, Aeolo, Telus and Doris—there appear two lackeys and a character representing *Cielo*. The first part of the work is concerned with the rivalries which for amorous and other reasons exist between the four elements, and with the delightful machinations of Quitapelillos, one of the two lackeys.

A new source of discord is introduced in the play when the nobles, all enraptured by the Virgin Mary because of *Cielo*'s description of her, compete for the privilege of taking her to Jerusalem where a mystery is hidden. These rivalries and competitions culminate in a long soliloquy by each of the nobles explaining why he or she is the most important of the elements and should therefore have the privilege of escorting the Virgin Mary.

When *Cielo* learns of their rivalries, he assures them that all are equally

important and urges them to live in harmony. He then states that all four may accompany Mary on her journey and that:

. . . con esto tendrán fin  
 los ahogos, las batallas,  
 los disgustos y las penas,  
 las contiendas y las armas,  
 la competencia en los nobles  
 y discordia concordada.<sup>22</sup>

Quitapelillos, one of the two lackeys and in many ways the real protagonist of the play, is a clever, witty *gracioso* in the mold of many of the *criados* of the late Golden Age theatre in Spain. His wit, which provides most of the humor in the work, can be seen in the following response to a question by Pireo:

Pireo: Quitapelillos, ¿tú aquí?  
 Quitapelillos: Sí, porque falté a vn don Viento,  
 si no es lo mismo vn don Ayre;  
 con que con lindo desaire  
 a tus plantas me arrojó,  
 y aun dize que me pagó;  
 deuió de ser con el ayre. (565-71)

To a later statement by Pireo, Quitapelillos remarks: “¿Con quién hablas? ¿Estás fuera/de tu fuego?” (1. 1129-30); and when Doris asks him if he will become her servant, he retorts:

¿Seruir?  
 tampoco, por no subir  
 a plaça de marinero.  
 Tierra pido y tierra espero.  
 La tierra es la que leuanta,  
 con tierra crece la planta,  
 aunque la tierra sea tierra;  
 pero en fin la tierra es tierra,  
 donde está la Tierra Santa. (1. 1349-57)

The tone of the play is light and generally festive, in large measure because of the witticisms of Quitapelillos and the amusing intrigues of love and jealousy. These intrigues, and the humor with which they are presented, are common to the light theatre of Moreto, Calderón, and other Spanish dramatists of the period; and the puns, word plays, and witticisms found in the work are worthy of the best of these playwrights.

It is also of interest to note that *La competencia en los nobles y discordia concordada*, which was published in Madrid in 1662 along with Cueto y

Mena's other works, has been mentioned as a possible source for certain of the characters in Calderón's *auto La vida es sueño*. Archer Woodford, in suggesting this possibility, postulates that Calderón, as a priest, would almost certainly have read Cueto y Mena's *Paráphrasis panegírica*, which deals with the life of a saint, and that, given his avowed interest in the elements, he probably read *La competencia en los nobles* . . . as well.<sup>23</sup>

*Paráphrasis panegírica*, Cueto y Mena's other play, was written to commemorate the canonization of Santo Tomás de Villanueva in celebrations held in Cartagena in 1660. The work is an account of the life of the saint as told by five allegorical figures representing *Tiempo* and the four cities in which Tomás de Villanueva lived.

The play begins with a rather lengthy monologue in which *Tiempo* talks of the many virtues of Santo Tomás de Villanueva and of his canonization. Of the virtues he remarks:

De vn Tomás de Villanueua,  
cuyas virtudes preclaras  
ni el mar alcanza en arenas,  
ni en orbes de luz Diana,  
Febo en átomos del día,  
ni la aurora en perlas quantas  
para hermosura del mundo  
llueue en platillos de nácar;  
de vn Santo que a la humildad  
tanto profundó la zanja  
que, siendo vn gigante en ciencias,  
ya diuinas y ya humanas,  
casi no se veía,  
quanto más se linceaua,  
porque al atenderle monte  
le hallaua la atención nada;<sup>24</sup>

In this passage, which is typical of the style in which the piece is written, Cueto y Mena's affinity for the *culteranista* school is apparent in the richness of language and of images. These elements are well exemplified in the first part of the passage in which the saint's virtues are compared in number to the sands of the sea, the spheres of light of the moon (Diana), and the dew drops of dawn, the latter being described as "perlas" and then as "platillos de nácar."

As *Tiempo*'s monologue ends, four nymphs, representing the towns of Villanueva, Alcalá de Henares, Salamanca, and Valencia, appear on stage. Each recounts the period during which Santo Tomás lived in the town she symbolizes. *Tiempo* and the nymphs then go to a church to give thanks for the life of Tomás de Villanueva, and all talk of his saintliness. The play

ends with one of the actors, as per formula, asking the indulgence of the audience for the shortcomings of the cast, and with musicians singing Villanueva's praises.

*Paráphrasis panegírica*, as the title indicates, is a panegyric which is given in behalf of Santo Tomás de Villanueva, although it might well also be conceived as a rhetorical painting of an altar piece. There is no attempt to introduce humor or intrigue into the play, or to develop plot or character. As a work of literature, therefore, it is of interest primarily for the *culturalista* tendencies it displays, although even here its value is more historical than artistic, there being only infrequent touches of imagination and originality evident in the piece.

Neither *La competencia en los nobles y discordia concordada* or *Paráphrasis panegírica* can be considered of outstanding literary quality, when compared to the Spanish theatre of the time. They are, nonetheless, important as examples of theatrical activity in Spanish America during the middle of the seventeenth century.

Although there is little possibility that Fernando de Orbea's *Comedia nueva: La conquista de Santa Fe de Bogotá* actually belongs to the early Colombian theatre, it is, nonetheless, often mentioned in essays treating this period. Of the author nothing is known except the name given on the manuscript, and no date has been established for the play. Javier Arango Ferrer, in his prologue to the edited version of the piece, states that it was written possibly near the end of the seventeenth century and copied in the eighteenth. He hypothesizes that Orbea was either Spanish or a *criollo* living in Peru, and that he had almost surely never been in Bogotá when he wrote the play.

Referring to the work as "greco-chibcha" in style, Arango Ferrer notes that it was conceived along the lines of classical theatre, but is full of factual errors and pseudoclassical allusions.<sup>26</sup> He then adds that:

"La conquista de Santa Fe de Bogotá" es falsa desde el punto de vista histórico pero como obra de teatro me parece excelente por la buena técnica de las escenas que van desarrollándose naturalmente con la trama y con el dibujo de los personajes. Más que de un drama heroico, la obra da la impresión de una ópera afónica, por el aparato escenográfico y por el corte de los personajes.<sup>27</sup>

The play itself constitutes a fictional version of the conquest of Santa Fe de Bogotá by the Spaniards. The conquerors, El Mariscal Quezada (Jiménez de Quesada) and El Capitán Belarcázar (Sebastián de Belalcázar) who, according to the play, come together to Bogotá, confront Osmín Rey de Santa Fe de Bogotá and claim his Chibcha empire for Spain. The Chibchas, led by their heroic general Tundama, resist but are defeated by a naval attack by the Spanish forces. Of the use of ships, which is of course impossible given



the location of Bogotá, Arango Ferrer remarks: "Le batalla entre indios y españoles tuvo lugar no ciertamente en tierra con caballerías sino en agua con buques. Obsesionado quizá por el fantasma de la flota griega don Fernando [de Orbea] adobó una pequeña Troya en los altos y apacibles campos andinos de los chibchas."<sup>28</sup> The defeat, brought on in part by an act of betrayal by one of the Chibcha princesses, results in the death of Osmín and Tundama and in complete victory for the Spaniards.

Replete with several amorous subplots, numerous classical allusions, two lackeys who are *graciosos*, and written in a combination of *romance* and paired hendecasyllable lines, *Comedia nueva: La conquista de Santa Fe de Bogotá* has many of the trappings of the theatre of the late seventeenth century in Spain. Arango Ferrer's evaluation of it as "excelente por la buena técnica de las escenas . . ." is exaggerated, but his remark that the work is more reminiscent of aphonic opera than heroic drama is perhaps a valid one. Agustín del Saz' characterization of the play also seems pertinent, although here too the evaluation of it as being generally a good theatrical piece may be somewhat exaggerated. He comments:

El fantástico drama, que acaba con el triunfo amoroso de Quesada, se aproxima más a la poesía legendaria de la aventura de España que a la materialidad de la verdad historicogeográfica. El mestizaje de lenguas y sentimientos, la fraternidad y la pasión de indios y españoles, caracterizan la obra. En general es una buena pieza teatral y, si se pudiera afirmar que Orbea era criollo, sería la primera nacional y expresiva del teatro hispanoamericano.<sup>29</sup>

The possibility that the play was written in Peru, and hence perhaps by a *criollo*, is based primarily on an allusion to "Ilustre Lima" in the final speech.<sup>30</sup> Arrom also points to the presence of various words which were in common use in Peru during the period and to the performance in the play of the Peruvian "Danza de la Colla" as additional support for the theory of an American and Peruvian origin for the piece.<sup>31</sup> One other element which lends credence to the possibility of an American origin is the inclusion of a verse, presumably from an undetermined Indian language, which is then rendered in Spanish.<sup>32</sup>

Although there are scattered allusions to playwrights and to performances of plays during the latter part of the seventeenth century and the first part of the eighteenth,<sup>33</sup> the next surviving theatrical work known to be from Colombia dates from 1752, almost a century after the appearance of the works of Cueto y Mena. The piece, a brief, untitled *loa*, was written by Jacinto de Buenaventura and presented in Ibagué on September 8, 1752, in honor of "la jura" of Ferdinand VI of Spain.

Published by Harvey L. Johnson in an article entitled "Loa Representada en Ibagué para la Jura del Rey Fernando VI,"<sup>34</sup> the piece consists of 311

lines and is in verse.<sup>35</sup> The cast is comprised of six persons with speaking roles—the King, four ladies, each personifying one part of the World (Europa, Asia, Africa, Mérica), and an ambassador representing the four women. There are, in addition, four Moors who do not speak and a character portraying “Música.”

The play is divided into two parts, the first honoring King Ferdinand and the second lauding the city of Ibagué for its nobility and for its tribute to the king. Each part contains an *estribillo* which is sung by Música. For the first part it is “¡Viua, viua para siempre!/¡Ay, qué gozo y qué contento,/ tiene el orue por tener/por Rei un Fernando Sexto!”<sup>36</sup> while the refrain for the latter part is: “¡Víctor, ylustre Ciudad;/víctor, mui noble Cabildo;/ víctor, Ybagué, que alegre/a Fernando dises víctor!”<sup>37</sup>

As the *loa* begins, the king is brought on stage by the other characters. Following verses in praise of this Monarch, the Ambassador informs him that four ladies wish to regale him with four enemies whom they have taken prisoner. Each woman then introduces herself and presents to the king the Moor she has captured.

The king thanks the four women and then magnanimously orders the release of the Moors: “Desataldos y que vean/el amor y piedad mía.”<sup>38</sup> The released men prostrate themselves before the king in homage to him. The women then dispute the right to sing the praises of the king, and the Ambassador determines that Mérica should be given the honor:

La Europa el derecho seda,  
la Asia ventaja no pida,  
y que se dé por vensida  
la Africa para que pueda  
la Mérica alegre y queda  
en deleitosa quietud  
ensalsar a la virtud  
de nuestro grande Monarca  
por ser de prendas una arca  
con tan rejia esadtitud.<sup>39</sup>

The first part of the play is concluded with Mérica's speech, in which she makes special note of the virtues of *prudencia*, *justizia*, *fortaleza*, and *templanza*, all characterizing the king, of course.

In the second part of the *loa* the four women and the Ambassador praise the illustrious city of Ibagué, giving special recognition to Fernando José de Caicedo, its noble Alférez Real. The piece then ends in typical fashion, with the king remarking to the other characters, and hence to the audience, that he esteems their applause and knows how to reward their praise: “porque vean que mi corona/saue premiar la persona/que me sabe culto dar.”<sup>40</sup>

Accompanying the *loa* is a "Descripción de los festejos," in verse, which provides us with the date of performance of the work, and with a description of the stage, as well as an account of the activities which were held throughout the celebration.<sup>41</sup>

Buenaventura's *loa* is of greater historical than literary value, just as is the case with the other surviving works of the early Colombian theatre. Johnson comments: "La loa, de sencillo lenguaje y de poco artificio, ofrece escaso valor literario, pero, no obstante, tiene interés para la historia del histrionismo y de las costumbres en Colombia, donde son algo escasos los datos del teatro de ese período."<sup>42</sup>

There exists a gap of almost forty years between the production of Buenaventura's *loa* (1752) and the next reference to theatrical activity in Colombia, although there doubtless was some activity during this interim. The first reference is from Pedro M. Ibáñez, who relates that on December 12, 1789, two plays, a comedy and a tragedy, were performed.<sup>43</sup>

Vergara also discusses a play written in 1789 and bearing the imaginative and somewhat lengthy title: *No se conquistan las almas con violencias, y un milagro es conquistarlos. Triunfos de la religión y prodigios del valor. Los godos encubiertos. Los chinos descubiertos. El oriente en el ocaso, y la América en la Europa. Poema épico dramático, soñado en las costas del Darién. Poema cómico, dividido en dos partes y cinco actos, con unas disputas al fin en prosa.* This "inmenso drama," which was found in an illustrated manuscript of 700 pages, had a prologue signed by one Fray Felipe de Jesús but there is no indication as to the play's author or his nationality. Termed a *disparatorio* by Vergara, the piece allegedly constitutes a *sueño* in praise of the region of Darién. Several of the characters personify cities or regions of Spanish America, including Santafé, Lima and Nueva España, and among the other personages are el Cid, Felipe II, Cisneros, Alonso de Ercilla, Bernardo del Carpio, a Spaniard with a guitar in his hand, and an English captain named Mr. Opere.<sup>44</sup>

For the final decade of the eighteenth century there is documentation which provides evidence of substantial theatrical activity in Colombia. Eustaquio Palacios, in his historical novel *El alférez real*, mentions the performance of García de la Huerta's *La Raquel* and of other "representaciones teatrales" in Cali in 1790 during the celebration of "la jura" de Carlos IV. He also notes that the spectators were novices with regard to theatre in that most had never seen anything more than *coloquios*.<sup>45</sup>

Bogotá's first theatre, completed in 1793<sup>46</sup> and patterned after the Teatro de la Cruz in Madrid, was built through the efforts of Tomás Ramírez and an unidentified associate.<sup>47</sup> The document in which Ramírez requests permission from the viceroy to build the structure is quoted "al pie de la letra" by Ortega Ricaurte, and one of the stipulations proposed by Ramírez is the following: "Que nos obligamos a dar una comedia con sainete y tonadilla

todos los domingos y jueves del año, exceptuando los de Cuaresma."<sup>48</sup> A later document, issued by the government official appointed to oversee the activities of the theatre also alludes to the presentation of plays on Sunday and Thursday of each week.<sup>49</sup> Caicedo Rojas states that in 1797 "treinta y nueve funciones se dieron desde el 30 de mayo de dicho año de 97 hasta 7 de febrero de 98, ejecutadas por actores, que, o bien habían quedado rezagados del tiempo anterior, o bien se habían hecho venir, aunque parece que algunos de ellos eran del país."<sup>50</sup> From these statements, assuming that what they indicate actually took place on stage, it can be seen that theatre one to two nights per week was more or less normal fare for Bogotá during much of the 1790's.

Along with the foregoing statements as to frequency, there survive documents and letters which furnish lists of actors and actresses who performed during this period.<sup>51</sup> Ortega Ricaurte provides, in addition, titles of some of the works which were staged by the theatrical company of Nicolasa Villar,<sup>52</sup> a company which apparently presented plays in Bogotá for at least four *temporadas* between 1792 and 1795.

In about 1797 various prominent citizens interested in theatre in Bogotá formed a *junta* to raise money to help support theatrical activities. The formation of this *junta*, coupled with the construction of a theatre and the recorded support of several government officials, makes it clear that considerable attention was afforded theatre during the period.

In spite of the relative abundance of chronicles, documents and other materials which refer to theatrical activity in Colombia during the 1790's, there is no surviving evidence of any active Colombian playwright from that decade, or of the performance of any plays written by a Colombian. As the eighteenth century comes to a close, therefore, we remain with four extant plays written by Colombians or residents of Colombia and with one play whose origin as yet has not been determined.

Putting aside Fernando de Orbea's play, which probably did not constitute a part of the development of the Colombian theatre, we find that the four plays we do possess range in date from 1629 to 1752 and show a clear kinship with several of the popular types of theatre being written in Spain during that time. The first of these plays, Fernández de Valenzuela's *entremés Laurea crítica*, is a brief comedy ridiculing several popular character types and satirizing the Góngora school of poetry. The next two works, both by Cueto y Mena, are *coloquios* entitled *La competencia en los nobles y discordia concordada* and *Paráphrasis panegórica*. The first of these is a comedy reminiscent of the light theatre of the late Spanish Golden Age, and the second a panegyric commemorating the life of Santo Tomás de Villanueva and showing an affinity for the *culteranista* tradition. The fourth play, Buenaventura's *loa* in honor of "la jura" of Ferdinand VI, is rather typical of the *loa* tradition, but is of more historical than artistic interest.

Of the four plays, then, one is an *entremés*, one a *loa*, and the remaining two are *coloquios*. These types of theatre, which are briefer and generally less pretentious than the standard three-act *comedia*, in all likelihood were the ones essayed most frequently by early Colombian playwrights, just as was apparently the case in Mexico, Cuba and Peru.

Even though they are rather few in number, the records and commentaries available on lost anonymous plays, dramatists whose works do not survive, playing companies, theatre seasons and individual performances suffice to suggest that between 1580 and 1800 there was in Colombia some measure of sustained dramatic activity. And these references, in combination with the four extant plays mentioned above, may well point to a significant theatrical tradition. While much additional material must be uncovered before we can accurately describe the popularity and importance of this tradition before 1800, it is hoped that the variety and continuity indicated by the information brought together here will offer a solid, unified base for continued investigations.

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## Notes

1. Anthony M. Pasquariello, "Two Eighteenth-Century Peruvian Interludes, Pioneer Pieces in Local Color," *Symposium*, Vol. VI, No. 2 (November, 1952), p. 385.

2. José Vicente Ortega Ricaurte, *Historia crítica del teatro en Bogotá*, Bogotá, 1927.

3. José Juan Arrom, *Historia del teatro hispanoamericano, Epoca colonial*, Mexico, 1967, pp. 65-68, 111-12, 135-37.

4. Agustín del Saz Sánchez, *Historia del teatro hispanoamericano*, Vol. I, Barcelona, 1963, pp. 33, 56-60, 141-46, 150-51.

5. José Caicedo Rojas, *Recuerdos y apuntamientos*, Bogotá, 1950, pp. 154-67, 197-201 (originally published in 1891).

6. Willis Knapp Jones, *Behind Spanish American Footlights*, Austin, Texas, 1966, pp. 293-305.

7. Héctor H. Orjuela, *Fuentes para el estudio de la literatura colombiana: Guía bibliográfica*, Bogotá, 1968, pp. 653-58. [In addition to the studies listed in this bibliography, there is reference to a brief "Reseña histórica del teatro en Bogotá" (*La Guirnalda*, Segunda serie, pág. 296) in José María Vergara y Vergara, *Historia de la literatura en Nueva Granada*, ed. Antonio Gómez Restrepo and Gustavo Otero Muñoz, Bogotá, 1958, II, p. 83, note 1. I have not been able to consult this *reseña*, but three paragraphs from it are quoted by Vergara (pp. 83-84).]

8. Willis Knapp Jones suggests the relationship between the play and this well-known theme. Ortega Ricaurte refers to it as an "obra distinta de *El conde de Alarcos*, but does not elaborate or give any source for the statement. [For a discussion of the Alarcos theme, see: Vernon A. Chamberlin, "Dramatic Treatment of the Conde Alarcos Theme," *Hispania*, Vol. XLII, No. 4 (December, 1959), 517-23.]

9. The exact year in which the first recorded play or plays were performed is disputed. José Manuel Groot, whose *Historia eclesiástica y civil de Nueva Granada* is one of the early histories of Colombia (begun in 1856), states that two bishops arrived in Bogotá on August 20, 1583, and that "la ciudad los obsequió con fiestas públicas en que hubo corridas de toros, saraos y comedias, dice el padre Zamora [an early Colombian chronicler]; de manera que éstas parece fueron las primeras representaciones teatrales que se vieron en el Nuevo Reino." (Vol. I, Bogotá, 1953, p. 324 [originally published 1869-70]) Ortega Ricaurte, however, presents a quotation from "el historiador Ibáñez" which gives the year as 1580 and the receiving priest as the Archbishop Zapata. The quote is not from Pedro M. Ibáñez' *Crónicas de Bogotá*, but may be from some other article or history by Ibáñez which I have not seen. It is, of course, possible that these historians are referring to two different occasions, but more than likely one of the two is mistaken.

10. See, for example, Pedro M. Ibáñez, *Las crónicas de Bogotá y de sus inmediaciones*, Bogotá, 1891, p. 48 (to 1590); and Ortega Ricaurte, pp. 4-5 (to 1594).

11. Harvey L. Johnson, "Una compañía teatral en Bogotá en 1618," *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, Año II, Núm. 4 (octubre-diciembre de 1948), pp. 377-80.

12. Willis Knapp Jones points out that Martín Calvo, the impresario in question, continued to Peru according to plan but apparently never reached Nueva España (p. 300).

13. Vergara, I, p. 88.

14. José Manuel Rivas Sacconi, in his *El latín en Colombia*, Bogotá, 1949, p. 136, shows conclusively that Fernando Fernández de Valenzuela, who was born in 1616, changed his name to Bruno de Valenzuela upon entering a monastery in Sevilla, Spain, in 1640. In a personal letter dated May 4, 1968 he further states that there is no other Bruno de Valenzuela on any of the surviving genealogical records, and therefore concludes that, barring the unlikely existence of some other writer by the same name, either these plays never existed or they were written at some later time. In the same letter Rivas Sacconi postulates that the two plays never actually existed. Willis Knapp Jones mentions both Fernando Fernández de Valenzuela and Bruno de Valenzuela (p. 297, footnote; p. 300), but does not associate them. On the same pages he also refers both to *Laurea crítica*, known to be written by Fernando Fernández de Valenzuela in about 1629, and to *Vida de hidalgos*, supposedly from 1619, as having been the first Colombian theatrical work. In so doing he draws from Ortega Ricaurte and from a commentary by Arrom and Rivas Sacconi in their "La *Laurea crítica* de Fernando Fernández de Valenzuela, primera obra teatral colombiana," *Thesaurus*, Vol. XIV (1959), pp. 161-85. He does not, however, attempt to reconcile or explain their conflicting statements. Agustín del Saz Sánchez, using both Ortega Ricaurte and Rivas Sacconi, attributes all three of these plays to Bruno de Valenzuela and also dates *Vida de hidalgos* from 1619. He cites Rivas Sacconi (actually Arrom and Rivas Sacconi), but does not mention his published evidence as to the date of birth of Valenzuela. Gustavo Otero Muñoz, in a note in the 1958 edition of Vergara's history, also copies the apparently erroneous information provided by Ortega Ricaurte (Vergara, I, p. 103, note 1). Ortega Ricaurte would also appear to be in error when he attributes the building of the hermitage of Nuestra Señora de Monserrate to Bruno de Valenzuela, an error repeated by Jones and Muñoz. The construction of this hermitage was, according to Rivas Sacconi, actually carried out by Pedro de Solís y Valenzuela, the younger brother of Bruno, and was not constructed until years after the date given by Ortega Ricaurte.

15. For an edition of *Laurea crítica* and an introductory study on the work, see Arrom and Rivas Sacconi, "La *Laurea crítica* de Fernando Fernández de Valenzuela, primera obra teatral colombiana," *Thesaurus*, Vol. XIV (1959), pp. 161-85. Rivas Sacconi also discusses the play briefly in his *El latín en Colombia*, pp. 135-36; as does Arrom in his *Historia del teatro hispanoamericano, Epoca colonial*, pp. 65-67. Another commentary, this one emphasizing the satire on Gongorism, is found in Eduardo Camacho Guizado, *Estudios sobre literatura colombiana, Siglos XVI y XVII*, Bogotá, 1965, pp. 85-94.

16. Arrom and Rivas Sacconi, "La *Laurea crítica* . . .," p. 172. Future references to their introductory study will be indicated by page numbers in parenthesis following each quotation, while references to the play will be indicated by line numbers.

17. This line is also interesting from the point of view of versification in that the dramatist saw fit to accent the "to" of *prototipo*, i.e. *protótipo*, in order to preserve the hendecasyllable line he attempts to employ throughout most of the play.

18. Arrom, *Historia del teatro hispanoamericano, Epoca colonial*, p. 67.

19. Rivas Sacconi also addresses this point when he states that he is not able to ascertain the extent of originality in the authorship of the work "porque bien podría tratarse de una simple adaptación o copia." He then cites several Spanish *entremeses* which are similar to *Laurea crítica* and concludes that: "Valenzuela, pues, imitó, a lo menos, alguna pieza en boga por entonces. De todas maneras, autor o transcriptor, tuvo parte importante en llevar a escena en Santa Fe el entremés que nos ocupa . . ." (*El latín en Colombia*, pp. 135-36, note 38).

20. See Rivas Sacconi, Prologue to Archer Woodford, *Obras de Juan de Cueto y Mena*, Bogotá, 1952, pp. ix-xxxix. In this prologue Rivas Sacconi brings to light various items relating to the life of Cueto y Mena, including place and date of birth, and his residence in Cartagena. He also points out that the date and place of his death remain unknown.

21. *Ibid.*, p. xi.

22. Juan de Cueto y Mena, *La competencia en los nobles y discordia concordada*, lines 2120-25. In *Obras de Juan de Cueto y Mena*, ed. Archer Woodford, Bogotá, 1952. All further quotations from this play will be identified by line numbers in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.

23. Archer Woodford, Introduction to *Obras de Juan de Cueto y Mena*, p. 15.

24. Juan de Cueto y Mena, *Paráfrasis panegirica*, lines 43-58. In *Obras de Juan de Cueto y Mena*. All further quotations from this play will be identified by line numbers in parenthesis following the quotation.

25. Javier Arango Ferrer, Prologue to Fernando de Orbea, *Comedia nueva: La conquista de Santa Fe de Bogotá*, Bogotá, 1950, p. 7.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

29. Agustín del Saz Sánchez, p. 59.

30. Fernando de Orbea, *Comedia nueva: La conquista de Santa Fe de Bogotá*, Bogotá, 1950, p. 146. The closing speech, which again is common to seventeenth-century Spanish theatre in that it asks the indulgence of the audience, is as follows: "Ilustre Lima aqui tiene/ fine el Concepto expresado/vuestra discrecion tolere/los yerros, q, han sido tantos."

31. Arrom, *Historia del teatro hispanoamericano, Epoca colonial*, p. 111.

32. Fernando de Orbea, p. 105. The passage in the Indian language is: "Mariscal tela/Mavorte sus rayos/Gelovra a sor/a peliache Osmin/España pacor/Marte conosin/Mavorte casol/atacama o neyta/mucoco picor. . ." And the Spanish rendition: "Al gran Mariscal/de España blason/el Guerrero Osmin/le postra el onor/rindiendole ufanos/al Marte Español/sus glorias amor. . ." According to one anthropologist familiar with South American Indian languages, the language above is not a recognizable dialect of Quechua or of Aymará but may be a dialect of Chibcha. This possibility makes the passage an even more intriguing one.

33. Sergio Elias Ortiz, in his "Concurso literario en Tunja en 1663," *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico*, Vol. XI, Núm. 8 (1968), pp. 120-26, discusses the celebrations held in Tunja in honor of the birth of the Spanish prince Carlos José. (Commentary based on an unpublished *relación* by one Alonso de Palma Nieto.) Plays were presented on three consecutive nights as a part of these festivities: "Los actos se distribuyeron en forma que pudiesen tomar parte todas las clases sociales, mediante funciones religiosas, panegíricas . . . y comedias en tres noches consecutivas. No constan los nombres de las piezas teatrales que se representaron, pero sí que cada una iba precedida de una loa, a modo de introducción para preparar el ánimo de los circunstantes" (p. 121). Ortega Ricaurte lists the names of several men who allegedly wrote dramatic works during the middle of the seventeenth century, including Lucas Fernández de Piedrahita; Francisco Cardoso; and Hernando Ospina (pp. 5, 7, 8). He does not give any titles, however. Vergara does provide the title for one play by Ospina—*Comedia de la guerra de los Pijaos*—and also mentions Piedrahita (I, pp. 88, 126). Ortega Ricaurte (p. 12), José Manuel Groot (I, p. 21), and Caicedo Rojas (p. 159) refer to the presentation of comedies during festivals in 1715, and the latter elaborates on them by stating: "En 1715 se dieron también otras representaciones con un fin político, y era el de calmar el descontento general que causó la arbitraria e injusta prisión y destierro del popular Presidente Meneses. Y agrega el cronista [Fray Alonso de Zamora] que 'en ellas hubo alardes mascaradas y comedias.'"

34. Harvey L. Johnson, "Loa Representada en Ibagué para la Jura del Rey Fernando VI," *Revista Iberoamericana*, Vol. VII, Núm. 14 (Febrero de 1944), 294-308. The *loa* comprises pages 296-303, while the poem describing it is presented on pages 303-305.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 295. Johnson describes the verse structure of the *loa* as follows: "La loa está compuesta de 311 versos, octosílabos todos con excepción de uno (verso 5) y divididos en 224 versos llanos y 87 agudos. Unas dos terceras partes de los versos están en quintillas (algunas tienen rimas defectuosas), estrofa usada con más frecuencia en las loas de los autos primitivos."

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 296-99. This *estribillo* is repeated six times.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 301-302. Repeated five times.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 298.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 299.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 303-305. In this versified description the author also refers to the presentation of other theatrical pieces, giving us thereby more information as to the nature of such celebrations and as to the role theatre played in them: "Deste modo prosiguieron/siete días con muchos toros/y un día de fiesta yntermedio/un abanze de un castillo/con los moros y los nuestros,/no faltando entremeses,/saraos, entretenimientos,/pandorgas, buenas comedias/y otros luidos festejos/que ymbentaron los vesinos/para maior lusimiento" (pp. 304-305).

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 294-95. He also makes note of several features of the play, such as the use of allegorical characters, the inclusion of various biblical allusions, and of slight touches which are reminiscent of the Gongorista poets.

43. Pedro M. Ibáñez, *Crónicas de Bogotá y de sus inmediaciones*, p. 161.

44. Vergara, II, pp. 22-24. I have not found any other reference to this manuscript, and do not know whether it still exists. If the title should prove to be indicative of a Romantic outburst, nonetheless, the early date (1789) would make it of extreme interest.

45. Eustaquio Palacios, *El alférez real*, 2nd. ed., Bogotá, 1945, p. 260. John L. Martin, in his "El alférez real: Another Novel of the Cauca Valley," *Hispania*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2 (May,

1941), pp. 193-96, also comments on the allusion to this performance, and talks in general of the historical nature of the novel.

46. Caicedo Rojas, citing the inscription on a *tablilla* which was placed at the entrance to the theatre, informs us that this theatre was provisionally inaugurated in 1792, and that plays were first performed there during that year. The *tablilla*, copied in Number 108 of the *Papel Periódico Ilustrado*, is inscribed as follows: "El 6 de octubre de 92, entoldada apenas la casa, se dieron ya unas comedias que llamaron provisionales, las cuales se prolongaron hasta el 11 de febrero, y concluida la obra, principiaron otras nuevas funciones el 27 de octubre del mismo año" (pp. 155, 167). A physical description of the theatre is provided by Vergara (II, p. 82).

47. Agustín del Saz Sánchez names José Dionisio del Villar as the associate (p. 142), but other historians are uncertain as to who it was.

48. Ortega Ricaurte, p. 18.

49. This intriguing document, which is quoted in Ortega Ricaurte (pp. 33-36), concerns itself primarily with rules of dress and deportment while attending a function in the theatre. Included, nonetheless, is the statement in question alluding to frequency of performances: "Si además de las comedias que se darán al público los domingos y jueves de cada semana, hubiese alguna otra extraordinaria, se avisará de ello con anticipación, por carteles, para que llegue a noticia de todos" (p. 35).

50. Caicedo Rojas, pp. 198-99.

51. Ortega Ricaurte, pp. 23-35, 37.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 38.