Book Reviews


*The Quack Doctor (La hermana Josefina)* by Fernando Camilo Darthés and Carlos S. Damel

*The Fate of Chipí González (El fin de Chipí González)* by José Rivarola Matto

*The Man of the Century (El hombre del siglo)* by Miguel Frank

*Men and Angels* will be of unusual interest to the dedicated or even casual reader of the South American theatre because none of its three plays is intended as heavy reading. Instead, this collection exposes that side of the theatre which is seen too infrequently—the light-hearted and whimsical which is created solely to entertain. In addition, the thirty-three page "Introduction" will appeal to those yet unaware of the development of this genre in South America. Following an abbreviated outline of the theatre up to the sixteenth century, and of the Mexican theatre up to Usigli, attention is focused on the drama in Paraguay, Chile and Argentina, the three countries represented in the book. There is also a checklist of translations of South American plays as well as some from the Philippines and New Mexico. This list has ninety different titles, and is arranged alphabetically by countries and by the names of the dramatists.

Professor Jones has chosen an interesting title for his 100th copyrighted publication. Even though one play, *The Quack Doctor*, does not incorporate angels as characters, the general theme suggested by *Men and Angels* is maintained in all three works since each combines fact with the supernatural. The plays are also similar in that all are amusing, however in varying degrees. The most humorous is *The Man of the Century*, a fanciful enactment of an angelic intervention in a Chilean household shortly before Judgment Day. *The Quack Doctor* ranks second with regard to its comic appeal. It is an auspicious commentary on the womens' struggle for equality, and is based on the plight of a female quack doctor who turns out to be a certified physician. *The Fate of Chipí González*, the least humorous play, is a satirical critique of the Paraguayan raison d'être as reflected in the tumultuous events in a young soccer player's life.

In *Men and Angels* Professor Jones has again displayed his extraordinary talents as a translator and an interpreter of the spirit of the South American theatre. There are only a few minor objections which may arise with respect to the translation itself. In *The Fate of Chipí González*, for example, it seems
that an illiterate ball player would use some expression other than “formidable” (p. 77) in an emotional outburst of joy. In *The Quack Doctor* scalpel seems preferable to “bisturi” [sic p. 48], and most American or English speakers refer to a perfect 100, not a perfect “10” (p. 52), on an academic score. Some readers may also object to the omission of a brief outline of the history of the theatre in the remaining South American nations. Even though Professor Jones’ aim in the “Introduction” is not to give a detailed history of this genre, a few comments on its recent growth would enhance the over-all appeal of the book. But such objections are of minimum consequence and are cited only to illustrate the care with which the volume has been prepared. *Men and Angels* should be accepted as a welcome contribution to the limited number of commendable translations of South American drama.

Robert J. Morris  
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This excellent volume—the first book about Villaurrutia’s work—will be most useful both for the general reader and for the specialist. The first chapter offers a very fine appraisal of the intellectual background, and one of the clearest evaluations offered on the “Contemporáneos” group; Dauster relates this group’s work to the aesthetics of the time and proves that its cosmopolitanism was in no way “anti-Mexican.” He goes on to give facts about Villaurrutia which bear on his work.

The next chapter studies Villaurrutia’s poetry in chronological order, making clear how its complexity and conceptual nature in no way make it coldly formalistic. Commenting on the early poetry, Dauster notes both its imitative nature and its use of techniques such as concretion, depersonalization, and antithesis—which become even more important later on. He then studies in detail the major poems of *Nostalgia de la muerte*, examining the different techniques through which Villaurrutia embodies the themes of death and of loneliness which dominate the work. He demonstrates that the “conceptista” devices, the paronomies, and the disemia in Villaurrutia’s poems are effective ways of capturing experiences. In these comments and in the ones concerning Villaurrutia’s later verse, Dauster makes clear how these works function as original poetry.

In chapter three Dauster focuses on Villaurrutia’s plays. Again he offers us close analyses which reveal their key characteristics. He notes how structures, verbal play, and tense dialogue account for the effectiveness of the *Autos profanos*; how *Invitación a la muerte* remakes completely the *Hamlet* story to embody Villaurrutia’s own themes of loneliness, death, and search for one’s identity; how Villaurrutia’s “commercial theatre” of 1941-1950 manages to use realistic plots and well-known conventions and still achieve effectiveness. All in all, he proves that Villaurrutia was no radical innovator, but that he brought to Mexican drama approaches and techniques which were then becoming prevalent elsewhere in the world; and that he used them to compose good plays which
surpass the localism and the worn conventions common to the Mexican commercial stage, and which give impact to Villaurrutia’s vision of human anguish and tension.

In dealing with the question of influences in his fourth chapter, Dauster defines very well Villaurrutia’s literary heritage and the connections between his work and that of Juan Ramón Jiménez, of Tablada, of Quevedo. He also notes an affinity between Villaurrutia’s outlook and Existentialism. But above all he makes us see that these affinities only make clearer Villaurrutia’s originality, his way of creating artistic works which stand by themselves and convey their own experiences. He links certain traits of these works with Mexican and even pre-hispanic letters, and leaves us with a picture of a writer at once universal and rooted in his traditions. The book contains a very useful selected bibliography as well as a chronological table and an index. It is clearly one of the best volumes published by Twayne on Hispanic literature, and proof that good and profound analytic criticism need not be tedious or pedantic.

Andrew P. Debicki
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Professor Arias-Larreta from the University of Missouri at Kansas City has prepared a useful textbook for teaching early American literature. It is in fact the only satisfactory anthology for this purpose that I know of, and I have used it successfully in classes. The three literatures covered are the Aztec, Incan and Maya; it also has a few animal tales from the Aymará of Bolivia.

Since this review is for the theatre, the two plays in the book should be mentioned first: Ollantay from Peru and Warrior of Rabinal from Guatemala. Neither of these has been translated into satisfactory English; perhaps an adaptation for the stage such as the one made by Carlos Girón Cerna called Warrior from Kiché might be attempted. I have seen this staged in Spanish, and it is very interesting.

The great play of the Incas was Apu-Ollantay whose text is included in this volume. It shows Spanish influence in the gracioso or comic figure and in the interlude. The theme is romantic and makes us wonder from what century it comes. The heroine Ima Sumac had a recent revival in the singing world.

The other play Rabinal-Achi or ‘Warrior from Rabinal,’ from the county seat of Lower Verapaz north of Guatemala City, was rescued by the French priest Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg in the middle of the last century. This tragedy is staged as a ballet set to the music of the “Son Kiché” or national Kiché dance. Flashbacks occur in the text. Patriotism and sorrow give the drama nobility; it is also romantic, especially when the Kiché prince tries to elude sacrifice and death. Court etiquette and a hint at genetics are found in his symbolic dance with the Rabinal princess.

Literature in the Náhuatl language of the Aztecs comprises the best selection. This describes the Aztecs’ militarism, especially as this was expressed in their poetry with its themes that the earth has been lent us and material things are
ephemeral. A barbarous tension runs through this poetry despite their love of beautiful things like flowers. The genres covered are the epic, the theatre (but with no examples), prose and didactic literature. We are given illustrations of old Spanish manuscripts of these poems.

Incan civilization was dynamic and concerned with social planning. The Quechua language is still spoken in the Andean highlands, and it was “written” by means of quipus or knotted tassels, mainly for keeping records; formal writing as we know it was unknown. The Incas had amautas or philosopher-teacher-priests, and Viracocha was their supreme deity. Manly sadness is expressed in poems which we read in Spanish translation; some lyricism comes through in poems which we read in Spanish translation; some lyricism comes through the triple barrier, if we include English as one link in this chain.

For the Mayan section, the Popol-Vuh or ‘Book of the Council’ was the sacred scripture of the still-existent Kiché nation of the Guatemalan highlands. Their ancestors came from Tula, the shadowy metropolis of the Tul-tecs or Toltecs north of Mexico City. In the text itself, the initial myths are vague; there is a parallel between Samson’s pride and that of the divine twins Hunahpú and Ish-Balanké. Hurakán or Hurricane, almost our wind god too, is the one-footed deity of destruction; his mate was Cabracane, the two-footed god of earthquakes. Legends include a confusion of tongues similar to ours at Babel. Pioneering times brings us a more historic mood; imperialism appears with the invading Toltecs, who were from the hilltops on the people in the valleys. Gumarcaah, “well built and marvellously strong” with its twenty palaces or clan lodgings, was renamed Utatlán by Alvarado’s Tlaxcalan soldiers who stormed the place in 1526; it still waits to be studied in the ravines north of Chichicastenango. Francisco Ximénez, the Franciscan curate of the latter town recorded this collection in the early XVIII century, and thus preserved it for Abbé Brasseur in the 1850’s. Some of this writing achieves sublimity, and its rediscovery in the Newberry Library of Chicago is one of the overlooked stories of this century.

The Adivinanzas del Chilam Balam or ‘Riddles from the Book of the Jaguar Priest’ of Yucatan relate the despair of the Mayas after the Spanish conquest. The Annals of the Cakchiquels might have been included to give the viewpoint of a nation rival to the Kiché; but no reviewer can really indulge in the luxury of revising an anthology.

This literature needs study, especially since the Nobel prize winner of Guatemala, Miguel Angel Asturias, has made it important. The nagual or totem figure which protects each man is found as a theme in El hombre que parecía un caballo (“The Man Who Looked Like a Horse’) by the contemporary dean of Guatemalan letters, Rafael Arévalo Martínez, and in “El brujo de Chitzajay” (“The Wizard of Chitzajay”) by Carlos Samayoa Chinchilla. Glossaries and wordlists in the various languages are useful, but only partially so since they are not coordinated; a description of the chief legends or the names of the principal figures would have been better for the student. At times the book is badly proofread. Latin and foreign quotations are particularly bad: on p. 24 we find homus for homo [americanus]; on p. 31 kaikais for haikais (or haiku); p. 119 “adonie” for “adonde”; and on p. 182, Edwar with no final d. The list of errata
is not sufficient, and would probably be shorter if the editor had done his own proofreading at the press in Buenos Aires.

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Recent Publications, Materials Received and Current Bibliography

[The following items may prove to be of interest to readers of the Latin American Theatre Review. Inclusion here does not preclude subsequent review.]


Teatro, No. 5 y No. 6 (1970-1971), revista de la Escuela de Teatro, Medellín, Colombia.


Rodríguez-Sardiñas, Orlando and Carlos Miguel Suárez Radillo. Teatro selecto contemporáneo hispanoamericano. Madrid: Escelicer, 1971. Tomo I. Contiene: Carlos José Reyes, Metamorfosis; Egon Wolff, Flores de papel; José Martínez Queirolo, Los unos vrs. los otros; Andrés Morris, Oficio de hombres; Maruxa Vilalta, Cuestión de narices; Joseﬁna Plá, Historia de un número; Gregor Díaz, Los del cuarto.


Iglesias, Roberto F. Programas de la Temporada Cultural 71 que incluyen El caballo de Troya y Segundo asalto y también la revista “Participación—Poesía.”


Fotos from a Curaçao “Tolla” play in the Papiamento language written by Pacheco Domacassé and directed by Tone Brulin.

Textos, No 1 y 2 (febrero y marzo, 1970). Revista mensual del festival latinoamericano de teatro y del centro latinoamericano de investigación e información teatral. Manizales, Colombia, Apartado Aereo 0665.


Suárez Radillo, Carlos Miguel. 13 Autores del nuevo teatro venezolano. Caracas, Venezuela: Monte Avila Editores, C.A., 1971. 535 pp. Contiene: Ricardo Acosta, Agua linda; José Ignacio Cabrujas, Fíeso; Roman Chalbaud, Los ángeles terribles; Isaac Chocrón, Tric Trac; Alejandro Lasser, Catón y Pilato; Elisa Lerner, En el vasto silencio de Manhattan; José Gabriel Núñez, Los peces del acuario; Gilberto Pinto, El hombre de la rata; Lucía Quintero, 1 × 1 = 1, pero 1 + 1 = 2; César Rengifo, La esquina del miedo; Rodolfo Santana, La muerte de Alfredo Gris; Elizabeth Schön, Intervalo; Paul Williams, Las tijeras.


*Conjunto*, revista de teatro latinoamericano (La Habana, Cuba: Organo del Comité Permanente de los Festivales), 3, No 10. Contiene artículos sobre el teatro universitario de Manizales por Hector Azar, *El menu*, obra teatral de Enrique Buenaventura, artículos por Collazos sobre el teatro de Buenaventura y sobre el teatro de protesta social por Isidora Aguirre.


