

The Theatre of Julio Ortega

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During the past decade several Peruvian writers have achieved considerable international renown. The attention given to such artists as Vargas Llosa, Solari Swayne, and Salazar Bondy, nevertheless, has not obscured the contributions of the most recent generation of Peruvian writers. Alonso Alegría, Julio Ramón Ribeyro, and, especially, Julio Ortega have achieved international recognition for the quality and variety of their artistic expressions, particularly their dramatic compositions.

In less than ten years Julio Ortega (born 1942) has proved himself to be one of Peru's foremost writers. He began his literary career while a student at the Universidad Católica de Lima. In 1963 and 1964 he won first place in the Juegos Florales of his Alma Mater for his short stories and poetry. In 1964 his first collection of verses, *De este reino*, was published in Lima. Two years later *Tiempo en dos*, a second volume of his verses, appeared with *Las islas blancas*, a book of his short stories. Ortega is also an outstanding literary critic as evidenced by *La contemplación y la fiesta* (1968), a collection of essays on the modern novel, and by his separate studies on José María Eguren, Juan de Arona, and Ventura García Calderón, which have been published in the various editions of "Biblioteca Hombres del Perú." In 1968 Ortega's first novel, *Mediodía*, was published along with another collection of his poems, *Las viñas de Moro*. He has also been a correspondent for a number of newspapers and magazines, a contributor to recognized literary journals, and a visiting professor at Yale University, among others. As of this writing he is residing in Spain.

Ortega was first introduced as a dramatist in 1965. His theatrical debut was made in cooperation with the Teatro de la Universidad Católica in Lima, and consisted of four of his works grouped under the title *Pasos, voces, alguien*. . . . It was the Teatro de la Universidad Católica which, the same year, published Ortega's first collection of drama. The ten works included in this volume, which is titled *Teatro*, are: *El intruso*, *La campana*, *Perfecta soledad*, *La ley*, *Se vende cualquier cosa*, *Sociedad anónima*, *Como cruzar una calle*, *El mosto de los lagares*,

Lázaro, and *Moros en la costa*. Plays written since 1966 are *Aguarde su turno*, *Pedir la palabra*, *La bolsa o la vida*, *Varios rostros del verano*, and *Mesa pelada*, his only political drama. As is so often the case with works by contemporary Hispanic American writers, however, those plays not included in *Teatro* are not readily available. Despite several trips to Lima, this writer has been unable to secure these works, with the exception of *Varios rostros del verano*. Nonetheless, it is felt that comment on Ortega's dramatic artistry should not be withheld simply because a few of his works are not published or available for analysis. Since his production is certain to increase, the following observations are therefore offered as a general introduction to his theatre.

Since the beginning of his dramatic career, Ortega has been vitally concerned with weakening the traditional interest in Peru in the naturalistic and vaudeville-type theatre. His production is a representative expression of the growing desire in Peru to establish a theatre of modern design which puts emphasis on works with universal appeal, man's problematical existence, and situations with an intellectual basis.

In this presentation a brief synopsis of each available work is given with some comment on its thematic significance and its individual dramatic merits, if pertinent. Evaluative comments on Ortega's over-all use of language, his characterizations, and other such elements of his art conclude this study.

*El intruso*¹ is a portrayal of X's inability to face the fact that The Intruder is gradually replacing him in his work, his home, and his love life. Everywhere X goes he finds The Intruder carrying on his normal activities. X never confronts his double, but finally decides to imitate the stranger hoping that, in this way, he can regain control of his own life.

In addition to being Ortega's briefest work, *El intruso* suggests the author's interest in pantomime since *The Intruder* never speaks and X's comments only reiterate what his actions bear out. This, like the majority of the following pieces by Ortega, is inspired in the author's observation of man's reluctance to exert himself for his own improvement. In most of his works a character is presented with a problem concerning his existence, yet takes no action since he is convinced that life is a futile adventure. In fact, man's passive nature before the problems inherent in improving his life is the principal theme throughout Ortega's entire dramatic production.

La campana (*Teatro*, pp. 13-21) is similar to the preceding work in that it, too, dramatizes man's passive resistance to forces which work to deprive him of his right to exist. Rov and Vor are imprisoned in a bell and can find no way out. Vor spends each day looking for an exit, but Rov is unconcerned and prefers to pass his time sleeping and eating. Vor finally ceases his search for an exit, thus implying that any effort to free himself from the bell is futile. He confirms his change of attitude in the final moments of the play.

Es imposible. . . (Silencio) Duerme amigo, sigue durmiendo. Qué feliz eres, Rov. Estamos presos, y tú sigues durmiendo. Para tí ni siquiera estamos presos. Yo, yo estoy condenado en una prisión con un hombre que prefiere seguir durmiendo. (*Teatro*, pp. 20-21)

La campana, one of Ortega's most successful compositions,² is much more impressive than the preceding work because its dramatic situation is more aptly articulated by action and dialogue, although the latter element is somewhat banal at times. In addition, the theme of the work is clearly manifested in the final moments when Vor finally ceases his search for an exit.

Perfecta soledad (*Teatro*, pp. 23-31) has more dramatic substance than *La campana* and *El intruso*, yet it is no longer than either of them. In this work He begins a conversation with She after asking that they not look at one another and that they not introduce themselves. He contends that any search for true love is futile and that therefore man can only maintain a passive and lonely vigil until the right person happens along:

Usted y yo no somos el gran amor que esperamos. . . . Esperar, esperar, eso nos hace puros. . . . Confíe. Como yo. Lo encontrará de pronto. Eso es lo perfecto del amor. . . . Nuestra soledad, perfecta ahora, hará que ese amor lo llene todo, que todo lo cumpla. (*Teatro*, p. 30)

She objects at first, but soon changes her mind and agrees that any concerted effort to find the right person is destined to fail. The couple then parts company, with each promising to continue a silent vigil for his true love.

Perfecta soledad is one of the best examples of Ortega's abilities as a dramatist. The characterizations are well drawn, the dialogue is more spontaneous than in many of his other works, and the dramatic situation is intriguing. Even though the play does question man's ability to search out his best mate, there is also a clear implication that man should resort to his reason and patience, not his physiological prowess, in order to find this person.

La ley (*Teatro*, pp. 33-42) continues Ortega's characteristic theme of human inanimateness and the absurdity of official institutions by ridiculing the frequently held belief that the perfect state system can really exist. *La ley* presents the story of two policemen in an unnamed state who try to convince a foreign traveler of the flawless nature of their judicial system. It is so perfect, they say, that there are no criminal acts committed and, as a result, the court system is in danger of decay.

- Aquí, señor, el sistema jurídico es toda nuestra vida.
- Hace tanto tiempo que no vemos brillar por su humana eficacia a nuestras leyes perfectas.
- Imagínese usted que debemos fingir robos para que las leyes funcionen. (*Teatro*, p. 38)

To prevent its complete ruin, the policemen request the traveler to subject himself to a court trial. They promise that he will be found innocent even though he is charged with the most abhorrent crimes. But the traveler, who has never spoken, boards a train and departs. In the hope that someone will agree to help them, the policemen approach another traveler and repeat what they said to the first.

In addition to being Ortega's first work with a satirical intent, *La ley* is different from the preceding pieces in that the peril of man's passive nature is

not dramatized by an individual. Instead, Ortega has shown this human weakness by implying that the machinery of the dormant judicial system is rusting due to disuse. In this regard, it should be noted that the policemen's conversation, which is actually a monologue because no effort is made to delineate their separate remarks, is the collective voice of the state's judicial system. Finally, even though *La ley* is slightly longer than the preceding plays, it progresses more smoothly and quickly because of the frequent humorous comments and the spontaneous nature of the policemen's conversation.

Ortega points out the negative values of man's passive nature in some works, and in others he dramatizes the tragic results that can be brought about by a zealous and passionate reaction to the problems of human existence. In *Se vende cualquier cosa* (*Teatro*, pp. 43-51), for example, he departs from his characteristic theme to show how one man's inability to control his power of reasoning results in murder. A very insolent Salesman has gained entrance to X's house, but X is determined not to buy any of his trinkets. After a heated argument the Salesman pulls a pistol, X reciprocates, and the confrontation seems deadlocked until the Salesman squirts X to cool him off. X is so shocked that he shoots without noticing that the Salesman's weapon is a water pistol. Then X puts the body in his chair, picks up the Salesman's valise, grins, and exits in the victim's original role.

While the theme of *Se vende cualquier cosa* is different from that of the preceding plays, there is little that distinguishes it dramatically. One improvement is the manner in which the dramatic tension is maintained throughout the piece, and this is partially due to the zeal with which the characters defy each other and to the manner in which their demands gradually increase in vehemence. The dramatic climax is reached when X shoots the Salesman, and it is at this point that the thematic intent is most clear. Then, when Ortega has X assure the Salesman's role, he clearly reinforces his premise that life is an absurd game, yet one which must be continued.

Sociedad anónima (*Teatro*, pp. 53-68) returns to Ortega's interest in portraying man's passive resistance by dramatizing the perils of egoism. The "sociedad anónima" is made up of four sociable but egotistical acquaintances whose only common interest is avoiding confrontation with the realities of existence. During one of their meetings, Demetrio, the most unenthusiastic member, arrives with his new sweetheart, Adelaida. She is not impressed with the members' boasting and chides their egocentric evasion of reality. As a result, and despite their dejection and wounded egos, the members accept Adelaida's challenge to overcome their selfish attitudes and to seek a meaning for their existence as Demetrio has done outside of the "sociedad."

The play suggests that man must participate actively in life if his personal existence is to be meaningful. While he maintains his animated being by communicating with those around him, he must not permit self-pride to force him into an isolated social position. *Sociedad anónima* is not as dramatically appealing as other works by Ortega because it is overextended, the dialogues are often declamatory and uninspiring, and the denouement takes place too abruptly to be convincing. In addition, one is not aware of the author's thematic intentions

until the final moments, and by that time many of the preceding developments seem irrelevant. The play is unquestionably one of Ortega's poorest.

Como cruzar una calle (*Teatro*, pp. 69-77) is yet another of Ortega's short pieces meant to dramatize why man must be aware of those factors which have a direct bearing on his existence. The protagonist is X, a man who is unsure of his ability to make a confident decision because he fears the consequence of possible error. In the play he cannot decide whether to cross a street because he has just seen a man killed by an automobile. This death produces extreme dismay and consternation in X, as reflected in the following soliloquy:

(agitado) Se puede o no se puede volver la vista atrás, ¿ésa es la cuestión! No, señor, no. Cruzar o no cruzar, he ahí la alternativa. ¿Cruzar? ¿No cruzar? ¡La calle es el vacío entre dos veredas! . . . (declamatorio) ¡Oh niveles inaccesibles, planos luminosos que así osciláis! (Al centro de la escena) Sobre este vacío la pobre sombra oscilando tan confiada. Ah, si nada más que dos orillas nos midieran. (Empieza a caminar de un extremo a otro, rápido, con las manos cruzadas atrás). Pero, no, las orillas son apenas para las huellas. Claro, uno pone los pies, deja una señal. A pesar del viento. Allí, deja una señal. Pero, ¿y aquí? Aquí la calle es la calle y está vacía. Aquí no quedan huellas. Estamos en el mar, somos el mar y no podemos beber el mar. Y entonces, ¿para qué contarle a nadie ninguna historia? Claro, una historia está en una orilla, es una huella, eso. (*Teatro*, pp. 73-74)

Then X queries the woman who has just arrived:

¿Es usted capaz de comprender la tremenda, increíble, asombrosa responsabilidad humana, física, invisible, que asume una persona cuando, por propia voluntad, se decide a cruzar una calle? ¿Sabe usted? (*Teatro*, p. 75)

The woman tries to convince X that to cross the street is an ordinary event and typical of man's daily actions. X is encouraged by the woman and decides to cross the street after a second man arrives safely to the other side. Then X closes his eyes and starts for the opposite curb, only to be killed by an automobile.

In this work the author suggests that man should not prolong his existence in doubt and that any decisions must be based on the situation in question. Yet, as suggested by the first of the preceding quotations, the thematic intent of *Como Cruzar una calle* is too often obscured or needlessly complicated by X's philosophical digressions. Particularly in the beginning moments of the play the dialogue would be practically unintelligible without the dramatic actions. Only in the closing moments is it clear that X, despite being a knowledgeable person, is unable to fulfill the responsibilities of life because he fails to be aware of his immediate environment.

El mosto de los lagares (*Teatro*, pp. 79-106) and the following dramas, *Lázaro* and *Moros en la costa*, are considerably longer than the other works in *Teatro*, yet none of these longer compositions departs from Ortega's usual dramatic and thematic tendencies. *El mosto de los lagares* is divided into three *cuadros*, and

is one of the best plays he has written. It presents the story of Juan's return home after an extended absence, and his family's adverse reaction to his presence. From the first moments of his arrival Juan is aware that his brothers despise him, yet tolerate his return in the hope that their mother's brooding will cease and that the family environment will be more pleasant for them. The brothers, then, resent Juan and blame him for the suffering they have endured during his absence. Once Juan is convinced of his brother's resentment and realizes that the bond between him and his mother is no longer strong, he leaves home again. But once away he decides to return because he owes a debt to his brothers. Juan reflects his change of attitude in the following soliloquy:

¡Ya es suficiente! Oh, pero qué he hecho. . . Sin saberlo he destruido todo. . . Nunca dije "llevadme al mundo". . . Pero, soy culpable. Soy culpable desde el primer día. . . Asumo la culpa de mis ojos abiertos. . . Asumo todas las culpas. . . La primera y la última. . . La vida partida en padres, en hijos, en pueblos, en hogares que se abandona para siempre. . . Asumo la espada que nos cortó así, en hombres, mujeres, niños, adultos, vivos, muertos. . . Yo soy culpable. . . Debo volver y decirlo. . . Debo aceptar mi rostro amarillo sobre una pared. . . Mi rostro entre las sombras, mi silencio de muerto. . . No debo huir. . . No debo sufrir más. . . No podría partir sabiendo que ellos, aquí, esperan que yo pague mi condena. Debo cancelar mi sorda deuda. . . Sí, sí, eso es. . . Ya estaba la vida partida por mitades sanguientes, y yo, cruel, terrible, la partí aun más, seccioné todavía con más dolor sus débiles círculos de agua. . . ¡Yo, yo soy el condenado! Debo volver. . . (*Teatro*, p. 101)

Juan's compassion, however, is not appreciated, and his brothers murder him for having left the second time. In the closing moments of the play the irony of his assassination is manifested as the brothers prepare to abandon their home. Now they are convinced that man's destiny is to leave the security of home and to seek some meaning for his existence.

El mosto de los lagares is one of Ortega's most accomplished dramatic works, and is also the most elaborate expression of his pessimistic outlook for mankind. My only criticism is that the basic simplicity of the plot and its development are sometimes complicated by Juan's long and bewildering soliloquies. While these weaknesses are frequently found in Ortega's theatre, they are even more apparent in his longer works. Nonetheless, those who are able to follow Juan's cerebral digressions will discover that man is doomed to a tragic end because he cannot bear passive resistance to his problem and because his brotherly compassion is also an unacceptable solution.

Lázaro (*Teatro*, pp. 107-39) is also divided into three *cuadros* and is Ortega's only dramatic piece in verse. It is an indictment of man's worldly existence, yet it includes no specific reference to man's passive or passionate nature. Instead, *Lázaro* is intended only to dramatize the anguish and futility of worldly existence. The story is inspired in the Biblical account of Lazarus' resurrection, and takes place after he has returned from the dead. In Ortega's adaptation *Lázaro* is not happy with his new life because it means nothing to him. Throughout the work *Lázaro* ponders the anguish and the insignificance of his existence.

Si a la noche responde otra noche
 y del hueso del mundo monda la muerte
 con diente ávido, o somos cada uno
 también gusanos de la tierra
 y es la tierra fea tumba
 y mordemos un cadáver maloliente. . .
 O trae la noche otra sombra, otra agua,
 y apenas si dormidos del sueño un hilo
 nos cose a la vida, o la vida
 nos desteje en los días, o somos
 una pobre madeja, sucia lana,
 y todo ésto, ¿para qué? (*Teatro*, pp. 133-34)

In a desperate search for some meaning for his life, he arrives in Jerusalem just before Christ is to be crucified and at the time when the peoples' malice and derision are at their height. Then, after the thunder and lightning that mark Christ's death, the masses become fearful and implore divine forgiveness. Lázaro chooses this opportunity to belittle their fear and to ridicule their remorse.

¡Alto! ¡Alto! ¡Detenéos temblorosos
 asesinos! ¡Qué! ¿Gemís acaso
 o contemplo una marcha de pálidos
 gusanos? ¡Ya sois libres!
 ¡Ya tenéis las manos rojas!
 ¡Qué feliz gente! ¡Bailad, bailad
 de contento! . . .
 ¡Tembláis como ladronzuelos!
 Sois libres, sabedlo. ¡Habéis
 ganado con sangre vuestra sucia libertad!
 ¿Habrà entre vosotros un hombre
 que vista con el silencio
 y no con tibio llanto?
 ¿Ha muerto para que tembláis? (*Teatro*, p. 137)

His mockery so enrages the people that they kill him, but Lázaro dies laughing because he knows that his assassins are only delivering him from the anguish and futility of human existence.

Lázaro is a pessimistic play devoid of intentional Christian doctrine. Lázaro does not rejoice in death because of his religious devotion, but because he knows that death is preferable to life on earth. Yet, while this work suggests an interesting interpretation for the original story of Lazarus, it is disappointing with regard to the use of language. Even though the play is written in free verse, the dialogues lose much of their intended linguistic appeal because they are more narrative and prosaic than poetic. The drama also exemplifies Ortega's tendency to obscure the thematic simplicity of his creation with needlessly complicated ideological and philosophical inferences. As one plods through some of the dialogues and endures constant rewording of Lázaro's plight, it becomes clear that Ortega might have developed this play with less emphasis on the intellectual

and more on its thematic clarity. This is particularly true since *Lázaro* has more dramatic potential than many of his other works.

*Moros en la costa*³ (*Teatro*, pp. 141-64) takes place in a library which displays the statues of Don Quijote and Sancho Panza, Don Juan and Doña Inés, Hamlet and Ophelia, Faust and Margarite, and Mephistopheles. Each night the statues become living creatures and descend from their pedestals to play canasta. With the exception of Mephistopheles, all of them are now decadent human beings, as suggested by their constant concern with petty matters and by their mutual envy of the cautious Mephistopheles. They realize that he is the only one among them who has preserved his original fame and personality, and they resent his presence. In the closing moments of the play, when they are no longer able to tolerate Mephistopheles' critical suggestions, they attack him. But he escapes certain death because they have to return to their pedestals the moment their wrath is vented. The play ends as Mephistopheles, hobbling to his pedestal, laments his inability to warn his companions of further degradation.

Moros en la costa, the last work included in the published volume of Ortega's dramatic pieces, is a return to his characteristic theme, that of man's passive nature. It is a rather simple play dramatically, and the thematic involvement is equally uncomplicated. The drama has a special imaginative appeal and admirably reflects Ortega's artistic originality in the way he gives a "behind the scene" account of the once famous characters' new lives. Their dialogue is well written and the attempt to personalize each one's manner of speech is amazingly inventive.

Varios rostros del verano,⁴ which in its original version was titled *Noches extrañamente divertidas*, was awarded second place in the 1968 Concurso Nacional de Obras de un Acto. That same year it was first performed by the Teatro de la Universidad de San Marcos. This play is also an integral part of Ortega's only novel, *Mediodía*. While it does not differ from Ortega's other dramatic pieces thematically, the work is, nonetheless, more involved than the other compositions herein presented in that the author's characteristic theme is supplemented with a number of related philosophical tenets, all of which are found in his other dramas. In this as well as certain other works, for example, Ortega dramatizes man's absurd concern with the trivial aspects of his condition, the egocentric defense of his hermetic existence, and the irony of his pessimistic outlook. *Varios rostros del verano*, then, is a synthesis of Ortega's philosophical postulates as expressed in his entire dramatic production.

Mur and Nin have been meeting regularly in a bar during the summer months. Each time their discussion has been based on a mutual preoccupation with death, and the doubts and uncertainties concerning life after death have made their existence an agony. One night Mur enters into a dream state which is progressively reinforced by the alcohol he is consuming. During an ensuing conversation Nin functions as Mur's conscience. Even though Mur is never able to ascertain Nin's true identity, it is apparent that Nin's different roles represent the memory of those beings with whom Mur has had some relation: his father, a friend, God, the Devil. As Mur answers Nin's questions, he relates a number of his vital experiences, all of which point to his characteristic withdrawal from

those personal relationships which could lessen or even terminate the agony of his solitary existence. More importantly, Mur's answers reveal that whether he is aware of his conscious reality or lost in subconscious meditation he is unable to escape his preoccupation with death and the thought that he has begun to die. This point is evidenced by Mur's admission before returning to conscious reality that he already feels dead:

Nin—Ha llegado tu hora, muchacho. Prepárate. . . Confiesa que quisieras huir de este lugar. Confiesa que aquí se vive muriendo a chorros. . . .
¿Ya has muerto?

Mur—Creo que ya.

The work ends with the characters' repeating their opening statements—that they spend each evening, regardless of the role each may play, attempting to escape their conscious reality because they do not want to continue to suffer their thoughts of dying.

Mur—(A la platea) Así señores y señoras, todas las noches muere uno de nosotros. Esta vez me ha tocado a mí.

Nin—(A la platea) Es la historia de dos viejos amigos que . . . no quieren seguir muriendo. Es su manera de evitarlo. Todos tienen su manera de evitarlo.

Of course the tragic irony of their own deceit is the lasting impression upon the audience.

Julio Ortega has indicated a fondness for *Varios rostros del verano*, along with *La ley* and *La campana*.⁵ The play has been reworked on at least three occasions and as a result is Ortega's most carefully elaborated drama. Structurally, for example, the play-within-a-play arrangement clearly focuses one's attention on the subconscious state of Mur and lends double significance to the dramatization of the basic theme of man's passive attitude towards his problematical existence. In addition, the close relation between the structure and the theme is substantiated by the harmonious balance maintained between the language and the action. While the play is essentially dependent on dialogue, the physical roles of both personages, particularly of Nin as he assumes the different identities, are an integral part of the character delineations and a welcome complement to the audience's interpretation of the theme of the play.

It does not seem an exaggeration to assert that *Varios rostros del verano* is Ortega's best drama. The dialogue is free of extraneous interventions and digressions which, as in several other works, tend to weaken and obscure the thematic unity. The author has also taken care to avoid possible confusion resulting from abrupt transitions from one thought process to another. Also, each character's psychological identity is maintained during the dream sequence. This is an important factor since Nin and Mur, like Rov and Vor in *La campana*, characterize separate aspects of man's existence. Mur is the voice of conscious awareness, and Nin is the voice of subconscious being.

Several conclusions about Ortega's drama can be made from the preceding observations. The most apparent is that all of his pieces are relatively brief and

simple. Brevity and technical simplicity are indispensable complements to Ortega's effort to dramatize his philosophical concerns in a logical and efficient manner. Nevertheless, some of his works suffer from technical weaknesses which adversely affect their thematic clarity. In his longer works, for example, extraneous or repetitive dialogues frequently appear, often as the author's attempt to strengthen the philosophical fiber of his play or to add a note of intellectual profundity. Too often these dialogues are declamatory and overly prosaic, even in *Lázaro*, his only drama in verse. As a result many of Ortega's dialogues are distracting additions and fail to become an integral part of the dramatic whole. It is worthy of note, however, that in those works which have only a few pages, such as *La ley*, *La campana*, and *El intruso*, the dialogues have no serious defects. They are concise, usually spontaneous, and have sequence.

Ortega's character portrayals, like his use of language, are somewhat unimaginative. Too often it is obvious that the characters are verbal devices which have been created only to express the author's philosophical evaluation of man's existence. And since Ortega's usual philosophic intent is to reflect man's characteristic passivity, he has not seen fit to invest his personages with distinguishing character traits. Consequently, there are practically no artistic or psychological variations between the principal characters in each of his works. In fact, Ortega's characters are usually dehumanized creations devoid of authentic human appeal or interests such as love, sex, or a sense of humor. There is no strong or impressive character, nor one with a sense of originality which might free him from being a simple representative of man in general. Ortega's most interesting characters, from a dramatic point of view, are found in *La campana* and *Varios rostros del verano*. In these works the characters can be considered to represent different facets of one man's being. In the former play, for example, Rov and Vor are reverse images of one non-existent personage. Nevertheless, they are still symbols of man's passive and passionate nature and, as such, are not to be construed as a variation of Ortega's typical character portrayals.

Like a great number of present day European and North American dramatists, and even the ancient Greeks, Ortega is preoccupied with the ordinary problems of man's existence. Throughout his production he implies a concern with man's inability to evolve some plan by which he can adequately cope with the consequences of daily living. Thus Ortega's principal theme is man's ineffectiveness when dealing with even the ordinary problems of his existence. For Ortega, whether man is a passive or passionate being, he characteristically fails to heed the reality of his situation and makes unwise decisions which only aggravate his miserable situation. Other of Ortega's underlying interests, although they are not mentioned directly in any of his plays, are man's inability to communicate effectively and the manner in which his egoism helps isolate him from society. Essentially, then, Ortega's drama dwells on man's incapacity to surmount obstacles and the futility of his efforts to improve his existence. His entire dramatic production is an ironic statement that life is an absurd experience which must continue, and that any reaction to one's existence is also absurd.

The theatre of Julio Ortega has been a valuable addition to Peru's increasingly varied and cosmopolitan dramatic offering. And among that nation's young dramatists, those who have begun to write for the stage since the early 1960's,

Ortega has made the most decisive steps towards severing Peru's unusually strong bonds of tradition and establishing a theatre of universal appeal. My study has shown, however, that its success is due more to Ortega's philosophical and thematic tenets than to dramatic and artistic merits. As a consequence, his plays often seem unpolished dramatizations of his own philosophical postulates. It is apparent that Julio Ortega has just begun his career as a dramatist, however, and additional experience and artistic maturity will allow full realization of his capacities.

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Notes

1. Julio Ortega, *Teatro* (Lima: Teatro de la Universidad Católica, 1965), pp. 7-11. Other references to this work will be indicated by *Teatro* and the respective page numbers within parentheses.

2. *La campana* has been presented in Lima and the United States. In addition to its publication in *Teatro*, the play also appears in *Teatro breve hispanoamericano contemporáneo*, ed. Carlos Solórzano (Madrid: Aguilar, 1970), pp. 71-76.

3. "Hay moros en la costa" is a traditional Spanish saying which was used to warn against an impending Moorish invasion of the Iberian Peninsula.

4. This presentation is based on a copy of *Varios rostros del verano* which was prepared by the Teatro de la Universidad Católica for the première of this work on February 10, 1968, in Lima.

5. In response to my expressed interest in these three plays Ortega wrote: ". . . me complace mucho que Usted haya pensado precisamente en las tres piezas más que más quiero, que mejor fortuna tuvieron." Letter from Ortega, Barcelona, September 28, 1971.