

## Book Reviews

*Tres obras de teatro.* La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1970. 364 pages.

The *Colección premio Casa de las Américas* for 1970 offers the reader, as the bookjacket advertises, three Latin American plays of differing styles and techniques. After reading the collection, however, one is forcefully struck by the fact that the three plays do come together at one common point: all are violent—psychologically, physically, or sociopolitically violent. In these three plays we see a world vision that is depressing and repellent; a world devoid of order, of reason, of any human kindness. (I hasten to add, unnecessarily, that this is not a specifically Latin American vision. It is, it seems, our contemporary vision, the world of most contemporary art. But of the three plays, only *El avión negro* can be located geographically, and by changing or eliminating a specific title or date, it, too, becomes universal.)

What are we to think of a world in which brutality is more common than normality? How must we cope with treachery, with parents who, when a man drags away their screaming daughter, watch placidly rather than “get involved,” with constant physical brutality, with kicking and beating? We are not told. It is painfully clear that an audience may not expect such answers of these plays. Our unhappy lot is to sit and watch the catalog of horrors recorded.

Of the three plays the least satisfying, theatrically, is *El avión negro*. Composed by four authors, Roberto Cossa, Germán Rozenmacher, Carlos Somigliana, and Ricardo Talesnik, the play is a patchwork of black-out scenes stitched together with musical thread: the bongo of Lucha, and the *merga*, a group of working-class amateur musicians. There are twelve of these skits, often very different in tone and technique, having in common only that each demonstrates a specific reaction to the “imagined” return of Juan Perón to Argentina. (How often reality imitates art.) Some of the scenes are enormously funny. I think specifically of the scene involving the two aged patriots (one returned to his prenatal state of helplessness, linked now by a plastic umbilical cord to a maternal life-giving bottle of plasma) and their protégé, a goose-stepping shoe clerk who has fought his way to a “respectability” he has no intention of sacrificing. Some scenes are chilling: for example, that of the dentist who in an access of rage drills-to-death a patient reacting joyously to Lucho’s bongo, which is summoning the faithful to “the General’s” return. And the family scene previously mentioned, which must be the ultimate in revolting bourgeoisie.

As entertaining as these skits may be, they don’t really *go* anywhere. The last, “las torturas,” does attempt to summarize the general emotions and dramatic intent of the preceding scenes. It is not effective. The problem of these closing speeches is the same as that of the play as a whole: there is no real direction, no thrust; we end at the same place we began. Ironically (in my view) the two characters in the last skit are named Malo and Bueno. But the truth is that there *is* no bad or good in the world of this play. There are no proletarian heroes struggling to improve the world for their fellow human beings. Regardless of class there are only ugly people in this world (the possible excep-

tion being the happy innocent killed in the dentist's chair). Those who have, or have won, domination, even those who will gain it, apparently are uniformly, wholly, seamlessly, devoid of ideal or of desire to better their world. Admittedly, it may be the authors' intent to present such a picture. I would not have imagined so.

*La mucca*, by Eduardo Alejo Pavlovsky, suffers from the same structural and dramatic defect noted in *El avión negro*. The play doesn't go anywhere. I do not mean to insist that a contemporary play must be bound by traditional problem-complication-resolution. But of all things we, the audience, must demand, if theater is to survive at all as a human experience, is some change in emotive tone, some tension, some movement from "here" to "there." The breathing rhythm of the play that imposes its cadence upon our own respiratory patterns must accelerate, or slow . . . , or stop. But when one begins at the emotive level of a screech, continues and ends at that level, he ceases to care. He is deadened, and can no longer react. The victims of the brutality to which he is witness become interchangeable. So what. Who cares?

I am aware that these objections to *La mucca* may to the author seem to summarize exactly his intention. My caveat is that although I recognize the black world vision (it is ever with us), recognize that in that vision we are all the interchangeable victims of a malignant and omnipotent force, I believe that to be effective dramatically, the author must be selective. He must manipulate us, not club us. What is most woefully absent here is contrast. We must at least glimpse good to recognize evil more clearly. We must have respite to know pain. And we must experience that most cruel of all emotions—hope—before we are most totally destroyed.

Pseudo-philosophical observations to the side, there *are* very interesting echoes in the play. Primarily, that of *cinema vérité*. Four characters, headed by El Sueco, invade the home of an upper-class couple while they are absent. (The invaders theme is everywhere in this collection: in "La sirvienta" scene of *El avión negro*, in *La mucca* itself, and in *Flores de papel*. We must pay Wolff his due: *Los invasores* is a milestone in Latin American theatre.) They are carrying heavy suitcases that clank and jingle when they are set down. Only in hindsight do we see the clues to what they contain so liberally sprinkled throughout the early scenes: "¿Qué hacer? ¿Cine mudo, vos?" (p. 255); "La escena es graciosa porque es evidente que los dos son buenos actores" (pp. 264-65); the Hollywood "smoking blanco y anteojos negros" (p. 267); clues which become increasingly obvious with the addition of references to "luces para una filmación," "guiones," etc. Following the arrival of El and Ella the cause for the invasion is made clear. In his continuing search for cinematic artistic truth El Sueco has come to believe that "tenemos que llevar nuestra realidad cotidiana a un estado de absoluta pureza" (p. 302). And his formula for purity requires that it be reached through violence: "Es sólo violentando que podemos volver a lo auténtico. Hay que violentar para rescatar" (p. 322). What Sueco succeeds in filming—through a process of doping and debasing, violating and beating—is *cinema vérité* seen through the lens of Antonin Artaud's *théâtre de cruauté*.

As previously stated, the prevailing emotive note of the play is a shriek. One

of the very few exceptions is a gratuitous section based on the unintentional humor of proper names. This scene seems completely artificial and contrived, an opportunity perhaps for Pavlovsky to use some material he has had bouncing around for a while. The scene doesn't work, and indeed, the play as a whole doesn't work.

Parenthetically, it is simply not possible—given the cruel psychological games in which every character participates and the familiar resonances emitted from the author's name, to refrain from mentioning the titles of two additional books by Pavlovsky: *Psicoterapia de grupo en niños y adolescentes* (1968) and *Psicodrama psicoanalítico en grupos* (1970).

Egon Wolff's *Flores de papel* is a different matter entirely. It is a forceful and frightening experience. This two-character play (a difficult technical problem which is skillfully handled here) is a further variant on the theme of the invader. Specifically it is the account of a middle-aged, unhappy woman who allows (invites?) a vagrant who carries home her bundles of groceries to stay in her apartment with her. He stays, to her destruction. In the course of the play, insofar as domination is concerned, their roles are reversed. But the black vision of the play is that the "lower" character does not rise to a level of greater comfort or beauty, but rather drags the woman back down to the ugly life of the destitute, the deprived, and in this case, the deprived.

One of the reasons that the play is successful is that there is dramatic tension, movement, a line of development. Another is that the play may be read on more than one level, variously, as a comment on the female, the human, or a specifically social, condition.

I have oversimplified the workings of the effective play, and overemphasized the failings of the unsatisfactory plays. Their joint effect, however, is powerful evidence of their authors' contemporaneity. Octavio Paz's statement that the interest recently evidenced in Latin American literature results from, and is proof of, the fact that Latin Americans are for the first time contemporaries of their world, is certainly applicable now to theatre. Yes, their world is our world. Ours, too, is the "grimace." The hero on the "black airplane" flies home to us all. And our celebratory garlands are all of "paper flowers."

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Teresa Cajiao Salas. *Temas y símbolos en la obra de Luis Alberto Heiremans*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, S.A., 1970. 256 pp.

This book is the first study of the entire literary production of Luis Alberto Heiremans (1928-1964). It is divided into five major chapters: I) "Introducción," which distinguishes Heiremans as a member of the Generation of 1950, a group of Chileans intent on breaking away from the national literary tradition; II) "El escritor y su circunstancia," a well documented biography of Heiremans and observations on the cultural and social experiences which influenced his artistic production; III) "El artista y su obra narrativa," which includes a discussion of his only novel along with a chronological listing, thematic

classification, and synopsis of each of the works in his four short story collections; IV) "El artista y su obra dramática," in which Professor Salas justifies her division of Heiremans' drama into two cycles, gives a synopsis of each work, and, in a noticeably brief evaluation, views his drama as a conventional example of poetic realism salvaged from mediocrity by the unique portrayal of a personage-symbol which represents an idea or bears a message of national significance and universal projection; V) "Temas y símbolos en su obra," in which Professor Salas briefly defines and identifies the major themes and symbols in Heiremans' production, then merely lists the individual works along with the specific themes (love, death, solitude, existential anguish, the transcendent search, and incommunication and alienation) and the symbols (the sea, river, swan, star, cross, butterfly, ring, net, etc.) each may contain. The study is concluded with a disappointing three-page summation of obvious statements concerning Heiremans' production and importance as a writer.

As evidenced by the extensive bibliography which follows the text, this book, the published version of Professor Salas' dissertation, represents a diligent investigation of Heiremans' life and work. It was published under the auspices of the Fundación Luis Alberto Heiremans, and brings together a wealth of data on the subject. It does not, however, offer a valid over-all evaluation of Heiremans' literary production. The way is left open for further research and critical writing in this area.

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## Recent Publications, Materials Received and Current Bibliography

[The following recent publications noted or received by the Editors of the *Latin American Theatre Review* may prove of interest to the readers. Inclusion here does not preclude subsequent review.]

Murch, Anne C. "Genet—Triana—Kopit: Ritual as 'Danse Macabre,'" *Modern Drama*, XV, Number 4 (March 1973), 369-381.

Solórzano, Carlos. *Testimonios teatrales de México*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1973.

*Noticias del teatro húngaro*. Instituto Húngaro del Teatro, Primavera 1973.

Suárez Radillo, Carlos Miguel, "Mayoría de edad del teatro independiente argentino," *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, Número 272 (febrero 1973), 187-200.

González Cajiao, Fernando. *Atabí, o La última profecía de los chibchas*. Ms.

Azparren Giménez, Leonardo. "El teatro venezolano no ha muerto," *Imagen*, No. 81 (15/30 junio 1973), p. 14.

Aguirre, Isidora. *Los que van quedando en el camino*. Santiago de Chile, 1970.

Canepa Gúzman, Mario. *El teatro obrero y social en Chile*. Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Cultura y Publicaciones Ministerio de Educación, 1971.

Rojo, Grínor. *Orígenes del teatro hispanoamericano contemporáneo*. Valparaíso, Chile: Ediciones Universitarias de Valparaíso, 1972.

Olmos, Carlos. *Lenguas muertas*. México: Instituto Nacional de la Juventud Mexicana, 1973.

- Vázquez, Washington R. *Comedias para la sala de clase*. Mimeographed copy. [Obras estrenadas por La Máscara, grupo de teatro experimental del Depto. de Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.]
- Argüelles, Hugo. *The Ever-Tightening Circle* [Translation of *La ronda de la hechizada*]. Mimeographed copy. Presented by The Backstage Theatre, Bloomington, Indiana, October 7, 1972, directed by Teresinha Alves Pereira.
- . *Where Ravens Mourn* [Translation of *Los cuervos están de luto*, by Elizabeth I. Balderas]. Mimeographed copy.
- . *The Miracle Weaver* [Translation of *El tejedor de milagros*, by Elizabeth I. Balderas]. Mimeographed copy.
- Cardona, Iván. "La pasión del teatro puertorriqueño según Luis Rafael Sánchez," *La Hora* (Puerto Rico), Año 3, Edición 79 (2 al 8 de agosto 1973), 12.
- Pereira, Teresinha Alves. *Hetaira* [un acto corto]. Bloomington, Indiana: Backstage Books, 1973.
- Argüelles, Hugo. *Los cuervos están de luto y El tejedor de milagros*. México: Organización Editorial Novaro, 1973.
- Noticias del Teatro Húngaro*. Budapest: Instituto Húngaro de Teatro, Verano 1973.
- International Theatre Informations* (Publications of the International Theatre Institute). Winter, 1973. Spring, 1973.
- Rivarola Matto, José María. *Encrucijada del Espíritu Santo*. Asunción, 1972. [Primer premio concurso de obras teatrales de Radio Charitas, 1972. Ediciones Charitas, No. 2.]
- . *El fin de Chipi González*. Asunción: Ediciones Diálogo, 1965. [Comedia en tres actos.]
- . *La cabra y la flor*. Ms. [Obra dramática en tres actos. Primer premio del segundo concurso nacional de obras teatrales, organizado por Radio Charitas en 1965.]
- Fratti, Mario. *Allende y Olivares—Two Suicides*. Ms. of a one-act play, 5 p.
- Custodio, Alvaro. *El patio de monipodio*. México: Ediciones Teatro Clásico de México, 1973. [Mojiganga en dos actos basada en "Rinconete y Cortadillo," "El celoso extremeño" y fragmentos de otras obras de Miguel de Cervantes.]
- Pereira, Teresinha Alves. *El alma en un hilo*. Bloomington, Indiana: Backstage Books, 1973. [1 act; 10 pp.]
- Heliadora, Bárbara. *Algumas Reflexões sobre o Teatro Brasileiro*. [Conferência pronunciada no Instituto de Artes da Universidade do Rio Grande do Sul em dezembro de 1972.]
- Santana, Rodolfo. *Babel*, a brief play in *Mester* (UCLA: Dept. of Spanish and Portuguese), III, no. 2 (April 1973), 42-56. Preceded by "El Teatro de Rodolfo Santana," by Susana D. Castillo, p. 41.