

Proliferation

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The most remarkable innovation Alonso Alegría, Director of the Peruvian National Theater, has brought to Lima's theatrical scene in 1977 is the *abono*, i.e., a subscription to nine plays per year at truly popular prices. This is of course nothing but a subscription to a repertory, a system widely enjoyed in Germany and England as well as on North American college campuses. Lima's *abono* costs the theatre-goer, per person, the ridiculous sum of 400 *Soles* if he or she wishes to go on Saturdays and Sundays, and only 200 *Soles* if on Thursdays or Fridays. At the exchange rate of 105 *Soles* per dollar (presently; it was 80 *Soles* when the first *abonos* were up for sale) that comes to four dollars for nine shows on weekends, two dollars for the same number of plays on the other days mentioned. The *abono* had been on sale for approximately one month when I was taking my first notes for this report (June 1977) and, amazingly, has not caught on very much: about 500 subscriptions had been sold by then, and these mainly to foreigners living in Lima. The reasons for this lack of interest, as they were given by diverse sources, are (a) *Limeños* are too anarchic to commit themselves beforehand to "cultural duties": they prefer to go to the theatre on the spur of the moment, even if this means paying 100 *Soles* at the box office or risking not getting seats at all; (b) the Peruvian idiosyncrasy is not to look ahead; (c) the people are too poor now even to pay such minimal prices. Since the potboilers do continue to have generally full houses, I am inclined to believe rather in the first two reasons.

The *abono* for 1977 comprises the following productions: *Los conquistadores* (Teatro Nacional Popular) by Hernando Cortéz, quite a good actor and not so good a director; Gogol's *The Inspector General* (Compañía Carlos Gassols); *Edipo Rey* (TNP, under the direction of Alonso Alegría); *Trotsky debè morir* by José B. Adolph (TNP, Alegría), plus one play that is still undetermined, since the one originally planned, *Equus*, got into trouble over the rights: these had been already acquired by Argentine producer and wower of Lima's ladies, Oswaldo Cattone, known for his costly productions of all the old stand-bys (*My*

Fair Lady, *Sound of Music*). The remaining subscription-offerings are plays for children as well as discounts for the purchase of publications by the Instituto Nacional de Cultura and a 25 percent rebate on next year's *abono*.

I was able to see some of the *abono*-plays while in Lima. First, *Los conquistadores*, a piece about precisely these gentlemen, and *The Inspector General*. Later, towards the end of my stay, I also saw *Edipo Rey*. In between, I saw a great number of productions, about some of which more below.

Hernando Cortéz, who also directed his play, takes us with Pizarro and his troop (or troupe) from Panamá to Lima via the Isla de Gallos, Cuzco, etc. I had the suspicion that he wanted to demythify the Conquistadores, take them out of the college or high school history classes, and put them before the spectator in their crassness, cruelty, with their intrigues and their avidity for gold. Strangely enough, in an interview Cortéz mentioned Bertolt Brecht as the one who inspired him to write this play (*Variedades*, 5/22/1977). This, because "Brecht hace mucho teatro histórico," perhaps a doubtful statement as expressed. Anyway, *Los conquistadores* may have a lot in common with the "teatro histórico" (as a lesson for today: "[La intención] es una crítica general a toda forma de conquista, a toda forma de colonización, a toda forma que termine en la invasión de un pueblo por otro más fuerte económicamente, culturalmente"), but it has nothing at all to do with Brecht. As in earlier directorial jobs, Cortéz, even with his own play, showed his lack of vision for the *complete* show, or act, or scene, devoting instead infinite care to their composite parts. This reached comic proportions in a scene where the drunken Conquistadores decide to play *picadores* with some *ñustas* (Inca princesses), surely a psychologically strange switch, especially in view of the fact that some *indios* were made to be the horses on which the Conquistadores sat in that *tercio* with the *pica* against the lady-bulls. As though the *ñustas* were bulls, they get, each one, stuck with the *picas* three or four times, while one single "shafting" would have done away with them for good the first time. And all the while, another *ñusta*, upstage center, sitting on some elevated chair, looks on in utter boredom and as if about to file her nails. No sisterly *ñusta*-solidarity. Cortéz simply forgot her in the overall picture. Unless, of course, he wished to make a comment with this on today's oft-encountered Latin American situation: the exploited exploiting the exploited. The language of the play was nothing memorable, although full of *carajos!* and *coños!*, which still please Lima audiences no end. "No he intentado hacer un lenguaje de la época, sobre todo porque el lenguaje de la época era muy semejante al que ahora usamos," he declared in a rather inconsistent statement. The acting was, with few exceptions, generally poor. A great disappointment was Luis Alvarez, Peru's perhaps best known and veteran actor, capable of excellent work, who simply slopped through his part as Pizarro: his projection was flat despite his mighty voice, his gestures either imprecise or exaggerated. And, as so often and still in Lima, all actors again replaced drama by shouting. You began to wonder if not even the demythified Conquistadores ever sat around quietly, between epic bouts or heinous cruelties, and discussed a sunburn or Lima's specialty, the fleas, or, come to think of it, the multitude of *cucarachas* swarming around the TNP's theatre, *La Cabaña* (an acoustically not very appropriate locale for the country's first company).

The Inspector General, a play I had not seen in years, turned out to be a very

sad disappointment, both because of the acting and because of the literalness of its interpretation. The first two acts were infinitely boring and cold and without anything to capture the audience's fancy or enthusiasm. I was about to leave, but decided to sit out one more act in case it should prove better. It did: the rhythm, the verve, the whole scenic movement picked up considerably. The last three acts, thus, were quite good, fast-paced and, over stretches, funny. Easily the best actor was Fernando Gassols, who really managed to create the figure of the mayor. Carlos Gassols, the false Inspector, was cold and gave the impression of not being quite "with it." That most theatrical scene, for instance, the consecutive paying of bribes to the "Inspector," a scene which, due to its always equal contents, requires a certain character-acting, perhaps even hamming it up, *faute de mieux*, fell flat with a thud: you only saw five people doing, one after the other, the same thing. Equally flat was the scene in which the Inspector woos both mother and daughter. Referring now not only to these two examples, but to the overall concept the director (C. Gasolls) presented of the play, one more, I am sorry to say, *habitual*, defect of Lima's theatrical work in general became noticeable: the already mentioned literalness with which the texts are approached (or, better, left behind). There is rarely any *study* of the text, any *discovery* of *what more* it says, or of the interrelations among the acts and scenes. Everything is taken at face-value and produced on that level. The only one who really attempts to discover texts, their not obvious sinews, their usability in given historical circumstances, is Alonso Alegría. The rest do exactly what the text, on the surface, seems to require, without *interpreting* it. This is true for comedy and for "serious" plays. Basically, what one has to do with is a lack of imagination.

Edipo Rey, by contrast, did show interpretation; in fact, as so often in Alegría's case, almost too much of it. One critic, very well disposed toward the production, even called it "Una bella 'traición,'" significantly (*La Prensa*, 8/27/1977). In an interview, Alegría pointed out a number of important things about his production: (1) Perú had not seen the play for twenty years and "no se tiene memoria de un montaje anterior por una compañía peruana" (from *Suplemento dominical, El Comercio*, 9/4/1977); (2) in the program it says that not a single sentence of the original text has been omitted; but what about additions? "Hay algunas partes en que me he tomado algunas libertades": reiterations, repetitions of references to elements of the myth to make identification easier for the public, etc. And, "Para escribir [!] esta versión consultamos seis traducciones castellanas distintas, dos traducciones inglesas y una traducción francesa"; (3) there was no chorus in the traditional sense: "la mejor solución . . . que usamos: dividir la parte del coro en personajes, ya que como personajes sí son perfectamente asimilables y comprensibles por el público"; and (4) "el elenco es óptimo." This last opinion turned out to be an illusion on the part of the director.

I saw the play in the very worst possible conditions: the presence in the house (that otherwise would have been quite empty) of something like 200 high school kids. Their noise throughout the play and their idiotic comments on the action on the stage, as well as their laughter (peer-directed, as drinking is of late said to be), made it impossible to concentrate on the play. When the first curtain went up and revealed the inevitable huge portal (with sliding-doors, mind you!) in a somber and sinister light, one particularly smart aleck shouted: "Dracula!" which

evidently says something about Peruvian education. Not surprisingly (and in his only known attempt at something like humor), Lima's theatre-critic, self-styled and of rather recent vintage, Alfonso La Torre, whose texts are famous for being always incomprehensible cerebrations, headlined his review with the words, "De 'Drácula' a 'Edipo Rey.'" He had been in the same performance I was.

I think Alegría did a magnificent job, considering the materials he had to work with. Time and again it was visible what he had aimed at, how he knows to squeeze the dramatic juice out of a play (he has a Fellinesque vein, as virtually all his productions so far have proven), and how the total *ambiente* frustrated his endeavors. His one error of judgment, I believe, was permitting the scenery to be built the way it was: a medley of steps, elevations, corners, blocks, and more steps on top of these. The result was that the actors forever had to climb up or climb down to or from cubes too high for natural movement. The acting, as always, was uneven. Perú has a number of very talented actors and actresses, but practically none that have ever been *trained* in their craft. Nor are there, of course, schools that could undertake this. Edipo (Walter Zambrano) was of good voice, average movement, but simply lacked stage-presence, something true for most of the others except Luis Alvarez (Messenger from Corinth) and, at times, Delfina Paredes (Yocasta). Add to this that, due to the high school kids, as of the middle of the tragedy the actors began to rush through their text. Inevitably, certain sequences became shouting-competitions, most unbearable of which was the Servant's (called "El Noble" in Lima) report on Yocasta's death. One thing Alegría did I found very interesting: he made the play circular by closing it with the same tableau that opens it. This made of the play proper a kind of flashback explaining the horrors the spectators assume must have happened before the performance begins. The play thus became something of a detective-story, except that the only one who does not know whodunit is the one whodunit. All in all, a very worthwhile effort.

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Turning away now from official offerings, let me mention other "serious" plays. There was above all García Lorca's *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, directed in the Sala Alcedo by Marcelino Duffau, who to me was unknown, and acted by a group called "La Brecha," of whom I had heard but by whom I had never seen anything. I do not know whether it was the effect of this production (too stark) or not, but seeing the play here, for the first time made me think that, except for the beautiful language (although already somewhat distant), some of Lorca's dramas are becoming rather silly. The solution to Bernarda's and her daughters' problems in today's (non-Spanish *and* Spanish) society are so simple and so easily found that all the fuss about honor and virginity and love and family and sex and desire and what-will-the-neighbors-say is, to put it mildly, rather irritating. Perhaps, however—you certainly could not judge by Lima's permissive society—in Hispanic-influenced societies the Lorcan problems still find some subconscious echo. This one, for instance, "PADRE MATA HIJA POR ENCINTA: La golpeó con una piedra, le disparó un balazo a quemarropa, la decapitó y sepultó la cabeza y el cuerpo en diferentes lugares . . . [todo porque] descubrió que su hija Juana María (16) se hallaba embarazada" (*Ultima Hora*, 6/25/1977, p. 5).

Still, the production by Duffau was well done. Especially the voices of the actresses were uncommonly impressive and articulated with an, in Lima, most

unusual precision and modulation. It was the first production in years in which one could understand *everything* said on the stage. Unfortunately, *again*, the more dramatic sequences, most especially in the last scene, degenerated into shouting-matches. Otherwise, Duffau showed a remarkable sense of style and, more important, knew how to impose it on his actresses, something notoriously difficult among Peruvian actors or actresses, who seldom show an awareness of what style means. The cast was highly disciplined, moved beautifully, managed to produce a rhythm, worked *together*, something virtually unknown on Lima's stages where generally everyone acts off into his or her own direction. Duffau made the production an expressionist one (lights, blocking: periodically, it became a sort of ballet among black-garbed, repressed demons—and sound). The only failure (among a number of technical, not very important mishaps) was, in my opinion—I did not then, and do not at this writing, have at hand the play's text—the casting and the direction of the grandmother: made up like a mummy, she pranced and danced and sang like a filly anxious to be a mare, which probably was meant to be very symbolic. The cast was largely unknown to me but could, I think, easily come close to becoming a model for Lima's theatres, for it managed to keep alive a serious play for an audience that has, these days, no reason whatsoever *not* to seek refuge from Peruvian everyday reality in *frissons* like plays about sexual deviance or nonsense-like sentimental corncocks by A. Paso. It can only be hoped that Duffau does not get discouraged (the cultural bureaucracy is doing its very best to achieve this) and that "La Brecha" keeps together. It will not be easy; Lima has experience and a long tradition in destroying what threatens with quality.

Then there was an interesting experiment by a good director, the Chilean émigré to Perú, Domingo Piga. He used a *very* short playlet by the Peruvian poet Gonzalo Rose on the each year more mythical figure of the guerrillero-poet Javier Heraud (killed in a gruesome manner in the final phase of the guerrillas and their extinction by the Peruvian Army in 1965) and attempted to make a production out of it that would last longer than the ten or so minutes it takes to read the text. Rose's vignette uses quotes from Heraud's poetry and letters and accompanies them by his own interpretation of "moments" in Heraud's life. The play, accordingly, is called *Momentos con Javier* and won, a few years ago, the yearly prize of the Teatro Universitario de San Marcos (TUSM) for one-acters. It is a tender text, at times interlarded with a bitter humor, that Rose imagines to have been spoken, as a conversation, by the poet and his girl friend in a Lima park. As so often, floridity interferes, but the over-all effect is quite touching and poetically convincing. No surprise, because Gonzalo Rose indeed is an excellent poet, among the best who write today. Piga "blew up" the text by projections, recitals of Heraud's poems and letters and by the reading of an excerpt from a fiction on Heraud's last moments, i.e. Piga made Rose's play proliferate. The procedure worked quite well. Unfortunately, however, Piga introduced a moralizing, didactic element which, it was my impression, was incomprehensible for the spectators (the motliest crowd I ever saw in a theatre: children who cried, servants, old men, *enamorados*, high school kids, and *machitos* from the neighborhood. Entrance to the TUSM productions is free). Piga had a youngster (originally it had been two, but one went on to appear in some other productions)

imitate, with vroom-vroom and all, riding around on a motorcycle, twice. The first time, the boy only *wanted* one; the second time, he *owned* one. Lesson: compare Heraud's idealism with today's kids' materialism. Aside from this bit of inorganic business, the production was not unimpressive. Unfortunately, even with these additions, the play was uncommonly short: less than forty minutes. Basically, what one had to do with was an homage to Heraud. Out in the vestibule, there was an exhibition of Heraud items—letters, photos, etc.—that attracted crowds even after the production closed; the exhibition in fact had to be reopened upon popular demand.

Towards the end of my stay in Lima, I was able to see *Equus*. Oswaldo Cattone had done an excellent job. As I remember, it is approximately four or five times that I have seen Peruvian-produced "serious" plays in Lima in whose course I felt that they were what theatre can and perhaps should be. One was the Velásquez brothers' *Marat / Sade*, a few years ago, another Alonso Alegría's *Hamlet* of last year and his *Waiting for Godot* at the outset of his career. In comedy, I would mention Elvira Travesí's *Mariposa*, *Mariposa* and some of the work put on by the Velásquez brothers, and that is it. Now I have a new "serious" experience to remember, *Equus*. Cattone's production ran with perfect smoothness, was audible even up in the last rows of the mezzanine (a miracle in Lima), where I landed since I had not bought my tickets in advance. The lighting was skill- and effectful, the acting uneven but at least of a certain quality, the dramatic moments sculpted, as it were, with care and a sense of how the interplay between stage and audience works and can be shaped. The set was of solid quality and tasteful, the sound always under control. Upon buying tickets, the spectator discovered attached to his program a black note which read, in white letters: "Una vez comenzado el espectáculo estará terminantemente prohibido el ingreso a la sala," a great idea in Lima but entirely impossible to enforce: people came in late anyway. Cattone played the physician, but he is no impacting actor. The boy was played by W. Taiman, a newcomer and natural acting talent. He was very good and of course very naked in the famous climactic scene: Lima's very first nude scene, which the audiences took in stride except for the older generation, who kept their murmurings to their age-group. The girl was splendidly naked too, but somehow male nudity seems to shock more: only Taiman's was commented on, not the girl's. The rest of the cast was between mediocre and pale. Enrique Victoria, as the boy's father, was uncommonly bad. "Uncommonly," because he is normally a quite experienced actor and not by far so bad as he was in *Equus*. It is known of course that Peter Shaffer, for this play, prescribes contractually that the staging has to follow the first English production down to the smallest details. This caused, among Lima critics and *méchants* some hectic lip-moving and tongue-wagging, but did no damage to the enjoyment of the play. They forgot to differentiate between having such prescriptions existing and being able to fill them. Cattone was. For a while; for the show had a much shorter run than expected (though always to full houses). This, because after about four weeks and when I had already left Lima, the show had become too much of a routine: the actors raced through their texts, as I was informed, were bored with their roles, above all young Taiman who declared that there were more interesting things to do than hop around naked each evening. Taiman is the

second revelation as an actor Lima has had in the last few years. He follows in the footsteps of one Robert Moll, also a most talented actor, though untrained, who came to the fore about three years ago. Both Taiman and Moll have left Perú and are looking for more luminous horizons.

There were still other "serious" plays, but they will be mentioned in different contexts.

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There can no longer be any doubt about it, Lima is being bathed and swaddled by a wave and the twaddle of gay liberation, although, to judge by the city's streets at night, they certainly do not *need* any liberation. Three shows were in gay power's service, one very well done, the other two very badly. The former is *Los muchachos de la banda* by Mart Crowley, directed by Edgar Guillén, the latter two *Trevor* by John Bowen and *El sordo cielo* by Michael Soringel (according to the newspapers), both directed by Efraín Rajman with a group split off from the Club de Teatro and staged in the Teatro de la AAA (Asociación de Artistas Aficionados) and in the locale of Histrión (the Velásquez brothers' house), respectively. Guillén did his production in the Teatro Arlequín (an ex-movie-theatre with sad acoustics).

As on an earlier occasion, with *El amor de los unos y de los otros* [see *LATR*, 9/2 (Spring 1976), 81], Edgar Guillén as a director—as an actor, in non-gay plays, he is rather mediocre—had come into his own. The show was very fast-paced, in parts hilarious, uncommonly (for Lima) skillful in its blocking of the "mass-scenes," in its timing (a theatrical exigency otherwise in the most woeful doldrums in Lima's theatres), but very uneven in its acting. The reason for the latter is the usual: bad articulation. Nobody ever seems to be able to teach Limeñan actors the technique of pronunciation on stage. Add to this the feminoid speaking habits rampant in this "Ciudad de los Reyes" and you get a salad of vowels and consonants that adds nothing lucid to the enjoyment of the offering. Still, the show was excellent, the scenic effects impressive. Guillén himself, in the lead (as the host of the party) was quite splendid during the first half of the play, but became increasingly mannered during the "telephone-game," in the final scene even unbearable. And, again, shouting replaced drama. "No pueden con su genio," as they say in Perú's capital. Even so, the production was lively, rapid, skillfully staged, one of the best I saw in this chameleonic season, especially if one considers that comedy, although seemingly so predestined for the highly frivolous Limeñan ambience, as a rule just does not work there, professionally.

Proof of this were the other two "liberationist" shows, *Trevor* and *El sordo cielo*. It is not that the (amateur) actors in either play were really *bad*. They were "all right" (in another play, perhaps), even had, some of them, a certain stage-presence, knew (except for Jane, in *Trevor*) how to project, even the sets were, while very tight, quite manageable by them. And yet, comedy it was not, and "stark drama" even less. I always count the laughs in Lima: in *Trevor* there were, during the ninety minutes it lasted, altogether *three* (excepting those by the claque, whose efforts were not emulated by the audience, which must have made the claque feel rather silly). I thought a long time about why *Trevor* did not come off. My conclusion was that it, literally, did not come across the foot-lights. The ensemble was not reacting to the audience. Had the people left the

AAA-theater, the actors would, it seemed, have gone right on acting, so intent were they to "do this show." In comedy, this lack of exchange between audience and stage is deadly. *El sordo cielo* was merely crude. Anyway, the Teatro AAA has a very *simpático* little bar, something no other Lima theatre has.

While we are dealing with poor productions, I must mention *Ifigenia en el mercado*, a play by Sebastián Salazar Bondy, Perú's effective and relatively recent savior of the national theatre (he died, unexpectedly and too young, in 1965). I include this production here because Salazar Bondy belongs to the Peruvian classics by now. He was a multi-talented playwright, poet, short story writer, journalist, and even, half-heartedly, a novelist, mentor of people like Mario Vargas Llosa, Luis Loayza, and others. You would expect, then, that his works would be produced with care, love, and veneration. Sometimes it is: I remember seeing, some years back, in Lima's Club de Teatro, a kind of homage to him: scenes from his plays, recitals of his poetry, etc. The theatrical part was done by the Velásquez brothers, and one scene they did from *Ifigenia* brought the house down. Nothing of this in the production I am commenting: the actors did not know their parts, the musical and dance interludes were absurd and even more inorganic than they always are in musicals. The acting was shamelessly amateurish, in fact *was* no acting at all; the sound ("fonomímica") atrocious. I left after the first half, wondering how these people even dared to charge admission. Sebastián Salazar Bondy, no *great* writer, but an agile and at times brilliant one, deserved better than that. It was sad to see this abuse of a play of his. Significantly, the production was done in the *sala* of the Ministry of Education, the Pardo y Aliaga.

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Comedy: During my stay in Lima, there were, as always, (1) a brainless, mushily sentimental little thing by Paso, *Cosas de papá y mamá*, a vehicle for sturdy Spanish actress Lola Vilar, who has become something of an institution among Lima's grandmothers, mothers, cooks, and secretaries. As Alonso Alegría remarked astutely in one interview I had with him: "People come to see Lola *as* such or such *personaje*, not a play in which a *personaje* is played by her. Ultimately, it's always Lola Vilar playing Lola Vilar, and people love her." They love her because her vehicles are always saturated with "values" dating from 1900 to 1930. The show produced thousands of laughs (six of my own), was played with the corn growing higher than the actors' heads, some very comical setpieces (a tango danced by Orlando Sacha, a good Argentine actor long resident in Perú, and Lola, which was not really a tango for anybody who has ever seen it danced, but even so great business, precisely because of the business both actors developed around it), and was directed by Señora Vilar's husband, Leonardo Torres, on the stage of the Entre Nous. Lola Vilar has a maddening habit of breaking, and making the other actors break, only to turn it into a laugh for the audience, to whom she throws kisses and grins and then stares at with big eyes of mock-surprise. Any line, in any play, that can be twisted into a reference to her attractively wide—and always *kitschily* dressed—figure is milked for all it can get, and more, in applause. She is an experienced and sovereign actress who quite simply satisfies a need for comical corn among Lima's ladies. As such, she deserves a kind of applause. Acting, she is a Latin version of Beatrice Arthur, only

not with the same histrionic range. She could have stepped out of a novel by Corín Tellado.

(2) *Zarzuelas*: I saw two, out of a repertory of about twenty. The troupe pretends to be Spanish but is only in part. Its director is Faustino García, who comes to Lima every year for three months and has his steady public. The vocal talent, in the *zarzuelas* I saw, is highly uneven. The acting is good among the old-timers, bad or non-existent among the people García picks up on his tours: Colombians, Chileans, Ecuadorians. Enjoying *zarzuelas* is a habit. I do not have it.

(3) Elvira Travesí: This actress is a phenomenon. I have seen her many times over the years and she has always impressed me. In 1976, she finally managed to get what must have been her dream for years: her own theatre. It is a "café-teatro," a fact that augurs badly, for the Limeñan "café-teatros" are of unparalleledly bad taste. But what "la Travesí" has done so far in her "Atico" is not at all bad. She picks plays that are vehicles for her, i.e., things that as a rule are not very bright. But how she "drives" the vehicles! I saw her in *Mariposa*, *Mariposa*, a play by Aldo Benedetti that has a funny—textually speaking—first act and then drops into absurd and melodramatic mush in the second act. But "la Travesí" brings it off. She is probably the only great Peruvian actress of these days. Better known from television—I have never seen her in that medium, because in Lima I have no set—when she acts on stage, she is overpowering: she is a real professional and a *comédienne* of the purest *estirpe*. Her presence on stage is magnetic, engrossing to a degree that makes you forget the text's mediocrity. In *Mariposa*, *Mariposa* she played a matron of admittedly very dubious past, brainless and egoistic, who pines after men who no longer seek her because she is too old. From her first entrance, she electrifies, making you—at any rate, me—wonder how she could ever have conquered Lima's general climate of mediocrity and hatred of excellence.

(4) Others: *El último de los amantes ardientes* was put on in the Sala Salcedo by Luis la Rocca, another Argentine, and three actresses, of whom two are worth mentioning: Elvira Alcantré, who has a very distinct style of acting but was not meant for this play, and Myrna Bracamonte, who has a very beautiful body but tends to charge her parts outrageously. All in all, the comedy did not come off very well but bore watching. It is one of the characteristics of Lima theatre that plays which are not particularly good show this so much more because there is no real tradition of "comedy acting," no skill in it that would in a performance compensate for the weaknesses of the text. This Neil-play—it is not his best, certainly—proved this perfectly.

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One of the remarkable developments in Lima's theatrical offerings—aside from the astounding proliferation of new groups and shows—is their "teatro para niños." The trend was begun, years ago, by Sara Jofré with her group "Los Grillos." In a small, primitive *sala* she started offering shows for kids, employing quite respectable actors (Aurora Colina, for instance). The theatre, being located rather far from the two theatrical centers of Lima, i.e., from the center itself of the city and Miraflores (the second and by far more agreeable center of the town), slowly developed a following—and, without doubt, made good money—which

served as a precedent for the subsequent "boom" of children's theatres ("shows," at any rate). They become active usually on weekends. Open any Lima newspaper on Saturday and Sunday and you will find a long list of "Teatro para Niños." On Sunday, August 7, 1977, for example, no fewer than eight different groups put on plays. This is quite an impressive number. I cannot judge the shows' quality because I have never gone to see any of them.

As for the "teatro de la calle," it has pretty much disappeared and been replaced by what might be termed *circus* "de la calle," fire-eaters, not very skillful magicians, and blowers of endless, terribly sad-sounding Andean horns.

On the other hand, what has begun about a year or so ago, finally having penetrated to Lima, is the experimental theatre or, as it is also known, "la investigación teatral." The schools being emulated are the Living Theatre, Buena-ventura's Colombian experiments, totally misunderstood Grotowsky and the old street-rituals of the San Francisco Mime Theatre in the days of President Johnson and after. I saw only one such result of this "investigación teatral." Its perpetrators were the members of the group Cuatrotablas, a collection of amateurs who a few years ago put on a quite well-done show, *Perú*, a medley of songs, one-acters topical and farcical, all of them terribly revolutionary but ideologically and esthetically very muddle-headed. The group later put on *Bajo las patas de los caballos del sol* by the Ecuadorian dramatist and poet Jorge Enrique Adoum, a production I was not able to see and of which I was only told that it was effective and that the group had travelled to Europe with it. What they offered this time, in the Pardo y Aliaga, was utter nonsense, the result of God knows what but certainly not of any "theatrical research." The audience had to sit on the stage in a quadrangle within which the "show" took place: lots of stamping of feet, jumping into the air, drumming, thumping, singing (quite catchy tunes), amateur acrobatics, all of it without any visible or guessable center of purpose. When the cavorting subsided, the "action" began, although nobody knew what it was. It appeared to *want* to be some sort of cosmogonic ritual as seen by Peruvian indios with both whispered and shouted comments in what seemed to be Quechua. Having heard about this Quechua-aspect beforehand, I requested the company of a native Quechua-speaker who told me afterwards: "*That's* not Quechua! It's gibberish with a few Quechua words. *You* can learn those words in one hour, maybe in less time. If that's research, I'll open my own Smithsonian tomorrow." Perhaps the group was attempting to imitate that P. Brooks' experiment of a few years ago. Still, after the rituals there came some mimed scenes which suffered from the fact that the actors (?) were no mimes, and so it went on and on, winding up with a resumption of the initial hopping and jumping and shouting and drumming. Cuatrotablas wants to go to Europe with this show and wow them there. And for next year, they plan a Congreso Internacional de Investigadores Teatrales in, of all unlikely places, Ayacucho.

A few days later I happened to be in Cali when Buenaventura was given a doctor *honoris causa* by the Universidad del Valle. The occasion brought with it long reports in the papers as well as a one-hour TV program on his and his group's work. It was fascinating to see a *real* experiment, which moreover even made sense.

UPDATE:

I was back in Lima for three weeks in December 1977. The *cartelera* had shrunk considerably (December through March are the summer months there). *Cosas de papá y mamá* was in its eighth month! *Los muchachos de la banda* went through its third *reprise*, with almost the same cast, this time in the Teatro Arequipa. Edgar Guillén had taken the play off briefly in order to produce his version of Anouilh's *Orquesta de señoritas*, done by actors in drag and the play brought up to 1977. I did not see the production as it closed soon because the Histrión group also had put it on, also in drag, with the Velásquez brothers (one of whom recently died) as the stars. I did see this (period-) production in the Sala Alcedo. It was funny in a gross way, certainly not subtle, as Guillén's production had been, I was told.

In the *café-teatro* circuit I went to see only Elvira Travesí and her daughter Gloria María Ureta, in another Benedetti play, *De jueves a jueves*, a stupid piece, even after the free drink you get. La Travesí, touchingly yet unfortunately, throughout the play limited her acting strictly to playing up to her daughter, who is a professional but in no way so impressive a presence as her mother is. One thing that struck me very forcefully in the very few scenes in which, with her daughter off-stage, La Travesí was able to come through "fully," was her astounding handling of pauses: she is a superb actress. Rumors have it that she plans to do, outside the *café-trago* chain, Brecht's *Mother Courage*. I hope I won't miss it.

Of the TNP-repertory (Alonso Alegría), Adolph's prize-winning *Trotsky debe morir* was on at La Cabaña when I arrived in Lima. Having just fled from the cold and snowy North, I did not, the first few days of my stay, wish to expose myself to the cold of dialectical thought; unfortunately, that is why I missed the production altogether: it was taken off for lack of public interest. The reviews of this Alegría-production I had a chance to read seemed rather puzzled or so "hintellectualized" (Alfonso La Torre's), as Cortázar would say, that one had no idea what the critic was talking about. Instead of *Trotsky*, Alegría put back on his *Edipo Rey*, a production that, according to Alegría himself, enjoyed increasing public interest and good audiences. I was unable to reach José B. Adolph for his comments. Concerning the *abono*, the exchange-rate this time was 1 US\$ = 136.50 Soles.

The rest of the offerings were *Dos hombres en la mina* by Ferenc Herzeg (?) at the Sala ENAE by the Teatro de la Universidad San Marcos; *Apenas una mujer* by Arakan Vaz Galvao at the Teatro de la A.A.A.; *El canto de la cigarra* at El Arlequín with Luis la Rocca and Elva Alcantré; *Ellos y yo* at the Corral de Comedias; and Oswaldo Cattone's return to *schmalz* with *Gigi* in the Teatro Marsano. I tried to see them all, but since the papers consistently announced days and times of performance erroneously, I finally gave up after having gone to the theaters several times and found them closed.

The year-end reviews of the papers, most extensively in *El Comercio* (1/1/78) mentioned under "Exitos de cartelera" for 1977 Lola Vilar's already mentioned *Cosas . . .*, *Equus*, Reynaldo d'Amore and Ofelia Woloshin in a *pot-pourri* of love-scenes called *Un tiempo de amar y un tiempo de odiar* at the Club de Teatro, a show with which both actors went on tour in Venezuela. Foreign troupes were rare in 1977 since the country has no money to spend on them. 1978 is to begin

with Calderón's *auto sacramental*, *El gran teatro del mundo*, under the direction of Ricardo Roca Rey, excellent and experienced regisseur, with Saby Kamalich and Ricardo Blume, both today movie-stars in Mexico and returning especially to Lima for this production, which is to take place in the atrium of Lima's San Francisco Church.

One "scoop": in an interview, Alonso Alegría told me that his new play, the verse-version of his "El terno blanco," is almost finished. Something to look forward to, no doubt. It is to be hoped that it meets with the same success his *El cruce sobre el Niágara* enjoyed, above all in England and the two Germanies.

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