

Here and There: Some Peruvian and Some Colombian Theatre

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Lima must today be one of the saddest cities in the world, even a depressing one in the winter months (June through November, more or less). The traveller reaching its airport with its meaningless but duplicate entry-formalities, and its painfully disorganized, even chaotic customs area, is overwhelmed immediately by the melancholy of Peru's capital: the grey and dreary sky, the polluted air, the clammy, cold and yet sweaty air, the dirt and the public carelessness about it visible all over, the few green areas strewn with what look like the contents of trash-cans or trampled down as with a vengeance into a brownish, bare, and sticky sod. And everywhere poverty. The old center of Lima (Plaza San Martín and its surroundings) has become one huge, sprawling and spilling mass of carts dispensing cheap food and leaving behind them nightly an ankle-deep, slimy, and pestiferous morass. No surprise that the smell of cooking-oil ("*Cocinero, de los buenos el primero*") pervades the city at all hours. And then there is of course the noise of all the thousands of cars honking their horns *porque sí*, the street manifestations, dispersed by the ominous-looking, water-shooting armored cars, and the countless street vendors selling simply everything, and then some, and occupying the sidewalks in such breadth that the pedestrian has to maneuver most skill- and carefully so as not to step on one *chuchería* or another. In a way, these *vendedores ambulantes* are the most admirable people of Lima: over many years, none of the so many and repeated police actions against them has ever been able to remove them and give the streets, not even the most central ones, back to the pedestrians. Also, they are said to be the only ones who indeed still handle cash, and supposedly millions of *soles*. Taxfree.

Even the comedies offered in Lima strike one as sad, though for different reasons. In one word: Lima has become the epitome of what might be termed the surrealism of poverty. But read the papers, and you wouldn't know it.

During this summer of 1978, research obligations kept me from spending

my usual length of time in Lima. But I doubt that I missed much, for the *cartelera* was minimal, if we exclude children's theatre, the *café-teatros*, and the very few street theatres that can very occasionally still be seen. The perhaps most interesting event, the international meeting of the so-called "Third Theatre" in Ayacucho, which had already concluded when I arrived in Peru, needs to be dealt with separately and not exclusively from a Peruvian perspective. Of Lima's commercial offerings during my weeks there, barely two are worth mentioning and commenting on.

Taking at random the column "En los teatros" of *La Prensa* of 6/13/1978, we find listed seven plays, of which one was not even being shown any more (the papers, as the press so often does in Lima, just kept on listing it because nobody went to the trouble to eliminate it from the column). That phantom play was *Farsa conyugal* by, as *La Prensa* insisted on spelling him, Alan Ayb Burn (Ayckbourn), directed by Alonso Alegría for the Grupo de Teatro Hebraico. The consensus of informed opinion was that it represented one of Alegría's better productions. More about the director of the Peruvian National Theatre below.

The other plays listed on 6/13/1978 were such fascinating items as *La sexy y el inocente* by one Joe Makia, a boulevard nonsense over which some of the most inept "musical" ingredients had been poured: phonomimic songs, a few dance numbers of grotesque and sleepy choreography performed by depressed dancers, lots of naked legs, hairy and shaved, and of course much shouting. A similar nonsense was veteran Lola Vilar's *El poder del sexo débil* by Carlos Llopis, directed by Leonardo Torres, Señora Vilar's husband. The actress' defects, mentioned in earlier reports, have reached outrageous dimensions; she no longer wishes to make only the audience laugh, now it is also her colleagues. She ad-libs for long stretches—not very funnily—at a time, throwing off, naturally, all the timing, so that frequently all actors start talking at the same time, and the most perseverant one wins. Any small (and of course unplanned) business that produces a laugh, she repeats up to ten times in a row. Since the *público*, *her* audience, laughs at virtually anything Lola does, it is easy to imagine what the show was like. It is a pity, for Spanish Señora Vilar is an experienced *comédienne*. As evidenced in this production, she has thrown professional responsibility and the famous Spanish *pundonor* to the winds.

Two productions that did remain on a professional level were Osvaldo Cattone's *Lluvia* (Maugham's old hat) and *La cama* (Jan de Hartog's *The Fourposter*), the first in Cattone's Teatro Marsano, and the second in the *simpático* Teatro de la AAA. Argentine Cattone is a thorough professional (though a better producer than an actor), has excellent collaborators, and knows how to *organize* a production. For the role of the prostitute he brought in Argentine Inda Ledesma, who charged her part strongly but to a still bearable degree. The rest of the cast was mediocre. Although it would appear almost impossible to do, Cattone, directing, managed to keep the relationship between the Reverend and the prostitute totally without the erotic tension so necessary if the play is not to be an aseptic discussion about sin and redemption. Although hardly anybody can be ignorant anymore of the drama's story, the final "fall" of the man of the cloth came abruptly and, as it were, almost as a surprise. The set was gaudily impressive (a very nice rain effect); only the sound constantly interfered with

the actors' lines; one simply could not hear what they said. Even so the production was the only one during my brief stay in Lima that exuded the atmosphere a good, paying bourgeois expects in a theatre. Cattone is the only truly theatrical entrepreneur Lima has, which more and more is causing resentment among the acting community. One comical aspect of the show was that the four supporting actors (the soldiers) all looked like Cattone. He himself this time did not appear in the play. His next role and production is to be *Othello*. Theatre-journalist Jorge Chiarella Kruger, in the Sunday supplement of *El Comercio* of 8/20/1978, p. 17, after an interview with Cattone, felt compelled to insert a personal statement, "Justa indignación," white on black, in which he proclaims: "Justa indignación ha causado en la gente de teatro que un grupo de conocidas personas, evidenciando con una temeraria afirmación su desconocimiento del desarrollo escénico en nuestra ciudad, haya publicado que gracias al talento y a la labor de Osvaldo Cattone se debe particularmente el renacimiento teatral contemporáneo en Lima. Nos sumamos al rechazo de tan imprudente concepto porque con él se quiere borrar de un plumazo la labor que vienen cumpliendo profesionales de prestigio, instituciones reconocidas, grupos de teatro para niños y trabajadores del teatro popular." A semiotic study of these words would result in interesting revelations . . . in favor of Cattone.

La cama was done by another Argentine actor, long-time resident in Peru, Orlando Sacha, and by Elvira de la Puente, his wife. It was skillfully done, though with *la brocha gorda*. Sra. de la Puente played Anna too much like a cutsie-girl, and both hammed it up heavily, squeezing the tear-ducts liberally. Director was Ricardo Roca Rey, an excellent director, who knew well how to handle the pacing. The blocking seemed awkward at times (too much furniture on the stage), and the business too often relied on meaningless fiddling around with chairs, and on cigarettes being lit and immediately extinguished. All in all, an enjoyable evening though rather too thick in sentimentality.

As for the rest of the offerings, nothing was worthwhile mentioning here, except perhaps the ICPNA's (Instituto Cultural Peruano-Norteamericano) non-commercial and amateur theatrical group with three one-acters by Tennessee Williams, lovingly produced but stuck with non-actors. The specific Williams quality did at no time come through.

There were one and a half productions worth seeing outside the commercial circuit with more or less professional actors. The one, at the Teatro Universitario de San Marcos, was the première of César Vega Herrera's prize-winning (1976) long one-acter *El padrino*; the half one was Brecht's *Un hombre es un hombre*, staged by the group of the Alliance Française in that institution's little theatre.

Vega Herrera is a very talented playwright with already a goodly number of mainly short plays to his credit. His best known is *Ipacankure* (1969), from whose original production (1970) one actor, Alberto Mendoza, migrated through time to take the lead in *El padrino*. The female lead was interpreted by Volga Santos, who turned out to be a revelation; she has an excellent voice and good control over it, a natural acting talent, and a very forceful presence which completely overshadowed her partner's, to an embarrassing degree in the violent scenes (something I believe was the director's fault). Mendoza, too, has a good voice, articulates well, but proved to be physically too hamstrung and insecure.

Director of this staging was Eduardo Hopkins, theatre critic of Lima's *La Prensa*. The play—"con diversos elementos . . . del género de la radio y telenovela . . . [con] frases hechas, un vocabulario tomado del cine, de la publicidad, del periodismo, de las fotonovelas" (Hopkins interviewed, Supplem. of *El Comercio*, 8/13/1978)—is about a supposedly poor couple (whose poverty never shows) who have made a suicide pact and presents, with flashbacks and ghostlike appearances of her parents or their voices, what they talk about, remember, regret, recreate, acting themselves in earlier stages of their lives, their past together. Sadly enough, the spectator never knows *why* they should have made the pact. The mechanically invoked "alienation" is void of meaning. Beside this basic flaw of the text, the dialogues often take unexpected turns that show no inherent logic. *El padrino*, while ambitious, is not one of César Vega's better plays. The direction added to the confusion, as Hopkins never was able to delineate clearly what the relationship was between the flashbacks and the dialogues into which they were inserted. Also, too often the woman's vocal violence was unmotivated. In reenacting scenes from the couple's three years of courtship, Volga Santos was by far too mordant and aggressive to make the spectator believe in the love between the two. It is not enough to repeat and repeat and repeat, as the text does, that the two love each other ever so much; we want to see and believe it. What probably happened was that there were too few run-throughs of the *whole* play and too much emphasis on rehearsing its individual scenes. The lighting was evidently meant to be full of profound meaning but struck me as capricious. Still, the production ran smoothly (except for the sound equipment, which, while always on cue, suffered from deficient reproduction), the actors knew their lines (an achievement for first nights in Lima), the pace was well-set and sensibly varied in the individual scenes, and the acting better than most you see in Peru. All in all, an interesting evening. It is to be hoped that at least Volga Santos soon gets a chance at a bigger play and perhaps a more substantial role.

Un hombre es un hombre was dominated by a woman. The first part was acceptable, the second a horrendous mess. Sonia Seminario, as the Widow, charged outrageously and, worse, even attempted to sing, which was most embarrassing. The most famous song, "Soldaten wohnen / auf den Kanonen" (I don't know what its Spanish version might be), was left out, which was just as well, considering the vocal "talents" available. The scene with the sale of the "elephant" and the subsequent events, as well as the sequence of the humiliation of the Sargeant were preposterously staged, and neither clicked into its plot function. The night of the "première" there were ten people in the audience.

Now, as promised, a few words about Alonso Alegría. The *abono* about which I reported in my last article, is dead; too little interest in the public at large. Moreover, no theatre, since *La Cabaña*, the National Peruvian Theatre's ill-suited "home," was being remodeled. A. Alegría's play *El terno blanco*, of by now apparently eternal "just-about-to-come-out"-ness, according to news reports has finally been definitely finished. At this writing (October, 1978), Alegría has staged, for the second time after about ten years, his adaptation of Mario Vargas Llosa's *nouvelle Los cachorros*. The first production was a sensation and ingenious. This second one got mixed reviews (according to the newspaper clip-

pings sent me); Alfonso La Torre, the most incomprehensible theatre-critic of Lima, became comprehensible and tore the production to bits. Mario Vargas Llosa is said to have been pleased and to have offered Alonso Alegría his second play (the first was *La huida del Inca*, 1952, staged by the author himself in Piura), "La señorita de Tacna," for production by the Peruvian National Theatre. The newspaper reports on this latest *Los cachorros* production are too conflicting in their descriptions to be reliable for an attempt at synthesizing them.

The plays put on in Lima after my departure and partially still showing at this writing, are: *Drácula*, of course, with Elvira Travesí and Alfredo Bouroncle; Cattone's *Othello* (after this, he has promised, he will return to *schmaltz*, in order to finance his next serious production); Regina Alcover in *Espíritu travieso* (*Blythe Spirit*).

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Coming to Colombia—Cali or Bogotá—is quite an experience. First of all, it is warm and the sun shines (in Cali that is; in Bogotá, as García Márquez is said to have said, it rains 400 days a year). Second, the place appears clean, has flowers literally waving at you (the wind in the afternoon, when most international flights arrive), and people run around in shirts and khaki-pants; if you wear a coat, they stare at you. This contrast can be seen already in Quito, if on your way to Cali you have to stay over in that town (don't ever trust the clock at the airport, and if you think you understand what the loudspeakers announce, first go and see *Mon oncle's M. Hulot*) for a sufficient number of hours to permit you a quick taxi tour through the city. Also, Cali has a nice little river, called Cali and in danger of dehydration because, for mysterious reasons, *caleños* are fond of burning down the woods that surround the town, reducing thus the ecological supply of whatever it is that makes rivers rivers. Along that river and early in the morning and, above all, if you do it, on that side of the Cali that is advisable for tourists, you can jog. On the other side of its course, you are likely to get mugged. As I was. Next, Cali is where Enrique Buenaventura now works and lives and where his Teatro Experimental de Cali (TEC) is. Finally, Cali is the town where interesting graffiti meet you on the prominent walls along the streets to your hotel. I remember two: "Rompe la cordura / Instálate en la locura" (corner of Avenida Colombia and Calle Quinta, where I also saw this): "Somoza, ahora / te liliputeaste." Colombians themselves, too, often call their fatherland, even in the papers (wh ϵ , for once, not worrying about which columnist writes better Spanish), "Locolumbia."

Part of the "locura" appears to manifest itself in the truly striking violence. It is, if you can trust the papers—which, by the way, are at astounding liberty to criticize the government and the administrative branches, and do—of such insane arbitrariness and savage cruelty that a visitor has to ask himself whether these crimes' perpetrators had apprenticed themselves to Ilse Koch or to Mengele. What is more, remembering the sadistic, truly sickening outrages of which you have read during the day, when you go to the theatre, its inevitable political and revolutionary exhortations simply appear unreal.

I saw little theatre in Cali, simply because there was very little of it during the two months I spent there (July and August of 1978). Still, even so I was fortunate enough in being able to see two TEC productions. One was "La orgía,"

part of Buenaventura's *Papeles del infierno*, and *El fantoche lusitano* (short title) by Peter Weiss in Buenaventura's adaptation. Both productions used "la brocha gorda," which is all right with me if it is done intelligently and *professionally*. In both cases it was. The political messages were roughly the same in both productions and so thick that you could effectively spoon feed them. What is perhaps most astounding in Buenaventura's directorial work is his scenic ingenuity. With a minimum of props and costumes he devises effects that are astounding. To describe them would dilate this text over too many pages. Yet, "brocha gorda" and all, the use of these manifold effects never is gratuitous or enjoyed for itself because somebody thought of it. The sum of Buenaventura's devices shows very clearly a strong and knowing, not to say cunning, *Stilwillen*, i.e. a will to style, something so woefully absent in much of Latin America's theatre. The TEC's actors and actresses are not actors in the sense of any high art of acting. On the contrary, they invariably stress the acrobatic ingredient of that art, to some extent the circus dimension, especially the clowns' techniques, as well as the mimes' skills. And yet, what they offer and how they perform and make use of the public's receptivity, for politics or for simple entertainment, is so engaging, so well orchestrated, and done with that proverbial "gusto," that even the "esthetes" cannot really criticize it; at least not the *theatricality* of it. The cast speaks (projects) well, is audible all over the TEC's rather primitive theatre, and feels *sure* of itself. This is in marked contrast with so many other experimental groups in Latin America, in the course of whose productions one so often is embarrassed for the actors, for the starkly visible strain on their faces and the trembling of their bodies due to their desperate *effort* to appear natural. Buenaventura is, I think, a very great director. I am not sufficiently familiar with his texts to be able to judge them. "La orgía" did not strike me as a particularly valuable play, though throughout it there were many moments when verbal brilliance or playful textual effects captivated me. The play is about a middle-aged and -class widow who, in periodic ritual attempts at recalling her more or less wholesome youth, on a certain day each month hires the poor, the dumb, the deaf, the wounded and the miserable—the exploited, in other words—to act out for her and with her, scenes from her "glorious" past. In exchange for this, they get fed and (poorly) paid. The author's political intention is too obvious to need elaboration here.

What was said above about the directorial achievement in "La orgía," is valid also for the *Fantoche lusitano*. Politically, the play came off very badly, because history has shattered the hopes it expressed for the exploited in Portugal's ex-colonies. Moreover, "libertad" has long lost its pious value as a catch-phrase. We know, and in reality have long known, what comes after liberation, and that "liberación" tends to be invoked and pushed through too often by dubious liberators on either side of a given fence.

The third play I saw in Cali, at the TEC stage, was a terrible let-down. It was the "recreación" by one Fanor Terán and his group, "La Cuchilla," of an *entremés* by Cervantes, as the papers proclaimed, and called "La elección." I do not know the *entremés*, and therefore cannot judge what Terán has made of it. What I *saw* was third-rate and, lamentably, on the level so characteristic of the work Latin American experimental groups tend to deliver. Again, gross effects

were aimed at, and definitely achieved, but they lacked completely the theatrical ingenuity of Buenaventura's group. The only "actor" who was comprehensible throughout his diverse appearances, was a little boy of about twelve years. All the others belonged, while some had good voices but constantly abused them, to the shouting-until-you-burst school. As for movement on the stage—there really isn't any "stage" at the TEC: the place is like a gymnasium with football seating on one end—the group clearly had no idea of even the fundamentals. In exchange, the audience was regaled with that apparently incurable illness of experimental groups before their shows really begin; tedious and lengthy gymnastics and breathing exercises, with a jump here, a skip there, some duo-acrobatics that do not come off, thumping on the floor and rolling on it in leotards, and so forth. And of course frequent "ever-so-in" comments exchanged in an unnecessarily loud voice about props, lighting, and pasos dobles (there was some dance-like frolicking going on from time to time, when the show finally got underway). It was all eminently silly. But the tickets were cheap and the cast evidently had fun among themselves. Since the title indicates the object of the play's critique, and since Colombia had only a few weeks before had presidential elections, comments about this adaptation of "La elección" by Terán and Cervantes seem superfluous.

Also of a political nature was the presentation by the Grupo Experimental Latinoamericano ("Grutela"), directed by Daniel Tenorio (whom I believe to have been associated a few years ago with Buenaventura's TEC), of *El trabajo enaltece al hombre, le da riqueza y renombre*. In a few introductory words, Tenorio maintained that the four scenes that constitute the work were based on materials his group had gathered "in the field," i.e. by visiting, in various parts of Colombia, places of labor conflicts, and by living with the families of strikers and listening to the reports of the labor force. The four scenes dealt, respectively and consecutively, with "La prueba" (a job candidate is asked to perform a physical aptitude test and fails), "El despido" (self-explanatory), a recruit and a civilian working side by side under the direction of a screaming and obscenity-loving *cabo* (the title of the scene was not announced), and a discussion between a hard-line and a doubtful striker about the attitude to take toward the management ("Solidaridad").

It was all miserably primitive, most poorly directed (for no visible reason, Tenorio made his inept actors engage in the strangest and entirely uncalled-for physical exercises), and so totally one-sided in its "message" that it is difficult to see how anybody, workers included, can take it seriously. Except for Tenorio, none of the other members of the cast were in the least endowed with any acting-talent; at best, they showed an occasional flickering of comicality. The rest was the apparently inevitable screaming. Of the four scenes, I found that only one—the soldier and the civilian shovelling dirt in an unlikely mad rhythm—had a certain potential; the soldier mildly incites the civilian to turn against the bosses (military and industrial), but nothing comes of it. Actually, of course, the incitation should rather have come from the civilian. The question that always arises in Latin American societies governed by wildly repressive and unrepresentative governments, namely: how is it possible that the armed forces or police, ultimately of the lowest social ranks, being exploited no less badly, if not worse,

by their superiors, than the civilians repressed, show time and again such cruel enthusiasm in performing the ordered repression, if the solidarity with the repressed would be expected to be coming naturally to the instruments of repression, how is it that they show no commiseration with those they shoot and maim and beat and torture? But the answer to this question, clearly implicit in the scene mentioned, was not even attempted.

After each of the productions I saw in Cali, the good ones and the bad ones, enormous efforts were made on the part of one or another speaker of the casts to invite the public to discuss the play, its politics, its quality, or theatrical problems in Colombia in general. In spite of some occasionally quite amusing cajoling, the public each time remained mum. As the *caleños* in general (according to my observation), those going to the theatre—primarily young people—do not seem to be of a critical or curious disposition, appear to accept anything. In order to verify this impression, I posted myself at the door of the theatre after each performance, hoping to capture private comments about the show the people had just seen. But in vain; I heard not a single critical or approving opinion. Fatalism?

There were probably more plays shown in Cali during my stay there, but the newspapers usually indicated the wrong days. In this, Cali's press duplicates Lima's: they, too, announce a show for a certain day and a certain hour; but when you go there on that day and at that hour, the theatre is closed.

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Update (January, 1979): Two things made my recent stay in Lima (over Christmas and New Year 1978-1979) difficult, theatre-wise (as Lieutenant Flap still says): (1) the stay was too short: approximately three weeks; (2) the Lima newspapers: they insist, even now that they are close to being handed back to their owners by the military, on their annoying habit of printing a *cartelera* that does not exist. When I arrived, there were eleven plays listed. Eager to see as many as possible, I spent a minor fortune in taxis to get to the theatres indicated, only to find out nine times they were all locked up. That left two shows. It is of course the fault not only of the papers, but also that of the individual companies: they simply do not notify the former when they close, be it temporarily, due to the holidays, say, or definitely. Not even supreme organizing talent Osvaldo Cattone, who kept *Espíritu travieso* advertising, half-price matinees included, when that play had long closed out. A very frustrating and costly state of affairs. Before commenting on the two plays I did see, two important news items, both bad for Peruvian theatre, and one correction.

The correction: in the main text I deplored the neglected state of Lima's few green areas. Two of them, the Plaza San Martín and its sister, the Plaza de Armas (whose age-old trees had been cut down under Velasco so that nobody should be able to take a shot at the Palacio de Gobierno in their shadows), this time had been cleaned up and looked very pleasant, trimmed, and flowery at the edges. No new trees had been planted for the presumably coming civilian government.

The news: Alonso Alegría has finally had enough and resigned from the Direction of the Teatro Nacional Popular Peruano, betaking himself immediately

and dramatically, to Miami, where he is to teach this year. I saw him briefly and learned that he had just come back from Europe where he apparently was all over the place, but principally in Eastern Germany where his *Cruce sobre el Niágara* continues to be a success in one theatre or another. In Rostock, he was invited to direct a play of his choice in the summer of 1979. With Alegría's nerves lost and patience *acabada* in Lima, few professional directors are left there. A more cheerful part of this news is that he handed over to his West German publisher, while over there, the finally finished version of his legendary *El terno blanco*. "Legendary" because it has for many years been always on the point of being finished. In Lima, the play is to have its world première soon in a production by the generally good (see below) Teatro de la Universidad Católica (TUC).

The other sad—in reality, grotesque—news is this: in an attempt at "rationalizing" the tax-system, the government has eliminated a number of "impuestos de bajo rendimiento." So far, so good: abolished taxes are always cause for ecstatic rejoicing, of course, and may there be more of them. However: which source of revenue is most likely to bring in an unsurpassably *bajo rendimiento*? The theatres, naturally. Were they exempted? No. Why? Because they offer no "espectáculos públicos deportivos," such as football, which *was* exempted: of the until then 28 percent on the net value of each ticket. Lima has two mass stadiums with a capacity of, together, approximately 100,000, and games are going on in them nearly every Sunday (not to mention all the other games going on throughout Perú, or the other days on which games take place). *Bajo rendimiento*? Whose is likely to be lower, the theatres' or the stadiums'? The measure, then, is demagogic. Especially if one thinks of the other costly sport Peruvians can no longer engage in: that of paying a truly excessive 29 per cent on the net amount for eating in restaurants.

The two plays I saw were *Los calzones (Die Hose)* by the so-called "German Molière," Carl Sternheim, and Norman Krasna's *Mi querido embustero (My Dear Liar)*, directed by Osvaldo Cattone. The Sternheim piece was produced by the TUC group and can be considered one of the better productions of 1978. For mysterious reasons the text used was a translation done "de acuerdo a la traducción inglesa de M. A. McHaffie" (Program-note) by one Alberto Isola, who also played the part of the writer Scarron. Perhaps it was this linguistic detour which left director Luis Peirano and the actors unaware of the meaning of some of the characters' names: the protagonist couple is called *Maske*, i.e. mask; the neighbor lady *Deuter*, which means, literally, "pointer-out." Startling was the scenery: imagine a boxing-ring with turn-of-the(last)-century bourgeois living-room furniture, which furthermore *rotates!* It was thought up by Jorge Guerra, who also played Herrn Maske. Asked by theatre-reporter Jorge Chiarella Krüger (*El Comercio*, Sunday supplement, 12/3/78): "¿Por qué usaron una base escénica giratoria?" Peirano gave an explanation that must surely count among the most mystifying ever given: "Por dos razones: la primera para reforzar la idea de que lo que está sucediendo delante del espectador es algo convencional; en este sentido es un recurso formal." The second reason remained unstated, unless Peirano's answer to Chiarella's next question—"¿Y no sucedería así si el escenario no girara?"—was meant to be it: "La obra podría hacerse sin que el escenario girara, no lo dudo. Pero a nosotros nos resulta un buen recurso

para hacer esta idea evidente. Además, el recurso nos permite completar visualmente la estructura de la obra. Nada sustancial ha cambiado en casa de los Maske, a pesar de los calzones caídos." If this (what?) is so (how?), why was the idea visually completed only twice, in the opening and the closing scene? The acting was quite good, especially by Mónica Domínguez, Jorge Guerra, and Alberto Isola, as the two Maskes and Scarron, respectively. Inevitably, there were the traditional shouting matches. At intervals, Peirano had decreed freezes, creating something like slightly grotesque tableaux, but their purpose escaped me. The most serious defect of the production was that Sternheim's ideological message remained unprofiled. But then this already invites the basic question the production raises: what can a German expressionistic play against the hypocrisies of the German bourgeoisie before World War I possibly have to convey to an audience in Lima? All in all, a pleasant evening, well-directed, well-acted, and loudly applauded.

Cattone's *Mi querido embustero* was a disappointment. Perhaps my reaction was due to the high expectations with which I went to the Teatro Marsano. I had seen him do very effective, though generally corny shows, and knew (and know) that he is a good organizer and has a splendid feeling for what theatre could and can be. The play he chose this time, after his vehemently discussed *Otelo* (which I missed) and *Espíritu travieso*, is, at best, a gaseous, unpretentious sit-com of TV caliber, wherefore it stands and falls with the skills and stage-presence of the actors. While those principally involved—Argentine actress Amelia Bence, Cattone's ex-wife, Cattone himself, Enrique Victoria—delivered their parts professionally, their skills and presence were insufficient, not to say mediocre. The only admirable thing I found was that Cattone had brought off the one thing comedies in Perú rarely manage: timing. He also took some liberties with the play, which, however, I found rather likable. In fact, these liberties, before the play proper, were what created a nice high pitch of theatrical expectation in the audience: one felt that "now, this is going to be *good*." But it was not. He opened the show, while people were still coming into the theatre, with stewardesses, over loudspeakers, going through their "at this time"-and-"smoking materials"-routine in preparation for Amelia Bence's landing in Los Angeles to receive the Oscar. Then an announcer, in front of the curtain and for God knows what reasons, does a little soft-shoe routine towards a mike, where he finally opens the well-known envelope and reads out the name of the Oscar-winner: Bence. She thereupon gives one of those inane little speeches which Oscars seem to produce in actresses, the audience applauds, and kisses are blown all over. Then the play proper begins. The set was Plastic Vulgar Modified and therefore praised for its "elegance" in the press-reviews. I found it rather sad that Cattone has fallen prey to a desire for his very own personality cult. I sat rather far back, in fact very close to the exit curtains. Therefore I was able to see a group of young ladies appear through them all of a sudden and just stand there. While I was still wondering what they were up to, Cattone made his first entrance. The ladies broke out on cue into wild, teenagerish squealing, sighing and clapping. With Cattone's first words, they disappeared whence they had come. Later on Cattone satisfied the non-claque ladies in the audience by appearing

half-naked, clad in pyjama-bottoms. Amelia Bence did not get to undress. Very Europeanly, opening night was on December 31.

The other plays listed in the press but not shown while I was there were: The Villareal University's *Topazo* [sic]; Carlos Gassols' Company with E. Neville's *El baile*; *Vía crucis* [sic] de Jesús Obrero; *Reflexiones humanas*, *Navidad siglo XX* y *Navidad en las clases sociales*, three presentations for which the "Primera Muestra RAYSUT" was responsible; Elvira Travesi's company did *Drácula*; Adrian Ortega's *Tan perfecto no te quiero*, directed by Manuel de Sabatini; Segura's *El sargento Canuto*; Mihura's *Madame Renard* with Lola Vilar; and a number of productions for children including *Noches de Zarzuela*. The café-teatros boasted of such things as *La Constituta*, a show not at all veiledly alluding to the *Asamblea Constituyente* that in July 1979 is to elaborate a new constitution for the country, which in 1980 is perhaps to be handed back to the civilians. Some of *La Constituta's* actors, transvestites, even appeared in the Asamblea, in drag and with press photographers, demanding *their* human rights. And Elvira and Orlando Sacha satisfied a most urgent public need by offering their "Show Cómico," *Ahora ya sabemos qué pito tocamos*.

Especially noteworthy is that Sara Joffré's children-theatre, "Los Grillos," was able to celebrate its fifteenth anniversary in December 1978. Interviewed on this occasion by Chiarella, energetic, bitingly outspoken, admirable, and ever so perseverant Sara gave hell to the Instituto Nacional de Cultura, spoke about the history of her group, and faced the future abstractly: "Poder conciliar la experiencia con la inquietud y el empuje de los jóvenes . . . que lo vivido no les sirva de traba a los nuevos . . . sino de apoyo para que lo conocido sea una ruta que facilite el camino hacia lo que se desea conocer" (*El Comercio*, Sunday supplement, 12/17/1978).

The traditional year-end overviews were impressionistic, i.e. not statistical, this time. *La Prensa* carried one long and one short account (12/24 and 12/29/1978). From both I list only those productions not mentioned by me in these pages. The short article reports that 23 groups were active theatrically in Perú in 1978 and mentions as outstanding directors Ricardo Roca Rey (*El gran teatro del mundo*), Alonso Alegría (*Esperando a Godot*, *Los cachorros* [Alegría's second adaptation of Vargas Llosa's *relato*, which distinguished itself from his first by leaving out both Pichula Cuéllar himself and his one great love, and by emphasizing the aspect of multiple reminiscences which constitute the work]), Alfredo Bouroncle, Leonardo Torres, Mario Delgado (he of the "experimental theatre"), Osvaldo Cattone—after whose name the paper pointedly put into parenthesis: "(argentino)," something it did not do after Sergio Arrau, who is Chilean—and Carlos Gassols. The plays the report mentions as important are *Tartufo* and *Electra*, both TUC productions, as well as *La cantante calva*, done by the Alliance Française group, and finally Ribeyro's *Santiago el pajarero*. In addition to these plays and people, the long report by Jean Rottman mentions an *hommage* to Brecht by Aurora Colina, the Grupo Telba's *La empresa no perdona un momento de locura*, directed by Chiarella and revealing, in Rottman's opinion, a promising María Elena Alva and Jaime Lertora. Further on she lists an off-spring of the Uruguayan group El Galpón with Pirandello's *El gorro de cascabeles* and praises vividly A. Colina's and Edgar Guillén's production of

Chilean Egon Wolff's *Flores de papel*. Her conclusion is that "tuvimos un buen año de teatro" and "Este año ha quedado demostrado que para hacer teatro en Lima, no se puede improvisar y que es necesario emprender cada obra con una organización y una infraestructura de tipo empresarial. Algunos intentos fueron hechos por orgullo personal . . . pero el público se dio cuenta. Hemos tenido de todo y para todos." Amen.

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