

Spanish American Theatre of the 50's and 60's: Critical Perspectives on Role Playing

EUGENE L. MORETTA

Like the strictly literary genres, poetry and narrative fiction, the theatre has become in our times a self-conscious, self-critical form of expression. From Pirandello to Genet and beyond, the more accomplished European and American playwrights have incorporated into their works personal visions of the theatrical element in life itself. Just as the poet's verses record the anguish of poetic composition and lament language's refractory ways, and as the novelist's prose meditates upon the interpenetration of truth and fiction, of the written text and the sign-filled outer world, so the dramatist's creation—dialogue and stage directions, later to become action, gesture, scenery, and lighting—often summons into being a life whose inner dynamic is itself shown to be a *performance* of one kind or another. The term "play within a play" suggests only one possibility among many. Besides the self-evident thematic presence of theatre in any production which requires professional actors to play at being professional actors (*Hamlet* and *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* come first to mind), spontaneous forms of human conduct which could properly be called theatrical often arise in the fictitious world created by a given work. Faithful to very basic patterns in day-to-day existence, these would include any kind of behavior governed primarily by a character's effort to sustain a particular image of himself and, often, to impress it upon the perceptions of another character or other characters, who thus become his special *audience*.¹ In certain cases one or more characters, with or without audience, find themselves emotionally or intellectually attached to a given image and begin to regard it as definitive, even if this places them at odds with the total reality in which they move. For each such character the image engenders a distinctive form of behavior, or role, which in some visible way differs from the behavior that might seem appropriate to the situation or from that which has previously typified the character—and that may even now continue to assert itself under the mask of the new *persona*. Organized and regulated forms of role playing, like acting (professional or *ad hoc*)²,

games (let us remember the presence of both theatre and game in the English word "play"), and ritual all occur within bounded spaces which separate the participants from the larger world and allow for autonomous spheres of activity. As part of the content of a dramatic work, each form represents one self-contained world within another, a single exercise in role playing set inside a conventional role-playing framework.

The formal theatre's onstage portrayal of what we may more broadly term theatricality appears to be very much a part of Spanish-American drama as it comes into its own during the late 1950's and the '60's. Already a prominent theme in the theatre of the previous generation,³ role playing now claims the attention of a number of younger dramatists, from Mexico and the Antilles to the River Plate, whose best works—even those not staged until many years after composition—reveal a sophistication comparable to that of the finest plays being written and produced at the same time in Europe and the United States. One finds role-playing *motifs* with remarkable frequency in these works, so much so that the absorption with and the elaboration of the theme impress one as crucial to the theatre's growth during this period. Certainly the Spanish-American playwright's meditation upon the ways in which all the world's a stage have, at least since the fifties, drawn him closer in spirit to his fellow practitioners of the art in other Western countries. We might also wonder to what extent it has assumed original features characteristic of a distinctive regional drama. Given the distances imposed by the geography of Spanish America, the degree to which the evolution of theatre can thus follow separate paths or progress at varying rates in different cultural centers, the short time span which this period covers, and its closeness to our own time, we must exercise caution in defining trends and movements. However, by acknowledging the importance of the role-playing theme, and by noting its presence and its functions in significant instances, we can at least move toward a critical overview of Spanish-American theatre as it approaches the threshold of the 1970's.

Taking the first step, let us examine role playing in two works from the late fifties—1958, to be exact: *Medusa* by the Mexican dramatist, Emilio Carballido;⁴ and *Los soles truncos*, by the Puerto Rican, René Marqués.⁵ At first glance neither seems to be *about* role playing at all. *Medusa* is Carballido's version of the ancient Greek tale of Perseus, son of Zeus and Danæ and slayer of the Gorgon, Medusa, the mere sight of whom turns mortals into stone. In the modern tradition of Anouilh's *Antigone* and Cocteau's *La Machine infernale*, the author works the principal events of the myth into his play; but his characters, their language, their mentality, and the atmosphere of their world are essentially twentieth century: Dánae's maids and Medusa's Gorgon companions, for example, recur to Mexican idioms and references to details of contemporary cosmetics and dress. *Los soles truncos* chronicles the attempt of two aged spinsters to dispose of the body of their recently dead sister without surrendering the house in which all three have barricaded themselves since their youth. In so doing, it focuses upon their anxiety to escape the ravages of an historical time which has already left its scars upon them and which hovers outside the house—that is, offstage—waiting to destroy them completely.

Yet in the unfolding of both these dramatic situations, however dissimilar

the one from the other, there develops a definite notion of role which suggests a conceptual affinity. For in each case, and with varying degrees of self-awareness, characters seek to sustain previously defined identities that, precisely as a result of having become established in time past, seem capable of conferring upon them a stable sense of self. This is more readily apparent in Marqués' play, in which the three sisters, determined to reject the changing outside world, have remained inside upon what amounts to their own stage—the center of which also constitutes the stage intended for the play's performance—so that they may continue indefinitely in their adolescent selves and by this mutual pretense cling to what the past has seemingly made fixed and inviolate. Most ardently committed to the reality of their closed universe, the youngest sister, Emilia, now sixty-five, acts her part with singular conviction. Leaving aside momentarily the ritualistic intent suggested by the notion of expiation for past wrongs (a subject to be taken up in connection with Triana's *La noche de los asesinos*), which she more than any sister insists must inform and consecrate their life together, we see that Emilia has become the champion and spiritual guardian of a shared but isolated and theatrically evoked existence. Described as delicate, with "cierta remota belleza espiritual" (p. 10), averse to the daily tasks of the workaday world outside, and quick to close shutters against the rays of its sunlight, she is above all a poet, whose verses, with their idyllic imagery and sentimental tone, testify to an age long vanished—and thus provide a kind of lyrical underpinning for its perpetuation on a private stage:

Soy piedra pequeña entre tus manos de musgo,
 Alas de arcángel para tu amor.
 Soy Cordero de Pascua para tu espada,
 Valle del Eco para tu voz. (p. 31)

In his *Medusa* Carballido, unlike Marqués, sets up no fixed or enclosed stage-upon-a-stage for his protagonist's ventures in performance. He does, however, establish a comparable tension between past and present in which the former supplies a model to be imitated by the latter: in theatrical terms, a script to be acted out. Whereas in *Los soles truncos* the role played in the present by each sister mirrors an earlier moment of her own life, in *Medusa* the juxtaposition of classical mythology and twentieth-century reality makes of Perseo not simply a hero, but more accurately the aspirant to a heroism already defined for him—perhaps less by what it is than by what it is not—and now, in his twenty-first year of life, present to him as a formula for specific actions. We can almost imagine him as a contemporary youth who has read the tales of ancient Greek heroes (even the tale of Perseus himself) and determined to follow in their footsteps, much as a sixteenth-century Alonso Quijano, intoxicated with stories of medieval knight-errantry, determines to live out the roles provided him by his reading. During the play's first act it becomes evident that the vision of such a "living out" of a prescribed part permeates Perseo's awareness of his new adult self and of his commission from the gods. In the scene immediately preceding Atenea's appearance we hear him declare to his mother, "Quiero ser héroe, pero [aquí] en Serifos no hay monstruos, ni guerras, ni nada" (p. 77), indicating that for him heroism exists first as a word and

concept (partially defined in terms of monsters and wars) and only later—possibly—as an existential reality. Before the end of the same scene Perseo again speaks of a heroism signifying “guerras” and “monstruos” after strenuously objecting to suggestions by Polidecto and Dánae that such a concept could allow him to consider killing his grandfather, Acrisio: “Ya soy mayor de edad: quiero ser libre. Quiero ser héroe. Según el maestro,⁶ ya estoy listo para serlo. ¿Y voy a empezar matando ancianos?” (p. 79). Atenea’s subsequent intervention, during which she informs Dánae that Perseo is to behead Medusa, only clarifies and completes for the youth the meaning of heroism in his own particular career. Thus, he is finally pushed over the line that divides learning a part from playing it out on one’s proper stage. The fact that Perseo’s stage is so large as to require him to traverse enormous distances, while remaining in Marqués’ play a small and confining enclave, does not diminish its significance in either case as an arena in which one sets about living one’s life in accordance with already-hallowed actions, gestures, and language.

Such a stage, it must be stressed, offers itself as a world in which role playing seems to promise self-fulfillment. As we have just noted, Perseo foresees his heroic adventure as a chance to become truly free, to realize the full potential for life which exists in him, a son of Zeus who has now reached manhood. Emilia and, to a lesser extent, her elder sisters in *Los soles truncos* conceive of their house and of their daily existence within it as preserving and bringing constantly to life all that is beautiful and noble in themselves. Both plays envision this fulfillment through role playing as the character’s response to the larger world in which his contemporaries go about their daily business in ways that strike him as meaningless, corrupt, or otherwise unfulfilling and even destructive.

Role playing is thus a refuge, the individual’s highly personal denial of a present from which he finds himself disaffected, and his adherence to pre-existent modes of behavior with which he perceives this present to be out of touch. Emilia and her sisters, Hortensia and Inés, have sought refuge from an alienating “time”: that is, a present in the form of flux or history, which to them has always implied change for the worse. In the political sphere “la cara horrible del tiempo” decried by Emilia in Act I (p. 19) signifies the invasion and subsequent barbarization of Puerto Rico by the United States. As evidence of ultimate decay in the sisters’ personal lives, it is reflected in the ill fortune plaguing their family and themselves. Hortensia’s broken engagement, Inés’ ugliness, and Emilia’s lameness symbolize an intolerable reality which their shut-in, supposedly timeless universe is meant to transcend.

In *Medusa* also, the present, given world repels the protagonist, enabling us to see his desire to travel and *perform* heroic deeds as a rejection of it. Act I begins by exposing the cynicism and vulgarity of Polidecto’s court. Maidservants engage in malicious gossip and readily prostitute themselves for gifts from visiting ambassadors, who, in turn, resort matter-of-factly to bribery and influence buying. The egotistical Dánae is morbidly absorbed by the memory of sensual delight and by beautifying herself, while Polidecto dotes slavishly upon her and looks upon the governance of his realm in the manner of a greedy shopkeeper.⁷ “¡Bailles, comercio, fiestas!” shouts Perseo scornfully to

his mother (p. 77). And later in the same act: "Mamá, . . . no soporto a Polidecto ni a nadie de aquí. Es imposible" (p. 81). His subsequent embrace of the hero's role, then, must be seen as a flight not only toward fulfillment through a particular performance (a future which is at once the affirmation of a past), but from the alienating environment which has been his world.

Neither in Marqués nor in Carballido, however, does role playing prevail as a viable alternative to life itself; rather, it is eventually discredited, its artificial reality ultimately shattered. In *Los soles truncos* flashback scenes allow us to piece together a story of betrayal and recrimination resulting from envy by the young Emilia and Inés of Hortensia, who, engaged to a dashing Spanish officer, breaks off with him and forever closes the house to the light of day when told by Inés that he has a child by another woman. We may consider these flashbacks not primarily as remembrances of what is past and done, but, given the way in which lighting and musical *motifs* blend them into the present, as re-enactments in which crucial events make themselves vividly felt even after the passage of decades. That the events in question involve a good deal of spitefulness and hatred among the three sisters means that in their attempt to create a world removed from time Emilia, Inés, and Hortensia have been unable to exclude those forces in life which poison and corrupt. On the contrary, they have merely frozen them at moments of extreme bitterness and thus incorporated them into their own private universe. When Hortensia mentions "fealdad," Emilia hastens to offer the qualification, "Sí, mucha fealdad en el mundo de afuera." However, her sister, less inclined to wishful thinking, replies, "No, en nosotras mismas, Emilia. Celos, envidia, soberbia, orgullo. Rencor" (p. 35). It is Hortensia's death from cancer—itsself the symbol of an encroaching destruction that cannot be held off—that provokes the final crisis for role playing as a refuge from life.

Act II finds Emilia's naïvete again exposed and rejected, at one point by Inés, the breadwinner, who, to insure the three sisters' survival, leaves the house to bargain and beg in the streets of San Juan. The compromise with role playing by which Inés periodically abandons the stage upon which she acts her part contrasts markedly with Emilia's refusal to emerge from the darkness of the house and from the ethereal realm celebrated by her poetry. Discovering in the recesses of the family piano the notebook which contains Emilia's verses, Inés remarks upon something "indecoroso" in her lame sister's secret writings and precipitates a revealing confrontation:

EMILIA—(*Protestando*) ¡Son puros mis versos!

INÉS—(*Después de una breve pausa, como recitando para sí*) "Tu pie lisiado sobre una palabra: amor."

EMILIA—(*Corrigiendo ofendida*) "Tu pie de fauno," Inés.

INÉS—Sí, a eso me refiero. Si hubieras escrito "tu pie lisiado" sería algo que entendería como tuyo. Pero un "pie de fauno" . . . Es casi obsceno viniendo de ti.

EMILIA—(*Guardando el cuaderno en el cofre y luego éste en el piano*) Es inútil discutir contigo, Inesita. Nunca entendiste nada de poesía.

INÉS—Te equivocas. Entiendo mucho de poesía. Entiendo la poesía de los silencios largos, del hambre y la miseria, y el orgullo. Y las frases

pueriles, y las frases que hieren. La poesía de la vejez y la penumbra, del sol despiadado, y la mendicidad encubierta. La poesía del cáncer de Hortensia, y la multiplicación monstruosa de las células en el pecho querido de Hortensia, y el dolor hondo que corrompe sin gritos. La poesía horrible del tiempo también yo la conozco, Emilia. Tuve que conocerlas todas, para que tú conservaras la tuya. Y la suya Hortensia.

EMILIA—(*Deslumbrada*) ¡Inés! Estás hablando . . . ¡Estás hablando en poesía!

INÉS—Pobrecita Emilia, que cree apresar la poesía en sus pobres versos. Y la poesía se la escapa en la vida horrible de cada día nuestro. (*Sonriendo*) “Sólo tu mano purificará mi corazón.” ¿Lo purificó acaso, Emilia?

EMILIA—(*Confusa*) Yo . . . No . . . No sé . . .

INÉS—(*Apasionada*) ¡Purifica el cáncer que corrompe, purifica el fuego que destruye! ¡Purifican los celos y el odio, y el amor de nuevo! Y el infierno. Y quizá la muerte.

(pp. 49-50)

Included in this implicit criticism of art's disdainful retreat from the larger, harsher world, on which it nevertheless depends for nourishment and protection, is the notion that performing on one's private stage amounts to cheating both oneself and life in an existence devoid of vitality and, therefore, of meaning. The purification to which Emilia aspires in the face of life's malevolence does not occur as a result of acting as though evil did not exist. Rather, in Inés' wiser and more eloquent words, it must be achieved by grappling with life's destructive forces, which are also the most intensely alive, forging them into concrete expressions of the will to defy destruction itself. Inés mentions fire, traditionally the image of both consuming and cleansing. Notwithstanding Marqués' less-than-subtle use of symbolism along the way (he locates the sisters' house on a street named Calle del Cristo, and at one point in Act II has Inés stretch out her arms to suggest crucifixion, pp. 47-48),⁸ the play offers an electrifying *dénouement* wherein Inés, rejecting both role playing and the baseness of the outside world from which role playing has served as a refuge, sets the house ablaze and thus dooms actresses as well as their stage to annihilation. Meaning is finally achieved in a self-immolation that finds Hortensia's body bedecked as for a wedding and her two sisters triumphantly exultant.

In *Medusa*, too, the individual's initial assumption of a preconceived role is later shown to be an inadequate, even pernicious way out of life's meaninglessness and corruption. Medusa herself disabuses Perseo of his heroic ideal. Instead of the depersonalized monster whom ancient mythology has led us, the contemporary audience—and Perseo, the contemporary searcher—to expect, she is cast as a tender, understanding young woman who has suffered deeply and become wise in the process. Their first, fortuitous encounter, at the start of which neither suspects the other's identity, quickly develops into an exchange over Perseo's desire to play, imminently, the hero's part. Here Medusa's down-to-earth outlook exposes the artificiality of Perseo's vision:

MEDUSA.—(*Condescendiente.*) ¿Para qué quieres ser héroe?

PERSEO.—Mira, tengo que sacar a mi madre del palacio en que vivimos. No quiero que dependamos de un extraño, como hasta ahora.

MEDUSA.—¿Y por qué no tratas de ser otra cosa? Carpintero, alfarero, poeta . . .

PERSEO.—¿Cómo crees? Tengo sangre real.

MEDUSA.—¿Sí? ¿No has estudiado la composición química de la sangre?

PERSEO.—Ya sé, quiero decir . . . Tengo posición, rango.

MEDUSA.—Niño, te han llenado la cabeza de ideas curiosas. Los únicos seres humanos aparte del hombre común, son los monstruos. ¿Qué es posición?

PERSEO.—Posición, sitio . . .

MEDUSA.—No hay más que un sitio: el que todos los hombres tienen en el espacio y en el tiempo. Superior, inferior: si no los usas como términos físicos, ya no quieren decir nada. ¿Qué es superior? ¿El hombre que mueve una palanca o el que escribe una oda? ¿El que navega o el que escala? No son posiciones, son oficios.

PERSEO.—¿Y el que gobierna? ¿El que tiene poder para mover cien mil hombres en una dirección?

MEDUSA.—Ése es, tal vez (muy raramente), el servidor de cien mil hombres. Si no, es sólo un pobre hambriento, con un oficio nebuloso y sin ningún fin. Mira, el hombre está solo y necesita un espejo que le diga: eres alguien, eres bello, eres bueno, vales. Ese espejo es la persona amada. Hay hombres que no saben hallar un solo espejo y buscan muchos. Tienen hambre de ser bellos, fuertes, buenos; tienen hambre de valer y gritan "soy, soy," pero nadie les responde. Consiguen entonces cien mil, o cien mil millones de hombres, que les digan a gritos "eres bello, eres fuerte, vales." Pero nada les basta. Ésos son los gobernantes.

(pp. 100-101)

Medusa's metaphor of the mirror indicates that what Perseo is about is essentially theatre, and that theatre—making oneself into both actor and applauding audience (multiple reflection)—leads one away from all that is truly vital and satisfying. The latter finds expression in the word "intimidación," which to Medusa can consist of sheer sensual enjoyment, contrasting with the statue-like hardness of one who has rejected life in favor of what is basically literature: "El héroe tiene el gesto de la estatua, la piel dura, los ojos duros; no tiene intimidación, porque su vida es una pieza literaria que va construyendo paso a paso. No vive para sí ni para su placer, sino para la construcción de una imagen ficticia que legarle a los siglos. Vive por su leyenda" (p. 101). Carballido has thus taken two key concrete details from the Greek myth and turned them around so that they convey a personal vision of role playing. For him the word "espejo" applies only secondarily to the surface of Perseo's shield, by means of which he may locate Medusa without having to look directly at her (even here the stage directions describe him, suggestively, as "tropezándose, porque sigue viendo el reflejo y no las cosas" [p. 99]); more important, it symbolizes a need for acclaim which, when expressed in role playing, becomes a pathetic substitute for life itself. Likewise, the statue, originally the sign only of the unsuccessful hero, turned to stone after having seen Medusa, here represents the very aspiration to heroism, which, when successful, brings about a kind of death in life. Thanks to Medusa's intervention, Perseo realizes that his proposed course of action (more accurately, acting) will, in terms of his previously expressed desire

to be "libre," set him apart not so much from the vulgar and cynical existence depicted in Act I, as from that spontaneity and closeness to others without which fulfilling existence is impossible. The "pieza literaria," which his life threatens to become as he lives out the hero's script on his own stage, corresponds to the unreal, stylized, and ultimately sterile world epitomized by Emilia's poetry in *Los soles truncos*. In both plays a larger life of one sort or another wins out over what is perceived as a vain attempt to reject it through adherence to already-fixed, pre-eminently literary norms.

But Carballido does not stop there. The final tragedy of his *Medusa* lies in the further realization that one cannot, in the end, choose between the shadow world of role playing and the intimacy of authentic life; that to enter upon adulthood is inevitably to suffer in oneself the triumph of role over life. Perseo cannot help but act out the hero's script to the last page, for it has been written for him by the gods; and the gods, as Medusa long ago discovered, are hostile to their creatures, punishing them out of envy for the simple joys that belong only to mortal existence (p. 111). No longer deluded into believing his role the door to freedom, Perseo is nevertheless incapable of ceasing to play it. He involuntarily kills Acrisio and later beheads Medusa in a fit of passion, going on to further exploits which he sees as fatally completing his definition as a hero, but from which the remnant of his earlier self feels increasingly estranged. Thus in Perseo we see ourselves as actors upon a stage we have not chosen, playing a part that is alien to us, prevented by an invisible and inimical director from making our exit into real and full life.

As the weight of mythical visions of heroism presses upon Perseo, so, too, our own past—history, culture, all that comprises the "given" of our lives—presses upon us and forces us along narrow and well-worn paths. All that is finally left to us is the gesture of protest by which we continue to affirm the unrealized and unrealizable potential for full life that is in us: a fist raised rebelliously against the gods, our fathers—in a word, against the directors of the staged performances that make up our contemporary existence. And so, in the final scene of Carballido's play, Perseo at least symbolically defies Atenea by refusing to honor her claim to Medusa's head, resolving instead to keep it for himself as the relic of a love from which he is doomed to be forever separated (pp. 136, 139).

Paradoxically, both *Los soles truncos* and *Medusa* set role playing against life, in the sense that performing opposes itself to living—only to succumb to it in the end—but at the same time they give role playing a decidedly lifelike appearance: Marqués' three sisters and Carballido's Perseo enter upon what they consider higher forms of life, turning to models for living supplied to them by the past. In two plays of the 1960's the paradox is reversed. With *¿A qué jugamos?* and *La noche de los asesinos*, by the Argentine Carlos Gorostiza⁹ and the Cuban José Triana,¹⁰ respectively, we come to witness role-playing activities that acknowledge and accept an artificial, other-than-life quality, yet that in their inner dynamism illuminate truths basic to the totality of existence. Here role playing means playing a game. Triana places his three characters—a brother, Lalo, and his two younger sisters, Cuca and Beba—together in an isolated room of their parents' house and has them, like young children (younger

than the twenty to thirty years which is their stated age range), simulate a situation in which they imaginatively cultivate their own identities and also take on the identities of others, like parents, neighbors, policemen, and a judge. As children's games go, this one is distinctly less than light hearted, since the situation played out within the two acts of *La noche de los asesinos* is the aftermath to a fantasized murder of their parents by the children, with flashbacks to moments of the family's earlier life and scenes such as that of the court proceedings against Lalo for the crime. Striking out in much the same direction, Gorostiza gathers together into a living room his five young, middle-class characters: Federico (Fede) and his wife, Leonor, the owners of the Buenos Aires apartment in which the play is set; two adolescent friends, Choni and Cacho; and Pasco, Fede's co-worker, who, it develops, has been carrying on an affair with Leonor. After taking them through several unsuccessful efforts at interaction, the playwright involves them in a parlor game invented by Fede, which requires the five to imagine the imminent end of the world and to reveal to one another what they would say and do, confined together, during a hypothetical last hour before total annihilation. Once again, the playing is far from playful. Nonetheless, it still comprises a game, in that the participants agree (albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm) to a specific set of rules and goals and to a limited sphere of action, knowing both to be artificial and distinct from the world out of which they have stepped and into which they expect to return.

In exploring the dynamic of these games, we must distinguish between them and the equivalent role-playing activities depicted in the two earlier dramas. Here, as in Marqués and Carballido, a somber vision of contemporary life prevails, and the characters feel personally threatened by the destructive forces present in the outer world. Yet their playing does not imply a flight into a sphere free from contamination by these forces, but the giving over of themselves to a precise, highly regulated mode of behavior intended to bring their total world clearly before their eyes. They seek confrontation, not refuge: to stare truth in the face, regardless of the cost. Significantly, the end-of-the-world game played out in Act II of *¿A qué jugamos?*—under the shadow of the mushroom cloud of mass annihilation which is Pasco's "dibujo simbólico" (p. 79)—follows a series of shorter role-playing episodes in Act I that may also be termed games and that by their studied evasions of the truth contrast with the characters' final and most sustained effort at play.

The first act begins on a comic note as Cacho, allowed by Fede and Leonor in their absence to study in their apartment, has secretly invited Choni there and has just used the older couple's bedroom (offstage) to make love to her. A phone call (the ringing of the telephone anticipating that of Fede's alarm clock in the final moment of crisis at the end of the play) announces the imminent return of the hosts and occasions a panic in which the bed is hurriedly made and other props, as it were, quickly rearranged on this stage-upon-a-stage to create the illusion that nothing exceptional has occurred. Cacho continues to dissemble after Fede and Leonor arrive with Pasco; and Choni, who had already made a hasty departure but now has been invited at the suggestion of the unsuspecting Fede to join the group, must pretend on her reappearance

that she is there for the first time. The three older characters conceal relationships and enmities which become evident to the audience only in moments of furtive communication between two of them. Playing in pairs at cordiality, they strike poses and are victims of them. Mutual pretense by Leonor and Pasco keeps Fede from knowing of their affair; by Pasco and Fede, it prevents Leonor from learning of their liaisons with other women; by Fede and Leonor, it hides from Pasco the fact that Fede is about to secure for himself the position to which the former expects to be promoted.

Besides these and similar episodes,¹¹ a sizable part of Act I introduces highly organized forms of mutual pretense that serve to build logically to the game playing of Act II. Film acting is one of these. In fact, the end-of-the-world *motif* appears initially as the theme of a film Fede and Leonor have just seen with Pasco and upon which they comment early in the play. Fede considers the film flawed because it has failed to convey to him a genuine sense of horror and because it has forced what he judges to be inappropriate emotional responses upon its characters: "Para mí todas son situaciones convencionales. Como esos que sonreían. ¡Mirá si la gente va a reaccionar así si se entera que viene el fin del mundo!" (p. 23). He later counters with a film of his own, an eight-millimeter home movie which alone among his collection he considers "cine-verdad," as opposed to mere "cine-artístico" (p. 51). In *¿A qué jugamos?* the film is projected for a double audience of actors and public, showing to the former, as characters, scenes taken by Fede and Leonor of one another in their Río hotel on the first morning of their honeymoon. Despite Fede's insistence upon the revealing, true-to-life quality of the film—an insistence which is in part insincere, because by showing these scenes he wishes above all to embarrass Leonor—the spectator sees in it sheer exhibitionistic posing, the newlywed couple affecting Beauty and the Beast: she, with exaggerated expressions of indignation at the camera's intruding presence; he, with Tarzan-like gestures of masculine ferocity.

Somewhat stung by the less-than-enthusiastic reception given his film by the others, and well under the influence of gin, Fede accuses his wife and guests of fearing to face "la verdad" in all its unpleasantness (p. 68). From his irritation, and from the needling with which most of the others now respond to him, comes his suggestion "que todos contemos lo que haríamos de verdad si viniese el fin del mundo" (p. 69). There follows a first attempt at the end-of-the-world game, which breaks down because, as an impromptu creation, it fails to generate the degree of seriousness needed to displace the jocular tone of the characters, who, in turn, fall back upon fantasies that are superficial, designed to mask their deeper selves. The exasperated Fede finally reacts with an anger that definitively removes game playing from the category of "novelitas para entretenerse en un día de lluvia" and makes it the means to an earnest, carefully planned search for the truth that underlies "lo que está pasando en el mundo" (p. 77).

If in Gorostiza's vision this truth about life is its cheapness—signified by Pasco's drawing of the mushroom cloud (and by sounds from an offstage toilet)—it becomes for Triana the heavy, cruel hand of an authoritarianism that from the perspective of revolutionary Cuba is seen to have permeated the society of

"los años '50," the stated setting for his play. The three characters of *La noche de los asesinos* "son capaces de representar al mundo" both in the dramatic recreation of their own life as a paradigm of human interaction and in the multiple-role play acting through which they impersonate key elements of an authority structure (parents, police, judge, etc.), the context of such interaction. As "representative" persons, they are also seen by their author to constitute, "en último término, figuras de un museo en ruinas."¹² Their abject state, evoked during the play by what seems to be the senselessly repetitive quality of their actions, by their apparent helplessness in the face of physical isolation, by the self-serving, hypocritical, and grotesque posturing of their family, neighbors, and the law, and—particularly in Lalo's case—by the memory of their parents' hatred and cruelty, thus serves as a commentary upon an order of existence lacking in dignity, compassion, and purpose. Lalo's word of complaint and reproach to his sisters echo Perseo's yearning, in Act I of *Medusa*, for self-realization and a way out of meaninglessness. They paint the picture of a world whose governing principle is the exploitation of the weak by the strong:

¿Qué importa esta casa, qué importan estos muebles si nosotros no somos nada, si nosotros simplemente vamos y venimos por ella y entre ellos igual que un cenicero, un florero o un cuchillo flotante? (*A Cuca.*) ¿Eres tú acaso un florero? ¿Te gustaría descubrir un día que eres realmente eso? ¿O que como eso te han estado tratando buena parte de tu vida? ¿Soy yo acaso un cuchillo? Y tú, Beba, ¿te conformas con ser un cenicero? No, no. Eso es estúpido. (*Con ritmos mecánicos.*) Ponte aquí. Ponte allá. Haz esto. Haz lo otro. Haz lo de más allá. (*En otro tono.*) Yo quiero mi vida: estos días, estas horas, estos minutos . . . Quiero andar y hacer cosas que deseo o siento. Sin embargo, tengo las manos atadas. Tengo los pies atados. Tengo los ojos vendados. Esta casa es mi mundo. Y esta casa se pone vieja, sucia y huele mal. Mamá y papá son los culpables. Me da pena, pero es así. Y lo más terrible es que ellos no se detienen un minuto a pensar si las cosas no debieran ser de otro modo. Ni tú tampoco. Y Beba mucho menos . . .

(pp. 21-22)

Lalo strives to create through game playing a separate realm that, unlike Perseo's leap into heroism and Emilia's flights into poetic fantasies, will manifest in clearcut form the very evils which in confused and fragmented ways have always pressed in upon himself and his sisters from the outside, as their given reality. This is a deliberate incorporation of the elemental structure of life itself, through the artifice of conscious pretense, into a sphere temporarily removed from life. It corresponds to Fedé's persistent attempts to hit upon a game which will bare life to the bone and thereby reveal concrete examples of an all-pervading depravity in which he already believes and which he feels impelled to confirm (in Fedé's own words: "Si la roña aparece es porque está. Yo, lo único que hago es sacarla afuera, nada más" [p. 109]). This somewhat sado-masochistic drive of Gorostiza's principal character presents an affinity with the theatre of cruelty. Triana's work may be considered an example of such theatre, so avidly does it pursue its confrontation with hatred and violence. Whereas in the earlier plays of Marqués and Carballido, life's basic ugliness

eventually intruded as an unwelcome guest to subvert the individual in his role playing (resentment, jealousy, hunger, poverty, and disease continue to poison the lives of Marqués' three sisters despite their efforts to exclude them), here it is invited inside and recreated as an integral part of the game structure. Thus, as the potential for nuclear holocaust deprives all human life of nobility, so Fede orchestrates a game world designed to expose mercilessly all that is ignoble in the sample of humankind now present in his living room. And, as in Triana's pre-revolutionary Cuba alienation and exploitation are the norm, so this playwright's characters unremittingly shoulder the full burden of their alienated selves and exploit one another in their self-imposed confinement. Recreating themselves in play as accomplices in their parents' murder, they engage in recriminations with each other over their relative guilt or innocence, loyalty and disloyalty. Projecting themselves as actors into the roles of their oppressors, they manage both to embody and employ as weapons against one another the very inhumanity of which they have all along been victims. "Revolver la porquería" is Beba's scornful characterization of their game at a moment of withdrawal from it (p. 57): a wallowing in the mire that describes, in the first instance, a relationship to the larger social context—a context seen similarly by Fede in his world as "esta sociedad de porquería" (p. 30).

The really striking feature of game playing in both these dramas is that at some point it reveals a life of its own more powerful than the human volition which has set it in motion. Drawing its participants inexorably on, it confronts them directly with truth; but, like the sight of God in the Biblical tradition, this stark vision of the truth constitutes a revelation so devastating that the game stands as the occasion of an almost unbearable intensification of experience. In Act II of *¿A qué jugamos?* we observe how its increasing momentum wrenches secrets from heretofore circumspect characters,¹³ secrets that, if revealed during the course of normal human interaction, would undoubtedly threaten the delicate fabric of *convivencia*—itself, as defined in Act I, a different kind of game in which the ugly realities of life are tacitly denied. First to succumb are the two younger, more impressionable members of the group. Yielding to Fede's relentless prodding but also responding to the inner need for an unburdening of self ("casi desafiante, como aprovechando la oportunidad para decirlo" [p. 85]) which the very setting and rhythm of the game make imperative, Choni details the facts of misery, love, and hatred which underlie her authentic identity as a person: life in a slum, jealousy toward her mother, and the presence of a stepfather with whom she has experienced both passion and betrayal. Later both she and Cachó—he as if to exact "una venganza" (p. 107) and she "con rabia" (p. 108)—proclaim to an astonished Fede that they have made love in his bed. Pasco, for his part, is impelled by the pressure which the movement of the game exerts, to abandon his usual reticence and admit to a romantic attachment that has led to a pathetic liaison with Leonor. At first, though disconcerted under the glare of Fede's improvised stage light, which makes him conscious of himself as an actor suddenly required to perform, Pasco holds in check only with great difficulty the already-insistent impulse to blurt out the real reason for his new-found hostility toward Fede:

PASCO (*vacila. Se muerde.*)—No puedo. Ya terminé.

FEDE (*intenso.*)—No tenés derecho a terminar así, ¿no entendés? Todos se comprometieron, aquí, a decir cada uno lo suyo. Y vos no podés guardártelo. Sobre todo después de mandarme a la mierda. ¿Por qué fue que cambiaste así? ¿Eh? Tantas ganas que tenías esta noche de estar conmigo, y ahora . . .

PASCO (*más fuerte que él. No puede contenerse.*)—¡No tenía ninguna gana de estar con vos esta noche! ¡Hace rato que no tengo ganas de estar con vos! (*Silencio. Se miran. Pasco entiende que habló de más. Trata de evadirse. Baja la cabeza y sale nerviosamente del haz de luz. El haz queda tres o cuatro segundos; el 'escenario' vacío. Al fin Fede desconecta el proyector. En seguida Cacho enciende—otro tiempo—el resto de la luz ambiente. Fede está con la cabeza gacha, pensativo. Tanto Pasco como Leonor están recogidos en sí mismos, sin mirarse y sin mirar a nadie. Sólo Chacho y Choni miran a uno y a otro tratando de saber qué pasa. . . .*)

(p. 91)

Eventually the urge to self-exposure generated under Fede's direction leads Pasco to a more candid admission:

PASCO.—Está bien. (*Tiempo.*) Lo que yo quería esta noche era estar con Leonor, no con vos.

FEDE (*inmóvil.*)—Y qué más.

PASCO.—Hace mucho tiempo, ya, que . . . cada vez que vengo aquí . . . vengo para estar con ella y no con vos.

FEDE.—Y qué más.

PASCO.—Y de ahora en adelante . . . voy a hacer todo lo posible para verla a ella y no verte a vos.

FEDE.—¿Sigo preguntando "y qué más"?

PASCO.—Como quieras. Pero creo que era eso lo que querías oír desde hoy.

FEDE (*tiempo.*)—¿Estás enamorado de ella?

PASCO (*apenas.*)—Sí.

Later aggravated by Leonor's disclosure, "¡Me acosté con Pasco!" (p. 117), this confession precipitates the ultimate crisis. For the game, much like a child who moves his hand ever nearer to a flame the danger of which he has imagined only in part, comes so close to the truth that for the first time it compels its participants to see their sordid selves with utter clarity. The resulting vision proves intolerable, and finally destructive. The last moments of the play bring a real and unlooked-for end of the world to this end-of-the-world game, notably to its most avid participant. Fede, who, as creator and director, has, until that point, skillfully used game playing to unmask others, finds that he is no longer in control of events and is thus unable to prevent a merciless unmasking of himself which Leonor, with her scornful rebuke to his much-vaunted "omnipotencia"¹⁴ and the announcement of her decision to leave him, has already begun (pp. 114-115). The revelation of Pasco's love for Leonor impels Fede to reach desperately for his trump card—the news that he has outmaneuvered Pasco so as to deny him his expected promotion (p. 112). This disclosure brings a threat of blackmail from Pasco, who realizes that Fede could have engineered

his *coup* only through bribery and in league with a prostitute whom Pasco also knows (pp. 115-116). Obligated by both wife and colleague to see that the real "porquería" is himself and only secondarily the "sociedad de porquería" that he has often smugly condemned, he at last descends to the primitive, savage depths which constitute his essential self,¹⁵ bared to an extent he could never have anticipated by a game that, with a driving force all its own, has dealt its players a dose of reality too strong for any of them to absorb. The scene of brutal, unrestrained physical violence and helpless weeping which concludes *¿A qué jugamos?* (pp. 117-118) represents the outcome of a process that in the play's introductory stage directions Gorostiza terms "la exacerbación de la realidad a la que la obra va accediendo a medida que transcurre" (p. 9): "exacerbación" in that the personal egotism, greed, and lust which define reality's true nature make themselves present up to and beyond the frontiers of human endurance, owing to the heightened experience of life toward which game playing, once undertaken in earnest, steadily builds.

Triana's three players, too, undergo what may be described as a raising of the voltage at which life is experienced. In this case, rather than a gradual intensification in all three characters toward a crisis point at the end of the play, we see them succumb to earlier moments of exhaustion; the magnetism which pulls them deeply into the game also generates an excitement that at times drives them to the verge of illness. Lalo's frenzied eagerness to play soon proves too much for Cuca, who confides her distress to her sister in phrases such as "El corazón . . . Óyelo, parece que va a estallar," "Quisiera echar a correr," "No puedo aguantarlo," and "Siento asco" (pp. 11-12). Later Beba suffers a similar prostration, desperate to withdraw from the demands on her made by Lalo and her now-recovered sister, who cruelly force her on:

BEBA. (*Saliendo de situación.*) No puedo. La cabeza me va a estallar.

LALO. (*Imperativo.*) Sigue, no te detengas.

CUCA. (*Sarcástica.*) Hazle caso al mandamás.

BEBA. (*Angustiada.*) Aire, un poco de aire.

LALO. (*A Beba.*) Ahora sonaba el timbre de la puerta.

Beba cae derrumbada en una silla.

CUCA. (*Como la madre.*) ¿Has oído, Alberto?

BEBA. (*Desesperada.*) Por favor, creo que voy a arrojar.

LALO. (*Molesto.*) Esta lo echa todo a perder.

(p. 40)

The highly charged current of life generated by game playing undoes Lalo, who in Act II pleads for water and begs to leave the room (p. 61). By the end of the act he is described as "vencido" (p. 109) and is left sobbing, exposed to the ridicule of his sisters (p. 110). Thus the structure and mechanism that keep the players riveted to the game create the need for a "time out"; the act of committed playing leads to an agonizing compression of ordinary reality, much as in poetry, for example, where a particular "playing with" (that is, selecting and arranging) words results in a more concentrated and powerful experience of language than verbal communication normally provides.

But what structure and what mechanism are involved here? *¿A qué jugamos?* presented a relatively simple situation, in which the fundamental depravity

only partially visible in the outer world became fully manifest in and through the world of serious play: that is, as the object of a discovery which only the playing itself could have made possible. Accordingly, the primary movement of the game, as it carried its players along with it, was toward ever more unendurable revelation. In contrast, *La noche de los asesinos*, its ambience of violent cruelty established from the outset by Lalo's cry of "Un asesino" (p. 3), leaves little or nothing to be discovered about life's essential meanness. For this reason we must turn elsewhere for an understanding of play and its power to "exacerbate" (Gorostiza's term is, if anything, even more applicable to Triana's characters) the experience of reality.

The concept that most naturally suggests itself is that of theatre, also indicated by the word "play"—as by the Spanish *jugar* when the object is *un papel*. Remembering the film *motif* present in *¿A qué jugamos?*, we realize that the idea of "player" in the sense of "actor" was never far from Gorostiza's mind: and, recalling Fede's careful use of lighting and other dramatic effects—plus his occasional prods to the reluctant assemblage, such as "El público está esperando" (p. 103)—we see that in that play, too, "game" sometimes meant "performance."

In Triana, however, the theatrical component in game playing is more pronounced. In the first place, as we have already noted, Lalo, Cuca, and Beba impersonate other known or imagined individuals. The dramatic virtuosity with which each does so is at times recognized by applause (even if sarcastic) from the other two and often serves to accentuate the malevolent and hypocritical element basic to the outlines of family and society which these impersonations sketch.¹⁶ Secondly, and more important, the three, in effect, "play" themselves. Given the fact that their entire activity has been set in motion by a fantasized event, the identities they project assume the artificial reality of assigned parts. Awareness of this theatricality extends to the players themselves. When, with the very first words of *La noche de los asesinos*, Lalo orders the door to their room closed, he thereby transforms the latter into a stage and evokes from Beba the observation that "La representación ha empezado" (p. 3); when at the conclusion of Act I he orders the door reopened, Beba announces that "La primera parte ha terminado" (p. 52). Similarly, the closing of the door at the beginning of Act II signals the start of a new phase in the performance (p. 55); its reopening in the final moments of the act indicates another ending (p. 109). In this way the dramatic event which is Triana's *La noche de los asesinos* coincides with a drama enacted by its characters. The existential facts of malice and oppression to which the characters' activity is a response are thus integrated into a system much more highly structured and expressive than the mere playing of a game, however serious, can by itself become.

Yet we must go beyond theatre as well. More precisely, we must see how the theatrical nature of what Lalo, Beba, and Cuca are about points to a way of recreating experience even more deeply rooted in human life than are the conventions of staged performance. To this end we may turn again to Beba's first line, "La representación ha empezado," and note Cuca's response, "¿Otra vez?," to which her sister makes the irritated rejoinder, "¡Como si esto fuera algo nuevo!" (p. 3). We may then proceed to the play's concluding scene and observe the following exchange:

- BEBA. ¿Estás dispuesta, otra vez?
 CUCA. Eso no se pregunta.
 BEBA. Llegaremos a hacerlo un día . . .
 CUCA. (*Interrumpiendo.*) Sin que nada falle.
 (p. 109)

soon after which comes Beba's—and the play's—final line: "Está bien. Ahora me toca a mí" (p. 110). What we, the audience, have witnessed, then, is only one of an indefinite number of representations of the same basic event, each attempting to improve on the one just completed.¹⁷ In this sense Triana's work contains within itself not so much another play as the phenomenon of incessant repetition (repetition which in the first instance signifies the meaningless, absurd quality of the characters' lives), since it remains open both at beginning and end to multiple enactments of his characters' one obsessive drama.

Vividly reinforcing this fundamental repetitive dynamic are certain auditory effects through which repetition is incorporated into *La noche de los asesinos* in the form of rhythm. Foremost among them in Act I is Lalo's prolonged and rapid rubbing together of two knives, accompanied by his reiteration of the syllables "ric-rac" and designed to build to what the author calls "un climax delirante" (p. 35). In the second act Cuca and Beba's voiced imitation of the court stenotype's "tac-tac-tac-tac" combines with an affected pronunciation of vowel sounds in speech and a continual rapping against a table to lend "una dimensión extraña" (p. 72) to the proceedings, the automatic quality of the sounds producing a "gran sentido rítmico" (p. 73) that leads the scene to "un breve instante de delirio" (p. 74). We may note, finally, the play's musical *motif*, consisting of a kind of chant which at time accompanies the dialogue and whose lyrics, constantly repeated, are "La sala no es la sala. La sala es la cocina. El cuarto no es el cuarto. El cuarto es el inodoro."

These lyrics provide an important insight into what is occurring here, for they express the essential autonomy of the world conjured into being by role playing undertaken as conscious "play": persons and things gravitate toward new identities. At the same time the chant, as part of the rhythmic creation of *La noche de los asesinos*, serves to actualize this transformation of reality at the most primitive level of human sensibility. It is through the cultivation of rhythm that the heightening of experience—the raising of the voltage, the absorption of life in concentrated doses, to employ images used earlier—which characterizes simple game playing becomes so intense as to pass from the game, through and beyond theatre, to the realm of ritual, in which the words, forms, colors, and objects of ordinary life become symbols of a world to which the ordinary affords no access.

The ritualistic foundation of the game playing in which Triana's characters engage has received attention in previous commentaries on the author's work. Frank Dauster observes how, in *La noche de los asesinos*, "El 'juego' del asesinato es, claramente, un rito ceremonial, con su letanía y la colocación sacramental de objetos. Más aún," he continues, "es un rito que antes se llevaba a cabo y que se realizará en el futuro."¹⁸ Dauster goes on to suggest that this "futuro" may finally include a real-life murder of the parents, for which the preceding enactments will have served not only as rehearsals (as in theatre), but as "un proceso

para purgar todas las emociones y las actitudes que pudieran dificultar su actualización" (p. 35). The need for purgation—purgation from a violence which itself embodies the violent essence of the characters' outer world—is taken up by Julio Ortega, who calls the three characters' game "una suerte de exorcismo patético": an attempt to confront and expel through ritual the guilt engendered in them by their patricidal impulse, but in the very process an act which recreates with excruciating vividness the violence at the root of that impulse.¹⁹ Ortega's observations bring into focus the idea of game playing as a double-edged sword. The playing is a means of privileged access to what is most deeply real, yet at the same time a participation in the real that overwhelms and devours rather than frees:

En un mecanismo de la obra Lalo dirige este juego mientras que sus hermanas, alternativamente, tratan de salirse de él, abatidas o temerosas, porque entienden que van cada vez más al fondo de la metáfora planteada, o sea que se acercan al mismo crimen convertido en pura finalidad. Lo curioso es que el juego absorbe de tal modo la situación planteada por la pieza que el nivel de realidad, de normalidad si se quiere, empieza a borrarse y el juego parece constituirse en la finalidad entera de los hermanos, como si el asesinato fuese fundamentalmente un exorcismo en su sola posibilidad. Y es que el juego aquí no es simplemente una representación o un doblaje de los personajes, sino que es una violencia desatada, una obsesión y una aventura que está enfrentando a los personajes consigo mismos. (p. 263)

The fact that here ritual, having originated in response to the need to cope with a human predicament, turns into its own *raison d'être* means that we have come far from the kind of sacrificial atonement which concludes *Los soles truncos*. True, at some point both Marqués and Triana involve their characters in rites which in one way or another incorporate the evils that are perceived as underlying their existence. In the first play, as we remember, Emilia's wish to expiate past sins by taking refuge from a sin-filled world yields to Inés' superior wisdom and "purification" through a quasi-religious act whereby the two living sisters offer themselves and Hortensia's body as victims to the all-consuming evil, symbolized by fire. Their rite of immolation (admittedly, rendered less than cathartic by Marqués' recourse to Wagnerian melodies and other clichés of an outdated romanticism) represents an ennobling self-affirmation in the face of life's harshness. Lalo, Cuca, and Beba, in contrast, officiate at what Ortega calls a black mass (p. 262). This is Lalo's "noche de vituperios" (p. 12): role playing which, once structured along the lines of a game, assumes a monstrous autonomy within which the individual finds himself not affirmed, but ever more hopelessly caught up in the rush of dark forces now unleashed. Even more pathetically than Fede in *¿A qué jugamos?*, the Lalo who has given himself confidently and completely to his chosen role is ultimately reduced by it to the drained and disoriented "figura de un museo en ruinas" that, as we have noted, defined from the outset his own and his sisters' tragic destiny:

- LALO. (*Entre sollozos.*) Ay, hermanas mías, si el amor pudiera . . .
 Sólo el amor . . . Porque a pesar de todo yo los quiero.
- CUCA. (*Jugando con el cuchillo.*) Me parece ridículo.

BEBA. (*A Cuca.*) Pobrecito, déjalo.

CUCA. (*A Beba. Entre risas burlonas.*) Míralo. (*A Lalo*) Así quería verte.

(p. 110)

Several works by young playwrights which appear toward the end of the 1960's and at the beginning of the new decade seem to take role playing in a somewhat different direction than we have so far seen. They bring us close enough to our own time to provide us with only a minimum of critical perspective. These concluding remarks, therefore, will be limited to setting down a few observations as to how role playing is viewed at significant moments of its thematic development in selected plays. One concept that appears to emerge from a number of dramas is that of role playing not as an activity which seeks vainly to create a refuge from the larger life (as in *Los soles truncos* and *Medusa*) or to concentrate life's primitive essence within the confines of a structured game world (as in *¿A qué jugamos?* and *La noche de los asesinos*), but as a consciously chosen performance capable of affecting, for good or ill, the totality of the person and his *milieu*. Whereas for Marqués and Carballido the choice for the individual is between playing a role and simply living, for Gorostiza and Triana there comes, at least implicitly, the recognition of the need to decide between two different types of role playing: that which tends to hide the truth (a *simular* whose purpose is *dismular*) and that which clarifies it. Before embarking on their end-of-the-world game in Act II, Gorostiza's characters spend all of the previous act engaging in varieties of play designed to conceal their lives from one another. Similarly, the total immersion in the harshness of truth undergone by Triana's three young players is set off against dissembling behavior by means of which the elders whom they impersonate are seen "playing" with one another. The two dramatists to whom we now briefly turn our attention offer meditations upon role playing both as an instrument of deceit and as a way to personal liberation for its participants and its audience. Their focus is on the interrelationship of performance and life.

In the same year that *¿A qué jugamos?* was first performed, the Argentine theatre invited its public to an even more nightmarish descent into the depths of human savagery, with Griselda Gambaro's *El campo*.²⁰ Set (except for the last *cuadro*) in the office of a uniformed camp commander named Franco—an office into which strange and ominous sounds penetrate—the play begins with the arrival of Martín, recently hired to work there as administrator. It continues with Martín's—and the audience's—realization that he has been assigned to a concentration camp; the appearance of Emma, with her shaved head, her disfigured, branded body, and her cringing submissiveness to Franco—all of which betray her status as a long-term prisoner—provides concrete confirmation of that fact. Appalled at Emma's plight, Martín eventually receives Franco's consent that she be released and takes her away with him to the apparent security of his home. There, however, they are intruded upon by strangers who proceed to brand Martín with fire, as Emma had once been branded. Thus the concentration camp, as an image of man's enslavement to cruel forces, is extended beyond the confines of a particular time and place to represent in the playwright's

vision the all-pervasive cruelty of the human condition. No one can remain "sin marca" (p. 100).

Martín's experience at the camp is basically that of spectator at a performance. Unlike the members of a theatre audience, however, his presence carries with it the responsibility to influence the course of events, a responsibility that becomes morally urgent with his increasing awareness of the camp's true nature. Here lies the impossibility of his situation, for during most of the play whatever compulsion he may feel toward fulfilling a moral duty is more than matched by the disorienting effects of a conspiracy of pretense of which Franco and Emma make him the victim. Together the latter comprise the cruelest of master-slave relationships, but this relationship is also a system which functions to preserve itself by projecting a false version of reality to the outside world—in this case, to the hapless Martín. The projection relies on a mode of speech, gesture, and action that presupposes (which is to say, theatrically recreates) an ideal realm of existence unfamiliar with hatred, violence, and suffering; this artificial world serves to deny the real one, which all the while struggles to impress its horrible truth on the senses of sight (Franco's SS uniform and whip, Emma's scarred body), sound (shouted commands, the barking of dogs, machine-gun fire, children's screams) and smell (the odor of burning flesh). Franco is at once an actor in this comedy and its director (at one point he is described as behaving "como un director de escena" [p. 45]). In the latter capacity he creates a stage setting—providing it at intervals with folk, classical, or anesthetizing background music—and assigns Emma the part she must play for him. The most common way in which both perform as actors, especially Emma, is by adopting the varied formulas of what polite society would consider refined, edifying discourse, to create "un tono de sociabilidad amanerada" (p. 38). A painful juxtaposition (present from the start in the word "campo") is continually maintained between Emma's visible wretchedness and phrases such as the following, delivered with a "sonrisa" that is often "social, . . . estereotipada" (p. 31), often "de ficticia excitación" (p. 54): "Concedo pocas entrevistas, mi tiempo está atrozmente [!] ocupado" (p. 32); "Mi público pocas adora" (p. 34); "El lenguaje de la música es . . . el lenguaje . . . ¡del alma!" (p. 40); "Querido, usted es un encanto . . ." (p. 45); "ofrecer mi arte . . . , entregar mi corazón" (p. 54); "Una dulce bondad que atempera las crueldades . . ." (p. 71); "Es un deporte apasionante" (p. 74).

Taken in its more general as well as its strictly theatrical sense, this false representation of events offers a study in the use to which a dominant system of power may put culturally legitimized forms of expression, appropriating them to itself in order to confound the individual's perceptions of reality and thus interpose a lie between him and the truth.²¹ In both Martín, as an outsider (interested spectator) to power, and Emma, constrained to be its accomplice (to act her part), we see the victims of such a comedy of falsification. Victims, we may add, not because the lie vanquishes truth in the depths of their being, but precisely because the two characters bear within themselves the agonizing and ultimately devastating contradiction between a reality experienced in the flesh and a quite opposite one summoned into existence by the playing of parts. It is this contradiction which drives Emma to frequent fits of terror, hysterical

laughter, and an uncontrollable scratching of her body. Likewise, Martín, continually buffeted between two worlds, soon loses his bearings and, eventually, even his ability to speak coherently (p. 66). In *El campo*, then, performance emerges as a basically oppressive, debilitating activity. Placed at the service of all that is sinister and malevolent in human life, it confuses man's efforts to recognize and confront evil.

Two plays by the Venezuelan author, Isaac Chocrón, suggest a more positive view of the interpenetration of role playing and life. In both *O.K.* and *La revolución*, dramas separated by two years' time,²² a certain kind of posing conceded to be fictitious nevertheless serves as a means whereby the individual at least begins to gain an awareness of the possibility of living a truly authentic life. Chocrón employs few characters and relatively simple situations. In Act I of *O.K.* Franco, now thirty, has been living for fifteen years with Mina, now forty-five, on the roof of a tenement. The two are visited by Ángela, an attractive widow of Mina's age, for whom Mina once designed a dress. Interested in the wealth she reports having inherited from her husband, Franco prevails upon Ángela to prolong her stay. As Act II opens, a year has passed, and now all three live prosperously together in a penthouse. Eventually Mina, perceiving her place in Franco's affections usurped by Ángela, decides to end the triangular relationship through a secret arrangement with her rival. In return for a promise of regular monetary payments from Ángela, she renounces all claims to Franco and leaves the penthouse for the unfamiliar world outside. *La revolución* evokes one evening in the life of a homosexual couple, Eloy and Gabriel, who, as nightclub entertainers, appear upon the same stage intended for the play's performance and before an audience that is also Chocrón's. Eloy, the master of ceremonies, is to introduce Gabriel, who, in the role of "Miss Susy," will dance and sing for the public. This time, however, discord between the two prevents them from completing the show as promised in the evening's program, and until Act II Gabriel does not ever appear in the feminine attire appropriate to his part. Instead, the performers—at times appealing directly to the audience, at times engaged in dialogue with one another—carry on a discussion marked by recriminations and justifications touching upon their life together and the way in which each envisions his function both on and off the stage. In the last, feverish moments Gabriel is felled by a bullet from the rifle which he himself has been recklessly brandishing as a sort of visual aid to the exposition of his argument; and Eloy drags him quickly from the stage, nervously dismissing the audience with an unconvincing "Esto es parte del espectáculo" (p. 79).

Both works provide abundant material for reflection on what it means to play a role. Several points in particular may be mentioned here. To begin with, the context within which role playing is to emerge approaches that of an existential void, a kind of aimless floating in a present in which identity and purpose are no more than memories (a condition reminiscent, to a certain extent, of the first act of Carballido's *Medusa*). Basically theatre of the absurd, *O.K.* introduces its audience to three "has-beens": Mina "fue costurera," Franco "fue bello," and Ángela "ha dejado de ser viuda" (p. 31; emphasis added). Early in Act I Mina acknowledges the need to find some meaning in a here-and-

now cut off from a life-giving past, and she attempts to involve Franco in her search:

Lo que pasa hoy lo dice tu radio. Lo que pasó ayer ya pasó. A mí lo único que me importa es lo de ahora, lo de ya, me importa cómo salir de éste . . . ¿Cómo lo llamamos hoy? Cómo salir de éste . . . ¿retiro involuntario? ¿nidito de amor? ¿limbo? Bella palabra. Limbo. ¿O situación? Situación. ¡Bravo! Llamémosle hoy situación. Mi situación, querido amigo, quiero decir la nuestra, es . . . ¿es qué? ¿Apatía? ¿Se cerraron todas las puertas? ¿Orgullo? ¿Pereza?

(p. 38)

This "limbo," or no-man's land, in which one identifiable way of life has been left irretrievably behind while a newer, different one has yet to appear, also defines the relationship of Eloy and Gabriel, whose main source of pleasure in the present—other than mutual insult—consists of their remembrance of youthful escapades in faraway cities where their acts were once acclaimed. Eloy now cuts a pathetic figure, "vestido con el clásico smoking lustroso y un poco raído de casi todos los mesoneros de tercera categoría" (p. 11). Gabriel, grown fat over the years, addresses the audience on behalf of both himself and his partner in words that echo those of the earlier play:

Aunque nadie lo crea, yo fui bello. Fui tierno, encantador, aun complaciente. Sí, señores, esto que ven aquí valió la pena una vez. Valió mucho la pena. Y no fui la excepción. Todos fuimos bellos al principio. Incluso Eloy. Fuimos bellos y deseados. Esa es la maravilla de ser joven: que uno es deseado. Y luego, sin a veces darnos cuenta, todos nos convertimos en algo semejante a mí.

(p. 45)

Chocrón shows how human interaction tends to accommodate itself to such a state of non-being by opting for the artificial stability of fixed roles defined not according to any truly human content (authentic intimacy, communication, growth), but rather in terms of an impersonal trade-off among individuals, each of whom is seen as primarily concerned with safeguarding his own private domain. The key word here is "entendimiento." Franco, after pointing out to Mína, "No nos vamos a volver nada. No nos hemos vuelto nada en todos estos años," goes on to specify what does constitute their relationship:

Nos entendemos. Eso es todo. ¿Cuántos se entienden tan bien como tú y yo? Somos felices. Tranquilízate. Ahora vendrá la señora distinguida y tú le tomarás las medidas, escogerán los modelos, le harás los trajes, cuando te pague compramos algunas cosas, y el resto me lo das, como tú quieres, y yo te besaré en la mejilla (la besa) y te diré: 'Espérame aquí. Ya vuelvo rico.'

(p. 48)

We can discern here a decidedly mechanistic form of human coexistence, wherein persons fall into predictable, almost automatic patterns of behavior calculated to make any genuine rapport with one another impossible. This is, in effect, a playing of roles that negates each player's vital inner self, investing him instead with a shallower, colorless *persona* which best allows him to pursue the satis-

faction of needs peculiarly his own. Thus Mina is left alone every morning to gaze through her binoculars at lovers in a nearby park; and Franco, to sit absorbed at the same time in the perusal of two-month-old newspapers. The arrival of Ángela, "la señora distinguida" awaited by Mina and Franco, only reinforces this tendency in what now becomes a threesome. Ángela seems to bring something of the nature of her former marriage, which she calls "un simple entendimiento" (p. 58), to the new arrangement. She, of course, contributes her large inheritance from the marriage and by so doing creates a situation—already imagined by Franco, as his remarks to Mina, cited above, suggest—whose governing principle is economic. Franco enjoys access to both women and the wealth of one of them in return for his affection. The women, for their part, "share" Franco as if he were property. As Mina will finally recognize, "La compra-venta es la ocupación actual y todo lo que nos rodea es un gran mercado. Aquí el valor, siempre, es material" (p. 141). The absence, at the profoundest level, of communication among persons continues in aggravated form under the new system until the moment of crisis.

Likewise, in *La Revolución* Eloy conceives of the night-club act as a business arrangement by which the public pays to "disfrutar un rato" (p. 26) and must be spared any kind of scandal from its entertainers: thus Eloy's subdued clothing, his obsequious manner, and his efforts to minimize the difference in life-style separating him from his audience. His agreement with Gabriel, under which the latter is charged with finding performing space for their shows while Eloy handles financial matters, also makes for a relationship marked by the avoidance of basic questions about the meaning and direction of their lives. "Tú alquilas y yo pago," Eloy reminds his partner. "Es un negocio igual que cualquier otro" (p. 14). Gabriel later has occasion to speak of "un entendimiento basado en el abuso . . . mutuo," and asks rhetorically, "¿No es eso lo que tiene todo el mundo?" (p. 68). In fact, through Gabriel's barbs we come to realize that for Eloy the real "show" consists of the projection of a false self to the audience; of a character whose inoffensive, ingratiating presence seeks to confirm that audience in the complacent sense of its own normality—while isolating the incorrigible nonconformist (Gabriel) in his unacceptability. In this way both performer and spectator become, in Gabriel's caustic metaphor, ostriches hiding their heads from a world too disturbing to confront (p. 42).

What we have seen so far in both plays is an essentially dishonest use of role. Dishonest, in the first place, because it is an accomplice in the exclusion of important aspects of reality from the characters' sphere of action; dishonest, secondly, because it is role playing that does not acknowledge itself as such. Set against it, and ultimately eclipsing it, is the phenomenon of conscious impersonation, through which Chocrón leads one character in each play to recognize himself and his situation with new clarity and to reach the threshold of radical change. Toward the end of *O.K.* Mina's perception of the overriding importance of "la compra-venta" to the three-way relationship dawns on her as the result of a game in which she and Ángela pretend to be one another. In assuming Ángela's identity she gradually adopts her mentality as well and suddenly finds herself insightfully "quoting" the other to the effect that "Con mi dinero, a cualquiera se compra . . ." (pp. 132-133). Aware of the truth of

what she has just uttered, she calls a halt to the game and, taking Ángela aside, concludes with her the agreement to "sell" Franco and depart. For, in the process of temporarily setting aside her own *persona* and putting on the mask of another, she has acquired the sufficient critical distance to realize that the only way out of this sterile relationship based on the laws of business consists of carrying its terms to their ultimate consequences. If all else can be bought and sold, decides Mina, why not people too? (p. 160). Beyond these, the farthest limits of closed, inhuman world, lies a dark unknown which, if not exactly comforting, at least represents freedom from an increasingly less tolerable situation and the chance for a new beginning, a real deliverance from limbo.

If we regard *La Revolución* as performance within a performance, we must further appreciate the fact that the play itself subsumes two distinct notions of what performance should be and do. In opposition to the kind of unacknowledged acting through which Eloy seeks to deny his being and leave his audience in undisturbed complacency, we witness Gabriel's unabashedly fervent involvement in a role to which he gives himself freely and completely, and which constitutes an alteration of identity even more daring than that which we saw in Mina's impersonation of Ángela. Indeed, as a transvestite, Gabriel effects the ultimate impersonation: a strikingly visible crossing of boundaries that are both personal and sexual. The "Miss Susy" who appears in Act II with makeup, wig, and pink gown, and to whom Eloy is only too happy to stand in contrast, represents the most scandalous expression of Gabriel's frequently verbalized desire to make something new happen, to produce "un acontecimiento en un lugar donde ya no ocurre ningún verdadero acontecimiento" (p. 26). To live fully, to be authentically in touch with oneself, is to leap out of one's normal being into a new dimension, which is at the same time to re-encounter oneself in hitherto unsuspected ways. This is the "revolution" toward which the play looks and is also the locus of disagreement between its two characters:

ELOY No te metas conmigo.

GABRIEL Bueno. Pero entonces métete tú con los demás.

ELOY ¿Por qué me quieres obligar?

GABRIEL Para saber que estás vivo.

ELOY Lo estoy. ¿No me ves?

GABRIEL Te veo y veo tu viveza, pero no estoy muy convencido de que estás vivo.

ELOY ¿Qué quieres que haga? ¿Que haga tu papel?

GABRIEL Que hagas un papel. Que asumas un papel. Que te conviertas en un papel. Eso es estar vivo.

ELOY ¿Que pretenda como tú pretendes?

GABRIEL ¿Qué importa pretender con tal de creer en lo que se pretende? ¿No me entiendes? Óyeme, existe una urgente, muy urgente, necesidad de que volvamos a ser personas pensantes, . . . que nos tiremos en picada. Es muy urgente, Eloy. ¡Tírate!

ELOY ¿Por qué? ¿Qué va a pasar? ¿Una revolución?

GABRIEL La revolución. Y ya está pasando, Eloy, está pasando. ¿No la ves? ¿No la sientes? Muévete o te va a triturar, te va a pisar, vas a quedar como colilla de cigarro besando el suelo.

Once consciously and wholeheartedly entered into, role playing becomes, again, the necessary first step in the individual's discovery of his most profound identity in the larger world. Not, as in Gorostiza and Triana, the prelude to an intolerable confrontation with that world's overwhelming evil, but, rather, access to a sense of personal value above and beyond the closed systems in which life remains something less than wholly human. "Soy un ser," proclaims Gabriel toward the end of Act II (p. 70). As in *O.K.*, which ends with Mina poised to embark upon a new existence of whose nature she is ignorant (the "Zambullirse . . . Tirarse a toda velocidad" of which she has earlier spoken [pp. 95-96] and which, as we have just seen, is echoed in the dialogue of the later play), Gabriel's vital encounter with self turns problematical for Chocrón's audience when that character, apparently responding to what he perceives as the need to confer a final value on "ser" by going violently beyond it "a través de la muerte . . ." (p. 70), fetches the rifle that in his own hands will prove fatal to him. The closed system has nevertheless been broken; and, regardless of the individual's fate in this instance, a way of liberation where others may follow is at least glimpsed as a possibility.

Thus this recent selection of plays from Spanish America—*El campo*, *O.K.*, and *La Revolución*—indicates, if nothing else, a return to the tradition of theatre as a uniquely social genre. The physical proximity of actors and public, which cannot be equaled, for example, by the mere contact of a reader with the written text of a novel or poem, already produces on its own scale the conditions of interaction by which persons' lives impinge upon one another in the world outside. The theatre's social orientation becomes even more evident in dramatic works wherein role playing, which in staged performance receives its most artistic expression, is elevated to the same level of theme. When, to go a step further, the treatment of the role-playing theme emphasizes the relationship of particular persons with the vaster world beyond their immediate sphere of life, as it does in these works by Gambaro and Chocrón, the theatre begins to emerge anew as the truly committed art form which in essence it has always been.

Brooklyn College

Notes

1. Cf. Chapter I, "Performances," in Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York, 1959), pp. 17-76.

2. Examples abound of improvised "performances"—often not explicitly identified as such—within a play. Groups of characters conspire to "stage" situations designed to conceal reality from other characters. This frequently consists of projecting false "realities" through control over setting as well as previously agreed-upon forms of behavior. In Calderón's *La vida es sueño*, to mention one well-known work from the Hispanic theatrical tradition, Segismundo is the victim, first, of a physical environment (a kind of stage set) by means of which King Basilio and his deputies confer upon him a bestial self-image intended to keep the knowledge of his princely state from him; secondly, of a concerted effort at pretense in which the same characters later persuade him that his brief reign as king has been merely a dream. The practical joke is another example of *ad hoc* acting. In *Saverio el cruel* (1936) the Argentine author, Roberto Arlt, whose plays mark the beginning of the contemporary period in River Plate theatre, involves a group of young, middle-class *porteños* in an effort to ridicule a pathetic butter vendor by convincing him that one of their number is mad and prevailing upon him to humor her so as to allow her to recover her sanity. Here improvised acting occurs

(Saverio engages in pretense and is at the same time its victim); and, as in Gorostiza's *¿A qué jugamos?*, to which we shall later turn, pretense is ever more earnestly pursued and takes on increasingly sinister proportions (Arlt, *Teatro completo*, vol. 2 [Buenos Aires, 1968], pp. 37-88).

3. Cf. my comments on Arlt, note 2. Mexican theatre of the same period provides, among other examples, *El gesticulador* (1937; first performed in 1947) by Rodolfo Usigli, in which the protagonist, seeing himself as a failure in life, impersonates a general of the same name who became a hero during the Mexican revolution. An excellent critical study of the 1920's, '30's, and early '40's in Spanish-American theatre is that of Grínor Rojo, *Orígenes del teatro hispanoamericano contemporáneo: La generación de dramaturgos de 1927; Dos direcciones* (Valparaíso, 1972). On the theme of role playing in twentieth-century Cuban theatre, cf. Matías Montes Huidobro, *Persona, vida y máscara en el teatro cubano* (Miami, 1973).

4. *Tragicomedia en cinco actos*. In Carballido, *Teatro* (Mexico, 1976), pp. 66-139. Completed in 1958, the play was first performed in Spanish in 1968.

5. *Comedia trágica en dos actos*. In Marqués, *Teatro*, vol. 1 (Río Piedras, 1970), pp. 5-66.

6. This "maestro," never actually present in Act I, is presumably the same character that appears in the last act as supervisor of the preparations for Dánae's marriage to Polidecto. As such he may be seen here at the beginning as a kind of stage director who, along with the gods themselves, serves to instruct Perseo in the proper performance of his pre-defined role.

7. Polidecto, too, can be said to play a role of sorts, since he does not hesitate to lie—that is, substitute appearance for reality—in the furtherance of selfish ends. However, because these ends remain uppermost in his thinking, and because he is fully conscious of merely misrepresenting the truth, his role playing differs fundamentally from that of Perseo, who gives himself to his part as to a higher truth. Polidecto's absolute cynicism cannot but scandalize Perseo, who, in an exchange between the two, criticizes his protector's invocation of "el pueblo" to justify his selfish deeds, only to hear the latter unabashedly admit, "Cuando un gobernante dice 'el pueblo,' quiere decir en general 'yo mismo'" (p. 74).

8. Marqués' short story of which this play is an adaptation is entitled "Purificación en la Calle del Cristo," thus emphasizing the expiatory intent of the sisters' self-immolation. Marqués, *En una ciudad llamada San Juan* (Havana, 1962), pp. 39-51.

9. Buenos Aires, 1969.

10. Havana, 1965.

11. Choni not only acts in complicity with Cacho to prevent the others from knowing until Act II that they have made love in Fede and Leonor's bed, but also affects an air of bourgeois sophistication that conceals the reality of her humble background from Cacho as well as the rest. We might also note, in passing, the frequent use of the *double entendre*—often containing a sexual meaning (cf. note 14), punning, and the reintroduction of a game invented years before by Fede and Cacho, in which one player must complete the first half of a proverb, supplied by the other, with the second half of a different proverb. We might say that in *¿A qué jugamos?* characters "play" with language, recognizing its basic ambiguity and malleability, and thus its potential for utilization in the service of indirection and evasion.

12. Author's introductory stage directions, unnumbered page.

13. Of these characters Fede, the instigator of the game, and the participant who remains most deeply involved in it, will, as we shall see, be most profoundly affected by its inevitable outcome. Of the others, markedly less enthusiastic and even uneasy but more or less resigned to humoring their increasingly discomforting host, Leonor provides the greatest contrast. Her prophetic response, early in Act II, to her husband's unrelenting insistence that nothing be kept hidden—"Una sabe dónde empiezan estas cosas; pero no dónde terminan" (p. 93)—distinguishes her as one disaffected almost to the extent of subverting the consensus on which the game depends. Her relative detachment (aided by her abstemiousness with regard to alcohol, the heavy consumption of which helps draw the other characters more fully under the spell of the game) enables her to perceive the course of events most clearly and, thereby, to furnish playwright and audience with a critical vantage point from within the drama. Cacho may also be seen in somewhat the same terms. The general tone of youthful innocence, straightforwardness, and good-will which he exudes ("A mí la vida me gusta, qué quieren que les diga. Y a ustedes los quiero" [p. 93]) separates him from the other characters, who, in addition, seem to have more to hide. However, it also gives him fewer qualms about going along with the end-of-the-world game, whose conclusion he is unable to foresee.

14. Cf. note 11. The sexual overtones of the word become more pronounced in the context of Leonor's reminding her husband of the occasions "cuando llorás, y te ablandás, y se te afloja tu omnipotencia" (p. 114). "Fede el omnipotente" is thus humiliated in much the same way he earlier attempted to humiliate Pasco by describing one of his childhood games as "Carlitos jugando con Carlitos" (p. 33). The use of sexual innuendo, especially between husband and wife, recalls Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and Martha's

reproaches to George in terms such as the following: "That's right, lunk-head; answer the door. There must be something you can do well; or are you too drunk to do that, too? Can't you get the latch up, either?" (New York, 1962, p. 193). Albee's play is, of course, present here in more general ways, notably in its vision of the game as an increasingly intimate contact with savagely powerful human forces. Note how the titles of successive acts—"Fun and Games," "Walpurgisnacht," and "The Exorcism"—reveal, as in Gorostiza's work, the game's ever more serious direction.

15. Ironically, Fede has earlier (p. 76) ridiculed Choni's idyllic fantasy of life "a lo salvaje" (p. 73). When "lo salvaje" reappears here at the end of the play—in anything but idyllic form—he can be seen as its prime victim as well as the character most responsible for having uncovered it in its authentic reality. The individual's primitive nature, now revealing itself as "savage" in the perjorative sense of the term, testifies against Fede's notion of a "sociedad de porquería": that is, a collective evil which presumably prevents the individual from manifesting his inherent goodness. In Leonor's words such a concept is equivalent to disclaiming responsibility for one's own baseness—"echarle la culpa a la Sociedad." Tauntingly she asks, "¿Quién es el que hace la Sociedad? (*A Fede*) 'Una sociedad de porquería,' como te gusta decir. Pero mientras tanto las manos bien medidas en ella, amasándola con ganas. Se da risa" (p. 114).

16. For example, Cuca's spirited defense of her parents early in Act I is taken by Lalo as belonging to her role in the game/performance and as such receives his applause as well as Beba's, though both reactions are clearly meant to be scornful. Lalo's sarcastic acclaim is conveyed in phrases like "Bravo. Estupenda escenita" (p. 27); Beba's, with the words "Merece un premio" and "La niña promete" (p. 28). Earlier in the same act Triana's stage directions describe the characters' devastating impersonations of their meddlesome neighbors as "la comedia de los fingimientos" (p. 15). In the courtroom scene of Act II Cuca's grotesque parody of the self-important prosecutor's address to the jury is termed an exhibition of "recursos teatrales" (p. 77) carried out "con gran efecto de teatralidad" (p. 79).

17. It could, perhaps, be argued that all such representations have been, are, and will be identical; in other words, that even the characters' references to the supposedly unique features of this performance and to what may be done differently in future performances, as well as the many times when one or another character, stepping "fuera de situación," apparently refuses to "play," are in reality parts of an unvarying script into which protest itself has been programmed. I find this possibility less convincing in view of Beba's readiness, in the last scene, to provide direction in the next representation—something she has not done in this one.

18. Chapter I, "José Triana: el juego violento," in Dauster, *Ensayos sobre teatro hispanoamericano* (Mexico, 1975), p. 33.

19. "La noche de los asesinos," *Cuadernos Americanos*, 164, No. 3 (May-June 1969), 262.

20. *Pieza en dos actos, cinco cuadros* (Buenos Aires, 1968).

21. Tamara Holzapfel identifies the play's theme as "primarily . . . political," calling *El campo* "essentially an allegory about political dictatorship and its relationship to art and individual freedom"; and again, "clearly an allegory about the pressures exerted by political dictatorships on the arts." ("Griselda Gambaro's Theatre of the Absurd," *LATR*, 4/1 [Fall 1970], 9, 11.) This interpretation recognizes the work's basically political orientation, yet strikes me as unnecessarily narrow. The cruel exploitation portrayed in the play can by no means be thought of as exclusive to the explicitly political entities (i.e., states) commonly known as dictatorships, but may be considered at least potentially operative—as the kind of basic *system* to which I have already referred—whenever some human beings dominate others. Nor are "the arts" the only area of life to fall victim to this exploitation. Emma's grotesquely pathetic version of a piano recital in *cuadro* 3 is certainly the most telling moment of juxtaposition between what is noble and what is base. However, we must remember that throughout the play non-artistic forms—as we have already noted, for example, the common phrases of polite conversation—are equally affected by the system's dynamic. We might say that the total culture becomes an object of manipulation whereby those who seek to perpetuate power may control the means of perception, thought, and expression which the larger community has bequeathed to each individual.

22. Caracas, 1969 and 1971, respectively. Both plays are subtitled *Pieza en dos partes*.