

A *Curriculum Operum* of Mexico's Wilberto Cantón

CARL R. SHIRLEY

With the death of Wilberto Cantón early in 1979, the necessity to begin to estimate the impact of his work on the mainstream of modern Mexican literature assumes greater importance than before. For more than three decades his theatrical productions have generally been well-received both by audiences and critics. Now that his writing has ceased, scholars must begin the task of cataloguing, categorizing and evaluating not only his plays, but also his other literary creations. A preliminary and highly useful undertaking is the construction of a *curriculum operum*. This is a difficult task with any writer, but especially so with Cantón, who wrote many different kinds of literature—poetry, drama, essays, translations, and even one novel. Moreover, since the majority of his work was in the theatre, there is a problem with establishing dates for performances, revivals and published editions of the same play, often with broad time separations. An additional dilemma is one of a relative lack of importance concerning matters of dates which is so prevalent in many Latin American countries. Cantón himself supplied me with a *curriculum vitae* with many dates which do not coincide with those found in standard bibliographical sources or do not agree with other reputable sources such as newspaper reviews of opening night performances.

For the compilation of this list I have employed, in addition to material from Cantón and personal correspondence, two principal sources: *Bibliografía del teatro mexicano* (México, 1962), by Ruth S. Lamb, and *Literatura mexicana contemporánea* (México, 1965), by Aurora Maura Ocampo de Gómez. A third work, *Teatro mexicano contemporáneo* (México, 1962), by Alyce Golding Cooper [Alyce de Kuehne] also proved highly useful. Works consulted with less frequency are listed in the text. The three sources listed above are all helpful, but are well over a decade old and thus do not reflect the author's work during a period when he was extremely active.

In all cases dates have been checked and cross-checked to avoid duplication of previous errors, but probably some have slipped through. In addition I am

sure that there are new mistakes for which I alone am responsible. When there are questions or problems, I have noted these, and in other instances I have attempted to explain discrepancies or to account for differences. Cantón's other theatrical activities—directing plays, translations and adaptations of works by other authors, editorial tasks, criticism, newspaper articles and letters—have been omitted and left for a more standard bibliography.

This *curriculum operum* is an attempt to bring together information from a number of sources for an up-to-date and accurate record of Wilberto Cantón's literary production in order to begin to evaluate not only his evolution as a playwright, but also as a multi-talented literary figure. It is not complete, nor is it intended to be a critical bibliography. I hope that it will serve as a valuable working tool for others who may wish to study the works of this fine Mexican author.

1942

- Item 1 *Cuando zarpe el barco*. According to Lamb, this play was performed by "un grupo de aficionados" this year. There are no other references to a performance in 1942 and it is extremely doubtful that this is an accurate date, since Cantón gave me the year 1945 on more than one instance. (see item 3)

1943

- Item 2 *Segunda estación*. Poem, published by the Sociedad de Artistas y Escritores Jóvenes, Imprenta de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. The colophon includes the following information: "Este poema obtuvo el primer premio de poesía en los Juegos Florales celebrados en el mes de Octubre de 1942, en la ciudad de Hermosillo, con motivo de la inauguración de la Universidad de Sonora."

1945

- Item 3 *Cuando zarpe el barco*. Cantón gave me this date. According to information in *Retrato de mi padre* (see item 62), which also includes this date, it was written "como ejercicio en la clase de composición dramática que impartía Xavier Villaurrutia."

1946

- Item 4 *Cuando zarpe el barco*. Ocampo gives this date, as does Cooper.
- Item 5 *La ciudad de México, águila y sol de su vida*. Essays, published by the Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1946. [Biblioteca Enciclopédica Popular, núm. 130.]

1947

- Item 6 *Un ensayo a propósito de humanismo político*. Thesis for a licenciatura en derecho, published by UNAM (México, 1947).
- Item 7 *Elegía temporal*. Long poem, published in *Cuadernos Americanos*, año VI, vol. 5 (septiembre-octubre, 1947), 215-222.
- Item 8 *Genio y figura de Guatemala*. Rather a combination of a travelogue and a series of personal experiences and memories of traveling in that country in 1946. Issued in Guatemala by Publicaciones

del Ministerio de Educación Pública. It is a particularly delightful little volume which provides valuable insight into the character of the young writer.

1948

- Item 9 *Cuando zarpe el barco*. Lamb gives this date for the first performance of this work by the Grupo Proa. This is confirmed by Antonio Magaña Esquivel in *Medio siglo de teatro mexicano [1900-61]*, (México: INBA, 1964), p. 147: "Noviembre y diciembre de 1948, en el Teatro del Sindicato de Telefonistas: se inició esta sexta temporada el 16 de noviembre con los estrenos de dos obras en un acto de autores mexicanos: *Gil González de Ávila*, de José Peón Contreras y *Cuando zarpe el barco*, de Wilberto L. Cantón, escenografía de Roberto Garibay."

1950

- Item 10 *Posiciones*. A collection of essays, published by UNAM (México, 1950). [Serie Letras, núm. 4.] Contents: "Recordación de Justo Sierra"; "Ramón López Velarde"; "Tres Visitas: 1. Pedro Henríquez Ureña, 2. Alfonso Reyes, 3. Rafael Arévalo Martínez"; "Pablo Neruda en México"; "El prófugo de sí mismo."
- Item 11 *Saber morir*. Play, performed in the Teatro Ideal, México, D.F., August 3, 1950, with music by Miguel Alemán Velasco, son of the president of Mexico at that time. This work, written in Paris the previous year, clearly demonstrates an influence of French existentialist writers. It was Cantón's first full-length play and enjoyed moderate success.
- Item 12 *Saber morir*. Published in *Cuadernos Americanos*, año IX, vol. 2 (mayo-junio, 1950), 233-288.

1951

- Item 13 A peripheral item, but worthy of inclusion here. This is a beautiful quarto publication of Enrique González Martínez' sonnet, "Tuércele el cuello al cisne . . ." Cantón provides a brief history of the work and some personal comments. Information in the colophon includes the following: ". . . se realizó esta edición como homenaje al poeta Enrique González Martínez. El 13 de abril de 1951, octogésimo aniversario de su natalicio, se terminó de imprimir en la Imprenta Universitaria, bajo la dirección de Wilberto Cantón." Only 500 copies were issued.

1952

- Item 14 *La casa de México en la Ciudad Universitaria de París*. (México: UNAM, Imprenta Universitaria, 1952). A study outlining the history of the planning, fund-raising and construction of the Mexican Student Center at the Sorbonne.

1953

- Item 15 Two excerpts from *Segunda estación* (see item 2), included in *La poesía mexicana moderna*, edited by Antonio Castro Leal. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1953), pp. 481-83. Selections are entitled "Esa dulce corriente" and "Todo es verde y azul." The editor provides a very brief biographical sketch.

1954

- Item 16 *Escuela de cortesanos*. Play, staged in the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City during the colonial period, is different from the author's other theatrical pieces in that it is satirical and humorous. It is also highly critical of society, a characteristic shared with many later plays.
- Item 17 *Escuela de cortesanos*. Published in *Panorama del teatro en México*, año I, núm. 3 (septiembre, 1954), 35-66.

1955

- Item 18 *Dos poemas*. An intriguing little volume, published by Brigadas Líricas Lanzadas Desde San Rafael (Mendoza, Argentina, 1955). The two poems are "Elegía temporal" (see item 7), and a long, two-part love poem. The object of the poet's affection here is named Eunice; the first section carries the notation, "Junto al Nilo, 1953." There is a four-page commentary on Cantón's poetry by a Mexican woman named Eunice Odio.
- Item 19 *América es mi patria*. Cantón gave me this title and date, and described the work as a novel for children. Apparently it was never published.
- Item 20 *El nocturno a Rosario*. Play, dealing with the legend surrounding the love of the famous Mexican poet of the nineteenth century, Manuel Acuña, and the beautiful Rosario de la Peña. This drama made its debut in Saltillo, Coahuila, on December 6, under the direction of Salvador Novo. The date was to coincide with the 82nd anniversary of Acuña's death. Rafael Solana, in *Noches de estreno* (México: Ediciones Oasis, 1963), pp. 81-83, states that this was to be the first performance of a tour of ten provincial cities. There is an amusing story here of the problems Cantón encountered with a conflicting performance of *Laura, la de Acuña*, by Eduardo L. Fuentes, a local playwright. Newspapers played up the problem of possible plagiarism, and tickets apparently sold very rapidly for Cantón's play. On the very day of the opening, however, the father of the state governor died and a public wake was scheduled in the Ateneo Fuente—exactly where *El nocturno a Rosario* was to take place—and the play had to be moved to another location. There was great confusion, made greater by the first act of *El nocturno a Rosario*, where Acuña and his mistress, Soledad, view the body of her dead father. The similarity to the actual wake created a minor scandal. The remainder of the tour included performances in Monterrey, San Pedro de las Colonias, a return to Saltillo, San Luis Potosí (Teatro de la Paz), Guadalajara (Teatro Degollado), and Nuevo Laredo.

1956

- Item 21 *El nocturno a Rosario*. The second performance of this play in Saltillo (see item 20) must have been after the new year began. I find a reference which mentions only the year and the Teatro de Obreros del Progreso.

Item 22 *El nocturno a Rosario*. Published. Number 53 in the series *Los presentes* (México, 1956).

Item 23 *Escuela de cortesanos*. Published. Colección Teatro Mexicano (México, 1956).

1957

Item 24 *El nocturno a Rosario*. Performed at the Sala Chopin, México, D.F., September 20. Directed by Jébert Darién. This debut in the Mexican capital was an enormous success; Solana describes the performances and public reaction at great length in *Noches de estreno*, 111-17.

Item 25 *Pecado mortal*. Play, performed at the Teatro Juárez, Temporada UNA, November 23. Directed by Jébert Darién. This work was very unpopular with the critics. It deals with a famous nightclub singer and his two mistresses. Although generally regarded as Cantón's worst effort, this play has many themes and characters which appear later in some of his better works. According to Solana in *Noches de estreno*, *Pecado mortal* "fue leída, hace algún tiempo, a un grupo de críticos y amigos del autor," and carried the title of *Ángel sin pecado* (p. 140).

1958

Item 26 *Malditos*. Banned in Mexico City, October, on opening night at the Teatro Juárez, by the Oficina de Espectáculos. Cantón is supposed to have written this play as a response to the critics who had been so harsh with him for *Pecado mortal*. This is a rather graphic but also didactic treatment of the subject of juvenile delinquency. There is an interesting and amusing "review" of the banning by Fausto Castillo in "México en la Cultura," *Novedades* (20 octubre, 1958), 9.

Item 27 *Malditos*. Finally opened at the Teatro Degollado, Guadalajara, October 21. It also played this year at the Teatro México in Monterrey and in Tampico, directed in all instances by Fernando Wagner.

1959

Item 28 *Malditos*. According to information supplied me by Cantón, there were performances of this play in Havana, Cuba, this year.

Item 29 *Malditos*. Published. Volume XV of the Colección Teatro Mexicano (México, 1959).

Item 30 *Malditos*. Published in *Teatro Mexicano, 1958* (México: Aguilar, 1959), pp. 241-314. This edition, selected and with a prologue by Luis G. Basurto, also includes *Los sueños encendidos* by Luis Moreno, *¡Cordelia!* by Federico S. Inclán, *El pequeño caso de Jorge Lívido* by Sergio Magaña, and *La Malinche* by Celestino Gorostiza.

1960

Item 31 *El jardín de las Gorgonas*. Published in *Tercera antología de obras en un acto*, edited by Maruxa Vilalta (México: Colección Teatro Mexicano, 1960), pp. 9-23. This play deals with an aging dilettante and his encounter with a youthful poet. Cantón here seems to have

tried too hard to be poetic. The work has characters and themes which are more fully developed later with *Inolvidable* (see item 34) and *El juego sagrado* (see item 47).

- Item 32 *El nocturno a Rosario*. Staged by INBA, September 2, as part of el Primer Festival de Teatro Mexicano, in the Arcos-Caracol, directed by José de J. Aceves.

1961

- Item 33 *Tan cerca del cielo*. Play, presented at the Teatro Fábregas, México, D.F., June 30 through August 27, under the direction of Virgilio Mariel. This is another treatment of the Maximilian and Carlotta period in Mexico's history. According to Solana there were plans to open this run with a performance at Chapultepec Castle, but bad weather prevented such an event. This play is not very highly regarded, although it was successful during its run.
- Item 34 *Inolvidable*. Published in August by Ecuador 0° 0' 0" [Revista de Poesía Universal] (México, 1961). This is a play in which the author examines the effects of fantasy and role-playing on the lives of his characters. The plot turns on the revelation of memories of an incestuous relationship. Cantón at one time stated that he considered this his best work, but in a later letter to me revealed that he really did not have a favorite—he always considered the one he was currently working on as his best.

1962

- Item 35 *Nosotros somos Dios*. Staged in November at the Teatro Milán, México, D.F., directed by Jébert Darién. Set against the backdrop of the Mexican Revolution, this play of intense family emotion contains many comments concerning individual responsibility. It is the author's best-known work in the United States, largely because of the student edition published in 1965 (see item 45). It was awarded the Juan Ruiz de Alarcón Prize as the best Mexican play of the year. According to information in *Retrato de mi padre* (see item 62), it was also performed under the title *La sangre derramada*, and a film version was made with this name.
- Item 36 *Inolvidable*. Performed in April at the Teatro Itatí in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with some success. According to Antonio Magaña Esquivel in *Medio siglo de teatro mexicano*, "ocurrió como un complemento de la temporada de teatro mexicano que organizó Luis G. Basurto con su Compañía Teatro de México en América." (pp. 147-48) Cantón seems to have been pleased with this event because he wrote me, in a letter of May 7, 1973, that a critic named Dora Lima in Buenos Aires had written an interesting account of the play.
- Item 37 *Tan cerca del cielo*. Published in *Cuadernos de Bellas Artes*, año III. Act I is in number 6 (junio), pp. 45-72; Act II is in number 7 (julio), pp. 93-124; and Act III is in number 9 (septiembre), pp. 53-72.

1963

- Item *Nosotros somos Dios*. Revived, February 23, at the Teatro Vir-

- 38 ginia Fábregas, under the direction of Jébert Darién. Several changes in cast members were made from the November, 1962 run (see item 35).
- Item 39 *Todos somos hermanos*. There is a record of performances of this play in August at the Teatro del Bosque, México, D.F., directed by Clementina Otero de Barrios. This is a comedy for children, based on *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. Apparently it was a successful production. As Solana points out, this is a bold experiment for an author of plays generally considered for "adults only," and Cantón surprised a number of people with the high quality of his work here. He experiments with the use of a "narrator" who also has a role in the action.
- Item 40 *Nota roja*. Play, made its debut October 17 at the Teatro Milán, México, D.F., directed by Fernando Wagner. Ocampo notes that it was performed in Puebla this same year. *Nota roja* is called a "reportaje en dos actos." It deals with power, politics, corruption and vice. Cantón again employs a character who acts as a narrator, a technique similar to that in *Todos somos hermanos* (see item 39).
- Item 41 *Nosotros somos Dios*. Published in *La Palabra y el Hombre*, núm. 26 (abril-junio, 1963), 315-376.

1964

- Item 42 *Murió por la patria*. Staged at the Nuevo Teatro Ideal, México, D.F. This is an elusive work, one which is not referred to very much. It deals with the deeds of the "niños héroes" during the American invasion of 1847.

1965

- Item 43 *Nota roja*. Published in October by Ecuador 0° 0' 0" [Revista de Poesía Universal] (México, 1965).

1966

- Item 44 *Porfirio Díaz, héroe de la república*. Cantón lists this work and this date in a *curriculum vitae* he sent to me in 1973. He describes it as an essay. This work is not mentioned in any other source.
- Item 45 *Nosotros somos Dios*. American student edition published, edited by S. Samuel Trifilo and Luis Soto-Ruiz (New York: Harper and Row, 1966). Cantón wrote "un mensaje al lector" in October, 1965, to be included in this volume. His comments provide valuable insight into his theatrical world: "Los estudiantes norteamericanos a quienes esta edición va dedicada no encontrarán en esta pieza novedades técnicas ni alardes vanguardistas; tampoco un frío documento sobre la historia de México en 1913; está construida dentro de las normas del género al que pertenece, tal como han sido trazadas desde Aristóteles hasta los modernos tratadistas, pasando por la muy importante estructura fijada por Ibsen. Pero lo que sí podrán seguramente percibir es un eco de los ideales de las luchas del pueblo mexicano en busca de una existencia más libre, más justa y democrática; y el testimonio que da un escritor de hoy sobre la vida de su país en el presente siglo." (p. x)

1967

- Item 46 *Malditos*. Finally made its debut in Mexico City at the Teatro Fábregas, June 23, directed by Rafael Banquells.
- Item 47 *12 obras en un acto*. Edited and with a prologue by Cantón, published in May by Ecuador 0° 0' 0" [Revista de Poesía Universal] (México, 1967). Contains his play, *El juego sagrado*, and the following note: "Esta obra fue escrita para un programa de obras breves que hubieran debido como punto de partida la situación de la conocida comedia de Emilio Carballido *El censo*. Los escritores que colaborarían en el programa eran, además del propio Emilio, Elena Garro, Sergio Magaña, Carlos Solórzano y Wilberto Cantón" (p. 54). In *El juego sagrado* Cantón repeats some of the themes and characters found in *Inolvidable* (see item 34). It is one of his best efforts.
- Item 48 *Nosotros somos Dios*. Published in December by Ecuador 0° 0' 0" [Revista de Poesía Universal] (México, 1967).
- Item 49 *Justo Sierra, héroe blanco de México*. (México: [Secretaría de Educación Pública, Sub-secretaría de Asuntos Culturales], 1967). Part of a government series of educational booklets.

1968

- Item 50 *Inolvidable*. Second edition published in September by Ecuador 0° 0' 0" [Revista de Poesía Universal] (México, 1968).
- Item 51 *Teatro breve*. Published. Colección Teatro de Bolsillo, Vol. 23 (México: [E. G. Gonsen, 1968]). Has only Cantón's two short works, *La niña de cristal* and *El juego sagrado* (see item 47). A note from the director of the series, Álvaro Arauz, states that "la colección de Teatro de Bolsillo, con el fin de divulgar el teatro mexicano en el extranjero, ha publicado, —en edición especial—, cinco volúmenes con obras de autores nacionales, las que serán obsequiadas a las Delegaciones de los países que vengan a México para asistir a los Juegos de la XIX Olimpiada. Las obras publicadas son de Elena Garro, Salvador Novo, Héctor Azar, Emilio Carballido y Wilberto Cantón." *La niña de cristal* is a dramatic monologue in which a young girl describes the impact of her initial experience with love to the older man who took advantage of her.
- Item 52 *Malditos*. Performed at the Teatro Comonfort, México, D.F., during the week of November 9-16, as part of the Festival de Otoño 1968. Nine regional theatrical groups performed in competition. The José Elías Moreno group from Cuautla, Morelos, presented Cantón's play, under the direction of Fernando Valle Ayón. The judges censured this performance "por la degeneración de un texto teatral, absolutamente inadmisibile." Cantón was so upset with the interpretation of *Malditos* that he sent a letter to one of the judges, Lya Engel, with the following comments: "Asesinaron mi obra porque su devoción hacia ella fue tan insuficiente que ni siquiera memorizaron el texto . . . La arrasaron, la violaron, la desfiguraron hasta un punto que al verme insoportable me hizo abandonar la representación durante un piadoso intermedio." The remainder of this letter is in *Revista de Bellas Artes*, No. 25 (noviembre-diciembre, 1969), 106-108.

1970

- Item 53 *Unas migajas de felicidad*. A revised form of *Inolvidable* (see item 34), reduced to two acts and including several changes. It opened August 14 at the Teatro Granero and later moved to the Tepeyac before closing on October 4. Cantón was not happy with the new title. Some of the changes are discussed in Robert L. Bancroft's article, "The Problem of Marcela's Future in Cantón's *Inolvidable*," *Romance Notes*, Vol. XIV, No. 2 (Winter, 1972), 269-274.

1971

- Item 54 *Pecado mortal* and *Malditos*. Published in a single volume by Organización Editorial Navarro (México: 1971). Cantón made numerous changes in *Malditos* for this edition. In a letter to me dated 16 January, 1973, he requested that I base my proposed translation of this play on this edition rather than the one published by Aguilar in 1959 (see item 30), "pues entre uno y otro hay ciertos cambios que me interesa sean tomados en cuenta."

1972

- Item 55 According to an announcement in the *Latin American Theatre Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Fall, 1972), 52, "Tres dramaturgos hispano-americanos recibieron menciones de honor en el Concurso Internacional de Teatro 'León Felipe' el tres de noviembre, 1972 en el Anfiteatro Richelieu de la Sorbona en París. *Clara Carla* de Luis Campodónico (Uruguay); *Entre los hombres como entre las naciones* de Wilberto Cantón (México); y *Tarántula* de Rodolfo Santana (Venezuela). Las obras premiadas serán editadas en México por Alejandro Finisterre [the director of Ecuador 0° 0' 0"]. Constituyeron el jurado Régulo Ahumada (Colombia), Antonio Buero Vallejo (España), Alejandro Finisterre (México), Federico Undiano (Argentina) y Carlos del Valle Inclán (España)." In a letter to me dated 4 November 1972, Cantón refers to this play by the title of *Entre los hombres y entre las naciones*. In the notes in *Retrato de mi padre* (see item 62) the latter form of the title is used and the work is described as "inérita." Apparently, Finisterre's publication plans were never carried out.
- Item 56 *Malditos*. Presented as part of a repertory of traveling theatre to the barrios of the Mexican capital, under the sponsorship of El Teatro Popular. This version, under the direction of Gustavo Rojo, was part of the Primera Temporada.
- Item 57 *Nosotros somos Dios*. Translation, *We Are God*, by S. Samuel Trifilo and Luis Soto-Ruiz, published in *Drama and Theatre*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Spring, 1972), 139-160.

1974

- Item 58 *El juego sagrado*. According to a letter to me from Cantón dated 23 March, 1974, "en el próximo mes de mayo, según me han escrito, se presentará en Nueva York, en español, mi obra en un acto *El juego sagrado*, junto con otras dos piezas breves de Carlos Solórzano y Sergio Bodanovich [sic]." If this performance took place at all it must have been by an amateur group. My research has not

yet encountered a review or an announcement of such a performance.

- Item 59 *El juego sagrado*. Included in *En un acto: Nueve piezas hispano-americanas*, edited by Frank Dauster and Leon F. Lyday (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1974), pp. 40-57.

1976

- Item 60 *Juegos de amor*. The only information I have on this play, based on a table of performances listed in the *Latin American Theatre Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Spring, 1978), 51, is that it was produced in 1976 by Salvador Varela. This is perhaps a performance of *El juego sagrado* under another title.

1978

- Item 61 *Inolvidable*. My translation, *Unforgettable*, based on the 1961 publication (see item 34), performed, October 17-22, by Workshop Theatre of Columbia, South Carolina, under the direction of William A. Mould. Cantón had planned to attend this "premiere in English" but at the last moment had to change his plans.

- Item 62 *Retrato de mi padre*. A one-act play, published by the Editorial Popular de los Trabajadores (México, 1978). This play was awarded "primer premio en el concurso nacional de Obras de Teatro Social." According to information in the prologue by Rafael Solana, Cantón attempted to withdraw the work from competition at the last moment because he wished to ". . . convertirla en otra mayor, agregándole un primer y tercer actos" (p. 3). Information at present indicates that he may indeed have done so. Unconfirmed sources lead me to believe that another work, *La antorcha*, was either staged or published, perhaps early in 1979. "La antorcha" is the name of the newspaper belonging to the protagonist in *Retrato de mi padre*. Either Cantón changed the title or wrote the other two acts he mentioned and gave the new play a new title.

1980

- Item 63 *Two Plays by Wilberto Cantón*. Translation of *Inolvidable* and *El juego sagrado* (*Unforgettable* and *The Sacred Game*), accompanied by an introduction and notes, edited by Carl R. Shirley. (Ardmore, Pennsylvania: Dorrance and Company, 1980).

University of South Carolina