

## Book Reviews

Hernández, Gleider. *Tres dramaturgos venezolanos de hoy: R. Chalbaud, J. I. Cabrujas, I. Chocrón*. Caracas: Ediciones El Nuevo Grupo, 1979. 143 pp.

Gleider Hernández' discussions of three major Venezuelan dramatists will be of interest to students of the Spanish American theatre, to those who specialize in Venezuelan literature and to those generalists who wish to have a clear overview of contemporary theatrical tendencies of that country. The introductory first chapter summarizes the history of the Venezuelan theatre, emphasizing the period since 1936. The summary divides this latter period into two: 1936-1945, the search for a national theatre; and 1945-present, the development of an autonomous theatre in Venezuela. This informative study then discusses each of the three dramatists through his own significant works as those works reflect past efforts and future directions for the Venezuelan theatre. The discussions begin with a brief introduction to the dramatist and to his work in general followed by a critical analysis of each of three plays. Chapter II emphasizes Chalbaud's predominant themes and his technical evolution. The chronological exposition of the plays *Cain adolescente* (1955), *La quema de Judas* (1964), and *Los ángeles terribles* (1967) reveals constant themes within a framework of experimentation with Brechtian techniques. For his discussion of Cabrujas in Chapter III, Hernández chooses that playwright's three most recent plays: *Fiésole* (1967), *Profundo* (1971), and *Acto cultural* (1976). Analyses of the plays trace the dramatist's development and maturation in terms of theme and technique. Detailed studies of *Asia y el Lejano Oriente* (1965), *Okey* (1969), and *La máxima felicidad* (1971) in Chapter IV stress Chocrón's search for new dramatic structures and his refinement of themes. The critical analyses of the nine plays are thorough and informative—especially for those who may not be totally aware of the works of these three important dramatists. The conclusions of Chapter V, however, are disappointing. While Hernández gives a concise summary of the themes and ideas of each playwright, he does not mention the techniques which he so aptly discusses in the preceding chapters. He also fails to draw any insightful conclusions about the Venezuelan theatre and its relationship to the authors upon which his study focuses. The concluding chapter therefore leaves an otherwise thorough presentation unfinished. Fortunately this weakness does not diminish the discussions of the dramatists themselves. The chronological listing of each author's plays—including unpublished ones—is more

helpful than the general bibliography, although this, too, indicates a thoroughly-researched study. As a whole, readers will find Gleider Hernández' discussion of these three major Venezuelan playwrights of substantial value.

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*Nuevos Pasos: Chicano and Puerto Rican Drama.* Nicolás Kanellos and Jorge A. Huerta, editors. Gary, Indiana: *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*, 1979 (año VII, no. 1, invierno 1979). x + 206 pages.

The clamorous success of Miguel Piñero's *Short Eyes* (1973) and Luis Valdez's west-coast version of *Zoot Suit* (1977) made the time right for an anthology of Puerto Rican and Chicano drama, one which would offer the best of the wealth of plays of which the abovementioned works are supposedly the tip of the iceberg. If one were to choose editors for such a joint effort, who better suited than Nicolás Kanellos and Jorge Huerta, experts in the field, academically—both are professors of literature and drama—and practically—both have directed theatre groups for years. So when *Nuevos Pasos* was just the promise of a forthcoming issue of *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*, expectation was high. Unfortunately, as Huerta himself admits, we still lack a good anthology of Chicano drama, a statement applicable as well to Puerto Rican, or more specifically Nuyoricano drama.

Five Chicano and three Puerto Rican plays from *Nuevos Pasos*. Of the former, only one, *Manolo* by Rubén Sierra, is close to full length; two, Ron Arias's *The Interview* and Duarte-Clarke's *Brujerías*, are short, one-act pieces. The Puerto Rican ones are longer. However, the problems lie not with length, but in areas more essentially vital to drama itself.

The Chicano works remain mired, more or less, within Luis Valdez's *Actos* influence. *Actos* function within their limited scope and purpose. However, stereotypes and simplistic responses to life become limitations when one attempts to go beyond the single-minded (and at times simple-minded) *Acto*. Certainly, if the writer seeks more developed, multidimensional plays, based on characters, in the standard sense of the word, then the task is clear—to create characters with convincing, arresting substance. None of the Chicano works do. *Manolo*, notwithstanding the editors' attribution of "complexities" to him, reads like a good-guy victim of circumstances. Killing him off at the end turns a weak play into a weak melodrama; the 'Manolo's-spirit-lives-on' epilogue sounds like a bad 1930's movie finale and worse 1970's drama.

In *Rancho Hollywood*, Carlos Morton avoids character development and the demands of realism by writing satirical farce with blatant caricatures instead of characters. Morton's is the best Chicano offering here. He utilizes standard Chicano fare: Brechtian techniques, quick rhythm, a good sense of timing and humor, clear ideological messages, all in the tradition of Valdez's *Teatro Campesino*. However, the work illustrates the flaw of most Chicano plays—political overkill. The clear ideology is Manichean, and the ending—an appeal to third-world brotherhood—is too idealistically pat. Farce it is, but finally un-

convincing, except to those who were already convinced. And the documentary, didactic goals are much better achieved in the best works—unfortunately omitted—of the *Esperanza* group from Santa Barbara.

The last point raises the question of why better material was not included. One could speculate about copyright conflicts, or the Teatro Campesino's refusal to release scripts of their longer plays, but the question remains unanswerable here. Possibly, there is just not that much good material available, period. One hopes this is not the ultimate reason.

Finally, the plays make it once again clear that contemporary Chicano *teatro* most often relies on enthusiasm, sincerity, simplicity, and a symbiotic relationship with its audience for its success. When read, little remains of these virtues, and glaring faults appear. But the sometimes valid excuse that plays are not meant to be read does not, in this case, nullify the impression that these plays would not be very good theatre either.

Two of the Puerto Rican contributions are weak, though for other reasons. Jaime Carrero's *The FM Safe* has excellent portions and great potential, but the ending betrays the work. After establishing the possibility of changes, especially towards a more equitable female-male relationship, the ending is a reactionary affirmation of macho assertion. The play ends as an urbanization of the western-movies motif of standing up to the bad guys. It is a shame that such high possibilities were dashed on the easily visible rocks of cliché.

*Olu Clemente*, Miguel Algarín and Tato Laviera's Afro-Caribbean musical elegy to Roberto Clemente, is an interesting attempt to combine Caribbean musical forms, social protest, and Afro-Caribbean mythology. It reads like poetry in parts, and is meant to be accompanied by conga music. However, other portions read like typical agitprop, with a sincere, but for outsiders strange, religious defecation of Clemente—which sounds too much like the old, and always corny, Hollywood tributes to sports heroes. While the most experimental of the collection, it is also the most regionally and ethnically limited.

Miguel Piñero's *The Sun Always Shines for the Cool* is the only fully achieved work in the book, with excellent dialogue, quick and never out of character; a believable plot; and an unexpected, powerful ending. One can dislike the world of pimps and prostitutes, but Piñero captures them well, convincing us of their motivation and the logic of the conflict. And no melodrama, no sermonizing, no didactics get in the way. The play's presence accents the faults of the rest.

The Introduction is adequate; the introductory notes to each work, useful. A critical bibliography would have enhanced the volume's appeal. One does wonder why the lack of "a strong social or political statement" is emphasized, negatively, in the notes on Estela Portillo's play, while not applied in Piñero's case. Could it be that good writing makes one overlook supposed ideological flaws?

Finally, the plays—except for Piñero's—could have benefited from rewriting and critical advice. Estela Portillo told this reviewer that her contribution was a working draft, far from finished to her satisfaction; she was right. But she could have been speaking for the others as well.

For the specialist this anthology is necessary. Yet one hopes that soon—very soon—another, much better one, will be available.

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