

Book Reviews

Acuña, René. *El teatro popular en Hispanoamérica: Una bibliografía anotada*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1979. 114 pp.

Whenever a new bibliography appears it almost always is received with expectation by the community of scholars which benefits directly from its circulation, particularly if it carefully lists works of a specialized nature and fills another crucial bibliographic gap. The lack, for instance, of a comprehensive bibliography treating works from pre-Columbian times to the early twentieth century still concerns many of us. We are equally aware, however, that Latin American theatre, as a genre, is expanding so rapidly that many bibliographies are outdated before they appear in print and a constant process of updating becomes essential in this field.

It was a pleasure, therefore, to see published René Acuña's fine contribution to the corpus of bibliographic material available on the Spanish American theatre. The volume is divided into two major areas: Spanish popular theatre antecedents, and the Spanish American expressions from pre-Columbian times to roughly 1970, although there are selected references to works published as late as 1975. This study shows a strong general listing of popular theatre, becoming a very helpful bibliographic tool for personal research and as a library reference bibliography. The divisions for the indigenous theatre and the colonial forms and themes are fairly exhaustive, but they concentrate on examples from the theatre of the northern hemisphere, while including only scant sources or entries from South America.

Despite the reader's initial positive reaction to Acuña's bibliography, and not wishing to detract in any manner from the importance of this study, we would be remiss not to discuss the limitations of the work. One difficulty stemming from the title leads to problems of scope and content. The ambiguity of the term "popular" and its restrictive definition by Acuña requires clarification. The author's preliminary comments give his interpretation of the term: "El teatro popular puede definirse como un conjunto de piezas dramáticas de diversa índole y longitud, por lo común anónimas, que se conservan por tradición oral o escrita . . ." (p. 9). The problem that immediately comes to mind is that only a limited portion of popular theatre is anonymous. Perhaps the use of qualifying adjectives in the title, like *anónimo*, *folklórico*, or even *folklórico-religioso*, in addition to *popular*, would have made the title more precise and would have clarified the content of the bibliography. The gaucho theatre, in most circles, is considered a folkloric or popular form worthy of inclusion, but the author overlooks it entirely. The theatre scholar recognizes as

well that an extensive socio-political popular dramaturgy has developed in Latin America in recent years, giving an added dimension to the term "popular" (see, for example, Gerardo Luzuriaga's *Popular Theater for Social Change in Latin America*. Los Angeles: UCLA, 1978).

Acuña's work concentrates on secondary bibliographic entries, disregarding most primary sources, particularly authored works. In a majority of cases the researcher can find citations for the original work in the secondary sources, but what of those authored texts which have not been studied to any extent and which do not fit the strict limitations of Acuña's definition of popular (i.e., anonymous) playwrights of popular theatre, such as Sor Juana María (Josefa de Azaña y Llano), Alonso Hurtado, Luis Rodríguez Velasco, Diego Mexia de Fernangil, Eduardo Calsamiglia, A. Acevedo Hernández, Jorge Zalamea, and Alfredo Saborio Montenegro? But even principal contributors like Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and J.J. Fernández de Lizardi are overlooked and do not appear in the annotations or index. Even so, the author includes two entries citing José de Anchieta's *autos*, but Anchieta's works, obviously, are not anonymous, so why include him and not all the others? (not to mention the existence of an extensive Brazilian popular theatre beyond that of José de Anchieta). There is, of course, the additional problem of including Brazilian works in a bibliography on Spanish American theatre, but then, why not change the bibliography's title in this regard also?

These omissions and formal difficulties cannot compare, however, with the exclusion of entries on the popular theatre of more recent years. The reader wonders about the bibliography on contemporary *pastorelas*, Magian King plays, spiritualist theatre, and the works of authors like Emilio Carballido, Carlos Solórzano, Luis Alberto Heiremans, José de Jesús Martínez, Ariano Suassuna, and Dias Gomes (and these are only a few of the most prominent). The plays by these dramatists do not fit Acuña's definition, but we doubt that he can find justification for excluding, on that basis, their *autos*, folkloric theatre, and the secondary source bibliography written about their dramas of this category.

In addition, several omissions surface regarding collections and studies containing bibliography and primary source, full-length plays: Luis Alberto Sánchez. *La literatura peruana*. Lima, 1965; Rubén Vargas Ugarte. *De nuestro antiguo teatro*. Lima, 1943; José Cid Pérez & Dolores Martí de Cid. *Teatro indoamericano colonial*. Madrid, 1973, to mention but a few.

The notes of an annotated bibliography should save the researcher time and effort. It would help, therefore, to list by title in the annotations those works collected in the studies cited. For instance, the reader does not know whether to consult Campa's "Six New Mexico Spanish Religious Dramas" and his "Spanish Religious Folk-theatre in the Southwest," or Correa & Cannon's "La loa en Guatemala," unless the titles of the works contained therein appear in the annotations.

Notwithstanding the objections posed to the content and breadth of René Acuña's topical bibliography, his work in this area takes positive steps to fill a major bibliographic void in the study of Spanish American theatre. The listings are more than adequate in many areas and will save countless hours of research if used as a point of departure for study in the popular theatre.

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Peden, Margaret Sayers. *Emilio Carballido*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980. 192 pp.

Author of four novels, a collection of short stories, and nearly one hundred plays, Emilio Carballido has finally been admitted into the volumes of Twayne Publishers. Long in the makings, this study by Margaret Sayers Peden is the first to encompass all of Carballido's work, both narrative and drama, from its beginnings in the late 1940's to about 1974. Unfortunately, the book is already outdated; Carballido has written at least a dozen plays since 1974, and continues to produce them at an amazing rate. As a result, the definitive study on this prolific author remains an elusive task.

Peden's opening line, "Emilio Carballido is Mexico's premier dramatist," leads the reader to expect a book-length defense of this statement. Yet the author avoids this trap, not hesitating to add criticism to praise, then gives as much attention to box office failures as she does to popular and commercial successes. Peden maintains another balance between plot and analysis by coupling concise summaries with critical observations concerning formal structure, theme, and style. Although Carballido's dramas overshadow his narrative works in both quantity and quality, Peden devotes ample space to his novels and short stories, frequently drawing meaningful parallels between the genres.

In the opening chapter, the author places Carballido within a national and a historical context by briefly tracing the history of Mexican theatre and narrative. She also provides a glimpse of Carballido's life and his literary circle, without suggesting any direct influences on his work.

Chapter II was most likely the hardest one for Peden to organize, for here she attempts to deal with 33 one-act plays. Due to their variety in tone and style, Peden divides them into several categories: early one-acts; monologues; realistic D.F. vignettes; two spectaculars; political realism (*Un pequeño día de ira*); and nonconventional plays of horror, myth, poetry, and drama (including *Yo también hablo de la rosa*). This is the weakest of the chapters, not only because of the many categories, but also because of the seemingly arbitrary way in which Peden distinguishes between one-act and full-length plays. It is not entirely clear why *Un pequeño día de ira* and *Yo también hablo de la rosa* are approached as one-acts while *Acapulco, los lunes* and *Conversación entre las ruinas* (also consisting of one long act) are included among the full-length works. The author perhaps could have avoided this questionable classification by treating as one-acts only those that have appeared in the four editions of *D.F.*, the latest of which contained 26 short plays.

Chapters III and IV focus on Carballido's narrative works, which consist of a collection of short stories and four novellas. Peden finds unity among the ten stories of *La caja vacía* in their provincial settings, family relationships, and nostalgic tone. She also points out interesting similarities between these stories, Carballido's youth, and later plays. In regard to the four short novels, Peden combines summaries of plot with critical observations on narrative voice and structure. Particularly interesting is her structural vision of *El norte* as a pair of concentric circles.

In Chapters V through VII, the author deals with Carballido's full-length

plays, dividing them into three basic groups: early realistic, conventional, and nonconventional. The first group—*Rosalba y los Llaveros*, *Felicidad*, *La sinfonía doméstica*, and *La danza que sueña la tortuga*—comprises a “realistic tetralogy,” all written during the 1950’s and in accordance with the conventions of theatrical realism. In the next chapter, Peden deals with five more conventional plays, yet distinguishes them from the first four by their later composition dates, technical innovations, and higher degree of seriousness. Finally, Peden arrives at the nonconventional plays, which she defines as those that display a nontraditional structure and a blend of realism and fantasy. The seven plays range from his first, almost entirely unknown effort, *Los dos mundos de Alberta* (1947), to the most recent play included in this study, *Las cartas de Mozart* (1974).

The last two chapters are mainly conclusive, treating both drama and narrative in a more general fashion. Under “Style,” Peden discusses form and structure, setting, gothic evocations, characterization, and the presence of the dramatist in his narrative. She also draws conclusions concerning Carballido’s dramatic use of visual effects, sound, space, and time, always carefully supporting her observations with specific examples.

In the chapter “Moods and Modes,” Peden talks about the presence of realism and fantasy, poetry and humor in Carballido’s work. After a concise summary of the considerable criticism that has appeared on Carballido’s use of realism and fantasy, Peden concludes that the majority of his works are neither one nor the other, but rather a fine blend of the two worlds. With regard to prominent themes, Peden sees in Carballido a humanitarian concerned with social conditions, women and their all too often wasted lives, life in the provinces, and the individual—his rights and responsibilities.

At the end of the study, the author generously supplies references, a selected bibliography, and an index. The secondary sources are annotated and thus helpful to the critic, although many of the items appeared in Mexican newspaper supplements and may be difficult to obtain. In the index, Carballido’s works are listed in the order in which Peden mentions them instead of alphabetically, a frustrating arrangement for the reader who is looking for the discussion of a specific play.

In spite of these minor shortcomings in the documentation and a few errors involving dates and names (characters and titles), Peden’s study is a well-written and highly useful tool to both novice drama students and mature Carballido critics. For every play, story, and novel written before 1975, she provides a meaningful summary as well as insightful and convincing critical comments, a considerable accomplishment for a book of this length. Peden has retained her reputation as the leading authority on the work of Emilio Carballido, an energetic and innovative dramatist who clearly merits more critical attention.

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