

## Book Reviews

Susana Castillo *El desarraigo en el teatro venezolano*. Caracas: Editorial Ate-neo de Caracas, 1980. 189 pp.

The Venezuelan theatre is perhaps the most viable and the most vital in Latin America today. It has a considerable number of competent professional actors, directors, and all the other individuals who go into the production of a play; it has several different generations of playwrights, whose works are published on a fairly regular basis. It even has that rarest of things in Latin America, an ongoing company, El Nuevo Grupo, which has its own theatre and producing organization. Yet, the Venezuelan theatre is not well known in the United States, even among those devoted to Latin American theatre, perhaps because it has not, in general, been well served by its own critics. The bibliography of studies of Venezuelan theatre is limited, and most are out-of-date or weakened by unflagging devotion to criteria which are extratheatrical and which get in the way of serious artistic judgements, whatever else they may bring to the works. Susana Castillo's study will do much to remedy this lamentable situation. It is not without shortcomings, but its advantages far outweigh its drawbacks.

The volume consists of six chapters; the first two establish Castillo's frame of reference and the last four, nearly two-thirds of the book's total pages, are devoted to contemporary dramatists. Chapter 1 surveys the theatre in what is now Venezuela from pre-Hispanic times; it leans heavily on Arrom and, to a lesser extent, on Solórzano. Chapter 2 examines the causes of what Castillo sees as the persistent theme of alienation which so characterizes Venezuelan theatre and, she believes, society. Although it has roots in mankind's nature, it is more firmly based in the drastic alienation of the modern world and the social problems of Latin America. More concretely, she finds the sources of this massive *desarraigo* in Venezuela's abandonment of its own traditions and social forms, and its feverish pursuit of an alien social and cultural model, with the consequent psychic deformation and mass social dislocation. This kind of thinking is widespread and influential in our society, and is certainly accurate in identifying some, if not all, our modern ills, although just how any nation gifted with raw materials for technology could have remained apart from scientific change, even had it wanted to, is certainly not clear.

The chapters on playwrights are "Un friso histórico: La obra de César Rengifo," "Una trilogía significativa: Chalbaud, Chocrón y Cabrujas," "Dramaturgia femenina," devoted to Elizabeth Schön and Elisa Lerner, and

"La promoción de relevo: Rodolfo Santana y José Gabriel Núñez." The basic format, while not invariable, is consistent: discussion of each dramatist's career in general, followed by a more concentrated analysis of one or two plays which exemplify the theme of alienation. The book's focus, then, is clearly sociological; the author seems to like Rengifo primarily because of his devotion to historical themes rather than for any intense dramatic values in his work. Castillo's only treatment of technical matters is to point out the nearly constant debt of the selected dramatists to Brecht and a few others. Although she does not deal with plays as plays but rather as expressions of a social theme, she does not fall into the Manichean excess which is so persistent in criticism of this kind; she recognizes the weak points of some of the plays (although perhaps not enough) and she does not praise or damn because of the dramatists' allegiance to this or that social remedy. At the same time, her approach is clearly one which sees these plays as social testimony, and it is questionable whether Chocrón and Cabrujas, for example, are best seen in this way.

*El desarraigo en el teatro venezolano* is a useful book which has much to say about the relations between society and theatre, as well as providing us with many insights into the process of the theatre in Venezuela and some of its most important contemporary dramatists. At the same time, it raises a good many important theoretical questions about the nature of national theatre and the extent to which it reflects or should reflect the so-called social reality of that nation. However one may feel about that matter, Castillo has provided us with a study upon which future work on Venezuelan theatre must rely.

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Parodi, Claudia. *Cayetano Javier de Cabrera Quintero: Obra dramática*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1976, 236 pp.

The main feature of Claudia Parodi's edition of theatrical works by Cabrera is a full-length *comedia*, *El Iris de Salamanca*. She also prints twelve festive, panegyric and occasional pieces presumably written by the same person. According to Parodi, these thirteen items would then be the only compositions by a Mexican dramatist of the first half of the eighteenth century to have been published. Her aim is to be useful; and she has succeeded nicely, offering a sensible introduction and thoughtful analyses and descriptions of the plays in addition to a bibliography of Cabrera's writings. She has scrupulously edited the texts of the plays themselves and provides a fairly small number of very helpful notes. The only major flaw in her handling of the texts is a tendency to confuse *que*, used pleonastically as the starter of a line of verse ('que no quiero yo ser monja, non'), or as a weak causal connective, with the interrogative *qué*. The problem is particularly severe in *El Iris de Salamanca*.

Even though one admires and respects Parodi's conscientious treatment of Cabrera, it is a little difficult to take *El Iris de Salamanca* altogether seriously. A *comedia de santo*, *El Iris* recounts the life and miracles of San Juan de Sahagún, and presented the susceptible dramatist with terrible temptations to

license. This is the kind of play that Cervantes' Canon of Toledo rightly excoriated; and one could almost imagine that, if it had not been for the Inquisition, the *comedia nueva* of Moratín's *La comedia nueva* would have treated the life of a saint rather than the siege of Vienna. The mockeries of conventual existence in *El sí de las niñas* suggest how richly the subject might have been developed. Of course, even Calderón wrote *comedias de santo*. But they are relatively few: *La devoción de la cruz*, *El príncipe constante*, *El mágico prodigioso*, *Las cadenas del demonio*, *El José de las mujeres*, *La exaltación de la Cruz*, *Los dos amantes del cielo*, and *El gran príncipe de Fez*. Moreover, Calderón gains in intensity and practices restraint by limiting himself almost completely with his saints to the miracle of conversion. It is this reliance on the progress to sanctity rather than manifestations of its achievement which keeps him on solid human and dramatic ground. To be sure, the main idea of *El Iris de Salamanca* seems reasonable and plausible. John comes to town as the peacemaker between two powerful families whose rivalries are creating continuous civil strife. But the incredible superabundance of incident—the swords no sooner sheathed than drawn, the succession of miracles, the general atmosphere of excess—all these reveal that no constraints avail. Pedro, the *gracioso*, in an obvious echo of Calderón, beautifully characterizes his master as one who: "Quijote a lo divino/a deshacer tuertos viene" (p. 8). Indeed, *El Iris*, stuffed as it is with episode, is a particular kind of farce. It is a rhetorician's farce. Just as a present-day imitator of Cicero might in a new Latin oration try to fill it with a maximum of tropes, so Cabrera, teacher of Latinity, has packed his play with enough events to nourish twenty plays. The result is repletion.

Yet even though an acquaintance described Cabrera's character as "bilioso, acerbo y melancólico" (p. xv), the best approach to his *comedia* is neither a censorious nor an earnest one. *El Iris de Salamanca* is a gas. It is great fun. I am sure that everyone connected with it, from Cabrera to the Viceroy himself, enjoyed it hugely. After all, it is partly titled a "Comedia nueva." Moratín would have appreciated Leonor's Cornelian dragon (*Médée*), as well as the neat classicizing touch of introducing the Furies. *El Iris de Salamanca* has everything.

The twelve occasional pieces that complete the volume are more routine and less fun, but graceful in their way. In his *loas* Cabrera has the rather bad habit of casting Calderón's themes and characters *a lo divino*. Of *El escondido y la tapada*, that most profane of the *comedias*, he makes a kind of morality and attempts something similar with *Darlo todo y dar nada*. Only once is a truly Mexican note struck, in the *loa* written on the occasion of the dedication of a church at the Bonanza Mines. It is, however, Vulcan who does the striking, and the rich veins of ore are allegorized into the cult of Mary.

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Soria, Mario T. *Teatro boliviano en el siglo XX*. La Paz: Editorial Casa Municipal de la Cultura, 1980. 217 pp.

Mario T. Soria, a widely-travelled Bolivian with a broad interest in the stage in general, contributes to our understanding of Bolivian theatre with

this straight-forward account of the theatrical atmosphere in his country. We can be grateful to him for his praiseworthy efforts, since comparatively little is known about Bolivian theatre, even by those who are knowledgeable about Latin American theatre. Soria wrote this book to combat this lack of knowledge by outsiders and to encourage people within Bolivia to renew their efforts to have an exciting and stimulating theatre, by reminding them of what has already been accomplished. Among these accomplishments are the winning of international prizes by Bolivian playwrights, the translation of some plays into various foreign languages, and occasionally, the performance of plays in amphitheatres with an audience of thousands.

These triumphs have occurred in spite of internal difficulties. Bolivia has suffered — and continues to suffer — from an almost complete lack of stability. Governments change so frequently there that it is difficult to keep up with them. Bolivian economic problems are reflected in the lives of the people who write for the theatre. As Soria points out, few dramatists can live from their earnings in the theatre. They are busily trying to earn a living from any number of jobs. Some writers will turn out one or two plays and then concentrate on other activities. Soria includes information about works besides plays, so as to explain the thematic links between theatrical and non-theatrical writing of authors who must be described as poets, philosophers, educators, and not simply as dramatists.

Soria's book consists of a prologue by Carlos Miguel Suárez Radillo, an introduction by the author, and the main body of the text. Suárez Radillo, who authored a valuable article, "El teatro boliviano de lo histórico a lo humano" (in *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*), comments on the rich theatrical tradition of the region in pre-Hispanic and colonial periods before Bolivia's borders were more narrowly defined. He also briefly traces the post-Independence development and adds a few words about the value of the modern stage in Bolivia.

In the main part of the study, Soria takes two approaches to the information that he gathered through research in libraries and interviews with authors and/or their families. The first approach is chronological and the second is bio-bibliographical. He deals with the history of the modern theatre in twenty-year periods. Then he devotes his attention to the lives and works of six writers: Mario Flores, Antonio Díaz Villamil, Joaquín Gantier, Raúl Salmón, Guillermo Francovich, and Adolfo Costa du Rels.

Social protest abounds as a theme in Bolivian theatre and too, there is an understandable concern with certain historical events such as the Chaco War. Some plays have a conservative approach in an attempt to be appropriate for the audiences who will see them. Others are more radical politically. Plays whose themes are considered to be too controversial on occasion have been banned. In discussing the theatre chronologically, Soria points out what some of the themes are during different periods and when they have changed. He tries to give a broad picture of the epochs.

When he turns to specific writers and their lives, the reader is able to view them against the chronological background of theatre in Bolivia that has been presented earlier in the book. When more material has been made available to him, Soria handles the lives and works of some writers at greater

length. In most cases, he tries to create for the reader a specific idea of the personal atmosphere surrounding the person whom he discusses. Soria writes of them with warmth and affection. The result is a series of intimate views rather than of impersonal discussions.

Soria presents the material that he has obtained in an able manner. He has certainly filled in some of the gaps existing in our knowledge of Bolivian theatre. At the end of the book, the author includes a bibliography of twentieth-century Bolivian plays and a selective bibliography of articles and essays on Bolivian theatre. Both should be useful to anyone wanting to do research on what is happening in a country where relatively few people have made heroic efforts to modernize their native stage.

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Castagnino, Raúl H.: *Teorías sobre texto dramático y representación teatral*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Plus Ultra, 1981. 176 pp.

Mais do que simples teorias, o que o último livro sobre teatro por Raúl H. Castagnino apresenta é uma história das teorias teatrais. Começando com a *Poética* de Aristóteles, quem o erudito argentino diz ser o iniciador do pensamento científico ("su poética es la primera epistemología sobre las condiciones de la creación estética por la palabra") chega até a época contemporânea, depois de especular sobre o "ocaso" do autor dramático.

No meio desta história cronológica das teorias e textos, chegamos ao ponto culminante da relação com a teoria do "anti-teatro," muito bem apresentada e explicada pelo autor. Citando a Albert Camus, Raúl H. Castagnino define o teatro do absurdo como um "anti-teatro." Para Camus o sentimento do absurdo era o divórcio entre o homem e sua vida, entre o ator e sua circunstância. Aí estava, diz o escritor argentino, o ponto de partida para as manifestações de vanguarda que apareceram na década de cinquenta com os dramaturgos Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, Genet, Pinter e outros. Isto quer dizer que, para Castagnino "O Mito de Sísifo" de Camus é um novo caminho teatral que chegou a influenciar muitas representações como as do tipo de "A Cantora Careca" de Ionesco. Sem parar entretanto como se isto fosse o fim do caminho, segue influenciando até o teatro mais recente de hoje em dia.

O tema do vazio espiritual, da trivialidade na comunicação com os semelhantes proposto em "A Cantora Careca" é o resultado desta sensação que o homem moderno sente de estar perdido numa vida insensata, inútil e sufocante. E assim explica ele o "absurdo": "Absurdo é desarmonia, desacordo com a lógica, irracionalismo, ridículo" (p. 136).

A parte relativa aos recursos teatrais modernos é obviamente a mais rica e mais bem estudada por Castagnino neste livro. Os vários sub-títulos do capítulo XIV, "Teorías teatrales del siglo XX," são bastante prova disto: "Teoría del futurismo," "La dictadura de los directores," "El expresionismo," "Del teatro épico y el distanciamiento," "El teatro poético," "La esperpéntica y el tremendismo," "La crueldad," "Iracundia y violencia," "Formas del compromiso y la existencialidad," "El absurdo y el antiteatro," "El teatro pobre," e "El teatro de confrontación y teatro de inmersión."

A nova publicação de Raúl H. Castagnino sobre teatro é pois essencial para qualquer estudioso do teatro contemporâneo. Atualizada como nenhuma outra obra no gênero, este livro vem nos abrir os olhos para as principais experiências teatrais acontecidas nos principais palcos do mundo, tanto nos mais vanguardistas como nos mais educacionais. E são inumeráveis estas experiências, estas tentativas de comunicação teatral em todos os níveis apropriados. Parece que fazendo isto o autor prova participar da teoria teatral mais em voga entre a verdadeira gente de teatro: a idéia de que o palco é um lugar onde estão todas as possibilidades teatrais e nele cada artista pode explorar o que que quiser ao mesmo tempo que deve oferecer o que sabe de seu e que nunca chegará ao ponto de nele encontrar o esgotamento total das experiências possíveis.

Em 1969, saiu publicado o livro *Teorías sobre el arte dramático*, pelo mesmo autor argentino. Embora tenha quase o mesmo título e o mesmo material, o presente livro não é uma republicação daquele. No primeiro Castagnino procura somente sintetizar os critérios sobre a produção do texto dramático e sua apresentação no palco, dando provas de tudo em documentos colecionados por suas pesquisas sobre o assunto. Já no livro deste ano seu propósito é ampliar e atualizar a apresentação destas pesquisas, abarcando não só o período antigo do teatro como principalmente e com mais detalhe os dez últimos anos, que não estavam incluídos no livro de 1969.

É notável a atividade deste escritor argentino como teórico teatral. Ele parece incansável, assistindo e criticando a tudo o que passa dentro e fora dos palcos, dentro e fora dos textos teatrais. Especialista em semiótica do teatro, é bem capaz, este dinâmico intelectual, de oferecer a um público leigo esclarecimentos e análises dos métodos e das teorias mais recentes que tenham qualquer relação com o dia a dia do teatro.

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## Two International Theatre Artists at Bear Republic

Two international theatre artists have visited Santa Cruz for the Bear Republic Theatre's final production of its Seventh Summer Season. Rafael Murillo is a Honduran theatre professional who came to Santa Cruz to direct the U.S. premiere of a free adaptation of Guatemalan playwright José Manuel Arce's play *Sebastian Goes Shopping* (De Compras). Mr. Murillo was the artistic director of the Teatro Experimental de la Merced in Honduras, a theatrical troupe that won several prestigious international awards.

He has been joined by his assistant from Haiti and France, Michele Armand Barthlemy. She has performed and directed with companies in Honduras, France and Colombia. Her most recent work was with Mr. Murillo in his work with the Garifunos of Honduras. She is also a singer with the popular Haitian music group, Shango.

*Sebastian Goes Shopping*, a farce with music about the coming of industrialization and consumerism to Latin America, played from August 27 to September 20. The company also performed the piece at the Teatros Nacionales de Aztlan (TENAZ) Festival and the People's Theatre Festival in San Francisco in September.

## TOLA Newsletter

En la primavera de 1981 TOLA publicó el primer número de *Teatro en las Américas*. Dicha publicación está destinada a promover el intercambio de información sobre actividades teatrales en Estados Unidos, Canadá y Latinoamérica. Los artículos aparecen en inglés, español, francés y portugués.

El presente número incluye un artículo de Joanne Pottlitzer que traza el desarrollo histórico de TOLA durante sus primeros 14 años, otro de Alberto Minero acerca de las consecuencias del Encuentro del 79 en los proyectos y servicios de TOLA, una sección informativa sobre el contenido y función de la biblioteca del mismo centro, una entrevista a David Benavente y, por último, una sección de notas del hemisferio que contiene información de las actividades dramáticas realizadas a nivel internacional.

## Recent Publications, Materials Received and Current Bibliography

[The following recent publications noted or received by the Editors of the *Latin American Theatre Review* may prove of interest to readers. Inclusion here does not preclude subsequent review.]

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