

## Something Old, Something New: *El Gigante Amapolas*

Andrea G. Labinger

The Romantic theatre in Latin America has been largely maligned, or at best, ignored by contemporary criticism. Indeed, there are those who go so far as to deny its very existence ("Poco o nada sobrevive del teatro romántico hispanoamericano," writes Emilio Carilla<sup>1</sup>), maintaining that if such a theatre flourished at all, it was simply an outgrowth of other, more popular *genres* of the period. According to Carilla: ". . . se puede decir que el dramaturgo [romántico], cuando existe, no se da exclusivamente como escritor de dramas, sino que cultiva el drama en medio de otros géneros."<sup>2</sup> It is true, as Carilla suggests, that the pieces written for the nineteenth century stage in Latin America are largely doctrinaire, polemical expositions of the political struggles of the age. They are dramatized essays, as opposed to authentic theatre.

In general, there is not much critical documentation to support the idea that the surviving Romantic theatre is anything but a relic of a period whose passions, history and beliefs seem quite removed from our twentieth century sensibilities. There are, however, occasional exceptions. One of these is *El Gigante Amapolas* by Juan Bautista Alberdi.<sup>3</sup> This play, written in 1841 by an Argentine journalist, essayist and self-designated Romantic, reveals a concept of dramaturgy, character development and language more akin to the present century than to its own. While the subject matter of *Amapolas* is clearly circumscribed by the political events of the period in which it was written, the abstract treatment of the theme and the universality of its application salvage this work from the oblivion into which so many of its companion pieces have fallen. One has only to compare *El Gigante Amapolas* with Alberdi's earlier play, *La Revolución de Mayo*,<sup>4</sup> to detect the qualitative difference between the two works. It is not surprising that Alberdi, the author of numerous satirical essays and the comic-allegorical novel *Peregrinación de la luz del día* (1871) should have achieved greater success in his second play, by tempering the seriousness of the subject matter with his characteristic comedic acumen,

as well as by disguising the historical particulars in an abstract framework.

*El Gigante Amapolas* is a product of exile. It was written in Montevideo, where Alberdi had gone in 1838 along with other young intellectuals of his generation to seek refuge from the outrages of the Rosas dictatorship. The play is, in fact, a political satire, directed against the "gigante" who dominated Argentina for two decades and whose name has undergone an easily discernible transformation in the title. To characterize *Amapolas* as a mere political *sainete*, though, as García Mérou has done,<sup>5</sup> is to do the work an injustice, for *Amapolas* is far more than that. While it is undeniable that the burlesque antics, inconsequential plot line, plebeian characters and didactic-nationalistic tone are reminiscent of the eighteenth century *sainetes* of Ramón de la Cruz, there is an underlying touch of the bizarre at the heart of this work. The irrationality and loss of identity, coupled with Alberdi's penchant for the ridiculous, bring this play astonishingly close to the absurdist creations of the contemporary stage. Cocca suggests this when he considers the humor in *Amapolas* as a precursor of the *esperpentos* of Valle-Inclán.<sup>6</sup> Valle-Inclán is not the only twentieth century author who comes to mind when reading *El Gigante Amapolas*. The subject matter, specifically the destruction of a grotesque *dictador-fantoché* at the hands of a group of bumbling subjects, can be found elsewhere throughout much of twentieth century literature. An obvious comparison would be the hideously deformed demagogue in García Márquez's *El otoño del patriarca*, or in the expressionistic portrayal of the dictator in Asturias' *El Señor Presidente*.<sup>7</sup> In earlier prose fiction, one can find precedent for the caricaturized tyrant in Valle-Inclán's *Tirano Banderas*. Still another novelistic antecedent could be Gallegos' *Doña Bárbara*. In the theatre, a late nineteenth century manifestation of this theme is Jarry's surrealistic *tour de force*, *Ubu Roi* (1898), in which the deranged monarch of Poland, Ubu, is portrayed as more ludicrous than horrific. Closer to home, the contemporary stage in Latin America has brought us works like Manuel Galich's *Puedelotodo vencido* (1976), a stylized version of a legend of the *Popol Vuh*, in which the exalted parrot-king, Gukup-Cakish, is defeated by his subjects, who disguise themselves as *muñecos* to achieve their victory. Even closer in tone to *Amapolas* is Matías Montes-Huidobro's *Ojos para no ver*, still another play about demagoguery, in which absurdist touches abound.

To encounter in our own century so many examples of the *dictador-fantoché* theme and its non-realistic treatment comes as no surprise. We are infinitely more accustomed to and prepared for the irrational in art than were our nineteenth century predecessors. Therefore, the discovery of the anomalous *Amapolas* deserves our careful scrutiny. Is *Amapolas* a literary anachronism, philosophically and artistically premature by some one hundred years, or is it merely a nineteenth century play in twentieth century garb? A closer look is invited.

In physical terms, *El Gigante Amapolas* presages the world of Beckett or Ionesco. As the play opens the stage is bare, except for the portentous figure of the Giant, who dominates all the ensuing action (or lack of action, to be more precise). Alberdi's stage directions indicate: "El teatro representa un espacio abierto: a la izquierda un gigante de tres varas, con un puñal de hoja de lata, de dimensión enorme, bañado en sangre" (p. 97). Grotesque though

he may seem on initial encounter, this Giant proves to be more enigmatic than terrifying. From the outset we are told that, his bloody dagger notwithstanding, the Gigante is an innocuous puppet, and any fear he may produce is strictly in the mind of the beholder. In his opening speech, the Sentinel on duty announces:

¡Son tan locos nuestros enemigos! ¿Acaso necesitan de que nadie los derrote? Ellos no más son los autores de sus disparadas: puede uno ser un gigante de paja, y con sólo estarse quieto, vencerlos a cada instante. . . .” (p. 97)

The Giant's immobility and *impuissance*, then, are a foregone conclusion. The stasis of the action is evident almost immediately; characters enter and exit in a futile, chaotic ballet. Absolutely nothing is accomplished through these Brownian movements; indeed, nothing truly happens at all until the conclusion. Throughout the entire play, visual austerity is enforced. There are only a few simple props: the drum played by the soldier Francisquillo or Tambor, a shotgun, a pair of binoculars, and the offstage sound of military trumpets. At one point Tambor's wife, María, is said to be running around a tree, but the tree is simply described by the other characters and never appears on stage.<sup>8</sup>

The starkness of the setting provides an ideal environment for the development of the imaginative sequences in this play. One might argue that the physical presence of the Giant could easily be eliminated, since he is no more than a symbolic representation of the collective fears of those who live in his shadow. There are many indications that all the action can be considered an expressionistic projection of the characters' joint and individual fantasies. On one occasion, María (both she and her husband belong to the Giant's army) reports on the strength of the enemy, saying: "yo he visto el número de los enemigos. . . . Son más muchos (*sic*) que el pasto de los campos. . . ." (p. 98). María's assessment is founded on pure hyperbolic hysteria, for the enemy consists only of three inept, self-appointed "officers"—Captain Mosquito, Lieutenant Guitarra and Major Mentirola, none of whom is particularly fearsome. María's exaggeration is elaborated *ad absurdum* when, later in the play, she asks Francisquillo why no dead soldiers can be found in the aftermath of the fierce battle he has just described. Without a moment's hesitation, Francisquillo replies, "Porque el mismo miedo los ha hecho revivir, y salir disparando" (p. 107). The enemy band, for its own part, seems equally affected by the pervasive atmosphere of fear and exaggeration. Alberdi uses false statistics to emphasize the illusory quality of observable reality, as in the following exchange among the aforementioned "officers":

GUIARRA — ¿Qué ve usted, capitán Mosquito?

MOSQUITO — (*Echando el antejo.*) Yo veo sesenta piezas de artillería, a la derecha.

GUIARRA — ¿Qué calibres?

MOSQUITO — Veinte de a ocho, y cuarenta de a treinta y seis. Y usted, ¿qué ve?

GUIARRA — Yo veo treinta escuadrones de caballería. Y usted, Mayor Mentirola, ¿qué distingue?

MENTIROLA — Yo distinguí como ocho mil infantes, situados hacia la izquierda del campo enemigo. (p. 110)

The evident contrast between what the officers allegedly "see" and what is visible to the audience is responsible for many of the play's humorous moments. The stalwart officers decide that, in the face of such formidable opposition, the only wise course of action is to retreat. They then proceed to do so, despite the Footsoldier's reassurances that "No hay más que un tambor y un soldado, que parece mujer, que da vueltas alrededor de un árbol" (p. 110).

The foregoing material, with its burlesque touches, is a standard farce situation and not in itself particularly innovative or remarkable. Yet, it must be remembered that slapstick is often associated with the Theatre of the Absurd, for as Martin Esslin points out, clowning and madscenes, along with "constant, and wholly purposeless movement,"<sup>9</sup> often serve to illustrate the existential void at the core of the laughter. Esslin traces the slapstick tradition from antiquity through the *commedia dell' arte* to the American silent film comedies of the early twentieth century, and concludes that underlying all the frenetic physical activity there is usually a serious intent. He speaks of the "nightmare" quality of these works, the alienation and fear experienced by these tormented, peripatetic characters, and concludes that they evoke our laughter only to draw our attention to their essential hopelessness. Certainly this is equally evident in the zanier moments of *El Gigante Amapolas*. María's running around the tree, the opposing armies' continual advancing and retreating, all seem to have a dual purpose. It is undeniably true that Alberdi's original intent, as stated by the author himself, was strictly political. By depicting the Gigante as a cardboard puppet, and the would-be "liberators" as clumsy, pusillanimous fools, he was aiming his satire at a specific target audience, namely, the Argentine patriots of his own era. The play is dedicated "a SS. los SS./Presidentes y generales Rivera, Bulnes y Ballivián, para que/ conozcan el escollo y se abstengan de caer en él" (p. 96).<sup>10</sup> Cocca suggests that the work is usually considered a satire of General Lavalle's campaign against Rosas. He further points out that Alberdi may have also intended to advise Rosas' supporters that their victory was less attributable to the dictator's strength than to the confusion and disorganization reigning in the liberators' camp. Yet, aside from the emphasis placed on the alteration of the dictator's name, there is no attempt to fix the play within the confines of its spatial and temporal orientation. Nowhere is Argentina specifically mentioned; the language is devoid of regionalisms of any kind. The characters are archetypal, and not designed to represent any historical figures in particular. Cocca, among others, sees the universalist tendencies of *El Gigante Amapolas* as a precursor of the full-blown allegory found in Alberdi's later work, *Peregrinación de la luz del día*.<sup>11</sup> What saves *Amapolas* from the tedious sentimentousness often found in allegory is the pervasive current of craziness that surfaces repeatedly in delightfully unexpected ways.

As mentioned earlier, the irrationality begins on a purely visual plane, exemplified by the ubiquitous presence of the *muñeco-Gigante* and the frenzied comings and goings of the frightened soldiers. Another related way in which Alberdi underscores the illogicality of his stage world is by sustaining a con-

stant disparity between perceived and described reality. Words become meaningless conveyors of false information, as there is frequently a blatant contradiction between what is seen by the audience and what is reported by the characters. In one of the most hilarious episodes of the play, the Gigante's Sentinel and his soldiers all hop onto the stage, their hands and feet tightly bound. As they line up to hear the Officer's exhortatory proclamation, they ask to be untied, to which their leader replies: "Para oír proclamas no se necesita de brazos ni pies." He then proceeds to address them as follows: "Hijos de la libertad, hombres que jamás habéis conocido cadenas ni ataduras. . . ." When a timid soldier attempts to correct this obvious misconception, he is summarily removed from the stage and condemned: "¡Atrevido! ¡Calumniador! ¡Fuera de la línea! ¡Por traidor infame de la patria! ¡Por enemigo de las libertades públicas!" (p. 100). The message here is patently absurd: "las libertades públicas" consist of restriction of freedom and enforced immobility. The Officer advises: "Os recomiendo de nuevo la inmovilidad más completa: aprended del Gigante, que asusta a todo el mundo por el hecho solo de no hacer nada; nuestras armas son nuestras ataduras: si queréis ser vencedores no deis un paso. . ." (p. 101). Thus, the illogicality of verbal contradiction underscores the visual effect. "The Theatre of the Absurd. . ." writes Esslin, "tends toward a radical devaluation of language, toward a poetry that is to emerge from the concrete and objectified images of the stage itself. The element of language still plays an important part in this conception, but what *happens* on the stage transcends, and often contradicts, the *words* spoken by the characters."<sup>12</sup> Puns, *double-entendre* and literalization of metaphor abound in the literature of the absurd. The devaluation of language, as Esslin repeatedly illustrates, is central to our twentieth century preoccupation with human isolation and lack of genuine communication. In *El Gigante Amapolas*, one sees a very similar conception of language. Alberdi manages to literalize the metaphorical expression "to have one's hands tied" by bringing his characters onstage literally bound, hopping grotesquely and listening to a speech describing the glories of freedom. How far is this, really, from the situation in Beckett's *Happy Days*, wherein the ever-optimistic Winnie reflects cheerfully upon her life's simple pleasures while sinking progressively deeper into the mud?

Another way in which *El Gigante Amapolas* approximates the absurdist vision is through reduplication of character and use of the multiple character. The first principle can be illustrated by Major Mentirola's monologue, which occurs at mid-play and can be considered a pivotal point in the development of the action. Abandoned by his companions Mosquito and Guitarra, Mentirola is faced with a momentous problem: how to carry on single-handedly the struggle against the Giant. He decides that, despite their absence, Guitarra and Mosquito should be consulted, and therefore resolves to argue all three sides of the issue by himself, alternately assuming his own role and those of his companions.

Speaking for Guitarra, he begins most earnestly to string together a chain of Sancho-esque *refranes*, none of which has the slightest relevance to the matter at hand: "Cada uno sabe bien dónde le aprieta el zapato. . . y donde hable el sabio, calle el borrico: y en resumidas cuentas, cada uno es dueño de

hacer de su capa un sayo . . .," etc. (p. 105). "Guitarra's" opinion, then, is to go along with Mentirola's order to retreat, because as the latter asserts in the former's voice, the Giant's immobility is surely a sign of the opposition's superior strength. Speaking next for Mosquito, Mentirola argues for the need to attack aggressively, "por la sencilla razón que el enemigo nos espera sin acción y movimiento, en lo cual se descubre su debilidad." (p. 105). The "discussion" quickly degenerates into a tirade of insults and namecalling, with Mentirola whirling dizzily from side to side as he plays first one role and then another. As the "debate" winds down to its inevitable conclusion, Mentirola tallies up the points and announces that he and "Guitarra" have won: "Y sobre todo, ¿a qué cansarme en dar gritos? La votación está ganada; somos dos contra uno, y debemos estar a la opinión que aconseja la retirada." (p. 105)<sup>13</sup>

The multiple character, *la Tropa*, works in conjunction with Mentirola's reduplication of character, and in fact provides the stimulus for his monologue. If *la Tropa* can be portrayed by a single actor—and this seems to be what the author had in mind, since in other places Alberdi identifies true choral speech with the designation "todos"—then it makes perfect sense, or nonsense, as the case may be, for Mentirola to represent other characters beside himself. *La Tropa*, in fact, suggests that he do so:

MENTIROLA — Soldados: Yo debo ser leal a vuestro noble coraje; yo debo hablaros la verdad; la situación es grave, y yo no puedo decirme a ejecutar una operación decisiva, sin oír antes el voto del ejército, en un consejo de jefes y oficiales.

TROPA — Sí, sí, que se forme un consejo.

MENTIROLA — ¡Que se forme! . . . Pero, ¿con qué oficiales y jefes le formaremos? ¡Aquí no hay más jefe ni oficial que yo . . . a no ser que yo solo me declare en consejo!

TROPA — ¿Y por qué no? Forme Vuestra Excelencia un consejo de Vuestra Excelencia mismo, y decida a mayoría de votos. (p. 104)

Aside from the hilarious irony provided by such a confrontation between a single-member "council" and a one-soldier "troop," there is also a great deal of creative intelligence behind this character shorthand. Alberdi, although not an accomplished dramatist, knew enough to keep his stage population limited for the greatest artistic effect. Some fifty years later, Alfred Jarry was to make the same discovery as he described his ideas for the production of *Ubu Roi* to Lugné-Poe in 1896:

No crowds; these are a mistake on the stage and hamper the intelligence. Thus a single soldier in the Review scene, a single one in the scrimmage where Ubu says: "What a gang, what a retreat," etc.<sup>14</sup>

Alberdi goes even farther than Jarry in reduction of characters and simplification of characterizations. While the skirmishes in *Ubu* are symbolically depicted through the use of one or two representative soldiers, the battle scenes in *Amapolas* never take place at all, this being of course the central irony of the piece. Père Ubu is indeed a tyrant, a pompous, overblown "armed pumpkin" who, despite his ridiculousness, nevertheless acts and exists. El Gigante, on the other hand, is totally inert. He does not act, but rather is reacted to.

He is an abstraction, fear personified, a creation that transcends mere distortion and enters into the realm of pure speculation, the theater of the mind. Many times throughout the play his existence is questioned, both by his own soldiers and by the enemy. From the opening scene, when the Sentinel observes, "Tenemos a la cabeza un héroe de paja," (p. 97) to the confirmation provided by the dénouement, the play hinges precariously on the reality of the central figure. Any attempt to debunk the Gigante is fearfully rejected by the other characters, who seem to sustain each other—and, indeed, the substance of the play itself—through their conspiratorial delusions. In this regard, the most ironic line of the entire play could be Francisquillo's ingenuous observation: "Las cosas están a la vista, no son materia de cuestión." (p. 107).

*El Gigante Amapolas* is a very exciting play from both technical and thematic standpoints. As a political satire, it succeeds thanks to Alberdi's acerbic wit and his well-deserved reputation as the "Argentine Larra." More surprising is the play's technical excellence. For a man who had only once before tried his hand at theatre, Alberdi managed to achieve what very few, if any, other Latin American dramatists accomplished in the nineteenth century. His use of the bare stage, absence of curtains, multiple and interchangeable characters, lack of sequential action, as well as devaluation of language, all approximate a twentieth century view of theatre. His reliance on illogic to supremely logical ends bring him very close to Esslin's definition of the Absurd. Can one therefore conclude that *Amapolas* is indeed a dramatic anachronism? Was Alberdi an anarchist in his dramaturgy, his political ideology, or both? The final moments of the play provide the answer.

In a kind of forced resolution, Alberdi introduces his *deus ex machina* in the person of an unnamed soldier, who later receives the designation of Sargento-General. It is he who guides the play determinedly back to its nineteenth century conclusion and who is, without a doubt, the voice of Alberdi, *pensador*. It is he who precipitates the final rebellion, the only act of heroism in the play, thereby shattering the argumental vacuum that had prevailed until then. As Cocca correctly points out: "El motín es la única manifestación de valentía en toda la pieza, que sin embargo ofrece un permanente clima bélico." (p. 111). This unexpected act of bravery consists of the Sargento-General's resolutely approaching the Giant, "ese miserable fantasmón," lifting him high in the air, and turning him upside down, shattering him against the ground. The astonished witnesses, eager as always to embrace a new hero, begin to acclaim the Sargento-General with cries of adulation. The Sargento-General silences them, cautioning them to respect the common wisdom of the masses, of which body he is merely a typical representative: "No, señores, yo no soy grande ni glorioso, porque ninguna gloria hay en ser vencedor de gigantes de paja . . . ¡Compañeros! La patria ha sido libertada, sin que hayan intervenido libertadores: saludad las revoluciones anónimas: ellas son los verdaderos triunfos de la libertad!" (p. 112).

These words, which close the play, also succeed in altering its nature in several ways. The farcical, satirical tone which had predominated suddenly disappears, and is supplanted by a serious political message. Alberdi the political theorist steps in to replace Alberdi the satirist, as Cocca notes in a brief afterword: "Estas palabras finales, aparte de la elocuencia y la ponderación

de juicio que traducen, muestran al pensador. Es el único pensamiento que identifica al autor de la admirable farsa con el dramaturgo de *La Revolución de Mayo*. Hasta este pasaje era Figarillo, es decir, un discípulo de Larra, capaz de competir, en genio satírico, con su propio maestro" (p. 112).

Yet, if *El Gigante Amapolas* is, as Cocca suggests, merely an "admirable farsa" about a harebrained military campaign, then why is its conclusion so unnerving? Why does the contemporary reader bristle at the final speech delivered by the Sargento-General? The explanation must be found in some fundamental incongruity between this last passage and the spirit of the work as a whole. Until now, the tone of the play had been deliberately disharmonious: directionless meanderings of existentially disoriented characters pronouncing disjointed speeches to invisible audiences. The Sargento-General, by extolling the virtues of reason and common sense and behaving in accordance with his avowed beliefs, provides a finale that surprises us by its very consonance. In so doing, he has profoundly altered the play, setting it squarely back within the confines of the age in which it was written. "Saludad las revoluciones anónimas" is by no means a call for anarchy; it is, rather, a tribute to the democratic principles with which Alberdi and his fellow patriots-in-exile hoped to heal their ravaged country. The neat resolution and final didacticism, while consistent with the overriding political philosophy and purpose of the play, detract from the work artistically. Without the final "coda," somewhat haphazardly appended, the play stands as a minor masterpiece. In a few brief pages, it synthesizes all that the Absurd<sup>15</sup> hopes to convey: the dramatic representation, in incoherent, illogical form, of a world devoid of significance, logic or certainty. It conforms in many ways with Esslin's guidelines for identification of the Absurd as a theatrical movement, *viz.*:

1. action appearing as "mysterious, unmotivated, and at first sight nonsensical."
2. a theater of situation as opposed to a theater of events in sequence; stasis.
3. lack of objectively valid characters.
4. disintegration of language.
5. circular structure, or progression signalled "merely by a growing intensification of the initial situation."<sup>16</sup>

In the final analysis, however, it is apparent that *El Gigante Amapolas* is a creature of historical circumstance, despite all superficial resemblances with the Theatre of the Absurd. There is a system of absolute, shared values in Alberdi's world, a faith in the essential cosmic harmony and the perfectability of mankind. If illogic and confusion prevail throughout most of the play, if the characters seem devoid of purpose or goals, the situation is deftly remedied by one final heroic stroke of the Sargento-General's sword. We find no such pat resolutions in the Theatre of the Absurd; indeed, unresolved conflict is the norm, rather than the exception in this type of theatre, as suggested by Esslin's reference to "circular structure" and "intensification of the initial situation."

Didacticism in art tends to emerge only when there is a shared system of values. Such was the case in Alberdi's world; hence the need for the Sargento-

General as Prime Mover. With very few changes (specifically some modification of the last scene), *El Gigante Amapolas* could be performed today as a dramatic manifesto of the grotesqueries of totalitarianism; its abstraction and humor transcend the limitations of time and place. By excising the Sargento-General's final, glorious victory, the play would lose some of its optimistic naïveté, but would in all probability be better received by a contemporary audience. We are, after all, children of a more problematic age, and perhaps our "Gigantes" are made of more resilient stuff. As long as oppression remains a part of the human condition, however, *El Gigante Amapolas* will serve as a valuable reminder of the paralysis caused by fear and the dignity to be found in struggle.

University of La Verne

## Notes

1. Emilio Carilla, "El teatro romántico en Hispanoamérica," *Thesaurus*, Vol. 13 (1950), p. 35.
2. Carilla, p. 35.
3. "El Gigante Amapolas," in *El teatro de Juan Bautista Alberdi*, ed. Aldo Armando de Cocca (Buenos Aires; Talía, 1960). All references appearing in the text are based on this edition.
4. *La Revolución de Mayo* was written in 1839, but was never staged. See Cocca, p. 28.
5. Martín García Mérou, in *Alberdi: Ensayo crítico* (Buenos Aires, 1890). Cited by Cocca, p. 36.
6. "Al humor y gracia de la concepción [de *Amapolas*] se agrega la ironía del estilo, habiendo sido comparado su 'gigante' a los 'esperpentos' de Ramón del Valle-Inclán." Cocca, p. 36. Cocca does not indicate who was originally responsible for making this comparison.
7. For a discussion of expressionistic techniques in *El Señor Presidente*, see Enrique Anderson Imbert, "Análisis de *El Señor Presidente*," *Revista Iberoamericana*, 35, pp. 53-57.
8. Part of this imprecision in describing the technical aspects of the play may be due to Alberdi's inexperience as a playwright. Cocca indicates that Alberdi believed his works were not stageable, and wrote for a readership, rather than for an audience. Unfortunately, Alberdi never lived to see *Amapolas* produced.
9. Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 289.
10. Cocca suggests that the play purports to ridicule the disorganization of the liberating army. Cocca, p. 36.
11. Cocca, p. 37.
12. Esslin, p. 7.
13. A curiously similar passage can be found in *Judith and Holofernes* (1849) by the Viennese playwright Johann Nestroy, whom Esslin calls a "surrealistic" writer. Holofernes says: "I am nature's most brilliant piece of work . . . I have yet to lose a battle. I am the virgin among generals. One day I should like to pick a fight with myself, just to see who is stronger — I or I." Quoted by Esslin, p. 29. It is interesting to note that Esslin considers Nestroy "a ruthless parodist of pretentious drama." The same can be said of Alberdi in *Amapolas*. While the two plays are contemporaneous, Alberdi seems to go farther in his development of the reduplicated character.
14. Alfred Jarry, *Ubu Roi, Drama in 5 Acts*, ed. and intro. by Barbara Wright (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. xi.
15. Central to Esslin's definition of the Absurd as an identifiable theatrical movement is the distinction between "absurd" in the sense of "ridiculous" and "absurd" in the sense of "uprooted" or "senseless." While illustrations of the former can be found throughout *El Gigante Amapolas*, it is the latter interpretation of the word that most concerns us here.
16. Esslin, Chap. 7, "The Significance of the Absurd," pp. 350-377.