

## Reviews

JOSÉ JUAN ARROM. *Historia del teatro hispanoamericano (Epoca colonial)*. México: Ediciones de Andrea (Vol. III, Historia literaria de Hispanoamérica), 1967. 153 pp.

FRANK N. DAUSTER. *Historia del teatro hispanoamericano (Siglos XIX y XX)*. México: Ediciones de Andrea (Vol. IV, Historia literaria de Hispanoamérica), 1966. 121 pp.

In the relatively limited world of Latin American drama criticism one is inclined to welcome with open arms the publication of new material, in particular any which transcends national boundaries. Often, however, serious defects make it impossible to maintain the initial enthusiasm. Some recent examples come to mind. Agustín del Saz' two-volume *Teatro hispanoamericano* (Barcelona, 1963) is a vast improvement over the only previous attempt (Willis Knapp Jones' *Breve historia del teatro latinoamericano* which appeared in 1956) to deal with the entirety of Spanish American drama, but Saz is overly routine and even stodgy at times in his presentations and discussions. Carlos Solórzano's *Teatro latinoamericano en el siglo XX* (México, 1964) is an insightful study whose careful synthesis is marred by its superficial nod in the direction of Brazil, apparently only in order to use the term "latinoamericano." Willis Knapp Jones' massive *Behind Spanish American Footlights* (Austin, 1966) is the first substantial work in English on Spanish American drama, and is a veritable mine of information on all periods and areas. It is seriously flawed, however, by an almost complete lack of organization and an insistence on an accumulation of minute detail in preference to critical analysis and discussion.

The books under consideration here must be received with the same initial sense of pleasure and subsequent twinge of disappointment. Ediciones de Andrea merits praise for including two volumes on the drama in its new eight-part series on Spanish American literature. These substantial studies, and their presence in the series, indicate that here at least the drama will not be given the rags and ashes of an incomplete and unsympathetic treatment. Nevertheless, imperfections in both works necessitate a somewhat guarded reception of what is obviously an important addition to criticism of this genre in Spanish America.

Professor Arrom's work, not new in the strictest sense, is a slightly revised and updated second edition of his earlier *El teatro en Hispano-*

*américa en la época colonial* (La Habana, 1956). As the author indicates in a short note to the new edition, "He modificado ligeramente el título, he suprimido las ilustraciones y he redistribuído las notas. He aprovechado la ocasión, además, para poner al día la bibliografía y hacer alguno que otro retoque al texto" (p. 7). While republication of a recognized work now out of print is certainly laudable, it is nonetheless regrettable that after eleven years the author has felt obliged to do so little revision. Several major critical works which include material on the theater of the colonial period have appeared during these intervening years, and it seems to me that Arrom's second edition could well have taken these studies into account.

Arrom presents five chapters set in chronological order. The first deals with the difficult questions regarding the pre-Hispanic theatrical tradition, and the second discusses drama in Spanish to the end of the sixteenth century. Chapters III and IV present the rise and decline of the Baroque in two sections (1600-1681 and 1681-1750); Chapter V covers the last half of the eighteenth century. An updated bibliography (including both general and national listings) and an index of names and anonymous plays conclude the study. Also, some changes have been made in order for the new edition to fit the already established *manual* format of Ediciones de Andrea: footnotes have been brought up to date and shifted to the ends of chapters; a short bibliography listing editions and important critical references has been provided for each major author; the system of indicating relative quality by placing two, one, or no asterisks by the playwright's name has been introduced.

Arrom's study, amply reviewed in its first edition, needs little further comment at this time. There are, however, two matters which may still bear some discussion. The first is the much-disputed "mexicanidad" of Juan Ruíz de Alarcón. Arrom's extremely partisan view is as follows: "Porque la explicación de lo que, desde su contemporáneo Juan Pérez de Montalván para acá, se ha llamado 'la extrañeza' de la obra de Alarcón, pudiera buscarse precisamente en su condición de mexicano" (p. 50). He presents this polemical question as if it were completely resolved, when in fact there seems to be as much against the Mexican explanation as in favor of it. In fact, some of the recent references cited by Arrom himself, in particular two articles by Antonio Alatorre (p. 57) are carefully-reasoned presentations concluding that the Mexican theory is not

as strong as it may have appeared at one point and, furthermore, that the entire matter bears meager fruits.

A second objection concerns the handling of certain plays which purport to belong to, or to spring from, the oral pre-Hispanic theatrical tradition. There seems to be little doubt, for example, that the *Rabinal Achí* is much nearer an authentic pre-Colombian representation than is *Ollántay*, which is strongly Spanish in its structure and characterization. However, since precise dating is not possible for either work and since both came to light in manuscript form during the nineteenth century, it is somewhat disconcerting to see the first discussed in Chapter I but the second not until Chapter V. There are other works as well which perhaps belong in the initial chapter: *El Güegüence* (also taken from a nineteenth century manuscript but apparently of an earlier date), studied in Chapter III, and *Tragedia del fin de Atahualpa* and *Usca Páucar* which are considered in the final chapter.

Professor Dauster's study begins where the Arrom book ends, and with enthusiasm and discrimination plots the further development of the drama from the relative mediocrities of the period following the Wars of Independence to the ever increasing heights of more recent years. Dauster's central interest is the twentieth century, since as he indicates: ". . . mientras más nos acercamos al momento actual, mayor profundidad y riqueza cobra [el proceso teatral]. Estamos en pleno renacimiento de la dramaturgia hispanoamericana" (p. 5). The diversity and value of the material discussed makes this a convincing position.

The sixteen chapters which comprise the study follow in general a chronological pattern, and attempt to provide for the reader both a sense of historical development and incisive description and criticism of individual plays and playwrights. This main corpus is preceded by a short section setting forth methodological considerations, and is followed by a useful general bibliography and an index of authors studied. In this volume, too, the same *manual* format is used.

This work is clearly the result of years of reading, and in raising serious objections I do not ignore its merits. There are, however, two major flaws which I feel must be identified and considered.

In the first place, I am upset by the book's structure, which attempts several things and realizes none completely. In the prefatory section Dauster presents the organizational problem in the form of a rhetorical

question: "Al trazar el panorama general de más de siglo y medio, se tropieza con toda clase de problemas formales. ¿Cómo organizar tal panorama? ¿Por países, por períodos, por géneros?" (p. 5). After a brief examination of each possible approach, he opts for an uneasy combination of the national and the periodic. Chapters I and II take a multi-national approach to the drama of the XIX century, while the remaining chapters have no consistent unifying thread. Chapters IV and V cover the first thirty years of the twentieth century, but are restricted to the River Plate area and Mexico. Chapters VI, VII, VIII, and IX represent the period 1930-1950, but again are limited to certain national areas. Chapters XI, XII, XIII, and XIV consider these same areas during the post-World War II period. Some other chapters have a restricted national scope yet cover the entire century (Chapter X on Puerto Rico and Chapter XV on Peru), while Chapter XVI is a miscellany depicting theatrical activity during the present century in Colombia, Venezuela, and Central America. The apparent lack of a consistent structure seems all the more strange in light of Dauster's own insightful comments on the questions of unity and chronology made early in the study. He observes in Chapter III that "A pesar de las fronteras políticas y del precario nivel cultural . . . el proceso cultural hispanoamericano es uno. . . . Este carácter unitario se nota en la prosa y en la poesía, y, si bien se mira, en el teatro también. A pesar de las diferencias, el proceso teatral de Hispanoamérica en el siglo XX tiene un perfil muy parecido entre una nación y otra" (p. 21). He then suggests three separate points in time, or "moments," which could have served well as anchor pegs for a more satisfactory synthetic multi-national handling of the material.

A second major inadequacy of the study is a lack of critical relief, to borrow a term from the cartographers. The reader senses a leveling presentation in which the peaks take on much the same appearance as the valleys. As an example, of the nearly 300 dramatists mentioned, about thirty-five are marked by one or two asterisks as being of special importance. While at first glance this appears acceptable, one soon discovers that only three of the single-asterisk authors occupy more than a half page. Of the seven designated by two asterisks, two are treated in less than a full page, three are given approximately one page each, and only two are considered in two pages. Inexplicably, however, many dramatists of no more than tertiary importance receive as lengthy a con-

sideration as that devoted to authors of secondary or at times even of primary rank. Hopefully, when the time comes for a second edition Professor Dauster will consider adding forty or fifty pages to his study so that at very least the eight or ten major figures of this period may be given the careful and penetrating criticism which they so richly deserve.

In summary, the appearance of these two studies is an important event in the continuing critical assessment of Spanish American drama, but it is inevitably one in which accomplishment lags too far behind possibility. Professor Arrom's work is already recognized and esteemed, but I find myself disappointed by its appearance here only as a minimal adaptation to a new *manual* format instead of as a substantial reworking after more than ten years. Professor Dauster effectively presents, summarizes, and judges the increasing flow of twentieth-century drama, but his study's imprecise organization and brief treatment of key figures tempt me to see it as the author's preliminary sketch for a better ordered and more lengthy study of the same material.

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ALFONSO M. ESCUDERO. *Apuntes sobre el teatro en Chile*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Salesiana, 1967. 80 pp.

In 1966, Professor Escudero (b. 1899) of the School of Pedagogy in Chile's Catholic University, published a stapled pamphlet on Chile's theatre, in fine print filling 45 compact pages. Now this valuable study has appeared in a second, amplified edition in bigger print and less crowded format.

Beginning with Chile's first effort at drama during the colonial period of Governor Alonso de Rivera, the historian mentions other dialogues, and the better known performances of 1633. He continues the history of the theatre following Chile's independence, not only in Santiago but in Valparaíso and other provincial cities. Foreign and national actors are catalogued.

Most of the volume is devoted to a later period. Following a discussion of the experimental theatres, the author treats the nineteenth and twentieth century dramatists in chronological order, with brief biographical comments and lists of plays. Sources of additional information are mentioned, both in the text and in a final "Fuentes Generales."

In addition to a number of rewritten sections, this second edition names authors of early plays and has a six column index of dramatists, both useful and neither included in the first edition. For quantity of information provided in a small space, this book would be hard to beat.

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Josefina Pla. *El teatro en el Paraguay. Primera Parte: De la fundación a 1870.* Asunción, Paraguay: Escuela Salesiana, 1967. 92 pp.

In 1965, Josefina Pla, one of Paraguay's most active dramatists, published a brief study of theatrical activity in her adopted country. Now she is expanding the material in the Camalote Series, of which this is the first volume. It begins with a discussion of a 1544 Corpus Christi *auto sacramental*. A section on religious plays by converts of the Jesuits, 1609-1767, is followed by a brief look at activity under Dictator Francia and the López family, including performances by imported companies brought to Asunción by "El Supremo." Two pages list the names of dramas and *zarzuelas* performed between 1855 and 1870. Notes and a four-page bibliography complete this first specialized look at Paraguay's early steps in the theatre. Later activities will be covered in two subsequent volumes by doña Josefina: 1870-1900, and 1900-1967. While abbreviated, it will be a guide for further studies.

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