

## Plays in Performance

### *Soldierboy* in Los Angeles

*Soldierboy* is a Chicano play that is simultaneously an anti-war drama as well as an exploration into the dynamics of the Chicano family. Written by Judith and Severo Pérez, a husband and wife writing team residing in Los Angeles, *Soldierboy* focuses on the readjustment problems of a Mexican American veteran in San Antonio in 1945.

Directed by Luis Valdez, the play was originally premiered by the Teatro Campesino in San Juan Bautista, California, in November, 1982. Then, in late January 1987, in an extensively revised version directed by Romulus Zamora, it was offered for six performances at the Stop Gap Theater as a production of the University of Southern California Division of Drama.

*Soldierboy* is set at the home of the de la Cruz family in west-side San Antonio, Texas, from August to late December, 1945. Intwoven with present action are flashback scenes in dreams, nightmares, and memories involving traumatic psychological scars from World War II in Europe. Frank de la Cruz, a returning Chicano veteran-hero, encounters a multitude of problems as he tries to readjust to a changing family situation. In a dramatic mode reminiscent of the plays of Arthur Miller, *Soldierboy* conveys a strong social message projected from the psychological states of individual characters.

In spite of Frank's status as a returning hero, he is confronted by discrimination from an American society that quickly forgets to honor a hometown hero but pointedly remembers social, cultural and educational differences. A number of complications in the play are based on alienation. There is a generational split between Frank and his parents who are much more limited in their outlook and aspirations; Frank's wife Esther has aspirations that are too liberal for Frank as she works toward personal and economic freedom. Frank's six-year-old son, Junior, barely relates to his father. Frank's brother

Willie has been cut down and debilitated by an accident that he realizes will eventually be fatal. Frank is also haunted by nightmarish wartime memories of violence, death and a doomed friendship.

Although the play verges on melodrama, there are several saving graces. One is the vitality of the characters who have the breath of life, particularly the multi-layered Frank. The play is engrossing because of strong characterization. Another factor is the biting humor that takes the edge off some of the many complications, underscoring the liveliness of the particularized yet representative Chicano characters. The dialogue, mostly in English but with some Chicano speech, rings true, and helps turn potentially melodramatic material into absorbing theatre. Audience identification is strong, aided by the neo-naturalistic mode, intercut with symbolic short scenes that express Frank's psyche, troubled by war memories, victim of a survivor's guilt. Under the direction of Romulus Zamora, the acting by the student cast was uniformly excellent; and careful and imaginative attention to detail successfully involved the audience in this human, humane, and humanistic play.

In a program note, Zamora indicates that the USC Drama Division in 1985 "began exploring development of a Hispanic Theater option BFA program to be the first in the nation. As the first step a Hispanic production was scheduled for the start of 1987." Judith and Severo Pérez' *Soldierboy* was the drama selected as the first production. Now, as a co-production of the Guadalupe Cultural Center and the Teatro Campesino, the play is set for presentation in San Antonio. It will also be included in a new compilation of Chicano drama under the editorship of Jorge Huerta. Undoubtedly, *Soldierboy* is worthy of this attention. Indeed, *Soldierboy* is a valuable addition to the Chicano theatre repertoire, indicative of the continuing vitality of Chicano drama.

Arthur Ramírez  
*San Diego State University*



*Soldierboy* by Judith and Seveo Pérez. University of Southern California, Los Angeles. Denise García, Ama Martínez, Rafael "Rafi" Pérez, Efraín Ciro Suárez. Courtesy: Arthur Ramírez.

## Alejandro Sieveking in U.S.

Chilean playwright, Alejandro Sieveking, and his wife, actress B elgica Castro, attended debuts of two of his works in translation last September in the U.S. *The Praying Mantis* (La mantis religiosa), debuted in the Brooks Theatre of the Cleveland Play House in Cleveland, Ohio on September 16, 1986 and ran for ten weeks, some 70 performances. Sieveking, winner of the 1975 Casa de las Am ericas award for *Peque os animales abatidos*, attended the last week of rehearsals and consulted with director Evie McElroy to help mold a play which The Cleveland *Plain Dealer* called "bold, brilliant."

This 1971 play, which has been performed in many countries in Latin America, is a play with a myriad of levels of interpretations, including repression of the poor by the bourgeoisie. Three sisters live in a large Victorian house in a small Chilean port town and attempt to hide a "family secret" from everyone, including Juan who is courting Adela. Juan embarks on a search for the truth behind the screams which emanate from behind a large carved wooden door, and the result is an entertaining work which skillfully blends elements of horror and comedy.



*The Praying Mantis* by Alejandro Sieveking. Cleveland Play House, Cleveland, OH. Robert Grey, Sharon Bicknell. Courtesy: Robert C. Ragsdale.

On September 10 and 11 Sieveking and Castro attended the world premiere in English of *The Ragged Rascals Ran* (*Tres tristes tigres*) in the Experimental Theatre of the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. This 1967 work, which as of this writing is enjoying a successful revival in Chile, played to capacity audiences as part of the University's Hispanic Heritage Week program. The appeal of the play remains undiminished after almost twenty years as it depicts the struggle for survival of characters for whom society has provided no real reason for living, as they are unprepared, or do not have the knowledge to be useful in a society. The play was performed by The Lite Players of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin and was directed by Betty Butcher.

Sieveking and Castro, who returned to Chile in November of 1984 after ten years in exile in Costa Rica, have been working and performing extensively since their return. During the 1985 season, Sieveking's play, *La Comadre Lola*, ran from April to September. Before their trip to the U.S. in September 1986, they were both acting in the very successful presentation of *La muerte de un vendedor* (*Death of a Salesman*) in Santiago. In 1987 they plan to mount a production of García-Lorca's *Bodas de sangre*, which they will present in Santiago for a number of months before embarking on a national tour to present the work in many of the smaller cities of Chile.

Charles Philip Thomas  
*University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh*



*The Ragged Rascals Ran* by Alejandro Sieveking. University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh. Valerie Lawson, Gary Hobbins.

## Una producción de *Hijos del terremoto*

Del 28 de febrero al 2 de marzo de 1986 se realizó en California State University, Los Angeles el estreno mundial del drama *Hijos del terremoto* (presentado originalmente bajo el título *Hijos de la tormenta*) de Osvaldo Dragún. Con esta producción, el Teatro Universitario en Español, bajo el tutelaje de los profesores Gigi Gaucher y Alfredo Morales, ha demostrado otra vez su capacidad para brindarle al público hispanoparlante del sur de California lo mejor y lo más novedoso del teatro hispanoamericano. Fue una representación muy poderosa, gracias a la actuación de sus intérpretes multinacionales. Entre los miembros del elenco merecen alabanzas especiales Pedro J. Razo en el papel de Tío Manuel y Eduardo Casas, que desempeñó el papel del Negro.

Además del interés engendrado por la aportación escenográfica, esta producción abre una gran polémica en cuanto a la libertad del director para modificar un texto dramático. La versión escenificada de *Hijos del terremoto*, la cual se anunció en el programa como "adaptación," se alejó bastante del texto escrito (véase *Gestos 2*, noviembre de 1986), reflejando así la filosofía artística del director mexicano Jorge Andrés Fernández, quien ocupa actualmente el puesto de director del taller teatral de la Universidad Autónoma de Baja California. Según Fernández, la infidelidad del montaje al texto escrito puede dar lugar a un enriquecimiento de la obra, ya que al montarla, el director la hace suya.

Aun teniendo en cuenta el enfoque particular del director, resulta difícil reconciliar esta representación con el propósito del dramaturgo, debido a las numerosas discrepancias entre *logos* y *gestus*. Aunque el problema de la enajenación humana (tema candente de toda la obra de Dragún)--y más específicamente el de la alienación del argentino--se destacó claramente en esta producción, faltaban muchas de las alusiones a la herencia judía del autor, elemento que se realza fuertemente en el manuscrito de este drama autobiográfico. Por lo tanto, el exilio voluntario del protagonista Corazón (*alter ego* del propio Dragún) y sus viajes de regreso, cada vez más desilusionantes, a su patria, aunque sugirieran la angustia del argentino frente a la turbulenta historia de esa nación durante las últimas cuatro décadas, no lograron comunicar en la representación el ansia nomádica del prototípico judío errante. Esta omisión tal vez se debiera en parte al deseo del director Fernández de hacer más universal el asunto de la obra.

Fernández optó también por omitir las múltiples referencias al agua, símbolo que Dragún emplea en el texto para representar la inestabilidad del argentino, el cual busca un puerto seguro en una sociedad que parece estar en constante movimiento, sin llegar jamás a ninguna parte.

Otro cambio notable ocurrió al final, específicamente en el último parlamento de Corazón (representado por Gilberto de Santiago), cuando el General Canfunfa (Humberto Almeida Jiménez), arquetipo del militar corrupto y abusador, le preguntó al argentino itinerante si pensaba marcharse definitivamente de la Argentina. Lo que en el texto original era una respuesta dudosa y ambivalente ("No, acabo de llegar ... creo"), en la representación se convirtió en rotunda afirmación de lucha ("Apenas. ¡Por fin acabo de llegar! ¡Por fin!"). A pesar de ser dramáticamente más efectivo, el nuevo desenlace no corresponde con la intención del dramaturgo, quien en su nota introductoria a la obra, nos ofrece una visión más pesimista del problema de la identidad judeo-argentina: "Inmigrantes que nunca llegarán al paraíso" (*Gestos* 2, 158).

El director se quedó fiel a las tendencias brechtianas de Dragún en dos aspectos. Primero, el acompañamiento musical por el conjunto argentino Estrella del Sur le prestó ambiente y fuerza a la obra, aunque poco o nada tenía que ver con la "música judía llena de aires tristes" especificada por Dragún en sus acotaciones. Muy efectivo también fue el uso de varias diapositivas de la Guerra Civil Española y de la época peronista, para equiparar los regímenes de los dos dictadores, Perón y Franco.

Esta metamorfosis artística de un drama a manos del director desentierra el eterno dilema ético y estético: ¿hasta qué punto tiene un artista el derecho de transformar la creación de otro?

Andrea G. Labinger  
*University of La Verne*

## Griselda Gambaro and José Triana at Dartmouth

Griselda Gambaro (Argentina) and José Triana (Cuba) participated in a small, round-table conference at Dartmouth dedicated to their theatre. The conference, organized by Diana Taylor from Dartmouth, ran from October 6-8, 1987 and brought together some of the most prominent scholars of Gambaro's and Triana's work: Frank Dauster, George Woodyard, Leon Lyday, Kirsten Nigro, Peter Roster, Fernando de Toro, Sandra Cypess, Priscilla Meléndez, Joan Rea, Becky Boling, Sharon Magnarelli, Elsa Gilmore. Phyllis Zatlin spoke on the reception of Latin American plays, specifically Argentinian, in Spain. Griselda Gambaro spoke on "Los rostros del exilio," noting that in recent years Argentina's population underwent both external and internal exile: "es una sensación curiosa encontrarse exiliado de esta manera en el propio país, donde pisando las mismas calles, transitando los mismos lugares, el paisaje se vuelve igualmente extraño..." José Triana's talk,

"Alusiones al delirio," relates how he and his sisters were able to "configurar totalmente un universo monstruoso y exultante, afiebrado y cómico," prefigurations of his future theatrical activity. In addition to the papers and discussions, the conference offered a full stage production of Triana's *La noche de los asesinos*, and Gambaro's *Decir sí* (in English, directed by Diana Taylor) to complement the theoretical discourse. Several of the papers presented at the conference, as well as the playwrights' talks, will be included in two single-author, critical editions of these playwright's theatre, published by Ediciones del Norte. These two volumes will be the first in a series of critical editions on contemporary Latin American dramatists.

Diana Taylor  
*Dartmouth College*



*Saying Yes* by Griselda Gambaro. Dartmouth College. Hanover, NH. Josh Manheimer, Laurence Davics.