

Book Reviews

de Toro, Fernando. *Semiótica del teatro. Del texto a la puesta en escena*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1987. 230 pp.

There can be little question that semiotics has played an enormously influential role in theatre studies in the last decade. This is especially true in the case of Latin America, where the emphasis of a semiotic approach on the design of the cultural text, its strategies for generating meaning, the various codes it employs in establishing a "circuit of communication" with various levels of narratees--readers or spectators--and the interlocking patterns of lexemes, sememes, and ideologemes has contributed immeasurably to reinforcing the need to speak of theatre as a socially significant cultural text defined and circumscribed by ideological parameters with an intellectually defensible critical discourse.

As a consequence, more properly formalistic or structural studies that concentrated on the work as a self-referential artifact, and sociologically inspired interpretations that were only able to paraphrase a reductionistically detached content have yielded to analyses that are able to respect both the specific textual dynamics of a play and to see it as participating in a system of social and cultural texts that lend it ideological significance. It is not, therefore, surprising that a semiotic approach to Latin American theatre has been endorsed so enthusiastically, particularly in view of the very obvious social and public texture of the spectacle and the enormous dramatic production that has occurred in recent decades.

Fernando de Toro is one of a solid group of Latin American theatre researchers who has found a semiotic approach especially productive, and his 1984 *Brecht en el teatro hispanoamericano contemporáneo* is a superb example of the sort of approach I have sketched above. The book reviewed here, *Semiótica del teatro*, is a valuable attempt to summarize in Spanish the terminology and protocols of the large amount of theoretical work that has hitherto been available only in English or French, with some scattered Spanish translations. De Toro does not propose to develop an original semiotic approach

especially designed for Latin American theatrical works (one would have difficulty imagining what such a model might look like) nor does he propose to interface the integrated theoretical principles he reviews with specific Latin American texts, preferring instead to speak in general terms. The six chapters cover the major topics: "El discurso teatral"; "Texto, texto dramático, texto espectacular"; "La semiosis teatral"; "La recepción teatral"; "Por una especificación actancial"; "Historia y semiótica en el teatro." Each chapter is divided into brief blocks, often only one or two pages in length. For some readers, the pithiness of this coverage will be a welcome relief from denser expositions, while other readers might find that it impedes substantially the appropriately and fully complicated explanation of key concepts with suitable references to specific plays. Certainly, the characteristic organization will make *Semiótica del teatro* especially suitable as a text in graduate seminars conducted in Spanish, where the full presentation of theatrical semiotics has been hampered by the lack of sophisticated enough texts, a qualification that, in my mind, excludes Raúl H. Castagnino's rather primitive *Semiótica, ideología y teatro hispanoamericano contemporáneo* (1974), which de Toro does not even list in his ample bibliography.

As regards to the fifteen-page bibliography of over four-hundred references, with the exception of de Toro's own publications, there are scant to no items that represent the application of semiotics to the study of Latin American theatre. This is a serious deficiency, since it denies the user ready reference to a really rather impressive list of critical accomplishments under the semiotic purview. While one might consult the 1985 *Bibliografía del teatro hispanoamericano contemporáneo* prepared by de Toro and Peter Roster (whose name has mysteriously disappeared from de Toro's entry), this bibliography has a number of serious technical defects that make it clumsy to use. Thus, de Toro is to be praised for having provided a solid and comprehensive survey of semiotic applications to the theatre, with due reservations about the overly schematic nature of some of the information he provides and the silence of the bibliography as regards the accomplishments of his Latin Americanist colleagues in the utilization of such applications.

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Pianca, Marina, ed. *Diógenes: Anuario Crítico del Teatro Latinoamericano*, Vol. 1 (1985) 180 pp.; Vol. 2 (1986), 206 pp. Ottawa: Girol Books, 1987.

Diógenes brings together a series of interviews, reports and essays describing the panorama of Latin American theatrical activity both in and outside Latin America. The two volumes offer invaluable information about the particular social, political and economic conditions in which this theatre develops, with reports on Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela. The first volume describes the situation of Latin American and "Latino" theatre outside of Latin America, specifically in the United States, Canada and France. While each volume focuses on a specific year, 1985 and 1986, the material ranges from detailed analysis of a particular situation (i.e., Osvaldo Dragún's informative article on the theatre crisis in Argentina in 1985) to questions of widespread and ongoing concern (i.e., Jorge Díaz' "Teatro chileno en el exilio"). Marina Pianca also includes reports on a fascinating variety of kinds of theatrical practice, from "el teatro en las cárceles del Uruguay" to revolutionary theatrical "brigades" in Nicaragua.

In her introductory essay, "Caminos del nuevo teatro," Pianca maps out the landscape of Latin American theatre since the Cuban Revolution in 1959, a date which for her marks the beginning of the first of the three stages in its development: 1) 1959-1968 "es un período de toma de conciencia, un período en que existe una conducta histórica que está muy a la vanguardia de la actitud teatral En este período se lleva a cabo un proceso de estructuración y fermentación a nivel nacional"; 2) 1968-1974 "se caracteriza por la internacionalización de este proceso y por el desarrollo de un teatro ya íntimamente vinculado a América Latina. Se lucha por la integración de América (Nuestra América) como único vehículo hacia la autodeterminación cultural y política. Es así que en 1968 aparecen las primeras ediciones de festivales internacionales de teatro latinoamericano"; 3) "Un tercer período--que va de aproximadamente 1974 hasta comienzos de la nueva década--se abre así bajo el signo de exilio, la atomización y la represión, para pasar luego a la reestructuración y una nueva esperanza."

While the first two stages identified by Pianca are straightforward, the essays included in the two volumes of *Diógenes* seem to belie Pianca's optimistic conclusion. The hope, articulated during the Primer Festival de Teatro Popular Latinoamericano in 1976, was that a strong sense of Latin American identity would surpass geographical obstacles. As Dragún observes, however, Latin America has not just

one culture, one identity, but many. Argentina alone, he says, "es un mosaico de espacios culturales ¿podremos nosotros reconocer la validez de imágenes dramáticas proyectadas por espacios culturales que desconocemos? Lo dudo." He doubts that Latin America's many parts make up a cultural whole, and more disturbing, that the different parts even recognize each other. Serving as a judge at the Festival Internacional de Caracas in 1983 in which a German rendition of a Greek tragedy won over a Bolivian ritual, Dragún concludes that the "imágenes dramáticas (griegas traducidas al alemán) nos eran más cercanas culturalmente, que las de nuestros hermanos de sufrimiento latinoamericano, los bolivianos."

The geographic and cultural distance between spectators and spectacle becomes even more foreboding when theatre practitioners leave Latin America. The reports on Latin American theatre in the United States, Canada and Europe demonstrate how vital a shared physical and ideological context really is, especially for people working in theatre. Jorge Díaz advances his opinion that Chilean theatre produced outside of Latin America is "pobre y escaso, aunque significativo como testimonio" because it lacks an audience that understands its codes. So too, the Primer Manifiesto de la Compagnie des Arts Exilio y del Teatro Latinoamericano en Quebec, published in 1985 by Alberto Kurapel and his company, expresses a similar frustration: "¡Once años de Exilio! Ciudadanos de ninguna parte. Se nos exige integración donde está prohibida la integración" Ironically, as Osvaldo Obregón points out in the report on "Teatristas Latinoamericanos en Francia," integration and cultural acclimatization to a foreign country pose their own threats. Latin American theatre practitioners, particularly the dramatists, risk losing their voice by addressing their new audiences in a new theatrical idiom. And even when works written by Latin American dramatists are staged abroad and attract international audiences, as currently happens in Joseph Papp's "Latino Festival," for example, the fear remains that they will be assimilated into a mainstream "masterpiece" movement, a "vitrina del 'mejor teatro'" as Pianca puts it.

In spite of the difficulties confronting these theatre practitioners both in and outside Latin America, *Diógenes* attests to their commitment to keep producing a theatre that speaks to their many realities and reflects their several aspirations. Herein lies, perhaps, the hope that Pianca refers to, and one that she helps realize by providing a space, within these pages, in which these voices, with all their differences, can again be heard together. And the space will expand, the introductory note to the 1986 volume informs us, for the *Diógenes* volumes form part of a larger project undertaken by ATINT (Asociación de Trabajadores e Investigación del Nuevo Teatro) which includes

the preparation and publication of drama anthologies and critical studies. Marina Pianca's *Diógenes* is a unique and important contribution to our understanding of and our research in this rich and complex field.

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Spinu, Marina. *Das dramatische Werk des Brasilianers Nelson Rodrigues*. Frankfurt: Peter Lange, 1986. 166 pp.

Literary critics describe Nelson Rodrigues as a great expressionist, a reviver of antique tragedy, a designer of archetypal themes, a naturalistic portrayer of the little man's misery, a melodramatist, a pornographer. In order to answer the question of what Rodrigues really is, Marina Spinu begins with an extensive biography of the author, who was born in 1912 in Recife. She then introduces his seventeen dramas in chronological sequence and interprets them in the light of their historical and biographical background. The origin, the production and the reception of each work are especially emphasized. The advantage of this method lies in the fact that each drama is examined by itself, so that the respective commentaries and reviews can be discussed in detail and on the basis of solid information.

A not very abundant, but controversial body of research on Nelson Rodrigues has until now suffered from the attempt to fit his multi-layered work into prefabricated molds. Marina Spinu does not create a new mold, but filters out a series of characteristic elements from the vast amount of information the author himself offers us, enabling the reader to form his or her own opinion of Nelson Rodrigues. The biography itself already offers leads to facilitate an understanding of this dramatist: Rodrigues's obsessions with illness, blindness, death, incest, nudity; his keen awareness of the reality surrounding him, of the double standard of society's morals; his bitterness; his championing of oppressed minorities; and also, his own controversial nature.

In Spinu's individual play analyses, the following elements are underscored: that the material for the dramas originates in the experiences of Rodrigues as a young police reporter in the streets of Rio de Janeiro; that Rodrigues created a new genre, the "tragedia carioca"; that his childhood obsessions dominate his subject matter and influence their treatment; that Brazilian reality is brought onto the stage in nightmarish distortion, creating archetypal dramas dealing with

universal human emotions; that in questions of dramatic form, his plays precede European absurdist theatre; that his lighting effects, use of microphones, of film, of simultaneous stage levels renew the Brazilian stage.

Marina Spinu's approach enables her to examine the multitude of positive and negative labels tacked onto Rodrigues as a playwright. For example, it is often said that he is a follower of O'Neill. But in analyzing *Senhora dos Afogados*, compared to O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Spinu proves the Brazilian's originality. At the same time this example shows how unfitting the label "mythical" is for him. While O'Neill tries consistently to write a modern parallel to Aeschylus, Rodrigues rejects the Electra subject matter *per se*, in favor of the Electra complex. And with regard to the "expressionist" label, Spinu shows that even though his purpose and subject matter permit analogies to be drawn with certain German expressionists, the Brazilian does not share the *Weltanschauung* on which it is based. Spinu also emphasizes the extraordinary role of the Polish director Ziembinski, who contributed decisively to the stage success of Rodrigues by introducing the European avant-garde style of performance (Meyerhold, the Russian avant-garde, German expressionism) to the Brazilian stage.

Marina Spinu's study is an excellent and stimulating introduction to Nelson Rodrigues research. However, it would be more enjoyable to work with it had the author placed her too numerous quotations separately, either as footnotes or in an appendix. There is hardly a sentence that is not interrupted by a quote, a bothersome and unnecessary kind of reassurance given Spinu's convincing mastery of her subject matter. Quite admittedly, this is a rather subjective objection, for other readers may have an aversion to footnotes or hate referring back to an appendix. Unfortunately, one cannot please every reader in matters such as these.

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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 the readers. Inclusion here does not preclude subsequent review.]

Boletín de la ATINT 2.3 (oct, 1987). Contiene notas sobre actividades teatrales en Buenos Aires, Managua, Veracruz (México), La Habana, y Estados Unidos.

Boletín del Instituto de Teatro 5 (1987). Incluye: Roberto Cossa, "Teatro y riesgo"; Juan Polito y Helena Sagaseta, "Teatro Abierto"; Marta Lena Paz, "El teatro argentino en la última década: Posibilidades de un lenguaje dramático de vanguardia"; Ana Scoane, "Entrevista a Alejandra Boero en ocasión del estreno de *Poder, apogeo y escándalo del Coronel Dorrego*, de David Viñas."

Buenaventura, Enrique. *CELCIT Cuadernos de Investigación Teatral* 22 (mayo-junio 1987). Contiene: "Notas sobre dramaturgia (Tema, mitema y contexto)," y "Dramaturgia del actor."

Conjunto 70 (octubre-diciembre 1986). Incluye: Fernando de Toro, "El teatro en Chile: ruptura y renovación"; Alberto Villagómez, "Tendencias en el teatro peruano actual"; Patricio Wood, "Encuentro con el teatro nicaragüense de hoy"; Eduardo Guerrero, "Entrevista a Jorge Díaz"; Jorge Díaz, *Canto subterráneo para blindar una paloma*; Grupo La Candalaria, "Así trabajamos *Guadalupe, años sin cuenta*; índice a los números 67-70.

Conjunto 72 (abril-julio 1987). Incluye: Yan Michalski, "El teatro brasileño en los ochenta"; Patrice Pavis, "¿Hacia una semiología de la *mise en scène*?"; y la pieza de María José Campoamor, "008 se va con la murga."

Conjunto 73 (julio-septiembre 1987). Incluye: Fernando Peixoto, "Teatro brasileño e identidad nacional"; Magaly Muguercia, "¿Nuevos caminos en el teatro latinoamericano?"; Patrice Pavis, "¿Hacia una semiología de la *mise en scène*? (II)"; Luis Molinaza, "Presencia del mito en el teatro dominicano"; Antonio Rodríguez de

- Anca, "La vanguardia teatral argentina"; y Enrique Ballesté, "Un cuarto."
- Dramaturgos* (Miami) 1.3 (set-oct 1987). Contiene una entrevista con Ana Margarita Martínez-Casado y la pieza "El primo," de José Corrales.
- Dramaturgos* (Miami) 1.4 (nov-dic 1987). Contiene: Matías Montes Huidobro, "Teatro cubano revolucionario."
- Espacio de Crítica e Investigación Teatral* 2.2 (abril 1987). Incluye: Enrique Buenaventura, "Dramaturgia, tema mitema y contexto" y "La dramaturgia del actor"; Jorge J. Monteleone, "El teatro de Ricardo Monti"; Beatriz Trastoy, "El teatro argentino de los últimos años: del parricidio al filicidio"; Susana Anaine, "El lenguaje dramático y la estética del cine en la obra de Oscar Viale."
- Gelpí, Juan. Rev. of *El teatro de Luis Rafael Sánchez. Códigos, ideología y lenguaje*, by Eliseo R. Colón Zayas. *Revista Iberoamericana* 140 (julio-septiembre 1987): 699-700.
- González Delvalle, Alcibiades. *Nuestros años grises*. Asunción, Paraguay: Editorial Araverá, 1985. 128 p.
- ICTUS. *Informa* (julio 1987). Incluye una entrevista a Delfina Guzmán y a Nissim Sharim, y reportaje sobre las representaciones de *Residencia en las nubes* en La Habana.
- ICTUS. *Informa* (septiembre 1987). Incluye textos de Fernando Alegría, Poli Délano y Bertolt Brecht.
- ICTUS. *Informa* (octubre 1987). Incluye textos de José Donoso, Raúl Zurita y Guillermo Blanco.
- Montes Huidobro, Matías. *Teoría y práctica del catedratisimo en Los negros catedráticos de Francisco Fernández*. Miami: Editorial Persona, 1987. 129 p.
- Nieman, Nancy Dale. "Dos estrenos de Jorge Díaz en Madrid." *Hispania* 70.3 (September 1987): 549.
- Pellettieri, Osvaldo, ed. *Obra dramática de Armando Discépolo*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1987. 373 p. Con un estudio preliminar, vocabulario y notas.
- . *Radiografía de Carlos Gardel*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Abril, S.A., 1987. 119 p.
- Pauliello de Chocholous, Hebe. *Índice de Bambalinas*. Mendoza, Argentina: Universidad Nacionl de Cuyo, 1987. 103 p. Índice de *Bambalinas: revista teatral*, que apareció en Buenos Aires entre 1918 y 1934.
- Pavlovsky, Eduardo. *In Slow Motion. The History of a Face*. Trans. E. Pavlovsky and J. Howley. Ms., 1985. 46 p.
- Quackenbush, L. Howard, ed. *Teatro absurdo hispanoamericano*. México, D.F.: Editorial Patria, S.A. de C.V., 1987. 270 p. Edición anotada que incluye Carlos Maggi, *Esperando a Rodó*; Jorge Díaz,

El lugar donde mueren los mamíferos; Virgilio Piñera, *Dos viejos pánicos*; Juan José Arreola, *Tercera llamada itercera! o empezamos sin usted*; Rodolfo Santana, *La farra*; Jorge Díaz, *Mata a tu prójimo como a ti mismo*; Eduardo Pavlovsky, *Cámara lenta: historia de una cara*.

Rizk, Beatriz J. *El nuevo teatro latinoamericano: una lectura histórica*. Minneapolis: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature/Prisma Institute, 1987. 143 p.

Romano, Francisco Javier. "La resurrección del poeta." Bahía Blanca, Argentina: Universidad Nacional del Sur, 1986. 25 p.

Ruiz, Ariel. "Razz, sexo y política en *Short Eyes* de Miguel Piñero." *Américas* 15.2 (Summer 1987): 93-102.

Tablas 3/87. Incluye una entrevista con Violeta Casal y ocho opiniones críticas sobre nuevos montajes de los teatros de la capital en la última temporada.

Teatro (Buenos Aires) 29 (mayo 1987). Incluye artículos sobre y entrevistas con Osvaldo Dragún y Mauricio Kartun.

Teatro (Buenos Aires) 30 (julio 1987). Número especial sobre Federico García Lorca, incluye reseñas de producciones argentinas de sus obras.

Teatro CELCIT Información (septiembre 1987). Incluye un homenaje a María Teresa Castillo.

Teatro CELCIT Información (octubre-noviembre 1987).

Teatro Nacional Cervantes. Reseñas de varias funciones: Griselda Gambaro, *Antígona furiosa*; Lermo Rafael Balbi, *Adiós, adiós Ludovica*; María Elena Walsh, *Vivir en vos*; y obras de Beckett, García Lorca, Odin Teatret.

Toro, Fernando de. *Semiótica del teatro*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1987. 230p.

Tramoya 8 (octubre-diciembre 1986). Incluye: Blanca López de Mariscal, "Una obra dramática inédita del siglo XIX"; y las obras: Manuel Gutiérrez, *Vaya una tía*; Rafael Medina y José F. Elizondo, *Chin chun chan*; Constancio S. Suárez, *Sacrificio de amor*.

Woodyard, George W. "Recent Developments in Spanish American Theatre." *Selected Proceedings: The Thirty-Fifth Annual Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Conference*. Greenville, S.C.: Furman University, 1987. 381-87.