

LATIN AMERICAN THEATRE REVIEW

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the Theatre and Drama
of Spanish and Portuguese
America*

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Critical studies:	6500 words	Reviews:	500 words for critical study
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Festival Reports:	2000 words		1000 words for play collection
Performance Reviews:	500 words plus photos		

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Abstracts

Gail Bulman, “Not My Choice: Feeling as a ‘Productive Paradox’ in Lola Arias’s *Doble de riesgo*”

Framed within Buenos Aires’s Parque de la Memoria, Lola Arias’s 2016 multi-media installation, *Doble de riesgo*, thrust affect to center stage and highlighted choice as pivotal, emotionally driven, and necessary for individual and collective momentum. The images in Arias’s exhibit thus went beyond inspiring catharsis or compassion; they questioned the role of emotions in creating communities and matters of individual and national security. Using Ben Anderson’s concept of a “productive paradox,” this article shows how Arias seized on the diverse but potent affective aftermath of multiple political and historical events in Argentina, moving her viewers from contemplating individual emotions to participating in collective, affective bonding. This article also pays special attention to the many doubles in *Doble de riesgo*, examining how Arias expanded and destabilized the notion of the double by transforming its visual elements into *trompe-l’oeil*—thus highlighting the instability, power, and perpetual shifting of her subjects’ emotions—as well as examining the ways in which the exhibit’s interactive elements made visitors into simultaneous actors and emancipated spectators.

Amalia Gladhart, “Translation Plays: La Malinche y otros intérpretes”

From the well-spoken Malinche, who translates Hernán Cortés’ semi-intelligible gibberish for a Spanish-speaking audience in Sabina Berman’s *Águila o sol* (1984), to the multilingual adolescents mediating between parents and host country in plays about immigration and exile, as in Roberto Cossa’s *Gris de ausencia* (1981), the translator is a frequent figure on the Latin American stage. Griselda Gambaro’s *Es necesario entender un poco* (1995) and Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda’s *La mujer que cayó del cielo* (1999) present complex representations of translation, showing it to be, at times, empowering and, at other times, limiting. Analyzing the above plays, this article considers why translation is performed in front of an audience or on the spectators’ behalf and how it may serve either to include or to exclude spectators or characters in the action of a given scene as well as highlight and question many of the constitutive elements of theatre. Interpretation ultimately ties translation and theatre together, as a translation is always an interpretation, just as interpretation is always part of theatre.

Aníbal González, “Teatro, arte y crisis en Puerto Rico: Desde *El velorio (no-vela)* de Antonio Martorell hasta *Las Nietas de Nonó*”

In the context of Puerto Rico’s ongoing debt crisis, two works stand out as original and insightful artistic responses to this difficult juncture: Antonio Martorell’s hybrid text, *El velorio (no-vela)* (2010), and the performance piece *Manual del bestiaro doméstico* (2015) by theatre group Las Nietas de Nonó. Simultaneously narrative and theatrical, Martorell’s work is a series of monologues and scenes derived from Francisco Oller’s iconic painting, *El velorio* (1893), which depicts a drunken celebration in a peasant home during the wake of a dead infant. Las Nietas de Nonó’s play offers monologues and sketches about the suffering of present-day Afro-Puerto Rican families whose male relatives have been incarcerated for infractions large and small. The play ends with a scene evocative of *El velorio*, in which the audience is invited to pay its respects to the bed-sheet-covered body of a character who has been murdered. The significant presence in both works of Oller’s masterpiece of realist painting—itself a response to social crisis during Spanish colonial rule—helps us understand the message of Martorell’s and Las Nietas de Nonó’s works. *El velorio*’s images evoke Alejandro Tapia y Rivera’s notorious quote: “Puerto Rico is the corpse of a society that is yet unborn.” Similarly, in both *El velorio (no-vela)* and *Manual del bestiaro doméstico*, the image of a dead child is a symbol

of the paralysis inherent to the colonial condition, in which the body of the nation is always waiting to be born, always waiting to grow up, suspended in an endless state of infantilism.

Melissa González-Contreras, “Del escenario al palco: Rearticulación del público en *Información para extranjeros y Cinema Utoppia*”

Theorists and dramatists Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal bestow a truth-revealing power to theatre in relation to its social context. In addition, they recognize the fundamental role of the audience as the creator of a play’s meaning and, although to different degrees and manners, push the audience to be an active participant both in theatrical performances as well as the world beyond the theater. This essay analyzes two plays from different settings: *Información para extranjeros* (1973) by Argentina’s Griselda Gambaro and the Chilean play *Cinema Utoppia* (1985) by Ramón Griffero. Through these plays I propose that the evolution in the conception of the theatrical character and the innovative use of the stage trigger a subsequent change in the function traditionally attributed to the theatrical audience, reflecting the practices developed by Brecht and Boal. In Gambaro’s and Griffero’s plays, the audience takes on a participatory role during the performance. This transformation of the audience responds to concrete sociopolitical circumstances, revealing certain truths and aiming to stimulate active participation in the sociopolitical processes to which the plays respond.

Priscilla Meléndez, “Teo- y narco-logías: Los mercaderes del templo en *El narco negocia con Dios* de Sabina Berman”

The concern with ethics and the search for goodness in Mexican dramatist Sabina Berman’s play *El narco negocia con Dios* (2012) arise from the moral chaos of contemporary Mexico, suffocated by *narco* culture, the collapse of its judiciary, and rampant corruption. Responding to questions about morality and which actions are considered good or bad, *El narco* places spectators within a shifting and cartoonish moral landscape in which the inconsistencies of blatant evil and sanctimonious goodness are parodied, leading the audience to confront liminal ideas of morality that exceed the usual binaries of social and ethical thought. This play’s theatrical inventiveness lies in its exploration of two issues with a lengthy philosophical history: religion’s role in morality and chronological time’s role in human existence. In terms of the former, Berman’s play parodies biblical discourse, beginning with its title. As for the latter, the play features frequent plot breaks that go against the conventions of irreversible, linear time. *El narco* ultimately rejects a religious vision of morality that is frequently binary and paternalistic, proposing a more complex, pluralistic vision that critiques human sociopolitical and cultural conduct from a secular standpoint, even as it questions the Western concept of linear, progressive time.

Elaine M. Miller, “*Ley seca* by Angie Cervantes: The Ordeal of a Costa Rican Teenage Girl”

In Angie Cervantes’s *Ley seca* (2007), seventeen-year-old Eva faces loneliness and social pressure as she seeks an illegal abortion. The play’s setting during Holy Week and use of the Stations of the Cross as its structural framework call attention to the ways in which the weight of the Catholic Church’s moral teachings and their influence on the legal regulation of reproductive rights in contemporary Costa Rica create obstacles for women. While Eva searches for help, she suffers the ordeal of her own Stations of the Cross, which parallel the Catholic devotion. Her agony increases as she finds her options limited by the binary relation of gender associated with compulsory heterosexuality. This article uses Judith Butler’s theory of gender as performatively constructed to examine how the dramatist subverts and dismantles the binaries linking rationality to men and nurturing roles to women. The voice-over of a thirty-year-old pregnant Eva combines with the interactions of teenage Eva with other characters to critique

compulsory heterosexuality as the ideal family model in Costa Rica and propose alternative configurations of the family and accompanying gender roles.

Kirsten Nigro, “La señora Macbeth: The Price Paid for Blind Love and Silent Complicity”

Griselda Gambaro’s *La señora Macbeth* (2003) is not so much an adaptation, appropriation or retelling of Shakespeare’s source text as it a complex hybrid of all three approaches. Gambaro places Lady Macbeth front stage; her famous husband remains off stage, although he is still a lingering presence in the play. Lady M, as she is called in Gambaro’s written play text, does not thirst for power but rather for her husband’s love. While she is not the prime mover in Macbeth’s murderous acts, she assumes his guilt, refusing to believe him capable of such crimes. Such is her love that Lady M speaks through Macbeth, speaking his words as written in Shakespeare’s text. This leaves her voiceless, resulting in a silence that renders her complicit in his bloodletting. As in so many of her plays, Gambaro works here by allusion and metaphor; Lady M’s not seeing and not speaking out are reminiscent of another time and place—Argentina during the Dirty War. Gambaro has allowed for this interpretation, but, as the witches in *La señora Macbeth* predict, there will be women in the future who are not blinded by love and who do make their voices heard.

Lola Proaño Gómez, “Filosofía feminista y escenarios teatrales recientes: Argentina 2013-2015”

This article considers Latin American feminist theatrical production, specifically from Argentina, to answer the question of whether the evolution of feminist philosophical theory has impacted Latin American theatre. To this end, the study examines *Mecánicas* (2013) by Celina Rosenwurcel and *Esquinas en el cielo* (2013) by Mariana Mazover. Unlike the productions of the 1980s, which featured the idea of a feminine essence, these recent productions stage the female subject in light of the spaces gained via deconstructionism in recent years, but they also show new difficulties that stem from the expansion of capitalism and its instrumental rationality. This article takes a feminist point of view, following Marxist feminist philosophy and its reflection on the patriarchal capitalist structure as well as theory of intersectionality. It concludes that considerations made through gender insufficiently explore the status of women today and that the analysis of feminist theatre needs to expand its view to include other philosophical categories that allow for more complex, nuanced readings and a better understanding of our times.

Beatriz J. Rizk, “Evelina Fernández’s Mexican Trilogy: ‘Setting the Record Straight’”

In this article I review Evelina Fernández’s trilogy of plays, *Hope, Faith, and Charity*. The trio tells a semi-autobiographical family saga covering nearly one hundred years. Throughout the plays, Fernández addresses big issues in everyday life, using national and international arenas of international politics as a background. Passing through the Mexican Revolution, the Great Depression, WW II, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the War in Iraq, the *Mexican Trilogy* gauges the effect these events have in the lives of the women in Fernández’s family, underlining the social practices in which various inequalities (gender, racial, and ethnic) are played out. Crossing the boundaries and thinking creatively about her family migration experience, Fernández shows us new ways of understanding social relations in pursuit of “setting the record straight” on behalf of the strong women who preceded her.

Vicky Unruh, “The Pedagogy of Emancipation in Norge Espinosa’s *Ícaros*”

This study argues that Norge Espinosa’s play *Ícaros* (2003) unpacks the longstanding, post-revolutionary Cuban connections among education, self-aware citizenship, and egalitarian ideals. In a contemporary version of the Icarus myth, Espinosa’s play stages the failed project

of an older generation (embodied in three Dédalos) to create a new kind of super being through their offspring—the play’s six Ícaros, charged with achieving their creators’ unfulfilled ideals. Here the Dédalos-Ícaros myth, coupled with the modern superhero identities assigned to each Ícaro, enacts the pitfalls such projects activate and evokes comparisons with the revolutionary “new man” envisioned by Che Guevara, a version of such utopian ventures rooted in a Cuban audience’s cultural memory. Against the historical backdrop of a state pedagogy forged through the renowned 1961 post-revolutionary literacy campaign and institutionalized for decades throughout Cuba’s public education system, the teacher-student dynamic constituted an idealized workshop for creating such a “new man” and for empowering citizens through social change. In this context, Espinosa’s play de-mythifies the lingering ideal of the Revolution’s pedagogy as a path to social utopia, while at the same time reenergizing the concept of human education as an expansive intellectual adventure of the kind conceptualized by contemporary cultural theorist Jacques Rancière. Through the dynamic relationship between the six Ícaros and their protean teacher, Ariadna, the play juxtaposes the timeworn pedagogic practices that Rancière would call “stultifying” with Ariadna’s simultaneous efforts to promote the Ícaros’ discovery of their own intellectual powers.

Margarita Vargas, “La incomunicación en la era informática: *La habitación* y *Cuerdas* de Bárbara Colio”

This essay studies *La habitación* (2004) and *Cuerdas* (2009), two plays by Mexican writer Bárbara Colio. It examines how the proliferation of various means of communication has not improved human beings’ ability to communicate effectively. Whether depicting characters who are strangers or blood relations, Colio disputes popular theories of communication and demonstrates that proximity in fact leads to violence and that devices such as telephones, speakers, intercoms, computers, etc. do not necessarily connect people. Moreover, to underscore the sense of alienation, the characters in *Cuerdas* occupy what Max Augé calls “non-places,” including an airport, a plane, a taxi, and a stadium. Ultimately, like in the Theatre of the Absurd, Colio’s postmodern characters and her audiences are left with the certainty that life continues and that the only alternative is to accept the world as we know it.

Michelle Warren, “‘My work is more necessary than ever’: An Interview With Rick Najera”

In this interview, actor, playwright, comedian, producer, director, and all-around funny guy Rick Najera speaks candidly about topics near to his heart. Najera discusses some of his past theatrical and comedic ventures, such as his early 2000s Broadway play *Latinologues* and his stage adaptation of *Almost White: Forced Confessions of a Latino in Hollywood* at Josefina Lopez’s Casa 0101 theatrical venue. He also explains the importance of his work in CBS’ Diversity Showcase, where he has helped actors and comedians such as Kate McKinnon (*Saturday Night Live*) and Randall Park (*Fresh off the Boat*) land mainstream roles. He explains how his work on promoting diverse representation in the media is more necessary than ever in the current U.S. political climate, in which many Latinos feel threatened.

Georgina J. Whittingham, “Lucha interior/ imagen exterior: Escindido discurso teatral feminista en *La colección de relojes* de Renée Ferrer y *Casa de muñecas* de Henrik Johan Ibsen”

Paraguayan author Renée Ferrer and Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen are among the first writers to depict the rise of feminist consciousness in their respective countries. In Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1879), the heroine’s restrictive economic and domestic role nearly destroys her sanity and shatters her marriage and its appearance of perfect bliss. Her distress is framed in the play’s suspenseful action and precise conversational speech, characteristic of nineteenth-

century realist drama. *La colección de relojes* (2001), Renée Ferrer's one-act play, takes place within the context of Alfredo Stroessner's (1954-1989) repressive regime. Splintered interior monologues, the dramatic text's predominant discourse, reflect the protagonist's cultural subordination and anguished dependence on a loveless marriage. In contrast, her connection to plastic arts and music provides support in her continued struggle for emancipation. Basing my argument on the premise that sixteenth-century Spanish conduct manuals—models of age-old control mechanisms—produce compliant female bodies obedient to patriarchal norms, I maintain that the historical bias under which women have lived continues to affect their freedom. Women continue to suffer under largely invisible mental constructs and traditions originally designed to prevent them from holding public positions and keep them enclosed in the domestic sphere.