Review of Teatro y vanguardia en Hispanoamérica, by Concepción Reverte Bernal

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is incomplete unless it marries this consideration of technique with a thorough historical understanding of the work in question and the context of its creation.

The inclusion in the volume of essays treating the techniques and contributions of actors – among them Margarita Xirgu, Irene López Heredia, Enrique Santos Discépolo, María Podestá, Pablo Podestá, and Eleonora Duse – facilitates the connections among theory, practice and history emphasized by De Marinis. In “Teatro, diálogo y silencios: El dolor de las palabras,” María Esther Badin eloquently discusses Eleonora Duse’s conflicted relationship with words, which the actor herself describes in her personal correspondence. Duse rejected traditional rhetorical conventions, choosing instead to obligate each word to “nacer de nuevo” through speech, silences and gesture. This technique forced her to grapple with the limitations of language, a process that ultimately resulted in critical acclaim for her interpretations.

Finally, the volume’s critical analyses of texts and performances treat the works of playwrights from both Spain – Rojas Zorrilla and Sanchis Sinisterra, for example – and Latin America – Rafuls; Rosencof; Conteris; Escalante; Pavlovsky; and Spregelburd, among others. Jorge Dubatti’s essay “Relectura de Flores de papel: dramaturgia vertical y producción de sentido político” is representative of those studies that offer a new reading of canonical texts. Dubatti rejects previous interpretations of Flores de papel as an essentially absurdist work. Although he concedes that El Merluza lacks referential qualities typical in traditional realism, he argues that the piece ultimately cannot be classified as absurdist, given its situated nature vis-à-vis the socio-historical context of Chile. Instead, Dubatti posits that Wolff’s work offers a dramatic metaphor of a realistic situation: the violence underlying the relationship between Eva and El Merluza, which in turn represents the socio-economic and political tensions present in Chile at the time the work was written. Dubatti then goes on to conceive of Flores de papel as an example of “realismo vertical,” a concept elaborated by Wolff in which a realistic situation is condensed into a metaphor, thereby eliminating the justification of cause-effect relationships in the dramatic action.

To conclude, this volume offers a valuable contribution to the field of Hispanic theatre and, true to the goals of GETEA, will be particularly useful to both practitioners and scholars who wish to expand their respective fields of reference.

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The considerable amount of critical attention to the poetry and narrative of writers like Vicente Huidobro, César Vallejo and Miguel Ángel Asturias has eclipsed
their less investigated dramatic works. Concepción Reverte Bernal’s study of plays by these and additional writers builds on a growing body of criticism on Spanish American vanguardist theatre. This book’s strength lies in its comparative and interdisciplinary nature, as the critic is keenly attentive to considering each play within the framework of not only its author’s life and larger body of work, but also international artistic tendencies. While offering astute commentaries, however, the chapters assembled in the book do not coalesce around an overarching critical position, and a guiding thesis is not clearly articulated from the start of some of them. At times, lengthy direct citations of previous critics also detract from Reverte Bernal’s original insight; she diminishes her own critical voice, for example, by ending two chapters with prolonged excerpts from other scholars. These statements aside, the author’s exhaustive research has generated perceptive readings of the plays and their contexts, and scholars will appreciate the extensive bibliographies that accompany each chapter.

The introduction lays the groundwork for the book’s focus on dramatic texts written from the 1920s to the 1940s with a useful summary of general movements (vis-à-vis international avant-garde tendencies), key works and important critical assessments of Spanish American literary vanguardism. The chapter ends with an apt consideration of the relevance of vanguardist drama – and Reverte Bernal’s study – to contemporary questions, such as how to create an intellectual and experimental theatre with wide appeal and the role of theatre amid increasingly mimetic technologies.

The second chapter examines what the critic calls the “Teatro de la crueldad de Vicente Huidobro,” focusing on two plays written in the early 1930s, *Gilles de Raiz* and *En la luna*, and emphasizing their debt to Antonin Artaud, Alfred Jarry and a range of European precedents. Huidobro recasts the notoriously sadistic protagonist of *Gilles de Raiz* as a victim of lovelorn madness, and the critic persuasively interprets this blurring of good and evil as symbolic of vanguardist heterodoxy in general and Huidobro’s calculated affronts to bourgeois morality in particular. Her study of *En la luna* emphasizes the role of grotesque humor and metatheatre in a political farce that, revealing a communist agenda, satirizes the descent of insubstantial democracies into absurd monarchies.

A shorter third chapter, “El drama-ballet Cuculcán, de Miguel Ángel Asturias,” underscores the cultural syncretism of Asturias’s play. The critic meticulously describes an array of indigenous and Western influences – from Mayan performance and mythology to Baroque poetry, Surrealism and the Russian Ballet – fused in *Cuculcán* and cogently suggests that trying to impose narrative coherence on the play would counteract the alternative aesthetic crafted by Asturias.

The fourth chapter, “Releyendo a Vallejo: Vallejo como dramaturgo busca un camino personal,” begins with a detailed inventory of Vallejo’s plays, all written in Europe between 1930 and his death in 1938 (but none staged during his lifetime).
The critic documents a range of artistic precedents, including the Russian theatre of the 1920s and 30s, the work of Luigi Pirandello and Romain Rolland, and Spanish American indigenismo, that prompted Vallejo’s evolution from a writer of bourgeois to proletarian and finally socialist drama. She then analyzes Vallejo’s negotiation of tensions between the individual, the family and the collective in three works, Lockout, Entre las dos orillas corre el río and his final play, La piedra cansada.

The final chapter, “Sirenas acriolladas: Conrado Nalé Roxlo y Francisco Arrivi,” examines reinterpretations of the mermaid archetype in several vanguardist plays. The author first discusses figurative mermaids staged by Alejandro Casona and Jean Giraudoux in order to propose, by comparison, that those imagined by Nalé Roxlo and Arrivi demonstrate a dramatic trajectory that rejects and then re-embaces realism. She characterizes Nalé Roxlo’s La cola de la sirena as a distinctly Argentine manifestation of a fantastic theatre with proto-feminist undertones. Her examination of Arrivi’s Sirena focuses on the Puerto Rican writer’s uncharacteristic adoption of social realism in a play that condemns the exploitation and destruction wrought by racism.

In omitting a general conclusion, Reverte Bernal misses a final opportunity to explicitly intertwine the distinct threads of each chapter. Nonetheless, this book offers richly contextualized readings of lesser-known plays and promotes further exploration of Spanish American vanguardist theatre.

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How does a woman manage to slither out of the role of passive muse to male creator and claim the mantle of artist for herself? In this ambitious exploration of ten Latin American women writers active in the 1920s and 30s, Vicky Unruh skillfully wields a performance studies lens to illuminate what once might have been the sole domain of literary studies. Even better, the branch of performance studies dedicated to oral interpretation of literary texts fruitfully crosses with the branch devoted to the analysis of construction of gender and/or sexuality, producing a series of nuanced accounts of how these writers sometimes reproduced yet ultimately subverted gender stereotypes.

Unruh’s study ranges from Argentina to Mexico to Cuba to Peru to Brazil and includes analyses of plays, poems, novels, essays and memoirs produced by an extraordinarily talented and determined array of women. Self-creation as artist, Unruh persuasively argues, involved performative strategies discernable both in writings