



# DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

V O L U M E

32

# DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

Criticism of the Most Significant and Widely Studied  
Dramatic Works from All the World's Literatures

VOLUME 32

Thomas J. Schoenberg  
Lawrence J. Trudeau  
Project Editors

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## Preface

**D***rama Criticism (DC)* is principally intended for beginning students of literature and theater as well as the average playgoer. The series is therefore designed to introduce readers to the most frequently studied playwrights of all time periods and nationalities and to present discerning commentary on dramatic works of enduring interest. Furthermore, *DC* seeks to acquaint the reader with the uses and functions of criticism itself. Selected from a diverse body of commentary, the essays in *DC* offer insights into the authors and their works but do not require that the reader possess a wide background in literary studies. Where appropriate, reviews of important productions of the plays discussed are also included to give students a heightened awareness of drama as a dynamic art form, one that many claim is fully realized only in performance.

*DC* was created in response to suggestions by the staffs of high school, college, and public libraries. These librarians observed a need for a series that assembles critical commentary on the world's most renowned dramatists in the same manner as Gale's *Short Story Criticism (SSC)* and *Poetry Criticism (PC)*, which present material on writers of short fiction and poetry. Although playwrights are covered in such Gale literary criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, *DC* directs more concentrated attention on individual dramatists than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries in these Gale series. Commentary on the works of William Shakespeare may be found in *Shakespearean Criticism (SC)*.

## Scope of the Series

By collecting and organizing commentary on dramatists, *DC* assists students in their efforts to gain insight into literature, achieve better understanding of the texts, and formulate ideas for papers and assignments. A variety of interpretations and assessments is offered, allowing students to pursue their own interests and promoting awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Approximately five to ten authors are included in each volume, and each entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that playwright's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's literary criticism series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a *DC* volume.

## Organization of the Book

A *DC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** consists of the playwright's most commonly used name, followed by birth and death dates. If an author consistently wrote under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction are any name variations under which the dramatist wrote, including transliterated forms of the names of authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.

- The list of **Principal Works** is divided into two sections. The first section contains the author's dramatic pieces and is organized chronologically by date of first performance. If this has not been conclusively determined, the composition or publication date is used. The second section provides information on the author's major works in other genres.
- Essays offering **overviews of the dramatist's entire literary career** give the student broad perspectives on the writer's artistic development, themes, and concerns that recur in several of his or her works, the author's place in literary history, and other wide-ranging topics.
- **Criticism** of individual plays offers the reader in-depth discussions of a select number of the author's most important works. In some cases, the criticism is divided into two sections, each arranged chronologically. When a significant performance of a play can be identified (typically, the premier of a twentieth-century work), the first section of criticism will feature **production reviews** of this staging. Most entries include sections devoted to **critical commentary** that assesses the literary merit of the selected plays. When necessary, essays are carefully excerpted to focus on the work under consideration; often, however, essays and reviews are reprinted in their entirety. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- A complete **Bibliographic Citation**, designed to help the interested reader locate the original essay or book, precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

## Cumulative Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *DC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *DC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *DC* volume in which their entry appears.

A **Cumulative Title Index** lists in alphabetical order the individual plays discussed in the criticism contained in *DC*. Each title is followed by the author's last name and corresponding volume and page numbers where commentary on the work is located. English-language translations of original foreign-language titles are cross-referenced to the foreign titles so that all references to discussion of a work are combined in one listing.

## Citing Drama Criticism

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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# Alejandro Casona

## 1903-1965

(Born Alejandro Rodríguez Álvarez) Spanish playwright, screenwriter, and poet.

### INTRODUCTION

Casona was one of Spain's most highly regarded modern playwrights. His plays are characterized by optimism and typically address the nature of reality and the importance of responsible living, employing such elements as illusion, folklore, and the supernatural. He wrote many of his plays in Argentina, where he lived from 1939 to 1963.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Casona was born in Besullo, a remote village in Asturias, Spain, on March 23, 1903. His parents were both teachers. During Casona's youth the family moved to several other locations in northwest Spain, and he became familiar with the region's landscape and folklore. Shortly after moving to Murcia, in southeast Spain, in 1919, he completed secondary school and enrolled in the University of Murcia, which he attended until 1922, when he began studying education at Escuela Superior del Magisterio in Madrid. Meanwhile, he began dabbling in acting and writing. In 1926 he completed his studies and was hired as a teacher at an elementary school in Madrid. His first book, a poetry collection called *El peregrino de la barba florida*, was published that same year. Also during the mid-1920s, he completed two works of translation and presented the first of his numerous public lectures. In 1928 Casona completed his first full-length original play, *Otra vez el Diablo* (*The Devil Once More*), eventually staged in 1935.

From 1928 to 1930 Casona served as an elementary school superintendent in Ses, an isolated village in the Valle de Arán, a small valley in the Pyrenees mountains. There, he wrote *La sirena varada*, which garnered national attention upon winning the Lope de Vega Prize in 1933 and received favorable reviews after its stage debut in 1934, in Madrid. Also while living in Ses, his first stage production, *El crimen de Lord Arturo* (1929), debuted in Zaragoza, and his first work to carry the pseudonym Casona, a poetry collection titled *La flauta del sapo* (1930), was published.

Between 1931 and 1936 Casona worked for the Inspección Provincial de Madrid, a government bureau. He was appointed head of the Teatro del Pueblo, a traveling company established by the government's Misiones Pedagógicas to bring cultural activities to rural Spain. As director of the troupe, Casona wrote and produced plays. Meanwhile, he received the national literature prize for his *Flor de leyendas* (1932), a collection of adaptations of myths for juveniles, and his career as a playwright was launched in earnest following the success of *La sirena varada*, which toured all major Spanish cities after its Madrid premier. Its success was surpassed by Casona's *Nuestra Natacha* (1935), which accomplished a run of five hundred consecutive performances, an unparalleled achievement in Spanish theater at the time.

In July 1936 the Spanish Civil War broke out. Fascist factions labeled Casona unpatriotic, and his works were banned. Like many of his intellectual counterparts, Casona fled Spain. In 1937 he sailed to Mexico, after securing a position as artistic director of the Díaz-Collado theater troupe, with whom he would travel to numerous Latin American countries. While in Mexico he completed one of his best-known plays, *Prohibido suicidarse en primavera* (1937; *Suicide Prohibited in Springtime*), which premiered in Mexico City. When the tour ended, he settled in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1939. He remained in Argentina for twenty-four years, occasionally visiting Spain before eventually returning to reside there.

Casona's years in Argentina were possibly the most fruitful of his career. His play *La dama del alba* (*Lady of the Dawn*), considered by some to be his most accomplished work, premiered in Buenos Aires in 1944. It was soon followed by another success, *La barca sin pescador* (1945; *The Boat without a Fisherman*). His next major work, *Los árboles mueren de pie* (1949), had a highly successful two-year run in Buenos Aires and is generally regarded as one of Casona's finest plays. He wrote numerous film scripts and contributed journalistic articles to Latin American periodicals during this time as well.

Casona decided to return from abroad and moved to Madrid in 1963, after the first productions in Spain of *Lady of the Dawn* and *The Boat without a Fisherman* in the early 1960s. These and other plays from previous decades were extremely popular with Spanish audiences

and received favorable critical attention. He continued to write. His play *El caballero de las espuelas de oro* (1964; *The Knight with the Golden Spurs*), debuted in Madrid. Casona died on September 17, 1965, as a result of complications following open-heart surgery.

## MAJOR DRAMATIC WORKS

A common theme in Casona's early works is the conflict between reality and fantasy or idealism. *La sirena varada* depicts characters who withdraw from society and live in make-believe worlds. Eventually they learn to cope with reality through the help of a doctor. *The Devil Once More*, set in an imaginary kingdom, features a young man who overcomes temptation by the Devil and saves his beloved princess. *Nuestra Natacha* depicts idealistic young people's efforts to improve their community. The play's main character, a student named Natacha, strives to improve educational programs at a reform school.

Casona wrote his best-known plays while living in Latin America. *Suicide Prohibited in Springtime* centers on a home for suicidal patients. While appearing to be a place that facilitates suicide, where individuals may kill themselves amid idyllic settings, it is really a disguised sanatorium, where the beauty of natural surroundings is used to rehabilitate patients. During the course of treatment they are often forced to confront the disparity between their own illusions and reality. The same sanatorium serves as the setting of *Los árboles mueren de pie*, in which a gentleman named Balboa goes to the sanatorium seeking help. He reveals that he has been deceiving his wife, the Abuela, by sending her fake letters purportedly from their grandson, who is a criminal, containing positive but false information to spare her feelings about the young man. A real letter from the grandson recently arrived informing them that he is traveling by ship to visit them, so the Abuela is expecting him. The ship sank and Balboa mistakenly assumes that the grandson is dead. Balboa cannot bear to tell his wife, and convinces Mauricio, the institution's director, to pose as the visiting grandson. After the real grandson appears, the Abuela realizes that he is despicable. Meanwhile, she has exacted the truth from Balboa. However, she pretends to believe the ruse and Mauricio, along with Laura, a young woman posing as the grandson's wife, depart believing that the well-intended deception worked.

In *Lady of the Dawn* a beautiful and mysterious pilgrim, who personifies Death, intervenes when a woman, Angélica, attempts to return to her husband, Martín, after her lover abandons her. Angélica had left town several years earlier and her reputation is pristine, as the townspeople presume that she died by drowning in the

river. Martín alone knows that she is alive and has been living elsewhere with a lover. During her absence he rescues a girl named Adela from the river, and they eventually fall in love. As Angélica attempts to travel to Martín, Death persuades her to drown herself. By sacrificing her life, the play suggests, her reputation and the happiness of others is preserved. *The Boat without a Fisherman* centers on a deal with the Devil, who is personified as a man wearing a black suit and carrying a briefcase. Ricardo, a stockbroker on the brink of financial ruin, reluctantly agrees to sign a document, knowing that doing so will cause a stranger's death, which he will not have to witness. In return the Devil will restore Ricardo's fortune. Following the death of the stranger—a fisherman named Peter—Ricardo travels to the Scandinavian village where the man lived, remorsefully struggling for redemption. He falls in love with Peter's widow and learns that Peter was murdered by a rival, Cristfán. The Devil reappears, telling Ricardo that he has forsaken his soul because of his will to kill. Ricardo replies that he can fulfill the terms of their deal by becoming a new man, in effect killing his former self.

Casona wrote two historical plays toward the end of his career. *Corona de amor y muerte* (1955; *Crown of Love and Death*) tells the disastrous love story of the crown prince of Portugal and his illegitimate daughter. *El caballero de las espuelas de oro*, the last of Casona's plays to debut during his lifetime, recounts the story of Francisco Gomez de Quevedo y Villegas, the famous satirist who fought corruption through blistering social commentary.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critics have suggested that Casona's use of illusion, the supernatural, folklore, and imaginative settings generated plays rich in symbolism and moral intent. The majority of Casona's works observe that true happiness can be found by freeing one's self from fantasy through navigating difficult situations. However, while his plays tend to stress the importance of accepting reality and responsibility, they also favor spirituality and intuition over science and the potentially dehumanizing effects of mechanized modern society. Ethical living was another prominent concern of Casona's. Critics have noted that his characters often have negative attitudes and wish to escape from the reality of their own self-imposed worlds. Their ability to adapt to their present environment converts their negativity into motivation toward positive goals, resulting in ethical lives.

Some critics have asserted that Casona's plays show a rare sensitivity to the human condition. Noting that Casona's works deal with solving spiritual crises created

by society, they find that his plays reveal intelligent understanding of the psyches of his characters, which inspires deep sympathy and moral concern for their situations. Another common topic of discussion is Casona's treatment of archetypal characters, such as the Devil and Death, who in his plays are human-like in appearance and capable of emotion. Several critics note that Casona's sympathetic portrayal of the Devil is highly unusual as well as successful in leading to a positive outcome. Critics have observed that Casona's plays generally have happy endings, with the last act containing new confidence and possibilities for the future.

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

### Plays

*El crimen de Lord Arturo* [adaptor; from the play *The Crime of Arthur of Savile*, by Oscar Wilde] 1929  
*La sirena varada* 1934  
*Nuestra Natacha* 1935  
*Otra vez el Diablo* [*The Devil Once More*] 1935  
*Prohibido suicidarse en primavera* [*Suicide Prohibited in Springtime*] 1937  
*Romance de Dan y Elsa* 1938  
*Sinfonía inacabada* 1939  
*María Curie* [with Francisco Madrid] 1940  
*Las tres perfectas casadas* [adaptor; from the novel *The Death of a Bachelor*, by Arthur Schnitzler] 1941  
*La dama del alba* [*Lady of the Dawn*] 1944  
*La barca sin pescador* [*The Boat without a Fisherman*] 1945  
*Margarita la tornera* 1946  
*La molinera de Arcos* 1947  
*Los árboles mueren de pie* 1949  
*Retablo jovial* 1949  
*¡A Belen, pastores!* [*To Bethlehem, Shepherds*] 1951  
*La llave en el desván* 1951  
*Teatro* 1951  
*Siete gritos en el mar* 1952  
*La tercera palabra* 1953  
*Obras completas* (plays, poetry, and prose) 1954  
*Corona de amor y muerte* [*Crown of Love and Death*] 1955  
*Carta de una desconocida* 1957  
*La casa de los siete balcones* 1957  
*Tres diamantes y una mujer* 1961  
*El caballero de las espuelas de oro* [*The Knight with the Golden Spurs*] 1964  
*Teatro selecto* 1966  
*Fablilla del secreto bien guardado* 1967  
*Farsa del cornudo apaleado* [adaptor; from the novella collection *Decameron*, by Giovanni Boccaccio] 1970  
*Farsa y justicia del corregidor* 1970

### Other Major Works

*El peregrino de la barba florida* (poetry) 1926  
*La flauta del sapo* (poetry) 1930  
*Flor de leyendas* (juvenilia) 1932  
*\*Nuestra Natacha* (screenplay) 1936  
*Viente años y una noche* (screenplay) 1940  
*La maestra de los obreros* (screenplay) 1941  
*En el viejo Buenos Aires* (screenplay) 1941  
*Concierto de almas* (screenplay) 1942  
*Cuando florezca el naranjo* (screenplay) 1943  
*Le María Celeste* (screenplay) 1944  
*\*La dama del alba* (screenplay) 1950  
*Don Rodrigo* (libretto) 1964  
*Obras completas* (plays, poetry, and prose) 1969

\*These works are screenplay adaptations of the plays of the same names.

## OVERVIEWS AND GENERAL STUDIES

### Bernard Dulsey (essay date March 1960)

SOURCE: Dulsey, Bernard. "An Afternoon with Casona." *Hispania* 43, no. 1 (March 1960): 79-81.

[In the following essay, Dulsey describes a discussion with Casona about his plays and playwrighting.]

One day last April my wife and I had the pleasure of visiting Alejandro Casona in his apartment in Buenos Aires.<sup>1</sup> We sat in his book-lined study and chatted, mostly of him and his plays. Casona, at fifty-six, is of medium height and weight, balding, and has a strong and interesting face. His eloquent and elegant Spanish effortlessly kept pace with his nimble thoughts. Even to unexpected questions his answers would come appropriately with never the slightest pause to search for *le mot juste*. It was to us an impressive exhibition.

He told us that modern Spanish dramatists up to 1927 had followed, knowingly or not, in the tradition of Calderón; however, he and Lorca became prime exponents of the *tradición de Lope*. Naturally then we spoke of the vital role of the woman in Lope's plays. He agreed with my opinion that in Lope's plots the woman often has an importance, a force and dimension unmatched in the works of other *siglo de oro* dramatists. Casona stated his belief that Lope enhanced the feminine roles largely because his "stars" were usually his mistresses. However, he added that the women in Spain have always been more important than foreigners believed. Even today, he said, the Basque women sign the deeds.



There is no question at all that in his own theatre, like that of Lorca, the women possess a depth and strength which at times is phenomenal, though never incredible. In Casona's case, unlike Lope's, the strong and meaty feminine roles often result from the fact that the modern Spanish theater has produced such outstanding actresses. Casona himself told us he wrote his masterpiece, *Dama del Alba*, expressly for Margarita Xirgu. She came from Chile to Buenos Aires one day to see him and asked, "What do you have for me?" Casona told us "You just couldn't write *any* role for a superb actress like her. It had to be a queen, an empress—or Death." And so of that meeting was born the *Dama del Alba*, written for the great Xirgu, who had years before performed in Madrid the *estrenos* of *La Sirena Varada* and *Otra Vez el Diablo*. (It is interesting to reflect that in the Spanish theater the company is usually known by the name of the leading woman. In the United States it seems our acting teams almost invariably put the man's name first; e.g., Lunt and Fontanne, Cronyn and Tandy.)

Casona said that *Los árboles mueren de pie* has been his most popular play abroad, having been staged in twenty countries. Incidentally, he showed us a telegram in Russian which he had just received from Moscow announcing the opening of one of his plays there. It can surely be said that Casona is the most popular playwright in the Spanish language. His latest play, *Tres diamantes y una mujer*, was awaiting a theater in Buenos Aires for its *estreno*. The individual plays there do not often have a long run but the theaters are evidently booked far in advance. While we were in Buenos Aires there were twenty-five to thirty plays on the boards. Since for forty or fifty cents one could obtain a fine main floor seat (*platea*), it is easy to see that neither actor nor playwright waxes very fat from his artistic endeavors.

Casona, however, has been able to live by his pen—a very neat trick for any Spanish language author. For not only does he write for the stage but he has written or rewritten many movie and television scripts. Yet he told us, rather unhappily, that he can not afford a car nor a trip to Europe or the United States. He longs for one hit on Broadway—"para independizarme."

He has been living in Argentina for twenty years. He left Mexico after a stay of less than a year because "The theater was my life and there was no theater in Mexico at that time." But while he lived there he was very fond of Mexico.

We talked of the movie *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* which Casona had just seen. He was bitter about the censorship in the Hollywood treatment, which soft-pedalled the obvious homosexuality found in the play. He is not, however, against censorship *per se*. Television or "anything that comes into the home" should be subject

to censorship, but the movies or theater should be relatively free.

During this discussion he stated that he thought Arthur Miller quite superior to Tennessee Williams. He admitted Williams had some poetic touches in *Glass Menagerie*, but said there were very few in *Streetcar* and almost none in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. According to Casona, nothing of Williams can approach Miller's *Crucible* or *Death of a Salesman*.

Then we chatted about the difficulty of writing plays. When I said that they seemed to be harder to write than either novels or short stories he heartily agreed. In the novel, he maintained, the reader takes the author's *palabra de honor* for granted. It goes unquestioned. But in a play the viewer has to be convinced in word and deed.

We spoke briefly of Casona's *Teatro del Pueblo* which he directed in Spain for five years until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Unlike Lorca's company, which played the principal cities in the provinces, the troupe led by Casona performed in hundreds of tiny villages, many of which had never before witnessed a stage performance. To such audiences they presented three or four farces or light comedies, each of a half-hour duration. They were helped wherever they were by the villagers in the building of a crude stage. Its crudeness may well be imagined for Casona said that the construction took about forty-five minutes. The plots presented by the company were often already known to the townsfolk who, so Casona said, had learned by heart the themes taken from *Don Quixote* or *Conde Lucanor*.

Our host, who spoke convincingly and feelingly throughout our visit, was especially eloquent when he uttered his disappointment with the present American treatment of Franco Spain. "In 1945," he said, "the United States was the hope of the world." But he regards our backing of Franco now as unwise as well as immoral. He feels certain that the Generalissimo cannot be trusted at all and would abandon any agreement whenever an occasion for bettering his personal position would occur.

We took our leave regretfully and then we mused, also regretfully, on the fate that dooms a dramatist of the artistic breadth of Casona to remain largely unknown to the vast majority of English-speaking theater-goers.

#### Note

1. It is not the purpose of this paper to outline Casona's life and works. Two very good recent sources for such data are the fine introductions to the text editions of *La Barca sin Pescador* of Balseiro and Owre (Oxford, 1955), and *Los árboles mueren de pie* by Juan Rodríguez-Castellano (Holt, 1953).

Charles H. Leighton (essay date fall 1963)

SOURCE: Leighton, Charles H. "Alejandro Casona's 'Pirandellism.'" *Symposium* 17, no. 3 (fall 1963): 202-14.

[In the following essay, Leighton questions the justification of critics' assertions that Casona's plays are strongly influenced by the writings of Luigi Pirandello.]

Because of Alejandro Casona's concern with illusion<sup>1</sup> it has become something of a critical commonplace to couple his name with that of Luigi Pirandello. These facile references, usually making use of *La sirena varada* as exemplar, do not really tell us too much.<sup>2</sup> Granted that both are concerned with the question of illusion versus reality, the question remains of the precise extent to which one is justified in calling Casona a follower of Pirandello.

Pirandello's most productive and successful period was the troubled decade 1915-1924. During those years he wrote his best known works: *Così è (se vi pare)*; *Tutto per bene*; *Come prima, meglio di prima*; *La signora Morli, una e due*; *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*; *Enrico IV*; and *Ciascuno a suo modo*.<sup>3</sup> An examination of these and later plays reveals that in them, Pirandello has activated artistically a number of philosophical commonplaces, all of which may be subsumed under the heading of rational solipsism. Literature has always provided a fertile field for the examination of this problem.<sup>4</sup> Virtually every major writer in the Western tradition has been occupied with one or more of its facets. The most enticing of these has been the most general—the question of whether or not there is one objective truth or an infinite number of subjective truths. As Leo Spitzer has pointed out, writers may be categorized with respect to their attitude toward this question.<sup>5</sup> Some like Cervantes feel that there is one truth but that no finite creature ever apprehends all of it; others, like Pirandello, insist that whatever truth there is, like beauty, resides purely "in the eye of the beholder."

There is another side to the problem. As long as the writer or the philosopher concerns himself solely with the perception of inanimate objects, perspectivism is a relatively uncomplex matter. When, however, he turns to man, the complexities become manifest and manifold. Psychologists are in general agreement that "every man in his time plays many parts," that each of us has a series of *personae* which we adopt consciously or unconsciously in the pursuance of our various roles in life.<sup>6</sup> Hence, any one of us may seem to be nothing more than a cluster of roles. The inevitable question then arises—what is the reality, the true person, behind the masks? Although some writers like Pirandello deny its existence, psychologists believe that, if we have at-

tained a reasonable measure of emotional security, there will be some integrated reality underlying and encompassing the various *personae*. The gradual apprehension of this reality is an experience all of us have had with our friends. Though never complete, it is often closely approximated.

A final aspect of the solipsistic problem is that of communication. If it is impossible or at least difficult to apprehend any truth, it is likewise impossible or difficult to communicate what we have apprehended to others. The resultant isolation of man from his fellows is one of the basic themes of Pirandello's theater and accounts for much of the tragedy found therein. Witness the statement of the Father in *Six Characters*: "But don't you see that the whole trouble lies here. In words, words. Each one of us has within him a whole world of things, each man of us his own special world. And how can we ever come to an understanding if I put in the words I utter the sense and value of things as I see them; while you . . . translate them according to the conception of things each one of you has within himself. We think we understand each other, but we never really do. . . ."

Pirandello was then a solipsist, even more, he was a complete solipsist, so complete indeed that Silvio D'Amico could say with justification that:

Son più di due millenni che un altro siciliano, Georgia di Leontini, scriveva un'opera divisa in tre parti: nella prima delle quali si dimostrava che nulla è; nella seconda, che se qualche cosa esistesse, gli uomini non potrebbero conoscerla; nella terza, che se gli uomini conoscessero qualcosa di esistente, non potrebbero comunicarsela. Sono, come si vede, le tesi pirandelliane. Eppure a nessuno è venuto in mente di accomunare, col drammaturgo d'oggi, il sofista del quinto secolo avanti Cristo.<sup>8</sup>

Armed with this admirably succinct statement of the Pirandellian theses, one will now be able to examine Casona's plays for examples of Pirandellism.

The most apparently Pirandellist of Casona's plays is *Las tres perfectas casadas*.<sup>9</sup> The plot in brief is as follows. On their eighteenth wedding anniversary three ostensibly happy, married couples gather, as is their custom, to celebrate both their anniversary and their good fortune. On this occasion, however, their joy is somewhat attenuated because of the unaccountable absence of the mutual friend who served as best man in the triple wedding. As the evening progresses, the husbands learn that the plane which their friend was to take has crashed and that his name appears on the passenger list. Assuming him dead, they proceed to open an envelope left with one of them years before with the stipulation that it be opened only after his death. When they open the letter they are shocked to find that this "friend" of theirs, an egotistical and cynical writer, has

betrayed them with their wives, the wives they had assumed to be perfect. The reactions of the offended husbands are varied but in character. Javier, a senator, wishes to confront his wife, Ada, with the letter to determine its validity and to ask for an explanation. Máximo refuses to afford credence to the allegations contained in the letter on the grounds that his faith in Genoveva exceeds that which he had in the dead friend. Jorge, like a *Siglo de Oro* stage-husband, wishes to seek revenge upon Leopoldina. Máximo prevails upon the other husbands to keep the letter and its contents secret. But as the ruined evening ends, there is little evidence that they will do so.

On the following day Ada, who has surmised something of the truth, extracts an explanation from her husband. Confronted with the letter, she denies its accusations. Later that day the supposedly dead friend, Gustavo, appears, and we learn that his accusations are indeed true but that in the case of Ada he has had relations with her but once and that she has never ceased to reproach both herself and him for the lapse. Ada elicits from Gustavo the promise that he will rectify the harm he has done by writing another letter and then killing himself. She demands this of him in the name of her daughter, whose paternity Javier has come to suspect.

Gustavo consents on one condition—that she come in person to his apartment to receive the letter. When she does so on the following evening, she finds that he has recreated the setting of her one previous seduction. He gives her the letter and asks her to stay for an hour. Somewhat unnerved she consents, but before the hour is up, it becomes obvious that Gustavo intends to repeat his former triumph. There is a struggle and Gustavo is shot—whether by himself, as he insists, or by Ada is unclear.

The play raises several questions of the sort dear to Pirandello. There is first of all the contrast between appearance and reality. When confronted with the fact of his wife's infidelity, Javier thinks that, if the whole matter can be kept secret, he and the other two husbands can continue to play their accustomed roles despite their knowledge. The solution he proposes is thus quite similar to that of *Tutto per bene*.

Then there is the question of what love is. In their final meeting Gustavo and Ada hurl accusations at each other. Each accuses the other of pride and egotism and a possessiveness which passes for love but is a perversion of it:

ADA:

¿Y qué sabes tú de amor? Amor es lo que yo siento por mi casa y por mi hija, lo que siento por todos los míos . . . ¿Lo oyes bien? ¡Los míos! . . . Tan míos, que una herida en su carne la sentiría como en carne pro-

pia. Eso es amor; y no esa fiebre vuestra que lo imita torpemente, y que no es, en el fondo, más que una mezcla de vanidad, de lujuria y de literatura.

FERRÁN:

No te conocía tan declamatoria. Ni tan egoísta.

ADA:

¿Egoísta? . . .

FERRÁN:

Rabiosamente. “Los míos, los míos . . .” ¡Pero eso no es amor! Es una aberración del derecho de propiedad.

ADA:

Muy ingenioso. (*Se sienta.*)

(p. 558)

Thus one must decide for himself whether or not Ada really loves her family.

Then the question of the nature of truth is raised in connection with the behavior of Ada. She insists again and again that she has never loved Gustavo. Yet in an access of emotion she seems to admit that she has indeed loved him all along:

ADA:

(*desesperada*) ¿Y qué quieres que confiese? ¿Que eres el enemigo de todo lo que es sagrado para mí, que eres el sueño vergonzoso de mi vida, que eres el último de los miserables . . . y que te he querido por encima de todo? ¡Pues sí! Si eso le basta a tu orgullo de hombre, ésa es la verdad. ¡Ésa es mi estiércol! Pero por encima de esa pobre verdad, está mi deber, ¡que vale más que tú y que yo! . . . Ahora, ya lo sabes todo.

(pp. 564-565)

Moreover, as the final curtain falls she is fervently kissing the dying man. Again, Casona never makes it quite clear as to what his version of the truth is. The audience must decide for itself.

Incidentally the question of Gustavo's motivation in writing the original letter is raised. The explanations he offers Ada for his despicable behavior are quite Pirandellist:

ADA:

¿Qué es lo que has podido proponerte al escribir eso?

FERRÁN:

Lo que se propone todo el que se confiesa; decir la verdad. ¿O es que no es verdad? . . .

ADA:

Es inútil, no te entenderé jamás.

FERRÁN:

Y sin embargo, no es nada difícil. ¿Quieres que te ayude yo? Vamos con orden. Supón, por un momento, que yo estuviera realmente enamorado de ti . . . ¡Furi-osamente, desesperadamente enamorado! Y que te lo hubiera confesado, con todo mi orgullo puesto de rodillas. Y que sólo hubiera oído esta respuesta tuya, un día y otro día. “Canalla . . . Canalla . . .” ¿No podría ser la venganza una razón . . . ?

ADA:

Si te hubiera rechazado siempre, tal vez . . . Pero des-graciadamente no fué así. . . .

FERRÁN:

En ese caso, mi humillación es mayor y la venganza más justificada. Pero, vayamos más lejos todavía; supongamos que yo no he sido nunca amigo de tu marido. Más aún . . . que le he odiado desde que éramos estudiantes. . . .

ADA:

¡Ahora, sí! . . . ¡Por fin creo que empiezo a compren-derte! ¿Y eso era todo? . . . ¿Celos?

FERRÁN:

(recogiendo su voz, que se ha emocionado un momento)  
Yo me he limitado a decir “supongamos.” No encontra-bas ninguna explicación, y te he ofrecido todas las posibles. Elige tú la más elegante.

(pp. 536-538)

There is some evidence, however, that he does love Ada, for he has made a ritual of recreating the circum-stances of their one stolen hour together. Each year on April 23 he reenacts in his imagination that delirious hour of love. But does he know what love really is any more than Ada?

Finally there is the question of the suicide. Did Gustavo fully intend to carry out the bargain? There is no doubt that it appealed to him. But there is throughout the whole last scene at least a suggestion of further deceit. It often seems that he has staged the whole thing just to facilitate another meeting with Ada under circumstances favorable to another seduction. But the strangest aspect of the whole play is that of the shooting itself. Neither Ada nor the audience can tell who did pull the trigger. And Gustavo's insistence that it was he may be a first and last bit of gallantry on the part of a defeated man. All of these ambiguities of motivation are similar to those found in *Ciascuno a suo modo*.

Although he suggests to the audience the difficulties of ascertaining the truth about human beings, their acts, and motives, Casona by no means implies that the truth is nonexistent. His position seems to be similar to that of Cervantes. Behind Cervantes' perspectivism lies a unity, as Leo Spitzer has pointed out: the personality of

the artist and in it a consciously presented analogue of the Mind of the Maker. Spitzer goes on to assert that “later thinkers and artists did not stop at proclaiming the inanity of the world: they went so far as to doubt the existence of any universal order and to deny a Creator. . . .”<sup>10</sup> I would except Alejandro Casona from this group because, like Cervantes, he implies that he knows the truth with regard to his creatures, just as God knows that relative to His. Herein lies the greatest difference between Pirandello and Casona: the former is obviously an agnostic while the latter evidently believes in a personal God.<sup>11</sup>

None of Casona's other plays comes close to *Las tres perfectas casadas* in utilization of situations or ideas that may be termed Pirandellist. Many of them do, however, contain a few such elements. *La sirena varada*, for example, has been compared to *Enrico IV* because of its “weird psychological types.”<sup>12</sup> Let us then see what basis there is for such a comparison.

In summary, the action of the play is this.<sup>13</sup> Ricardo, a young man, who as a child was denied the opportunity to indulge his need for make-believe, revolts against the limitations of a prosaic world. It is his intention to establish a small community for kindred souls: refugees from reason. For this purpose he acquires an old estate by the seashore and sets about assembling a retinue. As the curtain rises, he has already acquired two such individuals. One is a painter who has taken to wearing a bandage so that he may forget the banal colors of reality and create others completely original. The other is a poor gardener who, destitute and homeless, came upon the vacant house four years before Ricardo purchased it. In order to remain there unmolested he conceived the idea of dressing as a ghost and frightening away prospective buyers. Ricardo, however, reacted otherwise. Fascinated with the old fellow, he decided to add him to the members of his group. Now the “fan-tasma,” to his distaste, has no choice but to go on play-ing his role. Ricardo has invited Samy, a circus clown, to come and preside over his little republic and, while he is awaiting his arrival, Don Florín, a doctor and an old friend of the family, appears. He has learned of Ricardo's latest venture and come to dissuade him from it. At this point a beautiful young girl scales the wall facing the sea and enters through a window. She claims to be a Siren, professes love for Ricardo, and tries to persuade him to return with her to her domain beneath the sea. Ricardo is taken at once with her beauty and her irrationality. With the passage of time he falls in love with her, almost without perceiving it. When Samy finally arrives, he reveals the truth about Sirena. She is his insane daughter, María. With this shocking revela-tion Ricardo is at last convinced of the need for facing up to reality, and he consents to having Don Florín at-tempt to cure Sirena. All is going well when Pipo, the circus impresario, appears and another shocking thing