

Introduction

JAIME SALOM: A LIFE IN THEATER

FOR MORE THAN FOUR DECADES, popular and critical acclaim has regularly accompanied the singular dramatic output of Jaime Salom. This retired ophthalmologist from Catalonia, an esteemed elder statesman of Madrid's theater world, has remained a steady countervailing force to the momentary tyranny of fleeting artistic vogues and continues to be one of Spain's most successful playwrights. Salom's sprawling oeuvre defies ready summary even as the confounding diversity of his forty-plus plays grows more complex with each new work produced. This remarkably varied collection repeatedly resists authoritative discussion of "typical" subject matters, "usual" modes of expression, or "characteristic" techniques. Over the course of his career, Salom has been the winner of the coveted National Literature Prize and was twice awarded the *Espectador y la Crítica* Prize for the best play of the year staged in Madrid. It is difficult not to marvel at the succession of prestigious theatrical honors his work has won: the *Crítica de Barcelona* (twice), *Fraga*, *Bravo*, *Fastenrath*, *Álvarez Quintero*, and *Espinosa y Cortina* Prizes, the last three awarded by the Spanish Royal Academy. Salom's artistic production has not been limited to dramatic genres; he is also the author of two novels, scores of essays, television scripts, and adaptations

of both Max Frisch's *Die Chinesische Mauer* and Brendan Behan's *The Hostage*. Remarkably, given the trajectory of his distinguished career, it is still too early to speculate about Salom's permanent place in Spanish literary history, as the author, born in Barcelona on Christmas Day, 1925, remains as active a dramatist as ever. He has premiered, at the pace characteristic of his sustained productivity, five plays over the last seven years.

The far-reaching cultural tragedy of twentieth-century Spain remains the devastation unleashed on artistic production under the repressive Franco dictatorship (1939–1975) following the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). Salom was not yet a teenager at the outbreak of what would be his nation's defining modern conflict, a vengeful, punishing war that, by some estimates, claimed the lives of a million Spaniards and would leave its bloody imprint on the country's psyche for decades. Within this historical context, Salom's dramatic activity predictably reflects the various shifts in intellectual climate vis-à-vis the flourishing of the arts and receptivity to new ideas. An early spate of rather conventional "morality plays" met no resistance from hard-line authorities. However, once Salom undertook to write plays of more immediate sociopolitical relevance at the waning of the Franco regime, he did encounter increased hostility from critics and some unwanted attention from official precincts. Censors predictably kept their eyes on Salom's developing interest in historical drama. Both the theatergoing public and the authorities noticed the growth in Salom's personal perspective on the nature of existence to accommodate the human desire for greater individual freedom and self-determination. In light of this evolution of tolerance and sympathy, the author came to be embraced not so much as the playwright of conscientious objection to autocratic rule as something less political and therefore more enduring. Today, Jaime Salom is best characterized as one of the leading dramatic figures to play out onstage the messy moral quandaries of what it means to lead a good life in Francoist and democratic Spain. Salom's reputation to date remains that of a dramatist not given to easy moral dicta, a writer profoundly engaged with the confusing philosophical intricacies of everyday existence.

Salom's achievements as one of Spain's foremost contemporary playwrights, flowering as they did at a critical moment in his nation's history, have garnered him his share of international renown. Besides the numerous stagings of his plays throughout the Spanish-speaking Americas, a number of Salom's works have been translated into French, Portuguese, Italian, German, Arabic, Romanian, Flemish, Slovak, and Catalan. Two of his plays, in fact—the early *sainete*-

like *La gran aventura* [The Big Adventure] (1961) and *La lluna de València* [The Moon Over Valencia] (1992), a musical version of *El señor de las patrañas* (Rigmaroles) (1990)—were originally written in the language of his native Catalonia. Later in 1990 his play *Las Casas, una hoguera al amanecer* (Bonfire at Dawn) would be the first to premiere in Spanish abroad, in Mexico City—understandable given its subject matter. Salom's budding reputation outside Spain received an added boost with the publication in 1982 of Phyllis Zatlin's volume on the playwright in the Twayne's World Authors Series, a study that served as the writer's formal introduction to English-speaking audiences. Over the next decade, translations of Salom's works began to appear in English, and productions of his plays were staged intermittently in England and the United States. Salom's 1994 work, *Una noche con Clark Gable* [A Night With Clark Gable], was produced in Spanish at New York City's Thalia Theater. Since that time, Salom's works in translation have been available to English-language readers in a steady trickle. New York City's Puerto Rican Traveling Theater staged both Spanish and English productions of *Una hora sin televisión* (One Hour Without Television), *La playa vacía* (The Empty Beach), and *La piel del limón* (Bitter Lemon) in the late 1990s. It is hoped that the present volume, the first selection of Jaime Salom plays to be published in English, will contribute to his increasing international stature.

ETHICAL CONSERVATISM IN SALOM'S EARLY THEATER

Although Salom would not celebrate an actual staged performance of a play until *El mensaje* [The Message] premiered in Bilbao in 1955, his playwriting considerably predates this production. Salom was awarded the Teatro Español Universitario Prize in 1948 for *Mamá sonríe* [Mama Is Smiling], a play he had written the previous year, which, along with *Ha pasado una vida* [A Life Is Over] (1946), *La hora gris* [The Gray Hour] (1952), and the undatable *La noche en blanco* [The Sleepless Night], the author persists—perhaps unjustly—in considering unsophisticated juvenalia. Salom's gradual road to success over the next decade might be sketched briefly as follows: his 1960 play, *El triángulo blanco* [The White Triangle], was the first to be performed in Barcelona, and his next effort the same year, *Verde esmeralda* [Emerald Green], was staged in Spain's capital. Salom's subsequent detective drama *Culpables* [The Guilty] (1961) represents his first popular and critical hit, whereas the poetic fantasy *El baúl de los disfraces* [The Trunk of Disguises] (1964) is widely considered his first true work of original theater. A few moral melodramas intervened before *La casa de las*



El baúl de los disfraces (The Trunk of Disguises) (1964)

Chivas (The House of the Chivas) (1968) ran for 1,343 consecutive performances in Madrid, putting Salom on the map of twentieth-century Spanish theater. This groundbreaking treatment of a group of soldiers and civilians surviving near the front lines during the Spanish Civil War marked the end of a prevailing ethical conceptualization of theater to which Salom would never quite return.

The most transparent reason for Salom's critical self-distancing from many of his earliest dramatic efforts is their shared moral conservatism and preoccupation with guilt, responsibility, and familial duty. Raised in an observant Catholic household, the product of a Jesuit high school who came of age precisely as Spain fell under Franco's *nacionalcatolicismo* brand of fascism, Salom repudiated his unquestioning espousal of traditional Spanish values at about the time the twilight of the Franco dictatorship came into view. The end of the tumultuous 1960s, which saw the violent repression of student demonstrations in Barcelona, Franco's willful loosening of his authoritarian grip on the government, and Salom's growing discontent in his marriage with divorce still illegal in Spain, ushered in a nearly simultaneous change in the author's worldview—a general liberalization toward issues of social and political import with a more accepting stance toward the frailties and mysteries of the human condition. For critics accustomed to Salom's reliable reinforcement of the sanctity of marriage, individual subjugation to the church, and filial bonds of respect, this incremental shift toward a more relative and open dramatic treatment of psychological complexity seemed both perplexing and needlessly jarring. Reviewers sniped at an author they deemed a mere writer of entertaining comedies and crime dramas suddenly aspiring to the creation of serious literature. As might be expected, this sort of commentary was not devoid of political motivation. A brief synopsis of *Culpables*, a pop-genre murder mystery, will illustrate what Spanish theatergoers of the early 1960s might typically have expected from a Salom drama of the period.

Rogelio, a wealthy businessman, pays a surprise visit to the office of Dr. Andrés La Plaza, who is having an affair with his wife, Silvia. Instead of angrily confronting Andrés, Rogelio proposes that the doctor sign a false death certificate so Rogelio can avoid imprisonment for his bankrupt business by fleeing Spain and living off his life-insurance policy, thus leaving Silvia and Andrés free to marry. Battling his conscience, Andrés officially documents that Rogelio has succumbed to heart failure, and all goes well until a year later, when Inspector Ruiz shows up from Madrid. It seems anonymous letters have been arriving at police headquarters claiming Rogelio was in reality poisoned. Ruiz informs



Viaje en un trapecio (Trapeze Ride) (1970)

Silvia and Andrés, who are about to wed, that Rogelio's body, which they both know is not in the coffin, must be exhumed for tests. When a decomposed corpse is disinterred, Andrés begins to suspect Silvia of duplicity, even murder.

Although Ruiz assures the doctor that Silvia could not have killed Rogelio, a troubled Andrés confesses his lie and urges Ruiz to provide him with absolute assurance of his future wife's moral character. The inspector soon discovers that Rogelio's life insurance is being withdrawn from a Swiss bank by Salvador García, Rogelio's shady business partner. Andrés's former office assistant, secretly in love with the doctor for years, tries to clear him of suspicion by falsely admitting to having sent the letters herself. By this time, though, the astute Ruiz has solved the perplexing mystery: the body found in the coffin is actually that of García, whose embezzlement and attempted sexual blackmail of Silvia compelled Rogelio to strangle him. Rogelio is now living comfortably in Switzerland under his dead partner's identity, and it is learned that Rogelio himself has sent the letters, hoping to foment suspicion between the rigidly ethical Andrés and the unfaithful wife he still desires. At the play's close, Rogelio appears in Andrés's office armed with a pistol and asks Silvia to choose between the two men, knowing that the events he has set in motion will have diminished Silvia's love for someone who could harbor so much doubt about her conduct and personality. Silvia then kills Rogelio, but not before she poses the question of who the guilty parties in this tawdry episode of infidelity, fraud, duplicity, and murder truly are.

For audiences used to the light appeal of whodunit suspense and conventional morality, it is little wonder that Salom's subsequent dramatic works would cause such a stir.

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN SALOM'S MATURE DRAMAS

By the mid-1960s Salom had put aside such conventional productions to move in more substantive and compelling dramatic directions. Beginning with *La casa de las Chivas* and proceeding through *Los delfines* [The Heirs Apparent] (1969), *La noche de los cien pájaros* [The Night of the Hundred Birds] (1972), and *La piel del limón* four years later, Salom settled into a second phase of more socially and politically aware theater that coincided with the demise of Franco's once fearsomely autocratic rule. *La casa de las Chivas* is a prime example of the daring Salom began to exhibit in the never innocent (or isolated) world of theater under dictatorship. The play not only sympathetically depicts soldiers and civilians in their daily reactions to the ever-present threat of death in wartime but represents the first staging of Spain's definitive twentieth-century conflict as seen through the eyes of the losing republican partisans. Such a perspective would have seemed inconceivable only a few decades earlier, as Franco's



La casa de las Chivas (The House of the Chivas) (1968)

deadly retaliation against those who had fought against his fascist forces continued long after the war's end. *Los delfines*, too, portrayed in timely dramatic fashion the gradual dissolution of the once powerful Tuser family of industrialists in another oblique mirroring of an enfeebled and feckless regime. Following the death of the eighty-year-old patriarch Juan, his widow, Carolina, desperately connives to keep the business in family hands under the leadership of her son Fere. With ruthless single-mindedness of purpose, Carolina hopes to perpetuate total family control over the means of production, dismissing outright all talk of reforms such as power sharing with company employees. Progressive ideas coming from America, the New World's bastion of democracy, are held in contempt as transparent tricks to dispossess Tuser management of its economic stronghold, and Fere's antitraditionalist children want nothing to do with ill-gotten gains through capitalist oppression. *Los delfines* ends with Fere's suicide marking the inevitable dissolution of a once autonomous, isolationist system defiantly resistant to any form of change.

A few years later, *La noche de los cien pájaros* would similarly reflect the moral uncertainties surrounding an authoritarian regime in decline. The play depicts the relationship of Adrián and Juana, a couple married for two decades who, like Fere and his wife, Luisa, in *Los delfines*, have made their peace, acknowledging that their happiest days are behind them. Sadly for the two, Adrián's latent discontent surfaces abruptly at the twentieth reunion of what would have been his law-school graduating class. Years back, he had dropped out and married beneath his social class when Juana's parents, who ran a meat stall, died suddenly and left her in desperate need of help with the family business. After beginning an affair with Lilián, a successful former classmate's secretary, Adrián plots to remove the sickly Juana from the picture by lacing her heart medicine with poison. Although Juana dies (ironically) without ensuring her husband's expected happiness, Adrián is wracked not only by guilt but by plaguing doubt: Did Juana die a natural death, or was he actually successful in murdering her? Worse still, did Juana, aware of Adrián's lack of love for her, intentionally sacrifice her life so her husband could find the happiness that eludes him at the play's end? In a clear departure from the catholic clarity of his earliest plays, *La noche de los cien pájaros* declines to impose ethical imperatives on its characters, suggesting that notions of right and wrong are perhaps inextricably bound up in the instantial moral quagmire that is everyday life.

The family as societal microcosm remained under siege in Salom's first play to premiere after Franco's death, *La piel del limón*, whose very title is a reminder



Los delfines (The Heirs Apparent) (1969)

of the perceived compulsion to keep up appearances in the face of inner turmoil and decay. The work is Salom's strongest argument for the place of divorce in civil society, a cause the playwright championed rigorously during Spain's halting

return to constitutional monarchy. Juan and Rosa's emotionally dead marriage is held together primarily by consideration for their thirteen-year-old daughter, Alejandra, until Juan mistakenly believes he can find happiness outside the bonds of matrimony by living with his secretary, Bárbara, with whom he has long carried on an affair. In time, Juan is dispassionately reminded by his partner (and Rosa's cousin), Narciso, of the need to maintain outward propriety whatever the psychological cost, as his prolonged absence from home has begun to hurt their business. Intensifying this psychic conflict at the heart of the play is Salom's notorious decision to have Juan's daughter and lover be portrayed by the same actress in differing temporal planes. Juan has made up his mind to give his marriage another chance as the final scene opens with his return home for Alejandra's sixteenth birthday party, exactly three years after the action at the play's start. Bárbara's possible suicide is alluded to as *La piel del limón* ends with Juan and Rosa unable to resume conjugal relations in an atmosphere of frustrated self-determination reminiscent of the world outside the theater where rigid moral strictures once took absolute precedence over the reasoned alternative of personal choice.

Two political allegories produced ten years apart similarly bear witness to Salom's sustained engagement with the transformational history of his day. *Tiempo de espadas* (Time of Swords) (1972) is a radical retelling of the apostles' relationship to Jesus Christ, set in an unnamed country in the present. The play's imaginative recoding of Spain's political landscape at the end of the Franco dictatorship is, however, everywhere in evidence. The twelve followers of a recently sentenced revolutionary gather clandestinely in a restaurant's banquet room to discuss the future of their mission. Fearing arrest and uncertain of who should assume the group's leadership, the twelve demonstrate not only great personal differences but ideological dissent and even a possible misunderstanding of their captured leader's idea of deliverance. The pseudo-biblical aura surrounding the action of *Tiempo de espadas* underscores the totalitarian nature of the military regime parading triumphantly not only beneath the supper-club windows but, in a very real sense, outside the theater as well.

This pervasive aura of widespread, if impotent, political opposition is treated with comparable vagueness in *Un hombre en la puerta* [A Man at the Door] (1984), in which Víctor, the protagonist with notably liberal (even socialistic) tendencies, is expelled from a nondescript group of delegates. Fearing for his life like the disciple figures of *Tiempo de espadas*, he takes temporary refuge in the home of his ex-lover Miriam, who now lives with her lesbian partner, Berta. As



La piel del limón (Bitter Lemon)



Tiempo de espadas (Time of Swords) (1972)

in the play's earlier counterpart, no precise reference is ever made to a political leader, although *El hombre en la puerta* does contain language directly stating the need for a democratizing youth movement to replace the autocratic decision making of some head of state for life. The work thus plays out the complications of the characters' sexual triangle against a political backdrop pessimistic about the possibility of systemic change from within and with a phantom presence typical of the works of this phase. Not surprisingly, Salom, one of Spain's principal advocates for a return to normalcy after decades of reactionary politics, declared the tense and poignant *Tiempo de espadas* to be his favorite work of the twenty-plus he had written at that point in his career.

GROWTH OF A FEMINIST SENSIBILITY

After this politically charged period of provocative output, Salom's plays have increasingly showcased a wide range of subjects and a variety of innovative stage techniques. Not since early in his career has Salom premiered plays back-to-back dealing with a similar topic or pertaining to the same dramatic category,

and his oeuvre of the 1980s and 1990s is, in comparison, strikingly eclectic. The sheer scope of these more recent dramas has allowed Salom, in step with his liberal shift on social issues, to focus on the imaginative reworking of themes with which he has also since become identified, including the resonance of history in contemporary life, the driving need for freedom of being and expression, and the “equality” (often suggested through parallelism or doubling) between upper and lower classes, authors and actors or their characters, and men and women. Especially notable among these is Salom’s focus on the role of women in Spanish society. Following the broad comic portrayal of the Walter Mittyish Leoncia in *Cita los sábados* [Saturday Night Date] (1967) as a bored provincial housewife living out a series of fanciful adventures during a weekly game of Parcheesi, Salom’s female characters have increasingly acquired the multidimensionality and psychological realism they often lacked in his earlier works. Salom’s change in worldview is reflected in his concerted efforts to develop these characters sympathetically and give voice to their protests against the subtle (and not so subtle) ways in which they remain oppressed by Spanish society at large. Indeed, some of Salom’s most recent works have featured starring female roles written specifically with leading Spanish actresses in mind.

Even before his creation of Juana’s domestic tragedy in *La noche de los cien pájaros*, Salom explored the unique solitude women face in *La playa vacía*, indisputably his most metaphorical and metaphysical play to date. These qualities have led some to view the work, produced after *Los delfines* during what is still Salom’s most important and innovative period, as a kind of modern-day, profane *auto sacramental*. The widowed Victoria, facing a long, lonely off-season following the death of an elderly companion at the seaside resort she runs, implores Pablo, a beachcombing hired hand, to keep her company during the winter. Although Victoria, who is of a certain age, assures Pablo she is not paying him for sexual services, the two soon become involved until the younger Tana, a mysterious presence literally from beyond the waves, washes up seemingly lifeless onshore. Her appearance complicates Victoria’s neat plans for time with Pablo, as do the sporadic visits of her affable older supplier, the kindly, paternalistic, and somehow otherworldly Don. Although it is evident that each character symbolizes a potent existentialist force (Life, Sexual Pleasure, Death, and God, respectively), Salom manages to limn the bleakness of Victoria’s situation realistically enough for viewers to despair at her decision to drown herself by play’s end. Still, because of *La playa vacía*’s obvious symbolic veneer and experimentation with ontological themes, Victoria ultimately lacks full devel-



Una hora sin televisión (One Hour Without Television)

opment as a flesh-and-blood female character, however reminiscent her circumstances of the hopeless entrapment Salom came to see as typical of a woman's position in Spain.

This feminist sensibility has become a hallmark of Salom's mature works and is almost invariably on display in his more recent plays. Salom's sobering social commentary on Spanish machismo, *Una hora sin televisión*, provides a fine example of the difficulties even successful and seemingly independent wives face in confronting their husbands' general peccadilloes and inattentiveness. In this rare two-character drama, Patricia is reduced to begging the philandering Eduardo for the titular hour without television as the anniversary gift he has predictably forgotten to buy her. The play unfolds in real time as the sports-loving, model-seducing Eduardo finally threatens to shoot Patricia if she leaves him for the sensitive musical impresario she has elaborately described to him. Thoroughly unaware of this relationship, Eduardo is unable to tease Patricia for her impressive choice of a lover, so unlike the mousy violinist who had previously won her affections. After eighteen years of belittling her talents and ambitions as a pianist, Eduardo experiences his own emotional abandonment when

Patricia decides to leave her predicament, only to face the uncertainties that follow a woman after a broken marriage. Patricia's hopeful resolve to walk out on her husband in favor of a life of increased freedom and independence falters at play's end, providing an apt commentary on the limits to female liberty outside of marriage that Salom's dramas repeatedly decry. Although *Una hora sin televisión* ultimately leaves open the possibility that Patricia will reconsider her hasty return home, she is left suffering the miseries of near-total estrangement as the curtain falls.

There may be no better measure of the evolution in Salom's conceptualization and handling of female characters than his treatment of the relationships between two pairs of sisters, created over thirty years apart, in *Espejo para dos mujeres* [A Mirror for Two Women] (1965) and *Más o menos amigas* [Friends More or Less] (1999). Both plays present mismatched siblings, a homecoming, an emotional rapprochement, and a final decision concerning cohabitation. Although neither set of sisters can be considered the fully individualized ideal of psychological realism that has become the standard in mimetic dramatization, Salom's approach to these characters nevertheless illustrates the shift in social outlook and artistic temperament representative of the trajectory of his long career. In *Espejo para dos mujeres*, essentially a Christian morality play, Tina returns home to live with her younger sister, Laura, in northern Spain following the death of her atheist French husband many years after their disapproving father has passed away. Laura, who was left to care for the family (and who still looks after their dying maid, Patricia), is a model of self-sacrifice and charity in welcoming Tina back, oblivious to both her sister's philandering and their father's sexual hypocrisy. Laura's discovery that Patricia's apparently groundless hatred of her stems from a past encounter in which their outwardly respectable father insisted that the maid abort their illegitimate child happens after she learns that Tina has returned home with her lover, Peter, in tow. The play ends with the slightly cardboard figures of the sisters—one the paragon of virtue, the other the too worldly libertine—deciding to stay together in Spain despite their mutual love for Peter, who has expressed his own love privately for the virginal Laura. The sisters embrace melodramatically at play's close, affirming their filial duty to each other above romantic involvement with an attractive, reformed bon vivant left stranded at the airport, phoning frantically.

In contrast to the stock-character quality of Tina and Laura, Flora and Dora in *Más o menos amigas* are so fluidly, comically, and outrageously delineated that it might be said Salom chose to sacrifice fidelity to real-life charac-

terization in favor of the suggestive veracity of ironic excess. Flora, a slightly fastidious homebody, has gone to live with her foul-mouthed sister, Dora, a dubiously talented nightclub singer, after their mother's death. Dora's slovenliness grates reciprocally on Flora, who sets the action in motion by dating a would-be impresario who mistakes her at first for Dora, then shows up only sporadically to see her. Dora, too, is plagued by an apparently unfaithful suitor, her accompanist, Pipper; and after Flora and Dora find improbable success singing as a duo, the two set out to put their love lives in order. Dora's harsh dismissal of Flora's Fernando leads Flora to send Pipper packing, until it is learned in a brisk comic coda that both pairs have remained together as couples. Unlike the very different sisters in *Espejo para dos mujeres*, at the end of *Más o menos amigas* Flora and Dora opt not to live with each other, as Dora is appalled by her sister's chubby twins and bourgeois lifestyle while Flora laments her sister's increasingly risqué cabaret act. In comparison with the dated sentimentalism of Laura and Tina in *Espejo para dos mujeres*, the sisters in *Más o menos amigas* are drawn with such unrestrained gusto that they appear to embody, however comically, the infinite possibilities of individual growth and potential. Despite their humorous shortcomings, Flora and Dora exude the dramatic vitality of two female characters with irremediable limitations, yet unstintingly and vivaciously alive.

SALOM'S DRAMATIZATION OF SPANISH HISTORY

A runaway hit that secured its author's place among the major modern dramatists of Spain, *La casa de las Chivas* was Salom's first play to deal unequivocally with a historical subject. Although it might be argued that earlier works of primarily bourgeois sensibility—domestic dramas and light comedies concerning the interaction of family members or couples—were at least imbued with the restrictive ethos of Franco's Spain, *La casa de las Chivas* broke the mold, inaugurating a succession of variously serious, comic, sometimes farcical plays whose sustained focus was Spanish history as seen anachronistically through the prism of dictatorship. Whereas Salom may be most revered and best remembered for this cluster of plays produced between 1968 and 1976, a sufficient amount of his work from 1978 to the present explores historical themes to have tempted critics to consider these a kind of collective sociopolitical docudrama. Indeed, the three plays composing this volume are comedic variants of the extremely serious looks at history effected in the works discussed here from the same period.



El corto vuelo del gallo (The Cock's Short Flight) (1980)

El corto vuelo del gallo (The Cock's Short Flight) (1980), the first Spanish play ever to depict Franco as a "character" onstage—an empty chair at the reading of his mother's will—was predictably greeted with vociferous protests from the lingering fascist faithful. As in the foreboding works of shadowy political intrigue mentioned earlier and even in *La casa de las Chivas*, Franco is ever present, more notably here through his conspicuous physical absence. His menacing presence hovers palpably over the action of the entire play, whose central figure is Franco's father, Nicolás, a foul-mouthed, ill-tempered, skirt-chasing, generally dissolute republican with nothing but open contempt for his God-fearing, reactionary mama's boy of a son. Nicolás clearly favors his dashing aviator son, Ramón, who, it is implied, was shot down by Spanish planes once his own antifascist sympathies began to garner embarrassing attention. The play is remarkable for its cold-eyed treatment of the effects of childhood emotional trauma on the male psyche and is openly provocative in its intimations regarding the psychological formation of a totalitarian. Besides having the same actor play many of the bit functionary roles and one actress portray both Nicolás's daughter Pilar (by his pious wife of the same name) and Agustina, the child of the long-suffering woman with whom he lives, the play employs a fluid temporal plane in which the dead Pilar (Franco's mother) and Ramón occasionally



Las Casas, una hoguera al amanecer (Bonfire at Dawn)

return to dialogue with Nicolás. In breaking an unspoken taboo concerning what could and could not be done with the memory of Franco, *El corto vuelo del gallo* helped usher in a more open phase of theater in democratic Spain.

The uncompromising nature of Salom's take on Spanish history and his courageous willingness to invite controversy are equally evident in *Las Casas, una hoguera al amanecer*, a dramatization of the life of the priest called the "Apostle of the Indies." Las Casas's brave efforts to counter the inhumane treatment of indigenous populations during the brutal Spanish conquest earned him enemies at court, among his Dominican superiors, and even among members of his family. Salom's Las Casas, in keeping with the author's keen grasp of human complexity, is no one-dimensional saint. Gently mocked for his interest in the priesthood after a youth filled with its share of dalliance, Las Casas is tinged with reckless idealism, stubborn intransigence, even self-serving hubris. His personality as delineated by the playwright's empathic vision is also nuanced by a certain moral cowardice—for example, does Las Casas send away his former Indian servant, Señor, to face death from exhaustion at the mines because he fears his own human frailty will lead him to reciprocate Señor's homosexual desire for him? Salom's harsh look at the events of the so-called Black Legend

prevents both oppressor and oppressed from seeming unproblematically heroic. Bloody massacres resulting from indigenous uprisings, counterposed with the marauding savagery of unadulterated Spanish greed, ensure that neither conqueror nor conquered appears noble in the end.

In a pair of works approaching tragicomedy, Salom takes on two *monstres sacrés* of twentieth-century painting, Salvador Dalí and Pablo Picasso, exploring the psychic burden of Spanish creativity in a cosmopolitan setting. *Casi una diosa* (Almost a Goddess) (1993) takes its title from Dalí's worshipful treatment of his mistress and muse, Elena Diakonova (Gala), by turns fortune hunter, Circe figure, Christian mystic, slave driver, and paragon of artistic inspiration. What begins for the couple as a promising sexual triangle with Elena's first husband, French surrealist poet Paul Éluard, devolves into an unhappy union in which Elena, through sheer force of will, practically imprisons the irrepressibly free-spirited Dalí in their remote castle home. There, Dalí is compelled to produce ever more paintings for profit, however adulterated the art, while Elena openly pursues erotic encounters entertaining younger men. *Casi una diosa* treats wistfully the inevitable parting of Elena and Éluard, ill suited for each other in disposition and woefully mismatched in ambition, in stark contrast to the lunatic frenzy the play invokes surrounding the odd and mutually destructive relationship of Elena and Dalí. As in *El corto vuelo del gallo*, Salom makes poignant use of Éluard's continued presence beyond the grave and of an efficient multipurpose Other, who assumes whatever role the plot requires at the time. Compared with Dalí and his effete sensationalism, Elena emerges in a reversal of traditional gender roles as the true sacred monster exploiting the innocent talent and perverse affections of a feckless male *ingénu*.

The young Picasso, replete with impetuous artistic temperament, is portrayed in Salom's *Las señoritas de Aviñón* [The Demoiselles of Avignon] (2001) as the destabilizing element in a Barcelona brothel whose prostitutes he immortalizes in the famed portrait of the title. Insistent, penurious, with an overblown sense of his own potential, Picasso quickly makes a nuisance of himself to Madame Hortensia, who is preoccupied with the more pressing business of weathering her employees' simmering discontent. *Las señoritas de Aviñón* is less a play "about" Picasso than a colorful vignette of Catalonia at the turn of the twentieth century. The work focuses primarily on the interaction of the bordello's residents—the lesbians Antonia and Pepita; Picasso's favorite, Rosita; the depressive, man-hating Pilar; and Madame Hortensia's daughter, Sofia, who by play's end has succumbed to the life. Picasso's *succès de scandale* is revealed to the



Las señoritas de Aviñón (The Demoiselles of Avignon) (2001)

shock of the women, who understandably have difficulty recognizing themselves in his canvas. As they view their portraits displayed in a 1908 French magazine, Picasso's painting is grandly projected on a screen at the rear of the stage. Meanwhile, bombs exploding in the street and news of international turmoil serve as a muted backdrop to the eleven short scenes that provide a lurid but jaunty depiction of a bygone era. For some time Salom has been toying with the idea of writing a third "Spanish painter" play about Joan Miró but has quipped that Miró led too saintly a life to be the stuff of compelling drama—except, perhaps, for Holy Week celebrations!

Two obviously farcical treatments of medieval history provide an apt contrast to the sometimes somber, sometimes seriocomic visions of the preceding works. *Nueve brindis por un rey* [Nine Toasts for a King] (1974), notable for its ironic tone and ludicrous anachronisms, contains at its core the tragic cause of Catalonian marginalization in Spanish politics dating from the 1412 Compromise of Caspe. The play sends up the failure to elect Louis of Anjou to succeed the heirless King Martin I, making light of the church's rigidity and of bedrock democratic principles, as in the scene in which delegates hold up placards U.S. convention style in favor of their preferred candidates for sovereign. Through its

depiction of all the impossible back-room wrangling to enthrone Ferdinand I as king of Spain—a decision more a function of papal schisms and individual self-promotion than of communitarian considerations for the nation's best interests—the play never loses sight of this beginning of political irrelevancy for a fiercely independent province. In the work's encyclopedic coda, all the delegates at Caspe relate the mostly illustrious futures their compromised vote has garnered them, except Guillermo de Vallseca, Louis of Anjou's advocate, who is absent presumably for supporting the sole candidate who would have ensured Catalonian ascendancy. The implication, of course, is that this once prominent political figure is now not even a footnote to history.

Similarly, a planned rock opera, *Jerusalén, hora cero* [Jerusalem, Zero Hour], which Salom finished in 1995 after more than a decade of revision, is yet to be staged. The action, complete with musical score, provides a sardonic glance at the punctured idealism of a group of child crusaders during the Middle Ages who plan to set sail from Marseilles on a mission to bring peace and love to Muslim infidels. An odd departure from an already wide-ranging life's work, *Jerusalén, hora cero* is a rare bird in the Salom canon. As a play nonetheless very much engaged with the silly vagaries of history, it serves as a fitting transition to the works that compose the present collection.

THREE "HISTORICAL" COMEDIES FROM DEMOCRATIC SPAIN

Franco's death in 1975 after thirty-six years of dictatorship hastened the establishment of constitutional monarchy in Spain with the institution of parliamentary democracy and the restoration of the Borbón dynasty. For Salom, many of whose earlier works protested the right-wing repressions of their time, the promise of a freer, more open society facilitated the pursuit of new dramatic directions first explored in *Nueve brindis por un rey*. For the first time in his long career, Salom began to treat broadly historical subjects as occasions for humor, mockery, and send-up. Not since the early 1960s had Salom's dramatic output included such a large number of plays so comically ironic and lighthearted in tone. Alongside works conveying his continued interest in the psychology of contemporary relationships, Salom authored a series of comedies set, at least on the surface, ever farther from the often somber realities of twentieth-century Spain. The 1978 production of *Historias íntimas del paraíso* (Behind the Scenes in Eden) marks the start of an approximately twenty-five-year period encompassing the premieres of *El señor de las patrañas* (1990); its musical version in Catalan, *La lluna de València* (1992); and *El otro William* (The Other William) (1998). Also

during this time, Salom wrote the abovementioned *Jerusalén, hora cero* (published in 1995), *Aquel pícaro Madrid* [That Rascally Madrid], an homage to the nineteenth-century *costumbrista* Ramón de Mesonero Romanos (published in 1999), and *Esta noche no hay cine* [No Movies Tonight], which features a hapless production of *Othello* by a traveling theater troupe forced to use substitute actors (published in 2002 under the title *Este domingo no hay cine*). Collectively, these works represent a more recent phase of Salom's writing for the stage in which the imperative to respond artistically to political crisis yields to the (relative) luxury of unconstrained imaginative creation.

Salom's foray into "historical" comedy after his medieval farce *Nueve brindis por un rey* continued with a return to the dawn of creation in *Historias íntimas del paraíso*. Although it would be difficult to conceive of a setting more removed in time than the Garden of Eden, the play's antediluvian remoteness does not entirely divest its action of echoes of life under Spanish dictatorship. Nor do *El señor de las patrañas*, set in Renaissance Valencia, and *El otro William*, set in Elizabethan/Stuart England, rid their plots completely of connections to twentieth-century Spain. In contrast to his politically engaged works of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the three plays in this volume (and the others listed earlier) consistently remind viewers that history operates according to a kind of periodic, even circular chronology. The works endorse the old adage about history repeating itself as Salom, in choosing to dramatize symbolically charged eras, suggests a metaphorical quality to modes of existence outside a conventional movement of Time. Episodes and situations deemed unique to specific cultures or confined to certain generations are portrayed instead as palimpsests that reveal simultaneously past and present manifestations.

Thus, *Historias íntimas del paraíso* blurs strict temporal movement through a steady interjection of anachronism and hints at the interchangeability of individuals over time through Adam's replacement of his "wife," Lili, with Eve. The play relies on the religious resonance of Eden and the well-known biblical narrative of creation to unsettle viewers by demonstrating just how easily apparently objective "historical" record can be rewritten to serve political ends. In a similar vein, *El señor de las patrañas* makes exemplary use of dramatic irony by implicitly comparing the political intrigue of one dire moment in sixteenth-century Valencia with the memory of a not-too-distant Spanish past. The work's collapsing of linear time is continuously reinforced by the rigid symmetry of its two acts, in which overlapping rehearsals of the play within the play, parallel visits from a court emissary, and the explicit pairing of the roles of two young

women imply the sustainable repetition of people, places, and events. *El otro William* likewise defies traditional chronology by literally beginning in a present that opens onto the past and employing a protagonist whose two roles straddle these divergent temporal planes. The work's very title signals the central doubling that drives the plot and argues once again for a plausible view of historical character and incident as more archetype and imbrication than novelty and particularity. One can scarcely imagine Salom indulging such an aesthetic conceptualization of history while writing plays directed against the policies and ethos of the Franco regime. Circular time would have provided little help for arguments levied against a government most Spanish artists and intellectuals considered a historical aberration and a peculiar blight to be permanently expunged.

HISTORIAS ÍNTIMAS DEL PARAÍSO—BEHIND THE SCENES IN EDEN

Behind the Scenes in Eden is a comic retelling of the Judeo-Christian creation myth as it appears, somewhat contradictorily, in chapters 1 and 2 of *Genesis*. In the first version of the story, God creates Adam and Eve from the same clay, implying that the spouses are social equals. In the second, Eve is formed from Adam's rib and thus arguably is fashioned in man's image, not God's, in a subsequent stage. The play throughout is concerned with language, writing, authority, and books in general; its subplot involves the effacing of Lilith, Adam's purported first wife alluded to in nonbiblical Jewish texts, from "official" biblical sources. The imaginative premise of *Behind the Scenes in Eden* proposes that the two creation narratives actually refer to separate acts, from which Lilith sprang first and Eve only after Adam had tired of her predecessor's resolute insistence on equality. Before the expulsion from paradise that closes the play, Adam ensures that the "Lord's Diary" or "official record book" makes no mention of Lili (as she is named here), replacing her role in prompting the first couple's flight from Eden with the improbable substitution of a talking serpent.

Behind the Scenes in Eden makes excellent use of a mere four characters, the Adam-Lili-Eve triangle being joined by Angel, an alternately haughty and career-minded functionary just promoted to the new post in paradise. The play thus treats God as a sort of invisible CEO, introduced by Angel in the opening lines as He is being helicoptered away for His Sabbath/weekend rest. Determined not to return to the uninspiring bureaucratic departments from which he has been transferred, Angel assumes more than a rooting interest in the smooth development of the relationship between Adam and Lili, who are ill suited for



Historias íntimas del paraíso (Behind the Scenes in Eden)

each other from the start. The consummate profeminist, Lili demands equal consideration for her status as a woman, as Adam takes every opportunity to insist (sometimes violently) on his authority, superiority, and primacy. At times, in fact, Adam appears to be the only truly discordant element in the heaven-on-earth in which he has been placed, so it is hardly challenging for contemporary theatergoers to cast blame for the events in Eden where it really belongs.

At the play's premiere, Salom was dismayed by Spanish audiences' visceral negative reaction to the sympathetic character of Lili, whose uncompromising stance toward women's rights they considered strident, upsetting, even revolutionary at the time. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that Salom's advocacy of gender equality would face the sort of opposition it did in the early years of Spain's return to constitutional democracy. Viewers' widespread siding with the dull, doll-like Eve over the progressive and self-determined Lili may well be taken as a sad measure of just how reflexive and ingrained Spanish conservatism had become. Given the repressive air surrounding social and sexual mores on

and off stage, it comes as little surprise that Act One ends with an expected separation, whereas Act Two bears speedy witness to adultery.

As glib as the play is in its tone and treatment of what feminist scholars have called “phallogocentrism,” *Behind the Scenes in Eden* manages to raise almost every serious question related to women’s struggle for equal rights. Whereas many of Salom’s plays bear highly personalized dedications, *Behind the Scenes in Eden* is preceded by these words in the Spanish edition: “For the many Liliths who defend the dignity of women in this our unjust society” (translation mine). Indeed, before she exits from the stage of paradise, Lili addresses—however obliquely—the issues of birth control and family planning, child care, the pursuit of sexual pleasure, freedom of choice, respect for personal opinion, participation in decision making, and self-determination. Lili, from her first appearance onstage, protests the failure to consider her preferences for a desirable mate. Adam consistently declines to take Lili’s remonstrations seriously despite his obvious physical attraction to her and his subsequent yearning for her intellectual prowess. Lili’s innate understanding of the dire consequences of inequality within marriage assumes a prophetic guise by the close of Act One, as her words to Adam prove to be ominously on the mark: “This invention of man and woman can work marvelously well, you know, but it’s so carefully equilibrated that when one of them tugs the cord too hard, the whole thing can be wrecked in a moment.”

Salom’s decision to clothe Adam and Lili in the same casual attire of a T-shirt and faded jeans underscores the relaxed edenic environment soon to be destroyed while providing an apt contrast to both the silly “feminine” frilliness of Eve and the literally sexless starchiness of Angel. Adam’s oppositional machismo notwithstanding, his male member is declared an ugly protuberance in the scene in which Lili, he, and Angel display their physical sexual differences to one another. As Adam and his two extremely distinct helpmates play out the debate of what proper gender roles should be, Angel’s epicene being and occasional exasperated huffiness emphasize Adam’s brutal masculinity in its various guises: forbidding Lili to eat apples, insisting on sexual relations in the missionary position, destroying books he deems dangerous or incomprehensible, suggesting that women would be better treated if they yielded to man’s idealizing will, and breaking the (phallic) flute Lili has carved in perceived competition with Adam’s inferior instrument making. As Angel at times speaks lines that may be perceived as masturbatory (as an ethereal being he is sufficient unto himself) or even homosexual (he bristles whenever Adam urges him to imagine the



Historias íntimas del paraíso (Behind the Scenes in Eden)

latter's sexual relations with women), his character permits ample acting and directorial leeway to be maximized as the comic foil he embodies.

In the end, the excision of Lili from what is, in essence, the record of the world returns the play's focus to male authorial control over writing. A central irony of *Behind the Scenes in Eden* is that Adam, who ultimately pens the revisionist history of Eden, finds books heavy going and reading boring, whereas Lili laps up all the knowledge texts contain. Salom has great fun introducing anachronisms into Eden, a place where words, and not merely the abstract concepts they signify, were themselves new. Thus, the mention of "bubble bath," "kitchen," and "X-rays," to name a few, heightens the pathos in the coining of another series of far more meaningful utterances that practically chart the doomed course of human creation: "paradise," "man," "tree," "wife," "apple," "love," "kiss," "copulate," "reconciliation," "nostalgia," "longing," "sadness," and "civilization." Adam's distaste for proscriptive norms leads him to shred divinely authored texts such as *Planning for the Human Family*, *Practical Guide for Sexual Justice*, *Women's Rights*, and *Male-Female Equality*, substituting his own discriminatory

precepts for what is generally deemed to be God's benign rule. In the end, perhaps, Lili's objection to "a marriage like this, by royal edict," may serve as a blanket condemnation of all male hierarchical structures. Whether such a unilaterally oppressive system is imposed by God, Adam, or, in Spain's particular case, Franco, theatergoers may well agree with Lili's assessment (in the play's first version) of a reality in which one finds oneself without a voice: "This is a dictatorship!"

EL SEÑOR DE LAS PATRAÑAS—RIGMAROLES

Rigmaroles is based loosely on events in the life of the Valencian tanner, printer, and author Juan Timoneda (1520?–1583), whose importance to literature is better measured by his publication of early Spanish Golden Age writers (such as Seville playwright Lope de Rueda) than by the centrality of his own poetry, drama, and narrative. At best a minor Renaissance figure, Timoneda is today most commonly remembered for *El Patrañuelo* (1567), a popular collection of twenty-two mostly risqué narrative shorts known as *patrañas*, a genre translatable by dictionary definition as "tall tales," "yarns," "cock-and-bull stories," or the word that supplies the English-language title of the play. *Rigmaroles* places the salty sexual content of Timoneda's writing front and center in its opening lines, the coda of a bawdy play Juan has just composed for Valencia's upcoming festival. That these comic verses scandalize Juan's faux-proper wife, Isabel, to the point where she douses her husband with water underscores just how inappropriate they should be, but tellingly are not, for the Catholic celebration they were written to honor. The tension between the religious and secular realms in Valencian society is thus put on display from the very start and provides the philosophical backdrop to the action. As might be expected of any Salom historical comedy, this "Renaissance" farce and costume drama is also imbued with echoes of similarly dispiriting twentieth-century events.

Acts One and Two of *Rigmaroles* frame the play within the play that is the ongoing rehearsal of Juan's festival drama, which features a promisingly salacious cast of characters: cuckolded royal cousins, a humpbacked court jester, an innkeeper's daughter, and a traveling puppeteer. Around these parallel stagings the play's two simultaneous plot lines unfold, inextricably intertwined with questions of money, sex, and power: the growing fortune and influence of the Timoneda family, and the prospective happiness in love and marriage of Isabel's orphaned niece, Anna. Signs of a felicitous outcome to both initially seem propitious with the arrival at the solidly middle-class Timoneda residence of the Secretary to the Court, an aging widower who appears at first to be asking for the comely



El señor de las patrañas (Rigmaroles)

Anna's hand in marriage. The union would, of course, be a fabulous social match for this dispossessed young woman of dubious modesty, who is sexually involved not only with her cousins Vincent and Batista but with her uncle Juan. As the lecherous Secretary is the confidant at court to the libidinous Vicereine, facilitating the match proffers great promise for Juan's printing business and imminent membership in the Brotherhood of the Holy Blood, formerly reserved for men of noble birth. The Secretary's intention to live with Anna in concubinage, however, coupled with the Vicereine's sudden downturn in health, frustrates both possibilities, as a somberly attired Secretary reappears in Act Two forecasting the intellectual repressions of the coming Counter Reformation. The denouement of *Rigmaroles* concerns the aggrieved Timoneda family's response to the erratic Lord Patriarch's censoring of Juan's writing and to the Secretary's order that the rejected Anna live out her days in a convent.

Prostitution—not only of the body but of one's talents, morals, and ideals—may well be the overarching theme of *Rigmaroles* and is nowhere more evident than in the implicit comparison between Anna and Purity, the ironically named prostitute who replaces Juan's niece in the rehearsals of the play within the play. Anna, for whom Juan and Isabel hope to make an advantageous marriage, is far more immodest than the faithful and (improbably for her profession) virginal Purity, who spends her days pining for her Aniceto to return from seeking his fortune in the New World. Thus, whereas Anna lustily applauds the raucous action of Juan's play, Purity expresses her scruples at its immorality to great comic effect. Without question, Anna is knowingly dangled before the Secretary to the Court as a key to improving family fortunes at the expense of her happiness and the pleasure of her lovelorn cousins. Her status as chattel is further underscored when she is unceremoniously returned to the Timoneda household following the shift in political winds at the palace. In light of her suddenly diminished market value, Juan is left to contemplate the impossibility of becoming a Brother of the Holy Blood, the stalled ascendance of Timoneda influence at court, and the insistence that his genius pander to the repressive agenda of the new local government.

All but one member of the Timoneda household are guilty of sacrificing personal beliefs for the illusion of profit and gain. Juan is all too eager to hand over Anna for a chance at social climbing and a virtual monopoly on printing, whereas Isabel (at least at first) calmly ticks off a list of commodities and favors she expects the Secretary to bestow upon the family as compensation for her niece's absence. A somewhat dimwitted but ultimately sympathetic character,



El señor de las patrañas (Rigmaroles)

Isabel is particularly disturbed by the sexual exploitation of Anna, and of all the characters in *Rigmaroles* she most eloquently voices the quandary of the powerless before their oppressors. The couple's younger son, Batista, poised to take over the family business, is likewise thrilled at any hint of favoritism or protection coming from the court. During Anna's visit home in Act Two, he presents her with a leather jewel box he has crafted for possible widespread (and exclusive) sale among the ladies at the palace. Only Vincent, who is clearly smitten with Anna and thus wracked by jealousy, maintains an uncompromising ethical perspective on the wisdom of forsaking strongly held values for money, power, or influence. An idealist and dreamer as his father once was, Vincent yearns to escape the family's straits and keeps his mind's eye focused on the elusive horizon beckoning him to undertake the romanticized voyage out he has been secretly planning for some time. Vincent's tenacious adherence to principle resolves several dilemmas simultaneously at play's end and prompts Juan to reconsider Timoneda family options absent the possibility of self-determination.

Upon hearing the news of the regime change at court, Juan correctly predicts that a period of religious oppression and cultural isolationism will follow, but he does not appear to understand the full effect of the new repressions until he learns, as Vincent has presciently warned him, that his original literary compositions will be compromised. Juan's reaction to this plight mirrors the limited options open to the Spanish people under another, more recent dictatorship, as high talk of maintaining one's dignity in the face of adversity and not capitulating to the aims of authoritarianism quickly devolves into a sense of fatalistic despondence. Juan quite literally suffers an adverse physical reaction to the thought of self-censorship before turning his confused anger against himself and his family: Batista watches in horror as his father sets fire to the print shop but manages to stave off total destruction as Juan gradually comes to his senses. *Rigmaroles* closes with Juan prepared to write the kind of religious drama the Secretary now requests for the upcoming city festival, which is followed by a rather extensive comic coda in verse affirming the ultimately compromised nature of existence. It is man's destiny to be a cuckold, whether because of honor or women. *Rigmaroles* depressingly suggests that, without the option of escape or flight, reluctant conformity to autocratic might is a foregone conclusion.

EL OTRO WILLIAM—THE OTHER WILLIAM

The Other William takes as its point of departure a question long debated by scholars of British literature to largely inconclusive ends, namely, whether Wil-

liam Shakespeare was actually the author of the works historically attributed to him. Salom pushes this infamous canard to great comic length, relying on the theatergoer's ready knowledge and easy grasp of the Bard's canon in peppering his play with a constant flow of Shakespearean allusion, often from improbable angles. The "Other William" of the play's title is William Stanley, the reluctant Sixth Earl of Derby, a closet dramatist who has little time or inclination to give his title of minor nobility and unkempt manorial grounds the fitting attention they observe. Untroubled by his relative impoverishment, William is content with his status as poor gentry as long as he can continue to write unencumbered, undisturbed, and undetected by his noble peers. His private *métier*, though, is irreversibly threatened by his arrogant brother's untimely death when, because of the caprices of aristocratic succession, the title of Sixth Earl is conferred on him. As a full-fledged but dispossessed noble (his brother's conniving widow has arranged for the ancestral assets and estate to be bequeathed to her daughters and so remain in her hands), William cannot risk the discredit that signing his own works would bring to his name. He thus contracts an actor in London by the name of "Shakpso or Shaksper" to take credit for the dramas and to have them staged. This sets in motion Salom's comic premise, as questions of authorship and originality are repeatedly called into play amid the ominous encroachment of "real-world" demands.

As with many of Salom's other historically based plays, much of the viewer's pleasure springs from noting the comedy's handling of subtle incongruities between fact and fiction. Thus, elements of all that is known of Shakespeare's life—a famously paltry biographical sketch—are included with less regard for historical veracity than for speculative force. *The Other William* suggests that Shakespeare was a mediocre actor and possibly a bisexual rogue who trained to be a glove maker and attended a small school in his native Stratford-on-Avon before fleeing to London to avoid possible imprisonment for deer poaching. Other scattershot data from various accounts of his life, for instance, that he was left-handed or enough of a dramatic imitator to be deemed "a bird who adorns himself in someone else's feathers," round out this jaundiced depiction of arguably the most famous writer in the English language. Indeed, Salom's extensive research in preparation for writing *The Other William* extends far beyond the shrouded life of Shakespeare to an intimate acquaintance with his vast body of work.

Strewn throughout the play, for instance, are lines and scenes from Shakespeare's most beloved dramas, whose provenience provides some of the



El otro William (The Other William)

work's most humorous moments. The audience learns that William Stanley is writing "a little play about a couple of youngsters who fall in love" that he might call "Romualdo and Juslinda." This comes after William's tardy servant, Costrand, has informed him: "It's the nightingale and not the lark that caresses [his] ear," hardly the only instance in which William is supplied with a line by an unlikely source. Even more outlandish is the overlapping of his life and his art, as when his sister-in-law, the Dowager, tells him: "I've heard about a Jew named Shylock who has made a fortune lending large sums to noblemen" or Shakespeare returns Lady Derby's handkerchief to William after a servant of the Earl of Essex retrieves it from the nobleman's bedchamber. Before the play concludes, mention is made—however fleetingly—of *Love's Labor's Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard II*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *Henry IV*, and *The Tempest*. What's more, Yorick's skull (it is believed) sits all the while on a desk in William's castle.

Despite these obvious late English Renaissance trappings, *The Other William* is at heart concerned with the alienating aspects of authorship. Even while he is happiest, writing plays in enforced self-isolation from the world, William Stanley is "cruel and arrogant," disdainful of women in general, and cavalier toward the ministrations of his servant girl, Mary, in particular. Long before life's exigencies begin to close in on him—after assuming the station of the Sixth Earl of Derby, he is confronted with having to admit his authorship when *Richard II* sparks an antisedition riot—William is a failure as an enlightened human being, letting his estate go to weed, abusing his servant, Costrand, and using Mary flippantly to gratify his desires. As the Sixth Earl of Derby he ultimately loses Mary, experiences a disastrous political marriage, finds his reputation besmirched when his playwriting is exposed, and is left to face a court of law's imminent judgment against him. *The Other William* presents a strong case for the necessity of genius to thrive in seclusion, unperturbed by the impositions of the workaday world. The fragile tie connecting literary masterpieces to everyday life is left for the viewer to ponder.

Certainly, *The Other William* scrutinizes the intriguing question of artistic originality, reinforced in the play by Salom's use of doubling. Besides the parallel between the two Williams and the thematization of the porous frontiers between lived life and artistic product, *The Other William* takes advantage of fluid temporal and spatial planes. Thus, action that begins in the dramatic present with a guided tour through William Stanley's castle morphs seamlessly into the past with the same actor playing the guide suddenly portraying the Sixth Earl.

At another juncture, the actor in the role of Costrand steps out of character to don a judicial clerk's robe. Shakespeare, whom William Stanley has been paying to assume responsibility for authorship of the nobleman's plays, refuses to tell the court he is not their true author, rebuking the Sixth Earl for his neglect. "[Y]ou ignored your creatures like some superior and distant god while I, I modified scenes, corrected mistakes, cut here and added there. Perhaps you were the one who conceived them, but I cared for them as if they were my own children, I nurtured them and turned them into what they are," he protests, adding that he, "a humble actor," and Stanley, "a great lord," represent "two sides of a single coin." At Shakespeare's untimely death, Stanley admits, "I felt as if something of myself had died" before affirming that credit for his plays' authorship will remit without question to his own pen. Viewers of *The Other William* may well smirk at the statement's dramatic irony, however compelled they will feel to reconsider what it means to be a writer.

A PLAYWRIGHT'S FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Whether Jaime Salom will continue to entertain theatergoers and readers on both sides of the Atlantic with historical comedies remains an open question. His most recent plays, *Más o menos amigas* and *Las señoritas de Aviñón*, do, in fact, attest to a sustained interest in both comic and historical genres. It is also true that a considerable amount of his dramatic activity over the last decade or so has involved revising and reworking some of his earlier efforts. Whatever the case, with translations of no fewer than eleven of his plays now available in English, Salom is bound to enjoy increasing renown in America and the rest of the English-speaking world. With a career spanning nearly a half century and diverse works confounding facile encapsulation, Salom should have lovers of theater everywhere hoping that his future endeavors take drama, now in the twenty-first century, in still new and compelling directions.