THE HUMOR OF ALEJANDRO CASONA

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THE HUMOR OF ALEJANDRO CASONA

THESIS

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By

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. HUMOR IN FOUR PLAYS OF CASONA</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Sirena Varada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuestra Natacha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prohibido Suicidarse en Primavera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Arboles Mueren de Pie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Alejandro Casona is a pseudonym for Alejandro Rodríguez Álvarez. His father, Gabino Rodríguez, was a teacher, as was his mother, Faustina Álvarez. Casona himself was a teacher for several years. He was born March twenty-third, 1903, "en un pintoresco pueblecito del occidente de Asturias," which is called Besullo.1 Asturias is a very mountainous region far from any of the great Spanish cultural centers such as Madrid, Salamanca, or Barcelona; yet the writers of Asturias are well known. Casona's work, especially his La dama del alba, which is considered his masterpiece, contains much Asturian folklore.2

Alejandro Casona is a major playwright in the Spanish language today. He is known chiefly for his fantasy and humor. The intent of this paper is to show that his humor is a device for obtaining the attention of those whom he would teach. Is Casona basically a humorist, as is commonly believed? If he uses humor for the purpose of teaching, how does he do this? Is there at present any proof that Casona


2Juan Rodríguez Castellano, editor, La dama del alba by Alejandro Casona (New York, 1947), p. xi.
uses humor as a means towards an end, not as an end in itself for the pure amusement of his audience? Is Casona a pedagog teaching by means of his plays that reality is better than permanent flight into a world of unreality? Does he use fantasy and humor to interest his audiences so that he can get across to them a serious message?

"Para Sainz de Robles el teatro de Casona es un teatro para enseñar...; en ninguna de sus comedias falta un personaje investido de la misión de ser 'elemento pedagógico'."3

The major characteristic of Casona's humor is that it is gentle and almost always subtle. It leads the mind to more sober matters. The fantasy used is often in connection with the appearance of the humor and is explained in a logical fashion before the third act. Thus the fantasy has a use and exists not for itself. The appearance of a few supernatural characters, such as Death (La Peregrina) in La dama del alba and the Devil in Otra vez el diablo and in La barca sin pescador, combines both humor and fantasy. These characters are narrators who sound very like ironic teachers of ethics. They function also as plot manipulators and deus ex machina creations.

...Casona, como buen cristiano, cree que el hombre tiene un 'derecho sagrado a mantener un ideal' y que si la sociedad le niega ese derecho el artista está...

3Juan Rodríguez Castellano, "Las Doctrinas Pedagógicas de Alejandro Casona", Hispania, XLIII (March, 1960), 25.
obligado a crear nuevos ámbitos para que en ellos se desarrolle la actividad del espíritu.

...La enseñanza de Casona consiste en 'traer nuestra mejor vida, la que estimábamos como fantástica, a esta peor vida nuestra...revolcada en los tópicos y en la rutina.'

According to this Casona teaches spiritual redemption of the lost, the confused, the suicidal, the misfits in a hopeless age. He is, above all, a teacher of the courage to live. He seeks to show that one may gain, through love, the courage to face the bitterness of reality and to accept it. He also preaches respect for human life, duty, sacrifice, and the ethical life. Humor in his plays is incidental to these values; it is simply a pedagogical trick to gain and hold the audience's attention. Ironically he is best known for his humor and the seemingly nonchalant fantasy which are his trademarks but which are the least important of his aims.

Like most of the other playwrights of this century, Casona deals with the conflict between reality and fantasy; but he seeks to prove that reality must overcome fantasy, that sobriety must overcome romanticism, that facing the futility and grimness of life must overwhelm a desire for escape. Flight into an imagined world will never work out, he says.

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"...Casona's characters...in their desire for flight from the world, exhibit essentially a negative attitude and only in their adaptation, complete or partial, do they convert to positive aspirations. Very often a return to a struggle for a positive end occurs..."5

The resorting of despairing characters to the last extreme, suicide, which is usually frustrated by the hero, ends often with a refrain from Casona's philosophy of life.

La vida no es solamente un derecho. Es, sobre todo, un deber.6

Casona appears to argue that sometimes sacrifice for the happiness of the many and society may justify suicide. Ángelica's sacrifice [in La dama del alba] to avoid ruining the lives of all around her is a bitter duty she must face.7

Casona doesn't claim that all illusion is bad. The Abuela in Los árboles mueren de pie lets those who tried to help her believe they have succeeded, but, on the whole, Casona's conclusion is that the worlds of reality and happiness are synonymous.8

In La barca sin pescador Casona expresses the essence of his teaching: "En la vida de un hombre está la vida de

5Kessel Schwartz, "Reality in the Works of Alejandro Casona", Hispania, XL (March, 1957), 57.

6Alejandro Casona, Teatro II, "Prohibido suicidarse en primavera" (Buenos Aires, 1957), p. 34.

7Kessel Schwartz, "Reality in the Works of Alejandro Casona", Hispania, pp. 59-60.

8Ibid., p. 60.
todos los hombres." This is what Ricardo Jordán learns from the Devil; it indicates the regeneration of Ricardo's soul. Ricardo is no longer the cynical, pessimistic modern businessman who has signed away a man's life for money.

Casona's teaching in his plays is a natural result of his background, training, and inclination. Teaching was not the only ability that came naturally to him; so did the writing of poetry. The poetry which he attempted before he later launched upon a career of playwriting has been partly disowned by the mature Casona, but the poems are considered beautiful by most critics. His first poems were published in Murcia while he was a schoolboy there. They appeared only in local papers and magazines and have never been collected and issued in book form. In Murcia, also, he attended for two years the Conservatorio de Declamación, where, as he stated, "se reforzó mi afición por el teatro."11

During his undergraduate days in Madrid he wrote two volumes of poetry. La Flauta del Sapo was the second written but the first to be printed. El Peregrino de la Barba Florida was his first sustained attempt at poetry. In the latter he shows a nascent interest in the legends of Spain, which

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10Jose A. Balseiro and J. Riis Owre, editors, La barca sin pescador (New York, 1955), pp. xii-xviii.

11Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, p. xv.
was to blossom forth later in his works from time to time.\textsuperscript{12} Copies of these poems are difficult to obtain now, since they have not been reprinted since 1937.\textsuperscript{13} Needless to say, these poems will not be discussed in this paper. Since 1928 Casona has written twenty-one plays and innumerable motion-picture and television scripts, most of which are at present unavailable in the United States. Some of his plays have never been published, and none of the motion-picture or television works are in print. Difficulties in procuring copies of his works are increased by the fact that during his most productive periods he travelled through South America with an exiled Spanish theatrical company. The works then written were not printed, except for the production of mimeographed copies for the use of the actors. Only recently has any organized effort been made to collect and publish the plays in an orderly fashion. A set of his complete works has been begun but is far from completion yet.\textsuperscript{14}

The plays which contain the most humor and which are the best of his original works have been introduced by friends of the playwright into the United States through school editions for the use of students of Spanish. Knowledge of most of the other plays which are not obtainable must come from magazine articles written by such friends of Casona as Juan Carlos

\textsuperscript{12}Balseiró and Owre, editors, \textit{La barca}, p. xii.

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, p. xii.

\textsuperscript{14}Juan Rodríguez Castellano, "Las Doctrinas Pedagógicas de Alejandro Casona", \textit{Hispania}, p. 29.
Rodríguez Castellano who, incidentally, is also from Besullo, Casona's home. A limited number of scholars have discussed the unavailable plays, basing their knowledge upon readings of his manuscripts, visits to Casona while he lived in Buenos Aires or in Punta del Este, Uruguay, or upon performances of plays seen on stages in South America.

Since Casona was driven out of Spain early in 1937 by the advance of victorious Franco's forces, his plays have been banned in his native land until as late as the latter part of the nineteen-fifties. Obtaining any of his works from Spanish publishers has, thus, been out of the question. He escaped from Spain with the help of the famous Fifth Column which aided many of Spain's cultural leaders, scientists, and educators to flee from Franco's armies. Casona himself did not return to Madrid until 1962.15 During his odyssey of over twenty-five years, most of his published works have appeared in Buenos Aires, Argentina, or in Montevideo, Uruguay, where he moved in 1950.16 It may be several years before his copyright difficulties are straightened out. Meanwhile, enough knowledge of the plots, sources, and messages has been gleaned from writings about them to allow some judgment of his general development. He has grown away from


the humor-spiced plays of his youth through a psychological-Freudian period into a period of treating Spanish legend and history, and back again to comedy with, perhaps, a less idealistic message in his mellower maturity.

The following plays have been studied in preparation for this paper: La dama del alba, La sirena varada, Nuestra Natacha, Prohibido suicidarse en primavera, Los árboles mueren de pie, La llave en el desván, Siete gritos en el mar (with the two J. B. Priestley plays, Dangerous Corner and I Was Here Before, which inspired the Casona play), La barca sin pescador, Corona de amor y muerte, and Otra vez el diablo.

El crimen de Lord Arturo, which is based upon an Oscar Wilde play, Lord Arthur Savile's Crime, was unavailable, but the original play by Wilde was perused. Sinfonía inacabada, which is a romanticized life of Franz Schubert, has been discussed by one or two Casona scholars, but the play is unavailable. Reading of a life of the musician gives no aid since it is known that Casona chose his incidents and combined and rearranged events to suit himself. A life of Marie Curie, likewise, gave no clue to the possible treatment given the life by Casona in an unavailable play on that subject.

El Misterio del "María-Celeste" is not among Casona's readily available works because it is considered inferior to many of his plays. Thus, too, Romance de Dan y Elsa is
unavailable, as are Las tres perfectas casadas, La tercera palabra, La molinera de arcos, Sombras queridas, Tres diamantes y una mujer, and La casa de los siete balcones. The last three are of recent production and are not published yet. La molinera de arcos is based upon the Sombrero de tres picos story and La tercera palabra is a reworking of the Segismundo theme. Rereading of the Alarcón novel and of La vida es sueño indicates, of course, nothing of what Casona may have done with the themes. Of the plays accessible for this paper, only four have been chosen. They are: La sirena varada, Nuestra Natacha, Prohibido suicidarse en primavera, and Los árboles mueren de pie.

Such a limitation has been made for reasons of brevity and because these four plays contain the most humor. The how and why of Casona's use of humor can be illustrated with this quartet of plays, which are among his best. Evidently all of his works contain minute amounts of humor, with the clear exception, among the known plays, of Corona de amor y muerte and Siete gritos en el mar. Casona's reputation for humor, however, is based essentially upon the four plays discussed in this paper.

His early plays contain far more humor per se than the later works. This will explain why, of the four plays written before his exile from Spain in 1937, two have been selected for this paper. Of the four written during Casona's
peregrination through Latin America between 1937 and 1939, only one play has been chosen. Of the thirteen plays written between 1939 and 1960, only one, Los árboles mueren de pie, has been selected.

Casona's works may be divided roughly into four categories: original plays containing both fantasy and humor, reworkings of well-known plays and novels by other writers, original works containing fantasy but little or no humor, and plays based upon Spanish themes that contain no fantasy and only incidental humor in a minor character or two.

A glance at the plays in chronological order will show a not-so-curious fact: Casona has written few original works during his exile. This is because he was forced for twenty-five years to make a living as a hack-writer in a strange land. He labored at writing for the Argentine motion-picture and television industries amid political upheavals nearly as chaotic as those which forced him to leave his homeland. It takes longer to write an original work. Also there is the challenge of trying one's hand at themes that have attracted artists for centuries. This was a challenge that lured Casona from his first attempts at writing. His works based upon writings by other authors are not dealt with in this paper.

The first play, Otra vez el diablo, is generally unavailable in the United States, for it has not been reprinted.
with the frequency of the more popular second play, *La sirena varada*. Thus *La sirena varada* was chosen for this analysis of humor although a privately-owned copy of *Otra vez el diablo* was obtained. The humor in *La sirena varada*, which is similar to that in *Otra vez*, is of far better execution.

*El Misterio del "María-Celeste"* is not a humorous play; the "María-Celeste" is, in fact, a ship. Apparently *El crimen de Lord Arturo* follows closely the light, sharp satire upon which it is based. It is impossible, without examination of works such as *El crimen* and *La molinera de arcos*, to tell what elements of humor are original with Casona and to what extent he borrowed humorous elements from his sources.

*The Romance de Dan y Elsa* was written just as Europe was entering the Second World War; although it is a comedy and is supposedly a light love story, it is basically an anti-war diatribe intended to please the neutralistic Argentines. *Romance de Dan y Elsa*, although made into a highly successful motion-picture, as were many of Casona's plays, is not expected to become an immortal work.

The biographies of Schubert and Madame Curie differ widely in that the former contains much humor in characters other than the tragicomic Schubert, while the Curie play has very little humor at all. In *La tercera palabra* and in *Corona de amor y muerte* there is lacking even the *gracioso* (humorous servant, buffoon, or wry older person). *La llave*
en el desván is the opposite of a comedy, and its companion piece, Siete gritos en el mar, contains no humor other than occasional bits of bitter sarcasm. This play is gloomy to the point of depression and shows clearly Casona's brooding over the threat of nuclear war and his distrust of the United States. It is the clearest example of his ever-stronger xenophobia and fear of U.S. imperialism.

La dama del alba contains light touches of gentle humor, especially in the delightful character of Telva and in the children. There is pathos combined with humor in the moving character of Death, La Peregrina. However, the play is not essentially humorous nor was it intended to be so.

La barca sin pescador has been excluded from our study for the same reason; its humor is not an intrinsic part of the play but is incidental—its function is that of Casona's humor in any play—a means of capturing or recapturing and riveting attention upon the message. The humor in La barca sin pescador is centered around two characters, the Devil who makes two brief appearances and Tío Mariano, who is a sort of aging and rustically innocent Gracioso, a foil for the bitter-sweet and tender portrayal of the Abuela.

To discuss at length the elements of humor in La dama del alba and in La barca sin pescador would necessarily involve a tangent dealing with Casona's portraits of the very old, which are his best characters. It could thus easily
comprise an entire study. Inasmuch as Casona treats the Abuela in Los árboles mueren de pie with the same tenderness and humor, an analysis of this one play will also aid us to understand his use of humor when portraying the soul of an Asturian vieja.

Casona wrote Otra vez el diablo in 1928, when he was yet a university student. He had just written a Master's thesis upon the subject of "The Devil in Art and Literature", and this led him to continue his contemplation of Good versus Evil in the form of a play which concerns a student who wins a princess by withstanding temptation. In a poetic last act in which Good and Evil are symbolized by red and white spotlights, the red being the Devil and the student's lust, the white representing the purity of the sleeping princess, the student comes face to face with reality and overcomes Evil. This play, "a comedy with the flavor of a fable", won third prize in a contest sponsored by the Madrid journal A B C. The play had to wait six years before it was produced.17

Since he had so little success in this first attempt at becoming a playwright, Casona was forced to take a job as a teacher in an isolated, snow-bound region of Northern Spain, the Valle de Arán. It was not a desirable post. He married Rosalía Martín, a fellow student at the Madrid teachers' college, and together they went to the valley in the Pyrenees.

17Balseiro and Owre, editors, La barca, pp. xiv-xv.
In 1930 their daughter Marta was born, and there Casona printed his book of poems, _La Flauta del Sapo_, on the school printing press. There in the Valle de Arán he organized a children's theater which he called "El Pájaro Pinto". He was both writer and director for the theater. It was "realizado a base de repertorio primitivo, comedia de arte y escenificaciones de tradiciones en dialecto aranés." These _fábulas animalistas y romances_ were retellings of Spanish legends and old myths and fables. They had the pedagogical aim of lifting the students culturally.

In the Valley of Arán in 1929 Casona wrote his second play, _La sirena varada_. Late in 1930 he got a better position "en tierras de León y en su nunca olvidada Asturias". With the coming of the Second Republic, a larger sphere of professional activity, both in the theater and in pedagogy, unfolded for Casona.

Already, in _Otra vez el diablo_—even though its action takes place "en un país imaginario"—Casona had given an intimation of his republican leanings in the subtle mockery of the king and the monarchy.... The Devil says: 'Decididamente no hay nada como la corte para mi vida de Diablo. La monarquía y yo tenemos la misma estética: somos barrocos.'

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18 Shoemaker, editor, _Nuestra Natacha_, p. xv.
19 Ibid.
20 Castellano, editor, _La dama del alba_, p. xi.
21 Shoemaker, editor, _Nuestra Natacha_, p. xvi.
22 Balseiro and Owre, editors, _La barca_, pp. xvi-xvii.
He took examinations in open competition and won the superintendency of the elementary schools of Madrid in 1931. At that time he was selected to organize and direct the Teatro del Pueblo (also called the Teatro Ambulante), which was a part of an educational project known as Las Misiones Pedagógicas. It was sponsored by the Second Republic. Casona himself describes his Teatro in this manner:

...escena andariega que paralelamente a 'La Barraca' de García Lorca, recorría el mapa rural de la península llevando los gozos del arte a los más apartados rincones campesinos.

As leader of the Misiones, Casona wrote, adapted, and directed plays. He trained volunteer student actors and personally led eight of the twenty Misiones conducted in 1932. Still today he considers his work with the Misiones as the best work of his active life.

For this group Casona wrote several one-act plays, among which are: El entremés del mancebo que casó con mujer brava, (the ancient Taming of the Shrew story from Juan Manuel's fourteenth-century El Conde Lucanor), Sancho Panza en la Isla Barataria (from the Quijote), and the Balada de Atta Troll, which was later incorporated into Nuestra Natacha.

23 Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, p. xvi.
24 Balseiro and Owre, editors, La barca, p. xvii.
26 Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, p. xviii.
The Teatro Ambulante's repertory included twelve pieces, among them Casona's versions of Juan del Encina, Lope de Rueda, Cervantes, Calderón, Ramón de la Cruz, the Quintero brothers, and Molière. Later in Argentina he collected some of these plays and published them in an anthology called El Retablo Jovial.27 This book is not available in the United States, but El Mancebo que casó con mujer brava has been put out on one side of a record by the Spanish Music Center in New York.28 It is very brief and extremely clever.

In 1932 Casona found time, between his superintendency of Madrid schools and his Teatro Ambulante, to write a series of beautiful versions of great epics. This Flor de Leyendas included the Ramayana, the Song of Roland, the Nibelungenlied, and of course the Poema del Cid. In his desire to provide for Spanish children a modern version of the immortal literature of the epics is seen another aspect of the artist-teacher.29 Flor de Leyendas won the Premio Nacional de Literatura for the year 1932.30 In 1933 he entered La sirena varada in a contest in which one hundred sixteen plays were

27Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, p. xviii.
28Spanish Music Company Pro-Arte series, La Hora de la Comedia: Gilito de los Hermanos Álvarez Quintero y El Mancebo que Casó con Mujer Brava de Casona (New York), n.d.
29Balseiro and Owre, editors, La barca, pp. xvii-xviii.
30Ibid., p. xvii.
entered. La sirena won the highest award for a play written in Spain, the Lope de Vega prize. It had a brilliant première on March 17, 1934, in the Teatro Español (the government-subsidized theater) in Madrid. Its success made Casona famous.31

Dos años después, con el estreno de Nuestra Natacha, ya era el autor dramático más popular de España.32

From the time of the estreno of La sirena varada Casona devoted himself wholly to the theater and ceased to be, professionally, an educator. He continued, however, to teach his philosophy of life. He continued with the Teatro Ambulante until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936.33

Within a year after the presentation of La sirena the other play, Otra vez el diablo, was produced; but it was not the great popular success that La sirena had been.34 It was a succès d'estime which enhanced his reputation with the critics. At this time began the lifelong close friendship with Margarita Xirgu whose company produced the first two plays. Casona said in 1958 that he wrote his famed La dama del alba expressly as a vehicle for La Xirgu.35

In the same year (1935) came a collection of teatro menor for the repertory of the University Theater, [Madrid]

31 Balseiro and Owre, editors, La barca, p. xviii.
32 Castellano, editor, La dama del alba, p. xii.
33 Balseiro and Owre, editors, La barca, p. xviii.
34 Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, pp. xxi-xxii.
35 Bernard Dulsey, "Letters to the Editor: An Afternoon with Casona", Hispania, XLIII (March, 1960), 79.
and an adaptation of Alfonso Hernández-Catá's magnificent story El misterio del "María-Celeste". The latter was performed by the Bambal Company, and was successful, although not outstanding.36

Nuestra Natacha was written during the summer of 1935.

From its first performance in Madrid... on February 6, 1936, this play achieved an unequaled run of over five hundred consecutive performances—this in a country where the normal theater-going public is not large and runs are rare.37

Castellano, discussing the teacher in Casona, says:

¿Qué es Nuestra Natacha sino una exposición viva de nuevos métodos de enseñanza y donde el elemento pedagógico constituye el nervio fundamental de la obra?38

Soon Nuestra Natacha was being given from Spanish Morocco to South America; every important female star has played the role of Natacha at least once. Translation and performances elsewhere in Europe followed immediately. Three motion-picture versions of it have been made. Within a few months, however, Casona was fleeing for his life; he had long been aligned with the anti-conservative and the liberal elements in Madrid. His Nuestra Natacha attacked the señorito class who backed Franco.39

He was taken in by the Díaz-Collado theatrical company which had got out of Spain and was leaving for Mexico and a tour of the Americas. After rescuing his wife and child,

36 Balseiro and Owre, editors, La barca, p. xix.
37 Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, pp. xxii-xxiii.
39 Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, p. xxv.
he became associated with the company as literary director; in Mexico City he finished and produced his fifth play, the humorous Prohibido suicidarse en primavera. From Mexico the troupe went down the continent to Buenos Aires. Along the way Casona wrote El crimen de Lord Arturo, Romance de Dan y Elsa, and La sinfonía inacabada, which is a tale of a romance between Franz Schubert and one of his piano pupils. Casona takes liberties with history and chronology but he recreates perfectly a "music-box Vienna" during the heyday of German-Austrian romanticism.40

Casona reached Buenos Aires in the spring of 1939 and there he remained for eleven years before moving across the river to an estate in Uruguay which he named "La Sirena".41

Of Casona's exile Castellano writes:

Desde junio de 1939 vive y trabaja en la Argentina escribiendo para el teatro—su verdadero amor de siempre—y para el cine de aquella nación que ha sabido apreciar sus méritos y remunerar sus esfuerzos.42

In 1940 Casona wrote, by request, a play based on the life of Marie Curie. He wrote María Curie in collaboration with Francisco Madrid; it was successful but not outstanding. Then he threw himself into the making of motion-pictures. He wrote many movie scripts, among them versions of his own plays,

40Balseiro and Owre, editors, La barca, pp. xx-xxii.
41Dulsey, "An Afternoon with Casona", Hispania, p. 79.
42Castellano, editor, La dama del alba, pp. xii-xiii.
Nuestra Natacha, *El misterio del "María-Celeste", Romance de Dan y Elsa*, and *La dama del alba*. Much later he did adaptations of some works of Galdós. In 1941 was produced his next play, *Las tres perfectas casadas*. Based upon the novel *The Old Bachelor* by Arthur Schnitzler, it ran two hundred performances.43 Its plot was borrowed by a young Spanish playwright in 1958. Alfonso Paso, who is considered by some to be one of the best of Spain's new generation of playwrights,44 wrote *Cena de matrimonios*, about which Sainz de Robles has this to say:

Su argumento es bien simple y ya no muy original—recordemos, sin acordarnos de obras extranjeras, *Las tres perfectas casadas*: tres matrimonios y un amigo soltero se reúnen cierto sábado para cenar juntos... Una llamada telefónica misteriosa anuncia que uno de los maridos es engañado por su mujer. ¿Cuál? Y se inician las dudas, las sospechas, las disculpas...45

Casona's masterpiece, *La dama del alba*, was written in 1944. The dedication reads, "A mi tierra de Asturias— a su paisaje, a sus hombres, a su espíritu."46

*La dama del alba* is a strong and warm evocation of Casona's native Asturias and is considered by many critics as the purest theater of all his dramatic writings.47

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44Juan Rodríguez Castellano, "El Estado Actual del Teatro Español", *Hispania*, XLI (December, 1958), 433.


46Castellano, editor, *La dama del alba*, Frontespiece.

This was the play chosen to be performed in Madrid when Casona made his triumphant return in 1962.48

La dama del alba is the mysterious, lovely, supernatural being who appears at a troubled rural Asturian home in the guise of a pilgrim traveling to a shrine. She is Death, befriended by the innocent children and recognized with terror by the aged grandfather. The play is a philosophical poem with a well-knit and busy plot concerning a run-away daughter believed dead and replaced by a young girl who has been rescued from suicide by the run-away daughter’s deserted husband. The characterization of the various types of people is good. The only fantasy is in the appearance of Death at the beginning and end of the play. The humor is concentrated in the magnificent Telva, aging servant in the unhappy household, whose sharp tongue and Asturian proverbs provide the humor. Telva spars with the hired hand, the children, the Abuelo, and the St. John’s Day celebrants in much the same manner that the Abuela in La barca sin pescador battles verbally with the simple Tío Marko. La dama del alba succeeds in bringing to life the atmosphere as well as the customs and quality of personality of the Asturian people.

La barca sin pescador contains more humor, mainly in its supernatural character, the Devil, who is an often-discouraged villain. All stories depicting the Devil’s making deals with

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human beings are variations on the Faust theme; in this case Ricardo Jordán, the regenerated prompter, outwits the Devil and remains in Norway, presumably to marry the young widow of the man he thought he had killed. Casona cannot be surpassed when creating likable Devils. La barca sin pescador came to the stage in 1945, and it was soon being performed from one end of South America to the other.

In 1947 came La molinera de arcos, a tonadilla in five scenes of Goyaesque flavor. This is a new version of El Sombrero de Tres Picos, based partly on the Alarcón novel and partly on the ballads on the same theme that preceded it. In April, 1949, Los árboles mueren de pie came to the boards. It has become, along with La dama del alba, the best-loved play of Casona's. It was "loudly acclaimed and like other earlier plays was translated into various languages and performed in many cities of Europe and America."\footnote{Balseiro and Owre, editors, \textit{La barca}, p. xxii.}

At that time the plays of the British playwright, J. B. Priestley, were popular in Buenos Aires. Casona himself admits having been impressed by Priestley's \textit{Dangerous Corner} and his \textit{I Was Here Before}.\footnote{Charles H. Leighton, "Alejandro Casona and the Significance of Dreams", \textit{Hispania}, XLV (December, 1962), 697-698.} These plays deal with the telescoping of time and space, with dreams, telepathy, murders not really committed, and para-psychology. By 1950 Casona
had entered his "psychological period" which lasted for two plays. *La llave en el desván* was written in 1951. It is somewhat like the award-winning American motion-picture of the 1940's in which Ingrid Bergman starred, *Spellbound*. Both plays delve into childhood traumas, dreams, the subconscious; and both were aimed at teaching the fundamentals of Freudian psychoanalysis to the public. In the Casona drama the psychological probing into the past as related by dreams is done by an amateur, the family doctor, instead of by Ingrid Bergman; but the dreams in both plays are the "keys to the trunks" in the attic of the mind. In the case of *La llave en el desván* the trunk is more of a Pandora's box—the hero-villain dreams of murdering his wife, Susana, who has betrayed him. He does eventually murder her, just as he had dreamed, in the rain, in front of his laboratory.51

In his play of 1952, *Siete gritos en el mar*, Casona explored dreams further.52 Nothing is farther from humor than this play. It is a version of the ancient "Ship of Fools" theme. Priestley's device of having the action of the play take place as a result of a loud noise, a pistol shot that occupies only a fraction of a split-second of time, is used by Casona. Between the knocking-over of an end-table in the dining


52Balseiro and Owre, editors, *La barca*, p. xxiii.
salon of an ocean liner and the consequent waking up of the 
hero-narrator, the action of the first two acts takes place. 
The device is a tour de force to some extent; the entire play 
is, until the third act, only a dream—and the audience becomes 
aware of the fact only as the third act begins exactly as did 
the first act. In Siete gritos the bewildered audience slowly 
realizes in the third act that the characters are not dead, 
and the ship has not sunk. However, the hero, because of his 
dream, is possessed of some valuable information concerning 
his fellow passengers.

Soon Casona was being imitated by young Argentine play-
wrights such as Álvaro Yunque who used a dream sequence in 
his Absurdo-13313 which is similar to that in Siete gritos.53

In 1952 Casona wrote La tercera palabra:

Its theme is God, Death, and Love, and its prota-
gonist is a modern descendant of the immortal Segism-
mundo, hero of La vida es sueño. Segismundo has been 
brought up in the forest, where his father has kept him 
ignorant of books, women, and the dangers of civili-
ization...

Casona says of the play, "Es tema muy español, que arran-
ca del filósofo autodidacto Abén-Tofail, el Criticón de Gracián 
y La vida es sueño, para volcarse con otro gesto en Voltaire 
y en Rousseau."54

In 1954 he fashioned out of one of Spain's favorite love 
stories, based upon an historical event of the fourteenth
century, a poetical tragedy in which he uses neither humor nor fantasy. The play, *Corona de amor y muerte*, had its estreno in Buenos Aires in March, 1955. The story is truly the Romeo and Juliet tale of Spain and Portugal.

*Corona de amor y muerte* uses one of the tragic themes which has most deeply moved the Iberian peninsula....Among the great romantic lovers, this pair, the Galician Inés de Castro and her prince Pedro of Portugal, stands out because the woman's influence upon her lover and upon the nation does not end with her supreme sacrifice, but rather lives on until the great passion makes her a queen at last, though after death.55

This theme is still being done; a recent Spanish version of the story is Juan Ignacio Luca de Tena's *¿Dónde vas, triste de ti?* which was included in the 1959-60 edition of Sainz de Robles' *Teatro Español*. The Luca de Tena play is referred to by Castellano as "el gran 'taquillazo' de la temporada 1956-57...una cosa espantosa debida a la lamentable pluma de Ignacio Luca de Tena".56 Not all of Casona's imitators are successful. Between 1956 and 1962 Casona completed three new plays which have not been published. *La casa de los siete balcones*, which opened in Buenos Aires in April, 1957,

...es una comedia poética y difícil en la que se advierte parentesco especial con *La dama* y con *La sirena*. Es también una comedia extraña, con fantasmas familiares,

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56Juan Rodríguez Castellano, "Estado Actual del Teatro Español", *Hispania*, p. 433.
pero de gran fuerza atractiva por la rareza de tema y de personajes....La impresión que esta obra deja en el lector o espectador es que los dos personajes negativos nunca encontrarán la felicidad que buscan...57

It is lamentable that as yet this work is not available, for there are indications that Casona has returned to the fantasy and humor of his earlier plays with, perhaps, a more lenient attitude towards those who seek to escape into unreality and with less preachment.

The last two known plays of Casona's, about which nothing is known more than their titles, are Sombras queridas and Tres diamantes y una mujer, which was awaiting its estreno in Buenos Aires in 1959.58

Castellano reports that a complete works is indeed in progress and that it will include, in its next volume, La casa de los siete balcones, which Castellano read in a type-written manuscript sent to him by Casona in a letter.59

It is to be hoped that Casona will return to the style of his former writings and will produce more plays that teach but that are amusing at the same time, using humor as the Scriptures use parables.

57Castellano, "Las Doctrinas Pedagógicas de Alejandro Casona", Hispania, pp. 28-29.

58Dulsey, "An Afternoon with Casona", Hispania, p. 79.

59Castellano, "Las Doctrinas Pedagógicas de Alejandro Casona", Hispania, p. 29.
CHAPTER II

HUMOR IN FOUR PLAYS OF CASONA

La Sirena Varada

La sirena varada, the second play written by Casona but the first to be produced upon the stage, made its author famous overnight. It is easy to see why this play established his reputation. It shows a truly wonderful talent for use of stage lighting and music, stage effects, unusual settings, and technique in mood setting. In this early play, as in the first written, Otra vez el diablo, Casona uses unusual lighting to indicate emotional, mental, and moral states of major characters. In La sirena varada red and green are used, surrealistically, to suggest confusion of mind in the first two acts; white light in the final act indicates the return of reason to the would-be mermaid and takes away the eeriness from the old mansion and its inmates.

La sirena varada is a realistic fantasy in which Casona uses zany characters and tragically serious ones mingled together without a break in their believability; sometimes one character, like the "ghost", is both at the same time. Casona's fantasy from the beginning of his career is superimposed upon the most realistic situations. It often takes a second look to convince the spectator that fantasy is being used. The characters are so natural that the peculiar
situation appears normal until a few strange lines of dialogue lead the spectator into a maze of incomprehensible insanity—which Casona explains later in a logical manner.

La sirena varada, The Stranded Mermaid, is set in an old mansion in a deserted spot on a seacoast. The hero, Ricardo, is a disillusioned and bored young man from a wealthy family. He has retired from his life as a señorito to start a colony of non-conformists. He anticipates other characters in future plays by Casona—Lalo in Nuestra Natasha, Fernando and Dr. Roda in Prohibido suicidarse en primavera, and the Director, Mauricio, in Los árboles mueren de pie. Ricardo has already added the first member of his colony when the play opens. This first member is Daniel, a tragic character who is an artist but does not paint and goes about with his eyes bandaged. He is tired of all the conventional colors and prefers, he says, to imagine new and better colors. This is his refusal to admit that he is blind. Daniel, like many characters in Casona, has a symbolic meaning.

The house has come equipped with a shy, reluctant ghost. The ghost is really a hungry and gentle old man who had taken up residence in the house in past years, when it was empty. He had raised a little garden, read the books in the library, lived very frugally, and enjoyed life. But when the house was rented, he had to hide from the tenants. At a whim of Ricardo's, he becomes a "ghost" professionally.
Casona uses the arrival of a guest most effectively as a device at the beginning of a play, or as in *Nuestra Natacha*, both at the beginning and at the end. Explanation to the guest gives necessary exposition for the benefit of the audience. The recently-arrived visitor on stage as *La sirena varada* begins is an old friend of Ricardo's family, Don Florín, a medical doctor whose function in this play is similar to the function of Don Santiago in *Nuestra Natacha*. Don Florín has come to see how Ricardo is coming along with his wild scheme and also to try to dissuade the young man from such an idiotic whim. Interest in Ricardo is built up in the opening scenes so that when Ricardo does appear, the audience is anxious to see what he is like. Ricardo introduces the humor into the play; and, during most of the first act, he carries most of the humor in his dry remarks. Ricardo is cultured and highly eccentric, but it is not apparent until he opens his mouth. His first speech indicates something of his loose grasp upon reality. The doctor and the manservant, Pedrote, discuss Ricardo's venture with a rueful air as the play opens. Ricardo and Daniel at length appear; it is three in the morning and the doctor has been waiting for hours. Told the hour, Ricardo says, "Three o'clock—-a.m. or p.m.?"¹ Ricardo and Daniel are very vague; they do not explain where they have been at that hour of the night.

Pedrote is unable to offer a proper meal to the guest because Ricardo, perpetually off in the clouds, cannot concern himself with such mundane matters as getting in food. Ricardo wants breakfast; Pedrote has no milk; he has no money to go buy food. Pedrote has been complaining about a ghost in the house. Ricardo has previously told Pedrote to leave the ghost some rum and cheese since they had run out of milk. Pedrote asks what to leave tonight and Ricardo suggests rum and olives, if the cheese is gone; the ghost seemed to like the rum. Ricardo indicates, mostly by gestures, that he believes that Pedrote is the so-called ghost.

Casona's interest in Freudian psychology is apparent even in this early work. Ricardo tells of his sad childhood in a gloomy house with a repressive and strict mother; this same childhood is mentioned again in Siete gritos en el mar. Now that Ricardo is adult and in possession of his inheritance, he intends to live as he pleases. He is going to found a republic "de hombres solos donde no exista el sentido común." Don Florín is cynical about the colony: "¡Admirable! ¿Y para cuántos días?" Ricardo answers, "Para siempre." Don Florín is still cynical: "Demasiado; ya serán unos días menos."²

²Gillespie, editor, La sirena verdada, p. 11.
Demasiada razón, demasiada disciplina en todo. Y he pensado que en cualquier rincón hay media docena de hombres interesantes, con fantasía y sin sentido, que se están pudriendo entre los demás. Pues bien: yo voy a reunirlos en mi casa, libres y disparatados. A inventar una vida nueva, a soñar imposibles. Y todos conmigo, en esta casa: un asilo para huérfanos de sentido común. ....Y a nuestra puerta habrá un cartel diciendo: "Nadie entre que sepa geometría."³

Ricardo then asks the good doctor, who is quite sane and very disinclined to youthful fancies, if he can see the tree over there. Since this tree is a figment of Ricardo's playful imagination, the old gentleman cannot see it. Daniel claims to see it; "¡Hermoso roble!" he exclaims. This then is the difference, says Ricardo, between his republic and the doctor's world. When Pedrote enters with a tray, Ricardo shouts "¡Cuidado con ese árbol, Pedrote!" and Pedrote obligingly swerves to avoid it, saying politely, "¡No me habría fijado!"⁴ This is the first funny humor.

Don Florín is still not convinced that Ricardo has found his Erehwon. "...Pero ya te conozco: carnavalada para unos días, y a aburrirse otra vez por el mundo. Neurastenia."

Ricardo says of the ghost whom he has not seen: "Lo alquilé con la casa, pero no funciona."⁵ Ricardo is expecting at any moment the arrival of the chief member of his colony, to whom he has written, whom he calls, "Presidente

³Gillespie, editor, La sirena varada, pp. 11-12.
⁴Ibid., p. 13.
⁵Ibid., p. 14.
de nuestra república", the clown from an Italian circus, Papa Samy. He is described by Ricardo: "¡Conoce la Biblia y las estrellas!... un hombre sin sentido, soñador y borracho." 6

Samy's young daughter is discussed briefly. Ricardo vaguely remembers her; she had green eyes and was a strange one. Ricardo is not very interested in her memory; she fell overboard in years past during a trip by boat from Italy to Spain, and Ricardo saved her. Later word came that the girl had drowned elsewhere in the ocean. He appears to be not the least moved by the sad fate of the grateful girl who kissed his hands and called him Padrino when he saved her. Ricardo's sin is coldness; he bursts into "La Donna è mobile" at the end of his memories of her. Then he sees the ghost and cuts off his song in mid air. This pathetic character has a problem; he must be a convincing ghost or be thrown out of the house.

The ghost creeps upon the stage, dressed more-or-less as a ghost, and says morosely, "¡Miserable mortal!" Ricardo is pleased: "Formidable; un fantasma de la vieja escuela." 7 The ghost replies that he would certainly appreciate it if they would close the window; he hates drafts. The illusion is broken. Don Florín thinks that it is a practical joke.

6Gillespie, editor, La sirena, p. 17.
7Ibid., p. 19.
Ricardo swears that it is not a joke. The ghost explains that his name is Don Joaquín and he assures them that he is real and harmless. Ricardo is indignant, "¿Es posible que no sea usted un fantasma serio?"8

The tragicomical ghost is the major source of humor in the play; his sad little tale constitutes the most sustained, subtle, and wistful humor in the play. Casona often uses more humor in the first act, to secure the interest of his audience, than in the later acts when the interest is assured. The ghost tells Ricardo that he began dressing as a ghost to keep strangers out of the deserted house. Now he has had to let his little garden go to ruin. He has to hide all day in the attic; he is hungry. He says of his studies about how to be a ghost, "¿Qué libros, santo Dios! ¡Los pelos se me ponían de punta!"9 And worst of all, the house last night began moving, turning around and around. Ricardo remembers the bottle of rum left for the ghost. The poor ghost wants to leave the place; he is tired of playing ghost in order to have a roof over his head. Sleeping in a trunk in the attic is not like having the master bedroom. He is beginning to wonder if he really has been dead for centuries and is really a ghost. Ricardo cruelly half-convinces the befuddled old man that he is really dead. *No cabe duda;*  

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9Ibid., p. 21.
usted está muerto...Usted es...Napoleón." He calls Pedrote and tells him to feed Napoleon and to put him to bed in Pedro- te's own room. As the ghost leaves, Ricardo says, "Ya somos tres." As the doctor objects to such cavalier treatment of the innocent old man, Ricardo defends his irresponsible words to the ghost: "Nada de graciosó. He procurado darle una vida nueva y maravillosa; eso es todo."  

Sirena's strange, unreal entrance, her mysterious presence, and her unreal behavior and words are not obviously fantasy. Mystery is piled upon mystery until the end of the act. Is Sirena really a mermaid or not? Casona, as usual, makes it clear that she is not with her insane speech at the end of the act.  

Sirena's mysterious appearance through a window onto a balcony overlooking the living room where the action takes place is accompanied by the red and green lights and by appropriately weird music. She is announced by Pedrote: "Señor, hay una sombra trepando a ese balcon." Ricardo thinks it is Papa Samy who has arrived and chosen to enter in this odd fashion. Florín, thinking this to be another joke, goes to bed. Ricardo laughs, runs to the balcony, and finds there Sirena dressed in "un traje verde de fantasía".  

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Sirena runs to Ricardo and cries, "Dicki!" She throws her arms about his neck and kisses him. She begs him to forgive her for making him wait. It was not her fault; they have been holding her prisoner. She likes this house, but it should be painted more of a blue—the sea is so far away. Then with fright she says, "¿No eres tú Ricardo?" Her obvious fright at the end of her first speech dispels any tendency towards laughter that might occur because of her oddness. She is clearly not a comic character and nothing that she says can be construed as funny. Casona is now through with humor for the rest of the first act. Ricardo is enchanted with this creature who has appeared from nowhere; he goes along with her tale that she is a mermaid from the sea, beached on land against her wishes. It is not at all clear whether she is really supernatural at this point. Doubt as to what turn the plot is taking removes all lingering memory of the sadly funny ghost.

What begins as playing games for Ricardo soon becomes all too serious. But in this introductory scene which ends the first act, Sirena is convincing. Ricardo is as happy and as credulous as a child with a new toy. He half-believes that she is a magical creature from the sea. "¡Júrame que eres una sirena!" he begs. "¿No lo sabes ya?" she answers.\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\)Gillespie, editor, *La sirena*, p. 27.

\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 29.
Enchanted, Ricardo asks the mermaid to sing; she says at first that she is tired—the light of the day is so wearying. It is not day; it is about five in the morning. This is a first hint to the audience. "Which is our room, Dick?" she asks. This wakes up a few members of the audience who are not poetically inclined. Ricardo answers, "Ésa. Pero no vayas aún; yo no dormiré hoy." She says, "Eres cruel", but she sits down and takes his head in her lap and sings the weird, shocking-beautiful travesty of the "Song of Solomon" from the Bible to him. She kisses him and calls him "¿Padrino?" which gives away her identity. Ricardo, now serious, asks who she is. She draws back in fear and cries, "Don't hit me!" Then, turning her eyes towards the windows, where dawn is breaking, she says, "Look—now it is completely day—Good night." It is Papa Samy's daughter; she is insane.

The second act begins quietly. Pedrote is telling the ghost not to appear until midnight—that is the proper hour. The ghost says, "Mira, Pedrote, yo creo que tu señorito está chiflado." "¿Chiflado?" retorts the loyal servant, "Se dice excéntrico." Sirena and Daniel enter and the ghost, trying to obey Ricardo's orders, flees. Daniel in this scene admits to Sirena that he is blind, but she is too insane to realize what he is saying. This is why he can confess to her; it is

15 Gillespie, editor, La sirena, pp. 30-32.
16 Ibid., p. 34.
not a confession. "You are blue with a white smile...", Daniel tells her.\(^\text{17}\) Ricardo and Don Florín enter now; and Sirena shows an instinctive dislike for the medical doctor, who disapproves of her and is suspicious of her motives. Ricardo tries, still rather playfully, to discover if she is really a mermaid. He has been waiting for her down by the sea, he says. She fears that Ricardo will force her to move from the seashore to the mountains. She goes out. Don Florín delivers a serious harangue unbroken by humor.

Casona in this early play has not yet perfected the delivery of a serious section of a play interspersed with single lines of great seriousness and great humor simultaneously, as he does later in *Los árboles mueren de pie*. Florín's speech to Ricardo is not answered now by any funny remarks of Ricardo's. Ricardo is rather limp in his own defense, and the audience is led from tidbit of humor to tidbit as a donkey follows a carrot. The next humor is long in coming.

Don Florín tells Ricardo that he is in love with the girl; she may be part of a plot by Samy to get his money. "El amor necesita la verdad", says the doctor. "Sirena es una deliciosa mentira que no estoy dispuesto a cambiar por ninguna verdad," says Ricardo stubbornly. He is selfishly willing to keep her the way she is for his own amusement.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{17}\text{Gillespie, editor, *La sirena*, p. 40.}\)

\(^{18}\text{Ibid., pp. 43-44.}\)
Florín asks his godson, Ricardo, to return to the city with him. He suspects the girl is Samy's daughter; he distrusts the wily old clown. Florín and Ricardo part on terms that are hardly friendly. The doctor en route out makes an attempt to reach Sirena, who is still afraid of him. He says that he will soon be needed and will return.

Nevertheless, Florín's talk has set Ricardo to thinking. From this conversation on throughout the rest of the act Ricardo makes a serious attempt to discover Sirena's true identity. Sirena, in her big scene with Ricardo, is evasive, upset, and offended by his curiosity. Ricardo in exasperation, realizing that he truly loves the mermaid, cries, "Esta vida arbitraria que nos hemos creado empieza a marearme."19 This is the turning point of the play; Ricardo is saved. His eyes are now opened to the romantic and pointless folly of his irresponsible, cloistered life, his avoiding of reality. He begins to see that Sirena is mentally confused and needs help. Her disorientation has orientated him. His playing at fantasy with mock ghosts fades before the red and green glow of genuine and hopeless mental fantasy. He asks her once more who she is. "Soy blanca y azul,"20 she replies. Finally he drives her to flee in tears. She has decided that his questions mean he does not love her;

19 Gillespie, editor, La sirena, p. 53.
20 Ibid., p. 55.
she babbles of a son, "verde y amargo, mi niño." His shouts at her terrify her. She does not wish, she says, for him to see her cry; he, as upset as she is, follows her off the stage.

Without any transition comes the only truly funny scene in the play. This scene is used as a mood-changer and sweeper-away of built-up tensions so that the mystery may be extended longer without losing interest. This is the first time that Casona uses the terribly serious scene broken abruptly by an unexpected and comical comment or scene. The relief of tension automatically causes laughter; it is the famous, "Tennis, anyone?" (from the American play The Philadelphia Story) use of humor.

As Ricardo, frantic, follows the weeping mermaid off the stage, the ghost comes in from the other side. Don Joaquín is totally unaware of the tragedy in progress. He is trying to be Napoléon and he quotes a speech of Napoleon's later on in the scene. "Greetings, human; it has struck twelve," intones the ghost to an empty stage.22

Papa Samy, Sirena's tragic, weak father enters. He has just arrived, not to join Ricardo's colony but in search of his mad daughter. Pedro has ushered Samy in to wait for Ricardo. Samy is deeply worried. The ghost, seeing an opportunity to have some company, begins what he considers a

21 Gillespie, editor, La sirena, p. 55.
22 Ibid., p. 58.
good Napoleonic conversation. He begins Napoleon's Egyptian speech. "¡Soldados, desde la cumbre de esas pirámides cuarenta siglos contemplan vuestro valor!" Papa Samy, acting as if he hasn't heard, says absently, "Buenas noches". The ghost, in an aside to the audience, says, "No he hecho efecto". He explains to Samy that although he may easily be taken for the ghost of Napoleon, he really is not. He is Don Joaquín. The old man is trying to retain his sanity, his soul, his individual personality. Samy, brooding, again says politely, "Buenas noches". Slightly depressed at this brush-off, the ghost says in another aside, "¡Granito!"

Ricardo enters and rushes to greet Papa Samy. "¡Soldados!" says Don Joaquín, "desde la cumbre de esas pirámides..." Ricardo tells him rudely to shut up: "¡Fuera!" The frustrated Napoleon leaves, a tragic figure.

The cross-purpose conversation, or conversation on two levels or upon totally unrelated odd subjects at the same time is used by Casona later in a much funnier scene in the first act of Los árboles mueren de pie. Casona took for that play this scene from La sirena and rewrote it in longer form. He kept the circus clown and changed the erudite old bum into a retired professor of languages. Each party in the scene in Los árboles ignores the other; no one is hurt, as in La sirena. The ghost is the first version of a character who appears in

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23 Gillespie, editor, La sirena, pp. 59-60.
many later plays. Casona has a set of stock characters who reappear frequently; this may be the result of writing for the Josefina Díaz company which had a set number of actors.

Samy is Casona's best villain; he is not evil but weak. He loves his daughter, but he is cowardly and cannot resist either fear of violence or drink. Samy has let the world think that his daughter is dead rather than admit her illness. Ricardo, even when faced with the brutal truth from the father of the girl, still clings to the half-belief that she is not insane. He has given up his belief that she is a mermaid.

Sirena is not happy to see her father; she shows fear and begs not to be taken back. She realizes that her father has told of her madness, and she insists that it is a lie. She is not totally insane, else she would not realize that she is considered to be mad. The act ends with the question of whether or not Ricardo will accept her madness; and can she, perhaps, be cured?

As in most of Casona's plays, there is a longer gap in time between the next-to-last act and the last one than between other acts. In the third and last act of La sirena, a strong clear white light has removed the gothic shadows from the stage and from Sirena...it is the light of sanity.
The colony is terminated; Ricardo is no longer seeking escape. Reason and sanity have returned to Sirena. Doctor Florín has returned and cured the girl. The ghost has been released from his bondage to a ghost role he did not want; he is doing well with his garden and orchard. Sirena is now called María, and Pedrote is running the place. Samy also is there. Ricardo's love for María has enabled him to accept her illness to some extent, but he has in this act a relapse which is not unusual in Casona's plays. The road to reason is hard. María has been found to be pregnant, as is Marga in the later play Nuestra Natacha. Ricardo is going to move her to the mountain where she will never see and be obsessed by the sea again. Only the blind artist Daniel clings to his private illusion.

But the conflict is yet to come. The owner of the circus, Pipo, for whom Samy has worked, arrives to punish Samy and Sirena for running away. Pipo is an old school villain of the moustache variety; he is a bully and a bluffer. Pipo had taken the young girl as his mistress and he is the father of her child. He does not want her back; he wants mostly to terrorize Samy. The scene in which Samy encounters Pipo and in which Doctor Florín tries to prevent Pipo from seeing and telling Ricardo about María is recreated later in Los árboles mueren de pie in a scene between the two Mauricios. Ricardo's
driving Pipo away is the denouement of the play. No humor
follows the denouement. Samy goes off and returns very in-
toxicated in the scene with the evil character Pipo. Samy’s
entrance is a tragic rephrasing of the comic entry of the
ghost earlier in the play. Samy enters singing the “Mar-
seillaise” in broken French and waving a bottle. He is dis-
gusting rather than comical.

Casona allows Ricardo to accept the ruined María without
humiliation; Ricardo’s love for her is great. He does have
a violent reaction to this blow to his ego; when Sirena ap-
ppears for the only time in this last act, Ricardo begs her to
return with him to that never-never land from which she came.
He wants her to be the lovely mermaid singing to him on the
balcony rather than the pregnant María whose past is tragic
and sordid. But time cannot be turned back; sanity is better
than fantasy. Ricardo finally vents his anger on the long-
suffering Doctor Florín who has cured María. María cannot
go back to the sea; she no longer remembers her obsession.
She will not answer to the name “Sirena”. She is being saved
by motherhood, as her counterpart, Marga, is saved in Nuestra
Natacha. Ricardo tries to drag Daniel back to reality by tear-
ing his blindfold from his eyes, but Daniel is hopelessly lost
to unreality. Ricardo, as the play closes, is being led to
sanity by the serene María. At last she sleeps, and Ricardo
calls her “María” for the first time. Sanity has won.
Nuestra Natacha begins at a university in Spain, and the action centers around a small group of carefree students who are friends of Natacha's. The play opens with Aguilar and Somolinos on stage discussing the latest protest to University officials and the battles that are raging between students and police. It is reported that Lalo has been hurt in a fight on San Carlos. The audience has had time to wonder who Lalo is when in he comes with a bandage upon his head that gives the impression that he is severely wounded.

This young man, Lalo, is wealthy, brilliant, shiftless, good-humored, and a professional student. He carries most of the humor in the play, aided to some extent by a young pair of reluctant lovers named Mario and Flora.

"Es la tercera vez que me abren la cabeza en San Carlos. No sé qué empeño tienen esos bárbaros en averiguar lo que llevo dentro," says Lalo. He is enjoying being, temporarily, a wounded hero. When asked why he got mixed up in the street brawl and which side he was on, he replies, "¿Qué iba yo a hacer? Era una tentación...mi deber era ponerme donde hubiera menos [personas]." His prosaic friend Somolinos replies, "Ya. Romanticismo puro." Thus within minutes Lalo launches into the sardonic humor which all scenes

in which he appears possess. Lalo expounds:

Llegué en un taxi. Me acerqué a uno para preguntarle. Tenía un aspecto entre estudiante y obrero; estaba mirando desde lejos, en silencio y con un gran aire filosófico, como si la cosa no fuera con él. Le dije: camarada. Entonces se volvió, sacó la porra y zas. Un admirable ejemplo de laconismo. Cuando desperté estaba dentro de la Facultad, en brazos de esa muchachita rubia de Preparatorio, que me miraba llena de lágrimas. ¡Oh, es el gran momento de los heridos!

Rivera, upon entering, sees to Lalo’s wound:

Rivera: Pero, oye tú, ¿para esto te has puesto una venda de seis metros?

Aguilar: ¿Qué es?

Rivera: Si no tiene nada.

Lalo: ¿No?

Rivera: Nada, un rasguño.

Lalo: ¡Demonio!...Oye ¿y no se podría abrir un poco más?

Upon Rivera’s departure Lalo complains again: "Adiós... santa Isabel de Hungría. Es intratable este hombre. Se toma todas las cosas con una gravedad... ¿Qué culpa tengo yo de no haber recibido un estacazo más eficaz?"

A discussion of the just-finished examinations ensues, and Lalo’s strange attitude towards school is revealed. Lalo desires to fail his examinations; this is the opposite of the normal attitude. His smug assurance that he has indeed failed provides humor later in the act. But Lalo explains why: he

2Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, p. 5.

3Ibid., p. 6.
wishes to learn about life, to drink his youth to the last drop. To study is not enough—one must also live. He gives an example of the student in the ivory tower: his friend, Aguilar, who knows the heredity of peas but not when to sow them. Later Lalo scores his friend, Mario, who is an advanced student of entomology. Lalo says that Mario is so sabio that he is a half-wit. Mario is writing a paper on the mating habits of insects, but he is so involved in the love life of his subjects that he is unaware of his own non-existent love life. Flora, a student who constantly brings Mario specimens that she loathes to touch, is madly in love with him, but he is totally unaware of it.

Lalo's description of his college career is one of the wittiest speeches in the play. He says that he is thirty years old:

He he catorce que empecé a estudiar Medicina; tres generaciones han pasado sobre mi cadáver, y yo aquí, firme en mi puesto. Si la suerte me ayuda un poco, no terminaré en otros, catorce. ¿Y qué? ¿Creéis que he perdido el tiempo?*

Casona uses for the first time in Lalo's speech his leit-motif for many years to come, expressive of his own future philosophy of life; but he uses it here humorously and negatively, as later in this play he will have Natacha use it positively and seriously: "firme en mi puesto". Natacha ends

the play with this speech, in her case, of self-sacrifice.

Lalo says, regarding his educational career, "El primer año me suspendieron en Disección, pero aprendí carpintería; el segundo me colgaron en Fisiología general, pero aprendí a cultivar el maíz; el tercero cay en Patología y Terapéutica, pero aprendí la cría del conejo y a fabricar cestos de mimbre." Lalo has a now-deserted farm inherited from his grandparents, abandoned forty years, that he may make his "desert island". He half-seriously suggests that they all quit school and go there to create a model farm or factory. Aguilar says, "No, gracias. Demasiadas cabezas y pocas manos."6

In the first part of the first act, Lalo's function is that of a narrator, introducing the characters and giving the background information. His humor is the most typical use of humor in Casona as a means of getting attention while a stage is set and while a problem is being posed, which he will answer philosophically. Lalo is the foil for Natacha's sacrifice; he is her counterpart and opposite.

Mario enters now, returning from collecting specimens; he enters carrying a butterfly net. He is a comic type at first glance. Lalo's description of Mario as the absent-minded professor type goes: "...El otro día, creyendo que era un diccionario lo que tenía en la mano, se pasó media


Aguilar defends Mario by predicting that he will go far in his profession. Lalo retorts, "Lo está sobornando con escarabajos."8

The amusing little scene over the insect that the adoring Flora has brought Mario as a love-offering explains adequately the serio-comic Mario's personality. Lalo takes the cérberis tuberculata and looks at it from all angles as Mario raves about the specimen. Then Lalo returns it, saying, "Hijo mío, será todo lo reina de leyenda que tú quieras; pero yo no veo aquí más que un coleóptero indecente." Mario is horrified: "¡Un coleóptero! ¿Has dicho un coleóptero? Por Dios, Lalo; el cérberis es un himenóptero."9

When Flora asks if they have seen the newspapers, Lalo asks brightly, "¿Traen lo de San Carlos?"10 as if he expects the papers to carry a write-up of his injury. This is humor based upon false vanity, a humorous device that Casona uses expertly but rarely.

The papers, instead, have a large picture and article featuring their friend, Natalia Valdés, whom they fondly call "Nuestra Natacha". She has just received her doctorate in Pedagogy. She is the first woman in Spain to do so. The students now plan a party for her—at Lalo's expense.

7 Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, p. 10.
8 Ibid. 9 Ibid., pp. 11-12. 10 Ibid., p. 13.
Abruptly Lalo ceases to be a wag and asks, seriously, if Rivera and Aguilar are in love with Natacha, as he is. They admit that they are. Under Lalo's flippant discussion of being a failure romantically lies Casona's faith in life and in love's healing powers. In this play Casona teaches by having Lalo say the reverse of what he wishes to get across to the audience; while laughing at Lalo, it gets the message.

Lalo: ...En amor, como en todo, ¡es tan hermoso fracasar!

... El fracaso templa el ánimo; es un magnífico manantial de optimismo. Todo hombre inteligente debiera procurarse por lo menos un fracaso al mes.

Rivera: Pues no creo que sea nada difícil.

...Tan bello como es el papel de víctima, cuando se sabe llevar. El herido, el desterrado, el amante sin esperanza... ¿Qué le pides relaciones a una compañera? Conseguir que te diga que no... ¡Y dices tú que no es difícil!11

Much humor in Casona is based upon incongruity; things taken from the wrong point of view serve as sermons:

Lalo: ...¿Tú viste ayer mi examen de Medicina legal?

Rivera: Sí, no lo recuerdas. Fué espantoso.

Lalo: ¿Verdad? Pero, ¿qué iba yo a hacer? Era mi última asignatura; había que cuidarla.

El profesor me miró al empezar ¡con unas ganas de aprobarme! Pero yo me defendí como un león....Ah, los que no sentís esta emoción del fracaso, no comprenderéis nunca la esencia del romanticismo.12

The point that Casona makes here is that romanticism is wrong because it is based upon pessimism; optimism alone is healthy and can carry one through life’s vicissitudes. He was to test this theory in his own life within months; the exile that Lalo speaks of so flippantly became for Casona a reality. In his next play, Prohibido suicidarse en primaveras, Casona shows that he still holds firmly to optimism. No play of his is more optimistic than Prohibido.

With the entry of Natacha, a mystery builds around her, increasing in crescendo throughout her first scene; it is explained in the following scene. Natacha enters with her guardian, Don Santiago, who is a University official and a wealthy old bachelor. He rescued Natacha as a young girl from a reform school to which she was sent because she was a hard-to-manage orphan. When mention is made of Lalo’s projected summer theater and its planned visit to the Reformatorio de las Damas Azules, Natacha gasps, "¿Al Reformatorio de las Damas Azules? ¡No! 13

When Natacha is invited to the party the students are giving in her honor, they disperse to prepare the party, and

13Ibid., p. 15.
this leaves Natacha and her guardian to inform the audience of Natacha's past unhappy experience with the Reformatorio.

As Flora and Mario leave, Lalo comments, "La Flora y la fauna."

Lalo, before departing, gives a bit of pedagogical philosophy which abounds in this play: "un buen profesor debe parecerse lo más posible a un mal estudiante..."\(^1\)

Lalo alternates in this act between light commentary and deadly seriousness that at times is nearly pathetic. He switches again to his gaiety, which the audience soon sees is but a front for a very serious and confused young man. Lalo proposes to Natacha with silliness and tragic hope:

Lalo: ...Datos concretos: he aquí mi ficha. (Saca una cartulina del bolsillo y lee.) 'Lalo Figueras. Estudiante de Medicina. Treinta años. Herido tres veces en San Carlos....No habla alemán"....He tenido una novia alemana. No lo hare más....soy un romántico.

Natacha gives the calabazas to Lalo in what may be some day the classic turning-down in Spanish literature; she delivers him a lecture:

Natacha: No me gusta nada el romanticismo. Es la tristeza organizada como espectáculo público: llantos desmelenados, venenos, adulterios y músicos tuberculosos...

This sentiment is the germ of Casona's next play, Prohibido suicidarse en primavera.

Natacha continues: "...con muy poco más sería usted un salvaje perfecto....De quien está usted verdaderamente

\(^1\)Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, p. 17.
enamorado es de sí mismo....Usted sería un magnífico profesor de optimismo." She tells him to renounce his medical career --the world does not need one more bad doctor. Rather, he should go to find the poor, the sick, the laborers in forgotten hamlets; he should sing and play the guitar and teach these folk to laugh again. Then she will consider him the best of her friends.  

Lalo's reaction is to retreat within his bastion of zaniness. Don Félix Sandoval, a stuffy medical doctor who is connected with the Reformatorio de las Damas Azules, now appears and inquires politely for Natacha. He has the misfortune to meet with Lalo, who bewilders the old gentleman with a series of utterly crazy remarks about having been turned down by the lady--then he misdirects the doctor and sends him on a wild goose chase. When Don Félix returns, after having travelled in a circle, he again finds Figueras. Lalo has, to his horror, passed his courses. He is now a medical doctor. Mario and Rivera, leaving, say, "Respetemos su dolor", and, "Resignación, Lalo". The return of Don Félix finds Lalo, previously happily flippant as he told of being jilted, now in the depths of a gloom which is genuine. Lalo says, "¡Ay! Hace un momento yo era un estudiante. ¡Un estudiante, señor! Ahora soy un animal jurídico responsable.

15Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, p. 22.
Usted es médico también, ¿no?" Sandoval, mystified, answers, "También." Dramatically Lalo cries, "Entorne usted así los ojos. Mire al porvenir: clavículas rotas, fiebres terciornas, partos atroces... Y yo por esos caminos, en una mula, con un paraguas rojo..." Before Sandoval can take in this outburst, Lalo asks the surprised gentleman to have a drink with him; Lalo breaks his glass and abruptly leaves. 17

At last Sandoval finds Natacha. He arranges for her to take a position as head of the school she hated so as an inmate, and she agrees to do so on the condition that she will have a free hand to make changes. It is clear that neither Sandoval nor the students know anything of Natacha's past. Natacha calls her friends together for a toast to her new position. She says, "Vivir es trabajar para el mundo." Lalo brightens a bit and says, "¡Mañana mismo me matriculo en Filosofía y Letras!" 18

The curtain of the first act descends upon Natacha the positive and Lalo the negative and unredeemed.

There is pleasant dialogue in all of the second act, but it is because of the graciousness of the young girls in the Reformatorio and the dry humor of Natacha rather than the result of any definite exchanges of wit between the

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17 Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, p. 27.
18 Ibid., p. 30.
characters, except in one scene between two of the young people.

The act takes place entirely in the Reformatorio de las Damas Azules, which is supported by a group of malhechores del bien and is headed by a Marquesa of the Pardo-Bazán era. It is run, until Natacha arrives, by the formidable Señorita Crespo. She becomes Natacha's unwilling assistant and disapproves highly of Natacha's methods. There is also a Conserje whose power for psychological terrorizing of the girls is dependent mostly upon his military-like uniform, which Natacha persuades him to discard. He alone has been there for years and was there when Natacha was the school's worst girl. The Conserje begins as a sinister, almost cruel, character, and ends as a harmless and faintly humorous one. He, however, sides with Crespo at first in her disapproval of Natacha's methods.

The inmates of the school are introduced to Natacha in a charming scene; there are twenty-nine young girls. One, the current incorrigible, is locked up in solitary confinement where Natacha spent much time in her unhappy days there. Natacha frees the girl and wins her affection and trust. In time she conquers all of the girls with kindness. This act is a lesson in teacher education and adolescent psychology.

Marga, the incorrigible now tamed, has suffered from adolescent wanderlust and, like the hen who is bound to come
to no good in the Spanish proverb, has already come to a bad end. But her pregnancy is not discovered until the end of the act.

Natacha puts the girls to work doing things they like to do: sewing new uniforms for themselves, cooking, gardening, raising chickens, and romping on the Conserje's treasured lawns which they now care for themselves, to his fury. They are allowed to associate with the inmates of the boys' section; social activities develop. This proves to be too much for Señorita Crespo, who informs the Board.

When the play is on the verge of becoming a boarding-school drama, Don Santiago, Natacha's foster father, enters announcing the arrival next Sunday of the university group. They have been on a most successful summer cruise on the Mediterranean. They are bringing their Teatro Ambulante to entertain the Reformatorio. Lalo, Don Santiago reports, is truly in love with Natacha. Natacha makes no comment.

Then comes the only truly comic exchange in the act; Casona is teaching that "bad" teenagers are not truly "bad"; they need love and understanding from adults. This is more teacher education. The recently tamed Marga and the violent delinquent Juan meet as if by chance; Marga is reading an atlas of the world which Natacha has let her borrow. Juan, smitten with Marga, admits to her that he cannot read. So she gives him a reading and geography lesson.
Marga: ¿No fuiste nunca a la escuela?
Juan: De pequeño--una tarde.
Marga: ¿Una tarde sólo? Poca cosa habrás podido hacer en una tarde.
Juan: Poca cosa, sí; rompí dos cristales.

As they look at Africa, Juan sees a hippopotamus and remarks that it looks like the Conserje. Then they come to China; Marga says, "Los chinos andan descalzos, con túnicas amarillas, y van todos tirando de un coche con un inglés dentro." She also tells Juan of the Japanese custom of "hara-kiri". Juan is impressed. "How much you know! How pretty you are!" he exclaims. At the crucial moment, the old Conserje, highly suspicious, appears.

Conserje: ¡Preciosa escena!
Juan: ¡El hipopótamo!

Juan, leaving, snaps, "Voy," and, in true delinquent style, he saunters up to the Conserje and says, "Salud, maestro. ¡Qué espléndida barriga para hacerse el 'hara-kiri'!"

"¿El qué?" says the ungeographical Conserje. Juan makes a slashing motion across the portly gentleman's stomach and goes, "¡Arrears!..."\textsuperscript{19}

The turning point of the play takes place the next Sunday after Lalo's Teatro Ambulante have given their play for the school. The play is Atta Troll, a dramatization

\textsuperscript{19}Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, pp. 49-50.
of a literary satire by the German poet Heine. Mario is the bear, Atta Troll; his bear wife, Mumma, is acted by Flora; and Lalo is the Poet-Narrator who tells the tale and urges Atta Troll to break his chains and flee to the mountains. Casona's version is both sad and lightly humorous. As soon as they finish their performance upon their hastily-constructed stage, their gaiety is cut short. Like a clap of thunder the Marquesa and Don Félix de Sandoval arrive unexpectedly. Natacha has not informed them of the entertainment for the group of mixed students, but Crespo has reported it. The Conserje is out of uniform and the students are apparently running wild. They begin hurriedly removing the chairs and attempting to make some semblance of order. Lalo says to Natacha, "¿Barco enemigo?" Natacha, somewhat frightened, answers, "Es la Presidenta del Patronato". Mario is still in his bear costume and he startles the Marquesa. Natacha introduces Lalo to the Marquesa; Lalo, nervous, with his usual disdain for convention, says, "Estudiante siempre, herido tres veces en San Carlos", which is not calculated to impress the lady.

The Marquesa begins with a complaint about the luxury in which the girls are living—showers, table cloths, new uniforms and hair-do's. But her main complaint is the state of discipline. Natacha defends the mingling of the sexes.

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20 Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, pp. 59-60.
The Conserje, however, has reported seeing kissing going on. The Marquesa orders the girls lined up so that she may deliver a lecture. Marga faints. Within minutes Dr. Sandoval has discovered that Marga is pregnant, and Natacha's career is over. Marga ran away one night before Natacha's arrival and was picked up by a pair of young señoritos, the wealthy, irresponsible, and idly vicious young playboys whom Casona attacks here. The señoritos and their lady companions took Marga for a ride in a car, gave her champagne, and she awoke ill the next morning in a deserted park. The police returned her to the school where Natacha found her in solitary confinement. Natacha's reforms of the school are in no way to blame for Marga's condition, but Natacha is not allowed to defend herself. As the second act ends, she is thinking not of herself but of the girl.

The third act takes place on the ruined finca belonging to Lalo, which Natacha, her Reformatorio students, and Lalo and his student friends have transformed in one year into a model farm, al estilo israeli. Natacha has left the Reformatorio, and with the legal aid of her foster father, Don Santiago, has won her battle for the students. She has even carried away the Conserje, who is no longer the feared martinet but is now just plain Francisco, browbeaten and ordered about by the girls. The year the students from the university have given Natacha to help her get started is up today.
They are leaving, all except Mario, who plans to remain to finish his paper on insects...to the despair of Flora, who must leave. The students are waiting only until the first loaf of bread baked from the flour made from their own wheat comes from the oven. Marga is there, also, with her child; motherhood has been her salvation.

Casona has given his message; he has no further need for humor and uses little of it in this act. His humor in this play having been concentrated in the first act in order to snare and hold the interest of the audience, Lalo's complex personality has been illuminated with much humor. The third act is one of showing the end result of Natacha's theories of teaching and of completing stories of the individuals. The story is unconventional in that Natacha's love for Lalo does not end in marriage. Natacha is an example to the young of Spain, and she is more of a symbol than a typical heroine.

Don Francisco becomes the center of a brief humorous episode when he begs Natacha for permission to wear, for just this one day, his splendid uniform. She allows him to put it on, and within moments he is again the boss of the girls. They begin calling him Don Francisco and suddenly obey him with respect. This is a comment upon the force of the uniform rather than an attempt to be amusing.
Don Santiago arrives to congratulate his protegee upon her success with the farm. He asks her about her own future and about Lalo. She says, "una flor vale más que una lección de botánica". Getting around to Lalo, she admits that she loves him. Lalo has worked hard this year for her. "Lalo no tenía más que el gran pecado de nuestra generación: pensar que el corazón no es elegante, y tratar de esconderle siempre", she says.21

She knows that Lalo is going to leave, and, with tears she bravely says, "Mi deber está aquí." Like the frightened officer on the battlefield, she would run, but "estoy en mi puesto".22 She remains to do her duty though she may lose Lalo.

Lalo's only contribution to humor in the act comes at the end, when he is bidding goodbye to Mario, who is, as usual, looking through his glass at insects:

Mario: ¡Chist!
Lalo: (Baja la voz) ¿Qué pasa?
Mario: ¡Son dos escorpios rubios!
Lalo: ¡Ah!...¿Enamorados?
Mario: Están en los preliminares del rito nupcial.
Lalo: Muy bonito...
Mario: Es la ceremomia más curiosa que se puede imaginar. Primero la hembra, que es la más oscura, coge al macho del brazo...
Lalo: No, Mario; cuentos verdes, no.

21 Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, p. 73.
22 Ibid., p. 74.
Mischievously, Lalo adds that he has been teaching Fina some Natural History. He learns from Mario that he has given some entirely wrong information to the girl. Airily he complains, "Entonces, esa pobre chica ha perdido el curso."23

Encarna at last brings their first loaf of bread from the oven, but Mario is too busy to admire it. Flora arrives and wistfully reminds Mario of their parts in Atta Troll in which they were two bears very much in love. Mario does not take the hint. "Era bonita fábula de vertebrados", he says. In desperation, Flora explodes. She has never liked his terrible bugs, she cries—she liked him. She kisses him and leaves. Mario, the light dawning, goes after her.

Natacha and Lalo are left alone on the stage. Lalo innocently asks, "¿Adónde va ese loco?" "¡Hacia la vida!", answers Natacha. Lalo says, "¡Hacia la vida? Pues con esas gafas y esa manera de correr, como se le ponga un árbol delante, no llega."24

This scene, begun lightly, ends with a tragic note. Lalo tries to deed the farm to Natacha, but this she will not accept from him. He begs to stay; she will not allow him to remain longer. She promises that when her work there is finished, she will come to him and ask him if he still wants her. He assures her of his devotion and departs.

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24Ibid., pp. 78-80.
Santiago comes to be with Natacha while the students happily leave; Natacha cannot bear to go out and say goodbye. In bursts Mario, who announces that he is leaving with Flora. The goodbyes are said. Natacha says, "Estoy en mi puesto."

25 Shoemaker, editor, Nuestra Natacha, p. 82.
Prohibido suicidarse en primavera has few scenes that are not funny; this play, alone of the plays of Casona that are humorous in any way, is consistently so; it has more humorous lines and scenes than any of the others. Yet it takes imagination to enjoy the work. Part of the humor depends upon reading between the lines as well as upon past experiences of the audience. The wonderful scenes between the lady opera singer and her admirer, who discovers to his disillusionment that she is a virago and is far too much for him mentally, physically, emotionally, and culturally, depend in part upon the mental images already in the audience's mind about the stock character types: a pip-squeak of a little bank clerk and a Bruneihilde sort of opera singer.

The play is based upon an extremely funny idea, the institution or colony around which a collection of characters is gathered, as in La sirena varada and in the later Los árboles mueren de pie. The Suicide Home's main lobby is the place in which the action of the play takes place. On the walls are "óleos de suicidas famosos, reproduciendo las escenas de su muerte: Sócrates, Cleopatra, Séneca, Larra."¹ There are doors leading to the "Galería del Silencio" and

"Jardín de la Meditación" from this main lobby. As the curtain opens, all that the audience can tell is that it is some kind of hotel, institution, or retreat, with odd signs over the doors leading to the garden.

The audience is soon convinced that this must really be a "House of Suicides", and, while the idea is grotesque, it also has a horrible charm.¹

As the action begins, Dr. Roda, a mad-scientist sort of character, and Hans, definitely Teutonic, are discussing the patients. Newly arrived the night before is a young man with a love problem. He wishes to die; he is very nervous.

The Doctor is checking the few scraps of information the new arrival gave when he entered: Nameless, bank clerk, small salary, a disastrous love affair, has a book of unpublished poems. "Ah", says Dr. Roda,

...un romántico; no creo que sea peligroso. De todos modos, vigilelo sin que él se dé cuenta. Y avise a los violines: que toquen algo de Chopin en el bosque al caer la tarde...³

He asks about the Sad Lady, another "patient". Hans informs him that she is in the "Garden of Werther", but she is not being watched:

...La he venido observando estos días; ha visitado todas nuestras instalaciones: el lago de los ahogados, el bosque de suspensiones, la sala de gas perfumado...Todo

²J. Frank Toms, "The Reality-Fantasy Technique of Alejandro Casona", Hispania XLIV (May, 1961), 221.
le parece excelente en principio, pero no acaba de decidirse por nada. Sólo le gusta llorar.

The Doctor says to leave her alone: "El llanto es tan saludable como el sudor, y más poético."4

The male nurse, Hans, bears most of the humor in this part of the play; his blood-thirsty and serious desire to do his job and get as many people as possible to commit suicide possesses humor that is hilarious, even though macabre. Hans is unhappy because so far no one has committed suicide; the professor of Philosophy throws himself in the lake every morning but he swims out each time. The Doctor bids Hans to be patient. The Dama Triste enters:

**Dama:** He seguido sus consejos con la mejor voluntad; he llorado toda la mañana, me he sentado bajo un sauce mirando fijamente el agua... Y nada. Cada vez me siento más cobarde.

**Hans:** (animándola)—¿Ha visto usted nuestro muestrario último de venenos?

**Dama:** Sí, los colores son preciosos, pero el sabor debe ser horrible.

**Hans:** Puede añadirse un poco de menta, espliego...5

But La Dama Triste is dissatisfied with all forms of dying that they have to offer, and the lake is much too cold. She inquires if the bushes in the garden have been poisoned; she became nauseated while strolling there. The Doctor hastens to assure her that modern science, alas, has not, as yet,

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4 Casona, Teatro II, "Prohibido suicidarse", p. 10.
discovered a method of poisoning greenery. *La Dama Triste* encourages him to seek a way to do this; it will simplify matters for her.

Casona later carefully explains Hans' background so as to elucidate Hans' attitude, and in so doing he destroys the humor he has created in this character; Hans is part of the teaching in this play. The two funniest characters, excluding Hans and the mad Doctor, are the Lover (*Amante*) and Cora Yako, the opera star. *La Dama Triste*, Alicia, and the triangle of young lovers are more tragic than comic. The *Amante*, of whom the Doctor and Hans were speaking as the play opened, makes his entrance at this point:

Doctor: ¿Ha elegido usted ya su...procedimiento?

Amante: No, todavía no. Pensaba.

Hans: (ofreciendo la mercancía como en un bazar).--Tenemos un sazón especial para enamorados, un lago de leyenda...Si le gustan los clásicos, podemos ofrecerle el ramo de rosas con áspid, modelo Cleopatra, el baño tibio, la cicuta socrática...

Amante: ¿Para qué tanto? Cuando la vida pesa basta con un árbol cualquiera.

Hans: (apresurándose a tomar nota en su cuaderno).--Ah, muy bien. "Suspensión". Perfectamente. ¿Número del cuello?

Amante: Treinta y siete, largo.

Hans: ¿Tiene preferencia por algún árbol?6

Hans' single-minded efficiency offends the sensitive young lover who snaps that all this is too cold. "Tiene usted la frialdad de un funcionario."

La Dama Triste feels that it is so sad about such a nice young fellow. "Is it love trouble?" she asks. Then she says sadly, "I do not even have a love affair to remember!"

Hans says, "Y así todos. Mucho llanto, mucha tristeza poética; pero matar no se mata ninguno." The Doctor says to Hans, "Esperemos, Hans."

Now enters Alicia, who has no part in the humor whatsoever. She is a tragic character who, by giving of herself and her love, becomes needed and finds fulfillment in life. She has begun her career as a nurse, but she became too emotionally involved with her patients and failed at her job. She has at last found herself friendless, jobless, hungry, and desperate in a brutal world. She has come here to die. But after her first walk through the garden she runs back, terrified, to the lobby. She enters crying hysterically. The ropes for hanging, the gloomy music, the weird winding paths have made her wish to live. She had come here to die with others because she had lived in such loneliness. Now she has discovered that death is absolute solitude—one must live. This is the message of the play, which is elaborated upon by Dr. Roda, who explains the meaning and intent of the

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7Casona, Teatro II, "Prohibido suicidarse", p. 12.
Casa to Alicia and to the audience. Here Dr. Ariel is first mentioned. Dr. Ariel’s first experiment in public institutions for the succor of mankind is this Hogar del Suicida. His second experiment appears in Los árboles mueren de pie.

Dr. Ariel is now dead, but his assistant, Dr. Roda, has a sane explanation for all that the audience has seen up until this point. Dr. Ariel came from a family of men who, at a certain age, became suicides. To avoid a like fate, Dr. Ariel came to these lovely mountains and lived out his long life; when he died, he left this sanatorium to nurse back to mental health, if possible, potential or border-line suicides. This is not really a place for suicide; it is a place for dissuading potential suicide victims. By reverse psychology this miracle is accomplished—the more the victims are encouraged to finish their lives, the more they want to live. They get interested in each other and in nature and at last leave, cured.

Dr. Roda offers Alicia a position as an "enfermera de almas" in the institution. Alicia is not the main heroine of the play; however, she has more than a minor role. Dr. Roda and Hans are a two-part dissertation of facing life. Alicia and El Padre de la Otra Alicia are a sermon on giving to others. The comic duo of the Amante and Cora are not just comic relief—they form an essay on finding happiness in one’s

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*Casona, Teatro II, "Prohibido suicidarse", p. 15.*
own backyard. The love triangle of Fernando, Chole, and Juan constitutes another sermon on the meaning of love and giving.

Now Fernando and Chole enter this lugubrious place, mistaking it for a secluded mountain resort hotel. This is one of the funniest scenes in the play. These young lovers call each other "Capitán" and "Timonel" and decide, after viewing the empty lobby, that this place is simply Paradise. The Dama Triste enters and sees them: "Pobres...¿ustedes también?" she says to them. "¿Qué pena! Tan jóvenes, con toda una vida por delante y queriéndose así...Novios, ¿verdad?...Qué pena, Señor, qué pena...(Cruza la escena y sale.) Here, as in many of Casona's plays, the audience is at first bewildered, then it is let in on the secret of what is going on; then a new set of characters enters the stage, characters who are innocent of what is occurring, and the audience henceforth has the advantage of being in on the secret. It delights and amuses the audience to know more than the new arrivals, and at the same time it flatters the informed spectators. It is an age-old trick of comedians.

The apparition of the Dama Triste leaves them open-mouthed. Fernando, amazed, says, "¿Por qué le dará pena a esa señora que seamos tan jóvenes?" Chole retorts, "No lo habrá sido nunca. ¿Has visto qué aire melancólico?" Fernando adds, "Enferma del hígado, seguro. Lo siento por

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9Casona, Teatro II, "Prohibido suicidarse", pp. 16-17.
ti, Chole; me habías prometido llevarme al paraíso, pero creo que me has metido en un balneario." The portraits of famous suicides and the motto over the archway, "Ven, Muerte, tan escondida—que no te sienta venir—porque el placer de morir—no me vuelva a dar la vida." Santa Teresa."

eourage them to wonder if the place is perhaps a convent.

Chole: ¡Un convento! No digas...El claustro de mirtos, con un surtidor, las filas de hábitos blancos por las galerías, los maftines... ¡Sería magnífico!

Fernando: Para el turismo.

But Hans crosses the stage, ringing a little bell, announcing, "Sala de la cicuta...¡libre!"

The suave Dr. Roda enters and introduces himself to the two young journalists. Once Fernando discovers that this is something very unusual, he determines to stay. What a story it will make! "Inútil oponerse," he says, "Somos periodistas: si nos echa usted por la puerta, volveremos por la ventana. Disfrazados de jardineros, de inspectores de teléfonos, de vendedores de frutas..." So the good doctor permits them to remain—but they must pretend to be attendants. Roda then explains his Hogar del Suicida to them: "La primera reacción del desesperado al entrar aquí, es el aplazamiento. Su sentido heroico de la muerte se ve defraudado....Es el

10Casona, Teatro II, "Prohibido suicidarse", pp. 18-19.
efecto moral de una ducha fría...Es la primera etapa." Then comes the meditation stage—"Llega a sentir una piadosa ternura por el dolor hermano. Y acaba por salir al campo..."11

The third stage on the road to recovery: "...El pasado va perdiendo sombras y fuerza; cien pequeños caminos se van abriendo hacia el porvenir..." And the patient leaves, cured. Chole comments, "Precioso. Parece una balada escocesa."12

Alicia and Chole form a counterpoint, a play-within-a-play, in that Chole enters happy and follows this pattern in reverse towards an attempt at self-destruction, while Alicia proceeds from the first stage to recovery just as Chole proceeds from joy to misery.

Chole and Fernando collect the sad life stories of the other inmates with the intention of writing them—but Chole gets too emotionally involved with the people and begins to feel that it is cold-blooded to write of them as case histories. Her romance with Fernando, who does not share her viewpoint in this, (as, later in Los árboles mueren de pie the romantic hero and heroine clash over the woman's emotional involvement), begins to break up.

The stories are, briefly, that of the Amante, who was an underpaid and unpublished bank clerk who went one day to the opera and fell madly in love with Cora Yako, world-famous

12Ibid., p. 23.
singer. He returned again and again to hear her, and developed an imaginary love life with her in which they traversed the globe. He finally stole just enough money from the bank to buy orchids for the lady. He sent them to her, only to have them thrown out and his impassioned note ignored. He has come here to die, but he meets the real star and finds that life with her would be not so idyllic as he might think.

The story of Alicia involves an old man, a doctor, who has come here to kill himself out of remorse for the mercy killing of his crippled, helpless, and beloved daughter, who was named Alicia. Thinking that he had but a short time to live, the old man killed his daughter lest she suffer after he was gone; then he learned that he was not in the last stages of an incurable illness. In the Hogar del Suicida he finds the suicidal Alicia who has no one; in their need for someone they find happiness in each other. This is the first use by Casona of the interchangeable daughter which appears again in La dama del alba. In Los árboles mueren de pie the grandson is interchanged with a substitute.

The Dama Triste's story is the lost lover tragedy; her lover, a sailor, had gone off to the Philippines, never to return, and she has lived in loneliness until she could bear it no longer. She finds the professor of Philosophy, whose romancing, sandwiched in between throwing himself into the lake, is definitely professorial.
The major story is that of the love triangle involving Fernando and Chole and Juan, Fernando's jealous brother who appears at the end of act one with a genuine attempt at suicide. Juan has come here because he cannot have Chole and he wishes to kill his brother, Fernando. Instead, Juan attempts to shoot himself but lives to learn the meaning of real love based upon sacrifice rather than upon selfishness.

The line is a thin one between Casona's Devils and his heroes such as Fernando in this play, Ricardo from *La sirena varada*, Lalo from *Nuestra Natacha*, and Mauricio from *Los árboles mueren de pie*. Fernando's teasing of the distressed *Dama Triste* smacks of one of Casona's Devils and is wryly funny. Fernando's statistics about the incidence of suicide among the Latin peoples because of love is Casona's most famous speech; it is the speech most often quoted from his works. Fernando gives the figures for suicide for love: England—fourteen; France—twenty-eight; Germany—forty-one; Italy—sixty-three; Spain—four hundred and eighty...the United States—two (*mexicanos nacionalizados*). Casona teaches a bit of scorpionology here; the scorpion is the only creature other than man that will supposedly commit suicide, but it does so only when surrounded by fire so as to escape suffering.

Casona also gives the story of Leonardo de Vinci's attempts to poison a tree to make it give poisoned fruit. The pedagog is always present in Casona's plays,
The Dama Triste would like very much to die for love, but that takes two people. She invites Fernando to join her in a suicide for love, and Fernando’s answer is his funniest speech: "Honradísimo, señora, pero... estoy comprometido ya. Tengo que suicidarme mañana con una pianista polaca." Sadder than ever, the lady replies, "Siempre llego tarde."13

She then laments that Spain lacks volcanos from which to leap, as young Japanese star-crossed lovers leap from Fujiyama. She wishes to die because of "desilusión absoluta". She loathes her body, her too too solid flesh, bone, muscle. She is a romantic and would prefer to be a torrent of water, a spiritual being, a free soul without dingy substance. Fernando fiendishly tells her, "...ha necesitado usted tomarse ochocientos decálitros de leche, tres vagones de fruta, ocho hectáreas de guisantes y diez y siete terneros! El cuerpo, señora, es una realidad insobornable."

Horrified, the lady cries, "¡No! ¡No es posible!" Pleased with the damage he has done, Fernando says, "Aritméticamente exacto." The Dama broods until the third act over this grossness on her part; she complains, "¡Pero le juro que yo no me he comido esos diez y siete terneros!"14 This again is not humor; Casona is preaching acceptance of life as one finds it.

13Casona, Teatro II. "Prohibido suicidarse", p. 27.
14Ibid., pp. 28-29.
The second act takes place three days later, the day before the first day of Spring. Chole is changed, drifting towards the first stage conducive to suicide, in which most of the inmates are submerged upon arrival. She has taken down the death portraits of famous suicides and has replaced them with Botticelli's willowy blonde damsel called "Spring". She has been reading Dr. Ariel's book, *Suicide as a Fine Art*. As she reads, she begins to meditate. A philosophical discussion about suicide and its prevalence among those whom one would suspect to be happy follows. Chole and Dr. Roda lead the play away from humor for several minutes. Chole has taken to sitting up all night reading in the extensive library of suicide works, and Fernando has begun roaming the mountains out of boredom. The split between the pair is made clear here; they grow sharp with each other.

Chole: A María Antonieta le gustaba siempre vestirse de pastora.

Fernando: Y le cortaron la cabeza.

Fernando has brought her a white rose picked high in the mountains; she snaps that it will fall apart in the lowlands.15

Throughout the play Hans announces hopefully from time to time that the professor of Philosophy, whom the audience never sees, threw himself in the lake again—and that he

swam out, as usual. This is used as a transition device. Hans also has hope in the fact that the Dama Triste has quit eating entirely these days. But Hans is getting ready to explode; Chole's happiness, when she came there, infected the others; now the professor is whistling. Hans is explained away by Dr. Roda as a soul-mutilated man who lost everything in the war—family, home, business; Hans fell in love with Death, and "Ya no sé si lo tengo como ayudante o como enfermo", says Roda.16

This element of humor explained away, the funniest character in all of Casona's theater is now introduced: Cora Yako, who comes closer to being a figure of pure humor than any other Casona creation. Cora teaches the audience nothing; but she teaches the bank clerk, the Amante, much. She is large, blonde, beautiful, and totally uninhibited; and she exists for the enjoyment of the audience. She enters saying that she does not have a reservation at the Hogar del Suicida and that she of course has no intention of committing suicide—but it is a marvelous publicity stunt for a sagging career. She gives an unusual set of vital statistics to Fernando, who, as a "helper" to Dr. Roda, takes down her name and so forth. As a reporter, Fernando already knows something of this flamboyant opera star. "He tenido en mi carrera duelos, escándalos, un naufragio..."

she states airily. Fernando, writing, says, "Edad...¿Le parece bien veinticuatro años?" "Gracias", she says. Fernando checks a few details of her colorful past, "Ha estado usted casada con un raja indio. Se divorciaron en California." "Simpático muchacho!" she chortles at him.17

The Amante Imaginario enters, plucking petals from a daisy, and he proceeds to tell Cora about his imaginary love affair with the great Cora Yako. He has previously seen her only from the last balcony and has no idea who she is. She is touched by his tale of theft occasioned by his love for her, and she drags him away to the garden to reveal her identity and discourse upon her Wagnerian love.

Juan, the jealous brother of Fernando, meets Chole and drives her to attempted suicide by revealing how the happy lovers have ruined his life. Juan is a highly unpleasant character. Chole's subsequent attempt to drown herself is prevented by Juan, who carries her unconscious body to the lobby where Dr. Roda revives her. Chole awakes thinking that Fernando has saved her, and Juan is left in the cold again. The second act ends with furious Juan grinding his teeth.

Beethoven's Chorale Symphony, his last and Ninth, which has for a last movement the beautiful "Hymn to Nature".

(also called the "Hymn to Spring"), which is entirely sung, usually, in German, has an important place in the beginning and the close of the third act. Casona uses the music symbolically and refers to it in the dialogue. The act itself takes place on the first day of Spring, which symbolizes the rebirth not only of nature but of hope in the suicide colony. The act begins with the two girls, Alicia and Chole, discussing the music with Dr. Roda. Chole gives more of Casona's teaching of the value of human life: "Yo me he acercado a la muerte, y he visto ya que no resuelve nada; que todos los problemas hay que resolverlos de pie....pero me parece que el maestro Ariel y usted se han equivocado con la mejor buena fe....Coquetean ustedes con la idea de la muerte..." Thus Casona rejects his own fantasy, as he has rejected his humorous character, Hans, and has converted him into a sick man, thus removing Hans from further humor other than in one short scene.

The last act is the funniest of the three, for in it the romance between the ill-matched pair, Cora and the Amante, meets its fate. Chole has already advised Dr. Roda to close his house and to use his talents and money out in the world where men live and work. This is the seed of the future play, Los árboles mueren de pie. Hans enters,

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18 Casona, Teatro II, "Prohibido suicidarse", p. 52.
19 Ibid.
packed to leave; he is in a fine rage because everyone has
decided to live—the professor of Philosophy has stopped
throwing himself into the lake and is now spending his time
pionicking and in amorous dalliance with La Dama Triste, who
has decided to eat again. "Desde que estoy en esta casa,
sólo el perro del jardínero se ha decidido a morirse. Y se
murió de viejo," Hans complains. (In Nuestra Natacha the
gardener's dog has died, also). "No hay porvenir aquí," says
Hans. But the last straw has been that Cora Yako has been
throwing rocks and violets through his window before daybreak
and has been cooing at him. (Cora was mistaken, it turns out,
as to which window was the Amante's). Hans has a new job in
a hospital where people really die. He tells Dr. Roda to
close up shop and move to the city, which needs his help.
Roda does, indeed, at the end of the play see his error and
close the house and move to the city.

The comic ending of the romance between the Lover and
Cora shows that the disillusionment is mostly on the side
of the young man; Cora is not deeply wounded by his naivete.
The Amante enters the stage with the air of a fugitive, which
he is by now. Cora enters, looking for him:

Cora: ¿Dónde se esconde mi cachorro?

Amante: (Sobresaltado). ¡Tú!

Casona, Teatro II, "Prohibido suicidarse", p. 53.
Cora: Mi héroe, mi lobo, Alégrate, corazón; salta, grita, aúlla. ¡Ya me tienes aquí!

Amante: Te esperaba.

She has been up early, running about the mountains, bathing in the icy torrents, calling for him, throwing rocks at his window. She thinks that he reads too much; it is debilitating.

Cora: ¡Ah, cruel; estabas dormido! ¿Has pensado en mí? ¿Soy como tú me soñabas? ¡Hum, hum! ¿Es que no sabes hablar?

Amante: ¡Es que no me dejas!

Cora, however, is a trifle disillusioned about him and she proceeds to rid herself of the young man:

Cora: Yo te imaginabas vibrante, apasionado... ¡Subiéndote por las paredes al verme, arrancando las retamas al correr, saltándome a los hombros!

Amante: Tú me imaginabas un cruce de jabalí y orangután.

Cora: Algo así. Pero no importa. No estés triste tú, mi jilguero mojado, mi poeta de bolsillo. Te quiero como eres: pequeño, acobardado, soñador. ¡Ahora vamos a vivir! ¡A correr el mundo juntos...! 21

Thereupon Cora proceeds to frighten the ignorant youth out of his wits with a terrifying account of the perils of globe-trotting: small poisonous green mosquitos that cause fever and even death, consuls with red-tape, serpents and

21Casón, Teatro II, "Prohibido suicidarse", pp. 54-55.
crocodiles, fiebres gástricas; then she reassures him,
"por cada mosquito que produce Dios, producen una inyección
los alemanes". 22 She has friends among the consuls. They
will drive away—to happiness. He cannot drive a car. Well,
she will, then; she drives at ninety miles per hour and gets
there soon. He grows faint-hearted as she waxes lyrical with
enthusiasm. He has not a cent; he stole only enough for the
flowers for her. Well, then they will acquire a caballo
blanco. He does not understand this allusion to an old gen-
tleman who pays, and he does not speak other languages.
Well, she will do the talking. She overcomes each objection
with a disconcerting answer. He will get airsick. Nonsense,
it is not nearly so bad as seasickness. She soon convinces
him not to go; then she says that she will honk the car horn
for him three times. In an hilarious-tragic soul-rending
scene, the Amante, though urged to venture forth by Fernando,
loses his resolution. The Known is better than the Unknown;
the imagined woman was far better than the real one. She
sounds the automobile horn; he vacillates. She tootles upon
the horn of her car; he is tempted. She blows upon the car
horn for a third time; he does not venture forth. She drives
off in a cloud of smoke.

The Amante is offered a job with Fernando's paper. Fer-
nando, who says that they can fake pictures, tells the Amante
that he can write an exciting column for the newspaper about

his travels with Cora Yako. The Amante begins to imagine a
 glorious trip by airplane with Cora.

The play is now done; there is no further need of humor,
 and all that remains is to wind up the loose threads and re-
solve the love triangle. Juan learns generosity through
 love, and he gives up Chole to Fernando. Chole preaches the
 stoic philosophy that Natacha spoke, but she goes to Fernando
 like a bag of flour won in a lottery. By living she has
 brought the warring brothers together as her death would not
 have done. Juan sees them leave and sits down at Dr. Roda's
 desk to shoot himself. But he is prevented from suicide by
 the entrance of Alicia, who puts up a sign reading, "Prohibi-
do suicidarse en primavera". Chole has left it as a reminder
 for Juan. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony begins to sound, louder
 and louder, spreading its message of hope, and Juan and Ali-
cia leave to throw the pistol in the lake.
Humor has made Los árboles mueren de pie the most popular and beloved of Casona's plays in each of the many countries where it has been given. The humor in the first act is aided greatly by the elaborate and fantastic setting, which, like most of Casona's fantasy, at first appears not to be unusual. However, upon looking closer, the spectator discovers elements of fantasy not readily noticeable at first. "A primer vista estamos en una gran oficina moderna, del más aséptico capitalismo funcional", says Casona's long preliminary stage direction. "Archivos metálicos, ficheros giratorios, teléfonos, audífono y toda la comodidad mecánica".

But this is only at first glance; one also sees "un rastro sospechoso de fantasía: redes de pescadores, carátulas, un maniquí descabezado con manto, un globo terráqueo, armas inútiles, mapas coloristas de países que no han existido nunca; toda esa abigarrada promiscuidad de las almonedas y las tiendas de anticuario." A large portrait of Dr. Ariel, of whose first institution Casona wrote in Prohibido suicidarse en primavera, hangs upon the wall of this second of his institutions. The portrait is described thus: "con su sonrisa bonachona, su melena blanca y su barba entre artística y apostólica."\(^1\)

\(^1\)Alejandro Casona, Teatro I, "Los árboles mueren de pie" (Buenos Aires, 1958), p. 111.
Casona's technique in this play is to build up suspense during most of the first act, explaining the mystery at the end of the act. He uses fantasy as a tool to build up the suspense; he uses the humor as a device to break the tension of the growing suspense and to reverse premises taking shape in the minds of the audience so as to make the mystery greater. The humor, which begins with the first speech in the play, is not humor per se but a series of apparently disconnected statements regarding the unknown and highly suspicious kind of business this institution may be; the audience laughs out of bewilderment and because of the incongruity of remarks, circumstances, and people.

Al levantarse el telón la Mecanógrafa busca ansiosamente algo que no encuentra en los ficheros. Consulta una nota y vuelve a remover fichas, cada vez más nerviosa. Entra Helena la secretaria, madura de años y de autoridad, con sus carpetas que ordena mientras habla.²

Helena wastes no time in opening the play with a rather stern chiding of the young typist who is obviously having trouble finding cards in the file. Helena warns that one error and the police will be down on their necks. The girl finds a card with her eyes shut at the request of Helena; she reads the card, "Ernestina Pineda. Padre desconocido y madre demasiado conocida. Abandono del hogar."³

²Casona, Teatro I, "Los árboles", p. 111.
³Ibid., p. 112.
Neither Helena nor the typist are major or comic characters; Helena is the butt of the humor in one scene through her high-mindedness and stiffness, contrasted with the ridiculous events in the office. Helena is all business. The first comic character to enter is the Pastor, who changes costume in a small booth for that purpose right on the stage, and who emerges in a new identity before the end of the scene. Much of the humor in this act is created by a serious attitude about obviously ridiculous matters.

The Pastor enters complaining, "¡Protesto! Respetuosamente, pero protesto". The Pastor has been called because he is an expert in languages; "nine live and four dead, forty years of studies, five university degrees, and for what?" He carps because they are giving him inferior work to do; he was left out when they needed a man for the Embassy dance. "That night our business was not in the Salón but in the kitchens... a slight error in the narcotics would have ruined everything...." Helena snaps at him. The sparring which follows is more in the line of clever and amusing dialogue than openly funny. It is suspense-building and is not intended to be pure humor; its function is to impart information piecemeal to awaken in the audience great curiosity.

The frock-coated Pastor complains about his just-completed task—that of reassuring "a un problema de consciencia, con

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4Casona, Teatro I, "Los árboles", p. 114.
dudas religiosas y en una dama escocesa..." The Pastor protests, "¡Pero otra solterona! Ya llevo cuatro en menos de una semana. Y si hay algo en este mundo que un solterón no puede soportar es una solterona." Then, remembering that Helena is a solterona, he apologetically adds, "No lo digo por usted...Usted no es una mujer." He gets out of that with, "Quiero decir que es un amigo, un camarada."5

Helena has new orders for him; he is to go to the port and sing songs in Norwegian to homesick Nordic sailors. He is told to obey more and complain less. He disappears behind the curtain of the dressing booth and removes the disguise of a preacher and dons high boots, a sweater, and all the appurtenances of a sailor, including an accordion. The conversation continues through the curtain. When Helena asks him if he had any success with Miss Macpherson, since he is Catholic and she Protestant, he replies, "Para un profesor de idiomas eso no es dificultad: el protestantismo es un dialecto del catolicismo."6

Much of the humor in this play, as in all of Casona, is somewhat dependent upon gestures and facial expressions; all comedy in whatever degree is more dependent upon these factors than is tragedy. A funny face can make or break a scene in a comedy. Casona's use of facial expression is shown here:

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5Casona, Teatro I, "Los árboles", p. 113.
6Ibid., p. 114.
Pastor: ...¿A qué hora llega ese maldito barco?

Helena: ¿Por qué maldito?

Pastor: Quiero decir, ese dichoso barco.

Helena: ¿Por qué dichoso? No lo diga con ese gesto. Sonría. Una buena sonrisa es la mitad de nuestro trabajo.

Pastor: Está bien. (con una sonrisa que no le sale) ¿A qué hora deben llorar esos muchachos no-ruegos oyendo las viejas canciones de su país?

This play approaches farce in the first act, as in this scene following the Pastor and Helena's conversation. A buzzer rings three times and a book in the bookcase flashes red three times; a secret door opens, and in trudges the Ilusionista through the secret door. This is broad satire of the standard mystery play. However, this stranger who enters has in his hand a bunch of gaily-colored balloons on strings. From this farcical beginning the scene drifts into a touchingly humorous scene that is close to pathos. The newly-arrived Ilusionista, dressed in baggy clothes, has a definitely trampish air about him and a wistful sadness that is similar to the tragic figure of the ghost in Casona's La sirena. The old tramp enters complaining that carrying balloons compromises his dignity. Helena comments that the discipline of the organization is cracking; then she leaves for a few moments. The Pastor, now dressed as a sailor, sits down with the Ilusionista to wait for something. They begin to

\[\text{Casona, Teatro I, "Los árboles", p. 115.}\]
commiserate with each other in a bitter-sweet and sadly funny scene which is the apex of humor in the play.

El Ilusionista se sienta aburrido. Mientras habla hace las cosas más inesperadas con una naturalidad desconcertante: cada vez que busca algo en sus inmensos bolsillos van apareciendo enredados cintajos de colores, abanicos japoneses, frutas, una flauta, un trompo de música. Lo más curioso es que ni él hace el menor caso al Pastor mientras dialogan, ni el Pastor muestra la menor extranjería ante sus trucos pueriles. Hay frente a frente un tono doctoral y una sorna plebeya resignada.

As the pair complain to each other, the Ilusionista folds a walking stick up and puts it in his pocket, takes out a flute, blows a note on it, and puts it in another pocket in his voluminous trousers. He continues his absent-minded investigation of his pockets, pulling out and changing the color of a silk scarf, producing from somewhere a banana. He offers it to his companion, who shakes his head; so the Ilusionista peels and eats it himself. Their conversation is not in the least connected with what the Ilusionista is doing.

The Pastor mentions wistfully his years at the Sorbonne, at Oxford, and at Boulogne. The clown mentions wistfully his years with circuses at Hamburg, Marseille, and Barcelona.

Pastor: La biblioteca hasta el techo, la campana, el claustro gótico.
Ilusionista: La vieja carpa de lona, los caminos...
Pastor: ¡Cuarenta años de estudiar sentado!
Ilusionista: ¡Cuarenta países a pie!9

8Casona, Teatro I, "Los árboles", p. 115.
9Ibid., p. 117.
Growing friendlier, the duo share their unhappiness at being designated as numbers "F-48" and "X-31".

Tension can only be held so long by a playwright unless he intersperses a bit of action or comedy in a long stretch of suspense-creating non-action. This is the function of the pair of charming old gentlemen; their very lack of sinisterness cancels out the rather foreboding impression that the stern Helena has previously made upon the audience.

The Pastor has chafed twice now about being no longer considered an individual but a number, only to be told by Helena that knowledge of the identity of the others in the organization could betray them all if one were captured by the police. Now he delivers a message from Casona to the audience. He says:

Mi nombre verdadero es Juan. Poca cosa, ¿verdad? ¡Pero humano, señor, humano! Millares de Juanes han escrito libros y han plantado árboles. Millones de mujeres han dicho alguna vez en cualquier rincón del mundo 'te quiero, Juan'. En cambio ¿quién ha querido nunca al 'F-48'? Juan sabe a pueblo y a eternidad: es el hierro, la madera de roble, el pan de trigo. 'F-48 es el nylon.'

In the midst of this plea for the integrity of the individual is the millares de Juanes loved by millones de mujeres which is so typical of Casona's preaching with humor.

10Casona, Teatro I, "Los árboles", p. 117.
The Ilusionista is a progressive, however, and answers: "A mí me gusta el nylon; es cómodo y barato. ¡El porvenir!" But he adds, "La primera vez que me oí llamar así [X-31], creí que estaban llamando a un submarino..." While the Pastor recites Shakespeare, the clown sends a stream of water shooting out of his ear. Then, looking the Pastor in the face for the first time, he says, "No somos nadie, hermano: usted, un catedrático sin cátedra; yo, un ilusionista sin ilusiones."11

Casona has used open humor to capture the attention of his audience and to aid in mystifying it; now he ceases to use this variety of humor for the rest of the play. He relies upon sharply witty comments on occasion in the second and third acts, but mostly the humor that follows is inherent in his excellent characterizations of people. His sympathy and tenderness of handling the various characters admits a gentle humorous touch but no further broad cutting humor.

In the scenes that follow the discussion between the two members of the "organization" the heroine and the hero are introduced. Isabel, a young blonde, is ushered into the waiting room. The Ilusionista takes up his balloons and departs. He honks like a diesel truck as he passes Isabel. The technique of letting the audience in on the secret so that it may laugh at newly arrived characters on stage is

used here for humor. By now the audience has some idea that
this peculiar organization may have some altruistic purpose;
it is certain that the members are not, apparently, evil.

Isabel and the old gentleman, Balboa, who soon comes in,
now go through the initial shock and amazement that the au-
dience has just gone through. Helena has entered with Isabel
and announces her arrival on the intercom to an unknown but
suave voice, that of the Director who proclaims his eagerness
to see Isabel. She appears to be unacquainted with anyone
there and to be totally dumbfounded. As Helena tries to
make the place appear as much like a normal business office
as possible, odd things happen which embarrass Helena and
which have the effect of terrifying both Isabel and the eld-
erly gentleman who has been ushered in. In short order a top
hat left on the desk begins to hop and out comes a white rab-
bit. The little typist comes in and looks for a card in the
file, muttering to herself, "kidnapped kids" and "opium
smoker". Helena answers the phone and says that she cannot
talk just now—people are present. She disconnects the tele-
phone and takes it out of the room. Her little apologetic
comments about these events are humorous.

The newcomers are slowly becoming terrified. They strike
up a frightened conversation and attempt to decide what sort
of place this is; soon they are certain that it is not a
movie studio, nor a theater. Neither is it a circus, lodge,
or secret sect. Is it a political or terrorist organization? A spy ring? Balboa decides that it may be a white slave ring. Gallantly he promises to defend Isabel.

A beggar comes in and unloads jewels from his pockets. He reports on the intercom that S-3-2's mission is accomplished. Then, quite friendly, assuming the pair to be members of the organization, the beggar asks if Balboa is the colonel with the seven battle wounds for the wartime reminiscing bit. The frightened old man and girl decide that it is some sort of Mafia or crime syndicate. They become panic-stricken and look for an escape but find a dead end in the curtain leading to the wardrobe and makeup closet. They cannot telephone out; Helena took the phone. In a little dialogue between youth and age the young girl suggests several ways of escape or possibilities of behavior; the wise old man vetoes them.

They are nearly distraught when the efficient Helena enters briskly about her business and is confronted with an hysterical Isabel. The last member of the organization to enter and puzzle them was too much; he was a hunter who came in singing Italian opera. Between snatches of Figaro's aria he talked on the intercom, ordering fifty hungry dogs and rabbits for tomorrow. He flirted with the girl at the other end of the line and frightened the couple even more with his two huge dogs on a leash which he handed to Balboa.
He called the dogs "Romeo" and "Juliet" and departed as merrily as he had entered, thundering opera amid barking hounds. His happiness, which was in such marked contrast to the tormented indecision of the visitors, is in itself humorous. This was the last straw; the hunter convinced the visitors that they were in an insane asylum which the inmates had taken over.

As Helena attempts to calm the frightened visitors, the Director himself enters, saving Helena further embarrassment. Director Mauricio is the hero of the play; he is, like Ricardo in La sirena varada and like Fernando in Prohibido suicidarse en primavera, a cynical hero. He gives at this point, two-thirds of the way through the first act, a logical explanation for all that has taken place so far, thus dispelling the fantasy and injecting a sober note into what has so far been a comedy. This is the best example of Casoña's use of comedy for a definite purpose in order to present a message play without losing his audience.

Mauricio, the Director, explains that the institution was founded by Dr. Ariel, who has passed on to his reward. Dr. Ariel wished to help those weary of life, those overcome by the vicissitudes of living, and those blind to the joy of the gift of life. Their activities are dictated by the needs of heart-sore people who would, without aid, perish in body or soul. Their volunteers become actors who go into
life to succor the lost. Their pickpocket robs thieves in order to stop budding lives of crime. Their hunter helps luckless hunters. Once they produced a ghost to enliven the business district of a city where hearts were dead to anything but everyday drudgery. Isabela herself has come here after having been saved from suicide by the Director, who threw a bouquet of flowers through her window with the word "Tomorrow" on a card and left a message with their address under her door. Isabela's feminine curiosity preserved her life.

During Mauricio's description of the function of the organization, which does things for the good of mankind that could be misunderstood by the law, Casona presents two pieces of his basic philosophy:

Sólo entonces comprendió [el juez] que hasta en la vida más pequeña hay algo tan sagrado y tan alto, que jamás un hombre tendrá el derecho de quitársela a otro.13

...tal como va el mundo todos los que no somos imbéciles necesitamos estar un poco locos.14

Isabela's life history is given, and she is invited to join the organization and find employment with them. The old gentleman's story is given: he and his wife, Eugenia, have brought up a much-loved grandson who turned out badly.

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12Casona, Teatro I, "Los árboles", p. 131.
13Ibid.
14Ibid., p. 134.
The grandfather was forced to throw the boy out and the youth disappeared years ago—he went to Canada. The old man has lied to his wife for many years, creating a false grandson who lives a regenerated life in the letters written by Balboa himself to the grandmother, who believes the story.

Now the real Mauricio, the wicked grandson, is returning. Balboa, who had known Dr. Ariel slightly, has come to ask for a young man to play his grandson and a young blonde woman to play the grandson's imaginary Canadian wife. The ship carrying the grandson has gone down at sea, and the heartbreak of learning of the death of the worshiped grandson would kill the grandmother.

As the first act ends, Director Mauricio and Isabel are being outfitted with the proper luggage, photographs with a snowy background, clothing, and paraphernalia for a visit to the Abuela.

The second act contains humor that amuses and brings smiles but no true laughter-creating humor as in the wild opening scenes of the first act. The fantastic characters of the first act disappear and return no more. The humor in this act is based, first, upon the charming anxiety of the grandmother; then it turns upon anxiety centering in Mauricio's performance as the grandson who knows nothing of Canada or of architecture.
As the act opens, the Abuela and her two female servants, an old graciosa and a young one, are reduplicating each other's efforts to achieve perfection before the arrival of the grandson. The simplicity, purity of soul, overwhelming love, and sharp tongue of the Abuela make her endearing and funny at the same time. She has the openness and mental alertness, the true-to-life vividness, and the serene optimism of all of Casona's elderly characters. The old servant Genoveva gives the young one, Felisa, some good advice: "Cuando la señora manda una cosa y el señor otra, se dice que sí al señor y se hace lo que manda la señora."¹⁵

The first scenes hover between tears and laughter. The "travellers" arrive and tension builds; the eagle eyes and grandmother's heart of the Abuela are very acute. But Mauricio is not discovered to be a fraud. The reunion scene is amusing only in that Mauricio, the Director, discovers to his discomfiture that the little Abuela has a very retentive memory when it comes to things her grandson has been doing, as related in the letters she thinks he has written her. Balboa has told Mauricio the general contents of the letters he has written, but, of course, of necessity he has omitted details. Thus Mauricio finds himself trapped again and again. The Abuela has read atlases of Canada and books on architecture.

¹⁵Casona, Teatro I, "Los árboles", p. 144.
Isabel does well as the wife; her knowledge of Spanish is explained by saying that she had a Spanish grandfather. She is expected to play the piano—she cannot play a note. She cuts her hand to avoid it. The Abuela, somewhat tipsy from homemade liquor and happy excitement, is finally sent to bed. Then Mauricio and Marta-Isabel have a council of war. Mauricio delivers a cold-blooded critique of the evening's performance: her kissing was first too "fraternal" and then too passionate. She is getting too emotionally involved in her role.

The humor inherent in this scene depends upon the actors. Mauricio warns Marta-Isabel that she must cease using the usted with him, even when they are alone, lest she slip when they are with the Abuela. Secret lovers, he tells her, use the usted when alone so that they will not inadvertently use the tú when in public. Thus begins an attraction and a warfare between the supposedly happily married couple. They have been placed in the grandson Mauricio's old room, which has a room adjoining in which Isabel sleeps. Marta-Isabel tells the Director that she cannot possibly learn English overnight. He plans to sit up studying architecture. Mauricio says, "Hoy el inglés se ha convertido en un idioma tan importante que hasta los norteamericanos van a tener que aprenderlo."

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The title of the play is explained in the following passage from a conversation between Isabel and Mauricio at the end of the second act:

Isabel: Entonces ¿de verdad crees que el arte vale más que la vida?

Mauricio: Siempre. Mira ese jacarandá del jardín; hoy vale porque da flor y sombra, pero mañana, cuando se mueran como mueren los árboles, en silencio y de pie, nadie volverá a acordarse de él. En cambio, si lo hubiera pintado un gran artista, viviría eternamente. ¿Algo más?17

The third act is straight drama with little in the way of humor, direct or implied. It builds to a tragic ending softened by the stoicism of the Abuela, who, upon learning that her grandson is not the Mauricio who came with Isabel, nevertheless pretends not to know to avoid hurting the couple who wished to help her. Her true nieto did not take the boat he mentioned in his cable to Balboa. With gangsters and the authorities hot in pursuit of him, he took another boat instead and thus did not go down in the ocean. He appears in the third act; he is a very nasty character. Balboa's and Mauricio's efforts cannot stop him from approaching the Abuela for money. She, with great strength, refuses him the money.

The Abuela tells the departing "grandson" and "granddaughter" that the strange man (the true grandson) came to

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17 Casóna, Teatro I, "Los árboles", p. 163.
her room but did not say anything to her. They leave, at the end of the play, believing that they have made yet another soul happy with their art. They do not know that the brave old lady, while giving her "granddaughter" a recipe for an orange *licor*, is inwardly dying, as a tree dies, at the roots. Her self-sacrifice for others is far greater than their art.

The two servants do not appear to any great extent in this act. Marta-Isabel, as she sadly packs to leave the only real home she has ever known, says to Genoveva, "hacer un equipaje es como enterrar algo."18

The scene in the third act, in which the grandmother confronts Isabel with the unhappy information that she has discovered that her *niétes* are not sharing the same room, has potential humor, but it is so overshadowed by the mutual sorrow at the impending departure of the young couple that its humor is lost. There is no need for humor in this act, which is a building-up of romance between Mauricio and Isabel and a preparation for tragedy for the Abuela. Casona uses humor only where he feels that it is needed, as mortar between bricks; never does he use it for its own sake alone. Humor in the last act would detract interest from the tragedy.

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CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Even a brief discussion of Alejandro Casona's use of humor necessitates some consideration of Casona the Teacher, for his humor is inextricably tied up with his teaching. First and foremost Casona is basically a pedagog, and any understanding of his work must be founded upon that knowledge of him. He writes nothing that does not teach. This incontrovertible fact about him has been true from the beginning of his career, and it can safely be predicted that he will follow the trend until his death.

Therefore, in the analysis of humor in the four most humorous of Casona's plays thus far available it has been necessary to point out again and again that the humor is injected for the sole purpose of illustrating a philosophical premise, for high-lighting, by contrast, a point he wishes to make, or to break a serious discussion in progress for the nervous relief of the audience. All of this adds up to his growing mastery of keeping the attention of the spectator for long periods of time without use of much action. This in itself is a teacher's trick. The teacher, like the playwright, must work in one setting or room, and must work with words rather than with the freedom to move about as does
a motion-picture camera. The teacher soon learns to hold his students' attention or he fails at teaching. The teacher learns to break monotony of cerebral work with a fast quip, a clever answer to a question, or a funny gesture. The laugh of the students clears the air and provides a break that relaxes, preparatory to going on into more difficult material. Thus Casona uses humor as the professor uses it.

To separate his humor from his teaching is, therefore, impossible; and yet there has been little room for explanation in detail of everything that Casona teaches. In all of his plays he preaches one thing: courage. The man himself may be traced in his writings. In the two plays before the Civil War in Spain and his exile from Spain, Casona was developing moral attitudes. After the exile he is speaking from personal experience when he cries out against suicide and insists upon the integrity of the human being as an individual. He is for Good, concrete and abstract, against Evil, which he interprets as ignorance, or blindness, or weakness. Escape into unreality, into a world of fantasy is symbolized in *La sirena varada* by the blind painter, Daniel, who will not admit to himself that he cannot see and who blindfolds himself to hide his defect. This turning one's back upon reality is, for Casona, the greatest Evil. This is the dragon that he fights throughout his career. Even in his play *Corona de*
amor y muerte, which is based upon an ancient historical event surrounded by legend and has neither fantasy nor humor, Casona is dealing with a prince who, like the painter Daniel, cannot face reality and brings destruction upon the woman he loves. Prince Pedro in this play cannot marry both the Spanish princess sent to him by Castille and the love of his life, the Galician beauty Inés. Reality will not permit polygamy in a Christian nation. Yet he cannot give up his mistress; Casona infers that there has been a secret marriage. After the murder of Inés, Pedro still cannot face reality. He is as much a creation of Casona's as is Ricardo in La sirena varada in that he has his dead queen crowned by his court, in spite of the fact that she is and will remain dead. Pedro attracted Casona for that reason. In history Casona finds characters, as in fiction, who illustrate what he is teaching—that adding two and two to get five is the road to destruction. When Casona invents characters out of his fertile imagination as vehicles for the delivery of this warning, those characters present their message with tremendous force.

G. K. Chesterton defines the two terms "wit" and "humorist" thus: "The man who sees consistency in things is a wit. . . . The man who sees the inconsistency in things is a humorist. . . . Thus Shaw is a wit and Pirandello is a humorist."1

Casona sees neither the consistency nor the inconsistency in life, but rather he sees the mutability of the human mind. The possibility of change in the mind is to Casona miraculous. He teaches that the miracle of change in the human mind—towards stability, towards understanding, towards acceptance of life as it is and the ensuing happiness this brings, can be achieved by the person who wishes it. Thus most of his characters go through a process of gradual change, often accompanied by sorrow and relapses, in all of his plays. The twentieth century is plagued with the changing status of reality to unreality and back again; modern society produces lost and confused souls by the millions. Casona's teaching is centered around reaching and helping these people. He is neither a wit nor a humorist; he is a teacher of hope and of self-discipline. That is what this paper has sought to prove.

Christopher Fry once wrote, "Comedy is an escape, not from truth but from despair; a narrow escape into faith". Others have called humor emotional chaos remembered in tranquility. Humor is based upon connections made in the human mind between one thing, tangible or intangible, and another. The orderly, logical human brain tends to classify things or pigeonhole them by category. Humor as used by Casona consists often of mixing the categories, placing like with unlike in such a manner that the very juxtaposition of the ideas,

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items or persons creates a slight shock. The spectator is made to laugh out of sheer embarrassment at finding that what he takes for reality is not real, or that his brain's filing system is not working properly. Then the realization that it is a trick of the playwright causes relief—and more laughter. Humor gives Everyman a chance to feel superior to something or someone—to the clown falling on his face, to the man taken aback by the funny remark. Humor exercises the human ego and attracts attention; this is what makes the dictator fear ridicule—humor is worth a dozen armies. Treading upon the edge of tragedy, humor is humor only if it averts tragedy. There is no humor if there is not a shadow of impending tragedy; tragedy overdone a spoonful turns into hilarious humor.

Casona in the concept of two of the four plays discussed uses humor. Suicide is the least humorous of Man's moods; yet Casona has made it a basis of his Prohibido suicidarse en primavera. Had he labelled the play, "An Essay upon Suicide and Its Futility", his audience would have come prepared to sleep. Yet that is the message of the play. By creating an institution which at first appears to be set up for the sole purpose of encouraging and facilitating suicide, Casona appeals to the cruelty in the human race and uses that unpleasant instinct to trap an audience into a sermon.
In *Los árboles mueren de pie*, Casona presents an institution that appears to be extremely dubious, if not downright shady. Here, however, he plays upon the curiosity as well as the tongue-in-cheek virtue of his audience. Casona is a master of psychology; his every use of humor shows his knowledge of the human animal. Not until the end of the first act does he let the audience know that this institution is for the preservation of the lives of despairing people and for all sorts of humane works.

Casona's teaching is the same in all four of these plays; in *La sirena* the hero, Ricardo, and the heroine, Sirena-María, progress from unreality to reality. The older man, in this case Don Florín, the doctor, is Casona's spokesman. Much of the humor revolves around Ricardo's lack of touch with reality, and laughs are based upon his irresponsible answers to questions of others or questions he himself poses. His unawareness of whether it is day or night at the beginning of the play is an example of this. Pedrote's role is that of a very minor *gracioso*, the down-to-earth servant who plays Sancho to Ricardo's Quijote. *Don Quijote* in one form or another appears in each of Casona's plays—Ricardo in *La sirena varada*, Dr. Roda in *Prohibido suicidarse en primavera*, Mauricio in *Los árboles mueren de pie*, and both Lalo and Mario in *Nuestra Natacha*. 
In *La sirena* the ghost is both tragic and comic; most of the humor in the play is centered upon his problems. The apex of the humor in the play is found in the scene between the drunken and distressed Samy and the sober and distressed and terribly lonely ghost. The villainous Pipo who enters late in the play has no humorous overtones, although over-acting could produce great humor in that part and ruin the message that Casona imparts with Pipo, which is that Evil cannot be avoided and must be faced—it will not disappear of itself. This theme of facing and fighting Evil which runs like a thread through Casona's works is another consistent factor in his teaching.

In *Prohibido suicidarse en primavera*, the German efficiency of the Hogar del Suicida constitutes most of the humor in the first part of the play. The slightly-off inmates of the institution, as their personalities are revealed to the audience, and the light-hearted zaniness and bubbling youthfulness of the hero and heroine, Fernando and Chole, are in themselves funny. Yet the inmates are without exception tinged with tragedy. Dr. Roda and Hans are so serious that they at once appear to be slightly mad. Hans falls in the category of the murderous and charming little old ladies in the American play, *Arsenic and Old Lace*. He is totally mad and irrepressibly comic; his seriousness makes the humor.
The *Amante*, the mentioned-but-never-seen Professor of Philosophy, who keeps throwing himself in the lake, and the *Dama Triste*, who is something of a nuisance and a great deal of a bored romantic, are characters who are funny but who are within a hair's-breadth of tragedy. The lack of seriousness of the young lovers who wander in by mistake is charming but not humorous. The humor comes from the knowledge the spectator possesses of the nature of the "hotel" they have found, and the delight of watching their discovery of the meaning of the place. Alicia and the Father of the Other Alicia are neither teaching devices nor humorous characters; they fill out the cast, and Alicia forms half of a second pair of lovers through her scene with the sacrificial Juan at the end of the play. Juan is the element that introduces conflict into the play, but he is not a villain. He is tragically confused in a backwash of jealousy. Casona uses Juan for an essay on the psychology of siblings. Through Juan, Casona teaches a minor lesson in facing reality; he can have Chole but never her love. He sees the light and gives her up—finding Alicia, who has discovered that suicide answers nothing. Alicia speaks for Casona at times in this play.

Cora Yako, the opera singer for whom the *Amante* has developed such a hopeless love that he has come here to die of it, is the most truly funny character in the four plays.
Yet no main character escapes a teaching function; Cora X&k© has a use—she teaches the Amante that the poverty of his real life is better than life with her. The Amante chooses the known over the unknown, reality over unreality. Casona’s portrait of this irresponsible lady is one of his best. The entire romance between Cora and her little cowardly Amante is a lesson in accepting reality, as is the whole play. Only Hans in Prohibido suicidarse remains unchanged and hopeless. The miracle of change occurs through love or through a regaining of faith in life.

In Nuestra Natacha the hero, Lalo, and the heroine, Natacha, do not function as a unit. Lalo is the most humorous character in the play and his story is that of the coming-down-to-earth of a young man, a maturing and an accepting of reality by an irresponsible professional student. He is at times Casona’s mouthpiece; his humor is the most unself-conscious humor in these four plays. Lalo’s self-pity and false vanity are obviously a kind of laughing at himself; he does not take himself seriously at all and thus is funny without any taint of unpleasantness. Natacha is extremely pleasant, but she indulges in no open humor other than in her tolerant amusement at the Conserje, a cut-and-dried grazioso whose lack of a sense of humor makes him, like Hans in Prohibido suicidarse, funny. Natacha is the major teaching character in the play.
Natacha's "estoy en mi puesto" is the message of Nuestra Natacha. In this early play Casona's philosophy was already formed, but he had yet to develop pat methods of delivering it. Thus in Natacha three or four characters divide the message between them. Mario and Flora are comic in their roles as standard types in comedy—the unobserving male and the female who is chasing him. Mario in addition furnishes humor by being rather than by speaking; he is so stereotyped a character that the audience can almost anticipate his reaction to any given situation. Comments made about Mario are often funnier than Mario's own comments; his blockheadedness makes him amusing—especially since he is so brilliant. Casona's message, given through Mario and enunciated by Lalo in one of the first scenes, is that there is more to life than books. This theme was dropped by the more mature Casona when memories of university life had been dimmed by war and exile.

Mario and Flora form a charming pair, as do Marga and Juan in the love scene wherein the Conserje catches them kissing. Juan is funny only in that he is a rebel tamed by a young girl. His poking fun at the Conserje shows that Natacha has done what Senorita Crespo and the former administration have not been able to do. The Marga-Juan scene's purpose is not just amusement, although it is needed at that point as a break in the story of Natacha's success with her school. The scene shows how well, in terms of human
relationships, Natacha has succeeded. The play-within-a-play, *Atta Troll*, is not essentially funny; it is on the line between being sad and humorous. Its tragic ending is muted by the funny arrival of the grande dame and the school doctor; Cas- sonda here shows Natacha to be what Lalo said of a good teacher. She is caught doing something highly unconventional, like a bad student.

In *Los árboles mueren de pie*, the setting used in the first act is a deliberate and successful attempt to mystify as well as amuse the audience. The characters who enter are funny partly because they are unexpected and partly because they combine such human imperfection with such fantastic costumes and speeches. Helena is a female version of Hans and the Conserje; she gives rise to jokes but is incapable of making them; she is the butt of humor in the scene in which Isabel enters. The young typist is a minor character whose humorous remarks about "kidnapped kids" and "opium smokers" make an adverse impression on Isabel and Balboa. Their fear is funny, for the audience knows now that nothing bad will happen to them. The Pastor-turned-Sailor is unhappy in his job, and part of the humor of the character grows out of seeing a dignified professor in such ignominious roles. The Ilusionista's charm is like that of Charlie Chaplin; he is wistfulness personified. The Pastor and Ilusionista together give a lesson in the dignity of the individual human being.
Isabel, the heroine, finds life through giving of herself and through love. Mauricio, the Director, who also is not humorous intentionally, is Casona's spokesman in this play. He has few funny scenes; his message is that reality (life) is greater than unreality (art). He is changed when he recognizes the error of his attitudes. He turns from cold-bloodedness to warmth. The humor in Mauricio's remarks is the humor of a teacher lecturing with a pointed aside now and then to assure the interest of the listeners. Isabel is a tragic figure who learns to accept life and who emerges triumphant over life and over Mauricio's blindness to her love. Isabel and Mauricio in their antagonism-turned-love resemble Mario and Flora in that it becomes apparent to the audience that the woman is in love with man long before the latter realizes it. The audience knows that the man will be captured while he still considers himself free. This foreknowledge flatters and delights.

Balboa is the father-figure who has already discovered that his flight into fancy, expressed in the writing of the letters to deceive his wife and make her happy, may only cause her heartbreak. The fruits of his second attempt at deception, the bringing of a false grandson and granddaughter into his home, bring even greater heartbreak to the Abuela. The Abuela and her two women-servants are
touchingly humorous, but the plot is so involved with the return of the true grandson and the tragedy he brings that little time for amusing behavior on the part of the three women is allowed.

As in the first act the beggar and the hunter exist to frighten further Isabel and Balboa, so in the third act does the grandson exist to create the conflict and show the ugliness of reality. The Abuela's deception at the end of the play is shown to be of another kind; it is deception like Balboa's original deception with the letters—it is meant to prevent wounding another. The Abuela's lie to Mauricio and Marta-Isabel involves no self-deception at all. This is a line Casona draws between deception of others for their own good and self-delusion, which can lead to emotional catastrophe. The former is not evil but generally leads to hurting the person who was being protected; the latter is wrong and dangerous and must be overcome.

Thus each major character in Casona's theater has a definite message to deliver; each humorous scene has a reason for being. There is no humor solely for humor's sake. Rather than a humorist, Alejandro Casona is a teacher who uses humor as a cook uses spices.
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