

Humor and National Catharsis in Roberto Cossa's *El saludador*

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For more than thirty years, Argentine playwright Roberto Cossa has provoked audiences to laugh uneasily.¹ Most critics recognize Cossa's unique and enigmatic sense of humor, yet they rarely discuss it, preferring instead to examine his plays as treatises on social realism.² Scholars who mention Cossa's humor vary in their interpretations of it. Osvaldo Pellettieri, for example, has aptly shown how some of Cossa's earlier works, specifically *Los compadritos* (1985), imitate the traditional sainete by deforming reality, caricaturing *porteño* customs, exaggerating sentimentality, and highlighting the tensions in the everyday coexistence of *porteños* and foreigners (74-5). George Woodyard and Jean Graham-Jones emphasize Cossa's black humor and his connection with the Argentine grotesco criollo.³ Woodyard sees "humor, especially black humor" as a constant in Cossa's work and maintains that, "in the fine tradition of the Argentine grotesque, Cossa manipulates both linguistic and situational humor to provide entertaining diversions while delivering to his audience/reader a concept of deteriorating conditions" (107). Jean Graham-Jones agrees that "traces of the grotesco criollo populate *La nona*" (48) and sees the link that Cossa admittedly establishes between black humor and "the climate of terror in which the country was living" (Cossa in Graham-Jones, 46). She concurs with Cossa's and Pellettieri's views that the author uses humor both to parody the ideological discourse of the turn of the (twentieth) century and to express the climate of terror in Argentina in the seventies and early eighties (46).

Roberto Cossa's genius lies in his ability to depict disturbing moments in Argentine history and, at the same time, nudge his audiences into laughing at those situations through his complicated sense of humor. He does, indeed, play with sainete structures and black humor but he also inserts more traditional comic forms. Through his unique blend of humor, Cossa captivates spectators so that they laugh uproariously in the face of his unsettling messages.

This article examines humor in one of Roberto Cossa's later plays, *El saludador*, to analyze Cossa's multifaceted humor and to establish a connection between his humor and his reflexive realism while, at the same time, postulating a new, more psychological reading of Roberto Cossa's work. *El saludador* is more than just a mixture of comic forms; it could be read as comic agony, which Albert Bermel classifies as a unique type of humor. In *El saludador*, the playwright manipulates the audience through his humor. Once members of the audience connect with the comic target, their laughter initiates a catharsis that purges them of fear and anxiety. By examining Cossa's humor in *El saludador* and analyzing the way in which the playwright provokes audience catharsis, we show how the play reveals the actual psychological state of the Argentine spectator and nation.

When the protagonist first stepped onto the stage at the August 1999 performance of *El saludador* at the San Martín Theatre in Buenos Aires, the audience laughed heartily. In fact, the spectators were convulsed, not with horror, as Artaud would have had it, but rather with explosive laughter. Why were they laughing at this pathetic protagonist who had just returned from a self-imposed exile during which he had fought in Castro's Cuban Revolution? In the opening scene the Saludador returns home after having abandoned his family, only to be rejected by both his wife and the son who does not even know him. But when the greeter, the Saludador, as he is called throughout the play, is repeatedly thrown out by his wife and proceeds to return home again and again from similar and equally idealistic pilgrimages, each time missing another body part, the audience continues to laugh. In fact, they laugh through the final scene when the greeter rides onto the stage in a toy jeep, this time missing both his arms and both his legs. What is the root of this humor?

Humor is produced from the outset of *El saludador* through both the farcical situations and the exaggerated comic language. The situational humor is based on incongruities, the main one being the clash between the greeter's idealism and the realism of Marucha his wife. In her review of the 1997 performance of *El saludador*, Marina Sikora points to incongruity in "la oposición entre el carácter idealista del saludador y el carácter pragmático de su esposa quien no deja de darle consejos a su hijo para hacerlo progresar en su trabajo" (186). While the Saludador continuously returns from and talks of his world travels to right the wrongs of poverty, starvation, evil governments and wars, Marucha concerns herself with having enough money so that she and her son can eat. She urges her son, Vicente, to ask his boss for a raise

and constantly gives him new tips to ingratiate himself with the boss. As the Saludador tells Marucha of his work in Kiev with the Aborigines, in Mexico with the Zapatistas and in Biafra with the starving masses, her obsession is that Vicente succeed at his job. She warns her son, “Sabés lo que significa para nosotros este trabajo. Lo que significa para vos... y lo que significa para mí. Nuestra vida depende de este trabajo” (45). The Saludador’s Quixotic pilgrimages are inconsistent with her quotidian concerns.

Other incongruities abound. For example, Marucha is not the stereotypical forsaken wife whose husband has abandoned her; rather, she is a strong woman who does not particularly want him around any more. She schemes to get him out of her life and these new and humorous ploys inspire laughter. In one scene, as her husband prepares to celebrate his homecoming, Marucha tricks him into climbing the tree in the garden to pick a lemon for a special meal of “milanesas” (44-45). As he does so, she pushes him over the wall and throws his luggage over with him. Later, she tries to lure him into signing over the house to her by arousing him sexually, but when he is unable to sign because of his missing arm, she again dumps him over the wall (50).

These events – his returns, her kicking him out, his exaggerated expressions of love for the family he had long abandoned, her preoccupation with Vicente’s career – and the repetition of them, are a classic model for humor. Henri Bergson suggests that, in this repetition, the spectator is aware of the possibility of the snowball effect – that things grow and multiply (Bergson 29). It is perhaps this snowball strategy with which Cossa is playing; each time his protagonist returns he is missing yet another limb. At first, he is physically whole, but on his second return, he is missing one arm because, as he admits, “Saludé equivocado. En Angola... Alguien gritó: ¡ahí vienen los rebeldes! Yo agité el brazo... como corresponde. Me lo sacaron de un bazucazo” (47). Still his persistence remains intact. He cries over the idea that, after his accident, the *campesinos* did not want to embrace him because they were afraid of his mutilated body. He says, “Los campesinos no querían abrazarme. Me rehuían. Les causaba desagrado”(47). After a brief cry filled with self pity he remains ever the optimist and persists in his idealism as he affirms “Pero me voy a reponer. ¡Me queda un brazo y con este brazo voy a seguir adelante!” (47). Even when he loses a leg right before his third homecoming he still maintains his idealism. The humorous language and the Saludador’s optimistic attitude in spite of his maimed body inspire the audience to continue laughing, even as the protagonist literally falls apart.

In all the scenes, perhaps it is the Saludador's connection with the mechanical—Bergson's "something mechanical in something living" that inspires audience laughter. As Bergson has maintained, the string puppet is a character that "thinks he is speaking and acting freely," but really "he appears as a mere toy in the hands of another who is playing with him" (28). Saludador is both the world's toy and Marucha's toy. He thinks he is free to roam the world and fight his idealistic causes and then to return home to his loving family, but, as we shall see, both the world and Marucha are manipulating him.

Ever the idealist, the Saludador allows himself to be manipulated. Cossa's protagonist has noble and idealistic goals, but his means of attaining them are limited. According to Mark William Roche, Hegel finds humor in the "contradiction between this noble intention and the insignificant individual who tries to bring his intention to fruition" (137). The Saludador travels the world searching for every possible way to help, and then he returns home because he missed his wonderful family. He repeats, "Quiero volver con la Marucha y el Vicentico" (43). Everything in the real world reminds him of them. For that reason, he explains to Marucha, he had to hug all those peasant women in Kiev. He says:

¡Cómo te extrañé! Hace un tiempo en Kiev... Un congreso internacional por la defensa de los derechos del aborigen... Campesinas... y campesinas desfilando... Y nos abrazábamos. Una tras otra... Y de pronto... ¡Vos! ¡Sí, vos! Vestida de campesina ucraniana. Eras vos. Viniste hacia mí y me abrazaste. Y me salió del alma... ¡Marucha! ¿Qué hacés acá? Y la pobre campesina se dio cuenta... La ucraniana, pobrecita, se puso a gritar como loca. Y a partir de ahí toda mi vida fue un desencanto. (44)

Because the Saludador pursues so many idealistic causes he does not commit himself to any. The ironic gap between his expressed goals and his possibility of attaining them is rendered absurd as he becomes increasingly maimed.

Absurd, indeed, but his overflowing passion for both his family and for the marginalized citizens of the world makes him loveable. However, the audience recognizes that his idealism is doomed from the outset. Because he does not have the means to attain his goals, the Saludador is a parody of a tragic hero. Roche maintains that comedy often includes the parody of tragedy. He states: "The parody of tragedy does not necessarily target the tragic hero but the comic protagonist who claims for himself tragic stature" (150). The greeter views his causes as noble and allows himself to be mutilated for

them. By continuously venturing out into a world that physically abuses him and then returning home to his wife who psychologically manipulates him and plots to get rid of him, he creates his own tragic situations. Perhaps it is this parody of tragedy that makes the spectator laugh.

As comedy, though, the repetitions of the mutilations, the brutality of the idea of those mutilations and the absurdity of the situation might relate *El saludador* more to black humor. According to Patrick O'Neill, "black humor is the comedy of entropy, based on an essential incongruity. It is the comic treatment of material which resists comic treatment, and the evoking of a particular response: the reader's perception that this incongruity is the expression of a sense of disorientation and not a frivolous desire to shock" (74). Cossa disorients his audience by combining multiple surprises and juxtaposing them in unexpected ways: the Saludador's idealistic pilgrimages and returns versus Marucha and Vicente's everyday economic concerns, the Saludador's recurring mutilations versus his own and Marucha's reactions to them. If the playwright had wanted to shock his audience, the mutilations would have been painful or bloody. Instead they are bandaged and missing limbs obtained in a farcical, absurdist manner. Unlike traditional black humor, though, *El saludador* is not scornful. The mutilations suggest violence, but the Saludador's reactions to his wounds allow the audience to continue laughing in spite of the background of violence.

Even though only a violent world could so mutilate a man, irony and hyperbole make *El saludador* funny. The Saludador's character is ironic; he is the greeter without limbs for greeting. He has chosen "abrazos" as the trademark of both his personal and political life. The exaggeration of his desire to give hugs on both the international and the home fronts and the irony that the grand "hugger" loses his arms, his vehicles for hugging, inspire audience laughter.

Argentine audiences also recognize several neo-sainete structures in *El saludador*. Cossa takes Pellettieri's concept of "deformed reality" to an extreme by cutting off his protagonist's limbs. Furthermore, the playwright caricaturizes *porteño* customs through his portrayal of Marucha and Vicente's life and the Saludador's consistent longing for his "milanesa." The Saludador's exaggerated sentimentality mirrors yet another sainete structure. The greeter's repetition of his longing and love for his Marucha and his "Vicente, Vicentico, Vicen-ti-qui-qui-co, Vicen-ti-qui-qui-co" (53) provokes spectator laughter at the hyperbolic sentimentality.

While *El saludador* does include the variety of comic strategies outlined above, perhaps, more than anything, it is a play of mixed impressions where people laugh, but remain uncertain as to why they are laughing. The play incorporates comic agony which, as Albert Bermel describes, is “not just a mash of opposites, it is a distinctive type of drama” (2). According to Bermel, comic, from the Greek “komos,” indicates the triumphal return of a chorus or band of celebrants, while agony, from the Greek “agón,” signifies a sacrifice or the contest of physical or verbal prowess (7). The Saludador’s repeated returns, each time having physically sacrificed more of himself, “bring an experience of sacrifice or suffering into harmony – or more likely, collision – with an experience of triumph and uplift,” as Bermel suggests (7). The irony that the Saludador views his returns as triumphal on both the universal and the home fronts collides with the audiences’ view of his experiences on both fronts. The audience sees that he is mutilated, that he has sacrificed part of himself, and that he returns home for more psychological abuse. This collision between his view of things and that of the audience causes spectators to laugh.

The greeter’s exaggerated returns and his own farcical reactions to his mutilations are interwoven with the audience’s surprise at his new mutilations, with his constant rejection by his family and with Marucha’s economic preoccupations. By interweaving the comic and the tragic, and not alternating them as in traditional tragicomedy, Cossa manipulates his audience from the beginning. In this way, he lures the spectator into continuous, convulsive laughter. When the Saludador first returns, he is physically whole, so the audience does not suspect his future plight. Thus, they laugh from the beginning and because they later know the character and identify with him, they continue to laugh even as he becomes more maimed. As Bermel suggests, “we laugh at first, if uneasily, and continue to laugh, still uneasily, not because we are heartless, but because we respond to what the playwright, director and actors have arranged for us, a spectacle of comic agony” (2).

Comic agony differs from both comedy and tragicomedy because in comic agony, “the roles are liable to broadcast, sometimes painfully, sometimes continually, their own deficiencies and to turn the wit back into themselves” (Bermel 139). The Saludador is the target of all the jokes, even those he initiates himself. Cossa’s title character must be the butt of the jokes for Cossa’s humor to have the desired effect on his audience. *El saludador* is the type of comic agony in which the play is obtrusively humorous while still addressing weighty topics (Bermel 7). Cossa’s protagonist is an Argentine

idealist who has carried his idealism to an extreme. He is ridiculous because his idealism has led not only to his continuous expulsion from his family, but also to his own physical mutilation. On a deeper level, however, this broken man and this broken family are surrogates for the Argentine nation.

El saludador symbolizes the actual state of Argentina and its citizens in two important ways: economic and political. First, and most obviously, the economic concerns of the family are those of the nation. Marucha's incessant preoccupation with Vicente's job, with his conduct toward his boss, with his need for a salary increase, and with her complete ownership of the house, reflects the actual economic situation in Argentina at the turn of the twenty-first century. Even though Argentina had experienced a period of economic growth under president Carlos Menem (1989-1999), toward the end of Menem's term, a period that coincides with this staging of *El saludador*, "the economic recession of Argentina is deepening. Unemployment continues to increase and the most optimistic predictions for recovery say 'wait until next year.' The Argentinean population has a general feeling that the country is silently sliding downhill and that improvement cannot be expected until after the presidential elections at the end of the year" (Valente). Little by little, Argentina was sinking deeper into an economic slump. By the end of 2001, the Argentine national economy was as mutilated as Cossa's protagonist; the relatively new president De la Rúa and his economic minister had resigned, inflation had skyrocketed, unemployment was out of control, bank accounts were frozen, and pensions were taken away (*The Events that Triggered*). While Marucha's words express these growing economic concerns, *Saludador's* physical state symbolizes the maimed nation.

As Marucha strives for economic stability, she continuously reminds her son to be ambiguous, "ser ambiguo," with his boss. The important but ambiguous relationship with the boss evokes Argentina's relationship with an economic boss, the United States. For ten years, the Argentine peso was linked in a one-to-one parity with the U.S. dollar, a situation that may have promoted dependence and, at the same time, had a tremendous, but debatable impact on the Argentine economy. Even after the devaluation of the peso in January 2001, Argentina continues to seek help, in the form of loans and forgiven debt payments, from the United States. Cossa's play hints at the problematic economic relationship between Argentina and its "boss" in Marucha's warnings to Vicente. Moreover, Marucha encourages Vicente to repeat the words "diez mil dólares" within earshot of his boss so that the latter will recognize her son's financial prowess and raise his salary. The

dollar, not the peso, is what will promote him, and the more dollars the better. Marucha and Vicente's capitalistic concerns, however, clash with Saludador's socialist interests. When Vicente mentions his plan to request a raise to his father, Saludador replies, "Y de paso le pedís un aumento para todos tus compañeros" (53). Humorously, Saludador insists that he wants to meet Vicente's boss, "Y yo también le voy a dar un gran abrazo" (54).

The family's acceptance of the cooperative that they form at the end of the play suggests that, in spite of the U.S. economic connection, capitalism is still a questionable venture in Argentina. Ironically, it is Marucha who suggests that, "somos una cooperativa," rather than a family (60). In this new cooperative, Vicente works to support the family, always remaining "ambiguous" with his boss, while Marucha contributes her share through housework. The Saludador's "job" is to maintain good relations with the neighbors and to keep his wife sexually satisfied.

Economic concerns dominate *El saludador* and because the audience easily recognizes these concerns, Cossa uses them to highlight and purge a more significant and less talked about fear in his Argentine spectators. Alberto Ciria suggests that many of Cossa's works, "muestran una historia argentina como telón de fondo. La permanencia, o conciencia histórica de Cossa, aparece en todas las etapas creativas de su canon" (445). The audience recognizes Cossa's blatant economic themes and identifies them with their own situation and concerns. Nonetheless, as spectators ponder the Saludador's mutilations, they realize that there is more going on here. From the moment the Saludador steps onto the stage, Argentine spectators see an exaggeration of themselves, their neighbors, their fellow compatriots and their nation with regard to the economic situation of the family vis-à-vis the Saludador's idealism. The viewer acknowledges this surrogate from the outset, but has no idea, in the beginning, of the extreme to which Cossa will take it. The spectator immediately laughs at the exaggerated idealist and connects with him. As the protagonist becomes more mutilated, however, the audience continues to howl with laughter. Argentine spectators recognize this view of self and nation played out before them and their identification with it promotes the release and purging of some deep-seated political fears and emotions.

In *The Catharsis of Comedy*, Dana Sutton proposes that humor in a play, like in tragedy, can produce catharsis and that, "in the case of comedy, catharsis can be pinpointed in something tangible and undeniable, not the smile or the snicker, but the good honest explosive laugh" (2). Revisiting Aristotle's *Poetics* on both tragic catharsis and comedy and Freud's theory

on tendentious humor, Sutton suggests that comic catharsis is a process through which spectators purge themselves of the unwanted, negative emotions of fear and anxiety (pity) through their explosive laughter. When spectators accept the comic character as a surrogate who resembles a target, their identification with that surrogate prompts the bad feelings associated with the target and, thus, they are propelled into purgative laughter (51). Sutton maintains that, "for comic catharsis to work, the spectator must be able to perceive the target reflected in the surrogate and that the surrogate must be ridiculous" (56). At the same time, though, true catharsis releases only a portion of the fear and anxiety. To accomplish this, Sutton determines that, "the spectator must both perceive the target reflected by the surrogate *and feel superior to him* so that only a fraction of that spectator's bad feelings will be purged" (56, my emphasis).

In the protagonist of *El saludador* spectators see self and nation and identify with them. Certain of their superiority to this exaggerated greeter, spectators ridicule him. Through their laughter, viewers purge themselves of their fear that the character's situation is much like their own and therefore, they too are totally mutilated. Fears of physical, psychological or economic mutilation stem from what they know of their real life situation in the recent past. Sutton affirms that, "Comic catharsis works on knowledge and feelings from outside the theatre context. What we know and how we feel about the real-life equivalent of the comic character enter the situation and render it more complicated" (38-9).

The situations presented in the play point to the complicated state of the Argentine spectator and nation. What do Argentine spectators fear? What is the source of their anxiety? If the *Saludador* is a surrogate Argentine, he is physically and psychologically mutilated by the foreigner *and by his own family*. Economic concerns as well as the relationship with the United States are only a façade for the real fears and anxieties that dominate the Argentine psyche at the end of the twentieth century. Physical and psychological mutilation during and in the aftermath of the Dirty War (1976-83) weighs heavily on the national conscience. Spectator laughter purges them of some of their emotions and memories of the Dirty War. If the *Saludador's* wounds seem overstated, they pale in comparison to the actual tortures, abductions and killings that took place in that recent past. It is still too soon to fully comprehend the psychological impact of such individual and national mutilation. Nonetheless, as they watch the resilience of this maimed but idealistic protagonist, Argentine spectators subconsciously consider some of their post

Dirty War options. Masked behind the seemingly predominant concern in the play, the economic, repeated physical and psychological mutilation is a surreal and exaggerated real life experience in the memory of Argentine spectators.

How does a nation purge its fear of repeated mutilation in the aftermath of a Dirty War? How does a nation combat its fear that it might be unable to bounce back psychologically or economically from such maiming? By provoking laughter at the target, at itself, Cossa's play attempts to purge some of these fears by initiating a catharsis. By laughing at *El saludador*, spectators can face their anxiety over economic concerns, but, at the same time, they can partially recognize their own mutilation and their psychological reaction to it. Cossa questions just how much Argentines and their nation can bounce back from a maiming that was imposed on them from within their own nation/family.

At the end of *El saludador*, the maimed protagonist perseveres by trusting his family and rejoining them permanently. Because the Saludador seems to come to terms with his flaws and accept his new place with his family, spectators can purge some of their fears. They see that they too can withstand the maiming they have experienced and that, united, they too can persevere economically, socially and politically. The Saludador had allowed himself to be maimed and had not paid enough attention to his family/nation. Once he recognizes his commitment to them, he works with his family to form a cooperative and stable unit in which each member contributes uniquely. By manipulating his audience into laughing at the protagonist and, therefore, laughing at itself and its nation, Cossa provides a cathartic space in which spectators can partially rid themselves of their fear and anxiety of becoming ever more maimed. Through humor, Roberto Cossa vividly depicts Argentina's actual economic situation, but, at the same time, he highlights the subconscious fear and anxiety troubling his nation and promotes the purging of some of those fears. By provoking catharsis, Cossa, like so many of his Argentine theatre contemporaries, plays psychologist to a deeply fearful and anxious Argentine spectator and offers a unique opportunity for his nation to begin to move beyond those fears.

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Notes

¹ Cossa's works are now also performed with some regularity in the United States by Latino/Latin American Theatre groups such as Teatro Gala and Teatro de la Luna in Washington, D.C. In fact, Teatro de la Luna performed *El saludador* in D.C. in March 2000. Conversations with spectators of that event confirmed that Latin American/Latino spectators of those performances had reactions similar to those described in this paper.

² George Woodyard quotes the playwright himself as saying, "me gustaría que me recordasen como un autor cuyos textos ayudaron a comprender nuestra realidad y nuestra irrealidad" (94). Marina Sikora, as well, suggests that *El saludador* fits "en la larga trayectoria del realismo reflexivo, que desde su aparición en la década del sesenta, ha pasado por diversas etapas, tendiendo siempre a plantear duras críticas a nuestra clase media" (185).

³ Pellettieri determines that the contemporary sainete incorporates black humor and absurdist techniques in order to better criticize reality.

⁴ While this analysis focuses on the performance and the audience's reaction to it, quotes are taken from the first published edition of the play, edited by Felipe Galván.

⁵ Kirsten Nigro, backed by Jonathan Culler's theories on reader/audience response, proposes that "theatre practitioners do not operate in a complete void, the texts they write surely must have some kind of control, or at least power of suggestion over their readers" (103). Roberto Cossa, as both playwright and co-director of this production, does indeed exercise his power to control audience reaction to *El saludador*.

⁶ While I am aware of at least three runs of *El saludador*, both within and outside Argentina, that provoked this exact same audience response, I am not convinced that the playtext itself produces a catharsis in its reader. Perhaps this is because, as Kirsten Nigro suggests, "Both (the written playtext and the live performance) are defined by human presence, but it is the structure of fictive activities that distinguishes (written) drama" (101). In other words, written drama deals more with 'imagined' activities than real ones. As we will see, for catharsis to occur, the spectator must identify with the character. This would occur much more readily between humans representing 'real' acts rather than fictitious or imagined ones.

⁷ This production was co-directed by Daniel Marcove and Roberto Cossa. Actors included Hugo Arana, María Cristina Laurenz and Gerardo Serre.

⁸ According to Antonin Artaud, "At the point of deterioration which our sensibility has reached, it is certain that we need above all a theatre that wakes us up: nerves and heart" (84). He continues, "Imbued with the idea that the public thinks first of all with its senses and that to address oneself first to its understanding as the ordinary psychological theatre does is absurd, the Theatre of Cruelty proposes to resort to a mass spectacle; to seek in the agitation of the tremendous masses, convulsed and hurled against each other, a little of that poetry of festivals and crowds when, all too rarely nowadays, the people pour out into the streets" (85). One can not help but think of Artaud's definition of a theatre of cruelty when viewing Cossa's maimed, forsaken protagonist in *El saludador*. Perhaps Artaud was right when he determined that, "Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theatre is not possible" (99).

⁹ Oscar Pellettieri suggests that in other works Cossa uses deformed reality as a symbol to highlight certain attitudes. He maintains, "Tanto Cossa como (Oscar) Viale toman la deformación caricaturesca de la realidad no como fin en sí misma. Este procedimiento es un medio para poner de manifiesto lo inactual, lo mítico de ciertas actitudes. ... En *los compadritos*,

la caricatura del comerciante que es Carmelo nos deja ver la decadencia moral de la clase media en un amplio período de nuestra historia, el individualismo que puede acarrear una disgregación definitiva" (74). This is similar to the strategy Cossa uses in *El saludador*. Here, however, the protagonist's (literal) deformation is symbolic of the maimed nation, as we will show.

¹⁰ Conversations with various spectators of two different performances confirmed this uncertainty. Two other spectators were disturbed by the play and the audience's laughter.

¹¹ According to a report on the 2002 Economic Summit in Monterrey, Argentine President Duhalde asked the IMF, the World Bank, and U.S. President George W. Bush for loans to help Argentina out of its economic crisis. The response from IMF secretary Anne Krueger was, "Obviamente no podemos concedir préstamos en una situación en donde ellos (Argentina) continúan teniendo las mismas dificultades. . . Prestarle dinero al país en las condiciones actuales no tendría sentido para nadie" ("*Peso argentino*" on the web). President Bush's response was equally negative.

¹² She does insist, however, that saying "cien mil dólares" rather than "diez mil" would make Vicente look ridiculous (51).

¹³ According to Sutton, Aristotle's theory of tragic catharsis specifies, "the pleasurable purgation of two negative feelings: pity and fear" (13). Because Aristotle does not finish his discussion of comedy in *Poetics*, Sutton bases his theory of comic catharsis on a combination of Aristotle's theory and a theory found in the tenth century document *Tractatus Coislinianus*. Sutton maintains that "tragedy employs pity and fear to achieve a catharsis of these emotions, and comedy employs pleasure and laughter to achieve a catharsis of pity and fear." The theorist also suggests that, "Comedy both fills the spectator with mirth and merriment and exerts a cathartic effect that causes these feelings to bubble over into outright laughter" (14). For a more complete discussion of Aristotle's theories of catharsis, see Sutton.

¹⁴ Sutton attempts to decipher Sigmund Freud's difficult theory of tendentious humor and to relate it to Aristotle's theory on catharsis. Sutton affirms that tendentious jokes are those that have reference to taboo subjects and that, "The basic idea is that humor creates situations in which normal inhibitions are removed. And so, in the case of tendentious humor the surplus psychic energy vented by laughter is the energy that had previously been invested in maintaining the inhibition" (24-5).

¹⁵ Sutton suggests that Aristotle's use of the word *eleos* more likely denotes "anxiety" rather than "pity" (15).

¹⁶ As Jean Graham-Jones points out, earlier Cossa plays had actually impeded audience catharsis. She maintains that in *De pies y manos* (1984), for example, "Cossa, in relegating the intellectual to the role of tragic protagonist unwilling to recognize his own tragic flaw, also refuses to allow any pseudo-intellectual Argentines in his audience the luxury of catharsis. Having witnessed multiple episodes wherein the protagonist is exposed to his own cowardice only to see him refuse to recognize his error and consequently condemn himself to a purgatory of deferred catastrophe, the audience too remains unpurged of this flaw" (145).

¹⁷ Here I refer to Argentine playwright/psychologist Eduardo Pavlovsky among others.

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Gracias por todo

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