

The Poet as Hero:
Pedro Salinas and his Theater

by

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	7
PREFACE	11
INTRODUCTION	15
Part I	
The Genesis and Aims of Salinas's Theater	29
1 Salinas: Poet and Correspondent	31
Salinas's Letters to Margarita	32
Salinas's Letters to Jorge Guillén	39
Salinas's Letters to Katherine Reding Whitmore	54
2 Salinas: Poet and Essayist	69
Poets and their Vision of Reality in Salinas's Studies of Poets and Poetry	71
Salinas's Studies of Jorge Manrique and Rubén Darío	77
Salinas's Essays on Jorge Carrera Andrade and Federico García Lorca	83
Modernity, Communication, and Theater: <i>El defensor</i> and <i>La responsabilidad del escritor</i>	85
Spanish Playwrights and the Construction of Reality	94
3 Salinas: Poet and Émigré	101
Exile as a Spanish Circumstance and a Defining Feature of Salinas's Generation	102
Salinas's Literary Studies and the Theme of Exile	109
Salinas's Separation from Spain	115
Part II	
The Poet in the Theater	139

4	Poet and Plot: The “Fabula” of Confinement-to-Freedom . . .	141
	“Reality in Fable Form”: The <i>Fabula</i> of Confinement-to-Freedom	144
	Freedom and Felicitous Outcome	146
	Freedom and Tragic Outcome	152
	The Poet in the Plot	156
5	Poet and Plot: Two Variations	166
	A Nostalgic Transplanting: <i>El chantajista</i>	167
	An Anguished Prophecy: <i>Cáin o una gloria científica</i>	187
6	Poet and Perception: The Poet as a Visionary	202
	Salinas’s Views of the Poet’s Capacity to See	203
	Viewer-Guiders and Guided Viewers	210
	Eyes, Windows, Mirrors, and the Scope of the Poet	219
	Sightedness and Blindness	230
7	Poet and Circumstance:	
	The Poet’s Bridge between Tradition and Modernity	237
	Tradition, Modernity, and Cervantine Values	238
	The Poet’s Bridge Completed: <i>La Estratoesfera</i>	245
	The Poet’s Bridge Interrupted: <i>Judit y el tirano</i>	253
	The Poet’s Bridge of Hope: <i>Los santos</i>	261
	CONCLUSION	
	The Poet’s Place	269
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	281

Preface

MY INTEREST IN PEDRO Salinas's writings began when two inspiring teachers, Solita Salinas de Marichal, Salinas's daughter, and Edith Helman, close friend of the Salinas family, introduced me as an undergraduate to Spain's poets of the Generation of 1927. Salinas's poetry and essays initially captivated me and led eventually to exploration of his less well-known dramatic works. My study of his plays has come to focus on poet-protagonists who vivify communication with fellow characters. I investigate how Salinas, a poet living in exile, turns to theater to express nostalgia for his personal past, connection to literary tradition, and concern for the difficulties of modern life.

Attention to Salinas's own conception of the poet illuminates the evolution of his writing plays in exile. Salinas discusses the role of poet most explicitly in his essays, especially in *Mundo real y mundo poético* (*Real World and Poetic World*), *Reality and the Poet in Spanish Literature*, and *La responsabilidad del escritor* (*The Responsibility of the Writer*). According to Salinas, the poet, distant from the ordinary and mundane, thrives in a literary minority and voyages inward, while also possessing a feeling of community and endeavoring to connect with all society (*La responsabilidad del escritor* 179). Disagreement with the commonplace is the poet's first duty. The poet needs to affirm himself distinctively in order carry out his work (*La responsabilidad del escritor* 146).

Poets, for Salinas, extend beyond writers of poems to include authors exercising superior creative capacity in any genre (*La responsabilidad del escritor* 38). He deems the poet a visionary with exalted spiritual vision (*La responsabilidad del escritor* 182). Seeing more penetratingly than others,

the poet transforms ordinary reality through apprehending it more completely and lovingly. The poet is a far-sighted wanderer constantly open to the possibilities of creative activity, a traveller seeking both social emancipation and solidarity (*La responsabilidad del escritor* 142, 179-82; *Mundo real y mundo poético* 32, 78). Boldly trying to share his or her perspective with others, the poet joins ordinary and extraordinary reality and builds a bridge between tradition and present circumstance.

Elaborating upon the poet's social function, Salinas has the visionary traveller acting as a protector, consoler, torch, expiatory victim, historian, judge, seer, civilizer of humanity, revealer, director of peoples, liberator, and clairvoyant magician (*La responsabilidad del escritor* 235). In these capacities the poet transfers the spiritual realm into the social realm, private space into public space. The poet's world is one of possibility, and "far from remaining pleasantly outside the world, he lives at its very center" (*Reality and the Poet* 4, 164).

Salinas envisions the genre of theater a prime setting for the poet-creator to exert social force. The poet-dramatist forges a unity with the audience by giving voice to what has been composed in solitude (*La responsabilidad del escritor* 81-82). Within the dramatic work, poet figures can be depicted reinvigorating conversational language and endowing it with special expressive power. By writing plays in which poetic characters are prominent, Salinas expands his voice as a poet. He creates key figures who act as poets endowed with "una pujanza que nos afecta de una manera muy diferente a como nos afectan las demás" (a forcefulness that affects us differently from how others affect us; *La responsabilidad del escritor* 218). Study of Salinas the poet correspondent and essayist in exile will show the urgency of his theater production. Study of his theater will highlight the relationship of the poet to the theater and the possibility of a social dimension for theatrical works in contemporary conditions. Although as a poet-playwright living outside Spain he finds staging his works frustratingly difficult, his theater affirms artistic freedom and responsibility.

Strictly only two lead characters in Salinas's plays are poets or writers of verse by profession. A few are authors, and among the others

are a scientist, a shop owner, a model, a magician, a character in a book, a mother, a deity figure, and a fiancée. Yet all demonstrate exceptional creative abilities in their outlooks and dealings with others. A quest for emancipation guided by these key poet characters dominates each of the plays. In the genre of drama, the poet Salinas finds a structure through which to amplify his communicative voice and cast the poet into a role of liberator.

Until 1992, the most complete edition of the plays was *Teatro completo*, (Madrid: Aguilar, 1957), edited by Juan Marichal, which due to reasons of censorship, did not include one of his plays, *Los santos*. *Los santos* was first published in *Cuadernos Americanos* (México), 13, 3(1954): 265-91, and again in *Estreno*, 7(1981): 10-20, with introductory articles by Solita Salinas de Marichal and Francisco Ruiz Ramón. *Pedro Salinas Teatro completo* (Sevilla: Alfar), edited and introduced by Pilar Moraleda García, appeared in 1992. All references to the plays come from this complete compilation, and all translations of quoted Spanish excerpts are my own.