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Four Contemporary Mexican and Chicano Plays—An Analysis

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During my six years of teaching E.S.O.L. (English to Speakers of Other Languages) to 6th, 7th, and 8th graders, the majority of students has been from Puerto Rico and I have therefore concentrated on their literature for our studies, most recently focusing on *The Oxcart* by René Marques for the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute seminar in 1982 on Latin America. A small percentage of students has been Mexican in origin and both the Puerto Rican students and I have shared an interest in their background. This year, I would like to focus on contemporary Chicano and Mexican works as a means of incorporating these representatives of yet another Latin American country into our classes, thus giving both groups of students the opportunity to experience their common traits as well as their difference.

My emphasis last year was on the technical components of *The Oxcart* and on a simple reading through of the play. Due to the very personal message involved in the script to my Puerto Rican students who had themselves experienced most of the feelings described by Marques, many of the warm-up activities usually associated with readying a cast were unnecessary as these students very literally *were* what they acted. This year because of the Mexican examples and the often unfamiliar subject matter, more emphasis has been placed on exploring the feelings and motivations behind the words. Last year's was basically an oral approach; this year's preparatory and follow-up exercises focus on reading and writing skills. These two units can be combined, therefore, to supplement the reading, written, and spoken components of all E.S.O.L. instruction. The four selections, while containing sophisticated themes and high-interest levels, have very simplified vocabulary and grammatical structures and can be used successfully in middle school E.S.O.L. classes in which students' reading abilities are below grade-level.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to introduce teachers and students to three contemporary Chicano playwrights, Lu's M. Valdez, Rubén Sierra and Carlos Morton, and one Mexican, Elena Garro, through short examples of their work. The historical background of Mexican and Chicano Theatre will be provided in order to enhance students' understanding of what preceded each work. In order to appeal to the larger English-speaking audience, I have chosen contemporary theatre as the focus since I was unable to find any of the earlier works in translation. The Garro piece was included to represent contemporary Mexican drama because it so obviously contrasts with the formula of Chicano Theatre, which will be explained in the background section. In

addition to serving this purpose of contrast, it is also comparatively similar in feeling to the Morton work as it provides a non-traditional perspective on a religious theme familiar to all Mexican Catholics. I chose to analyze only sections of *La Raza Pura* as I felt that the language of the play as a whole was inappropriate for a classroom setting. The extracted portions stand by themselves, I feel, as they reflect the flow of a specific theme throughout the piece.

Those themes, very briefly, are as follows.

- *A Solid Home* (Garro) ¹ a deceased family together in a tomb contemplates life and death and the purpose of their existence -
- *Los Vendidos* (Valdez) ² —an Americanized Mexican, during Reagan’s term as governor, searches California for the “perfect” token Mexican model to fill the political post -
- *La Raza Pura* (Sierra) ³ a fragmented, avant garde approach to portraying stereotypical Mexicans in the context of an “All-Purpose Racial Agency” -
- *El Jard’n* (Morton) ⁴ —a farcical take-off on the book of Genesis which offers a contemporary slant to the story of the Creation.

The Garro play, being the only purely Mexican of the group, is available in a full English translation. The three Chicano works are written in what has been linguistically termed “code-switching,” ⁵ a natural blend of both English and Spanish which reflects the spoken idiom of millions of Chicanos. I have enlisted the aid of several non-Spanish speaking friends in order to elicit their responses to these dual-language plays and am convinced that the language barrier has not hindered their understanding of the basic themes and moods. Both *Los Vendidos* and *La Raza Pura* contain a sprinkling of Spanish throughout, the latter at one point incorporating a long poem in Spanish. Code-switching in *El Jard’n* is much more evident. However, the flavor of the Spanish comes across clearly—for those non-Spanish speaking readers—due to the playwright’s skillful handling of the English responses in the dialogue, the similarity of many Spanish words to English, and in some instances, direct translations in the text.

For example:

Dios: (Voice) Soy la voz de Dios. I have been speaking to mis hijos since the first hombre appeared on earth. His name was Adán and he lived in El Jard’n and he had a ruca named Eva who was rather coquetona. ¿Se acuerdan?

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Therefore, I feel that these plays can be used by Spanish and non-Spanish speakers alike. In fact, many of the Spanish words are specific to Chicanos, and even the Puerto Rican students who perused these plays with me were unfamiliar with certain expressions. The terms will be listed as an activity in the section on *Los Vendidos* as an interesting cross-cultural example of regional differences.

An historical approach is important for appreciating the contemporary literature of any culture; therefore, at this point in the unit, I am including background information to enhance teachers’ and students’

understanding of the four 20th century pieces selected.

Since the present border between the U.S. and Mexico—the Rio Grande—was not established until 1848 when Mexican forces were defeated and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo proclaimed an end to the Mexican-American War declared two years earlier, we must keep in mind that the territory we now know as Texas, Arizona, California, Utah, Nevada and parts of Colorado belonged to Mexico until it was ceded to the U.S. in return for \$15 million.

We can, therefore, divide the development of this drama into two stages, the pre-Columbian to present in Mexico on the one hand, and post-1848 Chicano on the other. Before beginning this historical presentation, it seems appropriate at this time to define “Chicano.” “Mexican-American,” “Hispano,” and “Spanish-American” were used interchangeably in the literature before the relatively recent arrival of the term. According to Cecil Robinson, the expression itself is a matter of controversy, its origin debated among the Chicanos themselves. One creditable version is that it originated among Indian groups in Chihuahua as an elision of the word “Mexicano.” From there, allegedly, it was taken up by Anglos in the border regions and used toward Mexican-Americans in an abusive or patronizing manner. ⁷ Fernando Pe-alosa suggests another possible negative source of “Chicano” in the sense of “trick.” Note that the English work “chicanery,” like the Spanish one, is derived from the middle low German word “schikken” by way of French. ⁸ However, with the dawning of the age of political militancy in the 1960’s, “Chicano” acquired a positive connotation. Political activists began using the term proudly to identify themselves with their Mexican Indian ancestry.

MEXICAN THEATRE

The history of the theatre in Mexico dates from the pre-Columbian period. Chronicles and memoirs of the 16th and 17th centuries indicate the existence of dramatic activities among the indigenous peoples prior to the arrival of the Spaniard. In the more advanced Aztec and Mayan civilizations, masks, dramatic enclosures with centrally placed stages, a chorus, and rudimentary stage settings were utilized. The Spanish, however, viewed these dramatic presentations as the fruits of a pagan culture which had to be discouraged. As a result, performances were for the most part forbidden, and manuscripts destroyed.

The priests, who accompanied the conquistadores, developed a religious theatre utilizing the dramatic ingenuity of the Indians as the base upon which their religious teachings were expounded. These early 16th century dramas were an interesting hybrid of the Old and New Worlds, resulting in unique stagings of biblical stories in which Adam and Eve, for example, were surrounded by ocelots, gold and plumed props, and native costumes. It will be interesting to consider these early Mexican works when we later focus on the contemporary play, *El Jard'n* which has as its setting the garden described in Genesis.

The second half of the 16th century saw the emergence of the “teatro criollo,” pieces written by people of all Spanish blood, born in the New World. These playwrights provided the earliest foundations for a genuine Latin American dramatic style since they chose not to imitate either the early religious plays or those of the emerging European Renaissance but strove for their own uniqueness. Fernán González de Eslava, who was born in Seville but spent the major part of his life in Mexico, is acknowledged by most authorities to be the foremost playwright of Latin America in the 16th century.

The 17th and 18th centuries saw the stabilization of the colonial regime and a subsequent general prosperity.

The new aristocrats imported plays of the Spanish Golden Age and repertory companies performed these pieces in Mexican theatres. Thus attempts to create a native dramatic style were overshadowed and the Mexicans, including Juan Ruiz de Alarcón and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, composed their works according to the formulas of the Spanish drama in vogue at the time.

The 19th century saw the first struggles for independence in Latin America, but the emergence of the new nations did not bring a complete break from traditional ways and in Mexican drama, romanticism was the order of the day, mirroring the European trends of the period. Mexican counterparts did exist, but the only plays which have survived are those of Fernando Calderón, again, based on pre-existing European formulas.

The first decades of the present century have provided two events which served as catalysts for the revival of the Mexican Theatre, giving it the foremost place among the centers of dramatic activity in Latin America—the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and World War I. Credit for the realization of change is due to the experimental theatre groups that were independent of the professional stage and Elena Garro, who is represented in this paper, is a product of this relatively new medium for the Mexican writer.

Born in Puebla in 1920, she has limited herself almost exclusively to the one-act play. Her theatre is a poetic one with echoes of folk tales and children's games. She presents in a deceptively simple manner the universal problems facing all people—loneliness, love, death and time.

CHICANO THEATRE

As stated earlier, the date of the American occupation, 1848, was the technical beginning of Chicano theatre. According to Roberto J. Garza in his introduction to *Contemporary Chicano Theatre*, Mexican travelling vaudevillian-type shows known as “Carpas,” and “Tandas,” short musical reviews based on long-ignored Mexican folklore, entertained audiences in the border towns during this period and continued beyond the turn of the century. Performed in tents quickly set up in the middle of the street, these enhanced the new “nationalistic, proletarian consciousness which grew out of the Mexican Revolution”⁹ and had typical commedia dell’arte stock characters dealing with problems faced by the miners and the railroad and agricultural workers. These dramas, in which the campesinos could relieve their misery somewhat by laughing at the actors’ antics directed against their common oppressors, probably were the precursors of the contemporary Chicano plays to be considered in this unit.

Between the turn of the century and the 1960’s, known as the “renacimiento” or re-birth of Chicano-created literature, there emerged several Mexican Folk Theatre groups in the southwestern part of the U.S. Garza remarks that the actual existence of the Chicano in American society was not represented through the romanticized performances of these groups and that it was not until October, 1965, that contemporary Chicano dramatic literature came into prominence. This new mode of expression was the direct result of the famous strike organized by the United Farm Workers under the leadership of César Chávez against the grape ranchers in Delano, California. Lu’s Miguel Valdez, whose *Los Vendidos* will be studied in this unit, founded the Teatro Campesino at this time, engaging itself primarily not in dramaturgy but in social action. His approach has been likened to the “agit prop” theatres which were prominent in the U.S. during the Depression and more commonly known as “living” or “guerrilla” theatres. In his efforts to educate the worker in the politics of survival, he also achieves elements of the roughish, picaresque type of humor enjoyed by contemporary Mexicans in the antics of their popular comedian, Cantinflas.

For many years, playwrights copied Valdez, especially in his development of “actos.” According to Valdez, this is a short—ten to fifteen minute—improvisational piece designed to inspire the audience to social action, illuminate specific points about social problems, satirize the opposition, show or hint at a solution and express what people are feeling. ¹⁰ During these spontaneous dramatizations, signs explaining the roles of the various persons connected with the strike would be hung around the necks of the participants. Thus the stage, very often the back of a truck, devoid of costumes, scenery and props, would provide a simple setting for these stock characters, including “Esquirol,” the strikebreaker, “Patroncito,” the boss, “Huelgista,” the striker, and “Contratista,” the labor contractor. The volunteers would then move into their act, thinking up their lines as they went along. The dialogue fluctuated between English and Spanish and there was much use of gesticulation to overcome language problems, resulting in slapstick humor. *Los Vendedos* is obviously the result of a Valdez acto as the stereotypical representatives of Mexican society are “displays” in a showroom for sale.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES FOR THEATRE HISTORY SECTION

1. What is code-switching? Have students give their own examples, Spanish-speakers throwing in English words and vice versa for English speakers.
2. How has the word “Chicano” evolved? What similarities are there between the development of “Chicano” and the concept of “Black”?
3. The cable Spanish station (S.I.N.) offers regular dramatic programming. Check local listings for any Cantinflas comedies or similar presentations to enable students to experience the farcical, stereotypical elements prevalent in Chicano theatre.
4. A field trip to the Yale Art Gallery and/or the Peabody Museum would be helpful at this time to view the pre-Columbian collections.
5. Students could acquire a visual understanding of the historical background by researching maps in which the changing Mexican/ American borders were clearly defined.
6. A chronological time-line could be utilized to help students conceptualize the basic progression of Mexican/Chicano theatre. This time-line is illustrated below.

15c.—Pre-Colonial Aztec & Mayan religious dramas destroyed by Spanish missionaries who regarded them as a threat.

1st 1/2 16c.—Biblical reenactments developed by Spanish clergy with elements of Old and New Worlds for purpose of instruction.

2nd 1/2 16c.—Teatro Criollo emerges—beginnings of a purely Latin-American dramatic style.

17 & 18c.—Drama of Spanish Golden Age imported or heavily influenced Mexican playwrights.
19c.—European Romanticism imported.
1848—Rio Grande established as border between Mexico and U.S.—technical beginning of Chicano theatre—“tandas” and “carpas” performed.
20c.—Mexican Revolution (1910) and World War I (1917) influence the nationalistic renewal of purely Mexican theatre—Mexican Folk Theatre groups perform in Southwestern U.S.
1960’s—Renaissance of Chicano-created theatre—Lu’s Valdez leads the movement with his “actos” or improvisations as a response to the Delano grape strike.

PLOTS, STRATEGIES AND CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES FOR THE PLAYS

I. A Solid Home , by Elena Garro.

This one-act play explores life beyond the grave as a group of eight deceased family members ranging in age between five and eighty years (before death) together in their common plot, ponders their status and the purpose of their existence. Faint memories of their earthly lives are recalled during this entombment as they contemplate the attainment of their promised paradise. The “remains” are in varying degrees of decay, providing comic relief for the otherwise morbid theme.

For example:.

Don Clement: For pity’s sake, now I can’t find my femur!

Vincent Mej’a: I saw Katie using it for a trumpet. ¹¹

The characters maintain their earthly personalities in death and are thus very real and easily understood. The family members eventually vanish from their present states in order to be reincarnated according to their wishes.

I feel that this treatment of life after death is accessible and inoffensive to my particular students, as their uniquely Puerto Rican blend of Christianity based in Caribbean superstition is hardly traditional dogma.

The three-part strategy which we have employed throughout our seminars:

1. record first impressions after a preliminary reading
2. re-read to confirm or refute these thoughts
3. read as an actor who would delve into one specific part

is an excellent approach to these plays with one basic difference. Before the initial reading, I feel the teacher's role is crucial to stimulate students' interest. Since this method requires three readings of each play (I have chosen short plays (10-28 pages) and excerpts for this reason) and since it is often very difficult to maintain students' interest during even one reading of a play, the preparatory activities are imperative for successful results. A respectful visit to a cemetery, either as a class or individually, would put students in the mood for the play. Back in the classroom I would shut the lights off (our room has enough natural light to allow for reading but maintain an eerie atmosphere) and greet students at the entrance to the "tomb" (the classroom) as they take their regular seats. I would very briefly describe the plot, leaving out the ending to stimulate their curiosity. With William Styron's suggestion that ". . . this artificial picture of life must start from the detail of actuality-the audience must be able to recognize it. . . ." ¹² in mind, the students could then be asked to imagine the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures of the tomb and under these headings write lists of adjectives, which could later be shared with the rest of the class. The concept of reincarnation could then be presented as a belief system which is accepted, if not by them, by certain other groups. Have them describe, at this point, either orally or in writing, what object they themselves would like to become in their transformation to the next life. And finally with Styron's "memory" as a point of departure, i.e., ". . . we know how the character feels about things from his past and this determines his present actions and thoughts. . . ." ¹³, have them list the qualities of their own personalities which they, like the characters of the play, would carry with them to the grave.

They would now be ready to read the play once for a general first impression. I would encourage a second reading with notations now of specific references to sensory details, personality traits and reincarnated modes. These should include costume notes (lace sleeping cap, nightgown, white dress, cuffs, fan, drop earrings, etc.), Don Clement's argumentative manner and Mama Jessie's vanity, and music from the harp of St. Cecelia, the fold of an angel's tunic and the stone slabs of a tomb as their desires for reincarnated forms. The play could now be read a third time silently with specific characters in mind to anticipate a class reading, and finally, followup activities might include:

- specifying the everyday phrases in the play which take on new meanings when taken out of the familiar context of earthly life and thrust into the tomb setting. Why are these a source of laughter throughout the play?
- tracing the title as evidenced throughout the play, leading to the final reference when Lydia contemplates her unfulfilled earthly dream of having a "solid home."

II. Los Vendidos , by Lu's M. Valdez

This "acto" dramatizes "the tactics and acts of intimidation that grape growers and farmers employed on Chicano grape pickers during the strikes in Delano, California." ¹⁴ The setting is "Honest Sancho's Used

Mexican Lot and Mexican Curio Shop” and the six characters are intentionally stereotypical and superficial. Sancho has specific “models” on display, including a farm worker, a street-wise dude, a bandit and a “vendido” (i.e. a sellout, an acculturated Mexican-American. The use of the verb, “vender” in various forms, including the title, changes its meaning according to the particular context.) Another typical “sell-out”, a “Miss JIMenez”—(a deliberate distortion of the Spanish accent)—who is a secretary from the then Governor Reagan’s office, has come in search of a “Mexican type for the administration.”¹⁵ She finally decides on the Mexican-American model who then breaks out of his complacent role at the end and encourages the three other models to turn on Miss JIMenez and on Honest Sancho.

Again, I would preview this play by giving a brief synopsis of the plot, excluding the ending in order to maintain the students’ interest. Valdez’s use of the “acto” as described in the Chicano Theatre section at the beginning of the unit could be reviewed at this time and large identifying labels placed around each actor’s neck (these would read:

- 1. CONTRATISTA [labor-contractor-Honest Sancho];
- 2. VENDIDA [female sell-out-Secretary];
- 3. PEON [Farmworker];
- 4. PACHUCO [gang member-Johnny];
- 5. BANDITO [star, martyr, Latin-Lover (all rolled into one)—Revolucionario];
- 6. VENDIDO [male sell-out—Mexican-American]].

Warm-up exercises would include the following descriptive stage directions taken directly from the text. These can be written on the board with the instruction to the students that the starred numbers (*) mean that two people are needed to enact these movements (preferably one male/one female). These pairs should be arranged before the warm-ups begin. The teacher or a student could take on the role of Honest Sancho and lead the activity by snapping his/her fingers, as this character does throughout the play, while simultaneously calling out the next number. Since the characters are actually described as puppets, have students enact the stage directions with marionette-like qualities:

MS. JIMENEZ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. screams 2. clutches *3. kicks Pachuco repeatedly
FARM WORKER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4. cuts grapes slowly 5. cuts grapes quickly 6. picks cotton slowly 7. picks cotton quickly 8. picks melons slowly 9. picks melons quickly
PACHUCO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10. does the pachuco bounce (cool, street shuffle) 11. pulls out a switch blade *12. stands out against an imaginary wall, legs spread out, arms behind back—second person frisks him *13. steals Secretary’s purse—she runs after him, gets it back, and kicks him
REVOLUCIONARIO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14. rides horse leading attack

- 15. becomes a martyr
- 16. becomes a moviestar
- *17. folds back Secretary, Latin-love style
- MEXICAN-AMERICAN 18. gives a political speech
- *19. kisses Secretary's hand

References to cars and food are used throughout the play to describe the Farmworker, the Pachuco, the Revolutionary, and the Mexican-American. After the initial reading, it might be fun to have the students match up the following quotes (I would mix them up to make it more challenging for the students) to the actual characters in order to test their awareness of personality stereotypes.

CARS :

Volkswagen of Mexicans built
close to the ground (Farm Worker)
built for speed, low riding city (Pachuco)
life features: Mag shoes,
dual exhausts,
green chartreuse paint job
dark tint windshield
antique well-built, sturdy, durable (Revolutionary)
International Harvester of Mexicans
sturdy U.S. steel frame
streamlined, modern apex of (Mexican-American)
American engineering

- What vehicle-related adjectives could be used to describe Sancho? Ms. Jimenez?
- What would the six vehicles/persons look like if you were costuming them? Use elements of both to sketch your concept.

FOOD:

beans and tortillas
chile
chile jalapeños (Farm Worker)
chile verde
chile colorado
hamburgers
Taco Bell tacos (Pachuco)
Lucky Lager Beer
Thunderbird wine
raw horsemeat (Revolutionary)
tequila
dry martinis (Mexican-American)
Langendorf bread

- Who would Ms. Jiménez feel most comfortable eating with? How about Sancho?
- What additional kinds of food would they order at a restaurant?

The following activities could be utilized now for a deeper analysis of the various roles. The chapter in Keith Johnstone's *Impro* entitled "Status" is worth reading at this point as the see-saw quality of relationships is

particularly evident in this play. ¹⁶ According to the author, status is something one does and is therefore unavoidable, i.e., no one can remain neutral. The “I-go-up/You-go-down rhythm is constant from beginning to end here and the characters’ status changes throughout. Johnstone considers this reversal of status between characters to be the mark of a good play. The element of comedy ensues when the status of two of the characters drops (Ms. Jimenez and Honest Sancho) at the end and we refuse to sympathize. The insecurity that the acculturated Mexican-American exhibits when he expounds in public on the negative experiences of his compatriots springs from his deeply-rooted self image of low status.

Johnstone suggests several exercises which would help students to interpret this change in status. First, they should analyze the characters in terms of status enjoyed at the beginning and then at the end of the play. Thus, Honest Sancho goes down in status as does Ms. Jiménez, while the Farm Worker, the Pachuco, and the Revolutionary are raised in status. The following exercises could be introduced at this time to make this concept clearer:

- group the characters as if a photo were to be taken at the beginning and then at the end of the play—what would be the difference in the various poses?
- eye-contact exercises in which the theory that the character who breaks eye contact and does not immediately glance back for even a fraction of a second is the higher in status
- have one person play two roles, for example, an improvisation between the Revolutionary and Honest Sancho thus changing from low to high status at first and then reversing it, using a very still head position when authoritative.

This would be a good opportunity to list some of the isolated Spanish/Chicano words used in order to define them for a clear understanding of the play. These include:

- carabina—rifle
- carrilleras—chin strap
- cochota—a derelict
- filero—switchblade
- gabacho—derogatory term meaning Anglo-Saxon white
- huaraches—sandals with tire-rubber soles
- lana—money
- pachuco—term used in the ‘30’s, ‘40’s, and early ‘50’s to describe a “zoot-suiter”, gang member; “vato” is the current term
- patrón—the owner of a hacienda
- ruca—girlfriend, “chick” ¹⁷

There are other phrases, sentences, even paragraphs used which are completely in Spanish and, as previously stated, would not have to be fully translated in order to get the full impact. For example, when the Mexican-American “awakens” in Spanish, the use of capitalization and exclamation points for an entire paragraph conveys his message clearly without the necessity of translating. ¹⁸ And finally, English vocabulary words which might require defining throughout the play are: acculturate, administration, ambitious, curio, debonair, inferiority complex, naugahyde, patriotic, scabs, scapegoat, sophisticated, suave, and urban.

III. *La Raza Pura*, by Rubén Sierra

This is a technically complex work made up of twenty-seven vignettes and employs films, tapes, slides, and over thirty actors. Sierra makes a powerful statement about the myth of being able to maintain racial purity in a rapidly changing society. The “All-Purpose Racial Agency” in the play resembles “Honest Sancho’s Used Mexican Lot and Curio Shop” in Valdez’s *Los Vendidos*. The Racial Agency handles a complete Chicano line of models including Tijerina Off-White, Acapulco Gold, and Chicano Cream. The playwright’s intent in this work is to provide his Chicano audience with a mirror of its foibles in a humorous way. He believes that “seeing our own mistakes as other people see them gives us an opportunity to pause and re-examine what we are and attain a new insight into what we really are”. ¹⁹

I have chosen to focus on one of the plays within the play, i.e., the romance between Jenny, an Anglo, and Jorge, a Chicano—a combined *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story*. These extracted sections, when viewed as a continuous story, make dramatic sense by themselves; also, the romantic theme can be easily understood by the teenagers I teach thereby holding their interest. Some of the students can certainly sympathize with the basic problem of parental conflict over dating patterns of either inter or intra racial couples.

In Scene 4, the sub-plot begins in the studio of the All-Purpose Racial Agency where two actors—the Girl, who represents a Chicana in her mid-twenties, and Agent III, an Anglo male of the same age—are acting out a scene for the director, Agent I. The rehearsal is going along at a serious pace when the director throws up his arms in despair and asks for a more exaggerated, melodramatic, soapoperaish rendition; the vignette ends by their compliance with his demands.

As there are only five lines involved in both interpretations, it would be fun to assign these parts as a homework assignment for memorization:

Girl: I want to very *much*, but it isn’t *possible*.

Agent III: [taking her hand] I don’t see why it *has* to be! We’ve known *each* other for over *three* years; that ought to mean *something*, shouldn’t it?

Girl: It’s not *that!* It’s because of my *parents*.

Agent III: Oh! They won’t *accept* me because I’m an Anglo. *Does* it bother you?

Girl: I *wouldn’t* date you if it did! ²⁰

The following day, test their memorization skills by leaving out every fifth word or so (the underlined ones) either orally or as a written assignment to see if they can fill in the blanks. Then, different couples could be randomly selected to present the serious version to the class, noting that the only stage direction given in this first interchange is that the boy takes the girl's hand. (This simple action usually embarrasses the actors and sends giggles around the classroom, so I always preface any romantic scene with the reminder that they are just acting and that professionals are often not comfortable with their partners in similar scenes but that their ability to make the audience believe in their emotions is the sign of a good actor, etc.) Let the students now experience the obvious difference between the sincerity of the first version and the overdramatization of the one to follow. The additional stage directions should be inserted in the appropriate spots in the second reading to further emphasize the contrast—try writing them on the board and have the students insert them where they make the most dramatic sense (mix them up, of course): “bringing hand to forehead;” “taking her hand and placing it on his heart;” “giving him her back;” “hanging his head;” “grasping her hands;” “bringing her to him;” and “pulling him closer, they embrace.”

As a warm-up activity at this point, let the students in the audience pretend they are actually holding cameras (or better still, with the assistance of the audio-visual department, this could become a reality). Have the actors “freeze” in the positions just described. Explain to students that this activity has particular meaning in this play as the use of projected photographs is used throughout as the actual stage setting.

The next encounter, Scene 6, is between the “real” romantic duo, this one a reversal of the first rehearsal scene, the girl, Jenny, being Anglo and the boy, Jorge, a Chicano. Jenny's parents have forbidden her from seeing Jorge anymore and Jenny has conflicting feelings of love for Jorge and for her parents. He suggests that if they wait a while, her parents might soften and allow her to plan her own future as his parents have done. She knows this would never happen and when Jorge suggests marriage, she feels that this would only intensify the problem. Jorge then expounds on his changing attitudes—from hate to pity—towards Anglos and the scene ends by Jorge's line:

—Then that settles it, so let's not hear anymore talk about you not seeing me anymore! We'll find a way, and if we don't, we'll make one! ²¹

In order to encourage student writing, I would preface this scene by telling them that before they read it, I will extract a few of the actual lines (including Jorge's line, just cited) for them to use as a skeleton for their own writing of this scene. This could be a team writing exercise in which, if the class permits, one boy and one girl could make up a team with the corresponding person giving the lines (girl: Jenny, boy: Jorge). The lines I would choose are as follows:

Jenny: Jorge, I'm glad you came.

Jorge: What's the matter? ²²

Jenny: _____

Jenny: What am I going to do? Go against my parents and sneak around behind them and continue to see you until I run out of lies to tell them? What do I do? ²³

Jorge: _____

Jorge: So what makes you so different, “gringa”? ²⁴

Jenny: _____

Jorge: We'll just have to make the best of it, simple as that! Well, what do you say? ²⁵

Jenny: _____

After they have all acted out their lines in front of the class, have them read the original script. A prize could then be awarded to the team who comes closest to the playwright's version or to that team which the class has determined to have written the best solution to the problem.

As an approach to Scene 10, students could be encouraged to recreate the setting from a living room in which Jenny is seated with her parents to a phone conversation in which Jenny calls from college and her parents (her mother on an extension phone) respond to her entreaties to marry Jorge. Again, extract only Jenny's lines (have a female student "on the phone" in front of the class giving each line in order) and have the class write what they feel the parents' response is on the other end. Only tell them who is responding to Jenny at that particular time. Again, have students recreate their original reactions and award a prize to the most original work. Then the actual script could be read by all.

Scene 18 is an attempt by two of Jorge's friends, Felipe and Juan, to understand his feelings towards Jenny. Since this is a perfect example of "code-switching" (see reference and example in introduction to unit), Spanish-speaking students could write a literal translation of the Spanish words and phrases, while English-speaking students with no knowledge of Spanish could write what they think is meant.

Scenes 21-23, the last in which the pair are on stage, depict Jenny and Jorge's visit to his Uncle Frank, a family outcast because of his drinking problem. They seek his support and encouragement and succeed as they tap his wisdom and his philosophic approach to life. These scenes can be read in a straightforward manner, noting specifically one of Jenny's questions and Uncle Frank's response as a base for a writing assignment to follow:

Jenny: Sure, but when it comes to parents, what are you supposed to do?

Frank: Well, you tell them you love them, you thank them for the life they've given you, and then you try to lead your own life. Not forgetting them; just making your own way. ²⁶

As a final assignment, have the female students write a letter to their "parents" (the teacher) using the three elements Uncle Frank has described. Have the males write to their "parents" as they feel Jorge has written to his, with obvious positive results.

IV. *El Jard'n* , by Carlos Morton.

Morton's first play resembles the "acto" described in the Valdez section in the beginning of the unit. It uses stock barrio figures and is a hilarious parody of the fall of man. The traditional biblical figures of Adam, Eve, God, and the Serpent dominate the action, but the playwright has thrown in a few extra characters whom his Chicano audience will readily identify: Matón ("Killer"), Ladrón ("Thief"), Muerte ("Death"), Columbo ("Christopher Columbus"), Padre ("Priest/ Confessor"), Ta'no ("Caribbean Indian"), Nixon, and a Reporter. Eve is aptly described as a "halfway-flirtatious chick" while the Serpent/ Devil is a dissipated, alcoholic street-type. The play contains many references meant to enhance communication with the audience: Eve complains that the traditional Mexican diet of beans, rice, and tortillas is ruining her figure; Adam mentions Farah slacks; God's divine plan includes having Adam and Eve join the Angel Mariachi Band; the Serpent calls Eve his "little enchilada". Once having established a close identification between the actors and the audience, Morton uses the biblical tale to suggest that the real tragedy of the fall is that man has lost touch with his spirit, the basis for racial and cultural pride. Adam falls in with a group of violent militants whose tactics are characterized as self-destructive and damaging to Chicanos. Through his play, Morton preaches racial harmony as he urges fellow-Chicanos to assume a role of peace-loving arbitrators between all races.

I feel that the biblical theme must be presented with an open mind and a good sense of humor by the teacher as it is an unorthodox interpretation and certainly not what the students or some teachers, for that matter, are used to hearing. (Columbus is also portrayed in a more realistic, less-idealized manner.) Before even mentioning the topic of the play, I suggest getting students into the mood by eliciting from them their own feelings about zoos from the point of view of their favorite animal. (Eve equates her life in the Garden with that of a caged beast.) In a very objective manner, the teacher can now inform students that the animal they are to describe is well-fed by the zoo-keeper, can exercise freely, has sufficient shelter, has another family member present of the opposite sex for companionship, and must always remain within the cage. Students can now write their thoughts taking this particular animal's perspective. If no value judgment has been implied by the teacher, the results of the student writing should mirror those depicted in the play—positive feelings of security and well-being on the part of Adam and adventurous feelings of breaking away to an unrestricted setting for Eve.

The theme of the play can now be presented, stressing that this is one person's interpretation of the Genesis story. A cursory silent reading of the 28 page play is suggested at this time in order to familiarize students with the plot and characters. The stereotypical qualities of each personality are obvious and students can be encouraged to imagine the performers on stage with the labeling system described in *Los Vendidos* earlier. Non-Spanish-speaking students will probably respond immediately to the multitude of Spanish words in the text. Assure them that after their first skimming of the play, the necessary time will be taken to analyze the language patterns used. After this first reading, have students write a brief synopsis of the play. This will illustrate to them (if they are only English speakers) that even without sufficient knowledge of Spanish they can get a general idea of the story line.

We can now consider the language structure of the play. "Codeswitching" is utilized here to a greater extent than in the other plays of this unit and for this reason the work can be used most successfully with either bilingual Spanish-English classes, beginning Spanish language classes, or with English literature classes, dictionaries close at hand. Most of the words can be found in a standard Spanish dictionary and the specific Chicano-flavored terms are basically the same as those employed in *Los Vendidos* and listed in that section.

I would begin the language analysis to either Bilingual or all-English speaking classes by writing the following Spanish words found in the text on the board in order to illustrate the striking similarity to English:

aventura	mango	
beastial	moral	
coco		paternal
coquetona	perfectamente	
cultura	persona	
dom'nio	pi-a	
espacio intergaláctico	ranchero	
esp'ritu	serpiente	
hoteles	soldado	
'ndio		tráfico
Jard'n		vinagre

There are many more to be found and a “treasure hunt” approach can be encouraged by offering a point reward system for each word encountered. Students could work in teams of two while reading the play the second time and make a simple dictionary to record their findings. A prize can be offered to the team with the most entries. Both bilingual and English-speaking students should write the corresponding English word in order to enhance vocabulary development. This also serves to encourage those beginning Spanish learners who might otherwise be intimidated by language study by giving them the facility to translate quickly. An obvious exercise for those students who understand the Spanish would be to translate, part orally, part written, wherever the words appear.

For the remainder of the analysis of the play, I have been inspired by the sense exercises in Brian Way’s *Development Through Drama*, specifically chapter 4 entitled “Imagination”.²⁷ I will use his examples as a basis upon which to elicit the students’ interpretations. Now that the play has been read a second time with the additional assistance of their personal “dictionaries,” I would begin the following warm-up activities associated with the five senses:

LISTENING:

Shut off lights in the classroom (often the use or sensitivity of one of the senses is increased by removing the use of the others) and have students close their eyes and concentrate on what they imagine the noises in the Garden to be. Remind them that the only human inhabitants are Adam and Eve, that the animals and plants have been created, and that whatever they interpret as God is present also. Adam and Eve have not yet been given their sight.

1. Imagine a small animal approaching Adam and Eve from a great distance. What do they hear?
2. Now a large animal is leaving their presence for a distant spot. Think of these very different sounds.
3. God approaches; now he/she (this always gets a response!) leaves. What noises do you associate with God? (If they envision God as spirit, corresponding noises should come to mind.)
4. The serpent appears. What sounds now?

5. Eve is about to leave the garden as she has been banned. She goes around with a tape recorder to store up her sound-memories of the setting. What does she record?

Now, turn on the lights. Read out the five examples given and have students write short phrases about each one in a poem-like quality. Have students read aloud their descriptive sound images in order for the class to guess which example they are referring to.

TOUCHING:

Again, shut off the lights. Begin the exercise by reminding students that everything Adam and Eve are experiencing has recently been created so these are new sensations to them and they still cannot see.

1. God arrives for the first time. Adam and Eve's initial encounter is one of half-wonder, half-fear. Is this a friend or foe? What do they experience as they touch God?
2. The Serpent introduces itself. Again, Adam and Eve are unable to determine their response until they feel the snake with their hands. What happens?
3. Adam and Eve are walking arm-in-arm through a path in the garden. What sensations do they feel in their feet? Now, a gentle rain begins to fall and they turn around to go home. How have their first sensations changed?

Lights can now be turned on and the written exercises repeated which followed the section on "listening."

SMELLING:

Let us develop these oral exercises using Christopher Columbus' perspective. He has just arrived in Puerto Rico (this actual encounter is contained in the play) and has never experienced tropical odors before. Students could be blindfolded one by one and led through these exercises with a Ta'no Indian guide, who also appears in the play.

1. He walks through a flower garden immediately after a thunder storm when the smells are intensely fresh. Describe what he senses.
2. He has taken a nap in a fruit tree orchard and slowly awakens. Much of the fruit has dropped from the branches and is decomposing at various rates. What does he smell?

3. He is invited to a home for dinner but is unfamiliar with the food offered to him. What smells does he like? What smells are not so pleasant?

TASTE:

1. The Ta'no Indian's perspective can be developed in this exercise as Columbus reciprocates by inviting him aboard ship for dinner the next day. Describe in writing what he tastes as he experiences the following foods for the first time (talk about stereotypes!):

- spaghetti and meatballs
- wine
- grated cheese
- garlic bread
- fried squid
- olives

2. The obvious example of the apple in the Bible story can now be used. It would be fun to provide one apple sliced in half per pair of students. What would Eve have to say about the apple once she has tasted it? Now she convinces Adam (after much prodding) to do the same. What opinion would he have of the apple? Write their responses.

3. Enlist the support of a few brave students by bringing to class as many examples of what you feel would be unusual foods for them (they would enjoy doing the same for you!) for a taste test. Let the students not participating write down the participants' descriptive responses to these new taste sensations. Herbs and spices are always good for this type of exercise (Columbus was on his way to India!), and certainly foreign pastries and candies would be palatable.

SEEING:

Adam and Eve have now opened their eyes, but God is having quite a problem determining their relative heights. All animal and plant sizes have been worked out successfully and are basically what we are familiar with now.

1. Eve is stretched out and is now taller than the tallest tree. She's having problems with her new eyes and cannot see far away. What does she see when she looks at the ground? When she looks up?
2. God tries a different approach with Adam. He is very close to the ground, almost as small as an ant. Adam's sight is also problematic as he can only see very close objects. He's walking through a large meadow. What sights does he experience as he looks down? Looks up?
3. God has finally decided upon the height we now know. But Adam and Eve are still having evolutionary eye problems and are color blind. They see everything in pink and blue. What is this unusual (for us) world like that they experience?
4. They have finally been thrust out of the Garden because they have eaten of the forbidden fruit. As a remembrance of paradise, God is allowing them to take ten pictures each with their cameras before they leave. What would Eve photograph? Adam?

As a final exercise, let the class read the play for the last time in groups which correspond to the five senses and write, as teams, all the words they encounter in the text with sensory definitions. They have thus read the play three times, hopefully without the usual groans which accompany such a suggestion, if these readings have been masked successfully behind the sense exercises.

In conclusion, I hope the reading of these plays using the various theatre techniques described in the unit will inspire teachers and students alike to dissect further dramatic works and find in them the basis for fun and educationally rewarding exercises in language development.

Notes

1. Francesca Colecchia and Julio Matas, *Selected Latin American One-Act Plays* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), p. 39-51.
2. Roberto Garza, *Contemporary Chicano Theatre* (South Bend: Notre Dame Press, 1976), p. 15-27.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 59-101.
4. Tino Villanueva, *Chicanos* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1980), p. 493-521.

5. Charles M. Tatum, *Chicano Literature* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), p. iii.
6. Villanueva, p. 493.
7. Cecil Robinson, *Mexico and the Hispanic Southwest in American Literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977), p. 308.
8. Fernando Pe-álosa, *Chicano Sociolinguistics* (Rowley: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1980), p. 2.
9. Robinson, p. 74.
10. Tatum, p. 52.
11. Colecchia and Matas, p. 39.
12. J. L. Styan, *The Elements of Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 11.
13. Ibid., p. 14.
14. Garza, p. 16.
15. Ibid., p. 18.
16. Keith Johnstone, *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* , (New York: Theatre Arts, 1979), p. 33074.
17. Librado Keno Vasquez, *Regional Dictionary of Chicano Slang* (Austin: Jenkins Publishing Company, 1975).
18. Garza, p. 26.
19. Tatum, p. 73.
20. Garza, p. 64.
21. Ibid., p. 68.
22. Ibid., p. 66.
23. Ibid., p. 66.
24. Ibid., p. 67.
25. Ibid., p. 68.
26. Ibid., p. 95.
27. Brian Way, *Development Through Drama* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1967), p. 42-64.

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Vasquez, Librado Keno, *Regional Dictionary of Chicano Slang*, Austin: Jenkins Publishing Company, 1975. Hours of fun with this look at the changing Spanish language with definitions such as "fuliar—to fool someone" and "gu'nchil—an automobile windshield"! A good companion to the Pe-alosa book.

Way, Brian, *Development Through Drama*, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1967. A theoretical and practical guide to the many aspects of play production.

STUDENTS' READING LIST

Colecchia, F. and Matas, J., *Selected Latin-American One-Act Plays*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973. Supplementary examples of well-known playwrights including two other Mexicans: Villarrubia, *Incredible Though it Seems* and Huidobro, *The Guillotine*. Contains Garro's *A Solid Home*.

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Jard'n , the only entry written mostly in English.

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