

DIALOGUES WITH "THE OTHER": Mexican Voices in Performance

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- JUAN RUIZ DE ALARCON, LETRADO Y DRAMATURGO: SU MUNDO MEXICANO Y ESPAÑOL.* By Willard F. King, translated by Antonio Alatorre. (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1989. Pp. 290.)
- FOOTLIGHTS ACROSS THE BORDER: A HISTORY OF SPANISH-LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL THEATRE ON THE TEXAS STAGE.* By Elizabeth C. Ramírez. (New York: Peter Lang, 1990. Pp. 194. \$43.95 cloth.)
- A HISTORY OF HISPANIC THEATRE IN THE UNITED STATES: ORIGINS TO 1940.* By Nicolás Kanellos. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. Pp. 240. \$38.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)
- MEXICAN AMERICAN THEATER: LEGACY AND REALITY.* By Nicolás Kanellos. (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1987. Pp. 125. \$10.00 paper.)
- THE DIALOGICAL THEATRE: DRAMATIZATIONS OF THE CONQUEST OF MEXICO AND THE QUESTION OF THE OTHER.* By Max Harris. (New York: St. Martin's, 1993. Pp. 211. \$45.00 cloth.)

In the years leading up to the quincentenary of the voyages of Christopher Columbus, interested scholars, historians, and grassroots activists began many dialogues between past and present, between conquered and conqueror, between a European self and an indigenous "Other" (or vice versa). As scholars reexamined and reinterpreted the experiences written about by Columbus, Fray Toribio de Motolinía, and other contemporaries, academic discourse began to reflect this activity, and positions for colonial specialists started to appear more frequently in the job listings of the Modern Language Association. Former heroes like Columbus were demythified, while previously unsung or understudied writers received more attention. Border cultures in the U.S. Southwest were legitimized and began to be studied. The five texts under review here participate in the ongoing dialogue about the Encounter, as each author explores questions concerning Mexican (or Mexican-American) identity as expressed theatrically over time.

The question of when theatre performed in Mexico became "Mexican theatre" bears reflection. Nearly a century after independence, the

Mexican stage was still echoing Spanish models, thematically and structurally. As late as 1932, Mexican dramatist Rodolfo Usigli noted the lack of a modern national theatre in Mexico and lamented the persistence of comedies in the style of José Echegaray that were performed by star-managers who depended on prompters to feed them their lines.¹ Usigli claimed that Mexican actress Virginia Fábregas ushered in the modern era in the 1920s, when she pioneered the use of the contemporary Mexican accent in performance, thus ending the long domination of Castilian pronunciation on the Mexican stage. In the late 1930s, Japanese director Seki Sano came to Mexico to train actors in the new “method” that he had learned in Russia from Stanislavsky.

Although the drawing-room comedies presented on the legitimate stage may have seemed far removed from everyday Mexican reality in the early twentieth century, the popular *revista* or review projected a different image. Often salacious and bawdy, these vaudeville-type sketches and song-and-dance acts featured the *pelado*, a down-on-his-luck type later immortalized by Cantinflas. *Revistas* were topical, and touring companies would adapt the dialogue and song lyrics to reflect gossip and personalities in each locale. Both types of theatre formed the repertory of groups discussed in Elizabeth Ramírez’s *Footlights across the Border* and in the two works on Mexican-American theatre by Nicolás Kanellos.

In light of the late development of a theatre that was truly Mexican, it is not surprising that scholars have debated for centuries over the *mexicanidad* of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. Born in 1580 or 1581 in Mexico City, Alarcón spent his first twenty years there before traveling to Salamanca to study law. He returned to Mexico for a few years (1608 to 1613), but ambition drove him back to the Spanish court. He spent the rest of his life in Spain and died in 1639 in Madrid. Willard King’s detailed literary biography, *Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, letrado y dramaturgo: Su mundo mexicano y español*, attempts to “rescatar a Alarcón de los intersticios de la historia literaria y restaurarle un perfil lo más nítido posible” (p. 9). After researching myriad historical, sociological, canonical, legal, and literary sources, King correlates influential individuals, events, and discourses with the particular plays in which they are manifested.

King combed archives in Spain and Mexico to assemble biographical information as detailed and complete as possible. She points out instances in Alarcón’s life when distant relations were able to provide financial assistance or moral support to the young lawyer in his quest for a secure position at court. By choosing certain relatives over others, Alarcón was able to deflect attention from possible Jewish ancestry and maintain the appearance of a pure lineage. King clarifies the significance of these actions by placing them within the context of an active Inquisition.

1. Rodolfo Usigli, *México en el teatro* (Mexico City: Imprenta Mundial, 1932), 109.

Its activities included conducting autos da fé, public spectacles that Alarcón undoubtedly had already witnessed in Mexico during his youth. The repressively prejudicial attitude toward Jews caused many of them to lead double lives, and Alarcón's acquaintance with systematic dissembling surfaces in his repeated choice of the topic as a theme in well-known plays such as *La verdad sospechosa*.

King stresses that while Alarcón was not officially part of the court until 1526, his legal studies and his richer classmates gave him access to a network of nobles in Salamanca and Seville, notably the Conde-Duque de Olivares. Thus although Alarcón may have had limited access to courtly life, he possessed some firsthand knowledge and much secondhand gossip that inspired him with plots and themes for his plays. King observes that while the *letrado* was studying canon law, his actual workload included many secular cases. References to Alarcón's activities in student diaries and poems provided King with information about his student days, which included debating, gaming, and visiting brothels.

Some thematic and formal influences on Alarcón's writing came from his formidable contemporaries and adversaries, who included such illustrious Spanish writers as poets Francisco de Quevedo and Luis de Góngora and Golden Age dramatist Lope de Vega. King devotes nearly twenty pages to an appendix detailing the ongoing literary feud between Alarcón and Quevedo, which includes full texts of two lengthy poems in which the two poets parody each other aggressively. But King also cites textual evidence in Alarcón's plays from the 1520s indicating that he may have taken some of his contemporaries' criticism to heart. His later plays exhibit a cleaner style (less *gongorino*), although they also convey implicit satires of Lope and Quevedo. One symptom of the strain of constantly responding to verbal abuse directed at his physical deformities as well as his writing style is the recurring theme in his later plays of the importance of friendship.

King also traces Alarcón's successive attempts to gain friends and favor at court in order to secure a permanent position and a stable income. Toward this end, fully a quarter of Alarcón's plays deal favorably with the relations between *privados* (favorites) and kings. If real-life privado Conde-Duque de Olivares ever attended Alarcón's plays, he undoubtedly would have understood and appreciated the implied compliment. When Francisco de Sandoval y Rojas, the Duque de Lerma, stepped down and Olivares assumed the role of *privado*, Alarcón finally received a post as *relator* (a government functionary) in the Consejo de las Indias, a "promotion" that effectively ended his career as playwright.

King's conclusion summarizes how Alarcón's "Mexicanness" explains to some degree his lack of interest in historical or rural drama (favorite themes of Lope de Vega). She further details how his position as an outsider endowed him with a unique perspective that enabled him to

write accurate and interesting *comedias de costumbres* about the Spain of his day. Another important dimension of Alarcón's writing consists of his rational style, his interest in reason and logic, and his tendency to leave endings more open and unresolved than his contemporaries did. All these features reflect his training as a lawyer.

Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, letrado y dramaturgo is indeed an accomplished and detailed work. I encountered only one unpleasant aspect: King tends to drop names that nonspecialists may find so obscure as to seem irrelevant. For example, she comments that a certain person was "cristiano nuevo, tal como lo había sido el célebre doctor Juan Huarte de San Juan" (p. 163). Elsewhere, she compares Lope with Juan Ramón Jiménez, a Spanish poet of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, without giving him proper identification. But even though the scope of the study is more biographical and sociological than literary, it succeeds nevertheless in illuminating certain aspects of Alarcón's work in fresh ways.

In the nineteenth century, Mexican national territory changed enormously as U.S. expansionism clashed with Mexican autonomy. By the start of the U.S. Civil War in 1861, U.S. territory had been extended to include Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California—about a third of the area that was formerly Mexico. Although the inhabitants of these regions were living under a new government, little changed culturally for many Spanish-speaking families. Hispanic communities throughout the Southwest enjoyed a vibrant professional theatre, a fact long ignored by mainstream theatre scholars. Mexican scholars neglected the subject because it fell outside national boundaries, while U.S. academics remained unaware of or unable to appreciate this theatre due to the language barrier. Recently, Elizabeth Ramírez and Nicolás Kanellos have published informative works on Spanish-language theatre in the United States. Both their books focus on the same period, roughly 1870 to 1940, and include illustrations and photographs of theatres, actors, playbills, and other realia. Working independently, both authors consulted the same sources and assembled very similar histories. Ramírez's book limits its coverage to Texas, however, and will be reviewed before the Kanellos study, which is broader in scope.

Ramírez begins *Footlights across the Border: A History of Spanish-Language Professional Theatres on the Texas Stage* by establishing credibility for her topic. The introduction points out that "Mexican theatre predates the first English-speaking theatre on the American continent." At the time Ramírez began research for her dissertation, "no detailed study of the professional Spanish-language theatre in Texas exist[ed]" (p. 1). Delving into Spanish-language newspaper archives, Ramírez found evidence of at least one "Mexican theatre" operating in Austin by 1875. Its usual fare would have been a mixture of opera, operetta, *zarzuela*, and serious drama. Going to the theatre was a social as well as a cultural activity, and

the dramas presented usually featured didactic or moralistic themes. Ramírez makes an interesting distinction: “the Mexican theatre was an elite institution but the Mexican American theatre catered to all classes” (p. 45). Except in a handful of theatres dedicated exclusively to staging plays, companies performed in church halls or mutual-aid society auditoriums.

Most of the Texas playbills advertise well-known plays by established Spanish dramatists such as the brothers Serafín and Joaquín Álvarez Quinteros and José Echegaray. The bill changed daily as companies performed various plays from their large and varied repertoires. A typical evening might include one long play, a comic afterpiece, and short skits or songs performed during intermissions. Ramírez details some of these plays and hypothesizes as to how Mexican companies acquired some of the Spanish material. In some cases, actors simply “adapted” from memory plays that they had attended.

Ramírez devotes one whole chapter of *Footlights across the Border* to describing the various types of acting companies, using the most famous or most successful to illustrate each one. In addition to watching family-based resident companies, Texans enjoyed the performances of touring repertory companies and large companies from Mexico City. Often actors also functioned as publicists, technical assistants, and managers. Ramírez cites the Solórzano and Villalongín resident companies as highly successful between 1910 and 1915. She also details the impact of Mexican actress Virginia Fábregas’s touring company on the regional theatre. Fábregas changed the company’s organization from a family-based group of shareholders to one of unrelated professionals who were retained on salary. The low visibility of these touring companies in the 1930s resulted directly from stricter immigration policies following World War I as well as from the impact of cinema throughout the United States.

Ramírez devotes another chapter to actual productions. In addition to describing scenery, backdrops, lighting equipment, costumes, and the like, Ramírez includes thirteen illustrations of famous actors in costume. She highlights the performance styles of popular leading dramatic actors such as Fábregas and Carlos Villalongín and mentions a few famous comic actors as well. The next chapter discusses audiences and performances, press coverage of performances, and the frequent benefit performances that often financed the companies’ return tickets to Mexico. Ramírez stresses the importance of the railroad, observing that most companies followed a similar route throughout the Southwest.

Ramírez’s conclusion analyzes the decline of Spanish-language professional theatre in Texas around 1935. She points to several contributing factors: new forms of entertainment (particularly vaudeville and cinema), a lack of new actors, increasing use of English rather than Spanish, and the financial impact of the Great Depression.

In *A History of Hispanic Theatre in the United States*, Nicolás Kanellos

also cites burlesque and vaudeville as factors that hastened the decline of Spanish-language theatre in the 1930s. He adds that economic factors such as increased ownership of theatres by European-Americans seriously reduced performance spaces for Hispanic companies.

Kanellos begins by reviewing the existing literature on Hispanic drama in the United States. Prior to the 1970s, the few studies that were made focused on folk elements. The explosion of theatrical activity generated by Luis Valdez and the Teatro Campesino in the 1960s piqued the interest of scholars from both traditional theatre departments and those specializing in Hispanic literature.

After providing a brief introduction and a chapter on the origins of Spanish-language theatre in the United States, Kanellos's study is organized around the major Spanish-language theatrical centers in the country: Los Angeles, San Antonio, New York City, and Tampa. He also provides a chapter on Hispanic theatre outside these major centers. The larger scope of this work reflects Kanellos's longer familiarity with the subject, first as a participant and for the last twenty years as a theatre critic and historian. Thus although his chapter on Texas greatly resembles Ramírez's treatment (they used the same sources to find the same information), his overall coverage extends beyond hers geographically and temporally. Among the cities discussed, Kanellos devotes nearly twice as much space to Los Angeles as to any other city and further signals the city's importance by discussing it first.

Evidence exists of Spanish-language theatre in California prior to Mexican independence from Spain in 1821, but Los Angeles gained particular theatrical importance in the mid-nineteenth century due to the availability of steamship travel to and from Mexico. By the 1860s, Los Angeles had become a regular stop for touring Mexican companies. During the Mexican Revolution, many Mexican companies actually spent more time in the United States to avoid the unrest and take advantage of eager audiences north of the Rio Grande. During the 1920s, which Kanellos characterizes as "the decade of greatest Hispanic theatrical activity in the history of the United States" (p. 21), five major theatres were operating in Los Angeles as well some twenty other active Spanish-language theatres in the same city. Some of these theatres, like the Zendejas, were razed and turned into parking lots in the 1930s. Others like the Hidalgo and the California now show Spanish-language films. Kanellos devotes one section of this chapter to local playwrights, many of whom had their plays produced as the result of contests designed to increase local patronage. Little evidence usually remains of their work other than mentions on playbills or in newspaper reviews.

San Antonio had fewer commercial theatres devoted to Spanish-language productions. Tent theatre thrived there, and productions were also staged in small community theatres and church halls. Two important

comic actors hailed from San Antonio: La Chata Noloesca and Lalo Astol. The latter comedian was still alive when the two studies were being researched and graciously provided both Ramírez and Kanellos with firsthand information as well access to his personal archives.

Kanellos changes gears when he moves away from the Southwest, emphasizing the fact that actors and audiences in New York and Tampa were not Mexican but predominantly Cuban, Puerto Rican, or Dominican. He notes that Eastern productions often included *bufos cubanos* (Cuban farces) rather than Mexican revistas. Theatrical productions in New York and Tampa were often held in mutual-aid-society halls, many times to benefit a political or personal cause.

One chapter describes *puebloando* (touring small towns) in the lower Rio Grande Valley, as well as theatrical activity in Northern California, New Mexico, Arizona, and the Midwest (near Chicago). The concluding chapter addresses the problem of lack of documentation and historical records (a concern Ramírez shares). In addition, Kanellos briefly outlines the present status of Spanish-language theatre in the United States. During its more than a century of existence, Hispanic theatre has evolved from being “a temple of culture” to serving as various “arenas for psycho-drama” (pp. 197, 198).

The studies by Ramírez and Kanellos are remarkably similar in certain respects. One difference is the way in which Spanish-language terms and titles were handled. Ramírez translated Spanish terms and titles into English for her readers, while Kanellos placed all theatrical terms used in Spanish in a glossary at the end of the book. He left several play titles untranslated, which may cause difficulties for readers lacking knowledge of Spanish. Two practical factors influence my preference for Kanellos’s study: its broader scope and its affordability. The study is available as a reasonably priced paperback edition for students, scholars, and aficionados as well as hardbound.

Many of the ideas Kanellos expresses in his study originated in papers he presented between 1978 and 1986. Three years before publishing his larger history, Kanellos collected some of these essays in a small volume entitled *Mexican American Theater: Legacy and Reality*. This volume explores the evolution of Spanish-language theatre as it paralleled the evolution of Hispanic identity in the United States. One essay acknowledges the importance of Luis Valdez and the Teatro Campesino as the model for modern Chicano theatre, in both its popular forms and its activist themes. Another essay explores the folkloric elements of Chicano theatre, from the inclusion of *corridos* (Mexican ballads) to the use of folktales, legends, and personal oral and written narratives in creating dramas. These elements serve to legitimize Chicano experience and reinforce important cultural ties to Mexico. The third essay analyzes how Chicanos use theatre to counter Anglo stereotypes, rewrite history, and de-

fine themselves in a positive way. Kanellos also provides a more personal essay outlining fifty years' of Hispanic theatrical activity in Northwest Indiana (near Chicago), a tradition he participated in directly for many years.

The last three chapters deal with various aspects of Hispanic theatre in the Southwest and are definite precursors to the work presented in the subsequent *History of Hispanic Theatre*. Kanellos invokes a historico-cultural perspective analyzing the importance of the circus in Chicano culture, which has origins in both Aztec and Amerindian societies. He also reviews the history of scholarly attention to Hispanic theatre in the United States.

Because *Mexican American Theatre* is a collection of diverse essays written over a period of eight years, some portions repeat basic information and definitions of terms found in other essays. Overall, however, Kanellos's writing is engaging, and his information provides a historical and personal (yet scholarly) perspective on an understudied aspect of U.S. theatrical history. At this point in time, an update or overview summarizing whether and how things have changed in the past decade would be welcome. Such a synopsis could also provide some continuity with what aficionados may have read in more recent publications.

The study by Ramírez and the two books by Kanellos present Mexican or Mexican-American theatre from a mestizo perspective. The plays performed represented (to varying degrees) the experiences of their audiences. In contrast, Max Harris's *The Dialogical Theatre: Dramatizations of the Conquest of Mexico and the Question of the Other* presents "dramatizations of the conquest of Mexico" and deals with several diverging points of view. Harris takes as his theoretical base the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin and Tzvetan Todorov. Bakhtin advanced theories about the dialogical nature of fiction and the concept of heteroglossia (multiple voices or modes of discourse found in narrative). Todorov, building on Bakhtin's ideas, reached the conclusion that the conquest of Mexico exemplifies the failure to reckon with "otherness." Harris explains his own purpose: "my questions have to do with the possibility that the theatre might prove a fruitful model (or metaphor) for the conduct of cross-cultural exchange" (p. 3).

Bakhtin asserted that drama contains no heteroglossia because the author's voice is virtually absent. Harris, however, reminds readers of Vasile Popovici's observation that Bakhtin considered only the literary aspects of the dramatic text. Popovici has affirmed that when theatre is performed, nontextual aspects allow for the emergence of other voices. Harris's subsequent chapters analyze plays written about the conquest by dramatists in various countries and eras: John Dryden in England (1665), Antonio Enríquez Gómez in Spain (1668), Antonin Artaud in France (1933), and indigenous Mexican performances (1585 and 1989). *The Dialogical Theatre* concludes with a discussion of how dramatizations of the Gospels served both the evangelizing agenda of the Spaniards and the need of the conquered to script their own meanings onto (or beneath) these stories.

Dryden composed *The Indian Emperour* entirely in heroic couplets. All the characters speak the same Elizabethan-style language, and no "Other" is really present. Dryden presents both points of view and shows the limited perspectives of both sides. Harris comments, "the lack of any clear hero in a play that so readily invokes the heroic code bespeaks a dissenting authorial voice in dialogue with the characters' invocation of the world of heroic romance" (p. 28). In this play, the voice of "the Other" is that of the dramatist. Harris reinforces this idea by including a reproduction of James Hogarth's painting of a performance of another Dryden play, *The Conquest of Mexico* (1732), in which all the actors are clearly European and no "Other" is onstage.

A play by Antonio Enríquez Gómez presents the author himself as "Other" in dialogue with his alter ego, Fernando de Zárate. Enríquez Gómez was a *converso* in public and a practicing Jew behind closed doors. He wrote many plays under his more Christian-sounding pseudonym of Fernando de Zárate, including *La conquista de México* (1668). A play on the same subject had been written by Spanish dramatist Lope de Vega in 1597. Harris postulates that Enríquez Gómez echoed the play by Lope (an ordained cleric) to "consolidate his Old Christian disguise [as Zárate] by a literary association with certified orthodoxy" (p. 37). Harris identifies signs that would have signaled to an Old Christian audience the triumph of Christianity in the New World. Such an interpretation would have masked Enríquez Gómez's portrayal of *marrano* defeat at the hands of Christianity. In this instance, Jewish spectators must have identified with the *indios* as a conquered people.

Harris then moves into the twentieth century in discussing Artaud's treatment of the conquest in *La conquête du Mexique* (1933). Although this play was never staged, accounts survive of the soirée at which Artaud gave a dramatic reading of his text. Harris reports that during this reading, "Artaud suppressed dialogue, insisting that all the sign systems of the theatre, including the live actors, speak in his own voice and that the voice of the other in the text be silenced" (p. 59). Artaud's theatre is thus totalitarian, and his portrayal of Mexico represents his colonizing of them for his own purposes (advancing his "theatre of cruelty"). Harris ends the chapter with an astute observation: "In the theatre, as in any cross-cultural encounter, dialogue can be resisted by a 'colonist' who demands that performance be governed only by his text, or by performers who refuse any engagement with another's text" (p. 62).

Drama in Europe historically served to reinforce existing Christian beliefs, not to convert pagans.² The importance of indigenous productions in terms of the thesis of *The Dialogical Theatre* cannot be understated.

2. Fernando Horcasitas, *El teatro náhuatl* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1974), 19.

As Harris stresses, Mexican plays “were the first catechetical plays to be performed by the evangelized community, in its own tongue, and under its own direction” (p. 70). The dramas Harris analyzes involve whole communities, take place in real space and real time over a period of several days, and involve large-scale sets, costumes, and elaborate crowd control.

The Tlaxcaltecas’ performance of *The Conquest of Jerusalem* (in 1539) cast Hernán Cortés as the sultan of the infidel army, which is defeated by the Christians. Harris suggests the following indigenous interpretation of this staging: “if the Turks have no right to hold Jerusalem, by what right do the Spanish now hold Mexico?” (p. 87). Similar cultural analogies occur in modern-day Huejotzingo, where indigenous Mexicans stage a three-day spectacle commemorating the Battle of Puebla, fought 5 May 1862. In these carnival celebrations, the combatants are Turks, Zouaves, Zacapoaxtlas, Indios, Zapadores, and Apaches. Spectators find “no Christians, no Spaniards, no unequivocally French troops” (p. 116). In fact, symbols stitched into everyone’s costumes signify that all participants are actually Aztecs, and thus the Spaniards are not present at all in this indigenous production. Other critics, including Victoria Bricker, have noted a complex “disjunction between costume and role” in indigenous performances implying that performances are intended for audiences with different perspectives (cited in Harris, p. 120).

The third part of *The Dialogical Theatre* presents two models discussing alterity or “otherness.” Aristotle’s model proposes that others are incapable of rational self-determination, while the Bible enjoins Christians to “love thy neighbor as thyself.” Research has shown that Nahua and Tlaxcalteca attitudes toward others resemble that of Aristotle and run counter to traditional Christian inclusiveness. Harris reminds readers that the *Requerimiento* (issued in 1513) claimed the world for the Catholic Pope and “requested” the Indians to submit or be enslaved by force. The natives clearly would not have understood such a document when read to them in Spanish, but it was propounded nonetheless as a legal basis for the Spaniards’ actions. Harris suggests, “it is [Columbus’s] Christianity that inclines him to seek replicas and his Aristotelian heritage that prompts him to settle for slaves” (p. 131). The slaves’ point of view remained closed to Europeans until Spanish Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún learned enough about indigenous beliefs and customs in their own language to record his information in Spanish.

Harris winds up his discussion of alterity by returning to the important role played by the audience in a live performance. When dramatizing the Gospels, Mexican audiences are invited to participate in the text, thus allowing for a multiplicity of voices and the possibility of varied interpretations. Harris points out that during these dramatizations, “the live entering” embodied by actor in performing a role (where empathy and outsidership occur simultaneously) exemplifies Bakhtin’s

prime example of the phenomenon—Christ himself, who is viewed as both human and divine. Thus when dramatizing the Gospels, Mexicans can be both self and “Other,” depending on which extratextual signs they favor. As Todorov noted, in any adaptation “the essential thing is to know whether [cultural influences are being] *imposed* or *proposed*” (cited on p. 167, emphasis in original).

Harris’s *The Dialogical Theatre* demonstrates how indigenous Mexican voices have subverted the colonizers’ version of events in their dramatizations for centuries. Farther North, these same subversive techniques can be perceived in modern Chicano theatre, as Kanellos explains in *Mexican American Theater*. Although a truly Mexican theatre did not develop until the 1930s, the strength of Spanish-language theatre in the United States allowed Hispanics to hear their own voices in their own language and to witness presentations of their own culture. Whereas mainstream Spanish dramas presented a particular segment of society, the revistas offered a more popular viewpoint. Finally, King’s study of Alarcón notes that his “Mexicanness” can be more readily traced to absences (such as lack of historical or rural dramas) rather than to the presence of any particular traits or aspects. These five studies are thorough and well done, each one lending its own voice to the ongoing dialogue about Mexican and Mexican-American identity and theatre, past and present.

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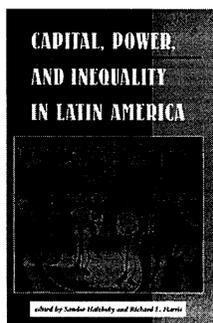
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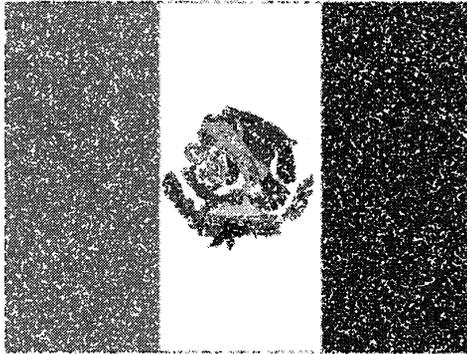
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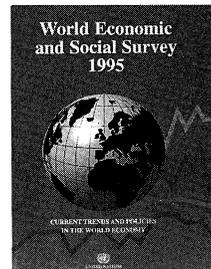
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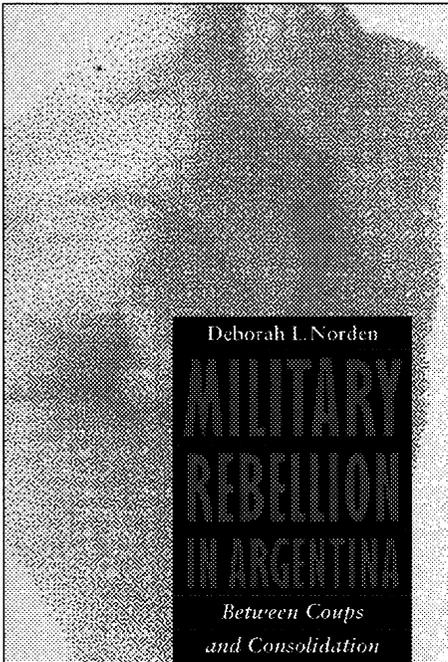
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