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## THE TEXANS

### A New Mexican Spanish Folk Play of the Middle Nineteenth Century

*Aurelio M. Espinosa*

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**T**HE FOLK DRAMA of New Mexico which is of Peninsular Spanish origin is fairly well known. Popular religious plays and the *Moros y Cristianos* type abound. A few of the religious type have recently been published.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these, there also exist in New Mexico, as in other parts of the Western Hemisphere where Spanish is spoken, historical Spanish folk plays of American origin and setting. Thus far, the manuscripts of two such plays have been found in New Mexico: *Los Comanches*, a play composed in the latter part of the eighteenth century, depicting a decisive New Mexican Spanish victory over the warlike Comanche Indians;<sup>2</sup> and *Los Tejanos* (The Texans), a folk play of the middle of the last century describing the "capture" of the Texan expedition to New Mexico of 1841 by General Manuel Armijo's men.

We know of only one manuscript of the New Mexican historical play *Los Tejanos*, the one obtained by us, in the summer of 1931, from Doña Bonifacia Ortega of Chimayó, New Mexico, who kept it with other manuscripts and family letters in an old trunk. The little mountain village of Chimayó lies some twenty miles northeast of Santa Fé. The manuscript consists of six small folios, pages eight by five and a half inches, each folio numbered at the top center, twenty-four pages in all. Since the name Menclaude (McLeod), one of the actors in the

<sup>1</sup> Arthur L. Campa, "Religious Spanish Folk-Drama in New Mexico," *New Mexico Quarterly*, II (1932), 3-13, and "Spanish Religious Folk Theatre in the Spanish Southwest," *The University of New Mexico Bulletin*, Albuquerque, 1934.

<sup>2</sup> Published in Spanish in the *University of New Mexico Bulletin* in 1907, and in English translation in the *New Mexico Quarterly*, I (1931), 133-146.

play, appears centered at the bottom of the last page, the manuscript may be incomplete, perhaps one folio missing. Those we now have are sewn together with thread, and although the thread is loosely stitched, there are no evidences of torn pieces of paper in the front or back that would indicate a torn folio. The script shows evidence of considerable handling, sufficient to warrant the conclusion that the play was presented more than once. The manuscript text, as may be judged from the script, belongs to the years 1850-1880. It is clearly not the original manuscript in view of the metrical errors here and there, showing omission of words and lines that are too long. It is probably a second or third copy of the original. Just when the original was composed it is not easy to say, although one may guess that it was composed soon after the Texan expeditionary force was captured in 1841, and certainly before 1846, when Armijo could not have been popular. The title of the play as given here is our own, since the title page of the manuscript is missing. Although the name Menclaude, or McLeod, appears after the last lines at the bottom of the last page, indicating the possibility that the manuscript is incomplete, the actual ending in the manuscript is a logical ending of the play.

The play contains 492 lines, twenty-three less than *Los Comanches*. The metre employed is the popular octosyllabic assonanced verse, the metre of *Los Comanches* and of most popular Spanish compositions in verse, whether dramatic or lyric. The language of the play is good and simple Spanish, but there are numerous New Mexicanisms, and the orthography and punctuation are very defective. The New Mexicanisms of the play require a separate study, and will not be discussed here. On the whole they are well-known dialectic peculiarities,<sup>3</sup> although a few new and interesting phenomena appear. The Spanish language of the Indian from Pecos, who takes such an important part in the play, is of paramount interest and importance, and is also a subject that merits special study. Some of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico speak that sort of Spanish even today.

The play *Los Tejanos* treats of the capture of General Hugh McLeod, the leader of the Texan-Santa Fé Expedition of 1841, and his forces by the soldiers of General Armijo of New Mexico. The events connected with the ill-fated expedition are for the most part well

<sup>3</sup> See Aurelio M. Espinosa, *Studies in New Mexican Spanish*, published in the *Revue de Dialectologie Romane*, Bruxelles and Hamburg, Part I, *Phonology*, 1909; Part II, *Morphology*, 1911-1913; Part III, *The English Elements*, 1914; revised edition, *Estudios sobre el español de Nuevo Méjico*, Parte I, *Fonética*, Buenos Aires, 1930.

known.<sup>4</sup> In general the folk play follows the historical accounts very closely. However, the question of the historical authenticity of some of the details of this newly discovered folk play, which was composed perhaps a year or two after the events narrated, is one that is yet to be solved. Of the Texan leaders, two are mentioned in the play that can be clearly identified: McLeod, who appears as "Menclaude," and Navarro. The New Mexican leader Armijo is of course the well-known general, Manuel Armijo. The Indian in the play mentions an Archuleta, possibly Armijo's aide, Pantaleón Archuleta, and an Italian, quite probably the Italian named Brignoli, who deserted the Texan army.

The Indian is one of the best characters in the play. It is he who gives account of the capture of the three Texans who were shot at Santa Fé (verses 104-111 of the original text), obviously Baker and Howland as mentioned in Kendall, and Rosenbury, who was killed when recaptured at San Miguel, and not at Santa Fé. The Indian states correctly that the three captured men had escaped, were again captured, and then killed. A play is literature, and a popular play, even when it is supposed to be historical, draws frequently from folklore, from hearsay, or from the imagination of the author. It is quite possible that the Indian of the play may be a purely fictitious character. He is a dramatic character worthy of the play of a master. The character is so well defined and the story he tells is on the whole so true, however, that we can not dismiss him summarily from the historical scene.

Until we have more details of the expedition, and not all from the Texan side, many of these and other points remain unsolved. But the important discrepancy between the Texan accounts and the New Mexican play has to do with the manner in which McLeod and his men were captured. According to the Texan accounts, McLeod and his soldiers surrendered without resistance. According to the play *Los Tejanos*, McLeod was captured by a very clever ruse on the part of General Armijo and his lieutenants. New Mexican and Mexican historians give no importance to this incident if it is true. The silence of the Texans would be of course easily explained. They speak of Armijo as an unpopular leader, of his army as worthless, and yet gave up to him without resistance. Despite the traditional Texan accounts,

<sup>4</sup> See especially *Letters and Notes on the Texan Santa Fe Expedition, 1841-1842*, by Thomas Falconer, one of the members of the expedition, edited with bibliography and notes by F. W. Hodge, New York, 1930; George W. Kendall, another member of the expedition, *Narrative of an Expedition across the Great Southwestern Prairies from Texas to Santa Fe*, 2 volumes, New York, 1844; H. H. Bancroft, *History of Arizona and New Mexico*, San Francisco, 1889, pp. 320-326.

the play version of the incident is not beyond the realm of possibility. The play opens in the Texan camp, with General McLeod asking his trusted lieutenant Navarro to question a recently captured Pecos Indian. The Indian from Pecos had been sent ahead by the New Mexicans to be captured by the Texans and then betray the New Mexican Don Jorge to the Texans. But this is merely part of the ruse. The Indian and Don Jorge lead McLeod away, and he is captured by the soldiers of General Armijo. How the rest of the army surrendered we are not told in the play. Perhaps that part was told in the missing folio, if there is one missing.

### THE TEXANS

[English Prose Translation]

[*McLeod, Navarro, and an Indian.*]

**MCLEOD.** I have just been informed that an Indian from the great Pueblo of Pecos has been taken prisoner, an Indian that the general of the New Mexicans has apparently sent to us. As my first lieutenant, Navarro, I want you to bring this Indian before me so that I may obtain from him the truth about everything that has taken place. I beg you to be very careful with him, because if you intimidate him we shall not be able to get the whole truth from him.

**NAVARRO.** If you leave the affair in my hands, sir, I promise you that your wishes will be fulfilled, for I am indeed quite ready to please you. The Indian is already here.

**INDIAN.** Good morning to you! How are you, Captain?

**NAVARRO.** I am all right, my friend. Sit down here. Bring him a smoke. I know that these people like to chat with fire in their hands.

**INDIAN.** I don't care to smoke. I am hungry, sir. I should prefer to have you give me some supper.

**NAVARRO.** Well, I certainly like that! For some time we have not had ordinary food for ourselves. How can we give it away? What we want you to do is to tell us the truth about everything that has happened. Our vanguard left us ten days ago.

**INDIAN.** The National Guard was already at Santa Fé. I saw it when I passed by there.

**NAVARRO.** I am not asking you about that. I know that in every capital there is a guard of honor, the one that is commanded by the

general. What I want you to tell me is what has happened to my men, those that have gone ahead of me?

INDIAN. I should gladly tell you the truth about the whole matter, sir. But really, I am afraid you would kill me.

NAVARRO. No, my friend. In the name of my country I will give you your freedom. That I can grant you indeed.

INDIAN. Well, listen to me, sir. Before I begin to talk I want you to put a shirt on me. I don't care if it is an unstarched shirt. I will then tell you just what has happened. And before I begin, I think I ought to get a pair of pants also.

NAVARRO. Apparently this fellow wants to clean me out! And what if, after taking all my clothes, he begins to tell me only bad news? Upon my word of honor, however, I will fulfill all my promises to this man even if he fails to tell me the truth.

ORDERLY. Here is the orderly, sir.

NAVARRO. Bring a complete suit of clothes, one of the best of my daily use. I want to present it to this Indian so that he will tell me the truth.

ORDERLY. Here is the suit of clothes, sir.

NAVARRO. Put it on, friend Indian. I hope we won't be sorry when you tell your true story.

INDIAN. Now I am indeed happy! See how well dressed I am. I'll bet my pueblo will now elect me attorney, governor, or war captain. I am going to begin now. Please don't get angry, Captain, if I tell you the truth. I passed by the capital two weeks ago, and there I heard of an Italian who told the whole affair to the government. He said that you and your people were coming here to steal. He said you were coming to rob the churches and the rich people. Murderers he said you were! I saw also three Texans there in the capital who had been caught stealing corn. They say they ran away afterwards and that they were caught near Pecos and shot. They also say that about a hundred of your men arrived at Antonchico, very fine looking men and well uniformed. But a man named Archuleta caught them and stripped them of their fine uniforms and tied them up. Now they are taking these Texans to El Paso as prisoners of war. Thus they are made to pay for their evil deeds. My people and my general spoke thus. My general also said that if he ever caught you he would tie your feet to your head. Don't you know he is a very smart man? He is a brave warrior, I want to tell you. He is braver than the Navajos and

the Gileños and has conquered them all. His name is Manuel Armijo. This is His Excellency's name. Everybody knows him and everybody fears him. That is the truth, sir. He is also a very rich man and he hates robbers. I really advise you to go back to your country. If Armijo ever catches you, nothing can save you. This is frankly my advice. My people are wild and if they catch you they will tie you up and take you to His Excellency. And he will fill your heads with bullets.

NAVARRO. Indian, you have confused me. What a crazy account you have given me! I wonder if it can be true? Yes, I believe that this Indian is telling the truth. I haven't the least doubt about it because he tells everything. Step by step he tells the whole story. Woe to us! Let us inform McLeod about the matter and he, as our leader, will decide whether he will await the arrival of these people.

MCLEOD. You don't mean to tell me that you have lost your courage, Navarro? Were you not really glad when the Indian began to speak.

NAVARRO. Indeed I was glad, my General. But the information that this Indian has brought to us has stunned me completely. Woe to us! He states that his chief is a peerless captain, brave, proud, and rich, a military leader of experience whom no one can vanquish. And the Indian is right when he states that if such a leader ever captures us he will most certainly have us shot. Decide what is best for us and let us not disgrace our national flag.

MCLEOD. Navarro, a military leader should not lose courage on account of mere stories. Get ready to lead the right column. Order William to take command of the left, and command the vanguard. Order the valiant Bonifás to command the rearguard. I will command the center myself so that I may be able to lead the attack. Order the artillery to be ready under the command of Bill so that we shall have some defense against an attack from the rear. I don't care to enter into peace negotiations. Please tell our troops that I am anxious to meet that New Mexican general face to face. We will see if he is really brave and invincible. I want to prove to him that in Texas there are many men of bravery and fine military training who can conquer him. And as to this Indian who has come here to disturb my peace, I ask you to have him shot by my soldiers.

INDIAN. I saw many soldiers in arms, sir.

MCLEOD. That is not what we are talking about. You are going to

die, friend Indian. In this way you will pay for the death of the Texans who were found stealing corn.

INDIAN. [*to Navarro.*] For heaven's sake, friend, don't allow them to shoot me. Right now I'll reveal to you where Ramírez is concealed. His name is Don Jorge. I'll show him to you.

NAVARRO. Ramírez? Who is he? Is he a man of some importance?

INDIAN. He is a very smart man, sir. I'll tell you all about him. All he has to do is to look at a dead man and he can tell you who killed him. He can take a stone and turn it into gold. He can tear up a piece of cloth and then make it like new. He can turn you into a chicken in the twinkling of an eye. He is wiser than Falseneno, wiser than Quevedo, and even wiser than Caifas who accused Our Lord. Just as Judas betrayed his Master he will betray you and deliver you to Armijo, my general, in order that he may question you. And if you don't tell the truth he will have you confess to the vicar, and then he will have his soldiers take you to the sentry box to have your head filled with lead. In this way you will die.

MCLEOD. Navarro, this Indian is making a prophecy of the end of my life. He must suffer death, and let my dagger do the work.

NAVARRO. My General, I have already promised him his life and freedom provided he deliver Ramírez to me and tell me the truth.

MCLEOD. Navarro, are you going to permit the Indian to tell me my future in such a cruel manner and face to face? In that case I prefer to trust in Ramírez himself. According to the Indian's story he is a talented fellow. I will try to interest him and treat him in a confidential manner, and if he is a grateful person he will not deceive me.

NAVARRO. Don't trust the Mexican. I fear the Indian is right when he states that the Mexican will betray you. I really believe the Indian tells us the truth. Just consider the behavior of those Mexicans who have already gone to Texas. Do as you wish, but please notice that the Indian speaks with the demeanor of an angel.

MCLEOD. Navarro, I am going to follow your advice. Call our men for a council of war. This is a serious matter and we must discuss it with the greatest caution.

NAVARRO. We have little time for long considerations, sir. The important thing is to have that man Don Jorge tell us all he knows about our enemy, what is the military power of his chief, etc., and in this way we can determine when, how, and where we can attack him.

MCLEOD. You have a friendly talk with the Indian so that he will



deliver to us that man whom he describes as being so clever and smart.  
 NAVARRO. Come here, friend Indian. If you will show me who that man is so that I can have a talk with him I'll give you a fine present. Look at this beautiful watch I wish to give you. [*He takes out a beautiful watch and gives it to the Indian.*]

INDIAN. That is a fine watch, I'll say! But why do you give it to me when you know that you are not telling me the truth? Just a moment ago you told me that my life was safe, and now I have heard that I am going to be shot.

NAVARRO. I told you I was going to give you your freedom, and very soon you will have it. [*Someone sings a beautiful song in the distance.*]

INDIAN. The one who is singing is Ramírez. You are going to find him this time!

NAVARRO. [*To the Guard.*] Soldiers of the Guard.

THE GUARD. We are ready, sir!

NAVARRO. Follow me and the Indian. He is going to take us to the place where Don Jorge is hiding. Don't make any noise and be on the watch so that we can capture him. According to our Indian friend he is a regular magician.

INDIAN. Here he is, sir! Here is the man I promised to deliver to you! [*Don Jorge comes out of his hiding place.*]

DON JORGE. You treacherous and faithless Indian, how dare you reveal my secret hiding place and thus profane the honor that should remain in the breast of every man although threatened with death?

INDIAN. Please don't get angry, sir. When my friend told me that they were going to shoot me I had to confess the truth.

NAVARRO. This is no time for speeches, Don Jorge! You are now our prisoner. We will now take you to McLeod, our General, and you can give him your reasons for having been so daring as to pass from your army to ours.

DON JORGE. I yield to force.

NAVARRO. My General, here is the man who was hiding over there. He was not clever enough to keep us from finding him.

MCLEOD. My dear sir, I ask you to reply to all my questions and to speak truthfully. I want you to understand that if your story is different from the story that this Indian has just told us your body will be food for wild beasts. On the other hand, you may rest assured that if you behave decently and tell us the truth your life will be

spared. Furthermore you will be taken to Texas at my expense, and there we will get you a job with a good salary. In this way you will be able to become a citizen of Texas and live comfortably. I promise you this on my word of honor and you can depend on it.

**DON JORGE.** I was coming here with an entirely different purpose, sir, but fortune is apparently coming my way and I must not reject it. When news came to Santa Fé that the Texans were coming to invade us I happened to be there. And I immediately began to make plans in order to be able to speak with the Texans. The General asked me to give my plans, and I asked him to order his soldiers to handcuff me and take me to the principal plaza, and to tell the people that I was a criminal and that I could not be set free. Then they were to wait until night and put me, thus disguised, on a swift horse so that I could escape and make the Texans believe I was a fugitive. In this way I thought I could speak with them and deliver them to my General. But now my luck has changed and bids me to become a citizen of that great country, Texas. So here I am, sir, ready to obey your orders.

**MCLEOD.** I thank you very much, my friend. I must address as my friend that man who in the future is to be on intimate terms with me. Now I merely ask you to tell me how you can deliver to me your general, Don Manuel Armijo.

**DON JORGE.** That, sir, is the easiest thing in the world for me, because, as you may have been told, I am not a Mexican, but an Andalusian whom bad luck brought to Santa Fé. And now I see good luck ahead of me if I can place my general in your hands. That I promise to do.

**MCLEOD.** Let me embrace you, my dear friend! I promise you that I will fully reward each and every service that you will render me.

**DON JORGE.** Well, sir, the first thing we have to do is to look over the ground and examine the road we are to follow. I think the best thing is for you and the Indian and me to go alone to examine the pass through which our troops must march.

**MCLEOD.** Come on, friend Indian! Let us go! And you, Navarro, please arrange the troops properly so that they may immediately begin the march through the pass that the Indian, Don Diego, and I are now going to examine.

**DON JORGE.** Yes, friend, let us go. The crown of laurels that you are about to win awaits you. As soon as you reach Santa Fé you will receive it from both the political and military command.

McLEOD. And I will name you my second in command. Aside from that, I am going to give you as a reward the wealth of the Chávezes and all the wealth now possessed by Don Antonio Sandoval [*McLeod stops and examines the terrain with his spy glasses.*]

We have travelled a long distance already. I can hardly see my soldiers with my glasses. There I see them at the very top of the mountain where the Indian was going to lead us to a precipice. [*A Mexican troop appears and the commanding officer speaks.*]

COMMANDING OFFICER. You insolent Texans, how dare you profane the territory of the Mexicans? Your audacity will now put a stop to your pride. This is going to be your finish.

McLEOD. Don Jorge, you have betrayed me! Now I realize that the little Indian from Pecos told me the truth.

DON JORGE. Die, you dog! Now you are going to pay for all the evil you had planned against my general! This will teach you not to trust the New Mexicans. Whenever you hear them bark at foreigners they always bite them. There is no doubt about it.